

TFTD 25.29 Monday April 7th

A very little man: Luke 18.31-19.10



I am quite tall. Six foot one. 184 cm. I find it quite handy being tall. I have consciously used my height in social situations all my adult life. I suppose if people can tell I am doing that it can backfire. I probably use my height without realising it. It has become part of who I am.

My brother is much shorter than me. We look similar enough to be obviously brothers but the difference in height is striking and people sometimes remark upon it. Maybe this is what has impressed on me what an advantage it is to be tall.

When my brother started school, he really looked like he shouldn't be there, he was that short. All the other children were significantly taller than him. What's he doing here? Shouldn't he be starting next year when he's grown up a bit? As his elder brother I was really concerned about it. I got special permission to visit him in the infants' playground.

But time passed and he settled into school life. It was a friendly little primary school and people knew he was my brother. But then we moved house, and we were in different schools, and we didn't know anybody. Some of the boys at my brother's school thought it was funny that this new boy was so small and thought they could have some fun bullying him. However, my brother asserted himself physically and

mentally against his attackers and soon commanded respect in the playground. In fact, he became something of a leader of other boys. And it turned out he was quite athletic. And brave.

In the meantime, I was having my own problems at my school so I stopped worrying about my brother and pretty soon I came to understand that he could take care of himself. Nowadays he is a very self-assured person with a strong personality. But I have never lost this appreciation of how your size can affect how people treat you.

I wonder how you react to Zacchaeus? Does being told that he is short affect how you see him? Do you see him a slightly comic figure, somebody who can be made fun of? Zacchaeus is also rich. Does this affect how you feel about him? And he is a tax collector. How does that make you feel? It's not a common name is it, Zacchaeus? He does a great thing in the Gospel, but nobody wants to name their son after the short man who had to climb a tree to see Jesus.

But Jesus made a bee line for him. I'm staying at your house, he says. And it is at this moment that we see the true measure of Zacchaeus. He declares that 'Half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.'

Zacchaeus is a man who knows how to respond to God, as Jesus recognises when he says, 'Today salvation has come to this house.' Just like the blind man on the way into Jericho who knows what to say when he meets God, 'Let me see again.' He too is affirmed by Jesus. 'Your faith has saved you.'

These two stories form another of Luke's paired stories. One is about a poor man and one is about a rich man but, in a way, they both do the same thing. In the presence of Jesus, they respond appropriately to God. And Jesus commends them for it.

The poor man responds by demanding what he needs. The rich man responds by giving what he can afford. So, in that sense they are different, but paired together, our eyes are drawn to what these stories have in common.

And of course, the message of these encounters for us is therefore the same. You are in a crowd. Jesus picks on you. What do you say? How do you respond? Because we are getting close to crunch time. We will soon arrive at Jerusalem.

Robin Pye