

“Out of His Tree” A sermon based on Luke 19:1-10 and 1 Corinthians 4:1-10 delivered on Sunday, November 2, 2025 by Rev. Alison Andrea Young at the First Congregational UCC of Onekama, Michigan.

*He was trying to see who Jesus was,
but on account of the crowd he could not,
because he was short in stature.
So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him.
—Luke 19.3-4*

If the crowd in Jericho that day were a more modern one, they might have said something like “Look at that little shyster tax collector guy—that sinner—always hate it when he comes to my door—what is he doing climbing up there? He must be ‘out of his tree!’” They would all agree with the self-descriptive words of Psalm 119: 141 “I am small and despised” to describe him! Certainly, for a rich tax-collector, a representative of the oppressive Roman Empire, to be seen debasing himself by scrambling up a tree to catch a glimpse of Jesus, a religious activist opposing the State, would have seemed foolish and embarrassing. Zacchaeus, they would surmise, was most certainly “out of his tree!”

Retired pastor and author, Steve Garnaas-Holmes in his Blog, *Unfolding Light*, might express it a little differently. He might say Zacchaeus was a fool, no--loony, wait, even better and finally, the worst of all---“uncool!” He writes:

*Would I climb a tree to see Jesus?
Would I make a fool of myself to meet God?
Embarrass myself, risk humiliation?
(You’re not really in love till you’ve embarrassed yourself.)
What would I dare, or not dare?
What would I risk to experience the Holy?
Am I ready for people to talk behind my back?
To give away a lot of money?
To allow Jesus to invite himself in, to invade my life,
when I definitely have not cleaned lately?
To commit to a loony scheme
that with Jesus could definitely get out of control?*

*Or do I slip back into the murmuring crowd,
all happy to consume me?*

*God, give me the faith to be gutsy for Jesus.
To be crazy for you, and let others call me so.
To counter the crowd, all those looming opinions
around me and inside me.
To follow a voice no one else believes in.
To be uncool for you.
God, give me the lovesick guts
to climb the fool tree.*

In his first letter to his beloved church in Corinth, Chapter 4, verse 10, the Apostle Paul describes this situation perfectly as “being fools for Christ’s sake.” God give me the lovesick guts to climb the fool tree” to be “uncool” to be embarrassed even, for Christ!

Most certainly Zacchaeus had no idea what the outcome of his foolish act would be that day. If someone had told him the day before Jesus came to Jericho, that the Messiah would come to his house and break bread with him and that he would give away half of his fortune to the poor and make amends to anyone he might have cheated—he would probably have accused **them** of being “out of their tree!”

Retired Lutheran pastor, Wayne Peterson, of Plymouth, MN in his “God Pause” devotion for Friday, October 28th comes at this whole passage from an even more interesting angle, I think: He writes:

“I must stay at your house today.” Today, think of “house” as your congregation. Imagine that you got the word that Jesus was coming to visit your congregation next Sunday. Imagine all the preparations that you would go through—the building would be thoroughly cleaned; the musicians would put in extra time rehearsing; you’d serve a full brunch; you would put up displays to show Jesus all the ministries you’re doing and those you plan to do. You’d do all that and more if you

knew Jesus was going to come to your “house” next week and, I daresay, your offerings would be greater than usual, because, well, Jesus is coming.”

What would we do here at the First Congregational UCC—right here in Onekama, MI?

(Get Answers)

We would do all these things, of course, but what Rev. Peterson says next is the crux of the answer to the question:

Friends, Jesus comes to our congregations every Sunday! “This is my body. This is my blood.” “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” Let us strive to bring Jesus our best of everything and do ministry in his name. Like Zacchaeus, we do this because we know “salvation has come to this house.”

Prayer

Lord Jesus, I pray for my congregation today—our pastor(s), our staff, our members of all ages. Fill us and our ministries with the anticipation that you are coming to our house, for indeed you are here! Amen.