

A NOTE TO PARENTS

In the story of Zacchaeus, last week's parable of the Pharisee and the Publican is actually lived out. The despised tax-collector repents and is welcomed home to God's favor. Like the parable, the account of Zacchaeus is immediately appealing, especially to children. Zacchaeus is, literally, the "little guy," who is maligned and left out, but whose determination and resourcefulness lead to his vindication. Zacchaeus is a sign of hope for anyone, children especially, who has felt the pain of being friendless and despised. He goes looking for Jesus, and finds that Jesus has been looking for him—and from their encounter flows grace and new life.

But, as with last week's parable, we miss the full impact of the story if we do not realize what Zacchaeus is. He is not a mere innocent victim of prejudice or social ostracism, but a genuine crook, an exploiter of the helpless, an embezzler; *his actions have victims, whose suffering is real*. If "tax-collector" does not do it for you, think of something else: Nazi collaborator, Klansman, drug dealer, scam artist, rapist, drunk driver, terrorist. It is easy to celebrate Jesus' forgiveness and grace if we imagine all its recipients as ordinary nice people who have somehow been dropped from the mainstream, misunderstood, bullied, or left out. It is easy to imagine we have learned to forgive like Jesus when all we have ever had to do is gloss over or excuse minor injuries, failures, or misunderstandings. It is easy to confuse indifference with charity, to imagine ourselves as peacemakers when we have never known what it is to hate and fear a genuine enemy, when we have never had to live with the lasting effects of an injury or loss brought on by someone else's vindictiveness, negligence, or unscrupulousness.

Zacchaeus repents—but that is after Jesus crosses his threshold. What comes first is the outrageous, scandalous grace, that does not excuse or gloss over the fault, but cuts right through it, bringing forgiveness and life. This week's *Sunday Paper Junior* asks your child to imagine that your family is one of Zacchaeus' victims. How would you feel when you saw Jesus inviting himself to Zacchaeus' house? Would you be able to rejoice?

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ZACCHAEUS WAS A TAX COLLECTOR.

Tax collectors got rich by cheating the taxpayers. They had no friends.



Jesus was coming to town. Zacchaeus went out to see him. But he was very short, and he couldn't see.



So he ran and climbed a tree.



Jesus came to the tree. He said, "Come down, Zacchaeus; I want to eat dinner at your house."



Zacchaeus was a liar and a cheater. He had no friends. But when Jesus came to his house, he changed. He said, "I'm going to give away half my money, and give back four times the amount I took from the people I cheated."

Jesus was glad. He said, "Today God's Kingdom has come to this house."



Imagine that your family is one of the ones that Zacchaeus had cheated. How would you feel when Jesus went to Zacchaeus's house? Draw your family in the picture.