

## **Sermons at the All Saints Anglican Church of Luxembourg**

**Preached by Rev Alison Heal on Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2025**

**Bible passages: Luke 19: 1-10 and Colossians 1:9-14**

This Sunday is almost too much, isn't it?

It's Sunday, so we're praising our Creator God, our Saviour Jesus who died and rose again. It's All Saints Sunday, so we're celebrating the feast day of our church, and all the global saints we're named after. And because it's All Saints, and All Souls, we're also remembering those we love who've died. Philippa

A holy muddle of praise, gratitude, sadness and remembrance. This Sunday really feels a lot like real life. Praise, gratitude, sadness and remembrance.

I asked Stephen to read this account of Zacchaeus, because on this All Saints Sunday, Zaccheus is a good example of what, or who, makes a saint.

Let's have a look at what we know about Zacchaeus.

He was short: good, I like him already.

He defrauded people, as part of his job. Hmm, not sure I like him so much, now.

He was curious about Jesus: fair enough.

He let his encounter with Jesus change him.

So how does this match to the life of a saint?

For a start, tall or short, tax collector or teacher, age or gender: these things don't make any difference. As the Bible says elsewhere, it's not the outside of the person that God looks at. Anyone can be a saint.

Zaccheus' job pretty much required him to defraud people. Maybe none of us feel we fall into that category, but we know there are some ethical grey areas involved in most of life. I've worked as a teacher in schools I wouldn't have put my own children into. I had to earn my wage in an environment I felt was harming people. I'm guessing, because of the human condition, the sin that gets into every human activity, you know the feeling. So perhaps Zaccheus wasn't that much worse than the rest of us, although everyone else told Jesus he was the 'Sinner'. But he wasn't a saint, before he met Jesus.

It was curiosity that led him to Jesus. Curiosity or desperation, perhaps, who knows? Something drove him to do something very undignified for a rich man – first he ran (not dignified), then he climbed a tree (how childish)! He had a certain status in life yet somehow he wasn't afraid to break the norms and challenge the protocol, when it came to Jesus. This sounds quite like a saint. It's really quite hard to remain dignified when you recognise that in Jesus, you're dealing with God, with us.

So Zaccheus was pretty well set-up to begin his life as a saint. He was flawed but curious. Rich but so driven towards Jesus that he acted shamelessly. I wonder how that sits with you, today? Do you recognise flaws in yourself, in your life? Do you wonder what's missing, how Jesus could somehow make up for these flaws?

Are you well-off and resting on your dignity? Are you prepared to sometimes break protocol for a better glimpse of Jesus?

PAUSE

Those things are what Zaccheus (literally) brought to the table when he met Jesus. The rest was up to Jesus. Jesus is the one who invites himself to the man's house. Jesus is the one who astounds Zaccheus by recognising him and eating with him. *Something* Jesus does is the prompt for Zacchaeus' extravagant repentance, which in Zaccheus' case means repaying all the money he's taken, above and beyond the legitimate taxes.

PAUSE

We'll leave the mystery of this change in Zaccheus for now, this visit of salvation to his house. We'll listen to our second reading, where St Paul tells us about how Jesus goes on to change others, in his mission to "seek out and save the lost".

### **Bible reading 2: Colossians 1:9-14**

I hope that this hop from Jesus meeting Zaccheus, to St Paul writing to an early Christian church, helps us to continue exploring the question: What makes a saint? Who makes a saint?

Jesus, obviously, was alive and walking around when he met Zaccheus. We rightly recognise his death on the cross and his resurrection as the key moment in our salvation, but we heard Jesus saying to Zaccheus even ahead of the crucifixion: 'Salvation has come to this house'.

In the letter Becky read, Paul is giving thanks for that salvation which has been accepted by these Christians in the town of Colossae, some years or decades after Jesus' sacrifice on the cross and his resurrection to glory. Paul hasn't met these Christians, he's just heard about their faith in the risen Jesus, and that's been enough to keep him praying for them.

Are they saints too, these Colossians, like Zaccheus, like you and me? Yes. A saint is someone who has met Jesus, who has turned to Jesus, leaving behind their old ways. The salvation comes, just as it did for Zaccheus, through the actions of Jesus, not the actions of the saint.

This is worth bearing in mind, as we look at everything Paul encourages the saints in Colossae to do. We've just heard a list which sounds a lot like 'being good'. But in the very beginning of the letter (before verse 9, where Becky started), Paul makes it clear that all of the 'good' comes from the grace of God, through their faith in Christ Jesus.

So, just as with Zaccheus, it's *Jesus* that makes the change in these people. They aren't changing through willpower or effort or grit or determination or trying super hard or just being nice people.

Let's just hear that again, in case it's something you need to hear in your own life right now:

These people aren't becoming saints through willpower or effort or grit or determination or trying super hard or being a really nice person.

In the section Becky read, Paul says they'll change through being filled by the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

That's how they become saints.

It's a bit uncomfortable that I can't do this in my own strength. It's a bit counter-intuitive that I can't go it alone, that I have to become undignified, like Zaccheus, and let God fill me with his spiritual wisdom and understanding.

But this, Paul says, is how we will walk worthy of the Lord. This, Paul says, is how the saints please God, bearing fruit in good work and growing in his knowledge. Sainthood doesn't start with us being good. It starts with God being with us, in the person of Jesus, in the power of his Holy Spirit.

The river is a good image here. When I first arrived in Luxembourg the Diocese asked me to write a short press-release about how it felt, to be ordained and to start my curacy here at All Saints. I wrote something like: 'it feels like I've jumped into a river, and I'm being carried along by the flow, but lots of other people are here with me and we're safe and we're cheering each other on as we go with the current'.

We're not in the business of living this Christian life, the life of a saint, in our *own* strength. Paul writes: 'May you be made *strong* with all the *strength* that comes from *his* glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light.'

Paul concludes: 'God has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.'

We're saints because, with all saints living and dead, God has rescued us from the ethical grey areas, the dangers and threats, the sins of our lives, and transferred us into the kingdom of Jesus. How do we make this change? *We* don't. *We* change, like Zaccheus, because Jesus comes to us. As we trust in him, as we dip our toes, paddle, jump, dive into his river, we experience what Paul prays for: to be filled with the knowledge of God's will, which continuously changes our lives as we live in the flow of the strength which comes from his glorious power.

Let's bow our heads and pray some of Paul's words for ourselves:

God our Father, Jesus our Saviour, Holy Spirit our strength, today we pray you will fill us with your wisdom and understanding, so that in you our lives bear fruit. Keep us coming back to you, because strength comes from your glorious power, and salvation comes when you stay with us.

Amen