

## The Search for a Quantum Epiphany

Scriptures:

Psalm 90:1-6

Luke 19:1-11

I thought I had made it clear that it would be best for me to wait on public speaking until my dental work is finished. I am aware of my verbal limitations while I am waiting for some new teeth. But Steve asked me anyway and I do have something to say, so now you will just have to bear with me. Just a couple days ago I had my second visit for impressions. I did explain that I usually give lousy first impressions so I was happy for the second visit.

I have a story: The scene is at the breakfast table of an everyday home. A mother is preparing pancakes for her two young sons, Kevin, 5, and Ryan, 3. The boys began to argue over who would get the first pancake. Seizing this teaching moment, their mother said, "You know, if Jesus were sitting here, he would say, 'Let my brother have the first pancake. I can wait.'" After a thoughtful pause, the older boy turned to his younger brother and said, "Ryan, you be Jesus!"

Anytime we make an effort to take Jesus seriously, we could be opening for an epiphany. So we begin in the full knowledge that any encounter with Jesus, fresh or second hand, new or old, can be life changing if we take Jesus seriously. Taking Jesus seriously always results in some form of change. It happened to Zacchaeus. By some process, he found a new orientation. Let's consider that process for a minute.

I have been challenged in recent years to try to understand Quantum. It has reached a state of nearly a social fad to talk about Quantum reality. People talk about quantum this and quantum that, but they never really explained it. What really is all the fuss about? What difference does it make? So I have made some very meager efforts to understand some basic quantum theory. I just finished reading the book by Deepak Chopra: *Ageless Body, Timeless Mind; The Quantum Alternative to Growing Old*. It sounded like a good subject for me, right?

The word Quantum simply means quantity, measurement, amount. And in its practical application it refers to the smallest value; as in physical matter, which can be broken down to pure energy. So the idea is that all that exists is energy which is always changing and moving. So a quantum view of the world is never static and is composed

of energy. Einstein carried that over to the idea of time and space. He concluded that time and space are an illusion as they are really energy and relative to the moment. He explained that time can shrink and expand. Our static view of time is an illusion. To manage our daily living, we created a clock and a calendar. And they serve a purpose. But in reality, time is relative and space is relative. You can read for yourself his theory of relativity.

Einstein did his best to explain the idea of expandable time and space. He gave an example: If you sit on a hot stove, a minute seems like an hour. But if you are sitting with your lover, an hour seems like a minute. Or in the words of the Psalmist: A day is as a thousand years to the Lord. The value of time is relative to the situation and the observer. I suggest this has implications for our view of life and death.

While in our conventional, natural world, there is both time and space, a beginning and an end, a before and an after – there is another dimension of spiritual reality where there is no before and after, no beginning and end – our life force is holistic, a form of energy that extends into eternity in both directions. In my own practical world, I seek to experience God and Life and Healing and Eternity in some form of existential awareness. I believe the Kingdom is at hand. I believe we can live as if the Kingdom is here.

The story of Zacchaeus is profound. Here, in his social paradise, we find a little man largely miserable. He didn't go out of his way to like others, and no one liked him. He was despised. While some Biblical authorities suggest that the scripture is not clear that he actually cheated anyone, public opinion was sure he had. We picture him, a wily, wicked, wizened, withered little old man; socially and religiously unacceptable. Ah, but that isn't all. First impressions seldom are.

Looking deeper we discover that Zacchaeus has a few redeeming qualities. He is tenacious, because he refuses to be put off by what people say or think. He is curious, which means he is still open to new things. And Zacchaeus knows, deep in his inards, that his life isn't really like he would like it to be. Having heard of Jesus, he casts all social propriety aside, takes a huge risk, and actually shinnies up a near by Sycamore tree in order to see and hear. After all, what can he do that will further damage his public image. To see him up there was surely a source of hilarity and derision to those who disliked him. You can almost hear them can't you? "Just where the old cheat needs to be....up the tree without a ladder. Better up there than down here with us and Jesus."

But Jesus sees him there. We know it's not unusual for Jesus to notice and care about the needy, the poor, and the sick. But it's harder for us to allow and applaud the way Jesus also cared for the socially and culturally rejected. When the gospel writers look at the crowds that gather around Jesus, they often put tax collectors and sinners in the same phrase together. But Jesus has different eyes than the crowd has. It should not surprise us that he sees Zacchaeus; this socially offensive but Jesus acceptable man, and says, "come down, I'm going to your house for dinner!"

The public square is full of all kinds of needy persons. But also very prominent in the crowd are the recognized leaders of the religious establishment, the keepers of the faith. We know them as the scribes and the Pharisees. They were there, not as benign observers. They were there as the protectors and guardians of the faith. Protectors of the city codes. They were basically good people, who took faith seriously as they knew it. They knew and understood the law. For them, interpreting how to obey was a worthy calling. But giving new perspective and new meaning to the law Jesus style was unacceptable to them. The keepers of the faith are usually not too open to someone who keeps saying, "You have heard it said of old, but I say unto you..."

So the Scribes and Pharisees were not about to let a new fly by night teacher do damage to the truths which they had studied and know by heart. Outraged, hurt, fearful, they say among themselves, "What good can come out of Nazareth." The NT is full of the opportunities they took to publicly challenge and make Jesus an object of ridicule. . Like a contemporary political announcement in our day, whether true or false, which does as much as it can to discredit an opponent, the Scribes and Pharisees are quick to do what damage they can there in the public square. "See," they announced, "he has gone to be at the home of a sinner."

But public opinion now and then underestimates what Jesus can do with good but socially unacceptable persons, with promising souls withered by public contempt who are yet brave enough to seek change. After his encounter with Jesus, Zacchaeus stood up and made a public pledge that truly rocked the city; "Behold, Lord, the half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if...if I have defrauded anyone, I will pay back four times as much." A great many people who strongly disliked Zacchaeus heard his speech. But he stood right up and said it. And what he said was not some benign and nebulous thing like, "I'm going to do better since I met you." No, this was a proclamation of a new person. and the change had teeth in it. He gave the stats: "Half of my possessions to the poor and four times as much paid back to any whom I have defrauded." That's measurably new! That is a quantum epiphany.

Now comes the hard part. It seems like a wonderful story until we realize that by what he did, Jesus was speaking as much to everyone else as to Zacchaeus. Did you miss the remarkable truth? Jesus says, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham." Which means, he too is also one of us; one with you. It means this measurably new person is as acceptable as all the good Jewish recognized keepers of the faith there in the square. Sinners and prostitutes were his table companions and ostracized tax collectors and Samaritans were seen as friends."

And the keepers of the faith, the Scribes and Pharisees were outraged. That proclamation, salvation has come to this house, is a quantum revelation. Jesus did not say, "Thanks, Zach. Well done. We'll see you in heaven." No. Today, salvation has come. The kingdom is at hand. The Kingdom is simultaneously in the past, present and future. Time and space are expandable. Time and space are relative to the existential demand for acceptance. Now is the time of salvation.

Author Robert Fulghum shares a story about an experience he had in the airport with a young woman. I'll quote him directly. "Dear Fellow Pilgrim, There you were, Hong Kong airport, end of the summer of 1984, tensely occupying a chair next to mine. Everything about you said 'Young American Traveler Going Home.' The backpack beside you bore the scars and dirt of some hard traveling....lucky young lady, I thought."

Fulghum goes on. "When the tears began to drip from your chin, I imagined some lost love or the sorrow of giving up adventure for college classes. But when you began to sob you drew me into your sadness. Guess you had been very alone and very brave for some time. A good cry was in order. And weep you did. All over me. A monsoon of grievous angst. My handkerchief and your handkerchief and most of a box of tissues and both your sleeves were needed to dry up the flood before you finally got it out....your plane was about to go and you had lost your ticket."

"After we dried you off, I and a nice older couple from Chicago who were also swept away in the tide of your tears, offered to take you to lunch and to talk to the powers that be at the airlines about some remedy. You stood up to go with us, turned around to pick up your belongings. And SCREAMED! I thought you had been shot. But no...It was your ticket. You had found your ticket. You had been sitting on it for three hours." Like a sinner saved from the jaws of hell, you laughed and cried and hugged us all and suddenly you were gone...leaving most of the passenger lounge limp from being part of your drama. And now often when I am sitting on my own ticket in some way—sitting on whatever it is I have that will get me up and on to what comes next—I think of you and grin at both of us and decide to get moving."

Some folks spend their lifetime in anticipation of finding a glorious epiphany illuminating the full purpose of their life and the final assurance that it was lived worthy of a final resting place in glory. And in Luke 19:11, the whole crowd thought they were about to witness the finale, the coming of the kingdom. But we learned from Zacchaeus, his own epiphany experience, that the kingdom arrives where we live. Remember what Jesus said to him, today salvation has come to this house. There was no waiting for the Times Square Ball to drop, no dramatic visit of an angel, Zacchaeus simply found a new orientation. He had been sitting on that ticket all his life.

A quantum view of heaven is that it existed before the earth was formed and it will be there after the earth is gone. The quantum view is that the creative force and energy of life exists simultaneously through all experience. Are we waiting for the kingdom to come to change the status of homelessness and injustice and create a new city building code in Fort Collins? By the standards of Luke 19, the kingdom is already here on Oak Street. When we embrace or shake hands with our neighbors, when we offer a meal, when we listen to their story, we are living out the kingdom. As with the molecules of the atom, the kingdom is a living reality in a form of measurable energy with power to transform all.

It was the theologian Martin Marty who made it famous: "The opposite of faith is not doubt; it is certainty. Locked in and not allowed to grow." Am I up a tree without a ladder? Where is my courage to come down and engage?

I now wonder. What will be my new quantum epiphany this year? When will a wave of understanding come over me with the power to really alter my way? What will that look like? I wonder if one day I will stand up and find the ticket I've been sitting on for so long. My prayer today is that each of us can be open to an encounter with the ultimate source of revelation. That epiphany is not anything we create or control. Our only task is to wait and to watch.

Or maybe it is just really even more simple. Maybe we just need an older brother to say it: "You be Jesus".