

IN the MIX with Jesus

Did you ever have a slogan that really motivates you? Christians might have 'WWJD?' I like the words from another song, by Toby Mac. ***He sang about wanting to be a daddy (father) 'in the mix'. The idea of being in the mix has inspired me*** in the past year, if not longer. Let me try to describe what these words mean for me. First, 'the mix' has to do with life. Life is, after all, a mix of different people all taking part in the life around us. You take part in many different mixes. —in your home, in your street, in your town—but also at your work, in your school, at the sportsclub-- and in the Netherlands, in Europe, in the world.

So, what is being 'in' the mix? Well that would have to do with saying, 'yeah, I'm engaged here. I am one of those people too.' In the song of Toby Mac, he wants to be involved actively in his kids' lives. Some mixes you choose to be part of; others you just become part of. No matter what we're doing, we all want to make a difference, to add value, to help, to be wanted, to be needed.

The world can be a complicated place, though. For today, I want to start off with 2 general observations.

First, we don't need to be part of everything. That would look crazy, and be crazy. Our job is to decide what to do with the mixes that come our way. Some situations in this world seem to be doing fine without my active participation. But there are equally many situations in the world that seem to call for an answer from us—and some of these are so big they feel overwhelming.

Second observation: the world is getting more complicated and busy. This puts pressure on our choices to be involved in some of the smaller mixes of daily life. Sometimes, it feels easier to stay on the sidelines than to reach out. Or, we get blocked from taking part and just get 'parked'. Call this 'being sidelined'.

Sidelined?

The idea of *being sidelined* seems relevant to me. We might be sidelined because we're busy in a season, but it might also have to do with many other things. We might be standing back because of what we believe about God or what we think about ourselves. We wonder if God wants us to be in a certain place. We might feel insecure, angry or hurt. We might wonder if we are qualified—or not? Sometimes we feel we have to be experts at everything! We wonder if we can really add any value in certain situations. We might feel powerless in the face of great need.

Here's another aspect of how what we believe about God can influence our taking part in the mix: but in some Christian traditions, **the world** is viewed suspiciously as a place to avoid—it's too dangerous, so better stay clear. I do not believe that that is what Jesus showed us.

Our prayer: Lord, speak to us today about you want us to be engaged in the world, about how you see us 'in the mix'.

Henk and Caleb

Henk shared with us last week how he often finds strength sitting quietly at the table with the Trinity. He encouraged us to regularly spend time with God. Then we can be in the mix, like Caleb. Henk explained how Caleb was strong in his relationship with God. As a result, Caleb didn't demand his rights, but was equipped by God to be active, but also to forgive, and to be patient.

Of course, Caleb points us to **Jesus, who is our ultimate example**. During his time on earth, Jesus kept a strong relationship with his Father. This allowed him to be able to show mercy and to forgive. But, before Jesus had 'done' anything, The Father declared him to be beloved Son. Then, from that place— among all the needs in the world— Jesus could take part in the lives of people, as the Father led him.

God loves it if we are in the mix. But I believe that He also loves to restore us if we get sidelined. Today we're going to look at someone who was sidelined. Someone who had stepped back from participating in important areas of life. In fact, you might say that he had stepped so far back he was 'up a tree' in more areas than one. Let's look at what Jesus did to restore him, and what that means for us.

Zacchaeus' story

Luke 19:1 Then Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. 2 And there was a man named Zacchaeus, a chief tax collector, who was very wealthy. 3 He was trying to see who Jesus was, but could not see over the crowd, because he was small in stature. 4 So he ran on ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see Him, since Jesus was about to pass that way. 5 When Jesus came to that place, He looked up and said, "Zacchaeus, hurry down, for I must stay at your house today." 6 So Zacchaeus hurried down and welcomed Him joyfully. 7 And all who saw this began to grumble, saying, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinful man!" 8 But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord, half of my possessions I give to the poor, and if I have cheated anyone, I will repay it fourfold." 9 Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man too is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

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On the surface, Zacchaeus seems to just be a curious man who wants to see the celebrity who is passing through town. But he's short, and no one is giving him a place to stand next to the road. So he runs ahead along the road where Jesus will walk, and climbs a tree to make sure no one will push him away. When Jesus gets there and sees him, Jesus calls up to him and says 'come out of that tree, I MUST stay with you, Zacchaeus.' Jesus then goes for a meal at his home. Some people don't like that—why is Jesus going there—of all places! 'Jesus is a man of God!' What is the problem with Zacchaeus? He collects taxes for the Romans and gets rich by

collecting too much, and keeping a lot for himself. People looking at his behavior and have disqualified him from life in Israel. They think that Zacchaeus (obviously) can have no expectation that God approves of him! He's sidelined. Jesus going there seems to be a sign of his approval.

At the end of the meal Zacchaeus announces a huge turnaround in his life..

Jesus comments on this by saying that Zacchaeus too is a son. In other words, according to Jesus, The radical changes in Zacchaeus' life are just a reflection of that fact that Zacchaeus is starting to accept that **he too is a son**.

So what happened at the table with Jesus? Somehow, in his meeting with Jesus, Zacchaeus has become **empowered**.

Jesus then says to everyone that there were **two things** he came to do on this earth:

to **seek** all people and

to **restore** them.

We have all lost sight of who we are as sons and daughters (he needs to seek everybody), and we all need to be **restored** to God's family.

God's motivation to save and restore us is driven by love.

God loves the world—

John 3:16-17 "For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. 17God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.

in the context of our story today, there are a few things to consider here.

God so loved the world.

He loves the world he made. He is committed to his creation—to us and to nature.. He has not taken a vacation. He is not too busy watching studio sport.

Wait, what is meant by **the world**? Because In some verses in the Bible we read negative things about the world, like (us) 'not loving the world', or 'the world will pass away'. We could spend a whole sermon series on this topic! For today, it's important to understand that when the Bible has a negative command or comment about the world, it generally has to do with *evil powers opposing* what God is doing in and with his good creation.

So God loves his creation >> And so He is engaged. His love leads Him to be in the mix.

He loved >> so he sent Jesus.

Empowered through Jesus

He sent his Son to restore us so that we know we are his sons and daughters— and can function with the family here on earth, in this time. We are ourselves sent out by God spread this good news: God considers us to be his beloved children. How do we spread this news? We are meant to follow Jesus' example: not by judging and condemning but by being sent—by being in the mix. Our role is **first of all to hold hands** with Jesus. *From that safe place* we can live restored and empowered lives. We can live in this world as free people.

That is what happened to Zacchaeus. Once he met Jesus, he was empowered to make free choices that flowed out of love not duty or people-pleasing. His behavior wasn't forced or for show, or to be a 'good' example of anything. Our behavior should be an authentic reaction to being God's beloved children.

God gives us power to accept his opinion of us: beloved children

I have made my own paraphrase of John 1:12

Jesus gives us power when we put our trust in Him. This power helps us to grasp hold of our true positions as sons and daughters of God.

Zacchaeus came out of the tree to receive Jesus. Then he accepted the word Jesus speaks: you are also a true son. Zacchaeus didn't become a son because he behaved well. He was always a son, even when people around him didn't recognize it; Jesus gave him power to grab hold of, to act on, this radical truth. And this opened the door for Zacchaeus to enter the mix.

His eyes on Jesus for his approval.

And the choices he then made reflected the values of God's family: doing justice, loving kindness, walking humbly with God. Would you agree this is relevant to daily life?

One of my favorite bible verses is Micah 6:8

"I've told you what is good, and this is what you need to do: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God."

A few things might change as we learn to walk with God!

Knowing that we are secure in God's love as beloved children empowers us in many ways...

- We might get new motivation to be in the mix;
- We might change what we do in our own 'mixes'..
- We might see that God is leading us to participate in some mixes we hadn't expected. People did not expect Jesus to eat with Zacchaeus.

- We can experience His peace to look at situations with God’s perspective—as valuable places to be.
- Gives us power to participate differently where we are now—or with different people.
- We walk humbly as beloved children with God, realizing that “Small” things matter too, like being kind, fair and patient.

What’s important is that we don't have to climb into the tree anymore, or stay there. Jesus climbed into the tree for us when he went to the cross.

Jesus says to you, ‘I must eat at your house today’. We can receive his power also today.

Putting it together

Here’s the sermon in a nutshell: As people, we long to belong and to make a difference in this world. But sometimes we get stuck. Jesus empowers us to understand who we really are—beloved children of the Heavenly Father. This gets us off the sidelines and into the mix, where we learn to walk in this world, connected with Jesus. Be brave. You are beloved sons and daughters of God and he wants you to be in the world to be salt and light.

Reflection questions to go deeper

What are the mixes in your life right now?

What do you feel the Lord is saying to you today, about your participation in the world, in the mix?

God loves the world so much that he sent his son to restore all things. What does this mean to you right now?

- We cannot do this alone, only with Jesus Ask Him to confirm in your heart the truth of his opinion: His dear sons and daughters. He wants to empower you in every situation.
- Reflect on what it means to be sent out into the world not to judge/condemn but to restore. What might this mean for you in your ‘mixes’?

Spend time worshipping your heavenly Father/ sing ‘you’re a good good father’ in your time with the Lord or in the housegroup together.