**Psalm 32**

**1**Blessed is the one  
    whose transgressions are forgiven,  
    whose sins are covered.  
**2**Blessed is the one  
    whose sin the Lord does not count against them  
    and in whose spirit is no deceit.

**3**When I kept silent,  
    my bones wasted away  
    through my groaning all day long.  
**4**For day and night  
    your hand was heavy on me;  
my strength was sapped  
    as in the heat of summer.[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm%2032%3A1-7&version=NIV#fen-NIV-14360b)]

**5**Then I acknowledged my sin to you  
    and did not cover up my iniquity.  
I said, “I will confess  
    my transgressions to the Lord.”  
And you forgave  
    the guilt of my sin.

**6**Therefore let all the faithful pray to you  
    while you may be found;  
surely the rising of the mighty waters  
    will not reach them.  
**7**You are my hiding place;  
    you will protect me from trouble  
    and surround me with songs of deliverance.

# **Luke 19:1-10**

**19**Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. **2**A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. **3**He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. **4**So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

**5**When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” **6**So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

**7**All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.”

**8**But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.”

**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.”

“Missing the Mark on the Way to Dinner”

The Rev. Lisa J. Durkee

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My neighbor three doors down in Camden is an Episcopal priest. Jeff also has been a school chaplain and was the dean of the chapel at St. Paul’s School in Concord, NH when I applied for a job there. We can be grateful that I was only a runner-up. He also left the school setting, and now works in a boatyard and as captain of one of the schooners during the summer, while also preaching every other week on Vinalhaven at the Congregational Church. I had already been writing about Zacchaeus and thinking about sin when I read a post he had made on Facebook, which redirected the overall arc of my thinking, turning my own musing this week into an extended metaphor that I believe may be helpful to you, too. As Jeff helped me get my little boat ready for winter, I asked his permission to share his post with you to get us started. He also invited me to join him sometime when he visits another neighbor about whom he wrote. I’ll share his brief account now so that we may unlock together what may be a new way to think about sin as we read about it in scripture.

Jeff wrote of our neighbor, “She also insisted I shoot some arrows with her new compound bow before I left. I’ve known for years - intellectually - that “sin” is an ancient archery term. It means merely to miss the mark. As I muse on this week’s sermon, I can’t stop laughing at how the crowd grumbled that Jesus was having dinner with Zacchaeus, a notable sinner. And yet Jesus sought him out and publicly, joyfully invited himself over for dinner. The story kind of speaks for itself. Having the bow in my hand and launching arrows helped me understand it even better. My arrows kept missing the mark until she told me to notice what was consistently happening. When I adjusted my aim, mindful of the tendency of my “sinfulness” the next arrow landed perfectly - and that was awesome.”

I don’t know how many of you have also ever shot an arrow from a bow. My own experience with archery is limited to about the tenth grade, when we learned how to shoot arrows in gym class. How many of you learned to shoot arrows in gym class? With the shocking incidence of violence in schools, I don’t imagine there are any that still offer physical education that includes what amounts to weaponry, even if it is for sport. And maybe archery seems an odd origin for understanding a theological term we use regularly, but I hope by thinking about the crowd’s reaction to Zacchaeus, about Jesus’ self-invitation to dinner, and about Zacchaeus’ response to being called out as a sinner, we might learn how to adjust our aim, as well. Collectively, then, I hope that we might respond to God’s invitation for change to our thinking and behavior in such a way that we know peace in ourselves and peace in our world. If this sounds like a lofty goal, then I invite you to consider how Ms. Nancy Sutphen was able to instruct twenty-five 15-year-olds so that some of them even got bullseyes with some regularity.

So, to our extended metaphor and Zacchaeus . . . There are so many ways to shoot an arrow badly, and they don’t even include my friend Mark shooting to another target, adjacent to ours, intentionally. There are so many variables: the bow with its bowstring, grip, and arrow rest; the arrow itself, with its head or point, fletch or flight—the feathers, the shaft, and the nock. That’s a bunch of new nomenclature for some of you, I’m sure, and does not even take into account what we may call user error or lack of ability. What might this look like in the story we heard from today and perhaps live “on the daily,” as our kids might say?

The Gospel of Luke is the only mention of Zacchaeus, a name that ironically means *pure* or *innocent* in Ancient Greek. We know a few simple facts about him: he is short; he is faithful such that he would climb a tree simply to get a glimpse of Jesus; he is despised by the other people in Jericho, because he is a tax collector, one who does the bidding of the Roman empire, and is therefore thought of as a traitor, and corrupt. He must also be rich as a result because he is able to give back not only what he has *taken*, but also half of what he *has* in order to feed the poor. So, we also know that Zacchaeus was capable of change. His aim has been trued. Prior to this encounter with Jesus, Zacchaeus might have been said to have arrows well guided, but with the wrong target. He had practice alright, but practice in how best to gain financially, pulling from his quiver first an arrow of deceit, then perhaps nocking it with the strength of imperial violence, guided by a fletch of the promise of individual worth and a sense of self-righteous power. But something inside of Zacchaeus must have known he had gotten things wrong.

Without asking anything of him, Jesus *tells* Zacchaeus that he is coming to his house for dinner. And in response to this acceptance, somehow immediately, Zacchaeus is moved to goodness. But Jesus and Zacchaeus are not the only characters in this story. The crowd of people quickly moves to judgement, not only of Zacchaeus but also of Jesus for stooping so low as to dine with such a sinner. Clearly, though, their criticism has not ever changed Zacchaeus’ behavior. The well-practiced barbs from a familiar quiver of complaint never moved him to consider their plight. Jesus’ acceptance of Zacchaeus, indicative of his apparent forgiveness is all it takes for him to decide to feed the poor. So, I wonder: what changed for Zacchaeus? Was it a shift in target? Well, it sounds like it. He achieves something very different from what *had been* his goal. Jesus presents a new way of aiming, perhaps a new shaft or fletch, and Zacchaeus accepts his invitation *gladly*. Maybe it is the new target, or the new teacher, or the new equipment, or maybe it is something inside Zacchaeus that has corrected his user error. We can’t emphasize enough that spiritual growth is possible—that growing new muscles can happen. Our hearts can be changed as Zacchaeus’ was. So often, though, we become weighed down by old habits of guilt, of shaming others or being convinced our own guilt is a permanent mark.

But with practice . . . How will we get it right? Well, not by carrying around the thoughts of previous failures, convinced that we—or that others—will continue to do the same. We have the possibility for achieving better aim each day. We don’t have to carry guilt or shame. Love doesn’t look like guilt or shame. As Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 13, “**4**Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. **5**It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. **6**Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. **7**It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.” Jesus does not keep a record of our wrongs but picks up that load of shame and guilt. And we take another arrow out of the quiver, trying again with our next effort to do what is right, to offer only the words that uplift rather than bring down; actions that have in mind not only individual gain but communal comfort and assurance. And we can live in such a way that we leave judgment to God and borrow from God’s model of forgiveness. There is no sin that God will not forgive.

And how about us? What if all our talk about sin were less about judgement and more about forgiveness—of ourselves and of others. By encouraging each other to notice what is happening and to aim differently the next time we are given a chance, we will find there is a great deal more joy. When we focus on the good and on possibilities for goodness, when we take aim with one another rather than letting fly in various directions, we are far more likely to see some arrows hitting the middle of the target. When we look forward, learning from our own mistakes and from the instruction of those who have been practicing for a long time, we can do better. We can let go of what we have gotten wrong and help each other to do what is right.

And let’s not forget about the invitation to dinner! Any kind of relationship to Jesus can happen this way. Out of the blue, in the middle of regular daily activities, we might feel a nudge to reconsider what we are doing; or, maybe you have been trying *very* mindfully to live in a particular way, and something upends your routine—something like grief, or a job change or loss, or illness, or children’s departure from home, or any number of less than wonderful circumstances—and you begin to act without thinking, or to move forward without your usual sense of moral compass. Then Jesus’ invitation comes, and it comes without first noting Zacchaeus’ or our sinfulness. Can I come over? I accept you as you are. Can we sit together in your house and talk about what really matters and how you can contribute to others’ joy and abundance rather than deplete it? Can I show you a new way of thinking, a new way of nocking the arrow of your intentions that leads to right relationship with others and with God? I’m coming to your house today. I forgive you. Will you forgive yourself? Amen