

**'Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today. So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner."**

*Luke 19:1-7*

### *Meditation*

God finds us in the place where we are and wants to draw us out of ourselves. In faith, we are always part of a larger whole. We are part of the body of Christ. At the deepest and most fundamental level: we are not alone.

For years it has been known that more and more young people feel lonely. Last week it was on the news that more and more young people – especially those in their late twenties – isolate themselves completely. They withdraw themselves from their social life, in extreme cases may even quit their study or work, and they can't even bring themselves to sustain social relationships with loved ones anymore. In Japan there is a word for this: *hikikomori*. This phenomenon could be explained by feeling high pressure to succeed in life, as well as the aftermath of the covid-pandemic where we all learned to stay at home. To withdraw yourself completely this way isn't good. Our head can be a dangerous place sometimes: with all the expectations you think you must fulfill, or the thousand different thoughts that can haunt you. You could think that this is reality and that you are the only one who is feeling this way.

God does not want us to roam in the dark. God always draws us out of ourselves, because we are not destined to be lonely, we are destined to be part of a community. When Jesus withdraws himself in the Bible, he is never completely alone. He is always in community with his Father, and the Holy Spirit always flows through him. So even the moments we spend in silence and solitude are not meant for shutting ourselves off, but for making contact. So that we can open ourselves up to hear the voice of God, and the voice of others.

In the familiar story of Pentecost, the apostles are mourning and feeling lonely and anxious as well. And they were isolating themselves from the rest of the world. Quite literally, they even put up the shutters of the house. But the Holy Spirit breaks through their isolation. They are lit up with passion and fire from the Spirit of Life, and they can go out again to tell others of the Good News.

Sometimes we don't have the power to draw ourselves out to make contact with others. Sometimes we would rather hide, as Zacchaeus does when he hides himself in a tree to catch a glimpse of Jesus. He cannot join the crowd as he is too little, and on top of that, he is not well-liked because of his work as a tax collector. But Jesus looks up and invites him to come down. That night, they will eat together at the house of Zacchaeus. In the same way, Jesus sees through our self-built walls and invites us to come out.

Also in faith, many of us feel alone sometimes. Maybe you are the only one in your social circle who is a believer, or your opinion may differ from the people around you. Maybe you feel alone in your doubts. Either way, we still need others. We also need people who differ from us, both in talents or traditions, to remind us that we are part of a larger whole. When we think about ecumenism, this is what we are doing: we are reminding ourselves that we are part of a bigger picture, that God will always try to break into 'our little world' and point to the people around us, that he will say: "Come, show yourself, I want to stay with you".

Let us then pray that God may find us wherever we hide our true selves, that he may carry us when we are lonely or afraid, and that the Spirit may lift us up and pull us out: away from our isolation, towards meaningful relations with those around us. Remember: You are not alone.