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Friendship as Missional Foundationalism: Advise for the Missional Church from the Wee Little Man

There aren't two categories of people.

*There aren't some that were born to have everything,
leaving the rest with nothing,
and a majority that has nothing
and cannot taste the happiness
that God was created for all.*

*The Christian society that God wants
is one in which we share the goodness
that God has given for everyone*
- Oscar Romero¹

introduction

This was not the first time Patrick and I had this conversation. He left a small rural town and showed up at the University with a Gideon's Bible in his glove compartment, the Roman's road written on a note card in his wallet, hundreds of Contemporary Christian CD's that sound just like 'the real thing,' and a Bible drill training that would make any youth minister proud. He didn't bring his Bible or a track to our meeting this time, just the same question he had asked before but this time I think he meant it. "I never knew people like this existed. I mean I don't even know what to do. There are so many lost people and I don't even know how to help them find the truth or...I mean I can't even figure out where they are and what they are looking for or even what their questions mean. At this point I am beginning to wonder if I am not as lost as they are.... Where is God here? Why isn't the good news good enough? Do you know what I mean?"

The questions facing Patrick are not his own, they are mine also and hopefully the church's too. We inherited a Christianity built for the modern world, but operating in it today seems lacking. The problem is not the gospel, but how closely it has been adapted and fashioned for a world less and less people exist in. Every word, truth, statement, piece of art, and even scripture looks, feels, and is experienced differently depending on the backdrop or the situation. For most of modernity, at least here in the US, Christianity or predominantly Protestant Christianity has dominated culture. The operational assumptions in the public discourse, regardless of one's religious or non-religious identity, were those of Protestant Christianity. Culture had a general understanding of the Christian faith in its modern Protestant form, and this lead to certain assumptions about faith, evangelism, the role of the church, salvation, and our relationships to persons and collectives that are no longer true. Patrick, like many of us, came face to face with this reality as we attempted to give a modern gospel to a

¹ Oscar Romero, *The Violence of Love* (Mary Knoll: Orbis Books, 1988), 177.

postmodern people. Where then do we go for advice on engaging our new situation without compromising the integrity of the gospel? One place is the story of Zacchaeus. What I have found both energizes, startles, and challenges me. Perhaps the wee little man can help create an imagination for the God Movement in the church and we may even discover something more profound than the assumptions we inherited.

He 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. Luke 19:1-3

the traveling worship circus and Zacchaeus

When Jesus came to Jericho he was no longer focusing only on his ministry, but had made the turn towards Jerusalem where the God Movement's conflict with the worldly powers would come to head. Jericho is the location for two incidental happenings that reveal the nature of the God Movement in two profound ways. The first is necessary for understanding the context of Jesus' encounter with Zacchaeus. With a crowd behind him and Jerusalem over the Jericho horizon, a blind man is told that the commotion he hears is the entourage of Jesus and so he calls out for mercy. Those at the front of Jesus' band of travelers try to silence the man, but the blind man's voice is heard and Jesus restores his sight. The blind man called out for mercy from Jesus and despite the organized ignoring and silencing by "those who were in front," Jesus came to the man and restored his sight. The response of "all the people" was the immediate praise of God. The blind man saw who Jesus was and when his sight was restored all the people praised God, even those who thought Jesus should not have been bothered apparently broke out in praise. This traveling choir of praise was the entourage of Jesus as he entered Jericho. They entered with praise on their lips for the active presence of God in their midst.

Zacchaeus lived in Jericho and from what Luke tells us his social status was as clear as that of the blind man, Zacchaeus was a chief tax-collector, rich, and unquestionably a sinner. Jericho was an important city, a commerce center for the region and a fertile agricultural environment. The warmer climate inspired the Herods to build a winter palace in Jericho and so Rome's client rulers invested a good bit of money into building a Roman style city out of Jericho. Being the head of tax-collection in a city that architecturally demonstrated the disparity between the rich and poor was not a friend making profession. While we are not sure what exactly 'chief' tax-collector means, we do know that personal and property taxes were collected by the Roman government directly, leaving the tax-collectors to collect customs. Rome was very sneaky in constructing an empire, it took all it could get and then farmed out a system that would lead to unlimited opportunities of exploitation. Zacchaeus was rich because he was in cahoots with Rome, he had bought into an imperial system of exploitation, and in doing so became the scapegoat for this community. In the

minds of Jesus' praise team Zacchaeus, this guy, was what was wrong with the world.

While on the surface Zacchaeus seems like a particularly depraved person, becoming rich off the exploitation of so many and supporting the foreign domination system of Rome, he made a compromise many of us could easily make. In the midst of the Roman empire there were not many options for ensuring food, safety, and a home for your family and none of them were without some form of imperial allegiance and service. In the first century, the meeting of these basic needs required you to be part of the 2 to 3 percent of the population who benefited from the organizational structure of the known world.² Most people would not have the opportunity to join this group of elites and so they were faced with no other option than a life of poverty without security where half of children die before the age of 10 and where strategic food shortages and military threat preserved the 'peace.'³ It may be near impossible to think of Zacchaeus as something other than a sinner, but it sure is easy to imagine making the same decision.

Zacchaeus, the rich tax-collecting sinner, wanted and needed to see Jesus. When Luke establishes him as undeniable sinner the reader knows that he needs to see Jesus, but like so many other sinners he heard enough stories in the first century grapevine that we wanted to see Jesus. Oddly enough the crowd once again is the impediment to the one in need, but this time it is not those up at the front who shun Zacchaeus but the nature of the group itself. Remember the crowd began praising God after the healing of the blind man and this celebration traveled as they came into Jericho. The crowd had gotten so worked up in its celebratory praise over the real presence of God in their midst that someone who wanted and needed to see Jesus could not. This traveling worship service had become a circus. They were all so involved and focused on the show that they failed to create space and an opportunity for the outsider to come in contact with Jesus. The traveling worship circus is then judged by Jesus, because once again he moves outwards towards the outsider, a sinner who could not find a place in the worship of the friend of sinners. It is important to remember that even worship focused on the actual movement of God in the world with Jesus in the middle of it, can inhibit the mission of the church. Here worship kept someone who wanted and needed to see Jesus from doing so.

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 19:4-7

friendship and the missional initiative

² The best figures have the elite 2 to 3 percent of the population consuming 65 percent of the available and harvested resources. See: Warren Carter, *The Roman Empire and the New Testament: An Essential Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 46.

³ Carter, 10.

Now we have no idea why Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus. There are a lot of good reasons different people want to see Jesus. The blind man had a good reason, the hemorrhaging woman had a good reason, the Centurion had a good reason, the rich ruler had a good reason because he was an attentive Torah keeper since he was a little youngster though it ended up backfiring, but this rich chief tax-collector in the Gospel of Luke that says “woe to you who are rich for you have received your consolation” decides he wants to see Jesus. We could say curiosity got the best of him, but that just doesn’t preach too well. How about we decide that there was a little excitement in Zacchaeus’ ear every time he heard about Jesus, maybe he knew that somewhere there was an answer for the problem he was in. Zacchaeus was not always a tax collector, he grew up like any other good Jewish boy, he knew the great stories of God bringing redemption and liberation to Israel. Zacchaeus knew the current situation well and that if he wanted to assure himself and his family security, food, home, and a future there seemed to be only one real legit option, namely join the other team. If you can’t beat Rome – Join Rome. The human race has continued to be plagued by Empires that operate on the bully system, using its military and economic strength to exploit other peoples. Zacchaeus was caught in a sick and twisted system. He had become part of what was wrong for with his world and thought maybe this God Movement he heard Jesus talking about might be the answer. Perhaps it had a place in it for those with a compromised faith and imperial allegiance.

Having been kept from Jesus by the traveling worship circus, Zacchaeus ends up in a tree trying to get a glimpse of Jesus. The action of Jesus here is revealing both of the nature of the God Movement and character of God. The emphasis of this passage is on the initiative of Jesus. Jesus came to Zacchaeus, halting the holy huddle’s celebration, and said “*Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.*” Jesus had not been to Jericho before but he knew who Zacchaeus was when he saw him. This may seem an act of divine omniscience, but that is in no way necessary for those of us who have been a member of any worshiping body for decent amount of time. Part of being socialized into any social group is learning just who is to be ignored, those to be tolerated, those to be ceaselessly praised, and those like Zacchaeus who were cursed, labeled, and actively shunned. Jesus listened well enough to those around him to know just who the man up in the tree was, though he had never seen him before. The chief tax-collector was an Other for this community, Jesus knew this and so he stopped the praising to give a sermon. This sermon of messianic action was titled “It all begins with friendship.”

When Jesus initiates an encounter with Zacchaeus he does so in friendship. This friendship is Jesus’ acceptance and identification with the despised imperial assenting, his own people forsaking, rich because he taxes all these people poor and gives some to Rome, Zacchaeus - identification with this man is the boldest example of the remarkable liberty Jesus exercised. Where the welfare of any person was at stake Jesus ignored all the taboos and social protocol, especially those of the worshiping community around him. They had missed the point and focused their life, energy, and focus inward. Jesus’ sermon

of friendship was for an external focus. Those who want to be a part of Jesus' church will follow the method of Jesus and too have an external focus. For the church to share the mission of Jesus, to participate in the God movement it too will seek out, value, and affirm the Other as an Other for God's sake. Zacchaeus could not "see who Jesus was" from a tree or by participating in a traveling worship service where he was not welcome, but only as a friend – at table. Jesus, knowing who was not welcome and why they were not welcome, went to them with an open invitation to friendship. This is the welcome of Christ. This is nature of the God Movement – Scandal. This is how Jesus came to be known as a friend of sinners, he "offered them inclusion in the kingdom not only *while they were still sinners* but also *without* requiring repentance as normally understood."⁴ There would have been no complaints if Jesus had stopped on the road, looked up at Zacchaeus, and said "If you repent of your participation in Rome's exploitation of these people, liquidate the wealth you have amassed by stealing it under the guise of legal legislation, and redistribute it today, salvation would come to you and I would take this worship service to your house." The method of Jesus' mission was not to get the sinners to conform to believe the right things, behave to the expectations and requirements expected of them and only then will they be accepted and belong to the community. The opposite is true. The God Movement begins by letting all know that they first belong. Without the adoption of any behavior or beliefs Zacchaeus belongs in the God Movement, because it is for all, especially the sinners and outcasts.

For the gospel to have integrity in a postmodern context it must be centered in friendship. Friendship is the only stance that can facilitate the openness of the gospel. Too often we assume truth or God is our possession we own, we believe we have exactly what the Other needs. Even if we hide this hubris under a guise of 'seeker sensitivity' it is not true friendship as practiced here by Jesus. The friendship of Jesus brings with it the messianic banquet, it is not simply the invitation to the group who gets in, but it is in fact its arrival. The friendship of Christ is an "unpretentious relationship," because friend is not a function but a relational reality.⁵ Friendship is not a thing or a single event, but a reality that will shape one's own existence. Friendship for both Jesus and his followers today includes vulnerability, because God's friendship is permanent. The friendship of God becoming the foundation for ministry requires a shift in missional focus. Regularly we are rhetorically violent and on occasion the possession of truth becomes physical, but "force and violence spoil human relationships. Friendliness makes them live and keeps them alive. That is why ultimately friendship is stronger than enmity. The world will belong to enduring friendship."⁶ If this is true, then God is not to be possessed and given, but instead we are to create relational space for God to come in our relationships. If we think we have everything that is just what we will miss. One may know truth, but no one knows it absolutely. When Jesus came to Zacchaeus he came with

⁴ E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 206.

⁵ Jurgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* trans. by Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 115.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 116.

an open hand offering the good news of his belonging and not a clinched fist of righteous judgment.⁷ Truth is not a sword, but relational reality of friendship grounded in the God who is love.

The radical openness of Jesus' friendship is not the contrived openness that exists in many forms today. It is not the Enlightenment ideal of tolerance, because Jesus did not wave at Zacchaeus he embraced him. It is not compromising middle ground of 'open but not affirming,' because Jesus did not treat Zacchaeus as a rich tax-collecting sinner, but a human being created in the image for whom he came to pronounce the God Movement's message of belonging. To Jesus, Zacchaeus had a name with one label attached – beloved of God. Jesus does something that is so difficult to do, he refused to play politics with a human being, even one he would identify as part of the problem. The invitation of friendship given by God in Christ is as far reaching as creation. One could be tempted to miss this radical method of evangelism practiced here by Jesus, but as Luke tells the only words Jesus in the story are those which share in the divine initiative of friendship and the pronouncement of salvation. These two words and in particular the first word, are rarely part of our 'evangelism strategy' and one can wonder what an institution of friendship would look like. To be sure, humanity would be the only requirement for participation. To take this seriously all the work of the church must begin with the welcome of Christ.⁸ In our going out and their coming in, the first thing must be the embrace of friendship with the Other. The welcome of Christ is an embrace, not just words. It goes to each person and includes the particularities of each individual life. The welcome of Christ is more than the welcome of the church. It cannot be an official greeting at a service or a handshake when one enters, for the welcome of Christ is centered in the friendship seen in Jesus – "an open and total friendship that goes out to meet the other."⁹ When friendship is our foundational stance, we will exist in relationship to and for the Other and God will not be a possession but a presence that comes in the midst of friends.¹⁰

The crowd's response to Jesus' friendship initiative is telling. The holy huddle who started off praising God for the healing of the blind man has now taken a final turn away from participation in the God Movement they were celebrating. After prohibiting Zacchaeus from getting to Jesus and making Jesus

⁷ The modern witnessing tools like the Roman Road and Four Spiritual Laws operate on the assumption that original sin is the singular obstacle to salvation, but if friendship is foundational the acceptance of God's original blessing for us is the greatest obstacle.

⁸ Jon Sobrino observes that there is no abstract concept of forgiveness of sin but the "direct demonstration of his 'welcome' to sinners...he does not appear directly as 'absolving confessor' of sins. What he does to sinners is much more: he welcomes them." see: Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological View* trans. by Paul Burns and McDonagh, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), 96.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 121. Moltmann also draws attention to the contrast between the Christian notion of friendship and the private individualistic one practiced by the modern world. To reclaim Christian friendship today he advises Christians to "remove friendship from the private sector, so that it may acquire the character of public protection and public respect...a total concept of friendship will have to be developed which includes the soul and body, the people who are like ourselves and the people who are different."

¹⁰ While outside the bounds of this particular method of engagement, there are clearly strong comparisons and possible streams of enrichment should this theme be developed in relationship to Trinitarian thought.

able to identify their vilified Other he had yet to meet, the holy huddle becomes a holy grumble. I like to imagine that it was not everyone, but Luke tells us that “All that saw it began to grumble.” What is even more striking is the nature of the grumble. It takes the form of holy indignation, “He has gone to be a guest of one who is a sinner.” What a presumptuous stance to think Jesus could be your own guest without also being the guest of a sinner. While this is clearly a false presumption, it is all too contemporary. The crowd did what many communities do; they define themselves over against something. When any community understands its boundaries in the negative, they are necessarily a turn away from violence. Important here is that the boundary of the God Movement founded on friendship is defined in the positive. It is an always expanding, ever embracing, and categorically porous movement of the divine. If there is to be a negative boundary it is not drawn by the followers of Jesus, but by the Other. Those who fear the intimacy and transformative power of friendship’s persuasive love can draw a line, but the people of friendship cannot. Both then and today the holy grumble is far from the holiness of the relational God revealed in the person and mission of Jesus. To grumble at the befriending of any sinner, is to grumble at the every activity and realization of the presence of God.

Zacchaeus stopped there and said to the Lord, ‘Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.’ Then Jesus said to him, ‘Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.’

Luke 19:8-10

salvation/the movement of God in the context of friendship

Zacchaeus responded quickly to Jesus’ proclamation of belonging and despite the protest of the holy grumble Jesus came as a guest and friend to the table of Zacchaeus. There is some space here in the story. We do not know what the decision of the grumblers was. Did they stay outside in the holy huddle even though Jesus would be leaving them behind, did they stomach becoming a guest of Zacchaeus’ too, or maybe they even realized what was going on and stayed in the company of Jesus by participating in the friendship of the God Movement. While we do not know what happened with that particular crowd, it would not be far fetched to imagine their response was as varied as our own today. Yet these verses are no longer focusing on the conflict between the crowd’s vision of Zacchaeus and that of Jesus’, but instead the transformation of Zacchaeus as a new friend of God.

The text emphasizes the radical and quick response of Zacchaeus to his new found circle of friends. The divine initiative and proclamation of belonging shakes Zacchaeus to his core. Before they even make it to his home he stops and voluntarily offers half of his possessions to the poor and promises to make

four-fold restitution to all he defrauded.¹¹ Surely this was good news for those grumbling minutes before. Those to whom Jesus most identified with and called blessed - the poor, hungry, and weeping - were frustrated by Jesus' movement towards the exemplar sinner and recipient of prophetic woes – the rich, full, and happy.¹² What occasioned this radical transformation is the embrace of God through the person of Jesus. Zacchaeus as rich, tax-collecting, poor exploiting, empire supporting, sinner was embraced into the friendship of God. In response to his new friendship and not prior to it, Zacchaeus repents in the fullest measure. The teachings of Jesus never fare well for the rich and Zacchaeus and Levi are the only ones who respond favorably.¹³ Why would friendship with God be so difficult that it would be easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God?¹⁴ This is not only a perplexing question, but one the affluent church of the first world should attentively listen to. The response of Zacchaeus is revealing, because moments after entering the friendship of Jesus he entered into friendship with the people of Jesus. The overwhelming majority of Jesus' people were the poor, oppressed, and marginalized. Jesus' preferential option for the poor creates a dilemma for the rich and this dilemma is one of friendship and not obligation. Obligation is not a category of friendship, because friends are attentive to the situation of each other and respond out of love for the other. When Zacchaeus entered the belonging friendship of God he was now attentive to the situation of his new friends. They were no longer people to be exploited and bled for his own gain, but people he was now going to live with in the presence of Jesus. The repentance of Zacchaeus was not first to God, but the people of God – the friends of God. In the context of these relationships the sin of Zacchaeus is revealed as social and not simply private and individual. The salvation Jesus identified and proclaimed was then as social as the sin. The gospel is social, more social than sin because in the consummation of the God Movement creation will find its intended identity in the friendship of God.¹⁵

The condemnation of the injustice practiced by Zacchaeus comes when his oppressed Other is no longer dehumanized. In the presence of Jesus they too are given names, identities, and the God given value of life is made known. The dichotomy of oppressed and oppressor is over come in the bounds of friendship in God. The evangelization of the power wielders is a liberating one, but not in a detached way. Friendship as the foundational context of the gospel helps Zacchaeus and his contemporaries in every age realize that “only by

¹¹ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 285. Johnson here argues that the text is best understood to describe how “Zacchaeus halted in their progress toward the house to deliver this statement publicly.”

¹² see : Luke 6:20-26

¹³ We also need not forget the wives of the affluent men who supported Jesus' ministry. In their marginalized status they supported the God Movement that in its coming would subvert the very affluence from which they gave to Jesus' ministry.

¹⁴ see: Luke 18:35

¹⁵ This truth is most strongly presented on the cross when Jesus prays for his murderers' forgiveness. There even death on a cross cannot end God's intention of friendship. The crucified lord prays publicly for their forgiveness creating the possibility of friendship beyond his murder and death.

participating in [the marginalized] struggles can we understand the implications of the gospel message and make it have an impact” in our relationships with them.¹⁶ Those who enter into the friendship of God “do with their own resources what God has been doing with God’s, that is, [empowering] those who are powerless.”¹⁷ It is important then to notice, as members of the contemporary church of Zacchaeus, the nature of his response which is two fold. His first response is to shed his abundance. In light of his new friends struggling to have their own necessities met Zacchaeus rids himself of his gluttony of mammon and simply gives half of his possessions to the poor. The realization in the context of friendship is that much of his impressive pile of stuff was in fact not his own. In response he gives half of his possessions to the dispossessed around him because he was no longer going to be possessed by his possessions or continue to perpetuate the lie that he in fact had the right to wealth while his friends struggled for necessities. What this first act is not is charity. This act was not detached from his inclusion into the friendship of Jesus and Jesus’ ensuing pronouncement of salvation. It is only in the context of friendship and repentance that the God movement “becomes Good News for Zacchaeus and salvation enters his house.”¹⁸ When one on the take from Rome became friends with Jesus, when he experienced the presence of the God Movement in real relationship, he recognized his sin and did more than give charity. He repented for having extorted what was not properly his. When the wealthy and powerful enter the God Movement they see a friend in need as a call to confession for having taken more than their share and justified their thievery by adopting the dehumanizing world view of Empire – here Rome. The lesson learned is simple, “the ultimate evil of riches is relational: the oppression of the poor.”¹⁹

The second voluntary act of Zacchaeus is even more telling if our comfort and imperial hermeneutic led us to interpret the first as simple charity. Here Zacchaeus promises to make a fourfold restitution if he has cheated anyone. The ‘if’ here is conditional only in the sense that specific acts of extortion will come to light as he lives in relationship to his new friends. What he is committing himself to is the most stringent demands given in Torah for stealing.²⁰ The conditional form of his statement is connected to having never seriously thought of life otherwise. In the past, like many of us privileged people, he did not think twice from reaping the benefits of a system that culturally marginalizes, economically exploits, and politically oppresses a majority of the human

¹⁶ Gustavo Gutierrez, *Essential Writings* ed. by James Nickoloff (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 252.

¹⁷ Brian K. Blount, *Then the Whisper Put on Flesh: New Testament Ethics in an African American Context* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 88.

¹⁸ Juan Ramon Moreno, “Evangelization” in *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology* ed. y Ignacio Ellacuria and Sobrino (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), 572.

¹⁹ Sobrino, 173. Here he also quotes St. Jerome who said that “For all riches proceed from injustice, and unless one has lost, the other cannot find. So this proverb seems to me most true: either a rich man is unjust or he has inherited from an unjust man.”

²⁰ Johnson, 286. see Exodus 22:1

population.²¹ Since it was his job and he broke no laws he was not stealing, but playing fair by the rules making all his wealth his own earnings. After entering the friendship of God this previous determinative reality is revealed as an idolatrous interpretive reality whose God is mammon. The rich are those left to choose who they will serve, for you cannot serve both God and mammon. When Zacchaeus says 'if' he is in effect admitting he does not know what it would look like to give himself to the God Movement and live in the loving mutuality of friendship with those who now have a name. At first glance he knows it requires a shedding of wealth, but immediately after that realizes that as he comes to be shaped more fully by his new relationships he may, and more than likely will, realize he has extorted someone. If he discovers this while living his life with the marginalized he will repay them fourfold. Zacchaeus has publicly committed himself to the God Movement and is in the process of being shaped by its vision or better yet, he is being converted. Today in the 21st century the affluent first world church also needs friendships that bring relational accountability "to those who are forced to provide us with "the good life" at their expense," because abstract ethics are not only contrary to the nature of friendship, but easily manipulated.²² Manipulation is contrary to true friendship, for in friendship there is an unforsakable solidarity funded by the love of God. The 'if' of Zacchaeus is a commitment not to defend his privilege, he will not blunt the gospel to a spiritual language with no consequence in the world he and his friends live in.²³ The repentance and new found stance of Zacchaeus "leads to a redistributive form of justice in which those defrauded by an exploitive system are repaid fourfold...The restoration of kinship status involves repentance, and repentance involves redistributing what has been taken falsely."²⁴ Zacchaeus took on a new interpretive frame work, the God Movement. In the framework of human empire, "the rich are all the people who live with tightly clenched hands. They are neither dependant on others nor open for others. The rich can only be helped when they recognize their own poverty and enter into fellowship with the poor."²⁵ Zacchaeus made this transition and joined the Movement. At this point, and not earlier, does Jesus say "today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."²⁶

²¹ Mary Elizabeth Hobgood, "Challenging Our Assumptions" in *Justice in a Global Economy: Strategies for Home, Community, and World* ed. Pamela Brubaker, Peters, Stivers (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 153.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Moreno, 572.

²⁴ William Herzog II, *Jesus, Justice, and the Reign of God: A Ministry of Liberation* (Louisville: Westminster John Know Press, 2000), 223.

²⁵ Moltmann, 79.

²⁶ James Cone makes an important observation when he says that "to enter the kingdom is to enter the state of salvation, the condition of blessedness. Historically it appears that 'salvation' is Paul's translation of Jesus' phrase 'kingdom of God.' But, oh, how the word 'salvation' has been beaten and battered in nineteen centuries of Christian verbiage! What can salvation possibly mean for oppressed blacks in America? Is it a kind of spiritual juice, squirted into the life of the dispirited that somehow enable them to withstand the brutality of oppressors because they know that heaven is waiting for them? Certainly this is

What does salvation mean here? It is clearly contextual, social, and a far cry from the individualist gospel present in church today. It does not promise security or prosperity in any worldly fashion and is decidedly obtuse and backwards to the logic of success and empire. The salvation of Zacchaeus is multifaceted and cannot be limited to a question of eternal destination. When Zacchaeus joined the God movement he claimed his identity as a son of Abraham, he came to be identified by his blessing of others. Zacchaeus' blessing of others is not in his giving of material wealth and restitution - that was part of his relational repentance - his blessing of others comes in the reorganization of his life and relationships to no longer be a slave of mammon, but a friend of God. He will bless others by living for the common good of his friends and not preserving the good life for himself.

Just before arriving to Jericho and healing the blind man Jesus was asked a question that assumed a very impoverished view of salvation, one that we will see is foreign to the gospel. A rich ruler asks 'What must I do to inherit eternal life?' It is no surprise that the rich ruler wants to discuss eternal destiny with economic terms of inheritance, because he envisions salvation as a possession given by God to individuals. The poor experience inheritance as the preservation of the oppressive system which ensures longevity to the gains of the wealthy. Jesus then asks him if he knows the commandments related to inter-human relationships – "you shall not commit adultery; you shall not murder; you shall not *steal*; you shall not bear false witness; honor your father and mother."²⁷ All these inter-human commandments the rich ruler reports to have kept since he was young, but Jesus knows that there is still one thing a miss so Jesus says, "Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."²⁸ Jesus was not using hyperbole to point out some spiritual struggle between his wealth and belonging to God, it was clearly physical. The commandments Jesus listed, and he did know them all, were those centered on human relationships. He then says one thing is lacking. The rich ruler thought of these categories in very individualistic terms and missed the point, just as he did when he started the conversation about eternal destiny. Sure he had not personally broke the law and stole from the poor directly, but this is not keeping the commandment of God not to steal. As we have seen in the salvation story of Zacchaeus the relational notion of theft only becomes clear to the rich when they are friends with the oppressed. In order to both answer the Rich Ruler's question and not compromise the integrity of the God Movement, Jesus is left to offer him what he needed but could not fathom due to his love of stolen wealth. The Rich Ruler was after one thing only, confirmation of his current life style's compatibility with an eternal inheritance. Outside of joining the friendship of God, Jesus could not give him what he wanted; a neutered gospel of confirmation that keeps the affluent happy, healthy, and heaven bound without one having to every enter into the friendship of God which will transform all who

what rules would like the oppressed to believe." see: *A Black Theology of Liberation: Twentieth Anniversary Edition* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1990), 126.

²⁷ Luke 18:21, Italics are mine

²⁸ Luke 18:22.

dare to enter. The Rich Ruler however does understand Jesus, since on hearing this he was sad because he was rich. We do not know what happens to this Rich Ruler, he may have responded later in life. We know the friendship of God is as near as the marginalized and the offer is always open.

In response to this direct confrontation with wealth the disciples ask just who then can be saved to which Jesus replies, "What is impossible for mortals is possible for God."²⁹ This question was more than a question of the salvation of the wealthy but of anyone. Jesus' answer leads us back to where we started, friendship with God. Salvation is impossible for mortals, but for God it is friendship. Salvation for one and all is then joining the movement of God in friendship. This truth will surely revolutionize our theology, but more than that our mission. As the church most akin to Zacchaeus we must refuse to describe friendship as something that can be had without the inclusion of our Two-Thirds world sisters, brothers, and enemies. We must take the advice of Martin Luther King seriously who said that "we will either live together as sisters and brothers or perish together as fools."³⁰ How would our relationships change with the marginalized should be become friends and realize that they are the global majority who live in poverty and we are the affluent global minority? We must also refuse to be ministers who preach a sermon that leaves Zacchaeus in a tree and the Rich Ruler happy. If we are to be a Jesus' church, then we will share in the mission of Jesus and preach the message of Jesus. At the foundation of the God Movement which we hope to be a part of is friendship. Friendship is the only foundationalism that can support the Good News, because friendship is the only relational structure that can begin with love for the Other in every varied form.

²⁹ Luke 18:27.

³⁰ Hobgood, 154.