Invitation to Change

Jesus transforms us in the routine of daily life.

- Jesus invites himself to dinner at Zacchaeus's home, challenging the hated tax collector to bring justice to the poor and those he's defrauded.
- The small size of Zacchaeus makes his story appealing to young children, who know what it's like to be too small to see.
- Today’s session invites children to explore Jesus’ story through creative drama, games and art.

Question of the Week
What portrait of a believer emerges from the persistent widow and the tax collector Zacchaeus?

Core Session
- Getting Started
- Gospel Story: Jesus and Zacchaeus
- Tall and Small (blindfold)
- Praying Together

Enrichment
- Discover the Good News (optional: hand mirror)
- Singing Together
- Craft: Mural (mural paper)
- Game: Jesus’ Friends
- Info: After Halloween
- Info: Young Children and the Gospel
- Info: Where You’ll Find Everything Else

Helps for Catechists
- More About Today’s Scriptures
- Reflection
- The Scriptures and the Catechism
- Liturgy Link: All Saints’ Day
- The World of the Bible: Savior
**Getting Started** (5-15 minutes)
Ask the children if there are ever times when they cannot see because they are still small. (Some of the times that they might mention are meeting someone at an airport or going to a parade.) Ask how can we see better in such situations. One answer might be: by sitting on an adult’s shoulders.

Ask the children to pretend that they want to see something that is very tall. How could they become taller? Let each child stand on a sturdy chair and tell the group what he or she pretends to see.

Ask the children when it helps to be small in order to see better—for example, to see ants or to find a lost penny on the floor. Ask the children to take turns pretending to be very small and telling the rest of the group what they pretend to see.

Tell the children that the story today is about a small man who wanted to see someone special.

**Gospel Story** (5-10 minutes)

*Jesus and Zacchaeus*

*Find Zacchaeus Storytelling Visuals for use in telling today’s story attached to this document.*

“Jesus is coming, Jesus is coming. I want to see him!” said Zacchaeus.

Zacchaeus was very short. He couldn’t see over the heads of all the other people waiting to see Jesus, too. “Don’t push me,” said a woman when Zacchaeus tried to get past her. “You aren’t very nice. Don’t push!”

Zacchaeus pushed anyway. He pushed his way through the crowd and climbed a sycamore tree! Now he could see Jesus! Right there! Jesus was waving at everyone!

Jesus saw Zacchaeus sitting in the tree and Jesus stopped. He looked at Zacchaeus and said, “Hurry down from the tree, Zacchaeus. I want to go to your house today.”

Zacchaeus was so excited that he almost fell from the tree. He and Jesus hurried off to Zacchaeus’s house. A man grumbled, “Oh, why is Jesus going with Zacchaeus? We don’t like Zacchaeus.”

A woman grumbled, “Oh, why is Jesus going with Zacchaeus? Zacchaeus steals our money!”

Soon Jesus and Zacchaeus came out of the house. They were both smiling. Zacchaeus said, “I’m going to give back the money I have stolen. I’m going to stop cheating people. I’m going to share what I have with poor people, people who are hungry and people who are homeless.” And he did.

**Tall and Small** (5-15 minutes)

First teach children this game chant:

We’re very, very tall.
We’re very, very small.
Sometimes tall,
Sometimes small,
Jesus loves us all!

Then show the children how to stand “tall” with their arms over their heads. Show them how to be “small” by squatting on their heels. One person is chosen to face away from the group. A blindfold or the child’s hands may be used to cover the eyes. The catechist silently models for the group whether they are to be “tall” or “small.”

The group chants together the game chant. The child who is blindfolded then guesses whether the group is “tall” or “small.” Repeat the game, giving other children a chance to guess.

**Praying Together** (5 minutes)

Talk with the children about why Zacchaeus was happy. Affirm the children’s ideas: Zacchaeus got to see Jesus. Jesus came to his house. Then add that Zacchaeus was also happy because he found out that Jesus loved him, just as he was. Affirm that Jesus loves each child in the group, just as they are.

Close by praying:

- Dear God, thank you for the story of Zacchaeus, the friend whom Jesus loved just the way he was. Thank you for making us friends of Jesus, too. Amen.

**Note:** Distribute this week’s *At Home with the Good News* to group members as they depart (or e-mail it to families after the session).
Discover the Good News (5-10 minutes)
On page 1 of today’s Discover the Good News you’ll find a story affirming Jesus’ love for all. Use other attributes to affirm Jesus’ love, too. For example: “Jesus loves people wearing sneakers. Jesus loves people wearing boots. Jesus loves us all!” Invite the children, too, to think of differences that Jesus loves (short hair, long hair, red clothes, blue clothes, boys, girls, etc.)

On page 2 you’ll find a game children can play with a hand mirror. The game affirms that each child in the room is a saint: a friend of Jesus.

Singing Together (5-10 minutes)
From Singing the Good News, sing together:
◆ “If Jesus Came to My House” (songbook p. 48)

Note: To access both the songbook and its attached MP3 files, open your Fall-C Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Singing the Good News.

Craft (10-20 minutes)
Mural
The children work together to make a giant mural. Use brown paper to cover as large an area as possible of free wall space. The paper should reach as high as the top of the children’s heads. Distribute felt markers or crayons.

Ask for volunteers to draw large trees that fill the mural. Explain immediately that other children will tape pictures on top of these trees, to prevent the artists from feeling disappointed. Ask one volunteer to draw a picture of Jesus. Ask each of the other children to draw a picture of himself or herself.

Help children use bits of masking tape to add the pictures to the murals. Jesus should be taped somewhere on the ground, in the center of the mural. Children can tape themselves on the ground, too, or in the trees, like Zacchaeus.

Game (5-10 minutes)
Jesus’ Friends
Sit with the children in a circle. Explain that Zacchaeus was happy because Jesus wanted him for a friend. Affirm that each child in the room is a friend of Jesus, too.

Choose a child you will describe, but do not share your choice with the children. Describe your choice by saying, for example, “I see one of Jesus’ friends who is wearing red.” Children can guess which friend you have in mind. After one or two guesses, give another clue.

Start with a clue that could fit several children, then give increasingly specific clues until only one child is left. (“I’m thinking of a friend whose sister is named Shauna.”) Encourage the children to call out the answer—“The friend is Kate!” Repeat until you have described all the children as Jesus’ friends.
After Halloween

Today, be sure to allow time for excited stories about costumes and candies before plunging into today’s session.

On the other hand, Halloween can be a bit unsettling for young children, too. All that talk about witches, ghosts and goblins! All those grownups acting oddly. And do the neighbors really not know who was under that mask? A scary thought!

We have the opportunity to extend the children’s celebration of Halloween with the Church’s celebration of All Saints. Let’s offer children the joy of fellowship with all the friends of Jesus in a room prepared to meet the children’s needs.

Young Children and the Gospel

Today’s session teaches the story of Zacchaeus, the little man who made a big change. In the Gospel of Luke, this story is almost an enacted parable, echoing the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, taught in the session for the 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time.

The message of today’s gospel for young children is that Jesus loves us just the way we are, whether we are big or small, and whether we do good things or bad things.

One way we communicate this unconditional love to children is by readily forgiving mistakes, and making generous allowances for young learners. Children appreciate an environment where clear limits are set, and where the consequences of transgressing those limits are clear—generally a time of separation until the child is ready to rejoin the group.

But children also need to know that their mistakes and faults will not be held against them. We communicate this attitude of forgiveness and acceptance when we:
◆ do not remind children of past errors
◆ welcome a child in time-out back to the group with affection
◆ readily admit our own failings—and then put them behind us

Where You’ll Find Everything Else

◆ Attached to this Session Plan you will find:
  — Backgrounds and reflections for today’s readings, titled More about Today’s Scriptures.
  — A printable version of today’s Gospel Story for use at home (to distribute or e-mail to families).
  — Zacchaeus Storytelling Visuals to print, cut-out and use in telling today’s story.
  — Suggestions and directions for a Creative Drama activity based on today’s story
  — An article on exploring the Characteristics of Autism, adapted from our special needs curriculum offering Rhythms of Grace.
  — A family paper, At Home with the Good News, to print and distribute or to e-mail to families for use at home.
◆ Open your Fall-C Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Seasonal Articles to find:
  — Information on Fall-C’s Models of the Faith.
  — An article for catechists and/or parents exploring The Pauline Pastoral Letters.
  — An article for catechists and/or parents exploring the importance of Sharing Our Story.
  — The Introduction for Preschool/Kindergarten for Living the Good News.
More about Today’s Scriptures

Today’s readings explore the transformation that follows our encounters with God. The author of Wisdom proclaims that God’s patience and mercy free us from our wickedness. In 2 Thessalonians, Paul encourages steady faith that waits quietly for the transformation brought by Christ. In the gospel story, Jesus grants salvation to a wealthy man who responds to Jesus with repentance and generosity.

Wisdom 11:22–12:2

In chapters 11–19, the author of Wisdom compares God’s treatment of idolaters, such as the Egyptians and Canaanites, with God’s dealings with the Israelites. These comparisons serve as a foil for the author’s primary intent: to portray the utter foolishness of idolatry in view of God’s majesty.

In today’s reading, the author describes God’s mercy and love for every part of creation. God is neither impressed by the world’s grandeur nor overcome by the world’s wickedness. God’s sovereignty displays the steadfast pleasure that God takes in all that exists. God deals gently with our sins not because they are inconsequential but because by doing so, we may discover the grace to repent and be free.

2 Thessalonians 1:11–2:2

This reading is the first of three from 2 Thessalonians. Paul’s stay in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-10) was relatively brief, and he left the new congregation exposed to the attacks of local Jews and Gentiles. Timothy’s encouraging report of their steadfastness in faith led Paul to write 1 Thessalonians about the year 51, the first extant letter of Paul’s correspondence and hence probably the earliest written material in the New Testament. Presumably 2 Thessalonians was written a few months later in order to correct a misunderstanding of his teaching on the “day of the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 5:1-2).

The reading begins with Paul’s brief prayer for the Thessalonians’ sanctification through the cooperation of God’s initiative in grace and of their human actions. Then Paul begins his teaching on the return of Christ, which apparently some believed had already happened. He discourages an alarmist mentality that disrupts the normal activities of life.

Luke 19:1-10

Jericho was a major trade center and thus also a center for the collection of customs. Zacchaeus risks ridicule and perhaps violence out among the crowds. Jesus makes the decisive gesture of inviting himself to dinner, thus offering Zacchaeus a fellowship denied to him by others.

Not in fulfillment of a rule, but in joyous and thankful response, Zacchaeus vows to give half his goods to the poor and to recompense generously those he might have defrauded. Zacchaeus chooses the most extreme repayment penalty prescribed by the law.

In answer both to him and to the murmurers, Jesus points out that even an outcast may receive and respond to “salvation” (v. 9), the presence of the kingdom in the person and message of Jesus. Through his repentance and faith, Zacchaeus became a true son of Abraham, walking in the ways of his forefather.

Reflection

By some standards, Zacchaeus might appear lost (he certainly does to the chorus of grumblers who resent the system of taxation he represents). But in another sense, he personifies the right response to Jesus. His life is as ordinary as a tax return or a sycamore until God breaks in. At first Zacchaeus seems propelled by curiosity, scrambling up the tree like a small boy. But Jesus’ courtesy astonishes him. (There’s also an element of humor in the Lord peering through the leaves.)

When Jesus invites himself over, Zacchaeus responds wholeheartedly. The scene where he welcomes his guest happily is a gold nugget in the gospel, set against darker, meaner-spirited scenes of rejection. And where do we stand, ourselves? Do we grumble about the Johnny-come-latelys, or those we would narrow-mindedly bar from the kingdom? Or do we rejoice when anyone gets it, even with twigs in their hair? If we can say “yes” to the last question, then we can relax into the joy of God’s abundance.
The Scriptures and the Catechism

Christian hope is based on Jesus’ promise to return when God will finally transform us and our world. For most of us, the expectation of Jesus’ glorious, future return is often vague and not particularly relevant because it seems so far away (CCC, #668–77). But through the example of Zacchaeus, we discover what it is like for Jesus to come into our lives now. His presence changes this tax collector’s life from hoarding to sharing (CCC, #1434–35, 1968–69, 2447, 2462), from oppression to reparation for unjust behavior (CCC, #2407–12), from being an outsider to being an insider, and from being lost to being found because he allowed Jesus to enter his house to share a meal.

Liturgical Link

All Saints’ Day

The celebration of All Saints’ Day on November 1 began as a feast day commemorating all martyrs, confessors and virgins, including those whose names were not known.

It was celebrated originally on the first Sunday after Pentecost, and the Eastern Church still observes this date. In the Western Church, the date was changed to November 1 in order to counter pagan festivals held to propitiate the evil spirits associated with the coming of winter and darkness. The customs associated with these pagan rites are still visible in the secular observance of Halloween (“All Hallows’ Eve,” that is, the Eve of All Saints’ Day).

The emphasis of today’s celebration is on the communion of all believers, living and dead, who are bound together in Christ’s love. The traditional term for this unity is the “communion of saints”: the whole family of God, the living and the dead, those whom we love and those whom we hurt, bound together in Christ by sacrament, prayer and praise. Christ’s kingdom transcends time and space; not even death can sever the relationship that the faithful have in Christ. Our prayers are joined by those believers who have gone before: that God’s will be done throughout the created order.

Not only is All Saints’ Day an occasion on which we might celebrate this fellowship of prayer, it is also a celebration of God’s desire to sanctify the lives of all God’s people. Too often Christians have limited the term saint to describe those of extraordinary sanctity. But in the New Testament, the word saint (Greek for a “holy” person) is used as a term of address for all the faithful (Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Ephesians 1:1). The lives of the faithful are to radiate the love of God given to us in Christ so that all the world might know that this love transforms lives.

The World of the Bible

Savior

In today’s gospel, Jesus declares that he has come “to seek out and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). Before it became a theological term, savior meant one who rescued someone from a difficult situation. Thus it was commonly attributed to the king or emperor or a general who saved the nation by winning a war.

For the Jews, God was their primary Savior because God rescued them from their oppression in Egypt, restored them after the exile, and sustained their covenant community.

For Christians, Jesus is the Savior because he rescued us from our broken relationship with God and offered us a new relationship under God’s kingdom rule.