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Spirit Life: Peace

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It was the summer of 2004. My wife and I just moved into our new house. Jonah, our oldest was 2 years old. We were turning this house into our home. Doing a bit of kitchen remodeling. Making this house a home, a place where when we laid our heads down at night, we would get a peaceful night's sleep. That's a home, right? A peaceful place to lay our heads. And one beautiful summer evening, as we were making this house our home, our doorbell rang. I hurried to the door as I was making dinner. I didn't want it to burn. A peaceful home doesn't include a burnt dinner. At the door was a little girl, must have been around 6 or 7 years old. She looked at me, startled, and I realized right away that she was expecting to find the former owners to answer the door. She looked at me and then leaned to look behind me to see if anyone else was home, trying to make sense of her unexpected encounter. And then I remembered that the previous owners had a daughter about her age, and I figured that they must have been friends, and this little girl was coming over to play.

I told the girl that the family had moved, we were her new neighbors, there wasn't anyone here to play with, and since it was dinner time, she should hurry home because her family was certainly going to be eating soon. I was super nice about the whole thing. As she turned to slowly walk away, I started to close the door and at that moment I heard my next-door neighbor's voice calling out to the girl and the girl ran across our yard to the neighbors. I turned back to the kitchen to finish cooking dinner. Peace restored.

A couple of days later, I was in my back yard and my neighbor was in theirs. Making the house a home also means yardwork. I walked over to say hello and I asked her about that encounter with the little girl. My neighbor told me that the little girl was an only child of a single mom who worked 3 different jobs, and many nights the little girl would go to certain trusted neighbors at dinner time to get something to eat. Otherwise, the little girl would go hungry that night.

What? I turned away a hungry kid. Me? Don't I know who I am? And, by the way, the little girls' name? Angel! I turned away a hungry Angel. In my haste, in my focus on making my own dinner, I failed to see this hungry Angel. I simply did not see it. Who do you think didn't get a peaceful sleep that night? But when you think about it, my experience pales in comparison to the many, many nights Angel laid her head down at night, without the peace of knowing where her next meal would come.

Now of course, how was I supposed to know? How was I supposed to see? We were new to the neighborhood. And that was my first encounter with the hidden hunger that exists even in nicely groomed suburbia. How could we see it? So yes, there are lots of excuses.

But what if we, you and I, know that there are hungry people out there and we still spend lots of time, and energy in our own kitchen's, making our own dinners. Where are the excuses then? And I'm not only talking about the physically hungry. Here at Prince of Peace we are focused on physical hunger, and that effort continues in earnest. But how about a different kind of hunger. How about a hunger that can be just as disturbing, a hunger that steals our peace as well? It's spiritual hunger. How about those who long for spiritual food? How about those who we know are spiritually seeking who find no peace because we are busy cooking our own dinner?

What I just described is the story of Zacchaeus and is the story of us. If you grew up in the church, I bet you could even sing the Zacchaeus song. Right... what do we know about Zacchaeus from that children's song – he was a wee little man, for some reason we've dipped into the Scotch/Irish translation of small – wee little man.

The crowd makes it hard for Zacchaeus to see Jesus. And he can't see Jesus, so he climbs up into a tree to see Jesus. We have the wee little man in our minds, but it may not be simply because he was short in stature. He was a wee little man because the crowd thought so little of him. Zacchaeus didn't deserve to see Jesus.

And here we have our first moment – who gets to see Jesus and who gets to decide? In the gospel of

Luke, leading up to the Zacchaeus story, there are many other stories of who society had judged worthy enough to see Jesus. A story about a widow, a story about the young, another story about a tax collector, and a story of a blind man. All who the crowd didn't or refused to see but were seen by Jesus.

And that is what happens to Zacchaeus. He really, really wants to see Jesus, he is spiritually hungry, he doesn't have peace, but the crowd, thinking so little of him blocks his view. In other words, the crowd is busy making their own dinner – focusing on themselves. And that in focusing on themselves – and their awesome amazing dinner – they prevent Zacchaeus from seeing Jesus. Spiritually hungry, Zacchaeus, looking for the peace of Jesus, humbles himself, he humiliates himself, and becomes like a child climbing a tree. But Zacchaeus is spiritually hungry and as he sees Jesus, Jesus sees him.

And when Jesus came to that place, He looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down quickly, because I must stay at your house today." So he came down quickly and welcomed Jesus joyfully. And when the people saw it, they all complained, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." (Luke 19:5-7)

Now this isn't just a grumble – this was a crowd full on complaining. Why would Jesus "see" this guy? Doesn't he know who this guy is? But Jesus is about to pick apart all their assumptions, will challenge our assumptions and might even frustrate us a bit.

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 19:9-10 NRS)

Salvation, deliverance has come to Zacchaeus house – his family, whoever lives under that roof... in God's eyes, being seen by God... now has deliverance, restoration back into community. That house now has more peace. That house is now a home, a place where Zacchaeus and his family can peacefully lay their heads.

What are you doing Jesus? You and I may ask, and the crowd was sure to ask... Jesus replies, you may not like it, it may frustrate the heck out of you, but even this guy, yes even this guy and his whole

family are a part of you and are a part of me. Just like a child of Abraham, like you.

And Jesus says, by the way, that's what I do. That is the reason why I came. The word that is translated as lost means "destroyed". For Jesus came to seek out and to save what was destroyed. What peace Zacchaeus must have felt. What peace his household must have felt. To know that he was seen, through the good the bad and the ugly, and delivered from destruction, by the great peace giver.

We are gathered here in this place. In some ways we are a crowd. In many ways, we are a crowd who has come together in a very particular way to know the peace of Jesus. Yes, just like the crowd we too are spiritually hungry, and the crowd should be spiritually hungry for the peace of Jesus. We spend a lot of time in the kitchen making the dinner that is served here every weekend. And at the same time, we are called to reach out to those who are not here. And why? I truly believe that what we do here at Prince of Peace matters. We have a particular way of seeing how God's complete and total inclusive love for all people brings peace in a world that so desperately needs it. And this makes a difference.