



A Radical Welcome
Wesley Mimico United Church
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by Paul Shepherd

Based on Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4 and Luke 19:1-10

Well, I'd like to start this reflection by discussing good old Zacchaeus, but I feel an obligation to unpack the results of our spirituality quiz from last week first. And who knows, perhaps as we explore our own collective spirituality, we will find Zacchaeus anyway.

I should probably begin by explaining that picture on the front of the bulletin, because that single picture is an image of our collective spirituality here at Wesley Mimico United Church. I wanted to give you the chance to reflect on that picture before I explained it, which is why there are no labels on the image. Just a circle, with a horizontal and a vertical dividing line. And then some red fuzzy lines spreading out from the middle of the circle.

The circle represents wholeness. The circle is an important part of the image because wholeness is important in spirituality. It is important that even if we – as a community of faith - express our spirituality in different ways, that we are all connected. That we are all part of the whole picture.

The vertical line represents the tension between thinking and feeling. The top of the line is the “thinking” end of the line, and the bottom of the line is the “feeling” end of the line. I'm sure that we are all aware of times in our lives when we respond primarily to our thoughts, and other times when we respond primarily to our feelings. The tension between thinking and feeling is a big part of both our humanity and our spirituality.

The horizontal line represents the tension between imagining God or Spirit as more mysterious or as more knowable. The left end of the line is the “God as Mystery” end of the line, and the right end of the line is the “God as knowable” end of the line. “God as Mystery” is the experience we have when we embrace our own sense of wonder and openness. “God as Known” is the experience we have when we feel we know God in more concrete ways through our own lives, through Scripture, or perhaps through hymns.

So, that just leaves the fuzzy red lines. What do you suppose those are? Well, those fuzzy red lines are our responses to the quiz. The line angles are not important. What is important is which quadrant the lines are in.

There are four quadrants within the circle. And each one of the quadrants represents a different “type” of spirituality. Therefore the fuzzy lines represent responses from all of us – collectively - from the spirituality quiz last week.

Looking at the quadrants separately, we see this:

Quadrant 1 – top right quadrant – 5 lines. “This is an intellectual “thinking” spirituality that favors what [we] can see, touch, and vividly imagine.”¹ This type of spirituality adds a lot to the whole, including theological reflection, and an examination of the words we actually sing or say during worship.

Quadrant 2 – bottom right quadrant – 8 lines. This type of spirituality is all heart, combined with concrete images of God. This type of spirituality adds a lot to the whole too, focusing on sharing stories, personal transformation, and experiencing the immanence of God in everyday life.

Quadrant 3 – bottom left quadrant – 9 lines. This type of spirituality includes listening to God, combined with a sense of being on a journey with the Holy. This type of spirituality also adds a lot to the whole, including contemplation, intuition, and a focus on an inner world. Mystics live here.

Quadrant 4 – top left quadrant – 6 lines. This type of spirituality includes active visioning, single-mindedness, and deep focus. This type of spirituality adds a lot to the whole, including liberation theology, and the idea that work and prayer may be the same thing.

So what do we see from this? Each quadrant contains a similar number of lines. That means that - in general terms - we are fairly balanced as a group collectively.

It's not completely balanced of course. If you compare the number of fuzzy lines above and below the horizontal line, you see that we have more expression in the “feeling” part of the circle than in the “thinking” part of the circle. And if you compare the number of fuzzy lines left

¹ *discover your spiritual type*, Corinne Ware, 1995. page 37.

and right of the vertical line, you see that we are really almost equally split between seeing “God as Mystery” and seeing “God as knowable”.

The image on the cover of the bulletin is an expression of our collective responses as a congregation. If we look at individual people, there is more variety of spiritual expression, with about half of us being in quadrant 3, the combination of “feeling” and “God as Mystery”. The other half of us are split fairly equally between the other 3 spirituality types.

[Is anyone surprised by anything? - comments - questions]

It's not a question that one spirituality type is the best. The reality is that collectively, we all do better if all of the spirituality types are present in some sort of balance. And I am delighted that – in general – we seem to have a good spread of spirituality types in this congregation. I am delighted that – in general – we are actually fairly balanced.

Now I have a question for you. When I was reading descriptions of the characteristics of each of the spirituality types, did all of the descriptions sound ... good? Did all of the descriptions sound like qualities and characteristics that any faith group would want to include? Of course they did. But of course, that's how I chose to present them. Any one of the spiritual types have negative aspects too, which – if pushed to their extremes – are actually quite unhealthy.

But the whole picture – the complete balance – comes from the mixture of spirituality types, and also the mix of the good and the not-so-good aspects of each of those types.

And this mix is where I find Zacchaeus enters our own story.

During Jesus's time, the local Jewish groups were living under an occupation put in place by Rome. And part of that system of occupation included extracting taxes from people. And that system worked in Palestine - as it did in other places under roman occupation - using collaborators: members of the local cultural group that essentially worked for Rome, extracting taxes from people in their own cultural group on behalf of Rome.

Zacchaeus was Jewish, but he worked for Rome to collect taxes from the Jewish population. And those taxes went to Rome, the hub of the civilization that was responsible for the occupation of Palestine at that time.

Is it really any wonder that Zacchaeus was hated? Is it really any wonder why the people were amazed - and likely very angry - when Jesus invited himself to dinner at Zacchaeus's place? Jesus collaborated with a collaborator.

Zacchaeus was rich, but he would have been shunned by his own cultural community. The text says that Zacchaeus was "short in stature", which I believe means more than saying that Zacchaeus was a short person. He was an outcast.

And Jesus welcomes him. Actually, Jesus does something even more radical than welcome him - Jesus invited himself to Zacchaeus's home. How often do you invite yourself into a stranger's home?

When we invite someone into our own home, we stay in control. We control when the refreshments will appear and what they will be. We control who else gets to be invited. But when we invite ourselves into someone else's home, we lose all control. We have no control over the events that will unfold. We have no control over who else will be invited. We have no control over when - or if - food will be served. We control nothing. We are simply present.

So when Jesus invited himself into Zacchaeus's home, it was a radical form of welcome. Jesus was willing to accept whatever Zacchaeus had to offer. Jesus was willing to not be in control - and Zacchaeus responded with enthusiasm.

A radical welcome is just that – radical! A radical welcome allows the best in the stranger to emerge. A radical welcome allows the best in us to emerge too. We - as a community of faith - bring a diversity of spiritualities together. And with that diversity, we can be radically welcoming.

I pray that this week we will all be looking for opportunities to give – or to receive – a radical welcome. And come and share your welcoming stories next week.

Amen.