

Interactive lesson



picture cropped from
<https://www.icanvas.com/canvas-print/elephant-and-dog-sit-on-a-tree-branch-mii323>

Have you ever literally gone out on a tree limb?

<Let them respond>

What is it like? <Let them respond>

Is it risky? <Let them respond>

When (or why) would you do it? <Let them respond>

What is it like to talk about faith in Jesus outside of church? <Let them respond>

When (or why) would you do it? <Let them respond>

What is the branch connected to? <Let them respond>

Is the tree sturdier than the branch itself, harder to break? <Let them respond>

What is your faith connected to? <Let them respond>

Is the church a stronger source of faith, with more ways to answer questions about God than you alone have? <Let them respond>

Do all branches of a tree point in the same directions? <Let them respond>

Does everyone show faith in the same way? <Let them respond>

We all try to see God from whatever path we have followed in life. Sometimes we feel vulnerable;

sometimes we appreciate the view; and sometimes we get lost in the crowd of worldly concerns, and have to strive to get where we can see Jesus more clearly. Whenever you feel like you have gone out on a limb for faith, remember that you are connected to something much greater, pray, and trust the Holy Spirit to provide help to get you safely through.

Gospel lesson

Just prior to today's story, Jesus had healed a blind beggar. The beggar then followed Him, glorifying God; the people who saw it praised God too.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/Lumo-zacchaeus/>

Luke 19:1-10

¹He entered Jericho and was passing through it.

²A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich.

³He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature.

⁴So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way.

⁵When 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."

⁶So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him.

⁷All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner."

⁸Zacchaeus stood 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."

⁹Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham.

¹⁰For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."

The word of God for the people of God

<Hymn "O Jesus, I Have Promised">

UMH #396>

Message: Man Out On a Limb



Foreground picture from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/face-to-face-with-jesus/twenty-first-sunday-after-pentecost-year-c-lectionary-planning-notes/twenty-first-sunday-after-pentecost-year-c-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Our gracious God who seeks out the lost,
as we take time now to further consider today's

scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That we may be restored with Your love to help all of those going out on a limb to seek You. Amen.

Our series for this last month of the lectionary year is “Face to Face with Jesus.” It begins with “Man Out On a Limb.”



picture from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/face-to-face-with-jesus/twenty-first-sunday-after-pentecost-year-c-lectionary-planning-notes/twenty-first-sunday-after-pentecost-year-c-graphics>

“What would it be like to encounter Jesus face to face? That’s the question this series sets out to help us answer.

We can’t know, of course, but we can get a glimpse of what happened to those who did meet Jesus in the Gospel texts we examine here.”

Back around the turn of the millenium, I was captain of the Sherburne Emergency Squad. Even then, we had been losing members for a decade and were struggling to have coverage – although back then, it was still all volunteer. I scrambled for ideas on how to get more help for calls and tried a number of things that had not been done before. I had to go out on a limb.



picture screencaptured from
<https://www.exploring.org/>

One idea was to tap into the pool of teenagers in the community. Through the Boy Scouts of America, I started Explorer Post 2896 - "289" for the Sherburne Ambulance number and "6" for the number of kids with which we started the group. We did a kick-off demonstration at the school, gave them some basic training, and then allowed those that met specific criteria (e.g., parental permission, minimum age, good grades, ability to get to the firehouse) to run on ambulance calls on evenings and weekends.

The kids were excited, full of new energy for helping as a second or third pair of hands in back with the patients. I found that we even got some new adult members as well, because the parents wanted to see just what their children were getting into. All of these people went out on a limb, too.

Having to deal with hard times is nothing new.



picture cropped and
 reversed from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/bible-characters-prophets/>

We hear in the psalm how "Trouble and anguish have come upon me;" Habakkuk cried out to the Lord for help, seeing destruction, violence, strife, and contention; and Paul wrote to the Thessalonians about the persecutions and afflictions they were enduring.

We know we have hard times today. Just like in Habakkuk's time, evil seems to be overtaking the world - we see corrupt politicians, systemic racism, everyone feeling afflicted by something and struggling to just to endure, let alone do good.

When we are stuck in hard times, God's Word - also known as Jesus - points us in the right direction. The psalmist described it, Habakkuk assured the people with it, and the early Christians survived with thanks to God because of it.

And speaking of Jesus, what happened in the Gospel?



screen captured from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qDbdpCpceqY>;
credit: LUMO

A guy was disliked because of his job and wealth, assumed to be rotten. He heard about some great man of God coming to town and wanted to see him, but the crowd blocked his view. So he ran ahead and climbed up to where he could see over the crowd, but in doing so, going out on a limb, he exposed himself to the Lord. Suddenly he was face-to-face with Jesus, who knew him by name and invited Himself into his home.

What would you do if you were face-to-face with Jesus, where everyone could see what you said and did? Zacchaeus was happy to welcome Jesus.

Cynics would say it was because of the honor in having someone famous over, an exclusive event. But who was Jesus famous to? He constantly butted heads with Judaic leaders and the Romans were wary of rebellions. Plus, Jesus traveled with a band of followers; having Him over meant having His disciples to feed and house too, not a lightly undertaken task.

Yet Zacchaeus was happy to! He seemed actually to love God and to be trying to live righteously. The people did not see it that way; they assumed he was bad. Think of our politicians today – would you think any of them welcoming [someone the crowds loved] was sincere or actually cared about God?

But what Zacchaeus said he would do was straight out of the law of Moses – and the Greek text could be translated that he was already in the habit of doing that. If that chief tax collector was as bad as the people said, he would not have been able to pay out what he promised, because the assumption was that all of a tax collector's gains were through fraud. He understood how the holy scriptures were to be held.

God knows our hearts. Jesus knew Zacchaeus was trying to do what was right, yet was being ostracized by the townsfolk. Previously, Jesus had helped a blind man to see. Here, Jesus helped the whole community to see. The public clarification enabled the community

to see Zacchaeus was actually good and faithful.

The relationship of the community with Zacchaeus was healed. And it was made possible when Zacchaeus went out on a limb to know the Lord better. It started with a heart seeking God and action taken when the Lord came near, giving him the opportunity.



picture from MMMS collection

God builds upon our faithful responses to opportunities presented to us. A couple of years after the emergency squad was benefitting from explorers' help, children of firemen got involved and asked if they could also help on fire scenes.

I passed the leadership torch over, and the fire department expanded the explorers' program to include some firefighter activities. They got more adult firefighters as well, when parents of the youths got involved. It was all possible because I went out on a limb, and the fire department community was willing to accept what they saw was actually good and useful.

What about us today? We struggle, but God's Word points us in the right direction. God will move in our lives. "If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come." Prepare for it!

Are our hearts open to the opportunities God presents for us? Do we even see those [right in the midst of our community] who struggle for acceptance, wanting to see and be seen?

Remain steadfast in your faith, true to God, even when afflicted. Pray for guidance, and when the Spirit speaks to your heart, be willing to go out on a limb for the Lord. Strive to support one another, be it in our little church, our Christian community, or in the area where we live. Try to notice those struggling, let them know that they are seen and matter, and help them to do the same for others.

Now let us respond with

The World Methodist Social Affirmation UMH #886

We believe in God, creator of the world and all people;
and in Jesus Christ, incarnate among us,
who died and rose again;
and in the Holy Spirit,
present with us to guide, strengthen, and comfort

We believe; God, help our unbelief.

We rejoice in every sign of God's kingdom:
in the upholding of human dignity and community;
in every expression of love, justice, and reconciliation;
in each act of self-giving on behalf of others;
in the abundance of God's gifts

entrusted to us that all may have enough;
in all responsible use of the earth's resources.

Glory be to God on high; and on earth, peace.

We confess our sin, individual and collective,
by silence or action:

through the violation of human dignity
based on race, class, age, sex, nation, or faith;
through the exploitation of people
because of greed and indifference;
through the misuse of power
in personal, communal, national, and international life;
through the search for security
by those military and economic forces
that threaten human existence;
through the abuse of technology
which endangers the earth and all life upon it.

Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy; Lord, have mercy.

We commit ourselves individually and as a community
to the way of Christ:

to take up the cross;
to seek abundant life for all humanity;
to struggle for peace with justice and freedom;
to risk ourselves in faith, hope and love,
praying that God's kingdom may come.

Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

<Doxology>

<Offertory / Pastoral Prayer>

Let us pray:

Compassionate God, as Jesus did for Zacchaeus, you reach across the chasms that we've created, the ones where we've isolated ourselves from the redemptive power of your love.

As with Zacchaeus, bridges have been built, and people who believed they were beyond your embrace have been welcomed to the table with open arms!

As we give to you this day,
may we also follow the example of Zacchaeus
– with an explosion of gratitude and generosity
– and may we also know his joy!

(above prayer from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org>)

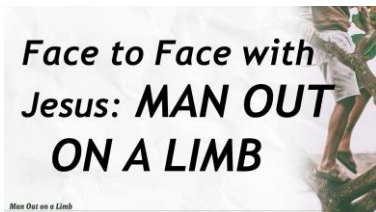
- Lord, please help {these members of the body of Christ whom we lift up} with Your healing touch and comfort:
 - **Gloria Dubois** – long covid issues; add'l care provider
 - –
 - –
 - –
 - –
 - –
- Thanks for
 - –
 - –
- Hold those who cannot be with us in Your loving embrace until we see them again.

- Family far off
- Travelers
- Send Your Spirit to address world/social problems
 - end bigotry, dismantle racism, reform systems persist
 - bring world peace
- Guide our Leaders – local, state, federal, international, and especially of Your church.
- Lord, please help people who yet struggle with war in their homeland; especially Ukraine.

All these things we pray as You taught us to pray,
<Lord's Prayer>

<Hymn "Freely, Freely" UMH #389>

<Benediction>



background picture from
<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/face-to-face-with-jesus/twenty-first-sunday-after-pentecost-year-c-lectionary-planning-notes/twenty-first-sunday-after-pentecost-year-c-graphics>

Mother Teresa once said that she saw the face of Jesus in everyone she helped.
Seek to be face to face with Jesus: go out on a limb this week.
Bring the message of hope and love, of justice and peace, to all you meet.
Let others see the love of God, the face of Jesus, and the power of the Holy Spirit within you.
Amen.