

Toy Story 3

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

October 10, 2010

5th in the six-part series: *St. Andrew at the Movies*

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Luke 19:1-10 (NRSV)

He 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.”

Galatians 4:4-7 (The Message)

⁴⁻⁷But when the time arrived that was set by God the Father, God sent his Son, born among us of a woman, born under the conditions of the law so that he might redeem those of us who have been kidnapped by the law. Thus we have been set free to experience our rightful heritage. You can tell for sure that you are now fully adopted as his own children because God sent the Spirit of his Son into our lives crying out, “Papa! Father!” Doesn’t that privilege of intimate conversation with God make it plain that you are not a slave, but a child? And if you are a child, you’re also an heir, with complete access to the inheritance.

Who are we? Really?

The world offers us many answers to this question. God offers us one.

Change is both inevitable and exhausting. The poet Matthew Arnold¹ put it this way:

For what wears out the life of mortal men?
‘Tis that from change to change their being rolls;
‘Tis that repeated shocks, again, again,
Exhaust the energy of strongest souls
And numb the elastic powers.

Mortal men, mortal women, and even, it seems, toys. Is there something that is unchanging about us, unyielding to the seasons of the calendar or the repeated shocks of life?

Discarded. Useless. Abandoned. . . . You choose the word. There are many that describe the way Andy’s toys feel when they mistakenly think he has tossed them aside as he heads off to college. (If you haven’t seen the movie, take a minute and read the plot summary on page 4.)

And then, not only do they believe they’ve been tossed aside, they end up the captives of the power-crazed despot, Lotso the Bear. Andy’s toys need to be rescued. Would they get rescued from Lotso? Would they come to see that Andy had never intended for them to end up in the trash? (A seeming eternity in the attic, maybe, but not the trash!) What choices would they make? What would their abandonment mean to them? Might it change them? Let’s look at Lotso’s story.

Lotso . . . and Zacchaeus?

This seems like an odd pairing. To see the connection, you need to know Lotso’s “back story.” He was once upon a time the beloved toy bear of an adorable little girl named Daisy.

¹From Arnold’s *Poems*, written in 1853.

But she lost her bear, in the way that children are prone to. By the time that Lotso had made his way back to the little girl, a new toy had taken his place. What would he do? His identity, his very reason for being, had been ripped from him. He felt discarded and abused, much like Andy's toys felt.

Lotso's heart hardened in response. He embraced power over love, the fist over the embrace, becoming the power broker among all the toys at Sunnyside Day Care.

Tax Collectors

Zacchaeus was a tax collector, but the Roman tax system was nothing like our IRS. Rome would contract out the collection of taxes in geographic areas. The winning entrepreneurial bidder would agree to pay the contracted amount of taxes to Rome. The tax entrepreneur would then put together an organization to do the actual collection. The winning bidder would employ chief tax collectors, like Zacchaeus, who made the whole thing work. Zacchaeus would have employed lower-level collectors, like Jesus' disciple Matthew, who would man toll booths and other small tax collection businesses. It was one of the largest enterprises of that time. In the Roman system, tax collectors would be free to collect all the money they could and keep whatever wasn't owed Rome under the contract. Thus, not only were they agents of the Roman oppressors, we can only imagine the methods they employed in gaining their wealth. Not surprisingly, in the Gospels tax collectors are usually lumped in with the prostitutes.

Toward the end of the movie, Lotso had one more choice to make. After Woody risked himself to save the hated Lotso from the incinerator, the bear could have responded to this demonstration of love with grace of his own. Instead, Lotso turned on Woody yet again. He turned away from grace and suffered the consequences.

How many people in our world share Lotso's story. Tragedy, loss, simply the bad stuff of life causes them to seek new life . . . in all the wrong places. All they can see is what they have lost; they are blinded a new future, fresh possibilities. Strapped to the front-end of a garbage truck is all that Lotso's bitterness can gain him.

What's Zacchaeus have to do with this?

The truth is that we aren't told anything of Zacchaeus' back story in Luke's gospel. But we do know that he chose the path of the abusive tax collector, earning the antipathy of his neighbors. Perhaps he simply chose the wallet over community, loot over love. But like Lotso, he gets another chance.

One day in early spring, the much talked about Jesus made his through Jericho, Zacchaeus' hometown, on his way to the Passover festival in Jerusalem.

Already contemptible in the eyes of his fellow Jews, Zacchaeus subjected himself to further ridicule.

This tax collector ran to catch a glimpse of Jesus

passing by, even though it was most unseemly for a Jewish man to run. Being a rather short man, Zacchaeus climbed a tree for a better view, something else unbecoming for a grown man.

Perhaps because Zacchaeus made such a spectacle of himself, Jesus spotted him in the tree and, as was his custom, he went to Zacchaeus' home. In fact, Jesus invited himself.

Can you imagine the joy Zacchaeus must have felt as he welcomed Jesus? Of course, the townsfolk didn't much like Jesus entering the home of the hated tax collector, but Jesus always seemed to hang around with the wrong sorts of people. Having invited himself into Zacchaeus' home, what happened next will be Jesus' miracle.

Zacchaeus asks nothing of Jesus, not even an answer to a question. He simply steps forward and, without prompting, commits to giving half of his ill-gotten possessions to the poor – not all, but half. Then, in keeping with the most stringent interpretation of the ancient Judaic law, Zacchaeus promises that he will repay four-fold those he has defrauded. Zacchaeus' repentance and generosity demonstrate that he is ready to embrace a new identity, a "son of Abraham" (v. 9) He was lost, but now is found.

Notice that Jesus does not ask Zacchaeus to give up all he has. Nor does it seem that Zacchaeus abandoned his life to follow Jesus. Rather, Zacchaeus is redeemed in his life. He is transformed within the life he is living. By God's grace, Zacchaeus points his transformed life toward repentance and away from exploitation. He will be generous to the poor. He will make amends to those he has wronged. He will stay a tax collector, but he will now conduct himself with honor and justice. He will heed John the Baptist's teachings to tax collectors: "Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you" (Luke 3:13). Zacchaeus will "bear fruits worthy of repentance" (Luke 3:8). Even after giving away half of his wealth and making reparations, Zacchaeus would have still been a wealthy and powerful man. But now, he will use his wealth and power and talents for God's purposes. He will be a force for good, pointing others toward just and generous lives.

Zacchaeus' encounter with Jesus has given him a new identity. Lotso was lost, but not found – and so constructed a new identity. Sadly, he constructed poorly, for others and for himself. Andy's toys also had to embrace a new identity. At the end of the movie, they will no longer be Andy's toys, instead they will find purpose and meaning in the joy they bring Bonnie and the other children. They aren't Andy's toys anymore, but they are still toys.

Our identity in Christ

Crises often force us to confront our identity. The inevitable changes as we move through life do the same. What is our genuine identity, that which our life is built around? A son or daughter? A parent? A father? A professional? A husband? A wife? . . . How do we see ourselves?

In today's passage from Paul's letter to the Galatians, he uses the analogy of minors, heirs, and inheritance to help the still newly believing Galatians to understand that their genuine and unchanging identity is now to be found in Christ. The answer to the question, "Who am I" is now "I am Christ's."

We *are* in direct relationship with God. We *are* dressed in the adult wardrobe of faith. We *are* in Christ's family. We *are* the descendants of Abraham. We *are* the adult heirs of God and the inheritance due God's heirs is ours.

It is not that we are going to be heirs, *we are heirs now*. We may not act like God's heirs much of the time, but that is who we are. If I had to act like an heir to be an heir . . . well, let's just say that the inheritance would forever elude my grasp.

Paul's point in this passage is larger than just the true identity of the Galatian Christians, though he begins this chapter of the letter by reminding them of their own experience of God's Spirit, which is the evidence and guarantee of their new life in Christ. Nonetheless, many of them still look to the keeping of the Jewish law as the mark of their salvation. They don't fully realize that the arrival of Jesus Christ freed them from the curse of needing to keep a law that they could not keep. Because God gave them the Law, they know sin in a way that other peoples do not.

Paul desperately wants the Galatians to grasp that the Law was only their temporary custodian. In Christ, who was himself born under this temporary custodian so that he could free us from the custodian's care, we, in Peterson's graceful paraphrase, "experience our rightful heritage." And our heritage is that we are new creations, made alive in Christ.

Because this world and everything in it is transitory, we are offered temporary custodians throughout our lives. Whether it is Andy or the little girl, Daisy, or our parents or our employers or even our spouses, these temporary guardians, providers of identity, aren't necessarily bad; they can be both good and necessary – like the Law of Moses. But they are still temporary and often prove brittle, breaking up in heavy storms. We are God's children, those who have placed their faith and trust in Jesus Christ. And only in Christ can we find the permanence and the strength that we need . . . and that God desires for us.

The Plot of Toy Story 3

(adapted from Wikipedia)

Andy, who is now seventeen years old, has outgrown his old toys, some of which have been either sold or given away. The others have been stored in his toy box and are being kept there while Andy prepares for college. Andy decides to take Woody with him and packs the other toys in a garbage bag, intending to store them in the attic, but Andy's mom mistakenly puts the bag out on the roadside as garbage. Believing that Andy no longer wants them, the toys sneak into a box to be donated to Sunnyside Daycare. Woody, who saw what really happened, tries to clear up the misunderstanding, but the others refuse to listen.

The toys are driven to Sunnyside where they receive a warm welcome from the daycare toys, led by Lots-O'-Huggin' Bear (a.k.a. Lotso). Woody tries to convince the others to return to Andy, but they feel that they would be happier at Sunnyside, so they let him leave without them. The others soon discover the children Lotso assigned them with are too young, and the toys are innocently abused by the children. Buzz goes to ask Lotso to transfer them to the older children, but learns they were put in the younger children's room on purpose and is caught by some of the Sunnyside toys and reset to his original, deluded space ranger self.

During his escape from Sunnyside, Woody is found and taken in by a girl from the daycare named Bonnie. One of Bonnie's toys reveals to Woody the truth about Lotso and Sunnyside.

Woody returns to Sunnyside to help his friends break out. A lengthy escape adventure ensues that would make Steve McQueen proud. At the last minute, when it seems that the toys will all be burned up in an incinerator, they are rescued by a claw crane operated by the squeeze toy aliens. Later, Lotso is found by a garbage man, who ties him to the front of his truck.

The toys return to Andy's house on a garbage truck and prepare to be stored in the attic. Woody decides he and his friends would better serve their purpose elsewhere. He writes a message on a post-it note and sticks it on the box with all the toys inside. After reading the message, Andy takes the toys to Bonnie. He introduces each toy individually and is surprised to find Woody included, but decides to let Bonnie have him. Then together with Bonnie, Andy plays with his toys one more time before he leaves for college. As Andy drives off, Woody sadly waves goodbye to his former owner, and he is immediately comforted by Buzz and then introduces his old friends to his new friends.

As the credits roll, the conditions for new arrivals at Sunnyside have vastly improved. It is revealed that Barbie and Ken are now in charge of Sunnyside and are making it a nice place for toys. The toys now take turns putting up with the younger children rather than forcing a certain group to put up with all of it.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

Rev. Edlen Cowley has developed the following questions as discussion starters for St. Andrew's Fall Fellowship Groups:

1. Zacchaeus was looking for an identity with and in Christ. He began a relationship with Christ and it changed his life. How has Christ changed your life? How have you found your identity in Him?
2. The toys in Toy Story 3 had the name "Andy" written on them, to signify that "Andy" was their owner. What name is on you? How is this name represented in your life?
3. Andy told Woody's new owner that Woody would "always be there for you and that he would never desert you." How have you experienced God's always being there for you and standing up for you?
4. How has your baptism put God's name on you?
5. What are some of the identity crises you have gone through in life?
6. What has failed in helping you get through those crises?
7. How could identity in Christ help you get through crises?

Daily Bible Readings

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

<p>Monday, Galatians 1 This is the only one of Paul's letters in the New Testament that does not open with a word of thanks for the letter's recipients. Paul's Greek is not as polite as it comes across in the English translations. Why is he so angry with these Christians? Why do you think Paul feels that he must defend his own apostleship? Why does he recount so much of his own story? What surprises you the most about the details of his story?</p>	<p>Tuesday, Galatians 2 Read Acts 15 for more on this council meeting in Jerusalem, assuming Paul is describing the same meeting. It isn't hard to imagine multiple meetings over such a contentious issue. What is the nature of the dispute? Why is it so important that the leaders of the movement must meet to resolve it? Why does Paul get angry with Peter (Cephas)?</p>
<p>Wednesday, Galatians 3 Paul now mounts his counter-arguments to the false teachers? How does Paul view the Law? What was its purpose? Do you think Paul means that with Christ, anything goes? How is it that you are one of Abraham's descendants? How would you explain this to another person?</p>	<p>Thursday, Galatians 4 How does the story of Sarah and Hagar help us to understand Paul's point? How is it that Sarah's son is born "through the promise?" This passage illustrates that Scripture can sometimes be pretty hard to understand. How do you typically deal with a confusing passage?</p>
<p>Friday, Galatians 5 We are new creations, free in Christ. But free for what? What is the nature of Christian freedom? What does this have to do with circumcision? Why do you think Paul contrasts the works of the "flesh" (our old self) with the works of the Spirit?</p>	<p>Saturday, Galatians 6 What does Paul say here about how we are to live out the unity given us in Christ? Notice that in v. 11, Paul takes up the pen himself. Notice esp. v. 15. What does Paul mean?</p>

