

## Embracing the Creep

*Pentecost 24C—October 30, 2016*

*[This transcript was meant for a spoken performance. It is not optimized for a reading experience.]*

*Zacchaeus, come down. Hurry, because I must stay at your house today.*

*—Luke 19:5*

*[Play video “Creep (America’s Got Talent)” by Brian Justin Crum]*

When? How? Where did you encounter your own creep? I am not talking about the person beside you. I am talking about you. You, sitting here.

When did you feel like a creep? When do you feel like a weirdo? When do you question what the hell you are doing here? When you do feel like you don’t belong?

I sensed that I was different when I was very young. That is the thing about being a creep: we learn at an incredibly early age—a preverbal age—the sense of other.

When you were a tiny baby, you began to discover that your parent was separate from you. You began to decipher “them” and “you”. You understood in a basic way the sense of self—the sense of I—in relation to the other.

I was a creative child. I remember in kindergarten that my two favourite play areas were, one, the doll house. I loved playing with the doll house. That house was a two-story colonial. That house had furniture, lots and lots of furniture. If I had been allowed, I might have played there for the whole time.

I also loved painting—not house painting but picture painting. I just need to have a sniff of tempera paint and I am transported back in time to my wooden easel, with paper and Gerber baby-food jars.

I would paint, I would mix my paints. Do you remember what colour you get when you mix all the paint colours together? The colour is brown, baby-poop brown.

That wasn’t the creative part. When I was finished with my picture, I would fill up the empty space at the top of the paper with comics. I would create boxes and characters, one box connecting with the other.

I don’t remember what my comics were about or even if they were about anything. I do remember Miss Phillips (that was my kindergarten teacher); I remember her coming up to my easel and commenting to the class how creative I was.

One time, she asked if she could hang up my picture in the hall for all the school to see. Of course I said yes. I felt so cool.

Adults can make you feel like you belong. Not only that, they can make you feel cool.

Even in kindergarten, I had a sense I was different. I was different than the others. I didn't have words to put with my awareness. It wasn't a feeling of being a creep or that I didn't belong. I don't think I really cared. I was creative and explored my creativity.

As I was sitting with this image, another memory came forward.

Still in the same school, I remembered the feeling when I did not belong. I remember when I was told—told by a teacher—that I didn't belong.

Choir. We had this music teacher who would come in and teach us music. Specifically, she would teach us how to sing and where you would stand in the choir.

Miss Music Teacher would come up to a student and you had to sing and repeat a simple tune. The words were... "A roo toot toot"

That was it, a roo toot toot.

If you didn't make the notes, she would pull on the top of your hair and sing back, "A roo toot toot".

The thing about this test was that the results put you in one of two categories. One group in the choir was called the robins. The other group was called the blue jays.

You didn't want to be put in with the blue jays. If you were a blue jay, you were a loser. I am talking about choir, not the baseball team.

Like the baseball team, if you were a blue jay you were out, out of the choir. This was not a time where every kid won a prize.

Guess which group I was in? You were supposed to say "robin" but you are correct: I was a blue jay. I was a big blue jay. I was the tallest kid in the class and I was only in grade one or two.

Oh, I got to stand in the choir. The key word is "*stand*". I was not allowed to sing. Miss "la-di-da" music teacher told me that I could only mouth the words, but I was not to make a sound.

When you tell a kid not to speak (especially not to make a sound) the impact is you start to feel "less than". You start to become self-conscious.

I stopped singing. I started to believe that my voice wasn't good. My voice didn't sound right. I was a blue jay. I was on the outside. I was excluded. And I began to exclude myself.

As the years went on, I struggled to fit in. Especially in high school. I struggled to be heard. I struggled to be included. I counted myself out more than I counted myself in.

I was called "faggot". I lived the words of the song:

*But I'm a creep, I'm a weirdo  
What the hell am I doing here?  
I don't belong here.*

I don't belong here. How many of you this morning have similar stories and the feeling of not belonging, of being a creep, being a weirdo?

How many of you have ever felt you were too fat, too thin,  
too tall, too short,  
too masculine, too feminine,  
too old, too young,  
too fast, too slow?

How many of you have felt you were “too whatever?”

How many of you this morning have believed what you were told, and it sucked the very life out of you, and you began to shrink?

How many of you have swallowed others' words so deeply that you thought or even attempted to kill yourself?

I have been there. I have attempted to commit suicide because I believed that I didn't belong. I believed that there was no place for me and—what the hell was I doing there?

This is a great turning against the self. The other, whoever the other is in your life, imaginary or real, has told you, has defined you and you believed them.

What the other has said about you has been accepted and swallowed without chewing on it. You have swallowed and it sits in your guts, undigested.

Swallowing crap from others, swallowing what is not true from others will make you sick.

What you swallowed can even kill you.

What is the antidote if you have swallowed something rotten? What is the medicine if you have swallowed something poisonous? You have to throw it up. You have to let go of it, get rid of it.

Once you purge what you have swallowed, then you are ready to embrace the creep that you are. Embrace the uniqueness that you are. Embrace the pretty parts and the not-so-pretty, too.

All that just to get you to this point of the gospel story from today. The story teller we call Luke writes about with a character called Zacchaeus.

You might remember from the children's song that Zacchaeus “*was a wee little man and a wee little man was he*”. He climbed up a sycamore tree because he wanted to see Jesus.

Last week, I talked briefly about the toll collectors. When you read “sinner” in Luke's stories, a better translation is “toll collector”. Toll collectors made a living by collecting taxes—lots and lots of taxes. They would skim off the top of what was collected and keep it for themselves.

The fact that toll collectors were considered unclean or sinners most likely, probably, maybe meant they skimmed a lot. The more they collected, the richer they became.

Zacchaeus gets away from the crowd and climbs a tree because he wants to see and hear this one called Jesus.

Zacchaeus cannot be seen in the crowd. Zacchaeus could not be heard in the crowd. Zacchaeus would have no place in the crowd.

The crowd in this story has declared the wee little man to be unclean a sinner, an outsider ... a creep.

You know the experience of wanting to distance yourself from ... a creep.

This is where the story gets turned upside down and downside up. Jesus not only sees the creep, Jesus speaks to the creep. Jesus says, "Zacchaeus, you come down because I am going to your house for tea."

That is how I learned the song. Jesus speaks and says, "I am coming to your house for a tea party."

The thing is, when you start including the outsider (whether it is you or them), the dynamics change. Barriers shift and begin to crumble.

Zacchaeus is seen, heard, invited and included. That is what the story teller wants you to hear.

When walls that divide come down, there will be those who will complain, threaten, defend and complain even louder.

The gospel says, *"They all complained when they saw what was happening. 'He has gone to stay at a sinner's house,' they said."*

Today's gospel is not about a come-to-Jesus moment for Zacchaeus. This is a much bigger and deeper story than a tale of conversion.

This was a story from the late first century told in the context of a Greek-speaking community of Jesus followers.

The people of Jericho who were also waiting for the parade were ticked off. They are angry—not with what Jesus had to say, but the way he said it.

The early listeners to this story must have heard and known about the community rules, the congregation rules of:

To love your neighbour,

Welcome the lost,

Forgive the guilty.

What challenged the community, then and there, and challenges us, here and now, is what Jesus did. Jesus—the early community—practised what they preached. That is what got the crowd upset.

Jesus preached that God's embrace was wide enough to welcome everyone. Jesus didn't just preach. Jesus actually went out and did what he said. Jesus not only talked the talk, he walked the walk.

The early communities were figuring out what it meant to be followers of the one called Jesus. They put inclusion into practice.

When the church invites—*really invites*—and includes—*really includes*—the diversity and uniqueness of others, then a miracle takes place.

Conversion/belonging happens.

Hope is restored.

Balance is regained.

When we, you and I can include the other, something changes. We change. They change. When change happens, there is no division of “you” and “them”.

There is only us.

“Labelling and separating people were not important to Jesus.” Today's story can stretch our imagination of whom we can be if we drew our circles wider and wider still.

Imagine who we can be if we step into the circle. What if we included ourselves and one another without labels and division?

We are on the eve of the eve of All Hallows. It's almost Halloween, the night of welcoming fright and freaks, creeps and weirdos.

Celebrate.

Embrace your Creep.

Embrace your self.

Embrace one another.

Know that you belong here, you belong here. Welcome ... because this is good news indeed.

—*Inspired from Barry Robinson's email sermon THE GOSPEL IN SYCAMORE.*