

## **“Watching & Waiting”**

**Sunday, October 30, 2016**

I find the best way  
to love someone is not  
to change them,  
but instead, help them  
reveal the greatest  
version of themselves.

-DR. STEVE MARABOLI -



[www.stevemaraboli.com](http://www.stevemaraboli.com)

***“Write the vision down,  
so everyone can see it.”***

Have you ever heard the term “Pew-Sitters”  
used to describe people in a Congregation?  
Cute... but it can be problematic terminology,  
because a pew sitter is like a “Bump on a Log.”

In the 1st twenty-nine years of my life  
I learned to be a very good pew-sitter.  
Eyes wide open & appearing to watch  
attentively, I would be in a deep sleep.

I became better and better at it.

I don't mean wool-gathering, though I did that too.  
You know... like you meditate, elbow on one knee,  
hand shielding the eyes... but it can be dangerous.



I remember one time, when I fell asleep,  
my center of gravity was too far forward.  
I slowly tipped over and hit my forehead  
on the next pew... waking up with a start.

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It works far better sitting up straight.

When Sue & I wed, we joined Centenary UC, Hamilton.  
and I stopped being a “pew-sitter.” I sang in the choir,  
I became an Elder, even took a turn at Clerk of Session.

Our four oldest daughters were baptized there,  
attended S. S., and that continued in Dunnville.

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In fact, when I look at the Church of 2016,  
I see less pew-sitters than there used to be.

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The people who came to Church just for appearances  
don't often show up now, except @Christmas & Easter.  
And... those who do come are looking for something.

But - there is still a huge but - many still feel  
that if they have made it as far as the church,  
somebody will hand that 'something' to them.

Like going to the corner variety... bring \$4.59, you  
get your bag of milk. That attitude'll kill the church.  
Church doesn't work that way today; as if it ever did.

### PAUSE

Sometimes my mind wanders a little, and I wonder idly,  
*“What would happen to this congregation if the Council  
prescribed a new minimum standard for membership?”*  
How about three years of weekly Bible Study,  
Catechism class, a test on Christian theology,  
regular attendance at worship, and full tithing,  
tithing being Ten % Off the Top... not after tax.

And unless you made such a commitment,  
you had no right to call yourself a Christian,  
or attend congregational and board meetings.

You could sit in a pew but wouldn't be able  
to take up the Offering, read the Scriptures,  
teach Church School or receive Communion.

That might bring membership at any given church  
down to a dozen... but they'd be a dedicated dozen.

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They could meet in someone's home, and afford  
to pay a fulltime minister whose salary would be  
about the avg. of the incomes of the 12 members.  
Then... being a Christian would mean something!

Mind you, I'm not advocating it, nor could I enforce it.  
This is your church, not mine; and you make the rules.

In fact, I pew sat in a congregation like that.  
Its Dedicated Leaders were an Elitist Clique,  
a bit like Scribes and Pharisees in Jesus day.

But I do fret about the future of the United Church;  
though it's easy to join, numbers are still declining.

There is growth in some Evangelical Churches,  
but research says it is mostly disaffected X'ians  
from other congregations... and not new-comers.

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There are very few outsiders as anxious to meet Christ  
as was the Zacchaeus of this morning's Gospel reading.

And Zacchaeus was poster-boy for outsiders.  
As an agent of the Roman Occupation Forces,  
he collected the head tax from his fellow Jews.

The whole garrison behind him, he added hefty  
commissions to the tax without fear of reprisal.

As you can imagine, it made an already unpopular  
vocation even more abominable to his fellow Jews.  
But, accustomed to his newfound source of wealth,  
it became difficult for Zacchaeus to reduce his fees.

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Trapped by his affluence, what he thought  
he owned, had actually begun to own him.

*“But I’m human, made in God’s image,”* he muses,  
and becomes ever more anxious. Lately -looking  
in the mirror - he hardly recognizes his former self.  
Just who can that *STRANGER* be looking back at me?

Having heard Jesus is comin’ to town, he felt drawn  
to the street to meet him; light blinking at the end of  
the tunnel of his loneliness and he’s drawn toward it.

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Ever feel that... something beckoning to you?  
A vision flashes. What was it that Jesus said?

*“That day, the coming of God’s kingdom,  
is like lightning, flashing across the sky.”*

But we ignore it, leaning back in our pews.

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Zacchaeus can’t ignore it; five/six deep along the road,  
the crowd recognizes him, and doesn’t let him through,  
but Zacchaeus persists... being too short to see Jesus  
over the crowd, he races ahead and clammers up a tree.



Musta looked silly, wealthy business man,  
elegant robe, shinnying up that sycamore,  
a grown man behaving like an 8 yr old boy;  
Aah yes, *“Unless you come as a child.”*

But soon he’s safe, well obscured  
by the leaves... a hidey-hole from  
which he can observe Jesus.

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A powerful metaphor that, for comfortable pew sitters  
in our day, and a précis of the whole Zacchaeus story.

PAUSE

Through the foliage, he sees the dust half a league off.  
As the crowd approaches, he can make out their faces.  
Soon... the one they called Jesus is right beneath him.

But, instead of sweeping on by, Jesus stops;  
not only does he stop, but he looks up at him.  
Looking right through the leaves... he speaks,

*“Zacchaeus! Come down from there,  
for I am dining at your house today.”*

Zacchaeus hadn't had anyone but Roman Officials  
to his home for so long he couldn't remember when.  
Even the fellow tax-collectors avoided his company.



As Zacchaeus jumps down from  
the tree, he trips on his robe and  
falls to the ground. Immediately,  
he's back on his feet; undaunted,  
he takes Jesus to his home.

Luke tells us that Zacchaeus  
welcomed Jesus... “joyfully.”

PAUSE

Filled with joy... unbounded joy... unconditional joy,  
Zacchaeus opens the door to his heart, his true self.  
All the leaves, all his pretensions, are stripped away.

But there wasn't much joy in the rest of Jericho.

Luke tells us those who witnessed the invitation  
complained bitterly about what Jesus was doing.

*"He's gone to stay at the house of that sinner."*

They must've followed along as well,  
because we hear Zacchaeus respond.

Luke tells us that Zacchaeus stood his ground  
and looked Jesus in the eye, as he said to him,

*"Look sir, I'm giving half my property to the poor.  
With the rest, I'll repay four-fold those I cheated."*

Suddenly, there's no longer any false light in the room.  
Zacchaeus looks into his mirror and sees a clear image.

Jesus sees it too... and he speaks of it to Zacchaeus,

*"Today this house has been reconciled with itself,  
and this man is able to see himself as he truly is.  
Salvation lives in this True Child of the promise  
made to Abraham, the grandfather of all Israel."*

Once more we hear Luke's Christology  
echoed in these parting words of Jesus,

*"For the Son of Man has come to  
seek out and salvage what is lost."*

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That is God's promise to us and it is also the mission  
for anyone who labels themselves, *"Christian,"* today.

We are the lost ones for whom Jesus is seeking  
and also the wounded healers, the lost seekers,  
out helping others to discover their true selves.

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To do so is to be those who wait on God  
as we're standing watch for one another.

PAUSE

Eloquently, the prophet Habakkuk gives us God's word,

*"When it comes, write the Vision down, so it can be  
clearly read by all.... For it will come soon - in its  
appointed time - and the faithful will see its truth."*

When it comes - when the Christ-Light flashes in -  
let God's Holy Spirit write it down upon your heart;  
and what's written on your hearts will bubble up out  
of your mouths, flowing into how you live your lives.

*"Write the Vision down, so everyone can see it,"*

Says the prophet, Habakkuk, speaking for God.



The residents of Jericho saw it written  
upon Zacchaeus. Obscured by leaves  
covering their "hardened hearts" they  
did not like what they saw of it... and  
they said so.

Others saw it clearly, as did Luke.

*"And it is coming soon, in its appointed time,"*  
continues the prophet, tacking on immediacy.  
I'll say it even more clearly... *"The time is now."*

*"And the faithful will see its truth,"*  
so ends Habakkuk's word of God.

So ends my message today, Amen.