



## **“Doubling Down on Love”**

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### **Scripture (ERV):**

#### **Luke 19:1-10**

**19** Jesus was going through the city of Jericho. <sup>2</sup> In Jericho there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a wealthy, very important tax collector. <sup>3</sup> He wanted to see who Jesus was. There were many others who wanted to see Jesus too. Zacchaeus was too short to see above the people. <sup>4</sup> So he ran to a place where he knew Jesus would come. Then he climbed a sycamore tree so he could see him.

<sup>5</sup> When Jesus came to where Zacchaeus was, he looked up and saw him in the tree. Jesus said, “Zacchaeus, hurry! Come down! I must stay at your house today.”

<sup>6</sup> Zacchaeus hurried and came down. He was happy to have Jesus in his house. <sup>7</sup> Everyone saw this. They began to complain, “Look at the kind of man Jesus is staying with. Zacchaeus is a sinner!”

<sup>8</sup> Zacchaeus said to the Lord, “I want to do good. I will give half of my money to the poor. If I have cheated anyone, I will pay them back four times more.”

<sup>9</sup> Jesus said, “Today is the day for this family to be saved from sin. Yes, even this tax collector is a son of Abraham. <sup>10</sup> The Son of Man came to find lost people and save them.”

### **Sermon:**

I learned about Dr. Brene Brown from my Texas daughter. Brigid moved there ten years ago to work on her master’s degree in social work. She got it, too.

And she got married to her Texas beau, my favorite son-in-law, and had a Texas granddaughter for Jim and I.

Brigid became a fan of things Texan. And Dr. Brene Brown is one of the things to really be a Texas fan about! She is a social work researcher, and author.

Brene is justifiably famous for her research and writing about human vulnerability, courage, adaptability and resilience. She gives a great TEDtalk, and has workshops on vulnerability, and resilience, that fill stadiums. Everybody knows her, her work, her famous Texas humor and frank honesty.

Among social workers, she is a total rock star.  
So, of course, I heard about her from my social worker daughter.

Now, if you don't know her, let me introduce you.

A woman of incredible work ethic, and rigorous research...she has researched the tough stuff...compassion, vulnerability, fear, resilience.

And recently, she went away from all her friends and all her fans online, from her blog, from twitter...she went quiet.

When she came back, in October, it was to admit that she had lost her sense of the power of love.

Not the mushy kind of love but the kind that keeps you trying. Working for justice, and for change. Working for a world where children aren't kept in cages, and people don't die of starvation or gun massacres, or the cold.

And she lost touch with that love.

In her own words: *"Instead of being fueled by love, I unconsciously had turned to fear, contempt, self-righteousness, and maybe a touch of high-octane disdain to navigate hard news and hard people."*

I couldn't help relating to her, especially that honest touch of "high octane disdain" towards others.

I could very well imagine a world full of people fueled just like this; on fear, contempt, and self-righteousness.

Whether it is a little mean and selfish guy like Zacchaeus in the tree, or the damaged ego of the man in the White House, who truly seems like a profoundly damaged child in the body of an old white man...I heard Brene speaking...

*"For me, the short, well-lit, well-worn, path from theory to action – from words to deeds – seemed so clear that all I could feel was hate and rage toward not just the perpetrators of*

*the shootings (in El Paso and in Dayton) and the inciters and normalizers of violence, but I was indignant toward everyone around me who didn't see the connections and weren't sufficiently outraged."*

Outrage is what the folks had when Jesus went off to eat at the house of Zacchaeus.

Plenty of outrage, but no love. No passion for healing, as Jesus healed that household in Jericho that day. Just rage at the brokenness of it all. Judgement against it all. "Burn it all down" rage.

Again, Brene writes, *"Without love as the driver, my rage and contempt didn't fuel action or serve as a catalyst. They killed my hope and resolve. Some days, my lovelessness just pulled the covers over my head, and other days it dressed me up in a "Death to Extremists" t-shirt and sent me into the world."*

Now, Brene shares that she was awakened out of despair, and inspired by the work of *bell hooks*, who wrote about love in a way that makes me want to go out and buy her book tomorrow!

*"Individuals who choose to love can, and do, alter our lives in ways that honor the primacy of a love ethic. We do this by choosing to work with individuals we admire and respect; by committing to give our all to relationships; by embracing a global vision wherein we see our lives and our fate as intimately connected to those of everyone else on the planet. Commitment to a love ethic transforms our lives by offering us a different set of values to live by. In large and small ways, we make choices based on a belief that honesty, openness, and personal integrity need to be expressed in public and private decisions"*

So, *bell* teaches a different set of values to live by, a global vision wherein we see our lives and our fate intimately connected, a life of choices based on the belief that honesty, openness and personal integrity are expressed in our lives and decisions.

Jesus and *bell hooks* share a lot.  
And Brene, too.

Urging us to be saving lives, including our own.  
Urging us to live by an ethic of love in action. A life of congruence, and power.

Lastly, this amazing Texan admits that living by a love ethic is costly, that it takes work and it takes the willingness to be changed.  
She makes a list, and you and I should probably make our own too:

1. Remember to accept and experience joy and grace, not just hardship and work. Joy is real, grace is real.
2. Remember that burn out never helped.
3. Remember that family and friends who love you are the safe place you need when you need a place to land.
4. Make sure that the anger comes from a place of love, not judgment.
5. Take time. Walk, do yoga, meditate...just take time to take care of you.
6. And give yourself time to nurture that relationship with the Holy that is astonishing and life giving, and rich and renewing.
7. Remember that the culture you create...at home, at work, or wherever, should be built on loving kindness.

Yes, this is hard work, and yes, I would say that the stories we hear about Jesus, passed down through thousands of years, tell us this, too! But as Jesus declares in this gospel tale of a rich man, whose life was changed, for the better...yes, we can be turned around, and yes, we can be changed, for the better. We too can be “saved” from the myriad sins of hate, fear, greed, envy, hopelessness and cynicism. And yes, we can be “found” after being “lost” ...found by the power of love, and the bravery it gives us to change ourselves, to change our world.

More from Brene:

*“Doubling down on love demands that we be brave enough to straddle the tension of staying awake to the struggle in the world and fighting for justice and peace, while also cultivating a love ethic in our own lives. We can’t sacrifice the micro for the macro, or the macro for the micro.*

*Love, belonging, connection and joy are irreducible needs for all of us. We can’t give people what we don’t have. We have to live love to give love.”*

Love, belonging, connection and joy: yes, they are irreducible needs for all of us.

As I look at the story of the transformation of Zacchaeus, that is what I see happening in his household, in his heart and in his world.

As followers of Jesus, let us give ourselves to sharing these irreducible and ultimate values of love, belonging, connection and joy; the crucial parts of being human.

The world needs this.

And so do we.

So much! So much! So much!

Amen.