

SERMON (Bishop Russell Kendrick)

Good morning! This is not my first time here, the last time I was probably the one that looked like a deer in the headlights. It was about three weeks after I had just started my job as your Bishop Elect. And so, this is my first official time and I bring you greetings from around this part of God's kingdom called the central gulf coast. We are 18,000 strong, all the way from Apalachicola Florida to Monroeville Alabama all the way from Eufaula Alabama down to Dolphin Island, which means I'm kind of like a traveling preacher. That's kind of what a bishop is and I want to thank you because this morning I only had to drive 15 minutes and that was a real gift of grace for me and I'm glad to be here. My name is Russell and you can call me Russell, that's just fine. I'll answer to a lot of things but I can tell you after 15 months of being a bishop that I still love Jesus and I am proud to be an Episcopalian. And I want the same two things for you.

John Claypool was an episcopal priest who was once ranked as one of the greatest preachers while he was living in the United States and he was most widely known for his preaching and teaching on grief, and healing, and hope. He had actually learned during his daughter's battle with leukemia and her subsequent death at just 10 years old. And after his daughter's death, a friend asked John Claypool if and when he actually had known God's power through that whole process. And Claypool answered that it actually happened when he was standing beside his daughter in the hospital when she was in the hospital bed and Laura Loo was suffering worse than she had ever suffered in a sense and everything in this father's body and soul was telling him to run away. To go hide somewhere and scream, to give up, but he didn't. And as helpless as he felt somehow his fear did not get the best of him and he simply stayed by her side, rubbed her back, gave her cups of water. Claypool claims that's the moment when he knew God's power. That God was near because he says it was only through God's power that he was able to stay by her side.

Twenty-six hundred years before John Claypool stood by his daughter's bed, there was a man named Habakkuk who said this, "I will stand at my watch post, I will keep watch to see what he will say to me and what he will answer concerning my complaint." Habakkuk, he's not on the best seller's list of the books of the Bible. This is the only Sunday in three years that you will ever hear his voice. But maybe we should hear more of him because I think he is one of the most candid, critical, and courageous voices in the entire Bible. The world is falling apart. There was strife, and violence, and contention all around him. And Habakkuk saw it all and what he saw he spoke out his beloved country of Judah. Having endured one corrupt king after another. The country, the economy was a mess. The poor were being neglected and the rich didn't seem to care. And the northern kingdom of Israel, their brother-sister kind of state was in ruins. And now there was this world power from the east that was kind of gathering at the borders in Babylon and Habakkuk cries out, "How long Lord, how long will I cry and you don't answer." Habakkuk cries out and silence is all he gets in return. And so, Habakkuk does the one thing that he can do. He doesn't run away, he stands at the watch post and he waits. In other words, he believes when there's not a whole lot to believe in. He has faith. When Habakkuk finally does get an answer, it was not the answer that he prayed for. Habakkuk, he wanted a heavenly divine intervention. You know like an army of angels or some kind of divine Messiah General that would right all the wrongs and come down in a fire of glory. Habakkuk wanted what we all want. For God to fix our problem now. But that's not the answer he gets. Write the vision, make it plain. For there's still a vision for the appointed time, it speaks of the end and it does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it. Look at the crowd there's scared it's not right in them but the righteous live by faith.

God tells Habakkuk to wait, to watch. In other words, to trust and have faith as hard as that sometimes is. And now here we are twenty-six hundred years later, imagine that, sitting in a church. The first thing I want to say is this, your very presence in a church is a sign of faith. It may not feel like it, you may even be here because your momma wanted you to be here. But you are here and there's a whole lot of reasons to not be here, but you're here. And you never know what showing up can mean unless you do. I don't know what you carried in this church with you today, I don't know the burdens on your heart, I don't know your desperate desires, and your unanswered prayers but I do know this twenty-six hundred years later, the world out there is still a mess. There's a whole lot of strife, and violence, mistrust, anger, fear, hatred. There's a whole lot of reasons to give up, walk away, and yet you're here. What I'm trying to say is this, sometimes the greatest miracle of all is the gift of endurance. And the most heroic of faith is to not be discouraged by despair, to not give in to bitterness and anger, to not runaway in fear, but to stay put. And to wait, and to watch, to have faith. So, thank you!

But now I'm going to go a little bit further. Because you see sometimes our waiting and our watching and our showing up can actually lead to more. Take for example our gospel. Zacchaeus is one of my favorite characters and it's not just because he's the patron saint of short people but that helps me. I know what it's like to be in a crowd and can't see. Zacchaeus didn't have to show up that day. Yall Zacchaeus had everything in the world. But Zacchaeus did show up and he stood out from everybody else. They call him and they say he's a chief tax collector and he's rich. Which that meant in the crowd that everybody else was looking on him as a traitor, a tyrant, and a thief. Or in the words of Habakkuk, Zacchaeus was one of those wicked people whose spirit was not right. And yet there he is, Zacchaeus shows up for whatever reason and look what happens when he does. Zacchaeus, Zacchaeus, hurry up and come down. I'm going to stay at your house today. I mean out of all the names in the church that Jesus could have called out, out of all the people that Jesus could have met, out of all the souls that Jesus could have touched, it is Zacchaeus who he calls. Yall this is remarkable and when Jesus calls out his name it was as if for Zacchaeus that God himself was making a claim in his life. And in that moment, everything changes for Zacchaeus. Right, in that moment Zacchaeus was kind of seized by God's amazing grace and free. In that moment, Jesus became a guest not only in his house but in his soul. Today salvation has come to your house and Zacchaeus gives away half his possessions. Which by the way since this is pledge Sunday let's make a note of that. A tithe is a good deal. Is that helpful? Good!

Anyway, so back to the sermon! And today at this confirmation, underneath everything that we're doing. We are declaring that salvation has come to your house. To Lane, to Renee', to Marge. It's okay if you don't fully understand. It's okay if you're not sure. Neither did Zacchaeus, I mean as far as I can tell Zacchaeus, it's not his belief that saves him. It was Jesus's belief in him and that's a point of faith that I think we tend to overlook. I want yall to think about this, that our salvation rests first and foremost in God's faith in us. This is good news by the way. Because my hunch is that a whole lot of us are not so sure about our level of faith. We imagine some kind of saintly model of faith and we're certain that we don't measure up to that. Because we know ourselves all too well and we are convinced that we have made a mess of things. And that we're not religious enough, or right enough, or perfect enough or whatever it is so we dismiss ourselves. It's a terrible thing we do to ourselves and it's wrong. I mean if there is room in God's house for Zacchaeus, then there is room in God's house for all of us. As broken as we might feel, as unworthy as we might seem, we are made worthy not because of our belief but because of God's belief in us. It's called grace. And it is a gift and the power bestowed on us in Easter. Yall remember we took the best that God could give us, his son. And we killed him. God had a

dilemma. And yall know what God decided to do. He did not send down an army of angels, there was not a flood, he didn't hit the delete button. God sent Jesus back to us a second time and he sent him back to us with this message, "I forgive you, peace be with you, shalom!" That's how much God believes in us. For the strife and the violence and for all the ways we're making a mess of this world, for all the ways we're making a mess of our lives, God apparently is not going to let go of us. And that's what's underneath this confirmation, God believes in you and your life matters. You're loved by a love that is stronger than death and today Jesus is calling to you. Today salvation has come to you and to all of us. Today is the day for us to take our place on the watch post. To wait and to watch, and to look for God's vision in this world and also to point to it in the way that we live. And that's the other catch. Zacchaeus takes on this vision and starts to live differently and as followers of Jesus. We believe that the vision of God is not just words written in stone. We believe that God's vision is alive in the word made flesh Jesus his son. And now today it's meant to be alive in our flesh, in our lives. This is God's vision, Shalom! That one day there will be a day when death is no more and sorrow will not be the last home. There will be a day when wars cease and the hungry are fed. There will be a day when all the power and politics of this world will give way to the peace that passes all understanding and all that is lost will be found and all that is wasted will be redeemed. That's the vision of God for salvation, that's God's vision for us. Shalom is what Jesus calls it and today we are supposed to take that vision and live it. And to Lane, and to Marge, and to Renee' you are joining a church and people that are trying to live this vision in St. Jude's. Rather than just talk about trying to get youth in your church you've taken the risk and actually go out and hire a youth minister. Rather than simply listen to Greg preach about poverty, you raise \$5000 to build a well. Rather than just watch the poor on the streets you've made beds for them. You're living the vision. So, thank you! But there's still more to do, right? The world out there needs to know that there's another vision. It is a vision that is more than the political promises, and the slogans, and the logos that fill our ears and our hearts. So, hurry up yall. Come on down from your watch post, come on down from that tree. Get out of your pews and get off of your knees because salvation has come to this house. Today God is calling for you.