“Treasure: Rescuing Your Treasure from Consumerism”
Luke 19:1-10

We have here the following supplies to play a game:

- Two pairs of oversized protective jumpsuits (or large aprons/trash bags with armholes).
- Two large rolls of painters' tape or masking tape.
- 15–20 wrapped/sandwiched items or mock paper cutouts of sandwiches labeled with consumer items (*"New iPhone," "Designer Shoes," "Subscription Service," "Luxury Car," "Designer Handbag," "Upgraded Kitchen," "Designer Watch"*).

I need two brave volunteers to come up front. I want you to pretend that you are hungry and we are going to use these supplies to try to satisfy your hunger.

1. Have both volunteers put on the jumpsuits or aprons.
2. Hand a roll of tape and a stack of "sandwiches" to two assistants (or ask two audience members to come up as "tapers").
3. **The Race:** Give them **60 seconds** to tape as many sandwiches onto the volunteers' bodies as possible.

You both look very well-stocked! But let me ask you... how hungry are you right now?

Can any of those sandwiches on your arms, legs, or chest actually satisfy your belly while they're taped to the outside?

It seems silly, doesn't it? Having food plastered all over the outside of your body while your stomach sits empty on the inside.

The Buddhist writer Roger Corless once wrote: 'Trying to be happy by accumulating possessions is like trying to satisfy hunger by taping sandwiches all over your body.'

We laugh because it looks ridiculous up here, but spiritually, many of us spend our entire lives doing this exact same thing. We seek after things that can never satisfy our hunger for God. We seek power, esteem, and security, but we never get enough of these because they are not the answer to our hunger. One of the traps we have is satisfying our hunger through overconsumption, consumerism.

Consumerism always makes us believe the lie that we need more than the bare necessities. It keeps us spinning and longing for more. We waste a lot of our life’s energy on things that never satisfy.

There are many problems with consumerism, but instead of focusing on the problems it creates, today I would like to invite us to look deep into what desire it longs to satisfy for us from the soul’s perspective. At the heart of it, consumerism is connected to our deep hunger for God, for love, and for connection. The greatest illusion in life is that we are

on our own and separate from God, from others, and all of creation. We often spend our lives aimlessly seeking after that connection when all we have to do is to release that illusion of separateness.

That is why advertisers can lure us into believing that more stuff is going to make us feel happy by filling that longing for connection that is deeply implanted within us.

Today we have a Bible story that deals with this deep desire for connection. It is the story of a man by the name of Zacchaeus, a tax collector who wanted so desperately to connect with Jesus. He was a despised man by society and from a human point of view, and he deserved every bit of it. The scarcity-driven dream of "more is better" had taken such a hold of him that he was willing to cheat his own people out of their money. At the time of Jesus, tax collectors were seen as collaborators with the Roman Empire and its occupation of the land and its people. They were agents of oppression. They not only collected the tax which the Roman government required, but they also added to the bill to get themselves a piece of the pie. They were legal crooks. Zacchaeus was rich, and his wealth came as a result of exploiting others. His description as a short man might be seen as a metaphor for his diminished spirit.

Zacchaeus felt so disconnected from society. He felt isolated. Even though he had a powerful position and was definitely rich in material possessions, he had very little loving connection to others in his community. This was at a time when such connection was so important to people. He should have abandoned his ways of exploitation in order to reconcile with his community, but he was stuck in the trap of consumerism. He kept accumulating more and more wealth, despite the fact that it made his isolation even worse.

Jesus was making this trip, from up north in Galilee, coming south through Jericho to Jerusalem. Jesus had every reason to ignore Zacchaeus and to continue to let him be resented by others. Let's listen to the story from Luke 19:1-10:
https://youtu.be/VOCxSYyJSDA

He entered Jericho and was passing through it. And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. And when 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." So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

What a turn of events! When Zacchaeus' hunger for God and for love was recognized and filled by Jesus, he was finally able to let go of his need for more.

This is the same hunger we experience. Ashley Hales writes this, "Retail therapy gives us the thrill of the hunt and a hit of dopamine (the love hormone) as we anticipate a purchase, but it cannot feed our hungers. We know this. But we return each time, hoping it will. We buy and we window shop because we aren't captivated by a better way, a better story. The process of finding holy in the suburbs is not necessarily eschewing Target runs, but it starts by waking up to our hungers in the first place. Our hunger is human: we want to be filled. We desire abundance and satiety. We want to belong to a people and a place. In the suburbs we settle for consumerism to answer our hunger to be whole."

I invite you today to take stock of your own hunger and longing for love. Where do you experience that deep sense of belonging and connection to God and to others? What would help you spend more energy dwelling in these places and experiences?

Guided Imagery & Meditation: Finding Your Tree
I invite you to gently close your eyes, take a deep, settling breath, and let your shoulders drop. Allow yourself to step out of the rush of your daily life and into the dusty, sun-drenched pathways of ancient Jericho.

Feel the dry, warm earth beneath your feet. Hear the low hum of the bustling crowd around you—the chatter, the shuffling sandals, the mounting anticipation in the air. Now, look inward at yourself. Notice where you might feel small, weary, or hidden behind the walls of your own life. Perhaps you have felt isolated, or perhaps you notice the quiet echo of that familiar hunger—the urge to fill an empty space with striving, with consuming, with grasping for "more."

Imagine yourself walking alongside that crowd. You realize that Jesus is passing by. A deep, aching desire rises up within your chest simply to catch a glimpse of him, to know that you are seen, to know that you are loved just as you are. But the crowd is too thick. The noise is too loud. Barriers stand in your way.

So, like Zacchaeus, you break away from the crowd. You run ahead.

You find a sturdy, rough-barked sycamore tree leaning over the path.
Using your hands and feet, you pull yourself up, branch by branch, lifting yourself above the noise, the judgment, and the clamor of the world. You settle onto a sturdy limb and look down the dusty road, waiting.

And then... he approaches. Jesus stops right beneath your tree. The noise of the crowd fades into a quiet hush. He tilts his head back, lifts his eyes, and looks straight up into yours.

In his gaze, there is no condemnation. There is no disappointment. There is only profound, radiant, unconditional love—a love that knows every hidden place in your heart and calls you by name.

Hear him speaking directly to you, cutting through all your doubts and defenses: *“Come down. Hurry, and come down... for I must stay with you today.”*

Feel the profound relief of being chosen, of being invited, of being fully welcomed.

Imagine sliding down from the branch and stepping right into his warm, welcoming presence. Feel the tension drain from your body as you realize your search is over. The hunger of your soul is met. You are home.

Rest here in this quiet, sacred connection with God for a few moments in the silence of your heart...*(Pause)*

When you are ready, take one more deep, grounding breath, gently open your eyes, and carry the warmth of this encounter into your week ahead.