

## **“Invitation to Reparations”**

**Luke 19:1-10**

**Sunday, August 15, 2010**

The exhibit at the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum is entitled - The Art of Gaman: Arts and Crafts from Japanese American Internment Camps, 1942-1946. The toys, games, musical instruments, walking sticks, pendants, pins, purses, teapots, tools, flowers, landscapes, maps, furniture are provide physical form to the art of gaman – a Japanese word that means to bear the seemingly unbearable with dignity and patience. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 all ethnic Japanese on the West Coast – more than two thirds of whom were American citizens by birth – were forced to vacate their homes and were interned at ten camps for the duration of World War II. While in the stark space of the internment camps the internees used scrap and found materials to make all kinds of arts and crafts. Making art was as essential as breathing air – while breathing is essential to mere existence making art was essential to emotional and spiritual survival. After the War, the internees were released with no pondering, plan or promise of help to re-start their lives. Some returned to old neighborhoods where their homes had been destroyed by vandals or by neglect; some stayed on in Wyoming, Utah, Idaho and other places close to the camps from which they had been released. After a long struggle and many missteps by the high ranking government officials the call for compensation was codified finally on August 10, 1988 when President Ronald Reagan signed into law provisions that would pay put \$20,000 to each surviving internee and establish a \$1.25 billion education fund. And on October 9, 1990 the first nine redress payments were made in a Washington D.C ceremony where Reverend Mamoru Eto, 107 years old, was the first to receive his check. While gaman is the Japanese term for bearing the unbearable with dignity - reparations is the term for repairing human rights abuses with the truth and tangible tribute transferred to victims. Holocaust survivors, Native American Indians, the Government of Kuwait, and many other examples could be cited as groups of people and nations that have received reparations for acts of genocide, war and human rights abuses. Just recently in the news we heard of the plight of Black Farmers who have endured years of discrimination practiced against them by the Federal Department of Agriculture. After reaching a compromise agreement with the Obama Administration on the amount of compensation, the Black Farmers saw their hopes fade for and favorable finish to this among several systemic sins, when the Senate failed to pass a bill that would have made reparations in this case a reality. The case for slavery reparations is a separate case altogether and one that exudes high, human emotion and one that demands, critical compassionate intervention. In 2009, the Senate and the House both passed a resolution apologizing for slavery. The non-binding resolution was just that an apology – no applied remedy and no clear consensus on a corrective course or if any correction has cause. And so the debate continues. Perhaps like verse eight in the Zachaeus story, the unsolicited will to wrestle with our woeful ways is the key to redemptive living, establishing social order and restoring human dignity and creativity. According to R. Alan Culpepper, the interpretive crux of this story appears in Zacchaeus’s declaration in verse 8. “Zacchaeus stood there and said to Jesus, ‘Look, half of my possessions, Lord I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.’” Up to this point, this series of sermons reflected on major ideas presented in the Zacchaeus story: 1. Invitation Initiated - from which we learned that following the example of Jesus inviting himself to share food, prayer, forgiveness, hope and freedom

from oppression with Zachaeus is our only mission; 2. Positioning to Get Invited, from which we came to the conclusion that there is honor in humility; 3. Initiating Trouble, that postulated that trouble comes when we embrace what and whom we are expected to exclude and 4. Invitation to Repentance taught that we can turn around and make it right or turn away and make more of a mess. Luke states that Zachaeus stood up, not in the tree, but on the solid rock of faith, and confirmed the genuineness of God's grace gripping his gut. For the first century disciple the stomach was the center of feeling and emotion. As an immediate consequence of his conversion, Zacchaeus made a concrete commitment to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God. His encounter with Jesus was not one that conjured up hell fire and brimstone but one that put him in an intimate relationship with everyone and everything around him. Every aspect of life was elevated to what would Abraham do, what would Moses do, what would Ruth do, what would John the Baptist and the eternal now – what would Jesus do. Zacchaeus's comment adheres to Old Testament laws of restitution. In Leviticus 6:5, we read "you shall repay the principal amount and shall add one-fifth to it. You shall pay it to its owner when you realize your guilt." In addition Zacchaeus's pledge conforms to the standards set by John the Baptist: "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none" (Luke 3:11)—half of his possessions. Tax collectors should collect no more than the amount prescribed for them (Luke 3:13), and soldiers were not to extort money from anyone by threat or false accusation (Luke 3:14). Zachaeus comes to the place of acting on his new found honor – having been visited by Jesus not by wailing and wallowing in his woe, but by gleefully and gainfully employing the methods of restorative justice by offering to pay reparations to those who have been harmed by his self serving and systematic sin. In the face of your sin, my sin and the sin of the whole world we might ask as Ralph Waldo Emerson asked: "Why drag about this monstrous corpse of your memory?" Why lug around the long dead past of sorry and sinister traumas? It seems to me that in the presence of Jesus, Zachaeus for one, realized that eternal life and a just earthly life are one in the same and so debts have to be paid and demons have to be exorcised. If not we continue to live in a haunted house. The well honed art of selective sensing is not an option when in the presence of Jesus. We cannot ignore, deny or expect impunity from actions that deny the humanity of others. Jesus senses, seeks and stimulates us in a way that restores honor, hope and hallelujah. We can do nothing less for each other in our daily lives whether in the past, present or future. Atonement for past sins is a soothing lotion for past lesions; it can be a salve for the future, a prescription to ease some of the hurt, frustration and bitterness that divides our minds, our families, our neighborhoods, our city, our nation, our world. There is an eighth wonder of the world emerging right in front of our faces in the form of Truth and Reconciliation Committees, International War Crimes Tribunals, Restorative Justice strategies and the growing global movement of defending human rights. That eighth wonder of the world is a social/spiritual movement on humanity awakening to the power of the human spirit not just to endure pain but the will to stop inflicting pain. The victims of oppression – slavery, child labor, human trafficking, war crimes, genocide, economic exploitation – tell the tales of tremendous tangible trauma. It is not enough to celebrate the incredible indomitable spirit of the oppressed as described by the Japanese word *gaman*. It is time to live well beyond these stories and the shallow apologies and sentimental sympathies that come in response and pay the price – after all that's what Jesus did for all of us. In Zachaeus we see the potential for our own salvation, redemption and release and that of the whole world.