

'This passage appears only in Luke and concludes what many scholars have called the 'Lukan Gospel of the Outcast' (15:1 -19: 10). (NCB page 1149)

This begins with the ' *The tax collectors and the sinners were all seeking his company to hear what he (Jesus) had to say*', and has already included one parable about a tax-collector, or publican, which we heard last week, where again a tax-collector seeks God but in contrast to the Pharisee and , perhaps Zacchaeus, remains at a distance from others because of his sense of unworthiness, his knowledge that is of his own sin. But these stories are told as much for the sake of the Pharisees as for the sake of the outcast' – of the younger son as well as the elder 'prodigal' son, of the rich man as well as his crafty steward, and of the rich man as well as Lazarus, indeed of all who have material riches but are spiritually poor. And, as last week, this is a warning to us also – it's a gospel to disturb the comfortable and give comfort to the afflicted. But it's done graciously precisely through the medium of stories: God no more wants to lose the Pharisees and the rich than the outcast. And so to a few stories about Br.Herbert – there won't be room for them all on Thursday, but there was always room for both the rich and the poor in Br.Herbert's path through life – a skill he learnt, as well as a grace he was given, through his own experience of both wealth and poverty, of being a member of a very cultured society in Dresden and then of finding himself first an alien in Germany, then a refugee, and then, initially to his great anger, an enemy alien in England – a country he had grown to love, and then later an outcast in a mental hospital, and thwarted in his desire to become a monk. As we all now know it's a story with a happy ending but one in which he attracted the ' outcast ' in all of us as well as the many ' men of the road' and other marginalised people who were always there for him as he was there for them - a stream of people which, often to the chagrin and alarm of those who lived with him, but a lesson too, would come at all times of the day and night to disturb the comfortable. Derek, who lived entirely outside the system and refused any treatment by the NHS as death comes upon him, Lowestoft Eddie who was barred from the night shelter in Bedford and one of Br Herbert's oldest friends – having known him in Cambridge as well as here: Tom who found a home with us after being banned from Emmaus and built some wonderful stone benches which will far outlast the monastery, Mickey Burgess who refused to visit whilst inebriated but famously fell into a pond next door trying to find us in the dark, Steve who was smuggled from one room or caravan to another and eventually brought about Br Herbert's banishment to Cockfosters, Cockney Ray who discovered where we kept our whisky and polished off the lot and wisely disappeared before we could find him, and so many more.

And, to pinch an idea from elsewhere – this is where the blossom is, out on a limb, with Zacchaeus.

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