**24 Pentecost, Nov. 3, 2013, Habakkuk 1,2; Ps 119: 137-144; 2 thess 1:1-4,11-12; Luke 19: 1-10, Rev Mary Trainor**

Antoinette Tuff had had a tough life, and she admitted that she had not been a saint in her earlier years. She shared she did not want to live anymore after her divorce; she understood what it was like to be hopeless. She also has a 22 year old son with multiple disabilities, which presented her near impossible daily challenges. Now, at age 46, she had a respectable job working as a bookkeeper in an elementary school in Decatur, Georgia. Her relationship with Jesus and her church had become very important to her. She had learned how to anchor herself in God, no matter what was happening around her. She had worked on her prayer life, and now knew how to pray. Jesus said in today's Gospel, "***For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."*** These words remind us of the hymn "Amazing Grace**:"I once was lost but now am found**."Antoinette had been lost and was now found. It was an ordinary Tuesday at work on August 20 earlier this year, until a 20 year old man armed with an AK-47 and 500 rounds of ammunition entered Antoinette's office in the school, and held her hostage. She called 911, and calmly told the armed man that if he put down his weapons she would stay with him and that he would not be hurt, that he would be OK. She spoke with caring to this guy, she even called him "baby and sweetie," which helped calm him down. Antoinette shared with him about her life, and how she understood his hopelessness, as she had once been full of despair too. The whole time she was held hostage, she prayed on the inside like she had learned at church. The gunman told her his name was Michael Brandon Hill, and she connected with him by sharing that her mother's maiden name was "Hill." They were probably not related, as the gunman was white, and she is black. She never stopped offering him opportunities to see what they both had in common. No one was killed that day, and Hill is now behind bars. The outcome that day was not tragic, thanks to Antoinette living out her faith in Jesus.

Faith is a verb, not a noun; it involves action. She said humbly in an interview later, "**God put me there to help."** Our Old Testament lesson today said, "***the righteous live by their faith"*** and our Psalm said, "***trouble and distress have come upon me, yet your commandments are my delight."*** And, Antoinette can also relate to Paul's words from today: "***steadfastness and faith during all your persecutions and the afflictions that you are enduring***." Antoinette lived by God's words that day. It could have been another Sandy Hook massacre if it was not for Antoinette's action. Will we live out our faith?

Today's Gospel story tells us about the transition of a guy from being lost to being found, from being a guy who was all about himself to a guy who was all about living out his faith. The setting is not an elementary school in the US but rather out in a town in Israel. Jesus was traveling through Jericho on the way to Jerusalem. In that crowd there was a man named Zacchaeus, who was a chief tax collector. Last week we talked about how tax collectors back then were crooks, because they pocketed a bunch of money for themselves -- this guy was the mega crook. He was a short man but a big sinner! The sequence of events of this Gospel is important. First Zacchaeus took action to see Jesus -- it was out of character for a city executive to climb a tree, but he didn't care, he REALLY wanted to see Jesus! There was a longing in Zacchaeus' heart that led him to take this action. Jesus knew it, for He has what is called "**divine foreknowledge**" that allows Him to know people and events before they happen. Jesus knew of Zacchaeus' longing, and helped the situation along by inviting Himself over! How did Zacchaeus respond? He became overjoyed and transformed by Jesus from ***lost to found***! We are told, "***he hurried down and was happy to welcome Him."*** And then, out there for all to hear, Zacchaeus put his new faith in action, "***half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor...and pay back four times as much."*** It was now that Jesus said that He, " ***came to seek out and to save the lost."***

A lot of people, when they think about church, they think about somber people passive in a pew. Following Jesus is so much more than this. Today's Gospel illustrates that faith is active: with Jesus the actions in our lives change. Faith is about doing things that please God, because of what God has put into our hearts. It doesn't matter if you are short like Zacchaeus or tall, white or black or red, man or woman or child, high school or college educated, employed in a shady way like Zacchaeus was or unemployed, wide or narrow, retired or working, married or single -- when you meet Jesus, He will change your life -- and it is to show in your actions. But, does it? or, do we hold it back?

Today we celebrate All Saints Day, a day when we honor the profound legacy of wisdom those who have gone before have left to us. Remembering them means letting their spirits inspire us in our daily lives, gently helping us as we make decisions to live out our faith. And, as we ponder those who have gone before, we are reassured that we are not alone; that we are surrounded by a great "***cloud of witnesses***," "***the communion of saints.***" Author Wendell Berry said, “We clasp the hands of those who go before us.” The Irish consider All Saints to be a "thin time" when the veil between heaven and earth grows more transparent. It is a time when the wisdom of the saints is closer to us. When we hear about people like Antoinette Tuff, a typical response is, **"Oh my, I couldn't have done that; how strong her faith must be!"** Yet, why shouldn't our faith be as strong as hers -- after all, we are not alone no matter what. We have God's power undergirding everything we do and the communion of saints cheering us on. It is like we have a huge steel I-Beam holding us up, and jet propulsion cheering us on; we can live out our faith!

There is a familiar children's song about this Gospel, and if you don't know it - it is worth learning. Singing it can help you remember this Gospel story, remind you to seek Jesus, remind you to be active in living out your faith. The words of the hymn are in your bulletin. Let us sing it together now: "**Zacchaeus was a wee little man, and a wee little man was he. He climbed up in a sycamore tree For the Lord he wanted to see. And when the Savior passed that way He looked up in the tree. And said, 'Zacchaeus, you come down! For I'm going to your house today! For I'm going to your house today!' Zacchaeus was a wee little man, But a happy man was he, For he had seen the Lord that day And a happy man was he; And a very happy man was he**.” Amen.