

THE HIGH PLAINS PREACHER

Welcome to the High Plains Preacher, stories about the Bible, high wind, fast horses, lack of moisture and other elements of life in the Texas Panhandle.

Gangbanger

By Fr. Jim Schmitmeyer

You remember the gospel story about Zacchaeus, the tax collector who was small of stature and had to climb a sycamore tree to catch a glimpse of Jesus?

If you've ever watched an action film where men start throwing punches, the short guys usually come out on top: They're wiry. They're fast. They're agile. They're scrappy and lean. And you don't want to get them riled up.

That's why I picture Zacchaeus as a little guy with thick glasses sitting behind a desk in some IRS office. Dog the Bounty Hunter is a better fit.

You have to remember that any Jew who collected taxes for the Roman Empire would make a good man spit. It's a historical fact that they were extortionists with the legal right to squeeze as much money from you as they could. So, I don't see Zacchaeus as a short guy with a pudgy face and soft hands. Rather, he was likely more like a gang-leader with a scar on his face and a knife in his belt.

Which leads you to wonder what kind of man Jesus was. What kind of man could get an extortionist to payback four times what he stole? When Jesus arrived in Jericho, Dog the Bounty Hunter was shaking in his boots like a small-time gangster the day the boss of the mob drives down from Chicago.

"Zach, climb down from that tree! It's time for you to have a 'come to Jesus' meeting!"

In other words, Zach wasn't a nice guy and some "nice guy" Jesus wasn't going to get some extortionist to suddenly change his ways.

Jesus was no Mr. Rogers. When it comes to sin, he comes on strong and the confrontation changes people in ways you would never imagine.

Look what it did for Zacchaeus. Then take a good look at yourself.