

Reader's Theater - Luke 19:1-10 (based on the NRSV)

PRODUCTION NOTE : If you do not have a large number of people available for this presentation, we suggest using cardboard cutouts of people lining the roadway into Jericho. You could have a lot of fun with this; use full size characters from movie promotions! What, you don't think Darth Vader would be eager to see Jesus? Don't be so sure - remember the ending of Episode VI!

Cast of Characters:

Narrator
Jesus
Disciples (if you have a large group)
Crowd (see production note about group size)
Zacchaeus

Stage Setting:

You will need something to suggest a tree. I once used people in the group as a tree that Zacchaeus "climbed". You can also use a chair, a step stool, a real potted plant with a ladder behind it - whatever you need to show the ascension. Recognize that what goes up must also come down.

The action in the story takes place as Jesus goes through Jerusalem, so make sure whoever portrays Jesus doesn't sprint through the set. If Jesus does get all the way across the space by the time he has his conversation with Zacchaeus, you can always have them go back the way they came to get to Zacchaeus' house.

Costuming is not necessary but left up to your discretion or the desire of the group. While your production needs¹ to be sure to nail the general movement and interplay of characters, interactions between Jesus and Zacchaeus, the crowd and Zacchaeus, and Jesus and the crowd are not written down. Use your own creative imagination as to how they will interact non-verbally.

As the presentation begins, the crowd is already lining the front of the space. You may need to take a few seconds to set this up, but be sure everyone is in place before the Narrator begins.

Narrator: Jesus entered Jericho on his way to Jerusalem.

Jesus and Disciples enter from one side and slowly make their way across the stage on the upstage side of the crowd. Jesus can pantomime shaking hands with people, or at least pushing his way through the crush of people.

Narrator: A man named Zacchaeus lived in Jericho; he was the chief tax collector and was rich.

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Zacchaeus comes in from the other side, downstage from the crowd. He pantomimes putting money in his pocket and then turning to see what is going on.

Narrator: He was trying to see Jesus, but he could not because he was too short to see over the crowd - AND they kept blocking his view.

Zacchaeus tries to get through in different places, but the CROWD bunches together and prevents it. Be sure to have this happen between live people so they can move.

Narrator: Seeing a tree down the road, he ran ahead of Jesus and climbed into its branches, hoping to get a glimpse as Jesus passed underneath.

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Zacchaeus, do what the narrator says. Jesus, keep moving slowly.

Narrator: As they neared the tree, Jesus looked up and saw him. Jesus said ---

Jesus: Zacchaeus, come down from there! I must have dinner at your house today!

Narrator: So, he quickly came down and was very happy to welcome Jesus.

Zacchaeus, climb down and come to Jesus, bowing to him with big smiles and lots of excitement! Jesus, you also smile and look happy.

Crowd - those who are human - look surprised and shocked and not happy at all.

Narrator: The crowd saw this and began to grumble among themselves.

Crowd: He has gone to the home of a sinner!

Narrator: Hearing them, Zacchaeus turned to Jesus and said:

Zacchaeus: Lord, look! Half of my possessions I give to the poor and if I have cheated anyone, I return payment four times!

Jesus: *(To Zacchaeus)* Today, salvation has come to this house - you, too, are a son of Abraham. *(To the Crowd)* The Son of Man has come to seek and save the lost.

Everyone freeze to the count of three, then exit.