

The Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost
Sunday, October 30th, 2022

Church of the Ascension, Ottawa

The Reverend Victoria Scott

Readings: [HABAKKUK 1:1-4, 2:1-4; PSALM 119:137-144; 2](#)
[THESSALONIANS 1:1-4, 11-12; LUKE 19:1-10](#)

How big is your soul? Do you have a “fat soul”?

I wonder if any of you know the book “Fat Soul Fridays”? (I didn’t even read the back cover before I started reading it. The author – Patricia Adams Farmer – had me at “Fat Soul”!) “Fat Soul Fridays” is a work of fiction, and in it, Patricia Adams Farmer has the characters live out a “Fat Soul Philosophy” of life.

The idea of a “Fat Soul” was born out of process theologian Bernard Loomer’s lectures and essays on the *size of our souls*. When Loomer talks about size, he means the range and depth of our love, and our capacity for relationships. He means the volume of life we can take in without compromising our integrity and individuality, and the variety of perspectives we can entertain without feeling defensive or insecure. He means the strength of our spirits to encourage others in diversity. He means the depth of our concern and our desire to help others increase the size of their souls by creating conditions that allow others to be free to develop their uniqueness and live into their diversity.

Our Gospel passage this morning brings us the story of Zacchaeus. We hear that Zacchaeus was “short in stature”, so he climbs a sycamore tree so that he can see Jesus. What if this reference to stature is an invitation to consider not just Zacchaeus’s physical stature, but also his spiritual stature: the size of his soul?

Our other readings this morning invite us to consider spiritual stature and the size of our souls. From Habbakuk we hear a view – a vision – in which God appears absent: chaos and injustice dominate the perspective. This is a “small soul” stuff. It’s “thin” thinking. Fear, scarcity, judgement, hatred: these things keep our souls small and thin. Yet Habbakuk hears God say: “write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it. For there is still a vision for the appointed time.” *There is still a vision for the appointed time*. This is fat soul thinking. It’s a reminder that the present

moment is not the sum of reality. It's an invitation to an expansive, soul-fattening view where our eyes, hearts and souls are open to potential and possibility along with the challenges of the day. Patricia Adams Farmer asserts that "...we need big visions, big spirits, and fat souls." This was true in Habbukuk's time, and it is true today!

In 2 Thessalonians we heard: "...we must always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing." These are soul-fattening verses!

And what about Zacchaeus and the size of his soul? Zacchaeus was a tax collector. The Roman imperial system depended on "small" or "thin" thinking, and Zacchaeus's life and perspective were embedded in keeping that system going. Thin thinking focuses on power and wealth. Thin thinking shies away from shared power. Thin thinking doesn't waste time on the "least of these", or on discrimination or violence and oppression. Thin thinking keeps the focus on money, on unilateral power, and on an "us-versus-them" approach to life. Zacchaeus would have had to have a small, or thin, soul as he prioritized prosperity and property over relationship and community. The grumbling that the crowd did when they overheard the exchange between Jesus and Zacchaeus was thin, small-soul living! Jesus lived a fat-soul life, and he invited Zacchaeus – and he invites us! – out of thin, small soul living, into an expansive, soul-fattening perspective and way of life. In that system, inviting himself to dinner at Zacchaeus's house – dining at Zacchaeus's house – was unacceptable, unthinkable. He offered that crowd – and he offers us! – an example of fat soul living as he turned the system of the day on its head. There is lost opportunity, lostness in thin thinking, and in living in ways that keep our souls small and thin. And there is salvation and healing and wholeness found in broadening our perspective and our capacity for love and connection. Jesus prioritized connection and community over power and wealth, and it's this that fattens souls!

Fat Soul is a metaphor for inclusiveness, love, and generosity of spirit. "Fat Soul Philosophy" sees the soul as the cumulative flow of all of our relationships with everything and everyone around us. A "Fat Soul" calls us to continually widen our circle of compassion and empathy and understanding. Patricia Adams Farmer writes that striving for a fat soul "...does not diminish one's own identity, uniqueness, or beauty; rather, it strengthens individual identity and uniqueness in the way a single color is

brought to life in a painting by the splash of a contrasting color next to it.” A fat soul can welcome diverse people, ideas, and ways of being in the world without feeling threatened. A fat soul experiences the intensity of life in its fullness, even the painful side of life, and knows there is something still bigger...

Jesus invites us to become fat-souled persons and congregations who build relationships rather than walls, and reach out to join God in healing the world. Last week, our Synod reps Sarah and Diana and I participated in the 142nd Diocesan Synod of the Diocese of Ottawa. Synod was a soul-fattening experience! We, as a Diocese have spent two years engaging in the Shape of Parish Ministry process, which had the goal of discerning what parish ministry should look like in a changing world so that we can thrive while serving God and the greater community. At the heart of this process is an invitation out of small, thin thinking into a fat soul way of being church. The proposals that were endorsed – wholeheartedly – at Synod make a space and a framework for us, as a Diocese to do the work of re-shaping so that we make change rather than being changed – so that we thrive rather than survive. This work will move us, as a Diocese, from thin thinking – survival, scarcity, anxiety about the future – to a fat soul way of parish life and ministry. A fat soul way of sharing information and resources. A fat soul way of opening our eyes and hearts to new ways to share God’s love, and to invite others into soul-fattening experiences, and a soul-fattening way of life. We’ll look forward to hearing from Sarah and Diana next week, and please do look through the Synod highlights document that was included in the newsletter, and speak to one of us if you have questions.

“Fattening our souls” isn’t something that comes about simply by wishing it to be so. It’s about gratitude. It’s about love. It is connected to our own self-love – to our own knowledge that God loves us all. Jesus tells us – shows us – that we are loved, unconditionally. This is God’s gift to us, in Jesus. Jesus shows us that we are love – our very essence is love and we are invited to “tap into” that love. This is what fattens our souls! We are invited to return to it, to rest in it in this whirlwind of life with all its conflict and suffering. We’re invited to let God’s love expand our souls, so that love, and compassion and kindness and mercy fatten them, taking up more room than judgement, hate, hurt and anger.

Our world does need big visions, big spirits and fat souls. We need reminders like the one the story of Zacchaeus offers us: reminders not to let thin, small, thinking dominate perspective and actions. We need reminders to widen our circle of compassion and empathy and understanding. May this time we share here this morning serve as a feast for our souls. May we leave here having feasted on love, and compassion, and empathy and generosity of spirit. And, may our souls grow fatter today, and every day. In Jesus name. Amen.