Busan Cathedral Sunday 3rd November 2013.

In the name of God,

Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Greetings from the archbishops, bishops, clergy and people of the Church of Ireland. Greetings from the diocese of Connor, bishop, clergy and people. Greeting also from the Assembly of the World Council of Churches.

Thank you for the joy and privilege it is to share in the worship of here this morning and for the warmth of your welcome to such a beautiful city and people.

When I was 4 years old I spent some weeks in hospital as I had been very sick after having my tonsils removed. My granny was very concerned about me and for some years afterwards insisted that every morning in life I drank a cup of milk with an egg beaten into it. This was to help me grow tall. I am not sure if it worked or not as maybe I could have been even smaller!

I can identify with Zacchaeus having to climb a tree to see Jesus. When I am in a large crowd it can be difficult to see because everyone else around me blocks my view and even on my tiptoes it can be hard to see. There is a tension presented to us in St. Luke's account of Zacchaeus meeting Jesus. The tension of this hated tax collector and yet someone who wanted to see Jesus. We can applaud his desire but the people in this story would have found it hard to applaud as he was despised and hated in the society of his day.

This "wee" man was not just a hated tax collector but much worse, he was a chief tax collector. He was taking money from the people and from the tax collectors, he was despised by the tax payers and the other tax collectors. This man was making money at everyone else's expense and to be a chief tax collector he would not have understood or practised the concept of mercy.

The gospel of St. Luke has some themes that seamlessly weave their way through the narrative. three of these themes meet in this passage. The problem of riches, Jesus friend of sinners and faith in unusual places that recognises Jesus and discovers new life.

The reading from the Hebrew Scriptures from the Book of Habakkuk highlights the struggle with injustice and how God has a view on those who abuse money and people. The letter to the Thessalonians describes the life of faith that is not just about words but about a lifestyle that is better than any sermon.

However let me return to the small man who had to climb the tree. This leads to a fascinating encounter with Jesus. Let me also point out the importance of hospitality and food to make this encounter one of intimacy and genuine listening. Jesus takes his time to meet with Zacchaeus and accepts his hospitality and meets him in the relative luxury of his home. There is something profoundly important about how Jesus engages with people that is not superficial but respects the individual.

This encounter was transformative for Zacchaeus and it leads to some definitive actions. He experienced a life giving moment that changed his life. This moment we call repentance, when he recognised how he had cheated and robbed people. But the repentance wasn't just words but actions. He gave half his possessions to the poor and paid back anyone he cheated by four times the amount.

Repentance is not just words but a change of heart and mind leading to a different way of living. What is experienced by Zacchaeus should be something we find challenging and life giving. It is easy to say sorry but it is more difficult to put it into practice.

However as I reflect on this beautiful encounter in the gospel narrative I am also struck by the thought that occurs frequently in the ministry of Jesus. I would express it as follows; "Jesus is found with those who don't belong". For the church in the 21st century this is an important marker. I believe that often we find God at work in unusual places and in unexpected ways. We need to pray to have our eyes and ears open to ensure we are observing and hearing so that we do not miss the opportunities for service and encounter that will be life giving for us and others. Too often our energy can keep our focus inward on church matters rather than outward into the world where we are called to be part of God's ongoing mission.

Let me return to my grandmother who despite my struggle with drinking milk and a beat up egg every morning did something much more important she showed me and helped me see by her life in more than her words that I was loved by her and by her God, who became my God and is our God. She helped me discover God's love whether I be large or small.

And now to God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit be all might, majesty, power, dominion and glory now and for evermore. Amen.