

On the Road to Jericho it happened.

A man, traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho, has a huge problem. This road, a road that I have been on, drops 3,600 feet in those 17 miles, from Mt. Zion to the Jordan Valley. And as it drops, you go from the mountain cool to the stifling heat of the desert. It is an eventful 17 miles, no trees, no people, lots of hills – and it is a place where many people have been robbed over the centuries.

The road to Jericho – the Jericho road. Things always happened on the Jericho road. 17 miles of violence – 17 miles of fear – 17 miles of oppression. It is a symbol to the world – for it was on this road that one of the greatest stories ever told has its setting. I talk of the story of the Good Samaritan. And the story that was told was one that concentrated on the indifference, the apathy and the busyness of others not willing to take time to help one in need. And all within the story were capable – but they chose differently.

This Jericho road that I speak of, though, could and does exist for people well away from the Holy Land. A Jericho Road could be here in St. John's. One could see it walking into the Health Sciences centre – all sorts of hurting people who have loved ones in the hospital or are heading into the hospital for a procedure. This Jericho road could exist in one of the Alzheimer's wards – where everyone is so very lost, so very confused. This Jericho road could exist among those struggling as single moms or dads – wondering where the money or strength will come from to face a new day.

The other day I saw a man on this road, he was begging for money on Kenmount road –some drivers, me included, passed the man by without giving him any money while others opened their windows and gave from their heart. Why the difference? I meet men and women on this road all the time – and it is not just the poor, the addict, the dying....

A Jericho Road could be a family member suffering with loneliness, an illness, depression, poverty,

A Jericho Road could exist anywhere there is distrust, misery, suspicion – the Jericho road could be any place where another is in danger. The danger is multiplied because of indifference.

I would like to retell this parable – perhaps with a bit of a different twist – using modern day comparisons.

One day a **Priest** went along the Jericho road. A very religious man – and as he travels, he sees someone who is hurt – and he is really upset. He goes over, bends down, praying – giving him the last rites. After that, he hurried back home and the next Sunday gave an excellent sermon – and boy, did he feel good.

The next person to come along the Jericho road was a **Pastor**. He too was really upset by what he saw – it was just awful – after all, is there no place safe to travel now days? Well, he came back to his church and he taught a course on the biblical implications of poverty – they showed films of the poor, of those who had

been beaten up – soon everyone who went to the course felt good – after all, they understood the Jericho road even better – and they felt good.

Another person – **an evangelist** – a great preacher never did go along the Jericho road, but he heard of the man. He knew this was an opportunity to pass on the message, so he gathered people together – they prayed, they sang, they praised – and afterwards, everyone felt better.

Now this road was well traveled – the next person to come along was an **activist**. He was very left wing – truly involved in any major protest you have ever heard of. When he saw the man who was badly hurt – he was angry, very, very angry. How could someone do this – so he immediately turned back and returned home where he immediately organized some major protests and marches, they disrupted traffic, made the news – and the more he spoke, the more people from all over listened to him. In fact they even marched down the Jericho road many days later and they felt good.

The last man to walk along the road was a right wing politician. He too saw the man and was visibly upset – it just showed his concerns that the nation was falling apart – and if his agenda was passed this would never have happened. He used the man as a example in many a speech over the next few months – got elected and of course changed some laws to benefit his agenda and he too felt good.

While the man on the road was visited by the Priest, the Pastor, the Left Wing activist and the right wing politician, and preached about by the evangelist, not

one of them helped – and in fact he died. He died having been robbed of compassion and dignity and love

This Jericho road exists all over the world, not just in the Holy Land. It exists even here in St. John's, in our neighbourhood and in our families. It exists any time there is suffering and oppression that is allowed to continue.

The story that Jesus told had a different ending than the one I interpreted – after all, the story Jesus told is perhaps one of the greatest stories ever told. And it all started with a question to a statement, **“who is my neighbour?”**

The first lesson as learned from Jesus' parable is he aggressively attacks non-involvement. The villains of the story are the Priest and the Levite. Not because they are bad men, but that they allow their excuses to overcome their duty, their responsibility to their neighbour.

Jesus even asks the lawyers who was the neighbour to the wounded man – and the lawyer tells him that it was the one who showed kindness.

I would like to tell you a story I read recently, and I have every reason to believe it to be true. At a seminary in the States, in Harvard University, a class was writing a three hour exam – a final exam in the course, “Christians and Society.” The exam was made up of some essay like questions about Christian morality and the application of morality within society.

Halfway through the exam, the professor announced that he has arranged to have lemonade and cookies on the lawn. He felt that they should get some refreshments and fresh air. The class, all who had been writing fervently about the Christian faith and morality, quickly head outside, and indeed there was lemonade and cookies.

But there in the courtyard was another part of the test – part of the test none of the students knew about. For the professor had arranged to have an actor, pose as a man who had been badly beat up lying in the courtyard. The students all saw him and they even talked among themselves as to what they should do, but at the end of the 10 minutes, each and every one of them trooped back inside, after all they had to finish their exam on morality.

Needless to say, they discovered that the test they were writing was a fake, and the real test had been in the courtyard – and each of them had failed.

You see, the story of the Good Samaritan is a story of people not wanting to get involved for a variety of reasons – it may inconvenience, it may cost money, we may get dirty, we are too busy with family, job, children, grandchildren, church, we are too religious. It was this attitude that Jesus condemned in his parable. In fact, the moral of his story is that you cannot be a Christian without getting involved. Faith must be lived, not just spoken.

Well, if this is a story about Jesus condemning those who do not want to get involved, it is also a story about involvement. It is a story about our getting

involved within our community, finding ways to make a difference – finding ways to be part of people’s lives, reducing their misery, reducing the misery of those who are also on that Jericho road.

Two examples I would like to give – both incredibly close to home.

I had opportunity to visit with Clayton Menchions, an older member of this parish, while his wife was in the Alzheimer’s ward at St. Luke’s and to visit with Marion Baggs, while her mother was in the same sort of ward at Agnes Pratt.

In both wards, while we walked in the halls, I watched as either Clayton or Marion greeted each and every person on the ward. I saw faces, some faces brighten for but a second at this recognition – this personification of love and acceptance, and I marvelled – for not everyone who goes on the ward or even works on those wards can do this – but it was done with such grace, such ease, such love, that you knew it was genuine – from the heart – and as I walked, I knew I was walking beside a modern day Good Samaritan.

Now both these people named would never wish this attention – for they simply lived their faith – but more importantly, they lived their faith in times of great strain, great difficulty, and when they could easy have focused only on his wife or her mother – or even, God forbid, never gone – but they gave of themselves, and for those moments, they walked along the road to Jericho with those who were lost. They were the good Samaritan.

This road I speak of is here, and when you place people you know in the story, suddenly it can and does become even more real. This road to Jericho, the road that is dangerous, has challenges around each turn, this road to Jericho that intimidates us, is here – how do you walk it? How do you become that Samaritan?

One day a lawyer came up to Jesus and asked, **“What can I do to inherit eternal life?”** And Jesus, being a good rabbi said, **“What do you think?”** “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength and you should love your neighbour as yourself.

Jesus said, “Do this and you shall live.”

But the lawyer became nervous, defensive and said, “Who is my neighbour? How do you define neighbour? Jesus said, there was once a man walking down the Jericho Road....

As Christians, we are always meant to walking this road, loving and caring for the people we find – never allowing our indifference or our busyness to define who were are.

Amen