

Living on the Jericho Road -May 31, 2009
Luke 10:25-37

“What does it look like to live the Christian life? If someone asked you that question, how might you answer it? For some Christians, the answer might go something like this. “The Christian life means we try to go to church every Sunday, we say grace before meals and avoid the most serious sins. And Christianity covers the after life. You don’t have to worry about where you’re going after you die. Heaven is a guarantee. So looking at our schedules, that means our Christian walk impacts Sunday mornings, a minute or so before meals and a constant awareness of what we’re supposed to avoid. Oh, and we need to throw in some prayer and Bible reading somewhere.

If that summarizes the Christian life, how excited will you be to invite others to be part of it? Think of your non-Christian classmates, co-workers, neighbors and family members. Then imagine sharing with them. “Hey why don’t you become a Christian? You’ll need to come to church, say grace before meals and avoid serious sin.”

Will your co-workers jump at that? Will your classmates leap to join up? Will an invitation to table grace and church attendance transform your hardened family member’s heart? Could we be

missing something if we have reduced Christianity to these 3 basic activities?

Now I’m not saying that coming to church, thanking the Lord for food and avoiding sin is unimportant. But did you notice what all three have in common? They’re all about us. But God’s Gospel is ultimately not about us and getting people to come to church. It’s about Him and what He has done to reconcile human beings with Himself. It’s about Him and how He uses those reconciled to spread the message of the ***whole Gospel***; preaching good news to the poor; binding up the brokenhearted; proclaiming freedom for captives and releasing prisoners from darkness.

So today, I have the privilege and challenge of presenting to you, on behalf of our church leadership, a statement we believe encompasses the whole Gospel. We believe it can bring focus and direction to our church family for the next few years. This statement embraces Jesus’ call for us to be salt and light to this world. It is the culmination of meetings, discussion, prayer and reflection of many. It is the also the closing statement to the last 9 months of messages on prayer and looking in, up and out. I believe Satan has actively opposed the delivery of this statement to you because he does not want

us to go this way. We wish we could have gotten it out much sooner. But many obstacles have come in the way. Yet the Lord has sustained us to this point on this day where we present it to you.

Now if you're visiting with us, you might think this has nothing to do with you so its time to leave. But this is a great Sunday to visit. You will see some of the heart of this congregation. We hope it will give you a glimpse into where we believe God is leading us as a church family.

Or you might not be officially involved in a church ministry. You might be bracing yourself for a huge guilt trip on the need for more volunteers. But in fact, we believe this statement can apply to us corporately as a church ***and*** individually as families. It can be lived out personally and publicly. It can encompass the Christian life in your neighborhood, at school and at the office. So please don't tune me out because you think I'm about to tell a dead dog story to emotionally manipulate you into signing up for something you're not gifted to do.

Or you might be broken by life over this past while. You need support, prayer and encouragement, not the corporate action plan of some organization. If you've been broken by life, this statement

describes your journey and our need as a church to respond to you. So will you bear with me and see if God brought you here today to discover a community He might use to reach out to you?

Or you might be wishing I would just get this over with. You've slotted in God for an hour on Sunday and the pastor better not go overtime. Friend, do you see the possibility that you might have a severely restricted view of the Christian life? Will you open your eyes to the possibility that you might need to broaden your understanding of the Christian life?

This statement comes out of one of the most famous parables in the Bible. So we will first look at the parable. Then I will present the statement and unpack it piece by piece. Finally, I will mention next steps and some possible ways we might respond even today.

Luke 10:25-37 NIV

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

²⁵On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

²⁶"What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

²⁷He answered: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'^[a]; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'^[b]"

²⁸"You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

²⁹But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

³⁰In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³²So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. ³⁴He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵The next day he took out two silver coins^[c] and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

³⁶"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

³⁷The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

Jesus is in a public place. Maybe He is teaching in the temple courts. Maybe He is discussing the Scriptures in a synagogue. Whatever the occasion, an expert in Moses' law stands up to test Jesus. Test is a very important word. The expert does not simply ask a question. He wants to examine Jesus.

So he asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus does not answer the man's question with an answer. He answers with a question. "What's written in the law? How do you read it?"

The law expert then repeats the greatest and second commandment. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind; and, "Love your neighbor as yourself." "Good answer," Jesus replies. "Do this and you will live." Now it is impossible to perfectly live out these commands. No one loves God with all their heart, soul, strength and mind all the time. No one always loves their neighbor as themselves. We cannot "do this" in our own strength apart from Christ.

But the expert in the law seems to think he can. Just to make sure, he follows up with another question. "And who is my neighbor." He wants to clarify who he has to love and perhaps who he doesn't have to love. Notice he doesn't ask for clarification about the first command; loving God. I guess he thinks he's got that one down perfectly.

Jesus again does not give a direct answer. He instead offers the Parable of the Good Samaritan. A man is travelling the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. Known as "the bloody way," it was the perfect trap for robbers. The road descended 1000 meters in only 30 kilometers. Through this rocky terrain, many hidden corners put travelers at risk.

This man falls into the hands of robbers. They beat him, strip him of his valuables and leave him lying on the road. A little while later, a priest comes along. He sees the beaten man. But instead of stopping, he passes by on the other side. Later a Levite comes along. He is an assistant to priests so he's another religious God-fearing person. But maybe he was on his way to attend church or synagogue. So he didn't have time to stop and also passed by.

Then a Samaritan comes along. To Jewish listeners and especially the expert in the law, things just got worse. Jews hated Samaritans and the Samaritans returned the hatred in full force. But this Samaritan stops to help this presumably Jewish man. He not only stops, he has pity and compassion on him. He goes to him and bandages his wounds. He places the wounded man on his donkey. It would be kind of like putting a bloodied person in our minivans.

The Samaritan takes the man to an inn. He hires a room and takes care of the man through the night. The next day, the Samaritan pays the innkeeper to continue to care for the man. Later the Samaritan will return to check on the man and pay any outstanding debt. So this Samaritan set aside his own schedule, safety and comfort to get down and dirty with someone who likely hated him. The

Samaritan shelled out some of his own money and invested personally in showing practical compassion to this person he didn't even know.

So Jesus turns to the expert in the law and asks "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law perhaps cannot bring himself to say "Samaritan." But he replies "the one who had mercy on him."

Jesus responds with the command, "Go and do likewise."

From this parable your leadership presents to you this focus statement:

SVBC – Becoming a church that lives on the Jericho Road in St. Albert and around the world. Could Jesus be calling SVBC to embrace this identity: "Becoming a church that lives on the Jericho Road in St. Albert and around the world in His Strength?"

Now let's consider the key terms in this statement. **Key Term #1 - Jericho Road** is central. Not many people will immediately know the phrase "Jericho Road." They would likely know Good Samaritan. But we thought Jericho Road would be a great conversation starter.

Say someone asks you "what's SVBC all about." You respond with "we're becoming a church that lives on the Jericho Road in St. Albert and around the world." They're likely to follow up with

“what’s the Jericho Road?” You would immediately have the opportunity to share the Good Samaritan parable with them. Right away you could squash that notion that church is only about going to church, saying table grace and avoiding the serious sins.

But much more important than a conversation starter, we thought Jericho Road aptly describes the reality of life in St. Albert and the world. The Jericho Road was a dangerous road to travel. There were many hidden possibilities of sorrow along the way. Doesn’t that sound a lot like our world and community today? If we take some time to look around, we will see beaten up travelers everywhere. Remember when Donna Ludlow – Salvation Army Family and Community Ministries shared with us about the poor of St. Albert? Remember looking out to the unborn, aborted and their parents when Norah Kennedy of the Pregnancy Care Center came? We had Wes Bowers from the Military Christian Fellowship share with us as we ponder prayer for and ministry to military, peace officers and their families. We had Joanne Van Beek of Rise Up Ministries come to speak to us about stopping abuse in families. We looked out against racism/favoritism. We considered God’s heart of compassion for the vulnerable, widows and orphans. Last week we pondered

looking out to gay friends and their families. All these travel the Jericho Road of our community.

We also considered the Jericho Road in other parts of the world. We heard about the Thembe children of Sierra Leone traveling their Jericho Road from Jack Robertson. Remember he shared about that translation project? We look forward to updates from our missionaries and friends out of country who minister on the Jericho Roads of Brazil, the Czech Republic, Cameroon, China, Honduras and Samaritan’s Purse. The pitfalls of the Jericho Road in this parable, parallel the perils many face in life today. St. Albert and the world are filled with people like that beaten man.

Jesus instructed the expert in the law to “go and do likewise.” Go along in life and watch out for beaten up travelers that come across your life’s path.

We believe the Lord calls us to see the world like a Jericho Road. But did you notice the statement does not say “becoming a church that travels the Jericho Road.” We want to be a church that **lives** on the Jericho Road not just travels it. **Key Term #2 – Lives** . Traveling implies you get on the road for awhile and get off when you reach your destination. It would be kind of like darting into a Jericho

Road ministry for a couple of hours and then back into our safe zone. But living on the Jericho Road involves being there for the long haul for people in need of mercy. We're not proposing that we do a couple of outreach projects and then rush back into the safe haven of the church for a decade. We need to live on this road.

For many of us, that means we have to be willing to give up bubble living. Now I'm not saying we give up blowing bubbles at birthday parties. But if we want to be more than a community that goes to church, says table grace and avoids the serious sins, we need to give up thinking we can live in a bubble insulated from the harsh Jericho Road realities.

Richard Stearns, president of World Vision, US has written a book called "The Hole in Our Gospel." He begins by describing a meeting with a 13 year old boy also named Richard in Rakai Uganda. Rakai is ground zero for the Ugandan Aids pandemic. At thirteen, Richard the boy was trying to raise his two younger brothers by himself in a small shack with no running water, electricity or beds. Outside the shack lie the graves of their parents. Stearns writes "I didn't want to be there. I wasn't supposed to be there, so far out of my comfort zone – not in the place where orphaned children live by themselves in their agony. . . I

much preferred living in my bubble, the one that, until that moment had safely contained my life, family and career. It kept difficult things like this out, insulating me from anything too raw or upsetting. When such things intruded, as they rarely did, a channel could be changed, a newspaper page turned, or a check written, to keep the poor at a safe distance. But not in Rakai. There, "such things" had faces and names – even my name, Richard." Stearns, 8.

Tim Keller, in his book "Ministries of Mercy" writes "For decades, evangelicals have avoided the radical nature of the teaching of the parable of the Good Samaritan. At most, we have heard it telling us to prepare a fruit basket for the needy each Christmas, or give money to relief agencies when there is a famine or earthquake in a distant nation.

But it is time to listen more closely, because the world, which never was "safe" to live in, is becoming even less so. We are finally beginning to wonder why there are suddenly hundreds of thousands "stripped and near dead" in the streets of our own cities.

Only a small number of people in the history of the world have lived in relatively "safe" conditions. War, injustice, oppression, famine, natural disaster, family breakdown, disease, mental illness,

physical disability, racism, crime, scarcity of resources, class struggle – these “social problems” are the results of our alienation from God. They bring deep misery and violence to the lives of most of humanity.

The majority of people who read this book however, probably belong to the relatively small group of folk, who, through God’s kindness, lead an existence generally free from these forces.

This comparative comfort can isolate us in a fictitious world where suffering is difficult to find. But this isolation is fragile, for suffering surrounds us – even in the suburbs! We need an accurate view of the world in which we live. Perhaps we need to see that, instead of living on islands of ease, we are all living on the Jericho Road.” 13.

We believe God calls us to live on the Jericho Road. But notice next that the statement does not say SVBC – *beginning to become* a church that lives on the Jericho Road. Instead we chose the word “becoming.” **Key term #3 – Becoming.** Becoming implies that something has already started. Becoming points to us already on the way. We chose that word because SVBC already has many Good Samaritans involved in various Jericho Road ministries.

In St. Albert and the greater Edmonton area, some of you have organized teams or gone down yourself to serve meals at Mustard Seed. You’ve given or helped at Kindred House. Some are actively involved Pregnancy Care Center and International Students Fellowship. Many of you get involved in your community leagues through coaching or volunteering at the schools.

Other Good Samaritans within this community participate in Worldwide Jericho Road projects like - White Cross to prepare bandages and supplies for hospitals in Cameroon. Some participate in the Joni and Friends in ministry to the disabled. We have a Habitat for Humanity leader in this congregation and several have taken up the Operation Christmas Child collection for St. Albert. Some have been sent out from this congregation to missionary work with YWAM, SEND. In the next few weeks we’ll be hearing from our friends working in China. Many of you sponsor kids in Honduras through Compassion or other agencies. Many have gone to Honduras or are preparing to go.

So we are blessed at Sturgeon Valley with many Good Samaritans. We envision the entire church family adopting a Good

Samaritan mindset individually and corporately. We are on the way, becoming, but have not yet arrived.

Key Term #4 – St. Albert. The statement identifies St. Albert as a community we especially want to impact. You might say, “Tom, that’s obvious. The church is in St. Albert.” But it’s tempting to bypass St. Albert as a “needy” community. Yet there are needy Jericho Road travelers all around us right in our city; Street people; moms in minivans struggling with life; military families separated by deployment; youth with drug problems; neighbors; shut in seniors; single parents; others you can think of.

Key Term #5 – The World - We include the world to remind us that beaten up and needy travelers around the world need the Gospel, mercy and support. We seek God’s wisdom on His plans for our involvement around the world.

Together all these add up to the focus that we sense the Lord leading us to for the next couple of years is SVBC – Becoming a church that lives on the Jericho Road in St. Albert and the World. But there is one unspoken part upon which the whole thing depends.

We ultimately depend on the invisible hand of God – We cannot become a church that lives on the Jericho Road in our own

strength. We don’t know what it will cost. We don’t know the culture shifts required for us to set up residence on the road. We’ll require great courage to face the dangers that come with stopping and helping those in need. Only IN Him, BY Him and THROUGH Him will this focus be realized.

That’s why I began this series on prayer last Fall. If we don’t pray and depend on the Lord, we’ll get slaughtered. We will be no match for the enemy. In John 15:1-5 Jesus speaks to His disciples.

John 15:1-5 NIV

The Vine and the Branches

¹I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ²He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes^[a] so that it will be even more fruitful. ³You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

⁵I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

Not you can do some Jericho Road ministry but you won’t be able to do others. You can do nothing apart from Him. If we try to go further towards this apart from Christ, we will get massacred. The enemy does not give up ground without a fight. Remember Ephesians 6:12?

¹²For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

There's an enemy army out there waiting to pounce, oppose and counter attack. But when we remain connected to Christ through prayer and His Word we don't have to fear. We can by His strength live on the Jericho Road and see God advance His kingdom through us. 2 Corinthians 10:3-4 describes this:

2 Corinthians 10:3-4 NIV

³For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does.

⁴The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.

But it starts with an intimate connection to the Lord both personally and corporately. So last fall we looked in at *inward issues* we constantly have to deal with in prayer. We looked at Simple Prayer – an intimate love relationship with God; the Prayer of Confession of Tears; The Prayer of Giving up Control; When God says no and the Prayer of Commitment. Then we *looked up* to the one we pray to. We considered prayer as praise to God; petitionary prayer; the Holy Spirit's help in prayer; Jesus Intercessory ministry and Prayer as struggling against these spiritual forces of evil.

When we've looked in and then looked up to the one we pray to, we're armed to look out in prayer and ministry to the world. Then we will by God's strength move beyond any reduced Christianity to an active, vibrant, ongoing walk with the Lord as we together spread His complete Gospel – the good news proclaimed of possible reconciliation with God through Christ; the good news demonstrated as the reconciled reach out in mercy to their world.

Richard Stearns – “We are carriers of the gospel – the good news that was meant to “change the world.” Belief is not enough. Worship is not enough. Personal morality is not enough. And Christian community is not enough. God has always demanded more.” *3 – Hole in the Gospel*. Being a follower of Jesus Christ requires more than just having a personal and transforming relationship with God; it also entails a public and transforming relationship with the world. (2)

How might you respond to this today?

We would like you to **pray over this statement** and seek the Lord on it. Do you see this as a direction He wants us to go? Then, on **Tuesday, June 23**, the Elders want to hear from you. We will be having a congregational gathering to hear your reflection on the

statement. After hearing from you, we will also put forward some specific possibilities of what we might do together as a church. So please pencil in June 23 to come together to talk, pray and dream.

But you might also respond to this statement today by considering where you fit in the Good Samaritan parable. Some of you here today are **like that man who fell into the hands of robbers**. You have some difficulty or burden you're carrying. If you know other Christians here today, share that burden with them. We come together not because we have it all together. We come to encourage each other and spur each other along in the Lord's strength. So share with your Christian friends or if you don't know anyone, take the response card, fill it out and then pass it to Gord our moderator, or Pastor Serge or myself on the way out. We will do our best to respond.

Others of you can engage in some **Good Samaritan** living this summer. Maybe you could have your neighbors over for a BBQ. You could prayer walk your street where you walk and pray for each home and each person you encounter. You could do a prayer walk around your school asking the Lord to reveal to you someone who needs help you can provide. Through your natural work/school/neighborhood

relationships – you might be the only Christian in their life. How can you help them? How can you show mercy to them?

We have begun asking questions like what help or mercy can we offer that this community needs? One idea put forward was that we explore how we might offer this building more to the community maybe for things like a blood bank, gym nights and family fairs with no strings attached.

We've started slowly. You see the announcement about Neil M. Ross School generosity to us in recent days. We invite that school across the street to have their Spring and Christmas concert here rent free – to give them an opportunity to be completely together as a school to witness their children's presentations. We couldn't offer something like that without a building. Now we have a gym. How could that be of use? This is God's building. What does He want us to do with it? How can we glorify Him through it? In what ways does He want to impact this community with it?

So you might respond to this message as a traveler or as a Good Samaritan. But there's a third character in this parable we know very little about; **the inn keeper**. During our discussions, one person asked "does living on the Jericho Road mean we must also see ourselves as

innkeepers?” The Good Samaritan had to take the wounded traveler somewhere for care. The inn keeper needed to sustain the wounded person. Could God be calling us to see the church building, ministries and body as the inn where Good Samaritans can bring travelers they’ve met? Those of you heading up some of these internal ministries need to realize that you contributing to the innkeeping care that goes on here.

Imagine what might be if the by the Lord’s strength we could say: SVBC – becoming a church that lives on the Jericho Road in St. Albert and the world. That sounds a lot more like Jesus’ call to His disciples – not just come to church, pray before meals and avoid some sin. Jesus asked “which of the three was a neighbor to the traveler?” “The one who showed mercy,” replied the expert in the law. “Go and do likewise,” said Jesus.

May God empower us to go and do likewise, as a church family.