**[1]** October 27th
Sermon Title: It happened on the road to Jericho
Scripture: Mark 10:46-52
Theme: Alms coming to life; what we give lives on beyond us.

“[Then](https://biblehub.com/greek/2532.htm) [Jesus entered](https://biblehub.com/greek/1525.htm) [Jericho](https://biblehub.com/greek/2410.htm) [and was passing through (*dierchomai* – on the way to another place).](https://biblehub.com/greek/1330.htm) And there was a man named Zacchaeus,…” Or, as in today’s passage, as [Jesus] and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving (*ekporeuomai* – taking a certain road out of) Jericho, … there was a blind beggar sitting beside the road named Bartimaeus …

**[2]**  ‘A funny thing happened on the way to the forum…’  This was the title of a Broadway Play in 1962, based on farces of the ancient Roman playwright Plautus. It was designed to teach us that ‘Life happens on the way to something else …’ A funny thing happened on the way to Jericho, or leaving Jericho, I met this man named Zacchaeus, named Bartimaeus … both blind, but in different ways.

**[3]** “Just passing through,” we can imagine Jesus telling those he meets in Jericho. Or, perhaps, being weary, “Let’s burst out of here,” we can imagine Jesus saying, at the exit gates of Jericho, disciples and crowd following. But, why would he say these things? Perhaps, like Samaria,
Jericho was a place to travel through without stopping. Certainly, the road from Jerusalem to Jericho was a dangerous road, as revealed in Luke’s Parable of the Good Samaritan. Robbers
and thugs hiding behind the rocks alongside the road, laying-in-wait for lingering travelers.
Josephus (37-93 CE) describes this first-century road as about 18 miles long (150 Roman stadioi). The road descended more than half a mile in elevation, from Jerusalem at 2500 feet above sea level to Jericho at 825 feet below sea level, most of the trip being in desert-like conditions. In modern times, one can visit the Good Samaritan Inn on the south side of the road about 6 miles east of Jerusalem, commemorating the Inn in the parable. Having a safe place to stop alongside the ancient road speaks of some safety being afforded travelers at the time.
Yet, a dangerous road nonetheless. Jericho, like Samaria, was a good place to be passing through, but not to linger very long.

Strangely enough, Jesus was baptized at Secu, near Ramah and Bethel, on the same road that Elijah followed to Jericho. It was out in the countryside, under the clear sky and flickering stars, away from the city. The Celtic Christians had a term for such a place: “a thin place” where the
veil between our world and the spiritual world is thin. It was approximately the same place along the road where King Saul had his prophetic out-of-body (ecstatic, frenzied) experience with Samuel, the spirit of God visiting them in life-altering ways, splitting soul and spirit, joints and marrows, before the Almighty (1 Sam 19:24).

Jericho also stood at the entry point to what was known as the Valley of Trouble, the infamous Valley of Achor, which runs north and south parallel to the Jordan River. This valley was named for a man named “Achan,” who made the mistake of not listening to Joshua when he commanded that no one should partake of the spoils of victory after the Battle of Jericho.  Achan and his family were punished for disobedience and forced to return what they had stolen; the valley, through its name, would forever be a warning testament to the trouble that comes from disobedience.  (Joshua 6-7).

Jericho is a very ancient city that archaeologically dates back to 9000 years before Christ.  Yet, despite all its varied history, the name “Jericho,” which means “fragrant,” identifies a city known more for its odor of evil than for its fragrance. You may remember that Joshua, with the help of his relatively small army, after surrounding Jericho and blowing the trumpets to bring down the walls of the city during the Battle of Jericho, then cursed the ground on which Jericho was built, declaring that the city was so evil that it should never be rebuilt. Specifically, Joshua declares that the cost of anyone going against the curse to rebuild Jericho would be the loss of children, both the firstborn and the youngest son (Joshua 6:26). Yet, despite the curse on Jericho, a man named Hiel of Bethel does dare to rebuild Jericho, even at the cost of his firstborn and youngest sons.

**[4]** Near the city of Jericho is a fresh water spring known as the Fountain of Elisha.  It is named for an incident described in 2 Kings: “The people of the city said to Elisha, ‘Look, our lord, this

town is well situated, as you can see, but the water is bad and the land is unproductive.”  Elisha

asks the people to bring him a new bowl and to put salt in it.  And, they did so, and brought it to

him.  Then, Elisha goes up to the spring and throws salt into it, saying: “This is what the Lord

says: “I have healed this water.  Never again will it cause death or make the land unproductive.”

**[5]** Leviticus 2:13 requires that all grain offerings be salted to represent a “salted” covenant with God. In this case, the salt identifies the covenant with God as an eternal covenant, a forever covenant.  A salted covenant, says Leviticus, is one that has a pleasing odor; a grain offering laced with honey or leaven will not have a pleasing odor to God.  The prophet Elisha used salt to “sweeten” and “heal” the brackish waters of the Jericho Spring (2 Kings 2:19-22).  A pact of friendship in the ancient world was seasoned by salted food eaten together.

Over time, Jericho loses its Joshua curse! In a certain sense, Jericho becomes a healed city. Once broken irredeemably, it is healed into wholeness. It’s reputation is totally changed by the Fountain of Elisha and the Door of Hope! The Prophet Hosea, speaking for God, promises:
“I will make the Valley of Achor, a door of hope, a gateway for hope.” (Hos. 2:15)  The valley of misfortune and trouble will be transformed into a gateway to the best vineyards of Judah. . Isaiah 65:10 mentions that the Valley of Achor will one day become a place (be transformed) where herds can lie down in peace (echoing the blossoming-in-the-desert, Christmas Rose of Sharon). And the Gospel of John weaves all of these threads of the narrative together as an image of Christ:  “I am the door; if anyone enters by me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture … I came that all may have life and have it abundantly.” (John 10:9ff)

In the time of Jesus, one might well have asked: “Can anything good ever come out of Jericho?”
Yet, the Bible tells us that the same question was asked about Nazareth? Not unlike Zacchaeus,
people in Jericho are patiently waiting for a healing word, one that gives sight and life.

**[6]** Bartimaeus shouts loudly over the top of the noisy crowds exiting Jericho! “Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!” Bartimaeus knew without seeing the one who could heal him. And he persisted. Getting up, stumbling toward Jesus through the crowd. Looking back, Jesus says: “What do you want from me, Bartimaeus?” And he answered Jesus, “Rabbi, I want to see!” Bartimaeus knew the one to go to, the one person in the crowd who could change his life. Bartimaeus, son of the highly honorable, Timaeus, ‘Receive your sight, your faith has saved you.’

There is a pattern here. Don’t you think? Jesus visits Jericho on his way to Jerusalem. And we are stumbling forward on the road. He’s just passing through, leaving on a certain road out of Jericho. A funny thing happened to me on the Jericho road! I found a “Door of Hope,” and a “Fountain of Life,” in Jesus Christ. Alleluia! Amen!