May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer. Amen.

The Lord said to Amos, “*See, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people*.” (Amos 7:7-17)

God speaks these words to Amos while standing next to a wall built with a plumb line. A plumb line, as you know, is a tool used by builders to ensure that a structure, a wall for example, is properly aligned, true, and straight. That alignment is what helps give the wall strength and stability. Some plumb lines are used to build a structure while others are used to build a life.

We all have multiple plumb lines in our lives. They are the values, qualities, beliefs, and priorities that guide our lives. They help us focus on what really matters. They offer us strength and stability.

The Law of the Canadian Constitution are plumb lines. The Torah of the Old Testament is a plumb line. So are the life and teachings of Jesus.

The plumb lines you and I choose for our lives matter not only for us individually but also for our community and our relationships with one another. Some plumb lines promote life and human dignity, others diminish life and human dignity.

One of the ways we begin making changes in our lives and community is by resetting the plumb lines. Sometimes we choose to reset the plumb lines in our lives. Other times we don’t. Other times events, circumstances, or experiences start the plumb line swinging and we are forced to rethink everything. It’s as if there is a reset on everything, including our plumb lines.

Who among us today doesn’t feel like he or she is having to reset the plumb lines of life? That’s what grief, suffering, and loss can do. They force us to rethink and reset the plumb lines of our lives. Resetting plumb lines is a part of every life in every place and in every time.

I think that’s what Jesus is doing in today’s gospel, the parable of the Good Samaritan. He’s resetting the plumb lines in the lawyer’s life. And I wonder how today’s gospel might help you and me restore and reset the plumb lines in our lives and in our community.

I don’t know what the new plumb lines will be for you, me, or our town. It takes time to reset a plumb line. You can’t do much with a swinging plumb line. The new plumb lines are revealing themselves every day and today’s gospel gives us some hints of what to watch and listen for.

Just like the lawyer in today’s gospel we know that we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our strength, and with all our mind; and our neighbor as ourselves. And just like the lawyer most of us live with a plumb line that distinguishes between who is and who is not our neighbor.

We’ll cross the road for someone we know, but for the stranger we often “pass by on the other side.” We’ll cross the road when it’s convenient and, on our way, but when it asks us to change, takes us out of our way, or costs too much we “pass by on the other side.” We’ll cross the road for a citizen but what about a migrant? We’ll cross the road for those who look, think, believe, and act like we do, but for those who don’t we “pass by on the other side.” We’ll cross the road when it’s in our own best interest, but when it’s not we “pass by on the other side.”

For some people we are willing to cross the road but for others we “pass by on the other side.” That plumb line is revealed in the lawyer’s question, “And who is my neighbor?” It’s a polite way of asking, “Who is not my neighbor?” “Who is not deserving of my love?” “Whose life is not worthy of my time and effort?” “Who can I ignore, denigrate, hate, or pass by?” The plumb line Jesus resets in today’s gospel declares, “No one.”

The issue for Jesus is not who the neighbor is, his or her identity, where he or she comes from, what he or she has done or left undone, what he or she believes, or what he or she thinks about us. There is no way for the priest, the Levite, or the Samaritan to know that information about the man who has been robbed, stripped, beaten, and left half dead. The issue for Jesus is what action you and I take or refuse to take for another’s benefit and well-being. Will we cross the road or do we “pass by on the other side”?

We usually cross the road only when it’s safe to do so. It’s a lesson we learned early in life. Setting new plumb lines means taking a risk. The new plumb lines will ask us to face our fears of others, change, and crossing the road.

The priest and the Levite in today’s parable passed by on the other side. They were afraid. The first question that the priest and the Levite asked was, ‘If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?’ … But then the Good Samaritan came by, and he reversed the question: ‘If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?’”

Maybe that’s the question that resets the plumb lines for ourselves and our community. If I do not stop to help, what will happen to the other, this community and this town? Amen.