

'The Courage to Heal'

This time of year can be difficult for many people. It's cold and dark, and illness seems to linger. It is also the only school term without a public holiday and it can feel as though it is dragging on and on...

It can be a particularly challenging time for those experiencing homelessness. We know there are many factors which lead to the overwhelming numbers of people 'sleeping rough' and it is usually combined with other issues including addiction, mental illness, and isolation. The vast numbers of people living right at the margins of the community is a grave injustice in a country as wealthy as Australia.

Homelessness has many faces

(excerpts)

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The first thing I noticed was his Mercedes. It was only when he got closer that I realised he was also wearing a pretty expensive-looking suit. We don't see the likes of — well, let's call him 'John' — coming to our soup vans every day. But John reminded me of a very important lesson. That homelessness hasn't got a 'look' — and the word 'homeless' never describes the person, only their circumstance.



It's clear that with homelessness there's no one size that fits all. It could be an older person, a couple in a car, a woman in a domestic violence situation or someone with mental health, trauma or substance abuse issues. On any given night across Victoria our volunteers see up to 1000 people, and we go out seven nights a week, rain, hail or shine. Most people come to us to talk, or for assistance. Usually they're very hungry and it might be their only meal for the day. These people may not attend other services during the day. They have told me they feel ashamed, because they don't feel like they're adequately dressed, or haven't had a shower for over a week, so they come to us and know that they will be accepted as they are and won't be judged.

According to results released in 2016, there were close to three million people living below the 50 per cent of median income poverty line. Of these, 731,300 were children. Unfortunately, this isn't news to us. We often have mum and dad with kids in the back of their car, who turn up for an evening meal. People ask me 'Why are they coming to the soup van? They've got a car.' Well, that family is probably going to drive around the corner and eat their food in their car and sleep in the car because that's actually their home. Providing a warm and comforting meal for those in need is so much more than just providing food. So many who come to our soup vans come because they're experiencing a great loneliness and emptiness inside.

You might want to know what happened to John. We gave him food and a sleeping bag. It turned out he'd lost his job, and the suit and car were the last things he owned. He talked and we listened, and I'd like to think that when he finally packed up for the night, he went away with something else, too.

His dignity.

Pause for reflection

What impact does a story like that of John's have on you?

Turn to slide 6 of the 'Courage' Resource: <http://www.kildareministries.org.au/courage.html>

- Read through the Scripture Mark 1:40-45 *Jesus cleanses a leper*
- Read through the explanation

The disease described as leprosy in the Gospels had the effect of ostracising its sufferers. The point of the narrative is not that Jesus literally healed the *disease* but that he healed the *illness* by re-socialising the outcast. This reintegration into community wholeness is reflected in many of the healing and exorcism narratives in the Gospels. The courage of Jesus is evident in his placing himself outside of the circle, breaking social and religious taboos to bring about a radical change in social relations.

- Questions for discussion from the slide

Final prayer

Litany to be read by a leader, with the group sharing the response

Response: 'Remind us that your love is with us'

- When loved ones experience pain and suffering...
- When illness, aging, or chronic pain diminish our joy...
- When doubts arise and confusion fills our minds...
- When others fail us or refuse to forgive us for our failings...
- When we stumble and stray from the path of goodness...
- When death separates us from those we love dearly...
- When financial problems threaten our security...
- When things do not go the way we planned...
- When depression or loneliness return again and again...
- When broken relationships seem unmendable...
- When our faith strengthens us and give us courage...
- When the precious gift of life is recognised and appreciated...
- When unexpected kindness and caring comes our way...
- When optimism stirs in our heart and springtime returns...
- When the peace of Christ calms our anxiety and softens our sadness...
- When we realise that our loving presence can make a difference...



(from 'Out of the Ordinary', Joyce Rupp)