

Luke 10:25-37

July 10, 2022

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Not my circus. Not my monkeys.

Have you ever heard that before?

My cousin's wife in Georgia was the first person I ever heard use it. I'm not sure if it's a Southern thing or not.

Not my circus. Not my monkeys.

I suppose that's what the Levite and the Priest were thinking as they walked by the dying, perhaps even dead, man as they walked by on their way to Jericho.

Let someone else take care of it. Not my circus. Not my monkey.

So, when is it our circus and when is it our monkey?

Usually when the phrase – not my circus, not my monkey – is used, it's in a judgy kind of way – well that's not the way I'd do it, but it's not my circus. Or, it's an excuse for not getting involved -like – you made your bed, now you have to lie in it.

So, maybe, for whatever reason, the Levite and the Priest thought this man deserved what he got, so they were not going to get involved.

The fun thing about parables is that they are chewy. There is a lot to chew on. And probably whatever we think about this parable says more about us than it does about the actual parable, and that is important. Parables are like mirrors.

So, what do you think of when you read this parable?

Somethings that are often missed are that the Levite and the Priest are leaving Jerusalem and that the man may actually already be dead.

The Priest and Levite are going down, that means away from Jerusalem, which also means that they have already completed the sacrifice at the Temple, which is only in Jerusalem, and are either going home or going someplace else.

Often we hear that the Priest and Levite needed to keep themselves clean so they can perform sacrifice, but they have already performed the sacrifice and have plenty of time to do the purifying ritual.

Most of the time we think that this man lying on the ground is hurt and will get better, but it doesn't say that in the parable. He could be dead already. So, maybe the Priest and Levite think that there is no use in stopping. The man is already dead, but they don't bother going to check.

So, what would you do? Would you stop?

The man lying on the road was the most vulnerable he could be. He could do absolutely nothing for himself. He was totally at the mercy of other people.

Have you ever been in that situation where you were totally dependent on others?

When I broke my hip, I couldn't move. I was stuck on the ground. Granted, I was conscious, but I absolutely couldn't do anything for myself. Thank God someone came along and saw me lying there. He immediately went into the office building and called the ambulance. Other people showed up and gave me blankets and stayed with me while I waited.

This man that stopped for me could have easily thought – not my circus, not my monkey. He could have said – I don't want to get involved. But, he didn't. He called for help. He did what he could.

And that's exactly what the Samaritan did. He used what he had for the man that was incapacitated. He looked at what he had on him and then used them for this other man.

He had bandages, so he bandaged the wounds. He had wine and oil, so he treated the wounds. He had a donkey, so he loaded the man on its back and took him to an inn. He had 2 denarii, so he gave it to the inn keeper for the other man's lodging. He used what he had.

This whole image perhaps reminds you of another event at the beginning of Luke - Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem. Eh... maybe keep that in the back of your mind.

And so, maybe we can let the Priest and Levite off the hook. Perhaps they were walking and didn't have anything to help with the injured man. Maybe along with crossing the street they also quickened their pace concerned that the robbers might still be there.

Again – we can fill in the details in whatever way we want, because they are missing from the story, and likely they will serve as a mirror to reflect back on us.

Now - here is something to think about. As you place yourself in the story, where do you place Jesus? Is Jesus in the story? Is Jesus the Samaritan? Is Jesus the man lying injured on the road? Perhaps we should see Jesus as the one lying on the ground, stripped of his clothing and nailed to a cross.

Then we have to consider – what would we do for Jesus? Is it now our circus? Is it now our monkey?

The gospel according to Luke is all about the Kingdom of God, and the Kingdom of God is not some grand Empire. The Kingdom of God is totally interpersonal. We live the Kingdom of God in how we treat other people. It has nothing to do with a president, senate, congress, governor, mayor, town council, or anything else. The Kingdom of God is between you and me, between us and other people.

We live the Kingdom of God when we care for those in need who are right in front of us. When we can help another, we help with whatever we already have to offer, and that then is an offering to God. God gives it to us and we give it back to God when God needs it, and in doing so, we love God and our neighbor.

The Priest and the Levite were concerned, among other things, about the Temple politics and what they had to do to keep their status, and that included the relationship with Rome as well. The Samaritan forgets all of that and only sees the injured person lying on the road. He doesn't say like the others – not my circus, not my monkey. He looks at this injured, and perhaps even dead, man and says – I can help – and then he does help. That is where eternal life is at.

The lawyer had asked Jesus – what must I do for eternal life? Jesus' final answer is – go and do like the Samaritan did, because eternal life is life in God. Only God is eternal, so when we enter into God's Kingdom, we are living the eternal life. It's not something far off in the distance. It is here and now right in the midst of us.

And it doesn't mean that we have to give more than what we can give. The Samaritan used what he had on hand. He loved God by loving his neighbor with the gifts that God had already given him. It wasn't hard. He already had it. He didn't have to run to the store or make something out of nothing. He looked at what he had and he gave them to someone who needed them more than he did.

Love is an action. Just as Jesus loves us so much that he is risen from the dead, an action, so we love God in action when we serve others as if they were our very own being, because as the body of Christ, they are.

In this parable, Jesus is the man lying on the road – stripped bare, beaten, robbed, and either dead or dying.

It is, of course, true that no matter what we do, Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, but don't we want to be part of the resurrection? Don't we want to join God's life giving activity in the world?

Of course we do. Of course we do – that's why we are given the Holy Spirit – so that we can be part of God's Kingdom here and now.

So, this is your circus, in the sense that you belong to it, and these are your monkeys in that you are a monkey too.

The Kingdom of God is a circus. You are God's monkey, just as everyone else is, and you are a vital part of the act in the center ring where Jesus is crucified, died, buried, then shortly after returns to life, ascends to heaven, sends the Holy Spirit, and then sends us out into the world.

You are not an observer in the stands. You are a vital part of the act, so go and do God's act of love in the world.

This is your circus. These are your fellow monkeys.

Thanks be to God. Amen.