

DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE: “Left For Dead”

First United Church, Waterloo – Sunday, June 12, 2022

PRAYER: “Help us, O God, to perceive sideways, to pick up signals otherwise, to be open to fresh insights and new possibilities for putting faith into practice, to move past routine and the familiar to uncommon understandings and to paths not yet tried. We pray in Jesus’ name.

VICTIM: (*Scene One, sitting on the edge of a bed*)

I know. You may have heard it hundreds of times before;
but, let me tell the story from my perspective and share the rest of it.
I don’t remember much about the attack. I was shoved from behind by surprise.
I tumbled off the road into the ditch where, at the bottom, my left knee smashed into a boulder.
Then, all I remember was feet trouncing me and fists flailing and pummeling me.
I winced and screamed at first and then, I stopped. I went numb. I blacked out I guess.

Hours later, that felt like a couple of days, I opened my one still relatively good eye
and tried to prop myself up, but I was too sore and winded.
Despite the blurring, I saw him clearly enough, that priest who paused on the road for a moment.
I remembered seeing him at a Passover festival.
He had a pointed black beard with a grey-white patch in the middle, and a distinctive nose.
He was the kind of religious leader who revels in the attention and status that authority offers.
He was all business and no nonsense in worship:
worship and sacrifice are to be done properly, with decorum and solemnity.
Was I surprised that he just leered at me and sort of sneered at me
from his seat inside his carriage, and then told his bearers to move on down the road?
Not a bit. Disappointed? Oh, greatly disappointed! But, not surprised.

Was it minutes later or an hour or more that that Levite passed by?
Agitated he seemed and squeamish.
“Oh my! Oh my! Oh, dear me, dear me! Oh my!” he kept muttering
as he made his way down the bank with some difficulty and looked me over.
I recognized him too. He was a neighbour to my brother-in-law in Jerusalem.
“Oooh!” he winced. “Aaah! Aaah!” he cried covering his mouth like someone about to vomit.
I must have passed out again, for I only felt him nudge me with a stick.
“Oh my! Oh my!” he muttered again faintly
as I heard his robes brush against the wild sage and bent grass as he struggled back up the slope.
I opened my good eye in time to see him look skyward from the road, checking for shadows
and becoming fidgety again while sweat was as obvious on his face as the smell of garlic.
I wanted to shout something uncomplimentary at him as he bustled on down the road,
but I was too wrung out and dry in the mouth to even speak.

Honestly, the two of them, what a pair! All their ducks neatly lined up.
Why should they bother losing time, and worse, risk their righteousness
to help some unfortunate, suddenly down-and-out person like me?
They moved on and left me just as my attackers did ... left me for dead.

And then, HE came! He was dressed differently. His skin was a shade or two darker.
He smelled different – leathery, like a well-worn satchel, tarragon scent, and donkey dander.
And he spoke with a dialect.

*“Oh God, have mercy!” I prayed silently. “He’s a Samaritan! Now, I could be truly done for!
Go ahead, bud, pull out a knife and finish me off. God knows I don’t deserve any of this.
Somehow, God will still take me up to heaven.”*

But, that wasn’t what happened. He touched me, gently, not roughly.
He grabbed my wrist to check for a pulse and ran his palm over my bloodied forehead,
then murmured in his dialect, *“Don’t move. I’ll be right back.”*

“O God, have mercy! O God, have mercy!” I continued to mutter to myself in fear.
He came back. His hands were full.

Working from forehead to my ankles, he dealt with one wound, one sore,
one bruise after another. Wine he poured on them; full-bodied wine I could tell by its aroma.
And then, he applied some ointment with lime and aloe in it.

Oh God, I can’t tell you how soothing that felt. It was mercy, absolute physical mercy!
I felt as comforted and composed as when my wife applied oleander and rosehip massage oil
some nights after I arrived home late in Jericho from a day of vigorous trading in Jerusalem.
Then, he tied bandages where bleeding needed to be arrested.

He broke two wooden slats off the crate I had used to transport oranges in
and made a splint for my sprained left knee, binding it tightly.

And then, he sat me up and put his precious wineskin to my lips and let me sip its nectar.
Surprise, surprise! Good things could come out of Samaria. And good people too!

I tried to utter some faint words of appreciation and thanks
when he put a shoulder under my right armpit and got me standing.

Then, he flung me carefully over his shoulder, carried up out of the ditch to the road
and laid me prostrate across the back of his donkey.

I raised my head towards him, smiled, and tried to wink my one half-open eye.

Then, I slumped down. Did I pass out, or fall asleep? I don’t know.

Sleep, I reckon, because at times I could feel the rocking motion of a trotting donkey,
not unlike being on a fishing boat on the Sea of Galilee.

VICTIM: (*Scene Two, at a wayside inn*)

About a week and half later, I was sitting on the edge of this bed in a wayside inn
from where I have been sharing the first part of my story.

So, keep imagining it all along with me. It’s the more decent of two inns in Bethphage,
a small village part way between Jerusalem and Jericho.

It's the place where HE left me having giving the innkeeper a chunk of change
 for my room, board, and medical needs from a local medicine woman.
 He said he'd come back in a couple of weeks to square up the rest of the bill.
 And I can tell you that it was no small expense.
 And, to look at him, you wouldn't think he had more than six shekels to rub together.
"He's good for it," the innkeeper informed me. *"He's never stiffed me on a bill yet."*
 I sent word onto my wife in Jericho through some other travelling guests:
"Tell her that I'm okay, that I expect to be home in another week or so."
 My bruises turned from purple to yellow. My wounds had scabbed over.
 The inflammation in my left knee subsided and I could get around not too badly with a cane.
 I still got dizzy spells though from time to time.
 When I'm thinking clearly, I try to figure it out. *"I don't get it,"* I told the innkeeper.
"Oh," he said, *"it has to do with that travelling Galilean rabbi called Jesus."*
He's met him, you know, and heard him speak strange wisdom
about losing one's life in order to find life."
"Oh," I replied. And, when the innkeeper went back to his desk, I thought *"Hunh?"*
 Then, I began to catch on.
 Almost everywhere that Samaritan goes, he gets messages that he's a loser.
 Jews despise him. The Romans treat him like dirt. But ... because he can't hate back.
 and because he's willing to help anyone in trouble – even those who make him uncomfortable --
 many of his own people think he's weird and chide him for his foolish generosity.
 They view him as one of those nice guys who can be easily duped,
 who could get his pants sued off time and time again by greedy predators.
 I imagined that even his wife and family give him a hard time over his free-lance generosity
 squandering, in their estimation, portions of his hard-earned living on one deadbeat after another.
 But that's it, isn't it?
 He himself is an outcast, a victim of a curdled culture, often made to feel he'd be better off dead.
 So, he can readily identify with the like of me lying beaten and robbed at the bottom of a ditch,
 left for dead. He doesn't see my nationality, my religion, my economic status.
 He only sees my helplessness; and, whatever inconvenience and income it costs him
 to offer assistance, he's willing to part with them.
 In short, he dies to his own comfort and self-interest
 and hands over a good chunk of his life and heart to complete but desperate strangers
 because he sees them as persons who, like himself, have been ditched in some social scrap heap,
 like the leftovers from animal sacrifices that get tossed outside the Temple as rotting garbage.
 He's not out to score points or rack up rewards with the Almighty through a raft of good deeds.
 He's just exercising self-giving love and compassion.
 When he did come back to check on me and clear up the rest of my bill,
 I thanked him profusely and offered to repay him. Can you imagine what he said to that?
 I suspect you can. He said, *"Don't bother repaying me. Just go, and do likewise."*

VICTIM: (*Scene Three, standing outside his house in Jericho*)

That was a year and half ago and I am virtually all better.
I've been testing out that conundrum about losing your life to find it.
You know what? It really works!
I was able to get near to that travelling rabbi, Jesus.
He came through Jericho one afternoon and started his teachings to a large crowd
in the town square in the shade of a huge sycamore tree. It's right across from my house here.
That day, that little weasel of a tax-collector, Zaccheus, was up in that tree
trying to horn in on the lessons unobserved. But Jesus saw him and did the darndest thing.
He interrupted his teaching session and told Zaccheus to climb down and go get dinner ready
because he was going to spend the night.
There it was: a wise, upstanding religious teacher, this Jesus,
was willing to go and keep company with losers as well as with respectable people.

Several Fridays ago, I was in Jerusalem at Passover time. I saw Jesus again.
There was great commotion as a crowd followed a troop of Roma soldiers through town.
They were parading some criminal through the streets and mocking him all the way.
On a craggy hill outside of town, they tacked him up on a cross between two actual bandits.
But he was no criminal. He was that same Jesus.
He hung there and bled there becoming increasingly limp and exhausted.
He whispered some unforgettable words of forgiveness, sipped on a sponge soaked in vinegar,
endured several more torments, then gasped a final cry committing his spirit into God's hands.
From my vantage point, I was riveted to the spot.
He was lifted up all right, but what I also saw was a person going down,
another discard outside the walls, someone respectable people considered too hot to handle.
In his lostness, leastness, and lastness, he was all passion and compassion.
That triggered my own sad memory: my lying in the ditch on the road to Jericho, left for dead.
Through Jesus, God identifies with the plight of all victims --
with those who have been mugged and stabbed, beaten and robbed,
with those who suffer and die through accidents,
with those who are remembered by wreaths and memorials on the roadside,
with those who are raped, molested, abused, or tortured,
with those who are displaced by war, famine, or pestilence,
with those who have to travel through life with mental or physical challenges,
with those who travel through life subject to the taunts and prejudices of others.
God is committed to helping them find a path to restoration of dignity,
a path to wholeness and fullness of life.
And I reckon that God is out to transform the perpetrators and abusers too
who have become lost in their own indulgences and deviant self-interest and protective privilege.

God uses such strange ways to save the day, such odd but compelling ways to save the world:
a foolhardy Samaritan who frittered away a piece of his livelihood on a beaten loser like me,
a horrifying spectacle of a Liberator, who by an agonizing death,
laid down his life for his friends.
I became one of his friends, a devotee of losing one's life to find it. And it works, it works!
Thanks be to God.