"Go and Do Likewise": Reconsidering Luke 10:25-37

by Joey Mokos

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise." Luke 10:25-37 NRSV

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Most of us are familiar with Luke 10:25-37, often referred to as, "The Parable of the Good Samaritan." It was of particular importance to Ivan Illich who often referred to this parable to make a point about the surprising nature of love, the inner turning of our guts that precedes mercy, and the radical redefinition of the neighbor that ignores religious, ethnic and tribal limits. According to the index in *Ivan Illich: An Intellectual Journey*, Cayley cites this passage seven times, sometimes in lengthy passages. Cayley correctly states, "Illich claimed this parable had been persistently misunderstood as a story about how one *ought* to act." (p. 351)

About a year before Ivan was born into eternal life, Wes Avram, Ivan, and I had a conversation about rethinking this parable. Wes, a rhetorician, and Presbyterian minister was tripped up by the rhetorical leap made in focusing on the action of the Samaritan. Wes and I argued that this may very well be a story about how one ought to 'act' if the model of 'behavior' was the man in the ditch. In fact, a careful examination of the passage shows that the lawyer is asked to identify not with the Samaritan, but rather with the beaten-up man in the ditch. In so doing, Jesus is inducing the lawyer into a new way of thinking and acting. Ivan was delighted and encouraged us to continue this line of thinking.

Later that same weekend, I went on to discuss with Ivan the potential for looking at his body of work as an exercise in theological anthropology, that is as an exercise in describing who we are and what gifts and talents we have as creatures of God. Ivan's response in the moment was, "I never thought of it that way." But he immediately went on to suggest we start working together to tease this out. The conversation continued that day, but we never had the opportunity to go as in depth as either of us would have liked. I have been living with this conversation for over two decades trying to make sense of the implications. It was profoundly significant at the

time and has only grown as an interpretive lens for reading Illich and thinking about how to live well.

One of the challenges of sharing what Illich can teach, is that people wonder what exactly to do with his description of the state of the world. A centerpiece of Illich's work in the 1970's was a description of how our institutions and tools become counterproductive. Illich describes the very place many readers look to solve problems in the world as making the problem worse. This can feel hopeless, yet Illich maintains a profound hope in the ability for a group of friends to forge new ways of living well despite collapsing or entrapping institutions. Readers sense that Illich perhaps holds different assumptions about who we are as created beings. I would argue that these "different assumptions" are anthropological assumptions, of which three are important.

The most important of his anthropological assumptions is the high regard in which he held human capability that found its source in his reading of the story of creation in Genesis. Illich finds significant meaning in the description of human beings having been created in the image of God. One of the implications of this in theological circles is that humans are therefore co-creators with God, although, Illich never addresses this point directly. Illich believed that human actions are rooted in their understanding of the world, and their imaginations are shaped by the tools and ideas they have about the world. But it is easy to lose sight of the fact that this understanding was created. To feel secure, human beings internalize the worlds they create to the point that they no longer see those worlds as something *they* did. Instead, people begin to see the structure of social relations as "self-evident" – rather than a human act of creation that can be revised and renewed, this understanding of the world suddenly becomes something external to human beings which now has the power to act upon them. For Illich, this is a distortion. It is a lack

of awareness of the nature of human beings as image-bearers of God. Illich did not believe human beings were born into "original stupidity" that needed the grace of curriculum to remedy, but rather that human beings are born with natural abilities and gifts by virtue of their creation. This noble view of the human being is a central component of Illich's theological anthropology.

But, for Illich, this elevated regard of human capability was also inherently limited. People are dependent on one's neighbors and friends because human beings were created to be in community. This is a second central assumption of his theological anthropology and infuses much of his work. For example, focusing on our capabilities—our gifts—without attending to our limits and our dependence on others, tips the multiple balances described in *Tools for Conviviality* towards a destructive path. One of the purposes of his argument in *Tools* was to restore human control over tools as a collective mutually dependent practice. It is the awareness of this interdependence that is the starting place for regaining balance. Illich's anthropological assumption that human beings are created for one another and that living with one another well is part of what it is to be image-bearers of God, requires this awareness and embrace of our mutual dependence.

Finally, the third assumption of Illich's theological anthropology is his view that the radical freedom to act is a central component of what it is to be human. This freedom was part of the creation of human beings in the image of God, but its realization in human life was restricted with the introduction of sin into the world. Part of human nature is our capacity to learn and grow through imitation and practice… however, our models for imitation became increasingly rigid and limited. Our desire to avoid suffering and death increasingly restricted our ability to suffer well and live well together. Institutionalizing the attempt to avoid suffering and

death has sent us over the second threshold as described in *Tools for Conviviality*, beyond which further action becomes counterproductive. The loss of freedom to love is one of the most tragic results of this sin and makes more important what was accomplished in the Incarnation. Jesus—the divine made flesh—made this radical freedom available to humanity once again. Jesus offered a new a model to emulate, a model of compassion and spontaneity. Jesus' coming into the world simultaneously freed us from the bonds of sin but also introduced new possibilities of sin, reasserting the freedom to choose our neighbor but potentially locking us into a condition in which everyone *is* our neighbor.

Luke 10:25-37 is an example of these dynamics at work. Illich's reading of the story focused on the example of the Samaritan and emphasized what is possible when the radical freedom to love is lived out. But as both Cayley and Illich assert, this freedom to love has been perverted by turning it into an ethical imperative. Freedom is thereby distorted into compulsion. The question is if it is possible to read this passage differently to preserve Illich's insight while avoiding its distortive consequences? I believe reading the story using the lens of these three anthropological assumptions of Illich provides just such a possibility.

The passage begins with a lawyer testing Jesus by asking him what the lawyer should do to inherit eternal life. With his question, the lawyer is not out to win a case or an argument but is testing Jesus to see what he knows. In the world of this text, ancient Jewish lawyers were interpreters and teachers of Torah. While they may have been called to resolve real world problems, unlike our modern-day lawyers who are pitted against each other in an adversarial legal system, it was the knowledge of Torah that gave ancient Jewish lawyers a position of prestige and power within the community. When Jesus seems to easily get to the heart of the law-

yer's question about what the law says about how to inherit eternal life including loving your neighbor as yourself, the lawyer feels the need to test him further. He presses Jesus by asking, "And who is *my* neighbor?" (emphasis mine). It is to this question that to Jesus replies with this familiar parable about a man going from Jerusalem to Jericho who encounters robbers who take everything from the man, beat him, strip him, and leave him for dead in a ditch by the road. Three people come down the road in succession: a priest, a Levite, and a Samaritan. Only the Samaritan stops and helps the man in the ditch, moved to pity (literally "a turning of the guts"). Jesus then ends by asking a question of the lawyer, "Which of these three men, do you think, *was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers*?" (emphasis mine) The lawyer says, "The one who showed him mercy." It is almost as if the lawyer could not even bring himself to say, 'the Samaritan.'

It is important to note that the lawyer, who is Jewish, is having a conversation with Jesus, who is Jewish. Ethnic identity within a defined group imposes rules for how to act: 'We Jews do 'x', we do not do 'y". Group identity was, therefore, built over and against other groups. This is certainly true in the case of Jews and Samaritans in first century Palestine. These two groups were enemies who lived in the same geography. Understanding that this religio-ethnic tension existed is crucial to the context of the parable and the ability of the parable to transcend its original context to impact our own. Sometimes Illich would substitute 'Palestinian' for 'Samaritan' to make this point.

"Go and do likewise."

Religio-ethnic tension animates Luke 10:25-37. The power of the story resides in the fact that a Jew is identifying the Samaritan as his neighbor. It is the hinge on which the story turns. However, what is often overlooked is the fact that

in responding to the question, "Who is *my* neighbor?" with the answer of "the Samaritan," the lawyer is identifying himself with the man in the ditch. The Jewish lawyer, a person in a position of power, must lower himself to recognize his enemy as the one with the power to aid him. This is an inversion both of power and of ethnic norms. Illich focused on this act of the Samaritan as an example of the freedom offered by Jesus to choose one's neighbor. This freedom to choose is corrupted when we turn it into an expectation to act a certain way. I would suggest that Illich's theological anthropology invites us to consider new questions in the light of how the parable ends, when Jesus commands the lawyer, "Go and do likewise". The questions become, do what? Who is the model? What is the relationship between the Samaritan and the man in the ditch?

The Greek is *Poreuou kai sy poiei homoiōs* – literally, 'go and you do likewise' or 'go and do the same.' Traditionally, this has been interpreted as referring to the action of the Samaritan. To do likewise, as the Samaritan, is understood as an injunction to aid the needy, as a recommendation to act mercifully towards the weak and downtrodden. Acting like the Samaritan fits with Jesus' message to lift the poor and needy, found throughout the gospels. This reading seems to follow the force of the narrative, and from the time of early Christianity, is the most common interpretation. Illich also focused on the Samaritan but, for him, it was not the merciful action of the Samaritan that lay at the heart of the parable. Instead, for Illich, it was the radical freedom the Samaritan demonstrated by crossing ethnic boundaries because he was moved by something inexplicable, that constituted the radical core of the parable and the true anthropological model.

Illich understood that when people focused specifically on the merciful action of the Samaritan as the model, it evolved into a moral imperative… ultimately leading to the

creation of social service agencies, hospitals, and, paradoxically, 'Good Samaritan' laws which protect anyone acting as the Samaritan from legal prosecution. For Illich, this unbidden compassion turned into compulsion is a corruption of the original message. It removes the central anthropological message of the story—that Jesus has opened the way back to the radical freedom human beings were created for as image-bearers of God—and instead leads to destructive results.

In my work as a Union Benefit Administrator, I've witnessed many such results. I recall a particularly awful case in which a man underwent surgery to fix his heart. Unfortunately, he had a stroke during the surgery and was put on a ventilator to assist his breathing. Within a few days it was clear he was 'brain dead' and unable to breath on his own. The family were hopeful of his recovery and the doctors obliged by continuing to offer different services. None of the interventions helped, and in fact may have made his situation worse. He was non-communicative and slowly lost weight, faced organ failures for which doctors hooked up additional machines. Ultimately, he developed bed sores that become infected, of which he finally died. He became a million-dollar medical case in which each intervention diminished his condition by simultaneously preventing his death while pushing him closer to it. This prolonged his suffering and his family and the workers who contribute to the fund still carry the medical debt. This is born out of the hubris and compulsion to act.

Illich attempted to rescue us from scenarios like this one by focusing on the freedom to choose the neighbor. Following the path laid out by Illich and further delineated by Cayley, I suggest their reading can be bolstered by a reading focused on the man in the ditch.

The Man in the Ditch as a Model of Dependence:

An alternative reading suggests we recognize that the parable is narratively embedded in a conversation between Jesus and the lawyer. Jesus shares the parable, principally, for the lawyer's benefit. Remembering Illich's belief in the communal nature of human beings helps us to see that the parable is situated in the human encounter between these two men—face to face. When the parable ends Jesus asks the lawyer: "Which of these three proved (or became) the neighbor to the man in the ditch?" They are still in conversation. The lawyer hesitantly answers, "The one who showed mercy."

Within the narrative context, it is the lawyer's recognition of the Samaritan as neighbor to the man in the ditch that constitutes the radical step. Jesus is leading the lawyer to take the same step of radical freedom that the Samaritan made—he is asking him to be a co-creator with God of a new world where a Jewish lawyer can recognize the Samaritan as his neighbor. But the lawyer cannot grasp what Jesus is offering while remaining mired in his position of power as a lawyer or as a person able to rescue the man in the ditch. To enter the radical freedom that Jesus offers, and the Samaritan embodies without distorting that freedom, the lawyer must first recognize his own weakness and dependence, the second of Illich's anthropological assumptions. Therefore, the accent of the parable can fall on the question Jesus asks at its conclusion which requires the lawyer to look at the situation from the perspective of the man in the ditch to give an answer. He must *become* the beaten up and broken man to see the Samaritan as his neighbor.

In this way, Jesus walks the lawyer through this difficult exercise of giving up the rigid rules of his reading of Torah and allow himself to hear the surprising call to mercy and compassion. When Jesus then commands "Go and do likewise," we can hear in this command the same belief in the

autonomous capability of human beings that Illich had. According to the alternative reading I've offered, this command enjoins the lawyer to recognize his vulnerability and dependence in likeness with the man in the ditch and to see mercy coming from surprising people and places. It is only from this position of dependence that the lawyer can go into the world with the radical freedom gifted to a human being and not use that freedom to distort and harm. Illich's insistence on the awareness of and living in mutual dependence as the way to pull human beings back from the second threshold follows the pattern that Jesus sets out, a pattern that will enable the lawyer to respond to the original question "what must I do to inherit eternal life." When Jesus says, "Go and do likewise" he is saying to the lawyer, 'Recognize your place of dependence in the ditch and practice relying on mercy and compassion to guide you.'

This reading is explicitly not about how to act but about recognizing our orientation toward God and other people. "Doing likewise," means recognizing our condition of vulnerability and dependence and acknowledging that God's mercy comes from surprising places. Further examinations of Luke confirm that the passage focuses more on self-lowering and receiving mercy rather than on acting. Immediately following this passage, we encounter the familiar story about Martha and Mary in Luke 10:38-42 where Jesus makes this point even stronger.

> Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so, she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha,

> you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her." Luke 10:38-42 NRSV

Mary chooses her place, literally lowering herself to sit at Jesus' feet. She chose to sit and listen to Jesus. Martha, on the other hand, was busying herself with all the tasks of hosting her guests. When Martha complains to Jesus, he praises Mary for having chosen the path of self-lowering and listening rather than the path of action.

The larger context of the gospel's audience offers further evidence that Luke was trying to disrupt status expectations and help his audience recognize mercy and compassion coming from surprising sources. The audience for the gospel is mixed with both Jewish and non-Jewish people, as evidenced by the frequent explanations of Jewish customs and words. Given that at least part of the intended audience is gentile, it is interesting to note that this parable of the beaten-up man in the ditch only appears in Luke. Of all the stories Luke could have chosen to include in this gospel, why did he include this one? I believe a partial answer to this question is that it fit his rhetorical needs. He must find a way to offer the good news of the incarnate Jewish God to non-Jews. The mercy and blessings offered by this Jewish God can be surprising as it crosses ethic lines and social boundaries. The message to the audience is that God loves you and is merciful to you, and if you recognize and act based on your dependence on God and on one another, you too can receive this blessing. Perhaps the message to gentiles is also a suggestion that they could be like the Samaritan and offer mercy to the Jews (or whoever becomes the neighbor). However, this must be balanced by recognizing that Jesus rhetorically removes the power the lawyer assumes he has because of his prestigious position.

The answer to the lawyer's question is simple if the lawyer assumes the condition of being in the ditch. It is easy to love the neighbor that just saved you. Jesus' message to love the neighbor is rooted in recognizing mutual dependence. Luke's audience is asked to recognize this same point regarding their Jewish neighbors.

Implications of being the beaten-up man in the ditch:

Reading Luke 10:25-37 with a focus on the beaten-up man in the ditch does not lend itself to the compulsion to love. It does not lead to naming laws, hospitals, or social service organizations after the Samaritan. It is about orienting toward surprise, gratitude, and our dependence on the mercy of others. It is recognizing our vulnerability and need for others. It cuts against individualism and asks us to see ourselves completely dependent on some surprising step taken by an unexpected passerby. It may not seem like comfort, but when I find myself feeling desperate or uncertain what I should do, this is a reminder to stop and ask for help. In these situations, help always comes from surprising places… if the traditional sources of support worked, I would not feel desperate.

If we focus on the action of the Samaritan, we find the one doing mercy, who is motivated by a churning in his gut that moves him to pity. It is as if a movement of the spirit causes him to lose control of his faculties, and he breaks convention to assist his historical enemy. Moral theology and philosophy often focus on how we should act, but perhaps we must begin with an examination of how we observe what is around us. Illich holds a high view of created beings, we are capable of greatness. However, this same gift can be overplayed and become destructive, hence the need for self-imposed limits. This is not unlike medicine that at the wrong dose becomes poison.

The reading of the beaten-up man in the ditch sug-

gests we should find the right orientation vis-à-vis God and neighbor – as being dependent on them. This should be held in tension with the Samaritan as the one doing mercy. To the extent we see the Samaritan as a model for action, it is worth considering that his action was spontaneous. He provided what seems to be just the right help for the situation, and it is possible that he knew the right thing to do because of his experience needing help himself at times. Sometimes we are the man in the ditch, sometimes we are the Samaritan, but in both places, we are called to recognize our dependence on others and let mercy and compassion guide us before social norms that block our recognition of our shared existence as creatures of God.

I recently read James Alison's Jesus the Forgiving Victim: Listening for the Unheard Voice with some people and we came across a story about a victim of bullying named Fernando. In the story, Fernando is a 'fairy', a feminine gay man who can't pass as straight. He becomes the target of bullying and eventually leaves the school. However, after some time away he returns to the school with more power, clout, and status than he had while he was at school. His father had ascended in the ranks of the government or in some other way his family grew in stature. The story is about how people feel when they see Fernando returning. Some of them fear Fernando coming to exact revenge. Alison then plays out different scenarios, but in one of them he suggests that Fernando comes back and forgives his bullies and still wants to play with them… only he wants to try to play a different game not rooted in rivalry and targeting of anyone —he hopes for a cooperative game. Given the title of the book, you may have already guessed that this is a story about Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. One of the people in our reading group was very disturbed by this because it suggested too much burden on the victim to make everything better. However, we dug into

the story and noticed that while Fernando was in the thick of being bullied, his only job was to survive. His choice about how to respond differently was only made possible by leaving and coming back with more power. In fact, he had stopped being the immediate target of bullying. His choice was only possible once the power dynamic changed. My friend identified with Fernando as a victim, but not with Fernando in a position of power. The opposite happens with reading Luke 10:25-37 – people identify with the position of power, and not with the victim. In both cases, the issue revolves around the question, "How should I act?"

Illich was not interested answering that question. In fact, he thought it ludicrous to try and answer that for anyone other than himself, and perhaps in support of a friend. Illich did not argue for a course of action in his pamphlets but for an orientation – a celebration of awareness as one of his essays was titled. He believed that people would come up with appropriate solutions in loving relationships. What one group of friends come up with will not be the same as other groups or be appropriate for them. This begs a question of scale. How large of a group can come together and act before they cease to recognize the unique situation the members find themselves in?

Without going too far down this rabbit hole, the point is that Illich had a radical trust in people to subsist and live convivially. This is only limited by how we encroach on other people's ability to do the same. The key to recognizing this begins with recognizing our dependence on the mercy of God and other creatures. Schooling, Medical systems, economics impose a moral imperative that interferes with our ability to recognize the hubris that suggests we are independent and do not need a neighbor. Hubris takes another form when we assume the position of power and in so doing assume the other person is in the ditch and in need of our assistance (a future

paper could look at 'diagnosis' in this context). It creates the basis for thinking we can solve problems for other people or impose systemic solutions to avoid ditches. This runs the risk of focusing too much on our own power to act rather than our mutual dependence and shared humanity. The dilemma we face is finding the balance between acting and awareness. Our solution to this is critical to pull back from the second threshold. I am certain I cannot answer this on my own, and that different groups of friends will come up with different answers unique to their situation. But I would suggest we would do well to recognize our place in the ditch — a place from which it is easier to recognize our neighbors and to accept the gratuity of their mercy.