

Go Ape

“Live it out.”

Luke 9:1-5

Fourth in the series, *Lights! Camera! Action!* (“Church” is a verb, you know)

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Aping

A young man received a parrot as a gift. The parrot had a bad attitude and an even worse vocabulary. Every word out of the bird's mouth was rude, obnoxious and laced with profanity. The young man tried and tried to change the bird's attitude by consistently saying only polite words, playing soft music and anything else he could think of to "clean up" the bird's vocabulary.

Finally he was fed up and he yelled at the parrot. The parrot yelled back. He argued again and the parrot got even angrier. Then in desperation, he threw up his hands and grabbed the bird and put him in the freezer.

For a few minutes the parrot squawked and kicked and screamed. Then, suddenly there was total quiet, not a peep was heard. Fearing that he had hurt the parrot, he quickly opened the door to the freezer. The parrot calmly stepped out onto the man's outstretched arm and said "I believe I may have offended you with my rude language and actions. I am sincerely remorseful for any inappropriate transgressions. I fully intend to do everything I can do to correct my rude and unforgivable behavior".

The young man was stunned at the change in the bird's attitude. He was about to ask the parrot why he had made such a dramatic change in his behavior when the bird continued... "May I ask what the turkey did?"

Of course, parrots don't enter into conversations like that. They don't process information and speak rationally, engaging you in thoughtful dialogue. They just hear meaningful sounds with some repetition and repeat them, usually at random. Say a word enough and you'll hear it back.

A few weeks ago the answer to a clue in the New York Times crossword was *parrot*. The clue was *ape*. In context, they have the same meaning. In case you're into such pastimes, *imitate; ape; copycat; copy; mimic; parrot; mirror; duplicate; make like; impersonate...* are all interchangeable as you decode puzzles.

Parrot, ape: “Monkey see: monkey do.” Like you’re standing in front of a cage at the zoo changing your stance and gestures only to have the monkey copy what you’re doing; when someone studies the words and actions of another and then duplicates it in their own speech or behavior we say that they’re parroting or aping.

It was when my son James was about twelve or so that I noticed how close he studied me as I drove the car. Then, when he took his road test several years later, I noticed how his style behind the wheel was so like mine. When his evaluator corrected him it was like she was correcting me. I was being aped!

The Extent of Your Control

Aping is the way we learn; it’s how we develop attitudes, opinions, habits and behavior. ‘Little wonder Jesus expects his disciples to “go ape after him.”

He came among us and he taught. On the hillside or in the Temple, house or synagogue he spoke of God’s love, pronounced forgiveness, healed the sick and cured the lame. He saw multitudes hungry and he fed them. He saw children excluded and he took them in. He saw rigid application of good rules getting in the way of people experiencing God’s real blessings and he broke through the rigidity.

This was Jesus: those who saw him and believed in him recognized that he wasn’t just another rebel thinking outside of the box. He had a knack of bringing in God’s true purpose. God’s true message. God’s love.

He didn’t just talk it out. He lived it out.

Now:

He wasn’t content for either his words or his actions to present a good lesson so we’d “get it”, learn the right doctrine and then go on the way we’d lived before.

He didn’t want to just change our heads. He wanted to change our lives.

He wanted to set something in motion.

No: he wanted to set us in motion.

I think he meant to have us become a new kind of community. If you think of it that way, I believe he had the church in mind. But not church as a place to go or a club to

have. Not church just as an institution. But a people in motion – having life together and doing things like he was doing things so that we would continue to finish what he started.

That's what he had in mind when he sent off his twelve closest friends who'd been following him and studying him. Do what he was doing. And they did.

With them, he wanted you to watch him and listen to him so that you'd sound like him and serve like him.

Parrot him.

Go ape after him.

Study him so you can be like him.

If there's anything he meant to have us understand, it's that his Gospel is not something you just enjoy and keep to yourself. His Gospel is for letting loose in the world.

So, when we get to looking like Jesus we end up having mission trips to do nice things for people who might have a hard time getting nice things. Then we also find we get new friendships with people we aren't naturally inclined to even meet.

We might get new understandings and new partnerships that result in a change in the way things are done in this world.

We might even get justice. Reconciliation. Forgiveness. Peace.

Go Ape for Jesus

I'm still trying to figure out a mystery that's over five years old. I had come home from my father's funeral and found that someone had mowed my lawn. I have no idea who did that. It might have been a church member, or it could have been someone living in my neighborhood. It may even be that someone on the church's Board of Trustees or staff decided to order the church's lawn service to add to their normal workload, which would mean that all of that church's members were the ones who gave me that gift. I may never know. No one ever stepped forward.

Yet, whoever it was, they were responsible for making it feel like God had just stopped by while I was out. Whoever it was, they were being just like Jesus.

They'd gone ape after him.

This is what Jesus started. And it's what you are sent to finish.

Maybe you could mow someone's lawn. Or, when you're out shoveling or blowing some snow, if we ever get any more this winter, perhaps you don't stop at your property line but go right on to the next...on both sides. Leave them wondering, "Who did that?" This could get fun: let them question, "Did God just stop by?"

That's what can happen once you go ape.