



Series Theme: Looking at the Familiar through Fresh Eyes

Title: The Golden Rule

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Synopsis: Doing good things for others is a very good thing, but just who should we focus on when we are presented with possibilities for doing good? Jesus told his followers that even non-believers will help their friends. Jesus told his followers that they had to do more – they were to love their enemies. Again, in doing good, we must be sensitive to the needs of others, giving them what they need, not necessarily what we want them to have.

THE FIRST SCRIPTURE LESSON: Luke 6:27-31 (NLT)

THE SECOND SCRIPTURE LESSON: Luke 6:32-36 (NLT)

MEMORY VERSE: “For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” Galatians 5:14

Grace to you and peace from the One who is and who was and who is to come.

What comes to mind when you hear the title of today’s sermon? The Golden Rule. It is probably one of the best-known sayings throughout the world – and it’s not new – it has been around in some form for hundreds of years.

Here’s the one we are most familiar with:

“Do to others as you would have them do to you.”

We are not alone in loving this truism. There are other ways this saying has been recorded – even from earliest times, before the biblical writers recorded these words of Jesus – in the gospels of both Matthew and Luke. In fact most religions and philosophies teach some form of the Golden Rule. Here are some other ways to say something similar:

“Do not unto others that which if done to you would cause you pain.”

“That which you hate to be done to you, do not do to another.”

“Do not do to others that which angers you when they do it to you.”

And one I think is really interesting:

“Treat your inferior as you would wish your superior to treat you.”

We are not alone in our commitment to this truism in today’s world either. In fact in 1993 at the Parliament of the World’s Religions, 143 religious leaders from the world’s major faiths signed the “Declaration toward a Global Ethic.” This statement declared the Golden Rule to be one of the common principles they all shared. The faiths represented included the Baha’i faith, Brahmanism, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Native American religions, neo-paganism, Sikhism, Taoism, Theosophist beliefs, Unitarian Universalism, and Zoroastrianism. So obviously we are not alone in loving this particular moral ideal.

So now, let’s unpack this truism a little. What does doing to others mean to you, to us? One of the first thoughts that might come to mind is the idea of “paying it forward.” You probably are familiar with the concept – doing something nice for someone else that that someone else did not anticipate or expect. When you’re in line at a fast food window, has anyone paid for your order before you are able to pick it up? How about someone paying for another’s meal at a restaurant – not because they know the person, but just because they wanted to. And the recipients usually never know who the person was who did this kindness. That is certainly doing to others what you would like others to do for you.

And sometimes this is shown in relationships among friends. My mother, for example, was a member of a women’s circle. They met once a month and learned some new craft. But as a part of that group, each person received the name of a “secret sister.” They remembered one another at holidays, birthdays, and other special days with cards, small gifts, that sort of thing. At the end of the season their meeting included learning who was the secret sister for each one. This was an exciting and very pleasant thing – doing for one another

what each would like to have done for them. Caring for one another is certainly one aspect of the golden rule.

Here’s a story that really puts things in perspective:

A holy man was having a conversation with the Lord one day and said, “Lord, I would like to know what Heaven and Hell are like. “The Lord led the holy man to two doors.

He opened one of the doors and the holy man looked in. In the middle of the room was a large round table. In the middle of the table was a large pot of stew which smelled delicious and made the holy man’s mouth water.

The people sitting around the table were thin and sickly. They appeared to be famished. They were holding spoons with very long handles and each found it possible to reach into the pot of stew and take a spoonful, but because the handle was longer than their arms, they could not get the spoons back into their mouths. The holy man shuddered at the sight of their misery and suffering. The Lord said, “You have seen Hell.”

They went to the next room and opened the door. It was exactly the same as the first one. There was the large round table with the large pot of stew which made the holy man’s mouth water. The people were equipped with the same long-handled spoons, but here the people were well nourished and plump, laughing and talking.

The holy man said, “I don’t understand.” “It is simple” said the Lord, “it requires but one skill. You see, they have learned to feed each other. While the greedy think only of themselves.”

But there is more to be learned from this golden rule. Doing to someone else what we would like them to do to us can be problematic. For example, as a kind gesture, pretend I want to have a pizza delivered to a friend’s house – they are having a family celebration. I know the whole family loves pizza. I love pizza. Pretend I love anchovy pizza most of all. So I have delivered to them a large anchovy pizza. But nobody there likes anchovies. I did to them what I would have liked done to me – but it was the wrong thing to do. Or perhaps they need gluten-free. Or perhaps they are vegan. All these situations would have meant that doing for them what I would want done for me would not have worked.

Christmas gifts are another arena where this doing to others what we would like ourselves can take a wrong turn. Think about the number of gift returns that stores deal with – things that are bought with the right intention – I think this would be great for _____. But

it was wrong – wrong size, wrong color, just wrong. That’s why I think gift cards have become so popular – they don’t need to be returned since they can be right for any taste.

Or take an extreme case – if someone is hooked on drugs and would like nothing more than their next fix, would it be appropriate for this person to give drugs to a friend? Or if someone enjoys pornography, would it be appropriate for that person to gift a friend with lewd pictures?

So perhaps the golden rule is not a sufficient rule – it needs some help. And this help comes from another famous saying – Love your neighbor as yourself. These two, taken together will give an extra filter on the ways we interact with others. We may apply the golden rule but then make sure that what we are doing is loving and in the best interests of the other person.

We have been talking about doing things for those we know, but we do things every day even for those we don’t know. There are small things we do every day – opening the door for someone entering after us or allowing someone to join the line of waiting cars when there is road work holding up traffic.

The scripture we are using for today is for situations where we have been offended or hurt or upset by someone. And instead of trying to get back at that person, maybe playing the game of one upsmanship – wanting to get back at them even worse than they got you. Instead we are to love our enemies, do good to them, bless them, turn the other cheek, give them your shirt, give to anyone who asks.

That’s a hard teaching. Can’t we just focus on those who are our friends? Those who don’t hurt us, who aren’t mean or hateful to us? Yes, we can do that, but Jesus’ words tell us that even sinners love those who love them. Even non-believers can do good things for those who are kind to them. So this teaching needs to go further than just doing good and nice things to those who are good and nice to us. We are to do to those nasty folks what we would have wanted those nasty folks to do to us. We are to treat them as if they had behaved properly toward us.

Recently I was fascinated by stories coming from Nepal regarding the climbers on Mount Everest. This year has been an especially busy year – pictures from close to the summit show a line of climbers waiting to reach the top. This is a problem. Not only is the problem of trash – discarded tanks and other gear as well as meal remains, but it has also pointed up the truth that not all climbers are successful. The total number of climbers is over 4500

making it to the top – that’s about 800 climbers each year. But records which have been kept since 192 show that there have been over 300 deaths.

More than 200 bodies remain frozen in place and impossible to retrieve. In this 2019 climbing season, 11 have died trying to fulfill their dream of beating Mount Everest. There are too many people trying to make this difficult trek and, so the accounts go, too many are going without sufficient expertise or proficiency. And because climbers are willing to pay exorbitant amounts to reach the top, even some of the Sherpas who lead these groups may not be as well trained and expert as was once the case.

Most deaths are because of avalanches, exposure, frostbite, problems with brain or lung swelling, or lack of oxygen. One might think that most of these deaths have happened on the way up the mountain, but that is not the case. Many of the deaths have happened in what climbers call the “death zone” on the way back down the mountain. That’s an area where oxygen is still needed – the air is too thin, not enough oxygen is available to maintain the exertion of climbing so help from their oxygen tanks is still needed until they get further down the mountain. Climbers may not have enough oxygen in their tanks to get far enough down the mountain to where oxygen is no longer needed.

Here’s a sobering story about this situation:

In 1953, Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay climbed the 29,035-foot peak of Mount Everest. Thousands followed, thanks to Nepal’s lifting its tight restrictions on climbing the legendary mountain. By 2014 over 4,000 people had reached the summit of the world’s tallest mountain, some paying more than \$100,000 for the experience.

One result of this commercial influx has been the erosion of the traditional moral code of mountaineering. In the rush to the top, amateurs who have paid a fortune will do anything it takes to get to the summit, including abandoning other climbers.

David Sharp became a casualty in March of 2006. The thirty-four-year-old engineer from Cleveland managed to reach the summit on his own. However, he ran out of oxygen on the way back down. As he lay dying, forty climbers passed him by, too eager to achieve their own goals to take a chance on offering their oxygen to someone else. David Sharp froze to death. Another climber said passing people who are dying is not uncommon. He states, “Unfortunately, there are those who say, ‘It’s not my problem. I’ve spent all this money, and I’m going to the summit.’”

Do to others that which you would have others do to you. Love your neighbor as yourself.

Would you be able to give up fulfilling your life’s dream and possibly putting your own life in jeopardy by stopping to help a fellow climber? Most of us will never be faced with such a decision. But there are other examples, more local.

Here’s another example from our own life. We live on Mill Hill Road. Our road was recently closed permanently to traffic between Old Bethlehem Road and Route 663. Yet people have continued to ignore the signs and use the road anyway. The road is truly closed by barriers and a large mound of dirt. Yet some have felt that they should not be kept from using the road – so they have gone around all the barriers and then trespassed by driving through a resident’s yard.

One person got stuck in the lawn of that neighbor after he ignored and went around the road closed and stop signs and a large pile of dirt so he could reach his destination – 663. He got stuck in the mud and the property owner called the police. The driver was fined \$600, needed to pay to have his vehicle towed out of the mud, and he also needs to pay to repair the homeowner’s lawn. His response to this situation? “Why should I have to pay for this – what about the 10 people I followed?”

Do to others that which you would have others do to you. Love your neighbor as yourself. Let us pray.

Loving Father, You have given us both the Golden Rule and the mandate to love others as ourselves. Help us be more successful in doing both of these. Help us to love one another, help one another, be sensitive to the needs of one another, and act as Your representatives here in Quakertown. Help us share Your kind of loving with all whom we meet. Amen.