

Jim Gill

February 24, 2019

“Golden Rules”

Genesis 45:3-11 Psalm 37 Luke 6:27-38 I Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-50 .

### **Luke 6:27-38 New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised (NRSVA)**

#### **Love for Enemies**

<sup>27</sup> 'But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, <sup>28</sup> bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. <sup>29</sup> If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. <sup>30</sup> Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. <sup>31</sup> Do to others as you would have them do to you.

<sup>32</sup> 'If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. <sup>33</sup> If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. <sup>34</sup> If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. <sup>35</sup> But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. <sup>[a]</sup> Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. <sup>36</sup> Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

#### **Judging Others**

<sup>37</sup> 'Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; <sup>38</sup> give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.'

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A little girl wrote to her pastor: Dear Pastor, I heard you say to love our enemies. I am only six and do not have any yet. I hope to have some when I am seven.  
Love, Jennifer.

That may be your attitude. "I don't have any enemies. I love everybody and everybody loves me." Maybe so. Or maybe we need to stretch our view of who an enemy may be. Could someone in your family be an enemy? A sister-in-law, perhaps, even a parent? Or maybe someone with whom you work? Maybe it's someone you're in competition with. Tonight people will be in competition for a Golden Statue named Oscar and they may not be following the Golden Rule to get it.

Competitors may become enemies. Not just in business but within the family. Brothers compete, sisters compete, spouses compete. Friends compete. Neighbors compete. There's nothing wrong with that. But feelings can be rubbed raw. Resentment can build.

Who is your enemy? There may be persons whom we secretly harbor ill feelings toward that we have never thought to classify under Jesus' definition as enemies. They are persons for whom we have ill feelings, or they are persons who harbor

ill feelings toward us. Of course, some enemies may arise because we try to do the right thing.

In our lesson this morning from the Hebrew Bible, Joseph is the favored son. . The brothers attack Joseph and fake his death. They bring back some bloodied clothes and tell their father he is dead when actually they have sold him into slavery. Time passes. Famine comes to Israel. These brothers are forced to go to Egypt and ask the Pharaoh for food. Can you imagine the drama of that moment when they are told that the one before whom they are kneeling is the brother that they sold into slavery? Joseph certainly had reason to consider his brothers his enemies. But in verse 20 of chapter 50 Joseph looks upon them with the eyes of forgiveness and says, "What you intended for evil God meant it for good. "

In the Los Angeles riots of 1992 Reginald Denny was pulled from his truck and beaten senseless, almost to death by four men. We remember the trial, the riots, and the controversy. But do you remember the fact that in the courtroom he was with the families of those who had beaten him? He had gathered together with them in their homes and had gotten to know them because he realized the only hope for the world was for us to forgive our aggressors. Outside the courtroom, after Denny pronounced forgiveness on those who harmed him, one newspaper man simply said, "Remember Mr. Denny has brain damage ..." So, we call someone brain-damaged who simply follows the command to love our enemies!

Twenty years before the birth of Jesus, the two most prominent Jewish rabbis were named Shammai and Hillel. One day, a man approached the two of them with this challenge: "I challenge you to summarize the teachings of your religion while standing upon one foot."

Hillel stood upon one foot and said, "Whatever is hateful to you, do not do to another. That is the whole law, and all else is commentary."<sup>1</sup>

There was nothing new in Hillel's teaching. The Golden Rule had been around for centuries in one form or another. Jesus did not invent it; he borrowed it from the best ethical traditions of the known world. Hillel taught it in Israel, Epictetus taught it in ancient Greece. Socrates, Aristotle, Confucius, Buddha, said this, but like the poster that I shared in my article this week but they put it in a negative way— "don't do unto other what you wouldn't want them to do to you." What is so unique about how Jesus said it is that it is expressed in a positive form. "Do unto others as you would have them do to you."

Last year I visited the Mosque in Baytown when I went to observe them observing Ramadan. I read the Golden Rule from the Hebrew writings. I read from the Quran. Then I read Jesus' version.

What is so enduring about Jesus' version is that it is reciprocal. The rule keeps us within a relationship to one another. Whatever you want done, you do it for somebody else. However you want to be treated, you treat everybody else that

way. If there is a word you want to hear from somebody else, you offer the word first. Living by the Golden Rule means you take other people seriously, particularly in their point of need. We share our burdens because we know what it is like to carry a burden. We listen to others because we know how it feels to be ignored. Like the Good Samaritan, we reach out to others because we know what it is like for somebody to pass us by. We put ourselves in others' place. Native Americans put it this way, "We walk a mile in someone else's moccasins."

As some commentators come to this part of Jesus' Sermon on the Plain, they interpret the Golden Rule as a summary of teachings that come immediately before. "Love your enemies," because you want your enemies to love you. "Do good to those who hate you," for you wish their hate to be transformed. "Bless those who curse you. Give to those who beg. Turn the other cheek." Those are some Golden Rules!

But there is no automatic guarantee. If you love your enemies, or act kindly to those who hate you, curse you, and harm you, there is no assurance your enemies will be kind to you. A good deed for others gives no assurance that others will be good to you. I wrote a song once that says, "No good deed goes unpunished."

What gathers us here as a church is not an affirmation of human goodness and competence, but rather a celebration of what God has done in the thick of our weakness and incompetence. The Gospel is good news about what God has done in the face of OUR misbehavior. God in Jesus has loved his enemies. Jesus was good to those who hated him. Jesus blessed those who cursed him. Jesus was kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Someone struck Jesus on the cheek, and he offered the other cheek also. Someone took away Jesus' coat, and he did not withhold his shirt. Someone took away all of his goods, and Jesus did not ask for them again. This is what God is like, particularly for those who do not do unto others as they wish it done unto them.

It is true that the Golden Rule has been present in many cultures, in many languages, among many peoples. Yet if Jesus came merely to teach people what they already knew, then he could have ignored the cross, lived to a ripe old age, never troubled anybody, and written self-help books.

Jesus died at the hands of people who thought they didn't need him. He forgave his enemies. He extended the mercy of God to all of us ... in the end that we might become merciful.

When we love one another like this, we show ourselves to be children of the Most High God. The promise of the gospel is that God is kind to the ungrateful, the wicked, and the self-sufficient." The gospel says, "Do unto others as God has done unto you." Pray for those who hurt you. Can you do that?

Howard Olds in his sermon points out that Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German pastor who came to America to study and lecture. But he decided to leave the

safety of this country and to go back to Germany and lead a church in the resistance movement against the Nazi regime. It cost him his life. But as he writes in his book The Cost of Discipleship, "We are approaching an age of widespread persecution. Our adversaries seek to root out the Christian Church because they cannot live side by side with us. So what shall we do? We shall pray. It will be a prayer of earnest love for those who stand around and gaze at us with eyes aflame with hatred, and who have perhaps already raised their hands to kill us." What will we do? We can pray. Why not? Why not a better way of life? 1

Charles H Bayer writes, "Jesus nowhere implies that Christians won't have enemies. While I like to think Christians are able to get along with everybody, I remember Jesus said, "Beware when all speak well of you." If I never do or say anything that is going to disturb bigots, racists, those who trust in violence, those who live off injustice, the insensitive, the crude and rude, I may never have an enemy. But neither will I have been faithful to the gospel. Christians will have enemies all right. What they need to be certain of is that they have the right enemies." 2

In 1991, Michael and Julie Weisser, a Jewish couple, received their first telephone call from Larry Trapp, the Grand Dragon of the Nebraska Ku Klux Klan. Trapp took great joy in harassing Jewish people, immigrants, people of color. He made threatening phone calls, sent out hate mail, and encouraged his followers to commit vandalism and acts of violence against non-white or Jewish people. But Trapp made a big mistake when he picked on the Weissers. They decided to fight his hatred with love.

Michael Weisser began leaving caring, friendly messages on Larry Trapp's answering machine. When the Weissers learned that Trapp was a blind, wheelchair-bound diabetic, they offered to run errands for him. Finally, the Weisser's continuous campaign of love paid off. Larry Trapp left the Ku Klux Klan and converted to Judaism. He gave the police and FBI valuable, insider information on local and national hate organizations. He also called every single person he'd ever harassed and apologized. But the Weissers went one step further. As Larry's diabetes worsened, the Weissers took him in and cared for him until his death. (3) I wish someone would make a movie of their story. That would be much more Oscar worthy than the Black Klansman. That movie only exposed the hatred of the KKK. The Weissers transformed hatred with love.

I believe the Weissers were living by Hillel's summary of the law. Jesus said, "Loving those who love you.... anybody can do that. That's for unbelievers. Amateurs! Loving somebody like Larry Trapp takes grace--the awesome, undeserved gift of love and mercy that God has given us. If a Jewish couple can love like that, cannot we who say we are followers of Christ improve our witness of love?

We live in a fear-based world of anger and vengeance. Fear and hate and unforgiveness lead to retaliation, revenge, and isolation,-- even war. They are all

one-way streets that lead to spiritual and sometimes actual death. Choosing love over hate frees us from our fear and our pride. It frees us to be a force for life instead of death.

Like Joseph's brothers, may we discover that the one we wanted to get rid of, the one whose arrogance drove us up a wall and the one who threatened to one day control us may be the very one God will use to save us or enrich our lives. Like Joseph, may we learn that the ones who berated us, the ones who dismissed us and the ones who did us harm may be the very ones God has sent us into the world to care for and protect. May we trust that God is at work to bring about good in our family even though we are experiencing conflict now. And may we even learn these lessons before subjecting ourselves, our parents and our children to decades of heartbreak and unresolved conflict. Trusting in the God who is at work in our lives, may we even manage to act in ways that leave us open to the Spirit's work of reconciliation in our lives now. 4

Joseph forgave his brothers and became their salvation from starvation. Jesus forgave those who crucified him. Reginald Denny forgave his attackers and befriended their families. Dietreich Bonhoeffer prayed for his enemies and yet lost his life praying for them rather than play it safe. The Weissers forgave their enemy and turned him into a friend by following ... the Golden Rules.

Let us pray. Lord, we come asking to know you and be known by You. We come seeking your peace that is so wonderful it is beyond our understanding. We come knocking, hoping and knowing that what you have in store for us is far better than we can imagine. We come seeking your Love, your Courage, your Wisdom, your hope and your power to be able to live lives pleasing to you that are beneficial to others.

Your love is unconditional. Your Wisdom is unfathomable. Your power is undeniable. Your grace is sufficient.

We pray for those unto whom you would have us do good. We pray especially for We pray for those who have the offices and the ability to seek peace between nations and for those of us who have the calling to seek peace between our brother and sisters in this world. We pray for those who have the vision of what must be done to help those in need that they will have the motivation to go after it

1. Faith Breaks: Thoughts On Making It A Good Day, by J. Howard Olds
2. When It Is Dark Enough, by Charles H. Bayer
3. Halberstam, Yitta and Judith Leventhal, *Small Miracles II* .
4. Dan Milford pastor of Covenant Presbyterian Church in San Antonio, TX.