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Title: God's Credit

Date: February 23 & 24, 2019

Preaching: Randy Spleth, Senior Minister

Scripture: [Psalm 145:1-9](#)

Text: [Luke 6:27-36](#)

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Some of you noticed that I had a work anniversary. Linked-In likes to keep your network informed. They always jump the gun. Actually, tomorrow is my work anniversary. Thirty-four years ago on Monday, Ann and I arrived from sunny southern California. Tomorrow's forecast is for 35 and sun. I don't think I saw the sun for at least three weeks

upon my arrival in Indiana. It was a cold gray March.

Starting a church is an interesting experience. One of the challenges is what are you going to name your church? We weren't too creative. I'll give you that. In the end, we did what many churches throughout the 20th century have done. We named ourselves for the area we were serving. But it wasn't for a lack of trying to come up with a different name.

A few weeks before we had our first worship, (that anniversary is coming up on the last Sunday of April) I sat with a few people to come up with a name. One of our charter members was a fellow named Jeff. He was vice-president for marketing at American Cablevision. He was all about newsprint pads, markers, and creativity. A number of names were thrown out, none of which stuck and all of which probably sound dated today. Good Shepherd. Community. Covenant. Resurrection. Lots of churches were being named like that in the 80s.

I will never forget when Golden Rule was suggested. Golden Rule Christian Church. Jeff didn't even write it down. "No!" he said. Golden Rule sounds like you don't really stand for anything like you are just going to be nice.

He had a point. The Golden Rule is kind of that way today, isn't it? "Do to others as you would have them do to you." (Luke 6:31) We have domesticated it to the point that all it really means is, "Be nice to people." It's why we teach it to children. "Be nice. Don't hit. Share your toys." When we say, "Do unto to others as you would have them do to you," don't we really mean, "open the door for someone carrying a load of groceries; or

get up and give your seat to someone who is elderly or pregnant.”? It’s a please and thank you sort of polite society statement on civil living. Smile, be pleasant, tell them “have a good day.” “Do to others as you would have them do to you.”

I don’t think domestication of this well-known verse is what Jesus had in mind. But, he knew it was inevitable because likely it had already happened. As hard as it might be for some to hear, the Golden Rule was not unique to Jesus. Everything out of Jesus’ mouth was not divinely inspired. Homer said it and I don’t mean Homer Simpson. I mean Homer, the author of the Iliad and Odyssey whose poems date 800 years before Jesus. It shows up in one of the apocryphal books of the Old Testament, Tobit and in early Jewish writing, 2 Enoch. Those date to a couple of hundred years before Jesus. Seneca, the Roman philosopher used it 50 years before Jesus spoke it in this sermon.¹ “Do unto others” had been around for a while when Jesus uses it and by itself, it probably would have brought as big a yawn as it maybe it does today. “Do unto others...I know, I know, be nice.” But the context suggests something completely different than a nice fortune cookie expression of civility. Context is everything. Let me remind you.

This familiar expression comes in the middle of the sermon which we began looking at last week, Jesus’ sermon on the level place. It is Luke’s version of the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew, Jesus goes up a mountain, sits down and teaches. In Luke, Jesus spends the night on a mountain, praying with a group of his disciples, trying to discern who the 12 apostles will be. In the morning, he picks the twelve and then, Jesus “... came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people.” (Luke 6:17) They have come to hear and be healed. That’s exactly what he does. He heals all of them.

“Then he looked up at his disciples and said...” (Luke 6: 20) I pointed this out last week. This is a targeted sermon. Jesus isn’t preaching to the great multitude of people, even though they might be listening in. He is preaching to the great crowd of disciples who are following him. In fact, he might even be more specific. He might be preaching specifically to the 12 apostles who he just tapped into serve. He is making clear the path which they are headed down and it isn’t just to be nice.

He says, “Listen up. If you are going to be one of my followers, if you are going to be a disciple, this is what you are going to do.” “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.” (Luke 6:27-28).

"Love your enemies?" Really? Some in this group probably started scratching their heads, wondering just what that might mean. It should be noted that in Jesus' time, maybe like it is in our own time, there were folk who seemed to think that it was their sacred duty to hate anyone who is not 'one of us.' Isn't that what is behind what we heard this week, that there is a 30% rise in hate groups in America over the past four years. Do you think there is more hatred in our community, in our country? I do. Some people literally think it is their duty to hate.

That kind of thinking is in the Bible. There was an entire Jewish community who preached this. The Essenes, who formed the Qumran community and who are responsible for the Dead Sea scrolls, believed that God called them to "love all the children of light and hate all the children of darkness."² Whether Jesus was thinking of the Essenes when he brought this up we have no way of knowing. We just know that it is human nature to hate. Unfortunately, we know it too well.

Someone must have asked, "Jesus, could you be more specific about love your enemies? And Jesus says, "Sure." "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. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again." (Luke 6:31) Jesus is covering the bases, suggesting the challenge to love enemies is inclusive, whether the enemy might be a group of people, like the Roman soldiers who could take your coat whenever they wanted or a personal enemy, someone who strikes you or backhands you with an insult. Enemies are enemies whether the enemy is an individual you can't stand or a group of people who have done your wrong or may have in the future, evil intent.

Love them.

- Love your enemies.
- Do good to haters.
- Bless cursers.
- Pray for abusers.
- Turn the other cheek.
- Give to takers and beggars.
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Then Jesus adds, "Do to others as you would have them do to you." (Luke 6:31) Wait a minute. That's supposed to be about being nice and we are nice people Jesus. That's why you picked us. You know we are nice. Give us some credit.

I don't know if someone said that out loud, or if he read their minds. I hope you realize by now that there is a lot that goes on between verses in the

Bible, a lot of conversations and questions, nodding yes and nodding no, body language, shuffling feet and awkward looks. Either someone said it or Jesus realized what they were thinking. "Give us some credit. We are after all, in church." Well, they weren't in church but you get the drift. They wanted credit for what they were doing and who they were, following Jesus around. "We are your disciples; give us credit."

So Jesus says, "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. 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." (Luke 6: 32-34)

I don't know about you, but I like credit. I'm not talking about your credit score or what's in your pocket. I'm talking about recognition. Credit is one of the first things you learn as an infant. Smile and say "dada" and "what a big boy you are." Take a bite of mush off of a spoon and you get credit, "that's such a good girl." We learn early about credit and it follows us through life. You know that to get credit for your homework, it has to be turned in on time. If you want a better grade, you can do "extra credit." We work to see our names on the playbill or the team roster, given credit for being in the show or making the team. We learn this early and live it out throughout our lives, whether it is taking out the trash or changing the diaper, closing a deal for the company or making it to church on Sunday. Give credit to where credit is due.

No. Jesus says that's not what he is getting at, not at all. Jesus is saying there is no credit to us to love those who love us. There is no credit to us if we do good to those who do good to us. And there is no credit to us to lend to those who will pay us back. No credit? Not even partial credit? Nothing. No. No credit.

I struggle with this passage because like you, I'm a credit-driven person. I may even be worse than you. I grew up in a credit-driven home and if I admit it, I've needed credit and recognition to make my way through life.

I did discover recently something that helps me get a handle on what Jesus is saying. I wonder if it might help you. The New Testament was written in Greek and in the expression three times repeated, "what credit is that to you," the word translated "credit" in Greek is the word χάρις "Charis" Do you know that word? Everywhere else in the New Testament, the word is translated "grace." Does that change the passage if we translate it that way? What grace is that? If you love those who love you, where's the grace? If you do good to those who do good to you, where's the grace? If you lend to

those who lend to you, where's the grace? There's no grace. This is the principle that Jesus is teaching.³ It is about grace, the Golden Rule, the principle about loving enemies, of being a follower, a disciple. We are to be gracious as God is gracious, to operate within God's credit system. And just so that they would get this, so that we would get it, Jesus adds, "But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." (Luke 6:35-36)

Jesus is on the level, and says, "Listen up. If you want to be my follower, you won't let your life become dictated by the people around you. The people who reject you to determine your life? No. The people who accept you determine your life? No. Enemies define your life? No. Friends define your life? No. The people who hate you, the people who love you do not create your character. Your character is created by the character of God. And what is the character of God? God is kind to the ungrateful and to the selfish. God is merciful." That's what Jesus says and I think he should know.

This is the principle: We are to be gracious as God is gracious, a merciful as God is. Call it God's credit. We are to be merciful and gracious to everybody, not just those who we love or love us back.

I would like to think that this might make a difference in your life, that this teaching might point you to the path which you need to travel. I think this because if we are honest, all of us has someone who we struggle with, someone one or some group of people we don't like, maybe even call enemies. Dare I say, there is someone or someone group that we might even hate. I know you may not want your pastor to be so transparent but I have my list. I've got mine, you've got yours. People who have hurt you, abused you, spoken badly about you, wronged you. And, you have people who you don't like, don't approve of, think are wrong, the way they are living, acting, thinking. I think it is just about impossible to avoid this kind of thinking and acting because today, there are a lot of people who are saying, "This is the way it is supposed to be. There are people who are your enemies, who you are obliged to hate."

Not Jesus. He says "You are to love enemies and do good to people who will have absolutely no will or way to thank you, no positive response, no love to offer, no kindness to respond with." Why? Because that's the way God does it, that's the way God is.

Just think what it might do in your life and our church if we could leave hate behind and love our enemies. I'd think word would get out about us, about

the kind of people we are. It might even cause us to change our name. We could be "Loving Enemies Christian Church."

Well, it doesn't really market, but, it might get us credit for trying.

¹ Craddock, F. Interpretation: Luke. Page 90.

² Hare, Douglas. Interpretation: Matthew. Page 58.

³ Craddock, Fred B. The Collected Sermons of Fred B. Craddock (p. 157). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.