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Title: And Then Some

Date: February 24, 2019

Preaching: Ryan Hazen, Senior Associate Minister

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

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

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I received a telephone call early last week from our youngest son, Matthew. Matt is 19 years old and is a freshman at Indiana University. It seems the primary purpose of his call was to ask if I was preaching today. "Yes," I said, "why do you ask?"

"Well, I think I'm coming home for the weekend, and I may be bringing some friends with me. We may come to church," he said. "If we do come to church," he continued, "you need to preach the best sermon you've ever preached."

Matt has endured enough of my sermons to be an adequate critic so I thought I would press for more information so, with some trepidation, I asked him, "What, in your mind, makes a good sermon?" I thought it a good opportunity to understand the mind of a teenager, as he will only be that for another couple of months. Matt is good at shooting straight with me. He told me the elements of a good sermon, points that I think I may forward on to the preaching professor at the seminary for possible inclusion in future preaching classes.

"Start funny," he said, "like you're doing stand-up comedy. Then, you can talk about Bible stuff but keep it interesting and relevant. Lastly," he said, "whatever you do, keep it short."

OK, there's Preaching 101 in a nutshell. Start funny, interesting but relevant Bible stuff and short. Let's get to it then.

I heard recently about a rather legalistic seminary student who wanted to have a scriptural basis for everything he did in life. He felt he was on solid ground with God and his call to ministry if he could quote the Bible - book, chapter, and verse - to justify all of his actions. He did all right with that until he began to fall in love with a fellow student. He wanted very much to kiss her and had the courage but he just couldn't find a scripture to justify it. So, being true to his conscience, he would simply walk her to her dorm each night, look at her longingly, and then say "good night." This went on for several weeks, but all the time he was searching the Bible, trying to find some scripture to justify kissing her good night. But, one evening, as he walked her to the dorm and once again started to tell her "good night," she grabbed him, pulled him toward her, and planted a ten-second kiss right on his lips. At the end of the kiss, the young seminary student gasped for air, and stammered, "Bible verse, Bible verse." The girl grabbed him a second time, and just before kissing him again, she said, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."¹

There's my comedy, now let's talk a little Bible. This verse is at the heart of where we find ourselves this morning. You likely know it as the "Golden Rule." The verse is found in the midst of the sermon on the plain. If you thought I was going to say, "the sermon on the mount," that is in Matthew and we are looking in Luke where it says in 6:17 that "he came down and stood on a level place." It's what Pastor

Randy talked about last week and if you missed the distinction between Matthew's version and Luke's version, I encourage you to go back and read or listen to that sermon.²

We are still with Jesus and his disciples on a level place and Jesus has just given characteristics of those who are BLESSED – the poor, hungry, weeping and those who are hated. He then gave four “woes” or causes of distress – rich, full stomach, those who laugh and those who are spoken well of. He's being honest with them and us about what is truly important. Standing in front of the outcasts of the day, the troubled and uncleaned, the sick and the infirm, Jesus is comparing and contrasting the blessings and woes of following him. He is saying, “This is what you've signed up for. Being a disciple of Jesus is not about spending your life chasing wealth. Woe to you if that's all you are. You are blessed when you know the deep hunger of your own heart for God and blessed when that hunger leads you to feed your hungry neighbor.”

That's where we continue with today's reading. Jesus is putting a point on how we are to go about being a fully committed disciple of his. “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you and pray for those who abuse you.” If that is not hard enough, he goes on – “if anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other one also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt.” And then, there it is, right after those specifics, Jesus sums it up in one line executive summary – “do to others as you would have them do to you.”

New Testament scholar Walter Wink suggests that if we understand the time of Jesus fully, we might understand Jesus' words as a form of non-violent resistance to oppression. In the culture of first-century Palestine, if you were superior to another person, you would strike them with the back of your right hand, never with the palm of your hand for that would mean you'd see them as an equal. Jesus is talking to victims here so oppressors will not see them as an equal. If you turn your face to the side, you force your oppressor to see you as an equal. Jesus wants us to see an almost comical situation here. The oppressor's hand begins to swing but is caught in mid-air because he doesn't want to treat you as an equal by hitting you with an open palm.

The same resistance comes in giving up your shirt when your oppressor asks for your coat. This isn't a case of giving an old coat to the winter coat drive. It's likely that Jesus is talking about someone asking for your coat in repayment of a debt. You owe your oppressor something and since you have no land and very little money, your oppressor asks for your very coat. There were very clear restrictions regarding the repayment of debts. You could not leave a debtor naked at sundown no matter what he or she owed. It simply was not to be done. So Jesus sets up another strategy of resistance. If they ask for your coat, give them your shirt too. There you'll be standing half-naked; they'll be forced to deal with this new reality you've set up. “No, no! No, no!” they say, “I don't want your shirt. Put it back on!” They might be so disarmed that they'll return your coat as well.³

Jesus is not telling people to remain victims but to find new ways of resisting evil. “Love your enemies,” Jesus said, “do good to those who hate you.” This is the ethic that moved Martin Luther King, Jr., to kneel down with many others in the face of water hoses and snarling police dogs. Many people thought he should have fought back. “Only violence can fight violence,” they told him. But the authorities and the oppressors didn't know what to do with this kind of resistance. They knew the power of violence; they knew the powerlessness of victims who knew their place, but this was something they hadn't seen before: victims who refused to be victims, victims who refused to fight back with violence, victims who claimed their place and reshaped the battle completely.

"Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you." And don't be too impressed with yourself for being good to your friends. Anybody can do that, 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." Just when we have the Golden Rule memorized, Jesus reminds us that it's far deeper than how we treat our friends. It's far deeper than what we hope to receive. It's even different from treating others the way we hope to be treated. Jesus comes back again to the place where he began: "But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return." It's about loving proactively.

You may have heard it said that every religion before and after Jesus has its version of the Golden Rule and that is mostly true.

Buddhists would say, "Hurt not others with that which pains yourself."

Jewish traditions and the Talmud teach, "what is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow men. That is the entire Law, the rest is comment."

Islam teaches, "no one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother what he desires for himself."

Baha'i and the Book for Certitude teaches, "he should not wish for others that which he does not wish for himself, nor promise that which he does not fulfill."⁴

Do you see the difference between these and Jesus? All of these are statements in the negative. "hurt not," "do not do," "no one is a believer," "not wish for others." Jesus stated his moral principle positively and with proactive action – "do unto others." Not doing something bad to a person is not the same as doing something good for them. It's somewhat easy and expected for emotionally healthy human beings to avoid doing something bad toward another person. In most civilized cultures this is pretty much expected, but it is something quite different to do something positive for that person. Do you see the difference? Not doing harm vs. doing something good? It's very different. Doing good takes more effort and energy than refraining from evil.

There is a huge difference between not causing someone harm and doing something positive for that person. British Bible scholar William Barclay uses the simple analogy of driving a car. I can drive my car in such a way that I do not harm people with my driving. I simply drive on the right side of the road and stop for all stop signs. But it is quite another thing to drive my car and pick up someone to take them to the doctor or drive my neighbor to a food bank, he says. It is one set of attitudes and behaviors that avoids hurting people with my car; it is another set of attitudes and actions that actually go out of the way to help people with my car.⁵

Do you remember the name Reginald Denny? Denny was a truck driver who was unknowingly driving through ground zero of the LA riots in 1992 after the acquittal of police officers in the Rodney King case. Denny was pulled from his dump truck and beaten senseless, almost to death, at that intersection. You may remember the trial, the riots, and the controversy. But do you remember the fact that, in the courtroom, Reginald Denny 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 newspaperman simply said, "Remember Mr. Denny had

brain damage ..." It's telling that we call someone brain-damaged who simply follows the command to love their enemies.⁶

"Love your enemies," Jesus said, "do good to those who hate you." Reginald Denny was shaped by a gospel deeper than hatred, stronger than revenge. I don't know that I could do what he did. It would be so much easier to be one of those other religions and just not retaliate. But we claim to be Christian and this is the hard part of being Christian. We have to go out of our way to be Christian. We have to act like we are Christian. The love that Jesus talks about is not practical, but it can change the world.

You might be thinking, but what about self-defense? I know, self-defense is a natural human instinct. There is enough mammal in the best of us to defend our territory, take care of our own, and protect ourselves from harm. Who could expect us to do anything else than fight for the right to take care of ourselves? If we are not predators, we are at least protectors.

My question is this. If the only means of self-defense is retaliation then where will it end? If a suicide bomber blows up a crowded bus in Israel. Israel responds by destroying an entire Palestinian village. The Palestinians react with more suicide bombers. Sooner or later somebody has got to stop it! If it is always a cheek for cheek, will we not eventually run out of cheeks?

Remember the famous French musical *Les Miserables*, Victor Hugo's story? Jean Valjean is a thief in search of personal redemption. No one will give him a chance except a Bishop of the Church. The Bishop takes him in, has him dine on fine china and expensive silverware, sends him to bed with his best candlesticks. The temptation is too much for this lifelong thief. So he takes the silverware and runs. Soon there is a knock on the Bishop's door. The police have the robber and need only the Bishop's identification to throw Jean back in prison. But the Bishop surprises everyone. He brings the candlesticks and says to Jean Valjean, I gave these to you as well. They are silver like the rest and would bring you 200 francs. I intended for you to take them. Here, take them too.

What is it that we need to give away that will allow us to love and not fear? E. Stanley Jones once asked Mahatma Gandhi why he refused to become a Christian when he so regularly quoted the words of Christ. Gandhi replied, "I don't reject your Christ, I love your Christ. It's just that so many of you Christians are so unlike your Christ."⁷ So it is our question too, "when will we who call ourselves Christian, become what we call ourselves?"

Time is short – time is short for this sermon to be classified as short, in fact, that ship may have sailed – time may be short for us to have an impact on our family, our church, our community, our nation, our world. Let me leave you with John Wesley's version of the rule –

Do all the good you can, by all the means you can,
In all the ways you can, in all the places you can,
At all the times you can, to all the people you can,
As long as ever...you can.⁸

Friends, when you are a follower of Jesus Christ, you must DO GOOD – AND THEN SOME!

¹ from sermon, "The Golden Rule," by Derrick Tuper. September 12, 2016 found at www.sermoncentral.com.

² sermon, "On The Level," by Randy Spleth was preached at Geist Christian Church on February 16/17 and can be found at www.geistchristian.org.

³ information of Walter Wink's commentary on Luke was found in comments by Rev. Dr. Barbara K. Lundblad, professor of preaching at Union Theological Seminary. Comments dated February 18, 2001 and found at www.day1.org.

⁴ summary of "golden rule" in other religions found on Wikipedia site under "Golden Rule."

⁵ Barclay, William. *The Daily Bible Study Series, The Gospel of Luke*, revised edition. Westminster Press, Philadelphia, PA.

⁶ Information on Reginald Denny from Los Angeles Times article dated August 26, 1993 and Wikipedia article.

⁷ Gandhi quotes recorded in book by E. Stanley Jones titled "Gandhi: Portrait of a Friend," published by Abingdon Press.

⁸ John Wesley's "Rule for Christian Living" found at www.christianitytoday.com in the "history" archives.