

7.16.23

God's Word: Proverbs 3:1-8; 27-35

Gospel: Romans 13:8b-12 (CEB)

Don't be in debt to anyone, except for the obligation to love each other. Whoever loves another person has fulfilled the Law. ⁹The commandments, *Don't commit adultery, don't murder, don't steal, don't desire what others have,*^[a] and any other commandments, are all summed up in one word: *You must love your neighbor as yourself.*^[b] ¹⁰Love doesn't do anything wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is what fulfills the Law.

¹¹As you do all this, you know what time it is. The hour has already come for you to wake up from your sleep. Now our salvation is nearer than when we first had faith. ¹²The night is almost over, and the day is near. So, let's get rid of the actions that belong to the darkness and put on the weapons of light.

Three Simple Rules: Do No Harm

"We live in such a fast-paced, frenzied, and complex world that it is easy to believe we are all trapped into being someone we do not wish to be and living a life we do not desire to live. We long for some way to cut through the complexities and turbulence of everyday life. We search for a way to overcome divisiveness that separate, disparages, disrespects, diminishes, and leaves us wounded and incomplete." (Job, pg. 7) And if we are honest, we know we are not on the right path and we're not sure if or how we can turn it around. Yet, we as Christians know that we can turn to the God who loves us, cares for us, and never leaves us or forsakes us.

So how do we get off this barreling train? How do we transform the world for Jesus Christ? How do we as the church show God's love in action? When asked what the greatest commandment was, Jesus answered in Mark 12 " "The most important one is *Israel, listen! Our God is the one Lord,* ³⁰ *and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your mind, and with all your*

strength. The second is this, *you will love your neighbor as yourself*. No other commandment is greater than these.” Ruben Job the author of *Three Simple Rules: A Wesleyan Way of Living* suggest this verse from Mark is “foundation for the faithful and good life at any age” (Job, 8) He suggest that we can truly change the world by living out three simple rules: Do No Harm, Do Good, and Stay in Love with God.

With all the selfishness and division that exists in the world today. We are at a point when it is hard to voice an opinion on any matter without being chastised. This is especially true within the greater church. And our witness in the world suffers. We in the church tend to look at our differences instead of the commonality that we share with others. Job points out that there must be a better way. A way of life-giving and practicing our faith rather than life-draining, a way that would enhance the quality of life for everyone that we encounter for as long as we live.

Often, we imagine this utopian society and believe that way of life doesn't exist, well this way of life does exist. We know it and can open it for all who want to accept it. Yet it is hard to follow through with this call to be holy as God is holy. “We all want to live that faithful and fruitful life even though we have often turned away from God's invitation for holy living.” (Job, 14) We are not the first folks to struggle with this calling. Look throughout the Bible and you will see many examples. The author in Colossians reminds us that we are God's chosen one's called to high standard of living in which involves compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forgiveness, and love.

John Wesley the founder of our Methodist movement recognized this call to holiness but also realized that it's hard to follow this call on your own. He recognized “everyone needs help to live a holy and good life in a world like ours.” (Job, 16) He realized that “one could have all the structures and systems but could lose the power of God that translates into a Christ-like life—a way of holy living that is constantly reforming and renewing the individual and the community.” (Job, 16-17) So Wesley designed his movement to include a disciplined way of life that has become our church's “General Rules” that at first shaped the societies and small groups but now govern our church. These rules have helped people

realize the power of God and led them to a way of holy living. These same simple rules are very relevant in our society today.

The first rule we will cover this morning is Do No Harm. “Love does no wrong (harm) to a neighbor.” This sounds so simple and easy, yet it is so hard. We don’t have to look too far to realize the lack of this virtue in our culture today. Obviously, we live in a dog-eat-dog world where our way is right, and your way is wrong. My interest trump any that you might have. It’s a me-first society and we don’t care who we hurt to get to where we want to be. To do no harm to a neighbor is not easy to do because it takes discipline, something that is lacking in a lot of us. It takes careful attention and awareness of those around us, empathy, and genuine care.

In our scripture today we read that love is the fulfillment of the law by not harming our neighbor. There are obvious examples of how we fulfill the law of loving one another such as not committing adultery, not murdering, not stealing, and all the other Ten Commandments. I’m not too sure what you are tempted with but for me I don’t think murder is on the top of that list. Yet doing no harm is not just about following the Old Testament law but about fulfilling the law of love. Doing no harm means, “if I am to do no harm, I can no longer gossip...I can no longer speak disparagingly” about others... I can no longer manipulate the facts to have them go my own way. I cannot diminish those who don’t agree with me. But I must honor all persons “as a child of God.” (Job, 22)

John Wesley said in one of his sermons that if we have the love of God and love of neighbor in our hearts then our hearts “would work no evil to their neighbor. It was impossible for them, knowingly and designedly, to do harm to any man or woman. They are at a greatest distance from cruelty and wrong, from any unjust or unkind action. With the same care they “set a watch before their mouth, and keep the door of there,” lest he should offend in tongue, either against justice, or against mercy or truth. They put away all lying, falsehood, and fraud; neither was guile found in their mouth. They spake evil of no man or

woman no did an unkind word ever come out of their lips.” (Sermon 4, “Scriptural Christianity,” in Works, Vol. 5; page 41)

When we resolve to do no harm, we should see people as God sees them. We realize that we are all on the same playing field, sinners in need of God’s grace and that time is short. When we focus on commonality instead of our differences, we lose our fear of the other and are able hear and understand each other more easily. It’s a great starting spot for a relationship because it takes away our preconceived notions or prejudices, we may have. And when we enter a relationship with this openness it allows us to get to know a person for who they are not who we think they are. It doesn’t matter if you are single, married, divorced, widowed, gay, confused, filthy rich, comfortable, or dirt poor, as the welcome says on the bulletin. We are perfectly imperfect church filled with perfectly imperfect people who worship our perfect Lord.

Yet, our scripture for this morning also reminds us that our time on earth is short and that we need to live our lives as examples of Jesus Christ in a world that so needs to hear it. There is an urgency in our call to do no harm. As Pastor Becky has reminded us over the past few weeks, times are changing. And it seems like there is no way to stop this barreling train of our culture of selfishness and division. But we can change the world one person at a time.

But again, if we’re honest, this simple step of doing no harm is hard for a lot of us. It’s hard because it has high demand of our self-discipline and requires us to have a deep faith. Faith that requires a radical trust of God’s Leadership in our lives. We like to be in control, whether that is with the remote, or in a meeting, or wherever. Yet to “do no harm” requires us to put God in his rightful place in our lives and compels us relinquish control. We don’t follow this practice of “doing no harm” because we fear the consequences and the unknown. What will it require of us to seek the best for another instead of ourselves? Are we willing to give up our prized possession or “the certainty that we are right, and others are wrong? Are we willing to trust God enough to follow the ways of the Spirit rather than the ways of

the world?" Will we be seen as weak? These fears are relevant and can often play a major role in not following through in loving our neighbors as ourselves.

There are many reasons "Doing no harm" seems simple but hard to embrace. "But the good news is that we don't have to make this journey alone. There is always One who stands there with us. And not only stands there but invades us with Spirit Presence and Power to practice our faith with integrity and fidelity to the One we seek and follow. This is at the heart of the Incarnation and of Pentecost." (Job, 28) It is only through Jesus' example and the gift of the Holy Spirit that we can survive and thrive in this way of living. John Wesley said, "to continue the way of salvation... we should begin "by doing no harm, by avoiding evil of every kind, especially that which is most generally practiced." (Job, 29; Discipline 2004; Paragraph 103)

What would it look like if we took this first rule seriously in our lives today? First, Job writes is that it would cause us to take a serious "examination of the way we live and practice our faith." (Job, 30) So in other words, awareness. This examination if sincere and thorough will lead to a distinct change in how we interact with the world around us because we will realize the destruction in which we inflict on other and therefore ourselves. Second, we will then be on guard so that all our actions will not lead to the hurt of another one of God's children or God's creation. Instead of bringing selfish ambition and destruction, we must commit to bring about healing, wholeness, and unity. Again, we must see the commonality among each other as children of God in need of God's grace and mercy. This is what keeps us accountable to the call to fulfill the law of love by loving our neighbor. Third, when we follow this simple rule, we are transformed and therefore can impact the world around us. Our own personal transformations lead to the transformation of the world around us. This is the step as we seek to live a life worth of our calling as sons and daughters of God, a holy life, which brings healing, and goodness to all we come in contact.

Folks, Romans 13 reminds us “the time is now, the hour has come, for us to wake up from our sleep.” The time is at hand that we live up the calling, to walk properly, to live Holy lives. That starts with one simple but challenging rule, to do no harm. Let’s change the world, it starts with doing no harm.