

“THREE SIMPLE RULES: DO GOOD”

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God’s Word: 1 John 3:13-24

Gospel: Matthew 25:31-46 (CEB)

³¹ “Now when the Human One^[a] comes in his majesty and all his angels are with him, he will sit on his majestic throne. ³² All the nations will be gathered in front of him. He will separate them from each other, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will put the sheep on his right side. But the goats he will put on his left. ³⁴ “Then the king will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who will receive good things from my Father. Inherit the kingdom that was prepared for you before the world began. ³⁵ I was hungry, and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. ³⁶ I was naked, and you gave me clothes to wear. I was sick and you took care of me. I was in prison, and you visited me.’ ³⁷ “Then those who are righteous will reply to him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink? ³⁸ When did we see you as a stranger and welcome you, or naked and give you clothes to wear? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ ⁴⁰ “Then the king will reply to them, ‘I assure you that when you have done it for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you have done it for me.’ ⁴¹ “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Get away from me, you who will receive terrible things. Go into the unending fire that has been prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴² I was hungry, and you didn’t give me food to eat. I was thirsty and you didn’t give me anything to drink. ⁴³ I was a stranger, and you didn’t welcome me. I was naked and you didn’t give me clothes to wear. I was sick and in prison, and you didn’t visit me.’ ⁴⁴ “Then they will reply, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and didn’t do anything to help you?’ ⁴⁵ Then he will answer, ‘I assure you that when you haven’t done it for one of the least of these, you haven’t done it for me.’ ⁴⁶ And they will go away into eternal punishment. But the righteous ones will go into eternal life.”

Three Simple Rules: Do Good

Have you ever seen the TV show Undercover Boss? This is one of my go to shows if there isn’t anything else on that I can find. I’ll always stop on it and watch. If you don’t know, the show features CEOs or higher ups in a company who don’t disguise and work alongside “normal” employees to see the health of their organization. They often discover incredibly good employees with incredible stories working hard for their company, that they seemingly would never know about without the experience. However, the opposite is the same as well. They often come across employees who are destructive and uncaring. This makes for great television; hence it compels me to watch. At the end of the show there is a big reveal, and the CEO or higher up reveals themselves to the employees, good and bad. All employees were unaware leaving some stunned, especially the ones “who weren’t living up to expectations... who were surely thinking, ‘if I’d known it was the boss, I would have given my best effort.’” Often the CEO will handsomely reward the good employees with large life changing gifts.

Jesus is kind of like our Undercover Boss in each person we encounter day to day. Our scripture passage this morning shares of the separating of the sheep and the goats and the defining factor is how people treat others. It doesn't matter who they are because when we act on the behalf of others, by doing good to them, we are doing good to Jesus himself. Just like the employees in Undercover Boss, folks are caught unaware, "if we had known it was you Lord...why didn't you say something? Why disguise yourself? Jesus might reply, "none of you knew I was there. It should be enough that the person you with was a person created in the image of God. Some of y'all got it right others didn't.

Isn't this our challenge today too? Can we see Jesus in everyone we encounter, counting them as a person of worth and a child of God? Our second simple rule like to Do No Harm seems simple, but it is a challenge. This way of living calls for us to live a Holy Life by "Doing Good." We've seen in our scripture; we meet Jesus in the unlikeliest places, and he challenges us to do good to all we encounter. John Wesley echoes Jesus' challenge while writing in his journal. "There is scarce any possible way of doing good, for which here is not daily occasion...Here are the poor families to be relieved: Here are children to be educated: Here are workhouses, where in both young and old gladly receive the word of exhortation: Here are the prisons, and therein a complication of all human wants." (Job, 35) One doesn't need to look very hard to see the need and the opportunity for "doing good" in our society today.

Yet the question remains, how does it look to "do good" practically in our divided, hurtful, hostile, and wounded world today? Jesus throws another curveball at in a verse in Luke sharing "that doing good is a universal command." (Job, 37) This means that doing good is not just limited to those whom we are familiar and friendly with but is all encompassing. "Doing good is directed at everyone, even those who do not fit into my category of "worthy" to receive any good that I or others can direct their way." Doing Good means "I do not need to wait until circumstances cry out for aid to relieve suffering or correct some horrible injustice." It means, "doing good to all in every circumstance and in every way I can." (Job, 38)

However, this challenge to do good is often hampered by our desire and ability to lump or list people and their perceived problems. Think about it, we lump folks together, "the homeless, welfare queens, the Third World, the mentally ill, the unemployed, illegal immigrants." We don't see the person in these situations we just put them in a category. Friends, when we do this, we do harm to the person and desensitize ourselves to the real struggles of others and we miss the opportunity to meet Jesus in them. And often, when we offer a blanket label to all who might fit into those conceived categories leaving us content to ignore or forget the personhood and commonalities we share. And so, we pass by or ignore persons in great need. Yet, as we shared last week, there is not one person who Jesus didn't die for, "the skinny one, the chunky one, the stressed-out mom, the teenager, the homeless, LGBTQIA+, mentally ill, illegal immigrants, and the like. We cannot reduce valued persons of worth to our own categories.

This has major implications on how we live out our faith as Jesus shares in this passage, it is not simply about our intensions anymore, now we must seek to do good for everyone, NO Exceptions! However, "every act and every word must pass through the love and will of God and there be measured to discover if its purpose does indeed bring good and goodness to all it touches." (Job, 38) Sometimes this can be tough, but I believe doing good comes naturally to all of us. Think about it, you can contribute to any charity you want, volunteer at a food bank (or VBS). Heck even celebrities are out there trying to us join their cause with sappy commercials on television. (Hello,

Sarah McLachlan) Those are easy to do but this is not what Jesus calls us to. He demands our time, our influence, our money, and most importantly our whole lives.

But again, just as with doing no harm our need for control can hinder us from doing good. The call to “do all the good I can” is such a frightening idea because “we like to know where we are going and what it will cost.” The needs of the world, my community, my congregation, my family are so great that if I were to do all the good I could, I might feel compelled to give everything away for some good cause.” But is that right? Can I do that? I’ve got so many others that count on me, too much stuff to do, and so many responsibilities. This is a noble thought but I’m not sure this is where most of us fit today.

Then there is the possibility that my gift of goodness could be rejected, misused, or used for something I don’t want it to be used for. What if that goodness was accepted then misused? You know we like to categorize folks, but we also like to categorize how folks use what we give too. Jesus reminds us that we are “love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us,” but also says “for he makes his sun to rise on evil and on the good and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.” (Matt. 5:43-45) The truth is, as Ruben Job says, “that my gift of goodness may be rejected, ridiculed, and misused. But my desire to “do good” is not limited by the thoughts or actions of others. My desire to do good is in response to God’s invitation to follow Jesus and it is in my control.” As Elsa says in Frozen, “let it go.”

Our desire should be to please God by our actions and intentions. We can determine to do good to all we meet without exceptions. The reward for our actions cannot be diminished by the response of others. The reward for our “doing good” is knowing that what we do is right and pleasing to our Father in Heaven. That we are children of God and there is no greater reward. Our value is not in the satisfaction of others or our own expectations but in the satisfaction of our God, nothing can change that status. We want that ultimate reward Jesus is speaking of in our scripture this morning.

Jesus identified himself as “one who serves” (Luke 22:27) and Paul said in scripture that our love should be genuine... by loving one another, contributing to the needs of the saints, and extending hospitality to strangers.” This is how we love God and love people. These are a great example of how to go about doing good and becoming servant. These verses use action verbs that are born from intent, words like bless, rejoice, live in harmony, associate, and living peaceably. These give way for more practical matters of feeding the hungry and giving water to the thirsty in a way of overcoming the evil that exists in the world today.

I believe as a congregation we can learn a lot from our heritage as Methodists and if we follow the example of the ones who went before us, we can change the world as they did. In the United Methodist Church’s general rules this simple rule of doing good, or serving, as Jesus would call it, is fleshed out in 4 different ways. These echo these verses in Romans. The opening statement on this simple rule says: “By doing good....in every possible sort, and, as far as possible, to all Persons: To their bodies... by giving food to the hungry, by clothing the naked, by visiting or helping them that are sick or in prison.” (General Rules, 2004)

To “do good” we need to care for the physical needs of others, no matter who they are, remember NO Exceptions. I’ve always used the example of someone’s house being on fire. If we try to hand them a Bible at that moment, they are going to push it aside to carry a bucket of water to put out the flames. Our heritage as Methodists values the physical well-being of others and to the point that we act. In Africa, for example, the

Methodist Church has carried out the plan of eliminating malaria by distributing mosquito nets to people. This effort called Imagine No Malaria has significantly reduced the deaths from malaria in sub-Saharan Africa. So, in our general rules call us to do good for the other's physical welfare. You guys do this in many ways, think about the school supply give away, the Farmer-to-Farmer initiative, and the upcoming mentoring program.

Just this week in our weekly newsletter you most likely read about Sally Ruth's call for tangible resources to help women in Liberia with hygiene products. Sally plans to take 500 reusable period pads to gift to women and girls in Harrisburg, Liberia. And Sally needs help! Are you able to use a sewing machine? If so, could she ask for your help? A bag of fabric, instructions, and a pattern to make pads can be picked up, and you provide the skill and thread. Due date is October 1st. If not a sewer, you can donate gallon sized zip lock bags, travel size bar soap, and new girls' underpants size 12-14 and women's sizes 5-8. See collection box in the coat room here at the worship center.

Second, our general rules state doing good "to their souls, by instructing, reproofing, or exhorting all we have any interaction with." Essentially, Wesley is saying we are in the business of soul care. Discussing with people their questions, hurts, pains, and framing that in the realm of the Trinity. We need to talk about Jesus and what He means to us. Wesley did this by "doing life together" in small groups and societies that kept each person accountable for their actions, all in the way of loving one another. We do good by talking about our faith not making it a personal matter! Faith is not meant to be individual but lived out together in community.

Third, "By 'doing good' we are helping each other in business, and so much the more because the world will love its own and them only. Wesley says we as the body of Christ should support each other in this venture. Whether that is in our businesses or whatever we are good at. We are to do good by using our gifts and graces in and outside the body of Christ.

Finally, we should do good "by running with patience the race, which is set before them, denying themselves, and taking up their cross daily; submitting to bear the reproach of Christ, to be as the filth and off scouring of the world..., for the Lord's sake." Wesley urges us to take a stand as one of the ways of "doing good." To be holy means to be set apart, to be different, to take a stand for something that is not popular. Wesley practiced this in his lifetime by protesting slavery. What is that in our society today? Racial injustice, Equal rights, voting rights, healthcare, what are you passionate about and serve those causes. Advocate and do good for the cause.

We are called to do good to all people, no exceptions, no matter who they are, and without conditions. To "do good" requires action, for the physical, spiritual, and emotional needs of those around us, and not being afraid to share our faith. To do this we know that we have the support of the Holy Spirit and fellow followers of Christ. But we are also called daily to take a stand for Christ and be different in this world. That is what it means to "do good." Remember our undercover Boss is there in those moments when we do good and recognizes when we don't. It may seem easy, but it demands our whole being. So, go and "do all the good you can, in all the ways you can, to all the souls you can, in every place you can, at all the times you can, with all the zeal you can, as long as ever you can."