

“More Than the Golden Rule”

Based on John 15:9-17

Printable Sermon by Rev. Grant Quever



Refugee camp in Greece: Can we love all God’s children with a love like we have for our own children?

Today is a great day. And it is a good day to honor our moms. Not everybody can be a mom, but everyone at some time in their life has had a mom, and at that time our mom was the most important person in our world. Some of us had moms who made great sacrifices in our behalf. We can be profoundly grateful for that. So today we honor our moms.

It’s not easy being a mom. Here are some examples of some mothers and the funny things they could have said:

Mona Lisa’s mother: “After all that money your father and I spent on braces, Mona, that’s the biggest smile you can give us?”

Humpty Dumpty's mother: "Humpty, if I've told you once, I've told you a hundred times not to sit on that wall." But would you listen to me? Noooo!"

Christopher Columbus' mother: "I don't care what you've discovered, Christopher. You still could have written!"

Michelangelo's mother: "Mike, can't you paint on walls like other children? Do you have any idea how hard it is to get that stuff off the ceiling?"

Jonah's mother: "That's a nice story, but now tell me where you've really been for the last three days."

It's not easy being a mom. I always find it interesting whenever Mother's Day falls on the Sunday when our reading for the day is from John 15:

"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love..."

William Makepeace Thackeray once said, "Mother is the name for God in the lips and hearts of children."

We love because God first loved us. That is the message for the day. In this passage, Jesus goes beyond the Golden Rule. The Golden Rule says what? . . . That's right . . . "Love your neighbor as you love yourself."

In this passage, Jesus goes beyond the Golden Rule. We are not simply to love our neighbor as we love our self; we are to love our neighbor as Jesus loves us. That's a different and much more difficult standard.

You see, our own human love is always conditional, transient, and selective. Today we may love someone because he or she is simply lovable or perhaps because they act lovable toward us. Or, they agree with the things we say, or do. But then we withdraw our love when we feel wronged or cheated. And, suddenly, love is replaced by a need for self-protection or vengeance.

By the same token, too often we only love those people who are like us who share our background, our status, our political views, or our values; who are talented and gifted and dress appropriately. Jesus' love, on the other hand is for all people. It is sacrificial. He loves you and me, birth marks and warts as well.

A lady was a writer for a magazine, and Valentine's Day was approaching. Her editor asked her to write a poem for the magazine. "But before you do," he said, "tell me what you think love is."

She got starry eyed. "It's looking upon a lily pond," she said, "with the one closest to your heart, by the light of the moon, while the lilies are in full bloom."

"Stop!" her editor said. "Let me tell you what love is. It's getting out of a warm bed on a cold winter's night and filling hot water bottles for sick children." That sounds like the voice of experience.

But her editor was right. Love is sacrificial, even though we may not feel we are sacrificing anything at the time. None of us, if we are healthy emotionally, love our children as we love ourselves. We love them more than we love ourselves. The Golden Rule is insufficient for the relationship of a parent and a child. We love our children as Jesus loves them.

But here is the real test of Christian love: can we love all God's children with a love that approximates the love we have for our own children? That is what Christ is asking us to do. Love others as **he** loves others. Wow! That's not easy. One morning in 2012, a Winnipeg, Manitoba, city transit bus driver named Kris Doubledee, 38, made an unscheduled stop on a busy street corner. The passengers all watched her as she got off the bus and approached a lady on the sidewalk who was barefoot.

Doubledee asked the lady if she had any shoes; the lady said no. So the bus driver removed her own shoes and handed them to the lady. "Here," she said. "You need these more than I do." Then Doubledee returned to her seat wearing no shoes and continued on her route.

A passenger asked her why she had done that. Doubledee explained that she'd seen the woman standing there before and just couldn't bear the thought that she didn't have any shoes.

Interesting, we say, that's the sort of thing Jesus would do. Yes, and that is the sort of thing a follower of Jesus might do. After two thousand years of Christian history, that shouldn't be such a radical thought, but it is. We claim to follow Jesus, but we have very modestly sought to live as Jesus commanded us to live, and that is to love as **he** loves.

We see that kind of love sometimes in those who care for the aged and the dying. There was an interesting story in *Reader's Digest*. It was written by a woman in Rhode Island. She wrote that only three times in her whole life did she see her father cry.

The first time she saw him cry was when she was eleven. His mother, her grandmother died.

The second time she saw him cry was at the airport when her brother departed for Vietnam.

The third time she saw her father cry was when he was in his 80s. Her mother, in late-stage Alzheimer's, resided in a nursing home. Her father had visited her mother, his much-beloved wife every day for ten years except for three months when he broke his foot. After his foot healed, he returned to the nursing home. It seemed like such a long time since he had seen his beloved wife. He said, "I thought Mother forgot me, but when she saw me, she smiled and said, 'I love you.'" Then, his daughter said, her father sobbed.¹

Some of you understand those tears. We know a little bit of what it means to love as Jesus' loved. We love those closest to us like that. The question is, can we enlarge that circle of love? That is what Jesus Christ is asking us to do.

There was an interesting story about a dog that made the newspapers a while back. Some of you have dogs and know how special they are. There was nothing special about this dog. He had no pedigree. He was a mutt, as we say.

But for some reason one day this dog stopped eating the food scraps that his master set out for him. Instead, he would take the bones, and anything else he could hold in his mouth, and disappear into the woods.

One day, being curious, the dog's owner decided to follow him to see what he was doing. What he discovered was that his dog had been carrying food to another dog that had been caught in a trap. Nobody had trained him to do this. Why he should take this action, nobody knows, but he was taking his own food to a comrade in distress; denying himself in order to provide another dog enough to eat.

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Could it be that at some time or another that dog had slipped into a Sunday school class and heard the teachings of Jesus? For, even though he was just a mutt, he was living as Christ would have us live.

Actually, Jesus gives us two commands in this passage. **The first is to remain in his love.**

Where do we find the power to love as Jesus loved? We find it by remaining in Christ's love as we practice our faith with worship and Holy Communion—receiving the body and blood of Christ who died for our sins. We can see that in the Bible, love is never a feeling; it is always an action. Behavior—that is why Jesus can command us to love.

In verse 12 Jesus gives us that second command. **It is that we are to “love each other as he has loved us.”**

That is what the cross is all about. We see Christ's love poured out on the cross. The greatest example of love took place when the Lord Jesus Christ hung on the cross to show us how important we are to God. “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.

The Golden Rule, as wonderful as it is, is insufficient for this task. We are not simply to do unto others as we would have them do unto us. We are to do unto them as Christ has done unto us. Amen.

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I. Jerry Shirley, <http://gbcdecatur.org/sermons/NoGreaterLove.html>.