



2/9/2020

“Do Good”

Scripture: Micah 6:1-8; Luke 6:27-36; Acts 10:34-38; 3 John 11b

Series: “Three Simple Rules”

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

Theme: Living in a complex, hectic world often filled with demands, ambitions, contention and strife, we have a choice and a way of living as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ that can change our world.

As we continue our theme of love this month, we continue our three week series with what John Wesley called Three Simple Rules, especially as shared by the late Bishop Rueben Job. Last Sunday we considered the first of those rules, which is “Do No Harm.”

The second rule is “Do Good.”

I remember growing up as boy, getting teased because of my last name. When my Jewish grandfather, who had immigrated from Russian Ukraine before World War I, came to America, he or the immigration authorities changed it from Guttmacher to Gutmaker; either to be easier to assimilate for him, or easier to spell for them, I’m not quite sure. You can imagine what I, as well as my brothers and sisters and even my son growing up, heard from other kids. I usually held my tongue or simply told them that my father was a doctor. He didn’t make guts, he helped to heal them.

† “**Do All the Good You Can . . .**”

John Wesley said, “Do all the good 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.”

He no doubt was reflecting and expounding upon the words he found in the sacred scriptures of the Bible, especially the teaching and example of Jesus himself. In the book of Acts, Luke tells how Cornelius, a devout and God-fearing Roman Centurion, had received a vision of an angel in human form, telling him to send for Simon Peter and hear what he had to say.

The Apostle Peter and some believers from Joppa went to the house of Cornelius, as the Holy Spirit instructed him, and as requested by Cornelius. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends.

After Cornelius explained to Peter what had happened, and why he sent for him, Peter began to speak: *“I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every*



*nation the one who fears him and does what is right. You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached— how **God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power**, and how **he went around doing good and healing** all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.” (Luke 34:38 NIV)*

And the Apostle John wrote in his third letter, “*Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. **Anyone who does what is good is from God.** Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God.*” (3 John 11 NIV)

Wesley believed that there was enough hardship in society that doing good could most likely be done on any given day. Whether it was individuals or poor families in need, children to be educated, workhouses of all ages gladly hearing the “word of exhortation”, in prisons, and other places where people live and work.

I remember another time while in seminary in Iowa, when a new senior pastor was appointed to the local United Methodist Church to which I had joined as part of my process toward exploring candidacy for ordination. I was also doing a supervised practice of ministry for seminary credits as the Youth Director. His name was Rev. Dr. Egon Gerdes. He was born in Germany and was also an adjunct faculty member of the University of Dubuque Seminary.

When he heard my name, he pronounced it “Gutmacher”, the original German way, saying that he heard of some living in Germany when he was younger, and wondered if I knew that it literally meant “Good-maker”? According to him, it was relatively rare and highly regarded among both Jews and non-Jews for helping others in various ways.

He told me of a fairly new mission in Virginia, started and directed by two ordained elders in the Virginia Annual Conference, formed by their families, called the Society of Saint Andrew. Dr. Gerdes had helped to inspire, encourage and support it several years earlier.

Since its founding in 1979, the Society of St. Andrew has worked to fulfill the mandate of the Gospel in our lives by striving to adhere to the words of 1 John 3:18: *Let us love not only in words, but in deed and in truth.* The mission of the Society of St. Andrew is to introduce people to God’s grace in Jesus Christ through meeting their hungers. It does so through volunteer gleaning; salvaging fresh, nutritious produce from American farms – produce that otherwise would be left to rot – and delivering it to agencies across the nation that serve the poor.

Since those early years in seminary, I have been blessed to meet the founders while serving in the Virginia Annual Conference, to help support the Society of St. Andrew through prayers, offerings and once or twice in hands-on distribution of produce.



In 2019 alone, their Gleaning Network collected and distributed over 13,000,000 pounds of fresh produce. Over 23,000 dedicated volunteers gleaned nutritious produce from farmers' fields and orchards after the harvest. I am glad to play even small part in such a wonderful Advance Mission of the United Methodist Church.

Most of us, too, if we keep our eyes and hearts open, can usually find some way or another to do good, even where we are, on a daily basis.

I am thankful and glad that here at CCUMC we extend hospitality to our Scouts, which provides leadership and training in building useful skills, self-esteem, good relationships and teamwork; instilling values of honor, service, and helpfulness; with a healthy and holistic approach.

And, as you heard this morning, we have missions like the Rotating Homeless Shelter, which provide opportunities to do good, in simple yet greatly needed ways.

But as Rueben Job points out, if we followed the full teaching of Jesus about doing good, things can get complicated. As we remember the words of Jesus (Luke 6:27-28), "*Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.*" We may often find it easier said than done.

Job says, "The words of Jesus and Wesley suggest that doing good is a universal command. That is, doing good is not limited to those like me or those who like me. Doing good is directed at everyone, even those who do not fit my category of 'worthy' to receive any good that I or others can direct their way." He adds, "This command is also universal in that no one is exempt from it." (p. 37)

He does say, however, that it is a choice, a decision we must make in order to follow it. "It is a proactive way of living." (ibid.)

It raises questions for reflection and prayer. Among those Bishop Job offers, and which I add to, include: What does it mean for me to "do good"? Where do I begin? Where am I being led? What are the boundaries, the limits? Is this simple admonition too difficult for me? What does it look like in today's world? Which leads us to this . . .

† **This way of living will require a careful and continual assessment of my/your life and the world in which we live.**

Rueben Job asserts, "It will require an even more bold and radical step than not doing harm to those who may disagree with me and even seek to harm me." (ibid. p.38)

We may find obstacles to this kind of doing good, like needing or desiring to be in control, responsibility to others, fear of rejection, ridicule by others, and misuse of gifts or assistance we



give to others. But, as Rueben Job says, “The truth is 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*. I can determine to extend hospitality and goodness to all I meet. I can decide to do good to all, even to those who disagree with me and turn against what I believe is right and good.” (ibid. p.40)

And I would add, you and I can decide what kind or form of doing good will best benefit the recipient. Rather than enabling a bad habit or addiction, we can choose and offer a better way to encourage or enable recovery. Rather than simply a hand out, we can perhaps offer a hand up through education and opportunity.

Just remember, as Jesus as tells us, “the reward for my doing good is not cancelled or diminished by the response to my acts of goodness.” (ibid. p. 41)

And remember this, Job says, “... deep within us are both the desire and the nudging voice of the Spirit, telling us to fashion and maintain a living and life-giving relationship with God.” (ibid.)

Yes, this is a challenging way to live. To love God with all our being and to love our neighbor as our self was never declared to be easy; but, Job says, “it was declared to be essential to our spiritual life, our life of faith, and our life with God.” (ibid. p.43)

Even still, Job cautions us about an “unhealthy self-denial”, as well as an “unhealthy self-worship” as promoted by our culture. “But taking appropriate care of self and living selflessly are not opposites,” he says. “Rather they are each essential elements of a healthy and productive life.” (ibid. p. 46)

So, here’s the good news for ourselves and others . . .

† **Each one of us is embraced in the unlimited, saving, and transforming love of God.**

Let me repeat that: Each one of us is embraced in the unlimited, saving, and transforming love of God.

As Rueben Job puts it: “Each one of us is the object of God’s love. Each one of us is the ‘apple of [God’s] eye and is always and ultimately safe in the strong arms of God (Zechariah 2:8).” (ibid. p. 47)

So, friends, realize or remember how much God loves you! Let that love fill your heart to overflowing!

Consider the ways that God has shown that love to you through the goodness of others.



Realize or remember how much God loves each and every one on this planet. Consider ways that you can show God's love and goodness to them as well. With open eyes, ears, hearts, minds, and doors, each of us can respond to the needs of others – physical, material, emotional, spiritual. Your world, our world, can be transformed, one good and loving action at a time!

Coming up in the season of Lent this year, we will be giving you some ideas for intentional acts of kindness. For now, let me encourage and challenge you this week to do all the good you can, even as the Spirit shows you or speaks to you.

With the love and Spirit of Christ our Lord, Amen.