

[the Golden Rule 1st Lutheran 2019]

EPIPHANY OF OUR LORD
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1ST LUTHERAN, MARSHALL
PASTOR SCOTT FULLER

Psalm 37:1-11; Matthew 7:1-14, 24-29

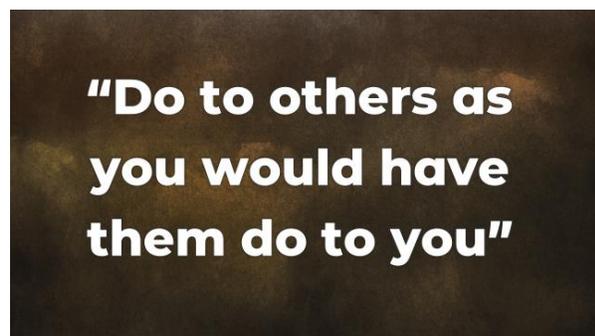
The Golden Rule

Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we believe and in believing we obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today's Gospel reading comes from the end of Jesus' famous *Sermon on the Mount*. It's a stretch of text in which Jesus covers virtually everything from the *Blessed R's* to today's list of *rules of good behavior* that make sense for any community, or any family, in any place, and at any time.

The slogan, the mission statement, the brand, if you will, is, of course, verse 12, the golden rule.



Say it with me... The message here is nothing new, nothing complicated, nothing even clever or cute. It's not mind-numbing, nor mind-blowing, it's neither inspiring nor enflaming – which is why it's **also** found, *in some form or another*, in virtually every major world religion.

It's – *Keep It Simple Stupid*

It's – *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*

It's the *ABC's*, and the *1-2-3's*, and the *Do-Re-Mi's* of how to make life work...

The problem is **not** in the *knowing*...the **problem, as we all know**, is in the *doing*...If only we could just follow that simple, little saying, that miniature maxim, that unpretentious proverb, then...well...I'm pretty sure our world look a little different...**Do you agree?**



There's a legend (told by the author Jill Lefore) about a town in New England long ago that was suffering through all manner of dissension and back-biting. We're told that the people were constantly involved in petty feuds, pitting neighbor against neighbor. One day, they all came together and agreed to consult a neighboring pastor as to how they could resolve their differences. The pastor agreed to think it over and then send them a letter detailing his judgment.

A few days later, the clergyman sat down and wrote his letter to the people, full of advice on how to make peace in their town. At the same time, he also wrote a note to a farmer friend of his who was having trouble with a bull. When the pastor was done, he called up two messengers, gave them the two letters, and sent them on their way.

*You can guess what happened, right? The pastor accidentally mixed up the letters. The message for the town got sent to the farmer friend. The message for the farmer got sent to the feuding town. Here's what the townspeople received: **"You had better see that your fences are put up well in the first place. Plough your ground deep; and sort your seed; be careful not to sow foul seed; and take care of that great, ugly bull. I think you had better poke him. The rest I will tell you when I come."***

Well...the townspeople sat in silence for a long time, contemplating the pastor's strange message. Finally, one man stood and said that he may have figured it out.

The putting up of fences must refer to the 10 commandments. The people had neglected these rules for far too long. And ploughing up the ground must be another way of saying the people need to open their hearts to the Gospel, to allow the good seed of brotherly love to be sown. The warning against foul seed was obvious: the citizens had an obligation to sort the truth from the untruth, and not believe every morsel of gossip they heard. And the great, ugly bull could only symbolize the devil, who had come into their midst and stirred up so much strife among them.

The people were so moved by the pastor's advice that they began confessing their sins and offering forgiveness to one another. They opened up their hearts and even prayed for each other. And peace reigned in the once-feuding town. (Adapted from a story by Jill Lefore, The New Yorker, "The Meaning of Life," May 21, 2007, 38-43.)

It wasn't *rocket-science* or *brain-surgery*-type knowledge that was needed – just some good, old fashioned horse-sense that was not all **bull...stuff...**

So why can't **we** make it work? Is there something wrong with us??

Or...here's another possibility – maybe there's actually something **wrong** with the **rule itself**, something to suggest that this **golden nugget** might very well be...made of **fool's gold??**

As I was working on my sermon preparation earlier this week, I found myself looking a blank slate, an empty chalkboard, a dark screen...

I mean, what's there to say about the Golden Rule that we haven't already heard before? And to top it all off, I was nagged by the question: If we did hear something new, would it make any difference? As I said, our problem is not that we can't understand the golden rule, right? It's more the fact that we just don't want to **embrace** it, we don't want to **proclaim** it, we don't want to **live** it...

So I did a little research about the golden rule... I watched a few T.E.D. TALKS on this very topic and discovered that there **are**, in fact, **some** folks who **do** believe that the golden rule is **wrong**, or rather that it's doomed to fail because its **focus** is wrong.

Two speakers in particular challenged the validity of this precious and universally accepted maxim ...



Their critiques centered on two assertions:

1. The Golden rule presumes that everyone sees the world in the same way that **we** do. And...
2. The Golden rule focuses **only** on our **actions**, our “doing” and “being done to.”

Let’s put this in perspective. I need a volunteer to come forward for a little experiment.

[to the volunteer] I want you to walk toward me and greet me as if we’re meeting for the very first time...

[come together and shake hands]

[to the congregation] Here’s something to think about: **how close should two people stand when they’re meeting for the first time?**

So, I’m going to move back, then start walking toward _____. I want you all to clap when you think that I’m at the perfect spot, and then not clap if I’m either too close or too far away. Your clapping will help us determine the perfect social distance between us... **[do the experiment]**

Now, let’s apply the *golden rule* to this situation...what if I liked to stand **closer** than normal to the person I’m speaking with? *Do to others as you would have them do to you* means that **I’m** going to stand **closer** because **I** want **them** to do the **same** to **me**, right? Which might be ok if the other person has closer-than-normal spatial boundaries, but they would be an exception to the rule, as we proved with our experiment.

So that’s one of the critiques – The golden rule puts us, ourselves and all our likes/dislikes, desires/pet peeves, US... at the center of our awareness and presumes that everyone thinks like us...So the truth, from this perspective is, if I focus on doing what **I** believe is right, I might very well be missing out on the way my new friend sees the world. Do you agree? Can I get an **AMEN?**

Another T.E.D. TALK speaker, Brendan Schulz, keyed in on the second part of the critique, that the rule **only** focuses on our **doing** and **being-done-to**. He argued that we need to upgrade the GOLDEN rule to the PLATINUM rule. **Does anyone know the PLATINUM RULE???** I didn’t either...here it is...

**“Do to others as
they would have
you do to them”**

Here’s an example: imagine being at a party with lots of people.

There are those who are drawn to the **middle** of the crowd where they are engaged in conversations, completely at ease with the noise, and truly enjoying the free-flowing, ever-changing mix of people.

Then there are those who are out on the **fringes** of the crowd, **also** engaged in conversations – but with only one, two, three, four people, completely at ease with the quiet, and truly enjoying the predictable mix of people.

Take a snapshot of that scene...because it’s a perfect picture of...my wife and me. I’ve mentioned before that Carolyn is an extrovert – gets her energy from interacting with ANYBODY and EVERYBODY... absolutely at ease, in fact, couldn’t be happier than standing in the middle of a friendly crowd.

I, on the other hand, am an introvert – I get my energy away from the crowd, by reading a book, or working in my office, or having a conversation with one, two, three or four people.

Last Monday evening I went to the PIZZA RANCH fundraiser for our YOUTH MISSION TRIP *by myself*, since Carolyn was at school doing parent-teacher conferences. I was blessed to be invited to eat with Bob and Corlys Knudson. We had a great conversation, talking about this very topic: introverts and extroverts. As it turns out Bob and I are **introverts**, cut out of the **same** cloth, in the **same** way that our *extrovert wives*, Corlys and Carolyn, are *twin sisters of different mothers*.

So the challenge for all of us is how to make the golden rule work: *do to others as you would have them do to you*.

If I focused only on **my actions**, only on what I would want to have happen, I would always be trying to keep Carolyn **out** of the center of the crowd.

In the same way that **she** would always be trying to drag **me** out **into** it – each of us treating the other as WE would want to be treated!! Make sense???

So what's needed to make the PLATINUM RULE work...???

*Do to others
as they would have you
do to them...*

You gotta get to know the other person, right? You gotta listen to them, observe them, understand them...and all that...takes...time, takes patience, and takes commitment...

So here's a question for you: **is the platinum rule even possible in our fast-moving world where we get to know people less often through in-depth conversations and more often through Facebook posts or Instagram stories or twitter...tweets...?**

The answer, on the **one** hand, is no... it **can't** work – because it takes too much time and energy to invest ourselves **completely** in **every conversation** we have during the day – to say nothing of trying to remember all the information we gather about the other person...

But on the **other** hand, I think the answer is yes, it can work for this very simple reason: at its heart, the **platinum** rule really is just the **golden** rule with a shinier name.

Here's what I'm talking about. If the platinum rule requires us to listen to our neighbor, to get to know them and what they need in life from us...isn't that exactly what the golden rule requires as well?

If we change the focus of the golden rule on just our actions, *do to others as you have them do to you*, to include **everything** we *think, do or say* with-or-about that other person, well, then, that, in a nutshell, *is* the platinum rule.



Which is, I think, exactly what Jesus intends offering us the Golden rule in the first place. The first two words of that verse define exactly what we're talking about: "***In everything***, says Jesus...*do to others as you would have them do to you...*"

In everything – in **all** that we **think, say or do...** *do to others as you would have them do to you...*"

Here's why I know that this is pretty close to the gospel truth. Look at the person who spoke these words.

Think of Jesus interacting with some of the people in the bible:

- as he forgave the woman caught in adultery...

Do to others as you would have them do to you...

- as he gave sight to the man born blind...

Do to others as you would have them do to you...

- as he healed the woman who had been bleeding for years...

Do to others as you would have them do to you...

- as he set free the man in chains who was tormented by demons...

Do to others as you would have them do to you...

And now think of what Jesus prayed as the soldiers nailed his body to the cross:

Father, forgive them for they don't know what they're doing.

Do to others as you would have them do to you...

So I think maybe we can just stick with the golden rule – and trust the words and voice of the one who spoke them to us, the one who died that we might be saved, the one who gives us life in God's name. Truly, he is the solid rock upon whom we can confidently build our lives.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.