

SERMON: Sunday – 20 February 2022 – Rev Alistair Cowper

Living out the Golden Rule

1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-50

Luke 6:27-38

It's really quiet simple isn't it?

Turning the cheek, giving your coat, going the extra mile - all in the sake of love.

Love, do good, be merciful, don't judge, don't condemn, forgive, give. Do to others as you'd have them do to you (6:31).

Simple yet so tough.

The Message translates Luke 6 verse 26 as "your task is to be true not popular".

Is that why it's often hard to live out the golden rule? Is it because we'd rather be popular with the crowd than be our true selves?

26 "There's trouble ahead when you live only for the approval of others, saying what flatters them, doing what indulges them. Popularity contests are not truth contests—look how many scoundrel preachers were approved by your ancestors! Your task is to be true, not popular.

27-30 "To you who are ready for the truth, I say this: Love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the supple moves of prayer for that person. If someone slaps you in the face, stand there and take it. If someone grabs your shirt, gift-wrap your best coat and make a present of it. If someone takes unfair advantage of you, use the occasion to practice the servant life. No more payback. Live generously.

Do to others as you'd have them do to you. With the measure you use so it will be measured to you.

It should be easy. If we want to be treated fairly, and with kindness then we're called to treat others fairly and with kindness.

It's an ancient idea. In fact it predates the times of Jesus of Nazareth. According to history, the golden rule has been around since at least the days of Greek Philosophy and Confucian times 5th century BC and most possibly to ancient Egyptian times, easy Genesis times of 2000BC.

It's familiar to Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Taoism as well as to Judaism.

In 1993, more than 140 leaders of different faiths around the world endorsed the golden rule as a common goal in inter faith.

And according to one historian, the golden rule can be found in some form in almost every ethical tradition (Simon Blackburn, *Ethics*, 2001).

Matthew in his Gospel quotes the golden rule in the form:

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"Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you. This is the essence of all that is taught in the law and the prophets" (7:12).

It's that important!

And similar verses are found in the New Testament whereby Jesus says the greatest commandment in the whole law is summed up in love - love God and love your neighbour as you love yourself.

And Paul, in Galatians, the entire law is fulfilled in a single decree: love your neighbour as yourself (5:14); and in Romans, love does no wrong to its neighbour. Therefore love is the fulfilment of the law" (13:10).

The golden rule might then be paraphrased as do everything in love. Something Jesus lived and modelled. And desires us to do too.

What Would Jesus Do has been a popular thing to ask in recent years and is another way of saying what would the loving thing be to do.

In any dilemma or decision we would do well to stop, look and listen, to quote (SLIDE) Tufty Fluffytail and the Green Cross Code or the song by The Stylistics.

“Stop, look, listen to your heart, hear what it’s saying ... love, love, love.”

The Jesus heart is our heart too, by faith.

The writer, Jennifer Heeren, said of this passage:

“Some people may say that it’s in our nature to do good to others. After all, there has been a “random act of kindness” movement for a long time. But, in general, most people only help other people when:

1. It’s their friend or family.
2. It’s convenient for them.
3. They’re in a good mood, or
4. They expect something in return.

But the Bible doesn’t say do random acts of kindness when you’re feeling good. It says to love others at all times. It even says love your enemies as well as those that persecute you. If you are kind only to your friends, how are you any different from anyone else. Everybody does that (Matthew 5:47). Loving everyone at all times is a much tougher task to accomplish. It’s imperative to allow the Holy Spirit to help you.”

She argues that in order to do to others as we’d have them do to us we’d do well to try to do several things:

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- Shed your own hurt (or hardened shell)
- Shed your self-centredness (and put yourself in the other person’s shoes)
- Remember Christ and your new life in Christ
- Live to help others
- Forgive others, even when they don’t ask for forgiveness

Humans have an amazing capacity to forgive and there are hundreds of stories of forgiveness that could help illustrate this kind of love.

But let me end with one story about Eva Kor.

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Eva Kor was a Romanian Jew who as a child, along with her twin sister, Miriam, was subjected to human experimentation by the SS doctor Josef Mengele at Auschwitz during WW2. Her parents and older sisters were killed in the gas chambers at Birkenau. She never got to say goodbye to them.

From the 1970s onwards, Eva publicly forgave the Nazis and founded a charity to help survivors of the holocaust. She travelled the world teaching about forgiveness.

In a newspaper article entitled , "Why forgiveness is the best revenge of all", written in 2019 just before her death, she wrote that she came to the conclusion as an adult that in order for her to heal, she must forgive those people who did horrible things to her in the camps. She spent months writing letters to those who hurt her. She even wrote one to "The Angel of Death".

These were very hard for her to write but through this she felt she became a happier and healthier person. Not everyone has agreed with her decision to forgive but she felt it was best for her and the right thing to do.

Her forgiveness has inspired many others to follow suit.

Forgive and you will be forgiven. Do to others as you would have them do to you. Love your enemies.

In Jesus name. Amen.