

Texts: Matthew 7:1-14; 24-29

Subject: The Golden Rule

Theme: A Strong Foundation

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany; February 10, 2019, Reformation Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV

Grace and peace to you from our Father in heaven and the Lord Jesus who is the Christ. Amen.

Bojana Zdraljevic fled with her family to the United States in 1991, only days before civil war broke out in Yugoslavia. Soon after her arrival here, Zdraljevic joined the Girl Scouts and became part of a nurturing group that she said is like a second family. By 1999 she president of her troop and was working to complete requirements for a Gold Award, Girl Scouting's highest honor achieved by community service. For her project, Zdraljevic said she wanted to do something for the homeless because she was once homeless herself. "I wanted to show the homeless community that there are people who want to help," she said, "and that there are people who want to do something other than to benefit themselves."¹ Can we do that? Can we show compassion for others, serve others, treat others as we would like to be treated? Sometimes you have to really go through something difficult to know what people really need. The founder of Girl Scouts, Juliette Gordon Low, wrote in November 1923: "The five requirements for winning the Golden Eaglet (as it was then called) are character, health, handicraft, happiness and service, and that others will expect to find in our Golden Eaglet a perfect specimen of girlhood: mentally, morally, and physically." Reformation's Girl Scout Troop 662 meets here every other Monday. They're following in the footsteps of Juliette Low and learning how to live lives of service and character. And they *are* characters.

¹ *Living the Golden Rule : Project Gives Once-Homeless Girl Scout a Chance to Help Others* accessed at <http://articles.latimes.com/1999/nov/25/local/me-37363>

One Iowa preacher used to end each of his sermons the same way. The choir and congregation would know it was time to get ready to sing when the pastor would say, “and so in our time...” and then tell them why the message ought to be relevant to their lives. I don’t know if Jesus did that, but the people must have been ready to go out to lunch by the end of it. Jesus is wrapping up the sermon on the mount, and teaching those who would follow how what it means to live as *kingdom people*, with love especially for those on the margins, freely forgiving, accompanying those who are grieving, because of the love of God shown in Jesus. He has a few more things to say about to be and how to treat one another.

Do not judge. God is holy. God is good and generous and God’s Word is true.

We do judge and not without reason. If we’re aware of it, we might try to refrain from being overly judged or hyper-critical. It’s not always helpful. Some of the things we say about each other include micro aggressions, underhanded insults and small offenses that lead us to belittle, denigrate, and discriminate against our fellow human beings. Okay, I have said some unkind things about the Kardashians and the cast of Jersey Shore, I’m sure. There’s no excuse for it. But some judgement has a place. We live in a world that often seems determined to destroy itself. People hurt people so often that if we were to just look away and claim, “who am I to judge” we would be of no help to anyone. If I just let my child touch a hot stove (you know which child I mean, don’t you?) he might learn, but he’d also suffer some serious pain. This same child also loves to run out into the parking lot. To help him avoid such destruction, I try to teach him, I try to correct the behavior that might endanger his life. Does he always listen? No. This means I have to work on my cardio. He’s fast.

Rolf Jacobsen from Luther Seminary says that “the law works best in the Christian life, when you apply it to yourself.” Lutherans understand that the law orders society and creates healthy boundaries for living in community as God’s creation. The law also shows us the ways we fail to do what is right, fail to love God and one another, and fail to be who we are created to be. Jesus words remind the hearers to look at themselves first. He tells them not to count themselves as higher than anyone else, but but to recognize that they themselves were guilty of the same offenses that were directed at them from the powerful and the religious elite.

It’s not good for us to judge based on human distinctions, to judge the sinfulness of another, or to claim we are better than another. This is not a strong foundation for our life together. But we do it. Is that how we want to be treated? Is it what we think we deserve? We want to judge. We do. It makes us feel superior. Even though we are not.

We’re good at thinking of ourselves. God knows.

Maybe that’s why we need something like the Golden Rule:

*“In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you;
for this is the law and the prophets.”*

Maybe you’ve seen it on a bumper sticker, and now you can get it on your license plate! Yes, the Interfaith Council of Southern Nevada has created a new license plate, featuring the image of a person helping another person, and at the bottom it says “Live the Golden Rule.”

Warren Carter, professor from Brite Divinity School, writes that it “provides a general orientation to guide specific actions in particular situations.” The golden rule is central to relationships according to many world religions. Rabbis would say something

similar “What is hateful to you, do not do to others.” The Buddhist saying is similar. Muslims know the saying, “not one of you truly believes until you wish for others what you wish for yourself.” Hindus would say, “This is the sum of duty; do not do to others what would cause pain if done to you.” Jainism includes all creatures - not just humans. Taoists, Sikhs, and Unitarians all know the Golden Rule. Jesus speaks it from the positive - do to others as you would have them do to you.” Do to others, what you would like done for you, to you, and on your behalf. Think about others. Remember the others he was talking about?

He was teaching about life in the kingdom for the poor, the mourning, the meek, the hungry, the merciful, the pure, the peacemakers, the persecuted and the oppressed. He taught them to be salt and light, to be tender, and loving, and nonviolent. He taught about giving, prayer, and trusting in God who gives everything that is needed. He shows what God was doing for them and teaching them to be different. He gives them a strong foundation for living a life as a disciple, a student of the teacher, a faithful child of God.

Jesus teaches that humans are not to judge others or - more precisely - not to condemn one another to hell. Jesus does call those who follow Him to discern what is right - to discern faithfully and prayerfully the needs of the neighbors, to serve and be served, to know and be known by God revealed in Jesus Christ. To love God, and to love one another. God gives these gifts of discernment, wisdom, and compassion. More than that Jesus is teaching the people to be faithful. To have a strong foundation of faith is not to need to judge one another, but to trust in God who gives good gifts; To discern what is right for any given situation and to pray to God for guidance; To serve the ones most in need and to serve others before ourselves. It is so easy to see the differences

between us, to judge someone for what they believe, who they love, how much they give or don't give, what they do with their spare time, or how they live. Pastors are no different. I fall into the same trap. To read these words of Jesus reminds me that it's not easy.

"The gate is narrow, and the road is hard that leads to life."

I want to live the golden rule. I just can't do it on my own. We can't do it on our own. I am still caught in selfishness at times, and even when I want to help I can pull any old excuse out of my...back pocket. The golden rule is a great idea, but it's still the law. And I can't live up to it.

Jesus calls the people who hear him speak to truly listen. He calls them to come together and pray. He calls them to care for each other, not to judge each other. He calls them, teaches them, empowers them to trust that God is for them, even if they're not perfect.

Jesus is the Word of life for a people despairing. Jesus is the righteous judge. Jesus is the faithful servant. Jesus is the one who walks the hard road for us, and despite our human differences, loves us all by giving his body and blood for us. God's mercy is served up at the Lord's table, where sinners are reconciled to the creator, where siblings put aside their differences, and all come with hands wide open to receive God's grace. To listen and trust in Jesus the living Word of God is to truly build a house on a strong foundation. Amen.

Human Family
By Maya Angelou

I note the obvious differences
in the human family.
Some of us are serious,
some thrive on comedy.

Some declare their lives are lived
as true profundity,
and others claim they really live
the real reality.

The variety of our skin tones
can confuse, bemuse, delight,
brown and pink and beige and purple,
tan and blue and white.

I've sailed upon the seven seas
and stopped in every land,
I've seen the wonders of the world
not yet one common man.

I know ten thousand women
called Jane and Mary Jane,
but I've not seen any two
who really were the same.

Mirror twins are different
although their features jibe,
and lovers think quite different thoughts
while lying side by side.

We love and lose in China,
we weep on England's moors,
and laugh and moan in Guinea,
and thrive on Spanish shores.

We seek success in Finland,
are born and die in Maine.
In minor ways we differ,
in major we're the same.

I note the obvious differences
between each sort and type,
but we are more alike, my friends,

than we are unlike.

We are more alike, my friends,
than we are unlike.

We are more alike, my friends,
than we are unlike.