

Shiloh United Methodist Church

The Gold Standard

Matthew 22:35b-40, 7:12 Rev. Tyler Amundson January 6, 2018

Spoken Word – Beginning of Service

Today we begin a new worship series on “Finding Joy in Real Life.” We are going to look at 5 biblically based principals of living, habits that can help us to live our lives abundantly as Jesus calls us to be people of faith. I expect some of us to have heard these before, for others they will be new. Wherever you are on your faith journey, my prayer for you during this series is that you find something to deepen your daily living, root your life in the scripture and to help you follow the ways of Jesus.

Our lesson for today is based on the Golden Rule, so as we begin worship I invite us to breathe deeply the air of a new year as we consider the Golden Rule:

Golden rules are nice, but you dare not store them in the bank.
They must be taken out and spent, used for the good they were meant.
To help God’s kingdom be present on earth, to help us find worth,
As we start worship today, may we be present to the one we who was
born into a home.

May we find in the golden wisdom, a treasure that guides us to God’s
throne.

Consider how you will live out the rule, and remember everything else is
just commentary.

Message –

As I said at the beginning of the service, this series is about finding joy, abundant life by living out 5 practices in the Bible, that are key to the Christian faith. These are principles Rev. Adam Hamilton taught at Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kansas. In my study of scripture I have found these lessons to be key to living the Jesus path, we talk about as Methodists, and as people of Christ. I hope in the lessons of the next 5 weeks you find some wisdom that guides your path and helps you live out your faith.

This week we are studying the Golden Rule, which if you ask the average person is “treat others as you wish to be treated.”

I want to begin our lesson today with a story from our Jewish brothers and sisters.

It was said once there was a school where people desiring to be Rabbis, teachers gathered. The leader of the school would have the young students debate with one another over the deep questions of faith. He taught them to debate these questions tenaciously and to not hold back from the toughest questions, and to not leave much space for their debate opponent to escape easily.

One day two students were debating some deep question, in the intensity one student said to his opponent, “I wish I could tear you apart as I would a fish.” The leader of the school heard this and immediately he stopped his students. He invited them to gather round and he stood between the two debating students and placed his hands on both of their shoulders and invited others to touch these two student until their was a chain of humanity.

It was said, that immediately the students in the room began to cry and scream in pain. For they could visualize the one student tearing the

other student apart “like a fish.” It was an awful image that cause deep wailing and pain.¹

Our two scriptures from today are from the gospel of Matthew and the writers and Jesus draw heavily on Leviticus 19:18.

Matthew 7:12 Common English Bible (CEB)

¹² Therefore, you should treat people in the same way that you want people to treat you; this is the Law and the Prophets.

Matthew 22:35-40 Common English Bible (CEB)

³⁵ One of them, a legal expert, tested him. ³⁶ “Teacher, what is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

³⁷ He replied, “*You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, and with all your mind.* ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: *You must love your neighbor as you love yourself.* ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands.”

The scriptures are where we draw as Christians our understanding of the golden rule. These are words attributed to Jesus and very few scholars debate if Jesus actually said these or not. In fact, you would be hard pressed to find a Christian that does not make these central to their life, because this notion is embedded in the Lord’s prayer.

However, what you might be surprised to know is there is quite a bit of critique of the golden rule. In fact, people are now trying to find the platinum rule. I wish them luck in their quest, and as you might find as you read critiques of the golden rule I don't consider some of these people very intelligent. However, that kind of thinking is not quite a way to live out this rule.

There is one critique of the Golden Rule I find quite compelling and I think it best outlined by a story Rev. Adam Hamilton tells.

¹ <https://www.facebook.com/myJLI/videos/2000609293356234/>

“How many of you grew up in the South? How do they serve their tea in the south? Sweet, right. Almost like syrup in a cup.”

Adam Hamilton began his ministry in Texas and would go over to peoples homes and they would serve him sweet tea. I remember my own first trip to the south and asking for iced tea and getting sweet tea. Like Adam, I remember almost spitting it out upon the first sip.

Tea made in the north is made the way it was intended, and like Adam I like it bitter as can be.

Rev. Hamilton shares that later he would put the cup to his lips, but if people would have measured the cup they would have found his tea cup never decreasing in the volume of tea in it.

He shares that these people were showing hospitality, serving something they loved. However, for him it is something he would not wish upon anybody. He like's tea the way God intended it.²

The challenge with the golden rule as outlined by popular culture, “Do unto others and you would have them do to you,” is what happens when what you do unto others doesn't really love them. What happens when it hurts them or just doesn't help their day? What happens when you loving your neighbor hurts their stomach? Not that sweet tea is mean, but it just doesn't necessarily refresh someone who doesn't need to be loved that way. Basically there are two problems here: 1. What we think is loving to another may not honor them, may not be what they need. 2. What happens when others return what we do with hate, the popular version still provides room to hate if they hate you.

A near contemporary of Jesus, a Jewish teacher named Hillel stated the Golden rule this way, “That which is hateful unto you do not do to your

² <https://vimeo.com/259759970>

neighbor. This is the whole of the Torah, The rest is commentary. Go forth and study.”³ Many of us at Shiloh have heard of version of this before. This understanding provides space for us to care for those who may never engage us in a relationship of love and demands we respect them even if we dislike them or can't seem to work well with them.

Jesus actually takes this a step further in Matthew 22, when he asks us to love God and love others as we would love ourselves. The word used in the Greek is Agape. Meaning we should unconditionally love others, ourselves and our God. Meaning Jesus is actually inviting us to basically seek relationships with our neighbors where we ask them what kind of tea we might serve them. We seek to love them as they need to be loved.

I think Jesus is trying to get us to dwell in the idea, that to truly live a full life we will have to learn God's way of love and the golden rule for Christians will be a hard journey. Like the Rabbi in our first story, we will have to feel the pain. I think it is why Jesus said love God with all your “heart, mind and being.” He knew this rule could only be lived fully if we were willing to feel the pain of our brothers and sisters, to find out what they need to be loved. To risk being open to what they are going through. To open ourselves to try and love like a God who loves all of creation, and to try and love like God means we risk feeling all of the other things God can perceive and feel. We risk making ourselves vulnerable to seeing pain along with joy, hardship as well as easing, perseverance as well as failure, and loss alongside deep connection and belonging.

Being a disciple, following the golden rule can be risky business, but it's the business Jesus and our God call us to.

I want us to consider the story of Wesley Branch Rickey for a moment. He was born into a Methodist family, knew well the understanding of

³ <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/hillel/>

faith and is even name for the founder of the Methodist movement. He worked hard to achieve in his life and found huge success.

If you don't recognize the name, Branch Rickey was a baseball executive in the middle part of the 20th century. To baseball fans his name is familiar, to the rest of us I am going to keep us hanging on who he is.

Branch Rickey is said to have arrived at his Pastor's office one day, the Rev. Dr. L. Wendell Fifield at the historic Plymouth Church in Brooklyn, a church famous for being church to Henry Ward Beecher who helped run the underground railroad.

It was said the Branch Rickey was invited into the Rev. Fifield's office. Upon entering in a typically boisterous manner Branch said, "Don't let me interrupt, I can't talk with you, I just want to be here. Do you mind?"

The two men proceeded to pass the time without speaking – the minister going about his work; Rickey frenetically pacing the floor, stopping only occasionally to peer out the window on the Brooklyn Heights neighborhood that surrounded the church.

Amid ongoing silence, more pacing, more stopping, more pacing, more stopping from Rickey for some 45 minutes, according to the article.

Finally, Rickey didn't just break the silence, he shattered it.

"I've got it," Rickey yelled emphatically as he banged his fist on the desk.

"Got what, Branch?" Fifield asked. "Wendell," Rickey said, "I've decided to sign Jackie Robinson!"

Rickey regained his composure he sank into a chair and told her husband, “This was a decision so complex, so far-reaching, fraught with so many pitfalls but filled with so much good, if it was right, that I just had to work it out in this room with you. I had to talk to God about it and be sure what he wanted me to do. I hope you don’t mind.”

The article continues that as Rickey straightened his bow tie and donned his worn hat, he offered, “Bless you, Wendell,” then left the room.

Wesley Branch Rickey would go from that room to sign Jackie Robinson to be the first black player in professional baseball in the United State. Jackie Robinson would debuted with the Brooklyn Dodgers April 15, 1947.

Living the golden rule for Branch involved some serious consideration. He knew Robinson would face ridicule, that people would fight him playing, and it could cost Branch his career. All these were risks, even though it was the right thing to do. Additionally, Jackie Robinson needed to be the right player. I found it said that Branch Rickie said about Jackie Robinson, “I’m looking for a ballplayer with guts enough not to fight back.” I like to also let it be known that Robinson was known for his faith, and for being a Methodist.

While living the golden rule can shatter barriers and make history, I think for all of us we need reminders of how living our everyday lives by this rule can also change the world.

Watch - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Phzi1wmEeEw>

Be you Elton Simmons, Branch Rickey, Jackie Robinson, or anyone who follows Christ you are asked to follow this golden rule. I honestly think it can transform the world if we all seek to live by it, to not inflict that which hate on another, and even more to try and love one another. If you imagine that between all the Methodists worshipping in Billings

this morning about 600 we make up about .5% of the population of Billings: First, Grace, Evangelical and Hope. If each of the people left our churches today and shared one random act of kindness, one deeply felt practice of kindness then 1% of Billings would have been transformed by the golden rule. Imagine what would happen if people paid that forward, what if all the Christians in Billings, all the people of faith in Billings shared a random act of kindness. Our city might start to look more like the Kingdom of God.

Today I invite you take home the first card in our hand of 5 cards, and to practice the Golden Rule this week by sharing a genuine random act of kindness. Small or big, God uses them all to transform the world.

As we close today I invite us to pray for guidance in following this rule: First, I will offer us a prayer and then I will invite us to pray the Wesley Covenant Prayer found on the screen.

God we ask your guidance as we seek to follow the Golden Rule, the Jesus rule you have taught us. We find it is not always easy and there are so many things in the world that distract us. Sometimes the road is not easy, sometimes it is the one with the most difficulty. We trust that following this rule will lead to abundant life, to the reduction of hate, and to the glory of you love on earth as it is in heaven. God we pray these things and now we pray our yearly covenant prayer taught by John Wesley and put in modern terms.

Wesley Covenant Prayer

I am not my own self-made, self-reliant human being.

In truth, O God, I am Yours.

Make me into what You will.

Make me a neighbor with those whom You will.

Guide me on the easy path for You.

Guide me on the rocky road for You.
Whether I am to step up for You or step aside for You;
Whether I am to be lifted high for You or brought low for You;
Whether I become full or empty, with all things or with nothing;
I give all that I have and all that I am for You.
So be it.
And may I always remember that you, O God, and I belong to each
other.
Amen.

Modified by hackingchristianty.net, Jeremy Smith. Original from: *The United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), 607. Used by permission. (Edited for Gender equality.)