

## DO GOOD

A 3-Simple-Rules Sermon Series Message by the Rev. Joyce L. J. Lawson

Luke 6:27-31  
Hebrews 13:1-3, 16

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We live in a turbulent world that is too often characterized by divisiveness that separates, disparages, disrespects, diminishes, and leaves us wounded and incomplete. For all of us who whose days are filled with too much activity, whose nights are too short, and who tend to see one another, our society and the world through the lens of the particular news network we choose to watch, how can we break free from the hold that this fast-pace, complex and divisive world has on us? To break free from the strangle hold such a life has on many of us if not most of us takes some radical re-thinking and behavioral changes. And so I invite you to turn to the One who created us and loves us – the One who told us what is most important, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” (Lk 10:27) This Great Commandment is simply stated, and yet, so challenging to take to heart and embrace as a way of life.

We are currently engaged in a three week sermon series that has us turning to our Methodist roots so that we may discover and ultimately embrace what it means to live the Great Commandment. What was it in the past that enabled individuals to live courageously and faithfully – that bound them to God’s presence and power above the influences of their day and time? To look at our Wesleyan roots is to see how God can take those committed to the law of love and make them and therefore us into a holy and powerful movement of transformation.

Last week, Pastor Nick introduced you to John Wesley’s 3 Simple Rules for living a faithful life – Do no harm, do good, and stay in love with God. Since my arrival at this church, I have given this small, brown book titled, Three Simple Rules: A Wesleyan Way of Living to those serving in leadership on the Church Council. I yearly remind them in June when new leadership begins of the historical significance of these three simple rules to the Wesleyan revival movement of the 1700’s. I challenge them to personally take to heart these rules as leaders of this church so that God may be at work in and through them to help lead a Methodist movement in Chagrin Falls today. I want you to know that additional books have been ordered so that those of you who have not served on Church Council over the past five years may also have a copy to read and re-read and to take to heart.

So, how did it go for you this past week as you tried to do no harm? Did you catch yourself before saying or doing something hurtful, harmful to someone else? To do no harm is difficult in a society that mostly encourages us to speak our mind without regard to the impact our words have on others – a society that tends to lift up our personal liberties above the well-being of others and the community as a whole. We need only to look at the daily news to be reminded that doing no harm is often not how we treat others.

Those of us who vowed to make every effort to do no harm this past week likely failed to achieve complete success. But if our goal is to live out Christ’s Commandment to love, giving up is not an option. For as long as you and I are doing harm to others through our words and actions, we will limit the power of Christ’s Spirit in our lives.

But there are two more rules, so we need to move on. Second rule, "Do Good." What does it mean to commit yourself to actively seek good for everyone in your world and potentially everyone in God's world? Simply, it means allowing the love of God to have hands and feet and to find voice through you.

I know the summer fair season is almost over, but I'd like to share with you a story that came out of an Ohio fair a several years ago. Katie Fisher was 17-years old at the time as she pulled her lively lamb into the arena of the Madison County Junior Livestock auction. Katie's mom was more than a little concerned that Katie, who was battling cancer, might collapse as she had a day earlier during the judging. The fair had been Katie's first opportunity in months to be outdoors and enjoy herself after weeks of hospital visits and chemotherapy. She hated to part with her lamb, but she was looking forward to a good return as she centered the lamb in the ring and the bidding began.

As the Columbus Dispatch reported it, the auctioneer, Roger Wilson, hit on a sudden idea to share with those in attendance something of Katie's situation in the hopes that it might push up bidding. Well, it worked because the lamb sold for about six times more per pound than the typical going price. But that was just the start. That first buyer turned around and gave the lamb back so that it could be sold again. One after another, families bid the price up and then turned around, donating it back to be auctioned again. The lamb sold 36 times that day, and the last buyer gave it back to Katie for good. Katie ended up with more than \$16,000 to help with her medical bills and she still had her headline-making lamb to take home with her.

And just this summer, a different lamb sold for almost \$34,000 at the Green country fair in Pennsylvania to support a different girl named Katie who was raising money to help her stepfather who is battling a brain tumor.

There are certainly countless stories that could be told of those whose lives have been touched by the kindness and generosity of others. I hope you have your own stories of how kindness and generosity have touched your life! I hope your life example has generated stories that others cherish and share! Whether it's at a local fair, at work, home, church, school or playground there are always opportunities to share God's love. The writer of Hebrews says, "Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God." (Heb. 13:16) So, what does doing good look like as it is lived out in your daily life?

As you think about your answer to that question, our passage from Hebrews points us to love, reminding us that all goodness begins, continues and ends with love (vs. 1). I think we are supposed to notice and take to heart that the doing good examples given to us in Hebrews as well as emphasized in our passage from Luke begin not with those we know best and care about most deeply, but with strangers and even enemies. "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you." (Lk 6:27-28) "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers... Remember those who are in prison..." (Heb. 13:2-3)

Sharing love, doing good opens the door for God's grace to be seen, God's will to be done and God's blessings to be experienced. Those who went to Guatemala experienced the loving hospitality of the people of Guatemala and in turn people there experienced the great blessing of new homes and new friends from Ohio. And obviously from what all you heard earlier in the service, we know that those who journeyed to Guatemala as vessels of God's love also experienced great personal blessing.

It was exciting to hear about the experiences of our Guatemala missionaries and how the power of God's love was at work through them. Of course, God wants to

be a work in and through all of us, and there is no lack of opportunity. John Wesley said, "There is scarce any possible way of doing good, for which here is not daily occasion... Here are poor families to be relieved: Here are children to be educated: Here are workhouses, wherein both young and old gladly receive the word of exhortation: Here are the prisons, and therein a complication of all human wants." (Journal from August 12, 1738, to November 1, 1739" in Works, Vol. 1; page 181) Every day, John Wesley looked for and found opportunities to do good.

Through the example of our Lord, Jesus and dozens of biblical passages like the ones read today, the faithful are encouraged to do good to those who are poor, hungry, homeless, in prison, sick, lonely, afraid, rejected and persecuted. The specific acts of doing good are vast, and will certainly vary from person to person according to God's purpose for each of us. There are ongoing opportunities within this church to join one of our team ministries to make a difference in the life of others. There are countless opportunities outside this church to volunteer, to help a neighbor, to extend simple and yet consistent gestures of kindness. To do good is not about doing one good deed a week, a month, a year, it's about a daily, continual life-style choice of doing good so that the love of God is made real through us.

"God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power... he went about doing good..." (Acts 10:38) Through him God's love empowered a transformational, world-impacting movement of Jesus followers. John Wesley took to heart Jesus' example of doing good and once again God's love brought sweeping, transformational change throughout England that spread to America as well as other places in the world.

What might happen if each one of us here today took to heart the Great Commandment to love God and others and therefore committed ourselves to first doing no harm and then actively doing good? Perhaps, the love of God at work through you and me might have the opportunity to bring transformation to this turbulent divisive country and world in which we live. Wouldn't you like to see what God's love can do through us? I sure would! May it be so! Amen.