

St. Luke's UMC  
October 27, 2024

*Do Unto Others Campaign*  
***The Sum of Everything***  
**Matthew 7:12; 2 Kings 6: 18-23**

There is an old fable about a monastery that had fallen on hard times. The buildings were getting run down. The monks were aging. There were no new recruits. Visitors didn't come for prayer and worship experiences like they once had. The abbot of the monastery grew desperate because he knew if something didn't change they didn't have a future.

He went to meet with a rabbi who lived nearby and was known to be wise. The abbot felt an outside perspective might be helpful. After pouring his heart out to the rabbi about all their struggles he asked the rabbi, "What do you think we can do?" The rabbi thought for a while, as if contemplating whether to share his thoughts. Finally he said, "The Messiah, the Christ, is among you."

The abbot returned to the cloister and shared with the other monks what the rabbi said. The monks went away with a sense of excitement finding it incredible to believe that the Christ was among them, as one of them. But which one? They started treating each other with special affection and honor and respect since the Christ could be any of them. Word began getting out to the community that something was happening at the monastery. People began visiting to attend worship services and prayer gatherings. No one could explain just what it was, but it was clear something had changed. There was a new sense of faith and hope because they looked for the Christ in each other. And that is how the monastery rediscovered itself.

When we treat each other as sacred persons, we make our world and the world around us a better place to live. That has been the basic idea we have considered this October as we move through another significant, but hugely divided election. No matter what ideology we hold or how much passion we have for any single issue, nothing should get in the way of our treating people with dignity and worth.

That's the point of the Golden Rule which we have spent these weeks exploring. Treat others the way we want to be treated. We began the first week looking at the opening words where Jesus said, **"In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you."** (Matthew 7:12) We put an emphasis on "in everything." In every situation we are called to practice understanding of others.

Then we considered the issue of Christian Nationalism as a threat to the Golden Rule. Last week, Kylee Larson, did a masterful job leading us in considering the heart of the Golden Rule, respect for each other. Today I want to close with the end of the Golden Rule where Jesus says, **"Do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and Prophets."** (Matthew 7:12)

This is Jesus' way of saying that the whole of faith is captured in this statement. The Law and the Prophets, the basis of what we are called to believe and do in life, is summed up in the Golden Rule. It is the sum of everything.

In physics there is a concept known as the theory of everything. In fact, that was the name of the movie about Stephen Hawking, the late theoretical physicist. The theory of everything posits the idea that there is a single, all-encompassing framework that explains the whole universe, that holds everything together.

In a spiritual sense Jesus says the same about the Golden Rule. It is the theory of everything. It sums up all of life and faith. What holds together our faith in God and our life in this world is living by this simple rule, do to others as you would have them do to you. Now so far we have considered how that statement implies important values like understanding and respect. Today we look at one more: Compassion.

We might think of compassion as a feeling. But compassion really describes what it means to put understanding and respect into action. Compassion is the combination of **com meaning "with;" and passion meaning "suffering"** as in the passion of Christ. Compassion means to suffer with others. It implies showing love when it is not easy, maybe even difficult. Have you ever had to suffer anyone? Are there people you sometimes have to suffer to stay in relationship with them? Compassion is the ability to show respect and understanding even when it feels like suffering to do so. Sometimes compassion means doing the unpopular, difficult thing in order to do the right thing.

Think of John McCain in his 2008 presidential run against Barack Obama. At a town hall meeting he said some very unpopular things, but not for reasons you might think. **Take a look...**

Some say McCain's campaign suffered because he refused to attack his opponent in such a personal way. This might not be what we think of when we think of compassion, but it is showing respect and understanding even if it might not be popular to do so.

One of the great stories of the Bible about compassion is from the Old Testament. Elisha the prophet was receiving clairvoyant awareness of Aram's plans to attack Israel. Elisha would tell the King of Israel what they were going to do and thus Aram was constantly defeated. The King of Aram, of course, thought he had a traitor who was leaking information, but when he learned that it was Elisha the prophet he sent his army to kill the prophet. When Elisha's servant woke up one morning and saw the armies of Aram surrounding them he panicked, but Elisha said, **"Don't worry. There are more with us than there are with them."** 2 King 6:16. You will want to hold onto to that statement for the next time you are in despair. Just say to yourself, "There are more with me than there are with them."

Elisha asked God to open the servant's eyes and when he looked up again he saw chariots of fire surrounding the army of Aram, so now instead of asking for eyes to be open, Elisha prays that the eyes of the army would be shut. So the army is blinded. Elisha goes to them and asks why they are there. He then says, "Well, this is the wrong

place. Let me take you there, and I'll take you to the person you're looking for." So he leads them by the hand into the capital city of Israel. Once inside the walls the gates come down, their eyes open and they realize their doom.

The king of Israel can't believe his eyes. He says to Elisha, shall we kill them? And this is a critical moment. They realize they can obliterate their opponent. They can let them have it. They've got them right where they want them. But that's not the right thing to do. Elisha says, "No! You didn't earn some victory. This is all God's doing. The right thing to do is to give them food and water and send them home." Can you believe it? You have the chance to trounce your enemy and the prophet says you should show them compassion.

Because, after all, the point is to live in peace. The goal is not to be threatened by the armies of Aram any more. So look at how the story ends. **"And the Arameans no longer came raiding into the land of Israel."** (2 Kings 6:23)

The goal was to have peace. Popular thinking said the Israelites needed to obliterate their opponent in order to achieve the goal, but in the end it was compassion that accomplished the mission. Compassion is what changes our world for the better.

We have a guest with us today whose life is an example of the power of compassion. His name is Immanuel Pius...

After the service you are invited to go to Room N101 for a Q&A with Immanuel to learn more about Angel House.

Being involved in efforts that foster compassion is what I believe can save our souls. Going through a national election in our country sometimes feels like the life gets sucked out of us. Instead of hearing politicians offer hopeful visions for the future, we hear demonizing and running down of others. We are led to believe that we should be afraid of each other, especially people different from us, and its like our souls start to shrink.

This is nothing new. This has always been a part of politics. Its just getting more dominant and uglier. What rescues our souls is to get around something that fosters compassion, something where compassion is being shown and built.

Let me tell you where I found that recently. Last week I was with a small group of pastors who meet once a year. We are from all over the country and we were hosted this time by Jay Cooper, the pastor of First UMC in Montgomery, AL hosted us this year. One Wednesday Jay put together a big day for us exploring the Civil Rights locations in the city. Most of these were part of the Equal Justice Initiative founded by Bryan Stephenson. We spent the better part of the morning at the Legacy museum, then the memorial overlooking the city and finally the historical garden walk along the river.

But it was our first event of the day that stood out for me. Jay took us to the old Dexter Avenue Methodist Church, just a block from **Dexter Avenue Baptist Church** where

Martin Luther King, Jr was pastor. At that time Dexter Avenue Methodist average close to a thousand people in worship each Sunday, but when the civil rights movement ignited, and the church took a supportive position, over half the membership left the church. Over the years the church slowly dwindled until the congregation could no longer sustain. Obviously the church took an unpopular stand.

But a few years ago the conference turned the property over to an academy called **Valiant Truth**. It is a school for African American boys facing very challenging odds to have a successful, secure life. The academy was started by two brothers, Fred and Anthony Broc. Jay went to school with them. Anthony leads the academy now and he and Jay have **remained very close friends**.

That morning Jay wanted to take us to their opening gathering. This is the way they start each day. As we arrived students were **sitting outside** in their coat and ties waiting for the doors to open.

The sanctuary was playing praise music. We went and sat toward the back. The students arrived sitting in **straight rows**. One of the student leaders went in front and led what was like a military drill. Listen to part of it. **(video)**.

Then one of the teachers led about 6 minute devotion remind them of the potential they have in God. Then as they filed out, row by row, youngest to oldest, they went to the altar and knelt.

This is where **Anthony, the leader of the school, and Jay, put their arms** around each one and whispered a blessed in their ear telling them they are special and important to God. They are loved. I love you.

They start the day with a blessing. When we spoke to Anthony afterward I said, “This is was like a blend of military school and revival.” He smiled and said, “My father was a Methodist minister. He was big on discipline. I found that when life has order and structure to it, we function better. But I also knew growing up that I was loved. My father gave us that blessing all the time. So we hold up two values: high expectation and love. We can give boys the tools to succeed but that isn’t enough. We must bless them and let them know they are loved.

I believe we can call that compassion, turning respect and understanding into expression and action.