

Leviticus 19:15; Matthew 7:12; Psalm 68:5
Giving theme: giving for justice

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GIVING THROUGH THE GOLDEN RULE
[Written in oral form]

The past few Sundays we've been talking about giving.
Yet,.....to be honest, sometimes, giving can feel more like a toll,... a payment, like....a loss or an expense.

There's a constant barrage of requests that come to us: "contribute to this needy cause"or... "donate Now for the election".... or.... "People will die without your financial help."
It all can be stressful,.....and draining.

To be sure, we are limited..... We can't give more than we have.
Yet, as I pointed out last Sunday, it helps to know the distinction between giving and donating.

Giving is a release. It is letting go, with no strings attached,... and giving presents a sense of freedom.

A donation is an investment. We are invested in the results, be it a smile or a particular action.

To help differentiate the two, consider the breathing process.
When I exhale I give up the air in my lungs.... I let it go, and believe me,...I really don't want it back. *
It's full of CO2. I want my next breath to be new air, hopefully fresh air,.....and I trust it'll be there.
When I breathe out--letting go of the air I possess, I trust I can breathe in air with oxygen.
It's a beautiful cycle. Plants love CO2, and produce more oxygen than carbon dioxide. A life of giving is lifegiving, and holding your breath is the process of dying.

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Today's giving focus is about giving for justice and giving to defend the weak.

No doubt, donating is involved in this, but giving is a requirement.

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There are numerous Biblical passages that state God's bias and concern for the poor and weak.
There are numerous passages that call us to help the poor and weak / to do justice, and not just rescuing.

The Leviticus verse that was read tells us, with holy forcefulness, to treat people fairly / justly.... to not grant favours or benefits to the wealthy and powerful. In other words,....work to make the playing field level.....and treat all as equals.
We are to do justice. To make conditions just/fair for all.

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This regard / this attitude / this practice is counter to culture....where the powerful and affluent receive special treatment and honoured status.  
The poor and weak pay higher fees, and are often considered inferior and with suspicion.

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The Golden Rule is a wonderful tenet. A common sense approach, so valued that it is prominently featured at the United Nations building in New York City.
Yet, it is only an overview / a beginning point.

Applying the Golden Rule demands interpretation and translation.

Others don't necessary want the same action toward them as we do.

The key is doing towards others in a way that they will receive it positively....as intended. And, figuring that out can be hard work--an exercise in giving.

For ex., you may appreciate a steak dinner as a reward, but don't offer the same to an Hindu.

If you and I were broke and panhandling on the street,...we'd want cash,....not a cold shoulder or a coupon to a grocery store....that in essence states, "I have money; I'm above you and know what's best for you."

Yes,.....I know,....we don't want to enable addictions,.... but if we really cared,....we'd do more. We'd offer real help.....as we would like to have done for us.

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Applying the Golden Rule is a base approach, an important way of doing justice. Yet, it does demand that we respect others,... and work hard to understand how best to give to them so it will be received as intended.

The Golden Rule is a way of giving. True, there is a quid pro quo aspect to it. "I'll be nice to you, so you'll be nice to me, too."

Nevertheless,.....the process begins with the risk of doing the first action..... It's a gift. The first step is a gift.

And, people really do respond to how they are treated.

No matter the merit, call someone a terrorist and then bomb them,...will never, ever yield a positive response.

You and I would not respond positively to such treatment.

Treat someone with suspicion or degrade them, and most will respond as treated,.....unless they are starting the gift of the Golden Rule.

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At the debate early last week, two candidate opposed bombing in Syria, yet neither said why! And, neither one asked if the bombing was working? In fact, it is reported that 30,000 more people have joined ISIS in the last couple months, and thousands more became refugees.

The violence is rendering more violence and victims!

And, the options are NOT bombing or nothing.

There is much that can be done, and it must begin with the gift of grace and kindness.

To end the violence, take away the fuel that feeds that fire.

Demand justice be done by all, and work hard to help people IN Syria and Iraq, and elsewhere, truly help them... with no strings attached.

As Christians,.... we can demonstrate that we believe the power of God's love and grace Can change lives / can make a difference.

People will respond positively when respected and truly offered help,.. just as you and I would respond.

Even so,.....it took decades and decades to produce the mess in the middle East,.....so it may take that long to heal all the pain.

"Oh,..... but we can't wait, and what about all the nasty things ISIS is doing in the mean time?"

First,.....Saudi Arabia has beheaded far more people this past year than ISIS,.....and our response is..????..... "Hey, can we sell you some weapons?"

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Second, the bombing and pouring in more weapons is only making things worse,..... I think a Golden Rule approach will change things in a better direction. It's a big problem, and it will take time to fix it, if we truly care.

And besides, problems can't be destroyed. They must be solved.

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I never was good at physics. I dreaded those questions that asked, "If a train left Toronto travelling at 70 k/h,.... and.... you know what I'm talking about. <

Can you image the grade I'd get if I simply set the test paper on fire?

To be sure, I thought about it.

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Doing Justice / doing peacemaking often requires a "transforming initiative". A transforming initiative is a proactive approach to the Golden Rule.

Here is an example:

President Eisenhower, who had seen the horrors of war and resisted the military industrial establishment, offered back in 1958,...a gift / a transforming initiative: out of the blue, he declared to the world that the U.S. would no longer test nuclear bombs in the atmosphere. He then asked the Soviet Union, if they would do the same,...and Eisenhower's initiative lead to the nuclear test ban treaty.

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Applying the Golden Rule can look like this:

1. Affirm your enemy's valid interests, and pray for him/her. Pray for her/his well being.
2. Talk to the other person or nation and seek an agreement.
3. Associate with the powerless who need justice. Doing that will put things in perspective and grant tremendous insight.
4. Do not return evil with evil, but instead start a transforming initiative. Give to others.....start a Golden Rule pattern.

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I was once asked by a couple who were deeply hurt by what someone did to them. It was a malicious act. They asked me how to respond.

I suggested that they prayer for that person to do well, and to drop off a freshly baked pie at his place. Don't say anything, just give it to him.

Unfortunately, they didn't take my advice,.... and are still plagued with anger and resentment.

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Giving for healing / giving for justice.....is Not easy.

And,.....we can't hide from injustice, and tossing some extra cash to the poor and needy is not enough. Plus, we can Not be the quiet in the land and be in tune with the strong and frequent message in the Bible about doing justice.

We must be gracious, and loving, and live giving.  
Moreover, the burden is on us! We are the affluent and powerful. We have prospered from the system / how things work, and we are called to change the very thing that is keeping us affluent and powerful. We must work for the weak and powerless. We must give up the tools that keep us comfortable and give them to the weak and powerless,.....be it our secure neighbourhoods,... our perks for having money to invest....and maybe our air miles too?

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Maybe.....this Golden Rule thing.....isn't such a good idea?
It sure demands a lot!or does it?
Actually, our world is a much better place when life is in balance.
This is true in nature,.....and with people,.....if we fail to see ourselves as natural / in nature.

Societies are far healthier and happier when there is income parity, and everyone is treated fairly and with respect.
It's so obvious, if we'd place ourselves in the role of the weak and powerless,.....if we were to associate with them.

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I realize I'm sounding harsh, and I don't mean to.  
We are kind and generous people.  
We truly want to help those in need. We want to help the refugees, and they desperately need help. Our nation should open our door wide open to them.  
Rescuing the refugees must happen; however, rescuing by itself is doing Nothing to stop the cause of their plight.  
And, doing nothing to change the system.....is making more refugees to the point where we won't have the time or energy to solve the problem in the first place.

We MUST do more, now. Even small things help.  
How much time and energy does it take to write a note each week to your MP... to the local newspaper... protesting that our country is a major arms dealer / that we are causing refugees with our bombing / that we are not paying fair wages.....we are not treating all people with respect,.... especially the first nations people.....  
How much time..... 10 min.... 15 minutes per week?

Moreover, the risk and demand could increase. There could come a time.....when will need to do civil disobedience for the sake of the weak and powerless.....and,..... under the new laws,.....we could be labelled and treated as terrorists.

What goes around.....comes around.....  
Maybe the Golden Rule does make sense????  
Maybe God was on to something when God called us to give of ourselves to do justice.....to do jubilee?

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We have it pretty good right now,.... most of us do.

Joseph, from long ago, written about in Genesis.....had it pretty good, too. He was liked by the Pharaoh. He and his people the Hebrews prospered.

Yet, the book of Exodus opens by saying, "Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph."

Subsequently, the prosperous Hebrews were resented and put into bondage.

I don't say this make anyone afraid. It's not a threat.

No one applies the Golden Rule out of fear, and selfish motivations are easily exposed. Nevertheless, how we live.....affects life for ourselves and others.

Moreover, We do justice / we do the Golden Rule because we love.

And,... that kind of love only comes from God.

It is World Communion Sunday. As we join Christians around the world partaking of this ritual,.....may we truly take in the love and passion of Christ.

May we commit ourselves to giving this planet a chance to be whole.

May we give as Jesus gave.....

May we be **in salvation**..... living and breathing Life...for all.