

**Do All the Good You Can**  
**A Sermon Delivered on Sunday, February 16, 2014**  
**By the Rev. Donna L Martin**  
**Luke 10:25-37**

Have you ever noticed how children like to receive an allowance, they just don't necessarily want to do all the chores necessary to receive it? Under the allowance system of child rearing, it is not unusual for there to be some haggling or resistance when it is time to do the actual work. Often, when children are asked to do a specific chore or a task – the immediate response, just after they ask "Do I have to?" and you say "What do you think?", is a string of questions related to the parameters surrounding the task. Can I do it later? Do I have to do all of them? Why doesn't so and so have to help me? How long do I have to do it?

It seems like this is sort of what happens in our scripture passage today. A legal expert asks, "What do I have to do to gain eternal life." Jesus says, "What do you think?" The expert replies, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus says, "Good Answer. Do this and you will gain eternal life." But the legal expert then questions the parameters of this answer by asking, "Who is this neighbor that I am to love as much as myself?" In other words to gain eternal life, just who do I have to love and just exactly how much do I have to love them?"

Jesus then tells the story of The Good Samaritan and in it he lays out the parameters of just who is a neighbor and how they are supposed to be loved. A neighbor is anyone in need and we are to love them by literally going the extra mile as the Samaritan did and we are to do whatever we are able to do to help them.

Today we continue our series Three Simple Rules that will change the world based on John Wesley's General Rules – Do no harm, do all the good you can, and stay in love with God. Last week we looked at the rule to do no harm. This week we will be exploring the second rule to do all the good you can. And I believe Wesley, in his day, encountered similar parameter defining questions related to his second rule do all the good you can.

So to make sure people understood the depth of this call to do good, he told his flock they were to:

Do all the good you can.  
By all the means you can.  
In all the ways you can.  
In all the places you can.  
At all the times you can.  
To all the people you can.  
As long as ever you can.

Wesley pretty much covers all the bases, doesn't he? Just in case we are trying to find a loop hole. Who should we do good for? Just our friends? Just people like us? Just worthy people? No. We do good to all the people we can. If we were to ask where should we do good, just in the church or in the community and schools and homes? The answer is that we do good in all the places we can. Do we do good by just giving our money or do give our time and talent and prayers as well? The answer is that we use all the means we can. Are we ever able to stop doing good? The answer is no, we do it as long as we can (<http://www.bellefontefait.com/3-simple-rules-do-good-sermon-for-11122012/>). What Wesley is saying is that the call to love others is extensive, all-inclusive, and encompasses all possible situations.

Now some of you might be thinking, "I already do good. I make a monthly donation to the Secret Society of Saint Stephen. I bring groceries to the church food pantry. I volunteer at the Cold Weather Shelter. I help my neighbors with their yard work and run errands for my aunt who no longer drives. These are all good things and they are worthy of recognition and honor, but there is always more to be done.

Because this rule, like the one before it (to do no harm), is not just something we do on occasion. It is not something we do hoping to get a checkmark or a gold star by our name on the heavenly rolls. It is a higher calling. It is a way of life. It is a way of living that permeates everything we do and everything we are (<http://bradsmith80.blogspot.com/2008/08/three-simple-rules-do-good-sermon.html>). When we live the rule to do good, we are committing ourselves not only to seek good for everyone in our little world, but also everyone in God's world.

This rule, then, should govern all the actions of our lives. It is like a litmus test. Every act we do and every word we say must pass through the love and will of God. It is here that it is measured to determine if its purpose

does indeed bring good and goodness to all it touches. (Rueben P. Job, Three Simple Rules, pg.39).

So again, just as with the rule to do no harm, this lifestyle of doing all the good we can is not just reactive, but it is proactive. In other words, it should not depend on what others do to us or for us. This rule is not: I'll be good to you if you are good to me first, but rather what good can I do in this situation or for this person before they ask and without them proving their worthiness first.

Do some of you remember the movie Pay It Forward? It is a movie about a boy, named Trevor McKinney, who, along with the rest of his social studies class, is given an assignment to come up with an idea that will change the world. Trevor's idea is called "pay it forward." That is, instead of paying a favor back to the one who gave it, you pay a favor forward to someone who needs a favor and then that person pays it forward and so on and so. In young Trevor's view, if each person did this for three people and if each of them paid it forward to three more people, the world would indeed be changed for the better. The three people Trevor chooses are a drug addict, his physically and emotionally scarred school teacher, and a classmate who is constantly bullied by his peers. Trevor's efforts to make good on his idea bring a revolution not only in the lives of himself, his mother and his teacher, but in those of an ever-widening circle of people completely unknown to him (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0223897/plotsummary>). Trevor is an example of how one person can make a difference.

I have met people like this. One was a wealthy friend in seminary who had the means to lease a condo right across from Perkins School of Theology at SMU in Dallas as she was finishing her degree. It was a three bedroom apartment and she was not there all of the time, so she invited other students like me to stay there while we attended classes. When my time staying there came to a close, thank you just did not seem to be enough and the actual cost to stay in such a place was far more than I could afford, so I asked what I could do in return and she told me to pay it forward. She said, "Donna, someday someone is going to need something that you can provide and you are going to remember this day and know that it is time to pay it forward. That is all the repayment I need. Just pay it forward."

Now this woman did good in a big way, but I have also been the recipient of small random acts of kindness that have also made a difference. Like the

lady in Hobby Lobby last week that offered to put my basket up after I had emptied the contents onto the checkout counter. It was a small gesture, but it was a kindness that registered in my heart and made me want to be a little more aware of and nicer to the people around me also.

Then there is the guy who goes through Starbuck's drive thru's doing good. In addition to his own order, he always pays for the coffee of the person in the car behind him. Mister, if you are sitting out there today. I drive a dark green mini cooper and I drink a Grande non-fat extra hot latte. Well, it was worth a try, right?

But you also need to know there are some obstacles to our doing good. And one of those obstacles can be our need or desire to be in control. If I do this good thing, then I want or maybe even expect this particular outcome. Such as, if I give a homeless person some money, I expect them to buy food with it. But it doesn't happen that way all of the time and what I want you to understand is that the response to your acts of goodness is not the point. It is your intention to do good.

You see, our goodness cannot depend on the actions of others. We should do good to all, even the ones who aren't like us, or that we might not understand, or even those we might not like. Because to do good is a universal command which means it is not based on whom we might deem worthy. We do not get to pick and choose who we do goodness to.

And our goodness also cannot be limited to those who will be appreciative of it. Our good and kind acts might be rejected, ridiculed, and misused. The person on the street asking for money may spend what we give them on beer or cigarettes rather than food. But this rule does not take that into account. Our goodness is still good in God's eyes even if it is misused by those who receive it. So our desire to do good should not be limited by the thoughts and actions of others  
(<http://bradsmith80.blogspot.com/2008/08/three-simple-rules-do-good-sermon.html>).

I had an experience recently that helped me to understand I cannot control the outcome of my good works. But first, I have to ask you if you remember the story about the young man walking on a beach that is littered with thousands upon thousands of stranded and dying starfish? The boy begins to throw the starfish back into the sea one-by-one. An observer

asks the boy how he can hope to make a significant difference when there are so many. And the boy replies, "Well, I don't know about that. I just know it makes a difference to this one." It is a well-worn story that appeals to idealistic people like me.

Well, I love that story. It is inspiring, but last month I actually had the opportunity to walk along the beach. And wouldn't you know, on that particular day there were a number of starfish that had washed up on the beach at high tide without a way to get back into the water. Well, of course the story of the boy on the beach came into my mind, so as I came across each starfish on my walk, I carefully picked it up and through it back into the water with, I have to admit, a fair measure of self-satisfaction at the good I was doing. But you know what? The reality was that some of the star fish were clearly past saving, and I am sure I found some of the same ones that I threw back out into the water on the beach again on my return trip. I didn't find as many as threw out, but some of them had washed up again without a doubt.

My point in telling you this story is not to depress you and it is certainly not to say, "don't bother trying to do good," but it is to say there is a profound reality in doing good and that is this: the result is not under our control and the outcome may not be what we expect or desire, but that does not absolve us from the command to love our neighbor or Wesley's rule to do good and it does not diminish God's reward when we obey.

I know this does not sit well with some of you. It doesn't fit with our sense of fairness, but do you know why another's person's response should not limit our good intentions? It is because the good we do is not a response to the world, it is a response to the grace of God that we have received (<http://bradsmith80.blogspot.com/2008/08/three-simple-rules-do-good-sermon.html>). God has done and continues to do such great things for us. We cannot hope to count the blessings we receive because there are has numerous as the stars and all in the starfish in the sea. And I might add, there are times when we have not been all that appreciative, but God keeps sending us grace upon grace and blessing upon blessing, so we respond to God's love and blessings by loving and blessing others.

So as mature Christians, let's not be like children, seeking ways to get around Jesus' commandment to love our neighbor or Wesley's rule to do good. But instead let us live lives in which we:

Do all the good we can.  
By all the means we can.  
In all the ways we can.  
In all the places we can.  
At all the times we can.  
To all the people we can.  
As long as ever we can.

Amen.