

***The Method Sermon Series:***  
**“DO GOOD”**

**Galatians 6:7-10**

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**Gal. 6:6**] Let him who is taught the word share all good things with him who teaches. [7] Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. [8] For he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption; but he who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. [9] And let us not grow weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we do not lose heart. [10] So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

Doing good has finally gone prime time. It has it's own show now. It's called the *Big Give Away*. Its make use of a familiar formula, almost like a frantic cross of *The Amazing Race* and *The Apprentice*, except with needy people thrown in the mix. Five teams of two are given \$2500, a clue and the photo and name of a person in need. The “Givers” then have five days to change their “Givees” lives. Each week, the weakest Big Giver is eliminated as determined by a panel of judges, and at the end of the eight-week series, the person who gives away the most wins.

These teams have done good things. So far, a homeless single mother with two teenage kids got a paid up apartment, a car and some cash to get her on her feet. A woman widowed when her husband was killed in a robbery got money to pay off her mortgage and scholarships for her two little girls to a local Parochial school. But as one person said, “Is there not something strange about making doing good into a competition where there are winners and losers?”

Whatever you think of the show as entertainment, it is good to do good for other people. Any effort towards that end should be applauded. But for us who follow Jesus, doing good is not a competition, it is not something we do in order to win something in return. It is something we do because of what we have already won – the grace and redemption won for us by Jesus Christ. As recipients of that free gift of grace, we are called to a life of loving as Christ has loved us.

The book of Acts contains a simple but powerful portrait of Jesus when it tells, “[H]ow God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good....” (Acts 10). He went about doing good. In 3 John, we are urged not to imitate evil but imitate good. The one who does good is of God. And in that part of the letter to the Galatians that we read this morning, Paul writes, “As we have opportunity, let us do good to all people.” Doing good is part of the DNA of what it means to follow the One who himself went about doing good.

It is understandable that John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Movement, would make this one of his General Rules. Last week, we talked about the first rule for those who want to be faithful to the way of Jesus as “doing no harm” – harm to ourselves, to others, to the social fabric of our lives together. But the Christian life is more than simply avoiding evil.

When I was a kid growing up, there was a little ditty we used to say that went, “I don't smoke, I don't chew, and I don't go out with girls that do.” To be a Christian was mostly couched in terms of “do not.” The stress was on the prohibitions, the negatives.

There are things that we should avoid to be faithful to Christ. But on the other side of the ledger, there is the positive command that we do good. Faithfulness to Christ calls not just for avoidance but for performance. The point is not to hide away and keep ourselves pure from the world but to engage the world for good. As we have opportunity we are to do good to all people.

Wesley had his own way of saying this:

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,  
As long as ever you can..

Following Jesus means doing good to all people.

From the beginning then, doing good has been a vital part of the Methodist “method.” Ours has been an activist approach to faith, seeking the transformation of individuals, but also the transformation of society.

All this might sound obvious. “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” It’s the Golden Rule. We have heard it all our lives. But the rule to do good is problematic for some people. For some, it is problematic theologically. As Protestants, we are heirs of the dictum: *sola gratia*. We are saved by grace alone and not by our good works. We cannot earn our salvation by racking up brownie points with God. Like we earn a paycheck by putting in the required hours. Salvation comes to us as a gift; a gift won for us in Christ’s life, death and resurrection. It is a gift that we receive by faith.

The problem is that this great doctrine leaves the whole idea of good works – of doing good – dangling. It makes it unnecessary, or at least of lesser concern in the Christian life. Finally, it can lead to a kind of cheap grace in which faith is separated from discipleship. It can become, kind of, self-serving – good is what’s good for us.

Wesley himself called faith without works the “grand pest of Christianity.” He believed firmly in the doctrine that we are saved by grace; by the free gift of God in Christ. But genuine faith evidences itself in good works. These works are the fruits of our relationship to God – the product of grace, not the cause of it. Doing good is the result of living in relationship with the One who himself went about doing good. As 3 John puts it, “The one who does good is of God.”

It is the way we imitate Christ – making his ways our ways. We do it for love. Not in order that God will love us more. We do it because we are already loved. Through the Spirit, God is at work in our lives conforming us to the likeness of Christ. Faith and the ministry of love are all of a single piece.

But there is also the problem that the phrase “do-gooder” doesn’t play well in our society. When you hear the phrase “do-gooder,” you probably think of someone like the Church Lady on *Saturday Night Live*. Someone who is kind of sanctimonious and self righteous, a busy body poking her nose into other people’s business, someone intent on forcing her ideas of rightness on everyone else. A do-gooder is someone with a condescending “I am better than you” attitude .

Do-gooder is also used to describe people who are seen as being out of touch with reality. People whose actions are seen as doing more harm than good. We kind of bristle at people telling us what to do, even when – especially when – they tell us it’s for our own good. You mind your business, I will mind mine.

And it is true, that sometimes under the guise of doing good, we can cause harm. During the inquisition, people were tortured...for the own good...to save their souls. Children are sometimes abused by parents who tell them it’s...for their own good. Sometimes the good we seek is our own good. Forcing our views on others becomes little more than a way of making us feel more powerful. We do good to prop up ourselves – to make ourselves look good in the eyes of others.

Paul tells the Galatians that, “If we live by the Spirit, we must be guided by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited.” There must be a kind of humility to our words and actions. Self-righteousness does not serve the cause of Christ. The good we do must be for its own sake, and not ours. We do it because it is the right thing to do – the good thing to do.

In the movie *Radio*, a high school football coach encounters a developmentally challenged young man known as “Radio” (Cuba Gooding Jr.), whom he takes under his wing. The coach invites Radio to team practice sessions. He drives him back to his home. He invites him to school to be a part of a class. In one scene, Radio's mother and Coach Jones are seated at her kitchen table having a talk.

Mother: "You know coach, it wasn't that long ago, I see you drive up in that truck of yours and be wonderin' why you're doin' what you're doin'. So, why are you doin' what you're doin'?"

Coach: "I figure it's the right thing to do."

Mother: "But there's a whole lot out there that's right. Don't mean we always do it."

To do good means that we do the right thing. Even, if sometimes, it can be misunderstood. Even, if sometimes, it will mean opposition. It requires a certain humility. “We must test our work,” Paul says. But we also need a kind of holy boldness in doing good.

Even though it meant opposition, Jesus healed on the Sabbath, he ate with tax collectors and sinners. When challenged, he took the side of children and women. He allowed himself to be touched by the untouchables. He did the *right thing*, even when others thought it was the wrong thing.

To live in the way of Jesus doesn’t mean we are goody two shoes, keeping ourselves pure. It means rolling up our sleeves and going to work. This is a proactive way of life which actively seeks to live the law of love. Which dares, in any situation, to ask: not what is the popular thing to do, or what is the easy thing to do, or what is the expedient thing to do, or what is the least risky thing to do. But, what is the *good* thing, the *right* thing to do?

As we have opportunity, do good to all people. Wesley lived by this rule his entire life. Although he made lots of money through the sale of his books and writings, he died almost penniless because he gave it all away.

At the age of 81, he writes in his dairy:

“At this season we usually distribute coals and bread among the poor of the Society. But I now considered, they wanted clothes, as well as food. So on this, and the four following days, I walked through the town and begged two hundred pounds in order to clothe them that needed it most. But it was hard work as most of the streets were filled with melting snow, which often lay ankle deep; so that my feet were steeped in snow water nearly from morning till evening. I held it out pretty well till Saturday evening; but I was laid up with a violent flux.”

At an advanced age, when he could have rested on his laurels, Wesley was still vitally engaged doing good at risk to his own health. It was not a rule so much as it was a way of life – the way of Jesus. Since that day, followers of Wesley have taken this rule to heart.

Mary Bethune was the last of 17 children, and the first free child in her family. Her parents had been born as slaves. As a child, Mary picked cotton and could not read and write. She was given a chance at education in a church-sponsored school five miles from her home. She walked back and forth for 10 years. Later, she received a scholarship to attend college. As an adult, she decided to open her own school. With exactly \$1.50, she began with five girls. Eventually, her school became Bethune-Cookman College of Daytona Beech. We had their choir sing for us here just a few weeks ago. Mary did all this because of the little Methodist church where she learned to love God. “God made me a missionary to people of all races.”

Several years ago, a young man in this congregation shared with me his dream of doing something for others. He had a good job but he felt God calling him to do good. In his spare time, he began to collect used furniture to give to people who had lost their homes. The Community Furniture Bank is now a full-time ministry.

I was talking to one of our members this past week, who lost her brother after a long illness. She told me, “I know people have been praying for him. And that has been a source of strength, but the strangest thing happened. On the day we heard of his death, I received a beautiful card from someone in the church. It was like a God thing to get that word of comfort on that day.”

We could go on and on with stories of what it means to do good. We don’t have to wait to be invited on a TV game show to do good.

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,  
As long as ever you can.