

The Rhodium Rule
Exodus 3:1-6 **Luke 6:27-38**

When I was young, I learned something called the “Golden Rule”. You know the one, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” It seemed, well, “nice”. I wasn’t sure what it had to do with everyday life, especially a day in school, but It was important, why else call it the Golden Rule?

But that was then, and this is now. Gold, while still valuable, isn’t NEAR as precious as some other rare metals. In fact, rhodium is now considered the most precious metal of all, more than twice as valuable as gold and 154 times the value of silver.

I think it is time to allow for civil inflation and revalue this critical bit of teaching from Jesus. In the Word for today, we encounter the most precious (and demanding) teachings of all, the rhodium rule. You heard the words just a few moments ago, but let’s listen to the words again:

“But I say to you that listen, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹ If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. ³⁰ Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. ³¹ Do to others as you would have them do to you.”

Have you ever really thought about what that means? What it implies as far as the way we, Christians, are to live our lives? Have you ever considered how truly radical that is, compared to the teachings of the world around us?

And while we are on the subject, have you ever heard either of these readings?

“Thou shalt not avenge nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”

Or how about:

“And do good to kinsfolk, orphans, the poor, the neighbor who is near of kin, the neighbor who is a stranger, the companion by your side”

If you did not recognize the last two, the first was from the Torah, the book of the Old Testament we call Leviticus (or Law) and the second was from the Quran.

They seem to share a common message, don't they? Which leads me to wonder, why is this so hard? Why is it that those who profess a belief in one of the great mono-theistic faiths of the world today can't seem to get it right?

Jesus went on to say:

³² "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³ If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴ If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. ³⁵ But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return.^[a]

Hang on...Why in the world would anyone want to do that? It makes no sense! It's common sense to care for those who care for you...to support those who support you. But others? Especially enemies? Ridiculous!

However, Jesus answered the question before we even asked:

Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for He is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. ³⁶ Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

But it doesn't stop there:

³⁷ "Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; ³⁸ give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back."

This is our Gospel reading for today...perhaps the most valuable rule of faithful living. Please note what it is not: It is NOT a plan for self-enrichment. It is NOT a way to ensure that people respect or love you. It is NOT good, common sense.

It IS the direction of our Lord and Savior.

Today's Gospel continues Luke's Sermon on the Plain with this teaching requiring unconditional, unlimited love.

Now please understand this, as it crucial to understanding Jesus' teaching: The love that discipleship in the kingdom of God requires, that is consistent in the behavior of Jesus' earthly pilgrimage, extends to all persons, regardless of merit or deservedness. We don't get to pick and choose who DOES deserve this love and who falls short.

The love of the disciple goes out to all, even the enemy, even to those who do us wrong, even to those who curse us and those who do us damage.

This is the radical stuff of the Gospel: This unlimited love, this "agape" love does not come from a moral "should" but from a holy, enlightened view of all people that only God can give us. This is love to be expressed even when there is no loving response...when the answer to the question, "What's in it for me" is a resounding, "nothing"!

I grew up in a Christian home. My parents were the type that only went to church when the doors were open...by which I mean, we were there a LOT of the time. Well, until I was told that I was unwelcome and my parents were unimportant, but that's a story for a different time.

Along the way I was taught to live a moral life, to respect others, to mind my manners and to "do to others as I would have them do to me."

HOWEVER

I learned in school that things don't always work that way. I first learned that by way of a boy named Mike. Mike was the school bully and I was the target for much of his sport. His friends loved to come and watch him pick on his victim of the day, and I seemed to be the most likely victim, at least it felt that way.

I had been taught in Sunday school to turn the other cheek, which was hard to match against a regular case of smack down. Pretty soon, others...friends and even my father told me I needed to stand up for myself, pay back the hits slug for slug. After all, "only sissies don't defend themselves". Pretty soon, I took all that to heart and, one day I decided to do just that... "stand up for myself".

During that tussle, I learned several things:

A longer reach gives even a tall, skinny kid an advantage.

I was stronger than I knew

And that when a bully goes to push you down so he can kick you, if you pull him down at the same time and land on him, it's pretty easy to break his arm.

I also learned that the satisfaction of "winning" faded fast. There had to be a better way, especially if I didn't want to become another Mike.

"Love your enemies and do good to those who hate you." Can any of us come close to fulfilling this expectation? If we want this rhodium rule to be more than just a well-known teaching, then we must ask God to help us take steps in its direction. It's the only way we have a chance to break the cycle of being the victim or being Mike.

Next then comes the practical question: This all sounds good as a sermon, but what about tomorrow, this week, next week? What are we supposed to do with all this?

The first step involves praying...praying for those who you fear, those you dislike and those who are your enemies. It's hard to hate anyone for whom we pray.

Second, we need to take the time to reflect on WHY we feel like someone is our enemy. Is it because of a perceived threat? Jealousy? Abuse? Insecurity? Violence? Cultural or political difference? Crime? An honest reflection helps us begin to understand ourselves as well as to apply this rhodium rule.

Third, what are realistic steps we can take to bridge the gap? What is both doable and within my time and resource limits? How can I become an agent of change?

Friends, as followers of Christ, as coworkers in Christ's mission, we are called to imitate Jesus' radical, all-encompassing love. We don't always succeed. All of us fall short. But the potential of failure is not a just reason to ignore this rule.

Why bother? Why ignore the wisdom of the world?
Do you remember how the scripture ends?

³⁷ *“Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; ³⁸ give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”*

I couldn't have put it better myself.