

3 Simple Rules

Methodist Roots: “3 Simple Rules”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – July 14 2024

8th Sunday after Pentecost

Readings: Deuteronomy 6:1-9; Romans 14:13-23; Luke 6:27-38

Reflection: Psalm 36

Greeting: The Lord calls us to serve in love as a sign of our desire to be saved. We do this by following the example set by Christ our Lord. Let us do no harm to others and avoid every kind of evil. Let us do good for others, showing mercy and justice. Let us demonstrate our love for God by following him in all that we are and in all that we do. Praise the Lord!

Prayer: Lord, may you remind us of your presence day by day. May we follow you in all that we are and all that we do, remembering your steadfast love that is always there for us. We thank you that you are with us in all things, and that you have brought us together in this place so that we may sing your praises and glorify your name. Heavenly Father, watch over us. Let your Holy Spirit guide us and lead us. And may we celebrate the love and mercy found in the life, death, and resurrection of your Son, Jesus Christ, our rock and our redeemer. By your love, it is in his name we pray this day. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 36

Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds. Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains; your judgments are like the great deep; you save humans and animals alike, O Lord. How precious is your steadfast love, O God! All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights. For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light. O continue your steadfast love to those who know you and your salvation to the upright of heart! (Psalm 36:5-10 NRSVue)*

We read the words of Psalm 36 and hear of celebrating God’s love in our lives. That the steadfast love and faithfulness of the Lord will carry us over any trouble and help us to find rest. That we should celebrate that God is with us in every step we take. What do you do when you feel overwhelmed? Do you turn to God in prayer? Who can you lift up in your prayers this week? How can you reach out to share the love of Christ with them? How can we live out our journey in Christ together?

Prayer: God, you are there for us before we know that we need you. Help us to remember your love as we seek to live in peace, helping one another. May you help us this day that we may remember your steadfast love and faithfulness. We come before you now with the joys

and concerns that we share on this day. We turn to you now with the celebrations that we have spoken together. We turn to you with the worries that we have lifted up with each other. We also bring before you the silent troubles and triumphs that we hold within. We pray that you will lift us up in love that we may know your strength. Help us in our laughter and our tears and guide us in sorrow and rejoicing. And may we join together joyfully by faith to celebrate your presence with us in love, forever and always. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading is from Deuteronomy chapter 6, verse 1 through 9.

“Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the ordinances—that the Lord your God charged me to teach you to observe in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy, so that you and your children and your children’s children may fear the Lord your God all the days of your life and keep all his decrees and his commandments that I am commanding you, so that your days may be long. Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe them diligently, so that it may go well with you and so that you may multiply greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, has promised you. “Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:1-9 NRSVue)*

Our next reading is from Romans chapter 14, verse 13 through 23.

Let us therefore no longer pass judgment on one another, but resolve instead never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother or sister. I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who considers it unclean. If your brother or sister is distressed by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died. So do not let your good be slandered. For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. The one who serves Christ in this way is acceptable to God and has human approval. Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong to make someone stumble by what you eat; it is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that makes your brother or sister stumble. Hold the conviction that you have as your own before God. Blessed are those who do not condemn themselves because of what they approve. But those who have doubts are condemned if they eat because they do not act from faith, for whatever does not proceed from faith is sin. (Romans 14:13-23 NRSVue)*

Our final reading is from Luke chapter 6, verse 27 through 38.

[Jesus said] "But I say to you who are listening: Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you; bless those who curse you; pray for those who mistreat you. 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. Give to everyone who asks of you, and if anyone takes away what is yours, do not ask for it back again. Do to others as you would have them do to you. "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive payment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. Instead, love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. "Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; 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."

(Luke 6:27-38 NRSVue)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

This week marks the beginning of a new series that I am calling Methodist Roots. As part of this series, we will be looking at some of the foundations of United Methodism, and we begin with three rules of John Wesley. He uses slightly thicker language, but Bishop Ruben P Job did a wonderful job of summarizing those rules for us into what are commonly known as the 3 Simple Rules. They are "Do No Harm" "Do Good" and "Stay in Love with God." These three are simplified down so that they are easy to remember and easy to understand. Each reading today corresponds with a different rule. We begin with our first rule, "Do No Harm." It is first for a reason. To live out the other two rules, we first must not be doing harm to a neighbor. If we are doing harm, we cannot do good. If we are doing harm, we cannot stay in love with God and let that love grow. So, we first do no harm. We hear of this idea in Paul's letter to the church in Rome. Paul says that we should not be a stumbling block to one another, harming each other in what we do and what we choose not to do. The example that Paul gives is that he doesn't think that anything he eats will make him unclean. But he also recognizes that others may still view some foods as unclean. To avoid harming his neighbor, he says it is better to refrain for them than to destroy their faith. Paul is advocating here for doing no harm to a neighbor. That if your actions will cause someone else to stumble, then you should see if there's something you can do to help your neighbor instead. We might have expected Paul to not care what others think since he himself feels no food is unclean. But he takes into consideration the feelings of those around him. He questions if he might be doing harm with what he chooses to eat around them. Wesley says that we should avoid all sorts of evil to avoid doing harm to a neighbor. This would include the obvious things like not fighting or cheating them, but also the less obvious things. We have to think of the consequences of our actions and how they may cause others to stumble. When we are being selfish, we only think about how our actions will impact us. But when we think about others, we might recognize how we might bring harm to another. It could

be as simple as showing off, making others self-conscious and hurting their faith. It is easy to put a stumbling block in someone else's path. A good way to avoid doing harm is to treat others how you want to be treated. Empathy is one of the greatest tools that we have in being able to live out our journey in Christ. Because good intentions can go wrong if we don't stop to think about how they actually will impact another person. This is why the first step is for us to actively do no harm.

Once we have taken that first step and have avoided doing harm to another, we then turn to doing good. That we should act with kindness, mercy, and love in how we treat each other. This brings us to our Gospel reading from Luke. Jesus tells us that we should love our enemies, do good to those who hate us, bless those who would curse us, and pray for those who mistreat you. That we should not treat people in response to their actions, but we should treat others how we would want to be treated. That we should give to those who ask and expect nothing in return. Jesus talks about how doing good is going above and beyond what the world expects. Instead of just doing good to those who already treat us with kindness and do good for us, we should go beyond that. That we are called to follow the example that Christ set for us. Christ gave himself for all people. On the cross, he forgave those who crucified him. He did not call for vengeance, but he called for mercy and love. When we follow that example, we reach out to do good for others the best that we can, in all the ways we can, doing all the good that we can. That we help each other so that we can do more together. We assist each other as the body of Christ. That the measure we give is the measure we get back. That we shouldn't expect more than we are willing to do. That if you want to avoid judgement, do not judge. If you want to avoid condemnation, do not condemn others. Instead, we should act in love. We should take up our cross to go and serve by doing all the good that we can in this world. That when we do good, we share the love of God with those around us so that we may better love our neighbor as ourselves.

When we do this, we grow in love with God. That brings us to our third rule and our reading from Deuteronomy. That we should love God with our whole being. That love should be marked on our doors and held up as a sign. That it should be on our hands and our foreheads, so we do not forget. We should repeat it to our children so they will know of God's love. God's love should forever be in our hearts and on our lips. That God's love should be the mark of who we are. That we should stay in love with God. And this third rule is worded a little differently than what Wesley originally wrote. Wesley said we should be "attending upon all the ordinances of God." He talks about being in worship, sharing in communion, prayer, and other ways we experience God's love. But it comes down to the way we experience and reflect the steadfast love of the Lord. We do this by celebrating God's love when we come together as the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood, sharing in God's love and grace. That when we read what Deuteronomy is saying, we are called to remember God's love and mercy for us. We are called to share that love and mercy with others. That we remember it when we pray, both together and alone. That we remember God is with us. We remember Christ's sacrifice so that

we would understand the depths of the love God has for us. That we remember God's love when we remember the guidance of the Holy Spirit, there to lead us day by day so that we may grow in love with God. That we are here in this place today to celebrate God's love that we may grow together in that love.

And these three simple rules are cyclical. Because they feed into each other so that we can keep growing as we follow Christ. Because first, we do no harm. We make sure our actions will not do harm to another. That we will not be doing harm to the people we should be helping. By making sure that we are doing no harm the best that we can, this enables us to focus on doing good. Not just what sounds good, but doing good because we took the time to reflect on what would actually be a sign of love and compassion. That we used empathy to understand others and acted with it to help them. That we are able to do good for our neighbor, offering our support, our time, our talents, and our gifts, so that we may do good in the name of Christ. And when we do good, it helps us to grow in love. We grow in the love that we show to our neighbor so that we may more deeply love our neighbor as ourselves. When we do that, we grow in love with God. That as we act in the community, we grow in understanding the love that God has for all people. And this inspires us to a more thankful worship as we devote ourselves to all of God's teachings, remembering all that God has done, is doing, and will do. That we recall God's steadfast love that endures forever. And as we grow in our love for God, it inspires us to go out and do even more. To be even more diligent with not causing harm to other. To be more fervent in going out and seeking ways to that we can do good. And that because of those actions, we grow that much deeper in love with God. When we enter this cycle, it constantly pushes us forward, refining our faith. It drives us forward in love, increasing our mercy and our desire for justice. It helps us to better understand all that Christ is for us today.

So, I ask that we all remember these three simple rules. Do no harm. Do good. Stay in love with God. Let them be a path forward so that we may experience the constant guidance of the Holy Spirit as we strive to do no harm to a neighbor. That we may imitate Christ in how we act in this world, doing all the good that we can for as many people as we can. That we do so by serving humbly with love and compassion. And that we be reminded of the love of our Heavenly Father in all that we do, growing in the love because we remember God's love for us everywhere and always. Keep these rules close to you so that we may all grow together in love. That it makes our path forward in God's mercy and love that much clearer. That each and every day we may strive to do better, to be better, and to love better. And that as we follow these rules, we grow in the love of God and our neighbor, celebrating all that God is for us this very day. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and

lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – Methodist Roots

We begin a series that looks at our Methodist heritage. "Methodist Roots" will be a six week look at the way that we follow Christ as United Methodists. We will be discussing the way that we live our lives in Christ, how we study, and how we interact with each other.

7/14: 3 Simple Rules

7/21: Reading Scripture

7/28: Grace for All

8/4: Good Works

8/11: Think and Let Think

8/18: The Individual in the Community

Neoga Grace UMC

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Neoga, IL 62447

(217)895-2809

Worship 10:30am

Toledo UMC

Madison & Ohio St

PO Box 267

Toledo, IL 62468

Worship 8:15am

Etna UMC

2799 Etna Rd

Mattoon, IL 61938

Worship 9:30am

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