

SERMON – Feb. 10, 2007

Luke 6 “Rule of Gold”

G&P

**From his hospital bed on the eve of open heart surgery, Pastor Bruce McIver asked his cardiologist, Dr. Dudley Johnson, "Can you fix my heart?"**

**The physician, known for being short and to the point, said, "Sure." Then he quickly turned and walked away.**

**Following the 12-hour surgery, McIver asked Johnson, "In light of the blocked arteries that I had when I checked into the hospital, how much blood supply do I now have?"**

**"All you'll ever need," replied the terse surgeon, who again ended the conversation by walking away.**

**Upon his discharge from the hospital, McIver's wife, Lawanna, asked the doctor, "What about my husband's future quality of life?"**

**Johnson paused and then said, "I fixed his heart; the quality of his life is up to him."**

Bruce McIver, "Stories I Couldn't Tell While I Was a Pastor" (Guideposts, 1991), p. 244-247; submitted by Hugh Poland, Kingwood, Texas

How shall we live our lives? What is quality of life for each of us?

Today, Jesus teaches us in the Beatitudes according to St. Luke. And in classic Luke style, Jesus is also the prophet who with his words catches the attention of all who in the crowd, from the very poor peasant to the very rich merchant. He starts with the poor and he blesses them with the joy of God. A joy that only God can give. He blesses those who are hungry for they have not been forgotten by God. He blesses those who weep because of the pain of life, that weeping will be turned into laughter. He blesses those who dare to follow him and pay the price of martyrdom, Joy will be in you as the Spirit fills your heart.

Then he turns to those who are rich, who have all that they will ever need. Warning to you who are rich in material things, you have your reward. Warning to you who are full in the stomach, for you will be hungry. Warning to you who are able to laugh now, for there will be a time of weeping. Warning to you for those who speak well of you, for they did the same to the false prophets.

Sounds like the good doctor who talked to his patient with a word of responsibility and warning. It got his attention as Jesus got the attention of those who stood on that plain of grass in full bloom.

But Jesus, now that he has their attention, he goes into how we live in the joy of God, whether we are poor or rich, laughing or crying.

Now listen to his words:

But I say to you that listen:

**Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek. Offer the other one as well. For anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you. If anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you.**

Jesus brings in a new way of living, a new way of looking at the world. It is not to be a patsy and fall to the evil in the world, but a way to challenge it at its core. The world works like this: an eye for eye and a tooth for a tooth, until we are all blind and toothless! We have always been a nation that must have an enemy. For some of you it was the Germans, Italians and Japanese in the middle of the last century. In my generation, it was the Soviet Union as we learned what to do in case of a nuclear war. The cold war was anything but cold. We learned to hate our enemy as we crawled under our desks during the air raid drills at our school. Crawl under wooden desks in case of a nuclear war! Wood burns, this was not good. The enemy was faceless.

Today, since 911, we hate Al Qaida. We hate terrorists, they are the enemy. But I think that Jesus knows human nature better than we do. For when we hate one group, that hate does not stay in that particular box. You see, Jesus knows that hate is pervasive. Hate knows no boundaries, it fills the heart with prejudice. It oozes out of the box and touches all.

I am just amazed at the hateful rhetoric already being volleyed at Sen. Barack Obama. A conservative christian, raised in a christian home, he has been accused of being muslim. He was been accused of not being black because he not the descendant of West African people who were brought to this country for slavery. A well known talk show host calls him a Halfrican American.

What hate does is that it may start with those who are faceless who put fear into our hearts, but it soon finds its way into our everyday conversation about those we do not like in our little circles, be they black, white, red, yellow, gay or straight.

Jesus gives us a third way to go, the first way is to attack ones enemy, the second way is to surrender to the enemy, but the third way is God's way. Love the enemy. Turn the enemy into a friend. Who would ever imagine that President Reagan would sit down with the Soviet Premier in the mid

1980's and they would welcome each other as friends. Not in my life time, but it happened.

For Jesus is not advocating that we fall down and accept abuse from someone else, rather he calls us to do the radical thing and pray for that person. In so doing one takes into them the power of God to heal and forgive and so not have that hate be apart of our life. This is the key. Whether it is giving ones coat or giving away food, it is not to be the victim but rather to take on the power of God in Jesus Christ and BE Jesus to that other person. For they will either become a friend or have nothing to do with you, because you are in the power of the Holy Spirit who leads us to take the 3<sup>rd</sup> way of the Cross for the sake of the world.

**I believe that the real difference in the American church is not between conservatives and liberals, fundamentalists and charismatics, nor between Republicans and Democrats. The real difference is between the aware and the unaware.**

**When somebody is aware of that love—the same love that the Father has for Jesus—that person is just spontaneously grateful. Cries of thankfulness become the dominant characteristic of the interior life, and the byproduct of gratitude is joy. We're not joyful and then become grateful—we're grateful, and that makes us joyful.**

**—Brennan Manning**

"The Dick Staub Interview: Brennan Manning on Ruthless Trust," ChristianityToday.com (12-10-02)

This joy moves us to be Jesus in the world and change it one person at a time. Jesus shows us by his ministry how to live in that joy. For where ever he went he dared to see the people that no one else could. He saw the blind beggar at the side of the road and stopped to talk with him. Healing was the result. A woman who had been bleeding for 12 years reached through the crowd and touched him. She was healed as he felt the power leave him. He looked for her, not to chew her out. Rather he not only wanted to restore her health, but also her self esteem so that her heart was healed as well.

Jesus leads us with the joy of life. Think about it. Everything he does and says has at its foundation the very joy of God that was present at the moment of creation. A joy that moves through the hate of this world and dissolves it. Because joy is the very power of God. It was joy of creation that moved Jesus to embrace the cross so that this joy might be restored in the hearts of all of God's children. It was the joy of the Spirit that moves Jesus to raise the child up into his arms with a joyful laugh and with a great smile teaches that one must have the joy of the child in order to get into the kingdom of God.

In this same Joy, Jesus embraces the disciples in the dark room on the night of Easter. A joy that sends them out into the world to tell all about the grace of God. A joy that changes hate into love. For Jesus gives us that word:

“Do to others what you would have them to do you.”

We learned it as the golden rule. It is not some lofty rule that you cannot do. It calls for kindness and joy in our relationships. If you don't want to be hit, then don't hit. I learned that from my mom. Once we internalize such a way of living, it becomes a part of our very nature to be kind even the face of the hate of this world.

“The Angel of Kindness” by Linda Knight, Woodslee, Ontario, Canada.

It was only a hug, a seemingly insignificant hug, and yet its gentle power helped to make a miracle happen.

The woman was new to the church. All Linda did was talk with her after the worship service, and give a kind word of welcome. She had been living in Canada for 3 years now, having escaped an abusive relationship in South Africa. Linda remembers commenting on the beauty of her accent as they spoke that day. She had shared the story of her escape from her homeland. At the airport, friends and neighbors had rallied around her, shielding her and her children from her outraged husband and the local police as they tried to stop her from boarding the plane to freedom.

That day at church, Linda gave her a bible and her phone number. She told the woman if she needed to talk to give her a call. That was when Linda hugged her. And they departed company.

Three weeks later, the call came. At the first sound of Linda's voice, she hung up. But she said that something nudge her to call again. Thank heaven she did. The woman was beside herself with worry and grief. Her 17 year old, special needs son couldn't handle the cultural differences between their homeland and his adopted country or the taunts and the ridicule of classmates. Her own life since coming to Canada had been equally challenging. She was paralyzed by fear.

Then she remembered the hug of a stranger. A hug that meant the world to her. The warmth of that touch was like Jesus telling her that all would be okay. . They talked for a long time on the phone that night. It was the beginning of a long friendship.

One day she phoned to say that she had a gift she wanted to give to Linda. There was a catch to the gift, though. Linda had to promise that she would give it away. Her curiosity was piqued. Linda waited anxiously for her to arrive.

She gave Linda a beautiful china angel. Its arms were outstretched, and it held a tiny dove in its right hand. It was “The angel of Kindness” given in appreciation of random acts of kindness. It had been given to her sometime ago by a person she had once helped. The woman told Linda that her hug

and phone number had quite literally saved her life. Now the Angel of Kindness was hers for the moment. When Linda experienced a random act of Kindness it would be time for the angel to take flight again.

No one is sure where the angel originated, but we know where its going, from one act of kindness to another. We never know when the Lord will use us. Sometimes, we do not even see the way He uses us. Yet these simple acts can be the glue that will hold life together. An act as simple as a hug.

**Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.**

Add this to your mission and you will have quality of life!

AMEN