

Epiphany 7C  
Luke 6:27-38  
February 23, 2025

“The Golden Rule”  
Rev. Dr. Brandon S. Perrine

*‘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 also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them 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 hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But 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 God is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as God 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.’*

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We all know the Golden Rule. It says, “do to others as you would have them do to you.” The problem is, I don't have fancy cars, millions of dollars, and lake-front properties to hand out...<sup>1</sup> Joking aside, the Golden

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<sup>1</sup>“Golden Rule Jokes,” Upjokes.com: <https://upjoke.com/golden-rule-jokes>.

Rule has been the backbone of Christian ethics since it became a religion in its own right. And some version of The Rule is found in virtually every religion and philosophy dating back to the time of the ancient Egyptians, 2,000 years before Jesus. It's really the backbone of all ethics—the Ethic of Reciprocity—and for good reason. But The Rule, as important as it is, is just one of the 14 unique mandates Jesus gives his listeners in this morning's text from Luke's gospel, a continuation of his Sermon on the Plain. He also instructs:

1. Love your enemies
2. Do good to those who hate you
3. Bless those who curse you
4. Pray for those who abuse you
5. Offer the other cheek
6. Not withhold even your shirt
7. Give to everyone who begs from you
8. Do not try to recover property that's been taken from you
9. Do good and lend, expecting nothing in return
10. Do not judge
11. Be merciful
12. Do not condemn
13. Forgive

Friends, let's call it what it is: this is a really hard list to follow—an impossible list to follow, at least all the time. As it is with much that Jesus said, some of these instructions do require background. For example, the admonition to turn the other cheek requires contextualization.

In the ancient world, any beating would have been done with the right hand, as the left was reserved for toilet tasks. As we established last week, Jesus was speaking primarily to oppressed people. Any blow they could expect to receive would be a backhanded blow to the left cheek. An oppressor never struck an inferior with the palm of their hand—that sort of fighting occurred only among social equals. What Jesus was saying is

that if someone backhands you on your left cheek, turn and make them slap or strike you on your right cheek as an equal.

Similarly, the admonition to give not your coat, but your shirt as well, requires contextualization. In the ancient world, a person's coat could be taken in partial payment of a debt, leaving a poor person to sleep outside or in a barn with not even a coat to keep warm. Since Jesus was speaking primarily to oppressed people, it's safe to assume that some of them had lost coats before. What Jesus was saying is that if someone sues you for your coat, give them the rest of your garments too—to strip naked and expose what the system is really doing to you. These were acts of resistance.

But, his words about loving and praying for enemies, mercy, forgiveness, and not judging are pretty straightforward. He meant what he said, as he said it. No contextualization needed. Truth be told, though, these additional admonitions really can be summarized by The Rule: treat others the way we would like to be treated. Today, though, I'd like to offer just the tiniest of tweaks to the Golden Rule. I know that it's asking a lot, but at least humor me as I explain.

Put simply, the Golden Rule urges us to treat others as we would like to be treated. The "Platinum Rule," though, encourages us to treat others as *they* would like to be treated.<sup>2</sup> This requires us to take the extra step of putting ourselves in someone else's shoes, trying to understand and respect their needs and wants. It requires us to empathize with others and even anticipate how our *doing* will be received by the *others* we're doing it to and for. Here's a really simple example.

If you stop by my office during the week for a chat, I will typically offer you coffee. John McKee knew this well. In fact, I think he sometimes stopped by more for the coffee than that chat! I prefer my coffee black. Only on very rare occasions when it's really bad coffee, do I add milk or

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<sup>2</sup> Mel Luckenbaugh. "What's Better than the Golden Rule?" Thecaap.org:  
<https://www.thecaap.org/news/whats-better-than-the-golden-rulenbsp>.

cream. I *never* serve bad coffee. So, if I was treating others as I would like to be treated, I would bring you black coffee. However, I know that some folks only drink coffee with cream and/or sugar. So, to treat others as *they* would like to be treated, I will simply ask how they like their coffee and bring it that way. The Platinum Rule.

Another example: In college, I went on a service/learning trip to Bulgaria. We worked with a church in the beautiful seaside town of Varna, on the Black Sea. The church was a relatively young protestant congregation in a country filled with old Orthodox Churches. The congregation had a wealthy sponsor, a church in Texas. The Texans decided to serve as they would like to be served and so, built the Bulgarians a lovely building with soaring ceilings in the sanctuary and generous education and fellowship spaces. And to assist the Bulgarians in getting their members to church, the Texans purchased a big 14-passenger Ford van. The problem was, the Bulgarians couldn't afford to heat and cool their beautiful sanctuary so they met in a basement classroom. And the streets of the ancient city were far too narrow for the big American van, so it remained neatly parked in the church courtyard. I wonder how it might have been had the Texans treated the Bulgarians the way the Bulgarians would have liked to be treated.

The Platinum Rule really is just a minor tweak on the old classic Golden Rule. But the addition of empathy ensures that our treatment of others isn't just good for us, it's good for them. It helps us avoid the assumption that what is good for us, is good for them, or that we know best how to fix their problems. Treat others the way they would like to be treated. "And that means asking them how *they* like their coffee."<sup>3</sup>

May empathy guide us as we seek to treat others the way *they* would like to be treated. Amen.

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<sup>3</sup>Fred Clark. "The Golden Rule And Porpoise Costumes," Patheos.com, July 10, 2012:  
<https://www.patheos.com/blogs/slacktivist/2012/07/10/golden-rule-jokes-and-porpoise-costumes/>.