

**April 30, 2017**  
**Matthew 6 – 7**  
**Benjamin A. Loven**

Today we continue what we began last week: working our way through Jesus' longest reported sermon, the Sermon on the Mount.

The basic reason Jesus preached this sermon was to show his followers what it actually looked like to follow him, so, as you might expect, he makes a number of commands.

But this isn't how Jesus opens the sermon.

As we heard from Pastor Fred last week, Jesus begins by telling the people who they are: "You *are* the salt of the earth." "You *are* the light of the world."

He doesn't say, "*If* you follow me and do what I say, *then* you will become salt and light..."

He starts by reminding his followers of who they, and who *we, already* are.

And because we are *already* the salt of the earth and the light of the world, *then* the rest of the sermon shows us what our lives will look like, tells us about the people we will care for, lays out the things that we will do.

So, what are these things that Jesus' followers will do?

Well, we don't have enough time this morning to go through *everything* in Matthew 6-7 (at least if we want worship to be done at the magical one-hour cut-off time) so I've boiled it down, pulling out all of the direct commands.

As I read them, I want you to notice where you get stuck, to pay attention to where you stop listening:

“Beware of practicing your piety before others.”

“When you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.”

“Whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret.”

“When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases.”

“Whenever you fast, do not look dismal, but when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face.”

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.”

“You cannot serve God and wealth.”

“Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness.”

“Do not worry about tomorrow.”

“Do not judge.”

“First take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye.”

“Do not give what is holy to dogs; and do not throw your pearls before swine.”

“Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you.”

“In everything do to others as you would have them do to you.”

“Enter through the narrow gate.”

“Beware of false prophets.”

As I pondered these commands this week, I kept getting stuck in the same place:

“In everything do to others as you would have them do to you.”

We all know this one. It’s the ‘Golden Rule.’ It’s shared across cultures and religions.

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

Treat other people like you want to be treated.

It’s basic, straightforward, and simple. It’s one of the first things we learn as kids.

“No, you can’t take that car from your sister; she’s playing with it right now. Would you like it if she took your book away from you?”

“Don’t hit your cousin! How would you like it if he hit you!”

“Why did you call your friend a not-nice name? Do you want to be called that?”

We want our kids to grow into respectful, considerate, caring people. We want them to think about others, to imagine how *they’re* feeling, to realize that the things we do to others *actually* affects them, either for good or ill.

Sometimes, this is easier said than done.

It’s easy to imagine how our actions could hurt the people we care about, or people we share things in common with. It’s easy for me to empathize with my suburban neighbors, who are college-educated, have professional jobs, have young children, are white, and grew up in the upper-Midwest.

But what about my neighbors who are the first in their families to graduate from college, or who had to worry about gang violence and drugs and abuse while they were growing up?

What about my neighbors who have to worry about their towns dying because everyone is moving to the city, or who are wondering if they’ll ever find meaningful employment again?

What about my neighbors who voted differently than I did?

...or whose skin is decidedly darker than mine?

...or who speak a different language than I do?

What about my neighbors who believe differently than I do?

What about my neighbors who frustrate me, who get on my nerves, who can't seem to do *anything* the way *I* think it should be done?

What about my neighbors who don't like *me*?

Do I have to empathize with *all* of these people?

“In everything do to others as you would have them do to you.”

Do to others... Jesus doesn't mean *just* the people I care about, *just* my family and friends, *just* the people I have things in common with...

He means *all* others, *including* those who annoy me, those who anger me, those who think differently than I do...even those who hate me...

“In everything do to others as you would have them do to you.”

To live out the Golden Rule means to experience life from someone else's perspective, to put ourselves in *their* shoes, to walk a mile in *their* boots.

The Golden Rule is fundamental, and it's basic, and it's hard...and we break it all the time...

But here's the thing. Jesus didn't.

The one who gave us this command, the one who told us that, as the salt of the earth and the light of the world, *this* is what the shape of our lives will be...he followed through with this fundamental command.

He didn't *just* walk a mile in our boots, he didn't *just* put himself in our shoes...he put himself in our flesh!

He became a human, to fully experience *our* life.

He came to be with us, to share in our experiences, and to help us see the truth about God and about ourselves.

But *we* didn't return the sentiment. *We* didn't put ourselves in his shoes...we got *frustrated* by him constantly reminding us that God's love doesn't fit neatly into a small box.

We didn't walk a mile in his boots...we got *angry* with him that he was always pointing out someone who needed our help, someone *we* didn't think was worthy of our attention, or of God's.

And eventually we'd had enough; we decided to get rid of him, so we nailed him to a cross.

But that's not the end of the story. Just two weeks ago, we celebrated that Jesus *didn't* stay dead! Despite our best efforts, we couldn't get rid of him.

And what's the first thing he did when he rose from the grave? Did he seek revenge on the soldiers who crucified him? Did he exact his vengeance on the priests and scribes who sentenced him to death? Did he turn his back on *all* of us who wanted him out of the way?

No!

Instead, Jesus appeared to his followers and said, "Rejoice! Don't be afraid. You're my family."

"In everything do to others as you would have them do to you."



Instead of paying us back for our actions, Jesus treated us, the very people who killed him, like he would have wanted to be treated: with love, not fear...with love, not violence...with love, not hatred.

It's fundamental, and it's basic, and it's hard...and in the light of Jesus' resurrection it *is* our calling.

*This* is the salt the earth needs right now, *this* is the light breaking through the darkness in our world. It's difficult to put on someone else's shoes, especially when those shoes don't fit very well, are covered in muck, are crumbling because of age and over us.

But just because something is hard doesn't mean it's impossible...after all, Jesus was *dead*...but not he's not dead anymore!