

“The Lists of Love”

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Luke 6:27-38

One year when I was shopping for Christmas the old fashion way, you know actually going into a store and looking around instead of looking around on Amazon, I overheard a conversation of a man with his five children. Each child had a piece of paper and a pencil in their hand. The father said, “I will be standing here in case you need me or want help with something.” Upon hearing those words, the children took off through the store. I went about my business but there were several times when I came across one or two of the children conferring over the piece of paper in their hands. Not wanting to miss a good sermon illustration, I listened to their conversation. “How much does it cost?” asked one child to another. “I don’t think it’s too much,” came the reply, followed by “Do you think he will let us get one?” as they grabbed the item and took off at a fast pace. I could hear, “I don’t know, but let’s ask.” I sort of followed along because what good is a sermon illustration without a point to the story. When they got to their dad, both children asked if they could buy the item in their hand. The father simply said, “Is it on your list?” In other words, if the item was not on their list, the children could not have it.

Jesus said, “Do unto others as you would have them do to you.” In other words, if it is not on your list to do to others, others won’t do it to you. The church calls it the Golden Rule. Many of us have heard it before today, but how many of us can actually practice what we hear or what we preach to others? I think the problem that many of us have is that there aren’t very many examples out there of people who are practicing the Golden Rule. Maybe that is why there is a growing movement across the Untiled States called: “Random Kindness and senseless Acts of Beauty.” Basically, the movement centers around doing little thing that remind others that people care. Some of the ideas that people are doing include...

- Paying for the person behind you at a toll booth or Starbucks drive thru.

- Sweeping or shoveling someone's driveway when they are not looking.
- Paying for someone else's breakfast, lunch or dinner without them knowing.
- Cleaning up the weeds in a shut-in's yard, and watering the plants if they need it.
- Picking up someone's newspaper that was thrown in the street and depositing it on their doorstep.
- Letting someone in on the highway.
- Returning anything you borrow in better shape than when you received it.
- Telling your best friends that they are your best friends.
- Taking someone out to lunch, your treat.
- Squeezing the tooth paste from the bottom.
- Mailing a "thinking of you card" to a friend.
- Picking up the litter instead of walking over it.
- And waving to kids in a school bus, people sitting on their front porches, police officers, firefighters, and school crossing guards.

Martin Luther King Jr. expressed a similar idea when he said, "Everyone can be great...because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love."

Now, I am sure that many of you think that I have always been this gentle and loving person all my life. My younger brother can assure you that I was not. I am ashamed of the fact that I was not very nice to my brother. I was bigger and stronger and not very patient. I can remember my grandmother telling me to remember the Golden Rule. Her interpretation of it was, "Boy, you will get it in the end, ten times as hard or ten times as loving as you give it." And you know, she was right.

I am not sure how people become kind and do nice things anymore but Robert Fulghum, said it best in his book, All I Ever Really Needed to Know I Learned in Kindergarten. Most of what we really need to know about how to live, what to do and how to be, we learn in kindergarten. These are the things that Robert Fulghum learned:

Share everything.

Play fair.

Don't hit people.

Put things back where you found them.

Clean up your own mess.

Don't take things that aren't yours.

Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody.

Wash your hands before you eat.

Flush the toilet.

Warm cookies and cold milk are good for you.

Live a balanced life - learn some and think some and draw and paint and sing and dance and play and work every day some.

Take a nap every afternoon.

When you go out into the world, watch out for traffic, hold hands, and stick together.

Be aware of wonder. Remember the little seed in the Styrofoam cup: The roots go down and the plant goes up and nobody really knows how or why, but we are all like that.

Goldfish and hamsters and white mice and even the little seed in the Styrofoam cup - they all die. So do we.

And then, remember the Dick & Jane books, and the first word you learned - the biggest word of all – “LOOK.”

Everything you need to know is in there somewhere.

The Golden Rule, and love, and basic sanitation.

Ecology and politics and equality and sane living.

Take any of those items and extrapolate it into sophisticated adult terms and apply it to your family life or your work or your government or your world and it holds true and clear and firm.

Think what a better world it would be if all - the whole world - had cookies and milk about three o'clock every afternoon and then lay down with their blankies for a nap.

Or if all governments had a basic policy to always put thing back where they found them and to clean up their own mess.

And it is still true, no matter how old you are - when you go out into the world, it is best to hold hands and stick together.

At some level, I think we all know how to be good people. For some of us, we forget how to be kind from time to time. For others, we let our emotions, stress, or some life-situation get in our way. I think that many of us would agree that practicing the Golden Rule is more of an understanding of ourselves and how we want to be treated by others. Most of us are too old to go back to kindergarten, but if all of you could make a list of how you want to be understood and remembered by others it would be: More loving, more giving, more praying, more accepting, more kind, and more forgiving.

Undoubtedly you wouldn't mind it if others treated you the same.

Keep in mind that if it is not on your list to do to others then there is a good chance that others won't do it to you. Maybe you could begin by asking someone over to have cookies and milk. And maybe later on, you could take a nap. But remember it is still true, no matter how old you are, when you go out into the world, it is better to hold hands and stick together in Christlike love and acceptance. Amen.