

Rev. Karen Graham – Church of the Redeemer

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Do Good

Last week I invited you to make a promise to yourself and to God to “do no harm.” To be intentional about what you say and do, the choices you make, and how you treat others. To do no harm is the first of the 3 simple rules of Wesleyan living, or the first of the 3 General Rules of the United Societies of the Methodist movement as John Wesley himself called them. To do no harm is a great thing, but it’s not really enough, is it? Because what happens when others do harm to us? How do we react? What is our response? Is non-action enough?

Maybe not. And so that’s why Wesley added a second rule for the Methodist Societies, which reads like this in The Book of Discipline:

‘It is expected of all who continue in these societies that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation, Secondly, by doing good; by being in every kind merciful after their power; as they have opportunity, doing good of every possible sort, and, as far as possible, to all men:

To their bodies, of the ability which God giveth, by giving food to the hungry, by clothing the naked, by visiting or helping them that are sick or in prison.

To their souls, by instructing, reproving, or exhorting all we have any intercourse with; trampling underfoot that enthusiastic doctrine that ‘we are not to do good unless our hearts be free to it.’

By doing good, especially to them that of the household of faith or groaning so to be; employing them preferably to others; buying one of another, helping each other in business, and so much the more because the world will love its own and them only.

By all possible diligence and frugality, that the gospel be not blamed.

By running with patience the race which is set before them, denying themselves and taking up their cross daily; submitting to bear the reproach of Christ, to be as the

filth and offscouring of the world; and looking that men should say all manner of evil of them falsely, for the Lord's sake" (par. 103, pp.73-74).

It isn't quite enough for us as followers of Christ to do no harm; we are to do good. To, as Paul put it in his instructions to the Romans, "Hate what is evil and hold fast to what is good, and to not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." Replacing evil with good is the positive side of doing no harm. And it adds just a little more punch, doesn't it? I can avoid saying bad things, I can do my best to not cause harm to others, but that doesn't necessarily mean I will say something uplifting, or that I will extend kindness, or that I will go out of my way to help someone, or to replace something bad with something good. Doing no harm in and of itself may or may not lead me to do good. So that's why we are told to do good. Doing good is expected of us.

I remember being raised with the dictum, "If you can't say anything nice then don't say anything at all." Taking that dictum to the extreme could mean a whole life of just not talking, couldn't it? Silence may at times indeed be golden, but silence can lead to passivity, and passivity can be mistaken for apathy, and apathy can be mistaken for cooperation, and thus it is that the status quo in life remains the status quo. Doing no harm is, again, a good thing, but without its corollary of "doing good," it can be a weak response to what's going on in our world, and even in our own lives.

So, "do good."

I went on line again this week and discovered some interesting things out there when I googled "Do Good." For example, there's a DoGood channel, in beta, which launched in May 2008. Its purpose is "to connect you with non-profits of all areas and stripes, either physically or monetarily." In its own words, DoGood Channel" allows anyone interested in causes having to do with animal protection and preservation, arts, culture, education, health, politics, and even religion, to discover efforts they might otherwise never learn about, and interact with such groups. The service is free to both non-profits

and the public. It was established in conjunction with Good2Gether Inc, a search and social media Web service.

There's also a business called "Do Good Advertising," which promotes ethical advertising. Here's what they say about themselves, "We only work with organizations and companies that help to contribute a positive effect on our society and the environment. In other words, we like to think of ourselves as an agency with a conscience....We don't want to work for anyone who exploits, misinforms and tricks people for their own financial gain. We also don't want to work for anyone who wantonly pollutes or exploits the environment in the name of a quick profit. 'Forget the flashy company cars,' their ad about themselves says, 'it's wobbly bicycles for us.' From stationery on waste card to super efficient web hosting, we run our company in such a way to have as little impact on things as possible."

There's also the "Do Good Vacation." "The idea is to use a vacation to do good -- and it's appealing to a growing number of families, especially those with older children. They're building houses with Habitat for Humanity and rebuilding burned churches with the Quakers. They're studying wild horses with Earthwatch, helping to maintain Appalachian and Colorado mountain trails, working alongside archeologists on remote Southwestern digs and with historians on National Forest land.

In a Business Week essay, Janet Ginsburg writes about "The Do-Good Imperative." She begins with this personal reflection, "When I first read about the computer designed for the One Laptop Per Child project, I wanted one. Not because it was adorable, cheap, or a means of doing good (to buy one you had to buy a second for a child in a poor country). I coveted its screen, designed for use in full daylight. Even my Apple MacBook Pro, with all its clever tricks, can't manage that. Add the LifeStraw water filtration system to the list of do-gooder objects I crave. This little wonder, a water filter outfitted with a straw, made the cover of the Design for the Other 90% show catalog at the Cooper-Hewitt Museum last year. It could as easily have graced the cover of an REI mailer. How about a windup flashlight crossed with a cell-phone charger? It's low

tech meets high tech with rugged, toy-like charm. Or charcoal made from plant waste instead of wood, developed for Haiti by MIT's D-Lab? Talk about a greener way to barbeque." She argues that doing good is smart business. "The qualities that make a product good for the developing world – sturdy, cheap, adaptable, modular, energy efficient, environmentally sound, computer platform-neutral, and bandwidth-savvy – make it a good product, period. Suddenly 'less is more' goes from abstract design ideal to the only viable option. This is why some of the most innovative ideas today are coming from efforts to address the needs of those most in need." Here is her conclusion, "The need for more and better answers is beyond urgent. Billions of people live in poverty. According to a recent Oxfam report, the number and severity of natural disasters is on the rise. So too are outbreaks of new emerging diseases, including HIV, SARS, Ebola, and West Nile, and a resurgence of drug-resistant scourges such as tuberculosis and malaria. In an ever-flattening world, regional disasters can quickly go global, while global events can have devastating local consequences. If innovation is driven by necessity, then there is more than enough inspiration for us all. Doing good is more than smart business. It gives hope for a better future". (BusinessWeek, July 7, 2008).

And finally, I saw an article titled "What's the Best Way to Do Good" on the website, FastCompany.com. The writers compiled a list of examples. Here are two of them: First, The Todd Wagner Foundation, founded by Todd Wagner in 1999. He was the cofounder and CEO of Broadcast.com until Yahoo acquired it in 1999. He turned down The CEO position at Yahoo to pursue private ventures and to fund an equity-capital initiative for minority-owned technology businesses. He also helped launch a neighborhood technology center in southern Dallas that provides free Internet access and training. His work with the Inner-City Games Foundation in Los Angeles earned him a Man of the Year Award in 2000. And second, Bea's Kids, founded by Bea Salazar in 1992. She was an electronics-plant shift worker, who had to go on disability. She tells her story, "In 1990 I had undergone back surgery and was on disability. I was depressed and just trying to get through each day. One afternoon, when I was putting out the trash, I saw a little boy digging in a dumpster for food. I took him inside, made

him a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, and sent him home. Fifteen minutes later, there was a knock at my door, and I opened it to find six more kids standing there. 'Is it true that you're giving away peanut butter and jelly sandwiches' one of them asked. I couldn't believe that there was no one caring for these kids. It was summer, and school was out. They told me that their parents had to work. The next day, more children showed up, and more arrived the day after that. When school began again, kids came and asked for help with homework. Volunteers and supplies from local churches and schools poured in. My landlord donated an apartment, and soon I had 100 children coming to visit each day. Ten years later, 5 of the kids have begun community college." In spring 2007, Bea Salazar received Oprah Winfrey's Angel Network Use Your Life Award" (www.fastcompany.com. December 17, 2007).

Of course I'm preaching to the choir. We know that examples of doing good abound by the thousands, and that some of the examples are right here in our own midst. The good you do is just as worthy mentioning as the examples that come from these business and secular sources. I know that. I know I don't really need to convince you to do something you haven't already been doing. The purpose for looking at these rules of living is really for us to be reminded of why we live as we live, and why we do what we do. We don't do good to receive awards. We don't do good to feel good, either. We do good because it's what we are called to do. We do good because doing good is what's right.

In his little book, *Three Simple Rules*, Bishop Reuben Job, offers this explanation for this second rule, the rule to do good. "Doing good, like doing no harm, is a proactive way of living. I do not need to wait to be asked to do some good deed or provide some needed help. I do not need to wait until circumstances cry out for aid to relieve suffering or correct some horrible injustice. I can decide that my way of living will come down on the side of doing good to all in every circumstance and in every way I can. I can decide that I will choose a way of living that nourishes goodness and strengthens community" (pp. 37-38).

A proactive way of living. I like that. That means intentional living, I think. It means being deliberate, and deciding ahead of time that one will do good. Not just when it's convenient, and not just when a special offering in church is being collected, and not just when others are joining you.

I bought this framed print for myself – to put in my office here at church. If I could I would have bought one for everybody. John Wesley's Rule, it is titled, and it reads, "Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can."

Wow --- not too much gets left out, does it? Just as there aren't too many loopholes or excuses we can make for not doing good. Not rich? So what? The widow of Zarapheth gave her last bit of meal to make bread for the prophet Elijah. Can't take a do good vacation to the mountains or to a national park? So what? You can do good right in your own home, in your own backyard, right here in your own community and church. Might get burned, or ripped off, or even turned down? So what? Doing good doesn't come with a guarantee. As Reuben Job puts it, "...my desire to do good is not limited by the thoughts or actions of others. My desire to do good is in response to God's invitation to follow Jesus, and it is in my control. I can determine to extend hospitality and goodness to all I meet. I can decide to do good to all, even to those who disagree with me and turn against what I believe is right and good" (p. 40).

The third letter of John includes this exhortation, "Beloved, do not imitate what is evil but imitate what is good. Whoever does good is from God." And in his summary of the life of Jesus, Peter tells the crowd, as told in the Acts of the Apostles, "That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced, how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him." He went about doing good -- can you think of a more succinct or more direct way of describing the earthly ministry of Jesus?

This summer we have experienced a number of deaths within our church family. Emory Lynch, Bob Fussner, Mary Barkey, and Dick Cramer. At each funeral and memorial service their lives were remembered and celebrated. Without exception, each person was acknowledged for doing good. Emory's involvement in integrating our schools, Bob's devotion to his family and to all the churches he shared his love and gift of music with, Mary's commitment to the well-being of children, Dick's peace activism, just to name a few. Doing good characterized their lives -- within their families, in their communities, in social and political causes, as people of faith. Each one lived out their faith in the context of doing good. I'm not sure there is a better legacy any of us can leave our children and grandchildren, or our own brothers and sisters within the church family than the legacy of doing good. What else would you want to be remembered for at your memorial service? How else would you want your life to be celebrated?

As this summer draws to a close, we remember those who have left us. Their example, however, remains. An example that Jesus has given all of us who follow him, and all of us who call ourselves by his name -- the example of going about doing good, the example of not returning evil for evil, but overcoming evil with good.

I found the words but not the music to an old hymn by Fanny Crosby -- it's called Do All the Good You Can, and one verse and the refrain goes like this: "Hearts and hands to Jesus, gladly we will give, in the path of duty, walking while we live; cheering on the sad ones, lifting those that fall, shining like the sunbeams, doing good to all. Marching on together, thro' this fleeting world below, helping one another onward as we go; Think of what a blessing, God the Father gave to man, Try and do for others all the good you can; let your smile be cheerful, ever and warm and bright, make the hearts around you, happy with its light."

So, friends, do all the good you can, by all the means you can -- with the gifts God has given you, with your own abilities and resources, do all the good you can; in all the ways you can and in all the places you can -- here in church, in your own neighborhood, at work and in school, when you're driving in your car, when you're in the grocery store,

when you travel far and near, do all the good you can. At all the times you can, and to all the people you can do all the good you can -- take the phone call that interrupts your plans and listen to the person that calls; don't be afraid to talk to the stranger that comes through these doors and sits next to you, and for as long as ever you can, do all the good you can -- there's no retirement from being a Christian, you know. Following the example of Jesus takes our whole lives. So no matter how young or old you are, no matter if you're strong or weak, healthy or sick, no matter if you've been doing this a long time or you're brand new at all this church stuff, there's a rule for living you can follow that will help you find meaning and wholeness and joy in your life : for as long as ever you can, do all the good you can. So be it for me, and you. So be it for us as Church of the Redeemer. Amen.