

Transcript of Sermon By
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First Baptist Church
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**No Ordinary Relationships:
It's Who We Are**

Luke 6:27-36

Morning Prayer:

We give praise to you, our good and kind loving Father. We give praise to you because you do not count our sins against us, but seek us out through the love of your son, Jesus Christ. We offer thanks today for individuals who have turned to us the other cheek. When we were angry or hostile, they did not respond in kind but took the blow of our unkindness or our malice and loved us anyway. We also give thanks for those whose soft answer turned away our wrath and made a straight pathway for peace between us. For spouse, for child, for parent, for brother, for sister, for friend, and for stranger, we thank you for those who withstood our deceitful words, our half truths--the words that we spoke with the full intention to wound—yet we were given back peace. We thank you for their strength of character, but also for the fact that they stopped the escalating spiral of retaliation that would have destroyed our relationship. Where would we be if not for their grace? As you have borne our misdeeds and our carelessness toward our commitment to you, may we do the same toward others? Grant to us the same strength of character, the same power of your spirit that we might be kind in our thoughts and charitable in both action and word and forgiving in all painful memories of life. For the sake of those we love, may we turn the other cheek. May we provide the soft word that ends wrath and may we be as full of grace towards those with whom we bear difficulties as you are toward us. In the name of Christ we pray. Amen.

Meditation Text:

The Kingdom Jesus preaches and lives is all about a glorious, uproarious, absurd generosity. Think about the best thing you can do for the worst person, and go ahead and do it. Think of what you'd really like someone to do for you, and do it for them. Think of the people to whom you are tempted to be nasty, and lavish generosity on them instead...There are two particularly astonishing things about these instructions. First, their simplicity: they are obvious, clear, direct, and memorable. Second, their scarcity.

—Tom Wright in *Luke for Everyone*

We all have things that irritate us beyond words. When these things happen, we just cannot control ourselves. This happens between spouses, between a parent and a child, between siblings who live together, between siblings who live in different states, between co-workers, and between people you go to school with. In our relationships, there are things that happen to us that hit our hot buttons, and we have to be on our guard all the time.

I will use a made up situation to serve as an illustration, but I am sure that you can recall things that have happened in your own life. Let's say you have had many discussions with your teenagers about leaving the lights on downstairs. It is the time of year when it gets dark early. You come in from work and every single light on the lower floor is on. Because this irritates you, you have counted and there are 48 light bulbs in the lower part of the house that are now burning and doing Georgia Power great service. You walk in, and there is nobody there. There are two TV's that you can see that are on, and you think you can hear the third. You think, *What are we made of? Are we made of money?*

You look around, and you start calling your child. Here comes your child from the other part of the house. In your best controlled voice you ask, "Where have you been?"

"Oh, the UPS truck came by the front door and I went . . ."

"Why are all these lights on?"

You tried to be firm but not irritated. Evidently, you failed because immediately your child responds, "Why are you always on my back about this?"

The proper answer would be, "I am sorry I left all the lights on," but as soon as you get the other answer, you say, "You go back and turn all those lights off." The conversation starts going back and forth, and pretty soon the conversation has spiraled up into something that resembles nuclear war. It could be about paying bills, disciplining your children, or who didn't clean up the microwave in the break room at work. In any number of relationships, there are things that get to us. We know they are going to happen. They happen daily or every week. In these circumstances, how do we decide today how we will respond when they do? What will be an appropriate reaction when the time comes?

If a spouse raises a voice, if another driver honks a horn, or if a co-worker tells a half-truth, how will we respond in that moment? It is pretty easy today. The choir sang, *Lord, Make Me An Instrument of Your Peace*. It was so melodic and sounded so good. We are in church. We are feeling good about this today. We would be nice. *I treat people fairly. I try to live by the Golden Rule. I just love everybody. I am going to treat everybody with love.* But then when the moment comes and the lights are on, the microwave is dirty, or the horns are honking, most often we treat people the way they treat us. Whatever kind of response I get is the response I am going to give back. In the ordinary traffic patterns of life, you are going to get back whatever it was you gave.

If I think that the clerk at the drive-thru at Starbuck's really does want me to have a nice day, when I drive up there, I am just so cheerful, "Well, fine. How are you? Hope you have a nice day. Here's a tip. Keep the change."

But if somebody raises their voice at me, chances are, if I don't actually raise the volume, the pitch is going to go up. That is a telltale sign. You may not have raised the volume, but when the pitch goes up, people know you are irritated. If somebody honks at me, I try not to honk back. Right? Usually, whatever it is that we get is the way we respond. That is just the way life works.

If you go into a business and there is a sales clerk that engages you in a question in which you must answer "yes" to begin with, you find yourself engaged so that you can have a good time, but if somebody is surly and acts like they did not want to wait on you, you think, *They are not getting a tip from me.* Whatever it is that we receive, we usually decide how we are going to respond by just simply giving it back. Of course, Jesus says this is typically not Christian. This is almost the antifascist of what it means to be a Christian.

Let me read the latter part of Luke 6: "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them."

If you treat people nice because they have treated you nice, what credit is that to you? Anybody does that.

"If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do the same." And on and on it goes. If you just treat others the way they always treat you, what credit is that to any of us as Christians? It is absolutely none. In the ordinary relationships of life, typically, how a person gets treated is in response to the way they treated other people. They make the decision based on, *What did you do to me? That is what I am going to do back.* But what Jesus says is that we make the decision based on who we are. It is who we are. We are children of God. "Be merciful as your Father in heaven is merciful." As God shows all this goodness towards others, we should show goodness toward others. It is not the way we were treated, but it is who we are that determines how we treat other people.

When we think about it from God toward us, this is woven throughout the New Testament. It is on so many pages, we just could not keep up with them all. The Golden Rule says, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

Are you familiar with the parable of the workers in the vineyard? The vineyard owner goes out and says, "I want to hire some workers. I am going to pay \$100.00 for everybody who will come to work at 8:00 a.m. and work all day." They go out and find all these workers and they work and they work.

About mid-morning, it becomes very clear that they are not going to be able to get the harvest in. The vineyard owner tells the managers, "Go out and hire more workers. It is 10:00. I tell you what, we will give them \$100.00 for all day, too."

At noon, they are still behind production so the vineyard owner tells the managers, “Go get some more workers. We will give them \$100.00 if they will work the rest of the day.”

Finally, at 5:00, the vineyard owner says, “It is going to be dark soon and we can’t get it all done. Go hire more workers and we will pay them \$100.00 if they will work the rest of the day.”

Of course, you can figure out what happens. He starts paying the people who worked from 5:00-6:00 p.m. \$100.00, and the people who have been working since 8:00 a.m. are saying, “Wait a minute. That’s not fair. You should not treat them like this.” The answer of the vineyard owner is very telling. “Didn’t we agree on a wage? What is it to you if I want to be kind to these people over here?” It is not about what was fair and how much a person worked. It was about the will of the vineyard owner. “This is how I would like to pay. I would like to be generous.”

Earlier, when we read the opening responsive reading, it included that passage where Jesus said, “God sends rain on the just and the unjust.” Of course, in Palestine, rain was a very scarce commodity so rain is a blessing. The statement of Jesus is “God chooses to bless those who are good and those who are evil. He gives good things to all.” Then we are told to be like our Father in heaven.

Jesus is the prime example. He is on the cross and all these people are gathered beneath him. The Gospel writer said, “They wagged their heads at him, scorning him, heaping insults upon him.” The soldiers are there, the ones who handled the very instruments of his execution. What does Jesus say? Does he respond in kind? He says, “Forgive them for they know not what they do.”

All through the scriptures we read that God extends love and grace toward us, not because of anything that we deserve, not because of anything that we have done, but because that is the way God chooses to love us. Time and time again, we are told, “and, therefore, you choose to treat other people the way you do because you are my children. You shall also treat them in the way that is good. If someone smites you, turn the other cheek. Give and forgive and don’t ask to be paid back.”

If you were in Bible Study this morning, we studied the passage about Nathaniel. Nathaniel is invited to come follow Jesus. The first thing he says to Philip when he receives the invitation is, “Nazareth? Can anything good come out of Nazareth.” He shows his prejudice and his petty inner-village squabble. If Jesus had responded in kind, he would have said, “I don’t want anybody who acts like that when they have never even met me.” He doesn’t say that. Jesus says, “Nathaniel, an Israelite in whom there is no guile. Come on, follow me.” He will not let Nathaniel set the terms of their relationship because they are not high enough. Because Jesus is Jesus, he refuses to allow pettiness, anger, prejudice or anything else to set the level of their relationship. He makes the decision because of who he is. That is all that he asks of us is that, based on who we are as Christians, we set the level of our encounters and our relationships with other people. If we will do this, we will find that our relationships are anything but ordinary.

What if you were in an argument with a good friend. For some reason, this has really gotten a hold of both of you and you are going at it. Finally, one person says, “Woe, wait a minute. Your friendship is too important to me for us to argue like this. I disagree with you, but I am not going to argue with you any more. Let’s find a way to work this out.”

What if there is an infidelity in a marriage? Let’s just say it is the husband. What if the wife were to say, “I am not going to let your infidelity trump my love for you. We are going to work this out because I think that Christ called me to love you.”

What if in all of these circumstances one person stepped back and said, “Wait a minute. Jesus has called us to extend grace. Jesus has called us to be forgiven. Jesus has called us to love one another, and I am not going to keep on acting this way. Let’s stop and see what might be done if we will give this to Christ. I will forgive. I will go the second mile. I will do whatever is necessary.”

How many relationships do you think are really like that? Not many. Wouldn’t that then mean that it was no ordinary relationship? When Jesus tells us to act like this in Luke 6, it is not so that we will be able to be smug about how good we are and about what great Christians we are. He does it because he says, “This is the way to an abundant life.” If we would all treat each other this way and actually live by the Golden Rule, can you imagine how many different relationships could be repaired and saved before they got to the place where they could not be repaired? Jesus tells us to live this way for two reasons: to act like God acts toward us and because it is the way to abundant life. These are the things that we do as children of God that give us the promise of hope.

In everyone’s life, there are memories of arguments and things that are said to us that are too painful to take back, things that were done to us that we are not sure we will ever get over. There are also things that we have said that we would give anything to have not said. We would give anything to somehow put those words back in our mouths and have not said what we did. It is too late; we cannot change the past. But what if in the middle of whatever was going on, one person in the encounter had said, “Wait a minute. Remember what Jesus told us to do?”

You don’t have to give up your integrity in the disagreement, but you can back up enough to say, “I am not going to treat you this way. We are going to have to find another way to resolve this.” That would be Christian, and that would indeed be abundant life. That would be the kind of relationship that we would all like to be a part of.

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