

**Sermon**  
**Community United Methodist Church of Coeur d'Alene**  
**Sunday, November 6, 2022**  
**10am**

Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:14-18 (NRSVUE)

[prayer]

Today we continue our #BeUMC stewardship series by focusing on the second General Rule of The United Methodist Church. Say it with me if you know it: Do good.

“Seek to do good to one another and to all” (v. 15). So says the Apostle Paul. A direct command, but not always so simple to follow. Perhaps you and another person disagree on what good looks like. Perhaps you have felt the tension of competing goods. Perhaps you try to do good but get discouraged and wonder if it really matters, really makes a difference.

As followers of Jesus, Scripture is one of the tools we use to help us discern the good we are called to do. But the earliest Christians did not possess the same Bible as us. They possessed the Hebrew scriptures – what we call the Old Testament – and a collection of eye-witness accounts of Jesus that were passed from Christian to Christian by word of mouth. Today’s Scripture lesson from First Thessalonians is in fact a part of the oldest piece of Christian literature that we have. It was written around 50 CE, twenty years after the death and resurrection of Jesus. It predates even the four gospel accounts in the New Testament.

The oral tradition of the early church was rich and powerful, but you can imagine how easily those stories could change in the re-telling – a detail added here or left out there and those little changes could have a big impact on how Christians understand what it means to follow Jesus. When Paul composed this letter to the church in Thessalonica, one of his goals was to put down in writing the common values that define the church. And he identified doing good – to one another and to all – as one of the hallmarks of Christian community.

Paul teaches us that goodness has both an inward and an outward thrust. In his letters he writes a lot about moral behavior and how one of the functions of the church is to train people in godliness. But godliness is more than simply being a good person and behaving morally. You do not have to be a Christian to be a good person. Godliness is allowing the Holy Spirit to transform us from the inside out, remaking our beliefs and behaviors in the image of Jesus. Godliness is to follow the Way of Jesus from the inside out. When Paul commands us to “pray without ceasing” (v. 17), one of the things we most pray for is this inner transformation.

As I was preparing this sermon, the hymn “Make Me a Servant” began playing in my heart.<sup>1</sup> If you know it, sing along with me:

*Make me a servant  
Humble and meek  
Lord let me lift up  
Those who are weak  
And may the prayer of my heart always be  
Make me a servant  
Make me a servant  
Make me a servant today*

The godliness that we pray for is a godliness that is other-focused. In the twelfth chapter of his letter to the Romans, Paul exhorts us with a long list of behaviors that define a Christian and a Christ-centered church. Eugene Peterson translated Paul’s exhortation into modern English:

*<sup>9-10</sup> Love from the center of who you are; don’t fake it. Run for dear life from evil; hold on for dear life to good. Be good friends who love deeply; practice playing second fiddle.*

*<sup>11-13</sup> Don’t burn out; keep yourselves fueled and aflame. Be alert servants of the Master, cheerfully expectant. Don’t quit in hard times; pray all the harder. Help needy Christians; be inventive in hospitality.*

*<sup>14-16</sup> Bless your enemies; no cursing under your breath. Laugh with your happy friends when they’re happy; share tears when they’re down. Get along with each*

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r6U8O\\_WnPZY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r6U8O_WnPZY)

*other; don't be stuck-up. Make friends with nobodies; don't be the great somebody.*

*17-19 Don't hit back; discover beauty in everyone. If you've got it in you, get along with everybody. Don't insist on getting even; that's not for you to do. 'I'll do the judging,' says God. 'I'll take care of it.'*

*20-21 Our Scriptures tell us that if you see your enemy hungry, go buy that person lunch, or if he's thirsty, get him a drink. Your generosity will surprise him with goodness. Don't let evil get the best of you; get the best of evil by doing good." (Romans 12:9-21, The Message)*

This code of conduct for Christian living has a missional purpose: It demonstrates to our neighbors the practical ways we strive to follow the example of Jesus. We nurture, edify, and hold each other accountable for the godliness that being a disciple of Jesus demands. Our growth in godliness is not just for our sake as individuals, but for the sake of our witness, so that others may see and come to know Jesus through us. Jesus said, "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16, NRSVUE). This is called being holy. To be holy does not mean we are perfect or self-righteous. To be holy is to allow ourselves to be set apart and consecrated for the glory of God. And few things glorify God more, Jesus tells us, than our good works. These works are a sign of God's heavenly kingdom breaking through here on earth.

When John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, began his holiness club at Oxford, he was passionate about methodical and disciplined faith formation through spiritual practices like fasting, prayer, and studying the scriptures. These practices aid in our inner transformation as followers of Jesus. But Wesley was equally passionate about putting that inner transformation to work doing good in the service of others. His holiness club visited the sick and people in prison and volunteered their time in various forms of charity work in the community. They made a special point of ministering to people on the fringes of society who were overlooked by the Anglican religious establishment. This popular quote about doing good is often attributed to him:

*"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.”*

**For a Methodist, there is no distinction between personal piety and social piety. If we dare to ask God to make us more like Jesus, then we offer ourselves to God for God’s kingdom work – anywhere, anytime, to any and all people.**

This commitment to doing good is part of the legacy that has been handed down to us here at Community UMC. We are inheritors of the holy witness of those who have gone before us. For more than a century, members of this faith community have allowed the Holy Spirit to work in and through them to help bring a piece of God’s kingdom to Coeur d’Alene. We the inheritors of more than a century of feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick, extending the hand of friendship and hospitality to the lost and lonely, advocating for justice. I have been part of this community four months and in that span of time we have:

- Raised funds for mission through our annual UWIF Rummage Sale
- Assembled and blessed LifeStart kits for foster youth
- Filled backpacks full of food for children in food-insecure households
- Purchased school supplies for the older siblings of our Head Start preschoolers
- Donated the use of our building to Community Action Partnership
- Baked birthday cupcakes for the residents at Orchard Ridge
- Cooked meals for the Ecumenical Kitchen
- Hosted three Mobile Market food giveaways with 2<sup>nd</sup> Harvest
- Supported the Kootenai Humane Society and the local food bank with in-kind donations
- Sent funds to UMCOR for humanitarian relief in Ukraine, Puerto Rico, and Florida
- Raised money for scholarships through our World Communion Sunday offering

Not to mention all the silent, unsung deeds of love and kindness that have been committed without a thought to whether anyone notices or cares. As the Rev.

Mindy Smith, Director of the Office of Church Engagement at Whitworth University, reminded me recently, “Ministry happens through the ordinary, simple ways of Jesus – walking through life, sharing a meal, listening to the pain and brokenness of our days, and celebrating together when the joy comes.”

Now take that list and multiply it by more than a century. It is impossible to quantify the impact. But if we could, *that*, church, is the glory of God right here in Coeur d’Alene. *That*, church, is a legacy to be proud of. And *that*, church, is a legacy I am asking you to sustain and support with your 2023 pledges.

When you give to the church, you are participating in this legacy of doing good. Most of our missional work is what we call “second-mile giving” – gifts of time and treasure and talent that go above and beyond the general fund of the church. But the general fund supports the infrastructure that sustains our commitment to doing good: This beautiful building that is our base of operations; the staff that supports and empowers our ministry; worship services like this one that gather us in as a community, nourish us with God’s Spirit, and then send us back into the world in mission. Each of us is a “neighborhood missionary,” called to bear the Gospel beyond these church walls into our neighborhoods and circles of influence where we can share the love and compassion of Jesus.

Friends, we do not do good because we expect to get anything back in return. If our witness translates to a growing church, that is just icing on the cake. We do good because we love God. And we love God best by loving each other and our neighbors.

So today, I commission each one of you to be doers of good. May the God who has begun a good work in you bring it to completion through the good work you do for others. May you receive with reverence the legacy of good that has been handed down to you. May you tend that legacy with prayer and gratitude, rejoicing in the coming of God’s kingdom. Let us not grow weary in doing what is good, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up (Galatians 6:9).

Amen.