

THEME: Three Simple Rules

“Do No Harm”

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber

June 22-23, 2013 at First United Methodist Church - Durango

Scripture: Romans 12: 14-19 and 13: 8-10

14 Bless those who persecute you. Don't curse them; pray that God will bless them. 15 Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with each other. Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all! 17 Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. 18 Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone. 19 Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, "I will take revenge; I will pay them back," says the Lord.

8 Owe nothing to anyone—except for your obligation to love one another. If you love your neighbor, you will fulfill the requirements of God's law. 9 For the commandments say, "You must not commit adultery. You must not murder. You must not steal. You must not covet." These—and other such commandments—are summed up in this one commandment: "Love your neighbor as yourself." 10 Love does no wrong to others, so love fulfills the requirements of God's law.

VIDEO Three Simple Rules Week 1 Sermon Starter

SLIDE Three Simple Rules – Do No Harm (Use Sermon ID Background)

I invite you to take out of your bulletin your Meditation Moments and your Message Notes. There is the Scripture listed that we are going to be using today as well and some blank lines for you to write something down. My hope is that you will hear something today that you want to remember and so please take notes as you feel any nudges from God during our time together and worship. Continued on that side and the back side you will find our Meditation Moments which give you a chance to read some Scripture each day this week and do some deeper reflection on what we are going to talk about today.

Today we begin a new sermon series called Three Simple Rules based on three rules that John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, put forth as ways of

living in the world for the early Methodists. The reason that John Wesley outlined the three rules is because one of the greatest challenges of being a faithful follower of Jesus in the world is living into the ideals of the two great Commandments that Jesus outlined for us. You remember what they were because we talk about them frequently here in this church.

SLIDE *"Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbor as you love yourself."*

While those sound like wonderful words and a powerful way to live life, they can be challenging to figure out how we live those out each and every day. I know this is true because in the all church survey that we have asked you to fill out I asked you for ideas on sermon topics. I'll be spending some time in July sketching out sermons for the next couple of years and I wanted to know what you would like me to preach about or what it is you are struggling with and here are a few of the responses that are typical of a majority of what I received.

"I would like to learn more about how to integrate my Christian faith into my daily life in a secular environment."

"How we can be followers of Jesus in a corporate world? How do we gracefully shine our light in places where there is no God?"

"How do I deal with other religions and people who believe differently than I do as a Christian?"

"How do we live out our faith in our families and relationships?"

"Ways that a parent can still believe they are whole and being a faithful parent when you are divorced."

"How do we forgive when we have been hurt badly by someone?"

Those are all great questions and they point to how challenging it can be to live out our faith in today's world because there are so many decisions to make. We make decisions everyday about life. We make decisions at work about whether we should do something this way or that way. We make decisions about how to use our words in our relationships. We made bigger decisions about where to live or where to work or where to retire. We make decisions about our health and well-being. We make decisions that impact our families and our friends and our neighbors and our coworkers.

In making all of those decisions or trying to work through those questions each one of us is looking for some wise counsel. We want something that will be helpful yet much of what we find in today's world in terms of advice and that making things more complicated and more difficult. Sometimes what we need most are bullet points. We need Cliff Notes which make things more accessible and easier to comprehend. Some of you might remember the movie *Titanic* which was 194 min. long. You can actually boil that movie down into three bullet points.

- Rich girl falls in love with poor boy on ship.
- Ship hits iceberg in the Atlantic.
- Boy dies sacrificing himself for girl who is singing on a headboard.

All five *Twilight* movies totaled 608 min. of your life which you'll never get back. You can summarize those 10 hours with the three points.

- Girl loves vampire and sort of love werewolf.
- Werewolves and vampires don't like each other.
- Robert Pattinson, Taylor Lautner and Kristen Steward are OMG hot! And their real lives are as dramatic as their on screen ones!

The bullet points don't tell you the whole story but they give you a framework for understanding the story. The three simple rules that John Wesley coined don't tell us the whole story of the Bible but they give us a foothold for understanding what the story is about and how our story fits into the story of Jesus and what it means to be the presence of Jesus Christ in the world.

The Bible has many commandments like not to be proud or conceited. Don't repay anyone evil for evil. Don't let any debt remain outstanding. Do not commit adultery. Do not steal. Do not murder. Do not covet or be jealous. Do not have any other gods in your life besides the one true God. Do not take the Lord's name in vain. Do not eat rock badgers (I promise you that is in Leviticus.) When you're trying to figure out where to go eat today be sure you avoid the rock badgers, okay? Do not lie. Do not judge. Do not hate your brother or sister. Do not let the Sun go down on your anger. Do unto others.

In short, all of these can be summarized in one bullet point.

SLIDE Do no harm

This is how John Wesley summarized all of those Commandments into one phrase that was simple and memorable. But what does it mean for us today?

People debate this in coffee shops and in university classrooms and in Bible studies. People argue this from two main perspectives.

SLIDE Deontological Ethics

Deontological ethics or deontology (from Greek deon, "obligation, duty"; and -logia) is the normative ethical position that judges the morality of an action based on the action's adherence to a rule or rules. It is sometimes described as "duty" or "obligation" or "rule" -based ethics, because rules "bind you to your duty".

A deontologist would say that we as humans have certain things that we are obligated to do and not to do. There are certain things which are right by their very nature and these are the things that we should occupy her time with. Conversely, there are certain things which are wrong by their very nature and we should avoid those things. Do not murder. Do not lie. Do not gossip, whether you gossip behind somebody's back or on Twitter. There are certain things which we don't do because they are not right and so we follow a rule.

A deontologist would say that is very simple when you decide to do no harm how you should behave. There is a set of things which you can list as what would cause harm and you just follow the rules and don't do those things.

There is another perspective or way of looking at how we do no harm that is called teleology.

SLIDE Teleological Ethics

Teleological ethics, (teleological from Greek telos, "end"; logos, "science") is a theory of morality that derives duty or moral obligation from what is good or desirable as an end to be achieved. This is also known as consequentialist ethics or pragmatic ethics. Teleology argues that we all have a divine purpose and an end towards which we are moving. If we are moving towards this end, which Christians understand as the love of God and the love of neighbor, then sometimes there can be questionable behavior which is allowed. They might say that the end justifies the means.

You can see how these two groups of people might argue about how to understand things, especially big topics like war. What does it mean to do no harm? It might sound like an easy question to answer but it can be more complicated at times.

The reality is that most of us are not simply in one school of thought or the other. It's not like we are always arguing from a duty perspective or always arguing from a pragmatic perspective. I know that there are times when I am a deontologist and a rule follower. I also know that if someone came into my house to harm my wife or my children I would turn to teleology and pragmatism very quickly. I can justify a roundhouse punch or the use of deadly force pretty easily when it comes to protecting my family.

Teleology however is not just about rationalizing some harmful behavior in order to achieve the common good. Teleology also recognizes that sometimes we do things that seem innocent on the surface but they actually are quite harmful. Let's take grapes as an example. When you go to the grocery store to buy grapes I doubt that you do so with any malice in your heart. You don't see anybody holding a bag of grapes and laughing in a sinister way in a grocery store. But when I was a young man growing up in California there were protests going on which tried to make people aware of the fact that when they bought grapes at the grocery store they were supporting working conditions for farmers and workers who were not treated fairly in the fields.

Let's get real personal and talk about Durango for a minute. This last week our Vacation Bible School kids were urged through one of their activities to do something for someone else. My daughter got an encouragement to get some food at the grocery store and take it to the food bank. She did that and when she was there we asked about those who came in to get food and why they typically have to go to the food bank. What we learned is what many of you know which is that in order to live in Durango with the high cost of housing you often need two incomes. On top of that, many of the jobs here in Durango pay a fairly low-wage which means that families with children in particular often have a hard time making ends meet. That combination of low wages and high rent mean that many need the food bank to get enough to eat each month.

Innocent acts like buying grapes and living in Durango are ways of participating in systems which can cause harm from a teleological perspective. Teleologically there are things that are harmful in terms of how we spend money and where we live and how we spend our time and where we shop. Some things that we think are harmless can actually be causing harm.

Let's look at another example from our daily lives which is television. Yes, there are some television shows which are not good for our hearts or our souls,

but just watching television doesn't seem like it's a bad thing, does it? There is a book that came out a few years ago called, *Entertaining Ourselves to Death*, by Andrew Strom based in part on the groundbreaking book by Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*.

Postman spends time talking about the word "amusement." The base word inside of amusement is the word "muse." If you were to use the word muse to describe somebody you would be describing them as your source of inspiration. They are the reason why you are creative and what inspires you to create. The prefix "a" means "the opposite of." If a person is "atypical" then they are the opposite of a typical person. So when we are becoming amused we are becoming the opposite of inspired and the opposite of creative.

Our God is the creator and we are asked to be creators with God as we are made in the image of God. Whenever we are making something with art or poetry or even creating our children, we are participating with God and God is running through us. When we are becoming overly amused, we are becoming less like what God wants us to be. Watching television might seem to be a harmless adventure until it becomes addictive behavior that sucks us in. This is why Postman says these things in his book. I just pulled a few of the quotes out but the entire book is well worth reading.

(Use the image from the book on the left with the quote on the right.)

SLIDE ***"[M]ost of our daily news is inert, consisting of information that gives us something to talk about but cannot lead to any meaningful action. (page 68)."***

SLIDE ***"The television commercial is not at all about the character of products to be consumed. It is about the character of the consumers of products. (128)"***

SLIDE ***"Americans no longer talk to each other, they entertain each other. They do not exchange ideas, they exchange images. They do not argue with propositions; they argue with good looks, celebrities and commercials."***

It might seem that watching TV is not that big a deal at first glance, and I'm the first to admit that I like to watch good television that is entertaining. I often times use clips from television or movies to make a point in a message, but the challenge comes when we make television into our God. When we look at

television from a teleological perspective we might recognize that when we let our lives mirror what we see on television and when we let television consume us to the point of making a generation of children obese because they need television or video games, then we have to ask if we are harming ourselves by the amount of television that we are consuming. Something that was meant to be good and entertaining may have turned into something harmful which is why we have to ask deeper questions.

SLIDE Do No Harm (with 3 Simple Rules Graphic)

Dating somebody can be a very simple and harmless thing that is supposed to be pleasurable and enjoyable. But if the main reason for dating someone is so they can rescue you from your loneliness or fix some problem that you are struggling with, then it can be a problem. If you are dating someone because they can fill a wounded hole in your heart or help you pay your bills then you in essence are using them and it's putting you in a bad relationship that is destined for struggles in trouble.

All these actions are not wrong in and of themselves—buying grapes, living in Durango, watching TV or dating someone. God wants us to experience life that is full and abundant and anything that we do that steers us or someone else away from that abundant life is causing harm. This means we need to stop and think more critically about how we behave and what we do because we are all interconnected in many ways.

Every person is a child of God and every person has sacred worth to God. The reason that God came in human form and was incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ was to send this a very clear message that God values people above all else. Wesley reminded his followers and we can take heed today knowing that doing no harm is about seeing each person the way God sees them, through the eyes of Jesus Christ.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu oversaw the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa that was meant to help the country move from apartheid to a country that would eventually host the World Cup in soccer. He was motivated by the African concept of Ubuntu. I heard about this concept from several people while we were in Kenya and I thought I would let you hear from him directly.

VIDEO Desmond Tutu on Ununtu

SLIDE Do No Harm

Instead of, "I think therefore I am," Ubuntu says, "I am connected therefore I am." Ubuntu means that in order for you to be all you can be I have to be all that I can be. In order for me to be all I can be, you have to be all that you can be. Our lives are intertwined. Forget rubber and glue because whatever we say sticks to them and sticks to you. When we rain on someone else's parade we step in the puddle and we get wet as well. Our culture says that we are very independent and individual and you can choose to do whatever you want to do—if it feels good just do it because it doesn't impact anybody else.

But the reality is that we know this is not true. What you do with your life impacts the people in your family and the people who were closest to you and the people that you work with and the people you are sitting next to in church. When we are at work and we manipulate somebody and we use them for our own advantage and advancement, we create a culture of manipulation in the workplace that we have to live in. If you go home and the first words out of your mouth are criticism and it slithers past your teeth, then you have to spend the rest of the evening in a house environment that you helped create.

This is why the Scriptures tell us that the best thing that we can do to find fulfillment and joy in life is to bless others. You are blessed to be a blessing and not simply meant to keep everything to yourself. You are meant to be a River that life flows through and not a clogged up reservoir where the water becomes stagnant and stale because you keep everything yourself. If you are blessing to your spouse, your kids, the waitress that used to bring you the rock badger sandwich and they are fully alive in God then it would benefit you because you have to live with them.

The pain we inflict on other people is pain that eventually we inflict upon ourselves and if we are not careful we will repeat over and over again. Jesus tells us to love our neighbor as we love ourselves because he recognized this and their connection that we have together and if nothing else we should do no harm because eventually it would harm ourselves.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a Lutheran pastor during the Holocaust and he died while in a concentration camp just before the Allied forces liberated Germany. He was helping Jews escape the country and even participated in the

plot to take down Hitler and he was hung for treason. One of my favorite books is his *Letters and Papers from Prison*. He wrote these words in one of his letters.

SLIDE (Picture of Dietrich Bonhoeffer to the left and quote on right)

"We must learn to regard people less in light of what they do or omit to do and more in the light of what they suffer."

We harm other people because we don't think they are children of God. We harm them because we don't think they're even human. We harm people because we don't recognize how connected we all are and that it harms us in the process. We moved so fast through life that everyone else is a blur and we don't slow down enough to see the features on their face or the scar on their cheek or the woundedness in their eyes. We don't realize that they have some of the same insecurities and pain that we have. Their life is much more difficult than we ever gave them credit for and we fail to see that and so we cause even further harm.

SLIDE **Do No Harm**

Let me ask you a question. If you're willing, would you raise your hand if you have experienced cancer or MS in your own life or in the life of a loved one in some personal way? Hold your hand up nice and high and as you do that I want you to look around. Almost every one of us has experienced just this one form of suffering at some point in our lives. You can put your hand down now. I wanted you to do that for two simple reasons. One, I want you to recognize that you are not alone and part of what it means to be in a community like the church is to recognize that we are connected and we're part of one body in Jesus Christ.

The second reason I wanted you to do this was to recognize that each of us should tread lightly when it comes to these and any other kind of suffering or illness that people struggle with. We are asked by Christ to do no harm and the best way that we can do that is to recognize the suffering and hurt that others have experienced and not acting different.

Let me ask you another question. If you have been affected in whatever way you want to define that by the recession and the economic downturn that began in 2008 would you raise your hand? Raise it high look around and know that you're not alone. Tread lightly on people's souls when it comes to this and do no harm.

If you are a fan of any sports team that has not won a championship in the last 10 years, raise your hand! Go ahead all you Broncos and Niners and Rockies and Avalanche and Cubs fans...!

Every one of us in this room has experienced pain of some sort in our lives because that's part of what it means to be human. No one knows your exact pain or hurt except God, but we have a chance and can make a choice to be honest with each other and share openly where it is we have experienced hurt which makes it much easier to do no harm. Maybe then we can start approaching people with gentleness and kindness and goodness.

Maybe the person who was late responding to an e-mail is late because something has happened in their family that is a bit more important than checking their smart phone every few minutes. Maybe they are as wounded as you are and they need grace and the benefit of the doubt as much as you need that. We are meant to do no harm and yet we send text messages and e-mails and we make assumptions about people's motives that many times are way off base.

We still do harm and one reason we do that is because of the way it makes us feel in the immediate moment. We often do it because we get something out of it or it makes us feel as if we are in control. When we hurt others it somehow makes us feel better for a moment. When you are feeling insignificant, the best way to feel better quickly is to make somebody else feel even more insignificant than you are. Then you can say to yourself, "I might not be the best person around here but at least I'm not like them." If somebody blames you for something then one way you make yourself feel better by blaming somebody else.

Let me give you a really concrete example of how this works for us. I have here with me 12 fresh doughnuts from Durango Doughworks. When I first got them this morning they were warm. The first doughnut you eat tastes pretty good doesn't it? Then you eat a few more and your stomach starts to feel a bit queasy. How do you feel if you eat the whole box? You will feel sick to your stomach. Would any of you like to try that this morning?

I actually did eat 12 warm glazed donuts when I was in college once on a dare. The reality is that after you do this you don't feel satisfied and you don't even feel full. You mostly wonder why you did it and the only answer you can

come up with is because you are in college and you only use your brain in the classroom. The more that you eat the less enjoyment you get out of each one. We call that the law of diminishing returns.

SLIDE The Law of Diminishing Returns

This law says that the more that you do something that was pleasurable at first, like drinking alcohol or looking at pornography or gambling or eating glazed doughnuts or doing harm to others, the less pleasure you get from doing it just once. You have to do it more and more in order to achieve that high. We get less of a good feeling out of doing these things over time but we find it hard to stop doing them because we remember that at one point it did feel good and we keep pursuing that experience again and again even if it leads to our own destruction. Then we start to live out this bumper sticker that I saw last week.

SLIDE "Hurt people hurt people" (graphic)

Hurt people hurt people. We who hurt and harm others are usually those who have been harmed and wounded ourselves. Somehow we try to make ourselves feel better by causing other people more pain and yet we find that this not lead to life or joy.

The people of Rome in the first century who were part of the church were hurting each other which is why the apostle Paul wrote these words in chapter 12:14-19.

SLIDE *14 Bless those who persecute you. Don't curse them; pray that God will bless them. 15 Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with each other. Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all! 17 Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. 18 Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone. 19 Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, "I will take revenge; I will pay them back," says the Lord.*

Do you know why God says that he will take revenge? I believe God says this because he knows that we can never be satisfied with revenge. God knows there will also be times where revenge is not even possible and he doesn't want

us to live with that pain and that hurt. He knows if we carry that around we will be miserable and we won't experience abundant life.

Several hundred years before Jesus there was a medical center in Pergamum called the Asclepion. On the video screen you will see the ruins found in modern-day Turkey.

SLIDE Ruins of Asclepion (graphic)

This place was dedicated to the god Asclepius, who was the god of healing.

SLIDE Asclepion god Statue (graphic)

You can see an artist's depiction of this place on the video screen.

SLIDE Asclepion Model (graphic)

If you were sick anywhere in this region you would travel to this city and walk through this entryway as you entered the city of Pergamum. The priest would examine you in the entryway on the lower right corner of this diagram. If you were too sick then you are not allowed into the medical center because it would be bad business if someone died in your medical center and you might give your disease to others.

SLIDE Asclepion Tunnel (graphic)

When your name was called in the waiting area you would be taken downstairs into a sleeping chamber. There were snakes in the room and you would be placed on the table and given medicine to make you unconscious.

SLIDE Asclepion Pillar with Snakes

Snakes would then crawl all over your body and when you woke up you would tell the priest your dreams. The priest would interpret your dreams and then give you a diagnosis and give you a prescription for healing. Sometimes the prescription was going to the theater or eating certain kinds of foods or drinking water or simply resting.

SLIDE Asclepion Site Map (graphic)

In all cases it would require you to go to the pools outside and cleanse yourself in the pools. You can see those pools in the middle of this site map.

SLIDE The Rod of Asclapius (graphic)

The image of Asclepion and the snakes are still enduring because we see those images on medical records and images to this day.

Listen to these words from the Gospel of John chapter 5.

SLIDE *Jesus returned to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish holy days. 2 Inside the city, near the Sheep Gate, was the pool of Bethesda, with five covered porches. 3 Crowds of sick people—blind, lame, or paralyzed—lay on the porches. 5 One of the men lying there had been sick for thirty-eight years. 6 When Jesus saw him and knew he had been ill for a long time, he asked him, “Would you like to get well?”*
7 “I can’t, sir,” the sick man said, “for I have no one to put me into the pool when the water bubbles up. Someone else always gets there ahead of me.”
8 Jesus told him, “Stand up, pick up your mat, and walk!”
9 Instantly, the man was healed! He rolled up his sleeping mat and began walking!

Archaeologists discovered that this pool at Bethesda was dedicated to the Roman god Asclapius. This man was not only looking for healing but he was looking for healing in the wrong place and from the wrong god. Remember that we learned a few minutes ago that when you went to the Asclepeon you were told to go and sleep while the priest waved his hand over you and then he interpreted your dreams, but in this story Jesus tells him to pick up his sleeping mat and walk. There are many images in ways that we can look at this story but one of the things that we can't overlook is the juxtaposition of this man looking for healing in the wrong place. There is no doubt that everyone who heard this story in the first century knew about the god Asclepius and Jesus is giving a very clear message that this is the wrong place to look for healing.

When we are experiencing so much pain we often time go looking for healing in all the wrong places. We think that if we hurt someone else that will make us feel better. We repeat this over and over again and we can't figure out why we never find healing.

SLIDE **How long have you been at your pool of Bethesda?**

Have you been there for 38 years, hoping for a different outcome for your actions? Have you been there for six months? Some of the most joyful and

fulfilled people in the world have experienced the same pain that you have experienced in your life. Some of the unhappiest and meanest people in the world have experienced similar pain to you. The difference between the two groups is not in the severity of the pain but in the decision they made in what to do with that pain.

We either take that pain and we make a decision to give it to God and Jesus Christ and let Jesus deal with the hurt and the revenge or whatever it is we are carrying with us, or we take the pain as a motivator to do harm to others.

Without raising your hand, let me ask a couple questions.

Who here understands what rejection feels like?

Who knows what it's like to have a broken dream?

Who knows the pain of feeling like you have to be perfect to get the love that you deserve and if you are not getting the love that you deserve it must be because you are not good enough?

Who understands the fear of abandonment?

Let me suggest to you that we are the walking wounded and when we come to church we often times try to hide that fact. We put all this makeup on to make sure that no one knows we were just crying as we walked in the room. We try to put on a smile even though we were just yelling in the car on the phone or to our family in person. Before we get out of the car we tell everyone in our family, "All right everybody. Put on your church face! We can't let anyone see us like we really are!"

People ask you nonchalantly, "How are you doing?" You answer a perfunctory, "Doing just fine," on the outside but on the inside you are broken just like the rest of us.

The good news of Jesus Christ is not that you can just take the words "do no harm" and do life better. The good news is that Jesus Christ can find you at your pool of Bethesda too and offer healing and out of your brokenness you can find the strength to do no harm because you recognize that each one of us is broken in some way.

If you can receive that forgiveness which is meant to wash over you from the cross, then maybe you will be a little less stingy with grace and it will be easier for you to do no harm. Let me suggest to you that none of us has the strength or

capacity to do no harm all by ourselves. We need to get to the cross and the gift of grace and mercy that is offered from God through Jesus Christ. If someone offends you or wrongs you then maybe you will have the strength to give them a little more grace when you recognize that you have been forgiven.

More importantly, when you can begin to feel deep down inside of you that you are worthwhile, valuable and a loved child of God, then you have a pool of strength inside of yourself out of which you can actually do no harm. You don't have to put others down so you can feel better. You don't have to make yourself better than everyone else because you are who you are, nothing better and nothing worse.

Jesus can find you at your pool of Bethesda. He can find you and he can heal you and he can give you the strength to take up your mat and walk and find abundance and joy again. The only thing that will stop hurt from having a domino effect and going from your life into another person's life and then into another person's life is Jesus Christ and the story of redemption and salvation that he offers to each one of us.

If you can give your hurts over to Jesus and honestly confess that you are ready for change then you can be saved. You can gather with other people like you in this place as part of the community that is being mended together to be able to form the presence of Jesus Christ in the world. The truth is that hurt people can heal people if they will be open to the healing presence of Jesus Christ. This is what Paul reminds the people of Rome in Romans 13:8-10

SLIDE ***8 Owe nothing to anyone—except for your obligation to love one another. If you love your neighbor, you will fulfill the requirements of God's law. 9 For the commandments say, "You must not commit adultery. You must not murder. You must not steal. You must not covet." These—and other such commandments—are summed up in this one commandment: "Love your neighbor as yourself." 10 Love does no wrong to others, so love fulfills the requirements of God's law.***

When you look at all the decisions that face you, big and small in life, loving your neighbor as you love yourself means seeing your neighbor as a child of God. It means committing to do no harm because you recognize that in loving your neighbor you are loving yourself.

Do no harm because it's better for your own soul. Do no harm because you recognize that we are more connected than you thought we were. Do no harm because when you inflict pain on others you eventually inflict pain on yourself as well. Do no harm because you recognize that each one of us experiences pain.

More than anything else, do no harm because you recognize that in the end God wins and your hurts will be healed through Jesus Christ. When you recognize this then your motivation for hurting others no longer exists. When you are struggling with the decision, how to treat someone or how to make a decision at work, the answer is to do no harm.

We're going to close in a prayer that is a litany. Every time you hear me say the words, "Lord, Christ Jesus," our response collectively will be, "Save us." This is a chance for each one of us to come to God and make this be a profound moment in our lives as we seek to do no harm in the midst of prayer. Let's pray.

SLIDE Leader: *"Lord, Christ Jesus"*

Response: "Save us!"

God we know that we have experienced pain in our own life that would inspire us to move away from others. We have heard horrible words like, "I don't love you anymore." Along the way we have picked up messages which say that we are not good enough. God we are terrified that these messages are true and we replay them over and over in our head. God we pray that you would heal us from all these hurts, "Lord, Christ Jesus"

Response: "Save us!"

Oh God we have taken our pain and paid it forward. Our words have sometimes been cruel. We have not been a safe place for other people were wounded to find healing. We have harmed others in the things that we have done and things we have left undone. We have delayed justice and often been obsessed with our own needs. God, we pray for forgiveness, "Lord, Christ Jesus"

Response: "Save us!"

We are ready for change. Today we pledge and we decide to give our hearts to you so that you can make us something new. You can make us into something that is more beautiful even now than we could ever imagine. We pray that you would come into our lives and make us a new creation. Heal us, "Lord, Christ Jesus"

Response: “Save us!”

In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

“Do No Harm”

Theme: Three Simple Rules

Scripture: Romans 12:14-19; 13:8-10

Things I’d like to remember from today’s sermon:

Meditation Moments

MONDAY, June 24 – **Read Exodus 20:13-17** – In the saga of how God relates to people, the Ten Commandments came at a pivotal moment. The Israelites had been slaves in Egypt for 400 years. They had learned the Egyptian culture, the brutal, dominating behavior of their masters. Now God called them to a very different quality of life, one that sought to avoid doing harm to others.

- Murder’s harmfulness is pretty clear. Think about the ways that adultery, stealing and giving false testimony against your neighbor cause harm. How have these behaviors harmed you, or someone you knew well? What kinds of things can we “steal” from others besides money or possessions?
- The Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary defines “covet” as “to want to have something very much, especially something which belongs to someone else.” If you covet, who does that harm? In what ways can coveting open the door to some of the harmful behaviors named in the previous commandments?

TUESDAY, June 25 – **Read 1 Leviticus 19:9-18** – Jesus said Leviticus 19:18—“Love your neighbor as yourself”—is a vital life rule. An expert in the law asked him, “Who is my neighbor?” In reply, Jesus told the well-known parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). But the expert could have known that Leviticus, in the verses before the command, already listed many “neighbors” God’s people shouldn’t harm.

- Have you ever heard the phrase “Don’t leave any money on the table,” urging you to squeeze every penny out of someone else in a business deal? How did the commands in verse 9-10, 13, and 16 urge the Israelites to deal with others? How can you as a Christian decide whether guarding your interests does or does not harm others?

- “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me.” That saying may help a child cope with playground taunts, but as adults we know words can do great harm. What principles do verses 12-13 and 15-18 teach that bear on how we speak to one another?

WEDNESDAY, June 26 – **Read Romans 13:8-10** – Paul sent this letter to a set of Roman house churches. In Romans 14-15, we see that these churches were very different. Some were mainly Jewish; others mostly Gentile. Their customs and standards of “righteousness” varied. It was all too easy for them to quarrel and tear each other down. “Love does no harm” was a big challenge, a crucial call.

- Bishop Reuben Job says “each of us knows of groups locked in conflict... the conflict is real, the divisions deep, the consequences often devastating. If... all involved can agree to do no harm, the climate in which the conflict is going on is immediately changed.” (from the book *Three Simple Rules – A Wesleyan Way of Living*) How might ugly religious conflicts (e.g. the Salem witch trials, the Inquisition) have been different if Christians had always aimed to “do no harm”? How can you stand for truths that matter to you without harming those who disagree?
- Which of the “deeds of darkness” Paul listed mainly harm the doer? Which of them harm others? In what ways does “do no harm” challenge you to avoid harming yourself?

THURSDAY, June 27 – **Read Galatians 5:13-21** – In *Three Simple Rules*, Bishop Job asks if one reason we don’t choose to live into “do no harm” may be that “we are afraid of its consequences. To abandon the ways of the world for the way of Jesus is a radical step.” Paul called the Galatian Christians to let the Holy Spirit’s presence radically change their lives.

- Paul describes the way of life he’s talking about with the phrase “walk by the Spirit.” When have you experienced “inner nudges” that move you towards something that is good or away from something that is harmful? How can you learn to be more attuned to the Holy Spirit’s leading in your life?
- Who have you known whose life consistently followed the pattern of doing no harm to others? In what ways did that person’s life avoid the negative traits that Paul lists in this passage? What positive impacts did (or does) that person’s life have on you and on others?

FRIDAY, June 28 – **Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24** – Paul wrote that to reject whatever is harmful makes space for all kinds of beauty in life. He lived in the Greco/Roman world. Its people enjoyed violent gladiatorial fights and chariot races, practiced “sacred” prostitution, and worshipped scheming emperors as gods. In many ways, we face similar choices about our attitudes and entertainments today.

- How much do the positive qualities of life Paul listed in this passage (e.g. rejoicing, praying, being thankful) appeal to you? How can you nurture an inner appetite for the good? In what ways do you find that choosing harmful attitudes and actions (to yourself or to others) reduces your appetite for the good things God offers?
- “Do not put out the Spirit’s fire,” Paul wrote. In what different ways do you believe God can communicate with you, helping you to discern what is harmful from what is good and helpful? How can you give the Bible’s principles, prayer, and sharing with Godly friends a larger role in your decision-making?

SATURDAY, June 29 – **Read Isaiah 11:1-9** – In *Three Simple Rules: A Wesleyan Way of Living*, Bishop Job writes that “even a casual reading of the gospel suggests that Jesus taught and practiced a way of living that did no harm. His life, his way of life, and his teaching demonstrated so well this first simple rule.” Jesus is the biggest reason for us to adopt this approach to life. Isaiah wrote prophetically

about God's dream of a world restored through the Messiah's work, a world where "they will neither harm nor destroy."

- Imagine a world where people never purposely harm or destroy. If they unintentionally do harm, they quickly apologize and make things right. How much tension, fear and grief would a world like that have? What one step will you take today to make yourself more aware of any harm you may be doing to others, especially those you love? Ask God for help. Seek pastoral or professional help if you need to. Do no harm.

Family Activity: In all families, we say words that hurt each other. Read Proverbs 16:21. Create a family encouragement jar. Cut out 30-40 slips of paper. On each slip, write a word or phrase of love, support, care or hope. Think about what words lift you up and include those as a blessing to others. Place all of the slips in a jar. Any time a family member has spoken words of harm, he or she can then pull out a slip of paper, apologize, then say something encouraging. Better yet, work toward not speaking words of harm at all. When you need help, go to the jar for ideas and inspiration! Ask God to help you use your words for good.