

Today we are remembering the Golden Rule, the idea that Jesus teaches us to treat and do unto others as you would have them do to you. We remember this sentiment joined with churches and organizations across the Hudson community, to remember to treat our neighbors the way we would wish to be treated - with kindness, with care and concern, with listening to understand rather than judge, with love for ourselves and the people around us. These are crucial elements and actions of doing and living into the commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves - listening, caring, and kindness.

The key part of the Golden Rule and indeed what Jesus teaches us in our Gospel reading today, is that the way we love our neighbors starts with ourselves. Our actions, our thoughts, our words, and our deeds. Creating a community centered on love of God and neighbors starts first with our own actions and behaviors. We cannot control how others are going to react or speak or judge or anything else, nor is it helpful to always assume that our neighbors are going to do unkind or unhelpful things. But what we can control is how we behave, the words we speak, the ways we interact with others, regardless of how they are presenting themselves too.

Jesus teaches us that we must take the log out of our own eye first before seeing the speck in others' eyes. This visual of a log in our eye helps us to understand the gravity, the weight, the huge importance of our own work and the things that we believe and struggle with and carry around as heavy judgment. And the log image is helpful for understanding that the work to take the log out of our own eye comes one piece at a time. I don't know much about woodworking or forestry, admittedly, but the little bit I do know teaches me that it takes multiple strokes to chop wood into manageable pieces. It takes a whole team of people with a common goal and purpose to deal with a big log in the way of the road or in the yard or even in the forest. Removing a log is not always easy work - it takes time, intention, and effort to do. And so does our personal work to be able to truly see others where they are, and not allow our own faults and shortcomings, histories and imperfections, to get in the way of seeing our neighbors as they truly are, our fellow beloved children of God.

And it's true, our neighbors are not perfect and have their own shortcomings and faults, just like we do. But we would not want others to treat us judgmentally or cruelly or with manipulative tendencies because of our imperfections. It's important that we extend that same grace to others - kindness, caring, listening, and loving, even when it's difficult. Even when we disagree. Even when we cannot fathom how this person is doing or saying something, they are still just as worthy of the love God gives us each and every day as we are. They are just as deserving of grace and mercy and forgiveness. They are our fellow people, created and loved by God.

This work on ourselves may seem scary or overwhelming at times. It's often uncomfortable and humbling to truthfully recognize our own faults and shortcomings. But only by this work on ourselves, by removing the logs from our eyes, will the Golden Rule truly begin to be possible. The work on how we treat others and how we present ourselves in the world is the starting place, the tangible action we can take to bring God's desired kingdom closer. And though the work is hard, it is absolutely worth it.

And we are never truly alone in doing the work of removing the logs from our own eyes. Jesus goes on to tell us that when we ask, we shall receive. When we knock, the door will be opened. And Jesus is the one who gives to us when we ask, and opens the doors when we knock. When we seek Jesus we find the life we desire. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, the one through whom all things are possible and indeed the hope for new life is rooted and grows in him. In His love. In His truth and commitment to the lowly and oppressed and the stranger and the neighbor. In his unabashed commitment to humanity and the love that's needed to keep us truly alive. In his unapologetic commitment to calling out the people and systems that need to change in order for God's reign of love to come nearer. In his ability to have compassion for the sick and hungry, homeless and hurting, struggling and sinful, deeply loved people of this earth and actually does things to help and heal and bring life to them. In his ability to choose the cross even in the midst of pain and hurt and suffering to his own body, out

of great love for us, so that by his rising and defeat of death we may have new and eternal and abundant life here and in the heavenly kingdom. In his ability to always bring resurrection hope even in the darkest of times. In his ability to truly inspire us to be His beloved body in this beautiful, broken world.

Jesus encourages us too with the wisdom that everyone who searches, finds. It's one of my favorite and most hopeful pieces of insight - that we find what we seek. If we are seeking love within ourselves and each other, then that is what we will find. If we are seeking to project what's uncomfortable or unfathomable or hard for us to carry emotionally or spiritually, then we will find faults in others. We will fixate on that speck in their eye instead of seeking what we can do differently, carry better, make a positive change in our world. Fixating on the speck in others' eyes is what Jesus calls hypocrisy. Before we can call others to action, we must do the work ourselves. And I certainly pray that as we do the work of removing the logs, we keep the love we seek in mind. We are not punishing ourselves for the logs in our eyes but rather working to create a more loving reality for us and the people around us. We are worthy of God's love, just as we are, and God truly does love and come alongside us in all we do. The measure we give is the measure we get - as much as we put into the work of being the love of God, the hands and feet of Christ in the world, we will get out of it too. We will see that love of God in others too, in their service to others, in the love our neighbors give back to us.

So when we remove the logs from our eyes, it is not for our own self-aggrandizement or solely our own benefit. Removing logs from our eyes to see each other and our world clearly is how we work to bring God's reign of love and kingdom of heaven nearer. We may not always be able to change the people and the systems that cause pain and hurt in our world, but we can certainly change ourselves and stop the cycles of hurt where we are. We can do our little bits of good where we can by first starting with our own selves. And Jesus comes with us in that journey. Jesus is the one helping us to break down that log into smaller, more manageable pieces so we can do the hard and holy and important work of removing it. Jesus gives

us hope and encouragement and love in that journey, no matter where it leads. God is with us, here, now, always has, and always will be. And I pray that this steadfast, never ending love of God inspires each of us to truly love one another as we have first been loved too. Thanks be to God, Amen.