

# LATHER, RINSE, REPEAT

A Sermon by The Rev. Dr. Arthur M. Suggs  
Preached on Rally Day, Sunday, September 11, 2016

*In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

## **Weaving and Braiding**

You might have noticed that today is sort of complex in a number of ways: The things that are involved in the worship service, communion, the dedication of Rally Day. But it's also complex in that there are four themes I would like to highlight: One I already mentioned, the Fifteenth Anniversary of 9/11.

The second theme is that Islam has two major holidays, and one of them coincidentally lands on 9/11. This is called Eid al-Adha, which is the Festival of Sacrifice. The third theme is Rally Day for us.

The fourth theme eclipses all the others combined. That is, we haven't paid proper recognition to the Endwell baseball team. They are the Little League World Champions from our own area, having won the title on August 28, and we're very proud of them.

So now, allow me to do a little weaving and braiding of these themes.

## **I. The Fifteenth Anniversary**

While I was preparing for this sermon, I remembered that it was five years ago when we had a special worship service in memory of the Tenth Anniversary of 9/11. One of the most useful areas of research for that particular sermon was looking back into older sermons of 1951 as pastors of a generation ago were speaking to their congregations on the Tenth Anniversary of Pearl Harbor. How we understood Pearl Harbor ten years after the

disastrous attack by Japan is what they were looking at then. I also noticed that the dedication of the memorial in Pearl Harbor was not accomplished until about ten years after the Declaration of War against Japan.

The same kind of delayed anniversary occurred in dealing with 9/11 in terms of a memorial. The fountains at the sites of the two fallen towers and the building of the new One World Trade Center did not occur until about the ten-year mark, when our soul as a nation was ready to do something about memorializing that event.

We are yet in the middle of a lot of soul-searching as a nation. Many people still have extremely strong opinions about what our very soul should be like as a nation. Some of us follow the Roman dictum of: "Let them hate as long as they fear, and keep our military as strong as possible." Others on both sides of the political aisle are questioning: "To what degree should we be the policemen of the world?"

One of the videos that went viral this summer was a fascinating one about an ex-CIA person who had been interviewing captured al Qaeda operatives, and the questioner was asking, in a sincere, legitimate way, "Why are you a terrorist? Why do you bomb indiscriminately? Why do you do that?"

The prisoner was trying to answer honestly: Using American movies for illustration, he

said, “You know the *Star Wars* series of movies? You’ve got the Evil Empire, Darth Vader, and all those enemy characters, and on the other side you’ve got this plucky band of rebels? Well, you guys are the Evil Empire. We’re the rebels, trying to take you down.” And then he pointed out that the United States has 662 military bases located in 38 countries.

## II. Eid al-Adha

The second theme I mentioned is Eid al-Adha, the Festival of Sacrifice. The Islamic name means submission. As the Christian religion is named after Christ, so the Muslim religion is named after the word for submission: “Obey,” knuckle under to the dictates of God.

The holiday that they are observing this very day, a Festival of Sacrifice, recognizes an unusual story in Genesis 22, also found in the Koran, in which Abraham is asked by God to sacrifice his own son.

To make a sweeping generalization, there is little motivation for Jews and Christians to preach on that passage. You come across it in Genesis, and it’s usual to move on as fast as you can. It seems weird for God to be asking for human sacrifice. We prefer not to deal with that. For Islam, however, that’s one of their central stories, that Abraham’s obedience to God was of such a deep core that he was even willing to sacrifice his own son.

This begs the question: What is the highest virtue for you? For Christians generally, it’s something along the lines of Christ-consciousness, putting on the mind of Christ in our everyday lives.

However, 1.6 billion people have a different highest virtue — that of obedience to the will

of God, whether you like it or not. Whether you think it’s good or not, you must obey.

## III. Rally Day

The third theme is Rally Day, and so we dedicate our Sunday School and ourselves on this Sunday.

I’d like to read you a paragraph by Brian Coppola, written in the *Journal of Chemical Education*. As most of you know, my wife, Tracy, is a chemistry teacher, and so one of the periodicals we get at the house is this fine journal. She came across a squib that churches, schools, and people in general need to hear. He wrote:

“There are no new stories, only retellings of old stories in new skins. I am struck by an unbearable sameness in the intended lessons: How it is that we never quite seem to learn them and how necessary it is to rediscover what we already know. Our collective capacity to forget seems purposeful: If you could not forget or get past a terror, sadness, or depression, then you would be forever locked into that moment. Amnesia is purposeful, but it also means that joy is as fleeting as agony, as is revelation and enlightenment. And so we visit and revisit ideas. Perhaps it is an important insight that we move forward in nudges and reminders incrementally rather than by leaps, [which affords] a chance for the reminders we need to overcome, at least for the moment, the amnesia.”

What I would like to suggest today is the lesson that we, the nation as a whole, must constantly relearn the lesson that we have too often forgotten, which is the Golden Rule. I

would like to present it to you again. I know I'm preaching to the choir, but bear with me.

### Various Versions of the Golden Rule

I'm going to give you a few versions of the Golden Rule, and I would challenge you to ponder its potential use in our national politics — we are all in the thick of this right now, just loving it, every one of us — in international affairs, in our interpersonal dynamics, in our churches, in our schools, in our offices, in our factories, how often is the Golden Rule forgotten?

Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount:

“Do unto others what you would have them do unto you” (Matthew 7:12). This is the meaning of the law of Moses and the teaching of the prophets.

He was actually quoting the Talmud. You have the Hebrew scriptures, but then there's this larger body of literature that is sort of parallel, and it supplements the Hebrew scriptures, called the Talmud. A bunch of oral and written history is there, and that's what Jesus was quoting.

Here it is in the Talmud (Shabbath folio: 31a, Babylonian Talmud):

“What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow: This is the whole Torah; the rest is the explanation; go and learn.”

Similarly for Islam, you've got the Koran and then you've got the equivalent of the Talmud, called the Hadith, once again a big body of literature, the oral and written traditions, stories, and so forth.

And in the Hadith, there's this little story:

“A Bedouin came to the prophet Muhammed, grabbed the stirrup of his

camel and said: O messenger of God! Teach me something to go to heaven with. The prophet said: As you would have people do to you, do to them; and what you dislike to be done to you, don't do to them. Now let the stirrup go! This maxim is enough for you; go and act in accordance with it!”

Zi Gong, who was one of the disciples of Confucius, asked:

“Is there any one word that could guide a person throughout life?” The Master replied: “How about ‘shu’ [reciprocity]: Never impose on others what you would not choose for yourself?” – Confucius, *Analects XV.24*

It's well known that the Golden Rule is found in every religion, every age, everywhere. It goes back into the Sixth Century before Christ. One of the great philosophers, called Thales (c. 624 BC – c. 546 BC), has one of the original versions of the Golden Rule, where he says very simply:

“Avoid doing what you would blame others for doing,”

Now we go all the way into modern times, to one of the speakers we've had here in the recent past, Evolutionary Theorist David Sloan Wilson. He is a professor at Binghamton University and author of *Does Altruism Exist?* This quote is simple but deceptively guileless:

“Selfishness beats altruism within groups. Altruistic groups beat selfish groups. Everything else is commentary.”

So we've covered the Anniversary of 9/11, with ongoing soul-searching; the Muslim

holiday, with a bit of insight into the will of God; and some reminders of the Golden Rule, encouraging us all to be sensitive to it, to remember it, and to apply it. Lather, rinse, repeat.

#### **IV. Little League Baseball**

Enough chitchat. Let's get to baseball. After the Maine-Endwell team beat the Seoul, South Korea, team 2-1 on August 28, they did what little boys (and grown men) do. They threw their hats in the air, they threw their mitts in the air, they jumped up and down, and many of them began to cry. They yelled and celebrated that moment of being Little League World Champions at eleven or twelve years old.

They went over and got their coach, and then they started doing a victory lap as they went down the first-base line into right field, hung

a left and went all the way through the outfield and came back down the third-base line, where they encountered the other team that also was crying but hanging their heads because of their loss.

Our team invited their team to join Maine-Endwell for a second victory lap. Champions all, Seoul lost only one game, and that was by 2-1.

Did any one of the Maine-Endwell boys consciously think about obeying the Golden Rule? No, they didn't think about that at all. It was something that came from their hearts; deep inside, it came from their Christ-consciousness. Come, join us as well. We are all champions.

The Bible says, "And a little child shall lead them."

*Amen.*