OCCUPY NOW!

The time is alive my friends. Just look into the streets. Just listen to the sounds. Just feel the electricity. Something big is afoot.

It’s not just on Wall Street. Or Seattle. It’s everywhere. People are speaking. Too many parts of our system are failing too many. People are being left behind – to live on park benches, to grovel for food, and to languish in prison.

The time is alive. It’s exhilarating. It’s terrifying. It’s overwhelming. And it’s at our doorstep.

The Occupy movement is giving voice to a gut reaction, a dis-ease in the pit of our stomachs, that as a country, we are failing at our most important task. The most important task is taking care of people.

In the beginning when humans went from being isolated individuals to community, questions arose. Big questions. Who am I? Whose am I? Why am I here? What is my purpose? What is our purpose? What is the meaning of life?

These are religious questions. And ever since we’ve asked them, we’ve been trying to answer them.

Our greed, creature comforts, and dizzying pace of life have shielded many of us from the search for answers. Indeed, many of us have forgotten the questions.

In every generation there comes a time when the questions can no longer be buried. I was just getting out of diapers when the 60’s happened. Remember that great revolt against war, that sexual revolution, that hippie craze that spouted free love? And the civil rights movement? The women’s movement? Well, those folks are retiring now.

And today’s generation is once again asking, “Who am I?” “Whose am I?” “Who are we?” “What is the meaning of life?” These are foundational questions. They are questions of conscience. They run deeper than corporate mission statements. These are religious
questions. They are deeply personal.

In the beginning when we humans sat in communities, we came up with some possible answers. In our opening words this morning, we listened to readings from sacred texts that include some of our ancestors’ responses. Over time we discovered it is better to live in community and in working relationship with others. It is no surprise that almost every religion that has survived the test of time has a version of the Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you”.

This makes for civil society. There is no room for greed. There is no room for “I got mine. Too bad for you.” There is no room for dehumanizing our neighbor. Who said we could make another human being, our brother, sister, mother, father, cousin, friend, or foe, not human? What kind of power do we think we have? Did we not learn anything from our days of pre-civilized individualism? There is a reason we developed communities. There is a reason we learned to live together. There is a reason we wrote Golden Rules. To live together, we have to be called to be our best selves.

I was reminded of this when I read a Facebook post this week, it said:

“Sometimes, I want to ask God why He allows poverty, famine and injustice in the world when He could do something about it, but I’m afraid He might just ask me the same question.”

“Why do we allow poverty, famine and injustice in the world when WE could do something about it.”

I live a comfortable life. Money gets tight sometimes but I don’t have to worry about where my next meal is coming from. I don’t have to worry about where I’m going to sleep. And I am incredibly fortunate to be employed – in a vocation that calls me. I am incredibly grateful.

Not everybody has all this. And our system doesn’t always help. But we are our system. We are our government. We created it. We elected it. We perpetuate it. It is us. And regardless of our own comfort level, we are failing as a society, as a community, and as human beings when the least of our fellow human beings is not being cared for.

The work is hard. We’ve been at it for all of human existence. We won’t fix it in our lifetimes. But that doesn’t excuse us. The meaning of life is not to see how comfortable we can get while our neighbor wallows in despair. The meaning of life is not to say, “I am the only one that matters.” The meaning of life is to love; to exercise our human ability to care for each other as
ourselves; to use our conscience to formulate golden rules, but also to use our every strength to act out the golden rule.

Who is my neighbor? Whom shall I love? Whom shall I treat as well as I treat myself? Whom shall I respect as I expect to be respected?

In Kirkland, 17% of our neighbors were born outside the United States. Fifty percent of them are U.S. citizens. They are our neighbors. In turn, we are the their neighbors. How do we expect to be treated? How do they expect to be treated? How do we live in community? How do we love our neighbor?

My friends, the question we should all be asking is “How do we occupy the Golden Rule?”

Can you imagine the justice and compassion that would flow out of decisions made in that context? Can you imagine every person, every neighbor near or far, being treated with respect and dignity? Can you imagine the end of starvation posters with images of children with bloated tummies, the end of campaigns to put a roof over every head, and the end of killing each other and calling war justified?

Can you imagine peace – a world in which greed is punished rather than rewarded, a world in which the Golden Rule is about fairness for all, not rape and pillage for selfish glory?

Yes, we can imagine it. And we can do it. And we can demand it. Even if we have to take to the streets and campout in the public square, the time is now. The time is alive. The time is ripe.

It is time to occupy the Golden Rule.

Blessed be and amen.