

CORE VALUES part I, Christ and Truth 8-4-13

(Romans 11:36) When you came into church this morning no one asked for identification did they? We welcome all comers, but as we begin our meditations in the word of God today, I am asking you to identify yourself. Maybe I should say, *classify yourself*. You are in one of three groups. Maybe you are a visitor to our church who is checking us out, considering if we might be a place for you to connect, a people to get involved with, or, at least invest your Sunday mornings. If you are in that group, today's message will be highly relevant as I intend to explain what we are all about. Others of you already consider North Park your home church. You may be a member, maybe not, but this is the church you have adopted to one degree or another. Most of you are in this camp and, for you, what we consider today is highly relevant as well because we are going to talk about our guiding values as a body of believers. Still others of you are in a third group of casual visitors. Maybe you are here visiting your children, or your parents, or a friend but you live elsewhere or worship elsewhere and if we ever see you again it will be infrequent. Glad you are here, but today's message is not so much for you although I think you will find it true and relevant and possibly applicable to your own church situation.

About a year and a half ago, the elders of North Park Church gave final approval to a set of core values. We had already established our mission, which is *to make disciples of Jesus who worship God passionately, connect with each other in caring community and impact the world by word and deed*. That settled we went on to discuss and establish what should be the guiding principles or values that shape our work as we endeavor to fulfill our mission. If you have ever been a part of a group attempting such a thing you know that the challenging element to this is the triage, the hard choices about what values make your list and what don't. I mean, if the list gets too long it becomes meaningless. So, we decided up front, due to the insistence of our brother, Dan Dupee, that we should restrict ourselves to five. We could easily have had a dozen or more. Our initial list was over twenty, but we felt we should trim it down to our top five. Presbyterians like lists of five. I have the privilege of setting these before you today, knowing that the easiest critique of such a document is to say, *how could you leave out this?* There are plenty of other values that are quite worthy. That we do not deny, but these are our final five and we believe you will find them agreeable. They are.

1. **CHRIST** – Jesus is preeminent, the One from whom, through whom and unto whom are all things.
2. **TRUTH** - God’s word is powerful and is to be learned, loved and lived.
3. **DEPENDENCE** – God is the Source of all our strength, wisdom and love; therefore we pray.
4. **THE LOST** – Both near and far, unbelievers matter to God and to us.
5. **FAMILIES** – healthy marriages and children are vital to God’s mission in the world.

Instead of our usual biblical exposition, our objective for the next two Sundays is to work our way through these five values and consider their importance, their meaning and what they say about our corporate life together. We begin at the beginning, with Christ. *Oh no, Him again? Why must we always be talking about Jesus?* I am so glad you asked. The reason is that He is our highest value. He is the Pearl of great price. He is the Way, the Truth and the Eternal Life. In our values statement we actually reference a Bible verse from Romans 11. There we find this: **34-36** *For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? ³⁵ Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? ³⁶ For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.* Pretty good stuff huh? Awesome stuff really and it explains why Jesus has to be value #1. All that we do is about Him because, as this passage reminds us, everything we have comes from Him. Everything we receive we receive through Him, and all that we do, we do for Him. Notice I use the pronoun *Him*. Jesus is not a spirit in the sky. He is not *the Force*. He is a person. Christians don’t just adopt a set of rules or an approach to living, or a philosophy of life. For us it is intensely personal. And the person is Jesus. It’s all about Jesus. Say that with me. *It’s all about Jesus.* We call ourselves North Park Church but we see ourselves as the church of Christ. We belong to Him. The church is His. When you say, *the Steelers are my team*, you don’t mean to suggest that you own them. You mean that you associate yourself with them. The owner is Mr. Rooney. It’s his team in a way it will never be your team. And so it is with the church. North Park is my church, but, most of all, it is HIS church. It is the church of Christ.

Then too the Scriptures say He is the Head. Colossians 1: **18a** *He is also head of the body, the church.* We are His body, He is our head. The fact that the church belongs to Jesus and He is our Head speaks to the issue of authority in the church. We are not a democracy here. The people do not rule. We are not a pastocracy. The pastor doesn’t rule. We are a monarchy. Jesus is the “mon.” We have one King. One head. And where He has spoken we say, “Yes, Sir.” No debate.

We don't debate over the core elements of our mission. The King has told us. We don't debate over what marriage is supposed to be. The King has told us. It is our job to understand Him and obey Him. Two weeks ago England was abuzz over the birth of a future king. Most of us could not have cared less. All this King George is going to be is a figurehead. They will bring him out for pomp, parades and the paparazzi. But those celebrating his birth have given him no real, practical power over their lives. Did you hear what I just said? I said, *those celebrating his birth have given him no real, practical power over their lives*. That sounds like Christmas in America doesn't it? And Christmas in many churches. *We are so glad the King is born! We just don't want him ruling over us*. Well, as best we can, your leadership at North Park Church intends to honor Jesus as King not only in our hymns and holidays, but also in the way we establish our doctrines, and the way we lead the church, and the way we relate to one another. Jesus as a core value speaks to the issue of authority in the church.

Then too the New Testament also tells us that the church is the Bride of Christ. In Revelation 19 we read of a great multitude that speak of the church in her relationship to Jesus and says, **7** *Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready*. That bride is the church. Understand please, that our relationship with Jesus is more than that of a servant to a master. It is more than that of a subject to a king. Our relationship is romantic. It involves passion and devotion, companionship and love. He knows us. We know Him. We are in Him. He is in us. Some see the church as a place to find friendship, community, and mission. The church is good for all of that. But, if you find all those wonderful things but do not find Jesus, you lose. You miss out. And you miss out forever. The vertical dimension. The relationship with God is where it all starts for us. It is what matters most. My longing is that we will be the type of church, that when outsiders come around us, or folks from the social churches come around us, they will be provoked to wonder *what is it about Jesus that these people make such a fuss over Him?* Colossians 1:**16-18** *by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him.* ¹⁷ *He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.* ¹⁸ *He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.* And that is why He has first place on our list of Core Values. (sing Knowing You vss.1 and 2, then into All Hail the Lamb)

The second of our five core values is *the Truth*. Going from Christ to the truth is a very short step because Jesus said, *I am the Truth*. When we say we value the truth, we mean to suggest that there is such a thing as truth, that it is objective and knowable and has been revealed to us by God. In our day and age, to say such a thing in sophisticated society is to earn sneers and snickers. It is also to invite accusations of arrogance. *Do you people dare to believe that you, you Christians have a corner on the truth?* This depends on what you mean by the word *corner*. We don't think we know everything. We don't think we are mistake-proof. But, we do believe we have been graciously given the truth, that it is superior to all opinions of men, and that it is unfailing. If that strikes you as arrogant, I would dispute your definition of arrogance and humility. G.K. Chesterton who live around a century ago, wrote about what he called the *dislocation of humility*. He said, *Modesty has moved from the organ of ambition. Modesty has settled upon the organ of conviction; where it was never meant to be. A man was meant to be doubtful about himself, but undoubting about the truth; this has been exactly reversed. We are on the road to producing a race of men too mentally modest to believe in the multiplication tables.* But we not only believe in the multiplication tables, we believe in the commandments and promises of God as given to us in Christ Himself and in this book. This strikes some as so far-fetched that they don't think we are serious. But we are quite serious. CS Lewis wrote this sixty years ago: *The great difficulty is to get modern audiences to realize that you are preaching Christianity solely and simply because you happen to think it true; they always suppose you are preaching it because you think it good for society or something of that sort.* No, we really believe it.

One of the main reasons we believe it? We have seen its power. Our statement says, *God's word is powerful*. The Scriptures tell us the word of God brings life to the dead, brings conviction to the proud, brings healing to the sick, brings freedom to the captive, makes straight what is crooked, protects what is weak, and revives what is languishing. Jeremiah 23:29 *Is not My word like fire?" declares the Lord, "and like a hammer which shatters a rock?* I Peter 1:23-25 *you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.* ²⁴ *For, "All flesh is like grass, And all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, And the flower falls off,* ²⁵ *But the word of the Lord endures forever."* In John 17, Jesus prays for His disciples and says 17 *Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.* This is what changes men and women. I cannot explain it, but I can bear witness

to it. This word, I will say it again, brings life to the dead, brings conviction to the proud, brings healing to the sick, brings freedom to the captive, makes straight what is crooked, protects what is weak, and revives what is languishing. That is why we value it so dearly. That is why it makes our top five list. And that is why we are committed to doing three things with it. You see them in our statement.

First, we learn it. We learn it. We don't just admire it. We learn it. We could have said *teach it*, but that didn't start with "L." I think you get the idea. We teach it, we learn it. In I Timothy Paul writes to his young disciple in ministry and says 4:**13-16** *Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching.* ¹⁴*Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery.* ¹⁵*Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all.* ¹⁶*Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching.* In Acts 2 we read of the early church that **42** *They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching.* So, because truth is powerful we are committed to learning it, not as an end in itself, but for the purpose of positive life-change. By the way, one of the alterations you will see among us in the Fall is that we are going to begin doing Scripture memory as a church. We will have a verse of the week which we will recite in worship, and Sunday School. It will be on the web and in our communications. It will be just another way to become a people of the truth.

Secondly, we are committed to loving it. It is not only powerful; it is precious. I Peter 2:2 exhorts us to long for the pure milk of the word. The psalms say 119:**103** *How sweet are Your words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth!* II Thessalonians 2:10 speaks of salvation as receiving the love of the truth. The love of the truth. Do you love the truth? Do you miss it when you haven't heard it for a while? Do you value it more than comfort and fun? We know how much we value something but what we are willing to give up in order to have it. Sometimes the truth costs us our comforts; it may cost us our worldly securities; it may cost us our popularity. It could cost us life and freedom itself. Is it worth that? You know, the love of the truth and the love of comfort don't mix well. CS Lewis wrote this: *I didn't go to religion to make me cheery. I always knew a bottle of Port would do that. If you want a religion to make you feel really comfortable, I certainly don't recommend Christianity.* AW Tozer writes this: *For myself I long ago decided that would rather know the truth than be happy in ignorance. If I cannot have both truth & happiness, give me truth. We'll have a long time to be happy in heaven.*

Beth and I have two grandsons. One is named Tozer, the other is named Lewis, after the two authors I just quoted. How we pray our grandsons will themselves come to love the truth like Lewis, like Tozer, like their grands, and own it as their own core value.

Thirdly, our statement says we are committed to not only learning and loving the truth, but also living it. There is very little more unsavory than a well-taught church-person who is abusive to his wife, or immoral in his personal life, or just caught up in petty self-interested pursuits. For those like this, knowledge is twisted into a grounds for feeling superior. Pee- Yuu! James reminds us in James 1:22 *Prove yourselves to be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.* Our desire then, our value, our commitment is to be a people whose conduct fits well and adorns the world-view we espouse and proclaim, and believe from the heart to be the truth.

Since it is a Lord's Supper Sunday for us, I will opt to stop there for today. But how are we doing so far? Christ and the truth? Are those two values we can rally behind? Find unity behind? Next Lord's Day we look at why we chose dependence, the lost and the family as our other three values. But consider as we close that Christ and the truth are not two values you were born with. They are not values natural to us. By nature we care about self not Christ. And we often prefer lies over truth when the truth makes us look bad. If you and I esteem Jesus and truth today, there can only be one explanation. The Lord God almighty has changed us. We have, by the grace of God, been made something fundamentally different than what we were. For that, we are eternally grateful and overwhelmed with joy unspeakable and full of glory. Let's gather around the table of the King and give Him thanks.