

The Core of Who We Are
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Last week, we looked at what hospitality looks like from God's perspective and how we called and equipped by God to extend God's love and grace as a church and as individuals out there in the world. We used the words "Radical Hospitality" to describe how our representation of God's welcome needs to exceed expectations. So how about today, did you park your car as far away from the door as possible to leave the space open for someone else? Did you look around you as you came in to see if someone else looked like they could use a hand? Did you take the time to introduce yourself to someone you don't know during the greeting time? Just want to keep all that in front of you!

We also talked about one of our core values here at Saint Paul's that strongly connects to hospitality, so I thought this week, we could take a look at all of the core values that help us define what an authentic faith looks like. These values determine who we are at the core as a church, and hopefully as followers of Jesus.

Our mission statement tells us what we should be doing – "**lead people to an active faith in Jesus Christ**". And we believe that an active faith looks like someone who **loves God, loves others, and serves the world**. So that tells us what we are to do as a church, as followers of Jesus. We are on a mission. We have a purpose. We are not doing church for the sake of church, but for the mission of Jesus.

So that's WHAT we do. Our core values help us determine HOW we going about living out our mission as a church and as individuals. They help us determine what faith looks like when it's put into action. These values drive the way we operate, how we live out authentic faith in the world.

My favorite amusement ride from the time I could reach the pedals until my mid teens was those jalopy car tracks with the metal guide down the middle of the path...remember those? That or go-cart tracks, but my mom didn't let me do that very often. See, I love to drive! Always have. Other rides were more thrilling, but nothing beats being in control! Well, the problem was, there were lots of drivers who weren't as good as I was, so they had those guides down the middle of the track to keep them other kids on the path. Our core values are kind of like that...they keep us on the right track of representing Jesus to our world...they keep us on track in our planning and living out ministry as a church. They keep our lives aligned with the things God cares about.

So let's take a look at them.

People Matter to God – All People.

And since all people matter to God, we need to see all people the way God sees people; as people worthy of his forgiveness, worthy of the cross, worthy of his love. This is the core value we lifted up last week when we looked at hospitality. If God loves and welcomes ALL people, how do we do that too?

Jesus didn't just go to meet with the upstanding people at the synagogues. He did that, but he also visited the sinners, the outcasts. He was very determined to show us that God cares for everyone, not just the acceptable people.

I didn't talk about this last week, but this is a very difficult thing for me to do...to see people as God sees them. I can be very quick to put labels on people; drunk, bum, degenerate, dead-beat, loser, low-life...and on and on. You know what I'm talking about. Those labels come to mind instantly. It takes very little effort for them to pop up. It takes extra effort on our part to invite Jesus to help us see with new eyes.

When I've been out on work days or on mission trips, or spending time just helping serve the poor, I notice something about me that is true of almost all of us. We want to get there, do something for them, and move on. I'm not saying that's totally bad, because at least we're out there. It's about the work. I keep my focus on the work. But usually, there is one person on the team who visits with the people being served and listens to their story. That's the one who sees people as God sees them! Authentic faith looks like that. It sets aside our pre-judgment of people and meets them where they are.

We must reach out to people and not wait for people to come to us.

When we look at the activity of Jesus in the Gospels, those four books that tell us about his life, most of the scenes are about Jesus going to where people were. He didn't set up a ministry and teaching center and wait for people to come to him. He took his mission to where the people were. When you read the Gospels, especially the book of Mark, Jesus is here, then he's there, then he's on this side of the lake, next he's over on that side of the lake, etc. And most of the accounts of Jesus interacting with people are with individuals, not with the big crowds that began to follow him around. Jesus reached out to people...

Jesus once said, ¹⁰ ***For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.*** (Luke 9:10 **TNIV**). He was talking about his own mission and that it was to go where the people were and seek out those who were far from God. One of the most famous stories Jesus told is about how God is like a shepherd who won't give up on finding a lost sheep and goes after it until it is found. (Luke 15)

Reaching out is about you and me going out into this world to share God's love. We just talked about one aspect of this with our recent series called "Contagious". That entire series was about ways that we can share the light of Christ with the people we encounter in this world. And there are lots of ways to do this.

Years ago, Ben Bainbridge received a call to take the gospel out to people who would probably never come to a "regular" church. So we launched The Salvage Yard on 1402 S. Main – a nightclub/coffeehouse ministry that reaches hundreds of people each weekend.

I know many of you are out there in the community...going where the people are to serve them. We have volunteers representing Jesus at Watered Gardens, Ascent Recovery Residence, Children's Haven, Community Clinic, Crosslines, Homebound Services, Life Choices, Salvage Yard, the Hospitals, Turn Around Ranch for troubled teens and more.

Recently Jerry Clair felt a call from God to organize our volunteers to do home repair and maintenance projects for people in need. One lady, completely on her own, gathers her friends and serves a meal at Children's Haven every week. Another lady took on the task of organizing the most recent "Women's Only Build" for Habitat for Humanity.

One member was listening to the message one Sunday about getting out there and serving in the community and that very same day saw that Life Choices was looking for people to volunteer. Now that lady is helping women with unwanted pregnancies explore all their options.

These are awesome stories, but serving the needy in our community is not the only way to go where people are. There are people who are distant from God at your office, in your home, on your bowling team. They are your family members, your friends, your customers, your neighbors. And you can reach out to them with a simple invitation to come to church with you, or bring their kids to CrossTraining this fall, or invite them to join you for a group at WNL.

Trying to reach out to people for us at Saint Paul's includes using local TV and radio to let people know that God loves them. We will be promoting WNL in a few weeks on the TV. There will be courses to help people with financial life, relational life, and spiritual life. These are needs common to many people and we're using the media to reach out to them and let them know that God wants to help them do life better. You can couple onto that invitation by talking about the adds with your friends and inviting them to join you.

Another way we want to reach out to people who do visit us on Sunday's is through our Mugging Ministry. It's not pouncing on people in dark alleys, it is taking a gift package with coffee mugs out to all our first time guests. It's in response to someone who visits us, but It's another small way we can reach toward them.

Authentic faith looks like reaching out to people. It's about actively going and inviting and reaching out to those who are far from God, those who are hurting, those who are discouraged, and those who have been burned by religion in the past.

God's Word is God's Living Voice

I know I'm going out on a limb here, but one of the essential guides for how we live an authentic faith and how we do church is the Bible. God speaks to us primarily through scripture. You know that we are constantly inviting you to do what, "read the Bible for yourself". That's because the primary tool God wants to use to speak into your life is scripture. In fact, all four of these other core values we are talking about today come out of God's guidance through the stories and lessons of the New Testament.

Reading our Bibles keeps us in touch with God, keeps our relationship open to his leading. God uses scripture to correct our wayward vision, helps us see our selfish ambitions and call us to a new life. He will use it to help us move out of our anger, our judgment, our sin, our unforgiveness, our addictions, our past and move us to places of new life, hope, forgiveness, peace, joy or sometimes in the middle of big storms of life, just comfort.

Here's how reading the Bible has impacted my life in two huge ways, because we don't have time to go into the thousands of little ways. When I was a new Christ – follower, I started reading the New Testament (which I recommend reading several times before you ever open the Old Testament). In fact, you need to take *The Bible 101* course this fall at WNL before going through the Old Testament. Anyway, I was reading the

opening verses of Acts when the words spoke to me heart in an amazing personal way, almost as if they were audible.

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Acts 1:8 TNIV

That night, God spoke deep into my soul and called me into a new direction. That was moment God asked me to go into full-time ordained ministry. It was the night I agreed to lay aside my other plans and follow him.

Many years later, Jennifer is reading the Bible and hears God nudging us to consider adopting a child. It was a long, long wait, and there were times that she wasn't sure if she heard God's call correctly, but finally Macie came home to us in February of 2007.

God can reveal some big things to us in scripture, but it's not just about big things. It's also about our seemingly insignificant, everyday, basic life choices. God wants us to use scripture to help us stay on course with his will, his desire for purposeful, meaningful, adventure-filled life.

Life is Meant to be Done Together.

Bill Hybels tells a story in his book, *Courageous Leadership*, about a couple who brought their newborn baby to him after worship one Sunday. He asked the couple what the baby's name is, and before they responded the mother pulled back the blanket that was covering the baby's face. Hybels felt his knees buckle and thought he might faint. The whole center of the baby's face was caved in. He didn't know how she kept on breathing.

The mother said her name was Emily and that they had been told she has about six weeks to live. The father added that they'd like to pray that somehow before she dies that Emily would know and feel her parent's love. And so they prayed. And as Hybels was handing her back to her parents, he asked, "Is there anything we can do for you, any way that we as a church can serve you during this time?"

The father said, "We're okay. Really we are. We've been in a loving small group for years. Our group members knew that this pregnancy had complications. They were at the house the night we learned the news, and they were at the hospital when Emily was delivered. They helped us absorb the reality of the whole thing. They even cleaned our house and fixed our meals when we brought her home. They pray for us constantly and call us several times every day. They are even helping us plan Emily's funeral."

Just then three other couples stepped forward and surrounded Emily and her parents. "We always attend church together as a group, said one of the group members.

That's a picture of doing life together; a tight-knit huddle of brothers and sisters doing their best to soften one of the cruelest blows life can throw. Where would that couple be, where would they go, how would they handle this heartbreak without the church?

Jesus invites us into a personal relationship with him, but it's not a solo journey. He gives us the model of including others into our lives for accountability, care, encouragement and challenge.

That's why we are constantly encouraging you to get into a group. Gather some acquaintances and start a home group, or get into a group at WNL. Start meeting people and connecting and building

relationships that will eventually grow into the people you want to do life together with. There's never a better time than now to start, and WNL makes it very convenient as well.

Living out our mission is to be done with Consuming Joy.

Life will always present us with pain and difficulties, but because of the power and presence of God in our lives there can be joy that overwhelms even the deepest darkness. Serving God is a joy! Learning God's purposes is a joy! And growing into the people God created us to be is the greatest joy of all!

When I think of people who are obviously filled with joy, I think of Randy and Mandy Hood. This amazing couple coordinates all five of our First Impressions Teams, they serve in any way that they possibly can, and they are uplifting to be with because they always carry joy with them wherever they go. Whenever I see them, I am lifted up. I know they love God and God is with them because I experience it when I'm with them.

That's the way joy is. Joy is contagious...it overflows into the lives of those around you. It's not the giddiness of happiness, but it's a freedom God gives us because we know we are secure in God's love for us, secure in that we are not walking through life alone. One of the most amazing places I encounter joy – believe it or not – funerals. Oh there's lots of pain – but there's joy because resurrection defeats death – and God is present in some amazing ways – so that means joy is there. In fact, wherever God is, there is joy.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness... Gal 5:22 TNIV

By "fruit of the spirit", Paul means the signs to others that God's spirit lives and dwells in you! If someone has God's spirit in them, these are the things that will spring naturally from their life. Joy is pretty high on that list! Remember that Joy is not the happiness you show from getting what you want. It is the byproduct of being alive in Christ, in fulfilling God's purposes. As I reflect on the last several months of my life, I can tell you that people around me have not seen enough joy. How about the people around you? I have missed out on too much life already. There is a new call in my life for me to let the people around me see the Jesus who is always with me through my joy! Let the people around you see the God who is always with you...let them see your JOY!

So this has been a review of the core values that effect HOW we live out our mission to lead people to an active faith in Jesus Christ. These values shape who we are as a church and as followers of Jesus. They are the guides that help us see what an authentic faith looks like. They are the core of who we are as followers of Jesus and as a church on his mission. And for today, that is the good news!