

“Vision Sunday: Core Values”

2 Thessalonians 1:1-12

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • January 15, 2017

This morning is what we call “Vision Sunday.” Once a year or so we talk about our vision for the church. We look at what kind of church God is calling us to be. You could say we look down the road a bit to see where Jesus is leading us, see what He’s calling us to do, and we talk about how we get there.

As a congregation we have been talking about this a lot over the past 4 or 5 months. You’ll remember that back in September and October the Session invited the congregation to a couple of gatherings where you were asked to share what’s important to you in the church. You were asked to help clarify our congregation’s Core Values.

Each of us values things differently in our lives. Even things that we all need or want. For example, when you’re in college food has a high value while sleep was a considerably lower priority. But then when you have babies sleep goes way up in value. And so it goes for all kinds of things in our life. Core values are those things that are non-negotiable. They’re the things that can’t be compromised. So it’s pretty important to know what they are.

In 1845, Sir John Franklin, a Rear Admiral in the Royal Navy, set sail with 138 hand-picked men on a voyage to chart the Northwest Passage around the Canadian Arctic. The voyage was expected to take nearly two years. Their two three-masted sailing ships were equipped with the latest technology – they had steam engines should there not be enough wind.

The problem is that they only carried a 12-day supply of coal. Nor did they carry any cold-weather gear capable of surviving in the Arctic. Instead, each ship carried a 1,200 volume library, an organ, and elegant china, crystal, and sterling silverware that had the officers’ initials and family crests engraved on the handles.

The voyage, however, was doomed when the ships became locked in sea ice, eventually sinking both ships, sending the sailors on foot

to search for help. None survived. At one point a search party found a group of frozen bodies miles from where the ships had sunk. With them were some of the place settings of china and silver.

The men of the Franklin Expedition made choices based on their values. And it cost them their lives. Jesus said, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” So the question for you today is this: Where is your treasure? What do you value? And what do we as a church value? Where is our treasure? What’s important for us?

In 2 Thessalonians 1, Paul says, “We...give thanks to God for you...because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing.” He goes on to praise them for their steadfastness and faith in persecutions and troubles. It seems to me that this should be our goal as followers of Jesus and together as a church. I can’t think of anything better than to be described as growing abundantly in faith, loving one another more and more, and standing firm when things are tough.

This is where clarifying our core values comes in. When we are clear about what we value most we have a clear sense of our identity and we are better able to focus on our mission. For many years we have said that our mission is “to know Christ and to make Christ known.” Last year we added one word to that. Now we say we are “*Living* to know Christ and to make Christ known.” This might not seem like much of a change but it is. No longer can we view the church as an institution where a few people work to make Christ known and the rest of us volunteer if we have time. Instead, we see the church the way Jesus intended it – a group of people who are living in such a way as to know Jesus better and to help other people know him. We no longer talk about “going” to church. We *are* the church. We come here to worship and to be equipped to live in a way that others see

how Jesus is changing us as we grow in our faith.

As I mentioned earlier, last fall the Session asked you to help us put in writing the core values of our church. They took all of your input, which by the way was really quite consistent, they met together a number of times and came up with the statement of core values and beliefs that's in your bulletin. These are the things that we as a congregation consider to be essential to our common faith and life.

But these core values are more than merely our current opinions. They are also important for guiding our work. As Paul says in verses 11 and 12, "To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, *so that* the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him." Ultimately our highest purpose is to glorify God. Our core values can serve as guardrails to help us stay true to His calling. This is serious. Paul warned the Thessalonians of the danger of not knowing or obeying God.

Over the next few weeks we're going to look at each one of these so we won't go into any detail today. But this morning let me encourage you to spend some time with these core values on your own. Read the Scriptures associated with them. Think about other passages from the Bible that reveal these values. How do they challenge or convict you? Is your faith growing abundantly and is your love for others increasing?

The thing about core values is that they exist whether we recognize it or not. The men on the Franklin Expedition valued luxury more than being prepared for their mission. And it cost them everything. When you and I let these core values actually determine our actions we will see the power of God unleashed in our church, in our personal lives, and in our community. May it be so, "according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Amen.