

What are Our Core Values?

Romans 12: 9-21

As we move toward writing a Grace Declaration, we consider each week a question. Today let's talk about our core values at Grace. In recent years organizations of all kinds have begun to define their core values—from businesses to non-profits to churches. For awhile writing “mission statements” was popular; now we go deeper to examine core values.

Core values represent an organization's highest priorities and most deeply held beliefs. They are like the core of an apple: the values at the center of who we are. They tell our heart. They are the cultural cornerstones of an organization. I like to call them animating and directing spiritual and moral values. They bring life and they guide.

What are ours? We might begin with the song we sing at the close of every monthly communion service; from Micah 6:8:

What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and love mercy, and walk humbly with your God.

I've seen T-shirts with that verse. If we had a Grace T-shirt that would be a good one.

An organization's core values usually are limited to around 5. What would ours be?

I

In our text from Romans 12, Paul is describing the workings of a church and describes in a set of imperatives what could be called core values:

- genuine love
- loving the good and hating what is evil
- mutual affection
- perseverance in prayer
- rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep
- befriending the lowly
- refusing to take revenge
- as far as possible, so long as it depends on you, living peacefully with all
- not being overcome by evil but overcoming evil with good

People sometimes say that Paul paid little attention to the teachings of Jesus. These words reflect closely the Sermon on the Mount.

II

In our Call to Gathering we read key descriptions of who God is and what God is about from the Psalms. We might call them God's core values:

-God sets prisoners free

-opens blind eyes

-makes those who are bent low straight

-watches over orphans, widows and strangers (immigrants).

-heals broken hearts and binds wounds

God is:

Long in mercy

And abounding in steadfast love

So we might summarize God's core values:

Compassion

Justice

Healing and Wholeness

Mercy

And Steadfast Love

To love God is to love God's values. To love God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength is to embody them in our lives and our life together.

III

When our most recent Pastor Search Committee set out to find a pastor they developed a set of core values to give to prospective ministers so they would better know who we are and what we are about. They listed five:

- 1) A strong sense of community
- 2) A commitment to diversity including: theological, racial, and socio-economic diversity.
- 3) A mission to meet the needs of people in our community and an increasing awareness of the need for social justice
- 4) A desire for spiritual growth
- 5) An appreciation for worship that enables us to worship God and to listen to God's voice and respond.

As I've listened to our three weeks of conversations so far, I think many of these core values have been named. What would you think about our developing a set of core values? Again, we need to narrow them down to around five, lest we become like the fabled Civil War general who jumped on his horse and rode off in all directions at once.

Such core values require a kind of courage as we seek to live by them. Maya Angelou says that without courage none of the other 6 virtues—Wisdom, Justice, Temperance, Faith, Hope and Love—could survive. To live them we stand by them, we promote them and we use them to set directions and make decisions. It means we choose this path not that path. We use them to remind ourselves who we are and what we are about.

When we plan our annual budget we consider them. Jesus said, “Where your treasure is there will your heart be also.” We keep to our promise to set aside 20% for missions because mission and ministry to others is a core value here. Our hands and feet take the path of our core values.

When the prophet Micah was asked to summarize all the 613 commands of God he came up with the three we sing:

do justice

love mercy

walk humbly

When Jesus was asked what was the greatest commandment, he summarized all the teachings as two:

The love of God with all you heart, mind, soul and strength; and the love of neighbor as we love ourselves.

How would we summarize our most cherished and core values?

As someone said, “If you aim at nothing you generally hit it.”