

Value Added July 27, 2008

As I was beginning my preparation for today's message, I decided to Google the term "core values" to see what I'd find. To my surprise, one of the first listings that came up had to do with Columbus-based Cummins Engine Company. Under the heading of "Global Vision; Timeless values," I found six core values held by that corporation. They were innovation, responsibility, community, integrity, results and diversity, and given the millions of dollars in damage that company incurred with the flooding, I'm certain that those are the values that are forming the foundation for their recovery. When I found those core values, I was amazed to find some succinct and clear words used to describe those values believed to be at the heart of who that company is.

I was somewhat surprised to find what I did because I know how hard it is to try to capture and name core values. That's something we've gone over time and time again in our behind-the-scenes work at The Garden. In fact, a couple of years ago, we revisited the core values we had originally named, and determined that at least two of them were more modes of operating rather than deeply-held beliefs that steered our life together as the entity we call The Garden.

If you look at your program, or take a look at the screens, you can see where we are currently when it comes to trying to name our core values. We say that they are: **Spirituality, Love, Inclusiveness, Creative Excellence, Celebration**. Let me tell you, it has not been an easy task to name succinctly those convictions we consider to be core to our essence.

Knowing how painstaking that kind of work is, I find myself wondering just how many of us try to do that in our own lives. Are we able to identify our core values? Before we go there, however, it might be helpful to be clear on what we're talking about when we use the words "core values." **A value is a principle or quality intrinsically valuable or desirable for us;** they are our convictions, our beliefs, and our ethics all rolled into one.

I think Jesus was referring to those convictions, beliefs and ethical underpinnings in the Bible passage for this morning. It appears that this passage is one of the kernels of wisdom that Jesus was prone to drop in some of his conversations and in the moments when he was trying to help folks live their lives better. We only know that these words can give us some clue as to the basic *modus operandi* for life.

Jesus put it like this: **"You must begin with your own life-giving lives. It's who you are, not what you say and do, that counts. Your true being brims over into true words and deeds."** If I were to try to define more clearly what he's talking about, I would say that he's emphasizing the need to be true to those traits, qualities and attributes that we believe, at the very heart of our being, to be the highest and most valuable to us. The point he's trying to make is that our values are evident

by the way we live, in everything we do and in everything we say. Our true being shows itself in our living.

If our values are so important that they are the guiding force for our lives, then it seems to me that we ought to be able to identify them, if for no other reason than to check ourselves occasionally on how well we're living them. Examples of personal values might be things like gratitude, family, relationships, truth, knowledge, achievement, and many, many more.

To get us thinking, I'm going to share with you a few of what I believe to be values that make our lives more worthwhile. You may or may not agree with me, but I'm hopeful that these will stimulate some reflection by each of us to re-visit our values, or even to try to name them for the very first time. I really believe that when we do that, we will find our lives to be more focused, we'll be more energetic, and life will be more worthwhile.

A big one in my book is **integrity**. Now dictionary.com defines the word like this: **the quality or state of being complete, unbroken, whole**, and a subsequent definition says **the quality or state of being of sound moral principle: uprightness, honesty and sincerity**. To say that someone is a person of integrity is, in my view, one of the highest compliments that can be paid.

You see, integrity encompasses a whole array of character virtues, and has to do with being trustworthy and trusting, being honest and fair. People of integrity are those from whom we know what to expect. We are assured they will act honorably and they will do what they believe to be right. They are those who live in tune with what many of us consider to be the highest principles by which anyone can live.

Integrity is not a word to be tossed around lightly, but it is one that carries a lot of weight. It has to do with one's heart being right, and one's life being lived in accord with the heart. I really believe that living a life of integrity is a worthy goal for each and every one of us.

Once we get past integrity, I'm at a loss to know what to name next, because it seems that there are so many things that emanate from that that it's hard to set them apart. However, we have to start somewhere, so I'm going to begin with one, and the band is going to help me. How about a little "Respect?"

It seems to me that respect appears to be all too lacking when we look around us. In fact, I wonder if much of the violence that we read and hear about on a daily basis isn't because we've lost a basic respect and regard for each other. Bosses fail to respect their workers; men and women don't show respect for one another in their relationships; children don't respect their parents or their teachers. We don't see the human being beneath the exteriors that we all wear.

One college student talked about a valuable lesson he learned when it comes to the way we treat people. During his second month of college, his professor gave the class a pop quiz. He was a good student and breezed through the questions until he got to the last one. It was this: "What is the first name of the woman who cleans the school?"

He thought surely this was some kind of a joke. Yes, he had seen the cleaning woman several times, and knew that she was tall, dark-haired, and probably in her 50's, but he had no idea what her name was.

Leaving the last question blank, he handed in his paper. Just before class ended, one student asked if the last question would count toward their quiz grade. "Absolutely," said the professor. "In your careers, you will meet many people. All are significant. They deserve your attention and care, even if all you do is smile and say 'hello.'"

The student wrote that he has never forgotten that lesson, and her name was Dorothy. Enough said about respect....every person is deserving of our respect, and it's a gift we must all learn to give.

Loyalty is another one of the values that I hold dear. It's about a commitment and faithfulness to a person or cause. I can't think about loyalty without thinking about the faithfulness of God to the promise made to us centuries ago. In essence, God said, "I'll be your God; you be my people." And God has stuck by us through thick and thin, never wavering, never failing to be right by our side. That's the deepest form of loyalty.

We can also think of loyalty in terms of commitment. Making a commitment and standing by it is not always easy. There are many temptations to veer off course and to go in another direction. However, being committed to a cause means that we will persevere regardless of how difficult the course, how large the obstacles, how impossible it may seem.

Loyalty, commitment, faithfulness—those are big words, and ones that many find too difficult in today's world. Yet I believe they are values worthy of being incorporated into our very being, and ones we can strive for when we fall short.

The last value I'm going to list for our purposes today is one that, again, is all too often lacking. It's responsibility. Those whom we consider responsible are reliable, dependable and willing to be accountable for who they are and what they do.

When someone is a responsible person, it's not just a matter of showing up on time, although that's important, or doing the job he or she is asked to do, although that, too, is important. It's also a matter of realizing it's not all about us, but it's about our need to help others and to make the world in which we live a more positive, more loving place to inhabit.

I really like the way Paul put it in Galatians 6:5, which says: "Each of you must take responsibility for doing the creative best you can with your own life." All he's saying is that it's up to us, and no one else, how our life goes. Sure there will be curves and bends, and sometimes it will seem as though we're going in reverse, but that's life. Being responsible for our own life means that we will not whine and cry about our bad luck; we won't blame all our problems on someone or something else. It means that we will dig in and make the best of things; we will act. In fact, I wonder if the word "responsible" isn't really about being "response-able?" It's something to think about.

So, I've named a few of those core values I believe to be essential for my life to be well-lived. Can you name some of yours?

Joel Weldon once said, "What you value is what you think about. What you think about is what you become." That sounds a lot like what Jesus said: "Your true being brims over into true words and deeds."

However we choose to say it, I think it's true, and I pray our lives speak our values loud and clear.

Have a good Sunday and go in peace. Amen.