

sw“ABRAHAM, WE HAVE A VALUE”

March 8, 2009

Romans 4:13-25

Introduction:

In our lesson from Romans we read this from verses 20-21, about Abraham: ²⁰*He never doubted that God would keep his promise, and he never stopped believing. He grew stronger in his faith and gave praise to God.* ²¹*Abraham felt sure that God was able to do what he had promised.*

Abraham, it seems, had a core value that carried him throughout his life. That value was absolute faith in God. It was a faith so strong that he never doubted. Instead, he had complete confidence in God's ability to do whatever He would promise.

I mention Abraham's faith in God as a core value. What are core values? There is this definition from "The Businessman's Dictionary": Operating philosophies or principles that guide an organization's internal conduct as well as its relationship with the external world. Core values are usually summarized in the mission statement or in the statement of core values. Oregon State University defines core values this way: *attitudes and beliefs thought to uniquely pattern a culture.*

Abraham's core value was unwavering faith in God. That complete trust in God guided everything Abraham did. When God told him to leave Ur of the

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Chaldeans and move to a land he had never before seen, he went. The attitudes and beliefs it took to trust God shaped Abraham's life and how he treated others. In turn what are your core values? What are the few values you absolutely draw a line in the sand about? Something which you just can't / won't compromise?

Without core values it is almost impossible for a company, a person, or even a church to closely define who or what it is. So,

What Are The Core Vales of Holy Cross?

Funny you should ask! Right now, the Long-Range Planning Committee is meeting. The first task our chairman, Don Kennon is taking us through is to asses our mission statement. As part of that we are looking at the question, "what are the core values of Holy Cross?"

We've discovered there are a lot of things we value. For instance, we value our Episcopal heritage, we value our prayer book. We value liturgy, music, scripture, our building, etc., etc. All of that is important to the members of the Planning Committee. However, we've been discussing a different kind of value that, right now, seems even more "core" to the group than all our inherited values. It is the notion that "every human soul is worthy of having a personal relationship with God through Jesus

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Christ.” I guess it is our way of stating John 3:16, *“for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son; that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.”*

We have had this incredible conversation going on about the implications of have a core value centered in the worth of each human soul. Imagine, for example, if Holy Cross had said two years ago that one of its core values had to do with the belief that every human soul is worthy of having a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Not only said that, but organized this ministry around that value and each member took it upon him or herself to treat others with that sense of worth, and with a sense of urgency that people meet Jesus so they can have their own personal relationship with Almighty God? What would Holy Cross look like today? Would there have been a split in the church? There certainly would have been disagreements over issues, but would it have resulted in going in different directions? We’ll never know, will we?

But, what if the Long-Range Planning Committee today says, “we believe this should be a core value of Holy Cross”; and passes it on the Vestry to reflect and decide. And, what if the Vestry says, “Yes” this bears

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witness to our souls and we are going to adopt it as a core value; and they roll it out to you the congregation, and you think and pray about it, and affirm that you want to be treated with the respect inherent in that value, and you will commit yourselves to treating others that same way.

What Difference Would Such a Core Value Make In Our Personal and Corporate Lives?

Let me first say what I don't think such a core value means. I don't think because we believe every soul is worthy of having a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ, that we will automatically like everyone. I don't think God requires that.

I believe the core value we are discussing is one Jesus Himself could, and probably did, believe in. Jesus went to the Cross for the entire human race. He was willing to die for each and every soul who ever lived. Think about that. Yet, there were people that Jesus didn't seem to like very much. One group I'm thinking of were the Pharisees. Pharisees, as a group, were very antagonistic toward Jesus, and He to them. They tested and taunted him every chance they had, and Jesus called them "hypocrites" and "Snakes". Yet, there were Pharisees who ended up believing in Jesus as their Messiah. One such Pharisee was Nicodemus.

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We meet Nicodemus in chapter three of John's gospel with these words: ¹*Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.* ²*This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him."* ³*Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God."* ⁴*Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"*

As much grief as the Pharisees gave Jesus he could have easily written off the entire lot of them; but Jesus believed in the worth of individual souls, even people he didn't particularly like.

Something transpired that night between Jesus and Nicodemus for we read in the 7th chapter of John's Gospel that Nicodemus stood up for Jesus against the rulers arguing for a fair trial for Jesus. In the 19th chapter we read that it was Nicodemus joined Joseph of Arimathea, who petitioned Pilate for the body of Jesus, by bringing a hundred pounds of necessary spices; and helped take Jesus down from the Cross and prepared him for burial. What is one soul worth?

In the case of another Pharisee, Saul of Tarsus,

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Jesus saw a man who had unique cultural gifts, the exhaustive education from one of the leading Rabbi's in Jerusalem, and the strength of character to be the Apostle who would almost single-handedly carry the Gospel into the Roman world. Jesus saw beyond class, and groups, and life-styles, and saw individual souls.

So, what is the motivation for operating out of a core value centered in the worth of each individual? If it is a core value that has God's approval then the Gospel is offered to everyone knowing what people can become when their lives are filled with the love of Jesus Christ. It means more will reject you and your message than accept. Some who reject will even be family and close friends; but we never give up on them. We hold them up to God, on the stretchers of our prayers, knowing what good can come to them if they just believe.

Who here today is not worthy of having a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ? I'm aware that, at times, people 'feel' like they are not worthy of such great love; but God has made it abundantly clear that God is no respecter of persons. God doesn't love some people more than others. God is love and loves us all. We don't love everyone. Some people we don't even like, BUT, are we capable of putting that aside for the

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surpassing worth of us and them knowing Jesus Christ and having an eternal future?

Abraham was willing to undergo any number of tough times because he completely trusted God. Peter had to learn to trust Jesus completely – to get his opinions out of the way. Sometimes, Jesus' way defies our sense of logic. He loves people in ways and times that seem strange to us, so it becomes a matter of our trusting that His ways exceed our ways, and His thoughts exceed our thoughts.

Jesus called it the Way of The Cross. If we try to live life only by our own wits we will lose the very life we are trying to save. On the other hand, if we lose our lives for the cause of the Gospel, we gain eternal life – and what is that worth?

Abraham, we have a value here at Holy Cross that we think you would be proud of. It stands in the great tradition you began of people who entrust their lives completely to the care of God Almighty. Abraham, we believe you understood during your life that God loves every soul with an eternal love, and desires they turn their hearts to God and trust Him with their lives. Abraham, we commit to live our lives in this tradition and treat everyone with the knowledge that they are souls worthy of having a

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personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. We
commit to never be ashamed of Jesus Christ and His
Words to us.

In Christ's name, Amen!