

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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SERMON: *Witnessing to the World*
SERIES: *Core Values*
SCRIPTURES: *Genesis 12:1-3; Luke 15; Acts 1:8*
SPEAKER: *Shaun Kipe*
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**Credit to "Focusing our Faith" (Craig Sider, Chap. 6) for valuable insights regarding this message; also credit to Tony Campolo and Philip Yancey!*

CHILD DEDICATION for SAMANTHA GANT FAMILY

Well good morning, it is so great to worship with you.

This morning and for the next five weeks are going to be taking a look at a series we started back in May.

Core Values of the Brethren in Christ Church (SERIES TITLE SLIDE). Several years ago there was a book written describing these core values.

And it's good to ask the question, why? Why are we taking time to talk about the Core Values of the BIC?

Cause sometimes we misunderstand the heart behind a series like this. The purpose of this series is not to say, "*Haha, look at us, we have it figured and we're better than denominations or other churches.*" In fact, and you probably picked up on this right away, many churches and denominations would affirm the BIC Core Values.

One of the reasons we're looking at the Core Values is because they are **based in Scripture**. You'll discover right away that the core values drive us back into some key themes throughout the Bible. Someone says to you, "what is Christianity all about?" Thinking through, picturing the core values is a great way to answer.

Quick review, here are the first five core values that we talked about earlier this year.

Experiencing God's Love & Grace.

Believing the Bible.

Worshipping God.

Following Jesus.

Belonging the Community of Faith.

These are all key biblical themes.

Second, talking about our core values really helps us to narrow down our focus as a church. It helps us, **to focus in on who we are**. What are those things that are most important to us?

For example, we all have core values in our personal lives. Those things that if you hang around us long enough, they just keep coming up. If you hang around me long enough, you'll quickly begin to pick up on my core values. What are the emphasis in my life? If you hang around me long enough I'm gonna talk about my family. If you hang around me long enough, I'm gonna talk about sports.

And so as a church, our core values are kind of like those things that we will talk about and emphasize regarding our faith. If you hang around us long enough, you'll start to pick up on some of our key themes, what it is that drives us.

And so that's really the heart behind this series. Based on key biblical themes and helps us focus in on who we are. That's why we're going through this series. And

there's a really helpful book that was written and if you'd like a copy of the book, let me know. Goes into detail about these core values. And in each of they foyers, you'll see we have a few posters again, just highlighting these core values.

This morning we want to talk about the sixth core value of the Brethren in Christ Church: **Witnessing to the world.**

We value an active and loving witness for Christ to all people.

We love sharing the Good News about God's love and grace, Jesus sacrifice and the abundant life that he offers with other people.

Part of our role as followers of Jesus is not just that we accept Christ into our own lives. Not just to get together with other believers. But one of our core values is that the message of Jesus is intended to be shared with everyone.

If you hang around, Five Forks, long enough, we kind of want to be one of those churches that is known for sharing the good news of Jesus.

One of the primary reasons we believe this is because it's a value you just find all over your Bible...the foundation for this core value is that...

I. Reaching out to the world is one of God's core values.

The overall, arching story of the Bible in so many words is:

Good creation.

Turning away from God.

And God in reckless abandon and love for us, reaching, striving, searching, calling us back to him.

That's the story of the Bible. God in search of his lost people.

Genesis 12

God chooses one man Abraham and his family to begin making himself known. He reaches out, he speaks to Abraham. "Starting with you and your family"...but listen to the trajectory of God's intentions with Abraham...

The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.

² "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

God's goal, God's intention from the very beginning of Scripture is an active, seeking, reaching out, searching for all people to know Him. Witnessing to the world is our core value, because it's God's core value.

One my favorite chapters in all of the Bible.

Luke 15 – Three stories, three really clear examples of God's desire to reach the world...

The chapter begins with...

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus.

I just really love that picture. Here is Jesus surrounded by tax collectors and sinners. The scoundrels, scandalous, immoral, the indecent, confused, broken. Kind of makes you wonder, why is Jesus surrounded by these kind of people?

² But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

And you can sense the disgust of the religious. Muttering. Mutter is not a pleasant word. You don't mutter about someone when you are happy with them, do you?

And as these religious elites stand around muttering about the people Jesus surrounds himself with. Jesus begins telling three incredibly powerful stories.

He suppose you have 100 sheep...herds and flocks and one goes missing. Wouldn't you leave the 99 and go looking for that one lost sheep.

He says, or suppose you have 10 coins and you lose one, wouldn't you go looking for that one lost coin.

And then Jesus really brings it home. He says, actually it's more like a father whose son goes missing. A father whose son get's lost, battered, beat up by this world. And he tells of a father waiting every day, sitting on his porch, looking into the distance for his lost son to return. And when he sees his son in the distance the father runs to meet him. It's God, searching, seeking, reaching out to his lost children.

Philip Yancey, wrote a book called, **What's So Amazing About Grace?** In a chapter called "The Lovesick Father," he retells this story. In modern day language...kind gives us a perfect picture of a God whose heart longs for a lost world.

He says, picture a young girl grows up on a soybean farm outside Decatur, Illinois. But when she's young, she's kind of rebellious. Her parents do not much care for the music she listens to or the clothes she wears or her nose ring. She does not much care for their values or their church. They have another argument. She locks herself

in her room. When her dad knocks on the door, she screams, "I hate you! Leave me alone." She decides to run away.

She heads for the bright lights and Los Angeles, CA. When she gets there, she is much lonelier than she had anticipated, but she soon meets a man who drives the nicest car she has ever seen. He gives her a ride. He buys her lunch. He shows her the city. He gives her some pills that make her feel better than she has ever felt, and she wanted to feel good, really bad. She realizes how much life and fun her parents have been robbing her of. This good life goes on for a month, two months, a year. The man with the nice car (she calls him "Boss") really knows how to have a good time. It's a side of life that she never knew back home. The parties and the gifts and the glamour are like being in another world for her.

Then after a year, the first signs of illness, brokenness, begin to appear. It amazes her how quickly the boss turns mean. Before she knows it, he turns her out on the street. No money; no clothes; no car; no parties. She is alone. She uses what she knows on the streets to get whatever money she can, but she looks gaunt and thin. The men she is with now are no longer wealthy and generous, and sometimes they're dangerous and cruel. All her money goes to support her bad habits. She eats whatever she can find. She sleeps on a metal grate or a park bench.

One night as she lies awake listening for footsteps, all of a sudden everything around her looks different. She no longer feels like a woman of the world. She is a little girl again, lost in a cold and frightening city. Her pockets are empty. Her clothes are rags. Her stomach is hungry. She needs a fix. Her eyes are filled with tears.

Then her mind flashes on a single image...her home back in Decatur, Illinois. And she thinks to herself, "Oh God, why did I leave? Even my pet dog at home eats better than I do now." She is sobbing, and now more than ever she just wantss to go home.

So she tries calling her parents. Three straight calls. Three straight connections with the answering machine. Twice she hangs up without leaving a message. The third time she says, *"Dad, mom, it's me. I was wondering about coming home. I'm going to be on a bus. It will pass through Decatur sometime around midnight on Tuesday. If you're not there, I'll understand and I'll just keep on going to New York. Just wanted you to know."*

The whole time on the bus, she can't turn off the questions. She wonders if they even got the message. She wishes she'd given them more warning. She wonders if they've given her up for dead. She keeps thinking about what she is going to say to her father. She keeps rehearsing this little speech in her mind. "Dad, I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I know it was my fault, not yours. Can you forgive me?"

Finally, the bus pulls into the station, and the driver says, "Fifteen minutes, folks. That's all the time we have." Fifteen minutes to decide her life. She looks in her little compact mirror, tries to brush her hair and get the lipstick marks off her teeth. She sees the needle marks in her arms and wonders if her parents will notice...if they're even there.

She walks into that bus terminal at one o'clock in the morning in Decatur, Illinois. She has imagined a thousand different scenes in her mind, but not one of them prepares her for what she sees because there inside those concrete walls around those plastic chairs, in that bus terminal, stands a group of 40 brothers and sisters and aunts and uncles and cousins and grandparents and one dog.

They're all wearing goofy party hats and blowing kazoos and cheering for her as if she were a hero coming home from a war. There is a giant hand-painted sign saying, "Welcome home" taped all the way across the back wall. Standing in front of that crowd with a tear-stained face and a trembling smile is the father whom she told she hated the last time she saw him. She can't bring herself to look him in the face as she starts her little speech. "Dad, I'm so sorry..."

He puts his hands on her face, and he raises her eyes up to him. He begins to laugh and cry so hard his whole body shakes. "I know," he says. What he used to say to her when she would cry when she was a tiny little baby, "I know, I know, I know. No need for another word. You'll miss the party. We have to have a party." He takes that beat up frail little body in his arms and holds her so tight.

And I don't know if you can picture this with me, but there's Jesus, surrounded by a whole host lost, frail little boys and girls and He says, *"Now if you start with a father like that, and then you think of One a hundred times better, a thousand times wiser, a million times more loving, then you'll start to get some tiny little echo of what a good God is and how much He loves you."* And how that Father spends every moment of every day looking, searching, seeking, calling for his children to "Come on home."

Jesus kind of says to the religious leaders that day, you better believe I'm out in the world, in muck because my kids are out there I'll do everything I can to bring them home.

Do you see why, here at Five Forks one of our core values is witnessing to the world. It comes from the heart of God.

His desire is for all of humanity to experience God's love and grace.

And see you and me, we are fashioned in God's image. If God's desire is for all of humanity to experience his love and his grace, then we're kind of like the welcoming party, that's what the church is. God is the good father in the story and we're the aunts and uncles, and brothers and sisters.

In fact Jesus final words to his disciples spell it out for us...

Matthew 28 – Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations...

This is often referred to as the Great commission.

Sometimes we begin thinking that witnessing to the world is reserved for a select few. Missionaries who travel to different countries or Pastors who preach messages or evangelists who are “gifted” for that kind of thing. But that’s not quite right.

Yes, some may be specifically gifted at witnessing but every single follower is called/instructed to witness to the world. Our brothers and sisters are out there, and we’re on search to help them come home. And so the church, needs us to stand up and do our part. One author says it this way...

“The unbelieving world is made up of a variety of people; young and old, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, urban and rural, with different races, personalities, values, political systems, and religious backgrounds. Isn’t it obvious it would take more than one style of evangelist to reach such a diverse population...somewhere in that multifarious group (in the hodgepodge of lost people) is a person who needs an evangelist of your exact age, career, and level of spiritual understanding, or of my exact personality, background, and interests.” (Core Values 105).

Second this core value, witnessing to the world...

II. Comes from an overflow of our own faith experience.

And I just love this, because sometimes when we think of the concept “witnessing to the world”...other people quickly become projects, and our efforts come across as “artificial and forced. But when understood rightly, witnessing to the world is simply an overflow of our own experience.

The idea here is, once you truly realize and experience God's love and grace in your own life...once you've received God's welcoming party for you, you'll just want to share that with other people. It will overflow from you, it will come pouring out of you.

When we were little we used to sing this song, maybe you did also...it was called running over.

“Running over, running over, my cup is full and running over. Since the Lord saved me, I'm as happy as can be. My cup is full and running over!”

I was reading a story, that Tony Campolo tells about years ago, when he was asked to be a counselor at a junior high summer Bible camp. And says, he kind of noticed that junior high kid's their idea of a good time was picking on other kids.

And at this particular camp, there was a little boy named Billy who was suffering from cerebral palsy. It's the kind of thing that can be debilitating enough on it's own that it can take over and consume one's life. But worse than that, as Billy walked across the camp with his uncoordinated body, the other kids would line up and imitate his strange movements, teasing him mercilessly.

One day, Billy was asking for directions, “Which way is the craft shop?” he stammered, his mouth contorting. And the boys mimicked him in that same mocking stuttering, “It's over...there...Billy.” And then they laughed at him. Humiliation is the kind of that can take over a person's life and ruin someone.

Two days later, it was Billy's cabin's turn to give morning devotions and prayers. Campolo wondered what would happen because his fellow cabin mates had appointed Billy to be the speaker.

Tony knew that they just wanted to get Billy up there in front of the entire camp so that they could make fun of him. As Billy dragged his way to the front, you could hear the giggles rolling over the crowd. Little Billy stood up there...but instead of remorse, or anger pouring out of his mouth...the only seven words that Billy could muster up, came from deep inside his heart. Like fountain, running over...

“Jesus...loves..me..and..I ..love..Jesus!”

I just thought what an incredible example, in a life full of overwhelming hurt and pain, this little guy had a fountain of God’s incredible love for him, and it was just waiting to explode...running over, running over...

See some of us, just so easy to get stingy with our faith.

Easy to begin thinking we earned it or we deserve it. Or that sharing that good news message is reserved for an elite few. Forgetting that God comes to us in grace and mercy and opens up the storeroom of his infinite love to us. And when we truly experience that, it motivates us to offer that to others as well. It will just start to pour out of you...

Kind makes you want tell everyone know...Jesus loves me and I love Jesus!

Third and finally, also important to notice this core value is intended for the entire world, for all people, everywhere!

III. All People.

Acts 1:8 – ⁸ 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.”

And so you...

A. Begin where we are.

Neighbors, friends, our community.

Your grocer, the clerk at the coffee shop you always stop at, the parents you sit beside at sporting events...

It is in our local community that we connect with those outside the church. We learn to know their names, their families. We become familiar with their desires, motivations, but also their heartaches and pain and their life stories. It is in doing life, that we connect and learn to love and to understand those outside the church.

This was the witnessing model of Jesus...he welcomes sinners and he eats with them.

Sadly, **“Many Christians have been so afraid of being contaminated by worldliness that they have avoided any social contacts with unconverted persons. As a result, they have no natural bridge for evangelism; what witnessing they do is usually artificial and forced rather than the spontaneous outgrowth of genuine friendship.”**

It is in doing life, in work and play, sharing meals that doors open up for us to naturally talk about the impact of Jesus in our lives.

And then you'll notice Jesus says...our witness must

B. Go to the ends of the earth.

Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria...and to the ends of the earth.

God's love and his invitation to the abundant life, is not reserved for us and people that look like us.

“Jesus offered his life and blood for the sins of the Iranian, the Slav, the Hispanic and the Chinese, just as he did for you and me.” (Core Values 97)

This is why as a church we support world missions. We sent a group of our teens and leaders to Puerto Rico this past summer and just outside in the foyer there are several cards of some of the missionaries we support around the world.

So when you show up here at Five Forks and people start asking, what are you all about? We say one of core values is “Witnessing to the world.” Seeking the lost is at the heart of God, it naturally overflows from our own personal experience with God and we believe everyone in our community and around the world should get to experience God's love and grace as well. So if you hang around us long enough...we'll be witnessing to the world.

Pray.

As we close our service today, we want to celebrate the incredible life that Jesus offers to us. One of the ways we celebrate is through sharing communion. We remember Christ giving his life on our behalf. His sacrifice on that cross, becomes the motivation to continue sharing the Good News story with all people.

Scripture.

COMMUNION