



GPS GUIDE: NOVEMBER 12, 2023 G r o w . P r a y . S t u d y .

Sermon Series: A Work in Progress

Sermon: Here & Now: The Present

This week we are reflecting on those core values that First Christian Birmingham identified as guiding principles in the work that God is calling us to. These values shape our ministry and our lives. We invite you to contemplate the ways these values draw you closer to God and to others who share this journey.

Monday Read: John 3:16-17

Core Value: **GRACE**

*Yes, God so loved the world
as to give the Only Begotten One,
that whoever believes may not die,
but have eternal life.
God sent the Only Begotten into the world
not to condemn the world,
but that through the Only Begotten
the world might be saved.*

It might be that all of us are familiar with this verse, it is a verse that is so often used as a litmus test for people of faith. "...whoever believes..." It's a verse so familiar, we sometimes forget it can still teach us something new. Lately I've been captivated by the first line... "God so loved the world..." What a limitless statement of love. Our core value of grace reminds us of God's unconditional love for all of creation. This passage reminds us that God's love meets us in all of our moments and God's grace invites us to take another step on our journey with the One who loves the whole world. What step will you take to love this world that God loves?

Prayer: God of limitless Love, help me to be the face of love for others, sharpen the image I see in the mirror until it is shaped by the grace that draws me into your embrace. Amen

Tuesday Read: Galatians 3: 26-28Core Value: **ACCEPTANCE**

Each one of you is a child of God because of your faith in Christ Jesus. All of you who have been baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. In Christ there is no Jew or Greek, slave or citizen, male or female. All are one in Christ Jesus.

The categories that divide us today may be different than in Paul's day, but divisions persist in all facets of our lives — divisions that run along lines of ethnicity, socio-economic status, gender, sexual orientation, ideology, political affiliation, and any number of other factors. Paul reminds us that whatever human categories may describe us, they do not define us, "for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." All human categories are subordinate and ultimately irrelevant to our primary identity as beloved children of God. And not just you or me, but every face you gaze upon today. We are God's. Our core value of acceptance says, *We affirm the inherent value of every person.* As you reflect on that value and Paul's teaching, how will you practice the unity of Spirit made possible through Jesus?

Prayer: Holy Parent, you created everything around us with the divine spark of life, remind us of the inherent value of all those we call sibling, teach us to live in unity as your beloved children. Amen.

Wednesday Read: Acts 2:42-47Core Value: **COMMITMENT**

They devoted themselves to the apostles' instructions and the communal life, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. A reverent fear overtook them all, for many wonders and signs were being performed by the apostles. Those who believed lived together, shared all things in common; they would sell their property and goods, sharing the proceeds with one another as each had need. They met in the Temple and they broke bread together in their homes every day. With joyful and sincere hearts they took their meals in common, praising God and winning the approval of all the people. Day by day, God added to their number those who were being saved.

For Jesus, faith is meant to be a matter of the heart. These early followers seemed to get that. Their commitment to God and to one another was evident in their living. They were family, kin, and it showed in their actions. It takes a community to hold on to the faith that God is working to bring in the midst of all the suffering and heartbreak and cruelty and hypocrisy of this world. Our experience of life in this world is such that we always have to keep learning what it means to have faith. That doesn't typically happen well when we try to go it alone. Faith is something that thrives and grows in the sharing. And that happens in the context of a village—a community of faith where we are committed to one another. Our community serves as an extended family for us in our faith. It's our support system, encouraging and guiding and strengthening us as we take our journey of faith. Today, give thanks for your church family.

Prayer: Lord, held together by your extravagant love, we embrace this journey of faith together. Thanks be to God for holy community! Amen.

Thursday Read: Psalm 148**We embrace God's creation.**

alleluia!
 Praise YHWH from the heavens;
 praise God in the heights!
 Praise God, all you angels;
 praise God, all you hosts!
 Praise God, sun and moon;
 praise God, all you shining stars!
 Praise God, you highest heavens;
 and you waters above the heavens!
 Let them praise the Name of YHWH,
 by whose command they were created.
 God established them forever and ever
 and gave a decree which won't pass away.
 Praise YHWH from the earth,
 you sea creatures and ocean depths,
 lightning and hail, snow and mist,
 and storm winds that fulfill God's word,
 mountains and all hills,
 fruit trees and ah cedars,
 wild animals and ah cattle,
 small animals and flying birds,
 rulers of the earth, leaders of all nations,
 all the judges in the world,
 young men and young women,
 old people and children—
 let them all praise the name of YHWH
 whose name alone is exalted,
 whose majesty transcends heaven and earth,
 and who has raised up a Horn for God's people
 to the praise of the faithful,
 the children of Israel,
 the people dear to God!
 Alleluia!

Creation is God's work. Before humanity was, the rest of creation came into being. The earth and her creatures – indeed the whole cosmos – have beauty, dignity and meaning before human presence. So, to nurture awe at the wonder of creation is part of our calling. Look up into the skies, walk in the fields, stand at the ocean's edge. Everything belongs, everything has beauty!

Humanity is also part of God's creation. Formed "from the dust of the ground" we are people intimately connected to the earth. As living beings our life comes from the Creator God, whose breath animates us. These compelling images give weight to both the privilege and task of being human on the earth. What will we do with the with the time we've been given to care for this world God loves?

Prayer: Creating God, we look with wonder upon this—your--world, the endless cycle of nature, of life and death and rebirth. Open our eyes to see, our lips to praise, our hands to share. May our feet touch lightly on the path we tread, and our footsteps be worthy of following you. Amen.

Friday Read: Luke 3:23

We explore God's purpose for our lives.

When Jesus began to teach and minister, he was about thirty years old.

Luke doesn't mean that Jesus lazed around for twenty-nine years and then, upon turning thirty, got off his duff and went to work. It's true, no one knows for sure what Jesus was up to before his thirtieth, but Christians have traditionally imagined him churning out tables and benches in Joseph's shop. In other words, working.

So, it's not work that Jesus begins at thirty. It's *his* work. Work only he can do; work that fits him; God-imagined, God-bestowed, Jesus-shaped work. A purpose so persuasive that he stops filling orders for dining room chairs, picks the wood curls out of his hair, and leaves his mother calling after him at the door. His work.

Each of us has our work, too. A purpose we find in the overlap of who we are, what we're good at, what we love, and what our human neighborhood is needing. Work that generates motivating joy as we lend ourselves to it. Work that makes us more fully who we were created to be as we give ourselves away in doing it.

Sometimes our work coincides with our jobs. Sometimes it doesn't: it disrupts and uproots us. Sometimes it leads to great public achievements. Often, it's as hidden as Jesus was in those first twenty-nine years. Whatever it is, we're meant to seek and find this work that is seeking us. We're meant to turn thirty, which thankfully, we can do at any age. What purpose is God calling you to in this season of life? How will you step out in trust to do it?

Prayer: God, may I find the work that is mine to do, and the courage and grace to do it. Amen.

Saturday Read: Matthew 7:12

We extend love and respect to all.

"Therefore treat others as you would have them treat you. This is the whole meaning of the Law and the prophets."

One Sunday recently, a new family arrived while we were walking through worship rehearsal on Sunday morning. One of their parents caught my eye as they came in.

"Are they allowed to sit wherever in here?" she asked, motioning to her kids.

"Of course!" I watched as our deacon offered worship bags to the children and shared with them about Worship and Wonder.

"They're going to be disruptive." The mother warned.

"They won't be the only ones. We're OK with it if you are. Truly all are welcome here."

All are welcome. It's a catchy turn of phrase. But what do these words mean? How do we convey the intention behind them? How do we let people know that it's true—all are welcome? How will you offer love and respect to those you encounter?

Prayer: Loving One, make us as good as your word.