

Questioning our Values:
“Kingdom Values According to Jesus”
Luke 4:14-21

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The world is abuzz these days about values. We promote our values, debate our values, vote our values, teach our values, and hopefully, live our values. Values are the personal qualities that sustain us in the big picture of life. Values are a set of guiding principles that help us make decisions. Values are beliefs and attitudes about what is good and right and desirable and worthwhile. People with fuzzy values live fuzzy lives.

So, I invite us to use these forty days of Lent to examine our values. I want us to lift up the floorboards of our convictions and examine them in the presence of Jesus. I want us to question, discuss, ponder, pray and pursue a life that is pleasing to God. I urge you to use the tools our Discipleship Team has made available to us, the devotional guide, the blog, and the sermons, not to be indoctrinated, but to be invigorated.

HOW DO WE DEVELOP OUR VALUES? We develop them from CHILDHOOD. Proverbs 22:3 says, *“Start up a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not turn from it.”* What children learn in their first six years of life will be the way they live for most of their lives.

In Nashville and throughout the NFL sports world, people are outraged about Titan football player Adam “Pacman” Jones. Has this last incident in Las Vegas, leaving three people injured, sent him over the edge of tolerance? While Mr. Adams and Mr. Fisher will make that decision, this much is self-evident. Money, fame and football stardom do not make a moral compass. They only expose what is already there, or in this case, not there. People live what they learn. Had you and I grown up on the streets of Atlanta, in the midst of gangs, without a family to guide us, I wonder what would have happened to us?

What Pacman needs is not condemnation, but conversion. He needs the Lord God Almighty to knock him off his high horse of narcissism and some good Christian friends to teach him the ways of Jesus. If you don’t think God makes a difference in a person’s life, just compare Pacman Jones with Vince Young. Pacman Jones is a child of God who needs a broken and contrite heart. I am praying for that to happen.

We develop our values from CULTURE. Whether or not it is clear to us, what we hear, what we watch, what we do, and what we believe, determine who we are. Let us not be fooled. Music, television, the internet, advertising, and celebrities can take the place of parents and spiritual mentors in giving children the values, beliefs and habits needed for a meaningful life. There is much emphasis today on “reality television.” Are reality shows reality? Do companies really do

business like The Apprentice? Do hospital emergency rooms operate like Grey's Anatomy? Does Desperate Housewives really reflect suburban values?

Humorist Ben Stein, who wrote for years about the rich and famous, came to the conclusion that the rich and famous are not so terribly important. So, in his last column he said this: "A man or woman who makes a huge wage for memorizing lines and reciting them in front of a camera is no longer my idea of a shining star." The real stars are parents who take time for their children, soldiers who give their lives for their country, or simply people who care about others.

We develop our values from RELIGION, or in our case, Christianity. Certainly people of faith have a role in shaping the values of individuals and society as a whole. As the great preacher of the 1940's, Harry Emerson Fosdick, says in his hymn, "Save us from weak resignation to the evils we deplore."

Someone asked Augustine in the fourth century if the world was in moral decline. Augustine responded, "It all depends upon the Church." As the salt of the earth and lights on a hill, people of faith do season society and shine rays of hope to the least and the lost. What Boy Scout has not benefited from keeping himself physically fit, mentally awake and morally straight?

But Christians have not always done a good job of representing Christ. Too often we have remade our Lord into our own image. We use the name of the Prince of Peace to justify our wars. We steal away behind some proof text of the Bible to justify our prejudice toward others.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer reminds us, "The real trouble is that the pure word of Jesus has been overlaid with so many human rules and regulations that it has become extremely difficult to make a genuine decision for Christ."

WHAT ARE THE KINGDOM VALUES OF JESUS? The values of Jesus are GOOD NEWS OF GREAT JOY. It's early fall, maybe September. Jesus is fresh out of the wilderness where he has spent forty days wrestling with the devil. There He clarifies His mission, establishes His purpose, finds the comfort of angels. After this exhausting self-examination and personal struggle, Jesus returns to Nazareth. Sometimes you just want to go home, get some of your mother's good cooking and your daddy's shy advice. Jesus returns to Nazareth where He had been brought up. On the Sabbath He went into the Synagogue as was His custom. The Lectionary reading for the day was from Isaiah 61:1-2. This is what it had to say: "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.*" Then Jesus concludes by saying, "*Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.*" The home-town folk are pleased and proud.

May we never forget; the Gospel is good news. I don't know about you, but I've heard too many sermons about gloom, despair and damnation of me. The Gospel is not bad news; the Gospel is good news. It says in this book, there's life for a look and Jesus can make us anew. Sermons need to lift us up, not beat us up; elevate us, not depress us; enlarge us, not belittle us; and empower us, not defeat

us.

The values of Jesus bring **LIBERTY AND RELEASE FOR ALL**. *“He has sent me to proclaim freedom for prisoners, and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed...”*

I don't cry very often in movies, but I found myself in tears Friday night as I watched the current release Amazing Grace. It's the moving story of William Wilberforce and his life-long struggle against slavery in the Parliament of England. This young man of unusual ability and noteworthy power relentlessly appealed to the consciences of sophisticated people to stop what no normal person could stand to embrace. He literally gave his life trying to set people free. What the movie does not include is the fact that slavery was finally, fully outlawed in England on July 26, 1833. William Wilberforce died July 29, 1833. Lest we think slavery to be a problem of the past, there are eighteen to twenty thousand people trafficked in the U.S. each year for forced labor or prostitution. There are twenty-seven million enslaved people worldwide, eighty percent of them women and over half are children under eighteen.

A sub plot to that movie is the life of John Newton, the preacher behind Wilberforce. A slave trader himself, Newton lives out the latter years of his life with the ghosts of twenty thousand slaves haunting him in the night. But as he proclaims in the movie, “I am a great sinner, but I found a Great Savior.” I don't think I'll ever sing about the amazing grace that saved a wretch like me the same again. Jesus Christ can do that for you and me.

The values of Jesus proclaim the year of **GOD'S FAVOR FOR ALL**. This kind of talk gets Jesus kicked out of town. But let us not be too quick to judge. These Nazarenes liked the idea of Jubilee. Who wouldn't be in favor of a little heaven on earth that grants forgiveness of debts and return of land to original owners? It was the sweet dream of all God's children in Israel. They hoped Jesus would make it happen. So their hopes rise with this hometown boy. But Jesus leads no revolution against Rome. Jesus fits no image of their expected Messiah. Jesus is not elected the Chief Rabbi of Galilee and worst of all, He tells the home folks that the Jubilee will be for widows and foreigners and lepers, as well as, you and me. Talk like that gets you in big trouble. So our story ends with Jesus between a mob of angry people and the precipice of a huge cliff.

So, I suppose I need to warn you. Fully embrace the values of Jesus and you could wind up there too!

Amen.