

In the Bestseller Good to Great, Jim Collins describes one transition from Good to Great Institutions is being able in a word or phrase to describe what we are about. Words. There have been times in human societies when Poets, Philosophers, Playwrights, agonized, labored over words. Today with Social Media and Politics, words seem disposable, meaningless. The Book of Genesis does not attempt to explain Geo-Physics, Biology or Evolution. Our ancient Hebrew ancestors, instead of using pictures like hieroglyphics or petroglyphs; as one of the first cultures with an alphabet used WORDS to describe what they believed. In the ORDINATION VOWS of Ministers, Elders and Deacons, there is that extremely awkward question of "DO YOU RECEIVE & ADOPT THE ESSENTIAL TENETS OF THE REFORMED FAITH and WHAT SCRIPTURE CALLS US TO BELIEVE & DO". What is being asked is WHAT ARE YOUR CORE VALUES? In a single Word what do you live and die for? What do you intend, other people will remember you for being?

While regularly mistranslated, the original Hebrew of Genesis was intentionally ambiguous, using the word "beginning" as a verb! The point is not identification of The Beginning as the Big Bang, the original act. "In beginning" identifies that when everything we can know or imagine was a Waste and Void, without tangible reality, without sound or sight in the blackness of the universe, "In beginning GOD created the heavens and the earth." As Christians one of our CORE VALUES is: In beginning: GOD = Creator.

When I was in College, the Chair of our Chemistry department had worked on the Manhattan Project developing the first Atomic Bomb, and his father had been a Presbyterian Pastor. He shared the idea that I have consistently used in teaching Confirmation Class to interpret Genesis 1. In the first place, it is miraculous that thousands and thousands of years before Charles Darwin theorized about The Origin of Species, that the ancient Hebrews who knew nothing of Science, recognized the same Order of events. Out of Chaos, a waste and void, reality is created to balance chaos, light to balance darkness. Creation of Order, of Light and Place did not eliminate Chaos, Darkness; we recognize the earth in balance with the darkness of space. We recognize light in balance with the dark. For life to exist, there needed to be a firmament in the heavens, an atmosphere, a separation between the waters of the earth and the waters of the sky. There needed to be balance between the Oceans and Land, between lakes, rivers and streams versus terra-firma. Before insects, fish, reptiles, birds and mammals, there first needed to be plant-life. All of this before our human ancestors ever walked this life. However, as Darwin & Physicists have theorized, before anything else, there must have been something that initiated change, a circumstance of FATE, a Cataclysm of Gases, a Big Bang. The ancient Hebrews instead identified that before anything else, In the act of Beginning from Chaos to Order, the Prime Mover from Darkness to Light was GOD, who created by calling things into being! GOD called for Light and there was Light, for an Atmosphere and there was. According to Genesis 1, the CORE VALUE, the most important individual in Faith is GOD, who is CREATOR. The Creator's ultimate act of Creation was to form humanity in GOD's own image and likeness.

According to Genesis 2, another CORE VALUE is that after GOD Called with a word every thing that exists into being, GOD desired to have a CARETAKER to care for the Earth. A Mysterious Mist came up from the ground, watering the face of the earth, and GOD formed us out of the dust of the earth, Humans of the Humus, Earthlings out of the Earth, Dust of Dust, breathing GOD's own Breath: LIFE into us, to make us ALIVE. The Hebrew word for BREATH, is the same word for SPIRIT, and also the word for WIND. GOD gave us responsibility for everything GOD Created, yet of all the stuff of this reality there was no companion for humanity so GOD separated humanity that we would always be searching for completion in others. Most mysterious of all, according to Genesis 2 GOD desired that as Creatures in the image of GOD, with GOD's own Breath in us, GOD desired that we would choose to love GOD. The great paradox being that if humanity is to choose to love GOD, GOD gave humanity Freedom of Will to choose to love or not to love.

In Genesis 3, a third CORE VALUE is named the origin of GOOD balanced with EVIL. There is RIGHTEOUSNESS, which is Being Right with GOD, and there is SIN which is hiding from GOD, from the World, hiding what we have done even from ourselves.

The Torah does not attempt to integrate or reconcile these CORE VALUES. They are CORE VALUES to faith in GOD and the stories behind each explain each.

The New Testament is our Greco-Roman Christian ancestors, not Ancient Hebrews, yet each of the Gospels also begin with CORE VALUES of the faith community. **MATTHEW** was addressed to a Jewish body encountering the Christian Faith. Matthew therefore begins with the GENEALOGY from ABRAHAM through DAVID, through the DEPORTATION to Babylon and Return from Exile, FULFILLED in JESUS CHRIST, such that everything of ISRAEL is fulfilled in JESUS CHRIST. **MARK** provides the earliest record of JESUS as the MESSIAH, beginning as all of us as Christians do with his BAPTISM, culminating in his RESURRECTION and the challenge to us whether we too will dismiss what we have witnessed, or whether we will spread the GOOD NEWS? **LUKE** is written to a Non-Jewish Gentile world, using the Jewish narrative adapted to include Greeks, Romans and all the world. **JOHN 1** returns to GENESIS 1, where by Calling LIGHT to appear, in a WORD, GOD called this to happen, therefore IN THE BEGINNING THE WORD WAS WITH GOD, WAS PART OF GOD and NOTHING WAS MADE without the Word. THAT WORD according to JOHN is what becomes incarnate, the LATIN WORD for OF FLESH, as we have in the word CARNIVOROUS and CARNIVAL, as JESUS of NAZARETH.

In all four of the GOSPELS, CORE VALUES to what we as Christians believe are:

JESUS is RIGHTEOUS, ie ONE WITH GOD;

JESUS was BAPTIZED by John the Baptist;

JESUS called Disciples;

JESUS celebrated COMMUNION;

JESUS died on the CROSS and was RESURRECTED.

Four and a half years ago, when I first came to be your pastor, I preached a couple of shall we say MEMORABLE SERMONS. Painfully, I was trying in those first months to illustrate MY CORE VALUES, and instead what everyone remembers are the illustrations without the CORE VALUES.

One where I literally stripped off my robe and clothes to Pink Pajamas, to get across the message I CARE ABOUT YOU SO MUCH I WILL GIVE YOU THE SHIRT OFF MY BACK.

One where we re-assembled loaves of bread on the COMMUNION TABLE as The Body of CHRIST, that this Sacrament is not just RELIGIOUS RITUAL, in our Stories we become the Body of CHRIST.

Several with my off-beat sense of Humor believing that FAITH like LIFE do not need to be boring. If I offended anyone, I sincerely apologize, HOWEVER, Self Sacrifice, The Body of Christ, finding Joy in Life, and an unwavering desire to LOVE THIS CHURCH are and continue to be my CORE VALUES.

As we attempt to clarify, to ourselves, to our Presbytery, to the world around us what we need and what we will do next we need to determine: Who are we now? What are our Core values? If you were to describe to someone who had never been to Church, who knew nothing of who we are, what we believe, or even friends who self-identify as RECOVERING CHRISTIANS or who previously had been part of this community & left during difficult times... What Words or phrases would you use?

This week, Please write those down and send them to me. We want to collect all the words and phrases you would use to name Our CORE VALUES as the Church in this time and place. IN BEGINNING, What is Important about this Body of Christ?