

Core Values: Authenticity & Community: | Kirsten Anonby & Dave Solmes

September 11, 2022

Questions:

- What has been your experience with stating values?
- Why are values important to you?
- How have you noticed values influencing our community?

As a council and ministry team we have been looking forward to these September Welcome Sundays. **For so many reasons.** We believe God is with us. God is leading Us. and God so much for us. We believe that People need the Lord & that God has unique things for our community to get involved in.

History: During these Welcome Sundays we wanted to take a good honest look at our values. It has been our pattern prior to the pandemic. As a community our journey with stated values began in 2006. Over the years .. we have found that our values have meant so much to us. . . Our values have helped guide our vision and mission to serve locally and globally.

Our hope when beginning the idea of refreshing our values 4 years ago, was to retain the heart of our values, while clarifying and rearticulating them for this new season.

The global pandemic was difficult. So many things were uncertain, and some things still are. So much of what we could / cannot do was in constant flux. As a ministry team and council, we felt in the midst of all that uncertainty to work harder than ever on the work of refreshing our values.

We set about to ask some honest questions as we looked inward, upward, and outward. All the while asking and seeking the Lord, while allowing him to speak to us.

I am so proud of our team and council, for how these conversations have been carried out the last few years. At the end of the process, we feel we have articulated some of the things that God has uniquely called us to be as a community. And yes, this has resulted in a refresh of our values statements. **If you think about it**, a lot has changed in our church and in the Langley area since LWC was led by a smaller ministry team, serving a congregation of less than 50 way back in 2006.

So with a new season in front of us, we felt this to be an optimal time to bring our refreshed values forward. This began on Sunday, August 28 when a number of people (70) made their way to our Core Values prayer night. It was such an encouraging evening.

Why ARE VALUES SO Important? Every person + every family, team, church has a set of values. Sometimes they are stated, sometimes they are not. There are times when we all have observed in a group or a team that the stated values are contradicted by certain repeated behaviors.

However, agreed upon values have the potential to give direction, problem solve, help in the decision making process. Values can unite a group when visible and invisible things are trying to pull people apart. Values give a group courage and clarity, and confidence when making decisions.

Within Living Waters, values have never been something our congregation has voted on. They don't show up in our policy manuals. Rather, our values are relational and offer each of us an invitation on how to lead our life responsibility, and how to engage this community.

While you find this list of refreshed values on our website, and now on the wall in the lobby in Fort Langley. Values are not really meant for a website or a wall. Values are a matter of the heart, and need to take root in our lives, and bear Fruit that will bear witness of our love for Jesus, and to people around us.

As a team we have felt (unanimously) that these 5 values, now accompanied by and refreshed definitions, offers us a good look at what it means to be a fully devoted follower of Jesus. **These five values are certainly not everything that could ever be said about Christian community & we understand that we won't always get it right.**

Yet, we feel **these values are our community's best shot at articulating what we think it means to be a community with Jesus in the center.**

These aren't just values we've decided that we like. This is who we sense we are called to be as a Christian community – as a church & we have arrived at this after bible study, prayer, and discussion.

So, to the many that have been around for a while you will notice there is change FROM SEVEN to FIVE values. We are of mind that as we discuss these 5 values, the next 3 weeks that you will appreciate their meaning and what they call us to. At any time, if you have any questions we would love to hear from you.

Preamble

We are a community yielded to Jesus, shaped by scripture, and dependent on his Spirit to faithfully follow him. Our values remind us of what a community with Jesus at the centre looks like, and of the distinct ways in which Living Waters Church is called to be that community.

We are a community – a group of people who intentionally choose to gather together. There are all kinds of communities who gather for all kinds of reasons: neighbours, co-workers, soccer parents on Saturday mornings, a few people on our pastoral team who will remain nameless have been obsessively gathering to play disc golf.

We are a community who gathers to faithfully follow Jesus. We love Jesus, and we live for Him, we yield to Jesus as our Lord – our King.

Because Jesus is our Lord we allow His book—the Bible, to shape us – our understanding of truth, of ourselves, our picture of God – our actions, our treatment of others.

And we are a community that is dependent on the Holy Spirit – we live knowing that we are unable to be faithful without the Holy Spirit to enable and empower us.

These three realities – yielded to Jesus – shaped by Scripture – and dependent on the Spirit are the solid ground that our values stand on. And they all point us towards Jesus.

What I find most helpful about them is that they don't focus on what we DO as a community (we pray, we read the Bible, we sing, we serve) . . . instead they focus on who we ARE as a community – or – more to the point – the kind of people Jesus calls us to become when we place Him at the centre. He calls us to be authentic, to let go of individualism to share in community. He calls us to a generous life, a life where we let go of what is comfortable so we can grow more like Jesus. He calls us to get involved – to participate in His work. Our values give us clear and applicable language for who we are called to be, for the attitudes and heart of Christian community.

These values are steeped in the overarching themes that we find in the Bible about who we are called to be as God's people – as his church. They are broad – reflecting the big picture of who the church all over the world is meant to be – but they are also meant to be specific – distinct – because we as Living Waters Church are meant to be God's people in a particular way. Every church, just like every person, reveals the heart of God uniquely.

We have five core values as a community, and today we're going to talk about 2: authenticity and community.

AUTHENTICITY

We value authenticity because Jesus always draws us into truth. We want to be honest with Jesus and with one another, because the truth in love makes community possible. We know that being authentic means getting messy; we want to build bridges and not walls. We want to be people who do what we say and say what we do so that Jesus is seen through our life together.

Authenticity has become a bit of a buzz-word in our culture. As people bombarded daily with increasingly sophisticated promotion and advertisements, we lead suspicious lives. People in our world are on the hunt for something real – something authentic.

My husband David intentionally shares during his classes at TWU. His students lean in when he shares—hungry for a glimpse of unvarnished humanity.

But for all its popularity, authenticity is difficult to live. Very difficult. True authenticity with others involves risk – because we lay down what protects us – our masquerade of being fine – our small talk. True authenticity is risky on another level because it calls us to lay down the illusions about ourselves that we hide behind in our own hearts. Authenticity with Jesus calls us to honesty with ourselves.

We value authenticity because Jesus always draws us into truth.

What happens when a person enters into a relationship with a God who, as the Gospel writer John says, is “full of grace and truth?” (John 1:17)

Jesus comes to us and pours out his grace – and because Jesus came to be with us – and died to set us free from all of our deepest, most shameful secrets-- we discover that we are known and loved by God as we are. And this discovery enables us to trust enough to allow Jesus to show us the truth about who we are. This is what Jesus calls us to.

It is God’s heart that we would grow in this direction of honesty – both with him and with one another. In fact, I have found that I can only grow in my honesty with Jesus if I am growing in my honesty with people. The two happen in our lives side by side.

I learned this in my 20’s when I lived with 10 other Christian women – a definite experience of authenticity. My roommates soon learned, among other things, that I was a sloppy dishwasher and that I was nosy – I know that they learned these things about me because they told me. But they loved me – and knowing they knew those things about me enabled me to more deeply and fully receive their love. It was an experience of grace.

We value authenticity because the truth in love makes community possible.

We are not interested in a community where everyone puts on their best clothes and pretends that everything is great. You might experience that on a Sunday morning, but that’s not who we want to be.

We want to be a place where we let our brokenness be seen, so that people can love us in the midst of it. We want to engage in authentic relationships that make room for disagreements, and even healthy conflict.

We are often uncomfortable with failure, with sickness, with grief, with pain, with loss, with brokenness and sin, with complicated issues that can’t be easily resolved.

But Jesus is NOT like that. He is at home with us when we are confused, doubting, struggling, in pain, grieving, sinning. None of our stuff is a surprise to Him.

And He calls us to follow Him into the complexity of real relationships – so we can be people who do what we say and say what we do – so we can look like Him – so we can be people who extend the grace of God to one another.

He calls us into authenticity.

COMMUNITY

We value community because belonging to Jesus means belonging with one another. As a diverse group of people welcomed by Jesus, we always want to make room at the table, because Jesus invites everyone. In life together we discover everything Jesus has for us. We love one another as Jesus loves us, relying on the Holy Spirit to unite and sustain us.

We live in what could arguably be the most individualistic (and lonely) culture that has ever been. We understand our lives first and foremost as individuals, our default understanding of identity is that it's shaped by each of us alone, and we are wary of the commitments that would limit our personal freedom. And yet, we are chronically on the hunt for the kind of relationships that make us feel safe, loved, and known, because, despite the individualism that surrounds us, we were built for community.

There is no way for us belong to Jesus without belonging with one another. In John 13 Jesus says *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."* This command – along with pretty much every other command in the New Testament – can only be lived out in community.

I find that holding community as a value calls me to see the Christian life differently – it corrects the individualism in my vision. It would be easy to assume that it's in my personal prayer times that I find everything Jesus has for me. Individual prayer matters so much – but it's just as much in community – with other people – that I find the abundant life I want. We are meant to be people who relate to God both when we are alone in prayer AND when we are together in community. To faithfully follow Jesus is to follow Him further up and farther in to community.

In our description of this value we say that "we love one another as Jesus loves us." It takes our entire lives to learn how to live out this short sentence. We want to be a community that takes this call seriously – that treats each person around us as a person– made in the image of God– worthy of love – even if they think and live differently from us. To take this call seriously means that we listen to each other, we make space for each other. We prioritize time together as God's people. Oftentimes church community is sanitized, nice, and terribly thin – like ¼ inch of topsoil on the top of hard ground. It might make the yard look better for a while – but it doesn't MEAN anything. This is not the kind of community that Jesus meant for us to build. Think of the images that the New Testament uses for the church – a body with diverse parts . . . a building (and we're the bricks) . . . a family.

Jesus meant for your Christian community to matter in your life – He meant for it to be a place of life-changing relationships – where people share in your joys and journey with you through the dark places. He meant this to be a place where you get to look across at someone you feel you have nothing in common with – and to discover that you love them because they love the same Jesus.

Jesus wants to love you through these people. And Jesus wants to love these people through you.

That's why when Jesus left this earth and sent his Holy Spirit, he established the church – not isolated individuals. This community was meant to be a place where his followers could practice being fully human, with the help of the Spirit. This is where we get to practice faithfulness and grace, patience and self-control, kindness and goodness. And as we live this out our life together becomes a place where people catch glimpses of the redeemed life we'll fully live when Jesus returns and lives among us.

Jesus said the world would know who we were and whose we were by our love for one another. We still have this call – to show the world the love of Jesus through being a different kind of community – that loves each other deeply. Individuals will not show people the full love of God – it takes a community to do that.

How do we see Authenticity and Community being lived out in our church going forward?

- **As a part of an authentic community** – We feel it is important that somebody knows our story – and knows what is really going on in our lives. So, we want to make room for one another, and hope to continue to prioritize moments so we can get to know each other. For example, during community time at our in person Sunday morning gatherings we feel community is built. Furthermore, we feel this value can continue to shape how our networks and life groups gather.
- **We believe following Jesus involves growing up in Christ.** Spiritual Maturity is not measured in years, but is more fully seen as we walk closely with Jesus and learn what it means to be fully human. We will continue to prioritize Zoe leadership courses for men and women, discipleship and Grow opportunities. We believe becoming a fully devoted follower of Jesus involves being honest in our understanding of how God has uniquely called and gifted us. We want everyone to share the load, so we will not organize our teams around “slot fling” and a plethora of sign-up sheets. We want to discover who we are in Christ, and go from there.

Authenticity INFLUENCES HOW WE TALK & GET ALONG WITH EACH OTHER

- **We imagine a community where no one feels like they are performing.** We want to push against the performative tendencies in our society. We want to be intentional – but not professional.
- **Authenticity involves sharing honestly about needs arising within our community.** We want to update our community on how things are going at the church, areas where volunteers and teams are needed, and when local needs arise. Furthermore, we want to share honest updates on how our global workers are getting along, as they serve in different parts of the world.
- **Authenticity involves being honest as we pray together and as we regularly gather around the lord’s supper.** We want this to be seen by the way we receive communion during our in-person services. We approach symbolically the “moving in the same direction idea”. We want everyone at LWC to be moving toward Jesus.
- **We feel that authenticity involves full disclosure** in the area of generosity and in the sharing of church’s finance updates.
- **We value hearing people’s stories.** We want to continue to prioritize Story Sundays and stories during Baptism Sundays. This will be the same during welcome meetups + newcomers life groups, and furthermore, within all our life groups + networks. People Matter so Stories matter.

Community: We believe authenticity makes true community possible,

- **There is no individual Christian life** – to belong to Jesus is to be a part of His overarching plan to build a new humanity. As we do this, we believe that this will provide a much needed witness and example in the world, on how to be rooted in authentic relationships. We consider God’s word to be true which says, “God commands His blessing upon the united.” We believe God’s heart is to bless this community with healing, deliverance, and hope for all people.
- **We believe Jesus calls us out of our aloneness and into community.** We realize many in this world are lonely and estranged. As people belonging to a community like Living Waters our hope is that all of us will get involved in providing care and concern for one another: Friendliness is to be followed by friendship that initiates reaching out, visiting, praying, encouraging, counseling, and mentoring others.
- **We see this value of community, exemplified in the priority given for each person that attends Living Waters to be rooted in relationship.** We see the value of joining a life group and getting involved in our networks, as a great step towards being rooted. We want to connect with our community online, and meet with our community in person.
- **We believe authentic community involves serving others wholeheartedly.** We are not consumers, we are community builders that sacrifice for the benefit of others. Going forward I believe we will marvel at how creative the activity of the body of Christ can be, as everyone gets involved.
- **We want to be a people of invitation and always make room.** We believe God is still at work in our church and this world. In a day when many relationships are short lived, disappointing, and hurtful we believe that Jesus’ invitation to join an authentic community, can provide healing for many and offer hope in this world. We believe God saves and delivers and wants no one to perish. We want many to receive salvation, care, and God’s blessing.

- ***Finally, We believe the value of authentic community***, carries a calling and responsibility to begin new ministries in different neighborhoods, and to meet, and serve new people. By no means do we think we have arrived and experienced all there is to experience. We believe that we have a responsibility to encourage Jesus' work, in the center of communities that are being built, and in neighborhoods that have been around for quite some time. We want to serve in new communities and invite people to gather in authentic community.
- **We believe the future of Living Waters is to be ONE church with multiple locations of authentic communities.** This next year we want to prioritize serving and gathering in 2 locations . . . Here in Fort Langley and in Willoughby.

So today – as we have said – We are not asking you to raise your hand to vote ... we are asking you to get involved ... to wholeheartedly give personal attention to your life, and of course, get involved in the life of this authentic community.

AS WE SAID this is not policy rather we aspire to these values be priorities.

As part of LWC I WOULD HOPE That you would give yourself WHOLEHEARTEDLY to the hopes, dreams and aspirations of these stated values.

Let's believe for God's blessing upon each other's lives, as we walk along the righteous path that these values call us on to.

And finally, let's allow the Holy Spirit to empower and enable us to nurture deeper friendships, build new relationships, share our faith, multiply His church, and personally be catalytic in the building up of this authentic community.

God has so much more for us . . . we have good days ahead.

Discussion Questions:

- What is most life giving to you about Christian community?
- What is most challenging to you about Christian community?
- How do you see the value of authenticity worked out in our community?
- How would you love to see the value of authenticity more fully expressed at Living Waters?
- How do you see the value of community worked out in our community?
- How would you love to see the value of Community more fully expressed at Living Waters?
- How do the values of community and authenticity challenge you personally?
- Pray for each other.
- How do you see Authenticity and Community being lived out in our church going forward?
- What are the benefits of authenticity? Why is best?
- What are your hopes and dreams for Living Waters church multiplying authentic community?