Good morning! As most of you know, we have been on a journey of prayer and discernment over the past year, seeking God’s will for our church. As a result of that journey, we have adopted a new mission statement…and what is our mission? To be the light of Christ in a hurting culture so that the lost are found, the broken are made whole, the fatherless find hope, and our city is blessed. That is our mission that is where we are going.

However, even though we have a new mission, we are not a new church. Colonial has been around now for 65 years, and there is a particular DNA to this congregation that is unique, and that DNA is defined by our values. As we pursue our mission to be the light of Christ, we will prioritize and make decisions based upon our six core values. And what are those six core values? Pray First, Safe Harbor, Better Together, Student Strong, Love Generously, and Truth Matters. This morning we will unpack the last two core values, beginning with…

**LOVE GENEROUSLY**

As Ken mentioned, the practice of generosity has long been held as a very high value at Colonial. Now, when I mention generosity, what’s the first thing that comes to your mind? Money? Gifts? Going the extra mile? I suspect we all have different concepts of generosity, so here’s the words we chose to use for expressing our core value: *Love Generously* – We love because God first loved us. We love through tangible expressions of generosity and care that bless people and bring glory to God.

Those words are very specific and meaningful to the Vision Team for several reasons.

First, our value of generosity is ultimately a response to the love that God first demonstrated toward us. Every breath that we breathe, every bite of food that we eat, every relationship that we enjoy, and every other aspect of our existence is due to the generosity of our Father in heaven. How easy it is for us to forget…to take a beautiful spring day for granted…to take seeing with our eyes, or hearing with our ears for granted. We are all inclined to grumble and moan about what we lack, when in fact we could spend countless hours expressing our gratitude for all that God done to bless and provide for us. Beyond the creation, our bodies, our families, and all that we take for granted that sustains life…God ultimately expressed His love for us in this: while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). When we were hopelessly lost in the darkness of our condemnation and selfishness, when we were yet hateful and rebellious towards God, Jesus willingly laid down his life to atone for our sin, that we might repent and be reconciled to God through His perfect blood. As Jesus said to Nicodemus in John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten son, so that whosoever would believe in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”
As Paul writes in Romans 8, “He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?”

Church, we can’t out-give God. He who did not spare His own son demonstrated a love for us that forever sets the bar for what “generosity” ultimately means. Here at Colonial, we know that we love because God first loved us. We are generous because our Father in Heaven has been so radically generous to us. We love generously because we have been generously loved by the One who laid down His life for us…He is the Most Generous One…and He has called us to be generous in His name.

If you study the book of Matthew, you will discover that Jesus is constantly teaching His disciples to be generous. He teaches them to love generously in their relationships by forgiving one another and even forgiving their enemies. Jesus teaches his disciples to be generous in counter-intuitive ways that surprise the pagan world. For example, Jesus says in Matt. 5:40-42, “If anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.” These teachings are hard for us to hear, but Jesus was perfectly clear: He expects his disciples to be generous just as Jesus is generous. Our generosity will set us apart as His Church.

In Matthew 25, Jesus paints a picture of the final judgment, when the Son of Man will be seated on his throne and all of the nations will be gathered before Him. There He will separate people one from another, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And what standard did Jesus use in his story to demonstrate what is expected of the redeemed? Generosity. Those who were welcomed and rewarded were those who showed mercy and generosity. And here’s the part that we must remember: Jesus made clear that as we demonstrate mercy and generosity to a person in need, it is as though we were actually showing mercy and generosity to Jesus Himself. As He says in Matthew 25, “Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.” On the other hand, to neglect mercy and generosity is, in essence, to show neglect and disregard for Jesus Himself. As Jesus says in Matthew 25:45, “Truly I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.”

It makes sense that if Jesus is in us, if we are His Church, we will be generous just as Jesus is generous. Now let me be perfectly clear: we do not love generously in order to be accepted by Jesus…we love generously because WE ARE accepted by Jesus…we love because He first loved us, right?

Now, generosity is not your best intentions or an emotion that you feel towards others. Generosity is not about giving whatever scraps are left over. Generosity is demonstrating the extravagant love of God in our act of extravagant giving, whether that be the giving of our time.
and attention, the giving of financial resources, the giving of our expertise, the giving of our hands and hard work, or whatever kind of giving is appropriate at that moment. Loving generously happens frequently here at Colonial in many different ways. Our Care Ministry is based upon this value of Love Generously, and countless lives are blessed every day by our church members who write cards, visit the shut-ins, mow yards, drive people to the doctor, intercede for hurting people in prayer, and in a myriad of other ways. Love Generously is also demonstrated in our missional giving…particularly to those in need in our community. We serve food to hundreds of hungry people each month in the Wornall parking lot; we assist people with food, prayer, and encouragement through the Encouragers Food Pantry each week. We give large gifts of support and encouragement to help fund local ministries like the Healing House, the House of Hope, Freedom Fire, Mission Southside, and Avenues of Life. We continue to Love Generously in our sponsorship of hundreds of orphans and at-risk children in Malawi, Haiti, and Kenya as well. We generously love those we will never meet through our investment in church planting in India. Generosity is a big deal around here, but let’s be clear about our particular understanding of that word means at Colonial: Generosity is always expressed in tangible, meaningful ways as an expression of love and care for others to the glory of God. That last part is important. We do not engage in acts of generosity to bring glory to ourselves. Jesus was very insistent that we as His disciples should not give to seek glory for ourselves. As he taught in Matthew 6, “When you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

Christian generosity is to be accompanied by modesty, humility, and a dogged determination to give all the glory to God. When the Church is generous…when we love generously, we bring hope to the world and glory to our Father in heaven, amen? So…as we pursue our mission to be the Light of Christ, we will hold ourselves accountable to Love Generously…that’s who we have been, that’s who we are, and we will continue to Love Generously, come what may. Let’s shift gears now and consider the final core value: Truth Matters. Meda Green will get us started.
(show video)

**TRUTH MATTERS**

Ask anyone in town, and they’ll tell you that at Colonial, TRUTH MATTERS. This value came across loud and clear in our recent survey of the congregation, and even though we list it last among our core values, it’s only because we see TRUTH MATTERS as the foundational value upon which every other value, as well as our mission, is constructed.
Here is how we worded TRUTH MATTERS: We study the scriptures to discover and be transformed by Truth. We believe Truth is a person, and His name is Jesus.

As you all know, we live in a culture where it is assumed and even taught that truth is ultimately “unknowable.” To make any claim of truth in our culture is to be considered arrogant, because, according to our cultural elites, no one has the authority to make an absolute claim of truth since all people are biased in some way based upon their perspective, their experiences, their place in society, etc. Never mind that the cultural elites are making their own absolute truth statement by insisting that there is no such thing as truth! The irony is pretty rich, but actually they are raising a good question. When it comes to the question of truth, it really does come down to the issue of authority. Can the authority be trusted? How do we know?

For Colonial, the authority by which we come to know and understand truth is first and foremost the revelation of God’s Word as found in the 66 books of the Old and New Testament. The Bible is authoritative for many reasons, not the least of which is this simple observation: the Bible presents a worldview that makes sense of the way things are. As we read the Bible, we come to understand that God created the heavens and the earth…the universe did not just accidently create itself. We learn that human beings are made in God’s image; and that we were made for a purpose, which is to bring glory to God (which means we are not accidental, impersonal machines that formed by time and chance over billions of years). The Bible helps us to account for personality, love, language, and relationships since we were formed in the image of a personal, relational, loving God. It is for this very reason that there is so much beauty in the world. Our origin from God also accounts for why human beings are moral creatures, since God is holy and just. And yet, we can also observe that everything is broken…things are not as they should be. Why is that? The biblical worldview helps us to understand that man rebelled against God and introduced sin into human history; and, ever since the fall, mankind has lived under the curse of sin and death. The Bible helps us to understand that God was not content to be estranged from His creation, so at just the right moment in history, God sent His only Son to atone for our rebellion by suffering our punishment on a Roman cross. Having satisfied God’s justice, Jesus arose from the grave and conquered death, that all who would repent and call upon His name might be forgiven and inherit eternal life. The Bible helps us to understand that time is linear; that history has a beginning and an end. The end of history will come about when Jesus returns, at which time all people will be judged. Those who are repentant and forgiven in Christ will be residents of a new heaven and a new earth where they will spend eternity in the unfettered presence of God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit…where there will be no more pain, no more tears, and no more death. However, those who remain unrepentant and unforgiven will live eternally separated from God with no rest, no hope, and no relief from their torment. The Bible tells us that we have an enemy named Satan. He is a powerful, personal, spiritual entity with legions of demonic servants who hate humans and desire to see us destroyed. The Bible also
bears witness that God is surrounded by a heavenly host of angels who serve as His messengers and do his bidding…and His angels fight on our behalf according to God’s plan and purpose.

This is a biblical worldview, and here at Colonial we believe it is 100% absolutely true. This biblical worldview informs everything we do, everything we teach, and every decision we make. Rather than adjust the Bible to our lifestyles, we believe it is incumbent upon us to align and adjust our lifestyles to what the Bible says is true. Such is why Truth Matters so, so, much. If truth is unknowable, we are adrift without a compass. If the Bible is the objective, revealed truth for all people, then we can know our place in this world and adjust our lives to live according to that truth.

How do we know the Bible is true? How can we be so sure? The simplest answer is this: Jesus. Jesus of Nazareth is clearly the most significant, most influential, most quoted, most important person who has ever lived. All of our lives are dated to his life. All of history is dated to his life. Jesus taught like no one else, Jesus performed miracles like no one else, and Jesus rose from the dead after three days like no one else. Jesus is still the name that is above all names. Jesus is still the name that sets people free from darkness. Jesus is the name that brings hope to the hopeless. Jesus is the name that people bear witness to when they describe a 180-degree change in their lives from those who were enslaved to sin to those who are now free. Millions of testimonies continue to be told everywhere, all over the globe, every day, and they all have one thing in common: Jesus. That’s because Jesus isn’t dead…He’s alive! Jesus continues to transform human lives, families, cities, and countries to this day, and here’s what we know about Jesus: He believed the scriptures were true. He spoke about Satan as a fact. He spoke of heaven and hell as well-established facts. Jesus acknowledged the reality of demons and angels and every aspect of a biblical worldview. Jesus not only spoke about the truth, in John 14:6 Jesus actually refers to Himself as The TRUTH. Such is why at Colonial, we believe that Truth is a person, and His name is Jesus. The Bible is true in that it bears witness to THE TRUTH, who is Jesus Christ our Lord, amen?

What I have just described to you this morning is the foundational value upon which everything else rests in this church. Jesus Christ is LORD…He is the TRUTH…and His WORD is true. This foundational conviction was established early on in Colonial’s history, and for 65 years, this church has not strayed from the Truth. That’s not to say that we have all been faithful…not at all…far from it, in fact. This church has been a hospital for sinful people for 65 years…no one here is without sin…no one has it all figured out…no one here has a monopoly on the truth in terms of our understanding or our perspectives. However, it has been the practice of Colonial’s leadership and that of this congregation to submit to the revealed TRUTH found in scripture, rather than editing the scripture to submit to the whims of our constantly changing culture. That’s what makes this church unique. That’s why TRUTH MATTERS so much. That’s who we have been…that’s who we are…and that’s who we will continue to be, come what may.
So…Colonial…THIS IS US. We are a church with a mission: to be the light of Christ in a hurting culture so that the lost are found, the broken are made whole, the fatherless find hope, and our city is blessed. We are a church with six uncompromising core values: we PRAY FIRST; we create SAFE HARBOR for hurting people; we are always BETTER TOGETHER; we are always committed to being STUDENT STRONG: we LOVE GENEROUSLY; and we hold fast to the conviction that TRUTH MATTERS. This is us…this is who we are and who we are becoming.

Now let me ask you a question: is this you? Are you in? Are you called to join us on this mission to be the light of Christ, to live into these values, to play your role in helping lost people find their way back to God…to commit yourself to the work of helping broken people be made whole…to live sacrificially so that the fatherless find hope…to work hard, to show up, to make your contribution so that our city is blessed?

If so, I hope you will make that commitment to Jesus this morning. Every person here is irreplaceable and vital if we are going to have any success in pushing back the darkness. I can’t do it alone, and neither can you. But together, through the power of God’s Holy Spirit, we can and will be the Light of Christ…and lives will be forever changed as a result. Think about it church…100 years from now, what will matter the most? What will matter the most is what we did with Jesus. What will matter the most is the relationships we invested in so that people could meet Jesus and be set free. What will matter the most is the eternal investment we made in individuals, families, our city, and the advancement of God’s Kingdom throughout the world. Those things will last forever.

So how will we go about it? What major changes are coming? I can’t answer all of those questions this morning, but I can tell you that living into the BLESS rhythms that we have been emphasizing over the past year is a good place to start. As we pray for those in our relational world, as we listen and engage, as we eat together, as we serve them, and as we share our stories, we will shine as the light of Christ in the places where we live, work, play, and learn. Begin with BLESS…that is something we can all do right now. Other strategies and tactics will be coming, I’m sure. We do have some other initiatives in the works right now. We are working to clearly define our Discipleship pathway as a means of helping people to shine brightly as the light of Christ. We are working to create a new system to help people discover their gifts and equip them to serve in their areas of giftedness. We are evaluating our programs and ministries in light of our mission and our commitment to BLESS the city. We are evaluating our worship environments in light of our value to be Better Together and to remain Student Strong. There is a lot of work that is going on behind the scenes, but for now, my number one ask is that you would pray first, and then seek to BLESS those in your relational world. You don’t need a church program to BLESS others…you just need Jesus, amen? Let’s commit ourselves to our mission, and let us continue to pray that God will have His way with His church. Let’s pray.