



Character counts. Plain and simple. Character counts.

This is true in our own community. The Crawfordsville School Corporation home page says its mission and goals are to, among other things to:

Support character education and character development in the school community.

- Support, model, and commend upholding the six pillars of character at all levels, recognizing them as integral learning and life skills
- Continue character education activities throughout the corporation
- Promote service learning activities within and beyond the community¹

Character counts. The Six Pillars of Character are:²

- Trustworthiness
- Respect
- Responsibility
- Fairness
- Caring
- Citizenship

Jesus makes this clear in today's comparison of himself as the Good Shepherd and the Hired Hand as one who has no character. Jesus is the one who is **trustworthy**: when the sheep need him he is present and he has their best interests at heart. We can believe what he says. Jesus is trustworthy.

¹ <https://www.cville.k12.in.us/domain/50> (April 21, 2018)

² <https://charactercounts.org/program-overview/six-pillars/>(April 21, 2018)

Acts 4: 5-12; Psalm 23; 1 John 3: 16-24; John 10:11-18

Jesus **respects** us. He calls us to him but he does not force us to follow him. Jesus grants us respect as humans created by God but given free will and a brain that can choose. Sure, he gets frustrated with us – he asks why we have so little faith- but he never forces us to change what we believe. He offers. He cajoles. He teaches. At the end of the day, though, he respects our choices.

Jesus has **responsibility** of being in this world, in human form. He has responsibility to teach and preach and to love. He cares for the sheep when they would go astray. He exercises his responsibility with love and compassion for us, especially when we are like sheep blindly following the latest and greatest showman who promises our lives will be just perfect if we will do “x” or “y.” And Jesus gives responsibility to the disciples. He sends them out two-by-two to preach and teach and then waits for them to come back to debrief, rest and then, after his death to be sent again into the world.

Fairness. The fourth pillar. So many people did not treat Jesus fairly. The Pharisees, the Sadducees and so many others found him a threat to their way of life that they sought his death. Jesus, though, despite the provocations, still treated them all with fairness. He did not lash out at them. Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. Fairness and forgiveness wrapped up in Jesus.

Ah, the fifth pillar: **caring.** Perhaps above all Jesus is caring. No matter what the circumstances, he cares for his sheep. He seeks the one who has left the safety of the pen. The one matters- we matter: individually and collectively. Jesus cares when we are hungry and tells the disciples to find the bread and the fish so that all may eat. And eat they do and even more besides: twelve baskets full. Twelve baskets left over to be distributed to the world. Twelve disciples sent into the world to spread the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, come to show us the way to life and life abundantly.

The last pillar of character is **citizenship.** Remember when the Pharisees and Sadducees seek to trip Jesus up by asking him about taxes? And Jesus cannily asks for a coin and then asks whose head is on the coin? Give to Caesar that which is Caesar’s, Jesus replies. You live in a world with a worldly government. Live within that world even as you recognize that God created everything and everything belongs to God. And Jesus replies when interrogated before his death that his kingdom is not of this world. The kingdom and the place where Jesus is a true citizen is God’s realm. We reference this in our prayer:

Our Father who art in heaven
Thy kingdom come
Thy will be done
On earth as it is in heaven...

And in The Revelation to John, Chapter 21 where we read:

Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their

Acts 4: 5-12; Psalm 23; 1 John 3: 16-24; John 10:11-18

eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

Jesus is a citizen of heaven first and foremost. Jesus calls us to be citizens of heaven as well. Jesus also calls us to be fair, responsible, trustworthy and caring citizens wherever we live. He does this, in part, by reminding us of the first and great Commandment: Love God and the second Commandment: love your neighbor. If we do these two things, we will have and practice good character. We will be a good shepherd and not a hired hand that runs away from his or her responsibilities at the first hint of trouble. We will go in the front door, not sneaking around the back to avoid notice because we don't want others to see us. We will stop and care for those in need because raising them up to a full and abundant life raises us up as well.

Jesus reminds us today that he lays down his life – willingly- for our sake. He cares for us even to the point of dying to save us. And it is Jesus who has power to take it up again. We can be cut down by the events and circumstances in our lives. We can let the troubles of this world overwhelm us. Or we can follow Jesus and live a life that is modeled on his. We can be people of character.

We said goodbye this week to Barbara Bush, former First Lady. I hope some of you had a chance to watch the funeral yesterday at St. Martin's Episcopal Church in Houston or to hear some of the many tributes to her life from any number of people, famous and not so famous. One of the images that struck me most was from Friday when everyone was invited to come to St. Martin's and pay their respects. More than 2,500 everyday people came. And greeting them while his strength lasted was former President George H.W. Bush. A man who suffers from a Parkinson's-like disease, is confined to a wheelchair, and is age 93. A man who had just lost his partner of 72 years. The grace and dignity of his actions really touched me. In his loss and grief he still cared enough to be present and greet some of the people who had come to pay their last respects to his wife.

Jesus is present with us in our grief as well. He is with us from our beginning and he will be with us at our end. Jesus is trustworthy. We, who are his sheep, can follow his voice with confidence that he loves and cares for us. We, who belong to the shepherd, can take comfort that he shows us the way to be good citizens, both here in earth and in the next. No matter our mistakes or the rabbit trails we follow when we get distracted, Jesus waits for us, patiently, kindly, and with love. After all, he's the good shepherd.

Each week as we come to the table of grace – the table where we are offered the bread of life we reminded that Jesus laid down his life for us. We are renewed and restored because he died for us. His rising to life after death gives us hope that one day, we too, shall be reunited with all those we love. Today, remember the story of the Good Shepherd. Remember and be refreshed and renewed as you strive to live a life of good character. Behold what you are and may you become what we receive from the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ the Lord. **Amen.**

4 Easter

Acts 4: 5-12; Psalm 23; 1 John 3: 16-24; John 10:11-18

April 22, 2018