

1 Sermon, January 16, 2011

Texts: Numbers 6:22-27, 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Title: "Everyday God Speech"

1. In crisis, we call on God
2. What about everyday God speech?
3. More often than not, public speech about God is negative
4. Often God speech is general
5. Bragging about God
6. Sharing about our trust and hope in God

1. In crisis, we call on God

Have you noticed, at times of crisis, our "God-talk" increases.

This week, President Obama talked openly about prayer, and asked us to keep the shooting victims in our thoughts and prayers. In closing, he said:

"May God bless and keep those we've lost in restful and eternal peace, may he love and watch over the survivors, and may he bless the United States of America."

2. What about everyday God speech?

It's said that there are no atheists in foxholes, so at times of crisis, we do talk about God reverently, and in a heart-felt way.

But what about at regular times?

How do we talk about God then?

Do we begin and end our conversations with God language?

The Apostle Paul used it in every letter. He opened with a salutation that referred to God, he told how he was hoping God would bless those to whom he was writing, and at the end, he wished them God's grace and peace.

Good bye, you know, is short for God be with ye. But we don't even say good bye. We say, "bye bye" or "bye now."

Now, I'm not saying we have to use God language all the time. But language is a key to our thoughts. If we aren't breathing the name of God very much, we probably aren't thinking about God very much.

Oh, I struggle with it, too. In trying to figure out which situations are appropriate for God language, I may miss the opportunity.

2 Sermon, January 16, 2011

I may, in ending a conversation, say "take care." There's nothing wrong with that. It's good to urge others to take care.

But how different it is to say, "I trust that God will take care of you."

Might it be better to say, "Trust in Christ," or "Trust God's grace"?

Would it hurt to say, "Go with God," or "God is good," or just "Christ's peace!"?

3. More often than not, public speech about God is negative

When I think about the kind of God language I hear in public, it is more often

"Oh, God..."

Is that short for "God help us"? or "Oh, God deliver us"?

But it's not offered as a prayer. It's spoken in exasperation, or surprise or shock or even disgust.

It bothers me.

I've decided that the next time someone says, "Oh God," I'm going to ask them what they mean by that.

A similar use is done in texting on cell phones. OMG is short for "Oh My God," and is simply used in place of "that's incredible!" or "I can't believe it."

And of course, that's nothing compared to the God language that some people use. The word swearing doesn't begin to cover some of the creative ways that people have of taking God's name in vain.

4. Often God speech is general

But how about us?

What is your God language like?

When someone sneezes, do you say, "God bless you"?

Do you ever say, "God forbid"?

What about "God only knows"?

How about, "For God's sake!"?

3 Sermon, January 16,2011

When we use the word "God" casually, without thinking about it much, it doesn't do God any honor. I don't think God is harmed in any way by what we say, but it reflects on how we think.

5. Bragging about God

I just ran across an article by Rusty Freeman, a pastor who works with Youth Ministries for Southwest Texas United Methodist Conference. Freeman describes a youth leaders meeting where people were talking about their ministries. He reports that good things are happening: Programming, missions, leadership development were all taking place, but a "glaring light of the obvious" began to shine on the proceedings.

"I listened to several people talk for more than 10 minutes each about what was going on in the life of their ministry and churches," Freeman writes. A subtle pattern began to develop.

"In all this bragging, discussion and retelling," Freeman says, "I did not hear once the name of or a reference to God. There was no mention of the Lord, Jesus, God, Christ or the Holy Spirit. Whereas the programs were seemingly successful, the deity whom we serve and for whom all things come was not mentioned."

This subtle omission became glaring to Freeman. "Church, don't make me say it," he writes. "Don't make me remind you that we are Christ's body, God's children, the hope of the world today. If you do not speak about what you have seen and heard with your words, with the hope and name of Jesus upon your lips, then all might just be lost and your life will not make a flip of difference to the Kingdom of God."

— "We should brag about our God in the same way we brag about our kids," (or grandkids).

6. Sharing about our trust and hope in God

Today I'd like to challenge you to speak about your faith and your hope.

4 Sermon, January 16, 2011

It may seem a little bit silly, but my wife, Marianne, has taken to praying the blessing found in today's reading from the book of numbers every time our son, Carl, goes away.

She says, and then Carl chimes in and then I join them:

The Lord bless you and keep you
The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you
The Lord lift up his countenance upon you
And give you peace.

It may seem a little bit over the top, but Carl doesn't seem to mind this motherly care, because he knows how heartfelt it is.

What can you say about your faith and hope?

I believe God will see us through

Or you could use the words of some African American Spirituals:

I don't believe God brought me this far to leave me.
There is a balm in Gilead to heal the sin-sick soul.
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know he watches me.
Like a tree planted by the water, I shall not be moved.
I've got peace like a river.
This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.
Deep in my heart, I do believe, we shall overcome.

Or some other hymns:

My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness.
God's grace will lead me home.
God is so good to me.

Speak your faith day by day. Find opportunities to put God language into your day to day life. Don't make it artificial; keep it honest – that you don't always know the way, but you trust in God to guide you. That God's not finished with you yet.

I think you will find it a blessing, and your thinking will be enriched as you think to speak of God's grace in your life.

Amen.