

“Godtalk”

13 Pentecost – Proper 18 – Year B – September 7, 2003
Grace Church in Haddonfield – Rev. Dr. Patrick R. Close

Have you ever noticed our ease at talking about a host of topics? We can easily converse about the weather, sports, grandchildren or children, and so on. Look how easy it is for us to talk about one another! What happens when it comes to talking about God and Jesus? Suddenly there is a strange silence. Why is it we have an absence of discussion?

The Gospel speaks to us today about being open. The word used during the healing of the deaf man is “*ephphatha*.” It literally means “to be open.” What does it mean to be open as a Christian? I’ve noticed something about being a Christian in America. First, we take it for granted. Maybe this is because there are so many of us. The other thing is that we assume someone else is doing the talking about our faith. Maybe that is because there are so many of us. What troubles me most is that we are letting others define what it means to be a Christian.

The work of being a Christian is so powerfully expressed in the Baptismal Covenant (BCP page 305). We are to ... “proclaim by word and deed the Good News of God in Jesus Christ.” We are to make the love, forgiveness and hope of God in Jesus Christ known to the whole world. WE ARE TO TALK ABOUT IT. Why isn’t there more talk happening?

I can think of a few examples where talking about God or Jesus happens. I think about the Cursillo movement in our Church. After you have been on a weekend, you are encouraged to be part of a weekly sharing group. Here you talk about how your faith life is shaped by the prayer, study and action that has occurred in the week before. Then the discussion asks participants to share their moment closest to Christ for the week!

Another example that comes to mind was the recent Vision Committee meeting I attended. I asked the group to each share about “where have you seen God today?” It was fascinating to hear people talk about how God was revealed to them. I keep thinking about one of the earliest lessons we learn in school ... SHARE! Maybe it’s time we starting sharing about Jesus with each other!

As far as I can discern, there are some obstacles to our talking about God or Jesus. First is the problem of pride. It’s the sense or expression that “I’m above all that. I don’t need God.” How sad. The reality is that we need God so much. We are never far from the Holy because God is constantly seeking us out. I also dislike what others say, “that’s something *those* people do.” This seems to be the placing of our faith on the margin, as something only crazy people do. No wonder people don’t share about God.

Another reason for our lack of discussion seems to be fear. I have had people say, “I don’t know what to say,” or “What if I say the wrong thing?” My favorite excuse is “I’m not _____ enough to talk about God (you fill in the blank ... smart, confident, brave, etc.)” Are these excuses the result of being too busy? Are we too lazy and really

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don't care or talk about God? If this is so, it is a sad commentary on modern day Christians.

The meaning of true religion is profoundly revealing in the Letter of James today. It says we are to be hearers and doers. It's not enough for us to come here and just listen. Our worship, our gathering as a faith community is meant to help us live our lives in the world. WE MUST ACT! Mark's Gospel talks about what it means to be a disciple. The healing of the deaf and dumb man is the evangelist's way of saying to us that we must open our ears and our mouths!

It's interesting to note that the Gospel of Mark contains this theme of maintaining secrecy and silence about who is Jesus. And yet, what we see when people encounter Jesus is that they can't remain silent! How odd that today our silence is so deafening. We manage to keep silent about Jesus quite well.

There has been a change in us. Clayton Schmidt in “Pulpit Resource” makes some interesting observations about faith in our country today. He notes that Christian countries are now mission fields because of the lack of faith. He says that we no longer live in a Christian century. We are seeing dwindling numbers of Christians in our country. Schmidt says that if God is doing anything in our lives, we aren't very noisy about it!

There used to be a popular television show years ago called, “I've got a secret.” It seems like we are living that out in our faith life too well. Are we afraid to share? Are we afraid that we will run out of God so we don't share the Holy? The truth is that we have Good News! There is no shortage; there is nothing to be hoarded. The truth is there is more than enough to go around! The truth is that Jesus can't be contained!

Talking about God is what we call “evangelism.” How strange that that word should stir so much fear in our hearts! What is evangelism? It comes from the root word “evangel” which means “gospel.” The gospel is nothing more than what God is doing in our lives! Evangelism is about people sharing with each other how Jesus and God are part of their lives. It is rewarding, empowering and encouraging to do so. I am fortunate to have people share with me about what they believe. Why is it that they are so reluctant to share with others?

Some of us have been talking about what we would like to see happen at Grace Church. We want to create a safe and inviting atmosphere where we can engage in “Godtalk.” We want to prepare ourselves to share about God and Jesus with others. It's as simple as telling and sharing our experience with others. It's time to stop letting everyone else define God and faith for us!

There are some ground rules that are vital to this atmosphere. We need to listen as much as we talk. We need to be nonjudgmental. When another shares, it's not up to us

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to correct, define or criticize. We need to be open and honest. We must keep it simple. Most important of all, we need to SHARE!

The watchword for today is “ephphatha”! BE OPEN! It’s time for us to be open to the healing of Jesus. It’s time for us to open our ears, and open our mouths. We are called to proclaim by word and deed the Good News of God in Jesus Christ. What I want to encourage us to do is to share our faith experiences with one another today. We can begin at coffee hour, or over brunch or lunch. It’s as easy as talking with one another. Let’s make Godtalk happen now!