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Psalm 145:1-5, 17-21
2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17
Luke 20:27-38

God Words

Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; his greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall laud your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts. – Psalm 145

The ideas that we have about God help to create the language that we use about God. What words do we usually use to describe God? Loving.... merciful.... just..... faithful.... strong... caring....

Those words that we use to describe God come out of what we believe about God, and they help us pass on our beliefs to children and new believers. When we refer to one another as being a “child of God” that says something not only about us, but about how we understand God.

Perhaps nowhere is this made more clear than in the Psalms. It is in the Psalms that we see the strongest and clearest words used for God. Remember Psalm 145 we heard just a few moments ago...

Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised;
his greatness is unsearchable.
One generation ... shall declare your mighty acts.

Then we hear of the “glorious splendor” of God’s majesty, and God’s wondrous works

The LORD is just in all his ways, and kind in all his doings.

The LORD is near to all who call on him
He fulfills the desire of all who fear him; he also hears their cry, and saves them.

The LORD watches over all who love him,
but all the wicked he will destroy.

All flesh will bless his holy name forever and ever.

These words that we speak about God are a vital part of our faith. They proclaim our faith with a clarity that is often overlooked. What do we believe? We believe that God has these characteristics, that God behaves in these ways, and therefore we use these words to describe God.

Now the title of this sermon was carefully chosen. I chose to use the title “God Words” because I knew that if I called it “THEOLOGY” you might have decided to stay home. But “theology” means literally “God Words” – we are all theologians – we are all those who speak God Words, words about God.

What will we say about God? What will we believe about God? Those two questions are at the center of our attention this morning.

How did you learn about God? If you are like most you heard from your parents – around dining

room tables and bedtime stories. Faith most often begins at home. The retelling of the stories of God is a primary way that we pass on the faith. In fact the people of Israel were charged with passing on the stories of God to their children, to write them on their doorposts.

There are no better teachers and no more important teachers than those who teach children every day in the home – parents, step-parents, grandparents, care-givers of all kinds.

Of course there are the crucial teachers in the Sunday school classrooms and LOGOS bible study teachers who help teach the stories of God.

Helping to coordinate both the Sunday school and our LOGOS program is our own Leslee Kirkconnell – who last week received word that her process is complete and she is now one of the few Certified Christian Educators in our entire Presbytery, and I trust that you will be hearing more about that in the weeks to come.

That teaching goes beyond just Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings. It is supported through the music we sing – music which has strong theology behind – which helps to teach about God as well.

All those ways in which we learn about God form the foundation for our faith, the groundwork for the Holy Spirit to capture our hearts for God.

Faith is a lot more than words. Without action to go with them, words can be quite empty. But when the words soften our hearts and faith takes hold of us, then we can build that faith that will carry us through the days when we have no words of our own.

When we suffer great loss – as individuals, as a family, as a country – our own words may fail us. We can feel lost, the earth under our feet shaken. Even our faith can be shaken at those times, but if we have heard the words faithfully passed on from previous generations, that we believe in a God who is loving... merciful... just.... faithful... strong... caring... those words and the faith they brought with them can help carry us through the valleys of life.

And so we gather each week in praise and worship of God. We gather even when we might not always feel like it, because we know that we need to be a part of what happens here. We sing songs when we are happy and when we are sad, to remind ourselves that God is the God of all life. We gather to confess our sins, even when sometimes we don't feel like we've done too much wrong, because it reminds us that God forgives all our sins. We gather to hear the word of God spoken, even when the readings don't immediately connect with us, we listen for the word of God because they become a part of us. The music and the confessions, and the readings, and yes even the sermons become a part of who we are individually and as the people of God gathered in worship. It shapes who we are, it shapes what we believe, it shapes how we are to live.

Belief starts with words spoken. When the words of hope and dreams are spoken they can begin to shape the way we live and act. And so I offer this statement of belief to you. I look around this great congregation and I see a faithful gathering of the children of God. I see all ages coming together to praise God with words spoken and sung, with prayers and praise, music and teaching. I see young and old seeking to better understand God, to learn and be reminded of what a great difference God makes

and how we can serve Him better.

I see a people of God nearing the end of one phase of their collective journey. With a spectacular display of faith this congregation undertook a renovation project of staggering proportions. While other churches packed up and moved out, you spoke with boldness of faith that we would remain First Presbyterian Church of downtown Gainesville, and God has richly blessed us. And so you started by rebuilding the space of Christian Education, building on the foundation that the Presbyterian Church has always held that faith is head and heart working together. And God richly blessed those efforts as you can see when you walk through the Lydia Ann Foote Christian Education building.

But you weren't done there. That was only the first step.

You knew that the worship of God was central to the life of any faithful community, and so you sought to renew that worship space by rebuilding the sanctuary. It was built not as a temple or monument, but as a place where lives could be touched, where hearts could be encouraged and renewed. Now as the worship space draws ever closer to be completed, we can see a time when that too will be accomplished. And God has richly blessed those efforts.

But we aren't done there. That was only the second step.

We now have a space where we can learn and grow in our knowledge of the Christian life, and a place where we can come together in worship of God's name.

Now it is up to us to use these tools which God has blessed us with, these foundations on which God wants us to build. We now have to use this place as a base for a renewal of Christian mission work into the city of Gainesville and indeed the world. We must find ways to win hearts and minds for Jesus Christ. We will do this not to fill more pews or more pledge cards, not to fill classrooms or choirs or committees, but we will do this because it is our charge.

In Romans chapter 10, Paul writes:

“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ [Paul then asks] How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent?

We have been sent to proclaim the good news of the salvation of Jesus Christ. We are not called to answer all the questions and problems in the world. We are here to spread that good news, in the words that we sing and speak, but also in how we live in the mission field... the mission field that begins at that door and extends in every direction.

God's word, God's Gospel, God's good news... that is what we must now turn our energies to proclaim. Again and again this congregation has acted on and shown their generosity and faithfulness, and God has richly blessed our efforts. The most important challenge now grows before us.

We have received God's blessing, will we proclaim God's grace and love and praise to the world that so desperately needs to hear it?