

Session 5: The language of Faith To Address the World

Faith Reminds us that change is always possible — Jim Wallis

(Voice overs in bold)

Each one of us and each of our religious communities have a language to talk about how we engage in the world. As we move toward completing our learning, we hope that you will think about the unique religious language and narratives you could use in your community to talk about all those issues that we face, at home and abroad, about which we care deeply, and including issues that also divide us. And we also want to consider how we approach, engage and listen to those of other faiths – and even those of no religion at all.

Katherine Henderson (4:00): I think that it's very important for leaders of faith — emerging leaders — to take up the mantle of civic engagement and to remind ourselves, but also our communities, our constituencies, that the church wasn't made for itself alone, the synagogue wasn't made for itself alone, in other words to be contained and just to make the people on the inside, you know, feel good about coming to church but that we're, that part of our DNA as faith people is to get out and to do the work that God calls us to do.

Gordon Tucker 1:41: I actually am a big believer that Torah has a purpose; it's not a self validating purpose, it's purpose is to create a better world.

Slide

As one religious leader wrote, "Creation teaches us that the universe is infused with values and shaped in accordance with a divine plan to maximize life in the world." One should live — and judge — life by standards that advance this plan. A neutral or wasted life is one that does nothing to advance the cause of Creation; an evil life is one spent in diminishing life or in opposition to the perfecting of the world. Our roles as religious leaders is to enhance creation, to maximize goodness and life in the world.

Slide

A slide with religious vocabulary.

Exercise? Which, if any, of these words speak to you? What words could you add to motivate people to engage constructively in addressing tough issues?

The great personalities of the Bible cared about individual human beings — they understood what it means to offer pastoral care. They also cared about society and how to make it more just. From Abraham to the prophets, from Moses to Jesus, CIVIC ENGAGEMENT — the ways we participate in our community — is A PIVOTAL THEME OF OUR SCRIPTURES. As religious leaders, WE ARE CALLED BY GOD TO RESPOND PROPHETICALLY, to comfort and to challenge, AS WE ENGAGE THE WORLD. IT

is the great task of our mission to know exactly how God is calling us. But there is no confusion that we are each called.

(Slides 9-10-11)

Bible Questions.

Exercise: What religious language or images, stories and values, could you use to help your community engage effectively and respectfully in civil discourse, even with those with whom they disagree?

INTERVIEW CLIPS

Ray East DSCF2040: 00:00:00

It's kind of like the angels, every time the angels talk to us, they say "fear not." And then Jesus says, "fear not" *many* times during the gospels and even after his resurrection, Jesus appears and he says, "fear not." I guess that's the biggest thing...fear of entering into tough conversations and dialogues.

Gordon Tucker 1:14: There's a bigger problem and it's a problem mostly of younger, speaking of rabbis here, but I'm sure it's true of all religious leaders. The younger they are, the more insecure they're going to be about how they're taking a stand in certain way is going to be read by their communities and how it's going to affect their standing and their job security.

Wesley 5:22

I think that, you know, obstacles, they'll come. And they come in different ways and to name an obstacle without being the situation is sort of, to me, it would be to just name what is clear, that this world is fractured. And it has things that are problematic and there some challenges we'll all face. So as a pastor, it's being very much so concerned about people's care for themselves, their families, the neighborhoods we live.

Kesha 32:10

We have to figure out a way to talk about God, to talk about religion. God is meaningful, and you can't tell someone that their god is making them bad. That's...that's damaging, that's violent, that's evil in it of itself. We have to figure what our relationship is to God and be proud of that, and be able to name it, be able to say it, and hopefully, by someone witnessing that, right? They're like "Oh, that works for me too."

Clifford 3:36

When you go into the public square in advocating [a] social justice point of view motivated by your faith, then you run up against persons who [are] doing the same from a different angle, and there's conflict. You're guaranteed to have a lot of material for reflection and at the end of the day, some scars and war stories. And also, an enrichment from those experiences rather than from sitting on the sideline. And you will become a more — we are already very three dimensional — you will become

more three-dimensional, you will become four-dimensional. And you'll be able to relate to a wider spectrum of persons who have also been encouraged to participate. Publically, you'll understand more about failure, about why tremendously admirable, venerable persons have succeeded and failed, who have been on both sides of that. I think it is impossible to be deeply engaged publically without building one's resumes, one's resume in both success and failure and many gradients in between. That's another important framework, is the generations who have, on whose shoulders we stand, and the generations who will stand on our shoulders. And so to kinda take a...to alternate between a more cosmic view of what you're doing and a then a very focused, more passionate view which will take over once you're in the field, once you're working with your strategy committee, once you're delivering your people to the action, once you're drafting your memo of understanding between you and conflicting factions, factions in your own ranks. So my point of view, my counsel to persons who are thinking about going into work that involves faith based communities, if you're not thinking about facilitating controversial issues as being a part of what you're doing, then you may want to consider another path... because that's one of the elements that makes it what it is.

Milgrom DSCF 4200 00:00:00

Over the decades of being a rabbi, of course, as a community we have faced issues that would and could divide us. Issues we face that challenge us as families, that challenge us in our political views, so how do we deal with that, and sometimes I have a very clear in myself of the outcome I'd hope we would reach. And sometimes it's not clear to me what the best way is. So we bring in different people, to present different perspectives, we study text with different points of view. Sometimes over the course of a year, we'll convene smaller groups to study an issue, bring the board to discuss the issues, and then as a community, develop a process in which we can come to a conclusion, read decisions, sometimes even to bring issues to a congregational vote.

Milgrom cont'd DSCF 4201: 00:00:00

More often than not, the answers are not clear, so it's more important to develop the community in which people can express and feel safe to express different points of view and sometimes I think history will decide if we've made a good decision or not but in the interim, it's important to acknowledge that the truth is multi-faceted and to have a community in which different perspectives can be honored and that people can be loved and cared for, even if they disagree with each other, even if people disagree with me, or I disagree with them, we acknowledge that the truth is going to be larger than any piece of it that any one of us has.

Gordon Tucker 1:56: You know one of the greatest lines in rabbinic literature is the one that says the mightiest person is the person who knows how to make his enemy into his friend. Just toning that down a little bit, to get someone who starts at loggerheads with you on an issue, to be able to by force of your conviction and your caring about that person at the same time to bring them around to see that maybe there's something here.

Damico DSCF 4194: 00:00:00

When I was serving in a UCC congregation, what I discovered is that there was great disagreement within the congregation about what issues the congregation should be standing forward on and speaking out on. However, as a pastor, it was critical that I demonstrated to those members of the

congregation that I cared about them, that God loved them, and that I would be there for them, no matter what their particular political opinion might be on any given issue. This made all the difference in the congregation's ability to respect one another across difference and to trust clergy, including myself, who were their ministers.

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Living in America with so many people of different religious faiths — and of no particular faith at all — we need to think about speaking truth with modesty. We are learning each day that religious modesty and not religious triumphalism is a core value we believe is shared by faith communities in the United States. Our traditions share the prophetic belief that: "People from many nations will come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of Jacob's God. There, God will teach us God's ways, and we will walk in God's paths (Isaiah and Hosea).'"

Slide 14

We hear this vision echoed in the words of the Catholic catechism:

The missionary task implies a *respectful dialogue* with those who do not yet accept the Gospel.³⁵⁹

Believers can profit from this dialogue by learning to appreciate better "those elements of truth and grace which are found among peoples, and which are, as it were, a secret presence of God."³⁶⁰

Slide 15

Abraham Isaac Kook, the first chief Rabbi of Palestine, explained:

For the building (this world in which we live) is constructed from various parts, and the truth of the light of the world will be built from various dimensions, from various approaches, for even "all these contradictory views are the living word of God."

Tony Richie 00:02:07: There is this continuing, dynamic movement toward others that, for me, is at the heart of what it means to be Christian. While the eternal, otherworldly aspect of our faith is certainly critical — the temporal — this-worldly engagement of believers with others is also critical.

Tony Richie cont'd 00:02:45: I think I would not be going so far, to say at least for myself, that I cannot be a good Christian all by myself. I need others to fulfill my calling, to fulfill my identity as a Christian. I need to interact and engage others. So then, for me being a Christian doesn't mean that engaging the world is just a kind of nice thing to do. It's essential: engaging the world is essential to my Christian identity.

Katherine Henderson 13:52: First of all, you know, religious diversity offers us enormous opportunities today...to understand God more deeply from one's own religious faith. My faith in God is so much deeper because I have seen faith through the lens of Muslims or Jews or Sikhs or Hindus or Buddhists. This doesn't mean that I lose my faith as a Christian but it means that the many names that I may have for God, for my sacred texts, and for my experience, are enhanced greatly and you know, why do we need to make God so small that God fits into our own image, right? So I think that there

are tremendous opportunities, so it means getting to know people of other religious traditions in a deep way.

In searching the different faith traditions, we have located key principles of public engagement we would like to share with you. We hope that these can serve as a guide as you embark or renew a commitment to bring your religious voice to the public square and help your community engage in civic life with respect, civility and openness.

SLIDE

Talk with passionate faith with the knowledge that just as there are natural laws of the universe, so there are moral and spiritual laws. But always acknowledge when looking at any issue that my faith can learn from others, that there is always room for growth. As it says in Proverbs: All the pathways of God's words lead to Peace.

SLIDE

Leave space to listen deeply so that we can better engage in *the active seeking of understanding across lines of difference*. There is a great truth in acknowledging that I can learn even from those with whom I disagree.

SLIDE

Engagement in the world and becoming a source of healing and learning means that we *encounter the commitments of others based on dialogue* rather than attack and rhetorical violence.

SLIDE

Every faith tradition teaches religious modesty. God is unknowable and so we only gain glimpses of divine truth. When I speak the truth as I know it, I shall always do so with humility and respect.

(Interviews with blessings)

Ray East DSCF2039: 00:00:00

Everyday we say the prayer of Saint Francis, "Make me an instrument of your peace."

Ray East DSCF2041: 00:00:00

I'd like to give you my double seminarians of encouragement. You know that in seminary there is so much pressure. Pressure to do well in studies, pressure to grow spiritually. Pressure to be able to accomplish everything you have to squeeze into those very quick years of information. But this challenge, to become engaged leaders, um, to bring about the spirit of the gospel and civic engagement...this ...this challenge is so important. And it can be so joyful.

Ray East cont'd 00:00:38

I just wanted to encourage you...use all of the skills that you have all of the time. And the opportunities, the resources to get your...uh... chops, to get a handle on this area. Because everything that you...that you can gain, everything you can study, and tools that you can acquire, they

will be put into use...uh...sooner...sooner than you expect. Jesus is laying out for us many opportunities for us to serve, to be effective leaders within our parishes, and in our communities, and in our schools, and in our Catholic institutions. So thank you for your ethos and for your generosity and for your willingness to take the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ and put it into action.

Noelle Damico DSCF 4196: 00:00:00: In a god who makes a way, where there is no way, bless us, discomfort us, and make us a whole people. Amen.

Shira Milgrom DSCF 4202 00:00:00: There's the tradition, a Jewish tradition, of blessing moments, and this blessing for encountering wisdom, encountering wisdom in a scholar, in a rabbi, in any person, and the blessing goes like this: (Hebrew transliteration) "Blessed are you, eternal source of the universe who has shared of your wisdom with mortal human beings."

Gordon Tucker 0:50: So we're told that one of our sages in ancient times had a little prayer he recited when he entered the house of study and another prayer that he recited when he left. And it's for any house of study, for any setting of religious leadership. And his prayer when he entered was, "I pray that no harm should come from the things that I do say and teach"; I wish that for all of you. And the prayer that he said when he left was a prayer of Thanksgiving that he was grateful for what he was being allowed to do in the world with the communities of faith and I wish you that as well.

Pickett cont'd DSCF4188: 00:00:00

One of the things that I would encourage seminarians to do is to engage the community. Uh, it's so important to have a connection with the community, agencies, with persons right, right outside your doors. Um, I just take an opportunity from to time to go out and to greet people, just to say hello, introduce yourself to the stores in the community, just walking up and down the street, seeing what's available to you and the resources that you have.

Pickett cont'd 00:00:40

Most importantly, it's just be yourself. Being open to what the holy spirit is doing and I believe that God will continue to open up many doors for you as you continue to seek your education as a seminary.

Take a moment to think of a blessing you would offer to those learning with you at this moment, a blessing that would help strengthen a resolve to reach out into the world to do good and inspire others to join.

(Pause)

Slide 14

We are grateful that you joined us in this exploration of religious leadership, civil discourse and democratic values. We end hearing the voice of the great prophet Micah whose words still resonate beautifully thousands of years later:

God has shown you, O mortal, what is good.

And what is it that God requires of you?

To act justly

To love mercy

And to walk humbly with your God.