

**Sermon Notes:** June 6, 2021 **Focus:** devils and swearing [Lectionary Readings](#)

There is a lot going on in the gospel today. We have religious leaders trying to stop the Jesus movement with name calling and satanic slurs (sort of). Jesus 'claps back' by saying they are blaspheming the Holy Spirit. I am going to focus on what my 7<sup>th</sup> grade mind can grasp: poop and profanity. I do this not just to be juvenile (which I do enjoy from time to time) but also, to find a way to have a less sanctimonious way of seeing how God speaks to our current moment.

### **First up: Profanity**

"Taking the Lord's name in vain" is the third of the ten commandments. On its face, the commandment seems to be an exhortation not to spell out OMG. However, if we are not careful, we flatten this commandment into just talking nice. Just avoiding saying g...t, while ignoring the weighty impact about how we speak of God demonstrates a faith spreading a mile wide and 1/4 inch deep. Go back and watch Jeremiah Wright's sermon about damning America that got Obama in trouble. You may remember how people clutched their pearls over an intentionally provocative curse. These same pearl clutchers used the swearing as an excuse to conveniently ignore the larger message.

God *does* care how you speak to God/ about God, and I think she cares *even more* how your speech blesses others. We take God's name in vain all the time, even if we never say a 'bad' word. We belittle individuals and even whole communities. Personally, I almost never cuss on Sunday morning, but too often I take God's name in vain by not practicing life-giving speech and action with my fellow Christians.

I don't think God gives a d... n about how empty your swear jar is. Sure, a regular diet of coarse speech is not particularly great. But what is life sucking is speech that focuses on slander and character assassination; speech that suppresses and minimizes; speech that belittles societies, countries and whole ethnic groups. Minimizing others is blasphemous.

When I read the Gospel text, I still have no idea what "blasphemy of the Holy Spirit" really was in Jesus' context. I do know what modern blasphemy looks like. It is labeling people as bad or inherently broken when we know they/we are made in the image of God. I offer an article on the 10 commandments from the Dayton Jewish Observer. It focuses on what is important about the 3<sup>rd</sup> commandment: "taking the Lord's name in vain"

<https://daytonjewishobserver.org/2011/01/watch-your-language-the-third-commandment/>

In the midst of Commandments to reject idols, remember the Sabbath, and eschew murder, doesn't avoiding the frivolous use of God's name seem a bit trivial? The original Hebrew suggests a second interpretation. "You are not to take up (upon the lips, utter) the name of Hashem your God for emptiness..." writes Everett Fox in the English translation most closely aligned with the Hebrew. Emptiness, not just frivolity. ....

In ancient cultures, possession of a god's name implied influence and power; people believed names were powerful tools that allowed them to control the spirits. God tells the Israelites, however, that He is different, that He cannot be controlled or manipulated...The Third (commandment) cautions against words or deeds that would weaken people's belief, respect, and awe for God and thereby diminish God's presence in the world.

To use God to justify our privilege and strip people of equal treatment is a blasphemous affront to the holiness of God. This 'vain' speech is an order of magnitude more damaging than you muttering God's name after you hit your hand with a hammer.

Rabbi Joseph Telushkin, author of *Biblical Literacy* adds to this idea. The Hebrew of commandment 3 can be read as "you shall not *carry* the Lord's name in vain." I wonder how I *carry* God's name. How do I walk justly, love mercy and walk humbly with my God? That is the weightier issue of *carrying* the 3<sup>rd</sup> commandment. **Sidenote:** Tik-Tok clergy talking about God's name:

<https://vm.tiktok.com/ZMetts2hh/>

### **Now, Poop**

The religious leaders were blaspheming the Holy Spirit by calling Jesus the "lord of poop." I mean this literally. Belzebul was the "Lord of the flies" (you know where flies like to gather). Belzebul was a title that the Hebrews used dismissively about the Philistine God of Ekron. The Hebrews were calling their enemy's God a piece of \_\_\_\_\_ and they called Jesus the same. All of that nuance is lost today if we just make Belzebul = the Devil.

Rabbit trail: There is an ancient text called the *Gospel of Nicodemus*. Centuries after Jesus, Belzebul is now known as the Lord of Hell. At one point in the story, Belzebul gets bad news from his boss Satan. Satan brags that he dragged Jesus to Hell. But...plot twist: Jesus gets busy releasing people from Hell. Belzebul is so mad at losing all his captives that Jesus demotes Satan and makes Satan Belzebul's prisoner.

Calling Jesus the lord of poop was intended to clip his wings in the eyes of the people. It is as old as time as well as being very current. We focus on one skewed and misrepresented detail to ignore the weightier issues. I can just hear the ancients now, "sure the blind see, the lame walk, the broken are healed....who cares? Did you hear that he's a real piece of..."

**So**, yes watch your mouth. Does it draw people in or belittle them? Do you discount or look carefully for grace? Sure, try to not use coarse language when you are cut off in traffic, but that's just a cherry on top of a life focused on loving speech.

**Todd**