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WORDS MATTER!

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**A soft answer turns away wrath,
but a harsh word stirs up anger.
- Proverbs 15:1**

Words, words, words. We speak them, hear them, listen to them, ignore them, all day, every day. Words are the way we communicate ideas or shut down learning. We build others up with our words or we tear them down. They are the way we express our feelings or repress the feelings that are denied. They are the ways in which we build bridges of reconciliation to one another or build impenetrable walls between us.

When I was a child, kids chanted, "Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words can never hurt me." It wasn't true then and it isn't true now. Words have incredible power to wound. Because they are so pervasive, we often accept them and believe them, even when they are unkind, untrue, and unhelpful. Sometimes we let them in, knowing that they will inflict damage on us. Sometimes we hurl them at others, knowing they will wound.

This has been a particularly vicious season of political rhetoric, tolerating and repeating words that my parents would never have allowed in our home when I was growing up. Words we didn't let go unchallenged and uncorrected in the family we raised. Words not tolerated in the families my children and friends are raising today.

How can we - in home and congregation - be healers? On November 9th, we need to find a way to come together as one big national family that can disagree, without being disagreeable. We need to reach out beyond national borders and recognize all of God's children as our brothers and sisters, created in the image of God.

FOR OUR CONGREGATIONS

We are a people of the Word. Jesus, the Word made flesh, who came to reconcile and heal and bring us together. We gather around the words that give life, and that abundantly. Listen to the words of Ephesians 2:14-22:

For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

What would it take for us to be "built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God?" Consider the following messages and behaviors:

- All are welcome ... it is more than a hymn or a slogan. We live it every day in every interaction, inviting, welcoming, connecting, supporting, affirming each and every person as one who belongs.
- Words are used with care. Some words simply are not to be used.
- Correction is delivered with clarity and grace and kindness, giving time to reflect and an opportunity to say it more kindly.

- Apologies flow freely and authentically to those we have hurt with our words. Repentance is lived, as words and behaviors change. Forgiveness is offered. Trust is rebuilt.
- We are patient, creating space and opportunity for change.
- Take it home and out into the world and practice it there every single day.

FOR OUR FAMILIES

From the youngest to the oldest, let home be

- *Sanctuary*, where all are safe from hurled invectives, cruel name calling, and labels that diminish.
- Ringed with *role models*. We are surrounded by those who use words in generous, appreciative, caring ways and who make that contagious.
- Where words are *never used as weapons*.
- The place we are taught to *test words before we speak* them by answering three questions: Is it TRUE? Is it KIND? Is it HELPFUL?
- Filled with *second chances* to do it right and to make it right.
- A place of *affirmation*.
- Filled with *deep listening* and *attentive presence*.
- A space to *discover our gifts* and hear others name them.
- Suffused with *unconditional love*, shown and spoken.
- The place we *practice* all we learn in our congregation.

Links to learn more!


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