

WORDS DO MATTER

There has been a lot of hype lately about how tedious it is to be politically correct. Some of the presidential candidates, notably, have been dismissive of “being PC” because frankly, they just don’t have time to waste on being politically correct.

Does it matter? You bet it does!

We’ve been exploring different dimensions of the question of “encountering others” this fall and I keep running up against the truth that WORDS DO MATTER. Being careful about the language we use is a matter of care and respect. Back in the 60s, feminism woke us to the awareness that our culture (and language) has historically validated maleness, heterosexuality, and whiteness as *normative* so that anything else was viewed as less than or deviant. That new awareness impacted how we talk about God, the adjectives we use in our writing, and the way we address each other... and so our words needed to change.

Words matter because as human knowledge progresses, language has changed to reflect a widening understanding of what is compassionate and appropriate to say. Making the decision to choose our words carefully, that is, *not* using language that denigrates some people, is not particularly difficult or complicated. It *is*, however, a caring thing to do that costs us nothing.

Maybe you are afraid you’ll use the “wrong” words. That’s okay. No one is immune to having prejudices or saying things that expose those prejudices. I may have them, you may have them, and the sooner someone calls us out on them, the sooner we can adjust our attitudes and language to reflect that new understanding. We all encounter new information, people, and ideas that force us to alter our own personal ideas of what’s normal. Rather than dismiss the unfamiliar as a burden, we can view it as an opportunity to expand our understanding of who we are in this world.

Being compassionate, sensitive, honest, and self-aware are all more complicated than knowing the exact right things to say at all times. But that doesn’t mean that paying attention to the words we use is something we can afford to ignore.

Pastor Ginny