Words Matter: Watch Your Mouth
Dianne M. Daniels; UUCN, Feb 25, 2024

Call to Worship – "Words Matter" by Rev. Carol Thomas Cissel, adapted by Dianne M. Daniels

Diverse. Multicultural. Inclusive. Welcoming.

If I made a list of every single Unitarian Universalist congregation I have visited or worshipped at, they would have a few things in common, including the use of these words.

Perhaps on the front of the Order of Service? Or proudly listed at the top of the home page of their website? Maybe they're clearly present on a rainbow-colored banner hanging in the sanctuary?

Wherever they are, more often than not, the words are proudly combined with another expression that has become an integral part of everyday UU vernacular: "All Are Welcome Here!"

I know why they are used so freely. Initially, there's a warmth of recognition when our eyes first catch sight of and recognize them. A sense of being acknowledged and valued moves from heart to head and then a smile settles on my lips.

My heart blooms. I feel like the Welcome Table has been set for me, and I am eager to pull up a chair.

All of this takes place in an unmeasurable instant. I love those words. I want what they promise. But it is simply not enough to print them on an Order of Service or in a

newsletter; they must have meaning and intention at their core and be followed up with action.

A desire for multicultural worship is a wonderful seed to plant, but it will not flower if that seed of yearning is not nurtured by a commitment and a plan.

Longing for diversity (of race, gender, or age) is only a beginning. It calls for caring and creative programming. If we are to serve into the future, into the generations that don't yet know us, that must change. I believe that we can transform first ourselves and then the world.

Without true resolve, planning, and measurable goals behind the things I see and the words I read, my trust and hope are broken anew.

Why does this break hurt? Every time I see those words, I feel the possible revival of Unitarian Universalism germinating in the warm soil of Spirit. I've seen the transformation begin to take place across our country - in places like Washington State, Washington DC, and California. Congregations in Oklahoma continue to push our faith forward. So, yes, I am hopeful—hopeful, but wary. On too many occasions and in too many places, these words and the ideals that they carry are given little more than lip service.

Words matter. They lift and hold us. They illuminate the future and shower us with possibilities. When misused, they hurt. Verbal cuts and abrasions sting. Language leaves wounds that become scars.

Words matter. If this and other UU congregations are not ready to meet the promises we craft and then share with the world—we should stop publishing them. Please don't invite

me to sit at your table unless you have a warm, satisfying meal to serve.

It doesn't have to be a gourmet feast; a potluck is fine. The soufflé may only have risen halfway. The cookies might be slightly burned on the edges. The pasta can be overcooked. That's okay. I'm starving. What it must be is full-filling, real, made with love, and ready to be eaten.

Remember: I believe what you say and write. Words matter.

We ask for blessings on our church home and our congregation - that we work to create and serve full-filling spiritual meals, made with love and ready to be eaten, and, in doing so, ensure that we will remain for generations to come who will also learn the power of our words and our actions that manifest our promises in reality.

Come, let us worship together.

Chalice Lighting and Affirmation:

If you happen to have a home chalice, please light it with us!

#449 – We Hallow this Time by Albert Thelander

We hallow this time together by kindling the lamp of our heritage.

Joys & Concerns

Now is the time in our service where we share our joys and concerns. I believe a joy shared can lighten the hearts and lift the spirits of those who hear it, while a concern shared lets the person, group, or cause mentions experience the combined love and care of this beloved community. Even if they are not here to

receive our words of support and comfort, the energy we send their way will be felt and I believe is also very much appreciated.

The floor is now open for Joys and Concerns.

Patrick Kirker – home sick with Flu, other NFA folks affected as well.

May all the joys expressed in the sanctuary today spread and multiply, lifting the hearts and spirits of all who heard them, and may the concerns shared today be minimized, divided, and separated so that they are easier to bear and to solve.

Let's please take a few moments of silence to send the energy needed to those affected, and to express the silent joys and concerns held in the sanctuary of our hearts.

Congregational Reading (responsive)

Our congregational reading is #461, entitled **"We Must Be Saved,"** written by Reinhold Niebuhr - please join me in the reading – I'll read the Roman text, and please respond with the italicized text.

Words Matter: Watch Your Mouth

By Dianne M. Daniels

Words have a lot of power – how much, you might say?

They have the strength to hold someone up when they feel like their strength is at its end and all they want to do is lay down and give up.

They have the strength to take two people who were living separate and equal lives, and join them together to build an even stronger, more loving, and more worthwhile life together.

They have the power to steal someone's joy and make them think they aren't worthy of good things, good experiences, or good feelings.

They have the power to make a perfectly imperfect human being ashamed of how the beautiful Spirit of this world created them, and to make them hide and dim the light that only they can carry.

The power of words – to be used for good or for ill, to help us understand that we have the freedom, ability and choice to speak our minds, and at the same time, we have incredible responsibility in how we use our power.

Our words can be used to advocate for ourselves and for others, We can voice our dreams, and decide our own destiny. We can also serve a wider duty – using our words and our voices for those around us.

We can speak up for those who are voiceless and make a difference no matter where we go. We can CHOOSE to use our voices, our words for good.

It's an incredible power – changing the lives of those around us and extending that power to change the world. Our voices, our

words have POWER. Do you understand how blessed and fortunate you are?

There are people we share this planet, this world with who don't have that power. They cannot just way what's on their mind, because their leaders understand the power of their words and their voices. We might just take that power and that responsibility for granted at times – I know I've done it in the past, and I hope – no, I work – to make sure I don't forget it ever again.

Some of you know that I love Affirmations – powerful and positive statements that can be change and empower your thoughts, your heart, and your spirit. I want to share with you one of my favorites:

I have the strength to tame my tongue.

The power of life and death are in my tongue. With my tongue, I choose to build others up, instead of causing harm. I choose to use my tongue to bless others by speaking words of life to them and about them.

Whatever I truly believe in my heart and speak with my tongue comes to pass. Therefore, I focus my intentions on speaking only positive words as much as possible. I focus on what makes life joyful and what honors the power of my words.

I am strong enough to overcome the impulse to blurt out words that can do harm. Instead, I exercise wisdom and restraint. I only allow gentle words to flow through my mouth.

My love for peace is more important than my need for the validation that **might** come by speaking my mind. I am strong enough to keep quiet instead of speaking words that will make a tense or uncomfortable situation worse.

There is wisdom in silence. I think before I speak. I choose my words carefully, recognizing the power of my speech. I deliberately choose my words to affect every person and situation in my life in a positive way as often as humanely possible.

I speak with grace. I use respectful language to honor those to whom I speak. I deliver my speech with tact, so others can listen to what I have to say and hear the positive intent in my words. I speak to others the way I would want them to speak to me.

I choose to speak slowly and consider my choice of words carefully. I consider the effect of my words before I say them and put effort into speaking words that have a positive effect on the minds, hearts, and lives of those around me.

Doing these things helps me to be impeccable with my words. To be impeccable with your word means that you hold yourself to the highest standard when you speak. If you agree to

do something, you do it. The words you speak are truthful, kind, and accurate.

It's not just the words you choose, but how and when you choose to speak them. When your word is impeccable, your words are honest and useful. Others will appreciate you and you'll strengthen your relationships when you decide to be impeccable with your word.

Here are some doable and important ways that you can use the power of your words positively:

1. **Honesty makes life simpler.** This is true on multiple levels. If lying isn't an option for you, you'll avoid putting yourself into situations where you feel the need to lie. You avoid the guilt of lying and the fear of discovery. When you lie, you're also forced to remain on-guard to protect your lie. My mama would say to me that "If you always tell the truth, you don't have to remember what you said." The alternative? Never being able to relax and just speak – you'll be under stress wondering if you're about to uncover a lie you told previously.

2. **Hiding the truth causes more challenges than the truth itself.** The Act of lying can cause a greater offense than the actual false words. You show others that your words cannot be trusted. You are buying some short-term relief at the expense of your future comfort, and your current reputation. The lies come back around eventually, and people in your life will start to wonder if ANYTHING you have ever said to them was the truth – including how you said you feel about them.

3. **Honesty and openness aren't the same thing.** Offering unsolicited opinions isn't necessary. There's no reason to offer up an opinion if it won't **help** the other person. You might believe that your friend is five minutes away from bombing her presentation but telling her that at right before she starts speaking isn't helpful. Telling your friend that you think she's fat is pretty open, but hardly helpful. I try never to offer up bad or negative opinions unless I also offer to either help resolve the issue or provide a workable alternative.

    - *Before speaking, ask yourself if your words are helpful. Exercise the right to remain silent generously.*

4. **Keep your word and your commitments.** Few things create greater distrust than not keeping your promises. If you promise to do something, get it done. Be on time with everything you do and if you cannot, clearly say why early enough so that people who depend on you can adjust.

5. **Avoid gossip.** Gossip isn't a wise use of your words. There are other ways to entertain your friends and co-workers. When you gossip, you become part of the problem. Gossip is rarely accurate and always at the expense of others.

6. **You receive respect when your word is trusted.** When people believe they can trust you, they grow to respect you, too. When it's discovered that you cannot be trusted that respect is damaged or destroyed, and it's difficult to regain. ***Trust and respect are easier to lose than they are to gain.*** Guard them carefully.

7. **Under-promise and over-deliver.** Be slow to make promises and promise less than you know you can

comfortably deliver. Most of us do this backwards. We promise the best that we can possibly do and regularly come up at least a little short.

Ensure that your words are honest, helpful, and timely.

How reliable is your word? Do your words inspire others or tear them down? Can people believe what you say?

Do you lie to yourself? Do you believe yourself when you say you're going to lose 10 pounds? Do your words help others or harm them?

Make the quality of your speech a priority for 30 days. Be impeccable with your word and your speech.

Life will be simpler and easier when you choose your words wisely. Be honest and supportive when you speak, focus on being intentional and clear with your words, and you'll increase your level of trust and integrity.

Amen. Ashe. Blessed Be.

Closing Words
"Our House" by Michael Devernon Boblett

May the walls of this house be strong in the face of storms:
Whether of winds or of words,
whether of thunder or of tyranny.

May the windows of this house be clear to the world's light:
Whether of dawns or of daring,
whether of sunsets or of stillness.

May the foundations of this house be firm upon the good earth:
Whether of soil or of sharing,
whether of bedrock or of behavior.

May the doors of this house be wide to all that come from afar:
Whether poems or people,
whether songs or strangers.

May this house embrace, like a graceful chalice,
The flame it cannot define or limit,
as a heart enshrines hopes larger than its beating walls.

Have a happy and healthy week ahead and Watch Your Words – because Words Matter.