

1 Sermon, November 14, 2010

Texts: Proverbs 15:1-7, James 3:1-9

Title: "I don't get no respect"

1. I don't get no respect
2. Jesus Loves the ones who get no respect
3. Spate of anti-gay bullying
4. Bullies seek out the weakest; the ones most compromised
5. We Christians need to stick up for the gays who are bullied, especially because we may have contributed to the problem

1. I don't get no respect

Do you remember Rodney Dangerfield, America's most unrespected comic, who died a few years ago? Rodney made a living, a very good living, telling how he got no respect: "I can't get no respect," Rodney would say, adjusting his tie, and then he was off with his endless repertoire of one liners.

"When I was a kid my parents moved a lot, but I always found them."

I never got girls when I was a kid. One girl told me, 'come over there's nobody home. I went over. There was nobody home."

"I told my landlord I wanted to live in a more expensive apartment. He raised my rent."

Rodney said, "When I was a kid my parents got me a dog but the dog and me could never get along. My parents got rid of me." "I tellya", he'd say, "I can't get no respect."

It was funny when Rodney told it on Letterman or Leno, but it wasn't funny in real life. Rodney was emotionally abandoned and was in and out of therapy all of his life. His humor was a way of coping and finally getting some respect and love.

Rodney's self deprecating black humor came out of the pain of his childhood & the resulting depression he battled his whole life. He was born Jacob Cohen, a nice Jewish boy from Long Island. His father was in Vaudeville. He abandoned Rodney when he was very young. Rodney's mother was uncaring. There was no love in Rodney's home. As a boy he helped bring in money by working for a grocery store. He said, "I found myself going to school with kids and then in the afternoon I'd

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be delivering groceries to their back door... I ended up feeling inferior to everybody."

2. Jesus Loves the ones who get no respect

Jesus would have understood Rodney's pain. He was drawn to the Rodney Dangerfields of the world, the people that got no respect, those who were excluded from respectable society, those who were ridiculed. Jesus loved hated tax collectors; he ate with the most respectable people in town, then when a woman of questionable moral character turned up and washed his feet with her hair — an incredibly intimate act in those times — he accepted her. Shameful tho his host thought him, he accepted the woman and her offering. Jesus was accused of hanging around with sinners. If Rodney Dangerfield had known Jesus' acceptance as a child, he probably would have wound up quite well-adjusted, and not working in comedy.

Jesus loved the ones who were outside the circle. And what so often sets people outside the circle is words.

What are some of those words? Stupid, idiot, klutz, loser, jerk, wacko, we could together list a thousand insulting words if we wanted to.

And those words don't have to be spoken out loud. They can be posted to a facebook page, they can be spoken behind someone's back, they can be emailed to a wide variety of people, they can be hinted at with a sneer, a raised eyebrow, a rolling of the eyes.

Today's reading from Proverbs talks about these things:

- 1 A kind answer soothes angry feelings,
but harsh words stir them up.
- 2 Words of wisdom come from the wise,
but fools speak foolishness.
- 3 The LORD sees everything, whether good or bad.
- 4 Kind words are good medicine,
but deceitful words can really hurt.
- 5 Don't be a fool and disobey your parents.
Be smart! Accept correction. . . .
- 7 Words of wisdom make good sense;
the thoughts of a fool make no sense at all.

Sticks and stones may break our bones, but words can destroy in an invisible way.

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3. Spate of anti-gay bullying

Why am I bringing this up today? Because it's very timely.

There has been a surge of anti-gay bullying lately. Mostly words, but sometimes violence, too.

Two months ago, a female UW-Whitewater student was called a name and punched in the face for wearing a T-shirt that said, "Legalize Gay." (Wis. State Journal, Nov. 10, 2010).

Six weeks ago, Billy Lucas, aged fifteen, of Greensburg, Indiana hung himself, after being called a fag one too many times.

Also six weeks ago, Tyler Clementi, a Rutgers University freshman jumped off a bridge after his "roommate and another student used a webcam to broadcast on the internet live images of him having an intimate encounter with another man." (Geoff Mulvihll, Samantha Henry, Associated Press, MJS, 10-3-10)

Four weeks ago, Seven young men in the Bronx have were arrested after the men made it their mission to find and attack two teenagers and a 30-year-old man they suspected of being gay, the police said. The attackers took the two teenagers and the 30-year-old man each into a vacant apartment, and abused them in ways I don't want to repeat in a sermon.

Two weeks ago, in Arkansas, Midland School District Vice President Clint McCance wrote on his personal Facebook page that he wanted gay people to commit suicide, according to The Advocate, a newspaper focusing on gay news. McCance used the terms "queer" and "fag" repeatedly, promised to disown his own children if they were gay, and stated that he enjoys "the fact that [gay people] often give each other AIDS and die."

Just after dark last Sunday, a woman student at UW Whitewater was approached by a man who shoved her and held her against a fence and called her gay.

Whatever your opinion about homosexuality, this abuse is wrong. Using suspicion of homosexuality as an excuse for bullying is no better

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than using race or religion or having an accent as an excuse for bullying.

4. Bullies seek out the weakest; the ones most compromised

There is bullying in Columbus, too. In the schools, among the youth, even among the adults. And by bullying I don't mean honest disagreement.

No, bullies use power for the sake of power. They are very pleasant to those who have power over them, but pick on the ones who have less power.

Bullies target the weakest, the ones in the most compromised position – the ones least likely to fight back.

That's one of the reasons anti-gay bullying is so common. It's easy to pick out an effeminate male as a target. He might be shy, or slight of build, and not have the friend network of the bully.

It's easy to find a girl that doesn't fit in, who isn't as popular, and bully her. If she's pretty, suggest she has loose morals. If she's not, call her a lesbian.

5. We Christians need to stick up for the gays who are bullied, especially because we may have contributed to the problem

Why am I bringing this up today? Because the church has often been part of the problem instead of the solution. The church has often shut the door on gays and lesbians, sometimes for legitimate reasons, often for reasons based more on fear than faith.

Jesus loves gays and lesbians, just as much as anyone else. And if ever the church indicates by its words or actions that gays and lesbians deserve less respect, it contributes to a climate where anti-gay bullying can be tolerated.

Rev. Cody Sanders, a Baptist pastor from Texas, wrote about this issue: "...the most dangerous form of theological message comes in the subtlest of forms: silence." And then he added, "The Longer We Wait, the More Young People Die."

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You know, it's not easy to preach on anything related to homosexuality, because the passions run very high around anything dealing with it. I don't know of anything that sparks more passion at the United Methodist Annual Conference.

The United Methodist Church's official position is a compromise: that we value gays and lesbians as people, we support their civil rights, we welcome them as members, but we don't allow "practicing" homosexuals to be ordained. We also do not allow UM pastors to perform unions for same-sex couples.

I don't want to stir up a hornet's nest. But I feel compelled to say something on behalf of those who are persecuted and bullied, not for their faith, but for an orientation that most for years have tried to avoid.

I want the church to be a refuge for anyone who is bullied or excluded or called names. I want the church to be a place of respect for those who get no respect elsewhere.

The book of Hebrews calls us to use our words carefully. Hebrews says that if we can control our tongue, we can exercise self-control in all other ways, too.

The book of Hebrews says that, just like a horse is controlled by a bit in its mouth, our speech leads our actions. Our words can heal or they can hurt. Our tongues can be a spark that starts a forest fire, or they can be like sweet music that calms the soul.

We can, by our witness to God's love, put out the message that no one deserves to be bullied. We can put out the message that God loves all people. Period.

Christ calls us to love our neighbor, and sometimes our neighbor is hard to love. And if we cannot bring ourselves to love our neighbor, at least we can respect him or her.

Christ has offered us grace beyond measure. We are each loved beyond anything we deserve. Let's pass that gift along.

Amen.

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Proverbs 15:1-7 (CEV)

- 1 A kind answer soothes angry feelings,
but harsh words stir them up.
- 2 Words of wisdom come from the wise,
but fools speak foolishness.
- 3 The LORD sees everything, whether good or bad.
- 4 Kind words are good medicine,
but deceitful words can really hurt.
- 5 Don't be a fool and disobey your parents.
Be smart! Accept correction.
- 6 Good people become wealthy,
but those who are evil will lose what they have.
- 7 Words of wisdom make good sense;
the thoughts of a fool make no sense at all.

Proverbs 15:1-7 (The Message)

- 1 A gentle response defuses anger, but a sharp tongue kindles a temper-fire.
- 2 Knowledge flows like spring water from the wise;
fools are leaky faucets, dripping nonsense.
- 3 God doesn't miss a thing—
he's alert to good and evil alike.
- 4 Kind words heal and help;
cutting words wound and maim.
- 5 Moral dropouts won't listen to their elders;
welcoming correction is a mark of good sense.
- 6 The lives of God-loyal people flourish;
a misspent life is soon bankrupt.
- 7 Perceptive words spread knowledge;
fools are hollow—there's nothing to them.

James 3:1-9 (The Message)

- 1-2 Don't be in any rush to become a teacher, my friends. Teaching is highly responsible work. Teachers are held to the strictest standards. And none of us is perfectly qualified. We get it wrong nearly every time we open our mouths. If you could find someone whose speech was perfectly true, you'd have a perfect person, in perfect control of life.
- 3-5 A bit in the mouth of a horse controls the whole horse. A small rudder on a huge ship in the hands of a skilled captain sets a course in the face of the strongest winds. A word out of your mouth may seem of no account, but it can accomplish nearly anything—or destroy it!
- 5-6 It only takes a spark, remember, to set off a forest fire. A careless or wrongly placed word out of your mouth can do that.

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By our speech we can ruin the world, turn harmony to chaos, throw mud on a reputation, send the whole world up in smoke and go up in smoke with it, smoke right from the pit of hell.

7-10This is scary: You can tame a tiger, but you can't tame a tongue—it's never been done. The tongue runs wild, a wanton killer. With our tongues we bless God our Father; with the same tongues we curse the very men and women he made in his image. Curses and blessings out of the same mouth!

James 3:1-9 (Contemporary English Version)

1My friends, we should not all try to become teachers. In fact, teachers will be judged more strictly than others. **2**All of us do many wrong things. But if you can control your tongue, you are mature and able to control your whole body.

3By putting a bit into the mouth of a horse, we can turn the horse in different directions. **4**It takes strong winds to move a large sailing ship, but the captain uses only a small rudder to make it go in any direction. **5**Our tongues are small too, and yet they brag about big things.

It takes only a spark to start a forest fire! **6**The tongue is like a spark. It is an evil power that dirties the rest of the body and sets a person's entire life on fire with flames that come from hell itself.

7All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and sea creatures can be tamed and have been tamed. **8**But our tongues get out of control. They are restless and evil, and always spreading deadly poison.

9-10My dear friends, with our tongues we speak both praises and curses. We praise our Lord and Father, and we curse people who were created to be like God, and this isn't right.

Many thanks to my friend, John Sumwalt, whose sermon I freely “borrowed” from.