

SUNDAY JANUARY 21  
9:00AM | 11:00AM

W H A T IF  
IT'S J U S T  
A F A D ?

W O R D  
P O W E R

JANUARY 2024  
SERMON SERIES



Sunday, January 21, 2024  
“What if It’s Just a Fad?” | Megan Berry  
Galatians 3:26-29, Matthew 22:36-40

Galatians 3:26-29 (NRSV)

“...for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise.”

Matthew 22:36-40 (NRSV)

“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” Jesus said to them, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

This month we’ve been focusing worship on the power of words in our lives and the world around us. Words are a powerful tool that give us voice, a sense of agency in our lives, an ability to connect with those around us, but they can also be a weapon. More often than not used to put others down, to harm someone’s spirit and emotions. When thinking about the power our words have, I often want to change the old saying “sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me” to “sticks and stones may break my bones, but words ALSO hurt me.” Because the fact is, our words are powerful and can hurt other people whether we intend to or not, so we need to work to use our words as a tool for loving one another rather than a weapon that hurts others.

So, you might be thinking “well Megan, yes, I understand this, but HOW” well great question, I am so glad you asked! The simple answer to this question is we make a commitment to learning. To finding ways to be more inclusive with our language, to learning about how people are referring to themselves, how they’re standing up for themselves against jokes that are more harmful than they are funny, or even just retraining our brain to genuinely react with “I’m sorry, thank you for the correction, I’ll do better” rather than being defensive. Because the fact of the matter is, our society is changing (scary I know!), but with that our language is also changing and evolving and people are finding their voices and speaking out for themselves, calling out what is harmful language, and pushing for a more loving and inclusive society. And this evolution requires everyone to be open to change and open to learning.

And there are a variety of sources that you can go to for this learning. In 100% honesty, one of my favorite sources of learning is my social media feed because often I find people telling real life experiences that may have gone really well or not so well, but the moral of the story and what I'm supposed to learn is always clear. Like, diabetics don't enjoy having their life changing diagnosis be the butt of a joke about eating too much candy, it's hurtful and harmful and not worth the laugh to many of us. But if social media isn't the space for you, there are also several websites and books that you can reference too.

This week, in CONNECTIONS, there were two links that are great starting points for reading up on pronouns and inclusive ways to refer to our disabled siblings in Christ. These are just 2 of many many articles and websites out there dedicated to helping people learn this new language and why this new language is an important step towards allyship and loving your neighbor.

There are also SEVERALLLLLLLLLLLLLLL books that you can check out and read and they are books for all ages. Demystifying Disability, A Quick & Easy Guide to They/Them Pronouns, and What are Your Words? are three books that are geared towards helping different age groups work through these questions in an age-appropriate way. A Quick & Easy Guide is written in a comic book style and aimed towards the middle school/pre-teen age group. What are Your Words? Is a children's storybook that gives an overview of pronouns at an age-appropriate level for elementary schoolers. Demystifying Disability is aimed more for adults and gives an extensive overview of ways we can be more inclusive and accessible for our disabled siblings.

You see by making this effort to learn how people choose to identify, to be respectful of their choices especially when that choice differs from the norm or calls out a harmful stereotype or joke, that is one of the best ways we can show our love and respect for another sibling in Christ. And this choice to love and respect comes with the full acknowledgement that the other person knows themselves best because they're the ones living in their bodies.

Oftentimes when I talk to people about the importance of using someone's preferred pronouns or learning more about why someone uses person-first language in regard to their disability, why they use specific language for their nationality, or how someone identifies their sexuality, I'm met with some version of this question "but what if it's just a fad?" Insinuating that this new eruption of taking agency over the way you're referred to isn't permanent but something that will fade away with time and be replaced by another "fad" we have to learn.

And while I could argue with someone about how language has always been evolving and we've adapted with the changes from Shakespearean English to modern English, or how jazz music paved the way for rock n roll and now pop punk is a new take on that genre, so was jazz music or rock n roll just a fad? No matter which facet I try to spin in my head to help people see things in a different light, at the end of the day, I just want to scream our verse from Matthew 22 at people "JUST LOVE YOUR NEIGHBORS!!!"

Whether this is easy or difficult, that is what we're called to do. Love God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself, on these two commandments hang everything.

I don't know about you, but often when I hear this verse, I think about the tangible ways I can do mission work to show my love for my neighbors, I immediately think about how I can be the hands and feet of Christ on this earth and use those gifts to love my neighbor as myself. But as I think about it more, and as I watch my friends struggle with people dead-naming them or purposefully misgendering or speaking to their caretaker as if they're not there themselves, I am reminded time and again that our ability to love one another and show that love extends to every aspect of our lives, especially our words.

While I could continue to stand up here and blabber at you about the importance of our words and being inclusive and making the commitment to learn all of this, I think it would be more powerful to hear from someone who has experienced this recently.

Betsy Erickson is going to come up and share a few words of her own experience with the importance of words and inclusivity...

*Good morning, friends.*

*Over the last six years or so, I've been on a journey with my oldest child that has been transformational for both of us. I'd like to share part of my experience. My oldest child is transgender. This realization evolved as my child entered their teen years. They began to feel uniquely and discordantly and quite horribly uncomfortable.*

*The teen years aren't easy ones, and initially, I wasn't sure why my child was struggling. My understanding crystallized when my child asked me to use a different name and pronouns for them. I chose a feminine name for my child. They wanted a new, gender-neutral name, and neutral pronouns. Honestly, I felt unprepared, and lost.*

*God's love was a place I found direction. Galatians 3:27-28 teaches us:*

*"As many of you were baptized into Christ and have clothed yourselves with Christ.*

*There is no longer Jew or Greek,  
there is no longer slave or free,  
there is no longer male and female; for all are one in Christ Jesus."*

*Friends, I honored my child's request. At first, using they/them pronouns felt uncomfortable. And sometimes, I messed it up. But using they/them pronouns and my child's new name was a meaningful way to demonstrate trust in my child's knowledge of themselves, and to respect them as an independent person.*

*One of the things I learned—really re-learned—through this transition is the power of the words we use to name each other. I call you "friends" to recognize the support and love my family receives from this church. When Megan gives the benediction, she calls us "beloveds"—the beloved children of God. Pronouns are equally important identifying words. If you try using the wrong pronoun for yourself like, —Betsy, he's speaking in church today. It feels uncomfortable, like my child must have felt.*

*Friends, we are called to love each other. We cannot truly love someone until we know them. To know someone, we must see them. So, when my child needed my help,*

*that's where I began. Seeing my child for who they are, not for who I thought they were. Knowing my child as their sense of self developed. Loving them through this transition.*

*The name that I chose for my child was classic and strong, beautiful and suitable for professional use. And—this was important to me—a name invoked light. A gentle light. The light of my joy to be their mom, and the light of God's love.*

*My child left this name behind in their transition. Now, we don't use or say that old name anymore. Instead, we use the name they chose. One they felt suited them better. Orion. They were inspired by the constellation and its connection to Greek mythology.*

*Through this change, Orion kept their connection to light, to the light of my joy, to the light of God's love. It wasn't the gentle light I originally envisioned. It is the powerful, elemental of light of the stars. Friends, I think it's beautiful.*

Our greatest commandment is to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and part of us loving God is also the call to love our neighbor as ourselves. We are all one in Christ Jesus, siblings of the same Church family. And even though siblings fight and bicker and like to prove one another wrong (okay maybe that's just me and my siblings), our greatest commandment is to love one another with our actions AND our words, and that takes intention, time, and most of all learning.

And it's not just our greatest commandment to love God and love our neighbor that calls us to do this hard work of learning and being inclusive of others. We see Jesus being inclusive and respectful of others' differences all throughout the gospels. Like when Jesus was inviting Zaccheaus and other tax collectors to be around him, or seeking out those like Bartimeaus who desired to be healed and was outcast because of his blindness, or when Jesus reprimanded his disciples who tried to keep the children away and he said, "let the children come to me."

Jesus' ministry was one of inclusion and love, that called people in as their full selves to be loved and cared for. If this love and inclusion wasn't at the heart of Jesus' ministry, then why did Paul spend so much time as a disciple of Jesus reminding different communities of this call to be loving and inclusive? We heard in our reading from Galatians how he reminded their community that there is no longer these binary dividing lines, that we are all one in Christ Jesus.

One of my favorite passages is when he writes to the people of Corinth and reminds them and us how we are all one body though many parts, and our many parts are equal and beautiful and important to be THE body of Christ together. We need EVERYONE in this.

Beloved, whether or not you believe all of this is just a fad or not, whether or not you understand all the terminology or not, I hope you walk away today with a renewed spirit to try and learn, but ultimately at the end of the day to always choose love, to choose language that reflects love, to choose actions that reflect love, to loving everyone you meet because that is our ultimate calling, to love God with our heart, soul, and mind and love our neighbor as ourselves.

Amen.