

Impact versus intention. Do you remember being in junior high - and meeting that person who was just the best - instant crush. You wanted to say something smart, funny, impressive. You open your mouth and you hear your self saying that the size of their nose is impressive, or asking them where they got their outfit because you hadn't seen something that great since you were five. You meant their nose was beautiful, and their clothes were better than you had ever seen. But with your nerves - one of our family's sayings is - my words they will not sentence.

What happens when I try to say something nice but it comes out all wrong?

We like to say that uism is a faith of deeds not creeds. We want to make the world better, we want to build the Beloved Community here now, we want to bend that arc of the universe toward justice NOW. We want to do all the things and fix all the problems. We care less about what people believe and more about what they do. - And yet I think that is not exactly true. What is true about deeds not creeds is that we are not so concerned about each other beliefs in God or the Divine are. Which of the manifestations of the sacred you believe in or maybe none at all is not so much of a concern for us. We can begin to believe about ourselves that the inner lives of our members, their beliefs are unimportant. I believe that is going too far. I do care what you believe, what your intent is

We are a welcoming congregation - We don't care who you love and what you do with your gene Talia - not our business - we do care that each of us is loved and loving. But who is the source of that love or the object of that love not so important to us. For many people who visit our congregation and then join our church this is a breath of fresh air. We do not have a creed a central belief that says - human beings only come in two kinds, male and female and they can only partner up in one way. This is a good thing.

We can begin to believe that deeds and creeds are not connected. We can believe that Deeds equate to impact and creeds equate to intention. And I suppose if you pushed me and made me choose only one, which is more important I would say deeds. It is all well and good for me to believe that you as a human being are important. But if I don't actually act that way it seems to me that my beliefs or values aren't worth much. And lets suppose that I don't like my neighbor who lives next door, this by the way is not true I have great neighbors, but for the sake of argument lets say I don't like them. But for the sake of the larger neighborhood and maybe my piece of mind I treat respectfully maybe not warmly but I am not mean to them and I try to help them like I would any other neighbor. I suppose that is better than liking them but

treating them poorly. My grandmother used to say, "No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted."

So if I were pushed to make a choice I would say that a good action made from a bad intent is better than a bad action made from a good intent. But it is just not that simple

I also know that our intentions and our impact are connected. We are social animals. We watch one another. We talk about reading the room, getting the temperature of a group. We like data, and facts, but we also rely on intuition and we talk about emotional IQ. We are all those things. We are not simply our intent and we are not simply our impact.

We humans are a species that is hardwired to connect and to belong. I could cite you studies about this however there is an easier way to prove this. What is the worst punishment for a person in prison short of death? - Solitary confinement. We are hardwired for connection. Pulling us out of community - even when that community is a prison goes against everything that we are. Some faith communities practice shunning. I don't advocate it but it is powerful - in a negative way precisely because we are social animals. When my children were younger a time out alone was more effective than yelling or spanking. Positive Connection is powerful and it is why I am such a strong supporter of us being welcoming and warm. Connection feeds people, and makes the world better.

In doing research for this sermon I ended up reading a couple of articles on the connection between physical pain and emotional pain. I'm not a brain scientist, or a psychologist, so I may not have understood all of the articles. But there seems to be an interesting connection between physical pain and emotional pain. The same part of the brain is stimulated when we experience physical pain and social pain.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3152687/>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-athletes-way/201403/the-neuroscience-social-pain>

Think about this - think about that relative, friend neighbor who makes jokes about others, or you in a really hurtful way and then says - just kidding. Maybe their intent is to be funny or maybe they are simply covering up their angry jabs with humor. But there is real research that points to the fact that when someone you care about

shames you or hurts you with words your brain reacts in a similar way as if they had just slapped you.

Words matter. Some will disagree with me and say I am just talking about political correctness. I am not. I am not trying to promote here some idea of what are the right words. I am not trying to set up an orthodoxy. I am saying that words matter, our intent when we use them and the impact that they have that we may not have intended

Intent and impact is tricky. Think about hand signals. In the US we use this sign a hand raised index finger and thumb making an O as a sign of OK. But if I understand correctly in Japan it means money and in France means zero. Or if you are from the North and you hear a southerner use the phrase Bless your heart it may not be as positive as it sounds. I once wrote my aunt a thank you note, when I was like 11, for a really horrible sweater she had given me. I believe I described it as out of this world, with unique colors.

Sometimes what we think we are saying just isn't received in the same way we intend. I really wish there was a sarcastic font for email and texts, and even for news stories. There is all the difference in the world GREAT and great. Its not just words it is also tone.

Really what this means is that words have impact. It seems like that would be obvious but we live in a time where many folks who want to be able to say whatever they want and then be able to say - just kidding - just words - don't be so sensitive. We have a president who called Haiti, Central America and Africa a choice word, and the administration would like us to believe that his words are unimportant.

And impact is hard to gauge or guess. When I am speaking with someone I don't always know what they are carrying in their hearts, in their history. I can make what I think is a compliment about someone's looks without realizing that they struggle with weight issues or self - image issues. And so I may not be heard in the way I intended. I may not be responsible for that impact, but I should be responsible for trying to understand what the impact of my words is. And if the impact is different than my intent and is hurtful try to repair it.

Friday night we had movie with the minister here and a group of about 14 of us watched "Hidden Figures" – the story of the brilliant African American women who did the math that got our space program literally off the ground. The character of Dorothy

Vaughn was supervising a group of African American women who were doing the computing work. Because she was African American NASA would not give her the official title of supervisor nor the pay that went with it. Not until she taught herself computer programming and taught the women she worked with that language. She and her women were the only ones who could get the new main frame to work. Then she was promoted then and only then did her former boss and now colleague start calling her Mrs. Spencer instead of Dorothy. It was a very small line – but it brought home to me how a person wants to be called should be paid attention to, what pronouns they want to use is important.

Intent matters as does impact. I can be sure of my intent or at least try to be sure of it. The only way I can truly understand the impact of my actions is the stay in relationship with the person I have impact on or who is having impact on me.

And that can be difficult and yet I believe church life is a great place to understand it. Sometimes we talk about things around here moving at the speed of church. That seems to be a slower speed than say business. Sometimes that is because we get stuck in old habits and change is hard. But when church speed is working well it is slow because we each are checking our impact and making sure that we are still in covenant with one another. That is slow work and important work.

So I invite you this week to take on the practice of pondering your intent, and then trying to step back and look at and understand your impact. See if they track and if they don't try to understand why not.

Stay in relationship with yourself and those around you this is the work of the Beloved Community.