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“No Problem” – (Acts 16:11-15)

Language matters. Or, better, what want to communicate, and how we say or write or email – or tweet – those thoughts, is very important. It’s a spiritual issue.

That language matters is nothing new. We all know this. But do we pay attention to our language? How often do our words just fill what could be silence, or get misinterpreted, or say exactly what we don’t mean?

Preachers live by and with words, so I’m talking to myself as much as anyone else – don’t worry, I’ll keep the conversation short. But there are a few examples I want you to think about, for you to consider as you tend your own spiritual garden, because language is a spiritual issue.

One example of mis-communication is on the front of your bulletin this morning. This is a photo of the sign in front of one of the motels on the strip along Miracle Mile in Tucson – not exactly five-star resorts. This sign caught my eye almost a year ago, and it’s still there, advertising “Specious Rooms.” The dictionary defines “specious” as

“apparently true but actually false, or superficially attractive, but actually of no real interest or value.” I’m not sure that’s what the owner of the motel intended to advertise, however accurate it might be. The word the owner was looking for was *spacious*, as in “having lots of space.” Big difference, but still a difference that could be easily missed. Someone probably simply wrote what they *thought* they’d heard, not understanding the difference between “specious” and “spacious” – one letter changes a lot. Language matters.

So, what are you trying to say? And are you saying it, or something else?

Another example, for which there is no excuse as far as most English teachers are concerned, was a Microsoft slogan a while back: “More useful, everyday.” Now the problem here is harder to explain, but even my Microsoft word-processing program picked it up as I was typing this sermon: Microsoft’s slogan used the single word *everyday*, which means “ordinary.” What they *meant* to say was “every day,” two words, which means “every single day,” or, “all the time.” They wanted to say that their products were always useful; instead, they actually said that their products were just common, unexceptional, and even boring. Which you Apple-types out there think is just about right. Language, and how we use it, matters.

Mark Labberton, the new president of Fuller Theological Seminary, writes in his book *The Dangerous Act of Loving Your Neighbor* that a subtle shift has been taking place in our everyday speech, and this is one that you may well have noticed, because I have heard (and used) it right here in this church.

When someone says, “Thank you,” how do you respond? “You’re welcome,” right? Meaning that whatever you’ve been thanked for “was gladly done or given.” But increasingly, people say instead, “no problem.” Do you catch the difference? One says, “happy to serve you,” the other, “it’s all right, you didn’t inconvenience me.”

Those are very different statements, aren’t they? But “no problem” is increasingly used, and increasingly used without reflection, just as the owner of that motel hasn’t noticed (or bothered to change) the message of that specious sign in front of that hotel.

This is a spiritual issue. What is it that we want to communicate, that we’ve joyfully served someone, or reassure them that *we* haven’t been inconvenienced? Labberton argues strongly that it’s the joyful service that is the Christian response, even if it *was* an inconvenience, because that is how Christ has served us. God wasn’t inconvenienced in sending Christ to save us, God did it out of love for us, and there’s nothing specious about that. It wasn’t “a problem” – it is love.

So it is a spiritual issue. “No problem” works at our spirit, our way of living faith. It’s a move from other-centered to me-centered.

In addiction recovery, people are often told to act the way they ought, even if it feels uncomfortable, because it’s the right thing to do, and the right thing will eventually become a healthy habit. “Fake it till you make it,” is the way it’s put.

The same ought to be true for us. Whether we know God’s love and care for us, or simply know that we *want* to be able to accept it, we ought to do and say things that embody – show in ourselves – the other-directed nature of our faith – especially if they’re not the way the world is used to doing things. Always, draw attention away *from* ourselves and *to* Jesus Christ. “You’re welcome” – “I’m glad to be able to serve you.”

In today’s lesson from Acts, a woman named Lydia, who already believed in the God of the Hebrews, heard the Good News of Jesus Christ from Paul, and believed. After she was baptized, she told Paul and his party, “If you consider me a believer in the Lord Jesus (still not sure of herself), come and stay at my house.” In that way she both expressed thanks to them, and by extending welcome, joyfully helped them. Lydia got the idea – reaching out to serve others. She embodied her message – “you’re welcome” – welcome to stay at my home.

So, as best you can, reflect on the words you use this week, and what they really mean. Are you expressing your faith, or your importance? Are you sharing Christ's freely given love, or your own generosity?