



## **Guest Opinion: Words Matter with Power to Cut Us Deeply**

**By The Rev. Kristopher D. Schondelmeyer**

**November 5, 2018**

During the week of Oct. 21, my heart was broken at the news of one hate-filled crime after another. Certain words spoken as of late, like "nationalist," carry painful embedded meaning, not only for brothers and sisters in minority communities, but for all of us. It is no coincidence then, that in the same week words like this are endorsed at the highest levels of our government, that those with fragile minds and hate in their hearts felt emboldened to act in violence.

During the week of Oct. 21:

- A man committed sexual violence against a woman on an airplane and used as his defense, "The president says it's OK."
- Two precious black lives that matter were killed in Kentucky by a man who, minutes before, tried to enter a black Baptist church.
- The nation was shaken by bombs sent by a deranged man to individuals whom the president has deemed his political enemies.
- A gunman entered a synagogue spouting anti-Jewish sentiments while killing the precious people inside at a baby-naming ceremony and injuring the courageous officers who responded to the scene.

In scripture, Jesus sometimes says, "I tell you the truth," before revealing some painful truth. Essentially, he was saying, "Let me make it explicitly clear." So, let me make it explicitly clear: There is no room, for those who follow Jesus, to harbor embedded hate in our hearts for people who are different from us. This is immoral. This is sin. This is wrong.

We have worked hard as a nation to force those who harbor hate to take a back seat to the better values of hope, of love, of compassion. I was reminded this past week of the saying I heard when I was young, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." Of course, this a lie. Words matter, and they have the power to cut us deeply.

My undergraduate work was in speech communication with a minor in political science. I studied how powerful words are. If we think our current politicians are simply unaware of the power the word “nationalist” holds for white supremacists, then we are turning a blind eye to the pain that word causes for Jews, for African-Americans, for Latinas, for women. Our words matter.

Words are symbols of the ideals we hold in our minds. A president’s words are supposed to be a symbol of the ideals of our nation. But, for some reason, it seems like we have stopped caring.

Some might say that my remarks sound partisan. But, I’m not talking about “political sides.” I think political diversity is a necessary and beautiful thing because when we work together from diverse viewpoints, we can solve the issues that confront us.

So, I’m not talking about “political sides.” I’m talking about the compassion of Christ. I’m talking about the Jesus who welcomed the foreigner, the person of a different faith, the woman, the children, the poor, the sick, the least of these.

I’m talking about the Kingdom of God where we beat down our weapons into tools for peace; we tear down walls and welcome all who live in love to sit at the table; we sow love and radical compassion into the world. Let me make it explicitly clear: Nationalism and white supremacy is immoral. It is sin. It is wrong.

May we, as followers of Christ, model a different way. May we be ever emboldened to speak love, to speak hope, to speak compassion into the world.

*Kris Schondelmeyer is a pastor of Deep Run Presbyterian Church and a doctoral student attending Palmer Seminary of Eastern University studying contextual leadership with a focus in religion and public policy.*