

## **“Seven Words We Don’t Use in Church”**

7 Week Sermon & Worship Series

Sundays, July 15 – August 26, 2018

First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia

Preaching: Senior Pastor Rev. Dr. James L. Brewer-Calvert

<b>Date</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Holy Scriptures</b>
July 15	SMILE	I Thessalonians 5: 14-18
July 22	CURSES	Psalms 19; Matthew 15: 1-13
July 29	GOSSIP	Proverbs 12: 18; James 3: 9-12; 1 Corinthians 13
August 5	SCIENCE	Genesis 1 and 2; Job 38
August 12	PRONOUNS	Matthew 7: 7-12
August 19	SHAME	John 4
August 26	SEX	Song of Solomon

**Sunday, August 12, 2018**

**“PRONOUNS”**

### **Matthew 7:7-12 (NRSV)**

*Ask, Search, Knock*

7 “Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. 9 Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? 10 Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? 11 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

*The Golden Rule*

12 “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.

### ***Relating with Other People***

Let’s have a conversation about how to love.

Let’s make some time and energy to consider how to connect,  
how to relate to and respect one another,

how to show the love we talk some much about having.

We could talk later about the whys and whens and whatever about love.

Today, because relationships are delicate, let’s focus on the how.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus lifted proverbs of grace we call the Beatitudes,  
He preached some reminders that God knows you intimately and cares for you,  
    knows how many hairs are on your head and is watching over you.  
He gave solid advice on prayer, meditation and faithful stewardship.  
He proclaimed how much God loves us, and that we are to love God and one another.  
Toward the end of the Sermon on the Mount,  
    He dropped a pearl of eternal wisdom on how to love.  
    *"In everything do to others as you would have them do to you;  
    for this is the law and the prophets."*

Jesus of Nazareth was well-read.  
He knew and revered the Holy Scriptures.  
He was familiar with the Torah and the Law of Moses,  
    which is found in Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.  
Some 1,300 years before Jesus walked in Galilee,  
    the Levite Priests spoke for the Lord, saying,  
    *"Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."* (Leviticus 19:18)  
When someone asked Jesus,  
    *"Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?"*  
[Jesus answered],  
    *"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."* (Matt. 22: 36-40)

So, when Jesus was preaching and wanted to emphasize  
    how we should practice using the love that God plants within us,  
    He offered what we know as The Golden Rule:  
    *"In everything do to others as you would have them do to you;  
    for this is the law and the prophets."*

### ***Relating With Other People, on Even Terms***

This ethic of reciprocity is as ancient and relational  
    as the original spiritual communities.  
500 years before Jesus was born in Bethlehem,  
    Confucius said something almost identical to Jesus' words.  
    *"What you do not want done to yourself,"* said Confucius, *"do not do to others."*  
    [Confucianism: 557 BC, from the Analects 15:23]  
Around that same time and age another Far Eastern religion called Buddhism  
    had in a text in the Udanavarga 5:18:  
    *"Hurt not others with that which pains yourself."*  
Hinduism also includes such a teaching, written in 3200 BC [From the Hitopadesa]:  
    *"One should always treat others as they themselves wish to be treated."*

We could go on for over twenty more sayings of grace:  
just about every religion and spiritual practice  
incorporates one version or another because our connections are  
delicate.

*“The Golden Rule is found in numerous cultures, religions, ethical systems, secular philosophies, indigenous (Native) traditions, and even in the mathematical sciences (e.g. the golden mean). <sup>[1]</sup>*

*“And because it crosses so many traditions and philosophies, the Golden Rule possesses tremendous moral authority and reveals a profound unity underlying the diversity of human experience.”*

*“Given its omnipresence across history, the Golden Rule is often described as a universal ethical principle.*

*To reflect on the Golden Rule is to reflect from the perspective of a universal wisdom.*

*Accordingly, the Golden Rule is not just a moral ideal for relationships between people but also for relationships among nations, cultures, races, sexes, economies and religions.*

*“The rule is an expression of human kinship, the most fundamental truth underlying morality.*

*From a religious perspective, the Golden Rule is the principle of the practice of the family of God, and it means relating with other people as a brother or sister.”*

### ***Relating With Other People, on Their Terms***

*Jesus said, “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you.”*

No timetable. No qualifiers. No mention of God by any name.

Pure, simple, direct.

Treat people how you want to be treated.

How do you wish to be treated?

We all want to be respected and recognized.

We all want positive, life-affirming connections with one another and with the Holy.

Well, how we treat and address one another connects us to the Divine and one another.

The Golden Rule is a good rule, a solid ethic to adhere to

when so many common rules are shifting, adjusting, adapting, evolving.

Language is starting to catch up with a broader, healthier grasp of gender identity.

For some of our neighbors in our community

gender identity is not based on physical attributes or body type,

their chromosomes or your expectations.

Gender is up here, not down there.

For some of us, how and what we think of ourselves

is the determinative factor in how or what we think of our gender.

Which means that how we speak to and with and about each other matters.

Our words, the language that we use, makes a difference.  
Our choice of words speaks volumes about our degree of respect for one another.  
The sooner and better that the Church of Jesus Christ  
recognizes and affirms this, the better for all parties involved.

“A pronoun is a word that refers to either the people talking (I or you)  
or someone or something that is being talked about (like she, it, them, and  
this).<sup>[ii]</sup>

Gender pronouns (he/she/they/ze, etc.)  
specifically refer to people that you are talking about.

A gender pronoun is the pronoun that a person uses for themselves.  
For example: If Alex’s pronouns are she, her, and hers, you could say  
“Alex ate her food because she was hungry.”

You can’t always know what someone’s pronouns are by looking at them.

Asking and correctly using someone’s pronouns  
is one of the most basic ways to show your respect for their gender identity.

When someone is referred to with the wrong pronoun,  
it can make them feel disrespected, invalidated,  
dismissed, or alienated.

If you are not sure, ask. It’s okay.

Ask: “What pronouns do you use?”  
or “Can you remind me what pronouns you use?”

It may feel awkward at first,  
but it’s not half as awkward as making a hurtful assumption.

She/her/hers and he/him/his are a few commonly used pronouns.

Some people call these “female/feminine” and “male/masculine” pronouns,  
but many people avoid these labels  
because not everyone who uses he feels like a “male” or “masculine.”

There are also lots of gender-neutral pronouns in use.

Here are a few you might hear:

They/them/theirs (Shea ate their food because they were hungry.)

This is a pretty common gender-neutral pronoun  
and it can be used in the singular.

In fact, “they” was voted as the Word of the Year in 2015.

Never refer to a person as “it” or “he-she”.

These are offensive slurs used against trans and gender non-conforming individuals.

[What if I make a mistake?](#)

It’s okay!

Everyone slips up from time to time.

The best thing to do if you use the wrong pronoun for someone  
is to say something right away, like “Sorry, I meant (insert pronoun)”

If you realize your mistake after the fact, apologize in private and move on.

A lot of the time it can be tempting to go on and on about how bad you feel  
that you messed up or how hard it is for you to get it right.

Please don't! It is inappropriate  
and makes the person who was misgendered feel awkward  
and responsible for comforting you, which is absolutely not their job."

### ***Relating With Other People, on Our Terms***

There is a scene in the film National Treasure that speaks to today's topic.

Nicholas Cage plays Ben Gates, a treasure hunter.

Ben Gates, Abigail Chase, and Riley Poole are in a clothing store in Philadelphia.

Ben and Abigail are geniuses; they're always the smartest ones in the room.

Riley is the tag-along.

The three are examining the back of a \$100 bill.

On the back is a drawing of Independence Hall in Philadelphia.

They are looking at the clock on the tower in the drawing.

[Abigail Chase](#): What do you see?<sup>[iii]</sup>

[Ben Gates](#): 2:22.

[Abigail Chase](#): What time is it now?

[Store Clerk](#): Almost 3.

[Abigail Chase](#): We missed it.

[Riley Poole](#): No, we didn't. We didn't miss it because...  
you don't know this?

I know something about history that you don't know.

[Ben Gates](#): I'd be very excited to learn about it, Riley.

[Riley Poole](#): Hold on one second, let me just take in this  
moment. This is cool.

Is this how you feel all the time? Well, except now.

[Abigail Chase](#): Riley!

[Riley Poole](#): All right! What I know is that daylight savings  
wasn't established until World War I. If it's 3 p.m. now that means  
that in 1776 it would be 2 p.m.

[Ben Gates](#): Riley, you're a genius.

What a great line: *"Hold on one second, let me just take in this moment.*

*Is this how you feel all the time?"*

That line is so smooth in the film, drawing a nod, a smile, maybe a chuckle.

However, when applied to human relationships, the line is profound.

There are some among us who are privileged to be included...always, all the time.

We are aren't talking about being the smartest one in the room, like Ben and Abigail.

We are talking about privilege.

Those who reap the benefits bestowed from being privileged

naturally assume they are welcome, included, respected, at home...always.

Too often those on the inside, who hold the power,

are indelicate about how the marginalized are treated.

Those who do not benefit from privilege, do not.

How many of our neighbors have been waiting

since the Golden Rule was first expressed:

*"In everything do to others as you would have them do to you..."*

They do not feel or believe themselves

to be automatically included, welcome, respected,  
unless they are specifically recognized.

That's how it is, my friends.

I had a memorable, teachable moment when a gay friend emailed me about this topic. He wrote, "...people in the margins don't know they are welcome

*unless they are named...* <sup>[iv]</sup>

*We need to name why we need to be specific with our welcome  
...and educate those who think the naming creates exclusivity*

*(sigh, the privilege of knowing you're welcome must be a comfortable place)"*

Is this how you feel all the time?

Do you feel that you are always included, expected, respected?

Four words for such thinking are straight white male privilege.

*Sigh, the privilege of knowing you're welcome must be a comfortable place.*

Or, do you feel that, by and large, you are not welcome,

that the roadside sign that reads "All Are Welcome"  
is not automatic or authentic or actuated

unless you and yours are specifically named and identified,  
lifted up and affirmed?

Is this how you feel all the time?

That all does not really mean all unless we state that All Means All?

We need to clarify who All really are, being specific in our attempts to be inclusive.

### ***Relating With Other People, on Inclusive Terms***

In 2016, I happily shared with Linda McCrae, a fellow Disciple of Christ,

that our congregation is open & accepting; here all people are made welcome.

She asked if we are open and affirming,

whether we have together made public a faith statement to that fact.

No, there is no need, I said, because we love and accept all people.

She pointed out that teenagers and young adults who are lesbian or gay,

transgender or questioning, and are seeking to figure out their true self  
would love to turn to the church, to God, to Jesus' love,  
for support and nurture, guidance and grace.

However, when our most vulnerable youth *do* look at and to and for the church,  
what they see instead is judgment and condemnation.

She said that these same youth are prime candidates for running away,  
for self-doubt, for self-destruction, for attempts at suicide.

Those who desperately need the love of God feel rejected by God and God's people.

If ever there was a reason to declare our congregation open and affirming,  
it would not be because I need us to be or you need us to be  
or we who are comfortable and at home in the church need it to be so.  
We who have power to wield and share are called by the Holy Spirit to use it for love,  
because in our fair city there is one life, one soul, one child of God  
who needs to know that God loves him or her or they or ze, and we do  
too.  
One soul is sufficient for the world to become open and affirming of all,  
because all means all.

Since then our congregation's newly proposed Welcome Statement  
specifically lists as many categories as we could imagine  
because the list includes folks whose identities  
have not been historically included or recognized.

### **Proposed Welcome Statement**

*First Christian Church of Decatur (Disciples of Christ) is an open and affirming congregation. We welcome everyone into full participation in the life and membership of the church.*

*Inspired and informed by God's love, mercy, and justice, we are purposefully involved in healing and helping our community and our world. We covenant with God and the greater community to nurture a spirit of love and service to neighbors, honor one another's differences, and fellowship in the breaking of bread.*

*Actively striving to honor each other's race, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, nationality, ethnicity, marital status, physical or mental ability, family configuration, political affiliation, economic circumstance, or theological perspective, we truly do welcome all.*

### ***Relating With Other People, on Holy Terms***

This weekend Katie took her parents to see Taylor Swift perform  
at the Mercedes-Benz Stadium on Friday.

OMG!

Taylor Swift was and is an amazing singer, songwriter, and performer.

I had to wear ear plugs to block out the audience's screams  
and still hear the thumping music.

(True Confession: Some of those screams may have been my own.)

"The [concert tour] theme, as [Taylor Swift] did mention a time or two, was snakes. [\[v\]](#)  
[Yes, snakes, like huge three-story tall pythons.]

As she explained,

*“A couple of years ago, someone called me a snake on social media and it caught on.  
And then a lot of people called me a lot of things on social media.  
And I went through some really low times for a while because of it.”*

But for Swift—as [she has demonstrated] so often—  
there was a lesson to be learned [from] this harsh experience.

She looked out at 66,000 fans and spoke on how to love.

*“Reputation is what people think about you when you’re not around.  
Connections are what we have, what we share, with each other.  
We’re not in control of our reputations.  
We can only attempt to control the connections we share  
with people who we care about and who care about us.”<sup>[vi]</sup>*

*“You shouldn’t care so much if you feel misunderstood by a lot of people  
who don’t know you,  
as long as you feel understood by people who do know you,  
who will show up for you,  
the people who see you as a human being...it’s you.”<sup>[vii]</sup>*

*You did that for me.  
One thing every single person in this stadium has in common  
is that every single one of us  
is sort of pining away for a sense of connection to someone else...*

*“There’s something that happens in your brain and your heart  
when someone just says, ‘Yes, I understand how you feel.’ ...  
Relationships—[they’re] just delicate, you know?”*

Then she stepped into a golden balloon basket  
and floated across the stadium, soaring over us in the night sky of the stadium,  
as our little lights shone like stars.

And she sang her song “Delicate” straight from her heart:

*My reputation’s never been worse, so*

*You must like me for me*

*“doing justice to the song’s candor and glitz at the same time.”*

*All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!*



## **Endnotes**

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[i] “Understanding the Golden Rule: Ethic of Reciprocity”, Progressive Christianity.org

[ii] Section on Pronouns drawn from [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Resource Center](#), Univ. of Wisconsin-Milwaukee website.

[iii] National Treasure film script transcribed by Drew’s Script-O-Rama.  
[www.script-o-rama.com/movie\\_scripts/n/national-treasure-script-transcript.html](http://www.script-o-rama.com/movie_scripts/n/national-treasure-script-transcript.html)

[iv] Rev. Mark Johnson, Exec. Dir. of LGBTQ+ Alliance, email to James B-C, May 22, 2018, adapted.

[v] Edited and adapted from [Rolling Stone Magazine](#) website, “Why Taylor Swift’s ‘Reputation’ Tour Is Her Finest Yet” By Rob Sheffield.

[vi] Transcribed by James B-C during Taylor Swift Atlanta Stadium Concert, Aug. 10, 2018.

[vii] Ibid, [Rolling Stone Magazine](#) website.