

These are the *Three Gates of Speech: Is it true? Is it necessary? Is it kind?*

A few years ago, someone in my congregation, lost her cousin in Iraq. He served in the military and was killed in the current war. His family lived in the Northwest so she, her husband and her children went west to go to his funeral.

When she came back to church the next week, she told me how good it was for her to be there with her family, how sad and good it was that she honored the life of her cousin and shared the grief with family and friends. She told me how the day of the funeral some people from the Westboro Baptist Church, of Topeka, Kansas protested outside the funeral. They assert that God is punishing the US for its tolerance of homosexuality by killing its soldiers.

Then she took my arm and described a roar of motorcycles driving down the street, between the protestors and the mourners. A group of veterans rode in to stand between the protestors across the street and the mourners.

The Supreme Court recently heard arguments in a case considering the competing rights of mourners and such protestors. It will consider the limits of speech, if any, in relationship to private funerals. Constitutional questions are embodied in the difficult cases where competing values are alive in the culture. Whatever the Supreme Court decides there will always be more or less hateful speech.

We always have the power to stand against hateful speech, every day, and speak words that heal instead of hurt and that restrain hate, instead of fuel it, so that those in harm's way know they are not alone. I grieve the young gay men and lesbian women who have taken their lives after experiencing humiliation and hate. I think of Matthew Shepherd. It was twelve years ago this week he was murdered. I also think of so much progress made, including this week the judicial ruling halting "don't ask, don't tell."

Let us be mindful of how well we practice our speech, understanding some behaviors are not to be tolerated with silent assent. When *necessary*, we are called to speak up when we hear hateful speech or bullying, whether at the dinner table, in the classroom, or at work. It can be something as simple as "I disagree". Or we can find someone who can help.

I think of those Veterans who ride in on their motorcycles, some or many of whom experienced a time when they received angry and hateful words from Americans. Who choose now to serve their fallen brothers and sisters and their families. Who say nothing, but clearly assert their loyalty and love, lost and found, in their own lives. Who stand, when *necessary*, on the side of *truth and kindness*. Who stand sentinel and silent with love.

I hope I see you Sunday. *Barbara*