

Column

The scene was the local Walmart parking lot. Returning to my car from the garden department, I heard a young man talking. Every other word out of his mouth was either profane or abusive, or both.

As I neared my car, I saw he was with several girls. All three were standing outside a parked vehicle smoking. I could not help but think, had this child no parent to model and teach him a better way?

I thought about saying something, but in the end kept silent. Did I do right? I'm not sure.

Respect, courtesy and the right use of words may be unfashionable virtues, but might it not be a time for these to be revisited and brought back? Such virtues, I want to suggest, are not only good for society but pleasing to the God who gave us tongue and voice.

The writer of Proverbs says as much when he writes: "The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips. Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones" (Proverbs 16:23, 24).

We find the same principle being approved in the New Testament. "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers," writes St. Paul in Ephesians 4:29.

Coarseness and the wrong use of language may be the order of the day, but it doesn't have to be. If change is possible, from where must it come? The obvious answer is the home.

Every home needs to be a school, a place where coarse speech is not tolerated but also a place where gracious language is practiced and praised.

I have a neighbour who on occasion takes in stray dogs. It is amazing to see what happens. These dogs come without manners and knowledge of right behaviour, but in a short time they begin to conform to what is expected of them in that household. Instead of being nuisances, they become pleasures. Might not the same be true with children?

But what about the tough kid in the parking lot spewing out coarse language? Is there hope for him? Of course, there is. The God who raised up

Jesus is able to lift up those stuck in ruts of destructive and ugly behaviour. It may not happen overnight, and almost certainly it will take mentoring.

Mentoring is where Christian people and the local church come into play. Are we up to the task?

ALMIGHTY Father, who hast given thine only Son to die for our sins, and to rise again for our justification; Grant us so to put away the leaven of malice and wickedness, that we may always serve thee in pureness of living and truth; through the merits of the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Collect, First Sunday in Easter, The Book of Common Prayer).

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