

2018

2018 WORDS OF THE YEAR

Wednesday, January 2, 2019
6:30pm



St. Mary's
Episcopal
Church

Publishers of various dictionaries have picked the 2018 "Word of the Year" (WOTY). Contenders were "justice," "toxic" and "misinformation," among others. Each of these words could warrant a full lesson for conTEXTS, but we will focus this week on toxic words, as well as their opposites: words that are healing, grace-filled and edifying. See the opposite side for how the top 2018 words were chosen.

While publishers of various dictionaries chose different terms for the "Word of the Year," let's focus this evening on the word "toxic," selected by Oxford Dictionary. The Bible has a lot to say about words and how we use them. So for this evening's conTEXTS we will explore toxic words, as well as their opposites: words that are healing, grace-filled and edifying.

A few questions to explore this evening:

1. If you were to choose a "Word of the Year" for 2018, what would it be, and why would you select that word?
2. When have you been wounded by toxic words?
When have you experienced words that healed?
3. When have you seen misinformation become toxic?
What other kind of communication could become toxic?
4. In what way were Jesus' words considered toxic by the religious leaders and by the Roman rulers of his day?



How might his words be considered toxic today -- and for and by whom?

5. While John, the Gospel writer, speaks of Jesus as the living Word of God, might Jesus himself be considered toxic today?
Who might have that point of view, and why?
How, by contrast, might Jesus himself be considered a needed word of healing to and for a wounded world?

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The iconic Oxford Dictionary selected "toxic" for the honor of 2018 WOTY. The publisher found the word, drawn from Greek and Latin terms meaning lethal poison on the tips of arrows, best reflects "the ethos, mood, or preoccupations of the passing year," likely to have lasting "cultural significance."

Researchers found that there was a 45 percent increase in the search for the term on oxforddictionaries.com during 2018. People also used "toxic" to describe a wide scope of "things, situations, concerns and events," including physical poisons found in toxic chemicals, substances, gas, waste, algae, air and water, and non-physical toxins found in some work environments, schools, cultures, relationships, masculinity and stress. The term "toxic," when used metaphorically, may apply to personal relationships, political rhetoric or policies, organizations, etc.

Dictionary.com's 2018 WOTY is "misinformation," chosen because the publishers observe that misinformation, or "false information that is spread, regardless of whether there is intent to mislead," increasingly guides people's decisions and deeds.

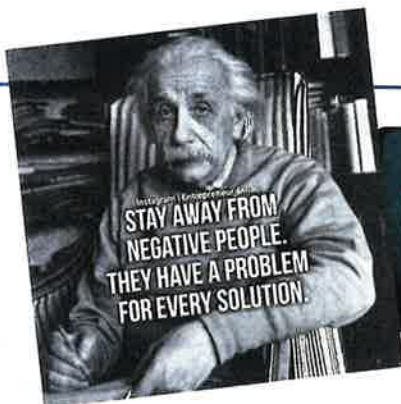
People who share misinformation may well believe what they share is true, even though the misinformation may have been deliberately created and spread as disinformation or propaganda by a person or persons who intended to mislead others. A politician, marketer, health practitioner or religious leader who deliberately spreads biased or untrue information to gain financial or political power is sharing disinformation; the citizen, customer, patient or parishioner who believes and shares disinformation is spreading misinformation.

Whether information is deliberately manipulated to achieve a malevolent agenda, or shared as misinformation by people who believe and spread the disinformation, serious and even violent consequences may result.

In an op-ed entitled "My Word of the Year Is Freedom," New York University history and Italian studies professor Ruth Ben-Ghiat, who writes on authoritarianism and propaganda, tied all three top words of the year together, stating that "Merriam-Webster's definition of justice includes 'the quality of being just, impartial, or fair' and 'conformity to truth, fact, or reason.'

Yet there can be no consensus on the definition of justice when the meaning and status of 'truth, fact, or reason' is contested."

When misinformation clogs communication lines, relationships can become strained and toxic.



TOXICITY



And finally, a couple of concluding questions....

Xiao Mina, Author of "Mememes to Movements," said, "Since the days we could speak, ... we could also lie, and since the days we could lie we could fabricate, we could create new stories."

Dictionary.com suggests that to fight misinformation, individuals can do the following:

1. Consider the source of the information. Is the source consistently reliable?
2. Fact-check stories before believing or sharing them.
3. Read entire articles before deciding whether or not to share them. Don't be lured by "click-bait," sensational headlines designed to outrage or pull on your heartstrings.
4. Direct others to "fact-checking resources when we see misinformation spreading."

Questions:

- Do you think these are good guidelines?
- If you think they are good guidelines, how do you practice them?
- How can you hold yourself accountable for your own processing of stories you read or hear or see online?



January 2019						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

Date	Meeting
January 2	conTEXTS
January 9	SWEEP
January 16	conTEXTS
January 23	conTEXTS
January 30	conTEXTS

