

### ***What Language am I Speaking?***

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I am struck by the things that my heart harbors:  
Words said in anger, directed my way.  
Actions taken that inflicted personal pain.  
Decisions made that imposed harm, threat or difficulty.  
Things that others have done;  
Things that I have done to myself.

I find that resentment can build when I reflect too long  
When I remember those events,  
Put faces to those hurts  
Recall names, places, dates and time.

I sometimes find myself wanting to exact something  
Perhaps some would call it revenge  
Others would call it payback  
Some would think that it is ungodly.  
Still others would think that it is normal (perhaps even human).

And yet, when I think of water that has traveled  
Under the bridges of my experiences,  
I try to let them go, not think or dwell on them  
I am sometimes successful,  
And sometimes not so much.

I have been doing what I am doing now for over 25 years  
I have pastored a local congregation for that long  
I was doing youth ministry for several years prior to that  
I was called into ministry over 37 years ago  
And preached my first sermon at the age of 14.

There's a lot of water under the bridge  
And quite a bit of pain in my past  
(even from the Christians I have served).

Words of anger and venom hurled at me  
Accusations and slanderous tales directed my way  
Challenges and threats have been uttered  
Turmoil and hostility surrounded our lives (on occasion)  
Betrayal and opposition enacted toward me.

Most of the trials in life  
Inflicted inner anguish and pain –  
And at times my heart dwells on them

And I think of anger, revenge, getting even  
But I also know there must be something more.

I just completed a profound reading,  
***“The Devil in Pew Number Seven”***  
Written by Rebecca Nichols Alonzo  
A woman dealing with pain inflicted when she was just a girl  
Coping with a hostile environment  
Facing a critically mean persona  
Dealing with the tragic loss  
Deciding between anger and grace,  
Torment or release  
Fomenting resentment or forgiveness.

She writes in her book,  
In a way that brings conviction to my heart,  
*“Forgiveness is the language of heaven.”*  
And in those words I hear both promise and challenge.

Sometimes, when my anger is harbored,  
I find myself feeling weary, bitter, discouraged and depressed.  
I am often shocked to discover that this  
Has affected the language that I speak  
Not just my words, but how I live, carry myself – even to how I breath.

In my anger, I find myself being short-tempered.  
I feel myself getting agitated and feeling aggrieved.  
I discover that I am feeling entitled to something better  
I resent that people don’t cater to me, my feelings, my wants  
I begin to harbor resentment, bitterness  
My words become critical, dispiriting, discouraging  
My spirit grows insensitive, despairing, defeated  
My heart begins to deaden and I become withdrawn.  
I am speaking the language of hurt  
Of anger.  
Of resentment.

But there is another language I can choose to speak:  
I can speak the language of heaven – the language of forgiveness.  
Even when I don’t feel like it –  
I can choose the language I use!

When I survey the hurts that have been inflicted,  
I can decide not to react and hurt back.  
When I contemplate the wounds to my heart  
I can decide not to wound in return.  
When I consider the words that have harmed  
I can choose to use a different language and not harm

When I think about my past and the betrayals I have felt  
I can choose to be faithful and live life with fidelity.  
I can choose the language of heaven – I can choose forgiveness.

There have been many in my past that I have harbored  
Feelings of regret, remorse, anger and resentment  
There have been others where I have been the source  
Of many of these same feelings from within.

So, for now, I seek the language from above  
I seek the forgiveness of others where I have inflicted pain  
And I express forgiveness to those who have been the inflictors:  
Whether it is deserved or not,  
Whether it is wanted or not;  
Whether it is asked for or not;  
Whether it is sought or not;  
Whether the need for forgiveness is seen, or not.

For I forgive, not to aid the one who has been painful  
But to empower myself to overcome.  
I forgive to align myself with God's language and not theirs.  
I forgive so that I may grow in the kingdom  
I forgive so I may move beyond what I carry.

I forgive –  
The pains arising from ministry  
The words slung in anger  
The threats uttered to intimidate  
The friends who have betrayed  
The colleagues who have ignored  
The accusations that have been hurled  
The people who have been involved  
I forgive...  
For that is the language of heaven  
And that is where I wish to reside.

Thank you Rebecca for sharing your story  
And reminding me that I must speak another language  
The language of forgiveness  
If ever I am to heal.

What language am I speaking today?  
To my friends and fellows...  
To my wife and family...  
To my parishioners and people...  
To my antagonists and my tormentors...  
What language do I speak?  
My prayer is that I become fluent in

The only language that matters and makes a difference  
For me and for all those whom I encounter –  
The language of heaven, the language of forgiveness.