

# Mean words may kill

She had decided to try one of the online dating services. Because she loved animals, she included a picture of herself with two of her dogs.

Shortly afterwards, someone sent this message: “Boy are you ugly. I want a good-looking woman. I’d rather date your dogs than you. Are they available?”

I share this cruel story for several reasons. First, you need to know that there is some peril to ‘advertising’ online. There are mean people, and they do mean things. I’m not surprised that the individual who sent the message was looking for someone. Who would want to spend time with someone so caustic and so cruel?

Second, there’s an important lesson to be learned from people’s mean comments. The young lady, a mental health professional, replied to his message: “What would make you want to hurt a perfect stranger?”

That really was the right question. When someone makes a mean statement or cruel judgment it always says more about the person making the statement than it does about the person it was said to or about.

We know the biblical quote: “From the fullness of the heart, the mouth speaks.” What our heart is full of is what will come out of our mouths. Put slightly differently, what is going on inside us will eventually come out of us.

We don’t see the world as it is. We see the world as we are. If we are filled with anger and bitterness, eventually we will inflict our anger and bitterness on someone else. If we are filled with fear, we will see the world as fearful and people as threatening. People who abuse others, were, in most instances, abused themselves. That’s why I think that some of the greatest heroes of life are those who were abused but who don’t abuse; those who were hurt, but don’t hurt others; those who were put down, but choose not to put down others.

The young woman who received the mean message admitted that she was “stung” by the comment. Who wouldn’t be? We are human, and we are conditioned to react to what people say to us. In the moment, we think the comment is about us. In the

course of counseling, we discover that the comment was about the one who made it.

What was going on in the mind of the man who made the comments? Who really knows? But we can certainly speculate that he wasn't particularly happy. Perhaps he didn't have parents who treated each other well. Perhaps his notion of beauty was conditioned by Madison Avenue and other "marketers of beauty." Perhaps his own social inadequacies had not made him acceptable to other women, and he was taking out his frustrations on this particular woman.

Often I hear people say something like: "Well, I haven't killed anybody!" They set the bar pretty low for evaluating their behavior. But in truth we may kill more often than we realize. When we laugh at someone's idea, we may "kill" that idea. When we mock someone else, we "kill" some of his or her innocence. When we are mean with our judgments, we "kill" something of someone's spontaneity.

There's an old counseling adage that goes: "What we don't work out, we will act out!" Put simply, if you feel unhappy, get into counseling and work it out. Heal your inner wounds rather than wounding others.

We learn again that words have power. Words can hurt. Words can heal. Mother Teresa put it so well: "It takes only a few moments to offer praise or compliments. But the memory of the kind words can last a lifetime."

Remember the kind words. The mean words weren't about you!