



What's In A Name?

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I've mentioned before that I enjoy team trivia. It's basically *Jeopardy* in a restaurant with your close friends or family. My husband and I went to trivia last night. Spoiler alert: we played terribly, but we had a nice dinner. The first round was promising; we answered every question correctly. After that it went downhill...in more ways than one.

We narrowly missed questions about a sports labor dispute and the Epstein-Barr virus. We misheard the question about James Joyce's *Ulysses* and answered laughably wrong. Then, we heard this question, "What 1933's radio program sidekick was named for the Spanish word for *fool*?" My husband and I tossed about names like Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy, but they were later and ventriloquism over the radio isn't really a thing. Abbott and Costello?

The correct answer was, "Tonto," the Lone Ranger's sidekick. Cheers went up from some tables who'd known the answer. At our table, I could only remark, "That's horrible."

Although the Tonto character – with storyline ties to the Bodéwadmi (exonym: Potawatomi) tribe – was at least one of the good guys, his name fed into all the tropes about Indigenous peoples. Tonto, the Fool. The word can also be translated in Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese as moron or stupid.

This week as we remember the life and ministry of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., I am reminded of how much work remains to be done. Racism isn't just a passing novelty of radio shows in the 1930's. And, it's not "trivial." We are still struggling to eradicate racism from our systems, our vocabulary, our processes, and our implicit biases.

It's not enough to be "good people." That's true, in part, because racism isn't exclusive to bad people. It's baked into our systems as a natural – in actuality, unnatural – part of how we function in the world. Identifying racism is a step, like when I realized a beloved Native character's name was a slur. We are invited to move beyond the identification of racism toward actions that interrupt it and make repairs. Notably, when the Lone Ranger series ran in Spain, the word "Tonto" was dubbed out, and "Toro" ("bull") took its place.

With Tonto's fictional Bodéwadmi heritage, I am reminded of the land acknowledgement the Milwaukee Presbytery adopted and that is posted on the front page of our website. It names our historic racism and concludes: "We promise to support the interests of the Hoocąk (Ho-Chunk) and Bodéwadmi (Potawatomi) nations, on whose trust lands our churches stand, in order to engage with the important work they are leading in language, culture, and land reclamation, through relationship and financial accountability."

How are we collectively upholding our promise? Do our Indigenous neighbors even know about this promise? We've made a good start, and there is much work to be done. Thanks be to God that we can begin.