

Say What?  
The Rev. Julie Wells Blythe  
February 16, 2014

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Matthew 5:21-24

Sermon Disclaimer: The sermon illustration used at the beginning of the sermon was chosen for the person to whom it is dedicated and has no relationship to the working conditions of the preacher! Let us begin.

I live with a wonderful man who works as a computer systems analyst. Every morning we get up and read the paper, trading the sections back and forth, making sure he gets the crossword puzzle and we both get the comics and the obituaries. Since this is Valentine's Day weekend, this first story is dedicated to my sweet, wonderful, Bob and to all of you out there who work in an office.

"Scott Adams, creator of the *Dilbert* comic strip, was conducting his "Second Annual Highly Unscientific Dilbert Survey," in which he asked this question:

"If you had a chance to hit your boss in the back of the head with one of the following objects, with no risk of being caught, which would you use?"

Here's how his respondents answered:

A large bean burrito -- 19 percent

"Nerf" ball -- 17 percent

Ripe melon -- 14 percent

Framed certificate of appreciation -- 13 percent

Outdated computer you are forced to use -- 13 percent

Your last performance review, including the 600-pound filing cabinet you keep it in -- 13 percent

All your coworkers, bound by duct tape and flung from a huge catapult -- 8 percent

A Ford Pinto with a full tank of gas -- 7 percent

Adams explains why the bean burrito is the big winner: "I think the bean burrito won because it would make a really cool sound and it would be messy with or without guacamole." He observes, further, that the bean burrito may have picked up a few votes for another reason: "Over 64 percent of respondents selected a non-lethal response, knowing if their

boss were injured, it would mean more work for them."

That's how things work in the twisted universe of *Dilbert*.<sup>1</sup>

In the real world, of course, none of the above are ever a good choice. But let's be realistic, there are times when we get angry with others, with co-workers, with family members, with people we have to deal with out in public, and yes, I know it is hard to believe but it is true – sometimes we even get grumpy with our brothers and sisters in Christ in our church family. As I read today's text and thought about Westminster, I know I have spent a lot of time this past year standing in this pulpit and being the cheerleader for this congregation. And that is a role I love and will always treasure. It is an incredible joy to stand before you and remind you of all the amazing ways we are God's beloved children in the world and the awesome work we do all the time to further God's kingdom in the world.

I didn't want to preach on this text. To be honest, I cut 2/3 of the reading from Matthew out because the other subjects it goes on to deal with are divorce, adultery and oath taking, none of which I wanted to deal with from this pulpit on this day. However, I could not get away from the fact that I know there are individual members of this congregation and groups within it who have long standing quarrels or feuds. There are times when a quarrel can be a good thing. When handled in healthy ways, a disagreement can lead to learning and growth on the part of all parties involved. One of my seminary professors, The Rev. Dr. Michael Kinnamon, always used to say that every dialogue has two plausible points of view. I know it can be hard for me to remember that and I think it is hard for most of us, at least from time to time. As I tell this next story, please think about whether there is anyone in your life here at Westminster with whom you have had a disagreement and keep them in mind as you listen:

The oldest Christian site in Ireland is said to be St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin. It is a beautiful edifice, but it also has a interesting piece of history involving one of its doors– it is known as the "Door of Reconciliation." There [is a] a rectangular hole hacked out of its center. In 1492, two prominent Irish families, the Ormonds and Kildares, were in the midst of a bitter feud. As the feud grew and turned into an all out fight, the Earl of Ormand was besieged by the Earl of Kildare. The Earl of Ormand and his family and followers took refuge in the chapter house of St. Patrick's cathedral and bolted themselves in. However, as the siege wore on, the Earl of Kildare concluded the feuding was foolish. Here were two families worshipping the same God, in the same church, living in the same country, trying to kill each other. So Kildare called out to the Earl of Ormand and pledged that he would not seek revenge or indulge in villainy — he wanted the Ormands to come out and the feud to be over. But the Earl of Ormand was convinced that it was a scheme full of treachery and

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<sup>1</sup> Animating Illustrations from "The Ethics of God's World (1)" in [Homileticonline.com](http://Homileticonline.com)

refused to come out of the cathedral. So Kildare grabbed his spear, chopped a hole in the door with it, and thrust his hand through. There was a tense moment until his hand was grasped by another hand inside the church. The door was opened and the two men embraced, thus ending the family feud. The Scottish have a saying, maybe you have heard it, "Chancing one's arm." It came about from the incident at St. Patrick's – it means to "take a chance" especially in reaching out to someone in reconciliation.<sup>2</sup>

It took great thoughtfulness on the part of the Earl of Kildare to decide that the feud was a foolish thing. It took greater courage to take the first step toward reconciliation. And let us not judge the Earl of Ormand too harshly, for who among us has at one time or another not trusted the intentions of someone with whom we have been fighting? Ultimately, the Earl of Ormand was able to get past his fear and anger and reach out and grasp the offered hand of the Earl of Kildare.

Jesus asks the same of us. Jesus tells us that if we are angry with a brother or sister or if they have something against us, we are to be reconciled to those people before we bring our gifts before God. This is not an easy task and it is not without risk. But I know there are those of us who have broken relationships with others in our lives and in our congregation. And I know that those broken relationships cause pain to all the parties involved. What a beautiful addition it would be to the wonderful strides that we are making as we journey forward together if we could take a look at how we might break through doors of anger and bitterness that still remain closed. These doors have people on each side who are wonderful, active brothers and sisters in Christ in our congregation who long for reconciliation but may not know where to start. Some of us may have to get our spears out and chance our arms while others will have to be willing to grasp the outstretched hand when it is offered. And trust me, I do not stand up here pointing at you from the pulpit as if I am pure and wholly blameless in some of the broken associations in my life. We all have them and we all have some responsibility in them. As your great cheerleader, I am standing in this pulpit this morning to tell you that I have complete faith in the possibilities for reconciliation in our lives. And who knows what amazing gifts of grace may come when we do the sometimes difficult work that leads toward peaceful relationships in our lives and in our church. Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> (From a sermon by Duane Smith, "The Work Of Reconciliation - Chancing One's Arm" 7/26/2009)