

Neighbors

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A Tale of a Pickle Dish

Two Sisters Find Reconciliation

By Jim Hundley

In a sermon just before Easter, I challenged the people to consider those in their lives with whom they need to reconcile, and to do it now, before Easter. "The world is being reconciled to God through the crucifixion and resurrection," I said. "Just as we have been reconciled to God, we need to reconcile, make peace, with each other." As I preached, I noticed one lady, "Mary," who became more and more upset and agitated as I spoke.



I stood at the church door to say goodbye and Mary was the last person in line. As she approached me, she growled, "I would like to talk to you in your office, right now!" As soon as the office door closed, Mary confronted me, "Who told you about me and my sister?"

"I didn't know you had a sister," I replied. "Somebody must have told

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you, and I do not appreciate you singling me out in a sermon."

God was up to something. I asked Mary to explain. Slowly, she began to tell me that 30 years before, both her parents were killed in a car accident. Mary and her sister had to close up the parents' house and divide up their belongings. Although Mary's mother had promised her the family's crystal pickle dish, her sister took it. The pickle dish became a wedge between them. Mary and her sister had not visited, exchanged notes, or spoken for 30 years, even though they lived close to each other in the same town. Each one had children the other had never seen.

As she finished her story, I said, "It's not too late. Call her."

Two days later the other sister, "Martha," called me and asked, "What did you say to my sister?" She told me that Mary had phoned for the first time in 30 years. After a long talk, they decided to take the next step and see each other. Martha asked me to facilitate their meeting.

As I arrived at my office the Saturday morning we had arranged, Mary was already there, anxious and unsure. Her sister arrived right on time, with a beautifully wrapped package. When Mary and Martha laid eyes on each other, their tears melted 30 years of icy anger. Sharing family pictures and apologizing to each other, they each held on tight to the other. This was a sacred moment, as I watched 30 years of pain and anger melt.

The pickle dish, for 30 years, had been a symbol of anger and estrangement. Now it sits on my desk in the pastor's study as a symbol of God's power. With God, anything is possible, even reconciliation between two stubborn sisters. □

This story is based on true events, although names have been changed.

Mary and Martha are also two sisters in the Bible who did not always get along. (Edited from a previous Neighbors article, ©2001.)

—The Rev. Jim Hundley is pastor of Wesley Memorial United Methodist Church in Norfolk, Va., where he, his family, and the pickle dish now reside.