

Dare to Be Weird©

1 Corinthians 3:1-9; Matthew 5:21-24 February 12, 2017 Dr. Sharlyn DeHaven Gates

So ... I titled this sermon *Dare to be Weird*, which you are probably thinking anyone who would give that title to a sermon must be a little weird herself. Well, of course you are correct. I acknowledge that I am, and always have been a little weird.

Think about people you know who are weird. What is it that makes them seem weird to you?

I must clarify something here. I did not look up the definition of weird before I titled this sermon. If I would have I probably would have changed it. The online Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines weird as:

Definition of *weird*

1. *I* : of, relating to, or caused by witchcraft or the supernatural: magical
2. *2* : of strange or extraordinary character: odd, fantastic

Well, I wasn't thinking of witchcraft or anything supernatural when I titled this sermon. The second definition comes closer to what I meant. I do think of a weird person or thing as something kind of strange or especially different.

I really like the definition of "extraordinary character." That fits very well with why this sermon is titled *Dare to be Weird*. Let's go with that one!

You'd have to be locked in a room with no television or smart phone or computer or any form of communication to not know that there is an awful lot of anger swirling around in our world right now. My goodness!

The election itself and all that led up to it was full of anger on both sides, wasn't it? I told you that my sister and brother and I were at such opposite ends of the spectrum that we could not even be Facebook friends without getting angry at one another. Mostly they got angry at me. Of course.

What was ironic is that my sister and I agreed to unfriend one another on Facebook until after the election and then we ended up being thrown together on election day because of our dad's surgery. She said she hoped she could keep her mouth shut and not be vocal with her opinions but she didn't think she could. I didn't think she could either. I vowed that no matter what happened or what she said I would keep my cool and not respond, not react.

But of course, we had to have that argument the morning after the election. And it wouldn't have mattered who won. It still would have happened. Of course, it was all her fault. "She started it," said the older sister, Sharlyn.

We're good now, because we just don't talk about it. Eventually, I'm sure she will see that I'm right. (Just kidding).

Social media has opened up a whole new way of being angry with people, insulting people, saying things to those you don't know very well, but also to people you love. Social media, and the freedom it gives to speak your mind without actually having to face the person has definitely contributed to people being very bold with negative, hateful rhetoric.

In today's gospel lesson we hear Jesus teaching something kind of weird. He's pointing out that everyone knows the commandment "Thou shalt not commit murder." Most of us know that is not an acceptable way to behave. We know that if we kill someone we will most likely end up in prison, maybe even be put to death too, as a punishment.

And those of us who are believers, who trust in the one true God of the universe – God who gave us the 10 Commandments to live by – to have life that is good – we know that to kill someone is against God's will.

But Jesus says don't stop there. It isn't just that it's wrong to finally hush someone up by killing them. He says it is anger itself that you have to watch out for. If you have anger against someone in your heart, then even that is something you should get rid of.

If we think about it, anger really is the seed of our mean actions. I doubt that anyone murdered without first having some anger over something. I suppose it could happen. Maybe it's a desire to have something that a person has.

But somewhere in the heart, there must be anger. Resentment too, comes from anger. Revenge starts with anger.

People in biblical days were all about revenge. An "eye for an eye" was the rule. Then Jesus comes along and says weird things. Like "Turn the other cheek." Here's how *The Message* translation puts it from Matthew 5:38-42

"Here's another old saying that deserves a second look: 'Eye for eye, tooth for tooth.' Is that going to get us anywhere? (Jesus says) Here's what I propose: 'Don't hit back at all.' If someone strikes you, stand there and take it.

If someone drags you into court and sues for the shirt off your back, gift wrap your best coat and make a present of it. And if someone takes unfair advantage of you, use the occasion to practice the servant life. No more tit-for-tat stuff. Live generously."

Mahatma Gandhi said, "An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind." Abraham Lincoln advised that the best way to destroy an enemy is to turn him into a friend. Weird, huh? Even today, we know we are more inclined to get even than we are to get let it go. To forgive.

Have you ever had an argument with someone and maybe you finally agreed to disagree. But then, this little nagging voice inside keeps encouraging you to find the proof that you are right and the other is wrong. And once you find something you can't resist showing them. And it starts all over again. And it just keeps on going.

Remember the story of the Hatfield's and McCoy's? It started in the mid 1860's during the civil war, on the border of West Virginia and Kentucky. Two families began feuding over the death of one who was murdered. And they kept the killing going; the feud alive for years.

They fought over who owned a hog, even going to the justice of the peace, who happened to be a Hatfield. Of course he ruled in favor of the Hatfield's after a witness gave him information. That witness ended up dead. There were intermarriages which added fuel to the fire.

The feuding just kept on going. We are talking about a great deal of violence and killing, about burning down houses and beating wives and shooting children. It wasn't your ordinary neighborly dispute.

In 2003, some descendants finally got together and signed a truce, saying that there was too much violence in the world and that if these two families could finally make peace, others could do the same. They wanted to send a broader message to the world that when national security is at risk, Americans put their differences aside and stand united.

Rio Hatfield said: "We're not saying you don't have to fight because sometimes you do have to fight," he said. "But you don't have to fight forever." (Wikipedia)

But Jesus weirdly says that's wrong. You don't ever have to fight. Think about the long, long years of anger and revenge that played havoc on those families and anyone involved with them.

Paul tells the Corinthians in his letter to them that they are still infants in the faith. They act like spoon-fed babies. He says we have to grow up and become mature.

There are numerous places in the Scriptures that tell us that God's way is for us to let go of anger. "You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger." (James 1:19)

The Psalmist writes in Psalm 145:8 "The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love." In Hebrew, the word used for describing God as *slow to anger* is literally translated as being "long of nose." You know how when someone is really angry they might snort. The Hebrew people said God's nose is long. Like the nose is a fuse.

Think about a firecracker with a very long wick. You could light it but it takes extra long for the fire to burn all the way to the firecracker. When it finally gets there it explodes. God, in Hebrew, has a long, long wick before he would explode with anger. In other words, God is merciful and ready to forgive and to love. God is ready to forget. His nose is long. It takes a while before God would explode.

In Deuteronomy 30 God tells the Israelites they have a choice. They can obey God's commandments – choosing life, or they can turn and be led astray thus choosing death.

We too, have a choice in our lives. We can choose to strive for growing up as mature Christians, paying attention to the weird things Jesus tells us to do; or we can follow what the culture and the world around us naturally want us to do. It's natural to want revenge. We want to be right even if we're wrong. We want to get even, to pay back.

Choosing life means living a peaceful, loving, forgiving life with others. And really, isn't it a great relief to let anger and resentment go? How can we live a life of joy if we carry such a heavy burden like anger – anger that can lead to much, much bigger, terrible, destructive things?

Jesus said, "come to me all you who are carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest." (Mathew 11:28) If we are willing to give up the things we harbor against one another and turn them over to Jesus, he will take them from us and we will walk lighter in his presence.

As the song we sang, says: Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in his wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace. Jesus dares us to be weird. Follow his lead and choose life. Amen.