



*"And all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made himself to be sin who did not know sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him." -- 2 Corinthians 5, 18 -21*

It is a truism that the seeds of violence and war are sown in the hearts of people long before they actually erupt in violent crimes or on the battlefields of the world. As a teacher, I have often felt that part of my mission was that of a peacekeeper with a mandate to keep hostile forces apart and to help bring about reconciliation and peace. I remember especially vividly three instances in which I had to intervene to prevent skirmishes between students from turning into all out war. All of these involved 12-13 year old students. The names I use below are fictitious - the events I describe are not.

### **Great Opportunities**

Sandy came to me with tears in her eyes and anger in her voice. Unkind words had been exchanged between her and a few of the other girls in my class. Her pride had been hurt and she was intent on obtaining swift justice for the wrong she had suffered. As a teacher with authority and power, I was to punish the culprit. Vengeance, she hoped, would be swift and painful for her aggressors.

I knew Sandy very well and also knew that the girls with whom she was now upset were her friends the day before and would be so again the next day. Sandy had a strong personality and I was certain that no real damage had been done to her self-esteem. What was really needed from me was not justice but something quite different.

After listening carefully to what she had to say, I looked at her with a big grin on my face and exclaimed with exuberance, "Aren't you lucky! Not everybody is given such a

great opportunity. Wow! These girls have given you the opportunity to forgive them. Isn't that great!"

This happened 15 years ago, but I can still vividly recall the look on her face. It alternated in quick succession from consternation, to puzzlement, to a smile (was she not the bearer of a great opportunity! - a Good News!), and back to consternation again.

I do not know whether Sandy was so confused by my statement that she simply forgot about her anger or whether she understood something, but by the end of the day she and her former "enemies" were friends once again.

### **The Sin of Blue Eyes**

Wendy was one of several girls in a family with a single mom. I knew that her mother was courageously and lovingly providing as best as she could for her children on a meagre income. There was certainly no room in her budget for such luxuries as the latest expensive fashionable clothes.

Just before recess ended one day, Wendy walked up to me, head down, tears not far away, and simply said to me, "The girls are teasing me because of my clothes."

I knew I could not confront the other girls in the class directly. That would simply have made the situation worse for Wendy. I therefore opted for another approach - an idea that popped into my head as I was heading back to class. When all of the students were back in their seats in the classroom, I looked at them, making a real effort to keep a straight and a stern face, and said: "I can't stand it anymore! I have always wanted to have blue eyes, but my eyes are brown. Every time I see someone with blue eyes, I get really frustrated. I won't stand for it anymore! All of the students in this classroom who have blue eyes, stand up and line up in the back of the classroom facing the wall." At this point, close to half the class got up and headed to the back of the classroom. I then proceeded to say: "From now on, I want you blue-eyed people to keep your heads down when you see me near you, whether it be here in the classroom, in the hallways or outside in the playground. I do not want to see your eyes anymore." I paused for a few seconds and said: "Those of you who think that what I am doing is rather silly, please raise your hand." Hesitant hands started going up one at a time until all of them were in the air. I then added: "You are, of course, quite right." I told them to sit down and said: "When people put others down because they look different, or have different clothes, or speak differently, they do something just as silly as what I have just done."

I left it at that and started the afternoon lessons. Later that same day I intercepted a note being circulated by some of the girls. It simply read: "I am sorry for making fun of your clothes."

## **This Hurts me More than it Hurts You**

Jenny, Sylvia, and Shauna had been at it for a while before I intervened. They had been pecking at each other all day and I could see the occasional feather flying. I knew I had to do something before World War III broke out.

I got a bat from one of equipment rooms and called the three young ladies outside the classroom, bat in hand. I said to them: "It really hurts me to see you girls fighting like this. In fact, it hurts me so much that I think it would hurt me less if you hit me with this bat. I then presented the bat to them and continued: "Here, I'll make a deal with you. Take this bat and hit me with it as hard as you can. That way you will get rid of the anger that makes you fight like that. I think that would hurt me much less than your fighting does."

Fortunately for me, all of the girls simply grinned and refused the extended bat. And yes, they did stop fighting. The peace between them was in fact long lasting. I do not recall any further serious altercations between them that day or even for the rest of school year.

All situations, including situations of conflict, can be "teachable moments", wonderful occasions to teach students how to forgive, how to treat others as they themselves would like to be treated, and how to disarm anger and hatred by choosing to love. All that is needed is a bit of imagination and a nudge from the Holy Spirit who can show us ways of peace and reconciliation.