

# WHEN YOUR PREACHER LEAVES: Interim Services for Churches Between Ministers

Newsletter, September, 2007, #15

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## Dead Flies in the Perfume: ROMEO AND JULIET

Dead flies putrefy the perfumer's ointment,  
And cause it to give off a foul odor;  
So does a little folly to one respected for wisdom and honor. (Ecclesiastes 10:1)

A rotting dead fly floating in a five-ounce bottle of Chanel perfume.  
Disgusting image. Meant to be.

People with wisdom and judgment are responsible for using them: otherwise they ruin their own reputations and disappoint those who respect and follow them. Shakespeare's most famous love story tells how two beautiful, passionate young lovers end in suicide because of their proud and foolish fathers, incompetent and wimpy counselors, and thoughtless, violent friends. Teenage lovers, groupies of all types, patriotic zealots, and sometimes church members are volatile and rash enough even when their leaders exercise wisdom. If their fathers act like teenage gang captains, tragedy is imminent.

### Principal Characters

Escalus, Prince of Verona  
Montague and Capulet, heads of two feuding families  
Romeo, son of Montague  
Benvolio, nephew of Montague and friend of Romeo  
Mercutio, friend of Romeo and relative of the Prince  
Friar Laurence, counselor to Romeo  
Juliet, daughter of Capulet  
Tybalt, nephew to Capulet's wife  
Nurse to Juliet, named Angelica  
Paris, young nobleman and relative of the Prince

### The Play

The Capulets and the Montagues have been feuding in Verona for years. A brawl breaks out, the third recently, and Prince Escalus threatens punishment for any further incident. Meanwhile, Benvolio convinces Romeo to check out the girls at a Montague party, where Romeo instantly falls in love with Juliet and later that night wins her heart and hand in the famous "balcony scene" (actually there's no balcony mentioned in the play, but it's a nice touch anyway).

Friar Laurence secretly marries the young couple in hopes that the union will end the feud, but within hours Romeo, Mercutio, and Tybalt get in a street fight in which Tybalt kills Mercutio and Romeo kills Tybalt. Escalus banishes Romeo, but the Nurse arranges for him and Juliet to have their wedding night before he leaves.

Capulet, not knowing his daughter is already married, arranges her wedding to count

Paris. When her Nurse advises her to forget Romeo and marry this rich nobleman, Juliet flees to friar Laurence for help and counsel. Laurence, an amateur chemist, hands her a potion that will make her appear dead for forty-two hours. His plan calls for her to drink it the night before her wedding, be discovered “dead,” and be buried in the Capulet family vault. Meanwhile he will summon Romeo to be there when she wakes up. None of this works. The only message Romeo gets is that Juliet is dead. He rushes to her tomb, where he encounters and kills Paris, who has come there to mourn Juliet. Romeo drinks the poison and dies just minutes before Laurence arrives and Juliet awakes. When Laurence spooks and runs, Juliet kills herself with Romeo’s dagger just as the Prince arrives, followed by Capulet and Montague. Escalus pronounces blame on them and himself, and the two fathers honor each other’s children as the play ends.

“From ancient grudge . . . “

The Prologue reveals the problem even before we start the play. Notice that the focus is not on the lovers; it’s on their parents:

Two households, both alike in dignity,  
In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,  
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,  
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.  
From forth the fatal loins of these two foes  
A pair of star-cross’d lovers take their life;  
Whose misadventur’d piteous overthrows  
Doth with their death bury their parents’ strife.  
The fearful passage of their death-mark’d love,  
And the continuance of their parents’ rage  
Which, but their children’s end, nought could remove,  
Is now the two hour’s traffic of our stage.

“From ancient grudge.” How many quarrels, fights, feuds, crusades, and all-out wars have come “from ancient grudge”? Hatfields and McCoys. Bloods and Crips. England and France. Muslims and Hindus. Palestinians and Jews.

In an episode based on Shakespeare’s play in *Huckleberry Finn*, a young couple from the feuding Grangerford and Shepherdson families elope to escape their warring relatives.

Huck is discussing the feud with Buck Grangerford:

“Did you want to kill him, Buck?”

“Well, I bet I did.”

“What did he do to you?”

“Him? He never done nothing to me.”

“Well, then, what did you want to kill him for?”

“Why, nothing—only it’s on account of the feud.”

“What’s a feud?”

“Why, where was you raised? Don’t you know what a feud is?”

“Never heard of it before—tell me about it.”

“Well,” says Buck, “a feud is this way: A man has a quarrel with another man, and kills him; then that other man’s brother kills him; then the other brothers, on both sides, goes for one another; then the cousins chip in—and by and by everybody’s killed off, and

there ain't no more feud. But it's kind of slow, and takes a long time."

"Is this one been going on long, Buck?"

"Well, I should reckon! It started thirty years ago, or som'ers along there. There was trouble 'bout something, and then a lawsuit to settle it; and the suit went agin one of the men, and so he up and shot the man that won the suit—which he would naturally do, of course. Anybody would."

"What was the trouble about, Buck—land?"

"I reckon maybe—I don't know."

"Well, who done the shooting? Was it a Grangerford or a Shepherdson?"

"Laws, how do I know? It was so long ago."

"Don't anybody know?"

"Oh, yes, Pa knows, I reckon, and some of the other old people'; but they don't now what the row was about in the first place."

The heads of the Grangerfords and Shepherdsons, or of the Montagues and Capulets, could stop all of this. But they don't, and their children and servants take their cues from them. In the opening scene two servants of the Capulet house, Samson and Gregory, swagger in, bragging about how they'll deal with Montagues. When Gregory says "The quarrel is between our masters and us their men," he says more than he knows. The quarrel is between their men because it's between their masters. If these two old men would quit fighting, their servants would too.

The danger of partisan feuds is that the people with the least sense have the most dangerous weapons. Shakespeare, who always includes only the barest of stage directions, introduces this scene with "Enter Samson and Gregory, with swords and bucklers [small shields]." Swords or guns in the hands of brash young men lead to violence and death. They don't think for themselves: they take their cues from their masters and use the feud as an occasion to test and show off their manhood. People with this attitude kill and get killed on city streets every night.

The worst of these hotheads is Tybalt, nephew of Capulet's wife. You probably remember him from high school gym class: every school has one. Big, athletic, cocky. Jealous of his honor and looking for a fight. Still, he's not mean to the core. He could be steered into good behavior by the right mentor.

Tybalt enters as the Samson and Gregory start a fight with the Montague servants. Soon old Montague and Capulet rush in, but instead of stopping this brawl they disgracefully try to join it. (Their wives hold them back.) Here, ultimately, is why Palestinian and Israeli boys, Muslim and Hindu boys, or black and Hispanic and white boys die with .223 and 9mm. bullets tearing through them: their fathers and older brothers let it happen "from ancient grudge."

The frustrating thing is that in other settings old Montague and Capulet behave like civilized, reasonable men.

After the fight, Montague solicitously questions Benvolio about his son Romeo. Later that afternoon, Paris—another young man fated to die from this feud—talks with Capulet:

CAPULET

But Montague is bound as well as I,

In penalty alike; and 'tis not hard, I think,  
For men so old as we to keep the peace.

PARIS

Of honorable reckoning are you both,  
And pity 'tis you liv'd at odds so long.

Pity indeed. That night the old man stops Tybalt from attacking Romeo, who's crashed the Montague party, calling him "a virtuous and well govern'd youth."

If he feels this way about the boy, why hate his family?

This feud, like many a schoolboy confrontation, is mostly words and a few bruises in the first encounters; bravado comes easily and cheap. But let young men start brandishing weapons instead of words, and even if they intend no serious injury the worst can happen very quickly. In Act 3 Mercutio and Tybalt start trash-talking each other. Neither means fatal harm, probably, but when Romeo restrains Mercutio, Tybalt stabs Mercutio under Romeo's arm, killing him. Minutes later, Romeo kills Tybalt: it's a sequence of street violence all too familiar.

There's no jeering laughter now. Family loyalties turn rage to white heat, and the course of violence quickly consumes Paris, Romeo, and Juliet as well.

"And I for winking at your discords . . ."

But there are other authorities responsible here. Prince Escalus stops the brawl in Act 1, but reveals that it's the third in the recent spate of violence. The citizens of Verona are sick of the whole mess, which has repeatedly interrupted their peace and business. Escalus threatens Montague and Capulet that they'll pay with their lives if further disturbance occurs, but when Romeo kills Tybalt, he alone is punished. Romeo returns from banishment, kills Paris, and commits suicide with Juliet. Surveying the scene, Escalus blames himself with the fathers:

Where be these enemies? Capulet, Montague.  
See what a scourge is laid upon your hate,  
That heaven finds means to kill your joys with love.  
And I for winking at your discords too  
Have lost a brace of kinsmen.

Escalus is an impressive, competent ruler, clearly concerned about his subjects. Nonetheless, the buck stops with such leaders as he, and too much "winking" at misbehavior leads to disaster.

"I dare no longer stay"

And then there are the counselors, Friar Laurence and the Nurse.

Friar Laurence means well, but he's out of his depth. Hoping Romeo and Juliet's elopement will solve the family feud, he marries the pair to force a reconciliation, a serious misuse his religious position.

Matters quickly get out of control, but Laurence is caught up in the affair now, and in

desperation he keeps coming up with exotic ideas that don't work. The ultimate involves his botanical hobby: the forty-two-hour potion. This whole bizarre plot is so complicated and strange that it's easily derailed by accident. Romeo, thinking Juliet dead, kills himself just before Laurence, old and slow, arrives at the tomb. When Juliet awakes and the guards approach, Laurence runs, exclaiming, "I dare no longer stay."

The old friar is distraught and repentant as he tells the Prince what has happened:

All this I know, and to the marriage  
Her nurse is privy; and, if aught in this  
Miscarried by my fault, let my old life  
Be sacrific'd, some hour before his tie,  
Unto the rigor of severest law.

Escalus pardons Laurence, but he remains another example of an authority figure who misuses his position and takes on more than he's capable of handling.

Angelica, Juliet's nurse, is even less excusable. Her main focus in life, apparently, is sexual love, and she's all afire to help Romeo marry Juliet. But like many people primarily interested in appetite, she lacks character in a crisis. When Romeo is banished, Juliet turns to her for counsel:

JULIET

What say'st thou? Hast thou not a word of joy?  
Some comfort nurse.

NURSE

Faith, here it is.  
Romeo is banish'd, and all the world to nothing  
That he dares ne'er come back to challenge you;  
Or, if he do, it needs must be by stealth.  
Then, since the case so stands as ow it doth,  
I think it best you married with the County.  
O, he's a lovely gentleman!  
Romeo's a dishclout to him.

We can almost see Juliet's face freeze as she hears this woman, who's been her nurse, counselor, and mother-figure since childhood, betray her. Such people deserve much blame.

Romeo and Juliet are ultimately responsible for their tragedy. They're impulsive, rash, and way too quick to act. But young people, especially when stirred by strong passion, are going to behave this way, and providing a loving, nurturing, guiding environment is what parents, ministers, teachers, and counselors are for. When these people act foolishly themselves, or bail on their responsibilities, their young charges suffer.

The worst, of course, are grey-beared zealots who warp the minds of the young and send them off to kill and die in senseless acts of terrorism and war. The King of kings will judge.

Life's hard enough without dead flies in the perfume. Our wise people need to be wise.

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## Shakespeare Quotations for Ministers, by John Parker

These are the forgeries of jealousy.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM 2.1

A reference to falsehoods that jealous people tell.

. . . the heresies that men do leave

Are hated most of those they did deceive.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM. 2.2

An especially useful quotation. It affirms that those freed of heresies are the strongest in refuting those heresies.

This is thy negligence. Still thou mistak'st ,

Or else committ'st thy knaveries willfully.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM 3.2

A rebuke of a stubbornly misbehaving person.

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### Smile of the Month

A family learned a prince was to visit. The mother reviewed the manners of her son, teaching him to bow, etc. She instructed him not to talk until he observed how to speak to a prince.

The prince arrived. The boy opened the door and bowed. The prince had long hair and a long beard. The mother said, "Come in and dine prince devine," She passed the milk for his coffee and said, "Have some cream prince supreme." The boy thought he had the idea. He passed the sugar bowl and said, "Have some sugar, you wooley bugger."

(This was my son's kindergarten graduation speech after I had taught him and encouraged him to say the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm from memory. Thirty-three years later, this is one of our family's favorite stories. JWB)

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### Mustard Seeds from Favorite Books, Jerrie Barber

*Before You Move: A Guide to Making Transitions in Ministry*, John R. Cionca, © 2004 by John R. Cionca.

In any body, a certain amount of body odor exists; it's true in the human body, and it's true in the local church, page 23.

In all of my visits to the doctor's office, I've never heard a physician complain, "All I ever see is sick people! I'm tired of sick people. I'd rather deal with people who are healthy." This scenario is absurd because curing sickness is the very reason doctors practice medicine. If people never got ill, physicians wouldn't be needed, page 23.

Sociologists who have studied the viability of groups suggest that, when the number of active congregational members who have lost confidence in their pastor goes beyond twenty-five percent, the critical point has been reached. If conscious efforts do not retrieve a lost confidence, it is wiser for the sake of the viability of the group, to give

someone else the opportunity to heal the breach. Once the group is split 50-50, or near this percentage, the danger of power struggles is exceedingly great. Therefore the pastor should be ready for the sake of the group to consider himself expendable long before things deteriorate to this point (Oscar H. Heinboth, *Calls and Vacancies* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1967), 21), page 67.

*References.* By this time in their dating relationship, both minister and congregation will have exchanged a significant amount of data. *No surprises* has been their mutual goal. But, so far, both parties have presented only their own interpretation of themselves, which may be colored by what they have chosen to disclose. For this reason, congregations typically ask potential candidates for references, even asking those references to suggest other sources to check, pages 129, 130.

The practice of reference checking is equally wise for the clergy. One colleague suggest that a prospective pastor solicit information from “a neighbor near the church who does not attend, a near-by minister within the same denomination, and two individuals who left the church recently, one happy with the ministry and one unhappy” (Kenneth Quick, “Candid Candidating,” *Leadership Journal* (fall 1990): 72), page 130.

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## Barber Clippings

We continue to enjoy the people and opportunities at Eddyville. The elders are reading a book on how to select a preacher. We are working on the self-study.

Since the last newsletter, Eddyville had *Founders Day*. It was a weekend to see the benefits of a small town. This is a great community to live and to have a good influence on the people in Lyon country as well as the congregation. I wrote some of my observations on my blog: <http://barberclippings.blogspot.com/> .

Some preacher and his family will be fortunate to live and work here. Last week, I preached at the Bethel congregation in Joelton, Tennessee. The emphasis was on communication: in the church, family, personal evangelism. The title of the series was “I Beg Your Pardon, I Never Promised You a Rose Garden.”

Next month, October 21-24, I will be with the Leanna congregation in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, in a meeting.

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I continue to work on pictures and information gathered on a trip to England to sites associate with the great hymns. I hope to complete a Power Point series for churches. Currently my freshman class at Lipscomb is studying the Seven Deadly Sins.

The article this month is a chapter on ROMEO AND JULIET from my manuscript on religious values reflected in the plays of Shakespeare.

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