

July 17, 2016

FRESH WINESKINS

Matthew 9:14-17

Gutenberg's printing press was seen as a terrible invention by both religious and political leaders when it first began to be used. It was feared that it could put wrong thoughts into the minds of the common people. Actually, should the masses know how to read, and, laws were put into print in the language of the people, control would be lost as those who began to know more called for accountability in their leaders. Likewise, should the commoner possess a Bible in their own language, the religious leadership of that day might lose power as well, as they were challenged by the same sort of call to accountability.

Columbus met great resistance from those who thought the world was flat when he said that the world was round and that you could reach the East by sailing west. The best scholars of his day thought he would surely sail over the edge of the world, when what actually happened was that he discovered a whole new world and launched an era of unprecedented discovery.

Copernicus proposed the idea that the earth revolved around the sun. We know this to be true today, but the powers that be of his day rejected the idea, because, for so long, they had believed that the sun revolved around the earth. If the earth should no longer be considered the center of the universe, if it was just another planet, its importance would somehow diminish. The new wine of Gutenberg's invention, Columbus' proposals, and Copernicus' premises could not fit into the old wineskins of the common way of thinking. But in time, the truth burst the bubbles that were kept so firmly in place. Sometimes, we are challenged to think outside the box of *the-way-it-is!*

City-wide electric lighting was thought of as an unreasonable expectation once.

Telephones would never become popular.

They said the automobile would never replace the horse.

If man was meant to fly, God would have given him wings!

If it was good enough for Abraham Lincoln, it is good enough for me!

All are examples of the old way of thinking, the old box!

The old wine may taste good, but remember, old wine was new once. Almost every Church in Europe and America has an organ in it. In fact, many tend to think only of organ music when they think of Christian hymns. But there was a time in history when there were no organs or pianos. All religious singing was done a capella.

Every year, there was a harvest of grapes! Every year, there was new wine. And every year, there was a need for fresh wineskins. It was not a matter of out-with-the-old-and-in-with-the-new! That would be foolish. The old wine was still good. In fact, many wines do improve with age. But, do you know what happens when the wine gets too old? It turns to vinegar. It's no good as wine anymore.

A patch made from cloth that had not been shrunken though many washings and dryings was going to shrink eventually. If it is used to patch an old, already shrunken garment, it will pull at the old fabric and create a tear that is worse than before.

The issue of old and new bears two lessons. To repair an old garment, you need an old patch. The new does not work with the old. The new, likewise, as Jesus said, does not *match* the old. Because we are comfortable with those old clothes, we like to keep wearing them. And likewise, we cherish the old ways. We're used to them. They make us feel good. In fact, certain generations reminisce about the good old days as if, in some way, they were better. Few will want to go back to oil lamps and outhouses though. What they'd like to revisit is what they think of as a moral innocence, or, a simpler lifestyle. But the longer they look back the more they realize that there was the same sort of decadence back then as there is today; and, life was just as hard and complicated then as it is now. There was just as much of a lack of appreciation for what they had then as there is today, and there was the same sort of taking-for-granted then that you see today. Some might blame the gradual escalation into today's problems on the escalation of feminism and women in the work force. But that is about as logical as blaming it on the moonrocks that were brought back to earth in 1969! Or... on television! The Church has always been there with its moral foundation. It's just that people began looking for fresh wineskins, because they had new wine!

We think we that the solution to the torn garment is to just get a new one... In fact, that's part of what is implied when Paul says, "*Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.*" (Ephesians 4:22-24) But that change of clothes has more to do with removing the dirty garment of sin to put on the clean garment of faith.

The first lesson is exactly what Christ says – the new will not match the old. He says nothing about whether or not the old is good or bad, right or wrong. It just doesn't match. And to try to patch an old garment with new fabric just doesn't work. What can be done, however, is, while hanging on to the old, comfortable garment, with its holes and all, we can get a new garment and wear it now and then until it gets comfortable. Gradual change works just fine.

You see it is not a matter of either-or, but of both-and. The old *and* the new. There should be a blend! In fact, oftentimes old and new wines are mixed to make certain types of wine that are supposedly very good! No one should be so set in their ways that they can't accept new blessings. Today, we think of those who rejected Gutenberg, Columbus, Copernicus, Edison, Ford, or, the Wright brothers... as fools. An unwillingness to accept change as inevitable is a sin! Likewise, however, no one should be so sure that every new idea, style, or possibility is automatically better than the old, that the old is seen as completely irrelevant. After all, the greatest growth in Christianity today is coming where traditional orthodoxy and evangelical witness (the old-time religion) is mixed with contemporary praise in worship!

Jesus was still being confronted by the Pharisees after the Banquet at Matthew's house. They're questioning His style and method. John's disciples happened to be close at hand, and, like the disciples of John and of the Pharisees, they did not join in the feasting, rather, they fasted.... often. "*But your disciples do not fast!*" Jesus' response is that the variety of behavior relative to the expression of faith

is...*relative*! There is a time for every purpose under heaven! (Ecclesiastes 3:1) And Jesus' imagery of a bridegroom and a wedding is eschatological. God was seen as the groom. Israel was the Bride, and the wedding as the celebration of the glorious relationship between them. So with these words of Christ: "*The wedding guests cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they?*" (v. 15), again, Jesus is claiming His status as the anointed One of Israel!

Jesus does acknowledge that his disciples will one day fast, but it will be "*when the bridegroom will be taken away from them.*" The joy that should be present in a person of faith should never be suppressed by such a grave seriousness that the person loses sight of the blessing that can be shared. Forgiven people should have a smile on their faces most of the time! Yes, we can get serious when we should. We cannot dance all the time. You would run out of breath, and...sad things do happen in life. Things sometime bring us to our knees. But when the Spirit lifts us up, we should rise!

What does the presence of the Bridegroom make you want to do!