

“New Wineskin for the New Wine”

Matthew 9:14-17

11/15/09

God supplies the new wine—creates a new vision, moves in a new direction, gives new life. We supply the new wineskin—willingness to follow and be changed.

Think, for a moment, of a time in your life when you were made aware of something new, something that totally changed your way of thinking and living. Maybe it was when you were a child and first learned about gravity—“Wow, if I try to fly like Superman I really will land on the floor.”

Early astronomers got into big trouble with the church when they dared to say the earth was round and not the center of the universe.

For some it’s the realization that *they* are not the center of the universe.

On a positive, for me, I had to make a big shift when I finally realized that I will make mistakes and mess up and sin and despite all that God still loves me and wants to use me. God wanted to do something new with me—ministry—and I had to let go of my old ways of understanding all this.

Matthew 9:14-17

New wineskin for the new wine.

God does something new within us and around us, and we must not get too locked in to our old way of thinking and doing and miss it.

Jesus says to John’s disciples, *“New wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved.”*

John’s disciples ask about fasting. But Jesus wants them to see that there is something bigger going on here. Jesus helps them understand that, yes, fasting is important. He doesn’t tell them to do away with fasting forever. But right now something new is going on. And to fast would not be appropriate. It would not be fitting for the time at hand.

They knew the Law very well, but they didn’t allow for God to expand their understandings and so limited the possibilities for God to do new things in their lives.

Of course we can only live on what we know and understand. But we must always remember that that is a very limited picture.

We are limited, God is limitless.

God does something new, gives us a new vision, moves us in a new direction. And if we are continuously trying to stuff the new vision into the old box of how we have always done things, then the box will break and we will lose the vision.

Travel back 50 years to the mahogany-paneled office of Sewell Avery, then chairman of Montgomery Ward & Co. Avery was responsible for Ward's failure to open a single new store from 1941 to 1957. Instead, the big retailer piled up cash—and then sat on it. Ward's amassed \$607 million, earning them a dubious Wall Street nickname: "the bank with the department store front."

So why didn't Avery join in the nation's postwar expansion by following Americans to the suburbs? He held firmly to the belief and vision that a depression had followed every major war since the time of Napoleon. "Who am I to argue with history?"

Avery demanded. "Why build \$14-a-foot buildings when we soon can do it for \$3-a-foot?"

Ward's eventually went bankrupt. How could corporate planning go so wrong? Montgomery Ward's troubles sprang from its firm adherence to an idea from a different time and culture. There was a new time, a new vision, and Sewell Avery failed to change to accommodate it. Consequently his business was wiped out.

Someone once said, "The truth that makes us free is often the truth which we prefer not to hear."

What new thing has God called you to do?

Have you allowed God to do it, or are you stuck in your old ways of living?

Jesus says, *"Neither is new wine put into old wineskins; otherwise, the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins are destroyed; but new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved."*

In ancient times, goatskins were often used to hold wine. As the fresh grape juiced fermented, the wine would expand, and the new wineskin would stretch. But a used skin, already stretched, would break.

God brings a newness to our lives that cannot be contained within the old forms.

God supplies the new wine—the vision, transformation, direction, new life in Jesus Christ.

We must supply the new wineskin—the willingness to follow and be changed.

We must be willing to follow God's lead and allow ourselves to be made new, so that we can grow and expand into the new thing God is doing in our lives.

We must always ask ourselves these questions: Do I try and fit the new thing God is doing in my life, or in the life of the church, in the old "skin" of my former ways of understanding, doing, seeing, living? Where am I holding back and not allowing God to fully take control and do a new thing?

One of my favorite places in the Bible is in Exodus, where we read of God's power in freeing His people, the Israelites, from slavery in Egypt. They are there for over 400 years. Finally, they witness the power of God in the 10 plagues, parting the Red Sea, leading them to freedom.

Now they are on the trail to the promised land, where a great life awaits. God brings the new. But some challenge still awaits them. They are in the wilderness, and begin to doubt God's power and ability to save them. They grumble against God.

"You brought us out of slavery just so we can die out here?" they begin to say to God and Moses. "We should go back to slavery. At least we knew what to expect."

And so God makes them stay out there for 40 years, so that the generation of grumblers passes on and never really gets to experience the fullness of God's plan.

God brought out the new wine—a new life of freedom and understanding how God works. But they tried to put it into the old wineskin, and it burst.

We are called to trust God with the new—even at times when we may not see right away the final destination or all the fruit of what's to come.

Tom Bandy, former pastor and leader in understanding church vitality, says, **"God's vision always sears lips, dislocates hips, and changes names."**

Basically he is saying that God's vision always changes things—never leaves things just as they are. We know that the Lord visited Isaiah and gave Isaiah his calling and new life as God's voice to His people.

In Isaiah 6:6-7 we read, *“Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: ‘Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.’”* God’s vision sears lips. Isaiah was changed, was cleansed, made new, as he was given his new vision and mission for his life. New wineskin for the new wine.

If we turn to Genesis 32:22 we read that Jacob, on his way to find his brother Esau and be reconciled to him, receives a blessing from God. But this comes with a change—the angel with whom Jacob wrestles dislocates Jacob’s hip and changes his name from Jacob to Israel, which means “The one who strives with God.” New wineskin for the new wine.

When Simon first went to meet Jesus, Jesus said now you are called Cephas, or Peter. New wineskin for the new wine. When Jesus called out to Zacchaeus, Zacchaeus immediately repented from his greedy living as a tax collector and changed his way of life. New wineskin for the new wine. Each person was willing to follow God’s lead and be changed. They were each willing to supply the new wineskin.

When God brings the new, we must be willing to follow God’s lead and allow ourselves to be made new, so that we can grow and expand into the new thing God is doing in our lives. We cannot try to fit the new into the old—it just doesn’t work. It may fit for a moment, but it doesn’t take long before the new wine God gives to us bursts the old wineskin, and then all is lost—we’ve then made a mess of everything.

Maybe we have accepted Jesus Christ into our lives, but try and contain Him in our old ways of thinking and living. The wineskin is going to burst.

Maybe God has shown us a new direction He wants us to take in our lives, but we feel secure on the path we’re on now. So we try and head in a new direction while staying on the old road. The wineskin is going to burst.

Maybe God has called to you to serve Him in a special way, but you refuse to make the choices necessary to live into His calling. The wineskin is going to burst.

How often do we say, “I love Jesus, but want to hold on to my own independence even when it brings me no real freedom. I love Jesus, but I do not want to give up what is comfortable and convenient for me.”

Does this mean that God is always trashing everything we currently have, that we must continually throw out everything we know and do? No. Not all the old is bad. Not all the old is useless. When Jesus talks about the new wine, He didn’t say that the wine and wineskins already present are discarded. The old wineskins still can serve a vital function to hold what the fruit of the vine has already produced. The old can serve as a foundation to build the new.

Last weekend the Southern Ohio District Board met for our annual retreat. A few of us were up quite early Saturday morning, since sleep was pretty tough to come by. As we sat and drank our coffee, we started ask ourselves the question: How do we continue to be Church of the Brethren and move into a new era?

What new thing is God doing that requires a new wineskin—a new format, new structure, new approach to doing ministry?

We must allow what needs to be transformed, to be transformed. We must supply the new wineskins, or we will never be able to contain all the new wine God continues to give us each and every day.

I have two pictures of footprints in my office. The one is entitled “Footprints”, which is Jesus’ footprints on the beach as He carries me in times of trouble.

The other is “Courage”—my footprints making the path where no one has yet walked.

Yes, there are times Jesus carries us when we cannot walk. But other times Jesus calls us and empowers us to walk where perhaps no one has gone before. To lead the way into the future He has set before us.

God’s ways are much greater than our ways. God, through Jesus Christ, beckons us out toward a new world, where there are possibilities we have not yet imagined.

Are you ready? Amen.