

Life-giving Lesson: A Parable for Pentecost

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Acts 2: 1-8, 12-21

Luke 5: 36-38

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<sup>36</sup> He told them this parable: "No one tears a piece out of a new garment to patch an old one. Otherwise, they will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will not match the old. <sup>37</sup> And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. <sup>38</sup> No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins. <sup>39</sup> And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for they say, 'The old is better.'"

2 Corinthians 5:17

<sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: <sup>[a]</sup>The old has gone, the new is here!

Does anyone really like change? We are creatures of habit. We prefer the "old", the familiar, staying in our comfort zone. (The dying words of the church: We've always done it that way.) One reason we resist change is that we often are not in control of the change that is happening. The change in question might even be positive: getting married, having a child, starting a new job. More likely for some of us—I'll speak for myself: down-sizing, moving, etc.

The setting for the parable—Context:

Jesus is dining at the home of that scoundrel tax collector turned disciple: Matthew. The other guests include more tax collectors, along with other sinners and some good religious people/Pharisees and their scribes are also present. First, they complain that Jesus is partying with the wrong crowd. Then they make the following observation: (v.33) "John's disciples often fast and pray, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours go on eating and drinking."

To this Jesus responds:

"Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? <sup>35</sup> But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; in those days they will fast."

The question of fasting is addressed to Jesus, but it really has to do with the behavior of his followers, (in other words, the church). The question is not whether or not fasting is right or wrong, but about whether and when Jesus' followers are to fast. Fasting, along with prayers and almsgiving, was one of the three good works of Judaism. Under the Old Covenant, fasting had a place. What is the place of fasting in the New Covenant which Jesus brings about?

With the reference to wedding imagery and with his identification of himself with the bridegroom, Jesus reframes the question. Weddings then and now were periods of prolonged feasting NOT fasting. Jesus is inviting his hearers to supply their own answer to his identity; to recognize that his mission is unique.

Then he launches into these two brief parables, which both make the same point.

The first pictures a new patch of cloth sewn on an old garment. When washed, the new patch shrinks, causing a tear in both garment and patch.

The second pictures used wineskins filled with new wine that ferments and expands, bursting the old and brittle skins. Both wine and wineskins are ruined. A few years ago, our friend Ed Newell gave Rob and me a bottle of his home brewed blackberry wine, a sweet kind of dessert wine. We decided to save it for a special occasion, and stored it in the cabinet under the kitchen sink. Fast forward a few months and one day we heard a loud gunshot type of sound accompanied by the sound of breaking glass! We couldn't figure out what happened, until we realized that the wine continued to ferment, the pressure built up and a small explosion occurred! It was quite a mess to clean up! Needless to say, the wine and the bottle were wasted!

Given the context, Jesus is using these metaphors as a way of saying that he is ushering in a "new order"—the New Covenant will differ significantly from the old.

The Old Testament prophet Isaiah anticipated this, proclaiming:

"See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you." (Isaiah 42:9)

"See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland." (Isaiah 43:19)

The prophet is saying, in essence, "pay attention"! God is up to something new—even miraculous! For who can make streams in the desert and a way in the wilderness but God alone? Pay attention, something is happening...

God is in the business of transformation.

All of us are made in the image of God, but sin has marred that image and has damaged our relationships—not only with our Creator, but also with one another, and with creation itself. We experience the effects of the fall in our daily lives.

God loves us so much, God is not content to leave us in this situation. God offers a remedy--It is not a patch or a temporary quick fix until something better comes along. God in Christ offers a new beginning...a fresh start.

The Old Covenant was good, but it was limited. New Covenant is better, it is more inclusive.

An old garment patched with new fabric—or new wine in old wineskin—these are incompatible. The result is that ultimately all are lost/destroyed.

In Christ, God brings new possibilities to restore our "old" sinful selves. How? Through work of the Holy Spirit...this is the connection with Pentecost!

Ever since he was a little boy, [Max's] parents had been promising that they would give him a beautiful car to drive when he turned 16. He even planned to park it in the family's barn....Only first his dad would have to get rid of that old car sitting in the barn. He couldn't wait for his dad to haul it off to the dump to make way for his dream car.

But when would that day come? When would that new car arrive? And when would his dad get rid of that old junky car under the tarp? Then one evening in early summer he heard strange sounds coming from that old barn.... What was going on? And he noticed that a light was on in the barn. He walked into the warm night air, down the dirt path, and poked his head into the barn door.

When he saw the tarp, rolled up and left against the door, he excitedly thought, Was Dad finally getting rid of that junky old car? But then he suddenly looked and saw one of the most incredible sports cars in automotive history. It was a Corvette, but not just any Corvette. It was the coveted, beautiful, powerful 1963 Corvette 327 V8 with a split window, aluminum knock-off wheels, painted candy apple red.

So that was the car underneath the tarp all those years?! [Max] was stunned. It was always there, just getting ready for his father's masterful work of restoration. (Adapted from Randall Rauser, *What on Earth Do We Know about Heaven?*, (Baker Books 2013) p. 157-158

The promise of God is to make of us "new creations". According to 2 Corinthians 5:17

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come.<sup>[a]</sup> The old has gone, the new is here!"

This transformation from "old" to "new" is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is a mystery...it is hard to explain, but it is observable. While it is an inner transformation, it becomes evident in how an individual thinks...and is further evident in the individual's behavior. One makes new, different choices than one did before.

The Bible tells us that the "new creation" has first, a "new heart" (Psalm 51, Ezekiel 18:3, 36:26). Remember that in Hebrew thought, the heart is the decision-making organ, the place where one's will or volition resides. So a new heart is significant as it will have great influence over one's choices, and behavior.

Likewise, God gives us the Holy Spirit to indwell our hearts and lives. The Holy Spirit has numerous functions:

- to convict of us sin and move us to repentance (Titus 3:2)
- to assure us that we are God's beloved children (Romans 8:16)
- to empower us to follow Jesus (2 Timothy 4:16-17)
- to reproduce Christ-like character within us, aka the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23)
- to guide us into all truth (Acts 10:19, 16:7)

--to sanctify us, which is the ongoing function of keeping us connected to God and growing spiritually. (I Peter 1:2, I Thess. 5:23)

Furthermore, as new creations, we are given a New Name.

NYU professor Adam Alter has observed the power names have to shape an individual's destiny. The technical name for this phenomenon is "nominative determinism," which literally means "name-driven outcome." (It used to be called 'self-fulfilling prophecy'.)

Alter points to the following examples:

The current Lord Chief Justice of England and Wales is Justice Igor Judge. His colleague, Lord Justice Laws, is a judge in the Court of Appeals.

In the realm of athletic pursuits, Anna Smashnova is a professional Israeli tennis player. Layne Beachley is a seven-time world champion surfer. Derek Kickett was an Australian Rules soccer player. Stephen Rowbotham was an Olympic rower for Britain. Usain Bolt currently reigns as the fastest man in the world over the 100 meter and 200 meter distances.

No doubt one could name more examples....

Are all of these examples just coincidences? For instance, would Usain Bolt run just as fast if his name was Usain [Walker] Plod?

Professor Alter concludes, "Researchers have shown that our names take root deep within our mental worlds, drawing us magnetically towards the concepts they embody."

*Adam Alter, "Would Usain Bolt Run More Slowly with the Name Usain Plod?" Science Friday (4-4-13)*

Likewise when the Bible says we were once "no people" and now are God's people, when we were once God's enemies but are now God's friends...we are indeed, given new names and new identities as God's daughters and son! Christians are "Christ-ones".

Furthermore, whether or not we can carry a tune, we given a NEW SONG to sing! We are to make a joyful noise, and give God thanks for our salvation and restoration.

All of this is possible through the gift of the HS who is God's change agent.

God loves us so much God does not want us to remain as we are, in our sin and brokenness, but through the power of the HS we can experience new birth...and become new creations in Christ.

There is no formula or "how to" video on youtube, because this transformation or change is not something We DO...it is the work of God's Holy Spirit within us, and we simply co-operate -welcome - allow the Spirit to change us from the inside out!

On that first Pentecost, God fulfilled a promise, made centuries earlier through the prophet Joel:

<sup>17</sup>“In the last days, God says,  
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.  
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,  
your young men will see visions,  
your old men will dream dreams.

<sup>18</sup> Even on my servants, both men and women,  
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,  
and they will prophesy. (Acts 2:17-18)

On that occasion and since, God has chosen to pour out the Holy Spirit into the lives of people—irrespective of age, of sex, of race.

“*Everyone* who calls upon the name of the Lord—will not only be saved” but will be filled with God’s Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:21).

<sup>3</sup>Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit God says, ‘Jesus be cursed’ and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit. I Corinthians 12:3 NIV

Rather like Jesus’ parable—the New Covenant is different from the Old..

The promise is to “everyone”, the sacrifice has been provided “once for all” in the redemptive death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. (Hebrews 10:2,10)

God is doing something new...putting “new wine” of the Spirit into “new wineskins” of many believers who are transformed from the inside out.

A friend of mine was approached by a street vendor in Mexico, hocking “Rolex” watches that he wore up and down both arms. He didn’t want much “dinero”/money for them. My friend asked him: “Why so cheap?” The vendor replied in a stage whisper: “They got no insides!” They looked authentic on the outside, but they were lacking the essential ingredients on the inside!

Friends, the Holy Spirit is God’s change agent, transforming us from the inside out! The Holy Spirit is the essential ingredient in each and every Christian! What ‘new thing’ does God desire to do in you and me? And in us as a community of faith called Calvary? God is in the business of transformation...that is the message of these “Pentecost parables”.