

Pam Riemer-August 26th, 2018

Scripture reading Matthew 9:14-17

14Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?”

15And Jesus said to them, “Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come, when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.

16And no one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch tears away from the garment, and a worse tear is made.

17Neither is new wine put into old wineskins; if it is, 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.

To put this into context, it follows closely after the Sermon on the Mount, followed by several stories of miracles. He is becoming unpopular, because he heals and forgives and he has been eating with the tax-collectors. And in these verses, he is accused of not fasting. But in fact, John and the Pharisees did not know why they were fasting, they were just following an ancient ritual. They were not allowing themselves to be fully open to Jesus’ teachings. Jesus did not measure religion by external actions like fasting or other requirements of the law. For him religion was a matter of the inner spirit, as we saw in his deeper interpretations of the commandments during the Sermon on the Mount.

He refers to his crucifixion in verse 15, he being the bridegroom, implying a great intimacy in his relationship with us. Here he refers to his crucifixion. He says that when he, the bridegroom, is no longer there, then there can be mourning and fasting, but until then the disciples should celebrate and be joyful. As we also should celebrate his presence among us, as we would celebrate at a wedding.

With his first parable of the patch, he is saying that there are times when things need to be completely overhauled and something new must take its place. Jesus was that something new. He was not just a patch to fix an old garment, he was an entirely new garment.

The second parable of the wineskins reinforces this idea of trying to force something new into old containers.

It doesn’t work because the old wineskins do not have enough flexibility to contain the new wine.

Jesus’ teachings in the Sermon on the Mount were so radical and so new that it could not work within an old system of laws and rituals. Faith should be developing and dynamic. There are times when we need to know when to let go of old habits, when they no longer have meaning. But the one thing that never grows old is our love for each other.

Henri Nouwen is quoted in the series introduction: spiritual practices are “ways to create a room where Christ can invite us to feast with him at the table of abundance.” It’s time to celebrate that abundance, simply delighting in God and letting God delight in us.

SMALL GROUPS

invite some people to share stories about things they love doing together as a church: funny stories, touching stories, stories to celebrate God's presence among you. As the father in the story of the prodigal son said to the older of his sons, sometimes we just have to celebrate and rejoice (Luke 15:32).