

The message given by Rev. Dr. Tom Zoelzer on Sunday, July 12, 2009 based on Mark 2:18-22

New Wine

A man was praying to God. He said, "God!?"

God responded, "Yes?"

And the guy said, "Can I ask a question?"

"Go right ahead," God said.

"God, what is a million years to you?"

"God said, "A million years to me is only a second."

"Hmm," the man pondered. Then he asked, "God, what is a million dollars worth to you?"

God said, "A million dollars to me is as a penny."

So the man said, "God, can I have a penny?"

And God said, "Sure!...Just a second."

I like to tell stories during my sermon time. There was a time in my preaching that I was a very traditional preacher that had three local points and a closing illustration in my sermons. They were OK, but over time, I have become more of a storyteller in my message time. I have discovered that stories draw people in and hopefully teach a lesson or make a point through the story.

For example, I still remember a story I heard in a sermon almost 30 years ago now. It was several days after Easter, and I traveled to my seminary in St. Louis, Missouri to attend their Spring Convocation for clergy. The preacher that year was Dr. Fred Craddock who at the time was Professor of Preaching and New Testament at Candler School of Theology

in Atlanta, Georgia. As part of his message on the power of storytelling, he told this story:

It was the 1950s, and a salesman from Ohio was traveling through a Southern state on his way back home from a sales call. The next day was Good Friday, and the salesman was trying to get to his home to go to services with his family. It was important to him to experience the story of Jesus' passion – his betrayal, desertion, and denial, and the suffering of the cross before attending Easter services. So he was anxious to get home.

But it was lunch time. So he stopped at a roadside café for a sandwich. It was one of those diners with small tables and a counter with stools to eat. He was greeted warmly and ordered a burger and a Coke for lunch. He was sitting there on his stool at the counter eating his burger when a Black man opened the screen door and just stood right inside the door and didn't move. The white man behind the counter looked across the room and said, "What do you want!"

The Black man said, "I was hopin' to get something to eat, sir." The man behind the counter said, "Don't move."

The salesman watched as the man behind the counter went to the grill. He thought the owner was going to put on another burger, but instead, he took his spatula and went to the back of the grill and began to scoop together some pieces of leftover burgers that were all greasy and hard back there. The man pushed it together, put it on a couple of old pieces of bread, put it in an old sack, threw it at the man at the door, and said, "Now git!"

The man at the door put down some money, went out to the porch out front, sat down, and began to eat his food.

The salesman at the counter was shocked at what had happened. He couldn't believe it, but he continued to eat his food. He didn't say anything to the owner. He didn't protest the treatment of the Black man. He didn't take his food out and sit with the man on the porch. He just continued to eat his food and stared straight ahead. And off in the distance a rooster crowed.

Now that's a story! I have thought about that story and the meaning of my discipleship to Christ many times because of that story.

Stories are very important to our Christian faith. Every year we tell the story of Jesus Christ over and over again and try to apply the meaning of his life and teachings to what is going on today and in our lives. Christianity is a religion based on a story. We call it a salvation story of good news.

Flossmoor Community Church has a story. You have been in existence for over 80 years. So you have been in existence long enough to have a story. I want to hear your story. This is one of the reasons I invited you to stay after church today and come to the chapel at 11:30 for a sermon discussion. I want to hear your story about FCC! I want to know what excites you about this place and what makes it important to you and this community. I want to hear the story of this church and how that story brings good news to you and this area. FCC has a story to tell. I want to hear it!

Jesus was a master storyteller. His stories we call parables. Jesus told stories to draw people in and along the way teach people the secrets of life through the ways of God. Today we still tell his stories. We tell the story of the Prodigal Son or the Good Samaritan, and we lean in to hear them one more time.

Jesus told a story one time to criticize the religious leaders of his day, and it is probably the story that got him put to death. Jesus was in Jerusalem during the week we call Holy Week, and it was Passover time for the Hebrew people. The people were excited about what he taught and said. He was causing a stir among the crowds and uneasiness among the religious authorities when he told the parable of the vineyard:

10 A man planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a pit for the wine press, and built a watchtower; then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. ²When the season came, he sent a slave to the tenants to collect from them his share of the produce of the vineyard. ³But they seized him, and beat him, and sent him away empty-handed. ⁴And again he sent another slave to them; this one they beat over the head and insulted. ⁵Then he sent another, and that one they killed. And so it was with many others; some they beat, and others they killed. ⁶He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, "They will respect my son." ⁷But those tenants said to one another, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours." ⁸So they seized him, killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard. ⁹What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. ¹⁰Have you not read this scripture:

"The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;"
¹¹ this was the Lord doing,
and it is amazing in our eyes?"

¹²When they realized that he had told this parable against them, they wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowd. So they left him and went away.

That was the beginning of the end for Jesus with the authorities that led to the cross.

Today we have Jesus' first 3 parables in the gospel of Mark. They are so short that often people do not think of them as parables, but they

are. They are the parables of the marriage feast, the unpatched garment, and new wine into old wineskins.

The marriage feast parable deals with fasting. It was the early church's way to say that Jesus was the groom for the church, the bride, and that their movement was going to be different than the Jewish traditions. Likewise, the new patch and the new wine talks about the new thing God was doing through Jesus.

But I guess I want to speak about the new wine parable because in my ministry, I feel like there have been times that I have brought new wine, new ways of doing things for Christ, and all I have accomplished is burst wine skins and made a mess. We can read this parable and look back and see how the reality of Christ burst the wineskins of the Jewish faith, and out of the old, came something new. As Christians we are excited about the new wine God has sent us through Jesus Christ! We drink deeply from it. We celebrate it. We value it. We honor. We live it.

But then it is hard to hear that there are times that we are the old wineskins that need shaking up because what occurs to me is that Jesus is always new wine that always bursts what needs to end and ferments new life. Jesus is always new wine.

If we are going to say that Jesus is alive among us and that the Spirit of Christ is all around us through the Holy Spirit and that God is everywhere among us, then we have to accept the fact that God through Christ is always bringing new possibilities so that we can have life and have it abundantly.

Jesus' goal was to bring the kingdom of God into our world and into our reality. Our goal is not to celebrate a dead religion but to live a living faith that makes God real and vital to our reality. Jesus is always the bridegroom that is the new patch and the new wine that keeps making our understanding of God real and relevant.

What this means to us as a church is that we are in the wine business! And like any business, we are always evaluating what to hold on to, what to let go of, what to do new, and what to do different. That's the business of being a church!

The key I think is to keep making new wineskins to go with the new wine Christ is fermenting. The existing wine is still good and vital, but the key is to not try to force the new into realities that could break but let the new become a new product line along side the existing. That's being in the new wine business.

A good example would be that my home church in downstate Illinois holds a confirmation reunion dinner every Holy Week for those who have been confirmed for 50 years or more with the group celebrating their 50th year of confirmation as the guests of honor. This is something that those who are retired and living in the area look forward to each year. If it were the only thing the church was doing, it would be a very one dimensional congregation. But in addition to this dinner there are other things that other generations and other people can do to experience the meaning and power of Holy Week.

This is new wine time for Flossmoor Community Church. Whenever there is a change in pastors, it is time to take stock, but also begin thinking

about what new wine the Spirit of Christ is fermenting for the future. When churches make room for all kinds of wine products, there is new life and vitality.

I started out telling you a story by Dr. Fred Craddock. He tells this story about his Dad:

My mother took us to church and Sunday School; my father didn't go. He complained about Sunday dinner being late when she came home. Sometimes the preacher would call, and my father would say, "I know what the church wants. Church doesn't care about me. Church wants another name, another pledge, another name, another pledge. Right? Isn't that the name of it? Another name, another pledge." That's what he always said.

Sometimes we'd have a revival at church. Pastor would bring the evangelist and say to the evangelist, "There's one, sic him, get him, get him," and my father would say the same thing. Every time, my mother in the kitchen always nervous, in fear of flaring tempers, or somebody being hurt. And always my father said, "The church doesn't care about me. The church wants another name and another pledge." I guess I heard it a thousand times.

One time he didn't say it. He was in the veteran's hospital, and he was down to 73 pounds. They'd taken out his throat from cancer and said, "It's too late." They put in a metal tube, and x rays burned him to pieces. I flew in to see him. He couldn't speak, couldn't eat. I looked around the room, potted plants and cut flowers on all the windowsills, a stack of cards twenty inches deep beside his bed. And even that tray where they put

food, if you can eat, on that was a flower. And all the flowers beside the bed, every card, every blossom, were from persons or groups from the church.

He saw me read a card. He could not speak, so he took a Kleenex box and wrote on the side of it a line from Shakespeare. If he had not written this line, I would not tell you this story. He wrote, "In this harsh world, draw your breath in pain to tell my story."

I said, "What is your story, Daddy?"

And he wrote, "I was wrong."

Jesus came into the world to spread the word of God and to teach us how to have life and to have it abundantly, to see things differently and to burst through the things needing bursting and fermenting the things that need fermenting so that we can have life and have it abundantly. Are you ready for the new wine God has in store for you? Amen.