

Renovation

Alan Claassen

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Scripture: Luke 5:36-39

Jesus also told them a parable: "No one tears a piece from a new garment and sews it on an old garment; otherwise the new will be torn, and the piece from the new will not match the old. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the new wine will burst the skins and will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed. But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. And no one after drinking old wine desires new wine, but says, 'The old is good.'"

One note before I enter into this morning's reflection: In place of the word *God*, I am going to use the words *Creative Energy*. I am doing this for a couple of reasons. One is that I don't think of God as a noun. God is not a being; God is *being* itself. I don't think of God as matter, as a thing among other things, existing in one place far away, long ago, or far above. I think of God as energy that is always engaged in the creative process, always exploring, expanding, learning, falling down and getting up again. In a word, evolving. Thank Creative Energy for evolution.

If you were looking for an organizational theme for the Bible you could go a long way with the theme of beginnings. The Bible is a story of beginning – again and again and again. It is a story of evolution, of change over time. Creative Energy loves new beginnings. What are the first words of the Bible? *In the beginning*. What is the first action of the Universe? An incredible release of energy that continues the expansion of the universe today. Chaos, light, dark, earth, sky, hydrogen, helium, stars, exploding stars, carbon, iron, bacteria, cells, water, birds, harbor seals in Bolinas Bay, oak trees scattered in the Valley of the Moon, spiritual activists gathered in a sanctuary dedicated to welcoming all. Back to the Bible again.

Creative Energy saves the human race and animals with Noah and the Ark.

Creative Energy begins a new people with Abraham & Sarah.

Creative Energy sends the people into a new land led by Moses.

Creative Energy renews the people with the words of the prophets.

Creative Energy takes the form of a person in Jesus.

Creative Energy takes the form of a community in the first followers of Jesus.

And when we live our lives as people united and uniting in Christ, we are said to be a new creation; we begin again as spirit-centered people.

If we open our Bible to the Psalms we will find many examples where the mighty works of Creative Energy are remembered and praised. And often, as in Psalm 104, these mighty works of Creative Energy refer to the ongoing creation of the universe.

You, O Creative Energy did fix the earth on its foundation so that it can never be shaken; the deep overspread it like a cloak and the waters lay above like the mountains. (5,6)

Countless are the things you have made, O Creative Energy. You have made all by Your wisdom; and the earth is full of your creatures, beasts great and small. (24)

All of your creation looks expectantly to You, to give them their food at the proper time. (27)

Sometimes new beginnings happen when nothing has been going on. Sometimes new beginnings happen when we realize something is going wrong. Sometimes new beginnings happen when we feel confused and abandoned. Sometimes new beginnings happen when someone has a vision: Let's land on the moon; let's land on a comet; let's end hunger and war. Creative Energy says "This is not the time to be afraid; this is not the time to hide. This is the time for a new beginning."

Jesus is a new beginning. Jesus comes to a people who are living under the rule of a foreign nation, Rome. And their own religious leaders seemed to be abandoning them and seeking favors from the Roman authorities. And Jesus comes in with a new message.

Blessed are those who know their need of Creative Energy, for theirs is the kin-dom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, those who know their place in the delicate balance of life, for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

And throughout the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is telling these beat-down people words they never heard from their temple priests.

You are the salt of the earth.

You are the light of the world.

Ask and it shall be given to you.

Knock and the door will be opened for you.

Do to others as you would have them do to you.

You can imagine the resistance – not just from the religious authorities, but from the people themselves. People not treated with respect tend not to respect themselves. And so Jesus had to wake these people up. He had to get around their defenses, their old patterns, their old ways of thinking. And so Jesus hung out with the wrong people and he taught with parables.

Do you know why Jesus used parables to teach people? Parables are for people who are stuck. Stuck in old ways of thinking, or old patterns of acting. To get people to see things in new ways Jesus told parables, like the one we heard today:

No one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins, the wine will be wasted, and the skins ruined. Fresh skins for new wine.

Make your wine cellar big enough that it includes old wine and new wine, well cared for. Make your wine cellar inviting enough that the wine offered here will make people feel that this is a nurturing place to raise a young family, or to evolve into one's own true self, or to continue the struggle for equality and justice.

I have another story for you this morning. This is an old famous story called the "Tale of the Two Sands." I found this in a book written by the great teacher of world religions, Huston Smith. The title of the book is *Forgotten Truth, The Common Vision of the World's Religions*.

A stream, from its source in far-off mountains, passing through every kind and description of countryside at last reached the sands of the desert. Just as it had crossed every other barrier, the stream tried to cross this one, but it found that as fast as it ran into the sand, its waters disappeared. It was convinced, however, that its destiny was to cross this desert, and yet there was no way. Now a hidden voice, coming from the desert itself, whispered: "The wind crosses the desert, and so can the stream." The stream objected that it was dashing itself against the sand and only getting absorbed. The wind could fly, and this was why it could cross the desert. The wind responded: "By hurling yourself in your own accustomed way you cannot get across. You will either disappear or become a marsh. You must allow the wind to carry you over to your destination."

The water didn't understand. "How can this happen?" "By allowing yourself to be absorbed in the wind." The idea was not acceptable to the stream. After all, it had never been absorbed before. It didn't want to lose its individuality. How could it become water and stream again? The voice in the sand replied, "The wind does it all. It takes up water, it carries it over the desert, and then lets it fall again. Falling as rain, the water again becomes a river." The stream was still reluctant, "How can I know that this is true?" "It *is* true, and if you do not believe it you will become nothing but a quagmire, no longer the stream you are today." "So I cannot remain the same as I am today?" "You will either be a quagmire or born by the wind. To make the right choice you must see your essential part." And the stream began to wonder what its essential part really was.

Then the stream vaguely remembered once before being held in the arms of the wind. And as the stream remembered, its vapor lifted up off the hot desert sands into the welcoming arms of the wind, which carried it gently and easily across the desert and to the top of a distant mountain many miles away. And it began the journey of being a stream all over again.

The stream was at the edge of the desert and wanted to move, but wanted to do it as it had always done before. But the voice in the sand, the voice in the wilderness said that the stream needed to be transformed in order to move. In order to be transformed, it had to remember its essence rather than its appearance, and this re-membering allowed the wind to lift it over the dry desert.

As with all good parables there are many ways to approach the "Tale of the Two Sands." We can look at it as it applies to individuals in need of transformation, or we can look at it from the perspective of a community seeking to transform. As a church growing together in a covenant of love and trust, we are called to hold in creative tension the needs and gifts of individuals and the needs and gifts of the congregation. This is the grace that the first followers of Jesus experienced as a gift of Creative Energy.

Amen.