

"A New Way" Part 2 -- The Adventure of the New & Different"

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Matthew 9:16-17 (Mk 2:21-22; Lk 5:37-38)

Romans 6:3-4

Rev. Terry Rothermich

Once again we experience Jesus employing images from everyday life to make His point. In these two images, He seems to not merely provide a corrective, as some might say-- though it is a significant one. Nor does it appear He is just taking His "editing pen" to some of the long-established traditional ways of 1st Century Judaism.ⁱ He goes far beyond that. And in going there He ruffles a lot of feathers along the way.

He tells the people that His words and His teachings show a totally new way of living faithfully in the Kingdom. At the same time He knows that this "new way" will often be incompatible with their honored traditions.

By the time wineskins are used for years they become stretched to their capacities. In itself, this is to be expected, and totally normal. His listeners would know this. However, if you then pour *new* wine into an old wineskin, then when the new wine begins to ferment (which it will), the old wineskin will be unable to handle it. The wineskin will burst, and the wine will be spilled out. Again, something His listeners would know. Then, neither the old wineskin nor the new wine will be useful. As one scholar put it, "Putting the new into the old will usually [inevitably] result in torn garments, or ruined wineskins." According to Jesus, the traditional forms of Jewish practice, though not invaluable, are now incompatible with the new. The new carries such power that the old cannot contain it.ⁱⁱ In the Gospel of Mark, this particular teaching is followed by an episode that perfectly examples it (see Mark 2:23-26; also see Mark 3:1-6).

Let me try to put Jesus' teaching into a contemporary parable.

A man buys a new car. He proceeds to put in it the "regular, leaded" gas which he used in his old car. One day he discovers that his car won't start. He has it towed to a repair shop. The mechanic tells him words he doesn't want to hear. "Alas, kind sir' *[not your typical 20th Century verbiage, so forgive me]* your car's engine is destroyed and completely useless." The mechanic informs him he may not put "the old regular, leaded gas" in his new car. The new car cannot use the old kind of gas.

Here is another way of looking at this. In one of their recent books on organizational development, Kevin and Jackie Freiberg write this,

"...where we aim, and where we focus our attention either moves us *toward* building what we want... or *away* from it.

"This is a fundamental principle known to all professional athletes. Where we look determines the position of our head... and our body follows where our head goes."ⁱⁱⁱ

God speaks to the people through the prophet, Isaiah,

"Do not remember the former things,
or consider the things of old. I am
about to do a new thing; now it
springs forth, do you not perceive it?" (*Isa 43:28-29*)

And once more, a bit later in Isaiah, God says it again,

"...I am about to create new heavens
and a new earth; the former things
shall not be remembered or come to mind.
But be glad and rejoice forever
in what I am creating..." (*Isa. 65:17-18*)

Sometimes, as Jesus knew so well, we tend to think that forces outside ourselves hem in our dreams and visions. It is rather like me saying to myself, "My happiness...my satisfaction in serving Christ depends mostly upon people and forces outside myself." Yet it seems this is just not the case. Undoubtedly, outside forces impact our lives. However, Christ tells us we have been given the power and the ability to do great things and to create new ways for the Kingdom.

"Truly I tell you, the one who believes
in Me will also do the works
that I do and, in fact, will do
greater works than these." (*John 14:12*)

And many of these "greater works" of which Jesus speaks will be new or different ways. (*See also Lk 10:18; Mt. 5:16, 28:20; Jn 17:22.*) And in today's Scripture, Jesus says, "the new wine cannot be put in old wineskins, because the old wineskins will not contain it."

To be sure, this "newness" must have been incomprehensible to His listeners, because they had been taught...and raised...with the understanding that the "way of God" was already written and entrenched in religious culture, so any "new ways" were unnecessary; even insulting to God. (NOTE: Some Hebrew scholars go so far as to tell us that ancient Jews saw these "new ways" as sin before God.)

We all know at least one principal of physics: that which is resting, tends to stay at rest; and that which is moving, tends to remain moving. I like to think Jesus wants this "physics principal" to be a "Church principal" as well. "A church which is resting tends to stay at rest;

and a church which is 'on the move' tends to remain moving." But we do not move alone. We move with the Holy Spirit.

There is, for me, a fascinating term used only twice in the New Testament, and it would, of course, be the apostle Paul who uses it □ a new creation. Galatians 6:15 reads, "...a new creation is everything..." And in Second Corinthians 5:17 Paul writes, "...if anyone is in Christ, [he/she is] a new creation..." This means made over; becomes a new person; sees differently; does differently; has new motives, new views, new principles and new ways.

Here I need to say something, since I have most likely ruffled some feathers. Our traditions *are* the anchor that can hold us in any type of weather. We need to remember them, honor them, and use the ones that will still help us keep grounded in who we are. Yet the road so many churches travel in the 21st Century has changed, and we need to help each other look ahead.

In recent years, Memorial has been on the move, though we may sometimes forget it. Let me give some examples...

1. You decided to call your once Associate Minister to be Senior Minister; a thing rarely done by most churches. Even more amazing might be that in spite of his many proddings, you have not fired him yet.
2. You introduced screens into the Sanctuary and began using power point in worship. A clear move forward.
3. You restructured your church staff in 2010 so it would function in a "new way" to better reflect a new environment.
4. You invited the Co-op Home School into this facility and hosted them for over eight years. Again, a huge "new way" for Memorial.
5. You are introducing new songs and new worship formats; something with which many churches still remain uncomfortable.
6. In 2010 you endorsed a new way of governing yourselves and your ministries. Another tremendous move forward
7. A couple of years ago you embraced doing communion by intinction on the first Sunday of each month; something many churches do not do regularly.
8. In the Fall of 2010 you invited "Church on the Journey" to join us in a new venture, thereby welcoming another church into our facility. *Together* we are now making new friends and joining forces and creativity in many education, youth, and outreach activities. Even more, when the occasion is right, we worship together. Most churches never do something like this.

9. And we are now moving into a "gifts ministry" approach, where people who have unique and special gifts or talents in certain areas are invited to serve in those areas without needing to hold a formal position or have a formal title. This approach is something more and more churches are embracing. Plus, as we know, the Book of Acts tells us this is how the early Church functioned. The concept of "elder" and "deacon" was unknown in the first century or so of the Church.

I could go on; but my point is, you have been on the move. You have already been taking on new adventures. What is exciting are the possibilities in 2012. And I bear in mind St. Paul's words to the Corinthian church.

"The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion... God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work." (2 Cor. 9:6-8)

So now, let me share a few of my thoughts for some "new-adventure-possibilities" in 2012.

1. How about "going green"? Looking at how to recycle better and entering into our denomination's "Alverna Covenant", which is a major focus of the Disciples of Christ.
2. Or establishing a monthly evening "Prayer and Reflection Worship"
3. Or creating a "Prayer Wall" or "Prayer Station" on which you can anonymously write the names of people and things needing prayer; whether in your personal life, or family life, or Memorial's life. We would pray over these things in Sunday worship.
4. Or exploring what we might be able to do with our exterior property in the area of "zero landscaping" in order to be more environmentally aware and set an example for the neighborhood and community.
5. Or how about applying more technology surrounding our worship, with things such as "live streaming of our worship" or videotaping sermons and copying them for distribution to our homebound.
6. Or offering a quarterly community-wide event, such as an Arts & Crafts day for families, or a mini-VBS 2 or 3 Saturdays a year, or community-wide workshops on finances, or volunteerism, or comparative religions

7. Or setting up a Memorial Volunteer Team, and once a month serving at some organization such as Meals on Wheels or the Soup Kitchen.
8. Or organizing a "Community Help Fair", inviting helping organizations to set up booths with a representative and invite families in the community to come and explore, all in one place, the different types of assistance available to them.
9. Or what might a "community Movie Night" look like, for neighborhood families?
10. Or what might we be able to do with the first floor of our Education Wing in order to make use of that now-empty space for community betterment and ministry enhancement?
11. And how about the idea that we poll each of you about what *you* would like to see Memorial do either "better" or "new" some new experiences in 2012?
12. Or, and I have raised this idea with the other Disciples pastors, and even here on a couple of occasions. How about exploring the possibility of turning the Food Pantry into a "Disciples Food Pantry, involving all 5 Disciples churches in a new and much more hands-on fundamental way?

There are "new adventures" we can talk about. The fun and joy in all these possibilities...if we indeed put some of these "on the table"... will be in choosing which ones to take on, and in what order! (Who says ministry cannot be fun and joyous?)

In any of this, we should, and must, take our lead from God's own words...

"Do not remember the former things,
or consider the things of old.
I am about to do a new thing;
now it springs forth...
... I will make a way in the wilderness
and rivers in the desert." (Isa. 43:18-19)

Praise God from Whom all blessings flow...!

ⁱ A thought in *"Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary", Vol. 1, p.64.*

ⁱⁱ *"Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary", Vol. 1, p. 223. Adpt.*

ⁱⁱⁱ *"Boom -- 7 Choices for Blowing the Doors Off Business-as-Usual", p. 113. Adpt.*