

WHAT ARE WE WAITING FOR?

DECEMBER 29, 2019 SERMON
NEW YEAR, NEW YOU SERIES

Mark 2:21-22 (NIV): "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. Otherwise, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins."

So we have made it through Advent, the time we set aside in the Christian year to prepare ourselves for Christmas. The waiting is over. The presents have been unwrapped. Some of you have already de-decorated. We've eaten our fill.

On Friday night, my mom dug into her cupboard to pull out all the last Christmas treats and found two bottles of wassail, a festive mix of juices and spices for drinking during yuletide. We were all sitting around the living room, sipping wassail and watching a movie when my 13 year old niece exclaimed, "Gross! This tastes like the smell of the Christmas store!" A week ago, that would have been MAGIC. Now, it's over, my friends. Anything cranberry, orange, and

clove is so over. The season is passing.

It's so quick. A whole season of waiting, and then boom! Christmas Eve. Christmas. Back to work!

But to me, this is prime time. Let me explain. We spend a ton of our life waiting, stuck between something that happened and the next thing that happens. We spend time waiting between game-changing moments. I have a friend who was recently stuck waiting on someone else to make a decision that would determine how my friend's life might progress. How many times have we been there? And I told them something I've said a hundred times: the Bible is a book of people waiting. Noah's ark. What were they doing on that boat? Waiting. Sarai and Abram is a story of people waiting. The Exodus — they wandered around in that desert for 40 years, waiting for the next thing. The prophets — telling people what was going to happen while they were waiting for it to happen. The exile was about waiting in a foreign land until they could go back home. The time between the Testaments,

which was some serious time — the people were waiting.

Waiting is kind of our way of being. It's our every day. It's the human condition. But it's not when the big stuff happens. The big stuff happens when we're not waiting. And right now, my friends, we're not really waiting on anything as a group. I mean — New Year's Eve? Yeah. Property taxes are due.

So this is when stuff can happen. And I mean spiritual stuff. Because we've been waiting for Jesus to arrive. And He has. We've had the Christmas warmth and revival. Our hearts are softer because God is this lovable accessible baby to us again. We're just on the cusp (or just over the cusp) of finding people annoying again. We're in a good spot.

This is the moment, this non-waiting moment, when we can make positive change in our spiritual life.

Jesus has this really short, kinda strange, very mundane parable in all three of the synoptic gospels — Matthew, Mark, and Luke. It has two parts. First He says, ““No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. Otherwise, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse.

This is a very practical statement. Most fabric shrinks the first time you've wash and dry it. You probably know that from doing your laundry. So when you patch something, the people of Jesus' day would have known, you don't do it with something straight off the loom. Because the one cloth will shrink, and the old garment will be worse off than it was. The tear will get worse.

He continues with something an example that will be less familiar to us but would have been quite familiar to its original hearers: And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the

wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins.

So what is wine? It is basically grape slurry that has been fermented. They didn't have glass bottling facilities back then. You put your wine in large pottery casks or, more likely, in goat skin bags. Yum. And when things ferment, they put off gasses. If you want to experience this with less alcohol, buy some kimchi (Korean fermented cabbage) and keep it in your refrigerator. You will learn about the gasses of fermentation as it takes over your house like a spicy cabbage pet. So new wine ferments, it puts off gasses. And a new goatskin bag will be soft and it will stretch to accommodate the fermentation activity. But an old bag that has already expanded will not have the room to expand further. If you put new wine into an old wineskin, both the wineskin and the wine will be ruined. So you can put old, already fermented wine into an old wineskin, but new wine only goes into new wineskins. Does that make sense?

When I was 19, I was sitting in a worship service in Kirksville, Missouri. It was the Sunday between Christmas and New Year. I had celebrated with my family for the holiday, and I was back at school. There was really nothing going on. School would start in a week or two. I went to church. We said the Wesley Covenant Renewal Prayer. It was probably my first time saying it. *It gutted me.* I was in prime time to say it. I wasn't waiting for anything. I was just present. And this prayer asked me commit myself to God in a way I never had before. And I made the commitment. I felt it. And then I heard a voice, just for me, telling me I was supposed to become a pastor, and I knew that my life had just changed. The Jesus in me had just expanded. The seeds that had been planted in my childhood sprouted to life. The fruit that had grown in me started to ferment. All that Communion grape juice I'd taken in my life was turning to wine.

And within about a year I lost my faith, turned my back on the church, and hightailed it as far from the church as I could get. Because. I tried to keep my

old life with the new, expanded Jesus. I hadn't made room for that growth. I had kept my old wineskin, and it couldn't take the expansion caused by the fermentation. I spent my time pursuing what the denomination needed out of me, and I didn't change. I should have spent my time figuring out what God needed of me first, then my wineskin would have been new, and I would have had room then to do what the denomination needed of me.

And while that is a dramatic example, I think it happens often in our spiritual lives. We get that warm, close to Jesus, sense of purpose feeling. The Jesus in us expands. But if we keep doing what we've been doing, if we don't exchange our wineskins for newer ones, we can end this possible time of expansion with an explosion instead. And the wineskin will be ruined, and the wine will pour out.

The good news here is that we serve a living God. Jesus can expand within us. God can cause fermentation within us. We can become more Jesus, less human nature. That's a doable thing. That's a God thing, and it's something easy to think about at this time of the year. Jesus is growing. He can grow within us.

We have to be able to expand with Him if we want to change. We can't sew unwashed fabric on torn up jeans and expect that to work, right? We can't put new wine in our same old bag. We sometimes say the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting to get a different result. It's the same kind of idea. If we keep doing what we're doing in our spiritual life, we're going to keep getting what we're getting. We have to try something new, to renew our spiritual life, to make room for something else to happen.

This time of year, when we're not in a season of waiting, when the thing we've been waiting for has happened and our hearts are softer and warmer, it's prime time to try something new in our spiritual life and make room for that expansion Jesus is trying to create in our lives. We have to make room

for the seeds to sprout and the fruit to ferment. I want us to think carefully about what our faith lives need, and it's going to be different for everyone. We're going to have to do a little work to find the next piece for us, and I'd be glad to have one on one conversations about where you are and where you wanna be. And here are some things you could consider adding to your spiritual life to renew your wineskin.

Rest. Are you tired all the time? Too tired to add something? Maybe we need to add more intentional rest to make more room for God to grow in us. God tells us to take a sabbath for a reason. Take a sabbath. Take half a sabbath. Have a day or half a day with no work at all. Take a phone sabbath. Plan it. Stick to it. Rest. Make room.

Connection. Do you feel kind isolated in your spiritual life? Are you doing it all on your own? Methodism began with people practicing their personal faith in connection with each other. These prayer cards are a chance to pull into connection with people. But maybe you'd like more connection, a faith partner. Maybe it's time to add an — are you ready for this word? Accountability-buddy. Someone you meet with once a quarter or once a month to talk just about where you are spiritually and where you want to be. We can find you someone to do that with. Or maybe it's going to Sunday School. Having people from church over for dinner and talking about real stuff. We are not meant to do this life of faith alone.

Scripture. Are you connecting with God's Word? This year, we're going to have suggested scripture readings in the weekly bulletin that are a little less familiar to most people. You can follow along and get more of God's Word in your life this year.

And you can add to this list — fasting, contemplative prayer, confession, giving, volunteering. We'll be talking more in-depth about spiritual practices over the next few weeks. Not because we're not enough as we are, but because we need to make more room for Jesus to grow. And

Jesus will grow within us. That's what Jesus does.
The Kingdom of God expands. Within us. And this
is prime season to let that happen.

What are we waiting for? Nothing. Let's seize this
moment. May 2020 be a year of wineskin renewal
for all of us. Amen.