

“Old World – New Wine”

Mark 14:35-36; John 19:-28-30; Mark 14:22-25



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(Temporary Pulpit Supply)

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until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”*
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The bulletin today titles this moment in worship a ‘*Meditation.*’ This attempts to signal that it’s going to be shorter than a normal sermon! It also suggests an approach that is more personally reflective.

Both will be true this morning. Briefly then, let me reflect with you around the theme Old World – New Wine.

Same Old World

At the start of each New Year we hope things will be different. Yet you and I have gone through this annual ritual enough times to know it rarely works out that way.

Last year ended with the execution of a tyrant, but little seems yet to have changed over there. The New Year began with the funeral and burial of a beloved President. We’d like to believe the decency of this good man will rub off on private citizens and politicians alike. We’ll see.

Speaking of politicians, the week closed with the familiar rhetoric of Congressional leaders promising a new era of bi-partisanship on the Hill. Don’t hold your breath! We’ve been down this road before.

Meanwhile many churches all across this land are struggling and suffering. The responsible ones are wrestling with their identity in this new century and their mission in their own communities.

None of these issues should surprise us. In fact, sad to say, we’ve seen it all before. This Old World keeps behaving in troubled and familiar ways. Twenty centuries ago it rose up in rebellion against the clearest advances of God’s love in Jesus Christ.

Everything came to a head in the tensions of that Upper Room. Jesus broke bread and said it was his dying body. He poured wine and said it was his shed blood. This Old World was about to make clear it would tolerate Jesus and his goodness no longer.

The disciples ate and drank in gloomy silence. Only one shaft of light penetrated the darkness. As they munched and swallowed hard, Jesus promised, *“I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”*

Promise of New Wine

New Wine in God’s kingdom! That’s the promise we all cling to in our wrenching times of grief. We claim Christ’s precious promise *“I go to prepare a place for you”* (John 14:2).

Oddly enough, even this promise seems to swim against the cultural tide these days. In the larger market of human ideas, eternal life has been relegated to ancient creeds, funeral liturgies and Easter sermons.

Believing in heaven seems self-centered to some, escapist to others, irrelevant to many. Consequently lots of people are ambivalent. They hope inwardly for *“the life everlasting,”* but outwardly make no claim for it.

That wasn’t Jesus’ style. He once prayed, *“I am no longer in the world, I am coming to you – Holy Father”* (John 17:11). Paul announced with no embarrassment. *“My desire is to depart and be with Christ”* (Philippians 1:23).

When grief sinks its teeth into our broken hearts, most of us steady ourselves upon what we have always believed. Like the thief on the cross we listen for our Lord’s promise directed to our loved ones, and to us *“Today you will be with me in paradise”* (Luke 23:43).

In his latter years my Grandfather maintained his strong faith within his Parkinson’s racked body. “Paul,” he once told me, “I’ve been thinking about heaven. You know, *Paradise* means ‘a king’s garden.’ Perhaps we will all gather first in the ‘garden’ and then – on new and strengthened legs! – we will walk together into our Father’s house.”

Jesus promised paradise and the Lord's Supper in its own way confirms it. The Communion wine we drink may be for us a foretaste of heaven. The Old World's trouble may be at our door, but the New Wine of God's Kingdom awaits us.

Now the Shocker

Right at this point, however, things get disturbing. Suddenly the Old World and the New Wine collide! Here is what I mean. Listen again to Jesus. *"I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."*

What shocks me is this. Jesus *did* drink again of the fruit of the vine and did so before that killing day was over.

Drift back in your mind to the executioner's hill outside Jerusalem. It was mid-afternoon and Jesus was close to death. He'd been hanging on the cross for hours. *"I thirst!"* he coughed out hoarsely. We're told *"they put a sponge full of wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth."*

Watch the scene closely. The sponge soaked in sour wine is pressed against the parched lips of our Lord. The tongue accepts. The throat swallows. The stomach receives the fruit of the vine!

I am comforted by Jesus' promise of God's Kingdom where New Wine flows freely. But when Jesus takes his first sip of that kingdom's wine while hanging on a cross – that shocks me!

God's Kingdom – future and glorious
All well and good!

God's Kingdom – present and painful
There's the shocker!

And the shock is personal. The cross of Christ keeps involving you and me. He who died on the cross calls on us not only to worship Him but also to shoulder *our own* cross. We are expected to voluntarily offer our lives to Christ as he graciously offered His life for us.

God's Kingdom becomes ours under the burden of the cross Jesus told us to carry. Your cross is not your hardships. Your cross is the ministry and service you willingly shoulder in obedience to Christ. It won't do to seek the future glory of God's kingdom and retreat from today's challenge beneath the daily burden of your cross.

Before there will ever be a crown there will always be a cross. That's true for us because it was first of all true for Jesus, "*who for the sake of the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, disregarding its shame*" (Hebrews 12:2).

"*We suffer with him,*" Paul explained, "*so that we may also be glorified with him*" (Romans 8:17). Jesus sipped the first New Wine of the Kingdom hanging on the Old World's cross. Whatever gave us the idea we'd have an easier time of it?

A Costly Faith

It's costly to raise to your lips the New Wine of God's Kingdom.

I had taken my place in the checkout line of a Christian bookstore. Just ahead of me was a woman preparing to buy a new Bible. She laid it on the counter. "Forty-seven fifty," said the clerk matter-of-factly.

"Forty-seven fifty!" echoed the woman in stunned amazement.

Irritated, she began fishing through her purse muttering all the while, "It's only a book!" Finally, tossing the money on the counter, she whirled around and announced with a shrug, "It even costs something to be religious these days!"

A prophetic utterance if ever I've heard one! It's costly to be a dedicated Christian today. It's costly to be a faithful church member today. O certainly in this church and around this Table you may seek and receive the sweet wine of Holy Communion.

But prepare yourself as well for tougher times my sisters and brothers in Christ. The tang of the wine is destined to be heartier.

For like Jesus you, too, may taste a fresh bite in the New Wine of God's Kingdom as you hoist the rugged weight of the cross Christ has given you to shoulder.

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