

July 30, 2017
17th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Matt. 13:31-33. 44-52

SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW

Some of these mini-parables are familiar. The tiny mustard seed that supposedly grows into a huge tree is pretty well-known for sure. Maybe the pinch of yeast that transforms a huge amount of flour and the quest to find hidden treasure at all cost are analogies that show up in various literary contexts. But have you ever heard anyone talk about the final mini-parable that Jesus uses to wrap up this passage? Let me know if you have, because I sure don't remember hearing anything about it before.

In fact, when I was reading through lectionary selections for this week and I got to the end of the Gospel lesson, I was like "Wait. What?" It was as if I'd never heard it before period. But of course I have. This is the fourth time I've preached on this passage. But it was as if it was totally new to me. *And he said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."* What is he even talking about?

Who remembers going to their grandparents' house as a child and playing in the attic? My grandmother wasn't a hoarder, but she did value old possessions from her own childhood and my father's childhood. The attic in her house was really an easy to access side room on the second floor under the slope of the roof. Every summer when we visited her we loved to go in that room and check everything out. It was a big clutter of old stuff. My favorite thing was a stuffed monkey named Jocko that had been my father's favorite toy as a child. I remember once my big sister who was about 15 at the time found my grandmother's wedding dress from 1919 and tried it on. My grandmother was actually quite pleased that it

fit my beautiful big sister. There were some valuable antiques in there, but most of it was just stuff. Every year we would pull out old favorites like Jocko, and every year there would be some new old treasure that we didn't remember seeing before.

Jesus says that to be one of his disciples is to be like we were as children exploring the treasures in an attic, pulling out the old things and the new —to us— things.

I saw one of those “what brings people to church” surveys recently. People were asked what do you look for in a good sermon. The predominate response was something like “I like a sermon that helps me see things in a new way.” They said they liked sermons that helped them take some old, familiar Christian concept and see that concept in a whole new way.

Maybe you've experienced that joy yourself. You're listening to a sermon about the prodigal son, thinking “I've heard it and heard it,” but then you hear something new. Some new insight and you say “Whoa, I've never thought about that before. That's amazing.” Anytime you hear something new in a text that's very old and familiar to you, I think it is the work of the Holy Spirit who just loves to stir up fresh new truth in us to enliven the Spirit within us which otherwise might grow stale. Something new and joyful comes out of the old.

At the same time, there is joy in the old. You know every year there are some new contemporary music style Christmas songs. Some of them are good and stick, like Mary Did You Know? which was new in 2014 and has become a favorite of many. But, imagine Christmastime without the old, familiar carols that you know by heart. Think about how you feel when we gather here in a darkened sanctuary on Christmas Eve, light candles and sing silent night. It makes you feel all Christmassy doesn't it?

The old and the new can both be treasures. That is what Jesus is talking about here.

But sometimes, people—especially church people I think—are reluctant to find treasure hidden within the new. People tend to be wary or suspicious of anything that might disrupt their comfort level. C.K.Chesterton, a beloved 20th century theologian, said that people who adamantly hold onto just what is old—who resist change in any form, have the idea that if you leave things alone you leave things as they are. You don't. If you leave a thing alone you leave it vulnerable to a torrent of changes. If you leave a white post alone it will soon be a black post. If you particularly want it to be white you must be always painting it again. . . . If what you want is the old white post, what you have to have is a new white post.

—G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1959), 115.

Sure, change can be scary or uncomfortable. Definitely change is not always a good thing. But there seems to be something in our DNA that is overly adverse to change. It makes sense. Early humans who figured out that if you have security and a good source of food and water, you're more likely to survive than the guy who decides to buck the system and go out on his own. But we didn't get to where we are today by staying hunkered down in a cave refusing to try new ideas.

Fellowship is in the beginning stages of what is going to be a pretty big change by next year. I know I find myself fearful about it from time to time. Some folks have told me they don't like it one bit. I'm sure the ones who are woohoo we're going to get a new pastor aren't telling me about it. The truth is, the track record for pastor transitions in this church has more often than not been painful. So it is understandable that there is some anxiety associated with this period in the life of this church.

Everyone here is *has been trained for the kingdom of heaven and so everyone here is like the master of a household bringing out the treasures both*

old and new. These words of Jesus, the last in his series of mini parables, are comforting in times of change. True treasure might be old, might be new. Hang in there, you might just be pleasantly surprised.