

NEW AND OLD

Matthew 13:51-2

While I was preparing for this sermon, I was reminded of years ago when Johnny Carson decided to step down from “The Tonight Show.” There was a lot of buildup to the final show. He shared at the beginning of that show that he was tempted after the hype to just show a rebroadcast. Likewise, I was tempted to just show an old sermon on the screen, but then I read the sentence in the Gospel lesson, “Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.”

“New and old.” That is what we face each day. Do I find a place by my knowledge of the roads or by GPS? Do I use a food processor or a knife and cutting board? Do I buy a reliable gasoline driven car or a new electric one? There is a balance between respecting heritage and embracing innovation. You can hear some say, “I think old items and old products are actually of higher quality than the newer ones because, in the past, everything was done as it was necessary. In the new era, people often try to deceive their customers and do not follow the rules. Therefore, new things are actually much weaker, while old things are more durable.” But others say, “It depends on the context, but generally new things often offer improved functionality and technology compared to old things. While old things may have higher perceived quality, unique character, and sentimental value due to history and craftsmanship.” The California University System stated recently, “After conducting extensive research and evaluating various AI tools and vendors, it was determined that OpenAI is uniquely positioned to meet our needs.” Yet surveys show that majorities of its students and faculty said they were skeptical of the benefits of AI for education, and they worry about AI's impacts on job security, creativity and the environment. So, should we go with the old, reliable or try the new?

We are a congregation in fellowship with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. Often by our nature we like the tried and true. The old German saying is often true for us “Wir bleiben bei Alten.” (We remain with the old). Our building lends itself well for traditional worship, rich with symbols used by Christians for centuries and using worship forms and hymns that are centuries old. Even when our forbearers had to change, like going from German, Norwegian, or Swedish into English, we didn’t make new translations. We borrowed the language already well established by the Anglican Church, because who has a better feel for the English language than the English? Though our organ uses a computer to help it run, it is still the old technology of making air blow through pipes. And of course, we feel most comfortable, like college students in a lecture hall, sitting in the same pew each Sunday.

Yet Jesus states, “Every teacher of the law who is a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like the owner who brings out both new and old treasures.” The “teacher of the law,” is someone who instructs people about God’s Word. The “disciple of the kingdom of heaven” is a Christian. So, the teaching of the Christian faith involves both old and new. What would He mean by that?

Matthew 13 is the third of Jesus' five discourses in Matthew's Gospel. The first discourse is the famous "Sermon on the Mount" in chapters 5-7. Matthew sets Jesus' teachings into five sections reflecting on how God's law in the Old Testament is contained in the first five books—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—what in Hebrew is often called the "Torah," which often translated as "law," but is better translated as "teaching," because it contains both law and Gospel. In this section Jesus delivers a series of parables all about what Matthew calls the "Kingdom of heaven," or what Mark and Luke call the "Kingdom of God." All rolled up the "Kingdom of heaven" is the rule of our King, Jesus, in our lives. Each parable progresses us on a journey showing how that Kingdom works.



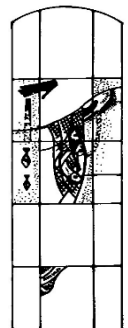
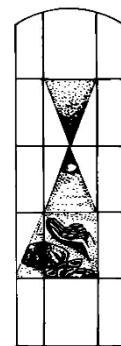
Jesus begins by telling us the story of the sower and the seed (picture left). Some seed falls on the path and is eaten up by the birds. Some fall on the rocks and sprouts, but the plants dry out. Some fall among the weeds, which choke them out. Some land on good soil and produce. The point Jesus is making is that different people will react differently to God's Word. Not all will come to and stay in the Kingdom of heaven.

Next Jesus tells the story of the wheat and weeds (picture right). A farmer sowed good wheat in a field, but an enemy sowed weeds. When both come up the man's servants ask if they should pull out the weeds. The farmer tells them not to because they might pull out good wheat. He tells them to wait until the harvest to separate them. Jesus is sharing that God allows evil to go on so that people can become a part of God's Kingdom. In the final judgment the evil will be destroyed while those in the Kingdom will be gathered to God.



In the next stories Jesus uses the illustration of a small mustard seed (picture left) and leaven (yeast) to show how God's Kingdom can grow slowly from little to big. We don't often expect such small beginnings from God.

The next parables of the treasure in the field and the merchant buying a pearl of great price (picture right) show how valuable and worth embracing is God's kingdom.



Then we are told of the net (picture left) which illustrates the final judgment when God will separate those who belong to His Kingdom, from those who do not.

That gets us to the picture of the man who takes out of his house both new and old treasures. Jesus tells His disciples this after He asks them if they understood His stories. In some ways they do, but in other ways they don't. Jesus tells them these things are mysteries which have been hidden from long ago. Why are they hidden? Because they are complex? Because they take more education and learning? No, what hides them and all of God's Word from us is sin, the sin that insists we know better. But it is also the sin that Jesus took to the cross with Him. He took both our old stubbornness and our new answers to things that leave God out of the equation and died with them. So, we can now embrace the Kingdom of heaven which is both the old message of God's love for us and the new that Jesus brings into our lives.

What keeps us going is placing our trust in God, not what we see. Paul says in Colossians, "For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory." Until He comes again, we face both the new challenges and the old inertia which would pull us away from Him. But He will not let go of us.

So, we hold to the old message of the God who is eternal and unchanging, but always looking at it through the renewing lens of Christ Jesus. Pastor Richard Osslund, who served here from 1986-2007, says that Lutheranism is not so much a church, but a movement to push the Gospel of Christ Jesus. That is what must dominate not only our life as a congregation, but even more as Christians who bear the name of Christ. Jesus gives us both people who help us hold on to good things that keep us anchored in that Gospel, but also innovative people who give us new ways to express that to the world.

I would like to share with you what was written years ago by member David Heddendorf, which expresses how we can do that. We read this responsively:

P: The Psalms speak of God's steadfast love that endures forever—love that holds us through the years, filling our memories of a joyful past and giving us hope for the future. Held fast by God's steadfast love in Jesus Christ, we hold fast to Him in turn, and to each other, as we try to bring the power of this connection to Iowa State, our local communities, and the world.

P: Holding fast means holding tight, whatever happens, just as God's steadfast love holds us tight—

C:— like a warm, firm handshake from a greeter on Sunday morning

P:— like the glue that binds a new pew hymnal, just as we're bound together in Christ

C:— like the nails a volunteer drives, helping raise a house for Habitat for Humanity

P: —like the hands that lift a heavy, brimming pot at a church dinner.

C: —like a mom's hand holding her daughter's, as she leads her to her first Sunday school class

P: –like the Sunday school teacher’s hand enfolding the timid child’s in a welcoming grasp

C: –like the concentration of listening hard to an international student’s halting English

P: –like the sure voice of a choir member hitting the right pitch in a difficult arrangement

C: like the hands of those carrying bags of donated clothes to help the poor.

P: –like faithful prayers for our missionaries, or a member who is ill, or a confirmation Prayer Pal

C: –like the quiet faithfulness of the harried businessman who never misses his men’s Bible study

P: –like the hands at each end of a folding table–raise, tilt, lower–preparing for a potluck supper

C: –like a teenager passing the video-game remote to the next Guitar Hero at a youth group event

P: –like the hands holding those of a member confined at home, or in a nursing home

C: –like the hold we keep on our traditions, strengthening us to reach out to others in new ways

ALL: In all these ways, and many more, we hold fast to God’s steadfast love, connecting faith and life in a time-tested bond that anchors us and guides us into the future.