

Natalie W. Bell  
 March 8, 2026  
 Third Sunday Lent

*New Wineskins*  
*Matthew 9:14-17*

*<sup>14</sup> Then the disciples of John came to Jesus, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast often,<sup>[c]</sup> but your disciples do not fast?” <sup>15</sup> And Jesus said to them, “The wedding attendants cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast. <sup>16</sup> No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak, for the patch pulls away from the cloak, and a worse tear is made. <sup>17</sup> Neither is new wine put into old wineskins; otherwise, the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins are ruined, but **new wine is put into fresh wineskins**, and so both are preserved.”*

*Let’s think about where we are*

in our walk through the Gospel of MATTHEW for Lent.  
 Matthew begins with famous birth stories,  
 from *Joseph’s point of view*, and focusing on his lineage.

*LUKE tells us about Mary’s life,*  
*MATTHEW tells us about Joseph and his family.*

It’s in Matthew that we hear about  
 the visit of the wise men to the toddler Jesus,  
 and Herod’s slaughter of baby boys,  
 causing the holy family to flee to Egypt.

*We see Jesus baptized* by John in this Gospel,  
 then immediately ushered into the wilderness by the Spirit  
 to be *tempted*, as we discussed last week.

*Then Jesus begins his three-year public MINISTRY.*

He starts to preach—one of his most famous sermons—  
 the *Sermon on the Mount in Matthew Chapters 5-7*.  
 He starts with those world-upside-down Beatitudes,  
 describing life in the kingdom of God.

Not a to-do list, but rather a *here’s what new life with me looks like*.

***He gives so many important LESSONS of faith in that sermon--***

Like the call to be salt, and light in the world,  
The call to love our enemies...to put our treasure where our heart is,  
And so much more.

***None of it is easy, but all of it is LIFE-CHANGING***

if we take it to heart.

His whole way of speaking and teaching and preaching is NEW.

He is not a typical Rabbi.

And his disciples are not typical students.

***He's doing some WILD STUFF--***

Like calling misfits as followers,  
including Matthew a tax collector!

He's healing people, even on the Sabbath,  
and has the audacity to say that their sins are forgiven—  
something only God can do!

He's eating with tax collectors and sinners,  
an act that would have immediately defiled any good Jewish teacher.

And here in this passage we see that his disciples,  
unlike those of John the Baptist, or other Jewish leaders, do not regularly fast.

***Why?***

Well, Jesus gives a cryptic message about the bridegroom being with them,  
***And new wine should be put into new wineskins!***

***WHAT'S going on? What is he SAYING?***

WHO IS this Jesus of Nazareth, son of Mary and Joseph?

And what does his message mean?

It's new and revolutionary—***EVERYTHING he does and everything he says!***

***So does this mean that he's LEAVING Judaism behind?***

No, Jesus was a Jew.

And Jesus says in Matthew 5:17:

that he has NOT come to abolish the law and prophets,  
but to ***FULFILL them!***

***But what does that MEAN?***

Well, Jesus seems to be bringing faith to a deeper level.

So many faithful Jewish people and leaders

were so concerned about the laws of Moses,  
and following the LETTER of the law.

***Jesus comes and says there is a DEEPER purpose.***  
There is a deeper meaning behind God's laws.  
And it's found inside of us—***within the human heart.***

***Faith is not about the letter of the law,***  
It's about the ***HEART.***  
It's about our motives, intentions, and desires.

***No wonder some people wanted to kill Jesus, after listening to him!***  
He is asking something different and deeper  
than for us to just follow rules.  
***He is asking us, inviting us, to be CHANGED.***  
Changed by faith in Him.  
Transformed by him.

***When asked why his disciples do not fast,***  
Jesus tells 2 parables, the first about sewing a new patch on an old garment,  
And the second about ***pouring NEW WINE into new wineskins,***  
not old ones---because they would burst!

***What is this NEW WINE?***  
It starts with Jesus himself.  
He is something new—  
he is the Son of God, in the flesh—***ushering in the KINGDOM OF GOD!***  
But this kingdom is really just the ***fulfillment of the prophecies and law.***  
It's what everyone has been WAITING for!  
***It's the new thing that God—the one and only God—is doing!***

***So we cannot, and should not ever say that Christianity wipes out Judaism.***  
Far, far from it.  
Judaism is our heritage, our ancestry.  
Our history.  
Our people.  
***WE ARE those people.***  
We would do well to know that history, even more.

We live and have faith alongside our Jewish brothers and sisters,  
AS brothers and sisters—the people of God.

***But Jesus' life and message, was also bringing in the new thing of God.  
It reminds me of what we read in Isaiah 43:18-19,***

Where God says:

<sup>18</sup> *Do not remember the former things  
or consider the things of old.*

<sup>19</sup> ***I am about to do a NEW thing;***  
*now it springs forth; do you not perceive it?*

*I will make a way in the wilderness  
and streams in the desert.*

So as we think about new wineskins,

***Let's think about the PROPERTIES of new wine.***

New wine is still in the process of expanding and fermenting.

It needs new, flexible wineskins.

If you put it into old ones, it can burst.

***But this means something that every human being the on the planet FEARS:  
CHANGE.***

***We HATE change, don't we?***

Who here orders the same thing at your favorite restaurant?

Who drives the same roads home?

Who loves those things that remain unchanged in church services?

***And yet, the only CONSTANT in life, is CHANGE.***

***Life is ALWAYS changing.***

The world is always changing.

And being a follower of Jesus Christ--- ***means we have to change!***

St. John Henry Newman once had this wise saying:

***"To LIVE is to change, and to LIVE WELL is to change often"***

***I wonder, how do YOU cope with change?***

What's your response when you are asked to change?

Does it make you feel angry? Frustrated? Scared? Vulnerable?

All of the above?

If so, you are not alone!

***Jesus came to bring a new way of life,  
not a 'patch' on the old one.***

And his new way of life requires new vessels,  
Which would be our transformed hearts and lives,  
So that we can truly hold what he brings us.

***Jesus is NOT just saying,  
My way of life is better.***

He's saying, ***GOD is doing something new.***  
Just like new wine---following Jesus means growing, changing, developing.

***Tradition is essential and a firm FOUNDATION for us,  
but it loses its meaning if we CLING TOO TIGHTLY to it.***  
As followers of Jesus, we need ***OPEN hands and hearts,***  
willing to embrace the new thing God brings us!

***Remember when we studied The SAILBOAT Church?***

And how we are called to be like sailboats,  
receiving the wind of the Holy Spirit in our lives,  
instead of trying to do everything ourselves, ***the same old way, like rowboats?***

***That's what Jesus is saying.***

He's saying---I have a new way of life for you.  
And it brings ***power, and hope, grace, and joy!***

***But, we have to ask ourselves, where are WE holding on to the old?***  
or trying to fit Jesus into an old way of life?

***Where are WE stuck on old habits?***

Or old expectations?

Or old ways of doing church?

***Lent is the perfect time to OPEN OURSELVES to the new thing God is doing***  
in our lives and the world around us.

How can WE be open to THAT NEW THING?

How can WE AS A CHURCH be open to the new thing that God is doing in our  
congregation?

***We have this wonderful MERGER of two great congregations—***

With great gifts, and now more financial resources

For mission and improving our space,  
for us and all of the groups and ministries that use this space!

***The question is: are we OPEN?***

***Are we open to expanding current and embracing new MISSIONS?***

The Elders and Deacons want to really focus on  
***food insecurity, families, and fellowship.***

***How can we help those struggling with HUNGER, even more?***

How can we incorporate the ***NURSERY school families*** even more  
into the life of the church?

***How can we improve our FELLOWSHIP***—within the church,  
and the wider community?

We had this great community picnic, we have some wonderful community events,  
we want to do that even more, and better!

***We serve around 100 FOOD PANTRY families*** each month

with food, and occasional hygiene supplies, and gift cards and holiday foods.

***How might we expand that mission?***

***We have 60 kids in the NURSERY SCHOOL,***

and they even collect for our food pantry.

But how can we bring them into the life of FPC even more?

Could they be in our talent show May 1<sup>st</sup>?

Could we have something special for them at the Craft fair May 2<sup>nd</sup>?

Or at our Fall Festival we hope to have, in October?

***And FELLOWSHIP***---this intersects with our desire  
to make our building more welcoming and accessible.

We are starting plans for an elevator, so that everyone can attend everything.

We've seen the type of elevator we want in another church,  
we have an architect to help us plan...

This is going to happen, praise God!

***And these BUILDING IMPROVEMENTS are all designed***

to enhance fellowship and community,

for our congregation and all of our building users and groups.

**Think** fresh paint and updating.  
A resurfaced parking lot.  
Fixing the roof and gutters.  
And so much more.  
Each commission is putting together a wish list,  
and soon we will start **making a plan for implementing** them each year.  
**God IS doing a new thing here at FPC!**

**What new thing is God doing in YOUR OWN HEART?**  
And how can you embrace it?

**Jesus BRING US NEW WINE—**  
new hope and inspiration and energy  
But, we need new wineskins to receive it.  
We need to have **open hands and hearts and minds.**  
Can we do that?

**Friends, hear the GOOD NEWS of the Gospel this Lenten season:**  
**God is doing a new thing.**  
Jesus is bringing us something new,  
If we open our hearts and lives and church, to receive it.  
May God give us the power of the Holy Spirit, to do just that.  
And all God's people can say together, Amen.