

New Wineskins

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[0 : 0 0] It is me. Hello, Table Church. Apologies. Oh my goodness. Hey, everybody. You talked back. We love it. Apologies for the extra percussion. It was on me. Just needed a little mic stand situation.

If we haven't met yet, my name is Meg Clark. I am obviously a member of the preaching team. I am taking my mask off. I attend the LGBTQ small group, and I am the director of prayer here at the table.

And I am very excited to be preaching to you today, continuing our series for Mark. We are in Mark 2, starting with chapter, starting with verse 18.

We got a little jitters up here, but it's all good. So if you want to flip there, turn on your phone. However you have the Bible, we'll also have it up on the screen when we get there. Let's just take a moment to pray, because I'm a little jittery.

God, we thank you for this opportunity. We thank you for this place. We thank you that we can build our lives on your firm foundation, on your goodness, on your love.

[1 : 2 1] Amen. Okay, great. We're feeling good here. Okay, great. Well, as you are flipping to your Bible, maybe you've already done so, I'm going to kick us off with a little personal tangent.

A couple weeks ago, we had the opportunity in my family to celebrate a very exciting event. My older sister got married. Very exciting.

She is the oldest of the three Clark kids, so the wedding was a bit of a to-do. If you have just looked at the heading in your Bible and said, Meg, this is not a wedding feast at Cana sermon.

What are we talking about the wedding? I promise there is a reason. So weddings are, you know, traditionally thought of as pretty celebratory events. If you have interacted with me much, my sister and I are very similar in that we are type A.

We like to have a checklist. We like to check off the checklist. I think that we had the songs picked for the reception two weeks after she got engaged, so a full year and a half before the wedding.

[2 : 2 6] We left, like, two slots for, like, new hits that come out in the meantime. So the preparation for the wedding was not the most celebratory we've ever felt.

In fact, before the wedding, two days before the wedding, my sister said, we just need to make it to 7 p.m. on the wedding day. And I sort of looked at her and said, do you know that we're starting getting ready at 9?

Do you know that the ceremony is at 2? And her response was, we just need to get through the speeches and the first dances, and then I can have fun. So she is thinking of one of what society has told us is one of the most special days of her life.

She's like, I just got to get through the first 10 hours, which is not the best mindset. Thankfully, the day came, and we were able to celebrate as appropriate.

The champagne popped at 9 a.m. when we started getting ready, and we were able to enjoy the fruit of all of the preparation, all of the hard work. So if this is not a wedding feast to Cana, why are we talking about the wedding?

[3 : 34] Well, mainly so I can show you this picture of how gorgeous I looked at the wedding. There's me. It's lovely. But also because weddings are a very common metaphor that Jesus uses in the gospel, and that is a metaphor that we see today, where Jesus is the bridegroom, where the groom and the church, the people of God, is the wife that he is celebrating with.

Jesus is committing that level of love to us. Last week, Pastor Anthony talked to us about the calling of Levi, the tax collector, where Jesus is dining with his tax collectors and people that the religious folk of the time think of as sinners.

And Anthony reminded us that with an encouragement to remember that God would dine even with us, and he also challenged us to remember that God would dine even with the people that we would not.

So we are actually continuing in that same dinner, and we are starting here in verse 18. Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting.

Some people came and asked, How is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting but yours are not? Jesus answered, How can the guest of the bridegroom fast when he is with them?

[4 : 59] They cannot for so long as they have him with them. But in the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast. No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth onto 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 are at the same meal, continuing this idea that Lexi introduced to us a couple weeks ago of these controversies that people try to catch Jesus up in. And at this point, they tried to catch him last week in, Why are you eating with these people?

And they sort of, he dodges that one. He explains that we are all sort of worthy of eating with Christ. And so this week they try to say, Wait, but you're not supposed to be eating at all.

Everybody else is fasting. You shouldn't be at this dinner party regardless. And so this sort of shifts. He's talking about the season of fasting that the others are in.

[6 : 08] And the people who are questioning him are trying to catch him out for not being in that same season. And that leads us to our first point for today, which is that life moves in seasons of feasting and fasting.

Neither of those is better than the other. And no one person can tell you what season you're in. It's been a rough year and a half for us, I would say.

With the pandemic, we have been trying to figure out, you know, how we can interact with people safely, how we've been worried about our health. If you live on your own like me, you have probably spent a lot more time alone in the last year and a half.

If you live with other people, you have probably spent a lot more time with those other people than you ever expected to in close quarters. It's been a rough couple months.

And I would venture to guess that some of us may feel like we are in that season of fasting. I shared in the LGBTQ group a couple weeks ago that I wasn't really feeling like I was on fire for God right now.

[7 : 20] I grew up Catholic in a church that did not use that kind of language, but went to a Hillsong church after college. I preached a separate sermon on that mistake. And they introduced me to the idea of no shade, but also a lot of shade.

They were not nice to me, and that is what it is. Their music slaps. They're not nice people. This is clearly where I've strayed from my notes, so that's what's happening. So while I was there, they introduced me to the concept of being on fire for God, which is, you know, you wake up every morning, and your first thought is, I am so excited to be part of what is happening.

I'm excited to wake up and get to church at 7 a.m. and unlock the doors and turn the lights on and take the trash out at the end of the day. And I was so on fire. And then when I kind of came time to leave that church, had a little bit of a season of fasting, but as soon as I got to the table, was right back on fire again.

Got plugged into a group immediately, joined the prayer team immediately, became the director of prayer pretty promptly, and then took the advantage to join the preaching team. But the last year and a half has been rough.

Online church is not the same. If you are joining us in online church, I'm so excited that you are able to be here with us this way, and yet I recognize that it is not the same. Those of you who are in person, I wish that I could see your, I'm sure, very enthusiastic smiling faces behind your masks.

[8 : 47] You're just so engaged. I wish that we could all come up and dip our own bread in the cup and do church the way that church feels like it. And yet right now, that's not really where we're at.

There is sort of a classic Old Testament scripture that we use when we talk about life happening in seasons. A little audience participation. Does anybody know what sort of the classic Old Testament scripture on seasons is?

Ecclesiastes, thank you. What a responsive, we got a good bunch this Sunday evening. Thank you. Yes, so Ecclesiastes 3 is the verse, there is a season for everything.

There is a season to reap, a season to sow. We're not going to read it because a lot of us have heard it many times. But this just kind of shows that this idea of seasonality is woven throughout the whole Bible.

You can see it in Jewish law, in terms of leaving your fields for a year to let them recover. And there's a lot of sort of feasting and fasting that we see.

[9 : 53] And in our scriptures today, we see that Jesus allows others to fast. You know, Jesus doesn't come in and say, no, I'm celebrating.

So everybody is celebrating. He respects that others are not in the same place as him. The two groups that are named are the Pharisees, who fast twice a week as part of their religious practices, and the disciples of John the Baptist.

This time, John the Baptist is imprisoned for speaking out against the injustices being perpetrated by the authorities. And his disciples are probably wondering, what gives?

You know, John is here and has been called to speak truth to power and to call out the oppression that's happening. And he ends up in prison. That is demoralizing.

As a lot of us are feeling right now. That is a time of fasting. And so if you, like me, are right now in a season of fasting, Jesus respects that.

[11 : 05] Jesus is okay with it. And even though in this moment, he says that he is in a season of feasting, he gives a sort of wink and nod that Jesus does about his death.

And, you know, hints that there will be a time when his disciples are fasting too. So he doesn't shame anyone and say, you know, you need to do X, Y, Z, and then you will be just as full of enthusiasm and zeal as you were before.

The other thing Jesus doesn't do, he doesn't stop feasting. So if you, and I know that some of you in this room are, are in a season of feasting, thank God for you.

Thank God that we are a community where there are people who are feasting and fasting. And I hope that you know that this is a place where you can celebrate that feasting. If you have gotten a new job, if you have moved into a great new apartment, if you are just excited for whatever you're doing this upcoming week for the holiday, we are excited that we can be here with you.

And communities need both. Communities need people who are fasting and people who are feasting to support and love each other. So that we sort of keep that idea of, you know, life is seasonal.

[12 : 24] And it reminds those of us who are fasting that there is a feast coming. And hopefully those of us fasting remind the feasters to enjoy it. Since, you know, there may be, there may be days ahead that don't feel quite as great.

That was a bummer to end on. So sorry. We're going to slide on into some more light trash talking of my last church. One day I'll talk about them enough with my therapist that I don't have to talk to you guys about it.

But I haven't done that yet. So now you guys get it. So in my last church, my pastor would frequently say from the pulpit that there were individuals, he would not name them, who would come to him when he was not, they were not feeling spiritually connected to God.

When they were in a period of fasting, I think they called it spiritual stagnation. And his first question was, are you reading your Bible every day? And people would say no.

And he would say, well, there's your problem. As if to say that it was their fault that their stepping away from what he thought was the best way to connect to God was the reason that they were not feeling connected with God.

[13 : 33] This is going to bring us into the second point of our series, which is of our sermon today, which is about you can't put new wine into an old wineskin.

You can't expect the spiritual practices of other people, of the faith that you have sort of moved away from. Maybe you're in a period of deconstruction to work with your current faith.

You know, practices change and develop, and there's room for stepping away from things that don't feel helpful, that don't feel like they're drawing you closer to God.

A lot of Jesus' messages come to us through parables and metaphors, and I don't know about you, but I don't know a lot of people who work on vineyards. And if they do, they do not use wineskins anymore.

So I attempted to come up with a modern-day metaphor through an unfortunate slapstick incident. I tried to go to jogging. I was trying to take up jogging because I don't like working out with a mask.

[14 : 36] It was a bad idea. Whatever. But I didn't think through, and I, like, had my app going, you know, because I was like, I'm going to do it. I want to track my stats. And so I have my phone with me, and I'm running, and I fall.

I didn't realize that you're not supposed to run while you hold stuff, because then the things break, because you can't break your own fall. So instead what happened is I fell, and I had my phone in my hand, and my face hit my phone, which hit the pavement.

So, I mean, I'm fine. Like, we're here. We're okay. I have all my teeth. But my phone did not make it. So we got a new phone, and for, like, two days I was going around with no phone case because my old phone case was not the right size.

I couldn't expect my phone case from my older iPhone to safely protect. I got some chuckles. It's a stretch of a metaphor, but we're doing it. To protect my new iPhone, and I would have damaged my phone more if I was handling it thinking that this old phone case was going to sort of keep it safe and protected.

And so I was able to go to the Best Buy. Don't buy a phone case from the Apple store. Do not waste your money. Get to the Best Buy and get myself a new phone case, which now sort of serves its purpose.

[15:57] Going back to what my former pastor said about reading the Bible every day, I know a lot of us sort of were raised with the idea of daily Bible reading, and it has become sort of like, you know, a book report.

You know, it's something that you have to do. You don't really want to. It's not necessarily your thing. For me, reading the Bible right now is not the best way for me to connect with God, and that is a scary thing to admit to a room of people who presumably love the Bible.

But a major sort of challenge that I have is that the Bible was written by men in a patriarchal system, and so the Bible sees and discusses God as male.

And for me, God is not male. I use a lot of they, them pronouns for God. When it feels best, I use she when it feels appropriate.

And so reading this book that talks about God as a man sort of reinforces that for me. It isn't great. And so a way that I found to combat that is through worship music.

[17:02] There is, surprisingly, a lot of worship music out there that does not use he, him pronouns for God. It is the sort of music, we sang a couple songs of it today, that addresses God as you.

And so I have pulled together a playlist, which we can throw up there. A little QR code. We're high tech today. It's called God is Non-Binary. And it is just a list of songs that does not, they don't have pronouns for God.

They don't call God king. They don't call God lord. It is just a little gender neutral taste of, you know, some ways to connect with God. But if you go find that, please don't judge my many Broadway playlists that are also on that account.

And this is me. So you're going to hear about some prayer in this sermon. Talk about an old wineskin. Catholic prayer does not really do it for me anymore. I said the act of contrition every day at the end of my school day growing up.

And it does not have a lot of punch for me in 2021. Pastor Anthony talked a couple weeks ago about challenging us to spend time in silence with God.

[18:12] Not expecting anything to happen. Not asking for a sign. Not calling on God. But just spending time. And I have been working on that over the last few weeks.

Like I said, I live by myself. And so I have started the practice of imagining that God is sitting in the room with me. Or sitting next to me.

That I can hold God's hand or put my head on God's shoulder. I don't have to tell God who said what at work today. Or why I am so tired.

But I can just be. And that for me has been incredibly healing. In a season where I don't see other people every day. I live in an apartment by myself.

I'm not going into work. And so knowing that I can sort of imagine that God is in my physical space has been really beautiful. I'd love to encourage us to think of other ways that we can connect with God.

[19:12] Other than compulsory daily prayer. Other than reading the Bible because we feel like we have to. You know, can we find God in meditation?

Can we find God in cooking? Can we find God in serving others? And we can look to Jesus as an example for this. We never, in the whole Bible, see Jesus use his sort of private quiet time to read scripture.

We know that he knows the scriptures very well. As a Jewish man, we see him at 12 sort of schooling the thinkers in the temple. But in his ministry, what he needs is to cook a meal for his friends.

Or to spend some quiet time away in prayer with the Father. And I would encourage us to try that out. To try out thinking of other ways that we can connect with God beyond what we were told when we were five.

That has worked and was great but might not be the best for us right now. And so if you'll indulge me, I will. We're going to do a little prayer right now.

[20 : 19] We want to throw up that photo. This is a meadow in Bavaria. So if you're missing international travel, you're welcome. If you've been to any prayer night that I've led, you've probably heard me talk about Psalm 23, which is the Lord is my shepherd.

It's the only scripture that I actually have memorized and has been sort of hugely foundational to thinking about God in a new way. And what I'd like to invite us to do is take some time.

We'll sort of reflect on the image and imagine ourselves there in this meadow that God has led us to. Maybe you are sitting by the side of the stream on a blanket.

Maybe you're bolder than I am and dipping your toes in to see what the temperature is. And then I will read Psalm 23. Psalm 23, you are welcome to keep your eyes open, focused on the image.

If you would like to close your eyes, that's welcome as well. And then we will sort of wrap up. So I'm actually going to step a little further all the way over here just to sort of keep our attention on this image.

[21 : 27] So we'll have a couple painful seconds of silence to just calm ourselves. And then I will read Psalm 23. The Lord is my shepherd.

I lack nothing. You make me lie down in green pastures. You lead me beside quiet waters. You refresh my soul.

You guide me along the right paths for your namesake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil. For you are with me.

Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows.

Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life. And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Amen. Amen.

[22 : 43] Thank you for participating in that with me. I hope it provided you with a moment of peace. And I hope that you know that that opportunity is always there.

This Bavarian meadow is always there for you to return to. If you're looking for more ways to sort of think about contemplative prayer, we actually have a prayer school coming up on December 1st.

The pastor Richard is going to be leading second QGAR code of the sermon. We're very high tech. It will be in this building, but upstairs. Pastor Richard is going to be teaching us about examine, which is a sort of Ignatian practice that focuses on sort of thinking through your day and finding God in moments of it.

So let's sort of recap our two main points, and then we can move on to communion. The first that we saw is that life moves in seasons of feasting and fasting.

Neither is better than the other, and no one can dictate where you fall. And I hope that that is encouraging to you, wherever you are on that spectrum.

[23 : 52] And our second point, which is a little more of a challenge, is that you can't expect the old practices that formed your faith to necessarily be the best way to continue growing it.

And so I invite you throughout these next few weeks to try something new. Try a new practice in addition to or in place of something you're doing now. And trust that God will meet you there.