

Treasures Old and New

St Philip's Anglican Church, O'Connor

Mid-week Eucharist, Thursday, 1 August 2024

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Matthew 13.51-53

The beginning of chapter 13 of Matthew tells us that on a particular day, as Jesus sat beside the lake, such a great crowd gathered around him that he had to get into a boat and sit there, while the crowd stood on the beach. Matthew says that “he told them many things in parables”—parables about the Kingdom and the word of the Kingdom. When he had finished, Jesus asked the disciples whether they understood what he had been saying. And their answer was yes; they understood in part, at least. And they went on were to learn more old and new things as they journeyed with Jesus.

“Therefore,” Jesus says in v. 52, “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.”

A “scribe” here means a scripture scholar, someone who studies the word of the Lord—a student of the law and the prophets. Jesus speaks of scribes who are discipled, apprentices, discipled to the kingdom of heaven. It's the same idea as when, at the end of the gospel of Matthew, Jesus commands his followers to go out to make disciples of all nations.

Such a “scribe”, Jesus says, one who is a disciple of the kingdom—will bring out of the master's storehouse treasures that are new and that are old. A skilled teacher will often begin with things the students already know (the old) and build on them to explore the new.

For us, the “old” is not what we call the Old Testament. Rather, it is the gospel as we have received it—indeed the whole Bible, but especially Jesus's own teaching. And the centuries of study, teaching, writing and preaching that rest on it.

Our faith is grounded in an orthodoxy (right teaching) that has been tested through centuries of often-difficult history. The core of it is summarised in the Creed that we repeat each Sunday. It's foundational to theology, the life of the church, and the life of discipleship. Much of what we learn from this inheritance can be readily applied in our everyday life.

Added to that is “what is new”. For Jesus' earthly disciples, that was almost all of what he taught them. For us today, Jesus' promise is that the Holy Spirit will lead us into all truth as we look into the scriptures, as we pray and listen and discuss. The Spirit brings new discernment and insight that that applies in our situation.

And if there is preaching or writing to be done, the Spirit will help the attentive preacher or writer to bring Jesus' story into our situation as hearers and readers.

Treasures that are that are new—new to us at least—are made alive by the Spirit and become part of our being, part of the Christlikeness that is constantly being formed in each of us. As we grow in Christ, there is the continual challenge of newness and change.

Like the disciples, our understanding is rarely perfect. We need to prayerfully chew things over. If we discern that we have been mistaken, sometimes we need to put aside new things and old things. If, by God's grace, we are confident of God's guidance, then we respond.

Jesus instructs us that wise teachers—those who are disciples of his kingdom—will share with us godly treasures that are both old and new. As we hold fast to old, traditional, and precious treasures of faith, let's be ready to welcome new things as the Spirit reveals them to us.