

**9.18.22 – Pentecost 15**

**“Mending with Patches”**

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

**Matthew 9:16 (NIV) ~ Pam**

<sup>16</sup> “No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse.”

**Mark 2:21**

<sup>21</sup> “No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. Otherwise, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse.”

**L: These are the Words of Jesus. C: Thanks be to God!**

**Luke 5:36 (NIV) ~ Pam**

<sup>36</sup> He told them this parable: “No one tears a piece out of a new garment to patch an old one. Otherwise, they will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will not match the old.”

**Leader: These are Luke’s Account of Jesus’ Teaching.**

**People: Thanks be to God!**

**Please pray with me:**

Creator God, thank you for illustrations to help us understand your Word better. We are grateful to be together today in worship; please be with those who could not be here today. We ask that as we study your word that you enlighten our minds and engage our hearts to ponder what the illustration of the cloth means in our lives. Now please speak through this messenger for the next several minutes. Amen.

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Happy Sunday! We are on our last officially scheduled parable study. I’d like to share the direction of our next nine weeks until Advent, so today is a good transition; how *ordinary* is old cloth with holes that need to be patched? Our subtopic for fall is “Seeing the Extraordinary in the Ordinary,” which ties into our year’s them, “Listening for the Work.” We are still discerning what work God is placing and will place before us in the coming years. Our mission and vision remain, yet the activity goals will vary as needs present themselves. Are you still listening and paying attention to the needs of our community, both internal and external? We’ll continue to apply these insights to the passages as we go along. Then it will be Christmas season, New Years, and a new theme for 2023:

a year of “Divine Experiments.” We tried a few new things this year; they went very well, and you are the proof that churches and people are adaptive and can be transformed by Christ!

This is pioneering language we spoke of last year, using “Canoeing the Mountains” book by Tod Bolsinger about the challenges to the Lewis and Clark expedition. **They** were and **we** are a resilient bunch of believers! After nearly twenty years as United Baptist, we’re tough and willing because of our ups and downs, losses and gains, illness or death, healings and new birth, and a pandemic survival! Surely with God’s help, we can thrive and serve the fearful in these prophesied times. The longer I am with you, the more I see Jesus re-building from the inside-out our fellowship and community, preparing others to meet him, love him, and **be** loved! Our foundations are strong; the legacy you helped build is solid and beautiful. Anyone who comes to the building for any reason feels God’s abiding spirit within our walls. May we practice good stewardship of what we have here, both the spiritual and physical, by inviting others to feel it too, and to extend that goodness and grace beyond our walls. Keep listening and sharing your spiritually healthy insights with each other and me.

In the days before extreme inflation, didn’t we just buy new things as others wear out? Some of us would hang onto things to repair them, but today’s generation is one of replace not repair. But have you ever loved a piece of clothing so much (either the style or the broken in feel of it, or the soft touch of an old sweatshirt), and just couldn’t give it up? Or have you ever decided to patch over a hole, a stain, or a tear in those beloved dungarees, or blue jeans? I admit to owning a few “loved to

death” garments. This is what our parable uses to explain the Kingdom Jesus brings, so let’s get some background first.

The context in all three Gospels was a meal hosted by Matthew (Levi), where he invited his associates (tax collectors like himself) to hear this man Jesus whose disciple he had just become. In Matthew and Mark, there were a few Pharisees there who asked why a Jew and disciple of Jesus would eat with such people. Tax officials of Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee, were considered the lowest of all occupations, due to the bribery and fraud expected by the king. The Pharisees were devoted to the Mosaic laws of purity rituals and cleanliness, so they considered Levi’s guests **sinner**s. Luke, interestingly, does not refer to Levi’s occupation, but does note his ethics don’t make him a good candidate as Jesus’ disciple.

The debate the Pharisees started was over fasting. Why did John the Baptist’s disciples fast for festivals when Jesus’ disciples were encouraged to eat and enjoy the feast. Jesus encouraged his disciples to fast individually if they felt called to discipline their bodies to draw closer to God, but not because of a religious mandate. Jesus responded that this meal with Matthew was like the kingdom of God, or a wedding banquet where he was king or bridegroom. Would you ask attendees to fast at a banquet in the presence of the hosts? Surely not! So, since he was present, they should be joyful and happy and eat; there will time for fasting and mourning in the future when the bridegroom would be taken away (here he hinted at his own crucifixion to come). While they did not really understand his explanation, he told them that John the Baptist was a reformer to bring repentance among Judaizers (the old system), whereas

Jesus was the new system, the Savior not here to patch up the failing institution but to transform it and bring something new (as the prophet Isaiah wrote: “See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. <sup>18</sup> But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create. Isaiah 65:17-18a). The repentance offered by John the Baptist was only the beginning of transformation. Jesus offers **new** wine.

Remember why one couldn't put new wine into old wineskins? We studied this parable during Adult Vacation Bible School. In the first century, wineskins were made of goatskin or sheepskin. They stretched when new but aged into cracking when older. If one were to place new wine into old skins, it would be a sad waste of wine because the new wine would ferment and cause the old wineskins to burst—the new wine would be lost and the wineskin not usable. As you think of these stories, do not think old/new but former/present/future. Jesus also talked about an old/former piece of torn cloth. How would you mend it with a patch? We go out and buy patches, but still have to wash them first. Best to mend with soft, worn fabric, so when the garment was washed, the formerly shrunken patch would stay attached and not tear. Using present/future or new unshrunk fabric would cause the “loved-to-death” fabric to tear new holes as the new would shrink and pull on the fragile old cloth.

As with all Jesus' parables, not everyone could understand right away. One scholar thought the disciples were the new cloth and Pharisees the old cloth. Most scholars, however, say the Kingdom Jesus is bringing is brand new cloth and cannot be attached to cover a flaw in the old systems; rather, he is bringing a whole new existence! He explains that John the Baptist had his purpose to patch up the old, but now the Messiah

is here, and his purpose is not mending, but metamorphosis! Christianity was not a patch to mend over Judaism, but it was a brand new or present/future cloth!

So, what do these parables mean for us and our church? A few may use it as an excuse, saying that you cannot add new cloth to the foundation garment, so why bother? Those voices come from dying churches and dying faith. **Jesus**, however, calls us to **transform** the whole garment, and **He** can do that! How? We participate by letting him transform us deeply in relationship, praxis, Scripture, prayer, and service. We ask the Holy Spirit to enter us as in Pentecost and fill us with love and purpose to change ourselves, each other, the community, and the world around us.

Sounds dramatic, huh! But it is what's happening here at United. Adaptive change happens both slowly and quickly—miracles do occur. Life that seems dull and boring becomes energizing and engaging once again! *Kairos* moments are instantaneous; the inbreaking of the Holy Spirit brings new awareness, great awakenings, and metamorphosis! What was a hardened black chrysalis becomes a vibrant and beautiful Monarch butterfly! ***When people grow together in community for a shared purpose to love and serve God, miraculous things happen!*** He will bring the workers and the harvest. The practices we've learned these last few years (prayer tools and styles, Scripture study and application, willingness to adapt to interruptions, loss and traditioned innovation, spiritually healthy engagement with small teams and new friends, dreaming dreams and listening for God's direction) have all prepared us for growth and divine experiments to welcome the curious who will begin

to say, “hey, what’s happening over there at United? Let’s check it out!” They may assume we are changing things out of sheer willpower or survival instincts, but they will instead **meet God here** and see that it is **Him** changing us which will change them too. Let’s not mend our cloth or lives with patches, but rather let us *live the new life*, the **new** cloth that Christ has given us! Amen? Amen! ||

**Will you pray with me?** Lord, thank you for this reminder that our best efforts are meaningless without you. Help us to be humble and willing as we welcome the Holy Spirit’s energy back into our visible corner of Annandale. Help us to be courageous enough to accept the new life and callings Christ gives. Thank you for this place and community of believers to support one another in this pioneering and transformative journey. Bring on the curious, the wounded, and the able workers; we are ready to serve them in new ways. In Jesus’ name we pray, **Amen.**