

The novelty of the gospel

Mat 9:14 Then John's disciples came to him, saying, why do we and the Pharisees fast many times, and your disciples do not fast?

Mat 9:15 Jesus said to them: Can those who are at the wedding mourn while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and then they will fast.

Mat 9:16 No one puts a patch of new cloth on an old garment; because such a patch pulls the dress, and the break is made worse.

Mat 9:17 Nor do they put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wineskins are broken, and the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are lost; but they put the new wine into new wineskins, and the one and the other are preserved together.

The words of Jesus in this text respond to the questioning of his adversaries regarding the tradition of fasting. They question the work of the Master and his disciples, because they understand that a new form of spirituality, a new way of understanding life, was emerging which came off as irreverence. Obviously, this teaching could not be without resistance. A tension between the new and the old is evident.

This enigmatic teaching of Jesus presents the novelty of the gospel demanding a new attitude, an open response to the mysterious action of God. The element that comes - the novelty of the Gospel - is very important, but the attitude with which it is received is also important. Just as the seed demands good soil; just as being a participant in the kingdom demands being born again; just as discipleship demands carrying the cross, the novelty of the gospel demands a renewed attitude toward what God is doing.

Remember that God is the one who "makes all things new", not seeking cosmetic or temporary solutions. Patching new cloth onto old clothing, putting new wine in old wineskins, these are actions or solutions that are immediate and functional, but the truth is that they do not solve anything. Time will tell sooner or later. Likewise, the old "set-in-stone" responses and attitudes of Jesus' adversaries are no longer responsive to people's needs.

God's saving plan in the midst of the dying human condition demands an intelligent response. A new reading of reality, a new listening to Scripture, a new experience in the Holy Spirit, a new concrete action. Because new results cannot be expected by always doing the same things, it is important that, on the foundations of faith, we join forces to be part of the new times proclaimed by the gospel.

The novelty of the gospel requires overcoming the outdated and perverse structures, it requires a discernment of the times we live in. Especially in times of pandemic, times of crisis and uncertainty that have exposed the fragility of life, health, institutions, and the social fabric. The newness of the Gospel calls for the proclamation of brotherhood and sisterhood, of solidarity, of hope in the face of the pandemic. In the face of new challenges, there are new responses and attitudes that make Christ present among the people.

The novelty of the gospel is like that patch or that new wine, which, far from causing a "worse break" or "a regrettable spill", tries to "conserve or preserve the one and the other together." A preservation that results from a symbiotic relationship, which brings out the best in each part to achieve an environment

of well-being for all. The one and the other are important, the one and the other are necessary, in the harmony and complementarity that are present in our images of the church: the body of Christ, the family of God, the spiritual house of the Lord.

This passage warns us against breaks, tears, and spills, but invites us to act jointly and coherently, paying attention to the signs of the times. What does the environment in which we live tell us? What is the will of God in this environment? How can I, and we, be participants in that divine will?

In any case, the objective is to find the best response in the face of a threatening situation. Today we talk about the Covid-19 pandemic, tomorrow it may be another sudden situation that tests our ability to be the church, to be human. But, as we said before, new challenges will demand new answers. Surely the novelty of the Gospel will have something to say, and for this it will invite us to make a joint effort to supply those who are cold and those who are sick, with good clothing and good wine that restores the joy of our neighbor.

In this way, may we cultivate fellowship between the Baltimore Presbytery and CEDEPCA, as we unite our lives with the one who "makes all things new." Let our joint effort be a comforting sign of the novelty of the gospel for this time. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

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