

Sermon, Pentecost 2021
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Sylvia Miller-Mutia
St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Albuquerque, NM
Sermon Link
Link to Scripture Texts:

And some people said, "They are filled with new wine."

Fair warning: today's sermon could well be called: Confessions w/Mother Sylvia--but don't worry--I'll be the one doing most of the confessing!

First, I have to confess that I am altogether too prone to take offense. I am far too quick to interpret any observation or opinion as an accusation or criticism or judgement. Which means I'm also altogether too quick to leap to self-protection, or self-justification, or self-flagellation, or self-defense.

I have to confess it would be more faithful--not to mention more helpful--in most situations for me to practice engaging the observations and opinions of other people with *less* anxiety and attachment (and by extension, with more care and curiosity). It would be a useful spiritual discipline for me to begin by treating every statement I hear as an observation, rather than accusation.

Over the years, my kids have given me plenty of invitations--both gentle and not-so-gentle--to "practice" this shift in perspective...

Like when as young children they would affectionately pat my post-partum tummy and say, "You have such a soft, squishy, mama belly." The ex-ballet dancer in me would catch her breath in horror, and then I'd exhale and remind myself that, on the lips of my children, this was no accusation. Just an honest--even appreciative! --observation.

Then there was that entirely unusual day a few years ago when I put on high heels AND earrings for a party. When I emerged from my bedroom one of my children exclaimed in surprise and awe: "Mama, you look beautiful! You look just like a teenager! Except for your face." Fair enough. I'm not a teenager. And for a number of reasons, that's actually a good thing.

And that day just last week when for some reason we were discussing what breed of dog each member of our family most resembled. "Mama," one of them ventured thoughtfully, "I think you would probably be a German Shepherd". "Really?" I responded. "German Shepherds just seem so...intense and intimidating...." All three kids looked at each other and then back at me like, "um yeah. Exactly!". "Really?" Well, I guess that's a good thing to know.

So, what do these Confessions with Mother Sylvia have to do with today's sermon? I'm hoping that these "reality checks" that my children offer me might point us towards the "reality check" God's Spirit is offering all of us this Pentecost Sunday.

In today's reading from Acts, we read that on that first Pentecost, in the city of Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit appeared as wind and fire and empowered the disciples to proclaim the Good News in every language under heaven. The author writes:

*All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another,
"What does this mean?"
But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."*

"They are filled with new wine."

I don't doubt that some of the bystanders that first Pentecost did say something like this. If you had been there, watching from the sidelines, wouldn't you? But are we sure that they "sneered" it? Maybe the author of Acts has made the all-too-common mistake of interpreting the words of the perplexed and bewildered and disoriented bystanders as an accusation. *"They are filled with new wine."* Maybe it was less of an accusation, and more of an observation. And an accurate observation at that!

"They are filled with new wine."

Actually yes. Come to think of it, Yes, they were.

Because that is *exactly* what God was-and is-- up to at Pentecost.

From that very first Pentecost right up to today...

God is actively, endlessly, abundantly
pouring out the new wine of God's Kingdom ...

God is actively, endlessly, abundantly
pouring out the new life of the Resurrection...

God is actively, endlessly, abundantly
pouring out the new power of the Spirit ...

Over, and around, and among, and between,
and into, and out of the People of God

This very day, God is pouring out
new power, new life, the new wine of the Spirit

Over, and around,
and among, and between,
and into, and out of us,
here at St. Mark's
And wherever else we may be

“They are filled with new wine.”

Indeed. At least, I hope so.

As St. Paul would later write to the post-Pentecost Church in Corinth:

“For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.”

We were all made to drink of one Spirit. Sometimes God offers small sips of the Spirit, but on Pentecost God invites the newborn Church to drink the New Wine of the Spirit like water from a fire hose!

So, my friends, this Day of Pentecost
let's take a deep breath, open wide, and get ready to drink...

But wait just one second, before we start...

Isn't there something else about “new wine” in the scriptures?

That's right...! It's right there in Matthew:

[Jesus says] “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. ¹⁷Neither is new wine put into old wineskins; otherwise, the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins are destroyed; but new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved.’

And also, in Mark...

²And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins.

And again, in Luke...

⁷And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the new wine will burst the skins and will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed. ³⁸But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins.

Beloved of God, at St. Mark's and beyond...

The Spirit is near us, among us today...

The Spirit is ready to pour forth among us
And fill us up to the brim with new wine
The new wine of justice, the new wine of compassion, the new wine of GOD'S kingdom

The Spirit is near us, among us today...

All ready to fill up our young ones with visions
All ready to fill up our old ones with dreams

But before we pray "Come Holy Spirit! Maranatha!" We should probably check and see--are our old wineskins really fit to be filled???

As Jesus taught, *"no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins."*

If you'll follow me, just briefly, back into the confessional, I need to confess yet one more thing.

I have to confess, I have been a grouchy mess on Sunday mornings of late. As we move together into this new era of post-Covid church, and the evolving landscape of hybrid worship and learning and life, it is disorienting, to say the least. We're all beginners--all the time! And I don't love being a beginner. I like being an expert. Our worship--like our world-- is in a constant state of flux--always moving and changing and evolving and shifting. So, from 8-10AM each Sunday, I'm really crabby, 'cause I feel like my head is going to explode.

Wait a minute. **Of course**, I feel like my head is going to explode. Because it probably is. My old wineskin is ready to burst. I shouldn't be so surprised. Jesus warned us...that's *exactly* what **happens** when you pour new wine into an old wineskin!

As the new wine of the Spirit is beginning to flow, it is also beginning to press into the stiff, shrunken walls of my old wineskin habits--the wineskin walls of perfectionism, and anxiety; certainty and self-sufficiency; competence and control; of familiarity and comfort. As the Spirit flows, and the pressure builds, my old wineskin walls are ready to explode.

People of God, this Pentecost Sunday, whether you like it or not, the Spirit is here within and among us.

And She's LONGING to fill us all up with new wine---as individuals and as a congregation, as the People of God in this city, this nation, this World.

This is Good News, but it comes with a warning: Old wineskins cannot hold the New Wine of God's Spirit.

The old wineskins of our lives--our hearts, our minds, our habits, our priorities.... must be made new so we can hold the new wine that God offers.

The old wineskins of our church--our patterns, and programs; our ways of working and worshipping; our leaders and even our language...must be made new so we can hold the new wine that God offers.

The old wineskins of our city, our nation, our world--our patterns of policing and protecting, of governing and gathering, of producing and consuming...must be made new so we can hold the new wine that God offers.

Here comes the bad news: We will have to burst open. And that will be messy. And it will probably hurt.

Here comes more good news: Even when we burst open, no new wine will be wasted--because it flows forth from an infinite source.

And there's more good news, still. Our Loving Creator is always on call, standing by, ready to step in to help us fashion new wineskins to welcome the Spirit when we're ready to burst.

In his Revelation, St. John writes: "...the one who was seated on the throne said, 'See, I am making all things new.' ...Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true."

And so, this great and glorious festival day of Pentecost, let us pray together that it will be so. Let us pray for the courage to allow God, who is making all things new, to make US new. Let us pray for the faith to allow God to replace the stiff, shrunken, old wineskins of our own hearts and habits and church and world with new wineskins, soft, and strong, and supple enough to stretch and stretch and stretch and stretch to receive the abundant New Wine of God's Spirit.

When others see us, may they wonder and say,

"They are filled with new wine."

And may it be so. Alleluia. Amen.