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Hello. Welcome to this edition of the St. Andrew's Enfield podcast with me, Steve Griffiths. Today we're going to be thinking about how as Christians, we have to hold in tension, um, the best from the past as well as, uh, look forward to a future that embraces all that is new. And that's true for us as churches just as much as it's true for us as individuals. And to think about this in a bit of detail, we're going to focus on Jesus' parable in Luke chapter 5 verses 33 to 39 where he talks about putting new wine into old wineskins. But as I record this podcast in June, 2019 in the UK context, we're going through a fascinating period of political shifts and changes. I know that this podcast is listened to, uh, right around the world, so forgive me for, reflecting on the UK political situation for a moment because some of the detail, uh, may not be familiar with some of you listening today. But even so, I'm sure that you will be able to relate to some of the principles anyway and you may be experiencing something similar in your own country as well.

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But in the UK at the moment, um, our political situation feels, um, a bit scary to see how the pieces are going to land. But it is fascinating, all the same. And one of the most fascinating aspects of it for me anyway, is watching how all the political parties are grappling with the relationship between, um, traditional, established systems and the demands of a new cultural reality. The Labour Party, for example, under, um, the leader Jeremy Corbyn is divided between those who want to embrace a traditional model of socialism that was born in the 18th and 19th centuries and those who believe that this model of socialism, um simply can't work in a globalized society that is driven by a different economic and class system. Uh, the Conservative Party is similarly divided between those who believe that a centre ground position embraces traditional Conservative values and those who believe a move to the right is the only way of upholding Conservatism as a political force in the nation.

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Uh, in the UK we've got a new party called the Brexit Party, and that's arguing that the traditional political model is broken and that it's time to give way to a new system that reflects a new reality, a new social order. They're quite a right wing party. Um, and then there's another new party in the UK as well, Change UK. They're arguing the same thing as the Brexit party, but from a much more centrist left position, that traditional politics is broken and that the new social order demands a new approach to governing, um, in the UK. And it may be the case in your country as well, but there are fundamental existential questions being asked of our democratic system right now. Nobody knows how it's gonna shake down and what in 10 years time, we're going to be looking back on. Now, as I say, I'm no, I'm no expert in world politics, but from what I glean in the news, uh, many other countries are experiencing similar shifts.

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So it's not just here in the UK. Um, as I say, perhaps your own country, uh, if you're living elsewhere, has a similar political narrative developing as well. There seems to be a philosophical, existential debate about the relationship between traditional systems and the requirements of new societies. And of course that debate is not limited just to the political sphere. It's not limited just to this current era of human society. It's been a constant question wherever we

find, uh, organized human communities, um, and not least in the church. And even in the time of Jesus, there was a debate raging about how, uh, this new religious worldview that would eventually embrace the name of Christianity should relate to the Judaism from which it was born. And that debate about the relationship between the old and the new is at the heart of this passage from Luke 5 verses 33 to 39 about the wine and the wine skins, the new cloth and the old garments.

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And, um, the context of this parable from Jesus is the fact that the Pharisees were criticizing Jesus after he attended a dinner with Levi, the tax collector. They were unhappy that Jesus, um, as a religious leader was spending time with someone who was such a hated figure, someone who was on the margins of their society. And so the Pharisees were trying to find a way to catch Jesus out. And the line of attack that they took on this occasion, um, was to critique his attendance at Levi's dinner party when traditional religious practice suggested that really he should be doing the exact opposite. And in verse 33 of Chapter Five, the Pharisees, uh, say this, they say, "John's disciples, like the disciples of the Pharisees frequently fast and pray, but your disciples, Jesus, eat and drink". So the implication is that Jesus' followers, um, aren't as spiritual as the followers of other religious leaders of the time.

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The implication is somehow that to be a follower of Jesus is, um, uh, sort of, um, uh, lazy spirituality. Um, a pick and mix spirituality, uh, in which partying is okay because it's fun, but the hard work of spiritual disciplines like fasting can be avoided. But they wanted to catch Jesus out about why his disciples seem to never fast, but spent their time at parties and wedding receptions instead. But Jesus is absolutely confident that he is teaching his disciples appropriately. And, and that confidence came out of a deep sense of, um, self identity. Uh, he knew who he was. He knew what was to come. And so Jesus knew, uh, how he should shape the disciples in the light of that. So in verse 34, Jesus says to them, "You cannot make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them, can you?" Now in those days, a, a wedding party would last for as long as a week.

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And it would often be a riotous affair - certainly be a great deal of fun anyway! Um, and a wedding party was not the type of event where you would want to be fasting. Um, and likewise the fact that Jesus Christ, the Son of God was in their midst, um, was a cause for celebration, not for fasting. But as he said in verse 35, "The days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them and then they will fast". Uh, he knew that his crucifixion and death lay ahead, um, he knew that the time for fasting and mourning would soon be here. But in the meantime, um, the presence of Jesus, the presence of the Son of God was a cause for celebration and rejoicing. And in the light of that critique, uh, by the Pharisees about Jesus's adherence to religious tradition, he then goes on to give a parable outlining his teaching on the relationship between the new and the old. And, um, from that parable, uh, I think there's two key issues that we are left to ponder for ourselves. And the first is to do with our relationship, um, as churches, uh, with tradition. The second is to do with our own personal

relationship with God in the context of our daily living. And, uh, these are the two issues that we're going to unpack now, um, in this podcast.

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So in this story from Luke's Gospel, the Pharisees wanted Jesus to conform to their traditions. Um, but Jesus fully understood that he was about something new and that he was introducing a new understanding of God, or at the very least reintroducing an old understanding that seemed to have got lost over the years. Um, and he wants to get across the idea that this, um, new way of doing faith is incompatible with the way in which the Pharisees were living out the ancient Jewish faith. So he uses two illustrations for this. First, in verse 36, Jesus says, "No one tears a piece from a new garment and sews it on an old garment. Otherwise the new will be torn and the piece from the new will not match the old". Um, it seems fairly obvious, isn't it? If I, if I have a hole in my jeans, uh, it wouldn't be very sensible to buy a new pair and then cut a patch out of the new pair and sew it onto the old pair.

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Um, who would do that? If I did that, I would have ruined the new pair of jeans and the old pair of jeans still wouldn't last very long with the new patch on them. It's completely the wrong way round of fixing something. And Jesus says, so it is with faith in God. Uh, we, we can't just take new ways of doing church and just plonk them on top of the traditional way of doing things, uh, because neither the old nor new will work properly and everyone will then remain unsatisfied. Something has to give. And then Jesus makes the same point again by talking about the, um, the fermentation process in wine making in verse 37. He says, "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." Now wine in Palestine, uh, fermented very quickly, uh, due to the warm climate. And wine skins were made of, um, uh, tanned goat skins

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and sometimes the skins would burst due to the gasses produced in the fermentation process if the skin was too old to contain the new wine. And again, I think Jesus is saying that's how it is with the church. Jesus has come with a radical new gospel. Um, it's all about empowerment of those on the margins of society. It's about healing the sick. It's about experiencing the fatherhood of God on a daily basis, mending broken hearts, uh, forgiving others. And his critique is that the, the manmade rules of the Pharisees was getting in the way of that with, um, outward displays of piety that didn't indicate an inward change of heart. And the history of the church ever since, I mean has been littered with debate about how we can maintain our ancient traditions whilst being church in the current cultural context. But we've got to be clear here that, um, Jesus, uh, was not wanting to get rid of tradition.

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And I'm certainly not advocating getting rid of tradition. If you turned up at our church on a Sunday morning, we're very liturgical. Um, I wear robes. I wear a chasuble. Uh, you know, we, we, we, uh, we, we have a Eucharist every week. You know, I'm not arguing for getting rid of the traditions of the church. And Jesus wasn't either. But his concern and my concern and I hope the concern for all of us is how do we carry on using, uh, the traditions of the church, uh,

usefully in a way that enhances the new and doesn't get in the way of the mission of the people of God. And Jesus made that so clear that he was not anti tradition, uh, in his Sermon on the Mount where he says this, he says, "Do not think that I've come to abolish the law and the prophets.

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I've not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the law until everything is accomplished." Jesus didn't want to do away with Jewish ritualism. And I would not want to suggest that as we try to find ways of doing church that are culturally useful, we should do away with our ritualism and our traditions and our liturgies. Far from it. Instead, the challenge for all of us is how do we recover, uh, the original intent, the original spirit of what our ritualism and our traditions and our liturgies, um, were originally created for? Um, how do we recover that and move away from just doing tradition for tradition's sake?

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So this relationship between tradition and new forms of faith is an important part of understanding the meaning of this parable. But I don't think it's the whole story because I think Jesus is also calling us to examine our own lives and think about, um, how we relate to God and the Christian faith on a daily basis. Now, for many people, it seems that the Christian faith and church activities, are some sort of add on to a lifestyle that remains fundamentally unchanged. Um, many people will come to church on a Sunday, uh, or they'll say that they're Christians but without ever really allowing the Gospel message and the Holy Spirit to transform how they behave or what they say or how they relate to others or how they prioritize their lives. And I think that Jesus is saying here, um, that it's impossible really to live like that. It comes down to the most basic of questions:

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Um, what does it mean to be a Christian? Uh, well, being a Christian is not defined by coming to a building once a week or singing some hymns or listening to a sermon or being involved in a church group. Uh, being a Christian is defined by living in a relationship with God; a transformative relationship in which we submit ourselves to his Holy Spirit and allow the Holy Spirit to work in us, to change us as people so that we can live out our calling as children of God. And so if we are Christians, uh, we will want to read the Bible more. We will want to pray more because this is how we hear from God and grow in a relationship with him. If we're Christians, um, we know the love of God for ourselves, and so we're going to want to tell others about him so that they can know God's love for themselves.

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If we are Christians, we're going to want to show love to others, um, in the most practical servant ways, putting the needs of others before ourselves. So being a Christian is about submitting to God in every aspect of our being. We don't always get it right. Uh, we're all weak. We're all vulnerable. We're all fragile and frail, and we're all, uh, on a journey into wholeness and holiness. Um, oftentimes we get it wrong, but the intent should be there within us to submit to the power of God at work in our lives. That is how the Christian life is lived

out. And so in this parable, um, I think Jesus is challenging us by stating that we cannot carry on living in the old ways with our old habits and sort of, um, stick God on like a bandaid or a plaster. Uh, the tension and the stress of trying to live like that is, it's just too much.

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So through this teaching of Jesus, we're called to question ourselves. Are we trying to sew Christianity onto our lives like a patch on our old way of living? Or are we resolved to live a completely new life in submission to God? Are we, are we trying to pour the new wine of a relationship with God into the wine skin of our old habits and attitudes? And if we are, it's not gonna work, something is going to give, something is going to break and we will be left with neither the satisfaction of a much loved old wine skin, or the delicious taste of the new wine. We just can't hold those two things, in tension and be at peace. Now it's much better to submit ourselves to God as our Lord and our King and to invite the Holy Spirit fully into our lives so that he can, um, work his transformation within us. And that is where peace and joy and fullness of life is to be found.

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So in conclusion, then we, uh,

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um, we note that life is often about, um, living in that tension between the much love systems and structures and behaviours of the past whilst trying to look meaningfully towards the future. I mean, it's always been thus in faith, in politics, uh, wherever human society is built, um, we want to hold on to what is good from the past, but to reinvigorate the spirit of our traditions, uh, with the new wine of a relationship with God and in our own lives, we need to, um, seriously examine who we are and how we live. And with honesty, recognize that we cannot pour, uh, the new wine of God into the old wineskins of ungodly habits and thoughts and behaviours and what is needed in our church and in our individual lives is nothing less than a, um, a complete transformation by the power of the Holy Spirit at work within us, so that we become the people, the church that we are destined to be. As Jesus says so simply in verse 38, "New wine must be put into new wine skins". So we invite the Holy Spirit to, um, take us and shape us and renew us in body, mind, and spirit so that we can be filled with the new wine of the love of God.

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Well, I hope that you found that a, uh,

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useful podcast today. Uh, if you want to carry on the conversation, then please do email me, steve.griffiths@london.anglican.org. Uh, check out our website standrewsenfield.com. Our Facebook page is St. Andrew's Enfield. Uh, please do subscribe to these podcasts, let other people know about them as well, so that we can continue to grow together as a community of learners um, as we, uh, explore together aspects of the Christian faith and God's love for us. And, uh, wherever you are today, what have you are doing, uh, I hope that you get a deep sense of God's transformative work in you as he pours his new wine into you, restoring you and making you whole. So, um, thanks for listening today. I hope you have a great day. Bye.