

**St. Luke United Methodist Church**  
**Bryn Mawr, PA**  
**The Rev. David Tatgenhorst**  
**14 February 2021**

Mark 2:13-22 Jesus went out again beside the sea; the whole crowd gathered around him, and he taught them. As he was walking along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him. 15 And as he sat at dinner in Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were also sitting with Jesus and his disciples—for there were many who followed him. 16 When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, they said to his disciples, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" 17 When Jesus heard this, he said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners." 18 Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting; and people[g] came and said to him, "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" 19 Jesus said to them, "The wedding guests cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them, can they? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. 20 The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast on that day. 21 "No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak; otherwise, the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. 22 And 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."

We take a moment to remember the mountaintop experiences where we knew God's presence most clearly in our lives. As we breathe in and out for a moment, let's notice that breath and God's presence with us even now.

February 14, 2021                    **Transfiguration of Faith**  
Valentines Day, Transfiguration Sunday, Evolution Weekend

The United Church of Christ has a slogan and banner that says, "God is still speaking." It could almost make me become a congregationalist. I agree that God is still speaking, and that God is speaking to our time and our place in ways that are evolving and changing - or at the very least that call for us to evolve.

I try to keep up with the times. If I was a cool youth pastor, I'm sure I would have dyed my hair purple more than once by now. Or I would have a tattoo or a pierced ear- something to show that I'm cool and connecting with the times. While I'm been a pastor at St. Luke, instead of changing to purple my hair has changed to grey.

My hair turning grey is not the only thing that has changed around here though. We became a reconciling congregation almost 6 years ago now and that symbolized a big change that had been going on for a long time. We've worked hard to connect our congregation to other churches and particularly to communities of color. It has been a good journey, listening to God's voice and following where God leads.

Churches generally have a lot of trouble with change. We are naturally conservative institutions. We uphold the basic values of the community and of the faith. That's part of what we do. So when Charles Darwin, who would have been 212 years old on Friday, started teaching that people were evolved from apes in his book *The Origin of the Species*, the church was one of his main opponents.

People very quickly realized that some key teachings of the church about Adam and Eve, and the creation of the world (if you interpreted them literally) were severely threatened by this new teaching. The authority of the church and its teaching took a drubbing and in some ways, we are still trying to catch up. Many church people fought pretty hard and even today take a stance that is pretty hard to square with what we've learned in the last hundred fifty years. Even public schools are still fighting against the teaching of evolution. Texas school board committees are still wanting to have their text books teach creationism - that the world was literally created in 6 days, as an alternative to the teaching of evolution.

A bunch of other church folks have come to a wary compromise - saying it's fine for the schools to teach evolution and the church to teach an alternative and not to worry about the differences and contradictions. I think the church ends up losing in that bargain, as more and more people choose to trust science and feel like the faith stance of the church is irrelevant to them.

Once a year on the Sunday nearest to Darwin's birthday I set myself the challenge to preach about my alternative

approach - that there is not a contradiction between our faith and science, that we in the church do not have anything to fear about the teaching of evolution, and we do well to examine any places where we feel our faith and our scientific understandings do rub against each other.

On these Sundays, I often notice the doctors, and other practitioners of science, nodding their heads during my sermon. They have already given their lives to science and know how important the teachings of natural selection and evolution are to medicine and our basic knowledge about who we are as a species. And that commitment still leaves room for them to explore their faith with us here in the church. I sense that they really appreciate knowing that they don't have to be two different people - one person at work and one person at church.

In our scripture reading this morning, and all through this first section of Mark (as we have been learning in our Bible study on this gospel), Jesus is contending with people who had a rigid understanding of their faith and their superiority to people they considered sinners, in this case tax collectors like Levi, who Jesus calls to be one of his disciples. They were appalled that Jesus was insisting on new teachings and including people they wanted to exclude.

Jesus seems to purposely challenge these "scribes of the Pharisees" These are the lawyers and representatives of the status quo. Jesus nudges them and even provokes them. Finally he says, "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."

To me Jesus is saying that God is still speaking, that faith is evolving and needs to find new ways to understand what God is doing in the world - to keep up. There's something new happening here and you can't put new wine into old wine skins. It will spoil the wine and burst the wineskin.

Now obviously, Jesus didn't know about evolution. Darwin wouldn't be born for 1800 years. But he was bringing something new to consciousness and proclaiming love for people who were on the outside of the scribes locus of concern. Jesus was challenging their rigid understandings and working to get them to see something new and be open to new possibilities.

I feel like Jesus could be talking directly to those good church people on the school board in Texas. You can't put new wine into old wineskins. The curriculum and your thinking needs to get an update or the wine will go sour and the wineskins will burst. We take the challenge ourselves today. God is still speaking and inviting us to open ourselves to new understandings and new connections in our faith life.

Jesus is talking directly to all of us. During the Enlightenment many people began to think their wineskin only needed to contain scientific thinking. They were right to recognize the value of rigorous scientific method and the powerful understandings of evolution and medicine. In our new wineskin today, we carry a hefty respect for those Important disciplines. We also carry in our newest wineskin a healthy respect for the mysteries of our lives - the power of evil, and the reality of death, the wonder of a story, and the healing power of love that is the strongest of all.

On this Transfiguration/Valentines Sunday, we open ourselves to the evolution of faith. On this Valentines Day, we open ourselves to God's love for all God's people. In this week of Mardi Gras, we celebrate God's presence with us on the mountaintop as we prepare for the Lenten journey of recovery that begins on Wednesday. We stand on the mountain with Jesus shining, loving us, setting us free to know God's truth.