Spirituality
Pencil Preaching



by Pat Marrin

View Author Profile
patrickjmarrin@gmail.com.

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“New wine, new wineskins” (Mark 2:22).

National Holiday for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Heb 5:1-10; *Mk 2:18-22*

In today’s short gospel from Mark, Jesus is questioned for not observing the regular fasting laws that the Pharisees and the followers of John the Baptist are observing. Jesus compares his presence to a wedding, when fasting is dispensed from so people can celebrate, eat, drink, sing and dance, often for several days.

Jesus is cause for feasting because heaven has come to earth in him. The Incarnation is the nuptial between God and his people, divinity and humanity. The Spirit of God is hovering over the world as at creation, the moment of conception when we came to be in God's image. Because of Jesus, a renewal of creation is happening. Those who accept him experience a kind of conception that will lead to their rebirth as children of God.

He uses two little parables to respond to his critics. They are like someone patching an old cloak with new, unshrunken cloth. As the patch shrinks, it tears away from the rest of the garment. Or they are like someone who pours new wine, still fermenting and expanding, into an old wineskin, which can no longer stretch, so it bursts, and the wine is lost.

The imagery is about the demand that newness places on the old. New ideas, hopes and dreams stretch tradition. New energy needs room to grow. Institutions that cannot adapt to change falter. Jesus is proclaiming a new way of understanding God that will liberate the community to new life. New wine requires fresh wineskins.

Two thousand years ago, Jesus was executed to try and stop the revolution of the heart and the transformation of history he proclaimed. But the wedding could not be stopped by violence, and it was revealed at Easter as universal and unstoppable.

More than 60 years ago, the Civil Rights Movement was the new wine challenging long-standing institutional racism. A champion of change, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated in 1968 to stop another wedding of justice and peace, still far from consummated but now written into the fabric of American identity. There can be no going back.

The promise of the Gospel is the energy built into the signs of the times. We feast on this promise in hope, even as we fast and struggle toward the day when it is accomplished.