

"DOING A NEW THING"
LUKE 5:33-6:11

You're at a wedding. Everything has been great so far; the service was wonderful, full of meaning, a celebration of love and trust, hope and promise for the future. Now you've sat down at the reception and the food comes along: first comes the soup, then lovely strips of chicken in a chilli sauce, a beautiful piece of sea bass, and finally white chocolate mousse. It is all wonderful, all specially prepared and laid on for the celebration. But nobody eats anything; we're all fasting! It puts a bit of a dampener on any celebrations! It would be a bit of a dull and dour wedding; it would not be much of a celebration!

You are preparing for a wedding, and you go out to buy new clothes, a new dress, a whole outfit fit for the occasion; or a new suit because you're told you need it! You buy it in the shop, and it has a designer label, so it costs a few pounds, maybe a few £100's and you are pleased with it and the colour is good and you think it will look good. Then you bring it home and start to cut it up because you have an old dress, an old suit that you really rather prefer and so you use this new dress, or this new suit to patch up the old one! They have very different colours, and very different material; the old is faded and the new is bright and it just doesn't look right, never mind that it is a real waste of new clothes!

Jesus is doing a new thing. Jesus is behaving very differently from way other teachers behave. We have seen on our journey through Luke so far that He is doing things that no-one else is doing; He is displaying attitudes that are new and different. He has healed people who are sick; but more than that, He has touched a man with leprosy and made him clean when the accepted wisdom is 'don't touch the leper'; He has said to a paralysed man "*Friend...*" (5:21) when only God can forgive sins! He has made friends with the wrong kind of people, tax-collectors and sinners rather than respectable, religious people. He has extended God's grace to everyone, beyond the boundaries of Israel, to people of every nation. All of these are new things. He is being watched by others: the Pharisees and teachers are watching Him to see how He will behave next. How do we cope with them?

Today in Luke we sit at Jesus' feet as He teaches and explains what He is about in these new things; so He uses the pictures of the bridegroom, the new clothes, and new wineskins to highlight these new things, these new attitudes that He is teaching.

The example we have today in Luke 6 is the Sabbath. The Sabbath was instituted by God in 4th commandment as a time to rest and do no work. By Jesus' time lots had been added: how to define work? There were 39 kinds of activity! So when the disciples did what they did – "*One Sabbath...*" (6:1f) – they broke 4 kinds of work rules; it was 'unlawful!' said the Pharisees; 'dreadful, beyond the pale!' Jesus challenged that attitude in 2 ways:

1) He told a story from the life of the greatest king Israel ever had, David – David and his men were hungry and asked the priests at temple for bread, but the only bread available had just come off the altar and only the priests should eat it, but because David was hungry and needed it, the priests gave it to him to eat; you can read the whole story in 1 Samuel chapter 21. Jesus says ‘That’s all right’; the others say ‘this is unlawful!’

2) Jesus healed a man in the synagogue – the man’s hand was shrivelled and the “Pharisees...” (6:7) Jesus healed the man, but the crucial thing about this healing was when it was done; it was done on the Sabbath and for Pharisees, that constituted work so it was ‘unlawful’, so ought not to be done.

Jesus wants to teach 2 new attitudes, so that people no longer think ‘lawful/unlawful’ any more:

1) “I ask...” (6:9) Think about doing what is good! That is most important way of judging an action, or a word, or an attitude. Is this something that is good; is this something that will help my neighbour? Is this something that will build someone else up? If it is good, then do it; if it will save a life then do it! That may sound far too simple and you may want to say ‘Yes, but what about...?’ and have all kinds of questions about what that means, but that is the first, very simple criterion that Jesus used; is it good? Is it for someone else’s good? Then do it!

2) Jesus is Lord – “The Son of man...” (6:5) You will have the chance to unpick this saying more in our discovery groups on Wednesday, but let me say quite simply that Jesus is Lord. This was most basic confession of Christian faith in the early days of the Church; ‘Jesus is Lord’. This means that our lives are guided and ruled by Jesus, not by an endless number of rules and regulations and traditions. The Pharisees thought that the kingdom of God would come by more law, more rules, more traditions; Jesus came proclaiming that the kingdom had come when He arrived and He is King and Lord; God rules when people acknowledge Jesus as Lord in way that they live their lives.

So we are to live by what is good and by being the kind of people that Jesus wants us to be.

When you buy a new mobile phone, you buy the basic package, or take on a contract that gives you so much. Then you can buy ‘bolt-ons’. These are extras that give you more time, more texts. You don’t physically bolt them on to the phone, but they are added extras. Jesus did not come to bolt something extra on to the existing package of religion. He came to do something completely new. He brought a new way of thinking, a new way of faith. Something new was breaking into the world to replace the old, something dynamic and powerful, full of grace and love and hope, something to celebrate – hence the bridegroom picture!

This was not a bolt-on to the laws with new laws. This was a new way of letting Jesus be Lord and for us to be the kind of people that He wants us to be. That is a very different way of thinking. We are not (or ought not to be) loaded down with all kinds of rules and traditions in our faith, but quite simply be the kind of people Jesus wants us to be.

Jesus does not come to us with a special religious bolt-on that will make us extra religious, not to add something extra to us as individuals, but to make us new people: *"If anyone..." (2 Corinthians 5:17)* We are not made mildly different people, we are made new people. This takes place when Jesus is Lord of life.

The biggest choices we ever have to make are about the way we think, how we shape our attitudes and behaviour. How do we do that? We can shape our attitudes and behaviour by the rules of the church, by the inherited traditions of church, or the inherited rules of society and some of that is good, but there is a new way that Jesus brought. Jesus is Lord – we live life in His way. He has shown us how to live and so we follow His example; He has taught us how to live and so we put His teaching into practice; we learn to be like Him and to honour Him. We ask "What would Jesus do?" Jesus is Lord of every part of life: He is Lord of the Church and the way we worship and our attitudes to one another; He is Lord of our relationships with other people, of family life, of friendships; He is Lord of the way we do our work and our attitude to people at work; He is Lord of the kind of people that we are, loving, kind, compassionate, generous, gracious; He is Lord of the way we use our money; He is Lord of every aspect of life. That's the way to think; that's the question to ask "What would Jesus do? What would Jesus have me do?" Jesus is Lord. There is a second question, related to the first. Is it good? Will my attitude be good and lead me to do good? Is this action a good one and will it do good for someone else?

The beauty of this service is that we see Jesus, not as some Lord who is domineering or oppressive, but as Lord who loved us and gave Himself for us. There is a hint of conflict in today's story; that conflict will lead in the end to the cross. The bread and wine show us Jesus as Crucified, One whose body was broken and blood spilt for us; this was not a defeat, not the end, but the kingdom of God is built here in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Taking the bread and wine confesses Jesus as Lord, crucified and risen; taking bread and wine commits us to be like Him and to proclaim to world that Jesus is Lord! It commits us to ask 'what does Jesus want me to be and do? Is this good?' Let us be the people who live with Jesus as Lord and who do what is good!