

Series: **EVERYDAY THINGS** - June 28, 2009

PATCHES AND BOTTLES
Matthew 9:14-17

I. INTRO

- A. I remember hearing a story years ago about a family that **always** baked a ham for their Christmas dinner. When they prepared it, they always cut off both ends of the ham. So, one daughter was preparing the Christmas dinner for the first time—and when her mother came, she noticed that everything was pretty much ready—except that the ends of the ham hadn't been cut off.

-She said, "Honey, we **always** cut off the ends of the ham!" When the daughter asked why, well, the Mom didn't have the faintest idea. So, curious, this girl tracked down the great-great grandmother and asked the question no one had thought to ask: "Why did we start cutting the ends off the ham?" The old lady said, "Cause that's the only way it would fit into the roasting pan!"

1. Anyone here have any family traditions? How many of you have traditions around how you celebrate Christmas? Anyone have any vacation traditions? One time we are at a cottage, and the people next door pulled up—supposedly from the city. And then they all jumped out of the car, ran screaming and yelling down to the dock—and jumped in the water, clothes and all!
2. Some traditions are funny—but some are **very** close to our heart. Sacred, really. Especially those that happen at the sacred moments of life; like the kinds of things that happen—and are said at weddings. I've seen a **lot** of weddings—and a **lot** of different outfits. But I've never seen a bride wearing polyester pants and a MegaDeath T-shirt. You know I like humor—and love to wear casual clothes—but I'm **very** careful in how I do a funeral. Traditions run close to the heart. Some are fine—good, really. But when tradition gets into the faith arena—**watch out!**

- B. Jesus stepped into this whole snakepit of **tradition** in a discussion He had about **patches and bottles!** To be honest, religious tradition is something that has probably cause more conflict, hatred and bloodshed in the world than almost any other. People have **died** over traditions. Literally.

-Now, you need to promise me that as we talk about tradition today, there will be no killing, okay? That there will be no fist-fights, shouting matches, name calling—**any** of that stuff! Do you promise? Are you ready to go?

II. IT NEEDS REPLACED...NOT PATCHED!

- A. Let me give a little background. The images of patches and bottles or wineskins come up fairly early in Jesus' ministry. Because of his astounding teaching and miracles, Jesus popularity is skyrocketing. But the most conservative—and most popular religious leaders in Israel, the Pharisees, are seeing some things about Jesus that are sending off all kinds of alarms. In fact, He was stepping on their toes—and creating job security issues for the entire religious community.

-For example, Jesus publicly forgave a paralyzed man's sins. And in the Jewish religion, there was a whole religious process for that—that involved priests, temples and offerings. Jesus said, "You're forgiven" and then **healed** the guy! So, Jesus was branded as a trouble maker.

-But then he chose a tax collector named Levi or Matthew as a disciple. Tax collectors were unclean—scoundrels! They had collaborated with the Roman government—and were considered ritually unclean. And almost as if to rub their noses in this indiscretion—Jesus went to a huge party Matthew threw for all his scoundrel friends. In our culture, it would honestly be like Billy Graham sitting in a smoke filled room—laughing and talking with the Mafia—or the previous owners this building!

-They're thinking, "Birds of a feather flock together! This guy is not at **all** spiritual!" Just like us, they were watching Jesus **very** closely—looking for further evidence of His lack of spirituality. And they find it!

One day the disciples of John the Baptist came to Jesus and asked him, "Why don't your disciples fast like we do and the Pharisees do?" Jesus replied, "Do wedding guests mourn while celebrating with the groom? Of course not. But someday the groom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast. (Matthew 9:15 NLT)

1. Did anyone notice **who** it is here criticizing Jesus' and his disciple's spirituality because they don't fast? It's the disciples of John the Baptist! "Hey, we fast—the Pharisees fast—but you don't!"

-In that culture, there were three things that truly Godly people did. They prayed, they fasted, and they gave money to the poor. Just a few chapters before this account, Jesus talks about these three things—and the thrust of what He says is, "Make sure you're not treating these things like magic—and be **really, REALLY** careful that you don't do them to show off your spirituality to others. That is **really** dangerous stuff! The **only** One who needs to know that you're giving, praying and fasting is God.

2. Fasting, in the Bible, is doing without food for a period of time—either as a sign of repentance of sin, or as a way of concentrating on prayer at a critical point in your personal life. In the Jewish culture, fasting was a sign of mourning—a way of humbling yourself before God and seeking God's intervention. Jesus, at one point, fasted for 40 days. Jesus doesn't say it's wrong, or just a stupid tradition; he just says, "Yeah, when there's a wedding—the wedding party doesn't fast! They celebrate!" And the **tradition** in that culture was that a wedding was the biggest party ever—sometimes lasting for a week!

-Of course, Jesus was referring to the Kingdom He had taught so much about. In a veiled way, he referred to his own death—**that** would be a time when there would be sadness—and no one would feel like eating!

- B. So, does Jesus believe in fasting—or not? Well, from what He goes on to say here, it's clear that **everything** is on the cusp of change! Jesus said in his most famous talk, **The Sermon on the Mount** that he didn't come to do away with the law and the

prophets; he came to **fulfill** them. At that moment, they had no idea that Jesus would literally dismantle the Jewish religion and tradition piece by piece—the temple, the priest, the ceremonies—and all the fences between people and God. And **He** Himself would make a way for everyone to come personally to God as Abba. Father! Jesus would replace all religion as the way to God. . What Jesus accomplished on the cross and through sending the Spirit was not a big patch on an old system; He made **all** things new. And **that's** what He's getting at here. This, friends, was **scary** stuff!
 -Jesus goes on to explain himself further with two images:

Besides, who would patch old clothing with new cloth? For the new patch would shrink and rip away from the old cloth, leaving an even bigger tear than before. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. For the old skins would burst from the pressure, spilling the wine and ruining the skins. New wine is stored in new wineskins so that both are preserved.” (Matthew 9:14-17 NLT)

1. Patches were a fact of life in Jesus' day. Clothes, made of cloth woven by hand—usually either cotton or wool—and people then did not need a walk-in closet for their wardrobe. The typical person would have one coat—and maybe two or three tunics. If you ripped or burnt a whole in your clothes, you patched them.

-Anyone here ever washed a new pair of jeans—dried them—and had to pour yourself into them? **They** knew that new cloth shrinks horribly—and if you use it to patch an older piece of clothing—it'll rip.

-And Jesus was saying, “I have come—not to patch an old system up with a couple of cool new ideas—but to replace it with what is **totally** new; a whole new way of relating to God.

2. Jesus uses another illustration that **everyone** would understand. Wine was a main staple of life in 30 AD. We are not familiar with **wineskins**, so let me explain that part. When new wine was made and preserved by fermentation, they would put it in specially tanned goatskins—with the legs sewn up. They were flexible—and would expand as the grape juice turned to wine. **[picture]**. But the fermentation process would harden the leather and make it brittle. If you tried to **re-use** the container, the gases would split the leather—and the wine would be lost.

-My Dad used to make homemade root beer—and put it in bottles to create natural carbonation with yeast. One year, he placed the in the balcony of our church fellowship hall—and the gases blew the caps off—dumping this sticky root beer all over the place! We learned!

-**Everyone** would've understood when Jesus said, “You don't put new wine in old wineskins!”

3. What Jesus is saying here is that He came to change **everything**. So, let's be clear. John's disciples come and subtly criticize Jesus and his disciples for not being a spiritual as they were—and as the Pharisees were—because they

didn't fast. And rather than saying, "Yeah, you know—you're right—we would show more devotion to God if we fasted regularly!" Jesus said, "This is a whole new party! This is a whole new deal! This is a whole new day! **Everything** needs to change. **Everything!**"

-The new cloth—the new wine Jesus is talking about is **totally** different than anyone ever expected. Approaching God had always been about temples, ceremonies, sacrifices, and special people. Jesus, Son of God, came—and on the basis of his own sacrifice—offered a personal relationship with the Father to every person who would receive it. Jesus leveled the playing field.

-In Jesus' name—**anyone** can come and receive the Spirit of God—and find the intimacy with God our hearts crave. You don't need smoke, candles, rituals, priests, or altars. Can you understand **why** this new way would blow people out of the water—like the religious professionals—whose livelihood and position in that culture was **totally** invested in the old religious system? Because of Jesus, spiritual relationship and transformation would become the biggest **come-as-you-are** party on the planet—the **Kingdom of God**.

- C. Now, for the most part—I think we get that. I think we **know**—at least inwardly—that no one comes to God and finds new life and forgiveness and freedom through following religious rituals performed by religious people. But I **do** think that sometimes, to use Jesus illustration, we get the **wine** confused with the temporary container.

-This cardboard wine container would give you a little better idea of what Jesus was talking about. It's temporary. No one, to my knowledge, collects these things—or tries to refill them.

1. The wine Jesus is talking about is God's plan to **redeem** and **restore** everyone and everything. And that's the thread all through the Bible—from Adam and Eve's decision to play God and decide right and wrong for themselves—to Noah—to Abraham—to Moses.

-All through the Old Testament—recording the activity of God—there are these fingers pointing forward to the Messiah. What was hidden was that God Himself would show up as a man—and give His **life** to make a personal relationship of intimacy with the Father possible. And that all the covenants with Noah, Abraham and Moses were wineskins. Temporary containers for what God was up to.

-That's why Jesus would say, "What I've come to do isn't a patch job; it's not filler for an old wineskin. From now on religion will be a thing of the past. **I AM** the way; **I AM** the truth; **I AM** the life—and from now on, no one can come to the Father except through me!

2. I've mentioned this before—I know—but let me say it again; the temptation for followers of Jesus will **always** be to turn a **relationship** with God through Jesus into a **religion**. And inevitably, when we do that, we make the rituals and traditions more important than the relationship. And the **danger** is ending up

more devoted and emotionally attached to empty, disposable containers than to the One who makes **all things new!**

-The problem is that wine **needs** a container. Don't get me wrong. The wine **needs** a wineskin. It's like a house—which is a container for people. Lots of good things happen in a house—but the house is **not** the family, right? If you make the family about the house—it can really screw things up, right? And if you make a personal relationship with the Father through Jesus all about the traditions, the containers—you will miss the point!

3. How many of you think we've clearly understood this principle Jesus was teaching—of the difference between the wine **never** changes—and the disposable containers for the truth and power and work of God? Let's check. I'll mention something—you tell me if it's **wine** or **wineskins**.

-Steeple?

-Crosses in churches?

-Baptism?

-Altar calls?

-Communion?

-Printed Bibles?

-The truth contained in the Bible?

-Ministers?

-Gatherings as believers in Jesus?

-Jesus as the only way to God?

-Buildings?

-The teachings of the Bible on marriage, sexual purity, and money?

5. The bottom line is—we live in a **rapidly** changing world. God has given us **incredible** latitude in the containers and structures and systems and methods we use. **Huge** leeway. But He has not given us permission to change His mission or His truth or His plan!

III. THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- A. There are some things I want us to think about as the take-away from these images Jesus uses.

-Let me ask a question: How many of you **truly** want to see Jesus' mission to **redeem** and **restore** everyone and everything accomplished. You **want** to do what is good and right—and make a difference with your life, time and resources? God **can** and **will** use motivation like that! But you need to be realistic about one thing. Satan will try to lead you off course. Want to know how?

-Review question: **Who** came and initially questioned Jesus' and His disciple's spirituality? Answer? The disciples of **John the Baptist!** Surprising isn't it—especially when **John the Baptist** was the one who proclaimed Jesus to be the "Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!"

1. I just need to say—**I'm not surprised!** Really good, well-meaning people have **always** been tempted to judge and criticize the spirituality of others. Aaron and Miriam did it to Moses—and were judged for it. And judgment and criticism

works **exactly** like you see it here. We start doing a good thing—and then judge others the basis of what **we** are doing. This even happens in dumb ways. Two days into a diet, we look at someone porking out on French Fries and ice cream and think to ourselves, “How **could** they do that to their bodies—when two days before **we** were doing it! Judging is based on **pride. Superiority.** -It’s **so** subtle. And at the core, it is obnoxious, unspiritual and of the Devil! And it destroys what God is up to. Pride is one of the things God hates **most.** Do you think He likes it more when it gets into the spiritual arena? God hates it **wherever** it is!

-Time and time again we’ve been warned to not to judge—because that’s **not our job!** Jesus was **very** clear about it. First He made it clear that we are to keep acts of devotion—things like giving to the poor, prayer and fasting **private.** And then right after that, Jesus said:

“Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. For you will be treated as you treat others. The standard you use in judging is the standard by which you will be judged. (Matthew 7:1-2 NLT)

-As clear as Jesus is here, if you look down through entire history of God’s people—judging others has become the preferred detour for people who initially only wanted to do what is right. Paul, an early church leader addresses some people who were doing this and says, basically, “Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? They have to account to God—not you!”
-And yet the urge to create lists of the right and good and spiritual things to do—and lists of bad things to **not** do--and then judge others on the basis of those lists seems irresistible. We keep falling into the same stupid traps!

2. And our motivation gets contaminated. We don’t just want to do **right—good—spiritual** things; we want other people to **notice** how spiritual we are. That’s why Jesus specifically told us to give to the poor, pray, or fast in ways that others know about it. Because when that kind of junk gets into our motivation tank—nothing good comes from it.

-And throughout His life, Jesus asks the question, “Do you want life and power and joy and love—or **do you want to be more spiritual than others.**” You can’t have both. Because criticism and judging—and all the other junk that goes with it grieves the Spirit—and the Spirit is the new wine—always making all things new.

-This leader, Paul, said that if the good things we do—giving talks, praying with incredible faith—even giving everything we own to the poor—or laying our lives on the line—if they’re done out of pride, to be noticed, to be seen as a spiritual cut above others—and not love for God and love for others—they’re **junk! Nothing! Noise!** See, the deal is that if Satan can’t stop us from doing what’s good, he **can** ruin what we do by creating in us a proud, judging, critical spirit!

-This, friends, is **really** sneaky stuff. We called to keep our eyes on Jesus—the **author** of our faith; the **finisher** of our faith—and keep our eyes **off** of others.

And that takes ongoing care, watchfulness—and intimacy with the Father. It takes inner discipline—to pick up on critical thoughts toward others—and an unteachable spirit in ourselves.

B. Something else. This discussion of disposable containers—structures, styles, methods, places—is just as current in our lives today as it was back when Jesus first used it. Jesus' point was to keep what's temporary—temporary; and **not** try to change what is meant to be unchanging based on the moving target set up by our culture. -This actually has some **very** practical implications to it. We have to pay attention to **paradigm shifts**. The first church Lori and I served was in a place called **Emporium, PA**. The entire town was build around a huge Sylvania plant. When we got there in 1983, the plant has shrunk from 3000 employees to 150. Want to know why? They made **radio tubes** in a world that had switched to solid state. Unemployment ran at about 35%. In that case, making a **better** radio tube didn't matter!

1. And this fits in everyday life stuff, too. If you're contemplating marriage, for example, you need to know that this is a **totally new paradigm!** Marriage is not a new bottle for an old life—or a patch!

-I **knew** that when I got married, but I didn't **get** it. I tried just bringing Lori into the family—and it was one of the dumbest, most destructive things I've ever done. The Bible says, that a man is to **leave** his Mom and Dad—and **cleave—be united** with his wife. I'm not the only one that dumb! You'd be surprised how many people get married—thinking that things can pretty much remain the same.

-It's the same with having children. Children are not a patch on an existing life. The choice to have or adopt children changes **everything**. It's a **new life in a new container for both parents**.

2. And choosing to believe in Jesus and follow Jesus is **not** a new patch on an old life. Choosing to follow changes **everything**. It changes your whole **reason** for living and loving. Over time it changes the way you treat others, the way you talk, the way you spend, the way you see the world, and the way you see yourself. It's not just the same ol, same ol with an insurance policy in your back pocket. God's plan, with our cooperation, is to make **everything** new! And the only way that can happen is for our lives to be filled with new wine—with the Spirit of God—and serve a new Lord. To look in the mirror in the morning and say, "There **is** a God—and it **ain't** you! **Jesus is Lord!**"

-Paul, this early leader who so totally followed Jesus—and rocked the church, wrote:

He died for everyone so that those who receive his new life will no longer live for themselves. Instead, they will live for Christ, who died and was raised for them. So we have stopped evaluating others from a human point of view. At one time we thought of Christ merely from a human point of view. How differently we know him now! This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! (2 Corinthians 5:15-17 NLT)

3. This new life is **continually** being given to the Church of Jesus through the Holy Spirit. And that means that things continually have to change within the Church. Know why? It's because we are called to conform to **God's** mission in the world to renew **everything**--not get Him to conform our lifestyles and politics and plans. What God is doing is **always** new—and it will **always** require new containers; new methods, new structures, and new ways of pouring the love, grace, power and compassion of God into the neediest places in the world.

-The Church of Jesus is **not** about our comfort level. It's about the **lost** being found and reclaimed. It's about us humbling ourselves before God—to do **His** will—not getting Him to do **our** will. The container is the part that brings the wine—the power and glory of Jesus—to the world. And it **must** change—because the world is changing **all the time**.

-I'll tell you specifically what our temptation is. It's to change the truth—and institutionalize the traditions. It's to change what God has clearly said about life, sex, marriage, greed, money and convenience to fit our culture—and then ask God to fit into the iron bottles we've created for him. And God says, "No—**you** have to change; **you** have to be made new." And if you won't—or don't? You die. Jesus **never** changes. Truth never changes to fit our lives or become more politically correct. But we **must!**

-Sometimes that's hard for us to see—because we view God as being the ultimate old-timer! One with the long white beard—saying, "Well, I remember back in the **good** old days—you know, when people were **really** committed! Life was hard, but **we liked it that way!**" The **truth** is—God is younger than we are!

-God is not confused by new technology; he is older than eternity—and yet more current than I-phone, Facebook and Twitter—and whatever the next evolution in technology is! And he says to people who think they're cool and surfing the latest wave, "**Get with it!**"

- C. I see a third issue when it comes to bottles and patches. One side of it is a sense that change means having to denounce or put down the structures God has used in the past to make a difference.

1. Know what I get tired of—especially in circles of Jesus' followers? It's the sense that, "Oh, yeah—**they** didn't have a good grasp of Scripture and what God is up to! How could **they** be so dumb and blind! But now **we** have gotten tuned into what God **truly** has been wanting to do all along." My sense is that God has used...and **continues** to use a lot of different **wineskins**—methods, structures and traditions. I don't think we need to put down how God has worked and what He's used in the past to authenticate a new method, structure or tradition God seems to be working through now.

-In the past, God has used printed Bibles, stained glass, organs, altar calls, hymnals, mass evangelism, small groups, buses, the Charismatic Movement,

classical music, sculpture, Sunday School, evening services, seeker churches and radio Bible teachers—and many, **many** more structures, methods and traditions. They're containers.

-Because none of these are specifically mentioned in the Bible doesn't mean they're wrong—and that the church has been off target. God works in a **lot** of ways! He can even use talking donkeys! We don't need to put down where God is working to authenticate anything. We just need to look for the edge of where He's working in new ways. God is **always** working in new ways! Why would we have to trash the ways God has worked in the past—to authenticate the new ways?

2. I'll tell you where the other danger is. In Luke's record, Jesus adds a **very** revealing sentence to the end.

New wine must be stored in new wineskins. But no one who drinks the old wine seems to want the new wine. 'The old is just fine,' they say.'
(Luke 5:38-39 NLT)

-This phrase, **The old is just fine**, describes why the religious leaders demanded Jesus' crucifixion. If Jesus was **right**—that He was the way, the truth and the life—that **new** wine needed **new** wineskins—well, it meant they would lose their edge. They would have to follow Jesus—just like the disciples—whom they despised. Their thought was, "Why change? The old traditions, systems, structures are working **fine** for us! Let's kill Jesus instead!" So they did. Which, in fact, **sealed their fate and the fate of the Temple, the traditions—all that was familiar.**

3. Remember the image I used a few weeks ago, where Jesus said that just like Moses raised up the snake on a pole in the wilderness—He, too, would be raised up so that all who believed would be saved? That snake was once a **good** snake. God commanded that it be created—and he used it to heal **thousands** of people. And Jesus authenticated it with His teaching.
-But if you look back into Israel's history, you find that this bronze snake had to be destroyed. Instead of it simply being a reminder of how God had worked, people started **worshipping** the bronze snake itself! They even gave it a special name. **Nehushtan!** It was a good snake—gone bad!

-And that's what happens when we start revering the structures, traditions, methods and things God has used. We don't **want** the new—because it means change. And we don't **want** to change! We'd rather sit in a circle, sing "Cum-By-Yah" and have an old wine and cheese party! But that's not our calling. Our calling is to the transformation of the world; and our calling is to follow the One who is **always**—to our frustration, I might add—**making all things new!**

IV. TWO THINGS

- A. I have two questions for you in closing this morning. Is there an area of your life where, if you were totally honest, you've been entertaining an attitude of superiority? And you've become judgmental and critical of others; of their spirituality, of what

they're doing—or not doing. If so, you need to know that this grieves the Spirit, hurts others, and damages the new things God wants to do. Will you stop—and will you love—and will you let God work where only **He** can work?

- B. Second, God is stirring things up. We're only 5 ½ years old as a church—and we already have traditions—ways of doing things that I believe God wants to change. And He's changing me—moving me into new areas I'm not familiar with. -And I want to ask--where's the place where the Spirit—the New Wine, wants to change you, renew you, renew what you're doing—and you're resisting because it means change? Will you choose to cooperate with the new thing He wants to do?