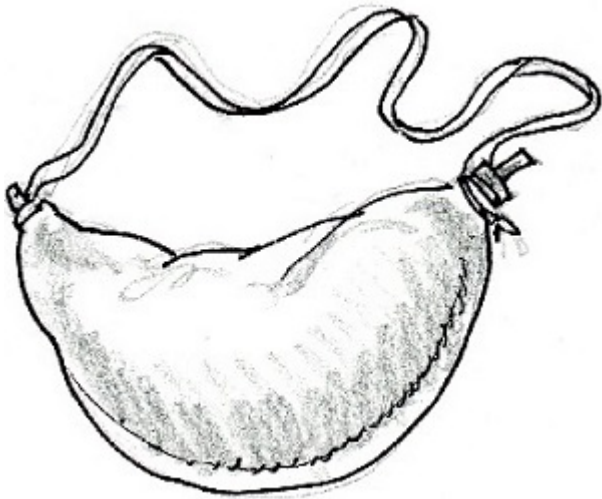


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by Pat Marrin

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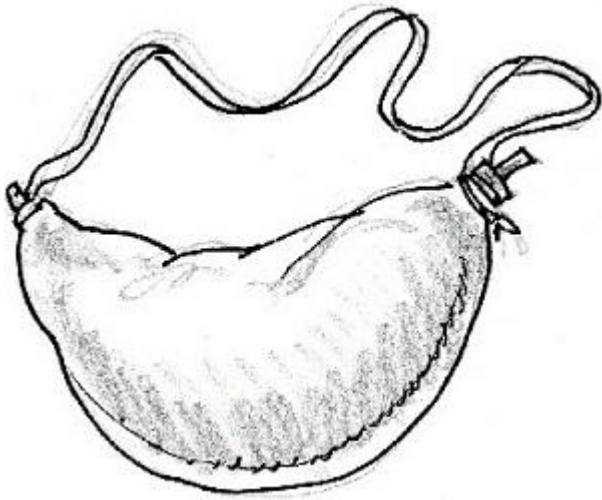
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“New wine must be poured into fresh wineskins” (Luke 5:39).

1 Cor 4:1-5; Luke 5:33-39

The practice of fasting was part of Jewish tradition touted by the scribes and Pharisees, and they were quick to criticize Jesus for not ordering his disciples to do it. He reminded them that during a wedding celebration people were not required to fast, comparing his presence to that of a bridegroom and his announcement of God’s Kingdom as a reason to rejoice. It is a lively metaphor that contrasts their penitential tradition to his exuberant revelation that something new and wonderful was happening right before them that they were failing to recognize.

Two other images convey the energy of expansive new life. Patching an old cloak with new cloth ensures that the patch will tear away when it shrinks. Putting new wine into old skins ensures that the fermenting wine will burst the skins. It was a perfect way to describe the need for new structures to accommodate new ideas or risk the destruction and loss of both. Jesus’ message was fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah: “Behold, I am doing something new; it is springing forth, do you not perceive it?” (43:19).

The idea of tradition offers people who fear change a sense of security, and leaders who appeal to the past and promise to keep things unchanged appeal to that fear. But it is a false security because life and change are inevitable. Tradition itself is a living reality whose values must be “handed on” (*traducere*) to preserve them in new circumstances. What does not evolve does not survive and attempts to halt this life process only destroy its vitality and adaptability.

Jesus' image of a wedding reminded his critics that the purpose of all their rituals and traditions was to enhance the Covenant, which ties directly to the Great Commandment of love, God's nuptial with his people. While they go about fasting with long faces, judging others for offending God, they were missing the wedding. So, with the fearmongers and those who barricade themselves from anything new or different. What are they missing? The real world, the chance to learn and grow, the mystery of life no one can control or stop. "Behold, I am doing something new. Do you not perceive it?"

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