

## In With the New January 10, 2010

Here we are—10 days into the New Year. Has the New Year brought newness, or is it still the same old, same old? The start of a new year, or a new day, or a new month, or a new anything really gives us a fresh start, an opportunity to re-purpose our lives, to reinvent ourselves, to revise who and what we are. However, many of us fail to do that. We keep holding on to the way things have always been, talking about the things we used to do, the people we used to know, how things used to be. As a result, we never welcome new ideas, new ways of operating, and new ways of being.

When it comes to resisting new ideas, the church is among the worst! One of the main cries heard in the halls of any church is, “We’ve never done it that way before!” Or, “We’ve always had this event!” Woe is the person who suggests a new way of functioning, or new ideas for how to connect with God.

That’s the heart of what our Bible passage for this morning is all about. Our part fits into a bigger section in which Jesus is challenging the religious types, who seem to have a passion for the old ways of being and the old ways of doing. Jesus is pushing hard on those who have a closed mind, and who shut out the possibility of anything new. In our passage, Jesus uses an analogy that listeners in his day would have understood. Here’s how our version reads:

**Then Jesus gave them this illustration. “No one tears a piece of cloth from a new garment and uses it**

**to patch an old garment. For then the new garment would be torn, and the patch wouldn’t even match the old garment. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. The new wine would burst the old skins, spilling the wine and ruining the skins. New wine must be put into new wineskins. But no one who drinks the old wine seems to want the fresh and the new. ‘The old is better,’ they say.”**

Let me try to explain the point he was making here. He noted how silly it would be to try to patch an old shirt or pair of pants with a new piece of cloth; it would ruin the new fabric, and the new patch simply wouldn’t go with the old garment. Likewise, he talked about wine and wineskins. Wineskins were the bottles of his day, and new wine had to go into new wineskins, because those wineskins had some elasticity in them, and could accommodate the fermentation process of the wine. However, an old wineskin got dry and brittle, and when new wine was put in it, it would burst, spilling all the new wine.

Jesus, in his own way, was railing against those who are close-minded about new ideas and new ways of being, urging them to be open to new methods and new ways of thinking. He reminds his listeners that one day the new wine will mature and will be the best, if it is handled properly. A person of faith, he seems to say, is one who is forward-thinking, has an adventurous spirit, and is unafraid of new ways of doing and being.

What might that mean to us on a personal level? The reality is that we are new people every single day; we just fall into some really rusty habits and routines, and our lives

become ordinary, lackluster. Sometimes we're afraid to make changes, afraid of what will happen. Yes, there is risk involved, but frankly, there is risk, and maybe greater risk, if we don't try new directions and take new steps. Jesus seems to be encouraging us to take seriously the idea that we can remake our lives, starting over in a whole new way, addressing new challenges, forging new pathways, if we're willing to trust God and start moving.

Take, for example, our work lives. I know that some here today are out of work, and are exhausted trying to find a new job, but let me ask a question: Are we trying to find one like we used to have? If we are, odds are quite high that those jobs will never come back because of our changing economy and job market.

What would it be like if we chose to go back to school, and re-tool for new opportunities? What might it be like if we reinvented ourselves, and pursued some other passions and interests and skill areas, and turned into an entirely new type of employee? No one can say that would guarantee a new job, but my guess is we might find doors opening that previously we never even knew existed! Actually, if you're one of those who's in a job search, you might even benefit from stopping in at The Garden Employment Connection some Wednesday evening, and see if you find there the inspiration to reinvent your work life.

I suspect there are some here today who are continuing to do the same job we've done for a number of years, so how might we get a fresh start this year? We might begin by asking ourselves if we're still trying

to do our job the same way we did 5 or 10 years ago, and see what our response is. If the response is yes, then I think we need a little boost to launch out in a new direction. However, I'm guessing that the answer is more likely to be no, if for no other reason than because of all the ways in which technology has changed so many things when it comes to work.

That's certainly true as it concerns ministry. Certainly people and relationships remain at the center of y ministry, but the way we connect with people and the way we foster relationships has changed significantly since I began in ministry almost thirty years ago! No one could have imagined back then that we would be connected so closely and so instantaneously via the internet, but that's exactly what we're doing. We don't have to have all those face-to-face meetings the way we used to, because now we can sit at home on our computer, and go to meeting. Much of our team communication is done virtually, and The Garden is on Facebook, relating to all of us and to the rest of the world. Times have changed, and we have to be open to new ways.

Just as times are changing out there, they're also going to change in The Garden, too. One of the major changes we're undergoing right now is a total revamp of our 10% charitable giving program. For the last 11 years, we have been choosing a different grassroots non-profit organization each month, and donated to that organization 10% of the monies that come in our watering cans on Sunday morning. We've been able to support a lot of different

organization over the years, and hopefully have helped Gardeners become more aware of the good work so many groups are doing in and around the metropolitan Indianapolis area.

However, we felt that things had become a little stale, and needed a facelift, so we're changing some things beginning this year. For one thing, we're going to choose an emphasis for a quarter, and then select an organization or more than one organization that happens to fit into that particular emphasis. For instance, this first quarter, we're going to focus on domestic violence, and the various groups that help those who are facing situations that endanger their well-being.

One of those organizations, Fresh Start of Indiana, actually began out of The Garden, and many Gardeners have contributed a lot of time and energy to help this group fulfill its mission. So, while Fresh Start will be our primary recipient, we intend to explore various aspects of this issue, and also introduce everyone to all the various groups and agencies in our community that help promote safety and wholeness for those who have faced violent circumstances. In early December, Channel 8, WISH tv, interviewed us and Fresh Start about their work. Let's take a look at that segment of Hoosiers Helping Hoosiers.

We're going to be doing the same thing each quarter during 2010—choosing an issue or area of focus for the three months, and then choose one or two or even three organizations that work in that particular area of interest. This

quarterly approach will not only result in a larger monetary donation in some instances, but it will also allow time to understand more fully the needs, and will make it possible for more Gardeners to get involved with our various recipients and help meet their needs. Thinking about the emphasis for a quarter can give us a more in-depth study of how our community is dealing with the many issues that face Indianapolis and the surrounding areas. So, the 10% program is getting a new look this year.

The same thing is true of our outreach effort in general. With the engagement of lots more Gardeners, those efforts have already begun expanding, because new people bring new ideas and new energy. That's part of what's happening with our Comfort and Care team, particularly at our Oak Hill site. While the team has resourced the care line (magnets available today) and offered support and prayers for those who request it, this group, too, is re-thinking how it operates and looking to see how more needs can be met.

Some of our Comfort and Care Team members have been trained as Stephens Ministers, and other Gardeners are currently going through the training. This equips them to offer help in a way that's more in depth than we typically consider. So, please know that if you have a need or concern, members of our Comfort and Care team are ready and able to support you.

I know you'll be hearing lots more about 2010 changes as the weeks go by. Along that same line, let me invite anyone who is interested to become involved in any

of our teams or with any of our 10% recipients. All through The Garden, we're looking for people who have ideas about messages to create, new directions to go, different ways to work, and fresh ideas about how our Garden is going to grow. Check out our [www.thegardenonline.org](http://www.thegardenonline.org) website, or contact any of us on Sunday morning to let us know your interest and abilities, and we'll do our best to get you connected. We'd really value any way you can help us re-create ourselves in the coming year.

I'm always sad to see the old year end, but there's a little bit of excitement about the possibility of turning away from what has been, and looking toward what is yet to be. I'm looking forward to 2010 and a fresh start. How about you?

**Closing:**

As we move into this new year, maybe we can be inspired by the words of JB Priestly, who said, **"I have always been delighted at the prospect of a new day, a fresh try, one more start, with perhaps a bit of magic waiting somewhere behind the morning."** I pray it be so for each of us in 2010.

Have a good Sunday, and go in peace. Amen.