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New Wine, Old Skins

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New Wine, Old Skins
A Liturgical Drama on Mark 2:13-22
A play for actors and singers by John Steven Paul
Developed in workshop by Soul Purpose,
The Liturgical Drama Troupe of the Valparaiso University Theatre
First performance at the Chapel of the Resurrection, Valparaiso University, February 27, 2000

Characters:

JESUS

LEVI

CHORUS of four divided as follows:

CHORUS A: A1 & A2

CHORUS B: B1 & B2

GENE

CAROL

EDWARD

*Enter LEVI, a tax collector from upstage; and to him,
JESUS coming up from the audience.*

JESUS:

Hey, man, follow me.

LEVI:

Where?

JESUS:

Wherever.

LEVI:

Okay. What for?

JESUS:

We'll eat.

LEVI:

You... *you'll* eat with me?

JESUS:

You bet. Got any friends?

LEVI:

Friends? Sure, but you won't like 'em.

JESUS:

You mean they're tax collectors and sinners?

LEVI:

In a manner of speaking.

JESUS:

They're my favorite dinner companions.

LEVI:

Well, that's a new one.

CHORUS A:

New wine!

CHORUS B:

Old skins!

CHORUS A:

New wine!

CHORUS B:

Old skins!

CHORUS A:

New wine –

CHORUS B1:

Who's that?

LEVI:

Howdy, partners. Levi's the name, collecting's the game.

CHORUS A1:

What d'ya collect, dude?

LEVI:

Skins.

CHORUS:

Gross, weird, etc.

CHORUS A2:

Are you a furrier?

LEVI:

Furrier than what?

CHORUS A1:

No, man, do you sell, like, mink coats?

LEVI:

No, not that kind of skins. Old skins.

CHORUS:

What?

CHORUS B1:

Hey, I know him; he's a tax collector.

CHORUS B2:

He skins *people*.

CHORUS:

Boo, hiss, tax collector, get outta here, etc.

LEVI:

Wait a minute. I skinned a few people, it's true. But today, for a change, I got some good news for you.

CHORUS A:

New wine.

CHORUS B:

Old skins.

CHORUS A:

New wine.

CHORUS B:

Old skins.

CHORUS A1:

So what's in your collection, dude?

LEVI:

Friends, fast friends.

CHORUS A2:

Fast friends?

LEVI:

Yeah, they'd rather fast than eat with me!

CHORUS B1:

Oh, brother.

CHORUS B2:

Where are they?

LEVI:

Here comes one now. Hi, Gene.

Enter GENE. He gives LEVI a very disdainful look. Then he speaks to the audience.

GENE:

(Speaking to JESUS) Wash your hands. I'm telling you, *wash your hands*. That's how germs get spread, you know. People pick up stuff – food, money, all kinds of stuff – that other people have touched and then they do something inane like stick their thumb in their mouth, or rub their eyes or pick their nose, sorry, and they put those germs right into their own blood stream. All they'd have to do is wash their hands right after they touch something... germly... and there'd be a lot less flu and colds passed around.

JESUS:

Seems like everybody gets a cold once in a while.

GENE:

Have you had a shower lately?... No, I'm not saying anything... I know you *like* musk cologne. But I've been in your room and I've seen everything else in that room except towels or soap. I mean, everything else is lying around out in the open, but no towels. Is that just a coincidence? Maybe you just like to keep your towels really clean so they're, like, always in the wash. Is that it? It would just be a lot sweeter around here if you used more soap more often. I'll bet you use 80% cologne and 20% soap, am I right? How about reversing those? It's why I moved out, you know.

JESUS:

I was wonderin'. So you didn't like my *Brut*, huh?

GENE:

I didn't like *any* of those people you're hanging around with over there now. Who are they anyway? They're not from around here, are they? Where did you meet them? They look like worse pigs than you. Are they bikers? They're so greasy. How can you hang out with them? Don't tell me you actually eat with them. Have you ever seen them wash their hands?... I didn't think so. They smoke pot, do they? And, what else... ? I don't want to know.

JESUS:

Is this how you divide the world: between clean and unclean?

GENE:

Is it so wrong to want to be clean? You know, really, perfectly clean? I know you can't be perfectly clean, but you can try. It's not an obsession to try, is it? There are some simple things you can do every day to be clean. It just takes a little discipline. You gotta start somewhere. And if you don't, I'm not coming back over there.

JESUS:

I'll do better. It just seems like there's more than one way to be clean.

Looking intensely at JESUS.

GENE:

What's happened to you? Is this the *new* you? We used to be... friends. More than that... you know. I used to respect you. You knew how to get things done. You knew what was right. You knew when to do things and why things had to be done a certain way. You knew the rules. And you were... clean.

CHORUS A:

New wine!

CHORUS B:

Old skins!

CHORUS A:

New wine!

CHORUS B:

Old skins!

CHORUS A:

New wine –

LEVI:

So, what do you think, partners? (*indicating JESUS*) New wine? (*JESUS waves*)

CHORUS:

Maybe. (*LEVI indicates GENE.*)

LEVI:

Old skin?

CHORUS:

Definitely. (*CHORUS points the way.*)

LEVI:

I'm afraid so. (*GENE goes off alone.*)

CHORUS A1:

Hey, tax collector, what kinda taxes you collect?

LEVI:

I used t' collect poll tax.

CHORUS B1:

Perfect for a polecat!¹

LEVI:

That's what I was, you bet. But no more.

¹ *Another name for a skunk*

CHORUS A2:

What are you now?

CHORUS A1:

A farmer?

CHORUS B1:

A tax farmer?

LEVI:

Naw. A fisher.

CHORUS:

An *angler*?

LEVI:

A fisher... of men.

CHORUS B1:

Just fish on your own side of the pond, scum.

CHORUS B2:

Hey, fisher, only men?

LEVI:

And wiiiiiiiiiiii-men. Like Carol.

Enter CAROL. She greets LEVI with just about as much enthusiasm as GENE did. Then she speaks to the audience.

CAROL:

I don't think I can go to church anymore. I know, I don't go very much anyway, but when I do, I just can't stand to be around all those people. I mean, they're distracting. I can't concentrate. And if I can't concentrate, I can't worship. I'm sorry.

Maybe I just haven't found the right church. I don't know. I don't think that's it though. I mean, even when I went home at Christmas, it was the same thing. Christmas is worse, you know. Then there are all those people there who never come to church except on Christmas or Easter. We call them "C & E people." They don't know the front end of the church from the back, when to stand up or sit down. And they never sing or even respond when they're supposed to. It's not like the whole service *isn't* printed out right there in the bulletin.

Not to mention the way they dress. It's either outfits that look just right for Mardi Gras night at the casino or Levis –

LEVI:

Hey, what's wrong with Levis?

CAROL:

Excuse me? I'm talking about jeans and work clothes and muddy shoes. I mean, "Hello, it's *Christmas Eve* in church. Dress up!" And their kids are terrible. Babies crying, little rugrats crawling around with runny noses. And the parents aren't much better. Coughing and sneezing. Hey, stay home if you're sick. Listen on the radio. Puh-lease! I'm trying to celebrate the birth of Christ, if you don't mind!

JESUS:

And they aren't?

CAROL:

They don't bother you, do they? No matter that they're late, and clueless, and their kids are obnoxious, and their clothes are all wrong, and you haven't seen them in church since last Christmas, if then. You deal with it. No, it's more than that, you really kind of like them, don't you? People you don't even know. I saw you hugging them during the passing of the peace. Geez!

JESUS:

... for short.

CAROL:

What's up with you? We grew up together. We memorized the catechism and got confirmed together. What does this mean? (*little joke*) Now I hardly ever see you. Not even in church. No, I know, I don't... go much. I just can't stand it, you know? But when I am there I don't see you. Where were you last week? Oh, that's right, at the prison. So, you want to go this week? Oh, no, I remember, you're going to the homeless shelter for services. Is this the *new* you? I don't feel

like we have much in common anymore, at least worship-wise. And, I don't think I like that. No, I didn't say I didn't like you, did I? (*JESUS shrugs and walks away.*)

CHORUS A:

New wine!

CHORUS B:

Old skins!

CHORUS A:

New wine!

CHORUS B:

Old skins!

CHORUS A:

New wine –

LEVI:

So, what do you think, partners? (*indicating JESUS*) New wine? (*JESUS waves*)

CHORUS:

Maybe. (*LEVI indicates CAROL*)

LEVI:

Old skin?

CHORUS:

Definitely. (*CHORUS points the way*)

LEVI:

I'm afraid so. (*CAROL goes off alone.*)

CHORUS A1:

So, tax collector, what changed you from a polecat...

CHORUS A2:

... to a cat with a pole?

LEVI:

A couple days ago, I was sitting at my toll booth...

CHORUS B1:

I hate toll booths. The gates are always stuck!

LEVI:

and *he* comes up to me and says,

JESUS:

Follow me.

CHORUS:

And you said?

LEVI:

Where?

CHORUS:

And he said?

LEVI:

Hey, I can tell this story. And he said...

JESUS:

Follow me.

LEVI:

Okay.

And the next thing I know...

CHORUS A:

Yeah?

LEVI:

And the next thing I know...

CHORUS B:

Yeah?

LEVI:

And the next thing I know...

The CHORUS looks at him as if they're going to beat it out of him if he doesn't say.

LEVI:

We're eating at my house with all the toll cats and the pole cats I know.

CHORUS A1:

Hey, what day was that? Weren't you supposed to be fasting?

LEVI:

Yeah, but...

JESUS:

The wedding guests cannot fast when the bridegroom is with them, can they? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast.

LEVI:

Well, that's a new one.

CHORUS:

New wine... old skins.

CHORUS B1:

Got any more old skins, collector?

LEVI:

There's always plenty of old skins. Here's one more.

Enter EDWARD.

EDWARD:

(speaking to JESUS) Have I ever crossed the street to avoid meeting somebody I didn't care for coming the other way? Crossed the street... You mean metaphorically? Sure. *(Pause.)* Well, you don't have to look at me that way. It wasn't *you*, at least not yet... heh, heh... ahem.

There are simply some people who I don't want to be associated with. Is that such a bad thing? I mean, for the most part, these kinds of people have separated *themselves* from the rest of *us*. How? By something they've done, or said, or didn't do, or didn't say. For example? Well, I suppose the most obvious ones are the criminals, the ones who've gotten caught, that is, and are reading last week's newspapers in the slammer. The cons are in there and decent people like me out here; let's keep it that way.

JESUS:

And once they've completed their sentences?

EDWARD:

Well, good for them, I guess, but I'd rather steer clear. After all, you can't tell me that prison changes anybody. What did they do that got them in there in the first place? If I'm going to invest my time in a friendship, I want value in return.

JESUS:

You sound like you're choosing a stock or a bond.

EDWARD:

Why has it somehow become wrong to be discriminating or – fasten your seat belts – to discriminate? My ability to discriminate is what makes me human; what separates me from animals? I think the word “discrimination” has gotten a bad rap. What does the word really mean? It means being able to perceive the differences between things: one piece of music is different from another, right? Who would deny that? Or one flower from another. Or one sports jacket. Or one novel. Or imported beer. Or.. person. To be called “discriminating,” used to be a

compliment. I know it's not PC now, but I for one, I'm telling you, am still a discriminating person and I'm proud of it.

JESUS:

What are you talking about?

EDWARD:

I'm *not* talking about racial discrimination. Or apartheid. Or Jim Crow. Or any kind of legal separation. But, I have to tell you... I mean it's no news flash that some people have chosen to live their lives one way and others... a different way. I'm not necessarily saying that one way of life is better, but we all have our preferences. And it's my right to associate with anyone and to disassociate with anyone. I can include *you* in or I can include *you* out.

JESUS:

He makes me sad, Levi.

EDWARD:

I'll tell you something that makes *me* sad. I don't believe that we can all live as one big happy human family, or that we can all break bread together on our knees. There are some people that you may want to eat with – and frankly, you do not look like a discriminating person to me – but I *don't* want to eat with. There are some people who I *don't* want to sit next to at the movies, or play basketball with, or share a washing machine at the Laundromat with, or go shopping with or sit next to at the Dunes, or walk on the same side of the street with...

JESUS:

Or pray with?

EDWARD:

Or pray with. Exactly. And *who* are you?

JESUS:

New wine.

CHORUS A:

And *who* are you?

CHORUS B:

Old skins. (*CHORUS points the way.*)

JESUS:

The oldest. (*EDWARD begins to walk away.*)

LEVI:

That's right, brother. These are the friends I was telling you about: Gene, Carol & Edward. These are the friends I was telling you about, my fast friends. They'd rather fast than eat with me.

Now JESUS and the CHORUS begin to make their way to the altar.

CHORUS A:

New wine!

CHORUS B:

Old skins.

CHORUS A:

New wine!

CHORUS B:

Old skins.

CHORUS A:

New wine –

LEVI:

Hey! Now the bridegroom is here. The new wine has appeared. But what happens to these poor old skins.

Who will eat with them?

Pause.

JESUS:

Follow me.

G, C & E:

Where?

JESUS:

Wherever.

G, C & E:

Where for starters?

JESUS:

Up there. (*indicates the altar*)

G, C & E:

Okay, what for?

JESUS:

We'll eat.

G, C & E:

You'll eat with us?

JESUS:

You bet. Got any friends?

G, C & E:

Friends? Sure, but you won't like 'em.

JESUS:

You mean they're tax collectors and sinners?

G, C & E:

In a manner of speaking.

JESUS:

They're my favorite dinner companions. Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick... I have come to call not the righteous, but sinners.

LEVI:

Well, that's a new one.

ALL:

That's a new one!

END