

The Thing About Yeast -VIRTUAL EDITION
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Westminster Presbyterian Church – Ontario, CA
July 26, 2020
Year A - 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Matthew 31:31-33

Well, here we go again.

For the third week in a row, we are focused on parables that Jesus told. And, for the third week in a row, Jesus is using imagery that I have to admit is a little obscure to me. For the last couple of Sundays, we've been dealing with farming and agriculture. The first of our two parables today, the Parable of the Mustard Seed, stays in the agricultural territory, which I've already acknowledged is not one of my strong suits.

Today, Jesus takes us into territory that is even more terrifying for me: cooking and the culinary arts. As Kay will tell you, my talent in the kitchen doesn't extend much beyond setting the timer properly on the microwave. If meal planning were left up to me we'd be spending a lot on take-out.

So, today's Parable of the Yeast isn't one that I tend to gravitate toward naturally in sermon planning. The meaning of this parable doesn't jump off the page and smack me in the face. A woman is making dough. She mixes in yeast. The yeast works its way through the dough.

Wow. Okay. The kingdom of heaven, the huge, massive and divinely designed kingdom of heaven is like yeast. I'm not one to contradict Jesus or question His wisdom in choosing images for His parables, but I've gotta say that if all I have to work with is what's on the page, I'm lost. I don't get it.

Fortunately, two thousand or so years' worth of Biblical scholarship gives me more than that to work with. If you dig deeper, there is truly subtle but very profound meaning in this parable.

The barrier we have to cross to find meaning in the Parable of the Yeast is that most of our modern translations simply do not do this parable justice. The New International Version, the version which we use for worship services, tells us only that the yeast was mixed in "a large amount of flour." The New Revised Standard Version is a little better but still misses the mark somewhat. The NRSV says that it was "three measures of flour."

"Three measures of flour." I hear that and I think, what, that it was three cups worth of flour? No! In Jesus' time, "three measures of flour" would have been an enormous amount of flour. That would have been about ten of our modern gallons of flour. You don't mix up ten gallons of flour just to make some pie crusts. You mix up ten gallons of flour because you are planning for an enormous banquet that will feed hundreds of people. Whatever this woman is preparing for, it is going to be a very lavish and very generous feast.

The second point that our modern translations unfortunately obscure is that Jesus didn't just say that the woman "mixed in" the yeast. In the original Greek manuscripts, the verb would have been more like "hid." That doesn't suggest that the woman was trying to do something sneaky or nefarious. What "hid" emphasizes is that the yeast is virtually invisible once it is mixed in. It is a substance that you can neither see nor taste but produces an abundance of bread. So, if you put yeast into ten gallons of flour, you are going to have to rent a warehouse to store all of the loaves until the banquet. The imagery here speaks of an almost ridiculous amount of

bread. Just as God has provided us with a ridiculous wealth of food, water and other resources necessary to sustain our lives.

Behind the miracle of Creation, there is something silent and invisible. It is there and it is there all of the time. Without it, there would be no Creation. The silent and invisible yeast that produces such abundance for us is God's creative power.

That silent creative divine power often produces astonishing and unforeseen results. By putting the Parable of the Mustard Seed together with the Parable of the Yeast, Jesus tells us to look for the unexpected. Sometimes the smallest and seemingly most insignificant objects or events can produce staggering miracles.

Right now, a tiny invisible microbe called the "coronavirus" is causing widespread suffering and pain, not to mention the hardships that come from the disruption of the normal processes of civilization. Our deliverance will ultimately come from the tiny invisible components of an effective vaccine. And that vaccine will be yet another blessing courtesy of God's creative power.

I really don't know much about yeast or baking bread (or baking anything else for that matter). But I do have faith, faith that God is always at work, the miracle is always at hand. I can't see it, touch it, taste it, feel it or smell it, but it is there and gives me very good reason to believe that better days are coming for us all.