

7.31.22 – Pentecost 8

“A Little Yeast”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Galatians 5:1-10 (GNT) ~ Pam

¹ Freedom is what we have—Christ has set us free! Stand, then, as free people, and do not allow yourselves to become slaves again.

² Listen! I, Paul, tell you that if you allow yourselves to be circumcised, it means that Christ is of no use to you at all. ³ Once more I warn any man who allows himself to be circumcised that he is obliged to obey the whole Law. ⁴ Those of you who try to be put right with God by obeying the Law have cut yourselves off from Christ. You are outside God's grace. ⁵ As for us, our hope is that God will put us right with him; and this is what we wait for by the power of God's Spirit working through our faith. ⁶ For when we are in union with Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor the lack of it makes any difference at all; what matters is faith that works through love.

⁷ You were doing so well! Who made you stop obeying the truth? How did he persuade you? ⁸ It was not done by God, who calls you. ⁹ “It takes only a little yeast to make the whole batch of dough rise,” as they say. ¹⁰ But I still feel confident about you. Our life in union with the Lord makes me confident that you will not take a different view and that whoever is upsetting you will be punished by God.

L: These are the Words of God through Paul. C: Thanks be to God!

Matthew 13:33-34 (NLT) ~ Pam

³³ Jesus also used this illustration: “The Kingdom of Heaven is like the yeast a woman used in making bread. Even though she put only a little yeast in three measures of flour, it permeated every part of the dough.” ³⁴ Jesus always used stories and illustrations like these when speaking to the crowds. In fact, he never spoke to them without using such parables.

Leader: These are Imaginative Words to Instruct Us. **People: Thanks be to God!**

Please pray with me:

Creator God, we thank you for our time together this morning. As we continue to study the parables of Jesus, we ask you to stimulate our imaginations, clarify our thinking, nourish our souls, and bring us closer to you in the material. Strengthen our hope and faith to know that even a little yeast transforms the flour as the good yeast of the Gospel transforms us. Lord, may we be attentive today and every day, listening for your direction as the Holy Spirit leads. Now speak through this message. Amen.

The parable in Matthew is often paired with last week's illustration of the mustard seed. We had a busy week, so if you didn't get to the parable study homework you could add it to this week's parable. Both are

pretty short, and the instructions are on the white insert. We'll start with the Galatians passage to set the context of freedom. But first, let's explain the words used in our translations today.

You probably grew up like me hearing the word "leaven" rather than yeast in both passages. Leaven and yeast are fermentation agents used with flour. In the Bible leaven was always leftover dough, what we call sourdough. In the late 1990's it became popular again as Carl Griffith's famous family recipe called The Oregon Trail Sourdough starter became available on the internet; it was a fad among church folks for some time as people got back to basics yearning for home baking perhaps as a reaction to the 1980's "Me Generation" or the 1990-91 Recession. If you tried it as I did back then, you'll understand this illustration better than most. During the pandemic, did any of you get involved making sourdough starter? And then sourdough bread? In the last 2½ years, so many people worked from home and became teaching assistants for their children online that moms and a few dads had to come up with science lesson demonstrations at home. Fermentation and breadmaking took on a whole new purpose! Our grocery stores even ran out of yeast and flour several times! Baker's yeast is the common name for strains of yeast used in baking bread and rolls and is the leavening agent which causes the bread to rise, by foaming and expanding to become lighter and softer. It converts fermentable sugars present in the dough into carbon dioxide and ethanol. This is not a full lesson, so you can read more about it online, at your favorite library or in a cookbook.

For the Jews, leaven or yeast was not a good thing; the Old Testament and Paul use it to represent sin and evil. Yeast was forbidden

in their diet during Passover as atonement, but also as a reminder how the Hebrews had to leave Egypt in haste with no time for bread to rise, so they recalled God's mercy at Passover by not consuming leavened bread. Unleavened bread or matzah is forever associated with the Feast of Passover and God's salvation. That's why even we Christians use unleavened wafers or pita bread when we take communion. Sometimes we figuratively use large loaves of risen bread to symbolize the goodness of Christ expanded in us. The other definition of yeast is a positive one in Matthew 13:33; how a small amount of Gospel (i.e., yeast in our illustration) can permeate the larger being (i.e., a person, church, or neighborhood). It only takes a little yeast to expand the whole loaf. Both interpretations are fine if they are explained, and you know the difference.

Paul's passage was addressing the false teachings in the church. As Christ followers were persecuted and the church began to spread away from its Jerusalem source, false teachers encouraged new Jewish Christians to turn back to their comfort zone of the Jewish law and the converted Gentiles to get circumcised, claiming they could hedge their bets with Jesus by following the strict Jewish laws. Paul fears that even one deviation from Christ's teachings could destroy the entire new church. One could not select which law to obey based on preference; any law placed above God would enslave his new friends. Salvation in Jesus on the cross and the love that he taught are the only true paths to faith freedom. Again, Paul asserts the Kingdom of God as understood through Jesus supersedes human kings and any rule of government. Although no followers had been yet circumcised, Paul also implied that one small step toward the law could open other more serious rules, like the mutilating

castration required by worshipping Cybele, the mother goddess of Rome, a practice in nearby Phrygia. Paul feared that the people preferred the yoke of slavery, not having to care for themselves or make any decisions. Life as a Christ follower would not be the easiest path, yet it contained, by his own testimony, the most liberty and grace.

Jesus used yeast to describe the Kingdom of God in Matthew 13:33 and also in Luke 13:21: “²¹ It is like the yeast a woman used in making bread. Even though she put only a little yeast in three measures of flour, it permeated every part of the dough.” Three measures of wheat flour are approximately 50 pounds of flour, enough for 100 people! Some scholars say only a dozen loaves of bread could be made from 50 pounds, but I imagine it depends on the size of the loaf! This example came right after the mustard seed parable, about a small beginning with great growth. Jesus uses these familiar life examples like plants, seeds, and bread to illustrate his complex teaching. A little yeast in that much flour looks like an insignificant ingredient, but it is the most important one to transform dry inedible flour into a loaf one may bake and eat. Also, remember Jesus’ words to the disciples in John 6:35: “³⁵ Then Jesus declared, ‘I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.’” So, this yeast (Christ) is a significant ingredient!

Without any explanation, the people who had ears to hear could understand that Jesus was speaking of faith and his followers, not just yeast and bread. He was speaking of a movement! Not only would the fermenting process affect the whole loaf, but it could not be stopped once it began fermentation. Have you ever made pickles out of cucumbers? Same fermentation process occurs with brine and spices. The pickle can

never be a cucumber again once the fermentation begins. Neither can a loaf of bread ever become loose wheat flour again once the yeast is added. Same with a believer! Even though sin is all around us and within us, once we belong to Jesus, we are transformed from within and can never be that other person again! Though the process of fermentation is invisible to our eyes, its results are visible and unchangeable. Jesus hints that his presence on earth has changed the disciples, the crowds, and us. True, some will reject him, and the unfermented loaf will not experience eternal living. However, God's hidden activity of transformation in the dough or inside of us is cause for celebration, and we will enjoy the rewards of a Messianic feast one day upon his return.

It only takes a little yeast, a little testimony, a little Gospel, a little courage to share it, a little persistence, a little bit of trust that God will act, and a little faith to see the rewards of great transformation right here on earth. Will you try to add a little of any to your daily faith walk? Let me help you. If this resonates, please see me or call. Amen! ||

Will you pray with me? Lord, thank you for this reminder that you are the yeast that permeates, yet in a society that rejects you, we can be the yeast. Help us to be aware, serving, and courageous disciples. You have transformed us, and we are still fermenting to be what you would have us be, both personally and as a church body. Help us to appreciate this growth within and beyond, and to use it to build your Kingdom. Let us share our stories and the gospel with others, so that they may know you. Thank you for direction, Lord, **Amen.**