

The Kingdom is like leaven

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Sermon Audio file

This month's sermon series is around Jesus' command to go make disciples. So we will be looking at how we can be involved in growing the kingdom of God, whether we feel that we are gifted evangelistically or not.

Turn to Matthew 13:33 - we are going to focus on one verse this morning.

He told them still another parable: The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about 30kg of flour until it all worked through the dough.

Kingdom Growth takes work from us

Have you ever tried to make bread? Here's one I made using 500g of flour. So the first surprise in this verse is that the woman is using a lot of flour - 60 loaves of bread, or if it was one of my pizza parties, enough pizza for 300 people. That is going to take a lot of work to mix it through that much flour.

Here's a video of kneading the right way which we will show while I am speaking - note that's just a half kilo of flour!

Next there's the yeast - or more correctly leaven. Yeast gets a bad press in Scripture, the other occurrences are comparing it to the spread of false teaching, the spread of influence of the Pharisees. Some commentators therefore argue that this passage the yeast must be evil too. That seems weird. Why would Jesus say the kingdom is like false teaching spreading throughout everything? How pessimistic.

I think the point is that Yeast in itself is neutral. It's a fungal organism that spreads its influence. It is a metaphor for things that spread - the Kingdom of God spreads and evil spreads.

I get my fresh yeast from Tesco - I love the smell of it, although the young girl who works in the bakery says the smell makes her feel sick. Why are you working in the bakery section?!!

The leaven in this passage is more like a sourdough starter than a refined purified product. More on that in a moment.

The leaven represents the Gospel, the woman is the church and the flour is the world we are trying to influence with the Gospel to see the Kingdom of God spread and grow.

We work the yeast into the flour kneading it in until it can influence the whole dough and then we leave it to prove or "rest" - the yeast does its thing, turning sugars in the flour into carbon dioxide and ethanol which causes the bubbles and develops the texture and flavour. Yeast breaks down complex sugars - the starches into more flavourful simpler sugar molecules. The gospel breaks into our complicated messy lives adding joy and peace as we are forgiven. Giving us a flavour too!

So what can we learn about the growth of the Kingdom from this verse?

Leaven has a history

Like I said, the leaven in the parable is more like a sourdough starter - a mix of flour and water that has picked up yeast type spores from the air and become a yeasty mix. I love a sourdough - more acidic flavoured bread. But a sourdough starter, a leaven has a history, it has been kept and nurtured and is

often passed down from one generation to the next. This one is just under a week old - started as I began to ponder these verses. Some sourdoughs get passed on from one baker to another and have a depth of maturity and flavour impartation!

We pass the message of the Gospel on to each other. This month we will teach you what the Gospel is - for many a reminder. We will nurture it so we can pass it on to be used well to build the kingdom.

Leaven causes the growth invisibly.

Look at this image of two bowls of flour a pinch of salt and water - exact same quantities. The one on the left had some yeast and the other didn't. This is two hours later. The leaven has caused it to grow.

We work the leaven of the Gospel into our areas of influence and God causes it to grow. In other parables, Jesus talks about us sowing seeds and going to sleep while God brings germination and growth.

We don't know how our words and actions affect others - God uses them.

Leaven works by contact.

It needs mixing in and kneading - that allows the gluten to form from proteins in the flour mixed with water. A well kneaded loaf can then hold in the bubbles from the yeast fermenting. Leaven works by contact it needs close proximity with the flour and water to get going and make the changes. We have to be in contact with those who knead the leaven of the Gospel.

John 3:16 tells us God so loved the world he sent his Son. The same author wrote 1 John 2:15-16 love not the world. Which is it? The first one is the people, the second one is the value system. Love the people hate the value system. We are not allowed to hate anybody - we are called to love everyone, even while hating the value system.

Many of us have lived next to neighbours or had friends for years and never shared our faith. You need to engage in what Rick Warrens calls apology evangelism! Admit your fear of talking to them to them! I'm sorry I have never told you about the most important thing in my life!

Leaven works invisibly but the effects are visible

The yeast works at a molecular level, transforming sugars, but the effects of the Carbon Dioxide produced are visible, bread rises, it gets texture and flavour.

Leaven works whether you understand it at a deep level or simple.

If you know you need yeast, flour, water and a pinch of salt and that you need to mix them and knead them until you can see long strands, that's enough. If you know the chemical processes behind it, it works just the same.

Whether you have the simplest grasp of the Gospel - which at its most basic is God loves you, you have sinned, Jesus died for your sin, choose to follow Him. That shared with someone can have the impact God brings on their heart.

Or you could be proficient in sharing the Gospel, understanding different world-views and which angle to start from for maximum impact and God can make the same impact in the heart of who you are sharing with.

Xiping story.

Leaven works slowly

My fresh commercial yeast rises in about 90mins, a sourdough is left overnight. It is slower. I'll even rest a dough in the cold, so it rises slower and develops more flavour. The gospel can take time to work (a long time if you never share it!). Alpha is beginning to bear fruit in Janet's school after 14 years of being there. Marilyn was praying for Alan for 35 years.

Leaven does work its way all the way through the dough and it will have effects - some will respond, some will take offense!

Isa 55:10 tells us As the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields fruit for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth, it will not return to me empty.

Point is rain soaks in immediately, snow has to sit and then melt first.

The gospel takes time to work in people.

Bread that has risen slowly is full of flavour and doesn't collapse.

This morning I am passing on some leaven to you. A bit of sourdough starter.

God loves you. You are a sinner. Jesus died for you. Will you choose to follow him?

Will you work that into the flour around you? The people you get to influence?

Acts 17 tells us "From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us." God has put you where you are now - the time and the place so the leaven of the gospel you have can act on the people around you.

Your part is to mix with people and get the leaven to make Gospel with those you love and interact with. God's part is breaking down the complex mess of peoples lives to simple grace and joy and peace. Hallelujah.

Up and at 'em folks!