

September 17, 2017 “Making and Baking Bread” Mark
8:13-21

Attending my daughter's induction service last Sunday, at Graceview Etobicoke, caused a flood of memories for which I was not prepared. I remembered as I entered the sanctuary last Sunday morning (the Presbytery service took place in the afternoon), I recognized and remembered I had been there once before. A classmate of mine, the Rev. Terry Samuel had served Grace Church Etobicoke during the years I served St. Andrew's New Liskeard in north eastern Ontario. I took the train to Toronto and spent my two weeks of study leave bunking in with Terry in the manse, and reading 800 pages of heavy theology.

Terry's reward for permitting me to come, and providing me with lodging was very basic. I baked for him while I was there. I baked 3 batches (12 loaves) of my home made bread. Terry had a freezer in the basement of the manse. What we did not eat, we froze down. My friend and colleague had never seen bread being made before. He was swept away by the miracle of watching the dough rise in a large mixing bowl. As the yeast worked, it would develop a mushroom like dome above the rim of the bowl. The dough would literally triple in volume. He was mesmerized by the process.

Terry like myself now lives in semi retirement I assume. Change has led to the amalgamation some years ago of Hillview and Grace Churches, using the church which was

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Grace and naming the amalgamated congregation Graceview. The memories of those two weeks came spilling back into my head as I walked down the aisle of the church, carrying my guitar case. Baking bread in Etobicoke somewhere around 40 years ago. Jesus said, "Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod." HE is not talking about baking bread. He is talking about something that has the effect yeast has in the production of bread. Yeast, provided with water and sugar grows. In the mixture of flour and the other ingredients in the dough, it spreads and infects the whole batch. It has the effect of transforming all of the dough in the bowl.

Jesus is talking about the effect of the teaching of the Pharisees and HE is talking about the effect, the lifestyle and example of Herod, have on other people. Jesus concern is that these two forces not affect the disciples.

The yeast of the Pharisees starts out somewhere very good. Unfortunately it becomes something very bad. The Pharisees were Bible thumpers. The Law and the Prophets. Old Testament Scripture. They poured over Scriptural teaching. And you may well ask how could that lead to something harmful? Here it is. The Pharisees were continually studying Scripture in order to answer the question what must I do to please God? Fundamentally they reduced Biblical teaching to a list of good works. Do these things and you will live a holy life. God will be

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pleased with you. Fail to do these things and you will be lost in sin forever.

Remember the Reformation? Late 1500's to mid 1600's. The Reformation ruptured the church which had been unified to that time, or at least was recognizable as one body. What happened was that a few of the church's clergy rediscovered the Bible. What they heard in the Bible was something that had almost been completely lost. They heard a call to believe in God and to believe God's promises as opposed to the church's teaching of do this...don't do that and you will be ok. That may seem like an oversimplification. My point is the teaching of the Pharisees had like yeast spread through all of Judaism. In place of dependence on the grace of God, was dependence on what I can do. I will live a holy life, and God will have to love me. The reformation occurred because the church made the same mistake. Dependence on the attempt to be "good" became the goal. And it replaced dependence on God...faith.

Yes, we do have to be concerned about living a moral life as God's people. We do. But the thrust of Jesus teaching is depend on God and not on yourself. Depend on His teaching in the Word because you depend on God for everything. It is a matter of where you place the emphasis. See, if you attempt to depend on your ability to do the right thing in every situation...good works. Two things happen. On the one hand

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you start to believe (notice that word) you start to believe...you can do this and get it right. Self reliance run rampant can replace faith, reliance on God.

The second problem is this: when we rely on human logic, our own ability to get things right, we have a tendency to build a system that allows us to blur the lines of what is acceptable to God, because you cannot serve two masters...yourself and God, scholarly authorities and God, worldly logic, the way of the world and God. You cannot serve two masters. And if we listen too closely to the desires of our own minds and hearts....we get in trouble real fast. We make mistakes. We find ways to justify what we know to be sin.

I am saying there was a time when the yeast of the Pharisees infected the church. And God through servants like Martin Luther and John Calvin and others, many of whom died for their attempts at leading us back to sound Biblical teaching, God graciously led our kind (people) back to himself and the Gospel of grace through faith in Jesus. We struggle to stay faithful. We know that. It is not easy. The yeast of the Pharisees can infect, and affect negatively, the whole bowl of dough, all the people.

The yeast of Herod is of an entirely different nature. I call it the temptation of secularity. I will share three words with you under this heading of the yeast of Herod. Skepticism, immorality, and worldliness. You have probably heard things

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like this. You mention to someone you trust and love something you heard at church or read in the Bible or a devotional guide. And this person you feel safe sharing your convictions with says, “You don’t really believe that do you?” Skepticism builds doubt. You may be tempted to question yourself, your faith, that portion of Scripture that you were reading. Herod was Jewish. He was not a believer in the conventional sense of that term. He was a skeptic when it came to God. He was not going to give over control of his life to anyone, least of all a God whom he could not see, and was not sure was really there.

When one reads about Herod and his court life as the Roman appointed “king” of Judea the first impression is that Herod lived the life of anything goes. He killed members of his family because he suspected them of wanting his throne and crown. His parties were legendary. Liquor flowed freely and sexual immorality were the norm. In our own time, he would have done drugs, although he was also the kind of guy who would have given his drug of choice to someone else to see whether or not it might kill.

Herod had given himself over to the ways of the world. He ingratiated himself with the Romans because he wanted more wealth and power. The Romans were the visible Empire that was conquering the known lands. Herod hooked onto their wagon because he wanted a slice of the pie. The ability to tax Judea dry. Someone else’s armies to guarantee

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his personal safety and his chosen lifestyle. We are continually tempted by voices from without the church and within that invite us to get with it, to give in on this point to change that detail of how we live as though one can be faithful to God and live by the standards of the world. This is what Herod and the Pharisees had in common...they tempted people to try to serve two masters at the same time. As Jesus said specifically concerning wealth...you cannot serve God and mammon...mammon being money.

In the portion I read to you from Mark 8 this morning it is obvious the disciples missed the point in its entirety. They said, "It's because we did not bring bread Jesus is talking about yeast." Jesus scolds them because they have seen 5,000 people being miraculously fed. And then they witnessed something similar. Jesus fed 4,000 people who had stayed for three days to listen to HIS teaching. His point to the 12 is "Do you really think I cannot feed us, we who are here in this boat?"

It frustrates Jesus that we can witness His love, His grace, and His power on the one hand, and fail to remember He cares about us at all, five minutes later. In the boat during the crossing of the Sea of Galilee Jesus reminds the disciples that in each of the cases where he miraculously fed crowds of people, big crowds, the leftovers He made them gather up would have fed them several times over on this little excursion. HE calls

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them. He calls us. To believe HIM and to trust HIM. Today, tonight, tomorrow.

Let us pray;

Lord our Redeemer, clearly we are surrounded by things that tempt us. The temptation to believe we can master righteousness beckons to us each time we make a faithful decision in light of your word and act on it. The temptation to be more like the world that surrounds us, especially in times when the way of faith in YOU seems so different, and when we witness a diminished interest in the things that glorify Jesus name, that temptation to be like the world is real and it is attractive. Lord, help us to be faithful to you, trusting you and not leaning on our own understanding. Save us from the yeast that can ruin the work you have begun in us through the work of YOUR Holy Spirit. Grant that we may glorify YOUR name in work and leisure...in all we do. Amen