

Provoked by the Parables

The Yeast

February 6, 2011

**Psalm 112:1-10 & Matthew 13:33
(Hymns – 480, 483, 530, 563)**

I have no idea where these parables of Jesus were first told.
The Gospel writers put them in such different settings
as they crafted their accounts
to highlight what they wanted to emphasize about the work of Jesus Christ.

Just take a few minutes before the service begins one Sunday
and look at where the parable we are reading that morning
is set in a different Gospel.
It's easy to figure out because the reference is in brackets under the title
in the Good News Bible.

So, this morning's parable about the yeast
is also found in the 13th chapter of Luke
in the context of a dispute with an official of the synagogue.
In Matthew, it's in the context of teaching his disciples.

But I must admit, I'm partial to the way Matthew has set up
this series of parables.
It's a kind of rapid fire set of similitudes about the kingdom of God –
it's like a growing seed, like wheat in weeds, like a net, like yeast,
like hidden treasure, like a pearl.
There's this wave upon wave of powerful images
breaking over the disciples as they listen and learn,
building within them and within Matthew's readers
that sense of hope and confidence
that the kingdom of God is at work right now
and will fully come in the end,
even if we can't see it the way we'd like it to be.
It grows slowly, in God's time, and often in insignificant, hidden ways.
But it does grow and we are part of that growth
through the inner workings of the Holy Spirit.

This is where I think today's parable is so powerful,
in drawing attention to the hidden, silent, unobtrusive, subtle ways
in which the Father and the Son work their persuasive ways with us
through the inner witness of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus is saying the kingdom of God is like a small amount of yeast
in a big amount of flour – 40 litres – the size of my gas tank.
This will produce enough bread to feed a village
and will be the work of a community.

The yeast goes in and starts to work.
Nothing seems to be happening
for a long time.
But gradually the leavening agent works and the bread rises,
becoming ready for baking.
It's that gradual growth that is emphasized here again,
but growth that is guaranteed to affect positively the whole batch of flour.

Two ways of taking this truth into our work and witness
seem to me to be particularly important for us here at Brentwood.

First, in relationship to our own faith and flourishing,
we would do well to pay attention to the little things and the simple things –
a kind work, a gentle touch, a patient attitude,
a generous act, a wise bit of self-control –
things that show respect for others as beloved creatures of God.
The fortitude of faith grows act by act, conversation by conversation,
as we practice the faith in our daily lives,
as we gradually work with the Spirit to build up our strength as Christians
to love and serve the world.

Second, in relationship to our flourishing future here at Brentwood,
we would do well to pay attention to the ordinary things
that have a particularly powerful impact.
I'm thinking especially of the way we welcome strangers,
new people in our midst seeking a connection with God and with others.
It's that first minute or so they are in this sanctuary –
Winston welcoming them at the door, Clarence coming over to them in the pew,
heads turned and smiles given –
welcome home to the grace of Jesus Christ.

These are just a couple of the simple, almost silent, ways
the kingdom of God grows within us and among us.
This parable reminds us to pay attention to those things,
to encourage each other to keep doing them,
and to have confidence that God will use these acts to build his kingdom.