

In Nomine Iesu

The Seventh Sunday after Holy Trinity 2023 A little yeast goes a long way – Matthew 16:1-12

“Then the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing Him asked that He would show them a sign from heaven. He answered and said to them, ‘When it is evening you say, “It will be fair weather, for the sky is red”; and in the morning, “It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening.” Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times. A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.’ And he left them and departed. Now when His disciples had come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread. Then Jesus said to them, ‘Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.’ And they reasoned among themselves, saying, ‘It is because we have taken no bread.’ But Jesus, being aware of it, said to them, ‘O you of little faith, why do you reason among yourselves because you have brought no bread? Do you not yet understand, or remember the five loaves of the five thousand and how many baskets you took up? Nor the seven loaves of the four thousand and how many large baskets you took up? How is it that you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread? – but to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.’ Then they understood that He did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”

Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who is the way, the truth and the life. Dear fellow redeemed in Christ.

We may look at the disciples in this account from Matthew’s Gospel and wonder how they could be so ignorant and unseeing. How could they think He was talking about yeast in bread when He was talking about the yeast that had spread through the hearts and minds of the people of Israel because of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees? Why did they worry as they set off into the wilderness without food again, but with Him in their midst. They had seen Him feed five thousand with five small loaves and two fishes. After that He had again fed four thousand in the same way. How could they be worried having seen such power of God?

On the other hand, why did Jesus, having seen their doubt and uncertainty so many times, bother to ask, “O you of little faith, why do you reason among yourselves because you have brought no bread? Do you not yet understand, or remember the five loaves of the five thousand and how many baskets you took up? Nor the seven loaves of the four thousand and how many large baskets you took up? How is it that you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread?” What was their problem? Why did they never seem to be able to overcome it?

I

The problem is summed up in Jesus’ words, “O you of little faith.” And we are no different from them. We excel at seeing and counting, worrying and figuring. But listening and believing, hearing and trusting You, these we have trouble with.

The disciples had just heard Jesus say, “Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” Then, instead of listening and believing, they started to look where they were heading – the wilderness, count what they had for provisions – none, worry that they should have purchased food – but it’s too late, figure what they were going to do and how. Perhaps, the Lord was not going to be pleased with them when He found out that they had failed to bring along food – again!

We have some of similar thoughts in our own uncertain economic times. Gas remains four to five dollars a gallon or more. What will we do? Should we drive less? Probably. Where should we begin to cut back? Food is more expensive than ever, especially certain things. What should we do? Should we budget differently? Probably. How should we rebalance what it is that we spend our money on? Utility costs are high and not going down. What should we do? Should we consider using a little less air-conditioning in summer and a little less heating in winter? Probably. But how can we change the habits we’ve grown so used to? Or should we cut out Christ and His church? That would certainly save us time, money, and effort. After all, what tangible benefit do we get back from hearing the Gospel, singing the great hymns of faith, and receiving the body and blood of Christ? But what do we lose?

We might even begin to think as some in Jesus’ day did, that our own well-being and the condition of our nation are tied together in such a way that the mission of the church must be changed, added to. **We might begin to think that the church should become more involved in the conduct of our nation’s affairs, as if the Christian church with all her many denominations has done the job her Lord gave her to do so well and efficiently these many years, that she has both the time and expertise to lend a hand to Caesar and help straighten things out.**

II

Dear friends, the problems of food and shelter and warmth will always be with us, just as the poor will always be with us, as Jesus said. We might even find ourselves among the poor some day. The problems of the nation and world economics will always be with us. Sometimes they will be more immediate and obvious, causing us to worry and calculate, to complain and become dispirited. We are so very much like the disciples of our Lord that it is painful to be reminded. The fact is that Jesus fed His disciples many times – sometimes miraculously, sometimes by just letting them gather a little wheat on the Sabbath Day as King David once did. He saved them many times from death – sometimes miraculously, sometimes by just steering them away from those who wanted to take Rome by the throat and free the Jewish nation from its bondage. And He called them many times, **“O you of little faith.”** **But you see, it was a great honor to be called such.** For He didn’t say, “O you of no faith.” He said, “little faith.” **In other words, they believed. They believed in Him.** And at the same time they struggled with their doubts and fears, and often relied too much on what they saw their eyes rather than what they heard from His mouth. **They struggled just as we do.**

Because they believed, because they were “of little faith” and not of no faith, He warned them of the leaven, the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees, whose trust was not in God or His holy word **but in their own understanding of God and His word.** Their confidence was in their own basic goodness and not in the goodness of Him who gives every good and perfect gift. He warned them - and us -

not to be deceived by the bread, that is, the teaching, the Pharisees and Sadducees offered to the weary, tired, and hungry souls of the people of Israel, but to trust in Him who is the Bread of Life come down from heaven above.

The **Pharisees and Sadducees**, whether those of first century Palestine or **those of twenty-first century America** who today are identified by other names, always offer bread, that is, doctrine or teaching, that is **shot through with the yeast of their own understanding, which is finally only misunderstanding**. Dear friends in Christ, trust only Him who knew no sin, who did no sin, whose life and teaching both were free of any sinful leavening of man's wisdom. Trust only the One who left us, and the whole world, with one final sign, the sign of the prophet Jonah, who came out alive from the belly of the fish on the third day.

In these week when national leaders have argued, debated, and manipulated the finances of our government, we ought not only to pray that they be given wisdom and a spirit of selflessness, but also to thank God for the many, many blessings He has poured out on us personally and on our nation as a whole, even though we can see that there are troubling, uncertain things that shake our confidence and seem to threaten our well-being. Yes, these are trying times. But yes also, that has always been so. **The world has always been a dangerous and uncertain place**. Perhaps we are now just taking notice of how very true that is. Things are always changing and decaying, and we don't like it. **We do not like uncertainty**. We do not like a red sky in the morning, we would rather see red sky only at night. **But thank God, we have a still greater and more sure sign than these or any others. We have the sign of Jonah the prophet: We have Christ crucified for sinners**, who rose from death on the third day so that we might be declared not guilty - righteous for His sake - and so have eternal life instead of death.

God has promised us no certainty concerning the things of this life, except that He will never leave us or forsake us. **But God has promised us complete certainty in regard to what comes after this life**. We will have eternal life for Jesus' sake.

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So, dear friends, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees of this 21st century. A little of their leaven goes a long way, and it can do great damage to your soul. **Believe instead only Him who rose from death on the third day**. The life and death of that One, that event that the world takes so lightly, that little thing goes a long way too. In fact, it will carry you through life and death. It will carry you out of this valley of the shadow of death into life everlasting. **So, don't worry so much about your bread. Do not worry overly about tomorrow. Believe Him who, by His life and death, became righteousness for us**, and who says to us, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria