

***Not Yet...But Soon?***  
**Preached by**  
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**United Church of Fayetteville**  
**October 1, 2023**  
**World Communion Sunday**

**For Reflection:**

*"Every tomorrow has two handles. We can take hold of it with the handle of anxiety or the handle of faith."*  
Henry Ward Beecher

**Hebrew Scripture Reading: Psalm 65: 4-13**

Happy are those whom you choose and bring near to live in your courts.  
We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, your holy temple.  
By awesome deeds you answer us with deliverance, O God of our salvation;  
you are the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas.  
By your strength you established the mountains;  
you are girded with might.  
You silence the roaring of the seas,  
the roaring of their waves,  
the tumult of the peoples.  
Those who live at earth's farthest bounds are awed by your signs;  
you make the gateways of the morning and the evening shout for joy.  
You visit the earth and water it,  
you greatly enrich it;  
the river of God is full of water;  
you provide the people with grain,  
for so you have prepared it.  
You water its furrows abundantly,  
settling its ridges, softening it with showers,  
and blessing its growth.  
You crown the year with your bounty;  
your wagon tracks overflow with richness.  
The pastures of the wilderness overflow,  
the hills gird themselves with joy,  
the meadows clothe themselves with flocks,  
the valleys deck themselves with grain,  
they shout and sing together for joy.

## **Gospel Reading: Mark 8: 10-21**

And immediately he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha.

The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, asking him for a sign from heaven, to test him. And he sighed deeply in his spirit and said, "Why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to this generation." And he left them, and getting into the boat again, he went across to the other side.

Now the disciples had forgotten to bring any bread; and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. And he cautioned them, saying, "Watch out—beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod." They said to one another, "It is because we have no bread." And becoming aware of it, Jesus said to them, "Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes, and fail to see? Do you have ears, and fail to hear? And do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?" They said to him, "Twelve." "And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?" And they said to him, "Seven." Then he said to them, "Do you not yet understand?"

## **Meditation**

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The Pharisees came to test Jesus. It was no friendly encounter among scholarly colleagues for the purpose of gaining knowledge, honing debate skills and mutual up-building—something for which both sides were more than adequately equipped. This was a test—a test which Jesus declined to take, probably understanding that passing one test only meant there would soon be another looming on the horizon.

Then he climbed into the boat with his disciples, perhaps hoping for comfort, rest—perhaps even a little communal kvetching about the Pharisees who would not be pleased. As they crossed the lake, the disciples noted they had forgotten to stock up on provisions. Jesus heard their "no-bread" lament and gave an odd little warning to beware the yeast of the Pharisees and Herod.

Now, we know a few things about yeast—(frequently referred to in Scripture as "leavening"), so we can speculate about what Jesus was suggesting. First, yeast puffs up bread, filling it with pockets of air, adding no nutrition and making it look like more than it is. Whether it is food or spirituality, a caution against swollen things that look bigger, more substantial, more nourishing than they are is a warning to heed.

The second thing about making anything with yeast is that it takes longer than without yeast. Hence, at the beginning of the Exodus, Israel was warned to take only unleavened bread. When you are in a hurry, waiting around for yeast to rise can be deadly.

Mark's gospel is an urgent one; Mark's Jesus acts and preaches with urgency. Jesus may be reminding the disciples that the time is now to act, to follow, and to believe—that waiting until the time is right, the provisions are gathered, until tests are passed, until the times are better—no matter who is promising them—is too late for participating in God's agenda.

Jesus' disciples respond remarkably with "He's annoyed because we have no bread."

Why the man simply did not exit the boat, stomp across the sea and head for the closest respite center for nearly-burned out, soon-to-be Messiahs is beyond me. Perhaps he was “mad about the bread?” Or perhaps he was frustrated because, while Jesus suspected that the Pharisees and Herod himself understand all too clearly what he was about, and exactly what threat he posed, his own disciples still didn’t understand. Perhaps he was angry because while they were moaning about having no bread, in fact, they had a loaf of bread.

Jesus then led his fellow boat dwellers through recollections of five thousand and four thousand, fed with apparently far too few loaves, who still had leftovers. “All this you have seen and heard and do you not yet understand?” I suspect there was more pain in Jesus’ voice than anger, for if a light bulb lit for the twelve with one loaf of bread, there is no evidence of it.

We look back and we understand. Or do we? History may have given us insight into some of the things the disciples didn’t understand, but, perhaps, this morning, we, disciples, sitting in a nave (Latin for “ship” or “boat”) gathered around one loaf would do well to try to hear Jesus speaking to us rather than to those long- ago disciples. It may well be we don’t understand as much as we think we do.

In the smaller boats of the households that make up our community, we may be hovering over our loaf, saying to ourselves, “We are not sure we not have enough. We don’t know if there will be retirement savings after the children go to college. We hope they can go to the college of their choice. We are worried about Social Security. These are deeply concerning times. We will wait until after the election, until after the kids are on their own, until after the new pastor comes, until, until, until ... to decide what we will give, share, and do.”

In the boat with us, Jesus says, “Why are you saying you have nothing? You have a loaf right there. Beware the yeast of false security.” You have families and homes and food and education and freedom and choice and more opportunity than anywhere else in the world. You have me. “Do you not yet understand?”

The church in the world is in a state of siege such as it has not seen since its beginnings. No one is trying to kill us, but church membership is no longer assumed for the vast majority of people. In a nation that seems to be trying to re-live its tweener developmental psychology, deciding who is in and who is out, we can feel isolated on a boat protecting the smaller resource base of respect, money and relevance we have in today’s world. Wouldn’t it be understandable if we said we don’t have anything, or at least not enough to share?

We sit huddled around what we have, saying we need to gather more provisions. After all, we barely have enough to keep the boat mended and feed the boat dwellers. After we gather more provisions, members, children, money; after we repair the organ and take care of our own elderly, well, ... maybe then. But right now, we don’t have the provisions.

In the boat with us today, Jesus says, “Why are you saying you have nothing? You do have a loaf right there. Beware the yeast of greater numbers.” You have these people. You have children and babies and faith and hope. You have teachers and leaders, prayers and caregivers. You have the wisdom of your elders, and the sacrifice of those who have gone before. You have some money and this building and creativity and energy. You have me. “Do you not yet understand?”

Today, in this boat, with Jesus, and, on this World Communion Sunday, with the whole world we are gathered around this one loaf. We share this one loaf—a loaf that in 2000 years: has never failed to feed a people; has never failed to be there when we needed it; has never puffed itself with the yeast of false humility, pretending to be less than it is; and has never yeastily swollen itself beyond recognition as the spiritual food that nourishes a people.

Today, we come to the Table to be fed, to be reassured, to be reminded of all that we have, to name the bounty we have received from the hand of God, not just this week or this year, not just in our own lifetimes, but across the history of time. We come to be lifted by Christ into the presence of God, to receive strength, energy and vision and so, to be gifted with hope.

As we leave this Table to go into the weeks ahead to pray for and support:

\*people around the world, especially in Maui, Haiti, Libya, and Ukraine

\*the hungry and homeless in our own community

\*our nation, being ripped apart by partisan politics and shattered by gun violence

May we recall the bounty of God, the life abundant with Christ and our history as a Spirit-led people: As we reflect on the pledges we will make for service, participation, support of one another and financial support for the life and the future of Christ's ministry in this place, may our compassion, our generosity and our hope for the future be so demonstrated, that instead of "Not yet?" the one in the boat with us to says, "The more you lean into the future, committing self, and treasure, the sooner you will understand that you have more than you think and enough. Well done, good and faithful servants. Now, you do understand in part, and soon you will understand more fully as you live out your pledges in life with one another, with trust, hope and joy."