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Leaven of Love

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our souls be aligned with you oh God, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

We are in week two of three where we are exploring some parables alongside the children in Sunday School. I wanted for us to become spiritually united, to set our hearts and minds on the same things each week for some time. And last week we had the parable of the mustard seed, this parable of something beginning so small and growing to abundance. I want this to be a season of abundance for us- which is truly a spiritual practice, to stay in the energy of what we DO have together, rather than what we don't what we have or might lose. We wondered about seeds planted in the earth already, that are showing no signs of growing under the snow, but are there being nurtured by the earth, ones we can trust will spring up. A quiet and slow growing hope for new life.

And this week the parable of the leaven, in both the Gospel of Luke and Matthew, Jesus compares the Kingdom of Heaven or God to yeast. In Matthew: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened." And in Luke, "And again he said, 'To what should I compare the kingdom of God? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.' Let us sit back and follow the clues of discovery with this parable together.

Both have the kingdom of God being mixed with something; for it doesn't do much on its own. That's a clue- it needs collaboration and community. It provides some rise to the bread, which would be unleavened otherwise.

But isn't unleavened bread considered more holy? The Jewish festival of Passover, which is the festival of unleavened bread, are some of the high holy days. Leaven or yeast in the spiritual circles that Jesus ran in, was symbolic for contamination or corruption. So this parable, comparing the Kingdom of God to yeast would have been shocking- The kingdom of heaven is something OUTSIDE of what we have designated as holy.

My sourdough starter died sometime earlier in the pandemic. Yes, I was one of those early-pan sourdough makers, which probably fizzled out because I am gluten intolerant and GF bread is just harder to make taste good. Otherwise I would have brought it so we could maybe smell together through our masks the slightly sour smell, the strange messy bubbling that happens in a warm corner with leaven.

Parables again in the Greek mean throwing things alongside each other. Par meaning "with or along side," and ballein means "to put or throw." Throwing common things alongside one another in an unexpected way.

Sometimes they were so common that people had a hard time seeing the realm of God like that. Both bread and wine, which Jesus says are his body and blood, are things with leaven in them, needed to rise and ferment. The body of Christ is full of yeast. What do we have around in Wisconsin that is full of yeast?

Now I never thought in a million years that I would preach from a beer can, but since moving to Wisconsin, well, it seems to just be what is around. Unless we want to like the kingdom of God to a cheese curd, squeaky and fresh, which rises to the top. Now please know that I am not promoting drinking, and if you are struggling with addiction in any way, I am here to support you. I know a lot about the difficulties of alcohol and I deeply admire the journey to sobriety. So we will look at this as an artifact, as cultural anthropologists: I bring this forth because the name of this beer can really got me- two women New Glarus, and it gives us a clue about our parable:

“Four thousand years before Christ, Sumerian women created the divine drink of beer. Viking women brewed in Norse society. European Ale Wives were so successful as cottage brewers they were taxed. Artisanal women lost their domination of the daily ritual of brewing during the Industrial Revolution. Today’s brewing trade is controlled by men. This beer, is a collaboration of two Craft companies both led by women, only available in Wisconsin! My reasoning for bringing this beer can forth is because it claims that women were the first brewers in the world. Which made me realize- who was making bread in the ancient world? Women.

Jesus was teaching with and in the things already at hand. But who was leaven common to? The kingdom of God wasn’t just what was around, but what the women already had their hands on. Women would be more familiar with the rise in the bread. Jesus isn’t just using any common symbols, but ones from the female realm.

In the Gospel of Thomas, which did not make it into the Canon of the Bible, but to me carries just as much merit if not more from the early Christian experience because of its exclusion- what were they afraid of? Thomas also has the parable of the leaven, but with a slightly different twist. From saying 96 of the Gospel of Thomas, “Jesus said, The Kingdom of the Father is like a woman. She took a little leaven, hid it in dough, and made large loaves of it. Anyone who has ears, let them hear!” Do you hear the difference here? In the Gospel of Thomas, Jesus likens the Kingdom of God, not to leaven, but to a woman. A woman who is baking. *Anyone who has ears, should listen.*

So now that we have discovered that Jesus is a hardcore feminist, I move to the spiritual quality of leaven. What does it feel like for us to be a baking woman, or filled with leaven? Rolling the dough in our hands, shaping it, allowing the yeast to transform anything it touches.

Leaven brings a rise in a serious situation. Brings love, inward growth in a place where flatness was previously experienced or expected. When things or people push our buttons and we react with seriousness- what if in those moments we did something else- we caught ourselves and we added some leaven, some air, some space, gave ourselves a rise or a little uplift, some humor.

What if, when joy came, we let it? What if we unclenched our jaws and relaxed our shoulders? What if we prioritized having fun rather than getting it right?

“God gave us life to be enjoyed. Jesus said in the Gospel of John, “I came that they may have and enjoy life, and have it in abundance (to the full, till it overflows)” John 10:10, Amplified Bible.”

Is Jesus really telling us, in his gentle voice booming through the ages, to lighten up? Let it be so. Amen.