

SEQUOYAH HILLS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“It’s Like...: A Little Dab’ll Do Ya”

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Matthew 13:33

November 6, 2022

We’re continuing in this series, “It’s Like...”, a look at a series of Christ’s parables, all focusing on what he calls the “kingdom of heaven.” As we’ve talked about, when Jesus says, “kingdom of heaven” here, he’s not referring to a spiritual destination for your soul after you die, but rather the emergence of God’s reign, God’s reality, breaking forth into the world. “On earth, as it is in heaven,” as it were.

(Grateful to Janna Preston, our Minister for Congregational Care, who preached last week. I know many of you have gotten the chance to meet her over the past five months, but last Sunday was her first Sunday preaching, when she shared about the so-called Parable of the Mustard Seed, and of how glimpses of God’s kingdom keep popping up, and inviting us to look for them.)

Jesus continues in that vein in the parable we’ll look at this week, but he switches up some of the imagery, no longer talking about seeds and growing plants. It’s just one verse, and frankly it’ll be a shorter sermon, to which you might be thinking, “Well Jay, can we do this more often?” But honestly, this description of the kingdom of heaven might be my favorite of all the ways Jesus talks about it. Let’s go to God’s Word together.

He told them another parable: ‘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.

Matthew 13:33

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.** Will you pray with me? Holy God, for the Word spoken and heard today, may it not be mine but yours. Amen.

I think the reason this parable is my favorite isn’t because of the yeast or the flour or the bread that’s eventually baked. It’s the mixing. In fact the Greek could just as easily mean, “hiding in,” as in the woman took the yeast and “hid it” in the flour. It’s the mixing, the hiding.

It’s intriguing enough to think of the kingdom of heaven, of God’s reign, God’s reality, being mixed in, or even hidden, within everything else, something that you wouldn’t otherwise know was there until later on, after it’s “baked,” so to speak. But something else I think is

compelling to me is that there's someone actively doing the mixing. It doesn't just magically happen.

Let's say the woman didn't feel like kneading the dough, didn't feel like mixing the yeast into the dough until all of it was leavened. How would that have turned out? Not sure how many bakers we have among us, but if she didn't mix it in, you'd just end up with granules of yeast in the dough and, later, the bread, and the bread is probably going to be pretty flat since the yeast is all clumped together. It didn't get all the way through to do its work.

Or think of it this way. If you got a new bucket of paint, have you ever watched them put it together? It's not like they've got all these different buckets of paint will all those different colors, all the 100 different shades of off-white. (Why there needs to be twenty variations between Macaroon Cream and Water Chestnut is beyond me, but you know, lots of options.) It's not like they've got all of them in the back room. They have a mixer, and that mixer's all programmed so that if you want a certain color, you have a base, often a white base of paint, and then a certain amount of other colors are mixed in.

And if you've ever watched that happen, I think it's kind of cool. It's pure white paint as a base, but for the amount of other color they mix in, especially for some of those off-white shades, they don't add all that much. Have you ever watched that? They put the can of paint under the machine, punch in the color code, and then the computer spits out what amounts to just a few drops of this or that other color, and you think, "That's it?"

Here's why I bring it up. What would happen if they didn't then take that paint can, tamp down the lid, and then put it in the mixer where the can gets throttled back and forth, up and down? Well, it wouldn't mix, would it? And if you then tried to paint with it without it being mixed, you'd just have mostly white paint going up on a wall with random streaks of blue or yellow or whatever other color that was supposed to be mixed throughout.

I think that's what Jesus is getting at here. When it comes to the kingdom of heaven, it's not just that yeast is added to the flour, it's that it gets mixed in, even until it seems hidden, and you'd otherwise not even know it was there, but boy can you tell a difference once it's baked. Take two lumps of dough, one of them leavened, the other not. Can you tell a difference when they're just lumps of dough? No, not really. But bake both of them, can you tell a difference then? Well yeah, one rises up and the other stays flat. That's the whole point of leavening the dough in the first place.

Years ago, I worked with a ministry in northern Mexico building very simple houses, and one part of the build was mixing concrete for the slab. No cement mixers were allowed, since we

were a bit off the grid, so it was all by hand in these big tubs, mixing in the right ratio of cement and water and gravel.

But one other thing you were supposed to do while you were mixing was add in a handful of concrete fiber into the mix. I'm no authority on this sort of thing, but as I understand it, the fiber was there to help strengthen the concrete, in particular to help prevent cracks in the floor from forming. And for one, you didn't just throw the fiber in a big clump into the concrete and leave it. You had to mix it in, until you couldn't even see it anymore.

And for those, like myself at first, who didn't really get the why behind adding fiber to the concrete, it might've seemed like an unnecessary bit of tedium. Why go to all the trouble of adding in and mixing in something that's ultimately going to just disappear? What difference does it make? One day someone took me aside and pointed out a slab in which an earlier group had forgotten to add the fiber. You know what it looked like? Once it had dried and cured and settled, and once it had been used by a family for a little bit, cracks started to form all across the surface, whereas another slab with the fiber in it, not so much. You can't see it, but boy does it make a difference.

So I think this parable is at once an encouragement and a challenge to us, we who as the church are seeking to further the kingdom of heaven, even to seek to be an outpost of that kingdom within the world.

In the life of faith, in the shared work of ministry, have you ever wondered whether your day-to-day efforts, the seemingly unnoticed, unrecognized acts of love poured into another's life, would they ever make a difference? Whether it's the small ways we pour into the lives of the young people in our church or your own children, or whether it's serving at the KARM dinner last week, or helping clean up after the Fall Festival last week when nobody's watching, or whether it's considering how God is leading you to pledge and give and you're wondering whether to commit a little bit more, have you wondered, how could this possibly make a lasting difference? It feels like anything you do just disappears into the mix of things, goes unnoticed, and bears no lasting fruit. It can be discouraging, to be sure.

But Christ tells us, that's how the kingdom of heaven works. It's mixed in, and it takes someone doing the mixing, and the result of it may not be evident until much later on.

Does it make a difference? Well, you tell me. Whether it's a loaf of bread or a concrete slab, can you tell a difference if that work of mixing in, that seemingly hidden, unnoticed labor, isn't done? You sure can. Can we say the same?

That's where the challenge comes in from this parable. Insofar as we are Christ's church, Christ's body, an outpost or an embassy of the kingdom of heaven, you could say, can you tell a

difference? By that I mean, wipe the global church away from existence, out of the history books, never happened, would the world miss it? Would there be cracks in the surface as a result?

Or just more locally, wipe Sequoyah Hills Presbyterian Church from the history books, never was planted here 75 years ago, never was a presence in this little pocket of creation. Would the neighborhood miss it? Even for those not necessarily spiritually inclined, would there be a sense of loss? As in, would there be something missing in this particular corner of the world without the presence of the church being mixed in over the years, or would it just be more lots for housing. The challenge before us is that we be the yeast being mixed into the world, that which can almost go unnoticed, until you see the fruit of that labor later on.

If you're honestly wondering about the answer to that question, would the world miss us, some food for thought.

Earlier in the service we went through a list of saints in our church who have passed in the past year. Some of you no doubt recognize some if not many of those names and cherish the memory of those we've lost. So think about the saints we remember today, and ask, how would my life, how would our life together as a church, be missing something, like unleavened bread or a cracked concrete slab, if not for the witness, service, and presence of those we've named and remembered? Whatever that answer is, *that's* the difference that the sometimes unnoticed, unrecognized work for the kingdom can make. *That's* the sort of difference that all those seemingly unimportant, unnoticed things you could do could make. *That's* precisely the sort of thing Jesus tells us makes an impact in the reality emerging by the new life that is in him. And *that's* what the kingdom of heaven is like.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.