

06.02.24 ~ Pentecost 2 & Communion Sunday

“Holy Yeast, Rise!”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

John 6:26-35a (NIV)

²⁶ Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. ²⁷ Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.”

²⁸ Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?”

²⁹ Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”

³⁰ So they asked him, “What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? ³¹ Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”

³² Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven.

³³ For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

³⁴ “Sir,” they said, “always give us this bread.”

³⁵ Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

Leader: These Are Christ’s Words of Instruction.

All: Thanks be to God!

Matthew 13:31-35 (CEV)

Stories about a Mustard Seed and Yeast

([Mark 4.30-32](#); [Luke 13.18-21](#))

³¹ Jesus told them another story:

The kingdom of heaven is like what happens when a farmer plants a mustard seed in a field. ³² Although it is the smallest of all seeds, it grows larger than any garden plant and becomes a tree. Birds even come and nest on its branches.

³³ Jesus also said:

The kingdom of heaven is like what happens when a woman mixes a little yeast into three big batches of flour. Finally, all the dough rises.

The Reason for Teaching with Stories

([Mark 4.33,34](#))

³⁴ Jesus used stories when he spoke to the people. In fact, he did not tell them anything without using stories. ³⁵ So God's promise came true, just as the prophet had said,

“I will use stories
to speak my message
and to explain things hidden
since the creation
of the world.”

Leader: These Are God's Illustrations.

All: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

Lord, our Master Baker and Creator, we thank you for bread. We thank you too for words of instruction to remind us that you sent Jesus to be living bread and sustenance for eternity. On this communion Sunday, we seek your presence in the elements we eat and drink, knowing that they are symbolic representations of your sacrifice. As Christ tried to explain to his disciples, he would not be with them very long, and the miracles they witnessed were just the beginning of belief! Open our hearts and minds to the mysterious grace and mercy that you shared in Christ and his Advocate. May the Holy Spirit be felt by all in words and deeds today. Please let your voice be heard today through this messenger. Amen.

You have a treat today in worship and message, because I have brought you some elements of my recent experience with Virginia Baptist Women in Ministry as they celebrated their annual Feast. The litany that was read and the new hymn we sang came from that wonderful day of worship in May. The topic was called Rise Up! There were 80-90 women and men who support one another in their callings and profession. It was held at the oldest Baptist Church in Richmond, First Baptist, founded in 1780. They are still relevant today and only recently voted to separate from the Southern Baptist Convention, ending their 179-year relationship because of the proposed amendment (likely to pass later this month) to SBC policy requiring members to: "affirm, appoint or employ only men as any kind of pastor". Like us, Richmond First Baptist routinely ordain women as deacons, hire female pastors, and gave to IMB and NAMB missions programs. They would be publicly disfellowshipped, and so reassessed their position and funding. That has nothing to do with today's message other than to share relevant state Baptist news. Some of today's message comes from inspirational sermons presented that day by Rev.

Mandy England Cole, Program Associate for The Bridge at Union Presbyterian Seminary, Richmond, VA and Rev. Dr. Art Wright, senior pastor, Williamsburg Baptist Church, Williamsburg, VA.

Our first passage from John 6 comes shortly after the miracle feeding of the 5,000 with just a few loaves of bread and fish. It turns out that there were 5,000 men and when you add in the women and children in that crowd, it was probably closer to 10,000 people! Does that change your image of the miracle? Up to that time, most Jews thought only someone as great as Moses could save them. In this story of sustenance, the people who for years claimed that Moses and the manna he provided in the wilderness for forty years was their life-giving historical hero, forgot that it was God who provided the manna. Now, after seeing Jesus facilitate this miracle of sharing and multiplying food for everyone, struggle to understand that Jesus was greater than Moses, because he had been sent by God to save them in another way:

³³ For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

³⁴ “Sir,” they said, “always give us this bread.”

³⁵ Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

Jesus did his best to explain his role and purpose to the disciples and to the people. The sign the people witnessed by the feeding confused them and the disciples, but Jesus came to earth not to fill human stomachs with food, but to fill our lives with the very presence of God. Salvation is not just coming to church each week or taking communion each month; rather, salvation is a matter of sharing in God's life through an intimate relationship with him, and we build this relationship through Scripture

reading, study, prayer, changing our focus, and surrender to his will. This is what we celebrate each month as we serve the Lord's Supper, that Jesus Christ is the Bread of Life, our daily sustenance spiritually and physically. Does your relationship with Jesus reflect that?

The second passage is one of the shortest parables in the Bible. It illustrates the Kingdom of Heaven, which is hard for humankind to imagine, much less understand. It is first like a mustard seed, very tiny, yet it grows to over ten feet and provides seasoning and food as a vegetable. This metaphor is often used to indicate growth, as in church growth. The growth hormone already exists in the seed, and only needs water, sun, and fertilizer to produce harvest. Although I too have used it to explain church growth, especially for us as a small church, I prefer the yeast metaphor, or leavening to explain and help us envision our growth.

You see, yeast is really a fungus, “a microscopic fungus consisting of single oval cells that reproduce by budding and are capable of converting sugar into alcohol and carbon dioxide (online Oxford Dictionary definition).” Although that sounds awful, you all know that yeast provides the risen bread dough with all those wonderful air bubbles that get baked in and give the bread its soft, tender texture and delicious baking fragrance; even realtors are known to bake bread right before an open house to put people at ease in this house so that they can imagine it as a home. The fungus part is a small amount that does not hurt the body in any way but increases the size and quality of the dough. We humans have been baking bread for over 10,000 years! It is simple and ordinary yet has a profound result.

Now another word for yeast is leavening: “a substance added to a cake, bread, etc. to make it swell and become lighter, especially a chemical powder or yeast.” Another definition that applies to the women’s gathering and to our church as a Missions Center is this: “something that is added to a situation and improves it, for example by making it more interesting, less serious or difficult, or more attractive.” Couldn’t you say that our new Food Mission is a leavening agent for Annandale? Couldn’t you say that your faith and actions within the community are or could be leavening agents for our church and Missions Center? I’ve heard it said that transformational faith is contagious, but not like a pandemic, more like yeast. The yeast stays within the host flour and cannot be separated from it as it transforms the dough, yet its very presence creates something different than it originally was.

The woman in our short parable was preparing bread for a feast for the whole town; it was a huge amount of flour – 60 pounds of our measurement – 3 levels the Bible states. Think back also to Sarah’s baking bread to welcome the angels that came to protect them. She used 3 levels also. We typically buy a 5-pound bag of flour, so imagine 12 of those in your cart. I don’t even have a bowl big enough for that! I saw several types of flour at the Amish Bird-in-Hand Farmers’ Market – sacks full of flour for sale, poured into smaller plastic bags for the tourists. It was freshly milled! And, oh the bread! I could not have kept the bread fresh if I’d bought it for today, but I did have some Amish sour dough toast these two weeks since my travels. It was organic, with no preservatives and no chemicals, very healthy. During the pandemic, sourdough recipes and breadmaking were quite popular, not just to pass

the time, but to connect with each other since we couldn't meet together. All these examples support and encourage how the church does and should work within the community and its own body of believers to illustrate the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven. You may not agree politically, but spiritually, we are called to love God and our neighbor, and so we do, and we shall continue to do so. There is more than enough bread to go around and enough leavening to make more! Have hope and faith that God is really doing the leavening and spreading his mission within this community called Annandale; it is our duty to join his efforts any way we can! God invites ALL to the table. May we welcome any who come? Amen? Amen! ||

Let us pray. Dear Lord, we thank you today for the chance to remember in spirit and symbol your son, Jesus. We thank you for his and your sacrifice and for the mystery of your Advocate, the Holy Spirit. We ask you to bless these elements of bread and juice to remind us that although we have sinned, we are forgiven, and must forgive others who sin against us. Help us to be the leavening agent that makes warm, fluffy, bread out of the heavy, wet dough of our theology and faith. Let us share that faith in you with others. May we be Yeasty People! Thank you, Jesus, for it is in your name we pray, **Amen.**