

Parable of the leaven

http://followingjesus.org/vision/parabolic_teaching.htm

He told them another parable: "The kingdom of God is like yeast that a woman took and concealed in fifty pounds of flour until all of it was all leavened." (Luke 13:20-21)

Modern people often think of leaven in a positive sense — fermentation, new life and growth. But for the people of Israel, leaven — today's yeast — was a symbol of uncleanness and corruption. In ancient times leaven was made by placing a piece of bread in a dark, damp place until it rotted, moulded and stank. Both leaven and the process of leavening were symbols of corruption. Leavened bread (our daily bread) was the symbol of the unholy, the profane, and a sign of everyday life. Unleavened bread was the proper symbol of the holy, the sacred, and the religious feast.

In this parable the leaven is kneaded into a large amount of dough and in time the whole batch becomes leavened. The amount of flour, three measures or fifty pounds, is the same amount that Sarah used to make bread for the three angels that visited Abraham at Mamre. Thus there is in this story the possibility of preparation for a divine epiphany, or revelation of God's presence. What's more, the enormous amount of dough suggests that what is taking place is not just ordinary corruption but monumental corruption. The kingdom of God will not take place where people are concerned about remaining holy and uncorrupted by the world. Reaching out in love, compassion, reconciliation and forgiveness is more important in God's eyes than moral incorruption.

In this parable Jesus again confronts the popular idea that the kingdom of God is holy, good and triumphant. The kingdom turns out to be active in the ordinary, almost unnoticeable aspects of life.

The leaven itself is not visible in the dough, but the effect of its action is gradually noticeable, sometimes taking us by surprise. God's action in our lives is not always obvious. In this parable Jesus points out that God does not operate in the world by great signs and wonders. There may be no great deliverance, no sensational conversion. God's action in our lives is present in a very real but often hidden way. The kingdom of God is found in small changes. The power of God's kingdom manifests itself by changing our inner dispositions and attitudes. The kingdom is present when our hearts are transformed so that our relationships with other people become transformed. The kingdom is active when we begin to turn our backs on domination, greed, power, and violence. It is found when we begin to live out God's vision of acceptance, compassion, sharing and reconciliation. Small mundane acts of love are signs of the kingdom. We are left with the hope of transformation without any experience of it happening.