

**Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles**  
**Fifth Sunday after Pentecost – July 9, 2017 – Summer Parables**  
**Rev. Anne G. Cohen, Minister**

**Matthew 13:33 (The Five Gospels)**

**FOR REFLECTION**

leav-en \* noun

1. a substance, typically yeast, that is added to dough to make it ferment and rise.
2. a pervasive influence that modifies something or transforms it for the better.

- <https://www.google.com/search?q=leaven&oq=leaven&aqs=chrome..69i57j0l5.3039j0j8&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>

**Heaven's Leaven**

33 He told them another parable: 'Heaven's imperial rule is like leaven which a woman took and concealed in fifty pounds of flour until it was all leavened.'

The Five Gospels p.195

Yeast. Today's reflection is on yeast.

Yeast is the driving force behind fermentation, the magical process that allows a dense mass of dough to become a well-risen loaf of bread. And yet yeast is nothing more than a single-celled fungus. ...[It] works by consuming sugar and excreting carbon dioxide and alcohol as byproducts.

Yeast's Crucial Roles in Breadbaking - FineCooking  
[www.finecooking.com/article/yeasts-crucial-roles-in-breadbaking](http://www.finecooking.com/article/yeasts-crucial-roles-in-breadbaking)

Yeast ferments. It consumes and excretes. In a word, yeast corrupts. You may know that in the Jewish Passover observance, leaven is a symbol of corruption and the lack of leaven stands for that which is holy. That is why unleavened bread is central to the meal. It also represents the quick exit (exodus) from Egypt which didn't give the Hebrews time to leaven the bread. But the main metaphor has to do with what is holy and what is unholy.

So, for Jesus – in this one-sentence parable – to compare Heaven's rule to leaven is a bit shocking. Our man sure loved to shock people. The Jesus Seminar – that unruly bunch of scholars who went looking for the authentic voice of Jesus in the gospels – most of the "Fellows" decided that "this parable transmits the voice of Jesus as clearly as any ancient record can." In one sentence, he uses three striking images.

The first image he uses is the word “hide” or “conceal” to describe the act of mixing flour and yeast. Jerry Seinfeld’s spouse, Jessica, wrote a cookbook entitled Deceptively Delicious. It all about how to conceal vegetables and other healthy items in otherwise kid-friendly food – so the kid will eat them. Jesus would have loved it. G-d tucks little bits of heaven’s leaven into our daily bread so that we don’t even notice it – but it changes our lives – for the better, of course.

The second image Jesus uses is “fifty pounds of flour.” That’s a lot of flour. And as you know – and certainly his audience back then knew – this is a direct reference to Genesis 18.

Three men appear to Abraham...as representatives of G-d. They promise him and his wife, Sarah, that she will bear a son the following spring, although she was beyond the age of childbearing. For the occasion, Sarah is instructed to make cakes of fifty pounds of flour to give the heavenly visitors. Fifty pounds of flour, it seems, is a suitable quantity to celebrate an epiphany – a visible, though indirect, manifestation of G-d.

The Five Gospels p.195

The Kin-dom of Heaven, G-d’s Rule, is an EPIPHANY – an indirect but visible presence – worthy of fifty celebratory pounds of flour. That’s big!

And then the third image is yeast – the corruptive force itself – as a description of the holy – when everyone knows it represents what is unholy. Alcohol for heaven’s sake! Beer bread – an unnecessary repetition. That just can’t be right! But it’s what Jesus said – according to the 200 plus scholars of the seminar. So, let’s play with it.

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Have you ever had an experience where something was corrupted – messed up somehow – didn’t happen the way it was supposed to happen – and then turned out to be the best thing ever?

- Many weddings I’ve officiated have had something go wrong – or different from expectations – and that thing turned out to be the most memorable moment of the day.
- I was never able to have children. And at the age of 51 Peter came into my life.
- ???
- ???
- ???
- ???
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It's possible that the painful process of selling the church building 6 years ago allowed this congregation to be (even more effectively) heaven's leaven – “a pervasive influence that modifies [the world] or transforms it for the better.”

Time will tell.

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Children's Time                      Bread                                      (leaven and heaven)

**Scripture Reading for Sunday July 9, 2017 – Pentecost 5 – Year A**

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