

July 30, 2017 8th Sunday after Pentecost

Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope

1 Kings 3:5-12, Psalm 119:129-136

Romans 8:26-39, Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

The Tassajara Bread Book, Edward Espe Brown, p 9. DavidLose.net from 7-27-17 for this date.
A Good Time for the Truth, ed. Sun Yung Shin, David Lawrence Grant's "People Like Us, p. 195-197.

Grace to you, dear people of God, grace and peace to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

There is a Zen quality to the The Tassajara Bread Book, often called "the Bible for bread baking."

I first thumbed its pages working at Wilderness Canoe Base, near the Boundary Waters Canoe Area.

In the off-season, instead of guiding canoe trips, our little community would take our turns in the kitchen,

recipes in hand, the big standing mixer nicknamed Bertha, churning bread dough,

On the quieter days, we'd stray from the standard recipes and consult Tassajara to learn more about

these little miracle creatures called yeast and their whims and ways.

Start with warm water, 90 to 105 degrees Fahrenheit.

Too hot, Tassajara says, and "the yeast becomes very frantically active and soon exhausts itself."

Too cold, and it becomes dormant.

Treat those little yeast-ies to something sweet: molasses or honey, sugar or corn syrup.

In one of our parables in the Gospel today, Jesus explains: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened."

Pretty straight forward, right?

From Sunday School days we've heard this parable, like the mustard seed, as proof of God's ability to use small nuggets to create abundance:

the yeast leavens the loaf and that's good;

the tiny seed grows and becomes the tree with habitat enough for the bird and her family.

But, It turns out that yeast in biblical time and culture didn't evoke the same happy sensory experience of bread baking or bread eating as Tassajara, or my love of good, crusty bread, might suggest

Yeast in the bible is usually seen as corruption and impurity, even sin.

I mean, it's decaying matter that you're mixing in to valuable flour, tainting the whole lump of dough.

And that lovely mustard tree with its roomy branches?

Gardeners beware: don't forget that it's a bushy, invasive, tiresome, uncontrollable weed.

So what is Jesus up to with these tricky parables?

And let's be honest, we could dig into the others in similar fashion. **What is Jesus trying to tell us?**

The word that comes to me most quickly is subversive: Jesus' Gospel is subversive.

Heaven's way is subversive. It's invasive. It's an all-encompassing change-agent that isn't content with half our attention, and doesn't always fit into the nice or comfortable cultural norms.

As David Lose says, "The Gospel of the kingdom that Jesus proclaims and lives is truly good news only to those who are not finally satisfied with what this life has to offer." Subversive.

If things as "they are" are okay,

then this weedy bush wouldn't be welcome news describing God's very reign,

then this corrupt leavening agent wouldn't ever be the choice of the bread-bakers.

I was chatting at a party recently when one of the women across the table looked around and said something to the effect that these are desperate times, people are depressed, things aren't okay.

I think she was particularly referencing the tensions and deep, complicated grief following the police shooting in southwest Minneapolis, but surely the news more generally.

Right there at the kitchen table, among some of her close friends, she was saying, things aren't okay.

Once we realize that business as usual isn't cutting it,

that health care is in a dire crisis,

that our racial tensions are denying dignity and mongering fear,

that the systems we hoped would protect everyone equally aren't exempt from trouble,

then in times like these, subversive parables may be the good news that they were back in Jesus day.

For Jesus' culture was laden with inequality—life was short, and hard, very hard.

The thumb of the oppressive Roman occupiers weighed heavy on their hearts and every part of their life.

Some of you know the book, A Good Time for the Truth: Race in Minnesota.

Sixteen of the state's best writers, all people of color, tell of what it's like to live in Minnesota in their skin.

Toward the end, David Lawrence Grant has a piece called *People Like Us*.

He begins by reminding us of when the nation's crack cocaine epidemic of the 80s and 90s had "finally caught up with Minneapolis" and in summers of 1993-94 it had "sparked the moniker, 'Murderapolis'".

As you'd expect, there was "public hand-wringing and soul searching" he says, especially in the news.

But then Grant reflects on a coolness, saying, "there was a strange, unnerving sense...that the horror and trauma...was being observed from some sort of remove, as though all of this was actually happening someplace else."

Then in 1995 a young, pretty, successful, suburban white woman was found dead in her car in a south Minneapolis parking lot.

“Up until then,” Grant says, “the growing list of dead putting the Murder in Murderapolis had all been poor and black or brown, residents of Minneapolis’s most challenged neighborhoods...”

“But now with Dunlap’s grisly murder,” he writes, “the tone of the local media coverage suddenly shifted.” It was subtle he notes, recalling a live broadcast in that parking lot soon after the murder.

The white female reporter and the white anchor chatted on air.

The anchor asked, “Well, there’ve been a lot of murders this year.

Why do you think it is that *this* case has so completely captured our attention and stirred up our collective emotion the way it has?”

The reporter pauses, reflective, the camera zooms in, and then the reporter says, “Well, I think it’s hit us so hard because this time, it’s someone like *us*.”

These words surely resonated with plenty who heard the report that night, but they also resonated with David Lawrence Grant, because, he says, “Her words had just made it crystal clear to me that I, and others who look like me, were not part of that *us* she’d imagined she was speaking to...”

My spouse, Jane, read the beginning of this essay to me, aloud, a week or two back, in the wake of the devastating killing of Justine Damond by a police officer, with all the complicated reactions.

Timely, isn’t it? So timely. **So much to learn and confess and do.**

Things are not as they should be, not in our city or state, not in our nation, not in our world.

Jesus parable, his subversive parable, with those three measures of yeast, hangs in the air: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed with flour until all of it was leavened.”

We are part of that kingdom dough. God’s subversive, disrupting, life-altering, truly life-giving kingdom is coming, and when we’re honest, we need it. That’s the promise.

These are hard times, very hard times, the woman at the party was telling her truth,

David Lawrence Grant is telling his truth. You have your own.

When our prayers become sighs, when our hope demands a measure of patience, and then some, when yeast is good news, nothing will separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, nothing.

The promise of yeast so thoroughly mixed, the seed that grows a mighty bush,

They mean God in love is doing something that will not leave us as we are.

Ultimately God’s heaven is coming, probably not as we expect or imagine,

but God’s heaven is coming, here, now, and ultimately that is good news. Amen.