

.Akron Christian Reformed Church

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2 Corinthians 5.16-21; James 5.7-11; Matthew 13.33-35

The Quiet Imperceptible Kingdom

Prayer: Loving and merciful God, we are here this morning for a myriad of reasons. Some of us come filled with anticipation to be near you and to worship you. Some of us come out of habit. Some of us are here because someone else has dragged us. Some of us enter this place because life is overwhelming. Whatever the reason we're here, holy God, accept our presence as a sacrifice offered to you.

Dear Holy Spirit, blow across our hearts and minds this morning, tuning them to your word of peace and reconciliation. Cleanse us of the distractions within us, that hinder us from experiencing your gracious presence and from hearing your voice, so that as you call each one of our names this morning, we may resonate with your attentive grace, mercy and peace. Amen.

When I was a boy I dreamed about playing baseball for the Detroit Tigers. What I discovered as I left childhood was that I wasn't half bad at baseball, but that there were a lot of boys who were much better. Therefore, I decided that it wasn't wise to bank on baseball, so I moved on. But the dream didn't die until I was 29 and living in rural Minnesota. That's when I finally conceded that the Tigers weren't ever going to discover me in Holland MN.

When I was a young man I dreamed about having a significant impact upon the world. And even though I knew that the probability of accomplishing such a thing was slight I thought, "Maybe I will. Who knows?" Then, somewhere around 35, about the time we moved to Akron, I discovered that the world wouldn't ever have the privilege of knowing me, I wasn't going to change anything.

When I was nearing 40, as things began to change around here, I thought that I might have an impact on our denomination. I felt like I had things to say to the church. Things about how to be a pastor, and how to get along with a church, and what to emphasize and what to forget.

But I realized soon enough that the truth was that I was the pastor of a small church, in a small corner of the world, within a small denomination, with which I was out of step. No one was going to listen to me. Eventually, I discovered that I liked the anonymity of Akron Ohio.

I still dream from time to time about saying something that will help the church. I think about telling the church about this place. But I can't quite find the right voice.

Every once in a while, I think that maybe the one thing of significance that I've accomplished is the blessing of people. Maybe some of the children whom I blessed, will bless their children, who will then bless their children, and by that generation they won't even have heard of me. They'll just be doing it because it was done to them. And I thought, "good enough"

I haven't been able to get those honey bees out of my head. No single one of them is important, except the queen, and yet they all go about their work as if the hive depends upon their tiny

contribution.¹ And even though the work of every bee is individually insignificant, the individually insignificant acts of 60,000 bees keeps an entire hive alive and thriving.

In the grand scheme of things none of us is all that important, or all the powerful, or all that noticeable. Most of us have an impact on a relatively small number of people. That's it.

All that can be expected of any of us, is that we go about doing the tasks that God lays in front of us day after day, and that's all. And somehow, by living our lives, we advance the Kingdom of Heaven. Somehow, by living our lives, we participate in God's story of his struggle against evil.

Our life, our faith, isn't all about making it to heaven when we die. In fact, that's not even a helpful way of living because it skews our life in the wrong direction, a self-centered direction. Our life, our faith, is about the struggle of the Kingdom taking hold in this world and defeating all that is evil. That's what our faith is about – being God's partners, Christ's ambassadors, proclaiming and living God's work of reconciliation.

Jesus said, "the kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough."

That woman is making a lot of bread. I figured it out. I use 2.75 pounds of flour when I mix up a batch of bread dough, which makes a couple of decent sized loaves. That means, for me at least, 60 pounds of flour would make 22 batches of my bread dough, or 44 decent sized loaves of bread. This woman's making a lot of bread, she must be preparing for a banquet, a party.

I also weighed the yeast yesterday. This bread making person will incorporate about 13 ounces of yeast into that 60 pounds of flour. That's how much I'd use -- 13 ounces of yeast to 60 pounds of flour. Fascinating what a small thing can do to a much larger thing.

Yeast is interesting. It plays three roles in bread making. It, of course, causes the dough to rise. But by fermenting it also strengthens the dough as it creates gluten. Plus, yeast is the source of great flavors. Yeast makes the difference between a flat, tasteless piece of Matzah and a piece of glorious bread.

Yeast is a single celled fungus that's found in the ground and air, but it lies dormant until it's mixed with warm water. But then, when it's mixed with warm water and flour it comes alive and begins to eat the sugar that's in the flour, which gives it gas, so it begins to burp and fart carbon dioxide and ethyl alcohol which causes the dough to rise.

Yeast is quiet and not particularly spectacular. It just kinda sits around waiting. But, once it's mixed into the dough, no one can separate it out. It's even more difficult to separate yeast from flour than to pick mustard seeds out of dirt. Depending upon the conditions it may work somewhat quickly, or it may work very slowly. When I need my bread to rise quickly I add a little honey, which the yeast loves to eat. When I want my bread to rise slowly I put the dough in the refrigerator which makes the yeast lazy and slow. Yeast, though, has the power to transform dry, saw dust tasting flour, into a spectacular piece of bread.

¹ You may want to read the sermon from July 30. I talk about the work of honey bees there

The Kingdom of Heaven is fomenting in the world, slowly leavening it, like yeast within dough. How long will it take? I don't know, but I do know that God isn't in any kind of hurry. Our impatient little schedules aren't God's schedule.

After all, the Holy Spirit brooded over the creation for billions of years before we got to this point today. Billions of years. I suspect that the Spirit will brood over the creation for billions of more years, leavening all that there is, before all of the creation becomes one with God again.

A while back, someone schooled by the CCO, said to me, "I believe in the restoration of creation that began at the resurrection. But, where is it? When I look around I can't see life getting any better. Is the restoration going to happen all at once, or is it a process? If it's a process then I should keep waiting, right? If it's sudden then I should be patient, endure evil, and wait for Jesus to change everything? I'm confused."

There are no real answers to questions such as these. I have my insignificant thoughts, but they aren't anything but my own thoughts.

The parable of the yeast mixed into the flour simply calls us to wait patiently and to be confident that even though we cannot see great transformation happening, the Kingdom of Heaven is real and at work. And we're to live our life, and complete our tasks, and rest in the knowledge that they are all part of the work of God to eliminate evil and to restore the world. We are to rest in the knowledge we are Christ's ambassadors of reconciliation. Our life counts.

Truly, God is presently working to destroy the evil that permeates the world. **But God is working quietly and slowly**, indeed, so quietly, and so slowly, that we often mistake God's quietness for **inactivity**.

Do not be a people who wring your hands crying to the heavens about how wicked and perverse the world is becoming and desperately pleading for God to destroy the evil that surrounds you. Because you'd just be wrong.

The world is not going to hell in a hand-basket, whatever that means. Because God is at work. His reign has begun. The forces of evil are being rounded up. The Kingdom of Heaven is fomenting and expanding within all of the kingdoms of this world. The Spirit is brooding. We have not been forgotten.

Do not mistake God's quietness for absence. Or God's slowness for inactivity. God is among us and with us and working through us.

She asked me: "If it's a process then I should keep waiting? If it's sudden then I should be patient, endure evil, and wait for Jesus? I'm confused."

Well, "the kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough." That will have to suffice for now.

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