

Leaven Things Up a Bit  
Second Sunday after Easter  
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“As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

At the meditation time before the Wednesday Eucharist this past week, I shared a reflection that I found at the United Church of Christ website. The author's premise was that it was not remarkable that Jesus was absent from amongst the dead, what was amazing was that he was present amongst the living. “In life and in death,” the author stated, “we are valued and celebrated not because of our absences but because of our presence – especially at critical life junctures.” Jesus was absent from the dead, but what left the disciples with burning hearts was Jesus' presence amongst them.

This meditation had me thinking a lot about bread. To be more precise I have been thinking a lot about leaven, that is yeast, the substance that makes bread rise. During Holy Week we talked a good bit about unleavened bread. With no time to allow the morning's bread to rise, the Israelites fled from Pharaoh under Moses' direction and ate flat bread which they hastily baked along the way. At the Passover we know that this story was retold by Jesus and his disciples as they shared the loaf of unleavened bread. But today, I want to think about leavened bread.

So I brought some with me. Well actually, I have brought leavened dough with me, haven't I? Because this is certainly not going to work well for those who intinct, or dip, their bread into the chalice. A doughy mess to be sure!

I brought dough because it embodies the rising process, the idea of leavening. Bread, well, it's easy to forget the process of going from flat to rounded that has taken place. But dough is constantly getting bigger until it is baked. I once forgot that I had put dough in the oven to rise over night and by noon the next day when I remembered, it was **huge**. There was as much dough rising above

the pan as there was dough inside the pan. Leaven is powerful stuff to be sure.

Jesus was gathered with his disciples, finally in the presence of Thomas this time, and Jesus tells them, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." Now before we go on this is just the perfect time, that was a joke you will get in a minute, to have a little Greek lesson. There are a variety of verb tenses in Greek that help you understand not just a time frame, as tenses in English convey, but Greek verb tenses give information about the nature of the action. "As the Father **has sent** me..." The verb "sent" is in the Perfect tense. The perfect tense is an action happening now that relies on a past action. So Jesus is saying the Father has sent me, this happened in the past and is done, it's fact; the sending which the Father did to the person of Jesus is done. But the appearing of Jesus before the disciples is still a result of the Father's prior sending and is happening now. In other words the effect of God sending Jesus is having consequences in this moment with the disciples. And now take the second half of that phrase, "so I send you." Think of this as a cause and effect phrase: God sends me, I send you. Leaven; yeast; an agent of rising.

Jesus came as God's presence in the world and sends us forth, as disciples, to be the continuing presence of God in this world. We are the yeast. We are the agents of rising in this broken and weary world. I think so often Christians get focused on "the great reward" the "heavenly ever after" that we bit by bit shift our focus narrowly to and upon the idea that in Christ we will be resurrected; we will be absent amongst the dead. What a shift it would be to turn that focus into one of presence. In Christ we now are and will be present amongst the living. That is the Easter miracle. It is one of presence and Christ commissions, or sends, us just like God sent him.

Our role in this world is to leaven things up a bit, to be, as ones sent by Christ, fully present amongst the living.