

March 30, 2011
Sermon for Lent IV
St Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie, TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

1 Corinthians 5:6-8 (ESV)

⁶Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?

⁷Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened.

For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. ⁸Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

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¹ *The Holy Bible : English Standard Version*. Wheaton : Standard Bible Society, 2001

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Amen.

Years ago as an Elder back home and now as a pastor, I have the unique advantage of seeing young people receive Holy Communion for the first time. The bread or the host, seems to surprise them the first time they receive it. They are thinking bread, and in some cases it seems like they are expecting something like Mrs. Baird's or Wonder bread, you know the kind that you make sandwiches out of. But the little communion wafer, this little piece of matzoh, doesn't look or taste like bread the kind of bread most of us are used to. In fact it doesn't taste like much at all, along the lines of cardboard or styrofoam.

The reason why it is so different from the bread we are used to is because it is unleavened bread, that is, bread made without yeast. Yeast makes the bread puff up and gives the bread different flavors, sometimes depending on the type or strain of yeast that is used.

Communion wafers are normally flat and thin. Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper during the Passover meal, when only unleavened bread was eaten so there was no puffy bread being made at the time. That is why, to this day, that we also use unleavened bread at the Lord's Supper.

Our usher is passing out the matzoh, the unleavened bread right now. The matzoh that you are eating this evening is much like a cracker, but it has roughly the same basic ingredients that were used at the Passover, wheat flour and water.

The original unleavened bread may have been softer and chewier but in these modern times, this is what is used at the Passover. Being unleavened is the main point. But like we have asked before...why?

Why is only unleavened bread eaten at Passover? Why do Orthodox Jews sweep their houses clean and rinse their cooking utensils and wash out their cupboards before the Passover in order to get every speck of yeast? Why does the Passover usher in a 7 day festival called the Feast of Unleavened Bread?

Well, there are two reasons why only unleavened bread is eaten at Passover. The first one is the main one. God ordered the Israelites to bake unleavened bread for the first Passover celebration because there was not enough time for leavened bread to rise. Within a few hours the Israelites would be on their way out of Egypt. They prepared this freedom meal in haste; hence, they ate unleavened bread.

The second reason, is a spiritual reason. Throughout the Bible, yeast or leaven has symbolized corruption, destruction and evil. In four ways, yeast symbolizes evil.

#1, yeast causes decay. The Hebrew word for leaven is *chametz* literally means "sour." Leavened bread is a sour bread. It contains a bacteria that starts the process of decomposition. Isn't that a bit like sin? Sin causes us to decay spiritually. It sours our lives. I remember trying to make root beer with the kids one time. We mixed it up and put it in a bottle and added the yeast, sugar and flavoring just like we were supposed to.

We let it age and when we opened the bottle, it smelled great. Ahh, homemade Root Beer! I poured a little in a cup and it foamed up nicely, and I took a sip...just before spitting it into the sink.

It looked nice, it smelled great but it was sour and nasty in my mouth. No matter how nice it seemed otherwise, it had become corrupt and was decaying.

2nd, a little bit goes a long way. A tiny bit of yeast can quickly leaven a whole lump of dough. Paul says the same in our Text, "*Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?*" In the same way, a little sin can infect and affect our whole being; the way we think, act and even feel.

The 3rd way yeast symbolizes sin is in how it causes us to puff up, expand and rise. Sin causes us to puff ourselves up with pride and arrogance. We can easily become conceited as we thumb our nose at God and our neighbor.

Finally #4. If you've ever baked sourdough bread or any of those heirloom breads that have been passed around, they all share the same strain of yeast. You prepare the culture for your batch of bread, use what you need and preserve the remainder in a cool dark place so that the yeast stays alive. When you are ready to bake again, you get some starter yeast from the culture that you reserved and the process starts over again.

Yeast used to be shared neighbor to neighbor, one pinch at a time as each household started and kept their own batch of yeast. Also in the same way, our sin can infect our family, friends and neighbors as they see our sin, become used to it and begin to commit the sins themselves.

Generation to generation, the sinful condition is passed from neighbor to neighbor; parents to children, the process continues on.

To symbolize that His people would be leaving the corrupting influence of Egypt, God ordained that they should only eat unleavened bread before they departed. Sacrificing the lamb and painting the blood on their doorframes secured their freedom. Eating the unleavened bread explained what kind of freedom it was to be. Freedom from sin and corruption.

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul applies the symbolism of the unleavened bread to us Christians. He tells us to: "*Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.*" Pretty clear. The yeast of sin corrupts, so cleanse out that old sin that taints our human nature. He goes on to tell us, "*Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.*"

The sacrifice of Christ, our Passover Lamb, has set us free from the penalty and power of sin. At His birth, Jesus did not inherit the leaven of sin from previous generations!

He was not infected by the yeast of sin! Pontius Pilate could not find anything in Jesus that deserved death. King Herod agreed with Pilate, they had to because our Savior is pure, sinless, without guilt – Jesus is unleavened!

Except for the leaven He took upon Himself, ours, for our sakes. God placed the most horrific penalty for sin, a sin He did not want to place on any of us who are full of leavening, full of sin. (*hold up a large piece of Matzoh*)

See this piece of unleavened bread? Notice it's markings. For one thing, the baking process has left it streaked and striped. In addition, it is pierced through with many holes.

The prophet Isaiah foretold that the Messiah would be pierced and striped like this unleavened bread. *"But he was [pierced] for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed."* Isaiah 53:5

Nails, thorns and a spear pierced His sinless body. The Roman whip or scourge lashed His back mercilessly so that it was striped. All because of the leaven of our sin. *"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all."* Is 53:6

But all of that is past. The sacrifice has been offered, once for all, for all time...and God has accepted Jesus' sacrifice.

"Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." Or so we are directed by God, through the Words Paul recorded in 1 Corinthians.

We are in the New Testament Church, the days have arrived when on those festival days of the church, when we eat the unleavened bread of Christ at His table. There Jesus, the sinless one, gives us freedom and life. As we receive His unleavened body, our sin is carried away, forgiven indeed and we too are unleavened as our sins are removed.

Somewhere down the line, the phrase, “you are what you eat” was spoken. No where else is it as true as in the Lord’s Supper. For when we receive the bread of Christ’s holy body in faith, the leaven of our sin is removed.

But we don’t stop there. God calls you to live in holiness and purity. With obedience to His Word. Get rid of that old yeast so that you can live as one without yeast. *“Let us ... celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.” 1 Cor 5:8*

Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Amen.

Adapted from the Lenten series: *Christ our Passover* by Rev. Dr. David Peter