

Bread Yeast and Spit Mk 8:1-26

Tim Anderson 14/4/2019

107 years ago today, a very significant event occurred.

14 April 1912, what happened?

The Titanic hit an iceberg.

It was a great tragedy.

More than 1500 people lost their lives.

It was a great tragedy not only because of the great loss of life, but because the loss of life was so preventable.

I heard Ken Morgan give a talk a number of years ago where he listed up to 5 easily preventable things that could have been fixed to avoid the tragedy altogether.

But even after the Titanic hit the iceberg, the loss of life was way higher than it should have been.

The lifeboats escaping from the sinking ship left only half full.

Was that because people were in a blind panic and they just had no idea

how many people could safely go in a lifeboat?

Was it ignorance?

No, sad to say it wasn't.

It wasn't ignorance, it was hardness of heart.

The poorer people had cabins in the lower decks, in the bowels of the ship.

The wealthy people had cabins in the upper decks.

When the order was given to abandon ship, the doors to the lower decks were locked.

It was for the purely selfish expedient of making sure all the rich people got onto a life boat.

Even after the ship had gone down

and there were people swimming in the water,

half full lifeboats rowed away from people looking to be picked up.

Was it because they didn't see them?

No. They saw them.

They had hard hearts.

They prioritised their own rescue above trying to save others.
And it can be a parable of the church.
Too often half empty churches lack the compassion
to really make an effort to reach the lost.
Is it because they don't actually realise that people are lost?
No that's not it.
People aren't stupid.
They can do the sums.
About 4 million people live in Melbourne.
About 200k are in church on any given Sunday.
That makes for about 3.8 million people who aren't
and many of them are lost.
We all know that.
The questions for us are,
"Are we prepared
to do the sacrificial things necessary to reach the lost?"
And "Do we know what those sacrificial things are?"
At Holy Trinity we are dedicated
to reaching people with the good news of Jesus.
Our mission statement is
"Helping people discover Jesus and his plan for our lives."
We are not going to be like the half full life boats that rowed away.
We are going to allow God to soften our hearts by his Spirit,
so that we develop true compassion for the lost.

Last week we read about the feeding of the 5000.
Jesus saw the crowds and he had compassion on them.
They were like sheep without a shepherd.
They needed to be taught about God and Jesus did that.

This week he's moved to compassion again.
And Jesus is going to feed them again.
This time the situation that calls forth Jesus' compassion
is a little different.
This crowd has already been with Jesus for three days.

Imagine that for a minute.
I've been preaching for 20 minutes.
And someone calls out,
"Please don't stop. Keep teaching us."
So I go on for another 20 minutes.
"Please don't stop.
Keep going for another hour.
Then we'll break for lunch and start up again."
It sounds somewhat unrealistic, doesn't it?
But this crowd has been with Jesus 3 days.
Whatever cut lunches they brought with them on the first day
were gone long ago.
They are now so hungry they are ready to drop.
And Jesus has compassion on their physical situation.
And he performs another feeding miracle.

That tells us something about gospel witness.
We can't separate people's physical and spiritual needs.
On one hand
there is a temptation to be plain insensitive to people's spiritual needs,
and think that if we eliminate injustice and oppression
then we have brought the kingdom of God on earth.
But there is no true peace and justice
outside a restored relationship with God.
But on the other hand, it's possible to teach the truth about God
and not truly love and care for your hearers.
What would that look like for us as a church?
We could have great biblical teaching that was faithful to the Scriptures,
but not be prepared to befriend the broken people in our community.
You don't have to positively exclude them.
You can put a welcome, church open to anyone, sign outside the door.
But then when people who aren't like you come,
you look down on them because of their tattoos or their drinking habits.
And you choose to only mix socially with people who are like you.
Every church thinks it's a welcoming church.

But how do we go at welcoming those who aren't like us?
And when they are broken,
with significant needs that are time consuming to meet,
how engaged are we really?
Jesus taught the crowd the truth about God for three days.
But then he made sure they had their physical needs met.
And even the teenage boys went away from that meal stuffed full.

So Jesus has done a great miracle.
And in verse 11,
the Pharisees come up to question him.
"Can you give us a sign from heaven?"
Now it's tempting to think that the Pharisees were stupid.
"I mean, guys, a sign from heaven.
Are you nuts?
What was the feeding of the 4000,
if it wasn't a sign from heaven?
Seven loaves, a few fish,
4000 men plus women and children feasting like there's no tomorrow.
That would be called a sign from heaven."
But the Pharisees were not stupid.
It's too easy to mistake hard hearts for stupidity.
We do it all the time.
They were not denying that Jesus had just done a miracle.
They were not looking for proof of the miracle.
They were asking for a sign that the miracle was from God.
Remember a few weeks ago when we were looking at Chapter 3.
"By the prince of demons he is driving out demons."
"OK Jesus, feeding all those people was a great stunt.
How do we know you did it by the power of God?
How do we know
you are not getting your power from somewhere else huh?
What sign can you give us to prove it?"

Verse 12

And Jesus sighed deeply and said,
"Why does this generation ask for a sign?
Truly I tell you,
no sign will be given to it."
The thing is,
when your hearts are hardened in unbelief,
there is no sign that would convince you.
When people have decided they just don't want to believe.
Nothing can convince them.
You might have wondered about some of your loved ones.
Why don't they believe?
It seems so obvious to you.
The world is broken, ravaged by sin.
We need a saviour to rescue us.
God sent Jesus to die for the sins of the world.
His resurrection proves that he overcame sin and death.
He's coming back again to judge the world.
This is not rocket science.
It's not complex to understand.
Why don't they believe?
But the complexity is not the problem.
It's the hard heart.
We need to pray earnestly for God to soften hearts.
It's the only hope for them.

And so Jesus left the Pharisees there.
And went off with the disciples.
He gave the Pharisees nothing.
It's not harsh.
There was nothing he could have given them.
Their own hardened hearts were preventing them
from receiving what he had to give.

So Jesus gets in the boat with his disciples.
And it's a bit of a comedy.

Jesus wants to warn them about the Pharisees.

They think he's telling them off
about failing to pack food for the journey.

So what does Jesus say? Verse 15.

"Be careful, watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod."

What does Jesus mean?

Yeast is something whose effect spreads.

You put a tiny little bit of yeast in the bread,
and the whole batch of dough rises.

What is the yeast of the Pharisees?

It's hardened cynicism.

Their cynical hearts are so hard,
they can't just take the miracles that Jesus does on face value.

And Jesus is warning his disciples,
hardened cynicism is contagious.

You need to watch out for it.

People with cynical hearts will poison your mind,
and that poison will seep down into your heart.

It can happen in relationships with people.

If you hang around with people who are cynical towards another group,
their cynicism can so easily rub off on you.

But Jesus is talking about cynicism directed towards God.

It works the same way.

If your peers are cynical towards God,
that's going to affect you.

People who are never satisfied with what God has done for them,
cannot be satisfied, and they will cause you to become dissatisfied.

Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Herod.

Well the disciples don't get it.

They think,

"Jesus has mentioned yeast.

Yeast goes in bread.

We forgot to bring bread.

He's annoyed with us."

But really?

They've just seen Jesus feed 4000 with seven loaves.
Why couldn't he feed a boat load of 13 with one loaf?
It seems easier actually.

So what are they stressing about?

Jesus said to them, verse 17-18

"Why are you talking about having no bread?

Do you still not see or understand?

Are your hearts hardened?

Do you have eyes but fail to see,
and ears but fail to hear?"

Now the disciples are not cynical like the Pharisees.

They do believe Jesus has done a great miracle
and unlike the Pharisees

they believe that his power to do that miracle came from God.

And Jesus doesn't walk away from them,
like he walked away from the Pharisees,
he teaches them.

He clearly doesn't think they are a lost cause.

But they have missed something important.

What have they missed?

"Guys, when I fed the 5000 with five loaves,
who many basketfuls did you pick up?"

Twelve.

So who am I?

You get that the miracle was done through the power of God.

But you have failed to make the next step.

Who am I?

When I fed the 4000 with seven leaves,
how many basketfuls did you pick up?"

Seven.

So who am I?

That's the crucial part that the disciples have not yet understood.

It seems obvious.

They understand that the miracle has been done by the power of God.

So who is it who has done the miracle?
They haven't got that yet.
They haven't yet understood that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.
That's coming soon.
Peter is the first to latch on.
And he does it later in this chapter.
We'll be looking at that passage after Easter.
But as yet, like us, the disciples haven't got there.
Why not?
It's not because they are stupid.
Their hearts are hardened.
Not hardened with unbelief and cynicism like the Pharisees.
But hardened none the less.
They are insensitive to a spiritual truth.
It's in front of them screaming at them,
and they just can't see it.
They're not dumb.
They're spiritually blind.
They just don't yet get it.

We see people like that too.
They aren't hardened and cynical about God.
But nevertheless they seem not to be able to understand stuff
that seems perfectly obvious to us.
And we get frustrated.
Why can't you see what I can see?

Is there any hope for them?
Well I want to put it to you that there is hope.
And the story of the blind man tells us what the hope looks like.
Now Jesus took two goes to heal the blind man.
In verse 23,
he spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him,
and asked, "Do you see anything?"
And did the blind man say like every other blind man that Jesus healed,

"Praise God, I can see!"

No he did not.

He looked up and said,

"I see people,

they look like trees walking around."

So Jesus said,

"Sorry mate.

Just made a little mistake with the focal length calculation.

I'll have it fixed in just a jiffy."

Is that what happened?

No.

An explanation that depends on Jesus having a minor stuff up is a good sign to look for a better explanation.

Jesus was teaching us something.

Jesus healed him in two goes

because he was trying to show us something.

I'll give you a clue.

Jesus is more interested in showing us something about spiritual vision than physical vision.

Why did Jesus heal him in two goes?

He's showing us that when God restores our spiritual vision, it doesn't always all happen at once.

Is there hope for people who just don't get it?

Yes there is.

They need to do what the blind man did and come to Jesus.

If his friends hadn't brought him to Jesus,

he wouldn't have been healed.

If people don't get it.

The path to wholeness for them

is a path to the gospel message about Jesus.

But don't expect that even if Jesus heals their spiritual vision, that it's all going to happen at once.

Let me ask you a question.

Did Jesus get you to the level of Christian maturity you have today

in one go?

Or has he been patient with you for years?

Has he dealt with you being sometimes enthusiastic
and sometimes completely distracted by other things?

Have there been times when you've wilfully gone in wrong directions?

Has he had to gently coax you back onto the narrow way?

And if it's been that way for you,

then why would we expect

it's going to be some other way for our loved ones

when we share the gospel with them.

But the wonderful thing is that Jesus finished the job.

Jesus put his hands on the blind man's eyes a second time.

And the second time he saw everything clearly.

At every point in the process it's all Jesus.

The blind man didn't heal himself.

Our loved ones who don't know Jesus,

they can't heal themselves either.

Only Jesus can restore our spiritual sight.

But when he begins the job, he will complete it.

So if you can see genuine evidence of the Holy Spirit

at work in your loved one's life,

you can be patient,

knowing that Jesus loses none of the sheep his father has given him.

Why does God delay?

Why doesn't he do things efficiently and quickly?

It's not because he can't work faster.

It's because he's teaching us to trust him.

If every time I preached the gospel,

someone got converted,

then I might start to think that it was about me.

But when I have to wait,

sometimes wait a painfully long time,

then I learn that it's about God.

Sometimes we have to even wait until after we have died to see the answer to our prayers.

William Tyndale was the first person to translate the Bible into English from the original Greek and Hebrew.

That was illegal in those days.

The church didn't allow the people to read the Bible in their own language.

And so for his troubles,

Tyndale was sentenced by King Henry VIII to be executed by burning and strangulation.

Probably in the other order.

While he was being executed,

Tyndale prayed, "Lord, open the King's eyes."

He was asking God to remove the spiritual blindness that had caused him to execute a man he should have honoured.

Now God answered Tyndale's prayer.

About 3 years after Tyndale died,

Henry put an English Bible into every church in England.

Wasn't that a remarkable change of heart?

Let's pray that God would soften hard hearts again.