

Saved By Grace Lutheran Church
Sermon by Pastor Tim Bartels

Trinity 7, 2014

Matthew 16:5-12

Part I

If you shopped Fred Meyers or Costco recently you might have noticed a recall in the produce isle. Certain lots of their peaches, nectarines and plums were contaminated. Fred Meyers posted a sign, giving notice. Customers could return the fruit for a refund. Not only did they post a sign, but they also did a press release. Via the press, customers were notified of the contaminated fruit. They even went a step further. They notified customers one by one. So, you got a phone call from the grocer, if you bought some of the contaminated fruit.

That was the problem. The fruit was contaminated with listeria. Listeria is a bacteria that can cause serious illness. It can include fever, muscle aches, nausea, and diarrhea. In more serious cases, it can spread to the nervous system and complicate pregnancy. According to the CDC, 1,600 listeria illnesses and 260 deaths are caused by the infection each year.¹

So you can see why the grocers put out recalls. They have a *responsibility* to the customer to look out for potentially contaminated produce. They have a *duty* to stock the shelves with food that is good – not harmful – but good for life.

That's how it is in life, generally speaking, isn't it? We are on the look out for that which is good, not harmful, but good for life...just like the disciples in our text. They had just been with Jesus on the other side of the Sea of Galilee. On the other side, a crowd of 4,000 people gathered around Jesus. After three days, they ran out of food. So, Jesus took care of

the crowd. He miraculously provided bread from seven loaves. They ate and were filled. Now, on the other side of the lake, the disciples had forgotten to bring leftover bread with them. Hungry, they looking for more. They needed bread for their bellies.

The disciples needed bread for their bellies; we do, too. The disciples were on the look out for what they needed for life; we are, too. We need it to live. After all, God created us to live.

Those of you who are children, think about what you need for life; what you look for. You have tons of energy and *need* time to run and play. When you are tired, you need down time. You need friends and time to hang out with them. You want to be accepted by your friends to be a part. You need clothes; and, you want the kind of clothes that fits in.

We adults have a little different emphasis. We are on the look out for a good deal to stretch the dollar. We do what we can to penny pinch. Some of you are on the look out for a good education for your children. You have to figure out how to get that for them. You might need to further our own education. It will help improve your marketable status in the workplace. In today's world, you need to keep up on technology. Technology's cost burns a hole on the pocket. All of us need to get the chores done; the bills paid; repairs made.

Part II

That's life. We are on the look out for; we worry about; we fret over these things. They can keep us up at night, wondering how we will get it all done. We do, because we *fail to trust* that God will provide for our needs. Like the disciples, we are often of "little faith." They, too, worried. They worried about not getting to eat.

Though they were, Jesus thoughts were on matters of eternal import. While they were worrying about bread for the belly, Jesus said, "Take

heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.” The disciples didn't get it. They didn't, because they were *stuck on* food for the belly. So they thought Jesus was warning them not to buy bread from the Pharisee and Sadducees' bakeries.

Jesus patiently explained, though. “Do you not yet understand, or remember the five loaves of the five thousand...nor the seven loaves of the four thousand?” It was as if to say, “You guys don't have to worry about bread. I'll take care of that; I'll see to it that you are fed. I have shown you that. I've fed thousands from a few loaves not once but twice. Right now, though, I'm concerned about *more* than bread for your belly. Right now is a teaching moment. 'How is it (then) you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread – but to beware of the *leaven* of the *Pharisees* and *Sadducees*?’”

Then the disciples understood. They finally got it. Jesus “did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the *doctrine* of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” It was their “aha” moment. By leaven they now understood that Jesus meant *false* doctrine.

God compares false doctrine to leaven in another place. There God says, “A little leaven leavens the whole lump.”² That is, a small amount of leaven can ferment a whole batch of dough. A small amount of false doctrine can permeated the whole body of doctrine. “A little cause can have a great effect.”³

That principle is illustrated by longer mathematical problems, like those in algebra and trigonometry. You can work through the whole problem. You can be confident that you did it right. You understood the problem. You did the right calculations. You checked it over. When you got the homework back, though, it was marked wrong. It was, because you had made a mistake at the beginning. The answer was wrong, even though you got all the other calculations right.

That's what happens with false doctrine. Take an example from our church's history as a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. In the 1800's our synod was a part of the Norwegian Synod. During that time the Norwegian Synod was split over a doctrinal point. The issue, in the final analysis, either gave God the glory or man the glory. Agreement seemed to be out of reach. People felt very strongly on both sides. Feelings were deeply bruised. Relationships were hurt.

It was finally resolved this way. They *agreed to disagree*. By doing that, they kept the peace. It seems like a small and insignificant matter. It does, but agreeing to disagree *fermented* the whole batch of doctrine over time. Today the old Norwegian Synod is a part of a church body that no longer holds to the inerrancy of Scripture. If Scripture has error, then anything goes.

To be sure, little causes can have great effects; a little leaven leaves the whole batch." Consider a few popular "leavens" with devastating effects. One *is*: agree to disagree. It means unity is *more important* than what God's word says. Another says: Part of the Bible is God's word, part is man's. That means *man* sits as judge over God's word. Still another equates faith to feeling. The result is man looks *inside self* to feeling, not God's word for certainty. Finally, man is born innocent. Born innocent, man can *help God out* by getting faith for himself.

All of this is the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. It is the leaven of *reason*. Reason looks at God's word and says, it doesn't make sense. *This* is what God must mean. Reason turns *within* man to get the answer. It is *man-centered*. It does not let God's word be final. It is the leaven that ferments the whole batch of dough; the error that ruins the whole body of doctrine; the listeria that makes the soul sick.

Someone said, "Doctrine is life."⁴ Life is Christ. You get that wrong and you are eating food bad for your soul. If the contamination of produce – peaches, nectarines, and plums – is bad for your belly, the leaven of

human reason is bad for your soul. It is bad for life in the here and now; bad for life in eternity. It is, because it makes us sick unto eternal death.

Part III

That's where Jesus comes in. He provides you with bread you need. The bread he provides is *himself*. He is the unleavened Bread; There is no spiritual listeria in him. He is without error; without sin. Jesus is free of leaven that ferments the batch of dough. He is pure, unadulterated food for the soul.

After feeding the five thousand, Jesus said, "I am the Bread of Life, whoever comes to me shall never hunger."⁵ In other place Jesus added, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."⁶

In other words, Jesus says, "You will be filled with my righteousness. All other spiritual bread is contaminated; contaminated it is not good for your soul; it makes you sick, spiritually. *Not* me. *Not* my food. My food nourishes, enlivens, fortifies. It does, because I lived a perfect life in your place. I *never* worried that I would have enough. I *always* trusted that my Father would take care of me. That was true even when I gave my life for your life. As I did, I took all your sin – your sin of worry and fretting over what you need for life; of eating contaminated spiritual food. It made me sick unto death. In my death I got rid of it all for you. It is *all* gone. Now I give myself to you in word and sacrament. Eat and be filled up. Filled up you have life; eternal life."

Filled up with Jesus, the Bread of Life, the church is called to preserve this Bread; to be on the watch for contaminants; to pay attention to and contend for God's word in its truth and purity.

To be sure, contending for pure doctrine is not a popular task. Though it isn't, imagine this. Imagine if Fred Meyer and Costco did not warn its customers of contaminants found in its produce; that they considered the task too unpleasant. That would be irresponsible. People's health would be put at risk. What a cry would be raised! How much more so the church! To be sure, the church *is* called to contend for the faith...and it is all about keeping Christ at the center. Christ is life; life is doctrine.

Part IV

Jesus has lifted our eyes to matters of eternal importance. That does not mean he is ignorant of matters that pertain to temporal import. He is fully aware; aware that you need bread for your bellies; friends to hang with; bills to pay. *Because* he has taken care of bread for your soul, though, you can be at rest. He will *also* take care of the bread that you need for your body.

Yes, you and I may have our worries; we may get distracted by those cares; we may. We do, after all, need to put food on the table, a shirt on the back, and a roof overhead. Though we do, all these things can't feed us forever. Only Jesus can; only Jesus does. Jesus is the bread that gives life eternal. Amen!

[1](http://columbian.com/news/2014/jul24/stores-react-tfruit-recall)columbian.com/news/2014/jul24/stores-react-tfruit-recall

[2](#)Galatians

[3](#)Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. II, p. 905

[4](#)Robert Preus

[5](#)John 6.35

[6](#)Matthew 5.6