



First Christian Church of Orange (Disciples of Christ)

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SERMON: Missing the Metaphor

Question: "Do you not yet understand?"

SCRIPTURE: Mark 8:14-21

By Pastor Dayna Kinkade

¹⁴ Now the disciples had forgotten to bring any bread; and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. ¹⁵ And he cautioned them, saying, "Watch out—beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod." ¹⁶ They said to one another, "It is because we have no bread." ¹⁷ And becoming aware of it, Jesus said to them, "Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? ¹⁸ Do you have eyes, and fail to see? Do you have ears, and fail to hear? And do you not remember? ¹⁹ When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?" They said to him, "Twelve." ²⁰ "And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?" And they said to him, "Seven." ²¹ Then he said to them, "Do you not yet understand?"

The gospel of Mark is a beautiful piece of literature. If it had a title it would be, "How to Follow Jesus: Lessons Learned from the Failure of the Disciples." Throughout the gospel of Mark, the disciples struggle to understand Jesus, even though they are right there with him. Almost every time we have one of these incidents where the disciples don't get it, Mark adds a story about healing a deaf or blind person before or after it. Our passage for today is no exception. Immediately following it a man is given his eyesight – and he doesn't get it all at once – it comes gradually. It is a good metaphor for what is happening to the disciples – they are having trouble seeing.

Our scripture reading for today is an example of the disciples completely missing the point of what Jesus is saying. Before Jesus says anything, we learn that the disciples forgot to bring any loaves with them. There was one loaf, however, in the boat. And that's the other thing, we know they are in a boat. The three times the disciples are in a boat with Jesus they flounder around like they don't know who he is. He calms the storm. He walks on the sea. And, in this instance, he gives a warning. He says, "Watch out—beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod." They hear the word "yeast" and immediately they think about the bread they forgot to bring. Jesus is talking about X and the disciples are talking about Y and because this message – this warning – is so important to Jesus he says to the disciples, "Do you still not get it? Are your hearts hard? Do you have eyes and fail to see? Do you have ears and fail to hear? And do you not remember?"

Have you ever walked a nature trail and run into warning signs? At Yellowstone, if you step off the trail you could fall into a pool of scalding sulfur water. When hiking around here you can run into mountain lions. What Jesus is doing is putting up two warning signs – one on each side of the path of discipleship. On the

one side are the Pharisees. On the other side, Herod. Either side of the path may look tempting but BEWARE – they both will corrupt discipleship if you are not careful.

On the Pharisee side of the path is the seduction of religious purity. The Pharisees are the keepers of the law. They know every law forwards and backwards. So as keepers of the law they are quick to call out lawbreakers and sinners. There is very little latitude for grace or compassion. Now don't get me wrong. They are not evil. They actually perform a valuable service in keeping the law and tradition from being wiped out completely. The just can't see the forest for the trees. They have forgotten God's overall plan for the healing of creation and gotten hung up on being religious bouncers.

On the Herod side of the path is the lure of empire. The Roman empire was an amazing enterprise. Through taxation, the empire built a magnificent infrastructure. There were aqueducts to carry water. There were all-weather roads – which made it easy to move legions of soldiers. If they wanted to slaughter everyone in a city – they knew exactly how long it would take to get there because they didn't have to deal with mud or other potential travel hazards associated with dirt roads. By the time, Jesus was born, Caesar Augustus had conquered everything and Rome was experiencing an extended time of peace. This is called the Pax Romana – the peace of Rome. While that sounds like a great thing it is important to note that the empire's peace was acquired and maintained by force. Rome used crucifixion to keep people in line. It's heavily armed troops were at the ready to protect Rome's interests from threats within and outside the empire. Herod was the client king of Judea and he was raised a Jew but appears to have been a Jew in name only. His title was King of the Jews and he is best known for his buildings and brutality. He even killed his own wife. He also lived a decadent and extravagant lifestyle. Can you see why Jesus is putting up a warning sign? He certainly wasn't for the little guy.

You know, at first I didn't like this passage. I couldn't figure out what I was thinking when I picked it out more than six month ago. It was like Mark stuck the words of Jesus into the middle of a different story. It makes perfect sense. In fact, all these years later, it still preaches. The disciples are concerned about their next meal and Jesus is concerned for all of humanity. Jesus is talking about the path of justice and the Kingdom of God while Christians today are talking about heaven, hell, the rapture, and apocalyptic damnation. Mark is trying to show us the way of discipleship. Jesus is putting up the warning signs. And Christians are all over the place – ignoring the warnings – straying off the path.

Case in point: An email was waiting for me Monday morning that came to me via our website. It said:

Hello,

Truly as a God fearing servant, I say to you. You are anything, but not a servant of God. You're of your father The Devil, and, the Truth, you will be in Hell. Homosexuals, feminists, adulterers, and all unrepentant perverts will have their part in The Lake of Fire. Romans 1:18-32. Jude 1:7. Genesis 19:1-29.

Leviticus 18:22. Second Peter 2:12-13. You and your cult are abomination unto The Lord.

Repent or go to Hell. Luke 13:3.

This not a message of hate, but Love of Jesus.

Jeremy

"Beware of the Pharisees," Jesus says, precisely because this is what happens when you put what you think is God's law before people. He says it is not a message of hate...but it is inches away from being violent and making God out to be a tyrant. And if God is a tyrant it is okay for HIS followers to be tyrants.

I think that is enough about danger of the Pharisees.

What about Herod? Is Herod still a threat today? Let's see... decadent lifestyle, peace through force, silence all opposition – that Herod's playbook. And don't forget the part where Herod is a Jew in name only – with no regard for people who are working like crazy and barely surviving. As long as those taxes get paid – the troops can be equipped – and interests of the wealthy ruling class can be protected.

Now maybe you are thinking – wait a minute – the disciples didn't have a say in anything Herod did. They didn't live in a democracy. They were the peasants that Herod cared less about. But there is something that Herod represents that is a temptation and a seduction for every person who follows Jesus – violence. If we try to get security by using violence – there will never be enough weapons, soldiers, bombs, and walls to make us feel safe. Never. Beware of the lie.

At the very beginning of Jesus' ministry, the gospel writer of Mark says, "The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him." (Mark 3:6) Jesus can't say it strongly enough. "Beware of the lies of the Pharisees and Herods of this world!"

The disciples are still learning...they don't get it...not yet.

Do you remember that I said this all takes place in a boat? The way Mark weaves the story of Jesus together the disciples find themselves in a boat with Jesus it gets rocked – literally and figuratively. The sea is a well-known symbol of chaos and uncertainty. Sometimes we need to get our boats rocked before we figure things out. Just keep Jesus in the boat.

If we look at Christian history we can see where people did not heed Jesus' warnings. War, torture, coercion, terrorism, colonialism, the inquisition, witch trials...I could go on and on...all done in the name of Jesus. And it continues.....

Jesus said to his disciples, *Do you still not perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? ¹⁸ Do you have eyes, and fail to see? Do you have ears, and fail to hear? And do you not remember?*

Sometimes it takes a little boat ride with Jesus to figure things out.

Do you know why Jesus said following him is hard? It's because Jesus is asking us to share. Jesus is asking us to go out of our way and sacrificially love our neighbor. Jesus is asking us to show compassion and work for justice. Jesus is asking us to cross the street for people we don't like and to love our enemies. Jesus is asking us to forgive the unthinkable. Jesus is asking us to resist vengeance and violence and systems the perpetuate it. Jesus is asking us to be concerned about the least of these. Jesus is asking us to live this way...to live as if the Kingdom has come and God is in charge. And guess what – it's hard. Especially when there are Pharisees and Herods telling us otherwise.

It is interesting to me that one of the first symbols of the church was a boat...as if to say we are all in this boat together...trying to figure it out...trying to understand...trying to remember. Jesus is in the boat with us – if we want him to be. Of course, when he starts saying to us, "Do you still not get it?" he might be the first one we want to throw overboard. But if we can keep him in the boat – we can heed his warnings – we can resist that which destroys – and follow his life-giving voice – not for our sake, mind you, but for all.

In the end, Mark leaves us hanging. In his version of the Jesus story, we don't know if the disciples ever get it or not. They are simply told by women coming from the empty tomb to go back to Galilee, where ministry happens and people live on the margins. That's where they'll find the risen Jesus.

And that is where we will find him...ministering to the ones that the Pharisees and Herods of this world discard. "Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Herod." It's just as valid today as it was then.

Amen.