

Tuesday, March 21, 2023
Season of Lent
Day 24

Matthew 16:5–12

⁵ When they went across the lake, the disciples forgot to take bread. ⁶ “Be careful,” Jesus said to them. “Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”

⁷ They discussed this among themselves and said, “It is because we didn’t bring any bread.”

⁸ Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked, “You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread? ⁹ Do you still not understand? Don’t you remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? ¹⁰ Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? ¹¹ How is it you don’t understand that I was not talking to you about bread? But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” ¹² Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Reflection

Earlier in Matthew’s gospel, we have dealt with stories of the religious leaders asking for a sign. However, it happens again in verses 1–5, this time the Pharisees and Sadducees are in alignment—showing how popular Jesus is becoming! It is this attempt to test Jesus that forms the background of our present passage. Jesus turns to the disciples and warns them against the ‘yeast’ of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Despite Jesus’s habit to speak in parables, the disciples hear a criticism of their lack of preparation by carrying bread. Jesus can’t believe what he’s hearing, and he responds with incredulity. Again, while he calls them people with little faith, he isn’t name calling. He’s describing them with real concern. After all that they have heard, all they have seen, all they have learned, all they have done, how is it they are still worried about bread?! And, if they are only this far along, how can they possibly be on guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees?

This passage revolves around “growing up.” Jesus, as their master, has determined they should be “at a certain level,” and they are not. So, he is giving them a “grow up” speech. Parents have this with children all the time—at least, I believe, good parents do. Often the metaphor used is pushing the baby bird out of the nest. A baby bird sits and waits for its parents to find worms, chew and digest them, and then regurgitate the food right into their waiting bellies. But at some point it is time for that to stop. It becomes time for the little birds to get out of the nest, to work their wings, to fly away, and to start their own reproductive cycle. Some birds need to be pushed out—hopefully they make it.

When Jesus says to beware of . . . , it indicates they have what they need to do that job, but it seems the disciples want to remain dependant on Jesus for everything. That might make a good disciple (at first), but terrible apostles for leading a movement to fulfill a mission.

This is an easy application for us too: we need to always be stretching for growth in the kingdom of God. It’s tempting to keep status quo. It’s tempting to rely on our Sunday school knowledge. It’s tempting to let writers, and speakers, and pastors to tell us what we should know, think, or do. It’s tempting to remain children, drinking sweet milk. Grow up! Read, ask questions, have conversations, think (humbly), go to church, engage in Christian community, pray, practice disciplines, care for the poor, and every other thing you can do to grow up into the head, Jesus Christ. That is the only way we will be able to be on guard against the yeast of Pharisees, Sadducees, and the spirit of the age that is at work. Each one of us are responsible to God for our own lives and development. We cannot be passive and we cannot remain children, hoping that others will lead us right.

Prayer

Lord, forgive us, we pray, for passively maintaining the status quo. Help us to stretch and step out of comfortable places. Help us to pick up and read your book. Help us to cooperate with your Spirit to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. Help us to grow up. Amen.