



Lenten Devotional: Week 2 8 – 14 March

The packet of yeast you received in worship serves as this week's point of reflection. Last week's focus on emptiness (symbolized by an empty bowl) encouraged practices of emptying that make room for a deepened relationship with God. This week, we will focus on becoming open to the ways of God's kingdom that can fill and transform us.

Scripture:

Nicodemus said to [Jesus], "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit." (John 3:4-5)

[Jesus] told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened." (Matthew 13:33)

Reflection:

Bread is the most universal and essential of all foods. Although there are many different types across cultures, bread in its most basic form consists of 4 elements - flour, water, salt, and yeast. Yeast cells - unlike flour, water and salt - are living organisms. In fact, your one small packet of dry yeast contains 43 billion single-cell micro-organisms!

Pick up the packet and examine it briefly, but do not open it. Consider the significance that so much "life" is contained in such a small packet. Place the packet in the empty bowl and set aside for now. It will be used later in the Lenten season.

Through the transformative process of fermentation, yeast makes bread rise. When mixed with warm water and flour / sugar, the yeast is nourished and multiplies in numbers. As the sugars are broken down, the yeast produces carbon dioxide, and the gas bubbles cause the dough to rise.

What an amazing and miraculous process that God has created! Who could imagine that such tiny microscopic organisms could transform a lump of dough into delicious bread? Or turn juice into wine? What at first seems insignificant undergoes major transformation and growth, resulting in life-giving nourishment. Yet, the conditions must be right. If the water temperature is too cool, the yeast will not "wake up." If the water is too hot, the yeast will be killed off. The baker must do the work of mixing and kneading the dough. And then, the baker must be patient, placing the dough aside while allowing it time to rise.

The role of yeast in creating bread teaches us much about how God's grace can transform our lives. **Our** potential for growth is beyond our imagining, yet transformation takes time and nurture. Lenten practices - such as prayer, fasting, generosity, worship, and service to others - help assure the right "conditions" for God's grace to shape and transform those parts of us that need growth and healing.

- What is there in me or my life that needs transformation and growth?
- How am I orienting my spiritual life during this season of Lent to create space for Christ's transforming love?

Prayer:

God, like a bakerwoman, you bring the leaven which causes our hopes to rise. With your strong and gentle hands, shape our lives. Warm us with your love. Take our common lives and touch them with your grace, that we may nourish hope among humanity. We pray, trusting in your name, through Jesus our Christ. Amen.

- Ruth Duck, as found in *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, No. 469



Instructions for Families with Children

Help your child/children “wake up” (activate) the yeast to better understand the devotional.

*Begin by carefully **opening the packet of yeast**, and pouring it out into the palm of your hand.*

Say:

- “Notice how small the granules of yeast are. Right now, it is as if the yeast is sleeping (dormant). But we are about to “wake up” the yeast (activate it). There are over 40 billion yeast plants in my hand!”
- “Although they are very small in size, those granules of yeast make a huge difference when it comes to making bread. It may look unimportant, but just this small amount of yeast is what makes two full loaves of bread rise!”

*Then, **activate the yeast:***

- *Using a clear drinking glass/ jar, pour in ½ cup of warm (but not hot) water, and a teaspoon of sugar. Stir to dissolve, then add the yeast and mix again. Wait for 5-10 mins.*
- *While waiting, **read through the scripture together (other side of page), and summarize the reflection about fermentation according to your child’s level.***
- *As the yeast multiplies and grows, it will create a creamy foam on top of the water. The foam will continue to increase in volume for an additional few minutes. The foam may overflow the glass.*

Say:

“Look how the yeast has grown and changed! Do you notice the smell of the yeast? As it grows, the smell becomes stronger. Lightly touch the top of the foam. What other things feel like this? The foam is an indication that the yeast is growing and alive.”

Discuss how the yeast was changed through the process of fermentation. The yeast starts as tiny, dusty granules, but when it is fed with the sugar and water, it grows and changes. The creamy foam shows that is happening. When those changes happen in bread dough, the yeast makes the dough rise.

Say:

“God works in us so we can grow and change and share God’s love in the world in more ways. Even though you may feel ‘small’ at times, you can make a big difference in the world! Like yeast makes bread grow, God’s love can grow in us.”

Discuss together some of the ways our actions of love make a real difference – like being kind to others, being kind to the planet, helping out at home, sharing what we have so those who are in need can be cared for.

Close with the Prayer (on other side).