

And You Thought Halloween Was Scary

It's interesting to me how Halloween has become such a huge event in our country. What used to be a chance for children to dress up and get candy has become an excuse for adults to indulge themselves in a host of unholy things. The growth in fascination with vampires, werewolves, zombies, with anything macabre and demonic is in itself frightening. People seem to love to be frightened. Maybe it's an opportunity to escape from the frightening realities of the world. Real life is so frightening that we are looking for a fantasy escape into make-believe fright. If I asked you what frightens you, some would say scary movies or vampires, but when we get serious, most of us are frightened by real things: the thought of a terminal illness, frightened of dying, frightened of losing our job, our health insurance, being alone. We are frightened by things that effect our current existence, our material way of life, but the truth is there is something much more serious, something much more frightening that should concern us. We should be concerned about whether we are destined for heaven through our faith in Christ, or will we spend eternity in hell, separated from God and his presence. Jesus said, **“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” Matthew 10:28.**

Talk about scary. Forget about Jason or Nightmare on Elm street. Forget about ghosts and vampires. Fear the One who is the judge of the whole universe, the One who examines the heart, the One who knows you and your sin. Fear the One who will not be mocked or deceived.

Jesus warned us about what to fear. Turn with me to Mark 8:15 and look at something else Jesus warned us about. **“Be careful”, Jesus warned them. “Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod.” Mark 8:15**

We've talked about this discussion the disciples were having about bread and the fact that all of this pointed to their lack of understanding. They were pretty slow on the uptake, kind of like most of us. Pastor Brian did a great job last Sunday sharing with us about the disciples' failure to understand. This morning I just want to focus on this one verse – this warning from Jesus about the yeast - the leaven of the Pharisees and that of Herod.

I don't know much about yeast or leaven. I know that at Passover the Jewish people have to get all the leaven out of their house. It commemorates the fact they left Egypt in such a hurry they didn't have time to let their bread rise. It is the leaven, the yeast that causes bread to rise. I

know that when Paula makes rolls, we want them to rise. That's not a bad thing, so why does Jesus warn us about the leaven of the Pharisees and Herod?

In the Scripture leaven or yeast symbolized corruption and the infectious power of evil. Let me quote from David Garland's commentary on Mark. "Yeast connotes to us that fresh and wholesome ingredient that makes dough rise and gives bread a pleasing, light texture. The ancient world used the more dangerous leaven. It was produced by keeping back a piece of the previous week's dough, storing it in suitable conditions, and adding juices to promote the process of fermentation. But this homemade rising agent was fraught with health hazards because it could easily become tainted; it would then spread poison when baked with the rest of the dough. It, in turn, would infect the next batch. That is the idea Jesus uses to refer to his enemies."

The idea was that of something that spreads silently, unnoticed, and as it does it corrupts and poisons, it infiltrates and affects and changes the very nature of the thing it infiltrates. The apostle Paul warned, "**Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast...**" **1 Corinthians 5:6-7.** And again in Galatians, "A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough." Galatians 5:9.

Jesus is warning the disciples, and us, to be on guard against the corrupting influence of self-righteousness and sin. Watch out, be on guard because even the little things, little areas of compromise with sin and unbelief and disobedience, like a little bit of yeast, can work its way into your life and corrupt your whole life and destiny.

Jesus specifically warned them about the leaven of the Pharisees and Herod. Those two didn't have anything in common - nothing to do with each other. But both influences presented a threat to the disciples and to us.

Consider the leavening influence of the Pharisees. We have already seen their self-righteousness. They were quick to judge others and condemn others but always ready to excuse themselves. They thought of themselves as the protectors of the law of Moses, the protectors of the Jewish people from Gentile/pagan influence. They thought of themselves as better than everyone else, holier than others and certainly holier than the non-Jews around them.

Jesus warns the disciples not to be influenced by the leaven of the Pharisees. Don't allow your self to become judgmental, critical of everyone else, condemning of others but never

examining your own life. Judging others, but never helping others to overcome.

Notice the context of Jesus' warning. Jesus had delivered the daughter of the Syro-Phoenician woman, a Gentile. He had gone into the region of the Decapolis and healed a man who was deaf and mute, probably another Gentile. And now he had fed a crowd of 4,000, and perhaps these folks too were Gentiles. It's interesting that when Jesus fed the 5,000 in Mark 6 these were Jews and it was the disciples who came to Jesus and suggested he send them away to get something to eat. Here in Mark 8, these folks are Gentiles and it's Jesus who brings up his concern for them and their hunger and not the disciples. I think some of that leaven of the Pharisees was already creeping into the disciples. They were prejudiced as to who was more valuable to Jesus, judging some as worthy and others not so much. They had to still be amazed that Jesus would care about these Gentiles.

Watch out for the leaven of the Pharisees. It is still affecting the disciples of Jesus. It makes us judge others with a harsh judgement while overlooking our own failures and sins. It makes us quick to point out the sins of others while we harbor unconfessed sin in our own heart and life. It makes us act like judge and jury rather than the witnesses he called us to be. Like the Pharisees, we point out the failures of others yet we do nothing to help them, to restore them, to forgive them, to lift them up.

Watch out for the leaven of the Pharisees. It makes us comfortable with our position and heritage without regard for our present relationship. Let me explain what I mean. The Pharisees were quick to point to themselves as children of Abraham, as true keepers of the Law of Moses, but they didn't have much of a real relationship with God. If they had, they would have recognized Jesus as the One sent from God. Instead, they rejected him and looked for ways to put him to death.

I know some folks that have been affected by the leaven of the Pharisees. They are comfortable with their position. Why, their family has been Assembly of God for generations. They come from a long line of preachers and Christian workers. They still love to talk about the good old days in church and what's wrong with this new generation of Christians but when it gets right down to it, they don't have much of a relationship with God. They know all the cultural aspects of being a good Christian but ignore God's commands. Still hanging out with the family, but spending nights clubbing and sleeping around or living with someone. You want

to be afraid of something this Halloween? Be afraid of the fact that ignoring your spiritual poverty, your spiritual condition is going to send you to hell. Thinking that because you still come around the church you are in a good position when you know in your heart you are sinning against God – be afraid because the leaven of the Pharisees has infiltrated your mind and spirit and it is separating you from God and from the relationship that you once had. It will poison you and destroy you. Beware the leaven of the Pharisees.

I don't want anyone to be eternally insecure about your relationship with God, but I also don't want you to live with some false sense of righteousness when your life and your choices and your lifestyle are sinning against God and his word. Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees.

And beware of the leaven of Herod. We've talked about Herod before. Wicked and evil, selfish and self-absorbed, he refused to believe John the Baptist or the teaching of Jesus. Instead, he did as he pleased, thinking he was in control of his life and destiny and God had no place in his life. He wanted to be entertained by John and Jesus, but he didn't want to commit his life to Jesus.

We talked about this two Sunday nights ago, the danger of allowing ourselves to become conformed to the pattern of this world rather than being conformed to the image of Christ. Romans 12 says, **“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Romans 12:2**

The pattern of this world. We aren't being forced at gunpoint to conform to the world. It's not persecution that is forcing us to conform, instead it is this steady, unrelenting, continual pressure to shape our lives into conformity with the world's pattern. This insidious pressure to be like the world.

I've used the word insidious to describe leaven a couple of times. Webster defines it as **Insidious: “Operating in a slow or not easily apparent manner; more dangerous than seems evident.”** The leaven of Herod is that little bit of evil, that little bit of sin, that ever so little bit of compromise that steadily works its way into your life and then spreads corruption into so much of your life. How can that one thing destroy so much? How can that one sin corrupt so much of my life? How can dropping my guard one time have such a devastating effect? A little bit of leaven works its way through the whole ball of dough and corrupts and poisons the whole thing.

Jesus warns us, watch out for the sin and compromise and subtle unbelief that just like

yeast, moves quietly through your life, your mind, your spirit, and then next thing you know, you are living according to the world's pattern and not the pattern of Christ and his word. It is more dangerous than seems evident. It's no big deal. It's just leaven...

I've seen it over and over again. When did you decide that living like the world wouldn't harm you or your children or your family? When did you decide that conforming to the pattern of the world wouldn't affect your destiny and that of your children and grandchildren for eternity? When did you decide you could live like that and it wouldn't matter to God? That it wouldn't separate you from God for eternity? When did you stop guarding against the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod and just allowed it to grow and infiltrate your life?

Jesus said "Watch out. Be careful. This stuff will destroy you!" And the disciples said, "I guess he's upset because we didn't bring any bread." They totally missed the point. They were so focused on material, physical stuff they couldn't even see the spiritual truth Jesus was talking about. It didn't even faze them.

You want to know what scares me? The thought that Jesus is shouting to us this morning, "Look out! That stuff is poison. It's going to send you to hell!" And it doesn't even register with us. We can't even hear it or consider it. "He's not talking to me." This doesn't apply to me. We think he's talking about whether we will be happy with sandwiches for lunch.

Jesus said, "Don't you understand? Can't you see? Can't you hear what I'm telling you? I'm the only answer. I'm the bread of life. You can't be infected with this world and expect to make it. You have to surrender your life to me. You are compromising with the world thinking it can satisfy you but it can't feed you. It can't give you a life of abundance. I'm the One that can satisfy the longing of your heart. I'm the one that feeds and satisfies in abundance, not the world. I'm the bread of Heaven, the bread of life. You are concerning yourself with stuff that doesn't matter. Who cares about lunch? I'm warning you about hell and your eternal soul."

I'm afraid today. Not of ghosts and goblins or people with hockey masks and chain saws. I'm afraid of letting sin separate me from God. I'm afraid of allowing compromise with the world to ruin my relationship with Jesus. I'm afraid of letting the leaven of Herod affect me and in turn affect my children, affect the next generation. I'm afraid of letting the leaven of the Pharisees turn me into a self-righteous hypocrite, pointing out your sins from the pulpit but refusing to deal with my sins in private.

I'm afraid of failing to preach the truth, of failing to warn people about hell because we don't want to be offensive. I'm afraid of standing at the judgment and having people who are headed to hell without Christ look at me and say, "why didn't you warn me? Why didn't you warn me about the leaven that was poisoning me?" And I won't have an excuse. I didn't want to offend you.

Be careful. Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod. What about you? Have you allowed sin and compromise to infect you, your lifestyle, your choices? Jesus said, don't be afraid of someone who can kill the body, be afraid of the One who can send body and soul to Hell. Fear may not be a good motivator, but then again, Jesus suggests it might be. If you are willing, take an honest look at yourself and your life. Is their leaven that is corrupting you and your relationship with God? If you died today, would you go to heaven or hell? Be honest and if you aren't sure you are going to heaven, you need to come to Christ in repentance and faith and get things right with God. Today.