

“It’s Time to Rise”

Matthew 13:33

9/13/09

Are you alive and active in Christ? Like yeast, we are called to bubble with Life which spreads throughout our community.

Yeast.

All I know about yeast is that it comes in those little packets. I’m not a baker, so I have limited knowledge about yeast.

But I do know that yeast does not work without that warm water added to it. That’s how it’s activated. And once it is, it’s just like Jesus describes: It brings life to the entire mixture, creating a living mass which grows far larger than it began.

Just from a little, simple organism.

There’s a whole world out there that needs you. They need you because they need God and you and I are the ones called to spread the Word. We’ve been activated by the power of the Holy Spirit and it’s time to rise.

It hit me the other day as I was thinking about my life and all that I am and do and have and I thought: What is it about my life that I cannot live without?

How would you answer that question? I found myself answering it with: The love of family, occasional sunshine, a purpose for living, and above all else, my relationship with Jesus Christ.

What does that have to do with yeast, as Jesus describes it? I realized that in naming those things for myself, those are the same things that I would want for anyone, that I believe no one can truly live without.

You and I sit here this morning and have been given a gift so amazing: unconditional love, forgiveness, and abundant life forever in Christ. God has lavished us with His love. There is nothing greater, nothing better, nothing more important in life than that.

And there is a community out there that needs to know that too. This is not a message about church, how we do church, or all the hang-ups that can come with that. Put aside anything you have experienced in the church to this point. Put aside anything we are currently “doing” here at Oakland. Put aside tradition, policies, favorite hymns and praise songs. Put aside your age, gender, or education. Put aside everything...except Jesus.

What is it about your experience with Jesus that this community cannot live without? And are you prepared to stake everything to share that?

Mike Yaconelli was the co-founder of Youth Specialties and spent 43 years of his life in ministry to youth, and 20 years as a pastor of a small church in California before he died in 2003. He once wrote:

“Let’s--all of us--decide to stop trying to convince the world that Christianity is true because Jesus makes us prettier, happier, thinner, wealthier, bigger, more successful, more popular, healthier, stronger, and more influential than everyone else. Do we actually believe that the world is impressed with our fancy new churches, 12,000 in Sunday School, five services each morning, the "millions" who are watching on television, converted beauty queens and professional athletes, our book sales, or our crusades? The world is laughing at us--mocking us and the Jesus we supposedly are serving.”

Mike Yaconelli in The Door (Sept./Oct.1989). Christianity Today, Vol. 34, no. 2.

Strong words, but true nonetheless. Put aside everything...except Jesus. What is it about your experience with Jesus that this community cannot live without? Christianity is true because God came into our dirty, messy lives and became one of us so that He would save us from ourselves. He accepts us and loves us into freedom from this world.

And into the lives of others we are called to go—messiness and all.

Acts 3

Peter says to the crippled man sitting at the temple gate, “I have no money to give you, but what I do have I give to you.” What was that? The healing and transforming power of Jesus Christ. Yes, the crippled man needed money to buy food, but even more critical than that was his need for Jesus.

Peter was never physically crippled, but he knew the crippling power of fear and shame in his life as he denied Jesus three times. And he knew what it meant to be released from that power which crippled him by the power of Jesus’ love and grace and healing transformation. And because of his experience with Jesus, Peter could not keep it to himself. Peter, now as boldly as anyone, walked through the streets of his town, where his people lived and breathed, his only desire to give to others what he experienced with Jesus.

Others continued to give alms to the crippled man, but never what he truly needed to be free. Finally, expecting only more money from Peter and John, the man received the totally unexpected—he is healed by the power of Jesus Christ shared through Peter. What has crippled the man for years has now been released. Even better, from the physical freedom he is given he now knows true spiritual freedom in Jesus Christ.

There is so much in our world, in the lives of people, that cripples us. Fear, loneliness, shame, self-serving attitudes—there is so much that keeps us from truly living as the creations God intended us to be, which is full of joy, peace, love, and a generous spirit.

What cripples our community? Do we recognize it, and are we truly ready to put our faith into action and offer to the people around us what they need to be free?

I believe that is what we need to be in prayer about.

Pray every day and constantly that God would show to you what is crippling our community.

Is it fear, the feeling of being helpless, relationships being replaced with technology? What is it, and how can we, Oakland Church of the Brethren, bring the freedom of Jesus Christ?

What does that look like exactly? It begins with you, asking yourself the question, “What is it about my experience with Jesus that this community cannot live without?” Name it. Be prepared to share it. The world needs it just as desperately as you do. Fall on your knees...and pray.

For me, I can begin to talk about it in terms of acceptance. What Jesus has given to me is unconditional love when I know I don’t deserve it. He accepted me where I was in my life, despite all my shortcomings, fears, doubts. And He still does, because guess what, I’m still not perfect and never will be in this world.

I know, what a shock.

But to know that I can walk through those doors every day, not because I am perfect, but because of God’s perfect love! How I want everyone around me to know that. I know that is something this community cannot live without. I know that is an important message I need to somehow share with them. I doesn’t matter who you are or what you’ve done or what crazy things go through your mind—God accepts you and loves you where you are.

Because when you know that, God starts to change you. Jesus gets in there.

How do I share that? Maybe by creating ways that I can interact with people and share my story with them. Loving them into trusting God by talking with them and getting to know where they hurt and are scared.

Be real with folks and let them see you're a person with all their same weaknesses.

Because we all are.

Nobody can be a better witness of what God has done in your life than you. So God says, "I just want you to tell other people what's happened to you, what I have done for you and how you came to know Me through Jesus." And He says, "I want you to go all over—wherever and whatever it takes."

George Gallup did a survey and discovered that 65 million Americans have no church home, but 34 million of them said they would attend if somebody would just invite them. 34 million just waiting for an invitation! You see, opportunities to share the Good News really are all around you. They are staring you in the face every single day. You just have to be ready for them.

Colossians 4:5 says, "*Conduct yourself wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time.*"

Make the most of every opportunity.

God wants to use you.

2 Peter 3:9, "*God doesn't want anyone to be lost, but He wants all people to change their hearts and lives!*" God is not willing that any should perish. And as long as there's one person on earth who doesn't know the Good News, God says we've got to keep reaching out.

Love demands I move beyond my comfort zone:

to people with different background, different education, different language, different economics.

1 Corinthians 9: "*Whatever each person is like, I try to find common ground with him so that he will let me tell him about Christ and let Christ save him.*"

Christians are called to build bridges, not walls.

We're to reach out to others. God expects us to make the first move.

Galatians 6:2, "*Stoop down and reach out to those who were oppressed. Share their burdens, and so complete Christ's law.*" What is Christ's law? Love your neighbor as yourself. Now, you don't have to leave Darke County to do this. It's all around us. Jesus always rooted for the underdog that people in that society wanted to ignore; the powerless, the poor, the left behind, the imprisoned, the orphaned, the widowed, the aged, the mentally ill, the social outcasts, sick, the lepers.

It begins with us individually, and it is toward the common good that we as the church must work.

What is it about your experience with Jesus that this community cannot live without, and are you prepared to stake everything to share that? When we do that, the community will be restored, transformed. And that will then be their entrance into the church and the start of their testimony before others of what God has done for them.

I think I have shared this before, but it bears repeating in this message. Philip Yancey says, "The government can do everything that Christ calls us to do, yet only the Church can dispense grace." I think what he is saying is this: The government can feed the hungry, but it cannot give them unwavering hope. The government can give out clothing, but it cannot give dignity. The government can send social workers to visit the prisoners, but it cannot give self-worth. The government can legislate morality, but it cannot instill the values from which right

living grows. The government can heal the sick, but it cannot provide the love that heals lives. Do you hear it? We are the ones who represent Christ to the world, and in so doing help people to come to know the One Who does give out hope, dignity, self-worth, values, and love. What is it about your experience with Jesus that this community cannot live without, and are you prepared to stake everything to share that?

As God calls to you, you can say like Moses, "Who me?" Or you can say like Jonah, "Not me." Or you can say it like Habakkuk, "Why me?" Or you can say like Isaiah, "Send me."

The most dangerous prayer you can pray is "God use me." Do you have enough courage to say, "God use my life"? Watch what happens! Little becomes much when you put it in the Master's hand. It's time to rise! Amen.