Lesson 13

Parable of the Leaven

The Woman and the Leaven
(Matthew 13:33; Luke 13:20–21)

How to Use This Lesson

- Core Presentation
- Parable: A parable is a metaphor that uses short narrative fiction to reference a transcendent symbol, which in the Gospels is generally the Kingdom of Heaven. The Godly Play approach to parables includes six guiding parables in gold boxes, parables about parables, side-by-sides, the parable cards, and the parable games (which include all the Parables of Jesus and his "I Am" statements). The materials are generally flat as opposed to the three-dimensional materials used for the Sacred Stories.
- As the thirteenth lesson in Volume 3 of *The Complete Guide to Godly Play*, it may be presented at any time, preferably in sequence with other parables.
- It is part of a comprehensive approach to Christian formation that consists of eight volumes. Together the lessons form a spiral curriculum that enables children to move into adolescence with an inner working knowledge of the classical Christian language system to sustain them all their lives.

The Material

- Location: Parable shelves (Parables may be displayed in any order, but ideally they are displayed on the top shelf of the Parable Shelf Unit because they are of equal importance.)
- Pieces: Gold-painted box with tan felt dot; box containing loaf of bread (one flat piece, and one risen piece), and three bowls of flour; box with triangular gold leaven
- Underlay: Tan felt (cut in the shape of a risen loaf of bread about thirty inches by thirty-six inches or seventy-six centimeters by ninety-one centimeters)

Background

The Parable of the Leaven is found in Matthew 13:33 and Luke 13:20–21. Many years ago, a little girl about five years old discovered what many people miss today about this parable. When commenting on her expressive art, she said, "The lady is Moses and the bread is not *matzo*." *Matzo*, the bread for the Jewish Passover, has no leaven in it.

In modern English, the term "leaven" has a positive connotation, but in ancient literature, except for Jesus' parable, the connotation was universally negative. It was a sign of moral corruption, because fermentation is a process of putrefaction in the mass of dough. Leaven was made by storing a piece of bread in a dark, damp place until mold formed.

The children do not know about this ancient view of leaven or perhaps modern views either, so the parable will define its own terms for them as it unfolds.

This parable begins with the formula, "the Kingdom of Heaven is like . . ."

Why tell parables? In parables, we enter with wonder to live the question. Parables question our everyday view of life. They wake us up to see in life what we have not seen before. Parables question the status quo, the order imposed by tradition, power or class. That is why Jesus' parables often got him into trouble, and why Christians ever since have tried to make parables more benign, so they will not disrupt our comfortable worldviews.

Notes on the Material

Find the material in a gold parable box with a tan felt dot, located on the top shelf of one of the Parable shelves. The underlay is tan, in the shape of a loaf of bread that has risen (about thirty inches by thirty-six inches or seventy-six centimeters by ninety-one centimeters).

The loaf of bread in the parable comes in pieces. First, there is a wide, flat piece with a one additional piece you can use to "build" the loaf as it rises. This is so the flat piece can be laid down first, the leaven, hidden just above it, and then the rounded piece placed over the leaven when the loaf is leavened.

There are three bowls with flour in them, a woman and a table. In some older Godly Play versions of this parable you will find that the woman is attached to the table, which also works well. The thought was that a table was not mentioned in the parable, so the table was more like an extension of the woman's creativity.

Special Notes

Please put the leaven in its own mysterious little box. The rest of the parable objects—flat bread, risen bread, and the three bowls with flour—can be put together in another little box, placed within the gold parable box that also holds the underlay.

Movements

Words

Watch where I go to get the story so you will always know where to find it.

You go first to the Parable shelves and pick up the box with the small tan circle on it. Tan is also the color of this parable's underlay. You don't need to say anything. Point to the small circle.

Bring the parable to the circle of children and place it in the middle to wonder about the box and its content.

Now, let's see. The box is the color gold. Something valuable must be inside. Parables are very valuable, even more important than gold, so maybe there is a parable inside.

The box looks kind of like a present. Parables are like presents. They were given to you even before you were born. They are yours. They are already yours even if you do not know what they are.

The box has a lid. It stops us. You see, sometimes, even if we are really ready, it is hard to go inside a parable. They are just like that. I don't know why. Don't be discouraged if you can't find your way in. Keep coming back, and one day the parable will open for you and you can go right inside.

I have an idea. Let's see what is inside the box. Maybe there is a parable inside.

Move the box to your side. Take off the lid and leave it tipped against the side of the box next to the circle.

Take out the underlay. Leave it crumpled up in the middle of the circle for a moment, and then begin to smooth it out.

I wonder what this could be? Hmmm. I can't tell. It is a kind of brown, though. It is sort of yellow and brown, a kind of tan.

How strange. I wonder what it could really be?

Movements

Look carefully into the box. There is nothing there to help get ready. The pieces left all have to do with the telling of the parable.

Take out the box with the leaven in it. Carefully remove the leaven and hold it out to the children in the palm of your hand. Place it in the middle of the underlay.

Now take the woman and the table out. Place the table under the leaven and the woman beside the table.

Place the three containers of flour on the table. Line them up, because they will be covered by the flat bread representation. Move the leaven to a spot just above the flour.

Place the figure representing the flat bread over the three containers for the flour, making a stirring movement with your finger.

Words

Let's see if there is anything else in the box to help us get ready for the parable.

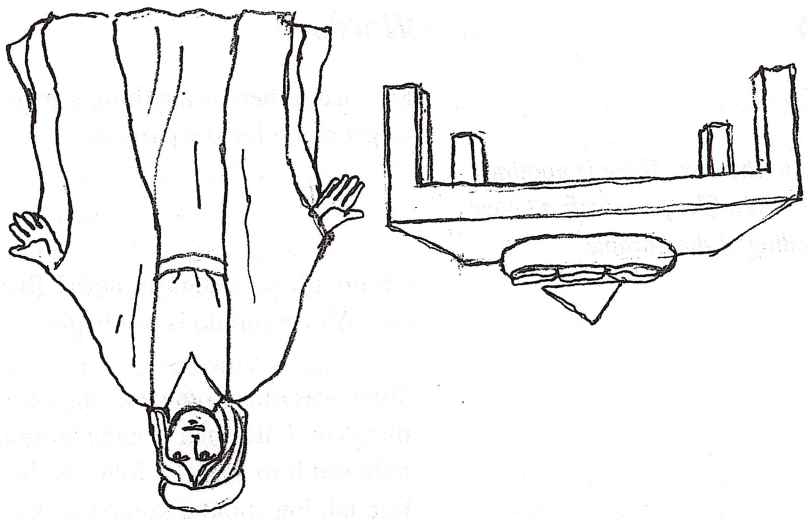
Oh no, I have some bad news! There is nothing else. All we can do is just begin.

There was once someone who said such amazing things and did such wonderful things that people followed him. As they followed him, they heard him talking about a kingdom, but it was not like the kingdom they lived in. It was not like any kingdom they had ever visited. It was not even like any kingdom anyone had ever heard of. They couldn't help it. They had to ask him what the Kingdom of Heaven was like.

One time when they asked him this, he said, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like leaven . . ."

". . . that a woman took . . ."

". . . and mixed in with three measures of flour, which is a lot . . ."



Creating the Risen Loaf (Storyteller's Perspective)

Movements

Place the bigger rounded figure of bread above (not on top of) the flat one and on top of the leaven so the risen loaf and the flat bread are one.

Pause. Lean back. Begin the wondering.

Words

"She hid the leaven in the mixture which swelled up and was leavened all over."

"It got big and puffy like the bread you buy in the store."

Now, I wonder if the woman has a name?
I wonder who she could really be?

I wonder if the woman was happy?

I wonder what the bread could really be?

I wonder what the leaven is, really, in the parable and in life?

I wonder if you could take the bread that was leavened all over and put it back like it was before the woman hid the leaven in it?

Movements

Lean back and reflect for a moment on all of these wonderings. You then begin to put things away, slowly and carefully, one at a time.

Bring the parable back to its spot on the Parable shelves.

Return to your spot in the circle, and begin helping the children choose their work for the day.

Words

I wonder if you have ever come close to a place where this happens? I mean really, not just in the parable or making bread?

While I am putting everything away, please begin to think about what work you are going to get out.

Watch now, where I go to put this parable away, so you will always know where to find it.

I wonder what your work will be today? You might make something about this story, or another story that you know. Maybe you want to work with something else. There are so many things you can choose from. Only you know what is right for you.