

MAY 31, 2026

# Marion weekly update

## FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

*SERMON "What Happened to My Pancakes?" Luke 12:1-3*

This week we are linking to last week's message as well. To help we have the visual of a watering can.

We talked about "watering the flowers" in our lives. Anything we value we must tend to. Like a flower we water it with our time, our energy, our resources, our gifts, and our presence. Otherwise like a flower without water it withers and dies.

Importantly, what we water it with is significant. We can show up, but HOW do we show up? Because sometimes we water with truly life giving water, and sometimes unfortunately we show up with poison.

The question is which is it? Well, like this can, what comes out of it depends entirely on what we put into it. If we put water in, water will come out. If we put poison in, poison comes out.

Our other visual was very helpful for me considering our scripture for today. If you notice, there's a bit of a mess where there wasn't one at first. At the beginning of the service the batter was contained in the glass. Over time, it got bigger, it grew, it expanded and overflowed all over the place.

I learned this a few years ago. I was helping John West early in the morning before one of our July breakfasts over at the ball fields. We were running around making preparations for the meal and he asked me to mix up the pancake batter. I of course agreed, mixing it just like I would at home. I filled the container pretty close to full. At home that's what I do. I mix it up and then immediately start dipping it onto the griddle or pan.

This time though that didn't happen. I mixed and continued moving around the kitchen doing other stuff. After a half hour or so I looked on the counter and the batter had spilled down the sides and made a good mess. And I thought to myself "what happened to my pancaked?!"

John explained to me that for the best pancakes you need to let the batter sit for a while because there are ingredients that cause the batter to rise, which gives fluffier more airy, and better, pancakes. Who knew?! Certainly not me.

I thought about that considering Jesus' warning against the leaven we allow into our hearts. In Corinthians and Galatians it's mentioned as well and typically we talk about how it "works through the whole lump of dough". In other words a little can get all through a lot.

There's more to it.

Whatever leaven we put in doesn't just work its way through. It causes what we have to get bigger. And as it gets bigger it overflows. If we are the water can, it forces whatever is in that can out.

And here's the thing about this leavening, this growing, just like me in that kitchen, we don't often realize what's happening until it's already worked through and had its impact.

Often we speak about the leaven as negative. That isn't fair. There's two sides to every coin and most of us have probably experienced both to one extent or another.

It's that moment of reflection, looking in the mirror at who you have become. And realizing you've become angry, sad, hopeless, frustrated, or any similar condition. And you say to yourself "how did I get here?" "I never intended to be like this" "What happened to my pancakes? They used to be joyful and content and now look at them. What happened?"

The opposite is also true. Maybe you looked in the mirror and realized just how joyful, peaceful, fulfilled, and hopeful life has become. It just kind of caught up to you. And you also think "What happened to my pancakes?" "How did things get so good?" "I never thought I'd make it this far in life!"

The answer to both is simple. It's a combination of how we are watering things, as well as what we are putting into our hearts that creates what kind of water it will be.

This happened to me recently. I found myself more and more aggravated. Since my task in our congregation is to serve you and bring the message on Sundays that meant I weekly was venting to Em about what was built up in me because it's not right to let that spill into my service here. Fortunately as we talked she made some points that caused me to make some changes that have made a huge difference.

As part of my diligence I try to keep up on community, national, and global events. Probably even moreso I try to keep up on what is floating around in Christianity in our communities and nation. What is being poured in to us?

More and more it is angry, callous, and divisive. Enemies are created where no enemy exists among us. And I hear and read voices claiming to represent Christ chiming in and feeding into the hate. It breaks my heart and aggravates me to no end to see the name of Jesus dragged around and misrepresented.

I was diving too deep through the week. It was too consuming. And I was reminded that I can keep my finger on the pulse without pouring so much of it into me. So I changed my diet of what I was consuming. I switched to more positive voices. To voices who encourage a more honest faith in Christ. And to things that promote lightness, laughter, and a good and servant heart.

You know what? That helped a lot. I changed the leaven that was growing inside me and that in turn changed me.

I want us to notice something about the leaven that Jesus speaks about. It's not to "beware the leaven of the sinner, the adulteress, the thief, the murderer" and so on. It's beware the leaven of the religious leaders.

Now this is speculation, but I think He knew something. He knew that by in large most folks knew that there was right and wrong in terms of behavior. So that wasn't as necessary. The problem was that people who had authority in their lives and were trusted were giving them bad direction.

They were not building a faith that was genuine to what God desired. So be mindful and don't let the hogwash penetrate. Why? Because it will work its way through all of us. It will grow. Then we will join them in being part of the problem.

Today it is my observation that too much Christianity has voices echoing the cultural trend to build walls between us. Find a difference with someone and now they are your enemy. There's little middle ground in many walks of life and people want you to take a side. Then we get pigeonholed and some include us while others radically exclude.

This isn't the Jesus of the gospels. Jesus said to love our enemies. He ate with the "sinners" and outcasts of His day. He asks us to bring people TO Him, not push them away. He didn't put expectations on who could come, He just said "come". When He scolded the disciples for blocking the children from seeing Him that lesson was that the children were the absolute bottom of the ladder in society. And yes, even they were welcome to come to Him.

Peter took the bold step to inform the Jewish Christian leaders that the Gentiles were also welcome. There was some discussion for certain but ultimately they agreed.

Like all of the misinformation from religious leaders it begins with cherry picked or manipulated scripture. They had been taught all their lives not to associate with Gentiles. Yet here they were being told that was incorrect. That wall was broken down and it was time to bring everyone in to the community of faith. This is Jesus sense that He wished that "none should perish".

Paul wrote it in his letters that there is no longer Jew nor Gentile, male nor female, slave nor free but all are one in Jesus Christ.

Too many places now claim all are welcome, yet what they mean is "welcome when you become like us". Jesus wanted us to "be one". Some say "we'll be one with them when they find Jesus". I say maybe many won't find Jesus until someone let's them know they are one with them as an example that they are desired by God.

In other word in order for the church to grow in the right direction and their faith to be full they had to introduce new leaven. It had to be the genuine leaven of Christ, not the convenient, divisive, oppressive leaven of the religious leaders.

This is so true today. What are we leavening ourselves with? If you look at the outrage, drama, and anger junkies around it's clear. You've heard me say before that personally I've never seen a time where it's so easy to set someone off. Even the most innocent comment on the wrong subject that scratches just beneath the surface can cause a hard and harsh reaction.

The problem is the leaven!

Paul tells us about what kind of leaven to put into ourselves. We put in the things that are good, pure, and right. We think on these things. We expose ourselves to voices and sources that hold us accountable and support us to live out lives filled with joy, gentleness, kindness, self-control, love, and faith!

There is so much around us that can keep us filled with a growing sense of Godliness and Christ centered hope and life.

They are people that speak these things into our lives. They are places that reveal a humbling glory and beauty of God that reminds us that we are small enough to bow and bend before a Will greater than ours. Yet we are big enough to make a difference in the direction and quality of the lives around us.

We are flawed and will never be Christ. And yet we can embody Him in a way that despite our imperfection we shower the world with as perfect a love and bright a light as we can.

It takes a bit of curating. But we can stay connected to this broken world without being consumed or corrupted by it.

Here's a suggestion from my own experience. When I visit with my family politics is off the table for discussion. People get too riled up about it. I'm not saying we should never talk about politics, of course we

should. But there is sometimes a weighing that must occur.

I would rather visit with my family and have the leaven of remembering the good they poured into my life growing up. I would rather experience the leaven of laughing with the kids as we play games and listen to people playfully trash talk one another. I would rather walk away with the leaven of a lifetime of memories that bring joy and inspire kindness and goodness.

I would rather that than let anything come in and be another leaven stoking something else that might draw my heart and spirit away from a Christ like spirit.

We've curated ourselves to, at least when I walk away, try to be leavened in the right ways.

Because like the batter, whatever we pour in will not just sit, it will grow.

Pour in our spiritual disciplines. Pray and pray with humility and honesty. Study scripture. Don't just read it. Study it. Reading and reciting the Bible means little. The religious leaders throughout all time could do that and it didn't mean they lived or taught it well. Study for what it says on its own terms and let that be leaven. Fellowship Not just coffee and donuts but real fellowship where there are relationships that can handle openness of struggles and failures so we love and walk with one another through those times. AND warmth of celebration when we have those precious and exciting victories!

This is the good leaven.

Seek out bridge builders, not wall builders. Seek out those looking to include rather than exclude. Seek out those who want to find common ground over and above creating an enemy for the sake of having an enemy. Seek out the servants who serve without reservation. Look for the voices that see the good and potential in others and in circumstances. Find the ones who are actively working for the good.

This is all good leaven. The more we take it in, the more it grows. The better the water we have for our lives, for our faith, for our community of faith, and for every relationship in our lives.

You are the watering can. What is filling you up? What is the leaven growing inside of you? Know that there is plenty in our lives to grow the good so that the good is what pours out of us without us even trying.

What's happening to your pancakes?