

**Sermon: Heaven Baked Bread**  
**Scripture: John 6:35, 41-51**  
**August 9, 2009**

I invite you to remain standing for the reading of the Gospel. Over the last few weeks, we have heard stories about the many ways God feeds us. God feeds us physically with food and God feeds us spiritually. God is the One who provides our daily bread to eat and God's presence nourishes our souls. Two weeks ago, Rev. Hill preached about the feeding of the five thousand. The story tells us that in God's economy everyone gets enough. Last week, Rev. Yebuah preached about the Israelites hungering in the wilderness and being fed manna from heaven. Today, I read from the Gospel according to John. In this story Jesus says that he is the bread of life who has come down from heaven. Let us now hear the Gospel lesson, I begin in the sixth chapter with the thirty-fifth verse....

**Prayer: Come, Holy Spirit, Come, and kindle within us a desire to hear that which you speak to us, your gathered people, this morning. Bread of heaven, bread of heaven, feed us 'til we want no more. Amen.**

As many of you know, this past June I was ordained as an elder of the United Methodist Church. That service of ordination marked the end of many years spent discerning God's call upon my life. Part of the ordination process for Methodist ministers is to reflect upon and answer several questions formulated by John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement. Every ordained Methodist pastor has been asked these historic questions by a bishop.

Two of the questions that I was asked were: are you going on to perfection; and, do you expect to be made perfect in love in this life. I am glad that it was Bishop Gwinn and not my fiancé, Elena, asking those questions of me.

Are you going on to perfection? Do you expect to be made perfect in love in this life? These questions reveal that John Wesley believed that when our lives are rooted in Jesus Christ, when we answer the call upon our lives and say, “Yes, I want to be a follower of Jesus Christ,” then we begin a journey. At the heart of this journey, each one of us strives to love as Jesus loves. Our hope is that one day all of us will love as Jesus loves. Step by step, we, as Christians, are going on to perfection.

To be perfect in love does not mean that we live lives free of mistakes. But, what it does mean is that we will be made perfect in love as our heavenly father is perfect. By answering these questions, I professed that I believe I am a work in progress, that God is not done with me, and that I am on a journey. We all share that journey. As we stay connected to Jesus Christ and his Church, we are fed and nourished to grow in the likeness of Christ. And as we grow in the likeness of Christ, we are perfected in love.

I admit that I am not finished, that I am still being shaped and formed in the hands of God. I believe that we, as a church, can admit the same things:

that we are not finished,

that we are going on to perfection,

that God is not done with us,

and that this congregation is being shaped and formed by the hands of God

day by day,

prayer by prayer,

person by person,

small group of believers by small group of believers.

Together we are growing in Christ.

In the Gospel lesson this morning, Jesus says that he is the bread of life. Because we are still being shaped and formed, because we are still growing in Christ, we are not yet bread. For bread to be bread means that there is a sense of completion. When the dough is baked and becomes bread the process has ended. We are not yet bread, because we are not yet done being baked.

This past May, a few pastors and I went to Great Harvest Bread Company in Cary to learn the art of bread-making. The owner walked us through the bread-making process. There, at the Great Harvest store, the bread-making begins at midnight when all the ingredients are mixed together and kneaded in a huge forty gallon mixing bowl. After the ingredients become dough, it is left to rise for several hours before it is shaped into loaves, baked, and then cooled. The wheat flour and other ingredients become bread through this 4-5 hour process; however, the 4-5 hour process that occurs at the bread store does not account for the time it takes for a field to be plowed, the wheat planted, grown, harvested, milled, packaged and sent to the bakery.

I tell you all of this to say that bread-making is a process. Most of us are strangers to this process because we have the convenience of going to the store and grabbing a loaf of bread from the bread aisle. Yet, until the wheat has gone through the process of planting, growing, harvesting, milling, mixing, kneading, and shaping, it is not bread until it is finally baked. For bread to be bread means that there is a sense of completion. Bread, except to be eaten, is a finished product.

We, as Christians, are not bread, because we are not yet finished. We are still being perfected in love. We are still being kneaded, shaped, or baked.

But there is one who is finished.

There is one who is complete.

There is one who was with God in the beginning and all things came into existence through him.

There is one who is not only bread, but who is the bread of life.

He is the one who perfects us in love.

He is the one who makes our lives complete.

He is the one who we call Jesus Christ, our Lord, the bread of life, and in him is life everlasting.

When we come and feast upon him, we hunger no more.

Now, we all have a habit of feasting on things. And in this world, there are many types of bread from which to choose. Sometimes the bread we seek does not ultimately satisfy us. We feast and feast and feast and yet we never seem satisfied. Our souls keep hungering for a food that will satisfy our deepest longings, but we keep going back to the same tables that serve us unsatisfying bread. Certainly there are many types of bread in this world on which we may feast.

But, there is only one bread of life, who is Jesus Christ, our Lord.

At the Lord's Table, Christians gather to celebrate Christ giving himself to the world. We celebrate our belief in the words of Jesus from today's Gospel lesson when Jesus says, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

Christ not only came and dwelt here on earth, but he gave his life up for us, and he gives his life to us through the practice of Holy Communion. It is at that table, the Lord's Table, that we eat and receive our fill.

A pastor was serving communion one Sunday and as she went along the altar railing, she came to a young boy. The pastor broke off a small piece of bread, placed it in the boy's hands and said, "This is the body of Christ, given for you." The boy looked at the bread and then up to the pastor and said, "I want more." The pastor was caught a little off guard. She had never heard that reaction before. After collecting her thoughts, she said back to the boy, "I promise you it is enough." I promise you it is enough.

We feast and feast on the various breads that the world has to offer, and then we come to this place and we receive a morsel of bread and a sip of juice and like the boy in the story we are told that it is enough.

Do we believe it is enough? Do we believe that the small morsel of communion bread fills us with enough grace, enough love, enough forgiven-ness to transform our lives? Do we believe that when we baptize children at that baptismal font that the handful of water is enough for the Spirit of Christ to work through to transform the lives of that child? Do we believe that Jesus Christ is enough? Jesus says to us: "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry." Jesus says, "I am enough. I make your life complete. If you abide in me, I will make you heaven baked bread."

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we are going on to perfection, because Jesus Christ is in our lives. When we abide in Christ, when we feast on him, we feast on the bread of heaven and we are made whole.

Christ makes us bread for the world. He blesses our lives and makes us complete. And then, Christ sends us into the world to be given in service of others. When we believe in the one who has come down from heaven and has fed us with his body, we are made into heaven baked bread, blessed and given in service to the world. Through Christ, we become the live-giving bread, the body of Jesus Christ.

Our lives are far from finished; we are still being baked. But as long as we are rooted in Christ, we are rooted in the one who gives life and life abundant. And it is he who sends us out to be bread for the world.

Let us trust, that through Christ, we are enough. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen