

## Title: “The Baker and the Bread”

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John 17:11b-19

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**Service Readings:** Acts 1:12-26, 1 John 5:9-15, John 17:11b-19

**Lesson:** *We have been separated and made holy and have been joined together in one body. We live in the confidence that we will never be abandoned and that we will always be protected by our Father.*

### Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Allow me to tell you a story about an old man. He lived in a time when, well, time seemed to stand still. Not much would change between one’s birth and one’s death and so there was time for a person to select and then master his craft. And this old man was known throughout the old village, and even the surrounding ones, as “The Baker”. Indeed, most didn’t know his given name and would just refer to him by that title. Every morning, before the sun rose, you would find him preparing for the day’s work. Logs would be brought in to feed the wood oven for the day, the old marble rolling table would be washed and carefully dried, and only then would the ingredients be brought out from the storeroom. And about this time every morning the local poulterer would arrive to supply him with fresh eggs and the local dairy farmer, fresh milk and butter. As the ingredients continued to collect at the far end of the table, he would begin the lengthy process of separation. He would first start with the eggs, selecting a few and setting aside the rest. He would then move on to the dairy and skim the cream from the tops of the jars and then measure out a few cups. The flour would be next, and he would separate a portion from the whole before moving on to the sugar and remaining items. Many a person had tried to duplicate his goods, but they always focused on selecting the perfect eggs, butter, flour. And when they would find themselves frustrated at the product they would produce, they would turn to him for advice, and he would always say the same thing: “It’s not the material - it’s the maker - that produces perfection.”

This old baker was a man dedicated to his craft but devoted to God and I can only imagine that our Gospel passage fell on his ears at least once in his lifetime. And I also wonder if he ever recognized his baking as an analogy to this portion of Jesus’ prayer. Listen again to the passage. I’m going to use the New Living Translation because it is easier to hear the connection. Especially listen for the word “holy” because this translation uses that word instead of “sanctified.”

<sup>11</sup> Now I am departing from the world; they are staying in this world, but I am coming to you. Holy Father, you have given me your name; now protect them by the power of your name so that they will be united just as we are. <sup>12</sup> During my time here, I protected them by the power of the name you gave me. I guarded them so that not one was lost, except the one headed for destruction, as the Scriptures foretold.

<sup>13</sup>“Now I am coming to you. I told them many things while I was with them in this world so they would be filled with my joy. <sup>14</sup>I have given them your word. And the world hates them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. <sup>15</sup>I’m not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one. <sup>16</sup>They do not belong to this world any more than I do. <sup>17</sup>Make them holy by your truth; teach them your word, which is truth. <sup>18</sup>Just as you sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world. <sup>19</sup>And I give myself as a holy sacrifice for them so they can be made holy by your truth.

Do you think the baker ever caught that? You see, he never looked for the perfect ingredients because he knew they couldn’t be found - there was no such thing. Every egg had its flaw, every grain of wheat, its imperfection. He would never be able to create if those were required. “It’s not the material - it’s the maker - that produces perfection.” And for Jesus the situation was even worse. The ingredients that he had to work with, us, were not just imperfect and flawed, we were spoiled, we were rotten to the core. There was nothing good in us that could even be considered usable. Indeed, that’s why he came to earth - because there was nothing we could do ourselves to improve the state that we were in. And so, Jesus prays to his Father on our behalf. He says, “Father, I am perfect. I am everything that they are not, everything that they can never be on their own. Use me. Place onto me every sin that has ruined their perfection. Place onto me everything that makes them your enemy. Make me their sin and let me take the punishment for them. Sacrifice me so that they can be made perfect when you look upon them.” And he knows that on the cross, this is exactly what will happen. He will become sin, our sin and receive the punishment for all of mankind.

But he also knows that many will reject the salvation that he offers and so he prays, “Father, for those that believe in me, separate them from those who do not. Make them holy, set them aside, protect them, and use them for your work.” And much like the baker, Jesus asks that the Father to take those which he has separated, those which he has made perfect, and bring them together. He petitions the Father to unify them - us, to mold us, to make us into something new. He asks that the Father brings us into unity with himself. He calls his people, his church, into one body and Jesus becomes the head. And I can imagine the baker thinking about this in relationship to his bread. He mixes it, kneads it into dough, molds it, and then places it into the fire. And there, surrounded by flames it produces good, but always under the watchful eye of the baker who protects it from destruction.

And God answers his prayer. He makes Jesus the sacrifice that atones for our sins and Jesus hands that reconciliation, that victory over to us. And because we believe, God forgives our sins and sets us aside, he makes us holy. And once separated from the rest of the world he brings us into unity with him, through Jesus. And there he protects us from the evil one. “Do not fear, for I am with you,” he tells us in Isaiah. “The Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one,” Paul writes in his letter to the Thessalonians. We are safe. We are protected. We are not alone.

And we know this to be true, but how often do we find ourselves in the flames of this world? How often do we look around and believe that we *are* alone? That we have been abandoned by the church, by God himself? How often do we stand in the oven of life and wonder why it seems we are no longer part of the dough, no longer part of the whole, but just a single ingredient standing alone?

And that's the power of this message. It's a message that assures us that we are not alone. Jesus secured that promise on our behalf. When we find ourselves in the fires of this life, in an oven where the world seems to have abandoned us, and where our baker is even nudging us closer to the flames, we can stand confident that we do not stand alone. We can stand confident that Jesus stands with us in our moment of isolation. And we can stand confident that God will protect us from the flame and will never let it destroy us.

And we don't just have his words to fortify this confidence. We have Jesus himself. He comes to us at his table. He comes to us as his body and his blood. And when we participate in this meal, we receive him. And the bread and the wine are physical reminders that he is *in* us and because of that, we are never alone.

Please pray with me.

(Is. 41:9-10)

I took you from the ends of the earth,  
from its farthest corners I called you.  
I said, 'You are my servant';  
I have chosen you and have not rejected you.  
So do not fear, for I am with you;  
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.  
I will strengthen you and help you;  
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.