

Kneaded by Hope  
John 6:27-29  
October 6, 2019

Clinton G. Roberts  
First Presbyterian Church  
Lake Forest, Illinois

When I was a boy, my father taught me how to make bread from scratch. He taught me by example, and never forgot the way he did it.

On Saturday mornings, twice a month, I would forgo the cartoons to come into the kitchen of the old house we lived in, where Dad had set up his prized 1903 St. Louis Exposition Patented Bread Maker. It looks basically like a steel milking can, but it has a vice on the bottom of it that you can clamp to the table so it doesn't move, and has a big snake-like stirrer that fits down the side, and a great big long crank – and on the end of the crank is a black wooden ball. And the crank goes round and round and that was my job – and I loved it. I loved making bread with my dad.

So each Saturday he would get out the flour and the water and the yeast with a little bit of sugar and I would turn that bread maker for ten or fifteen minutes or more and then when it was ready he'd take that

glop of dough and he would fashion it into a ball and he'd put it into a great big yellow bowl that belonged to his mother – a bowl that looked very much like this one – which came from Barry Wenger, our organist – and it belonged to his mother, or maybe your grandmother Barry (laughter). But that was the kind of bowl that dad would bring out.

And then we'd have to wait. And 10 year old boys don't like to wait, but bread – you can't rush the making of bread. Bread functions on its own time. You don't force bread to function on your time – you have to adapt. You have to learn how to wait. Don't you think the best things in life are worth waiting for? Homemade bread is one of those best things. So after a half an hour had passed or close to an hour, things would be ready and dad would take a look at the dough and he'd nod and he'd smile because the dough had risen. He would dump it out onto the table and begin to go to work – the kneading of the dough.

Kneading has a 'k' in front of it but you say it 'kneading'. Dad was a small man not more than 5'7 and a half. He had black hair and blue

eyes and the sonorous voice of a Welshman, but his hands were square and strong and honest, and I would watch them as he kneaded bread and rolled his knuckles into the dough and folded it back kneading it again.

It didn't take me very long as a little boy to realize dad had a lot on his mind on Saturday mornings. He was a Presbyterian minister back in the 1960s and there was an awful lot going on and people in his congregation were upset about one thing or another – the war in Vietnam, civil rights, those darn hippies and their flowers and their music. And then of course the congregation with their joys and their sorrows, and he would come close to those joys and sorrows as a pastor. Sometimes we wouldn't make bread on Saturday mornings because there would be a funeral across the street in the church and dad would have a funeral to do. I knew he thought about these things as he kneaded the dough. Sometimes those fists would come in pretty hard and other times he was very gentle as he handled the dough. And I think about the dough – as the more he kneaded it, it began to change – it became more elastic, responsive, almost alive – as if it had its own distinct identity.

I followed in my father's footsteps and became a Presbyterian pastor myself. And fifty years later people are still upset over the same things that they were back then. People have the same joys and sorrows that they did back then too, living their lives in sickness and health, lost, mourning – I understand that better now as a pastor myself. And as I bake bread I've come to realize you can't do this with half a heart. You have to put your whole heart into it – its bread. You have to put everything in. So when I work the bread I think about my family and friends and their joys and successes, birthdays and graduations, and I also grieve with their sorrows and sufferings and the sufferings of this world in which we live in. And my lament goes into the bread – the pummel and roll – as I think about life and about the people I love and like a prayer it all goes into the kneading of the bread.

Our Lord Jesus understood bread when he traveled from village to village through the hills of Galilee. The people were 'kneading' him, weren't they? The sick and the lame, the blind, the diseased – they all called out, "Master have mercy on us!" And he did have mercy. But it came at a cost – the cost of loving – carrying their burdens and taking

them into his heart. His followers weren't much better – filled with questions, seeking wisdom and knowledge, they followed him from village to village. They were skeptical doubtful confused by his teaching but he was patient with them – teaching them about how the poor became rich and the last became first. He never stopped doing that – teaching and loving them to the very end.

And then there were his enemies – the scribes and the Pharisees, the high priests, the Herodians. They all wanted to do him in. And they finally got that done didn't they? With the help of the Romans and the betrayal of one of his own. They pummeled and rolled him – and then they flattened him, and then they bundled him into a tomb and that night rolled a rock in front of it and they thought it was over and done never to return. But dough has a way of rising again. As does love.

The scriptures say in the Old Testament that love is stronger than death. Death is flames and flashes of fire, but the gospel says that love is stronger than death and that in the fire of God's holy love – what was dead became alive. And the *dough* became bread. It's not the same, and yet – it is. One comes from the other – bread is meant to be eaten. Bread is meant to be shared which is exactly what Dorothy Chantler

has done for us this morning with this bread that she has lovingly made and baked and brought to this House today for us to share together.

Jesus said, “I am the bread of life! Those who come to me will never be hungry.” What must we do to receive the bread that doesn’t perish? Jesus already told us what you must do to receive this bread – what must you do? You must trust and believe. You must love and receive as he said ‘this is my body and is given for you. Take, eat. Let’s pray.

Gracious Lord – As we take and eat this bread, your body, with sisters and brothers numbering in the billions across the globe today, may we know again the power of your love. May we understand that you take all that this world is and all that we are into yourself, and through the power of resurrection, you change it. You transform us and we are filled with resurrection life. Lord, we hunger for this bread, the bread of heaven. May we take it and may we share it for the sake and in the name of Jesus, the bread of life – crucified and risen. Amen.