

**Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family****Title: About Sacrament****Lesson: John 6:35, 41-51 NRSV**

*<sup>35</sup> Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. <sup>41</sup> Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." <sup>42</sup> They were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?" <sup>43</sup> Jesus answered them, "Do not complain among yourselves. <sup>44</sup> No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day. <sup>45</sup> It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. <sup>46</sup> Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. <sup>47</sup> Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. <sup>48</sup> I am the bread of life. <sup>49</sup> Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. <sup>50</sup> This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. <sup>51</sup> 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."*

This past Tuesday morning, I had an interview with North-West District Committee for my Provisional Membership at the First United Methodist Church of Barron. To become a Provisional member, candidates have two interviews. It was the first interview, and I will have the second one in November. Although I practiced a lot about the interview, I was very nervous because I didn't know what questions they were going to ask me. Moreover, I'm an ESL: English is my second language, so I was very nervous. So, I decided to do my best to prepare it and leave everything up to God.

I kept repeating Psalm 23 while I was going to the interview place: "The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for

his name's sake..." (NIV) After arriving at the church, I sat in a church bench and prayed in silence until I met them. Thankfully, the committee members welcomed me and asked me about my call to ministry, how I have experienced the fruit of the Spirit in my life and ministry, and finally they asked me if the church I serve is the light and the salt in the world. In a word, they asked if my ministry is salty. So, I answered them, "Yes, it's too salty!" English is my second language, but they encouraged and complimented me. Of course, I also got advice on the parts I need to supplement. That's how the interview ended, and I relaxed at home. By the grace of the Lord, I was told that I passed the interview on the phone that evening and to prepare well for the second one. It was all by grace. I'd like to say thank you to everyone for your prayer for my interview. Thanks be to God! The second one will be more difficult and take all day long, so keep praying for that.

**(Slide1)** By the way, I noticed that some church members were wondering why I am having the interview and what Provisional Membership is, and I felt the need to explain it. I'm currently serving Willow River Parish as a Licensed Local Pastor. I was allowed to lead the Sacrament in the appointed churches, but it doesn't mean I was ordained. So, I have to renew my local pastor license annually. There are two main tracks in the ordination process: Elder and Deacon. Deacons are called to Word, Service, Compassion, and Justice. Some of them serve local churches, but most of them serve the church in the world; for example, some of the deacons work as professors and work for the church in the world. The Elders are called to Word, Service, Sacrament, and Order. They have an authority to preside the sacrament. Sacrament indicates Baptism and the Holy Communion. Generally, most of them serve the local churches.

A few weeks ago, I joined in the new clergy orientation at Pine Lake United Methodist Camp. Right before the end of the gathering, an elder presided the Holy Communion. For your information, Licensed Local Pastors are only allowed to preside in their churches and congregations. It is a difference between Elders and Licensed Local Pastors. Each person has a different calling from God. According to the calling, they serve God. There are no high or no low in the calling, and each call depends on the calling given by God.

Basically, to be ordained as Elder, there must be a call to the sacrament. Then, we can see that the sacrament is important. Currently, we have the communion on the

first Sunday of each month. We have it repeatedly. Repetition means important. Then, why is the sacrament important and essential in our ministry? And, what does the sacrament mean?

**(Slide2)** Sacrament is a way how we experience the grace of God. Therefore, the sacrament is for everyone, and everyone can join in. Even people who don't know God and haven't experienced God's grace and love, can join in the sacrament because God is at work in our lives even before we know it. As I said before, I experienced the Holy Spirit for the first time when I was a high school student. But, as I was raised as a pastor's kid, I was baptized when I was 1 year old regardless of my will. When I was 1 year old, I had no idea who God is or what God's love and grace are. I don't remember what I was thinking back then. Anyhow, I was baptized when I was a year old. Likewise, everyone is welcome to join in the baptism and the Holy Communion because God has loved us even before we know that love. This is why babies can be baptized. And we welcome the new members to the body of Christ through the baptism.

**(Slide3)** In today's gospel reading, Jesus introduces himself to people as the bread of life. Also, he says that "Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." (35) He also tells that "No one can come to me unless drawn by God." (44) Finally, he says that "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." (51) Jesus spoke clearly to people that he is the bread of life, but it was hard to understand for them because no one spoke like him.

According to Genesis, because of Adam's disobedience to God's word, all his descendants became sinners. Therefore, we are also sinners before God. But, He loved humans so he sent many prophets to this earth. They consistently proclaimed to the people saying "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." (Matthew 3:1, NIV) However, people didn't listen. Rather they asked, "Why should we repent? Who is God?" No matter how the prophets were sent to this earth, people didn't repent at all, and didn't return to God. Thus, God decided to send his only Son Jesus to this earth. He came here as the fully God and the fully man. And, suffered by people, crucified, died, and was resurrected.

Jesus paid for our sins on our behalf by giving us the bread of life and his flesh and blood. He died for our sins. He became the bread and drink for us. We remember the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus by participating in the Holy Communion. However, just remembering this is not enough to walk the way of disciples because disciples of Christ not only remember Jesus' life but also practice love in life.

The call to the sacrament begins with realization that all humans are the children of God and equal before God. Until coming to the states, I had an opportunity to serve the English Ministry of a Korean Methodist Church in South Korea for more than three and a half years as an assistant pastor. While serving the ministry, I had met people of various cultures and races. One was from America, one from Canada, one from China, one from Germany, one from Russia, one from South Africa. **(Slide4)** Especially, I remember one of the church members named Anna Lisa Ohnstad. She was an American who came from Texas. She was an English teacher at Yongsan International School of Seoul. As Korea is a monocultural society, she was feeling a little homesick and lonely, and had a little depression, and she was struggling with language and cultural barriers. She needed friends and prayers. My colleagues and I met her every Sunday at the church and prayed for her, and we often visited her home to care for her spiritual health. Like this, the more I served the English Ministry, the more I realized that we are all the children of God. And, while I was praying, I felt strongly God's call to the sacrament for the multicultural ministry, and I followed God's call to Wisconsin.

**(Slide5)** To make a long story short, I believe that the society we live in needs the sacrament whenever I hear the news such as racism. Sacrament means that God loves everyone, and that we are all equal before God. To participate in the sacrament is to confess that the person next to us, the person behind us, the person in front of us are all our sisters and brothers in Christ regardless of races, cultures, languages, ages, socio-economic status. I believe all evils occur when we forget that. Therefore, this is why we have to make people disciples. This is why we should welcome new members to the body of Christ. This is why we have to do the sacrament. This is my calling and the direction our churches should take. Let us create a difference for the world we live in through our faith. Let us make the world salty and shine brightly as the salt and the light. Thanks be to God.