

Text Proverbs 9:1-6; Psalm 34:9-14; Ephesians 5:15-20; John 6:51-58  
Theme Longing for the Bread of Life  
Subject Christ, the true food and drink  
Occasion 11<sup>th</sup> after Pentecost – 8/20/6 – Peace – Pella

Last week I had the privilege of worshiping with the people of Augustana Lutheran Church in Boone

Both pastors were away: one for continuing education and the other for vacation but they had arranged for a beloved pastor, Forrest Chaffee to serve in their absence  
Pastor Chaffee is known for his easy-to-follow preaching that is lush with illustrations.

His theme last Sunday was “Longing for the Bread of Life”

His sermon was fine but my mind went many places other than what was offered (you know how that goes)

I was in the Word but not with the preacher

This last week I was in Clayton County

I was alone fishing, mowing acres of grass, sawing-up wind-falls, stacking wood

And I was thinking – Longing for the Bread of Life

I had long hours of silence in which I was listening for the voice of God

Today is after all the commemoration for Bernard of Clairvaux

Bernard is the one who, in the 12<sup>th</sup> century worked to restore silence as an essential aspect of prayer: so people would be silent long enough to hear God’s voice.

Silent – Longing for the Bread of Life

We’ve been hearing the readings from John 6 for 4 weeks and we will again next week

The chapter began with Jesus feeding 5000 people with 5 loaves and 2 fish

Then it spins out what such a miracle means:

How people chase after Jesus for more free, good bread

How he teaches that he is the Bread of Life

How the Bread of Life leads to eternal life

How the people shout all the more, “Give us this bread!”

So here we are today –

Jesus teaching “those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life”

He explains that this is to abide in him that he will abide in them

Not so long ago a pastor and her daughter were walking along the seashore.

The girl asked her mother about that Sunday’s sermon on this very teaching

“Mom, I don’t understand – how can Jesus live in us and we live in him at the same time?”

As they walked, the mother found a bottle with a cork in it. She removed the cork and half-filled the bottle with sea water, re-corked it and threw it into the sea.

They watched the bottle bob up and down – the mother observed, “The sea is in the bottle; the bottle is in the sea. We live in Jesus; Jesus lives in us.”

Our reading tells us that by eating and drinking Jesus – by abiding in Jesus and he in us

We have life now

We are promised eternal life

We will be raised on the last day

We will live through Jesus

We will live forever

Longing for the Bread of Life might seem like simply longing for life or eternal life

But we’re alive and trust Jesus’ promise

In this life we long for the Bread of Life all the more

What’s the bread?

What’s the substance of life for which we long?

The last verse of our first reading speaks to this (It’s our watchword for this week)

**“Lay aside immaturity, and live, and walk in the way of insight”** (Prov. 9:6)

We are so dazzled when we hear insights

It’s one of the joys Pastor Kim and I have while working with the Peace Council, committees and leadership teams

As we face topics, situations and problems, the conversations lead to new *insights* – perspectives that loosen tangles & shape problems in opportunities

But I dare to say that insights and wisdom aren’t the stuff, the substance, the bread that we long for in life

Circumstances arise that make insight & wisdom important blessings

But they are not the Bread of Life

9 years ago I returned to academics to pursue an additional degree – it seemed the next thing to do with the bishop’s continuing education requirement having doubled to 50 hours per year.

I learned a lot

I earned more credentials

And I got an additional degree

But the longings in my life continue

In 1889 Vincent Van Gogh painted *The Steps at Arles* (you can see it at the Forest Park Art Museum in St. Louis)

It depicts a large, white mansion in the background

A road leads from the foreground to a stairway that goes up to the mansion

On the road in the foreground are 2 girls dressed in white heading for the stairs

Farther along the road, nearer the stairway, are 2 women dressed in black

A crippled man dressed in black using a cane is descending the stairs

Vincent explained the painting to his brother Theo as a description of life  
 Pursuing an objective that only spends the days of life – that there must be  
 more than the pursuit of a destination built and named by others years before  
 There must be some substance – some Bread

The story of the winning greyhound that refused to race again after he caught the rabbit  
 comes to mind

Longing for the Bread of Life is a deeper longing than a destination  
 a deeper longing than arriving at someone else's destination or winning someone  
 else's race

Food is certainly a core longing for all people – sustaining life (some even make the case  
 that all the wars throughout history are based on the longing for food)

Recently I heard a review of a book that reported the study of starvation conducted by the  
 University of Minnesota during World War II

Volunteer men in their mid-20s (all Conscientious Objectors) starved themselves

They did not eat – *nothing* – for weeks – maybe 5 or 6 weeks

Researchers observed what happened to them

Their bodies and chemistry; their thoughts and emotions

As their bodies struggled to survive, the men thought about food constantly – from  
 frequently in the first few days to all the time

Young men with no *libido* – were not interested in anyone or anything else  
 food was their only thought

The researchers also studied what was necessary to restore the volunteers to health

How nutrition had to be gradually restored

that eating lots of their favorite food would be deadly

These learnings have been applied and expanded throughout the world to rescue  
 starving people

In America the learning have been applied to the treatment of anorexia  
 nervosa (people who starve themselves to satisfy a longing; the only  
 psychological disease that can cause death)

Longing for the Bread of Life

What is the bread that Jesus offers?

In Christ we who name him as Lord *belong* to him

*Belonging* – life with others who

care for us, love us unconditionally, support us in our needs, listen to us, affirm &  
 admonish us, never abandon us

Once we *belong* to such ones, whether this be only one or many,  
*Belonging* is the Bread of Life for which we long in this life  
 Even when we *belong*, we long for it by investing in it

As school begins, I think of my first days of school (you too, yes?)  
 My favorite years of public school were middle school  
 All of us had caught on – playing alone was past  
 We delighted in being together  
 We moved like a flock of birds or a school of fish  
 [Parents watched in wonder and encouraged group experiences when at their best]  
 I haven't forgotten some of the pains  
 they came in the form of rejection and isolation (you remember, yes?)  
 It wasn't perfect community but it was our first experiment

Soldiers experience much the same  
*Belonging* is at the center of building a team – commitment to each other  
 Soldiers tell of their life-long commitment to their unit  
 Some are closer relationships than others but the commitment to the whole is what  
 makes the unit successful  
 and they remember – some of their most treasured memories  
 and a longing to *belong* again

The AFT (Adult Fellowship Together) groups here at Peace Lutheran are designed to help  
 us *belong* to one another – to share the vision, mission and ministries of the whole  
 congregation while enjoying in a very personal way this gift of *belonging*

Our family tables are where we gather with friends and family  
 These tables are often passed down from generation to generation  
 They are lasting symbols of the substance of our *belonging*  
 Not fleeting like middle school  
 Not temporary like a military unity  
 Family tables hold the patina of family history  
 Birthday dinners and homework  
 where children bring friends to meet the family,  
 where great news and bad news is discussed,  
 where lessons of life are taught and learned

Our family tables are where we discover clearly to whom we *belong*

Longing for the Bread of Life is a desire to come to such a table

To *belong* to a people with whom all of life can be shared  
 We are a congregation, the people of Peace  
 we gathers around this table – here it is clear: we *belong* to each other

Some have been here at this table since the beginning

Some are new

Some of our relationships are treasures

Others are more difficult

Yet, at this table, the Lord's table, we *belong* to each other

We are a people responding to God's call to

*love others and share the good news of Jesus Christ*

We've got some great history

We've had some difficult times

Right now we're in the middle of a program toward relocating

The middle time is always difficult

We sense a longing to land

To realize the completion so we can focus all of our energies on the  
stuff of our mission:

to learn, worship and serve

*Belonging* as we do, to each other

We can welcome the Bread of Life in this Holy Communion today

Together around the table

Enriching the patina of our mission as

*Together We Grow Peace*