

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

August 5, 2018

Sermon by Pastor Bart Brauer

Eat the Amen, Eat the I Am

—John 6:24-35

Using five loaves of barley bread and two small fish, Jesus fed and satisfied the bellies of 5,000 men. He received the five loaves and two fish from a young boy, gave thanks, and had the disciples distribute bread and fish out to the crowd as he miraculously multiplied the food until everyone was done eating. That miracle of Jesus was supposed to tell people something. It was a sign. A sign about who Jesus is, where Jesus came from, what capability and compassion Jesus has. But the men whom Jesus fed missed the sign and saw something else: a potential king who could keep filling their bellies with food.

(Point to an empty stand next to the pulpit.) You see here this empty stand. Today you are being asked to put something on this stand. When you come to Jesus, you are looking for something. In your inmost thoughts and desires, you want something. In your heart of hearts, you seek something from Jesus. Put it here on this stand. Lay it out there. You might as well because Jesus can expose it anyway. And after you chew on what he has to say about that, then Jesus has something to offer.

Jesus knows what the crowd wants. Jesus left after feeding them yesterday, so they go looking for Jesus again today. And when they find him, here is what he says: *“I tell you the truth (Verily, verily, I say unto you; Amen, amen, I tell you). Everything Jesus says is true. But when he starts saying, “Amen, amen, I’m telling you,” it’s time to stop talking and start listening. “You are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill.”* Their motive is exposed. Their deepest yearning, their highest aspiration, their inmost want and their utmost fantasy is...food. More bread, more fish. And in Jesus they thought they had just hit the jackpot. But there are two kinds of food according to Jesus. Food that spoils, and food that lasts. One of them is obviously preferable, and it comes from only one source. *“Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.”* Jesus is talking about himself. He is the Son of Man, and so he is the only source of food that lasts to eternal life.

What are you really looking for from Jesus? Put it here on the stand. We like to think we are noble. We like to tell ourselves that our deepest yearnings and our highest sights of what we want from Jesus are commendable. But then we are brought back to reality. *“All man’s efforts are for his mouth, yet his appetite is never satisfied”* (Ec 6). That is the Bible’s wise assessment of our reality. There is good reason why the Bible also says, *“Do not wear yourself out to get rich; have the wisdom to show restraint. Cast but a glance at riches and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle”* (Prov 23). Jesus adds an explanation point to those Old Testament passages by telling anyone who would follow him, *“Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear...Do not worry...your heavenly Father knows that you need [these things]. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness”* (Mt 6).

But daily bread so easily and so naturally becomes the thing that consumes us. By daily bread we mean everything that we need for the upkeep of our body and for the maintenance of our earthly life. I mean, you could put food on this stand, or a beverage. You could put money on this stand. A job. A career. A house. A car. A gym membership. Medical bills. College debt. Time to get away or just a toy to be amused. Whatever you think you need for bodily welfare, it could find a place on this stand. But it’s more than daily bread. It includes anything we need to eat our daily bread in peace. Without violence knocking down our door, without thieves threatening to rob our account anytime we swipe a card or insert a chip, without our country being ripped apart, without strife ruining our family. We fear being alone, going broke, or getting terminally ill, not necessarily in that order. Does this get your attention? All these matters dominate our time, our energy, our thought life. They dominate our prayer life. What would make you get into a little boat and row miles across the lake to get to Jesus? What would make you get in your car and drive miles through traffic to get to Jesus? What would make you just slip away from it all and seek a personal audience with Jesus? That’s what you put on this stand. If it’s anything that spoils or perishes, anything that ultimately comes to an end, Jesus essentially says, *“Don’t come looking for me just because you want that.”*

“Amen, amen, I tell you.” Eat that amen and consume it. Internalize this amen that Jesus speaks. *“I tell you the truth, you are looking for me...because you ate the loaves and had your fill.”* If all you are looking for from Jesus is that the needs of this life be met, it will all perish, and so will you. You are a sinful human being. Me too. Just like we are more than a walking organism made up of tissue and bone, we do more than just make mistakes and learn from them. We do more than just commit careless errors. We are sinful human beings. We sin. We put what we really want on the stand, and if he delays in giving it, we become impatient. We put what we desire on the stand, and if he does not give it, we get disappointed, we get angry at him. We put what we yearn for on the stand, and if he gives it, we take it for granted and expect more. We expect bailouts, passes, and indulgence from him when we have been wrong. But when he wants to address our sin and when he speaks of eternal consequences for our

sinful vanity, naturally we don't want to hear any of it. Don't be that way. Eat the amen. He exposes your sin to you, he exposes my sin to me, to bring us to repentance. So instead of just looking to him for food, we look to him for forgiveness.

Be careful what you consume from American religion, even American Christian religion. There's a strong element of so-called prosperity gospel that dominates American Christianity's airwaves. Come to Jesus and...you will break out of the cycle of poverty. Come to Jesus and...you will be financially successful. Come to Jesus and...your relationships will be great. Come to Jesus and...you will fulfill your dreams. Come to Jesus and...you will break the chains of generational curse and find happiness and contentment beyond compare. And on and on. First of all, Jesus does not promise us fulfillment and success in the way the world gives. Second, even if you successfully use Jesus to acquire all those things, what good will all that do you? All those things perish. None of them is eternal. That's why the real tragedy in the so-called prosperity gospel is that it sells Jesus short. He has so much more to offer that is eternal.

Jesus offers the crowd bread, a bread different from loaves of barley. They say, "*Sir, from now on, give us this bread.*" But the bread Jesus offers is not a what. It's a who. "*I am the bread of life.*" It's the first of Jesus' "I am" statements in the gospel of John. "*I am the bread of life.*" It's not about putting whatever perishable bread you want on the stand and going through Jesus to get it. The only thing on that stand must be Jesus himself, the bread of life. You go to Jesus to get him. Because in him you will find what you truly need. And in him you will acquire what he desires to give most of all.

Let's look in depth at Jesus' statement and savor it.

"*I am.*" As I mentioned, this is the first of many such statements. "I am...the light of the world, the gate, the good shepherd, the resurrection and the life, the way and the truth and the life, the vine." There's a taste of God in every one of those statement. "I am." That is the way God talks about himself. "I am who I am," God revealed to Moses at the burning bush. "I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another." "I am the LORD, and apart from me there is no savior." "I am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more." This is the talk of the one and only God of all grace. Jesus says, "*I am.*"

"*The bread of life.*" The comparison is easy enough to understand. Bread made of barley or wheat or any other grain has been a staple of life in many places in many eras. It fills rows of shelves in our supermarkets to this day. People eat it and stay physically alive. Jesus brings life and keeps people alive. And yes, he does open his hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing, providing food and drink and all that's needed every day for physical life. But obviously Jesus is talking beyond the present physical life. He is talking about eternal life. Our most pressing need is that we do not die forever. "Dying in our sins" is what Jesus calls it in the gospel of John—perishing eternally under the wrath of God. Jesus saves us from perishing under God's wrath because he already experienced God's full wrath in our place through his suffering and death on the cross. Jesus saves us from dying in our sins because he is the sacrificial Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. To know God and to know Jesus Christ, whom he sent, is to have eternal life. Your soul will have life with God when it departs the body upon your physical death. Your body will be raised from the dead, and body and soul you will live with God forever. There's a whole lot packaged into that statement, "*I am the bread of life.*"

He is the bread of life, so obviously, you eat him. Eat the I Am. In the context of John chapter 6, eating him means coming to him. It's the same as believing in him. And Jesus makes great promises to anyone who eats him, that is, anyone who comes to him and believes in him.

"*He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.*" It's the strongest possible way that Jesus can say it any language. "The one who comes to me will never hunger, and the one who believes in me will never thirst ever." It will never happen. With Jesus, you will never go without a gracious and compassionate God. With Jesus, you will never go without God's love. You will have the forgiveness of sins always. You will have eternal life as God's free gift to you, and Christian peace and joy that no one can take away. You will have no reason to ever seek another god. No other one exists anyway. You will have no urge to build your own bridge to some deity by what you do. The true God has already come down and saved you. Never hunger. Never thirst ever. Feed those promises through your ears into your heart. Feed them through your eyes into your mind. Chew on them day and night. Listen, listen to Jesus, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.

The next three Sundays the bread of life will be offered from this pulpit in a short sermon series from John chapter 6. Eat the Amen by taking to heart Jesus' call to repentance. Eat the I Am by taking Jesus at his word and trusting him for what matters most, eternal life.