

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Pentecost 13
August 19, 2018
Sermon by Pastor Justin Gran
You are what you eat

—John 6:51-58

Dear friends in Christ, “you are what you eat?” Ironically, I typed out that phrase “you are what you eat,” just after I ate a Bosa’s cake donut left over from Wednesday morning Bible study. Not the healthiest choice, but to be fair it was only half of a donut. But as they say, “you are what you eat.” As you think about that phrase, you’re probably thinking about the last thing you ate. Was it a healthy choice that leaves you feeling pretty good, or was it that donut or another less-than-healthy option that has you reevaluating your diet? Certainly all things in moderation is a good approach to eating, but remember you are what you eat.

Over the long run if you eat healthy food most of the time and practice a reasonably healthy diet— in general you are likely to be healthy. If over the long run you indulge in a diet that consists of junk and if the occasional indulgent treat becomes the norm, then you may bear the consequences someday. You are what you eat. For that reason, there is a big push today for healthy and clean eating. New diets. A variety of supplements. Meal replacements. Super foods. Whole grains. Organic. No preservatives. Grass-fed. 0 trans fats. Probiotic. Non-GMO. Natural. Good source of omega 3 fatty acids. And now I’m just throwing out healthy sounding buzzwords but you get the point. Many Americans recognize the importance of eating healthy. And there are some real and tangible benefits to doing so. You feel better. You might have more energy. You may be able to ward off type-2 diabetes and heart disease, or other diet related complications. You may even be able to live a longer and more active life. You are what you eat...

But here is a sobering reminder. Even those health foods that promise cleaner bodies and healthier hearts and maybe even longer life... They still have a shelf life. They spoil. They rot. You still end up tossing them in the garbage or flinging them on the compost pile to decompose. It’s a sobering reminder that the food we ingest, no matter how healthy it is, is just like the bodies that it nourishes—perishable. That brings a whole new meaning to the phrase, “You are what you eat.”

Jesus talks about that kind of food in John 6—bread that spoils. “Your Fathers ate the manna in the desert and it sustained them for a generation, but they still died.” But then he talked about a different kind of food—food for your soul that endures to eternal life. Jesus told the hungry crowd, ***“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”*** To eat this Bread means nothing more and nothing less than to believe in Jesus Christ. It means to swallow him whole, to digest his every word, even the ones that challenge our limited reason. To eat his flesh and blood here means to chow down on the person of Jesus Christ with all our hearts and minds and souls by believing in him. This Bread is Jesus. This Bread is life. You are what you eat.

As you think of that phrase, “you are what you eat,” in a spiritual sense, take a look at your spiritual diet— what you’ve been consuming lately. Have you been making healthy choices lately, or have you at times favored less-than-healthy options?

I don’t know if we always realize the spiritual junk food that is trying to be shoved down our throats on a daily basis. It’s like there’s an all-you-can-eat buffet of godless philosophies and ideas, streaming online, blaring through the radio and on TV. Look at ads and billboards, it’s a food court of immorality, but it’s packaged in a healthy-looking wrapper. It smells good. It goes down smooth. And maybe you don’t dig in to the moral filth or godless, selfish banter that’s dished out for mass consumption, but maybe you have a little sample here or there. Maybe materialism becomes a meal replacement for the kind of comfort that only Jesus can offer. Keep in mind that marketers call us “consumers” in the hopes that we’ll gobble up the latest deals. On top of it all, we have a sinful nature that has an insatiable appetite for sin. That’s why it needs to be starved, not fed.

Or maybe our diets are lacking vital nutrients. That can be just as threatening. If you think of your faith in terms of diet, is it well fed or is it malnourished? Have you only been snacking on Jesus lately? I’ll just take a quick rote bite out of his word before I fill my day with fluff. Or I’ll have a bite of this truth or a nibble of that commandment, but this particular teaching of Jesus is just too hard to swallow. I’m not even going to try to chew on it.

These bad spiritual dieting habits, might not immediately seem all that harmful. But all that spiritual junk food that is being served up in bulk is really garbage. It’s an imitation. It might look good but it’s rotten and deadly.

Maybe those fasts from Jesus and his word don't seem all that harmful—but over time it wreaks havoc on your spiritual health. Remember: you are what you eat. You gobble up garbage and things that spoil—you spoil... You feast on Jesus who gives life and who is life, you live. Eat and live!

Listen to these words of Jesus and consume them and digest them: ***“I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”***

As you read through John 6 it seems that the more the crowd insists on physical bread that spoils, and cares less about the spiritual food standing in front of them, Jesus' speech intensifies. The picture gets more vivid, even shocking—“Eat my flesh. Drink my blood. I am the food you need for eternal life. Consume me.” But at the same time, he's gentle and generous. He doesn't come trying to force-feed himself to us. He simply sets a banquet before us of good, wholesome, healthy food for our souls and says “Come. Eat. Live.” He lays down his life, yes, his very flesh and blood, which also the flesh and blood of God. The feast is ready... dig in. chow down. Eat and live.

There is no meal replacement for Jesus. There is no supplement need in addition to him. He needs no gimmicks to make himself sound healthier and more sustaining than he really is. Again his speech intensifies—“***For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink.***” He is authentic. He is genuine. He is real food for hungry hearts. He's no imitation. He's not some hypothetical, philosophical idea floating around out there. He's God-incarnate. He walked this earth with flesh and blood. He stood right in front of thousands of people. They saw him with their own eyes, maybe some even touched him. There he was—the Bread of life come down from heaven.

Here he is. Right before us. Jesus is real food and real drink for your soul. And remember, you are what you eat. Yes the food you eat and enjoy spoils just like the body it sustains. But Jesus Christ—true God in flesh and blood—is real food that offers real, concrete benefits. ***Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.*** The Living Bread was sent by the living Father from heaven, so the one who feeds on him lives. You are what you eat. You are alive because Jesus lives. You are no longer a spiritual corpse dead in sin, but you live in forgiveness and righteousness before God because Jesus gave his flesh for the world. Jesus bore the ravages of sin, your sin, on his very own body. And yes even died. But unlike the food that nourishes your body, Jesus doesn't spoil. He did not decompose when they laid him in his tomb. God raised him back to life and he will do the same for you. Jesus lives. Feed on Jesus and his forgiveness. Feed on Jesus and his resurrection. Feed on Jesus and live.

You want a diet that is pure, and healthy, and life-giving? Here it is. That's what Jesus told the crowd. “So you want bread? Here it is. Here I am. ***“This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever.”***”

You are what you eat. When you go home later today, I hope you take away more than just that catch phrase. And if you were planning on picking a donut or two on your way home, I hope I didn't spoil it for you. But I really hope you got a healthy, heaping, helping of Jesus. And I pray that you continue to feed on him the bread of life Bread of life... That's a very vivid picture that Jesus gives. “Eat my flesh. Drink my blood.” He's more than just a snack to tie you over, so don't just snack on him. He offers more than just a nibble, so don't just have a little taste. Dig in to every morsel truth that comes from him. Chow down on the grace and wisdom pours forth from him. Feed on the Bread of life. Eat and live.

Amen