

Good morning everyone, my name is Mark and I'm one of the pastors on staff at North Shore Alliance Church; it's great to have you with us. So you all know my name, but there's a number of you that I don't know--on the count of three, in a clear, loud voice, I want all of you to tell me your first name. 1, 2, 3...

illus: Did I hear a few other "Mark's" out there? We Mark's need to stick together. I'm not sure about the rest of you, but I'm quite attached to my name--Mark. It's short, it's crisp, it's strong, and I love the fact that there is a book in the Bible that shares the same name. There's nothing fancy about my name but I like it--I couldn't imagine being called anything but *Mark*. I asked my parents once why they gave me this particular name because it doesn't run in our family. Essentially, it came down to how it sounded; they liked the sound of my name: *Mark Allan Peters*.

I can remember being young, maybe 9 or 10, when my mom gave me a special gift. It was a certificate-like piece of paper with my name on it, penned in fancy calligraphy. I wish I still had it, but the image is clear in my mind: "*Mark*" was in large bold print and underneath was written the meaning of my name, *Mighty Warrior*. I loved looking at it, *Mark, Mighty Warrior*, every time I looked I imagined that one day I would be strong, mighty, and courageous.

My wife's first two names are straight from the Bible: Naomi Rebecca. Naomi means *pleasant*, Rebecca means *captivating*--in 14 years of marriage, I've found her to be both. And when it came to naming our children, we wanted to choose names that had special meaning. When Naomi was pregnant with Luke and we found out that we would be having a boy, we began to hunt for a name we could both agree on--that proved to be harder than we imagined.

At one point Naomi suggested a name that she liked the sound of, but when I looked it up in the baby name book I discovered that this particular name meant "Elf Ruler". I distinctly remember pulling out the veto card (we both had one) and saying: "*No son of mine is going to bear a name that means 'Elf Ruler'!*" Luke's name means "bringer of light".

In the Scriptures, God refers to Himself by many names:

- there is *Elohim*, which is the generic name *God*.
- but then there is *El-Shaddai*, which means *God Almighty*
- there is *El-Elyon*, which means *God Most High*
- and *Adonai*, which means *Lord and Master*.

But among the many names by which God had revealed Himself, one in particular came to be known as *the Divine Name*. This was the name that God gave in response to Moses' question. In Exodus 3, God commissioned Moses to go to Egypt and to tell Pharaoh to release all of the Israelites from slavery. As you can imagine, Moses wasn't too keen on the idea. In Exodus 3:13 Moses said to God, "*Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?*"

And response, God gave Moses a name, the Divine Name: Yahweh. In Hebrew, Yahweh is composed of 4 consonants--the ultimate 4-letter-word. Yahweh is the most common name for God in the Old Testament, it appears over 6700 times, but it's a strange sort of name.

God didn't say, "*Call me Bill, Bob, Susan, or Sally,*" He said "Tell them that Yahweh sent you." Yahweh means "*I AM who I AM,*" or, "*I will be who I will be.*" In other words, "*I AM the One who exists, the*

One who Is, the One who has always been. I AM here, now, filling every place with My Presence.” Yahweh. I AM.

illus: what I want you to do right now is take the next 30 seconds to turn to someone seated close by, and here’s what I’m going to have you do. I want you to fill in the following blank: *I am* _____. I want you to quickly tell them something about yourself--it doesn’t have to be deep or meaningful, just fill in the blank: *I am* _____. I’ll give you 10 seconds to collect your thoughts and then each of you can take 10 seconds to offer a brief description: *I am* _____.

Let me call you back. What are some of descriptors you used? All of these statements offer up a description of being; they say something about who, or what, we are. *I am...*

Sometime after the last book of the Old Testament was written, the Divine Name, *I AM*, became so revered by the Jews that they stopped using it; they refused to speak it aloud for fear of dishonouring or misusing the Name. To this day, when an orthodox Jew reads the Old Testament aloud, every time they come across the Divine Name in the text, their eyes read “*Yahweh*” but their lips speak “*Adonai*.”

So why am I telling you all of this? Because when Jesus showed up and began to teach, He began to play fast and loose with this Divine Name. Not in the sense that He misused God’s name, but in the sense that He began to hint that God’s Divine name could be applied to Himself. On at least one occasion, Jesus directly applied this Name to Himself and the crowd immediately picked up stones to to kill Him for blasphemy. Yahweh. I AM.

Who was Jesus? Everyone wanted to know who He was and where He was from. Was He a prophet, a healer, a wise teacher? Was He a revolutionary, a political leader, a future king? Everyone had an opinion on Jesus--people still do. Some today ignore the historical records and suggest that Jesus is a fictional character. Some people consider Jesus a political martyr, while others say He was a brilliant ethical teacher. Muslims refer to Jesus as a prophet, while others say He is God. *Who do you say He is?*

Over the next 7 weeks, we are going to take a deeper look at who Jesus thought He was. In John’s record of Jesus’ life and ministry, John captured seven statements that Jesus made concerning His own identity, seven *I AM* statements.

Jesus took the Divine Name, *I AM*, He took this broad-brush-stroke name and He filled in some of the details. He is not simply *I AM*, but I Am the Bread of Life; I Am the Light of the World; I Am the Gate; I Am the Good Shepherd; I Am the Resurrection and the Life; I Am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; I Am the True Vine. Seven statements, seven metaphors, seven word-pictures. And each of these statements offer both a declaration and an invitation.

The **declaration** comes in the form of revelation: Jesus reveals who He is and in doing so He reveals the true nature of God. Jesus’ God-revealing-metaphors are simple and yet profound; there is both clarity and mystery involved. But His **invitation** is straightforward. With each *I AM* statement, Jesus is saying: *Come to Me, I am what you need, I am what you are searching for.*

Perhaps you’re just beginning to investigate the spiritual side of life, and you’re just beginning to consider Jesus; His invitation is for you:

Come to Me, I am what you are searching for. Perhaps, you have been following Jesus for a long time, His invitation to you is no less real or poignant: *Come to Me, I am what you need.*

This morning, I'm going to begin with Jesus' first *I AM* statement: "I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE. *Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.*" And in order to uncover this declaration and invitation, I'd like to invite you to turn with me to John 6 (that's page 1655).

The statement I just read comes from John 6:35, but we're going to start by looking at John 6:1-15; Jesus does something remarkable here that sets the stage for this first *I Am* statement. I'm not going to read these first 15 verses, but I would like to briefly re-tell the story.

Jesus and His disciples were in familiar territory, near the Sea of Galilee; most of the disciples grew up on these shores. It so happened that Jesus and His disciples went up on one of the hills surrounding the shore, and it wasn't long until a great crowd began to gather. And that's when it happened--Jesus' stomach began to growl. I don't know that for certain, the Bible doesn't say, but it's a hunch of mine. At any rate, it was likely close to meal time, because when Jesus saw the crowd approaching His first concern was whether they had something to eat.

John 6:6 tells us that Jesus "*already had in mind what he was going to do,*" but He turned to His disciple Phillip and asked him a faith-stretching-question. "*Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?*" Phillip's response didn't outline a solution, it pointed to an impossibility. Vs. 7, "*It would take more than half a year's wages to*

buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" Jesus, we don't possess the resources required. Phillip was right, he didn't have the necessary resources, but Jesus did. Another disciple, Andrew, found a young boy with five barley loaves and two small fish and Jesus multiplied it--just like that. Jesus took a boy's meal and fed a crowd of over 5000; there was even 12 baskets of leftovers.

As John recounts this story, he doesn't refer to this multiplication as a miracle (though it certainly was); instead, he calls it a "*sign.*" As you read through John's account, you will find that the seven *I AM* statements have a counterpart--seven *signs.*

Now we all understand the purpose of a *sign*--a *sign* tells us something, it points to something. A traffic *sign* might tell us to turn left or right, a billboard *sign* might tell us what to wear or what to buy; even a hunger pain can be a *sign*--it tells us that our body needs food. *Signs* are all around us--they are meant to capture our attention.

Jesus multiplied bread and fish, one small meal became food for 5000. A miracle? Yes. A *sign*? Absolutely, and the people picked up on it right away. The people of Israel were just like us, they grew up on stories from their past. When I hear someone talk about "the goal heard round the world," I am brought back to the 1972 Summit Series, where Paul Henderson scored the goal that sealed Canada's victory over the Soviet Union's hockey team. I wasn't even alive when it happened and yet it is a part of my history; it's one of Canada's greatest sporting moments.

When people saw Jesus miraculously feed thousands in the middle of nowhere, it triggered their own history. *Hadn't Moses done the same while Israel wandered in the desert?* Moses gave the people manna,

bread from heaven. Every day there was enough for every stomach; every morning it was waiting for them--there was a fresh batch of it covering the ground. Manna was a miraculous *sign* of God's faithful love, His provision.

And so, when the people saw Jesus perform this sign they wanted to keep Him around, and maybe even make Him King. But Jesus knew what was in their hearts, He knew they had misinterpreted the *sign*, and so He withdrew to the mountain.

Let's pick up the rest of the story in chapter 6, starting at vs. 25. *When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?" 26 Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. 27 Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval."*

28 Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" 29 Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." 30 So they asked him, "What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? 31 Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"

32 Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. 33 For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." 34 "Sir," they said, "always give us this bread." 35 Then Jesus declared, "I AM

THE BREAD OF LIFE. *Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."*

This is the first Jesus' seven self-revealing declarations: *I AM the Bread of Life*. Jesus chooses a metaphor that is simple and common, a staple in everyday life. Do we have any bread lovers among us this morning? I love bread, especially bread that is thick, or dense, or crusty. Give me a nice rye bread, or sourdough, or a long, thin, french baguette and I'm a happy man.

illus: This June I'll be turning 40--suffice it to say, I'm now a long way from my high school years. But that being said, I have some vivid memories from those years, for instance, when I was in high school I can remember being hungry all the time. I ate like a hobbit--first breakfast, second breakfast, lunch, snack, supper, second supper, late night dessert. I don't know how Mom kept up with the groceries.

Coming home after school was particularly bad, I would typically go from the back door straight to the fridge. But every couple of weeks, I would come in through the back door and be hit by an aromatic wall of deliciousness--one sniff and I knew that my mom had been baking bread--that was all it took to say to myself: *today is a very good day*.

Jesus chose a staple like bread to make a statement about Himself and about our selves. Hunger and thirst is so basic to life--everything we can see is made up of matter, our bodies are made up of matter and they have real, material needs. Jesus reminds us that our bodies hunger and thirst for nourishment, so too do our souls. Bread can satisfy a stomach, but it takes Living Bread to satisfy the soul.

We are well practiced in detecting physical hunger: when our stomach begins to growl, it's a sign that we need to eat something. Unfortunately, we are not nearly as practiced in recognizing when our soul is growling.

What constitutes a soul growling? As I've thought about this week, I've come to the conclusion that we live unaware of our soul cravings because they come to us in unexpected packaging. Soul cravings don't often begin with an overt longing for God, for worship, for prayer, for religious activity--if they did, we'd probably respond differently. Instead, our soul cravings come wrapped in the packaging of boredom, or fear and anxiety, or packaged in a longing for something more, a longing for love, for meaning and significance.

And I want to suggest to you that all of these, and many more, are directly tied to our soul's craving for God. But since many of us don't know what boredom, or fear, or love, meaning, and significance have to do with God, we don't recognize that it's our soul that is growling--and we end up trying to feed these hunger pains with material things.

When we're bored, we try to plan more adventure into our lives--we take up skydiving or bungee jumping, we plan a trip someplace exotic, we take up a new hobby, we renovate our house, or search out a new relationship.

If we are fearful and anxious, we might try to think positively, or look for for mental and emotional escape. Some of us medicate with t.v., others with drugs and alcohol, others with sex--the possibilities are endless.

If we find ourselves hungering for purpose, meaning, and significance, many of us try to find a new job or career, we search within to find our true "passion." But if it's love we're after, some of us exchange our old relationships for ones that hold the allure of something "more." It's amazing to think that our soul is actually craving God, and yet at times we can misinterpret the craving and end up pursuing adventure, or self-medicating behaviour, or a new career, or even trading in our spouse and children. *What are your soul cravings?*

We are, all of us, incurably spiritual--we hunger for meaning, we thirst for significance, we long for the transcendent. And the pursuit of the material doesn't provide us with the key to lasting satisfaction.

Do you know that Jesus is the solution to your soul's hunger? You can try feeding your soul with material solutions, and it will mask your hunger for awhile but it won't take it away--it will simply drive your hunger underground for a time. Jesus said, I AM the Bread of Life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

Jesus fed a crowd near the Sea of Galilee, and the next day they searched Him out. But Jesus saw through them; their driving motivation was the possibility of another free meal. And so Jesus said to them, paraphrasing vs. 27, "Do not pursue your stomach's satisfaction to the neglect of your soul. Don't pursue what is temporary and miss what is forever." You see our body craves what is temporary--the next meal--but our soul craves God, and He is forever.

Forever is a long time isn't it? We can wait in traffic for 20 minutes and complain that it's "taking forever!" We can be hunting for a new job, or waiting for Mrs. or Mr. Right and lament that it's "taking forever!" We can live for years with chronic pain and it feels like forever, doesn't it? It isn't. Forever is a really, really, really, really long time--it's hard to even talk about "forever" and "time" in the same sentence because "time" has a beginning and an end, "forever" doesn't.

In vs. 40, Jesus said, "*my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal [forever] life, and I will raise them up at the last day.*" This is good news isn't it? God's desire is that **everyone** who looks to Jesus and put their trust in Him will have a forever life with God.

Your gender, your ethnicity, and your age--none of these disqualify you. Your parents, the place you grew up, your past failures don't disqualify you. Your present troubles, your questions, and even your excuses don't disqualify you--Jesus came to give you life.

In vs. 47-51, Jesus said, "*Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life. 48 I am the bread of life. 49 Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. 50 But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. 51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.*"

"*This bread is my flesh, which I **will give (future tense)** for the life of the world.*" Jesus was speaking about the Cross--the universal

symbol of suffering and shame, would be transformed by Jesus's sacrifice.

We're all smart enough to recognize that there are direct consequences for the choices we make. If you lie and cheat long enough, you're going to get caught. If you drink to excess, you're going to get drunk. If you ignore your spouse, you're going to have an unhappy marriage, or no marriage.

So too are there consequences for our sin. While sin can be conceived of as breaking God's laws, more often, the Bible describes "sin" as a breaking of relationship with God. In the extreme, "sin" is our way of saying, "*God, I don't want you in my life. I don't need you. I want to live independently, I want to call the shots, I will decide the when, the where, the how.*" There are consequences for these kinds of choices--we cut ourselves off from the Giver of Life, death is the inevitable result.

Jesus said, "**I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE.** *Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. Whoever eats this bread will live forever.*"

The Bible describes "becoming a Christian" in many different ways, but here, Jesus describes it simply as *a coming to Him and a believing in Him*. When we *come to Jesus* we leave certain things behind--we leave where we were and what we were doing--we cannot simultaneously occupy two places. When we come to Jesus we leave behind our self-reliance, our pride, our achievements.

None of us are invited because we are superstars--we aren't invited because we are worthy, Jesus invites us because we are loved. We aren't invited because He needs us, we are invited because we need

Him. When we come to Jesus, we commit to following His way instead of our own--we've all been down that road before, following our way, trying to satisfy our soul cravings, *do we really want to keep going down that path?*

Becoming a Christian" means *coming to Jesus and believing in Jesus*. When we *believe*, or, *put our trust in Jesus*, by necessity we revoke our belief or trust in other things/persons. We give up the notion that we can make ourselves right before God and come to accept and celebrate the truth that Jesus's perfect life, His perfect sacrifice on the cross is what makes us right with God--it doesn't depend on us but on Him.

"I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE. *Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.*" There's much more that could be said about this first *I AM* statement, the church has been chewing on these words for nearly 2000 years. But when you break these words down to their essence, this is what remains: *Jesus is Life. Jesus offers Life. Jesus can satisfy your soul cravings.*

This is quite a declaration; it's quite an invitation. Let me invite you to come to Jesus and have your hunger satisfied.

Prayer: (a) for salvation; (b) for soul satisfaction

Benediction: at the conclusion of my message, I prayed, inviting some of you to come to Jesus and put your trust in Him for the first time. If you made that decision this morning, I'd love to hear from you. Can you do something for me? Can you come and let me know,

or send me an email this week? We'd love to help you begin to take your first steps in following Jesus.

Jesus taught us to pray, *Father, give us this day our daily bread*. May the Father Himself, the Great *I AM*, nourish, sustain, and satisfy you today, tomorrow, and forever. Amen.