

The Sixth Sunday of Easter  
St. John 16:23-30: "What Does 'Amen' Mean?"  
May 25/26, 2019 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

### In Nomine Iesu

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O Lord Jesus Christ, who said to Your disciples, "Whatever you shall ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son": Give us grace, we beseech You, to ask aright; teach us to bring our requests into harmony with Your mind and will; and grant that both our prayers and our lives may be acceptable in Your sight, to the glory of God the Father. Amen. (*Parish Prayers*, ed. Frank Colquhoun, p. 89)

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)*

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*The sermon text for today is taken from the sixteenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:*

[Jesus said:] "Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He will give it to you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full. / "I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech but will tell you plainly about the Father. In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me and have believed that I came from God. I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father." / His disciples said, "Ah, now You are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech! Now we know that You know all things and do not need anyone to question You; this is why we believe that You came from God." (ESV)

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*These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Jn. 17:17)*

In Christ Jesus, who opened for us direct access to the Father by His innocent suffering and death in our place, dear fellow redeemed:

What words do you say every single day? Some of the likely ones are: hello, good-bye, yes, no, good morning, good night, please, thank you. Maybe you say "I love you" to someone each day. If you're around kids, you hear them say "why?" or "why not?" every day. There's another one that I'm confident you say each day – the word "Amen."

If you say prayers when you wake up in the morning, before and after meals, and before you go to bed at night, you might say "Amen" five to ten times a day. The number may be even higher if you pray throughout the day. If you used the word "Amen" about 50 times a week (including all the times in church), you would be saying or singing it over 2,500 times each year. If you lived eighty years, this would mean using the word "Amen" over 200,000 times. That's a significant word!

But why do we use it? Where did the word come from? **What Does "Amen" Mean?** The word is found thirty times in the Hebrew Old Testament, where it is pronounced "ah-main." Pagan

scholars say the Hebrew people took the word from the name of an Egyptian god. And the name may sound similar, but it isn't even spelled the same. The noun "Amen" actually comes from a Hebrew verb which means "to confirm" or "be trustworthy."

In the Old Testament, the word was used to show agreement for what someone said. One example is when the Ark of the Covenant was brought to Jerusalem by King David. On this occasion David led a song of thanks, and all the Israelites responded with a loud "*Amen!*" and *praised the Lord*" (1Ch. 16:36). The word "Amen" is also used as a conclusion, such as when it ends the first four sections of the Book of Psalms.

"Amen" was used as a part of the synagogue worship of the Jews, so Jesus would have heard this word frequently as a boy. Later on in His public work, He often utilized this word to emphasize the truth of what He said. Each of the seventy-five instances of "Amen" in the four Gospels comes from Jesus as part of the phrase, "*Amen, I say to you,*" often translated as "*Truly, I say to you.*" In the Gospel of John, Jesus' use of the word is always doubled, like it is in today's text: "*Truly, truly, I say to you,*" or "*Amen, amen, I say to you.*" "Amen" is used about twenty-five more times in the New Testament in connection with a statement of praise or as a conclusion to one of the Epistles.

What we do not find anywhere in the Bible is a command that we use this word, or that it must be spoken at the end of every prayer. We do not have instructions for how to end our prayers, but we do have instructions for how to pray. Jesus taught prayer both by example and by education. He often spent time in prayer to His heavenly Father, including the night before His death. These frequent references to His praying should show us how important prayer is.

He also taught His disciples what they should and should not do regarding prayer. He told them they should not draw attention to themselves when they pray, like "*the hypocrites*" who stand prominently "*in the synagogues and at the street corners.*" Instead they should pray humbly and privately to the Father, who promises to hear their prayer (Mat. 6:5-6). Of course it is also fine and good to pray in public like we do in church, as long as this is not done for show.

The Lord also directed His disciples to avoid "vain repetition" or "empty phrases," as though "*they will be heard for their many words.*" Jesus told the disciples a great multitude of words is unnecessary, since "*your Father knows what you need before you ask him*" (Mat. 6:7-8). Right after this Jesus taught them to say the brief but exceedingly rich "Our Father," or "Lord's Prayer."

The Lord's Prayer shows us how bold we should be in our petitions or requests. When we pray for what God has promised to give us, we do not pray conditionally. We do not say, "*Thy kingdom come if You want it to,*" or "*Thy will be done if You're not too busy,*" or "*Give us this day our daily bread if You are happy enough with us.*"

Jesus taught us to pray with boldness, to use imperatives: "Give us!" "Forgive us!" "Deliver us." Jesus repeated this instruction to pray boldly when He said, "*Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened*" (Mat. 7:7-8).

This is not how the doubter approaches prayer – the one who isn't sure God is listening or even wants to hear his prayer. James writes that *"the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways"* (Jam. 1:6-8).

So how can we learn to pray with more confidence, as Jesus invites us to do, and not be unstable doubters? The key is found in today's Gospel reading. There Jesus says, *"Truly, truly, I say to you – listen carefully; I am not lying –, whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He will give it to you."* The key is in those three words, *"in My name."* Jesus repeats that phrase three times in this section, and He had already used the phrase four times before in the same conversation (Joh. 14:13, 14, 26, 15:16). That makes seven uses of this phrase in the night before His death.

Jesus explained what *"in My name"* means further along in the text. He said they could pray boldly to the Father in heaven because He loves them. And why does He love them? *"[B]ecause,"* as Jesus said, *"you have loved Me and have believed that I came from God."* That is what it means to pray *"in Jesus' name."* It is to pray with faith in Him and all He has accomplished for our salvation.

Your boldness in prayer is directly related to your confidence in Jesus' work. If you are certain that His perfect life is fully credited to you by faith; if you believe that He made complete satisfaction for your sins by His death on the cross; and if you trust that He rose again on the third day in victory over your death, then you should not wonder if God hears your prayers or wants to hear them.

Do you think God the Father wanted to hear the prayers of Jesus, His Son? Then why shouldn't He want to hear your prayers? *"[F]or in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith"* (Gal. 3:26). When you pray *"in Jesus' name"* – by faith in Jesus – the Father looks upon you with favor. He looks at you through the lens of His Son. He does not see the sinner who has fallen again and again, the weak Christian who spends so much of his time worrying about unimportant things. He sees His holy, blood-bought child. He sees a rightful heir, one to whom He will give all the riches of heaven.

Since the heavenly Father looks upon you in this way, there should be no question in your mind that He wants to hear your prayers. But not all requests are the same. Not all prayers are proper. You do not get everything you want just because the Father loves you, or because you pray *"in Jesus' name."* We love our children, but we do not give them everything they want. They do not always want the right things.

You should not pray to God for foolish things, like vast riches to live an indulgent life, or a different family than the one God gave you, or impressive power and prestige in the world. These are the desires of the flesh. On the other hand, you can pray without hesitation for the good things God has promised to give you, like you do in the Lord's Prayer. You can also pray for things you aren't sure that God will give you, confident that He will do what is best. In this regard, you may pray for improved health, for a better work environment, or for relief from something that troubles you or those you love.

When you make these humble petitions by faith in Jesus, you are assured that your requests are heard by Him and will most certainly be answered. This is where “Amen” comes in. It is much more than an “okay, I’m done,” or some kind of punctuation mark. It is a word which confirms what has been said “in Jesus’ name.” It expresses trust that the Father in heaven has heard the prayer and will act. It is not a word we are required to use, but if it was used so often by Jesus, it should be useful to us.

**What Does “Amen” Mean?** In his classic definition in the *Small Catechism*, Martin Luther writes, “Amen means that we should be sure that these petitions are acceptable to our Father in heaven and are heard by Him; for He Himself has commanded us so to pray and has promised to hear us. Amen, Amen; that is, Yes, Yes, it shall be so.”

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.*

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