

Sermon Text for February 8, 2015

by Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Psalm 121, Revelation 22:18-21

“That’s the truth!”

We’ve had internet problems in the sanctuary over these last few months. I went to Best Buy to get a new router, I was looking down the aisles, I knew where they were, the salesman was in the aisle helping someone else. The first routers were about \$300 and the salesman said, that’s the one you want, if you stack about three of them together they are so powerful that you can talk to God. He said that, I said good thing, because they’re going in a church. I bought the \$70 router and it works great.

We’ve had a lot of fun over this past year as we looked at the Apostles’ Creed. We saw I believe, and broke a mirror to remind us that our faith is not really about us but about the God who loves us more than anything in the world. We had fun hearing about hell, and I got to dress up. Today is the last sermon on the Apostles’ Creed, our statement of belief that we have used for over a thousand years. I don’t know about you, but one of the things that I appreciate about this church is that we are connected to those who have loved and served Christ not just over a few years but over the past hundreds and thousands of years.

The last word is always Amen. In most mainstream churches you say amen at the end of a prayer, at the end of a sermon. Amen was added in the past at the end of some hymns. In that tradition Amen has been used as a sign of conclusion, finality. But not all traditions understand Amen in that light. For many of Amen is an agreement during a sermon. Amen, instead of STOP means keep going. Amen is sometimes paired with PREACH, WELL, THAT’S THE TRUTH. In many traditions Amen is an encouragement to continue instead of a command to stop, it is a word that means I’m just getting started instead of an appeal to stop.

Today we are going to look at the various uses of Amen and discover that it is a very versatile word. In Revelation Christ is called the Amen. Amen is used to affirm what we believe in Scripture. So it is fitting that since we started by saying I believe, after we have laid out and stated all that we believe, we end today by stating Amen, or that’s the truth. Today we will use Amen not as an imperative to stop, but rather as an encouragement to continue and proclaim the truth, and be able to live by all that we have professed up to now.

You probably did not know it but you are all able to speak Hebrew. Amen is not an English or American word, but rather it is a Hebrew word with a number of different meanings. Stay with me as I work through not all of them but a very extensive list of meanings for Amen. Now would be a good time to get out your Bibles because we are going to use them. We are not just going to be looking at Psalm 121 and Revelation 22. I'm going to keep you guessing and keep you on your feet. It is going to be a different type of teaching, so stay with me.

I think most of us have been taught that Amen means traditionally: So be it. Meaning you confirm or support what was stated. It can also mean make firm, to trust and believe, verily or truly, firmness and steadfastness. One of my favorite uses of Amen is found in Isaiah 7:9 where the prophet states "If you do not stand firm in faith, you shall not stand at all". Listen to it in Hebrew. IM LO TAEMINU KI LO TEAMENU. In Exodus 4: 31 we read that the people believed, were convicted of what was spoken. They were amened. In English you can't use it as a verb but in Hebrew it is often used as a verb. Psalm 41:13 we read at the end of the psalm what I call the double dip of Amen, Amen. Habakkuk 2:4 tells us that the righteous shall live by their faithfulness. They shall live by their Amen. Nehemiah 8:6 once the book of the law is opened for the first time in generations the people proclaim Amen, Amen, and then raise their hands and worship God. Look now in Hezekiah 14, verse 7. I got you didn't I?

Amen has a broad variety of meanings. It is not by any means strictly a closer but rather it is a very powerful confirmation of all that has been said, a binding contract in in some cases. It is an assertion that not only do you agree but you will support and live by what was said. That is why it is imperative that we finish with Amen today because it is, yes an ending, but also because it is like the handshake and our signature that says by God's power I will live my life in this way.

Think of this Amen that we find here at the end of the Apostles' Creed. It isn't casually or haphazardly thrown in there just to end a prayer. When you say Amen at the end of the Apostles' Creed you are saying I believe in what was said, and I will covenant today to live by what was said in that Creed. This one little word says all that.

In the New Testament we read today the very last words in all of Scripture. How many of you have ever looked closely at the very final words of Scripture? These last words give us an amen to a warning and a curse to anyone who would change what was said before.

Turn to Revelation 22 again. Now at face value this Scripture is about the eternal hope we have in the second coming of Christ. Maranatha, come Lord Jesus. The Amen is a confirmation of that belief, of that eternal hope that we have and of the fact that we do know the end of the story.

There was a series of pictures that went viral a little while back, they are pictures that are taken by a husband as he follows his wife from prediagnosis to death. This might be the Amen that we are used to, that which is final, but this is not what we find here in the Apostles' Creed.

It ends with a victory for our side so we can live our lives without compromise knowing that the joy and the pain, the affirmation and the suffering we experience now will all be redeemed in Christ's coming. Our amen here in Revelation is a stamp of approval of this good news.

But if you notice, there is a warning here as well. We also need to be warned of changing what we believe on a whim. It may be fun and interesting to think off the top of your head theologically, but without the foundation of Scripture and our confessions to interpret Scripture we can easily get lost. Deuteronomy 4:2, and 12:32 contain similar warnings to anyone who would want to change or delete that which we believe and that which is foundation to us as a people of faith. II Peter 3:16 gives us a worst case scenario to who would want to change the Scripture and our basic fundamental beliefs. The amen in Revelation is a confirmation to all that has been started and confirmed before. When you read Amen in Revelation it is stating that what you have read is the truth.

Amen, that's the truth. But as Pilate would ask in this changing and shifting world where people see truth as being relative: what is truth

Our belief in the truth ultimately will decide whether we believe that God is in charge or not, whether God is going to win or not. If we do not believe that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life then we are going to wander our entire lives looking for pearls in the mud upon which to base our lives. Not a very satisfying way to go about life.

In Scripture we find a direct reference to Jesus in Revelation 3:16 as the Amen. Other places we find Jesus identifying himself as the truth, a common synonym for Amen. John 8:30: you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free and then in 14:6 – I am the way, the truth and the life. Jesus is described and describes himself as the truth.

A crucial component of Jesus' teaching is to use the word Amen. Whenever you hear Jesus saying truly, truly, or in some translations, verily, verily what he is really saying is Amen, Amen. This is the truth, you better listen to what comes next. Whenever we say Amen it is supposed to add importance and authority to what has been said or done. What Revelation teaches us is that any authority that we have and any authority in our speech and any truth that we utter can only find its origin in God's word.

The Apostles' Creed is not a fabrication of the church fathers, but it is a Scriptural decree that ends with Amen because it is the truth. So often the church speaks without realizing that its authority does not come from within. We are not keepers of the word but rather the disseminators. Our Amens ought not to keep the truth locked up and within the community but rather it should allow the truth to go out. The church is not Christ, but rather it represents him. The church does not possess the Holy Spirit, but rather the Holy Spirit possesses the church.

Amen is a reminder to all of us that we are people of the Word. We do believe in certain unchanging truths which we find in Scripture. We reform society with the Word and we are constantly being reformed by the Word. Amen does not mean we are set in our ways, but rather that we believe we are ready to be shaped and guided by that to which we just Amened.

The final words of Revelation belie an expectancy for the second coming of Christ that will change all that we believe. But until that time let us join together and say Amen to that which we believe and will follow. Amen? Amen.