

Why do you say "amen," Christians? We've said it half a dozen times in the service already, but what you mean by it when you say the word "amen"? Is it something that you just say purely out of habit, purely out of tradition? The Church has been saying "amen" since the time of the Old Testament. Is that the reason why we say it? That can't be the only reason. Because if it didn't have any meaning, then what's the point of saying it at all? Do you say "amen" as a way of saying "we're done now"? My prayer's over. I've said what I needed to say, and so this is the end? We might use it that way, but it's got to mean something more than that. It has to have something stronger, or else it's just a word with very little meaning. If we want to know what the word "amen" means, Christians, we only have to look to the Bible, and especially our Old Testament reading for today. Because if you look at chapter 15, verse 6, it says this, "And Abram believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness." And if you put your finger right there on the word "believed," you would have the same word in Hebrew as "amen." Abram "amened" the Lord. Abram "said amen to God," and the Lord counted it to him for righteousness. So if you want to know what amen means, then, it has something to do with faith. It has something to do with believing. And that's what we see happening in our reading for today.

Because Abram at this point in the book of Genesis is troubled. He's not really sure what's going to happen. Because all the way back in chapter 12, which was several years ago for him now, God had promised him that he was going to make his offspring numerous, and in him all the nations of the world would be blessed. But that hasn't happened. Abram is still right here, and he doesn't have a child. And so he's wondering to himself, "When is God going to keep his promise? When is God going to do what he said he was going to do?" That's the question that he wants answered.

But the Lord comes to him here in verse 1, and says, "Fear not, Abram. I am your shield. Your reward shall be very great." "Don't be afraid, Abram! Don't be worried. I'm going to take care of you," the Lord is saying. "I'm going to do everything for you, and you don't have to worry about a thing. I will protect you. I will be like a shield to you. And your reward indeed shall be very great." But Abram knew all of this. He'd seen God do all of these wonderful things for him time and time again, sometimes doing miracles through him. But he still wants to know: when are you going to keep your promise?

That's why he says to him in verse 2: "O Lord God, what will you give me? For I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus." It's worth noting that this is actually the first time that Abram has ever said anything to God. Because in the previous three chapters, he just listened, and then he did what God told him to do. But now he wants to know, when are you going to give me this child?

He's not angry about this, though. Don't take that the wrong way. It's not like he's saying, "God, you're never going to keep your promise." No, what he's saying is: "God, when? When will you do this? When will you keep your Word? When will you do as you said that you would do? Because I'm in my eighties now. Time is running out for me. When will you finally keep your promises like you said?" Because he's become impatient, almost. Impatient to see God do exactly what he says, impatient to see the fulfillment of that promise. When will you do this just as you said?

Christians, I think we too can sometimes feel this impatience with God. This kind of impatience that says, "God, when are you going to keep your Word? I know you're going to do it, God. I know you've said you'll do it, but when? When will you do it? I've prayed for something, for example, and I prayed over and over again. But when, Lord? When will you do what you said you're going to do?" You might even say, "I've heard all of your promises that you made to me: the promises of life, the promises of salvation. But when, Lord? When are you going to do this for me? I know you're going to, but I'm simply impatient to know when you will finally do it." Now, we shouldn't do that in a sinful way, because there is such a thing as sinful impatience, where we accuse God of never doing what he says. But a godly impatience wants to know: "How long, O Lord? How long do I have to wait? How long before you do what you said you're going to do?" We need to know, because we want to see God keep his Word.

And so Abram thinks about it for a little bit, and he says, "Well, maybe there's kind of a different way that you meant this, Lord." And this is what he means when he says in verse 3: "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir." Maybe this is what you actually meant, God. Maybe you really meant that you're going to give me an adopted son. That this member of my household, this Eliezer of Damascus, he will become my son, and that's how you're going to keep your promise. Because in the Bible, whenever someone adopted someone, they became family, just as if they were their actual child. It was that important, that serious, in the Bible. And maybe Abram says, "Maybe this is what you meant." Because I think we do that too, sometimes. We see God do something like what he said he's going to do, and we say, "Maybe that's what he actually meant. That this is his actual promise, that he's kind of keeping it sort of." But that's not very satisfying, is it? We don't want God to give us a half-promise, to give us a kind of halfway solution to our problem. We want to see what he's actually going to do. If he has promised something, we want him to keep his Word.

Because Christians, God is not a God of half-promises. God doesn't say one thing and do another. God does exactly what he says he's going to do. Which is why he says to Abram in verse 4, "This man shall not be your heir. Your very own son shall be your heir." "I'm not giving you an adopted son, Abram. I'm not giving you this kind of half promise. Your own flesh and blood will be your heir, because I am the Lord. I have promised this to you, and I will do exactly what I said that I'm going to do. I'm going to give you the son that I promised you in due time."

And to really strengthen that for him, to really show just how serious he is, he tells Abram to go outside to give him a sure sign that he's going to keep his Word. God says to him, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them. So shall your offspring be." Look at heaven, Abram. Count all those stars, if you're able to do it. This is my promise to you that I'm going to keep my Word. And in those moments when you are doubting, in those moments when you are wavering, in those moments when you're not sure if I'm going to keep my Word, you can look at them, and they will remind you of the promises that I have made you today. I will do what I have promised to do. I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven. In you all the nations of the earth shall be blessed. And I will give you a son, because I am the Lord. And you only have to look up at the stars to know that I will do this.

And Christians, Abram believed the Lord. Abram "amened" the Lord. Abram "said amen to" God's promises. He said in that moment, "Yes, Lord, I know that you're going to do what you

said you're going to do. I know that you are a God of your Word. You have made this promise to me, and I believe your word. So I will say 'amen,' and hold onto that promise, because you will not fail to keep it." And Abram did just that. Because he still had to wait. It would be fifteen years or more before Isaac would finally be born. But Abram knew in that moment that he had something to hold onto, that he could say "amen" to God's promises, because God is faithful to his word.

And Christians, this is why we say "amen." We say "amen," because it shows us that we trust the Lord. It shows us that we believe him when he makes his promises to us. The things that he has said are not half-promises. They're not things that he's going only kind of keep. God said it. We can believe it, and say "amen." God says to you: "Your sins are forgiven, because of my Son, Jesus Christ." God said it. I believe it. Amen! God says to you: "You will live in Jesus Christ forever, to be with him in the joys of paradise." God said it. I believe it. Amen! God has said to you that he will hear and answer your prayers, because of his Son, Jesus Christ. God said it. I believe it. Amen! God has said to you that he will be with you always, even to the very end of the age. God has said it. I believe it. Amen! And God has promised you that Jesus Christ will be victorious over all things, that this evil which we see around us will come to an end and will be judged on the Last Day. God said it. I believe it. Amen!

Yes, dear Christians, God gives us his promises. And we can say "amen" to every one of them. We can believe what it is that he says, because he is the Lord. And in those moments when you're wavering--and we will waver, because we are still in this sinful flesh--in those moments when we need to be reassured that God will do what he says, God has given us something to hold onto as well. Not the stars, like Abram, but the sacraments. Those promises that God has made to you, to show you beyond all doubt that he will keep his Word. And in that moment when you receive the very body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ here at this altar, God is saying to you that your sins are forgiven, and that he will keep every one of his promises. And you can know that today, because he has given you his own son. Yes, Christians, we can hold onto those things that God gives us. And we will know beyond all doubt that we can say "amen" to every one of his promises.

So trust the Lord, Christians. Trust him. He is a God who keeps his Word. He will do what he says he's going to do. He will not fail to keep that promise. Not halfway, not partially, but fully, because he is Lord. And let all the congregation say, "amen!"

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, we thank you for your Word and for all the promises that you have made to us which are "yes" and "amen" in Jesus. Strengthen our faith this day, O Lord, so that we may trust always in you, knowing that you will do as you say. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.