

The Lord's Prayer: Amen.  
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First Presbyterian Church of Waukesha  
September 9, 2013

**Matthew 6:9-13 King James Version**

<sup>9</sup> After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

<sup>10</sup> Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

<sup>11</sup> Give us this day our daily bread.

<sup>12</sup> And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

<sup>13</sup> And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

When I was doing my chaplaincy internship, as is required in preparation for ministry, one of my colleagues was a man who had been in ministry for two decades in a church he began himself in a denomination I can no longer remember. I'll call him "Fred." In an intensive experience like the hospital setting, amid people grieving and dying especially, the group who walks with you is so important. I was lucky and my peers, I think, felt the same way as we trusted one another with a great deal of personal information. This man I spoke of, trusting us, asked us as a group to give him feedback in another area of his ministry outside the hospital. He had been told by his congregation that he interjected "Amen" into every sermon, as they delicately put it, a little more than necessary. He asked us to watch a video of a recent sermon and give him our feedback. As it turns out, his congregation was right. Rather than offering "Amen" at the end of sentences or for emphasis on a point of God's graciousness, "Amen" was Fred's "um." "When our Lord Jesus, Amen, taught the disciples, as they were, Amen, walking from one town, Amen, to another..." In the sermon we viewed were over fifty "Amens."

His "Amen" was, indeed, distracting from the message. More important than that, his "Amen" was unconscious, said without thought or deliberation. If I were to have chosen a second lesson for this morning, it would have been twelve verses from Deuteronomy 27. As William J. Carl III explains, "In Deuteronomy 27, Moses says that the Levites are to inform all the people they shall be cursed for making a graven image, dishonoring mother or father, moving their neighbors' stones, leading the blind astray, withholding justice from the stranger, the orphan, and the widow. After each admonition, Moses declares 'And all the people shall say, "Amen."'"<sup>1</sup> The purpose is that the people acknowledge what is being asked of them and agree. "Amen" is one of those few words that did not get translated from its original language in the Bible – it remains in its Hebrew form. If it had been translated, rough translations could be "I agree" or "so be it." Even Shakespeare uses it in this context in *Much Ado about*

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<sup>1</sup> William J. Carl, III. *The Lord's Prayer for Today* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press; 2006) p. 94.

*Nothing*, as Don Pedro affirms Claudio's love for Hero, saying "Amen, if you love her; for the lady is very well worthy."<sup>2</sup> Any way you look at it, "Amen" is not to be said without thought.

What I suspect we've learned this summer about the Lord's Prayer is that none of it is to be said without thought. The ending should be no different. And, if you were only halfway committed when saying the rest of prayer, saying "Amen" is the equivalent of jumping in with both feet. If any of you watched *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, you'll be familiar with Captain Jean-Luc Picard's command: "Make it so." Our "Amen" is a version of that – we're not telling God to make it so but we are, instead, vowing to do our part in making it so. Your kingdom come, I will work to make it so. Your will be done on earth, I will work to make it so. We forgive our debtors, I will work to make it so. Yours is the kingdom, I will work to make it so. And the power. And the glory. "Amen" to this prayer is "Amen" to all it contains.

As brothers and sisters under one who loves us immeasurably, we make known our willing surrender to God's plans with the word "Amen." In our "Amen" we are promising to reflect the holiness of God's name, giving God honor by speaking of the glory of God's kingdom, telling of God's power, making known to all people God's mighty deeds and glorious splendor. With "Amen" we vow again to let go of our plans that we might let God's kingdom come, around us, with us, through us. "Amen" affirms our trust in God's will and our **willingness** to seek it and follow it and live it. "Amen" means I am opening my eyes to see my brothers and sisters as God sees them.

I will go from my place of prayer to be the means that no one should be hungry and all should have enough. Wherever I am I will be open to receiving God's Word. I will keep working on forgiving others, even today when I am crabby and distracted and doubtful, I will keep trying. I will reach out my hand so you can lead me, Lord. I will give myself to your deliverance. I want to remember that you are my ruler, O God. I want to recognize your power above all else. I want to give you glory for all the good I recognize, and I hope to be more aware of the good that surrounds me. Amen. I will try. I give you my feeble but earnest promise that I will try to live up to all that I have prayed today. And I will return tomorrow to make my vows again, and to seek your strength to carry them out again. And the day after that. Every day.

William Carl says well that "Amen" is not the end of the prayer but only the beginning.<sup>3</sup> He, along with James Mulholland, likens the "Amen" vow to the wedding vow. He says, "Saying your 'Amen' to [the Lord's Prayer]...is like standing before your bride or groom, 'before God and these witnesses,' saying 'I do' and 'I will' to the wedding questions, then repeating your vows. It's a two-way

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<sup>2</sup> William Shakespeare. *Much Ado about Nothing*, Act I.

<sup>3</sup> William J. Carl, III. *The Lord's Prayer for Today* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press; 2006) p. 93.

street. Even as you are vowing to hallow God's name, watch for God's kingdom coming and God's will being done here on earth as it happens in heaven and forgiving others their sins against you, so God is vowing to sustain you with daily bread, to forgive you, to lead you away from temptation and deliver you from the slavery of sin in which evil ensnares you. But saying our vows is the easy part. The hard part is living up to them, just as in marriage."<sup>4</sup>

The hard part is living up to the "Amen." You already knew that didn't you? And so did Jesus. This prayer is not your prayer or my prayer but our prayer. Community gives us the strength when ours is failing, the courage when ours is lost. Community holds our faith for us when we need to set it aside in favor of doubt. Community surrounds us with love when we prefer anger. This prayer was not meant to be prayed by ourselves, just as this faith was not meant to be lived by ourselves. Maybe, today, when I say "Amen," I can live into it 83% but tomorrow I'll only manage 6%. That's okay because someone else will be having a 92% day. We keep at it together, pulling each other up when we need it and supporting the ones who serve as our examples. So when we say our "Amen," we are saying "I will work to make it so" AND we are saying "I will work to help others make it so." That can feel like an enormous task if we think the burden falls upon our shoulders alone. But we carry it together and, together, we do what we can. So we can say "Amen" not with fear or hesitation but with confidence that we join our "Amens" to a chorus beyond number. To that, I say, "Amen."

Let us pray: Lord, we agree. Lord, we will do our part to make it so. Lord, we will do our part to help others make it so. Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> William J. Carl, III. *The Lord's Prayer for Today* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press; 2006) p. 95.