

**,St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, Wisconsin
December 9, 2018**

**Series: "The Hopes and Fears of All the Years
Are Met in Thee Tonight"**

Our God Knows When to Speak Up

I want to begin with two stories. One from my childhood and the other from my children.

For those parents who have bored five and six-year-old boys and girls sitting next to them, I distinctly remember when I was that child. The pastor would drone on and on. Finally, a magic word was spoken. "Amen."

I didn't know what "Amen" meant. I thought it meant. "Stand up and stretch your legs."

Today I'm going to say "amen" a lot in this message. Be careful not to stand up when I say, "Amen" because the sermon won't be over.

So the good news for you parents with bored five and six-year-old boys and girls... The Holy Spirit does work miracles. Somehow he made this bored child into someone who loves Jesus and wants to live for him. Trust that the Holy Spirit is working that same miracle in the children sitting next to you.

So today, we will talk about what "Amen" really means, and how wonderful it is not just when we say "amen," but how special it is when God says, "Amen."

The second story is from my children. Joni and I followed in the pattern set by our parents and gave our children a quarter to put into the offering plate. What is a quarter for a bored five or six-year-old? A toy obviously!

So it comes as no surprise that more than one quarter fell to the linoleum floor during the church service. But one quarter will forever stand out in my mind. One of our boys managed to drop the quarter so that it landed on its edge and rolled up right in front of the lectern from which I was preaching. It went round and round. I tried to ignore, but finally I gave up and just watched it until it fell over. That one quarter became the focus of my attention... and of everyone else in the service.

Why am I sharing these stories? Because God's promises can be like one quarter.

God makes lots of promises, and it is easy for us to enjoy the fulfillment of those promises and take them for granted. But if one promise seems to fail, that attracts our attention.

You might be thinking, "I never feel like God's promises ever fail."

But perhaps there are some in your life too. When I asked my brothers and sisters at the Ministry Growth Team about this, here are few they suggested:

- “Train a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it.” Anyone here worried about the faith of your child?
- “My word will not return to me empty but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:11). Anyone ever wonder why you believe, but your brother or sister who heard the same gospel doesn’t? Why didn’t God’s word work for them?
- “All things work together for good to those who love God” (Romans 8:28). That is easy to say, but hard to see.
- “Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life” (Psalm 23:6). I’ve talked with enough Christian friends who seem only to have tragedy following them all the days of their lives.
- “Ask and it will be given to you” (Matthew 7:7). I’ve had lots of “slam-dunk” prayers that I think God should have answered in the way I was thinking, and nothing has ever happened? Did God’s word fail?

When you are dealing with the big things in life, it isn’t hard to wonder... God will you keep your promise?

That’s why I wanted to read with you Psalm 89. It is written by Ethan the Ezrahite, a wise man and a musician who lived at the time of Kings David and Solomon, and evidently into the sad years after their glorious reigns.

As you begin the psalm, it sounds like everything is just fine. It is only at the end of the psalm that you realize Ethan’s eyes are focused on that one quarter going round and round, that one promise of God that seems to have failed. Look ahead now if you’d like. Or let the suspense build as we read this psalm.

Ethan begins praising the LORD for his “Amen.” You see “amen” doesn’t mean, “stand up and stretch your legs” like I thought as a child. It means, “This is true! This is certain.”

Scan over Psalm 89 below and notice how often the word “faithfulness” comes up. Each time it is a translation for the word “amen.” The psalmist is praising God because when God speaks, God is saying, “Amen!” This is true. This is certain. You can count on it.

A Song of Praise to the LORD's Faithfulness (The LORD's Amen!)

- ¹ *I will sing of the LORD's great love forever;
with my mouth I will make your **faithfulness** known through all generations.*
- ² *I will declare that your love stands firm forever,
that you have established your **faithfulness** in heaven itself.*
- ³ *You said, "I have made a **covenant** with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant,*
- ⁴ *'I will establish your line forever and make your throne firm through all generations.'"*

God is faithful. He makes a promise and says, "Amen" at the end of it.

The Multitudes of Heaven Praise the LORD's Faithfulness

- ⁵ *The heavens praise your wonders, LORD, your **faithfulness** too,
in the assembly of the holy ones.*
- ⁶ *For who in the skies above can compare with the LORD?
Who is like the LORD among the heavenly beings?*
- ⁷ *In the council of the holy ones God is greatly feared;
he is more awesome than all who surround him.*
- ⁸ *Who is like you, LORD God Almighty?
You, LORD, are mighty, and your **faithfulness** surrounds you.*

The angels in heaven hear God saying, "Amen! I make a promise and you can count on it!"

The Created World Praises the LORD's Faithfulness

- ⁹ *You rule over the surging sea; when its waves mount up, you still them.*
- ¹⁰ *You crushed Rahab like one of the slain; with your strong arm you scattered your enemies.*
- ¹¹ *The heavens are yours, and yours also the earth; you founded the world and all that is in it.*
- ¹² *You created the north and the south; Tabor and Hermon sing for joy at your name.*
- ¹³ *Your arm is endowed with power; your hand is strong, your right hand exalted.*

Look around at the created world and remember that the God who had the power to create this world certainly has the power to fulfill every one of his promises.

The Church on Earth Praises the LORD's Faithfulness

- ¹⁴ *Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne;
love and **faithfulness** go before you.*
- ¹⁵ *Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you,
who walk in the light of your presence, LORD.*
- ¹⁶ *They rejoice in your name all day long; they celebrate your righteousness.*

17 For you are their glory and strength, and by your favor you exalt our horn.

18 Indeed, our shield belongs to the LORD, our king to the Holy One of Israel.

This is one of the reasons we gather as a church, to praise God that he makes a promise and then he is the one who says, “Amen!” at the end of it. God’s love and his “Amen” give us reason to gather to praise him.

The LORD’s Faithfulness in Promise

19 Once you spoke in a vision, to your faithful people you said:

“I have bestowed strength on a warrior; I have raised up a young man from among the people.

20 I have found David my servant; with my sacred oil I have anointed him.

21 My hand will sustain him; surely my arm will strengthen him.

22 The enemy will not get the better of him; the wicked will not oppress him.

23 I will crush his foes before him and strike down his adversaries.

24 My faithful love will be with him, and through my name his horn will be exalted.

25 I will set his hand over the sea, his right hand over the rivers.

26 He will call out to me, ‘You are my Father, my God, the Rock my Savior.’

27 And I will appoint him to be my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth.

*28 I will maintain my love to him forever, and my **covenant** with him will never fail.*

29 I will establish his line forever, his throne as long as the heavens endure.

Here is the promise that Ethan is hanging on. God has promised that David’s throne, his kingdom will last forever. Here is just a hint of the problem.

The LORD’s Faithfulness Even Toward the Ungodly

30 “If his sons forsake my law and do not follow my statutes,

31 if they violate my decrees and fail to keep my commands,

32 I will punish their sin with the rod, their iniquity with flogging;

*33 but I will not take my love from him, nor will I ever betray my **faithfulness**.*

*34 I will not violate my **covenant** or alter what my lips have uttered.*

35 Once for all, I have sworn by my holiness—and I will not lie to David—

36 that his line will continue forever and his throne endure before me like the sun;

37 it will be established forever like the moon, the faithful witness in the sky.”

The LORD promised that his promise, his covenant, was not dependent on the faithfulness of David’s descendants. Even if they failed, God would still speak his “Amen” and be faithful to his promise.

The LORD's Faithfulness – Where is it?

³⁸ But you have rejected, you have spurned, you have been very angry with your anointed one.

*³⁹ You have renounced the **covenant** with your servant
and have defiled his crown in the dust.*

⁴⁰ You have broken through all his walls and reduced his strongholds to ruins.

⁴¹ All who pass by have plundered him; he has become the scorn of his neighbors.

⁴² You have exalted the right hand of his foes; you have made all his enemies rejoice.

⁴³ Indeed, you have turned back the edge of his sword and have not supported him in battle.

⁴⁴ You have put an end to his splendor and cast his throne to the ground.

⁴⁵ You have cut short the days of his youth; you have covered him with a mantle of shame.

Here, finally, Ethan reveals the pain in his heart. God, you made this huge promise to David. I've hung my hopes on that promise. I heard your "Amen!" And yet you aren't keeping your promise! God, I don't get it!

Ok, here I want you to know just a little more about Ethan the Ezrahite. We know he was a musician appointed by King David, but we also know that he was wise. In fact, the author of the books of Kings praises King Solomon's wisdom by saying that Solomon was wiser even than Ethan the Ezrahite (1 Kings 4:31).

What is my point? Brothers and sisters, when it seems like promises of God are falling to the ground, you are not alone in that feeling. Even a wise man like Ethan struggled.

It is not wrong to admit your struggles. It is not wrong to admit that you have doubts. Let's be honest and just say that sometimes we just don't get what God is doing.

Just listen to Ethan's plea!

The LORD's Faithfulness – the Basis for Hope

⁴⁶ How long, LORD? Will you hide yourself forever? How long will your wrath burn like fire?

⁴⁷ Remember how fleeting is my life. For what futility you have created all humanity!

⁴⁸ Who can live and not see death, or who can escape the power of the grave?

*⁴⁹ Lord, where is your former great love, which in your **faithfulness** you swore to David?*

⁵⁰ Remember, Lord, how your servant has been mocked,

how I bear in my heart the taunts of all the nations,

⁵¹ the taunts with which your enemies, LORD, have mocked,

with which they have mocked every step of your anointed one.

How long! Read the psalms over the next few weeks and highlight how often the psalmists cry out, "How long!" How often don't disappointments and defeats make us like that five-year old

boy thinking, “How long is this sermon going to be? How long until I hear the pastor say, ‘Amen!’?”

Here is another interesting thing about the psalms. Often the psalm does not end with a “happily ever after ending. This psalm, as so many, end with an “I don’t get it” lament.

So very often God doesn’t give us the solution. He leaves us looking down at these promises that seemed to have failed.

Is that where it ends?

No, that takes us back to the covenant. Ethan clung to that one-sided covenant God had made with David. “You are going to have a son that will reign forever.” Ethan listens for the “Amen” that God speaks over that promise. God is faithful.

When you look down at the promise that seem to have failed, that is the time for us to go back to the one-sided covenant that God has made with us, the one-sided “new covenant” sealed with the blood of Christ. Remember in the institution of the Lord’s Supper, Jesus said, “This is the blood of the new covenant.” That new covenant is described in Jeremiah 31:33-34.

³³ “This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the Lord.

“I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts.

I will be their God, and they will be my people.

³⁴ No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the Lord.

“For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”

When you feel like God isn’t keeping his promises, go back and claim again God’s covenant with you. Claim again that he forgives you, that he is your God, and that he can give you that peace in your heart and mind that surpasses all understanding.

That’s what enables you to believe the impossible. The angel told Mary, “Not one word of God will fail” (Luke 1:37). Not one promise of God is going to fall to the ground.

How do I know? Because God kept the big one. He has sent his Son to be your Savior. And that makes every other promise of God certain... even though I can’t see it.

That's what the Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 1:20: "No matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ. And so through him the 'Amen' is spoken by us to the glory of God."

Ethan was struggling to believe that God was going to keep his promises. So he purposely went back to hear God's "Amen." Let's do the same. I suggest some Bible reading: "My Next Steps to Hear the LORD's Amen." My goal is simply to help you see that God has fulfilled his promises of the Savior. Go back and hear the Lord's Amen to this great promise. If our God has kept that promise, he certainly can and will keep all the others. "Not one word of God will fail." Amen.

My Next Steps to Hear the LORD's Amen

Read the promises of the Savior and their fulfillment:

- Monday: Isaiah 7:1-14 & Matthew 1:18-25
- Tuesday: Micah 5:1-5 & Matthew 2:1-12
- Wednesday: Isaiah 40:1-8 & Matthew 3:1-6
- Thursday: Isaiah 9:1-7 & Matthew 4:12-17
- Friday: Isaiah 53:4-6 & Matthew 8:14-17
- Saturday: Isaiah 6:1-13 & Matthew 12:15-21 & John 12:37-41