

**WHEN ALL THE PEOPLE OF GOD SAY,
“AMEN!”**

They set out from Rephidim and came into the wilderness of Sinai, and they encamped in the wilderness. There Israel encamped before the mountain, while Moses went up to God. The LORD called to him out of the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep my covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.”

So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him. All the people answered together and said, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do.” And Moses reported the words of the people to the LORD.

Exodus 19:2-8 (ESV)

This is the word of the Lord.

Here at the foot of the mountain, the Lord and Ruler of all the earth gathers His own for careful instruction and holy consecration. The instruction He gives are the 10 Commandments about to be delivered to Moses. The holy words of God come directly from the heavens above to the people of God below, but they come through the mediation of Moses. The holy consecration is that these descendants of Jacob are to be a treasured possession in the eyes of the Lord. Among all the people He has created in the earth, these Israelites are declared a holy nation, a people set apart for God’s own purpose and by God’s own choosing. Notice that they are not a kingdom of priests and a holy nation by their own choosing, nor from their own declaration. God is the One who does the choosing. God is the One who calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies (as we confess of the Creed).

It is significant for us to understand that this treasured possession and holy nation did not deliver themselves from the bondage of pharaoh, nor did they free themselves from the rod of Egyptian oppression. They were blessed with a great deliverer

in Moses, a figure of the greater Deliverer to come. Just as through Moses God bore one nation on eagles' wings and brought them unto Himself, even so Jesus bears up the whole world of peoples, that is to say, all nations, and draws them unto Himself as the Church beneath the cross. So this wilderness gathering of God's chosen people is not a gathering for its own purpose, for its own mission for good in the world. Israel is the prototype of a greater, future gathering at the foot of Mt. Calvary. There the whole nation of Israel is reduced to one in the person of Jesus Christ for the life of the world. He is the Chosen One of God, the greatest and highest of all high priests, our Holy One incarnate come down from heaven to redeem the earth by the forgiveness of sins. Jesus is the entire Commandments in their living, breathing form, manifest for all the world to see. What the people of old witnessed in their own mighty deliverance from Egyptian oppression, the apostles of our Lord witnessed in greater might through the deliverance of all peoples from sin, death, and the devil's power in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, as people of God, delivered and preserved on eagles' wings, it is our duty even now today in our 21st century to thank and praise, serve and obey His voice. His voice still speaks to us a living word in the pages of Holy Scripture. What He said to Israel of old, He still says also to us now in our own time and in our own day. And how is this speaking delivered, and how is it heard today? Many Christians listen for the voice of God to be heard immediately and directly. You pray to God for answers, and then look for signs or clues all around. You search your heart and probe your feelings for some spiritual discernment. Sometimes you wonder if He's even listening. Sometimes your compass is off, and the answer you assume is from God turns out to be disastrous. How can you be certain it's God's voice you're hearing? Perhaps you have been tricked.

Today's text reveals how God truly answers prayer, and how His Word comes to us. Nowhere does it tell us that Moses searched his own beating heart, or the elders sought out signs and wonders in the wilderness for spiritual discernment. Nowhere does it tell us that the people stared at their bellybuttons and expected some direct revelation. God chooses to work through means. He calls forth Moses as the go-between mediator. He is uniquely qualified to go between Himself and the people. The progression of our worship today remains—God speaking through the pastor to us. The priest is an intercessor who prays on behalf of the people to God, and the answer comes through the priest back to the people. This is what happens in the Divine Service. When the pastor faces the congregation, he is bringing a word of God to the peo-

ple. When he faces the altar, he is speaking on behalf of the people to God. God works through these means to make Himself known to us. “These are the words that you [Moses] shall speak to the people of Israel...” (verse 6b). Moses is a type of Christ who was to come. Moses points us to Jesus who prays to the Father for us sinners. Just as Moses called together the elders of the people and delivered God’s Word to them, so today the Lord of the Church calls, gathers, and sends forth His modern-day elders. These are the pastors called by the congregation to serve and speak, to care for God’s kingdom of priests and His holy nation. They are not called to speak their own words, to bring their own opinions, their own feelings to bear, or their own hearts to decipher what God is saying. Preaching is not an exercise in the pastor’s theological aptitude. It’s not speech-making, nor is it a platform for debate. Preaching isn’t pastoral axe-grinding or an opportunity for the pastor to vent his frustration or personal displeasure. The sermon should never be a preaching down to the people, but a preaching for pastor and people. Preaching is a word of God for the people to hear and believe. It is a means of grace both in the Law and in the Gospel not only for the congregation but also for the pastor himself.

The response to God’s voice spoken to Moses, and from Moses to the elders, and from the elders to the people is a most fascinating study. Our text takes us to verse 8 where holy Scripture says, “All the people answered together and said, ALL THAT THE LORD HAS SPOKEN WE WILL DO. And Moses reported the words of the people to the LORD.” The holy nation, this kingdom of priests, God’s treasured possession, gave their AMEN to Moses. As people of God’s Word, we do the same here in our worship. In the old Lutheran hymnal (some of you may remember), the last verse of each hymn ended in a boisterous “Amen.” Literally this Hebrew derivative means “yea, yea, let it be so.” So the “Amen” belongs to all the people...it belongs to you. The pastor prays it as one sinner among many on behalf of himself and the people he serves, but foremost it belongs to you, dear Christian friends as believers. What God says in His Word is given to us for our good and for our deliverance. What His voice booms forth from the heavens is binding on earth. “Amen” is our ascent to God’s voice of command and His Lordship not only over eagles and their wings, but also over us—all of us, all the time. “We will do all that the Lord has spoken,” the people said.

And did they? And do we? No. While Moses is up on the mountain receiving the holy words of God, the people are below crafting their own golden god-calf. So much for doing all the Lord has spoken. And don’t begin to think it’s any different for

us. In church we sing and say “Amen!” but the workweek doesn’t work out well for us. We are sinners by nature and unclean. Faith grows weak. God’s voice is crowded out by other voices. We say “amen” with our mouths, but our hearts and hands and feet do another thing. It’s true of you, and it’s true of me.

So what’s the use? Should we just quit listening to God, quit praying, quit the faith altogether? No. Sin and guilt worked in the conscious candidly show our need for a Savior. We need a Mediator more than ever before. We need Jesus, crucified and risen again for us, to deliver us from this body of death. And amazingly He does! Amazingly He remains faithful when we flag in our faith and fall flat on our faces. Remember how I said at the beginning that God Himself is the One who chooses. He calls. He gathers. He enlightens. He sanctifies. He declares us His own people for His own possession. Therefore, trust Him to forgive, renew, and strengthen you in the “amen” you pray. Hear His Word over and over again even when it is a hard word to hear. Read, mark, learn, and take God’s Word to heart because only then can you and I embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life.

On this very text of which I preach, the Reverend Doctor Senkbeil instructs us with these timely words: “Among us it is just as it was with Israel at Sinai. Therefore God convened His people in solemn assembly by person invitation through Moses... We should note that this convocation was called by God for the purpose of hearing God; the Lord gathered them together by His Word so that they could hear His Word. There on Sinai, amid fire and smoke and earthquake, the Lord Himself summoned His people to solemn assembly and spoke with His servant Moses. This assembly was brought about by God’s Word in order to hear God’s Word” (Dying to Live, pg. 124, 125). That is precisely why we are gathered here today. God is speaking to us, and we are listening as He speaks. Will you give your amen to what He says, or withhold it? “For now, just as then,” Senkbeil writes, “God creates a community by His Word in order to hear His Word. It is a holy convocation; an audience with the living God. And so we must realize the public liturgy is like no other public gathering” (Dying To Live, pg. 127).

Here at the foot of the mountain the Lord and Ruler of the heavens and the earth gathers His own for careful instruction and holy consecration. The words He gives are the 10 Commandments, and the consecration He pronounces defies all human logic. He declares us a holy nation, a chosen people through the blood of the Lamb. And all the people of God say, “Amen.”