

MT. ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
 Confirmation Sunday
 4/28/19
 Genesis 15:1-6
GOD'S PROMISE TO YOU
 Pastor Scott Bergemann

Everything is going to be ok. Tell that to a panicked family who is about to miss their plane on a vacation trip to Florida. I am talking about my family earlier this week! We got held up at security because they didn't want to give us back our two car seats. When we finally got them back, we had to run what seemed like a mile down the concourse. Everyone else had gone onto the plane and they said, "Ok you can go on the plane, but you can't take your carry-on luggage and your car seats with you. The

plane is full." Meanwhile our kids are having all this fun looking at the planes and saying hi to everyone. They are not worried because their mom has told them, Everything is going to be ok. So despite the circumstances, they hear what their mom says, and they are fine.

When we say everything is going to be ok to our kids or loved ones, we do so knowing that we are not in control and don't know the future. But God does. He is in control. And we know that we will be safe in his hands, despite what the outward circumstances look like. This would summarize Abraham's life, trusting in God's Word and promises. And confirmands, this would summarize today for you as you stand on this threshold of looking where God has taken you by grace up to this point and looking ahead into the ever turbulent path of life. Resting securely in the promises God makes to you today, for they go wherever you do. But wait a second. Isn't this about you! Isn't this confirmation day about you making a promise to God? And saying that you will not deny the Lord even if it means death? Certainly that is involved in the confirmation ceremony. But that's not really the point of today.

It is all about being zealous for all the right answers, and studying hours on end, and getting good grades, and being able to stand up in front of everyone and say, I did it! Look at me! The apostle Paul (who accomplished so much) would say No. For all his accomplishments he would consider them rubbish in comparison to knowing Christ and all he has done. For without him we have nothing. With him everything. Confirmation means strengthening. Not you strengthen you. But God strengthening you. Through his Word and promises. Grace has gotten you to this point. You could say your confirmation is the Amen that you say to all the promises God has made you. Amen let it be so. That's exactly what our text says what Abraham did. He said Amen to God.

That's the Hebrew word translated "believed" here. **"Abraham believed the Lord and it was credited to him as righteousness."** Abraham said, "Amen. I am driven away from all my human thoughts and efforts. I hear what you are saying, dear Lord, and I believe it. I am taking you at your word. You made a promise and I say, Amen."

When the word of the Lord came to Abraham in this vision that we heard earlier, it was the fifth time that God had communicated with him. You may recall that God told Abraham to move from his homeland, at age 75, to the land of Canaan. With this command God also made a bunch of promises to Abraham: he would be given a great land, his descendants would become a great nation, and through one particular descendant, all nations on earth would be blessed. In what must have been a surprise move to his family, Abraham took God at his word and moved. Abraham said Amen.

But ever since the move there had been one set-back after another. You'll have to read Genesis 12-14 on your own to find out all the details, but doesn't that always seem to be the case? You go out on a limb and do something for the Lord, but there doesn't seem to be any reward in it. You refuse to indulge in premarital sex and lose your boyfriend because of it. You stay away from alcohol abuse or drugs and you are made fun of. You spend time with your family or your church and you lose out on some earnings or don't get as much playing time or get passed over for a promotion. And when anything like this happens, you start thinking God is at fault, wondering if you should have believed him in the first place.

When something similar happened to Abraham, we are told, **"After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: 'Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.'**" There were no fireworks, no miracles, nothing crazy. God simply communicated through his word to Abraham, and repeated his promises.

That God told Abraham was his shield and reward would have been comforting, to be sure. God promises his presence, his provision, and his protection. God promises us the very same thing when he says he will never leave you. He tells us to pray for our daily bread and then assures us he'll take care of our every need. And he reminds us that he will protect us with his mighty power, even sending angels to watch over us. And even if something bad happens, it will all work out for our good.

We have heard these promises before. Do we believe them? I mean, really, truly believe that God will provide and protect? If you lost your job would you believe in God's promises of providing for you, or do you believe him only when you receive your paycheck? If your car broke down in the middle of nowhere, do you believe God's promises to protect and preserve or only when help finally arrives?

Here's the inside scoop on his promise to Abraham. You see, in all of his messages, God always made sure to mention Abraham's descendants, his offspring. It had been ten years now since God first told this senior citizen that he and his wife would have a baby of their own. When he was telling Abraham – the childless Abraham – that he was his shield, he was saying, "Despite how things look, I will be your shield and protect you and make sure that my word to you is gold. I will see that my promises to you come true. You are going to have to trust me on this."

The kind of God that you and I have is not a God who shows up right after we won the lottery and says, "See, I have provided for you." He's not the type of divine being who only arrives after we won first place and says, "It was my power that allowed you to win." He is a God who comes to us in his Word when we failed to make the team, when we lost a best friend, when our car broke down right after learning we needed to have surgery, and tells us, "Despite what it looks like, in spite of these horrible circumstances, I am not going to quit on you. I am still your God. I will take care of you. I will make sure my promises to provide and protect you will come true. You're going to have to trust me on this."

Abraham believed God. But in his initial fears, before God spoke, Abraham was in his 80's now and there was no seed, and he had resigned himself to thinking he would have to go about the custom of the day, legally adopting his servant as his offspring, though it wouldn't be his own flesh and blood.

The word of the Lord came to Abraham again, and wiped that silly notion away. **"This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir.' He took him outside and said, 'Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.'"**

Whether Abraham was a visual learner or not, the point was driven home pretty clear. "You will have a son. I know you're old. I know that things aren't looking humanly possible that you and your wife will have any children. But you will have children and grandchildren. Tons of them; a sky full. I have spoken this word of promise to you. Take me at my word and believe what I have said. Even without an amen from you they are going to happen. I have spoken! Any reward you get for your accomplishments on earth is rubbish compared to the reward I will win for you through my Son that will come from your descendants. He will give you a victory that will win you and all the family of believers the promised land of heaven. Now that's proof that I am your shield, your very great reward. Amen Abram! Amen Jade! Amen Tyler! Amen Lauren! Amen Kenny!

And don't think Amen is the end. Even though that means the end of the sermon. And you are probably happy when I say Amen because that means it's over and it's done! No when I say amen, it's the beginning. The beginning and start of a new week of God's promises as you walk out those doors. This is no end, but only the beginning of your life in Christ. Don't lose that Amen, yes Lord let it be so with your promises. Don't lose that Amen like sadly others have who have sat where you have sat. We start to lose it when we stop saying amen. When we stop praying. When we don't see a need for God and his daily help and guidance in our lives. We stop praying because we don't have time. We don't say Amen because we count on our own accomplishments. And we thank ourselves for our own goodness instead of remembering to thank the one who has given us life and breath and all things. We lose the Amen when we lose the Word in our life. And we think, "Ah Jesus is my Savior, that's good enough for me when I die. That's a good insurance card in my pocket. So now I can just do what I want and live how I want and I will be ok. Don't believe that lie of hell.

Even though at times we forget to say Amen because we are focused on the things of this world. Remember the greatest Amen to have ever happened that covers all those times we forgot to say it. After God had fulfilled his promise to Abram and gave him descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky, too many to count (you and me are his descendants by faith), God sent that seed who crushed the head of the devil under the weight of the cross that carried all our sins. Satan was crushed, sins were removed and forgiven by Jesus' blood, the righteousness he won and achieved by his perfect life he credits to us who believe, and the Amen? Well the greatest Amen is his resurrection on the 3rd day. Yes, the Lord's promises are true. He is risen! Amen let it be so. We are shielded by the cross from our sins and death we deserved. Rewarded with eternal life thanks to Jesus glorious Amen.

Because of Jesus' cross and his glorious Amen, our Amens will never end! They are countless because of the Lord's countless blessings and promises. Parents, teach your kids that. How? Don't just pray with them or read to them a devotion. Hand them the baton of faith and say, "Now say your own prayers to God, without me. Now read a devotion on your own, without me. Now spend your own time in the Word with God, without me. Because before you know it, they will be out of the house and on their own. Do not be afraid. God is their shield. God is their great reward too. And when the turbulence of life comes and we fall into Satan's traps, let us remind each other, as a loving family of faith, of God's Amen that is our rescue. He is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia. Amen.