

Devotion – Nineteenth Week after Pentecost

Rev. Jeanne Simpson

While I'm out of town – this week in Croatia and Slovenia, visiting Roman ruins and alpine lakes – I'm thinking of you in worship. I hope Heawoon has been welcomed and has a good first week of practice with the choir. As I think of worship, I'd like to look at two words we use in the service that come directly from the Hebrew: Amen and Hallelujah.

We use "Amen" at the end of prayers, at the end of many hymns, and at times when we want to chime in with approval or applause over something someone says or sings. But what does it really mean? Unlike "selah" that we see at the end of a lot of Psalms (scholars think it was a musical direction, but no one really knows), we know what this word means. "Amen" comes from a group of words referring to what is true, trustworthy, reliable, and faithful. Another word related to it describes solid, secure ground into which a tent peg can be hammered. The word is also used to describe reliable sources of water. So in a land where solid, secure ground and reliable sources of water were at risk at times, this word, "Amen," means that the ground and water are trustworthy. This word implies that we believe what we've heard, we are committed to living in a way to make that prayer come true, and that God is dependable, reliable, and faithful. Our prayers remind us that God is like an ever-flowing stream of life-giving water.

Jesus uses the word "Amen" over a hundred times in the gospels. But Jesus usually says it *before* he's about to say something that is really important. Some modern translations translate "Amen" to "Truly I tell you." We would translate that in today's language to "Seriously! Listen up – this is for real! No joke!" or "Hey, I've got something important to tell you, and it's the gospel truth!" The meaning is the same – what Jesus is getting ready to say is trustworthy, true, and reliable.

"Hallelujah" is another Hebrew word we use often in worship. It means "praise (*hallel*) the Lord (*yah/iah*)." It shows up over 150 times in the Bible. Praise means acknowledging how great someone or some action is. God is praised, especially in the Psalms, for God's saving grace. We use this term in worship when we sing, dance, give thanks, or praise God's goodness. It is usually done with other people and implies happiness and rejoicing. It is our joyful acknowledgement that "God is good all the time."

I leave you with this verse from Psalm 145:8 – "God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love."

Amen and Hallelujah!

Jeanne