

# I'M IN WITH THE IN CROWD!

Sermon, July 29, 2018

Texts: Selections from John 6 (including 56-69); Ephesians 6:10-20

If you have been around awhile, you are familiar with the little responsive "liturgy" initially taught us by the late Rev. Dr. Tyler Johnson, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Newport for over thirty years, and who after his retirement worshipped with us frequently and supplied our pulpit on occasion. We slightly amended this liturgy by adding another line approximately five years and eleven months ago.

"God is good."  
"ALL THE TIME."  
"All the time."  
"GOD IS GOOD."  
"Amen?"  
"I'M IN!"

If you are new here and have heard this little liturgy, you might have wondered what it's all about ... well, today I opted to do a slightly **AMEN**-ded summer sermon rerun to inform any new to our congregation in recent years (*as well as those who may have missed that Sunday in 2012*), so you can be a true part of the "**I'M IN**" crowd here, and to remind all the rest of us of some really basic, but important, things. (*The sermon title is a bit of a pun drawn from Dobie Gray's 1963 hit, "I'm In With The In Crowd"... Partial lyrics: --"I'm in with the in crowd, I go where the in crowd goes. I'm in with the in crowd, And I know what the in crowd knows Any time of the year, don't you hear? Dressin' fine, makin' time ... We breeze up and down the street, we get respect from the people we meet. They make way day or night, They know the in crowd is out of sight - "*)<sup>1</sup>

There are a few Biblical words that almost defy exact translation, so much so that translators over the centuries have, for the most part, left the words untranslated and have simply put in the phonetic spelling ... two words in particular are the words "Hallelujah" and "Amen." In some translations, "Hallelujah" is translated as "Praise the Lord;" as it is thought to come from the root Hebrew word ("Hallel") "to praise" and the first syllable of God's holy name ("Jahweh"). I'm told, however, this isn't an entirely accurate translation; no one is absolutely certain what "Hallelujah" means ... so again, in many Bibles it is left untranslated and spelled out phonetically. The Hebrew word "Amen" has also remained largely untranslated down through the centuries ... you pick up a Greek, German, French, English, Swahili, Japanese or Rhode Islandese Bible and you will find the phonetic spelling of the Hebrew word "Amen." Various translations over the years for "Amen" have been, "So be it", or "So it is," or "It is true," or "Let it BE true." Well, if you were here six years ago, you may remember my favorite definition or translation of Amen, something I learned from an insight shared by the president of Cedarville University six years ago ... at Dr. Brown's opening chapel talk Monday morning in Steve's first week of college, he suggested:

**"AMEN" MEANS "I'M IN."**

When you say "Amen," you are saying "I'm in!" (*Think of it as saying 'Amen' with a Southern drawl.*) Think of it ... usually when you say "Amen," what are you doing? You're closing a prayer, or agreeing with a point; but it's also a response, a way of confirming what's been said, with personal commitment: *"I agree! I'm in!" "Amen, yes; I'm in, I'm in!"* Since that Sunday almost six years ago, we added something to the Rev. Dr. Tyler Johnson's response: *"God is good." "ALL THE TIME." "All the time." "GOD IS GOOD." "Amen?" "I'M IN!"*

**Amen!** I'm in! I'm ready to suit up, as Paul admonishes in our Epistle reading today ... I'm ready to put on my armor and stand for the Cause and my Captain, to advance the faith, because "I'm in!" I'm ready to get my helmet of salvation on my head and my breastplate of righteousness in place and my belt of truth firmly buckled and hold up my shield of faith, and I want to get good with using and wielding the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, because "I'm in!" There's more than a sermon in itself here, but think of the intentional imagery of Paul: I need to get my **helmet of salvation** on; in short, I need to make sure my head is protected, that my *"head is on straight"* with the knowledge of what God's holiness and His salvation and grace is all about, that I am saved by His grace and therefore I do belong to Him, that I am called to **protect** my brain and to use it well in His service. I also need to get my **breastplate of righteousness** in place ... that's the part of the armor that covers the heart, which implies that my heart needs to be right, it needs to be kept safe, for a righteous and guarded heart is a strong protection! Yes, I fail and I stumble and I sin, but I need to deal with it and get my heart right and my head on straight with God through grace and I need to do all I can to live righteously ... with my belt of Truth firmly buckled so my pants don't fall down and trip me up! As I said six years ago, I know half-fallen pants seem to be a fad these days, which I CAN'T STAND ... **Man up!** Pull up your pants, get a hold of a true Belt, put that Belt on and buckle it tight! Truth is **so** central to our faith; make sure it has a firmly buckled grasp of our middle holding *everything* in

<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qF7KU50IY34>

place and keeping us from looking like buffoonish clowns! (*This, too, is a sermon in itself, but when we start playing fast and loose with the truth, when truth is compromised or ignored or left in some "drawer" someplace, everything falls down or falls apart and we really do become foolish, buffoonish!.*) Then carry the **shield** of a solid, tempered, weathered and tested faith, and learn to "wield" ... i.e., learn to properly know, use and apply ... the sword of the Spirit, which Paul tells us is the Word of God! Then put on and lace up your Gospel shoes, "shoes" that enable you to walk and run and advance to give good news to a world that so desperately needs to see someone genuinely and truthfully and sincerely walking in this faith, the only faith that can lead to genuine peace, and all the while you are doing this continue to pray pray pray! Pray like it all depends on God, but work like it all depends on you! **AMEN?** (*"I'm in!"*)

In our Gospel reading we read selected verses from John 6, especially the closing verses. In this chapter is the feeding of the five thousand which we looked at last week in Mark's gospel; as mentioned last time, of all the many miracles performed by Jesus in His earthly sojourn it's the **only** miracle other than the Resurrection told in all four Gospels, a fact which by implication alone should tell us it's a pretty important miracle ... and make no mistake about it, the Gospel authors want to make clear that it was a miracle. This hungry crowd got fed by Jesus. In Verse 15 John tells us they were ready to come and make Him king; at long last here was somebody who can take care of their hunger, somebody who will meet their needs. But Jesus doesn't go with this agenda. There's a sermon in itself here, but He runs away from it, off into a mountain, because simply meeting human appetites and satisfying our desires isn't exactly what His kingship is all about!

The crowd eventually finds him back in Capernaum and say, "*Rabbi, when did you get here?*" Jesus responds by saying, "*You are looking for Me not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill.*" In verse 32, Jesus says, "*My Father gives the true bread from heaven.*" Apparently not fully understanding His implications, the crowd responds, "*Sir, give us this bread.*" Then, Jesus cuts to the chase and says, "*I AM the Bread of Life.*" From here to the end of the chapter, it becomes clear these are not the words the crowd wanted to hear. They want Jesus to provide for their needs. They want Jesus to satisfy their appetites. But Jesus says there is a whole lot more to all of this than just meeting our temporary hungers. He is not the bread giver; He *is* the Bread. He is not the means to an end, He *is* the end. He is not our Savior because we have use for Him in our lives. He is our Savior because in His sacrificial love we find salvation; in Him alone our deepest needs are met. Then He goes on to speak hard things; at first blush He even seemed to be talking about eating His body and drinking His blood. Some are probably thinking, "*What is this?*" Apparently, many of them really weren't interested in trying to figure out what He was really saying. Perhaps, though, there were some who did begin to understand the gravity of what He was saying. From the vantage point of history we know the price of salvation was His broken body and shed blood; He *will* give His very flesh and blood to save others. The more insightful ones may be thinking, "*What, then, will He ask of us in return? Where will He ask us to go? What will He ask us to give? What will this grace demand of us? It all just sounds too much.*"

At the end of the chapter the crowd was gone. A congregation of well over five thousand has dwindled to a small handful of twelve or so stalwarts (*so much for "effective church growth strategy"*). Many of the fickle followers had turned away; they were no longer going to follow Jesus ... probably because He would not give them what they wanted, or perhaps they didn't understand what He was talking about, it all seemed too hard, and/or too confusing, or too demanding; so, they left. Jesus then turned to those who remained, and said, "*Will you go also?*" In what is one of his shining moments, Peter replies, "*Lord, to whom would we go? We've come to believe that you are the Holy One of God.*"

And there it is. Basically, Peter is saying, "Amen." "**LORD, WE'RE STILL IN!**" They are "in", no matter what.

As a pastor, I can appreciate Peter's response. Over the years I've seen many people come and go in their journeys of faith and levels of commitment to Jesus Christ and His church. We have a fairly full sanctuary this morning, but if all the people who have wandered in and out of these doors over the past twenty-three years were here this morning, we would have a crowd numbering in the thousands as well! I've watched boys and girls go through our Sunday School, never become part of our youth ministry programs, and are never seen again. I've seen members of our youth programs graduate from high school and disappear, only sometimes returning when they have children of their own (*and probably realizing they need HELP with this awesome, intimidating task of parenting!*). I've watched people bring their children to Sunday School and even church, but then drift away as the children leave school. I've seen people who come for six months, a year or longer and then for whatever reasons fail to return. I have seen people who have spent ten, twenty even thirty years in the church, who have some disagreement with another member or with me as the pastor, or they'll have some loss or crisis or tragic event happen in their lives, and are never seen again. But I've also been privileged ... very privileged ... to see many people, like many of you here this morning filling this sanctuary on a hot summer day, who are "in" for the long haul, no matter what.

What a treasure, what a blessing, what an encouragement to me and to others are those of you who are still "in," in for the long term, as followers of Jesus Christ. You have a special kind of faith, a faith that says "Amen." A faith that says, "I'm in." I'm *still* in. Because you have learned

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