

Fellowship in the Gospel

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[0:00] All right, can you hear me okay? All right, I'll take a thumbs up, that's good. I hope everyone had an enjoyable Christmas.

I was glancing over some old communications from earlier this year, and I was reminded of how things have changed.

Back in March, we had a conversation about how we were going to leave the doors open at the school so the people didn't have to touch the handles, and we were going to hand out communion with gloves on.

And in my mind, I remember thinking, this is pretty good. We're putting some good, safe things in place for whatever is going to happen. Little did we know how much things were going to change.

And so I was just thinking through how we were at Kennedy Longfellow, and then they closed, and we went to Rent24 and the police station, kind of a combo deal for a little bit.

[1:06] And then we broke into small groups, and we met in houses, and then we came here to Hope and then Starlight, and then we find ourselves back here at Hope.

And it's been a wild year. I say that because this is the end of 2020, and so I think it's helpful to look back over it.

And I want to commend you, our church, for your flexibility through this difficult year and your determination to want to gather together as a church.

And I don't mean physically gather together, so don't hear that. Whether it's a couple dozen here or a group over there or an individual in their house, meeting together like this is difficult.

And so I appreciate the lack of fighting and divisiveness, and I appreciate the patience and understanding you guys have in fighting to meet together, whatever that looks like.

[2:10] And I'm thankful for Sean because I know how much time he's put into looking to how policies have changed. And there was a time where it seemed to change daily, and it took up a lot of his time.

And he sought to make it as comfortable as possible for as many people to be accommodating, to do what was right by both what was happening with the government and also us as people in the church and to do it biblically.

And so I thank Sean for that. You guys and Sean, us together, I'm grateful for what God has brought together, and we need each other.

And I say this because it's true, but I say it also because it goes so well with Philippians and what Paul is doing with a church that he started back in Philippi.

Last week, Sean brought us the word and reminded us of our great example of Jesus Christ, his example of humility that he showed when he died on the cross for us, and how we should live as lights in the world because of that.

[3 : 28] And three characteristics, if you remember, that Sean brought out were unity, humility, and perseverance. Before we move in our passage tonight, I wanted us to be reminded that those three characteristics, they can't happen by themselves.

I mean, they're not individualistic in nature. Unity can't be unity unless there's people involved, right? Humility and perseverance can't happen unless there's people around us.

And so I want all of us to remember that those characteristics are characteristics that happen in our partnership in the gospel. And that's what we're going to be looking at tonight.

Partnership in the gospel, or as the title says, fellowship in the gospel. What does that look like? And how do we do it? In our passage this evening, we'll read it in just a minute, but we'll be looking at Paul's travel plans.

We'll see two examples that Paul is going to give us so that we can observe and we can examine and ultimately follow these examples that he gives us.

[4 : 49] Two examples of gospel partnership. That is, Christ-centered service for one another. That's the partnership we're talking about.

When it's done for Christ and not an inward focus, then it'll have those characteristics that Sean preached about last week. The unity, the humility, the perseverance. So let's pray, and then we'll read our passage together.

Amen. Lord, we pray that you would meet us this last Sunday of the year.

We pray that you would speak to us through these few verses. Help us to see the example that Paul has for us to see here in Philippians.

Encourage us, Lord, through your word, and we pray that you would correct us where we need to be corrected. May we not waste this service. May we not waste the last few days of this year.

[5 : 56] May we plan not to waste next year in our service to one another, in our glory to you. And we ask these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. Philippians chapter 2. If you would turn with me or flip in your device, Philippians chapter 2, we're going to read verses 19 through 30.

Verse 19. I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. For I have no one like him who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare.

For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father, he has served with me in the gospel.

I hope, therefore, to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me. And I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also. I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need.

[7 : 12] For he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. Indeed, he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.

I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again and that I may be less anxious. So receive him in the Lord with all joy and honor such men, for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.

So we see travel plans for Timothy, possible travel plans for Paul and some other guy named Epaphroditus. Why is he telling the church at Philippi this, and what is its importance to us?

I'm sure as we read through this passage, you see that there's more there than just travel plans. See, for these guys, as it should be for all Christians, traveling is living.

Paul isn't just talking about their travel itinerary, he's talking about their life. And we get to get a glimpse into how they live life.

[8 : 35] Their traveling is an aspect of their life for Christ in service to others. So here's the breakdown of, you see it up on your screen, of what we're going to be looking at tonight.

So the example of Timothy, the first half. The second half is the example of Epaphroditus. And then we'll spend a few minutes on you and me, our church, and thinking of 2021.

One question that came to my mind, and maybe yours, is why does Paul give us two more examples to read about?

I mean, we've been given the example of Jesus Christ, the prime perfect example. And next we have Paul. He wasn't Jesus, but Jesus came to Paul, right?

Like physically came to Paul. Like Jesus came and busted into Paul's life and gave him a godly smack as he's going in the wrong direction.

[9 : 42] And Paul turns around and with that same fire in his soul, he spends the rest of his life for Christ. Obviously we need Jesus.

We live for him. He died for us. There's no gospel without Jesus. And we need examples like Paul, right? But if you're like me, sometimes there's a disconnect.

I'm sure Paul knew this and probably it's one of the reasons why he gives us this passage. He gives us two examples. Two examples of people who, in my mind, are a little bit more average, normal, day-to-day people that I feel like I can connect with a little bit.

That's where most of us are. But I think we all can be a Timothy. We can all be an Epaphroditus. And I'm not putting them down saying that they didn't serve wholeheartedly like Paul.

But I think you know what I'm talking about. Sometimes Paul can feel like someone that is kind of untouchable after Christ, but a good example to follow. Paul says this to the church at Corinth in 1 Corinthians 4.

[11 : 03] He says, So Paul knows this, and he's helping us, these churches that he is creating, that we're all to follow Christ.

And we're to follow and imitate Paul because Paul is doing the same thing. And we're to follow Timothy and Epaphroditus. As long as we're all imitating what Christ wants us to be doing, we're going in the right direction.

So Paul has given us just grab points to hold on to as we go through life. Paul's planting churches for Christ.

He's teaching Timothy. There's other brothers and sisters who are learning, hearing about Christ. They're becoming followers of Christ. They're living for Christ. Day-to-day, walking out the Christian life.

All of this. It's all about one big mission for the glory of God and the building of His church. Let's look at verse 19.

[12 : 21] Paul knows that God is sovereign and is in control.

He's not sure how things are going to work out. He hopes he gets out of prison. He hopes that he's not going to die there. But he's hoping to send Timothy back to Philippi so that you are encouraged by him and I will be encouraged by hearing news from you.

He knows that Timothy is that communication line between him and this church that he loves back in Philippi. So before we go any further, who's Timothy?

Some of us may not know the background or who Timothy is, so just briefly. We'll read more about this as we get into Acts, hopefully next year.

But Acts chapter 16, the first three verses say this. Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. This is before the church of Philippi has even started.

[13 : 33] So just a little bit of perspective. Paul came to Derbe and to Lystra. There was a disciple there. His name was Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was Greek.

He was well spoken of by the brothers in Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him. And so he took him. He circumcised him because of the Jews that were in those places, for they knew his father was a Greek.

I won't get into all of what is entailed there. We'll get into that when we get into Acts. But Paul wanted young Timothy.

We don't know exactly, but most likely Timothy was around 18, 22 years of age at this point. Paul and Silas are going on a missions trip. They want to spread the gospel. They're looking to start a church somewhere.

They're not sure where. And Paul wants to take Timothy with him. So we know Timothy was young.

[14 : 40] He was a Christian and he had a good reputation. It says here that brothers, that is Christian believers from these neighboring cities of Lystra and Iconium, they spoke well of him.

To me, that means not only was he likable, but he was involved with things outside of his immediate circle. When people in other cities, other churches know of him, he was involved.

He served. He did things. That was before he traveled with Paul. What does Paul say about him now? We can read that in verse 20 through 22.

For I know no one like him who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare, for they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father, he has served with me in the gospel.

Timothy was there in Philippi when the church was started, so they knew him and he knew them. Paul says, I don't have anyone like him. Timothy was like Paul's son, his protegee in the Lord, in the ministry.

[15 : 54] And it's important to remember here also that humility is not lost on these guys. As we look at the beginning of this letter, notice it says in verse 1, Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus.

Paul didn't say, Paul and my helper, or Paul and my student, servants of Jesus Christ. They're peers. They're on the same level working the mission for Christ.

Paul says that Timothy was genuinely concerned about others. Many people that Paul worked with were not like this, at least that's what he says here.

There was an aspect to their service that was self-serving in nature. They helped in the ministry, they served, but there's an interest in self that seems to be greater than their interest in Christ.

They served with an agenda. And I wonder, as we look at this, if there are times where we struggle with that as well. If we come into the church and we serve, or we get involved with different things, and there's more of an agenda on self than there is on Christ, and we don't just genuinely serve caring for one another in any way that we feel God wants us to serve instead of finding somewhere that suits our needs.

[17 : 31] Serving with an interest for Christ. Because notice in these verses how Paul ties the concern of others to what Christ is interested in.

It says in verse 20, For I have no one like him who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare, for they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.

So we see this connection of others seeking their interest where Timothy is seeking other people, and that lines up with what Jesus Christ's interests are.

And so we need to be careful that what we are in line with is Jesus Christ and not ourselves. Let's move on.

Verse 23 and 24. I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go for me, and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also.

[18 : 45] Most likely when Paul says as soon as I see how it will go for me, he's referring to getting out of prison. Now I don't know for sure what the reason is why he wants Timothy there.

Maybe it's for physical support. Maybe for court reasons it's helpful to have Timothy there. Maybe it's just to encourage him while he's in prison. I'm not sure.

But we know that Timothy is loved and very special to Paul. And so at the same time, we know how much Paul wants to send him back to the church and encourage them.

So you can easily see this tension between what would help Paul and what would help the church. Timothy, a young man living for Christ and genuinely concerned for others.

So as we move into the next section, we see in Timothy these characteristics of humility, of unity and perseverance. Paul can't send Timothy yet.

[19 : 50] He still wants to encourage the church. So his other option that he sees is Epaphroditus, who is with him and his goal is still the same. I want to encourage the church and I can encourage Epaphroditus if I can send him back.

So we pick it up in verse 25. I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier and your messenger and minister to my need.

For he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. Epaphroditus was one of Paul's brothers. Now not brother from the same mother, brother in the Lord, right?

Brother with the same heavenly father. Some people say, well, yes, but aren't we all children of God and we're made in his image? Yes, that's true.

We are. And we share in that same common grace that God provides each one of us. But there's something more with those who believe in Jesus Christ.

[21 : 05] And so when we see in the New Testament, they say brother or sister. Besides those times when it's obvious that we know that they're talking about their physical family, it's more than a friendly greeting.

It is a reminder of our connection to one another in Jesus Christ. When we talk about this partnership in the gospel, it's more than just a common goal.

Church is more than just a club, something that we go to on the weekends so that we feel like we have friends. We're talking about a much bigger family thing. Being loved by and living for a heavenly father because he sent Christ to die for us.

Being adopted into a family we don't deserve. Being able to be ruled by a king who created the universe. That's the family that we're talking about.

We all have an earthly family that God did create and we love them. At least we should. Most of them. That's good and natural.

[22 : 12] But there is a bigger, a deeper, a far-reaching, more important family of God that is being referred to here. God is making for himself a people, a family, a church for himself so that when he returns we can be like him and we can live with him for eternity in the presence of our God the Father.

So Paul says, Epaphroditus is my brother. That's big. That means something when he says that. He also calls him his fellow worker. Why?

Because life as a Christian is work. Not working only for yourself, which we do. We have jobs. We have to work. But working for Christ, for others.

Serving them. Jesus says in Mark 10, 45, for even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve. First Peter 4, 10, each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others.

Serving others is work. Serving in the church is work. Caring for other Christians is work. Being a Christ follower involves some level of work. It's what we are called to do.

[23 : 36] Epaphroditus was from Philippi. He was a worker in the church at Philippi. We don't know exactly what he did but he was a partner in that work of the gospel.

So Paul calls Epaphroditus a fellow soldier. He's not talking about serving in the military together. He's referring to being fellow soldiers in God's army.

Paul likes to use this language of fighting and army and some of them might say well that sounds violent. I thought God was about love and peace and Christians should be as well.

But God's army is not a physical fighting thing. It's about spreading the good news of the gospel and fighting against the lies that Satan has out there.

It is a war but it's a spiritual war. It's a fight against Satan and the lies of sin and darkness because Satan doesn't want us to know anything about a God a heaven or in hell.

[24 : 40] He wants us to be content right exactly where we are so that we will live for ourselves and in the end we'll die and we'll be in hell with him which he has no choice of being pulled into because of what he did back in the beginning.

So Satan doesn't want anyone to know about this. That's the war that is going on. Epaphroditus was one of those people who worked and fought alongside Paul for the advancement of the gospel.

Paul also calls him your messenger speaking of the church of Philippi and minister to my need. The Philippian church collected a gift of money.

Growing up in the church that I went to or that I grew up in that was called a love offering. Missionaries would come on occasion to our church and they would tell us about their mission and what they were doing for spreading the gospel and we would take up an offering like all good Baptists right?

We'd take up offerings and that money that we collected would be given to them as a love offering as an encouragement as a way to help them in their mission and that's what the Philippian church did.

[25 : 58] They collected money and they needed a way to get it to Paul whom they wanted to support. Not having a Western Union nearby Venmo wasn't quite on the scene.

They had the money but not a way to get it to Paul who was in Rome. And so someone needed to take that money and travel 800 miles from Philippi to Rome and give it to Paul and that's where Epaphroditus raises his hand and says I'll do it.

Now probably not traveling alone because they just didn't do that. He may have been traveling with his son or with a servant. Either way I get the idea that Epaphroditus was probably not someone who couldn't handle himself if need be.

I wouldn't sign up for this mission if I was well me small and looked like I could be beat up easily.

I don't imagine Epaphroditus was like that. I don't know what he was like but he had it was common to be robbed while traveling and at this distance we're talking six to eight weeks of day to day traveling from Philippi to get to Rome carrying money.

[27 : 20] I don't know how much but it was a substantial amount of money. Doable but tough and dangerous nonetheless. He was the church's messenger for their gift to Paul.

During his trip most likely as he is getting near Rome he gets sick so sick that he almost dies. Verse 27 says indeed he was ill near to death but God had mercy on him and not only on him but on me also lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.

Can you imagine the sorrow the sadness and guilt Paul would have if Epaphroditus dies as a result of wanting to minister to him?

Can you imagine what the church of Philippi would feel like if they sent him and he dies somewhere in that mission? Paul's in prison and he can't do anything about it and the church is sending someone with money and that person just wants to help Paul and they die on their way.

That would be horrible. And yet at the same time Paul knows because he said it back in verse 21 that dying is better.

[28 : 40] To die would be gain because it would mean we would be in the presence of God and the presence of Jesus Christ our Savior. That's helpful I think to think about because there are times there are situations when someone doing the ministering like Epaphroditus doesn't make it.

Like Hallmark movies they don't always end happy. Some people that you think were doing all the right things should not die and they die and we don't get it.

Take comfort in the fact that Paul says dying is gain because of what we get after this life. Sure living now is good and we can tell people about Christ but dying is better in the end.

But God spared his life and Paul is thankful for that. Paul is eager to send Epaphroditus back to Philippi because of that and I'm sure Epaphroditus is eager to go back and share with the church how he was saved and the time he got to spend with Paul and how he encouraged Paul and Paul encouraged him.

Also he gets to go back with a letter from the apostle Paul. Now I'm sure that probably is a bigger thing to us now than it was back then but that's still a big thing and it was also customary that the messenger get to read that letter to the church so imagine Epaphroditus when he gets back he gets to read this letter Philippians to the church in Corinth and then answer questions from the people talking about that trip he was on so you can imagine Epaphroditus is quite excited about his return back and in his reading he'll get to read verses 29 and 30 let's look at those Paul says this so receive him talking about Epaphroditus in the Lord with all joy and honor such men for he nearly died for the work of Christ risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me now maybe some people thought that Epaphroditus had stayed with

[31 : 06] Paul too long maybe they thought he was too weak maybe he traveled at the wrong time he took the wrong path you know how people get when you do things a little different than what's in their mind I'm sure there were people that weren't exactly happy with the time frame or anything about the mission regardless Paul tells them receive Epaphroditus receive him back in the Lord with joy and honor him honor people like him why because he came he did a service to me that you couldn't complete Paul also points out how Epaphroditus is Christ like and how he served others back in verse 8 of this chapter Paul's talking about Jesus and he says he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death speaking of when

Jesus was going to die on the cross for our sins and then here when talking about Epaphroditus Paul says he nearly died for the work of Christ Jesus was obedient to death Epaphroditus was obedient and almost died so there's some connections here and how he served and wanted to serve whatever that cost was there's also one more aspect that Paul wants them to know the church of Philippi wanted to support Paul they wanted to send him money but they couldn't have done it until Epaphroditus made that possible so the church of service to Paul couldn't be completed without Epaphroditus help he needed the gift the church needed him to send it there that's how God intends it to work we need each other in a partnership in order for the church to grow to be encouraged to spread the gospel and that brings us to our last point and that is that's you that's that's me that's

Trinity Cambridge Church as we move into 2021 and before we get into that but as part of that are you a Christian this evening before we ask Christians questions to help them navigate this next year I want to ask those who aren't Christians do you know God's love for you his greatest expression of love was sending Jesus Christ we just celebrated it in Christmas sending Jesus Christ who would then go to the cross and die for our sins that was his greatest expression of love for us and if you don't believe that if you don't share in that love then you don't get to participate in that love of

God completely that may not sound too bad right now as you feel comfortable but that also means that as your life ends you don't share in that love of God that you never believed in to start with if that's you then I would encourage you to reach out to someone here tonight if you're sitting at home in a group ask somebody in your group in your community group ask someone to share with you what the love of God is and they would love to share that with you if you're already a Christian then let's think about these examples that Paul has given us we already know that God is building a family a people for himself and this is not done in isolation we grow and we encourage and we serve one another but it's not by ourself for ourself we don't see a model of that anywhere in the scripture and yet we have so many people trying to do life that way so ask yourself this question are you a friend like

Timothy or Epaphroditus maybe you're not and you need a friend like Timothy or Epaphroditus there are some of those in this church are you working towards being that type of friend encouraging caring praying loving serving one another as we move into 2021 will your mindset be like chapter 1 verse 21 that says for me to live as Christ and to die as gain or will your mindset be more like chapter 2 verse 21 that says for they all seek their own interest not those of Jesus Christ Timothy and Paul they weren't or Timothy and Epaphroditus they weren't Paul but they were godly examples that were given and called to emulate they aren't blazing in the spotlight examples like

[36 : 49] Paul but dedicated consistent servants for Christ Paul and Silas they were out there they were preaching they were in their face it was like they were on the front lines of missions going forward and then all of a sudden they get arrested they get thrown in jail so imagine what this looks like they're in jail things felt like they were on fire moving forward and then Timothy is standing there if there's other people with him they're like what just happened so what do they do they say we need to pray for them so praying and they're singing and what happens supernatural stuff happens now I don't want to give away all the things that we're going to dig into when we get into acts but mighty things happen to the church when they care for one another putting other needs first praying for

God to do things they can't control that sounds like where we're at right now you might be thinking that sounds really good I'd like to live and serve like Timothy and Epaphroditus but how do we do that in the church how do we serve others when we're dealing with coronavirus that's a good question so I'd like to ask or I'd like to give you a couple things to think about as we end this year and realize that next Sunday when we meet back together again even though it will be 2021 life will still be weird and church is still going to be uncomfortable and separated at least compared to what we knew it to be a year ago now it seems right for our church in this moment to be partly in person and partly virtual

I understand both sides and it's right and good add to that the fact that COVID-19 didn't catch God didn't catch God off guard God is sovereign God knows these things before they happen he controls them he knows what we need he also knows what is good for us he knew it was going to happen allowed it and has a purpose behind it so as we think about Paul going to prison think about how God ordained Paul to go to prison so that he would have time to write letters that would encourage millions of people and help strengthen his church going forward think about how that lands for us as we look at COVID-19 and how we think that we are being held back so instead of thinking how long are we going to be separated like this how long do

I have to go to church where nothing is like it used to be or maybe you're thinking everything I enjoyed about church is gone God's not gone his word is not gone your salvation is not gone our identity in Christ is not gone our partnership in the gospel is not gone our call to serve others and share the gospel is not gone it's different but it's not gone it would be more helpful if we started asking questions like what does God want me to do during this time when things have been stripped away as I mentioned Paul was in prison and wrote letters that encouraged millions he was locked up and he still found a way to share the gospel

I know we're not in prison but that just means life's not as bad as what Paul had it we still have ways to connect with one another we can still call and text and send letters we can go online they had none of that back then I know it's different there are people in our church that need encouraging and if you're one of those people who don't need encouraging praise God because there's probably two other people who do need encouraging so what what are you as a Christian called to serve them supposed to do there are still people in our church that are trying to do life in isolation reach out to those people pray to know who those people are start by letting them know that you're thinking about them you care about them you'd like to pray for them see how you in your current situation whatever that looks like could serve and encourage other people in our church like

[42 : 19] I said it will look different I know but God doesn't tell us to stop serving serving isn't only for a season prayer isn't only in the easy times prayer is all time encouraging and meeting together regardless of what it looks like is something that the church that is you and me are called to do together regardless of what it looks like for the glory of Christ and for the encouragement of one another and if you're one of those people out there who are struggling I want to encourage you to reach out to another brother and sister stop trying to do life on your own stop trying to do your version of church and COVID by yourself it's why God gave us the church so we could struggle with one another struggle and then encourage and strengthen and grow if you are struggling tonight please don't continue in your struggle don't go into the next year continuing to struggle reach out to someone reach out to someone in your community group reach out to someone that you know just send a text do anything if you're like me sometimes

I miss the obvious don't sit back and say well you should have noticed yeah we should have but raise your hand anyway because we don't want you to fall back we don't want to miss you we don't want not to be able to serve and encourage you I guarantee that if you ask someone to pray for you to meet once a week just to talk about life maybe to study a book together I guarantee that they'll be helped by them helping you it's just how God ordains it to happen don't waste this growth opportunity and let's not sit around idle for the next three months six months nine months it's already way faster than a lot of us thought it would happen let's not waste that time sitting around waiting for things to change hoping the church goes back to what it was thinking that we can't grow thinking we can't do anything for

God because we can so let's partner together and let's grow in Christ for his glory and for our edification and encouragement tonight let's let's pray together Lord we pray that you would give us time this week that we can reflect on your word reflect on this passage reflect on our life reflect on where we are with you where's our personal life think back to March when things changed so drastically and for some of us we had a lot of time and we had things we can do and between then and now we filled that time with other things

God I pray that you would help point out those things that have come in and choked out our free time and instead of using that time to strengthen our Christian walk we have become lazy in our Christian walk and we become stronger in other things that probably don't matter Lord we ask that you would help meet with us this week and point out those things if that's in our community group great if that's in our personal time great Lord we ask that you would meet us and put your life where we are failing and we could be growing where we are focusing on ourselves and we're not focusing on you so that our verse for 2021 will be Philippians 121 for to me to live is Christ and to die is gain we're okay to die because we know we will be with you and if we continue to live which is great help us to live in serving others for your glory

God be glorified through our life be glorified in our church Lord and we pray these things in your name amen