

FOREVER and EVER, Amen!

This is the last phrase in the conclusion of the Lord's Prayer, following the seven petitions of the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples to pray in the gospels of Matthew and Luke. We join with other members of the body of Christ worldwide when we give voice to this in almost every worship service we attend and at home. The petitions are well defined in Martin Luther's Catechism. The 1st petition addresses and acknowledges God, the Father, our Creator and the creator of all - and that His name is holy and sacred. The conclusion again directs our attention to the Father - our Abba - and affirms that the kingdom, power and glory belong to Him always! To this we echo amen, meaning "Yes! Yes! Let it be so!" But as humans living on earth, how do we understand forever, much less forever and ever? Let's think about that for a moment. If I were to ask you what is your earliest childhood memory and how old you were at the time, probably there would be as many different answers as there are people in attendance. Or listening, or watching, or reading this. My earliest memory, which was verified by my aunt, was when I was hospitalized with pneumonia shortly after my 1st birthday. It was a winter Sunday morning in Sauk Centre. I was in a crib with an oxygen tent enclosing it. The floor was concrete with a floor drain not far away. I had to go to the bathroom and the floor drain was my goal. Somehow I got out of that crib and falling, crawling and almost made it. I remember crying, which got the attention of a nearby nurse. Within minutes my aunt arrived. The point is all of us sometime in childhood begin remembering people, places and events. And continue to do so through today. Which is not to say that we remember everything by any means. Memories fade. Some things we choose to forget and others that we wish we could! If we live in the past or only think about our future, we miss the precious gift of today! Which is all any of us have, isn't it? So from our childhood through now, isn't this our forever and ever?

Memories have triggers. People. Places. Things. Food. Laughter. For me probably the most powerful is music. A melody or a lyric can bring me back to a certain place and time vividly as I'm sure you have also experienced. Maybe it was a special Christmas, or a wedding. Or a baptism. Or a funeral. Or a dance. Or a date. Or fireworks. Or holding hands. Or a first kiss. Randy Travis had a popular song in the 1970's

titled Forever and Ever, Amen! Here a few of the lyrics: "As long as old men sit and talk about the weather, as long as old women sit and talk about old men, if you wonder how long I'll be faithful, I'll be happy to tell you again. I'm gonna love you forever and ever, forever and ever, amen! They say time can play tricks on a memory, make people forget things they knew. Well, it's easy to see, it's happ'nin' to me. I've already forgotten everybody but you!" In 1977 Debby Boone sang a popular tune called You Light Up My Life. She was raised Christian and explained that many of the songs she chose, especially love songs, she thought of as singing to or about God and her faith in Christ. Instead of singing to her sweetheart or husband, by changing a noun or a pronoun, she looked at the song in a different way. Now these days changing pronouns has become quite the craze in today's world. I will refrain from commenting on that, but I hope some of you might try this on a favorite love song of your own. Here are the chorus lyrics to You Light Up My Life:

"And you light up my life. You give me hope to carry on! You light up my days and fill my nights with song!" I moved to Thief River Falls in 1961 as a seventh grader. That was also the th 1st year of the Minnesota Vikings. I became and remain a fan. Our football team went undefeated, untied and unscored upon that season. As 8 graders, the same results occurred again, but not without a major scare in the last game. We were winning by several touchdowns. Time was running out and our opponent had the ball deep in shadow of their own goalpost. The

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coach decided to put all of our 3 string in to finish the game. On 2 down, their ballcarrier broke through the line and was off and running. It seemed he would certainly score a touchdown. There was no one near him. But suddenly behind him from the far side of the field a lone figure gave chase and was gaining ground. As he neared our goal line, John dove and caught him by one ankle. The runner fell to the ground. The coach immediately put the 1st string defense back on the field, but let John play the rest of the game. John saved our season, the game and the day! Fast forward to 1998. I'm one of three freshmen football coaches. My son is on the team, whom I've coached the previous five years in youth football. One day at the end of practice, I share John's

story with the team. John had a certain physiological condition which I shall not describe here. Almost everyone in junior high was aware of John's plight. Most people had settled on a nickname for John. It was in poor taste and somewhat cruel. But it never seemed to bother John at all. He always had a smile and a "sunny disposition. Before the end 10 grade, his abnormality had been surgically corrected. After that, he was always just John. After telling John's story, Many players thought I had made this story up. Twenty-five years later, most of them believe me now. In today's world, the use of John's old nickname would probably be considered bullying.

Another day after practice, I asked those same California freshmen what forever and ever meant. The young men who went to church knew it was from the Lord's Prayer. Almost every one of them had heard it or at least heard of it. But none of them could figure out what it had to do with football. One said, like praying before or after the game? All good, but not what I'm getting at. Then what?

Let's take a quick look at team sports. Most are primarily reactive. In baseball, the batter and the eight other player's on the pitcher's team, react to the ball that the pitcher throws. If the batter hits the ball in fair territory, all nine players in the field now react to the batter's action, which started as a reaction. In football, it is 50/50. The 11 players on defense react to the designed play that the 11 players on offense enact at the snap of the ball. I believe 50% action and 50% reaction is the highest action rate possible in team sports. In order for a play to be successful, each member of the offense must carry out his assignment, barring a failure by one or more members of the defense. Likewise, the members of the defense must be in the right place, react successfully, defend and tackle for little or no gain, a loss, or a pass broken up. Players on the field must stay alert and be ready for every play. All game long! Forever and ever? They were beginning to understand. Forever and ever, amen? Yes! But wait! There's more! There's more? Isn't there always more? Yes, until there isn't! What about the figure eight? Or lying on its side somewhat squished, is the symbol of infinity. Without limits. Endless. The first four words in the Bible: "In the beginning God" Without limits. Endless! Undefined and unmeasured by man, science, intelligence - human or artificial! To the team I the suggested we add one more word to this

phrase. A word that sounds just like two words that are already in the phrase. The new word that should be placed right in front of the amen. There was head scratching, whispering and a few elbows polking. Finally, someone said the word aloud but with a question mark after it. Endeavor? Yes! Endeavor! Working to achieve something! Trying hard to do something! To reach a goal! In football, it is victory. In the church it is being a member of the body of Christ to fulfill God's plan! Even if we don't know or understand what exactly that might be. But we are assured that we are not and do not walk alone! We have our Heavenly Father, Jesus Christ His Son, our Savior and the Holy Spirit who intercedes for us! To those of you who can see and are willing please read with me this phrase I tried to get that freshmen football to embrace: Forever and ever, endeavor! Amen! May the words from my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to Thy ears and acceptable in Thy sight. Yes, Yes! Let it be so!