

Sermon for Sunday, April 19, 2015
St James Episcopal Church, St James NY
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It's the third week of Easter, the third week
of celebration
of the resurrection of our Savior
Jesus Christ,
and us with him.

It's also the first of five weeks
in which we use the service from Enriching our Worship,
one of the authorized services
of the Episcopal Church.
These services have been developed
in the years since the publication of our Book of Common Prayer.

You might ask,
why do we need new services?
Isn't our Book of Common Prayer good enough?

Well, back in 1789,
when the first Book of Common Prayer of the Episcopal Church was published, it
included these words: "It is a most invaluable part of that blessed 'liberty wherewith
Christ hath made us free,' that in his worship different forms and usages may without
offense be allowed, provided the substance of the Faith be kept entire...therefore, by
common consent and authority, may be altered, abridged, enlarged, amended, or
otherwise disposed of, as may seem most convenient for the edification of the people,
"according to the various exigency of times and occasions."

In other words, from the very beginning of our church in the United States, it was
expected that liturgies would change as our culture and language changed. And so there
were major revisions to the Book of Common Prayer in 1892, 1928, and 1979, and minor
revisions and additions in 1896, 1914, 1933, 1935, 1949 and 1966. The intention with
our current BCP, published in 1979, was that the process of revision would continue;
however, with the availability of cheap printing of photocopying, it was decided that
instead of printing yet another new BCP, with the huge costs of buying it for parishes,
revised liturgies would be made available in digital form, to be printed locally.

One of the reasons for new liturgies
is that new archaeological and historical studies
reveal more details of what worship was like in the early Church,
and so we include some of those details
in our worship.

And so the Eucharistic prayer we are using these five weeks
follows the tradition
of some of the earliest prayers
of the church.

Another reason is that language changes,
and our prayers reflect those changes.

That principle goes back
to the time of the Reformation,
when Archbishop Cranmer
wrote the Preface to the first Book of Common Prayer in 1549 and said,
“And moreover, whereas s. Paule would have suche language spoken to the people in the
churche, as they mighte understande and have profite by hearyng the same; the service in
this Churche of England (these many yeares) hath been read in Latin to the people,
whiche they understoode not; so that they have heard with theyr eares onely; and their
hartes, spirite, and minde, have not been edified thereby....So yt here you have an ordre
for praier (as touchyng the readyng of holy scripture) mucche agreable to the mynde and
purpose of the olde fathers, and a greate deale more profitable and commodious, than that
whiche of late was used. It is more profitable, because here ...is ordeyned nothyng to be
read, but the very pure worde of God, the holy scriptures, or that whiche is evidently
grounded upon the same; and that in suche a language and ordre, as is moste easy and
plain for the understandyng, bothe of the readers and hearers.”

In other words,
our prayers should be as close to Scripture as possible,
and in ordinary language.

And so today,
instead of focussing on the psalm
I thought it might be helpful
to focus on the Lord’s Prayer,
and how it has been heard and read
throughout the centuries.

The earliest record we have of the Lord’s Prayer

is in the gospels,
and most likely
the gospel of Luke.

That was written down in Greek,
but Jesus most likely spoke it in Aramaic,
the language that most people spoke
in the Holy Land in Jesus' time.

The closest language today is probably Syriac, used in parts of Syria;
it's a little bit like Hebrew, but not quite the same.

And it would have sounded something like this:

Abun d-bashmaya
nethqadash shmakh
tithe malkuthakh
nehvwe tsebyanakh
aykana d-bashmaya aph b'arha
havlan lahma d-sunqananan yaomana
washbuqlan hawbvayn ahkanna
daph hnan shbvoqan l'hayyabayn
wela tahlan le'ynesyuna
ela patzan min bisha

That's probably how Jesus and his disciples
would have said it.

And if you happen to be fluent in Aramaic
you'd notice that it ends with "deliver us from evil."

Because what we call the doxology,
the part that says

"For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, for ever and ever"
isn't actually in the bible.

It was added later, when the prayer began being used in worship.

But it's not in the earliest manuscripts of the gospel of Matthew.

But back to the prayer itself.

Jesus most likely
taught it to his disciples in Aramaic.
But because the language of education
was Greek,
the gospels were written in Greek.

So in the gospel according to St Luke, it sounds like this:

Πάτερ ἡμῶν ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς·
 ἁγιασθήτω τὸ ὄνομά σου·
 ἐλθέτω ἡ βασιλεία σου·
 γεννηθήτω τὸ θέλημά σου,
 ὡς ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς·
 τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον δὸς ἡμῖν σήμερον·
 καὶ ἄφες ἡμῖν τὰ ὀφειλήματα ἡμῶν,
 ὡς καὶ ἡμεῖς ἀφίεμεν τοῖς ὀφειλέταις ἡμῶν·
 καὶ μὴ εἰσενέγκῃς ἡμᾶς εἰς πειρασμόν,
 ἀλλὰ ῥύσαι ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ.

Pater hēmôn ho en tois ouranois;
 hagiasthêtô to onoma sou;
 elthetô hê basileia sou;
 gennêthêtô to thelêma sou,
 hôs en ouranô, kai epi tês gês.
 ton arton hêmôn ton epiouision dos hêmin sêmeron;
 kai aphen hêmin ta opheilêmata hêmôn,
 hôs kai hêmeis aphiemen tois opheiletais hêmôn;
 kai mê eisenenkês hêmas eis peirasmon,
 alla rhusae hêmas apo tou ponerou.

Literally translated, those words are
 Father of us,
 the in the heavens let it be holy-ized the name of you,
 let be coming the kingdom of you
 let be becoming the will of you
 as in heaven and on the land.
 The bread of us the on-being be giving to us the according to day,
 and from let go to us the misses of us and for same we are from letting go to every one
 owing to us
 and no you may be carrying us into trial.

You can kind of recognize the Lord's Prayer that we pray,
 but it sounds strange, doesn't it?
 That's the problem
 of translation,
 taking the words in one language
 and making sense of them in another.

One of the earliest translations of the Lord's Prayer was into Old English, in around the year 1000, and it sounded like this.

Úre Fæder, þú ðe eart on heofonum, sí ðín nama gehálgod.
Tócume ðín ríce. Geweorðe ðín willa on eorðan swá swá
on heofonum. Sele ús tó-dæg úrne dæghwamlican hláf.
And forgif ús úre gyltas,² swá swá wé forgifað úrum gylten-
dum.³ And ne læd þú ús on costnunge. Ac álýs ús fram
yfele. Sí hit swá.

Or literally

Our Father, thou that art in heavens, be thy name hallowed. To come thy kingdom. Become thy will in earth so as in heavens. Give to us to-day our daily loaf. And forgive to us our guilts, so as we forgive to our guiltling ones. And not lead thou us into temptation. But release us from evil. Be it so.

It sounds similar to both the Greek text and the version that were most familiar with, but there are some variations.

Some of those are because from Greek, it was translated into Latin, and the early English translations came from the Latin version.

So lets jump forward four hundred years or so, around 1380, to the translation made by Wycliffe:

Oure fadir that art in hevenes, halewid be thi name. Thi kyngdoom come to. Be thi wille don in erthe as in hevене.² 3yve to us this dai oure breed over othir substaunce. And for3yve to us oure dettis, as we for3yven to oure dettouris. And lede us not in to temptacioun. But delyvere us fro yvel.³ Amen.

It's getting closer to the one we recognize, isn't it?

By 1549, when the first book of Common Prayer was written,

we have this:

OURE father, whiche arte in heaven, hallowed by thy name. Thy kyngdom come. Thy
 will be done in earth as it is in heaven. Geve us this dayeoure daily bread. And forgeve
 us oure trespasses, as we forgeve them that trespasse agaynst us. And leade us not into
 temptacion. But deliver us from evell. Amen.

Now we're very close to the version that people in the Anglican tradition have been
 saying
 for the last four hundred years,
 though we have the doxology.

One thing to notice here
 is that it ends with the words we normally translate,
 "deliver us from evil."

They come
 from some of the relatively early manuscripts of the gospel of Luke, and so they are
 included.
 Even though we now know,
 based on even earlier manuscripts,
 that Jesus maybe didn't include them.

Now let's jump forward to the twentieth century.
 Learning has flourished,
 hundreds of new manuscripts have been discovered,
 the Dead Sea Scrolls
 and many other fragments of scripture,
 along with details of the worship of the early church.
 Knowledge has expanded infinitely
 since the sixteenth century.
 And so across the world
 and across all Christian traditions
 they began to look again at the ways that we pray in worship,
 and to reclaim the traditions
 of the early church in the language of today.

We see some of that
 in our Eucharistic prayers.
 Even in the Book of Common Prayer that we have in our pews,
 Rite 2 is very different from Rite 1.
 It is much closer

to the way the early church
celebrated the Eucharist.
And the Eucharistic prayer we are using today
is another one from the early church.

And of course, the Lord's Prayer is different.
What we call the "new" Lord's prayer
was translated in the 1970s.
It's in our BCP - usually on the right hand side of the page,
beside the traditional one.
And there are two very important differences
from the traditional version.

One is the line,
"Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us."
The word trespass
has changed in meaning since the time of the Reformation.
Back then
it meant any sort of wrongdoing.
But now,
it means walking on someone else's property or invading their space.
That's not the same thing.

The Greek word
was "misses."
It was like when you throw a spear or shoot an arrow at the target
and miss the mark.
That's how sin was described,
missing the mark.
But the translator realized
that that isn't what misses means in modern English. And so they decided simply to use
the word "sins," as being the closes single word that means the same.

The other line is the one that reads,
"Save us from the time of trial."
That's very different from "Lead us not into temptation, isn't it?"
Now you'll remember that the Greek was
"no you may be carrying us into trial."
That word trial,
which is sometimes translated temptation in Scripture,

what it referred to in the time of the New Testament
was the trials that Jesus predicted would come
at the end of time,
the suffering and persecution
that was expected to precede
the final triumph of God's kingdom.
When those times came, Jesus said,
people would be tempted
to deny their faith.

And so the prayer is not about ordinary everyday temptations to do the wrong thing,
but about situations that might tempt us
to abandon
out faith.

And so as the best approximation to the original,
the translators came up with the words,
"Save us from the time of trial."

So this has been more of a teaching sermon than normal.
But it's important to understand why we pray the words that we do,
and why sometimes,
change is important.
Because it moves us closer
to truth about God
and truth about our own lives and faith.
Sometimes that makes us uncomfortable,
but Jesus never promised
that following his way
would be comfortable.
Instead he promised
that everything would be made new,
recreated,
and us with it,
and that he would be with us
always.