

Homily for Saturday in the Fifth Week of Easter

May 16, 2020

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

Acts 15:36–16:10; Psalm 100; John 15:18–25**

We heard the beginning of the John’s narrative of the supper before the passover on Maundy Thursday. The passage ended with these words, “If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.”¹ Two Thursday ago, April 30th, our gospel lessons at these Easter weekday Eucharists have continue with the rest of John’s supper before the passover narrative. At the end of the first day of this continuation, Judas, “went out, and immediately it was night.”²

Three days ago, on Wednesday, I preached on the first eight verses of the fifteenth chapter of John, Jesus’ words about Jesus being the true vine, his Father, the vinedresser, and those who heard him that night, being the branches of the true vine.³ On Thursday, we heard Jesus’ command, “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love.”⁴ Yesterday, Father Jim

¹ John 13:15–16.

² John 13:30.

³ John 15:1–8.

⁴ John 15:9.

Pace, for his last Eucharist as our assistant priest, had the continuation of Jesus' words about loving one another. Jesus said, "Greater love no one has than this, that one lay down his or her life for his or her friends."⁵ And then he declared to them that they were no longer his students (disciples) or his servants, but they were now his friends because he had made known to them "all that he had heard from [his] Father."⁶ The last words from John that we heard yesterday were, "This I command you, to love one another."⁷ The next words, the beginning of today's appointed gospel, are "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you."⁸

The shadows of sin and evil are intertwined with all of Jesus words on his evolving his relationship with those who are with him, with those who will come truly to believe in his word. For me, the most powerful words in today's passage are these, Jesus said, "You are not of the world . . . I chose you out of the world."⁹

When the Episcopal Church started drafting contemporary language versions of familiar prayers in

⁵ John 15:13.

⁶ John 15:15.

⁷ John 15:17.

⁸ John 15:18.

⁹ John 15:19b.

preparation for the 1979 Prayer Book, some prayers drew more attention than others. One very important prayer, a contemporary language Lord’s Prayer, for a number of different reasons, was a real challenge. For a while, “holy” replaced “hallowed,”¹⁰ but eventually it returned to the contemporary form because it was a word still in use in contemporary English and a good translation of the Greek.¹¹

The priest theologian Origin, who died in circa the year 254, complained that Matthew and Luke had used a Greek word that was unknown to Greek speakers of his time—the word translated as “this day” or “today” or “the morrow.”¹²

The real challenge was the richness, the complexity, in Greek of the petition, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” We Episcopalians ended up with, “Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil”—a worthy translation in its own right. The Church of England maintained, “Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.”

¹⁰ *Services for Trial Use: Authorized Alternatives to Prayer Book Services* (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1971), 74; *Authorized Services 1973* (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1973), 66.

¹¹ *The Draft Proposed Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Church Hymnal, 1976), 97.

¹² *Synopsis of the Four Gospels: Greek English Edition of the Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum*, ed. K. Aland, 15th ed. (2013), 57, note *m*, note *k*.

Pope Gregory the Great, who died on the twelfth of March in the year 604, moved the Lord's Prayer to the place where we know it. Massey Shepherd wrote that he "deliberately made it the climax, and to him the most important part, of the Consecration."¹³ At this point in my own journey, I sense Shepherd was on the right side of this question. This prayer, found in Matthew and in Luke, reaches back in its own way to Jesus' words in John about the bread of life and the reality of the struggle all of us face with the mysteries of sin, sickness, evil, and death.

Again Jesus said to his friends words for them and for us, "You are not of the world . . . I chose you out of the world."¹⁴

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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¹³ Massey H. Shepherd, Jr., *The Oxford American Prayer Book Commentary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), 81–82.

¹⁴ John 15:19b.