

## Sermon 2023 09 24 Text

When I am preparing my sermons, I find that the Collect for the Day is generally the first thing I read.

And there are good reasons for that. One reason is that it is usually a beautifully poetic, flowing text. Another reason is that it exists as a summary of the whole of the readings and the context of our service of worship.

The Collect also marks the end of the opening part of our Eucharistic Worship and leads us into the readings and sermon.

A collect is simply a prayer meant to gather the intentions of the people and the focus of worship into a succinct prayer. All of the collects more or less fit a pattern that was developed, and some would say perfected, by Archbishop Cranmer.

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A quick liturgical quiz:  
True or false?

The Collects which we use today have their foundation in those written by Archbishop Cranmer for the first Book of Common Prayer to be used throughout England and authorised by Henry VIII in 1662.

Those who agree? Those who disagree?

Well, some parts of the statement are true.

Collects by Cranmer certainly appear in the Book of Common Prayer authorised for use throughout England in 1662. But Henry VIII died in 1547.

And the 1662 Book of Common Prayer was not the first prayer book authorised for use throughout England.

Cranmer's Collects appeared in the first Book of Common Prayer, prepared largely by Cranmer, and authorised for use throughout England by Edward VI in 1549.

The 1552 Book of Common Prayer, also called the Second Prayer Book of Edward VI, was the second version of the Book of Common Prayer and contained the official liturgy of the Church of England from November 1552 until July 1553.

Why July 1553? Well, that was when Edward VI died, and his sister Mary ascended to the throne. She returned the authority for the Church in England to Rome and the Book of Common Prayer was abandoned.

However, Mary died in 1558 and Elizabeth (or Elizabeth I) ascended the throne. One of her first acts was to take back control of the Church from Rome and return it to English authority. But Elizabeth died in 1603 and a new Book of Common Prayer (the one we still use today) was not authorised until 1662 in the reign of Charles II. This prayer book preserved most of the beautiful Collects drafted by Thomas Cranmer for his Prayer Book in 1547.

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So, what might we gain from today's Collect?

Loving and righteous God,  
your boundless generosity exceeds.  
all that we can desire or deserve,  
and you give to the last worker all you promised to the first.:  
liberate us from all jealousy and greed,

that we may be free to love and serve others,  
and in your service may find our true reward;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

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How might we draw truth and inspiration from these 60 words?

In the first four lines we reflect on the nature of God.

God is loving and righteous.

God's generosity is without boundaries and is far greater than anything we can imagine. More importantly, the generosity we receive from God is far greater than anything we can possibly deserve.

We do not earn the richness we receive from God. The toil of our day and the actions of our minds can never be sufficient to liberate us from attempting to bring forth fruit from the dry, dead soil. A soil so lifeless that we should labour in the long hours of daylight to bring forth barely enough to sustain our lives.

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But we are not held captive by our nature or by what we deserve – for our God sent the Christ as a demonstration and as a liberation from that poverty of life. And so, we are able to live in a space where generosity is without boundaries.

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In the next two lines we make a petition.  
“...liberate us from all jealousy and greed,  
that we may be free to love and serve others...”

We ask, we beg that the essence of our lives might be changed to reflect the essence of God.

There is a recognition that we have allowed ourselves to become people of jealousy and greed. We recognise and acknowledge, that when we were created and known by God from the moment of conception we were in a state of purity.

And we must humble ourselves to accept we have allowed ourselves to be changed – or that we have even sought change – that has led us away from God and away from each other.

Look at how we are sitting in Church. Some are together, some are a little distanced, some are apart.

This comment is not designed to embarrass any individual. When I sit in the pew, I sit in my own little world, still held victim by that living for self. And we might also infer from that for all our protests we do not really want new people invading our service, sitting in our spot, raising voices are fresh and discordant.

If this community is to have a future, are we prepared to put aside our comfort and our dignity, not only to welcome new faces, but to give up our safety barrier and to go out and invite other into our circle of love for that is the essence of what we mean when we ask “...that we may be free to love and serve others...”

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And then that final line to enlist help to ensure that God might hear us, and that we might have the strength to carry out those things for which we ask.

Our ending, “...through Jesus Christ our Lord...”

Our desire to overcome our selfish nature is so strong, and we recognise that we lack the capacity to act in our strength alone.

So, we align and unify ourselves with the Christ so that we may hold to the integrity of our words, and so that we might strengthened by the power of Christ to transform our words into actions.

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O God, we beg you, make it so!

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