

## Easter 6B 2024

Today's gospel is one of those passages that is impossible to translate without losing a lot of meaning, so I want to look a little at the Greek and English in order to deepen our understanding of what Jesus is teaching us.

I'll then offer you an alternate translation as a way of bringing out a different side of this multi-layered, rich text.

First, we are hampered in English because, unlike Greek, our second person singular and plural are the same: you.

We cannot tell whether there is one of you, or a thousand of you.

There is just "you."

Since we are steeped in individualism in our culture, when we read the translation, it tends to sound to us like Jesus is speaking to an individual, but this is not the case in Greek.

Luckily, southern English, which came out of a more agrarian, less individualistic society, was forced to address this problem, so it can serve to make things clearer.

We use "y'all" for the plural.

You can tell when someone is not a southerner, by the way, when she uses y'all for one person.

Y'all is always plural, though it is complicated.

Someone might be talking to one person, but mean his whole family.

When saying goodbye to a single person, for example, one might say, “Y’all take care!”  
or even “Y’all come back!”

In such cases, we mean your whole family, you and all those close to you who are not  
present right now.

There are instances when we would not use y’all because speaking to the whole family  
would make no sense.

One would never say, “Hey y’all!” to one person.

That sounds delusional.

My seminary suite-mate was from the mountains of Virginia.

He said that, in that area, a standard greeting was “How’s you ma ’n them?”

They do not ask how YOU are, but about the whole family, starting with your mother.

There is a recognition that a person is affected by the whole group.

If your “ma ’n them” are not well, then you are also not well.

Similarly, y’all is always plural, but it might be used to refer to people who are not  
present.

One more thing.

Even though y’all is plural, if you want to make it clear that what you are saying applies  
to each and every one of all those present, then you have to say “all y’all.”

This is not redundant.

For example, I could say, “Not all y’all live in Shallotte.”

To take a Biblical example, when Jesus washes the disciples feet and Peter asks him to wash him all over, one could translate Jesus’ oblique reference to Judas as, “One who has taken a bath does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is completely clean. And y’all are clean, though not all y’all.”

(Do you think he gave a sidelong glance to Judas at that point?)

Using “y’all” to show clearly that Jesus is speaking to a group allows us to see more clearly the effect of today’s passage.

It makes it clear that Christian love is a communal phenomenon.

With this in mind, let’s hear this passage again with a different translation.

“As Dad has loved me, so I have loved all y’all; abide in my love, y’all. If y’all keep my commandments, y’all will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Dad’s commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to y’all so that my joy may be in all y’all, and that all y’all’s joy may be complete.

“This is my commandment, that all y’all love one another as I have loved all y’all. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. All ya’ll are my friends if y’all do what I command you. I do not call ya’ll servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called

y'all friends, because I have made known to y'all everything that I have heard from my Dad. And I have laid down all y'all to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that Dad will give y'all whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving y'all these commands so that all y'all may love one another."

You may have noticed that I changed one more thing (well, two, but I do not mean referring to the Father as "Dad").

The Greek does not say "I appoint you," as our official translation has it, but that "I laid you down."

In other words, "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. Y'all did not choose me but I chose y'all, and I have laid all y'all down."

There is a sense of being offered as a sacrifice to God, and it is a sacrifice that HE chooses for us.

Americans tend not to like this notion that God made the choice for us, that we are from the outset given to God.

We like to think that we are free to choose whatever we want, but when we go down that path of selfish choice, of me me me, we become slaves to chasing our next whim.

This reminds me of when my colleague, Richard Elliot, facetiously sang at clergy conference last fall:

"Jesus loves me,

Me, me, me

He just loves me,

NOT you, ME.”

God has set up the world so that, at some point, we are going back to God.

In the meantime, the more we chase ego, the more lost, empty, enslaved we become.

We cannot change that.

It is a baked into reality.

We came from God and are going back to God.

We can throw temper tantrums; we can be as selfish as we want, and lose any love that others might have for us.

We can become isolated and lonely, but we cannot change this fact of existence.

Our lives are laid down for others.

Only a life lived with the needs of the whole in mind is fulfilling.

Otherwise, we become isolated from all to which we are connected, all that feeds us, and it shows.

Recently, on the way back from Fresno, I was waiting at gate B3 at the Dallas/Fort Worth airport for my flight to Wilmington.

Two men sat down in front of me.

One was wearing a two-inch wide diamond bracelet with rows and rows of diamonds, or rhinestones.

Whatever the case, he wanted us to think they were diamonds.

He also wore a diamond studded necklace, large diamond encrusted watch, and a ring with many diamonds, as well.

To me, it all looked like something one would wear for a Las Vegas act, not to travel.

The other guy seemed to be his assistant.

Whatever he was, he orbited around the diamond-encrusted guy, and was somewhat more reserved in his dress.

When I observed the face and demeanor of the first guy, he looked like someone who had never experienced much love in life and was desperately trying to fill that emptiness with the envy of others.

There was so much emptiness and longing and hurt and even desperation there.

It seems like it ought to work to be selfish all the time, but it eats at our souls and we have no choice in the matter.

God chose for us.

God set up the world to function a certain way.

The more we think about the whole, about all y'all, the freer we are, the healthier we are and the world around us, as well.

I am encouraged by those people in Africa and India that I have shared with you in my weekly emails who are banding together, entire villages, to renovate the land, to return it to its former green state.

Their projects only succeed because they are all working together.

The more we shrink within ourselves, the more trapped we are, starved for connection,  
and the more damage is done, inside and out.

Christ has laid down our lives.

We can ignore this, but then we pay the price by being empty.

The gospel frees us by helping us to live in accord with reality, with our created nature.

People sometimes look to religion to provide them an easy out, a way to transcend the  
system, a pass, but in reality, religion just turns us right back to reality.

Jesus taught us that, if we want to feel fulfilled, in sync, at peace, then we must consider  
not just ourselves, but the whole, all people.

Peace be with all y'all.