

St Michael & All Angels, Chetwynd

The Collect for the Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Trinity

O Lord, we beseech thee, absolve thy people from their offences; that through thy bountiful goodness we may all be delivered from the bands of those sins, which by our frailty we have committed: Grant this, O heavenly Father, for Jesus Christ's sake, our blessed Lord and Saviour. Amen.

The underlying Latin version of this prayer is in the Sarum Missal, where it is the collect for this same Sunday. Translated into English for the 1549 Book of Common Prayer, two small changes were made in 1662. Firstly, "absolve" was substituted for the archaic 'assoil', which means the same thing. And secondly the word "all" was shifted: in 1549 the collect spoke of *"the bands of all those sins"*, whereas in its new position, in a stylistic adjustment, it emphasises that we are all the subject of the collect.

Apart from improving the rhythm of the collect, that change of position for the word "all" could have been the result of a conscious or unconscious recollection of Paul's writing in Romans 3:23, *"For **all** have sinned, and come short of the glory of God"* (my emphasis). The desire for forgiveness of sins may well have felt particularly urgent in the early Christian centuries, when the western Roman Empire was disturbed by so many threats and changes. At that time of uncertainty and anxiety, people's sense of unworthiness and sinfulness may have been accentuated, though in Christian teaching there is no simplistic correlation between misfortune and sinfulness.

This collect recognises human frailty and the tendency to fall short of our potential to love God and love neighbour. It portrays this weakness as leading to the sense of being bound by "the bands of…sins". "Bands" means bonds or chains, and the picture here is of humanity held in captivity by sinfulness. The collect seeks God's "bountiful goodness" to bring release and freedom; and the collect highlights the one through whom this freedom comes by describing Christ in the attribution as "our blessed Lord and Saviour".

There is a suggestion of the 'bands of sins' the collect speaks of, as well as the hope of deliverance, in Paul's writing. Romans 8:21 reads, *"the creature itself shall also be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God"*.

The collects are shot through with Scriptural themes, ideas and phrases, and this Cranmer and the Reformers would have found congenial, surely an important reason why the collects were (with some doctrinal amendments) found to be worth retaining.

Towards the end of the Sundays after Trinity, and so near the end of the liturgical year, we have this prayer for forgiveness, reflecting a longing for the freedom to be the people we are designed to be by our loving Father. Despite all that would hamper our lives – both factors from within and circumstances imposed on us from without – we are invited to look to God's mercy afresh, and to celebrate our deliverance into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

James Graham
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