

St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Sedona, AZ
August 31, 2025
Twelfth Sunday After Pentecost, Proper 17, Year C
The Rev. Lynn J. Perkins

Earlier this morning, Bishop Kirk led us in the Collect for this Sunday, which begins: **“Lord of all power and might, the author and giver of all good things: Graft in our hearts the love of your Name....”**

Graft in our hearts this love for you.

My parents retired from Atlanta, Ga. to a little town called Chuluota, FL, near Orlando. They had a small house with lots of lovely citrus trees in the backyard. Visiting them, I learned a very little bit about grafting, an important part of managing citrus trees.

In grafting, a shoot or twig from a desired plant is inserted into a slit on the trunk or stem of a living plant, from which the graft receives sap – nourishment. For my parents' trees, the “rootstock” was something called sour orange, a very hardy tree that produced fruit you would not want to eat! However, through grafting, their yard produced all sorts of delicious, juicy citrus fruits – oranges, tangelos, grapefruit, lemons, etc.

When you want to graft something, you first prepare the rootstock by using a very sharp, very clean knife to make a clean cut on the rootstock, creating a space for the “bud” or “scion.” Then the growing tissue of the scion & rootstock are carefully aligned, the scion is inserted into the prepared cut, the graft is secured with special material, it is kept moist and protected from too much sunlight, and voilà – it grows and provides tasty, juicy fruit.

Graft in our hearts the love of your Name.... Loving God's name is simply another way of saying “loving God” -- loving God's self-revelation. Why is it necessary for us to ask God's help in loving God's name? Let's turn to our first lesson this morning for a clue.

That lesson comes from the Apocrypha – books written during the “intertestamental period” – that is between the time of the Old Testament and the New. These books were still regarded as important and inspired writings.

This morning's reading is from the longest and one of the most important books of the Apocrypha – with several names: The Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach or just Sirach or Ben Sirah or, as the early church chose to call it: Ecclesiasticus: “of the church.” That title indicates how important the early church viewed it to be. It is Wisdom literature – similar to Proverbs,

Our reading begins with these words: **The beginning of human pride is to forsake the Lord; the heart has withdrawn from its Maker.**

Consider the Garden of Eden story. Almost from the very beginning, we humans decided we know better than God. We ate from the tree of knowledge of Good and Evil rather than trusting God and God's instruction and direction.

Human pride! Vanity! Forsaking the Lord. The heart withdrawn from its maker.

This seems to be our story, over and over and over again!

Something significant has to happen to turn our hearts back to God – to our maker. To bring us to humility – to truly holding God first in our lives – and not ourselves.

Thus – our Collect for today. This Collect is based on a prayer from ~500-600 AD, and it was contained in Thomas Cranmer's 1549 Book of Common Prayer. In it we prayed:

Lord of all power and might, the author and giver of all good things: Graft in our hearts the love of your Name; increase in us true religion; nourish us with all goodness; and bring forth in us the fruit of good works;

One resource describes this Collect as an “Extended metaphor of the farmer or gardener: the fruit of good works is brought forth by the grace of God who plants, nourishes, and continues to care for His own.”

Just like the delicious fruit from my parents’ backyard.

As with grafting, this work of God within us can require a clean, sharp knife – it can be a bit painful!

But Psalm 112 reminds us:

1 Hallelujah!

**Happy are they who fear the Lord *
and have great delight in his commandments!**

**7b their heart is right;
they put their trust in the Lord.**

So, this is homily is something of a Valentine’s Day sermon, I guess. It’s all about our hearts. It’s about where they are, how they are, whose they are. And if we truly want God’s help in changing our hearts, we must first recognize the where, how, and whose of our hearts right now.

Are we more concerned w/recognition, like the people in Jesus’ parable?

Are we focused on acquisition, protecting ourselves & our own?

Do we need a heart transplant? Or at least, a grafting?

If you answer yes, then, allow the Great Physician – the Great Arborist – to do the needed work within you – the loving surgery God described in Ezekiel 11:19-20:

I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God.

May it be so. Amen.