

Date: October 25, 2026 (Pentecost 22)

1. Texts: Deuteronomy 34:1-12; Ps. 90:1-6, 13-17; 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8; Matthew 22:34-46.
2. Subject: the faith.
3. Topic: the tyranny of sin and the fear of death.
4. Aim: instruct, encourage.
5. Proposition: "Christians are to live as if they were freed from the tyranny of sin."

THE TYRANNY OF SIN

Listen to the "Collect of the Day" that we will pray towards the end of our Service of Morning Prayer:

Lord God our redeemer, who heard the cry of your people
and sent your servant Moses to lead them out of slavery,
free us from the tyranny of sin and death,
and by the leading of your Spirit bring us to our promised land;
through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you
and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

The language of this collect *used to be* dramatic and poetic: "...free us from the tyranny of sin and death..." Since the rise of Putin and Trump, tyranny has become normalized and disguised in the Halloween costume of violent patriotism. Current political realities have weakened the language of this collect, making it sound petty and even trivial.

Re-writing such a collect would take a lot of time and effort—it is never easy to change a prayer book in the Anglican Church. So, we'll have to recover some of the urgency of this collect if we are to pray it meaningfully.

Tyranny is a form of government where a single ruler or small group exercises absolute, uncontrolled power in a cruel, unfair, or oppressive manner. A tyrant rules without legal constraints, constitutional limits, or accountability to the people. Authority is maintained through fear, punishment, intimidation, and the suppression of basic freedoms or dissent. Decisions depend on the ruler's personal whims rather than established laws or principals of justice. There is no balance amongst the branches of government, amongst the executive, the legislative and the judicial. Power and action are concentrated in the executive branch without limit or constraints.

This has become an accepted means of governance in many countries in the world, particularly in countries with a greater share of economic power. So, when we pray this collect, we cannot sense its urgency and the depth of its power.

But, think about this: according to the collect, sin and its offspring death are tyrants over us. They rule without checks and balances. They maintain control through fear and intimidation. Afraid of disturbing the peace, the Church rarely speaks about sin and death. Public discourse is discouraged. The reign of these joint tyrants is secure.

Contrary to what we might have thought, the collect insists that God has not yet dethroned sin and death. Yet, through Jesus, God has opened the stairway to heaven so that we might experience eternal life and salvation. Surely, salvation must be the cure for sin and death. Maybe the authors of the collect got it wrong?

Let's choose to believe that the authors actually got it right. Yes, God has solved the problem of universal sin. Jesus' life, death and resurrection are the proof of his identity and so proof of his saving love. But his solution must be individually applied through faith in Jesus. The plea in this collect is not, "Free us all from the tyranny..." The plea is "Free each of us from the tyranny of sin and death..." We will achieve freedom from such tyranny through our own adoption of Christ's lordship and salvation. God has already acted, but each of us must accept his offer of rescue.

We do this through a personal and meaningful commitment of faith. Faith is the life-changing relationship with God through Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. This faith relationship exists within the boundaries of love, trust, self-sacrifice and surrender to the will of God. That is, we love God and we trust God. Because of this, we choose to sacrifice ourselves for God's sake and so surrender to God's will. Love, trust, self-sacrifice and surrender create the relationship of faith with God.

In this relationship, sin holds less power over our lives. In addition, we can use the example of Jesus and his teachings as our defense against sin.

This also dulls death's greatest weapon, fear. Many Christians—maybe even most Christians—fear death because they believe God will punish them for their sins. The faith relationship assaults death and fear by providing confidence in Christ's forgiveness.

The world's current political climate weakens the language of today's collect. We have to work to recover some of its impact. We do this by renewing our commitment to our relationship of faith in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As we take God more seriously, we can take the meaning of this collect more seriously. God frees us from the tyranny of sin and death through our faith commitment. Of course, we have to make the choice of faith for this miracle to occur.

AMEN.