

A change is coming!

A change is coming and it may be to a place you least expect – Our Bible.

Language changes and constantly adapts to reflect our changing lives, experiences, and cultures, and allows us to accommodate new ideas, inventions, and technologies. Not only the words change, but the way we use them changes too.

I'm always intrigued when Merriam-Webster and Dictionary.com add new words each year. In 2024, creepy-crawly, capicola, snog, and street-corn, along with 25 others, were added!

“Church language” changes too. Remember when the Apostles’ Creed changed from “descended into hell” to “descended to the dead”? So much of what we associate with hell is imported from cultural references in books and film, not only from biblical witnesses. Or think about the versions of our Lord’s Prayer? The “traditional” version is from way back in 1662 and the “alternate” version that some still call “new” was released in 1977.

Translations of the Bible change too, and we’ve been through this before. My first Bible was the Revised Standard Version (RSV) from 1952, updated again in 1971. The *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV) came out in 1989. The King James Bible translation goes back to 1611 and the *New King James* (NKJV) in 1979.

But why do Bible translations change? Isn’t there a “perfect” Bible? There are constantly discoveries of ancient texts, such as the Dead Sea Scrolls, new insights into biblical scholarship. God also deserves the best each generation can render. The growth of information in the past 30-plus years makes Bible research, interpretation, and understanding an ever-changing effort.

As a denomination, the ELCA now uses NRSV. In July, the ELCA, as well as dozens of other denominations, will transition to NRSVue (New Revised Standard Version – *Updated Edition*). This translation took almost three years of work by 37 different communions or denominations. The NRSVue sought to use all current available scholarship and eliminate any social, political, or theological agenda, any of which would put to question the integrity and trustworthiness of the translation.

If you’re following along in the NRSV pew bibles during worship, you might notice some differences with NRSVue read from pulpit. I encourage you to approach these changes with a sense of wonder and let this wonder lead you to hear what God might be saying through this difference. Talk with others! Come to a Bible Study!

In his book *The Murderous History of Bible Translations*, Harry Freedman says something really important: “living in a more tolerant world doesn’t lessen the emotional attachment that people have to a particular translation. For many people, the words of the Bible that they’ve grown up with are comforting and changing them can be unsettling. Freedman says that there’s really nothing uncontroversial about any change, simply because it’s the Bible.”¹

¹ <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/interview/even-better-bible>

As always, then, you are encouraged to use your favorite translation of the Bible for your personal devotion, study and prayer. Referencing a variety of versions helps to stretch our hearts and minds, and to gain greater insight into how God continues to faithfully speak to God's people.

Thank you for your patience as we make these shifts. And as always, please reach out to me if you have questions.

Many blessings, Pastor Karen