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Matthew 27:15-17, New Revised Standard Version, updated edition.

¹⁵ Now at the festival the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner for the crowd, anyone whom they wanted. ¹⁶ At that time they had a notorious prisoner called Jesus Barabbas. ¹⁷ So after they had gathered, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?"

Yeshua, there's a pork in my shoe!

I want to look at the same passage today, but from two different translations. I'll do this with two different passages, in fact. I often compare different English translations of the Bible because subtle differences in English translations of either Hebrew or Greek scripture reveal intriguing facts about the Bible, things that we wouldn't notice if we were reading only one translation. Sometimes it has to do with a dominant translation being out and out wrong. In this case, today, it has to do with two translations being different, but both being correct.

I'd like to start with my kids, which are not kids anymore. Wendy and I have three adult children. Our youngest is our son Julien, who is 32. Anyone who is a parent is likely to have a story like this one. It has to do with how families often develop fun replacement words for real English words. One day, the entire

family was on a walk in the neighborhood. Julien was three. When we had gotten about a block and a half from the house, he started noticeably limping and then he yelled out: “I’ve got a pork in my shoe!” You know, pork, like a kind of meat that you might have for dinner. He was a little guy caught in a tough situation: he had to communicate something serious, and he had to do it right now, but he wasn’t armed with the right word. Well, when Jesus said that we should accept the kingdom of Heaven with the innocence of little kids, this is part of what he meant. We should never be afraid to express ourselves simply because we’re not sure exactly how to do it. Kids are not ashamed of not having big vocabularies. They use what they have. We stopped. Wendy peeled his shoe off the foot he was gingerly holding high in the air – and shook out the pork.

Let’s talk about Jesus. We’re here because of Jesus, right? Jesus made a special point of treating the lowest in society with great respect. He embraced the sick, the disabled, those forced to live on the perimeter of society. His name holds a very high position on our shared vocabulary. He is named Jesus, right? We’ve been calling him that for many hundreds of years. That’s what our Bibles call him. Just remember that he was a Jew who spoke Aramaic, a language somewhat different from but related to Hebrew, and his faith language, the language he used in the Temple, was Hebrew. Hebrew is called a “sacred”

language by many scholars because the people who knew it couldn't speak in it fluently, like the Jews in Israel today can. But the New Testament is written in Greek. This is because just before the life of Jesus, Greek speaking people had ruled the Holy Land, and Jews had willingly adopted their culture, their clothing, and their written language. Greek was the way in which literate Jews proudly wrote. But there are some who say that it's a mistake to call Jesus "Jesus". An important point is that Jesus did NOT speak Greek, and since he was probably not well educated beyond having studied Hebrew scripture, he probably couldn't write Greek fluently, either. In comparison, Paul, who was a highly educated Jew, could write very literate Greek. Interestingly, Jesus is in truth a Greek name - more or less. Here's the derivation. His Hebrew name, and Jewish kids where he lived were given Hebrew names, was *Yeshua* (*YEH-shoo-uh*). It means "Yahweh is Salvation" or "The Lord is Salvation". It was a very common name in his time and place. But when the New Testament was written, his name was translated into Greek and became *Iēsous* (*ee-ay-sooce*). That's how his name appears in the original Greek texts of the New Testament – remember that the New Testament authors all wrote in Greek, which, again, was the literary language of Jesus' culture. And the common English transliterated spelling for *Iēsous* (*ee-ay-sooce*) is Jesus. A transliteration is when the letters of one language or alphabet are

traded for the letters of another language or alphabet, to create a similar sound – and so, *Iēsous* (ee-ay-sooce) became Jesus.

But what does this have to do with our two Bible passage translations? I wanted to talk about Jesus' name. As I began to write this sermon, another thought struck me, and I'd like to go there first. He was not really called Jesus, but there were other people in the New Testament who have come to be known as Jesus for the same reason as him. Remember Barabbas, the guy who was sentenced to death and would have been killed if folks had voted for him to die instead of demanding that Jesus be executed? (In reality, the people voted to set Barabbas free.) Here's something from near the end of the Gospel of Matthew:

¹⁷ As the crowds gathered before Pilate's house that morning, he asked them, "Which one do you want me to release to you—Barabbas, or Jesus who is called the Messiah?" ¹⁸ I read this version just to let you know that a favorite translation of mine because of its readability, the New Living Translation, isn't always the most accurate. In this case, the New Revised Standard Version, and this is from the updated edition, a newer version of the translation you have in the pew is more accurate. It reads: *¹⁷ So after they had gathered, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?"* In other words, Barabbas' common name was Jesus, at least when

translated from Hebrew to Greek to English. The New Living Translation, for some reason, drops his true first name and calls him Barabbas, although that is not what is written in the original Greek language of the New Testament Scripture. There were other Jesuses in the Bible. In Colossians 4:11, Paul writes:

¹¹ Jesus (the one we call Justus) also sends his greetings. These are the only Jewish believers among my co-workers; they are working with me here for the Kingdom of God. And what a comfort they have been!

This time, the New Living Translation is correct. This is, of course, a completely different Jesus from Jesus Christ and Jesus Barabbas.

But in truth, there are a whole bunch of Jesuses in the Bible, if you consider the following. Want to know the English spelling of *Yeshua* (*YEH-shoo-uh*), that is, if you go directly from Hebrew to English, without stopping off in Greek? Remember, Yeshua is Jesus' true name in Hebrew. Well, when translated directly into English it's Joshua. There were multiple Joshua's in the Bible. As it turns out, since we translated the Old Testament directly from Hebrew to English, we usually see the name Joshua in the Old Testament. (But this isn't a rigid rule.)

Now, there is something very interesting about Joshua - the extremely famous character from the Old Testament - having the same Hebrew name as

Jesus Christ. When Moses and his people were in the desert and approaching the Promised Land, Moses sent twelve spies into the land of Canaan to check it out. One of them was Joshua. Joshua was essentially Moses' assistant, and he became the leader of the Israelites after Moses died at the threshold of Israel. He was born in Egypt before the great exodus, and so he was far from a young man when they entered Canaan. According to the Bible, Joshua led the bloody conquest of Canaan and later allocated land to the twelve tribes of Israel. According to the Book of Joshua, he lived to be 110. Some time I'll do a sermon that discusses the invasion of Canaan. It probably was nowhere near as bloody as we think, and in fact, it might have been completely non-violent. But the point here is that Joshua led the Chosen People to victory over their enemies and into an earthly kingdom, promised by God via the Old Covenant between God and Moses. (God also promised his blessing and many descendants for the Chosen People.) Jesus Christ, or Jesus the Savior, who bears the same name, led his people – us – to victory over a greater enemy, earthly evil, and to the eternal kingdom of God. Perhaps this parallel would be much more widely noted if we hadn't accidentally ended up calling them by what English speakers think are two very different names. But Yeshua to English is Joshua, and Yeshua to Greek to English is Jesus.

Let's get to the Bible main passage wanted to talk about today. The first version is from the traditional King James Bible, which is not famous for being highly accurate. It was written to be poetic. The second is from, well, a common favorite of mine, the New Living Translation. Here they are, with the King James Version first, from Acts Chapter 7:

⁴⁴ Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as he had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen. ⁴⁵ Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drave out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David; ⁴⁶ Who found favour before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob. ⁴⁷ But Solomon built him an house. ⁴⁸ Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, ⁴⁹ Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? ⁵⁰ Hath not my hand made all these things?

Now, here is the same passage from the New Living Translation:

⁴⁴ "Our ancestors carried the Tabernacle with them through the wilderness. It was constructed according to the plan God had shown to Moses. ⁴⁵ Years later, when Joshua led our ancestors in battle against the nations that God drove out of this land, the Tabernacle was taken with them into their new territory. And it stayed there until the time of King David.

⁴⁶ "David found favor with God and asked for the privilege of building a permanent Temple for the God of Jacob. ⁴⁷ But it was Solomon who actually built it. ⁴⁸ However, the Most High doesn't live in temples made by human hands. As the prophet says,

*⁴⁹ 'Heaven is my throne,
and the earth is my footstool.
Could you build me a temple as good as that?'
asks the LORD.
'Could you build me such a resting place?*

⁵⁰ Didn't my hands make both heaven and earth?'

Notice that in the New Living Translation, the leader of the Israelites is called Joshua, but in the King James Version, he is called Jesus. This is a piece of a speech that Stephen gave to the Council of high-ranking Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. Remember that Stephen is considered the first Christian martyr. He was a deacon in the church at Jerusalem. In his speech, he repeatedly reminds the listeners that the Israelites (who later became the Jews) over their history repeatedly abandoned God and turned to worshipping idols. He argued that Jesus was the Savior and that all people, Jews and Gentiles alike, should accept Jesus Christ. They ended up dragging him out of the council room, past the walls of the city, and stoning him to death. Stephen was a very gifted orator, and in our passage, he tells the Jews that the Temple, which they see as the home of God, isn't really God's home. Stephen quotes their Scripture, which we call the Old Testament, to tell them, in the New Living Translation, that:

⁴⁵ Years later, when Joshua led our ancestors in battle against the nations that God drove out of this land, the Tabernacle was taken with them into their new territory. And it stayed there until the time of King David.

In the King James, we read:

⁴⁵ Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drave out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David;

Stephen is quoting Isaiah, from the beginning of Chapter 66. This is a great passage, as it points out a fundamental difference between our faith and the faith from which it was born. Ancient Jews saw the Temple as literally the home of God, where you would find God. Many Jews believe that after the End Times, the world as we know it will go on, except that there will be peace on Earth. But we don't see our church here as the home of God, only a place where we come to worship God. And we believe that at the end of time, life will go on in a completely different fashion. But do please keep in mind that both Jews and Christians vary a lot in just what they think will happen at the end of time, and I have only presented one specific Jewish way of thinking. But the point here is that the King James Version of the Bible calls Joshua "Jesus". We could argue that this means that the King James, as poetic as it is, and as much as it has radically impacted western civilization, is wrong. But no. The King James simply uses the Hebrew to Greek to English version of our Lord's name and assigns it to Joshua as well, perhaps acknowledging that the two names are the same.

Let me end with this. Remember Julien? The little guy with a pork in his shoe? He used the wrong word, right? Well, from then on - and we still do it - when the family takes a hike, if anyone gets anything in their shoe or boot and has to stop to pull it out, that person yells out "I've got a pork in my shoe!". And

we understand that person perfectly. Language is an always-shifting, always growing thing, and linguists have tracked significant interrelationships between languages that might otherwise seem to be extremely different to modern people. If enough people started copying Julien - which I admit enemy might not happen - in fifty years, the word pork would have another meaning in the dictionary: something sharp that gets caught in your shoe and causes an owie.

So, we can call Jesus anything we want. Jesus. Yeshua. *Iēsous* (ee-ay-sooce). We could call him Tony. It wouldn't matter. His name is a powerful name, and that power doesn't come from how you spell or pronounce it, or what native language you speak. The energy, the vigor of that name, comes from the person who bore it – our Lord, our Savior, the Christ. Christ, by the way, comes from the Greek word *Christos*, which means the Chosen One or the Anointed One. Either way, Jesus is the Christ – and maybe that says it all: Jesus is the Chosen One who chose us. That is why we are gathered here today in joy to celebrate the person whose throne is in Heaven, not in this beautiful building in which I am deeply honored to preach. Jesus is also the person who leads us to spiritual salvation and taught us how to live on this Earth. We live with joy, with humility, with empathy, with forgiveness, and with respect for all people.