

March 6, 2024
Homily Manuscript

Mark 1:16-20

¹⁶ As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁷ “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.”* ¹⁸ At once they left their nets and followed him.

¹⁹ When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. ²⁰ Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

*ESV: “...and I will make you become fishers of men.” with footnote that says “The Greek word *anthropoi* refers here to both men and women.”

KJV: “...I will make you to become fishers of men.”

NASB: “...I will have you become fishers of people.”

NET Bible: “...and I will turn you into fishers of people.”

Good NewsBible: “...and I will teach you to catch people.”

CEB: “...and I’ll show you how to fish for people.”

NRSVA: “...and I will make you fish for people.”

“Fishers of People’ or ‘Fishers of Men’? Decisions in Bible Translation”

As we continue with our homily series on topics suggested by you, the parishioners of St Matthias, tonight we’re going to explore decisions in the translation of scripture. In particular, this topic stems from a question raised about a famous phrase Mark 1:17, which some more recent versions of the Bible have translated as “fishers of people” while this phrase has more traditionally been translated as “fishers of men” and some even recent versions of the Bible continue to translate it that way. So ultimately we will get into the subject of gender inclusive principles in Bible translation, but before we get to that I wanted to broaden the scope of this homily to talk about why translation of scripture is so challenging, drawing primarily from the insights of Biblical Scholar D.A. Carson.¹

Carson shares an Italian pun: “Traddutore, traditore.” Literally translated, this means “translators, traitors,” but the sense of its meaning in English is that “All translation is treason,” meaning that whenever there is translation from one language to another, some sense of what was meant in the original language will inevitably be lost. And this very phrase proves the point, for to give English speakers a sense of what is meant, we’ve had to go from two words to four, but in doing so we’ve had to completely sacrifice the sense of the pun in Italian, that the two words “traddutore” and “traditore” sound extremely similar. All translation is treason: something of the original sense is inevitably lost in all translation. And this is absolutely the case in Bible translation.

So let me describe for you just a few of the challenges that face Bible translators.

1. First, as many of you know, the Bible was written in ancient languages. The Old Testament was written in Ancient Hebrew, with a smattering of Aramaic here and there. Meanwhile, the New Testament was written in a dialect of Ancient Greek known as Koine Greek. And both Ancient Hebrew and Ancient Koine Greek differ from the modern versions of those languages in significant ways. But we have no dictionaries from the time that these ancient languages were active to explain what words meant. So, as I mentioned last week, to understand and make modern dictionaries of what Ancient Hebrew and Ancient Greek words mean, scholars have basically had to compare all the instances of a word in the individual contexts they’re used in. And when words are used rarely, then there can remain a lot of uncertainty about what a word means. For example, the Hebrew word תִּשְׁבָּע (pronounced tesh-oo-kaw') that we looked at last week from

¹ D.A. Carson, *The Inclusive-Language Debate: A Plea for Realism*, Baker: 1998

Genesis 3:16,² which is usually translated “desire” is only used three times in all of the Old Testament.

The Greek New Testament contains more than 600 words that are only used once³ and the Hebrew Old Testament contains about 1400 Ancient Hebrew words that are only used once, about 400 of which are difficult to interpret.⁴ Have any of you ever been reading the Old Testament and come across a footnote that says the meaning of the Hebrew word is uncertain?⁵

So, translating the Bible is difficult because we’re dealing with ancient languages where there can still be uncertainty about what a word means.

2. But added to that is an additional challenge of words having multiple meanings. We know this from English of course. For example, take the verb “to run”. This word can refer to going somewhere with quick steps, but we also say that machines run, the politician runs for office, the FBI runs down a fugitive, you might run a fence around a field, or you might even run an idea up the flagpole, so to speak.⁶ Every language has words with multiple meanings. And to illustrate how this is the case in Biblical languages, I’ve provided some different instances of the Ancient Greek word *sarx*. This word means “flesh”, but let’s look just briefly at all the different ways it is used to communicate different meanings and how different versions of the Bible have rendered it.⁷

- In Matthew 16:17, Jesus couples the word poetically with the word blood to refer to human beings. So the first five versions cited translated it as “flesh and blood”, expecting the reader to understand this figure of speech, while the last two versions opt to be more clear about what it means, but consequently lose the mention of either flesh or blood at all.

Matthew 16:17- “*sarx* and blood have not revealed this to you.”

King James Version (KJV) - “for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee
English Standard Version (ESV) – “For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you...”

New International Version (NIV) – “...for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood...”

New Revised Standard Version (NRSVA) - “For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you...”

New American Standard Bible (NASB) - because flesh and blood did not reveal *this* to you,

New Living Translation (NLT) - You did not learn this from any human being.

Common English Bible (CEB) - “...because no human has shown this to you...”

² Genesis 3:16 - “16 To the woman he said, “I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.” (NIV)

³ When a word is only used once, this is called a hapax legomenon. Read more about it here: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hapax_legomenon

⁴ <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/hapax-legomena>

⁵ A list of Biblical words where the meaning is uncertain can be found here:
http://www.thealmightyguru.com/Wiki/index.php?title=List_of_biblical_words_with_uncertain_meanings

⁶ “Has 'Run' Run Amok? It Has 645 Meanings ... So Far,” May 2011,
<https://www.npr.org/2011/05/30/136796448/has-run-run-amok-it-has-645-meanings-so-far#:~:text=So%20Far%20One%20three%2Dletter.alone%20%E2%80%94%20has%20645%20distinct%20meanings.>

⁷ Adapted and updated from Carson, pp52-54.

- Next, in John 17, Jesus uses *sarx* without “blood” to refer again to human beings. But since He doesn’t use the “and blood” construction - since it’s more of a one-to-one match of “flesh” to “human beings”, some of the translations felt more liberty to translating *sarx* as ‘people’ or ‘everyone’, thought a few of them include a footnotes making clear that the Greek word literally translates as ‘flesh’.

John 17:2 - “just as you have given to him authority over all *sarx*”

KJV - “As thou hast given him power over all flesh...”

ESV - “since you have given him authority over all flesh...”

NIV - “For you granted him authority over all people...”

NRSVA - since you have given him authority over all people,*...” [fn: Gk *flesh*]

NASB - just as You gave Him authority over all *mankind. [fn:Lit *flesh*]

NLT - For you have given him authority over everyone

CEB - “You gave him authority over everyone...”

- However, in Romans 11:14, Paul uses the word *sarx* to refer more specifically to his own people, the Jews. And so, all of the modern translations feel the need to make this meaning more explicit by saying something other than ‘flesh’.

Romans 11:14 - if somehow I might make jealous my *sarx* and save some of them.”

KJV - “If by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh.”

ESV - “in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them.”

NIV - “in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them.”

NRSVA - “in order to make my own people* jealous, and thus save some of them.”
[FN: Gk *my flesh*]

NASB - “if somehow I may move my *own people to jealousy and save some of them.” [fn:Lit *flesh*]

NLT - “for I want somehow to make the people of Israel jealous of what you Gentiles have, so I might save some of them.”

CEB - “in the hope that somehow I might make my own people jealous and save some of them.”

- But, as anyone who has read much of the New Testament is probably aware, in many instances Paul uses the word *flesh* - *sarx* - to refer to a sinful way of living or thinking, which we see in both Galatians 5 and 1 Corinthians 3:3.

Galatians 5:16 “walk by the spirit and you will not fulfill the desire of the *sarx*”

KJV - “This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.”

ESV - “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.”

NIV - “So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.”

NRSVA - “Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh.”

NASB - “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.”

NLT - “So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won’t be doing what your sinful nature craves.”

CEB - “I say be guided by the Spirit and you won’t carry out your selfish desires.”

1 Corinthians 3:3a “for you are still *sarkikoi* [that is, characterized by *sarx*]”

KJV - “For ye are yet carnal.”

ESV - “for you are still of the flesh.”

NIV - “You are still worldly.”

NRSVA - “for you are still of the flesh.”

NASB - “for you are still fleshly.”

NLT - “for you are still controlled by your sinful nature.”

CEB - “because you are still unspiritual.”

And yet, in each of those exact letters, Paul uses the word *sarx* to mean something entirely different in a different context.

- In Galatians 4, Paul refers to the “weakness of the *sarx*”, but translators understand that he is talking about being physically sick or ill.

Galatians 4:13 “Because of the weakness of the *sarx* I first preached the gospel to you”

KJV - “Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first.”

ESV - “You know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first,”

NIV - “As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you,”

NRSVA - “You know that it was because of a physical infirmity that I first announced the gospel to you;”

NASB - “but you know that it was because of a *bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time;” [Footnote: Lit *weakness of the flesh*]

NLT - Surely you remember that I was sick when I first brought you the Good News.”

CEB - You know that I first preached the gospel to you because of an illness.”

- Meanwhile, in 1 Corinthians 9:11, Paul uses the *sarkika* from the root word *sarx* to refer to material provision earned through work.

1 Corinthians 9:11 - “it is much if we reap spiritual your *sarkika* [that is, things characterized by the *sarx*]

KJV - “If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?”

ESV - “If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?”

NIV - “If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you?”

NRSVA - “If we have sown spiritual good among you, is it too much if we reap your material benefits?”

NASB - “If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?”

NLT - Since we have planted spiritual seed among you, aren’t we entitled to a harvest of physical food and drink?”

CEB - “If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it so much to ask to harvest some material things from you?”

So, Bible translators have to deal with uncertainty about what certain words mean, discerning what meaning is best when words have multiple meanings, and how to best communicate the sense of what is being said to readers of the Bible today that balances the way something was originally said with how the *meaning* of what was said might be best comprehended by a contemporary reader.

Although, these challenges of vocabulary are not the only obstacles for translators to navigate, there is also factors I don't have time to wade into tonight that both word structure⁸ and sentence structure⁹ differ from language to language. But all of this is to show that task of translation is not only very difficult, but all Bible translation requires the translator to first seek to understand all that is being said the original text, by taking into account morphology, syntax, the immediate context of the passage, the overall context of the biblical book, theological considerations about what is being communicated, and so on, to then make a decision about how to best communicate the sense of what is being said to the reader in the current language without using too many more words. And while footnotes can mitigate this a bit, inevitably something will be sacrificed: "Traddutore, traditore," - All translation is treason. #

But I agree with Carson, that the highest priority needs to be translating the text into the current language - in our case: translating in a way such that its meaning is most fully understood by the average English speaker in 2024. Therefore, an additional factor in translating scripture is that languages are always changing; it is the nature of every human language to change over time. And to illustrate this, I had the lector read Isaiah 19:1-12 from the King James Version of the Bible,¹⁰ published in 1611 and I trust that you found it as mystifying and difficult to comprehend as I did. Well, just four hundred years ago, this was the clearest and most understandable way this passage could be translated for English speakers. But since then, meanings and use of certain words have changed or become antiquated. So, all translations are temporary because language changes!

And this leads us more particularly to the use of words pertaining to gender and how their meaning and understanding change over time. In the culture that both Biblical Hebrew and Biblical Greek were written, it was common for groups of both males and female to be referred to with the male referent.

⁸ When it comes to word structure, some languages are more inflected than others. For example, any of us who know Spanish or have taken Spanish in school know that Spanish verbs are more inflected than English: where we often add a 'd' or 'ed' to the end of a verb to indicate something being done in the past - like "I loved", "She loved", "we loved" - Spanish could have a dozen different endings to the same verb to indicate something done in the past based upon whether it was complete or not and whether it was first person singular or third person plural. Well, both Biblical Hebrew and Biblical Greek are much more complexly inflected than English or Spanish, which yet again makes it challenging for a translator to communicate the full or precise sense of what was written.

⁹ The sentence structure - or syntax - of Biblical Hebrew and Biblical Greek are very different from English. The Greek phrase *en tō iōannēn exelthein*. If we just transliterated it, so just translated each word to English and added them all up, this would mean "in the [with respect to] John to go out," whereas translating the phrase it would simply be "when John went out."

¹⁰ Isaiah 19:1-12 (King James Version):

¹ *The burden of Egypt. Behold, the Lord rideth upon a swift cloud, and shall come into Egypt: and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at his presence, and the heart of Egypt shall melt in the midst of it.* ² *And I will set the Egyptians against the Egyptians: and they shall fight every one against his brother, and every one against his neighbour; city against city, and kingdom against kingdom.* ³ *And the spirit of Egypt shall fail in the midst thereof; and I will destroy the counsel thereof: and they shall seek to the idols, and to the charmers, and to them that have familiar spirits, and to the wizards.* ⁴ *And the Egyptians will I give over into the hand of a cruel lord; and a fierce king shall rule over them, saith the Lord, the Lord of hosts.* ⁵ *And the waters shall fail from the sea, and the river shall be wasted and dried up.* ⁶ *And they shall turn the rivers far away; and the brooks of defence shall be emptied and dried up: the reeds and flags shall wither.* ⁷ *The paper reeds by the brooks, by the mouth of the brooks, and every thing sown by the brooks, shall wither, be driven away, and be no more.* ⁸ *The fishers also shall mourn, and all they that cast angle into the brooks shall lament, and they that spread nets upon the waters shall languish.* ⁹ *Moreover they that work in fine flax, and they that weave networks, shall be confounded.* ¹⁰ *And they shall be broken in the purposes thereof, all that make sluices and ponds for fish.* ¹¹ *Surely the princes of Zoan are fools, the counsel of the wise counsellors of Pharaoh is become brutish: how say ye unto Pharaoh, I am the son of the wise, the son of ancient kings? ¹² Where are they? where are thy wise men? and let them tell thee now, and let them know what the Lord of hosts hath purposed upon Egypt.*

So, for example, when the Old Testament refers to the “Sons of Israel” in Hebrew, the ancient audience understood this to refer to both the men and women of Israel. And when the writer of a New Testament letter was written to a Church and addressed them as brothers - *adelphoi* - but did not write *adelphes*, sisters - the First Century receivers of that letter still understood the letter was addressed to both the men and women in the Church.

Now, with the phrase we’re giving particular focus to from Mark 1:17 - ‘Fishers of People’ or ‘Fishers of Men’ - Jesus could have used a phrase that refers to males in particular - the Greek word *aner* - but He used *anthropoi* - which refers to human beings. So His disciples understood that He intended for them to seek to make disciples of not just males but of all people, males and females. However, when the King James Bible was written four hundred years ago, the English word most commonly used to refer to the whole human race was “man” or “men”. When people in the 17th century read Jesus say in this verse, “I will make you to become fishers of men”, everyone largely understood that Jesus was referring to all human beings, not just males.

However, language does change, and for many complex reasons, but the reality is that where the average person would have understood the word “men” to refer to males *and* females, studies shows that this is no longer something that can be taken for granted.

Mark Strauss cites studies that were done primarily in the 1970s - so fifty years ago - that demonstrate a large percentage of the population perceive masculine generic terms like “man” and “he” as exclusive rather than inclusive, that is, referring primarily or exclusively to men; and with children it’s even stronger than with adults.¹¹ The results of some of these studies are detailed in the footnotes of this homily’s manuscript. So, for this reason, if a Bible translation is seeking to be most fully understood by the average English speaker over the last half-century, “Fishers of people” should be preferred in Mark 1:17 over “fishers of men”.

¹¹ Strauss:

“Joseph Schneider and Sally Hacker (1973) gave college students hypothetical chapter titles for a textbook on sociology and asked them to bring in pictures that could be used in the chapter. Among students who were given titles using generic “man,” such as “Industrial Man” and “Economic Man,” 64 percent of the pictures submitted showed only men. When gender-neutral terms like “Industrial Life” and “Economic Life” were used, only half of the pictures contained only male images. This represented a statistically significant 39 percent increase in the number of women portrayed.” Lavis Wilson (1978) conducted a similar study on teachers, asking them to mark which of a set of pictures (containing a man and a woman, two men, or two women) applied to stimulus words like “repairman,” “salesmen,” “men of good will,” “early men,” “stone age men,” “craftsmen,” “policemen,” as well as gender-neutral equivalents like “cavepeople,” “salespeople,” “police officers,” etc. Wilson found that teachers were more likely to select pictures of men and women when generic terms were used.” J. A. Sniezek and C. H. Jazwinski (1986) similarly found that when subjects were asked to draw pictures of “man,” “people,” and “men and women,” pictures of “man” had significantly more males than those drawn for “people.” In another study these researchers determined that when occupations and their accompanying explanations use generic masculine terms, 92.9 percent of names requested for that category were masculine.

Studies of children have produced similar results. Aileen Nilson (1973) found that young children thought that “man” meant male people in sentences such as “man needs food.” Linda Harrison (1975) asked junior-high students to draw pictures of “early man,” “mankind,” “early humans” or “early men and women.” The least number of women were drawn in the “early man” category, and (not surprisingly) the most women were drawn for “early men and women.” In another study, Linda Harrison and Richard Passero (1975) read elementary school children sentences which contained either inclusive words like “people,” “salespeople” and “pilgrim ancestors” or masculine generic terms like “man,” “manmade” and “pilgrim forefathers.” When asked to circle pictures which indicated the referents of these sentences, females were circled more often for the inclusive sentences.

These studies indicating that children often misunderstand generic “man” as male-only have important implications for the uproar over gender-inclusive language in children’s versions like the International Children’s Bible (ICB) and the New International Reader’s Version (NIRV). If children are even more prone than adults to misunderstand masculine generics, one would think that the choice to use more inclusive terms in these versions would be appropriate.

There seems little doubt from these studies that when “man” is used as a generic term, it is often misunderstood to refer only to males. At the least, a certain level of confusion and ambiguity often results. This confusion has been illustrated by many writers. Psychologist Wendy Martyna points out the startled laughter that greets such sentences as “Menstrual pain accounts for an enormous loss of manpower hours,” or “Man, being a mammal, breastfeeds his young.” Compare the sentence “Humans, being mammals, breastfeed their young.” The latter is obviously a more clear and unambiguous statement. Note the subtle ambiguity in phrases like “a man for all seasons,” and “no man is an island.” The former is specific (male), the latter is general. Similar results related to perception and usage have been demonstrated concerning the use of generic “he”...

[Mark L. Strauss, *Distorting Scripture?: The Challenge of Bible Translation and Gender Accuracy*, Wipf & Stock 1998.

But in the late 1990s, when the NIV was easily the dominant translation in Protestant America, some extreme conservatives were upset that the NIV began making some changes in a more inclusive direction for translating generic gendered words. Part of this reaction was out of concern for protecting Complementarianism, which we talked about last week: some perceived the language change in our culture as being a result of feminism, which some passionate Complementarians can tend to demonize as being bad in every way. And, there can be no doubt that the feminist movement has had an impact on the English language and how it is understood, but the shift toward the understanding of man and he as being exclusive of women had also begun long before the feminist movement. But eventually this outrage led to the creation of the ESV. The English Standard Version, which our current Book of Common Prayer uses, unfortunately, was basically created in reaction to largely sensible & defensible changes accommodating for gradual changes in the English language. And when it comes to Bible translation, whatever are the varied causes for a language to change are not nearly as important as how a contemporary person is going to *understand* the text, and ensuring they understand its meaning most accurately given how language is used in the present day. And D.A. Carson, who by the way is complementarian himself, passionately defends such realism: that comprehension should be a higher priority than culture wars.

So the Committee on Bible Translation (CBT), which is a 15-person committee behind the translation of the NIV Bible and includes both Complementarians and Egalitarians, has a list of policies - from 1999, when it comes to gender inclusive language. And you can read it in full at a link in my footnotes.¹² In it, they express their commitment to modify patriarchal language from ancient biblical cultures that appear in today's context to deny the common human dignity of all hearers and readers.¹³ And so, you can see some of the results of this policy in black-and-white in the "Five examples of different approaches to translating Gender in Scripture."^{14,15}

In the first three examples, where the King James Version always used "man", "his", and "he" and assumed the reader knew it applied to both men and women, the NIV modifies the translation to be more inclusive - to apply more clearly to both men and women - even if they have to change from singular to plural, while the ESV is less committed to this.

Proverbs 20:24

KJV - "Man's goings are of the Lord; how can a man then understand his own way?"

ESV - "A man's steps are from the LORD; how then can man understand his way?"

NIV- "A person's steps are directed by the Lord. How then can anyone understand their own way?"

Matthew 15:11

KJV - "Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man."

¹² <https://www.bible-researcher.com/nivi-guidelines.html>

¹³ CBT Policy on Gender-Inclusive Language, I.D: "The patriarchalism (like other social patterns) of the ancient cultures in which the Biblical books were composed is pervasively reflected in forms of expression that appear, in the modern context, to deny the common human dignity of all hearers and readers. For these forms, alternative modes of expression can and may be used, though care must be taken not to distort the intent of the original text."

¹⁴ Adapted and updated from Carson, pp52-54.

¹⁵ Additionally, for non-generic gendered terms, "where context clearly shows that reference is to males (only, they) retain masculine references; same with female references. And "where the original cultural context shows what was a distinctively male activity" at the time - like that of bowman or a oarsman, but a suitable non-gendered alternative exists, like changing bowman to archer or oarsman to rower, "these are usually to be preferred".

ESV - "...it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person."

NIV- "What goes into someone's mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them."

James 1:20

KJV - "For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."

ESV - "...for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God."

NIV - "...because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires."

Then, fascinatingly, in the fourth example, from Matthew 5:9, though the King James had even chosen 400 years ago to translate the Greek word for "sons" as "children", the modern ESV reverts back to "sons", with a footnote.

Matthew 5:9

KJV - "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God."

ESV - "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons* of God.

[*Footnote: Greek *huioi*' see preface]

NIV - "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."

And finally, in James 2:14 we see that where the King James maintains James' address to the Church as just "brethren", and the ESV just modernizes it to "brothers" with a footnote, the NIV *renders it* "brothers and sisters" even though sisters does not appear in the Greek, since James was intending to address both men *and* women in the Church, but ancient custom was to just say "brothers".

James 2:14

KJV - "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him?"

ESV - "What good is it, my brothers,* if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?" [footnote "Or *brothers and sisters*"]

NIV - "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?"

Now, believe it or not, we actually see St Paul himself make a similar accommodation when quoting from the Old Testament. As you can see next, in Second Samuel God refers to Israel "my son", but when when St Paul quotes this verse in Second COrinthians, Paul adds in the Greek word for daughters (*thygatēr*)!

2 Samuel 7:14 (NIV)

"I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands."

2 Corinthians 6:18 (NIV)

"And,

'I will be a Father to you,
and you will be my sons and daughters,
says the Lord Almighty.'"

Note: the word for daughters is included in the Greek of 2 Cor 6:18. Despite not being in 2 Sam 7:14, St. Paul added in “daughters” when quoting 2 Samuel.

But I would add that there are still no shortage of situations where translation decisions around gender are very complicated. The one example I will give is the term “son of Man”. This phrase appeared in verse 4 of our Psalm tonight. And in the Old Testament world it was in one sense just a poetic way to say “human being”. And in many instances, that is all it means, so it’s no big deal for a translation to render it as “human being”. But if you have read the Gospels very much, you’ll notice that Jesus uses this phrase a good bit, as a way to refer to *himself* in the third person. But when Jesus does this, He is not only highlighting His own humanity, He is also evoking some Old Testament passages where “son of Man” is being used as a prophecy about Jesus. So, whenever a translator comes across the term “son of Man” and believe it is being used as a prophecy about Jesus - such as in Daniel 7:13-14¹⁶ - it would be a mistake to translate it as “human one” or “mortal”, but in places where it is used in the Old Testament to just refer to human beings in general and there is no evidence of a messianic prophecy (like Psalm 8:4¹⁷), one might argue it is better rendered “human being” with a footnote that says the Hebrew is “son of Man”.

So, this concludes my homily on Decisions in Translation. Hopefully you have some greater understanding of the factors that go into a decisions on how words relating to gender get translated, why I prefer to use the NIV over the ESV, and also why I love footnotes.

Before we break off into small groups for discussion, I want to open up for a few questions, if there are any.

Discussion Questions (with 2 or 3 or 4 people around you)

1. Despite what studies show about general trends, how each of us hears words or phrases is still a very subjective experience for each individual. How have you experienced hearing generic gendered words in scripture like people/mortal/human being vs “man” (when it is being used to refer to all humans), such as with a phrase like “fishers of men” vs “fishers of people”?
2. The homily suggested that the highest priority in Bible translation should be translating the meaning of the text into the current language in such a way that it is most easily comprehended by the average person who speaks that language. Does this resonate for you? Why or why not?

¹⁶ Daniel 7:13-14 (NIV)

“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man,* coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.”

[*Footnote in the NIV: “The Aramaic phrase *bar enash* means *human being*. The phrase *son of man* is retained here because of its use in the New Testament as a title of Jesus, probably based largely on this verse.”]

¹⁷ While this is debatable, Carson observes that when Hebrews 2:6-8 refers to this psalm, it is Jesus’ humanity with both men and women that is at play, not His masculinity.