

Welcome, Announcements, and Land Acknowledgement

Celebrations / Joys and Concerns

*God's blessing on you. God's blessing on you.
God's blessing, dear friends. God's blessing on you.*

➤ *O let the power fall on me*

Call to Worship [Psalm 139: 1-6, 13-18]

O LORD, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away.

You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, O LORD, you know it completely.

You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it.

For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

Wonderful are your works; that I know very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed.

How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! I try to count them – they are more than the sand; I come to the end – I am still with you.

Gathering Prayer and Words of Hope

Creator God, in this time of worship, fill us, call us, shape us, guide us. Free us from all that burdens us and strengthen us for the work of being Christ's disciples.

Merciful God of all time, when we cannot seem to let go of traditions that no longer serve your will, forgive us. Help us to take up respect for past, present and future.

Merciful God of all people, when we have trouble letting go of relationships that are not healthy, forgive us. Help us take up appreciation for one another's uniqueness.

Merciful God, when we will not let go of plans that lead us in narrow ways, forgive us. Help us to take up your call to move in new directions.

Merciful God, when we do not let go of notions that keep us apart from one another and from you, forgive us. Help us to take up the cross of Jesus Christ who leads us ever closer to you and in whose name we pray. **Amen**

The God who searches us and knows us, who has formed us and loves us still, promises to be with us always. Know that your sins are forgiven.

➤ *I come with joy*

530

† Prayer for Understanding

Gracious God, as we grow in relationship with you, give us courage to follow you wholeheartedly. Free us from that which holds us back so that we may fully embrace the message of your Holy Word. Amen

Scripture

Jeremiah 18: 1-11 [OT 720]

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: "Come, go down to the potter's house, and there I will let you hear my words."

So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was working at his wheel. The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him.

Then the word of the LORD came to me: "Can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as this potter has done? says the LORD. Just like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. At one moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, but if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will change my mind about the disaster that I intended to bring on it. And at another moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, but if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will change my mind about the good that I had intended to do to it. Now, therefore, say to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: *Thus says the LORD: Look, I am a potter shaping evil against you and devising a plan against you. Turn now, all of you from your evil way, and amend your ways and your doings.*"

Philemon [NT 215]

Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,

To Philemon our dear friend and co-worker, to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

When I remember you in my prayers, I always thank my God because I hear of your love for all the saints and your faith toward the Lord Jesus. I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective when you perceive all the good that we may do for Christ. I have indeed received much joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, my brother.

For this reason, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do your duty, yet I would rather appeal to you on the basis of love – and I, Paul, do this as an old man, and now also as a prisoner of Christ Jesus.

I am appealing to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become during my imprisonment. Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful both to you and to me. I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you. I wanted to keep him with me, so that he might be of service to me in your place during my imprisonment for the gospel; but I preferred to do nothing without your consent, in order that your good deed might be voluntary and not something forced.

Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while, so that you might have him back forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother – especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. If he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand: I will repay it. I say nothing about your owing me even your own self.

Yes, brother, let me have this benefit from you in the Lord! Refresh my heart in Christ. Confident of your obedience, I am writing to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.

One thing more: prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping through your prayers to be restored to you.

Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Message

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The short book of Philemon is an interesting letter – a masterful piece of subtle – and not so subtle – rhetoric filled with hints about how Philemon should behave. The author – probably the apostle Paul – is a very persuasive writer. This was possibly a handwritten note, enclosed as part of a more “official” letter to the Corinthian Church.

The note is addressed to Philemon, the owner of Onesimus, a slave. There are indicators however that suggest it is intended to be “overheard” by the whole community. Paul is calling upon the witness of the whole church in Philemon’s house to ensure that Paul’s hopes are fulfilled – that the community will apply pressure on Philemon to act as Paul desires him to.

Onesimus – a name which means useful – may have even been the one who delivered the letter. He was a slave at a time when slavery was a legal and common practice. Onesimus had left his owner Philemon, and Paul is sending him back. Onesimus was most likely sent to care for Paul during his imprisonment. During this assignment, it seems that a moment of transformation transpired between Paul and Onesimus – a transformation in relationship that Paul describes by saying that he gave birth to Onesimus while he was in prison! Paul calls Onesimus his child and his heart. Paul then calls for Philemon to refresh his heart.

Paul employs a play on the meaning of the man's name, saying that Onesimus appeared to Philemon to be "useless," while he has now proven "useful" to Paul and thus to Philemon too. Onesimus' utility – his role – has shifted. What else would that mean other than to welcome Onesimus into his household as if Onesimus were Paul himself? Paul is arguing very forcefully that in the future Philemon should regard Onesimus as a *more than a slave – as a beloved brother*.

Paul promises to pay any debts that Onesimus may have incurred. Paul also asks Philemon to prepare a room for him – Paul – for he will soon be coming to visit! Paul is not asking Philemon merely to prepare the guest room – he is reminding him that he will visit and ensure compliance! Even if Philemon might disregard Paul's written entreaty, he is warned that Paul will soon be there – in person – making it even more difficult for him to refuse the request. Finally, Paul reminds Philemon of all he owes to Paul: *I say nothing about your owing me even your own self*. Paul may "say" nothing about this debt, but he is certainly willing to write about it!

Paul may have, physically, saved Philemon's life. But more likely he brought Philemon to faith – to new life in Christ. And now Paul is calling on Philemon to live out that new life in a new way – to move beyond the common, legal, accepted practice of slavery.

Paul is asking Philemon to see Onesimus with new eyes – as a sibling in Christ. This has ethical and social implications. Paul is calling for a radical reorientation of the community's understanding of Onesimus' identity. He is no longer merely a cog in the machine of the household – no longer worthy because of the utility he provides for his master. He is kin. And this transformation is a vivid embodiment of the gospel. He is a walking reminder of the power of the good news.

If Onesimus is part of the family of Christ, he must be treated as such and that means he must be set free! There can be no slavery or separate status in the Christian community. All are part of the body of Christ. None can be abused, cheated, treated unjustly, or forced to live in poverty.

We can read this note and come to know something of the original context and intention of the message. We can also see how the letter has been interpreted and used throughout history. Some have used this text (inappropriately) as support of the status quo – encouraging slaves to obey their masters and masters to treat their slaves kindly while still seeing them as property.

Philemon challenges us to ensure that every Christian is free – politically, economically, and vocationally. We cannot have anything to do with the exploitation of others if we are to claim

to be Christians. We need to be part of the movement insisting that all persons receive a living wage, family leave, and health care. The letter to Philemon challenges church and state alike to ensure the well-being of every citizen – challenges **us** to be consistent in seeking justice for workers and vulnerable persons.

This is its relevance for us today – what its message can be for us – how it remains a “useful” letter. It is not meant to change everything, but it is meant to create some change – in us and how we treat one another.

Just like Philemon, each of us today is immersed in our culture's values and common practices. Many of these values and practices are consistent with our faith but others are not. Are there aspects of our lives – things we do and think – that upon deeper reflection we would see as inconsistent with our call as followers of Jesus?

For Paul, what happens in the faith communities of his time is a matter of life and death. His letters are not just doctrinal – not just concerned with ideas – Paul is a pastor caring for communities of faith as seeds of the resurrection – as sites of transformation – where the new and abundant life in Christ can flourish.

Imagine what such transformations might look like in our community of faith and in our circles of family, friends and community. How does the gospel change not just our minds but how we relate to one another?

Tomorrow is Labour Day – a holiday for many still part of the work force but also a time for all of us to think about our economy and workplaces through the lens of our faith. We know that God's will is for each of us to live a life of wholeness. God's abundance is to be shared which means all workers need to be paid a living wage and treated with dignity.

The reality is that in our economy and in our culture, some workers are much more valued than others. We often fail to look at each person and see a child of God endowed with infinite value. Instead, we may see the dropout, the formerly incarcerated person, the immigrant, the under-educated, the person with a disability, the older and slowing-down person, the one who doesn't speak like me – or look like me – or act like me.

The abuse and exploitation of these *others* impacts all of us, whether we choose to see it or not. In an ideal world, laws, regulations, trade agreements, and labour contracts would protect all workers and ensure fair pay, good benefits, decent working conditions, and respect on the job. But we are not there yet. We live in a fallen world, and we are part of the problem. But we are also called to be part of the solution. We are called to examine our lives and acknowledge our complicity. We are called to be savvy and persuasive like Paul – deciding the best way to intervene to make things better. We cannot do everything, but we certainly can do something.

- We can buy fair-trade products even if they cost a bit more because we know then that workers who grow and provide those products are receiving fair compensation and reasonable working conditions.

- We can support farm workers as well as others in low paying and temporary jobs. We can support workers struggling for better pay, more consistent hours of work and safer working conditions.
- We can advocate for raises to the minimum wage so that it is a living wage. We can advocate for job creation. We can seek to create a trend toward greater income equality.
- We can write letters to the editor or politicians and others in positions of power to exert some influence – to cause some transformation in the world.

We live in a land flowing with milk and honey. God's abundance has been lavished on us to be shared among all God's people. But we know that not everyone is living the abundant life that God desires. Let's search our hearts – examine our actions – and seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We may not be able to help all our neighbours, but we can surely help some. Let's do our part to stand with those on the margins – to participate with God in creating a world that more closely matches God's vision.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen

➤ *The clay-stained hands of love* 296

† Offering Invitation

On the Labour Day weekend, we offer to God the fruit of our labour to support in the redeeming work God has begun in the world. Give in hope and in trust that God will accomplish more than we can ask or imagine through our gifts.

➤ *Praise God from whom all blessings flow* 306

† Offering Prayer

O God, we offer these gifts to you. Bless them and use them – use us – to heal and reshape the world you love with the Good News we celebrate in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

The Apostles' Creed – an affirmation of faith 539

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen

Gathering at the Lord's Table

The celebration of communion is always a festival of friends – where we gather around the table with all our hopes and dreams, longing for a glimpse of the holy.

It is here where bread is broken, and the cup is shared that we can be most truly ourselves – seeing ourselves and others as children of the living God.

Here, that which is earthly becomes divine and that which is human becomes more than has ever been dreamed.

Come to the table – you are all welcome.

Christ invites us to meet him here.

➤ *Put peace into each other's hands*

560

God be with you.

And also, with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to God.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is good to give God thanks and praise...

Gathered among friends, Jesus took bread, and after he blessed it, he shared it with his disciples, saying, "This is my body which is for you."

In the same way he took the cup, and after giving thanks for it, he offered it to everyone saying, "This is the new relationship with God, sealed with my sacrifice. I will drink with you again in the coming kingdom of God."

Following Jesus' example, we take this bread and this cup; the ordinary things of the world through which God breaks into the world, enters into our lives, and blesses us. We celebrate with great joy the resurrection of Jesus, his presence with us in this feast, and his promise of a new creation as we affirm the mystery of faith...

Sing Christ has died and Christ is risen, Christ will come again! Sing Christ has died and Christ is risen, Christ will come again!

Blessed are you, O God, for you have brought forth bread from the earth and you have created the fruit of the vine. In the beginning you watered the earth so that men and women would have food and drink. You gave your servant Sarah bread to strengthen her family on their journey and wine to make them glad. You called Moses and his people out of slavery – refreshed them with food in the wilderness. You gave Mary and Joseph their daily bread to share. Here at your table

you offer us bread and wine for the journey to nourish and sustain us. And so with all our sisters and brothers, before and beside us, we praise you, singing...

O holy, holy, holy God, O God of time and space. All earth and sea and sky above bear witness to your grace. Hosanna in the highest heav'n, creation sings your praise. And blessed is the one who comes and bears your name always!

Lord Jesus Christ, present with us now, as we do in this place what you did in an upstairs room, breathe your Spirit upon us and upon this bread and wine, that they may be heaven's food and drink for us – renewing, sustaining, and making us whole – and that we may be your body on earth, loving and caring in the world.

Amen, amen, O Holy One! Hosanna and amen! Amen, amen, O Holy One! Hosanna and amen!

Sharing Bread and Wine

Those in person have received a pre-sealed communion package. Everyone consumes the elements together in their own space...

These are the gifts of God for the people of God – we remember and share with thanksgiving...

The bread of life. The one who breathed on the first disciples is present for us in this bread.
In it God comes to us so that we may come to God.

The cup of grace. The one whose spirit stirred the church at Pentecost now revives us in this cup.
In it God comes to us so that we may come to God.

† Prayer after Communion

Amazing God, thank you for breaking into our world and living among us. Thank you for showing yourself to us in both subtle and boisterous ways. Help us to look for you, to keep watch for you, to wait on you, and to know that you are always working in our lives whether we recognize your handiwork or not. You enter our ordinary lives and set a holy table among us, filling our plates with the Bread of Life and our cups with Salvation. Send us out, O God, with tender-heartedness to touch an ordinary everyday world with the promise of your holiness. We are bold to pray as Jesus taught, singing...

➤ *Our Father in heaven (The Lord's Prayer – no repeats) 469*

Blessing

Go faithfully into the coming week – blessed by God – valued by Jesus Christ – energized by the Holy Spirit. And may the grace of the risen Christ, the wisdom of God and the nurturing community of the Holy Spirit embrace us all. **Amen**

➤ *May the God of hope go with us every day 726*