

## **SUNDAY 9<sup>th</sup> August 2020**

**Welcome & Announcements** (Caroleen)

**Call to worship** Psalm 34 video 'Taste & See'

**Praise Song**

**Opening Prayer** (Colin)

**O T reading** Psalm 133 ( Benjamin)

**Video** The Hope of Freedom

**Hymn** Broken Vessels (sun 29/9/19)

**Scripture Reading** Philemon (Colin)

**Sermon** ( John Wonnacott)

**Prayers** (Laura)

**Hymn** HP 86 Tell out my soul (Sun 10/2/19)

**Blessing** (Colin)

### **Welcome & Announcements**

#### **Call to worship Psalm 34 video**

I will extol the LORD at all times;  
his praise will always be on my lips.

<sup>2</sup> I will glory in the LORD;  
let the afflicted hear and rejoice.

<sup>3</sup> Glorify the LORD with me:  
let us exalt his name together.

<sup>4</sup> I sought the LORD, and he answered me;  
he delivered me from all my fears.

<sup>5</sup> Those who look to him are radiant;  
their faces are never covered with shame.

<sup>6</sup> This poor man called, and the LORD heard him;  
he saved him out of all his troubles.

<sup>7</sup> The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him,  
and he delivers them.

<sup>8</sup> Taste and see that the LORD is good;  
blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.

### **Praise Song**

**Opening Prayer** *I will extol the Lord at all times; His praise will always be on my lips. Lord God we come to lift High Your wonderful name this morning; for You are the God of glory & of grace. We come full of thankfulness this morning; for You are the One who looks on us in love & answers our prayers... And Lord we come to You with joy this morning; for You are the one who sets the prisoners free; You are the God of forgiveness & of freedom.*

*So Living God we come & praise You for all Your many mercies showered upon us in Jesus Christ .... Yet even as we do so we*

pause & quietly confess that while You continue to bless us abundantly... that sometimes we fail to bless You or others.

So we ask again for Your mercy in the quiet.

And we hear the good news of the gospel that *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.* 1 John 1:19

We are now going to hear our Old Testament Reading

**Old Testament Reading** Psalm 133

<sup>1</sup> How good and pleasant it is

when God's people live together in unity!

<sup>2</sup> It is like precious oil poured on the head,

running down on the beard,

running down on Aaron's beard,

down on the collar of his robe.

<sup>3</sup> It is as if the dew of Hermon

were falling on Mount Zion.

For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life for evermore.

**Video** 'The Hope of Freedom'

**Song - 'Broken Vessels'**

All these pieces broken and scattered

In mercy gathered mended and whole

Empty-handed but not forsaken

I've been set free, I've been set free

*Amazing grace, how sweet the sound*

*That saved a wretch like me, oh*

*I once was lost, but now I'm found*

*Was blind but now I see*

*Oh, I can see it now*

*Oh, I can see the love in Your eyes*

*Laying yourself down*

*Raising up the broken to life*

You take our failure, You take our weakness

You set Your treasure, In jars of clay

So take this heart, Lord

I'll be Your vessel, the world to see

Your life in me, oh

*Amazing grace, how sweet the sound*

*That saved a wretch like me, oh*

*I once was lost, but now I'm found*

*Was blind but now I see*

*Oh, I can see it now*

*Oh, I can see the love in Your eyes*

*Laying yourself down*

*Raising up the broken to life*

*Amazing grace*

*How sweet the sound*

*That saved a wretch like me, oh*

*I once was lost*

*But now I am found*

*Was blind but now I see X2*

*Oh, I can see it now*

*Oh, I can see the love in Your eyes*

*Laying yourself down*

*Raising up the broken to life*

*Amazing grace  
How sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me, oh  
I once was lost  
But now I am found  
Was blind but now I see x2*

Oh, I can see it now  
Oh, I can see the love in Your eyes  
Laying yourself down  
Raising up the broken to life

Oh, I can see it now  
Oh, I can see the love in Your eyes  
Laying yourself down  
Raising up the broken to life X2

### **New Testament Reading - Philemon**

Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, & Timothy our brother, To Philemon our dear friend & fellow worker—<sup>2</sup> also to Apphia our sister & Archippus our fellow soldier—& to the church that meets in your home: <sup>3</sup> Grace and peace to you from God our Father & the Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>4</sup> I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, <sup>5</sup> because I hear about your love for all his holy people & your faith in the Lord Jesus. <sup>6</sup> I pray that your partnership with us in the faith may be effective in deepening your understanding of every good thing we share for the sake of Christ. <sup>7</sup> Your love has given me great joy & encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the Lord's people.

<sup>8</sup> Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold & order you to do what you ought to do, <sup>9</sup> yet I prefer to appeal to you on the basis

of love. It is as none other than Paul—an old man & now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus—<sup>10</sup> that I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. <sup>11</sup> Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you & to me. <sup>12</sup> I am sending him—who is my very heart—back to you. <sup>13</sup> I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel. <sup>14</sup> But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favour you do would not seem forced but would be voluntary. <sup>15</sup> Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever—<sup>16</sup> no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man & as a brother in the Lord.

<sup>17</sup> So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. <sup>18</sup> If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. <sup>19</sup> I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back—not to mention that you owe me your very self. <sup>20</sup> I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. <sup>21</sup> Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask.

<sup>22</sup> And one thing more: Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers.

<sup>23</sup> Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. <sup>24</sup> And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas & Luke, my fellow workers. <sup>25</sup> The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

**SERMON** “From a bother to a brother”

I am grateful for Colin's kind invitation to share in this service. Philemon was read earlier and in it Paul writes a very personal letter to Philemon on a very sensitive topic. This is not ivory tower theology written in the clouds; this is grounded in real life and involving real people.

It is only one of five books in the whole library of the Bible that is a chapter long. The brevity of its 25 short verses does not lessen its explosive power.

My hope and prayer is that just as this letter made a difference to Philemon and others so too it will make a difference to us. Let's ask God His help in understanding this letter and applying it to our lives.

Let us pray...

Our Loving Heavenly Father

Thank you for your living word and as we take hold of it may you embrace us afresh. As you have already been speaking to us in this time together so, by your mercy, may the Holy Spirit take these words and speak through them; take our minds and think through them and please come and take our hearts and set them on fire with love for you; each other and your world. **AMEN**

— oo0oo —

COVID-19 has brought many changes to our lives. For some of us it truly has been a time of life and death. Our lives have been turned upside down by awful illness and even the loss of loved ones. Others of us have experienced changes that are not as earth shattering but the way we live our lives has been transformed.

For instance more people than ever before are buying online and having their purchases delivered to their door. Indeed there are

some who have put signs on their doors to say that they are praying for such key workers.

When a delivery comes what happens? There's a knock on the door or ring on the bell and we go and receive the package. We take the package, say a quick thank you to the delivery person, perhaps scribble a signature and off they go perhaps never to be seen again.

However, imagine if there came a ring on your doorbell and when you open the door there's a delivery person but instead of your focus being on the parcel they are carrying your focus is on the person. Why? Because standing in front of you is someone whom you never thought you would see again. Someone who had been part of your life but due to circumstances, maybe difficult ones had disappeared from your life. Instead of you giving a smile, a scribble and a thank you I imagine you would have a completely different response. Perhaps one of excited welcome or indeed stunned silence.

I imagine that this was how it was when the letter to Philemon was delivered. We are told in Colossians the letter was hand delivered by two people; one was called Tychius and the other was called Onesimus. Philemon did know Onesimus but clearly from this letter they had parted company and not on good terms. In verse 16 it says that Onesimus was Philemon's slave.

Slaves were not so much considered as people but as property and it would seem that Onesimus had done wrong, possibly he had stolen from Philemon, had run off and now he is back on Philemon's doorstep. I imagine that Philemon had lots of questions buzzing in his head. This was the purpose of the letter - to explain why Onesimus had returned. Philemon must have been eager to read it. Let us look at it more closely.

In the opening verses Paul introduces himself saying that he is in prison either in Rome or Ephesus and greets Philemon. He then mentions Apphia who the commentators think is Philemon's wife

and also Archippus who we think is their son. Paul refers to them in ways that help us know that they are believers. Philemon is described as a friend and a brother; Appia as a sister and Archippus as a fellow soldier. More than that it is in their home that the church in Colossae meets. They were probably involved in its leadership.

Paul goes on to say how he thanks God for Philemon. He is grateful to God for his partnership in the gospel and how his faith has refreshed the hearts of believers. What a great thing to say about someone else!

You can imagine Philemon reading this, he may even have called over to Apphia and Archippus and said to them “hey - Paul mentions yourselves and says hello!” Having spoken words of appreciation Paul gets to the heart of the matter and makes a plea to Philemon. He makes the plea for four key reasons in verses 8-10 for love’s sake, for Jesus’s sake, for Paul’s sake and for Onesimus’s sake.

What was the plea? The plea was to take Onesimus back. This was a huge thing that Paul was asking. If slaves had little value in the Roman world, runaway slaves had even less value. Indeed the very least a captured runaway slave could expect was a beating and to have the letters ‘FGV’ standing for fugitive branded on his face - that is if the former boss did not decide to have him crucified - yes crucified! But Paul is not suggesting any of these things. Instead he wants Philemon to take him back but not even as a slave. He wants Philemon to take him back as a brother!

verses 15-16 *“that you might have him back forever - no longer as a slave but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord.”*

Paul explains that Onesimus had found him when Paul was in prison. God used Paul to help Onesimus become a Christian.

Onesimus, by God’s grace had felt Christ knocking on the door of his life. Onesimus had invited Jesus into his life to be his Lord and Saviour.

Onesimus’ name means “*useful*” and in verse 11 Paul makes a play on the meaning of the name and says that Onesimus who was formerly useless to Philemon had been of great use and help to Paul in prison and now Paul wanted to give him the opportunity to be useful to his old boss - as someone has said *‘the bother has become a brother’*. Paul goes on to mention that if there’s anything that Onesimus owes to Philemon Paul will cover the cost of it.

Wowee! What an incredible story! It’s like the Prodigal Son and Good Samaritan stories rolled into one. While Paul leaves out mention of the cross he is clearly living out of a cross centred life. The cross is all over this letter. Paul has been used by God to reconcile Onesimus to God and now was being an advocate on Onesimus’ behalf to Philemon.

I think it is fair to assume that since this letter is in the Bible that Paul’s prayers were answered and that Philemon welcomed Onesimus back - the former bother became a brother. The delivery of that letter was something I imagine that Philemon and Onesimus remembered for the rest of their lives as did I’m sure the church in Colossae. History would suggest that not only did Onesimus become part of the house church in Colossae he went on to become bishop of Ephesus.

There is so much more that could be said but in the time remaining here’s a couple of thoughts...

I wonder have you like Onesimus, Philemon, Paul, Apphia and Co responded to Christ knocking on the door of your life - have you invited him in - if not I wonder what is it that’s holding you back from letting him come in and be your Saviour, Lord and brother?

If we have taken that step of faith I wonder friends does this letter speak into our own prayer lives - I know my prayer life has been challenged having seen how Paul's plea to Philemon was soaked in prayer.

Does it speak into our relationships - whose lives can we, like Philemon, refresh today? Are there broken relationships where we've been hurt or hurt others? Perhaps its memory is like it happened yesterday. Perhaps we have long forgotten the reason that we don't talk any more to that person, or that family, or that church or that particular community or people group. I do not underestimate the pain of this but as Paul encouraged Philemon so may we find ways to be reconnect with those who we have fallen out with.

Paul here is an advocate for Onesimus - are there individuals or groups that we should be advocating for, speaking out on behalf of? Slavery is very much a modern day scourge here in this country never mind anywhere else. Is there more that we could learn about slavery, are there letters that we could write to political representatives or others like Wesley writing to Wilberforce all those years ago?

No doubt this letter will have raised for you other thoughts - may you and I, like Paul, Onesimus and Philemon respond to the Holy Spirit's nudges and prompts and take action.

As Paul demonstrates in this letter prayer has to be at the forefront so let's pray now...

Dear God

Your reconciling love, at huge cost to yourself, brought us back to you - thank you so much. Forgive us when we take it for granted. Help us to take steps of faith if we have not done so already that we know ourselves as your sons and daughters. We do not underestimate the deep pain that individuals and groups of people have experienced through broken relationships. It is to you that we

look to heal broken relationships for we cannot do it on our own. May we be reconcilers and advocates in your world that others would be reunited to you and to each other, that slavery would be done away with. These prayers we offer to you in the name of our brother, friend, Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. **AMEN**

### Prayers for Others

#### Hymn

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!  
Unnumbered blessings give my spirit voice;  
tender to me the promise of his word;  
in God my Savior shall my heart rejoice.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his Name!  
Make known his might, the deeds his arm has done;  
his mercy sure, from age to age to same;  
his holy Name--the Lord, the Mighty One.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his might!  
Powers and dominions lay their glory by.  
Proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight,  
the hungry fed, the humble lifted high.

Tell out, my soul, the glories of his word!  
Firm is his promise, and his mercy sure.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord  
to children's children and for evermore!

**Closing Blessing**

And let us bless each other now with the words of the grace.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ & the love of God & the  
fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all forevermore.