



Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter



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Understanding the New Testament The Letter to Philemon

¹⁰ I am appealing to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become during my imprisonment. ¹¹ Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful both to you and to me. ¹² I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you. ¹³ 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; ¹⁴ but I preferred to do nothing without your consent, in order that your good deed might be voluntary and not something forced. ¹⁵ Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while, so that you might have him back forever, ¹⁶ 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.

Philemon 10-16 NRSV

Philemon is a fascinating document. It is accepted as an authentic letter written by Paul but it is unique in the New Testament because it was written primarily to an individual rather than to a congregation. Paul is helping a parishioner understand the meaning of the Gospel and, perhaps, seeking to better understand the Gospel himself.

Paul appears to be writing from prison to a wealthy Christian named Philemon. We can assume Philemon was wealthy because he owned slaves, one of whom has run away and has been staying with Paul. Paul also asks that Philemon prepare a guest room for him when he next visits indicating that he owned a large home. Philemon may have hosted a house church. The slave's name is Onesimus which is Greek for "useful" or "beneficial." Paul is being held as a prisoner but we are not told where. Prisons in the first century varied by locality and the status of the prisoner. Some prisoners were held under conditions that we would call house arrest and were able to receive visitors and transact business while awaiting trial. Post-trial incarceration was less common. The penalty for conviction was usually death or exile.

Paul is in a quandary. Onesimus is a runaway slave, a serious crime in the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire had a massive slave population and Roman citizens lived in constant fear of slave uprisings. The penalty for a slave running away from his master was death by crucifixion. Although it is conjecture, it seems likely that Paul established the church of which Philemon is a part and then baptized Philemon and his household, including his slaves. Onesimus ran away from Philemon to Paul. He has since been helping Paul in his ministry and Paul has come to depend upon Onesimus. In the letter he offers this play on Onesimus' name:

¹¹ Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful both to you and to me. *Philemon 11 NRSV*

Paul has even begun to think of Onesimus as his son. Vs 10.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, probably written at least a decade earlier, Paul advised slaves not to seek their freedom:

²⁰ *Let each of you remain in the condition in which you were called.*

²¹ *Were you a slave when called? Do not be concerned about it. Even if you can gain your freedom, make use of your present condition now more than ever.* ²² *For whoever was called in the Lord as a slave is a freed person belonging to the Lord, just as whoever was free when called is a slave of Christ.* ²³ *You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of human masters.* ²⁴ *In whatever condition you were called, brothers and sisters, there remain with God. 1 Corinthians 7:20-24 NRSV*

As Paul saw it, all are slaves to Christ and stand equally before the Lord. And, since Paul was anticipating the imminent return of Christ, there was no point in seeking to change your status even if you were a slave. However, if we are all the same in the eyes of God is it right for one Christian to own another? When the letter to the Corinthians was written Paul does not seem concerned about that question.

There is some dispute about exactly what Paul is seeking from Philemon. Some people believe that Paul is asking Philemon to free Onesimus. One could speculate that close association with Onesimus has caused Paul to question his belief that slavery is not a significant issue. Another possible interpretation is that Paul is asking Philemon to give him Onesimus; in other words to make Paul a gift of Onesimus as a slave. We simply do not know.

One thing is clear, however. Paul does believe that the fact that both Onesimus and Philemon are brothers in Christ ought to have an effect on how Philemon treats Onesimus:

¹⁵ *Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while, so that you might have him back forever,*
¹⁶ *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.*

¹⁷ *So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. Philemon 15-16 NRSV*

It is here that I find the Gospel. This is probably one of the most difficult of all Christian principles. According to the standards of society there are often many differences between us, especially differences in social status. But Christians are called to see one another as brothers and sisters in Christ and treat each other accordingly.

Next week: the Letter to the Hebrews

Advent Study and Sermon Series

A Different Kind of Christmas

Beginning December 1st I'll be leading an Advent study called "A Different Kind of Christmas." We'll meet in the Fellowship Hall at 9:45. Each participant will receive a devotional guide with readings for the rest of December. My sermons for the five Sundays in December will also deal with the topics in the Study. The topics for the study and the sermons are:

Expect a Miracle
Giving Up On Perfect
Scandalous Love
Jesus' Wish List
By A Different Road

The study and sermon series is based upon material developed by Rev. Mike Slaughter. Please prayerfully consider being a part of this study.

Advent Eucharist

The Lord's Supper is the central expression of who we are as the Body of Christ. We come together around the same table bringing all our troubles, all our concerns and all our differences. At the Table of Lord we pray that God make us "One with Christ, one with each other and one in ministry to the world." We will celebrate the Eucharist each Sunday in Advent.

The Last Minute Toy Store and Graceworks

Trinity UMC works in the ministries of 61st Avenue UMC in Nashville. One of the principal ministries of 61st Ave UMC is its Last Minute Toy store. This "store" provides gifts for children whose families could not otherwise afford to provide gifts. Several thousand Children in Nashville are assisted every year.

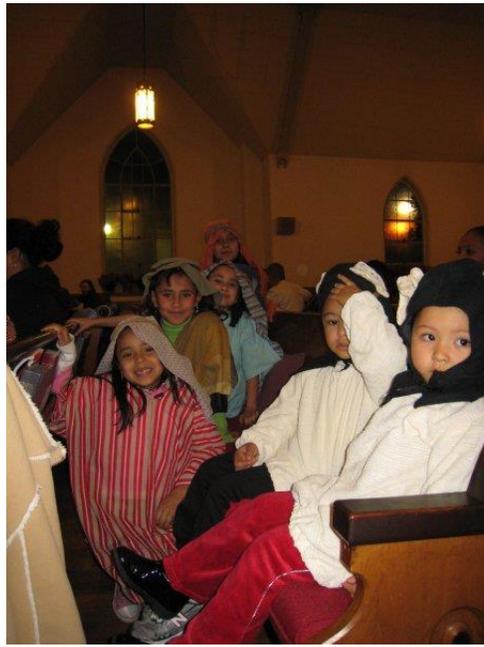
On December 18th Trinity UMC will host the meal for the workers at the Last Minute Toy Store. If you would like to help with that ministry, please contact Charles Wilson. The Toy store will need volunteers from December 18th through December 21st from 11:30 AM through 5:00 PM. If you would like to work in the ministry itself, or have questions about the ministry, please contact Rev. Meaker.

Graceworks here in Williamson County also has ministries directed toward helping those in need to experience a joyous Christmas. Trinity UMC will once again work with Graceworks to help provide a Christmas for families in need and to help with their "Christmas Manger," which also helps provide gifts to people who otherwise would be unable to afford them. Graceworks manger will be December 16th from 4:30 to 9:30 PM. Please contact Nanette Noffsinger if you wish to participate in the manger.

What Is An Unrehearsed Christmas Pageant?

If you have not heard of it yet, We are planning an Unrehearsed Christmas Pageant for Sunday, December 8th. But what is an unrehearsed Christmas Pageant?

The typical Church Christmas Pageant is a telling of the Christmas story by our children by means of a play. Usually there are about three weeks worth of chaotic rehearsals which require young children to memorize lines and where they are supposed to be during the play. The result is often quite jumbled with children showing up in the wrong places at the wrong times and forgetting their lines. None of that usually matters much to the parents and families because they simply came to see their own child anyway.



The Unrehearsed Christmas Pageant produces much the same result without all the angst associated with rehearsals and trying to get young children to memorize a script. The children dress up as Shepherds, Sheep, Stars, Angels and Wise Persons. There is a narrator to tell the story, supported by congregational singing of Christmas Carols. Everyone enjoys participating in the program (there are opportunities for adults to dress up as well) and then we break for punch and cookies. We will also provide an opportunity for children and adults to make an offering of canned food or money to support the food pantry at GraceWorks.

The pictures here will give you some idea of what is involved in the way of costumes. Julia Moore and Jeanne Rybolt are coordinating this event but will need help from as many members of the church as are willing to help to get costumes together and otherwise organize the event. Please prayerfully consider being a part of this ministry this Advent.

A Note from Julia Moore and Jeanne Rybolt

As we prepare for the Unrehearsed Christmas Pageant we could use some help collecting the following:

Plain sheets/fabric – to make animal costumes and shepherd tunics
Thick yarn for donkey’s tails and manes
Robes for the shepherds and innkeepers
Head coverings – scarves, possibly towels, etc
Crowns or something to make them from for the wise peeps
Tinsel for halos and angel adornments
Props (gifts from the wise peeps, staffs, very small flashlights)
Cording/rope to hold head coverings on heads and/or close those robes
Animal costumes (a stretch but thought we’d ask)
Headbands suitable for holding halos
Tulle (I’m dreaming of making at least one camel costume)
Elastic
Velcro
OLD plain light colored t-shirts in various sizes (we’ll probably cut them up a bit to make child sized tunics)
Some kind of hanging rod set up
LOTS of prayers

Thanks for your help

The Poverty and Justice Bible

The Poverty & Justice Bible is a bible that highlights each passage of scripture that deals with the issues of poverty and justice. There are more than 2000 references in scripture to poverty and justice, as opposed to four or five on such controversial subjects as homosexual acts or marriage. Yet many Christians seem to think that helping the poor is a pointless and even harmful act. As an on-going part of this newsletter, I will be providing citations to passages from the Old and New Testaments each week that deal with what scripture tells us about poverty and justice. If you are interested in learning more about *The Poverty & Justice Bible* you can check on Amazon.com or go to www.Justicebible.org.

*² Proud and brutal people
hunt down the poor.*

*But let them get caught
by their own evil plans!*

...

*¹⁷ You listen to the longings
of those who suffer.
You offer them hope,
and you pay attention
to their cries for help.*

*¹⁸ You defend orphans
and everyone else in need,
so that no one on earth
can terrify others again. Psalm 10:2, 17-18 CEV*

The poor have often been the targets of people wanting to take advantage of them down through the centuries. Here is evidence that it has been going on for at least the last 3000 years. One might ask where the profit is in that since the poor have so little. The answer is easy. They may not individually own much, but there are so many of them that it can be profitable to cheat the many out of what little they have. Yet the Psalm here also echoes another refrain. God hears the cries of those we oppress.

One day a king decided to call in his officials and ask them to give an account of what they owed him. ²⁴ As he was doing this, one official was brought in who owed him fifty million silver coins. ²⁵ But he didn't have any money to pay what he owed. The king ordered him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all he owned, in order to pay the debt.

²⁶ The official got down on his knees and began begging, "Have pity on me, and I will pay you every cent I owe!" ²⁷ The king felt sorry for him and let him go free. He even told the official that he did not have to pay back the money.

²⁸ As the official was leaving, he happened to meet another official, who owed him a hundred silver coins. So he grabbed the man by the throat. He started choking him and said, "Pay me what you owe!"

²⁹ The man got down on his knees and began begging, "Have pity on me, and I will pay you back." ³⁰ But the first official refused to have pity. Instead, he went and had the other official put in jail until he could pay what he owed.

³¹ When some other officials found out what had happened, they felt sorry for the man who had been put in jail. Then they told the king what had happened. ³² The king called the first official back in and said, "You're an evil man! When you begged for mercy, I said you did not have to pay back a cent. ³³ Don't you think you should show pity to someone else, as I did to you?" ³⁴ The king was so angry that he ordered the official to be tortured until he could pay back everything he owed. ³⁵ That is how my Father in heaven will treat you, if you don't forgive each of my followers with all your heart. Matt 18:23-35 CEV

It matters to us who is taking and who is receiving. According to Matthew, it has always been so. When we are the beneficiaries of some action we can clearly see the justice in it. If others are the beneficiaries we are not so sure. If we come to believe that the benefit being given to another is coming out of our own pockets a reaction may be even more extreme. Yet Christ reminds us that we have been the beneficiaries of an extraordinary act of Grace. This act of Grace is one that we could never pay back. In light of that, perhaps we should be more willing to help others who are in need. Be more willing to show mercy.

Bible Study

For the last two years I have led a bible study on Thursday mornings. We have recently begun a study of the Book of Psalms. There is room for as many as would like to participate. Please call me if you have questions or simply come and be a part of our study. We meet from 10:00 to 11:30 on Thursday mornings.

I believe that study of scriptures with other Christians is an essential part of our journey as Disciples. If you would like to be a part of a bible study at another time, during the day or evening, please contact me. If we can interest four or five people in gathering at a particular time I would be glad to lead another study.

Prayer Ministry

The following persons have agreed to be part of the prayer ministry at Trinity UMC:

Elva Beard	Sarah Jordan	Kenneth Stevens	Judy Richardson
Larry Eastwood	Mac McAfee	Patricia Stevens	Charles Wilson
Leslie Eastwood	Rachel Newman	Sam Richardson	

The members of the prayer ministry of Trinity United Methodist church covenant with one another to pray daily for:

- Those concerns on the prayer list of the Church and for healing of body and spirit for all persons listed;
- For each ministry of the church that each ministry would work to bring the Gospel to those within our community and most especially to bring the Gospel to those who have not yet accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior;
- For all the members of the Trinity UMC community that they be led and enabled to live as the Body of Christ;
- For our local community and all its needs, especially for those who are struggling with the burden of poverty;
- For our nation and our world that God help lead the people of the world to live in peace with God's Kingdom.

If you would like to be a part of this ministry (or if you have already spoken to me about it and were inadvertently left off the list) please let me know and I will see that you are added.

Up-Coming Sermons

December 1st: A Different Kind of Christmas. Expect a Miracle. Something extraordinary happened with the Birth of Christ. A miracle. Is it possible for us to experience a miracle this year? My texts are Isaiah 7:14 and Luke 4:18-21.

December 8th: A Different Kind of Christmas. Giving Up On Perfect. So often we seek perfection in what we do. This can be a special problem at Christmas as we seek to have the "perfect" holiday experience. Yet, when we look at

scripture we find that God seems willing to work with us even though we are less than perfect. My texts are Jeremiah 1:4-10 and Luke 1:26-34.

Worship Leaders Schedule

December 1

Rachel Newman, **Liturgist**

Tommy & Jo Cotton, **Greeters**

Mike & Elaine Rohrig, **Ushers**

December 8

Elaine Rohrig, **Liturgist**

Donnie & Renita Hartsock, **Greeters**

Marty Bauguess & Herb Haynes, **Ushers**

Announcements

You will want to participate in the “**Hanging of the Greens**” **this Saturday, Nov. 30 at 9:00 AM**. This will be a great time of fellowship as we prepare the church for this Advent Season.

Ho Ho Ho Ladies,

You better watch out,
you better not cry
better not pout
I'm telling you why-

Mrs. Santa is hosting the United Methodist Women's Ornament Exchange and holiday buffet (\$10.00 donation) at **Elaine Rohrig's on 1552 Timber Ridge Drive, in Brentwood**. **The event will be held on Tuesday, Dec.10th at 6:00 p.m. R.S.V.P. 810 - 9923 or eannchat@aol.com by 12/1/13**

Merry Christmas to all and to all a good night.

As mentioned earlier in the letter, please mark your calendars for **Sunday, December 15 at 4:00 PM**.

The “**Unrehearsed Christmas Pageant**” will take place and we are all participants! Following the pageant, we will enjoy **singing carols, eating chili and enjoying fellowship**.

You will want to mark your calendar for the **Christmas Cantata, “Canticle of Joy”** which will be presented by the choir and orchestra. This event will take place **Sunday, December 22 at 4:00 PM**.

You are also invited to a reception following the cantata at 5:00 PM. The ladies of the church will provide refreshments for the reception. A sign-up sheet is posted on the bulletin board to list what you plan to bring. Thank you for your participation!

Our **Christmas Eve Service** will take place **December 24 at 4:30 PM**. This will be a candlelight service that is a beloved yearly event.

November Birthdays

Cheryl Wilson, Betty Haynes, Brooks Crowell, Ross Crutcher