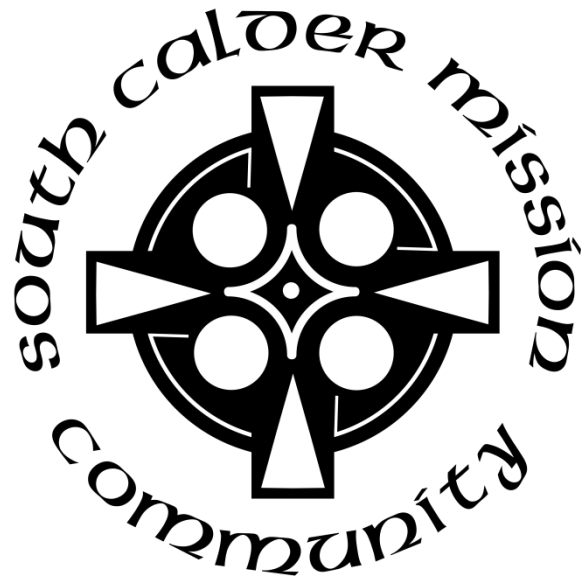


*into his courts  
with praise...*



A Service of the Word

Sunday 7 September 2025  
Twelfth Sunday after Trinity.

## A Service of the Word for Sunday morning

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### INTRODUCTION

*"May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace  
and peace."*

*Philemon 3*



### THE CONFESSION

The grace of God has dawned upon the world with healing for all.  
Though we have grieved him, yet he will heal us if we confess our  
sins in penitence and faith.

**Almighty God,  
I confess that I have sinned against you  
in thought, word and deed;  
I have not loved you with all my heart;  
I have not loved my neighbours as myself.  
Have mercy upon me,  
cleanse me from my sins,  
and help me to overcome my faults,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

### *Receive God's forgiveness*

May the Father forgive us  
By the death of His Son  
And strengthen us  
To live in the power of the Spirit  
All our days. **Amen.**

### **PRAISE**

O Lord, open my lips...  
**and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.**  
Give me the joy of your saving help...  
**and sustain me with your life-giving Spirit.**

### **THE COLLECT**

God of glory, the end of our searching, help us to lay aside all that prevents us from seeking your kingdom, and to give all that we have to gain the pearl beyond all price, through our Saviour Jesus Christ.  
**Amen.**

*Suggested hymn to sing or read* **Brother, sister, let me serve you.**

### **THE WORD OF GOD.**

#### **Psalm 139.**

O Lord, you have searched me out and known me; ♦  
you know my sitting down and my rising up;  
you discern my thoughts from afar.  
You mark out my journeys and my resting place ♦  
and are acquainted with all my ways.  
For there is not a word on my tongue, ♦  
but you, O Lord, know it altogether.  
You encompass me behind and before ♦  
and lay your hand upon me.  
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, ♦  
so high that I cannot attain it.  
For you yourself created my inmost parts; ♦  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.  
I thank you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; ♦  
marvellous are your works, my soul knows well.

My frame was not hidden from you, ♦  
when I was made in secret  
and woven in the depths of the earth.  
Your eyes beheld my form, as yet unfinished; ♦  
already in your book were all my members written,  
As day by day they were fashioned ♦  
when as yet there was none of them.  
How deep are your counsels to me, O God! ♦  
How great is the sum of them!  
If I count them, they are more in number than the sand, ♦  
and at the end, I am still in your presence.

#### **Jeremiah 18:1-11.**

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.

## The letter of Paul to Philemon.

From Paul, a prisoner for the sake of Christ Jesus,  
and from our brother Timothy.

To our friend and fellow-worker Philemon and the church that meets in  
your house, and our sister Apphia, and our fellow-soldier Archippus

May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.

Brother Philemon, every time I pray, I mention you and give thanks to my  
God. For I hear of your love for all God's people, and the faith you have in  
the Lord Jesus. My prayer is that our fellowship with you as believers will  
bring about a deeper understanding of every blessing which we have in  
our life in union with Christ. Your love, dear brother, has brought me great  
joy and much encouragement! You have cheered the hearts of all God's  
people.

For this reason I could be bold enough, as your brother in Christ to order  
you to do what should be done. But because I love you, I make a request  
instead. I do this even though I am Paul, the ambassador of Christ Jesus,  
and at present also a prisoner for his sake. So I make a request to you on  
behalf of Onesimus, who is my own son in Christ; for while in prison I have  
become his spiritual father.

At one time he was of no use to you, but now he is useful both to you and  
to me. I am sending him back to you now, and with him goes my heart. I  
would like to keep him here with me, while I am in prison for the gospel's  
sake, so that he could help me in your place. However, I do not want to  
force you to help me; rather, I would like you to do it of your own free will.  
So I will not do anything unless you agree.

It may be that Onesimus was away from you for a short time so that you  
might have him back for all time. And now he is not just a slave, but much  
more than a slave: he is a dear brother in Christ. How much he means to  
me! And how much more he will mean to you, both as a slave and as a  
brother in the Lord.

So, if you think of me as your partner, welcome him back just as you would  
welcome me. If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge  
it to my account. Here, I will write this with my own hand:

I, Paul, will pay you back.

(I should not have to remind you, of course, that you owe your very self to  
me.) So, my brother, please do me this favour for the Lord's sake; as a  
brother in Christ, cheer me up!

I am sure, as I write this, that you will do what I ask – in fact I know that  
you will do even more. At the same time, get a room ready for me,  
because I hope that God will answer the prayers of all of you and give me  
back to you.

Epaphras, who is in prison with me for the sake of Christ Jesus, sends you  
his greetings, and so do my fellow-workers Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and  
Luke.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

*Suggested hymn to sing or read **Lord, make me a mountain.***

## GOSPEL

**Luke 14: 25-33.**

Now large crowds were travelling with him; and he turned and said to  
them, 'Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife  
and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my  
disciple. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my  
disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down  
and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it?  
Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who  
see it will begin to ridicule him, saying, "This fellow began to build and was  
not able to finish." Or what king, going out to wage war against another  
king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten  
thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty  
thousand? If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a  
delegation and asks for the terms of peace. So therefore, none of you can  
become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.'

## REFLECTION – The Letter to Philemon.

Though short – today's reading constitutes the whole letter – the Letter to  
Philemon follows much of the 'shape' of Paul's other letters. Paul writes  
with the authority of an apostle, but usually names in the opening greeting

other key people who are with him, in this case Timothy. Perhaps to show that he is writing on behalf of the Church rather than just himself?

Next come the people to whom the letter is sent: 'To Philemon and the church which meets in your house', also to 'our sister Apphia and our fellow-soldier Archippus.' Possibly Paul names these others to make sure that the local church knows about the letter – it is not private.

Then, as here, there is usually a section of thanks: Paul finds something good to say about the people and church to whom he has written.

Next comes the main reason for the sending of the letter, and we'll come back to that in a moment. The ending follows a familiar pattern, with greetings from others who are helping Paul at the time, including here Mark and Luke, (usually assumed to be the two who would later write two of the gospels). To that extent, Philemon is much like Paul's other letters.

Now, what is it about, and why was it sent? It appears that Philemon had a slave called Onesimus, who ran away. The existence of slavery is not directly challenged in the New Testament – the first generation of Christians believed they only had a short time before the return of Jesus, and their priority was mission more than changing the social order. We can't really blame them – it took Western Europe another 1800 years or so to sort this one out – though a comment later in the letter perhaps hints at a desire for change. So this slave runs away, and happens to meet Paul. In fact, as Paul obviously knew Philemon, perhaps Onesimus sought Paul deliberately. Under Paul's influence and teaching Onesimus becomes a Christian, so Paul sends Onesimus back and asks Philemon to forgive him, saying, 'Now he is much more than a slave: he is a dear brother in Christ. How much he means to me! And how much more will he mean to you.'

There is a certain amount of 'buttering up' going on here: 'I could order you, but because I love you I make a request....Even though I am Paul, the ambassador of Christ Jesus, I make a request to you on behalf of Onesimus.'

A bit further on Paul writes, 'If Onesimus owes you anything, charge it to my account.' Paul takes the pen from his secretary and writes in his own hand, 'I, Paul, will pay you back.'

However, he goes on, 'I should not have to remind you that you owe your very self to me.' – presumably because Philemon himself came to faith under Paul's ministry and teaching. What Philemon owes to Paul is much, much more than Onesimus owes to Philemon. So there is some steel behind the buttering up.

Paul then says that he believes Philemon will do even more than he is asking. This is sometimes taken to be a request that Philemon will also release Onesimus from slavery, but we can't be sure of that. And then there is the final promise (or warning!): get a room ready because I'm coming to see you soon.

This letter contains a very human story, yet its underlying message is more than just personal. It is about relationships within the Church; about the duty of forgiveness and re-instatement after repentance; about fellowship and the acknowledgement of our obligations to one another; about the value that God our Father places upon every Christian, whoever they are and whatever their background. So there is teaching here as well as a good story.

#### *Postscript:*

You might nevertheless wonder why this very personal letter should have been included in the New Testament alongside Romans, Corinthians, Galatians and the rest? Most of the names in the letter to Philemon also crop up in Colossians (including 'our dear brother Onesimus'). Philemon's church is probably in Colossae, Laodicea or Hierapolis, all close together and no great distance from Ephesus. It is generally thought that those churches were founded by missions from Ephesus, which itself became a great Christian centre by the end of the first century. It is also thought that it was in Ephesus that Paul's letters were first collected together, copied and distributed. The first (or one of the first) bishops of Ephesus, still in post in 110 AD, was called Onesimus. There is no proof that this is the same Onesimus, but how wonderful if this former run-away slave became a valued member of the Church, then one of its leaders, and eventually Bishop of Ephesus. We can't be sure of this, although it is widely accepted, and would explain why this little letter to Philemon came to be treasured, and included with Paul's other letters.

**Jonathan Falkner.**

*Suggested hymn to sing or read* **Only by grace can we enter.**

## THE CREED

**All** I believe in God the Father,  
whose loving care is the pattern for family life.  
I believe in Jesus, the Son of God,  
who lives in my heart through faith,  
and fills me with his love.  
I believe in God the Holy Spirit,  
who strengthens me with power from on high.  
I believe in one God;  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.



*A time of quiet prayer for*

- *The universal Church - Bishops, synods and all leaders church*
- *The leaders of the nations*
- *The natural world and the resources of the earth*

**Loving God I see the news and I am afraid. Violence is spiralling out of control. I don't know what to think or feel. The temptation to fall into hatred, or despair feels very close at hand.**

**Help me to remember that nothing in all creation can separate me from your love that I know in Jesus. May your perfect love for me cast out my fear and free me to discern what is mine to do amidst the chaos of this suffering world.**

**Amen.**

*Finishing with the South Calder Mission Community prayer...*

**Heavenly Father we thank you for the life of your Church in this place, and in all the villages of the South Calder Mission Community;**

**for all who have served and worshipped you in years gone by, for all who make up your family in our churches today, for the faith we have in common, and for the people and traditions which make each church unique.**

**By your Spirit, guide and equip us, that together we might find new ways to reach out to our local community, to show your love to our neighbours, and to encourage them to follow the Lord Jesus in their lives. Father, we offer ourselves to your service. In the unity of the Holy Spirit, And in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

*and the Lord's prayer...*

**Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come;  
thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread.**

**And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.**

**And lead us not into temptation;  
but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom,  
the power and the glory,  
for ever and ever. Amen.**

## THE CONCLUSION

*Suggested hymn to sing or read* **Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go.**

*The following prayer is said*

**Be with me, Lord, as I finish my prayer today.  
May my lips always speak the truth;  
may my eyes which have read your word  
see only what is good;  
and may my life as well as my worship  
be always pleasing in your sight,  
for the glory of your name. Amen.**

And now may the Lord who brought us to birth by his Spirit,  
strengthen us for the Christian life.  
May the Lord who provides for all our needs  
sustain us day by day.  
May the Lord whose steadfast love is constant as a mother's care,  
send us out to live and work for others.  
And the blessing of God Almighty,  
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
be with us and remain with us always.  
**Amen.**  
So now may I go in peace to love and serve the Lord.  
**In the name of Christ. Amen.**

## Links for the hymns

Brother, sister, let me serve you.

<https://youtu.be/EQaOErUUjm8>

Lord, make me a mountain.

[https://youtu.be/NN\\_OYOHbafs](https://youtu.be/NN_OYOHbafs)

Only by grace can we enter.

<https://youtu.be/hv72Q23Ilp0>

Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go.

<https://youtu.be/AUVAAbXgJyqQ>