

September 4, 2022, 13th Sunday after Pentecost
Pastor Tom Olson
Minnesota Valley Free Lutheran Church

PRELUDE: Ruth Antal (Fugleberg Sing)

HYMN #379 “Jesus in the Morning”

CALL TO WORSHIP: Psalm 100

40+: Blessed is the man
who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked

39-: or stand in the way of sinners
or sit in the seat of mockers.

40+: But his delight is in the law of the LORD,

39-: and on his law he meditates day and night.

40+: He is like a tree planted by streams of
water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither.

39-: Whatever he does prospers.

40+: Not so the wicked!

39-: They are like chaff
that the wind blows away.

40+: Therefore the wicked will not stand in the
judgment,

39-: nor sinners in the assembly of the
righteous.

40+: For the LORD watches over the way of
the righteous,

39-: but the way of the wicked will perish.

HYMN #206 (vss 1,4 & 5) “When Morning
Gilds the Skies”

CONFESSION OF SIN: Let me hear joy and
gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice.
Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my
iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and
renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me
from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from

me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and
grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Then I will
teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn
back to you. Amen

CHILDREN’S SERMON: Count the Cost

READER: Dave Osthus

OLD TESTAMENT LESSON: *Deuteronomy 30:15-20* See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. 16 For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess. 17 But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, 18 I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. 19 This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live 20 and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

GOSPEL LESSON: *Luke 14:25-35* Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: 26 "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters-yes, even his own life-he cannot be my disciple. 27 And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. 28 "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? 29 For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, 30 saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' 31 "Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? 32 If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. 33 In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple. 34 "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? 35 It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out. "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

READER: Here ends the reading of God’s Word.

CONGREGATION SINGS: God be praised, for His glad Tidings!

CONFESSION OF FAITH: *I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, And of all things visible and invisible.*

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, Begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of very God, Begotten, not made, Being of one substance with the Father, By whom all things were made; Who for us, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, And was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, And was made man; And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate, He suffered and was buried; And the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures, And ascended into heaven, And is seated on the right hand of the Father, And He shall come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead; Whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Spirit, The Lord and Giver of Life, Who proceeds from the Father and the Son, Who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, Who spoke by the Prophets. And I believe one holy Christian and apostolic Church, I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins. And I look for the Resurrection of the dead, And the Life of the world to come. Amen

GLORIA PATRI: Ambassador Hymnal p. 4 (please put on screen) *Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen, Amen.*

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRAYER

PRAISE SONGS: CHOSEN BY RUTH

SERMON: PROVIDENCE: “THE BROKEN ROAD” Philemon 1:1-23

One of the most memorable weddings I have officiated was Korby and Suzie. They were childhood friends in Orlando, Florida and both went there way to abusive relationships, divorce, raising children and shattered lives. They reconnected and fell in love as adults. There was not a dry eye in the church when they played the then popular country song, “God bless the broken road that brought me here to you...” They had several amazing years together. They hunted deer together. They attended Disney World together, which she loved, often, with their children. They turned their hurting children into a good family who were a regular part of our church youth group. It was a broken road that became a good road by the grace of God

The book of Philemon is about some deeply broken people that God transformed into beautiful souls. Let’s talk about it.

I. THE SALVATION OF PHILEMON

Philemon 1:1-9 Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker, 2 to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier and to the church that meets in your home: 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 4 I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, 5 because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints. 6 I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ. 7 Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the saints. 8 Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, 9 yet I appeal to you on the basis of love. I then, as Paul-an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus-

PROVIDENTIAL BROKEN ROAD #1-Philemon’s salvation came through the witness of a Paul, who once persecuted Christians.

The salvation of Philemon came through the Apostle Paul. Paul is the example of a terribly broken person that God transformed. He was part of the martyrdom of Stephen. He went on to be a terrorist, a persecutor of Christians, until he met Jesus on the road to Damascus and was powerfully transformed. Paul went on to be the great missionary who brought the gospel to Colossae. There he won a successful man named Philemon to Christ. But Philemon continued to be a slave owner as was customary in that culture. (Church tradition says he became a good slave owner and treated his slaves like his own children but Onesimus misused money and ran away from him.) Sometimes in those days slaves actually chose to remain with good masters rather than be set free. Notice here what Paul observes in Philemon:

- Verse 5 he and his congregation were known for their faith and love
- Verse 7 his love is an encouragement to Paul and he refreshed his heart
- Verse 8 Paul is confident Philemon will do the right thing about Onesimus

Paul the missionary and Philemon the Colossian slave owner were both touched by Christ through salvation. Two very broken people became new creations in Christ. **2 Corinthians 5:17** *“Therefore, if anyone is in*

Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”

II. THE SALVATION OF ONESIMUS

Philemon 1:10-20 I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. 11 Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me. 12 I am sending him-who is my very heart-back to you. 13 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. 14 But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do will be spontaneous and not forced. 15 Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good- 16 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 man and as a brother in the Lord. 17 So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. 18 If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. 19 I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back-not to mention that you owe me your very self. 20 I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ.

PROVIDENTIAL BROKEN ROAD #2 -The salvation of Onesimus came through being a runaway slave that “bumped into” the very same Apostle Paul.

DESPERATE: Onesimus ran to the best place to hide, the giant city of Rome. That is a long way from Colossae and Philemon. He likely sought out Paul because he was in trouble. Paul was able to lead him to saving faith in Jesus. Onesimus was not only converted, he was what some people call “GLORIOUSLY SAVED.” Look at what Paul says about him:

- Verse 10: he became my son
- Verse 11: he was useless but now is useful to Paul and Philemon. He was a new person, likely a good and trustworthy worker.
- Verse 12: he is my very heart
- Verse 13: I would like to keep him
- Verse 14: he was “Providentially” separated from Philemon in order to come back permanently in a good way
- Verse 15: he is now your spiritual brother
- Verse 16: Paul is willing to pay anything he owes

TRANSFORMATION: God took an untrustworthy servant and turned him into a dynamic, compassionate, brave and caring man of God. Onesimus is now willing to go back and face whatever he may face in order to make things right with his master. He is a changed man. This is what happens when Jesus enters into a person’s heart in a real and experiential way. It changes you from the inside out. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. I have met a number of people over the years who have been completely changed when they experienced salvation and the presence of the Holy Spirit in their hearts. Ben Hayden was a radio preacher from Chattanooga, TN that I used to listen to. The name of his radio program said it all. It was called “Changed Lives.” The old song says it well, “What a wonderful change in my life has been wrought since Jesus came into my heart...floods of joy o’er my soul, like the sea billows roll, since Jesus came into my heart.”

III. THE RECONCILIATION OF THE TWO

Philemon 1:21-25 Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask. 22 And one thing more: Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers. Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. 24 And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers. 25 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

PROVIDENTIAL BROKEN ROAD #3: Their reconciliation came through unprecedented willingness of Onesimus to return to slavery and the unprecedented willingness of Philemon to receive him as a brother in Christ without retaliation or brutal punishment. This must have been a powerful witness to the community.

REUNION: What do you supposed happened to most runaway slaves when they were returned to their masters? I would suspect most were either severely and publicly beaten as an example, or they were even put to death. Masters wanted their slaves to fear running away. Can you imagine what the return of Onesimus to Colossae was like. He would walk into town and people would gasp. The rumors would fly quickly. People would gather in the square sure to see a flogging or an execution. Much to their amazement Philemon would leave his business, come running toward Onesimus who was running toward him. They would embrace and weep as Philemon said, “Welcome home my brother.” The community would be in shock.

POINT: Jesus takes broken people and makes them into dynamic ministers of the gospel. Some of the

most effective ministers and evangelists I know were once some of the most sinful and rebellious lost souls. Those of us who have not experienced the depths of sin and depravity have a hard time seeing promise in terribly messed up and ruined people. But those who have been in the depths and lifted out by Christ become ministers who see great potential in the most hopeless cases. They build dynamic churches out of souls that would have a hard time getting an opportunity among righteous people. Jesus picked some rough, tough, poorly educated men to be his disciples. The refined and educated religious world looked down at them. But when the disciples got filled with the Holy Spirit, they transformed communities from Spain to India in a few years. The broken road is often the road that leads to powerful ministry.

ONESIMUS: What happened to Onesimus? Most of the traditions tell us that Philemon gave him his freedom and he returned to Rome to help Paul in his imprisonment. From there one father said Onesimus became the Bishop of Ephesus. But other tradition said he was driven by the Romans into exile, tortured and put to death for his faith. There is a feast day in the Orthodox church for Onesimus and here is what they say is the purpose of the day: *The feast of Saint Onesimus calls the faithful to learn that every human being, no matter how many mistakes one made, no matter how many wrongdoings one committed, has the opportunity of salvation and must not lose the hope of forgiveness from God.*

APPLICATION: Have you lost the hope of the forgiveness of God? Have you given up on someone, maybe yourself? Do you think your road is too broken for God to mend? I pray that this book about three very broken men who were transformed by Jesus Christ will encourage you that God can still use you and others in mighty ways as you come to the cross for forgiveness and new life.

EPILOGUE: Back to my opening story about Korby and Suzie: The life of Onesimus appears to have been short but powerful in impact. It is kind of like the life of Korby who brought such powerful healing and love to the broken life of Suzie and her children. After a number of beautiful years, this marriage “made in heaven” suddenly ended. Korby, only in his 40’s, was running a race and fell over instantly dead of a heart attack. The broken road continues for Suzie as she pours her heart into her children and loved ones. But she refuses to be bitter and continues to live fully and acknowledge the goodness of God in her life. The broken road really never ends until we are safe at home in heaven. Until then, we cling to the promises of God and seek to bring the good news to the broken world

we live in. Today as we partake of holy communion, bring your broken life and shattered dreams to the altar and receive Christ’s grace and healing. Amen

Now may the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen

HYMN #417 (vss 1-4) “Just As I Am”

HOLY COMMUNION

CHORAL BENEDICTION: Tune “Edelweiss”
May the Lord, Mighty Lord, Bless and keep you forever-- Grant you peace, Perfect peace, Strength in every endeavor. Lift up your eyes and see His face, Feel His grace forever. May the Lord, Mighty Lord, Bless and keep you forever.

POSTLUDE: Ruth Antal