



STAYING CONNECTED

A WEEKLY NEWSLETTER FOR OUR MCIVOR CHURCH FAMILY

FEBRUARY 4, 2024

WORSHIP -

THERE'S A WIDENESS IN GOD'S MERCY

*There's a wideness in God's mercy
Like the wideness of the sea
There's a kindness in His justice
Which is more than liberty
There is welcome for the sinner
And more graces for the good
There is mercy with the Savior
There is healing in His blood*

*There is no place where earth's sorrows
Are more felt than up in heaven
There is no place where earth's failings
Have such kindly judgments given
There is plentiful redemption
In the blood that has been shed
There is joy for all the members
In the sorrows of the Head*

*For the love of God is broader
Than the measure of the mind
And the heart of the Eternal
Is most wonderfully kind
If our love were but more faithful
We should take Him at His word
And our life would be thanksgiving
For the goodness of the Lord*

PRAYER FOCUS - A SLAVE FORGIVEN

"It seems you lost Onesimus for a little while so that you could have him back forever. He is no longer like a slave to you. He is more than a slave, for he is a beloved brother, especially to me. Now he will mean much more to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord." Philemon 1:15-16

"I tell you, her sins—and they are many—have been forgiven, so she has shown me much love. But a person who is forgiven little shows only little love." Luke 7:47

"Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you." Ephesians 4:32

"You can be sure that whoever brings the sinner back from wandering will save that person from death and bring about the forgiveness of many sins." James 5:20

"Make allowance for each other's faults and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others." Colossians 3:13



SERMON - PASTOR MIKAYLA

When we re-read passages and books of the Bible, they often bring up new thoughts and themes for us to consider. When we go through different phases in life, certain biblical themes may become more apparent and applicable for us. And God has allowed it to teach me in light of what is currently happening in my own life.

Without sharing too many details, last week someone in my life who is a Christian, said and acted in ways that were hurtful to me. When I spoke up, I was met with harsh words. I found this to be really tough, especially coming from a fellow Christian. Even more difficult was the fact that this person never addressed their behaviour. I've been trying to figure out what hurt more: the lack of acknowledgement of their behaviour, or no consideration to my points which I believed had merit. All I know is that it continues to hurt as there has been no resolution.

Since this happened, I've been thinking about my own actions and how I feel about forgiving this person. It can be really tough to forgive someone, especially when they do not acknowledge the ways they have hurt you.

So as I've read through Philemon, I am learning more about this profound forgiveness that Paul is petitioning Philemon to give to Onesimus. As much as I speak to you, I am also speaking to myself about forgiveness and how this might take form in my own life.

Philemon is a letter written by Paul to Philemon, a fellow Christian, regarding his slave Onesimus. What Paul is him to do is big. He recognizes that Onesimus wronged Philemon and fled. But Paul is asking him to welcome Onesimus back, and now as a brother in Christ. Legally, Philemon was able to do what he wanted in regards to punishing Onesimus, but Paul is asking for him to consider a new way as part of the family in Christ.

Koinonia is where the vertical relationship we have with God affects our horizontal relationships with others. Our faith is

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meant to be shared in communion with one another and our kinship is not just shown in word, but in deed. Koinonia is an integral part of transformation in Paul's letter to Philemon. But koinonia is also important for our focus of forgiveness.

Forgiveness should be free. Paul had a certain level of authority as an apostle and this would have carried weight in the letters he wrote. He could have demanded Philemon to forgive Onesimus for his wrongdoings. But verses 8-9, 14 say, "...although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, yet I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love...I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favour you do would not seem forced but would be voluntary."

Paul understands that true forgiveness is not something we can force people to do, rather they must decide for themselves. Rather than using his authority, Paul petitions using the fact that Philemon and Onesimus are now brothers in Christ. He hopes that Philemon will see the transformation Onesimus has experienced and forgive him for what he did in his life without Christ. Despite Paul's persuasive letter, he ultimately gives Philemon the choice, signalling to us that Paul believes forgiveness must be free.

The book of Philemon also teaches that forgiveness shows our faith. If I think about my own situation, I ask myself, "How can I show my faith in response to this person?" If I keep telling everybody about how frustrated I am with this person, saying that they should apologize, it is clear that I have not forgiven and others around me are likely not seeing how forgiveness shapes my faith.

Now this doesn't mean that we let true injustice happen and forget about it in the name of forgiveness. But in a situation like my own, my act of forgiveness will go a lot further than continually complaining about this person and what they've done. My hope in my situation and in our similar experiences, we recognize the issue, fight for what is right and just and learn to forgive in humility.

The book of Philemon also teaches that forgiveness can be facilitated by friends. Paul acts as a type of mediator in this situation. He shows Philemon and Onesimus how to deal with conflict, which should allow this process of forgiveness to be genuine and not out of obligation.

Paul does this by rebuilding trust based on Christ as the foundation. We don't know much about the relationship between Philemon and Onesimus, but Paul helps the situation by reconnecting the two men and building a new trust. We see this through the way he addresses them, Philemon as brother (v. 7) and Onesimus as his son (v. 10). Since they both trust Paul, his care in calling them family is important.

Then asks Philemon to do the right thing as he is seeking his voluntary consent. Paul appeals to Christian love, to koinonia instead of authority. Paul also offers to pay the cost of any damage caused. All of Paul's actions here are examples of how friends can facilitate forgiveness. Paul does not abuse his position of power, but guides them by way of creating a trusting relationship.

God loved us so much that He sent His son to wipe our sins clean. Through Christ, these sins have been forgiven, which means we should also strive to forgive those around us. To be like Christ means forgiving when it is not warranted, when it is not reciprocal, forgiving even when we don't feel like it.

When I think of my situation I may think, "This person hasn't admitted any fault. They claim to be a Christ follower. Where's the acknowledgement? Where's the apology?"

But I need to remember that I cannot control their actions and that my forgiveness should not be based on what they choose to do. If Jesus went based on this same logic, we would all be done for. Jesus does not forgive us based on our amount of apologizing or acknowledgement of our wrong doings. When we've repented of our sin to the Lord, we are forgiven.

Having given a lot of thought to what forgiveness looks like, I still know that my own example will be difficult. My flesh wants to stay mad, growing in bitterness. But we have a good God who looks at all my flaws and mistakes and says, "This has been paid in full. You are forgiven."

No matter what comes of my experience with this person, I must look to Christ and see all He's forgiven me of. This can help me to move forward. Considering the vital ingredient of koinonia, I must strive to put frustrations aside and view us as equal in Christ, both part of the family of Christ.

Whether we are seeking forgiveness or working to forgive, may we strive to be like Christ. May our forgiveness mirror that of Philemon and Onesimus, and more importantly that of Christ in relation to us. When we act within this mindset, we are partaking in koinonia: a community that lives with and for the Lord.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Wednesday, 7pm – Youth Group and Kids Club
Thursday, 9am and 5pm – Harvest Manitoba Food Bank
Friday, 7pm – Young Adult Worship Night
February 18, 11:30am – Family Fun Day Outreach
February 20, 9:30am – 55+ Walk & Talk "Frauds and Scams"
February 24, 3-4:40pm – Inter-Church Prayer Vigil for Peace and Justice in Ukraine, Mclvor Church
February 25, 11:15am – Spring Finance Meeting & Lunch
March 25-28 – Mclvor Spring Break Day Camp

WAYS TO GIVE

We accept donations by cash or cheque, as well as e-transfers to mcivor@mcivorchurch.com or via credit card on www.mcivorchurch.com. To arrange a gift via Direct Deposit, please contact the office at 204.339.1691.

**** Church office hours are Tuesday to Friday 9am to 4:30pm. ****