

Sermon Title: **“Between Paul and Jesus’ Disciple”**

Bible: **Philemon 1-21 & Luke 14:25-33**

When: on Sunday, September 4, 2022

Where: about 30 people (plus YouTube streaming viewers) at Gilroy UMC

Opening Prayer

O Lord, thank you so much for calling us your children. And can we be disciples? Can we carry the cross and follow you? O Lord, please lead us to be your disciples. Let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

1. Paul’s Letters

How many books are in the Bible? Sixty-six Books. In the Old Testament, there are 39 books. In the New Testament, there are 27 books. In the New Testament, how many Gospels do we have? Four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Then, how many of Paul’s letters in the New Testament? Depending on the opinion of the particular biblical scholar, it can be 13 or 14 letters. Paul’s letters are 13 or 14 out of the 27 books in the New Testament. Which of Paul’s letters do you like most? Some people like Paul’s letter to the Romans, because it has many great theological foundations. Some people like 1 Corinthians, because of chapter 13, the Love Chapter: “Love is patient, Love is kind....”

2. Philemon

My favorite of Paul’s letters is Philemon. First of all, Paul’s letter to Philemon is very short.

It has only one chapter, and 25 verses. As we already read 21 verses today, if you read 4 more verses, we can say that we read one whole book of the New Testament. Second, this letter is kind of a personal letter to his friend and co-worker, Philemon, regarding one person, Onesimus. So, we can see Paul's real life and thoughts.

This letter was sent by Paul to Philemon. Paul and Philemon were friends and co-workers. They were working together for the mission. There were other people mentioned: Apphia and Archippus. But, the Greek word "you" from verse 4 through 21 is singular, not plural. So, we can say that this letter was sent specifically to Philemon.

Who was Onesimus? Verses 15 and 16 say, "Perhaps this is the reason he [Onesimus] was separated from you [Philemon] for a while, so that you might have him back forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother." "No longer as a slave" means that Onesimus was a slave. "Onesimus was separated from Philemon" might mean that Onesimus had run away. Then, we can say that Philemon was the master. Verse 18 says, "If he [Onesimus] has wronged you [Philemon] in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my [Paul's] account." Probably, when Onesimus ran away from his master, Philemon, there was a possibility that he had wronged his master or stolen something.

Onesimus was not a good slave. Nevertheless, Paul regarded him as his child and his beloved brother, no longer as a slave, more than a slave. While sending Onesimus back to his master Philemon, Paul asked Philemon to welcome Onesimus just like Paul himself. Paul's intention is not that clear, but it sounds like Paul tried to obtain Philemon's forgiveness and

Onesimus' freedom from being a slave.

In another of Paul's letters, in Galatians 3:28, Paul said, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." There is no longer slave or free in Christ Jesus. This sentence has the power, because it has Paul's real life in it, the real story of Paul and Onesimus.

2. The Cross and the Cost of Being Jesus' Disciples

Today's Gospel reading of Luke from the lectionary talks about the cost of being Jesus' disciples. At that time, it was a time of persecution. To be Jesus' disciples meant to give up their parents, their family, their friends, all the possessions they had, and even their lives. It was the cost and the cross at that time to be Jesus' disciples. They knew the persecutions, and the results. Nevertheless, our faith ancestors carried the cross and followed Jesus.

3. What is your Cross and the Cost to be Jesus' Disciples?

What is our cross here and now? What cross are you carrying now? What is the cost to be Jesus' disciples? Because there is no persecution, we do not need to give up our family, our friends, what we have, and our lives. What cross do you carry?

One of the reasons why I chose to be a United Methodist Church Pastor is that the United Methodist Church has the appointment system. I see this appointment system as our cross to carry. Pastors are appointed or sent to each local church every year. This also means that the congregation receives and accepts the appointed pastors every year. For this appointment system, pastors are required to report on their ministry and they are to be evaluated every

year until retirement. Because I saw that many great pastors faced ugly endings, I like this annual evaluation and appointment system, because I believe that it will protect me and the church. Sometimes the evaluation and the appointment can be neither easy nor comfortable. It can be very challenging sometimes. The pastors should meet the new church, and the congregation should welcome a new pastor. From one of the SPRC Trainings, a Staff Parish Relations Committee Training, I heard that some churches prefer to have a white male pastor who is married, and has three children. It is natural to want to have our preference of pastor, since we are human beings. But we are here as a church to follow Jesus. Not to follow our preferences. Not to follow our comfort zone or pride. Beyond our comfort zone, pride, and our personal preferences, we can follow Jesus! So, to me, to us, to the United Methodists, the annual appointment system is our cross to carry.

Our United Methodist Church has a long history of Social Justice. We do not close our eyes and ears toward social justice issues. We are the people of open hearts, open minds, and open doors. This is our cross to carry, too. When there is a sorrow, it is our sorrow. When there is injustice, it is our problem. When there is brokenness, it is our brokenness. Our individual peace and salvation is important. But our calling does not end there. To follow Jesus means to love others. To follow Jesus means to pray “...thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” When there is sexism, racism, violence, Islamophobia, and homophobia, we speak up and stand up! That’s because we are the people of heaven on the earth!

4. Communion and Our lives

Today, we will have Holy Communion. When we take bread and drink juice, we are united with our Lord Jesus Christ. It means that we offer ourselves as a holy and living sacrifice. Paul took care of Onesimus not as a slave, but as his beloved brother. So, when he said “There is no longer slave or free,” we can feel his life. When we follow Jesus beyond our pride, our preference, and our appointment system, beyond our church, we can bring Jesus’ love and grace. As we taste Jesus’ love and life with the bread and juice, may our love and life be bread and juice for others and for our community. “Make these gifts of bread and juice be for us the body of Christ, that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood.”

Closing Prayer

O Lord, we want to follow you. It is not easy. It is not comfortable. But, with our whole lives, beyond ourselves, beyond what we have, beyond what we like, beyond who we are, we want to follow you. When we follow you, please lead us to your grace and love. In Jesus’ name. Amen.