

October 16, 2022
The Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Pastor Matt Duerr

TRUE U-Give Them the “F!”

Grace, Mercy, and Peace to you in the Name of the Father, and from our Lord Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen. Welcome back to your second class at True U-Truth University. Just a quick recap and last week’s lesson at True U, we talked about a spiritual/social dichotomy. It’s a dichotomy that focuses on that phrase, “It’s all about you.” And that’s what society tells us, ‘It’s all about you.’ You decide your truth. And we’re told that truth should be based upon our emotions, and of course, what the experts tell us. On the other side is the spiritual; the spiritual, I tell you. And God tells us that we are called, and He empowers us to be a covenant to the people, so that others will see us when we do the work of an evangelist. They will hear and see complete teaching from us. Why? So that the blind may see and turn.

This week we continue in our chapter on spiritual dichotomies. Society would have us believe, that if you run into a problem, the best thing that you can do is cancel that problem or whatever is creating that problem. Now I’d like you to think about that. I’m going to say something here that might upset some people. But it’s true. Cancel culture has been around for a very, very long time. In fact, it is literally Satan’s tradecraft.

Consider in the Old Testament king Ahab and Jezebel; they did not like what Elijah had to say. So, what was their response? Kill him! Fast forward a few hundred years, or a thousand years to the time of the New Testament and what do we see happening when Peter and John are preaching in the temple, after giving a lame man the ability to walk? Kill them! The religious authorities wanted to kill them. In fact, consider Saint Paul as he goes to Ephesus and preaches the good news there. What was the response? Kill him. Cancel culture, that’s Satan’s tradecraft. It’s ultimate goal is destruction, death, of anything that opposes him or his thoughts.

On the flip side, let me play a little bit with you with your mind, with your memory. I bet all of us would agree that every once in a while, we hear a story about someone, or some group of people that goes well above and beyond what would be expected for the benefit of others. Whenever you hear that kind of story, you oftentimes hear the phrase, “it restores my faith in humanity.”

Well, we have a story like that in the Bible. Meet Saint Paul, Philemon and a guy named Onesimus. I think we all know Saint Paul, he’s a pillar in the Christian Church. He wrote more books of the New Testament than anyone else. And Saint Paul wrote a letter to Philemon. What does Saint Paul say to Philemon? And try to

put yourselves if you might in Philemon's shoes. And imagine you get this letter from Saint Paul.

Saint Paul says, "I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers." Now that one sentence, that one sentence could lead to a whole series of sermons. Paul gives thanks and we could do a whole series of sermons on the need to give thanks. Really even more than giving thanks, in making it a focus in our lives to see where God is acting and then our need to give thanks for what God is doing. But of course, we also see that he's praying God to God always. There's another sermon because we are to pray at all times, and in all situations for all people.

But then again, he gets very specific because he's remembering Philemon in prayer, so maybe we should do a sermon that focuses our need of focusing our prayers on each other, on the prayer list on the back of our bulletin. Yeah, I'm not going to go with any of those three sermons because Paul is not done writing.

He continues, "because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the Saints." Wow! Now, there are some great sermons because when we hear Saint Paul say; "I hear of your love." That word for love is that is agape, the highest form of love, sacrificial love, putting others above you. There's a sermon. But then again, we see that word faith and Paul is commending him for his faith toward the Lord Jesus and towards all the Saints. His faith is a faith in action benefitting the body of Christ. Yeah, but I'm not going to go with either one of those sermons either.

Saint Paul continues writing about Philemon "And I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ." Now who is this Philemon that he's talking about here? It was a convert. A convert who Paul led to Christ. He's now an evangelist, as we see, sharing his faith. But he has learned well from Saint Paul because what does it say? "For the sake of Christ." Philemon is doing this not for himself, not for personal accolades, no he is doing it to the glory of God. And he's supporting the other Saints to the glory of God. But I'm not going there in that sermon either.

Because he continues; you might be getting the feeling of wow, this Philemon is a pretty amazing character. Now listen to Saint Paul again, the big pillar. "For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love my brother. Because the hearts of the Saints have been refreshed through you." What a compliment coming from Saint Paul! Saint Paul gets much joy, much comfort, from Philemon when he sees how Philemon has touched the hearts of other Christians and refreshes them when they're down in the dumps. This Philemon guy, he's awesome! He's amazing! He could lead to like nine or ten sermons as I counted!

But let's go back to my thing that Saint Paul said, "I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ." He is praying that he becomes effective; it sounds like he's already effective. Oh wait, it must be about that full knowledge, he needs to complete teaching of last week. That's what St. Paul's talking about, right? No, this is where Onesimus comes in, and this is where our sermon today goes.

Who is or who was Onesimus? We have to go through this whole book of Philemon, which by the way is one chapter long, and look for clues. First of all, we notice that Paul was in prison when he writes this. He's in prison in Rome and it is there that he refers to Onesimus as, I quote, "my child." So, we know Saint Paul never got married. This is his spiritual child. Now we're not talking some weird ethereal thing here, no this is Onesimus is like Philemon. He is someone who Paul shared the gospel with and who came to faith in Jesus Christ. You see Onesimus, we read, was formerly useless to Philemon. So, Philemon knew him and when he looked at Onesimus, he said he was a useless chap. Why would he say that? Well, because of what else we learn, he was a slave. A slave of Philemon's who ran away. And the fact that he was a slave of Philemon, who ran away, and was useless to Philemon means that he was either one of those slaves who was always causing trouble, or he was one of those slaves who pilfered, stole, and ran away with it. And what does Paul say? "I'm sending him back to you."

But then he ramps it up a little bit. He says, "I'm sending my very heart." Now when you think of Saint Paul saying I'm sending my very heart that should make us all stop, kind of gasp, because he's saying, I'm sending something I love very, very dearly. That's Onesimus. In fact, Paul continues that he would have quote, "been glad to keep him on Philemon's behalf;" so that Onesimus might serve Paul on behalf of Philemon. Saint Paul wants him to stay, would love to have him stay and to be able to say he's here because Philemon's letting him be here with me. That Philemon is such a good guy! But he says, no I can't do that though, because he is your slave. He is your property, you own him and, I quote, "don't do anything without your consent."

But that's when Paul shifts gears with a perhaps scenario; he lays out to Philemon that maybe, perhaps, God has taken Onesimus leaving, his lack of loyalty, his pilfering, and God's going to use that to make a difference. A difference where Saint Paul says, 'so that you might have him back forever.' So that he wouldn't be back as a slave, but as your beloved brother. Now think about what Saint Paul's written. He's referring to Philemon as his brother. He's now saying to Philemon now Onesimus your brother. In fact, he ends up by saying, "receive him as me."

When you see Onesimus come back Philemon, look at him as if he's me, the one who led you to Jesus. In essence what Saint Paul was doing is he's reiterating something from the Old Testament from the book of Esther, where Mordecai says to Esther, "who knows but that you were born for such a time as this." And Paul is putting it on the line here with Philemon concerning Onesimus and he's saying to Philemon; "Philemon, buddy, give Onesimus the big F. No, no, no, not the F we think of today in today's day and age, the F bomb. No this is a very positive F. It's the big F. It's **Forgiveness**. And it's something that seems to be lost in this world of today that is focused on 'it's all about me and cancel culture.'

In fact, when we look at our gospel this morning, we already see the way people look at forgiveness. That servant was forgiven by his master a boatload, and he was more than happy to go, 'yeah thank you for forgiving me, it's just you and me buddy, awesome! Oh, this person that owes me, forget it! I'm not forgiving him.' We'd love to accept forgiveness, but we do not like to dole it out. And Paul is calling on Philemon to forgive as he has been forgiven. And that is what will make his testimony now effective. Because people will see it, and it will lead people to the firm knowledge of what our forgiveness from God really looks like. We really are sinful beings. We are useless to God and yet He forgives us. And if Philemon will do this, all those who look up to him, will see that act of forgiveness and it will be powerful. Paul is asking Philemon, to literally become the ultimate object lesson. Live forgiveness so others can see.

Now, you might be saying, 'OK, Pastor now I know where you're going with this story. I need to look and see who I need to forgive.' Well sort of yeah, but I'd like you to take it a step further. I'd like you to look around you, in your family, your neighborhood, your place of work. Who do you know that needs to see you forgive? You're right we need to look and see who we need to forgive, and we have to look beyond that person to see all those who would see us forgive, and the impact that that would have on others. That's what Saint Paul is saying to Philemon. And that's the message of this today, this scripture. Be powerful, be effective, be full and forgive.

In our Savior's Name, Amen