

This is not easy, but it is the shape of Christ. Just as Paul offers to bear Onesimus' debt, Christ bears our burdens. Just as Philemon is asked to welcome Onesimus, Christ welcomes us. The cross is the shape of costly hospitality and radical love.

Wonderings

- I wonder what relationships in our own lives might need to be reshaped by love rather than by power or obligation.
- I wonder what it would mean for our churches to be known for radical hospitality rather than exclusion.
- I wonder what we may need to "give up" in order to follow Christ more fully.

Connecting to Life and ideas for sharing on the trellis for the wider church. What examples, pictures or music might you share with the person leading your church worship or preaching this week?

- Where do you see costly hospitality lived out in our world today?
- What are the structures, social, economic, or cultural, that prevent us from welcoming others as equals?
- How might our own community embody Paul's invitation: "If you consider me your partner, welcome them as you would welcome me"?

Prayer

Christ who bore the cost of love,
teach us to walk
your way of hospitality.

Free us from what binds us,
so that we may welcome others
with open hearts.

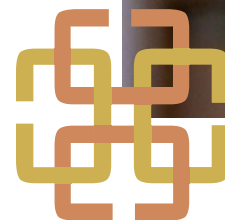
Give us courage to love
where it is costly,
to stand with those excluded,
and to bear one another's burdens.

Send us out as your disciples,
reshaping our communities
with your radical love.
Amen.



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Photo: Erika Giraud (unsplash.com)



HeartBeat

Welcome him
as you would
welcome me

Sunday 7th of September

Lectionary Reading:
Philemon 1-21
Luke 14.25-33

Opening Prayer

Begin with a simple prayer
of gathering:

God of love,
we bring ourselves as we are.
We bring our questions,
our longings,
and our struggles.
Teach us your way of love
and show us what it costs
to follow Christ.
Amen.

Scripture

Read aloud both passages slowly:

- Philemon 1–21 (Paul’s appeal for Onesimus)
- Luke 14.25–33 (Counting the cost of discipleship)

Encourage participants to listen for a word or phrase that stands out.

Share these thoughts with one another

Wondering

- I wonder what words or phrases in these passages make you uncomfortable.
- I wonder how you feel when Jesus talks about “hating” family and giving up possessions.
- I wonder how Philemon felt when asked to welcome Onesimus as a brother.

Reflection

Philemon and Luke may seem very different. One is a private letter about reconciliation; the other is a public challenge to the crowds. But both press the same question: what does it really cost to follow Jesus?

- In Luke, Jesus uses shocking language: “hate” family, give up possessions, carry the cross. It’s not about literal hatred but about reordering our loyalties. Discipleship means loosening

our grip on security, wealth, even relationships, so that we can belong fully to God’s kingdom.

- In Philemon, that costly discipleship takes flesh in relationships. Paul refuses to command Philemon. Instead, he appeals to love, asking him to see Onesimus not as property but as a brother. This was a radical, counter-cultural demand that would have been costly in a society built on slavery.

MONOLOGUE:

In the House of Philemon.

Ask someone in the group to read this

I remember the day as if it were yesterday. We had gathered in Philemon’s house as we often did, lamps lit against the falling dusk, bread and wine on the table, prayers whispered in anticipation. The letter had arrived from Paul- Paul, our beloved friend, writing from prison. We leaned forward, eager to hear his words.

Philemon sat at the centre, the scroll in his hands. His wife, Apphia, was there, and Archippus too, and a few of us from the community. And then him. Onesimus. Standing to one side, awkward, uncertain, eyes cast down. A runaway, a slave. We all knew his story, though we did not speak it aloud. Philemon began to read.

Paul’s words poured out like oil and fire. At first they were familiar: grace, peace, thanksgiving. But then came the heart of it. “Though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do your duty, yet I would rather appeal to you on the basis of love.” Appeal? Love? I glanced at Philemon. His brow furrowed, his lips pressed tight. Paul was asking him not to punish, not to discard, not even to ignore. - but to welcome Onesimus as a brother. As a brother!

“Welcome him as you would welcome me,” Paul wrote. The words hung heavy in the air. Welcome a slave, a runaway, as if he were Paul himself. Our teacher, our father in the faith, the one whose voice had first told us of Christ.

I felt my chest tighten. Did Paul know what he was asking? To treat a slave as an equal? To overturn the order of our society in the intimacy of our own households? It was unthinkable. Dangerous. Costly.

And yet... as the words echoed in that room, I felt something shift. This was not just about Onesimus. It was about us, about me. Paul was holding up a mirror: could we be a community shaped not by command or coercion, but by love freely given? Could we bear the cost of welcoming one another as Christ had welcomed us?

I looked again at Onesimus. For the first time, I saw not a servant, not a runaway, not a problem to be solved, but a man. My brother.

When the reading ended, silence lingered. Philemon’s hands trembled slightly as he rolled up the scroll. No one moved. All of us were caught between the old world we knew and the new world Paul dared us to imagine.

I do not know what Philemon felt in that moment. But I know what I felt: the weight of choice. The cost of love. The shape of the cross.

And I knew, somehow, that nothing in our community would ever be the same again.

Silence : Keep a time of quiet to ponder the reading .

Now explore further

Together, these texts invite us to see that:

- The gospel is not about coercion but transformation of the heart.
- Hospitality is not politeness, but radical welcome that overturns hierarchies.
- True love costs us something: pride, privilege, possessions, and sometimes comfort.
- Discipleship is not cheap grace, but solidarity with those society excludes.