

Sunday, September 7, 2025—Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

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Introduction

Called to contemplate the cost of discipleship, we might be helped by translating Paul's request to Philemon into our prayer of the day: Refresh my heart in Christ. Strengthened by the company and forgiveness of Christ in holy communion and recalling God's grace in remembrance of baptism, we can be strengthened in this hour to "choose life"—to choose life in God as our own.

Prayer of the Day

Direct us, O Lord God, in all our doings with your continual help, that in all our works, begun, continued, and ended in you, we may glorify your holy name; and finally, by your mercy, bring us to everlasting life, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen

First Reading: Jeremiah 18:1-11

¹ The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ² "Come, go down to the potter's house, and there I will let you hear my words." ³ So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was working at his wheel. ⁴ The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him.

⁵ Then the word of the LORD came to me: ⁶ Can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as this potter has done? says the LORD. Just like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. ⁷ At one moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, ⁸ but if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will change my mind about the disaster that I intended to bring on it. ⁹ And at another moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, ¹⁰ but if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will change my mind about the good that I had intended to do to it. ¹¹ Now, therefore, say to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: Thus says the LORD: Look, I am a potter shaping evil against you and devising a plan against you. Turn now, all of you from your evil way, and amend your ways and your doings.

Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18

¹ LORD, you have searched me out;

O LORD, you have known me.

² **You know my sitting down and my rising up;
you discern my thoughts from afar.**

³ You trace my journeys and my resting-places
and are acquainted with all my ways.
⁴ **Indeed, there is not a word on my lips,
but you, O LORD, know it altogether.**
⁵ You encompass me, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.
⁶ **Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is so high that I cannot attain to it.**
¹³ For you yourself created my inmost parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
¹⁴ **I will thank you because I am marvelously made;
your works are wonderful, and I know it well.**
¹⁵ My body was not hidden from you,
while I was being made in secret and woven in the depths of the earth.
¹⁶ **Your eyes beheld my limbs, yet unfinished in the womb; all of them were written in your
book;
my days were fashioned before they came to be.**
¹⁷ How deep I find your thoughts, O God!
How great is the sum of them!
¹⁸ **If I were to count them, they would be more in number than the sand;
to count them all, my life span would need to be like yours.**

Second Reading: Philemon 1-21

¹ Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,
To Philemon our dear friend and co-worker, ² to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow
soldier, and to the church in your house:
³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴ When I remember you in my prayers, I always thank my God ⁵ because I hear of your love
for all the saints and your faith toward the Lord Jesus. ⁶ I pray that the sharing of your faith may
become effective when you perceive all the good that we may do for Christ. ⁷ I have indeed
received much joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the saints have
been refreshed through you, my brother.

⁸ For this reason, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do your duty, ⁹ yet I
would rather appeal to you on the basis of love—and I, Paul, do this as an old man, and now
also as a prisoner of Christ Jesus. ¹⁰ I am appealing to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I
have become during my imprisonment. ¹¹ Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed
useful both to you and to me. ¹² I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you. ¹³ I
wanted to keep him with me, so that he might be of service to me in your place during my
imprisonment for the gospel; ¹⁴ but I preferred to do nothing without your consent, in order
that your good deed might be voluntary and not something forced. ¹⁵ Perhaps this is the reason

he was separated from you for a while, so that you might have him back forever, ¹⁶ no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother—especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

¹⁷ So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. ¹⁸ If he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. ¹⁹ I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand: I will repay it. I say nothing about your owing me even your own self. ²⁰ Yes, brother, let me have this benefit from you in the Lord! Refresh my heart in Christ. ²¹ Confident of your obedience, I am writing to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.

Gospel: Luke 14:25-33

²⁵ Now large crowds were traveling with [Jesus;] and he turned and said to them, ²⁶ “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. ²⁷ Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. ²⁸ For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? ²⁹ Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, ³⁰ saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’ ³¹ Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? ³² If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. ³³ So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.”

Prayers of Intercession

Gracious God, we come to you in prayer for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

We pray for the church to follow in your ways, that it may be a witness to your love for all people. Help us choose all that is life-giving and confront the forces of death. God of grace, **receive our prayer.**

We pray for creation, that it may be cherished and nurtured. Sustain farmlands, animals, and waters; restore places affected by calamities; and shield coastlands from rising seas. God of grace, **receive our prayer.**

We pray for those in authority. Grant them wisdom to govern justly and compassion to care for the marginalized. Equip them for actions that further the common good. God of grace, **receive our prayer.**

We pray for those who are sick, hungry, unhoused, or lonely. May they find healing through your love and the care of those around them. Lead us to be your hands and feet in the world. God of grace, **receive our prayer.**

We pray for this congregation, that we may be united in love and faith. Refresh our hearts in Christ, and deepen our support of one another. We pray that our sharing of faith may transform lives. God of grace, **receive our prayer.**

We thank you for those who have died and now dwell with the saints. Surround them with your divine mercy, that they find peace and rest in your loving embrace. God of grace, **receive our prayer.**

We entrust these prayers to you, O God, in the name of Jesus Christ, our redeemer and friend.

Amen.

Reflection

Freed—From and For

Freedom flows through all the readings this day. Moses reminds the people of Israel they have the freedom to choose between life and prosperity or death and adversity. Ironically, this freedom to choose life comes through the freedom to choose obedience to the commands of God. In other words, Moses tells the people, they are free to choose bondage to God and life or bondage to sin and death. Either way they will be bound to something.

In the second reading Paul reminds Philemon that he—Paul—is not free but is a “prisoner of Christ Jesus.” This is Paul’s linguistic wordplay to help convince Philemon to free his slave Onesimus. Paul reminds Philemon that he has the freedom to hold on to his slave Onesimus and the freedom to grant Onesimus freedom as his brother in Christ.

In the gospel Jesus speaks a challenging word, which resonates in ways that might make modern people a tad uncomfortable. You might phrase it: Do you own your stuff or does your stuff own you? Jesus seems to suggest that our stuff, our possessions, could make it difficult to follow faithfully. It is easy to dismiss this suggestion with a wave of the hand, “Oh, that certainly is not me”—until you start to consider just how much stuff is stored up in our homes and attics and garages (some of the latter with no room for cars).

In Christ, freedom comes from letting go. Freedom comes through giving away and trusting Jesus. In Christ we are free people. Free to choose life, free to choose faithfulness, and free to open our arms wide and receive the free grace of God. This is the God who chooses to never stop loving us.



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