

Service Overview

Speaker: Ben

Sermon Series: At The Table With One Another

Message: Welcome & Inclusion

Scripture Reference: Philemon

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Worship Singing

Song: How Great is Our God by Chris Tomlin

Song: How Great Thou Art by Stuart Wesley Keene Hine

Song: What A Beautiful Name by Hillsong Worship

Song: Lord Of Lords by Brooke Ligertwood & Hillsong Worship

Post-Worship Prayer *Speaker: Kathy Bates*

Lord, we lift up your name today. We set our eyes afresh on you, Jesus. It is our joy, our privilege to worship you, God. We praise you. And I'm just reminded today, Lord, that we're joining with creation, your creation, who also lifts its voice to acknowledge you as Lord of all.

And Lord today, as we worship too, I just want to pause and pray for those who are in countries where they are persecuted because of their faith. We join with them in worship this day and we want to pray, Lord, that you're strengthening for each one of them. We pray for your protection for each one of them. We thank you, Lord God, that they are brothers and sisters in Christ, so let us not forget them. In Jesus' name, amen.

Introduction, Announcements & Upcoming Events *Speaker: Kathy Bates*

Kids, I just want to say it's so good to have you worshipping with us. I love having you worship. Before you leave, those who are in kindergarten through to year six, put your hand up if you're in that age group.

I just want to make sure that you have signed up to our kids holiday program, because it is coming up very, very quickly. And if you're in that age group, you need to be there because it's going to be so good. Also, I want to encourage those of us in that age group, or perhaps you're a grandma or a parent, and you think, 'actually, I've got neighbours or I've got relatives that are in that age group,' that you might just want to extend an invitation to them to come to the kids holiday program as well, because it's such a fantastic opportunity. It's a great week, and it is also a week where our kids get to hear the gospel.

--- Break as children leave kids church ---

I want to invite every single one of us to join a team that is really worthwhile. You have that invitation right now. So as a church, every year we celebrate Jesus transforming lives. On our tree over here, each piece of fruit represents a story from this year of the way that Jesus has touched or transformed a life. This includes bringing someone to faith in him, renewing faith in him, significant growth in him, physical healing, spiritual healing and emotional healing.

But you know, there's a bunch of people who are involved face to face in Jesus transforming lives because lives don't get transformed just in an isolated vacuum. Usually, it's usually part of a team

effort. So, there's a bunch of people who are involved face to face, but then there's a whole other support network behind the scenes that actually back up the face to face people.

And so I want to invite you to be part of the team that sees Jesus transforming lives. But right now, we're asking for those who are behind the scenes, who would back up those who are doing the face to face, for you to be part of that. We have need for those who could help us with our sound team or our computer tech team in the morning, and we can provide training into that. So you don't have to come as an expert. We will train you up in that as an apprentice. We're not going to give you a bunch of instructions and leave you to it. We'll come alongside you and make sure you're confident in what you're doing.

We also need people who will just set up our chairs for Sunday mornings, so you could be part of that. You could clean a section of the church. You know, it doesn't have to be every week. It's when you're able to, over the next four months on a roster system. All of these jobs are very, very important to make the team operate as a whole, so we'd love to have you join.

Also, another face to face opportunity right now is to join our Park Ministry team. Every week we serve lunch to about 80 underprivileged people in Prince Alfred Park in Parramatta. Some of them sleep rough, and all of them live on what we would say is on the margins. So we get to serve lunch and come alongside them. And we need people, particularly in June and July. Our roster is very thin during this time, so we would love to you to be part of that team to see Jesus transform lives down there.

If you're able to help in any of those things, you can jump on our website and you can indicate what you are willing to be part of. You just go to the serving section, click the appropriate team and go in there, and you can indicate that you're willing to serve. You could note it on a card today, or you could just come and even talk to any of the pastoral team as well. We're trying to make this as easy as possible, but we want to want you to be part of what it means to be part of a team that is really worthwhile, and it really is.

I also just want to talk quickly about small groups in Parramatta Baptist Church. Small groups are a really important part of our church's aim. Why do we exist? We exist to make disciples as Jesus' commission to us. We are to make disciples. And that means relationships—to grow in our relationship with God, grow in our relationship with one another, but also engage in mission, bring others into the kingdom of God. Small groups function to stir up those things. They function to grow out and deepen our relationship with God.

Small groups are a beautiful way to grow and to deepen relationships with one another, but they're also a time where we can pray for others, as well as being engaged in the missional work of God, seeing others and bringing others into the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

And so they're important part of the life of our church. Around half the adults in our church and most of our young people are part of small groups. At the moment, there's an opportunity if you're not in a small group and would like to be in one. We had a newcomers afternoon tea the other day, and I think we've got seven people from that group looking to join a small group, and that will happen in the next week or two.

So it's just a good time to jump into a small group. And a number of small groups are looking for some people to join them at the moment. And I also have one kind of small group which isn't a small group yet, but they're on their way to becoming a small group, so you may help them become a small group. So if you'd like to do that, there's a few ways to do that. You can email me stephen@parramattabaptist.com, or you can come and see me at the end of the service. You can note it on a card and drop it in box at the back of the room. Those are probably the three best ways to do it, but, there's the invitation. If you're not part of a small group, I would love to see you join one.

Also, we have a church meeting next Sunday June 23 at 12:15 PM after our service. We'd love for you to come. It's just a single agenda item meeting. We want to explain and pass a resolution authorising the Baptist Property Trust to execute a new lease for our childcare centre. We need a forum of church members to be able to do that. It'll just be a quick meeting after our second service at 12:15 PM next Sunday June 23.

Prayer *Speaker: Kathy Bates*

Unknown

Let's pray. God, we just want to thank you for the many opportunities that are before us. Jesus, I want to thank you that you do invite us to be part of a very worthwhile team. Oh, God. I thank you that you call us to be fishers of men. And I thank you, Lord, for all that it means. The joy of seeing people come into your kingdom, the joy of seeing people explore who you are, the joy of walking alongside and watching those who are new in Christ grow. The joy of seeing those who have walked with you for many years and seeing them still continue to grow. The joy of being alongside brothers and sisters as we lift our hands in worship, lift our hearts and voices in worship.

God, I just want to thank you that there's so much joy and purpose in your Kingdom. God, I want to thank you that your invitation is to all of us, that you never invited people to just be spectators while others got to play the main game, but that you invite every single one of us. And I thank you, Lord, that there is a place and role for every one of us, because you have gifted us.

And so, God, I just pray that for each of us we would find our feet. I pray, Lord God, that it would be a joy to serve you. I pray, Lord, that in the squeeze of all the other priorities and commitments in our lives, Lord, that we somehow squeeze out things of your kingdom. Lord God, I just pray, help us as we order our lives, as we order our priorities.

And Lord, today I want to pray for those who are in our lives who don't yet know you. But God, I just want to pray. Would you continue to be at work in them? Lord, I pray that we would see and seize opportunities to be your hands and feet, to love with your love, Lord Jesus, to serve our people of peace, to be alongside them when they ask questions. Lord, that we would be able to be those people who can help them explore who you are, Lord God, that we might read the Bible with them, that we would have our own testimony and faith conversations with them.

So, Lord, I want to pray that your Kingdom would continue to expand beyond those of us in this room who already know you. Lord, I pray that we would continue to plant seeds so more and more people know you across this city. Jesus, open our eyes and enlarge our hearts.

And Lord God, we pray for those in the park today as well. Lord, we just ask, would you bring wholeness and healing? We pray, Lord, for those who feel at the end of themselves, Jesus, that they might look up and find you. And we pray, Lord, for timely conversations and timely opportunities to pray with friends in the park today. Encourage each who are serving today. In Jesus' name, amen.

Worship Singing

Song: Here's My Heart by Chris Tomlin, Jason Ingram, Louie Giglio

Bible Reading: Philemon

1 Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,

To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker – 2 also to Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier – and to the church that meets in your home:

3 Grace and peace to you[a] from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

4 I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, 5 because I hear about your love for all his holy people and your faith in the Lord Jesus. 6 I pray that your partnership with us in the faith may be effective in deepening your understanding of every good thing we share for the sake of Christ. 7 Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the Lord's people.

8 Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, 9 yet I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love. It is as none other than Paul – an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus – 10 that I appeal to you for my son Onesimus,[b] who became my son while I was in chains. 11 Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me.

12 I am sending him – who is my very heart – back to you. 13 I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel. 14 But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favour you do would not seem forced but would be voluntary. 15 Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for ever – 16 no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord.

17 So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. 18 If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. 19 I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back – not to mention that you owe me your very self. 20 I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. 21 Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask.

22 And one thing more: prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers.

23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. 24 And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers.

25 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Sermon: At The Table With Each Other – Welcome & Inclusion *Speaker: Ben*

Welcome to church. My name is Ben, and I'm one of the pastors here. We're going to have a Bible reading in a moment, but before we do, I wanted to jump up and give you a bit of context to kind of understand what's going on, because we're going to read a book of the Bible called Philemon. This is only a 25 verse book, but there's a lot of things that are going on, and there are three different people who I want to introduce you to, to hopefully help you understand what's going on.

Okay. So I have three people. The first person is Paul. Paul is a pretty well known person in the context of the church. He actually authored a lot of the New Testament itself. Now, Paul, he was an apostle around when Jesus was around and also around at the birth of the church. And so Paul took on the mission of going around to the known world, sharing the gospel, the good news of Jesus. And as he went around, he'd start churches in the places that he visited. He would start a church, go somewhere else, start a church, go somewhere else and start a church.

One of the people that he came into contact with was a man named Philemon. Now, Philemon was a well-off and influential man. We don't know a whole lot about him. In fact, we don't know anything about him outside of the book that's written to him, and what we do know is he is a slave owner, so he had a degree of wealth.

Now, when Paul met this man, Philemon, he shared Jesus with him, and Philemon gave his life to Jesus. And then Paul continues his journey and goes and shares the gospel elsewhere. Whilst he goes and shares the gospel elsewhere, we see that, Philemon, reports of what Philemon's doing and how he's living. And Paul's encouraged by the way that Philemon continues to honour God in how he's living. So we have a good relationship between these two.

I also need to introduce you to Onesimus. This man is a slave belonging to the slave owner Philemon. We don't know fully what goes on between these two, but something goes wrong. We assume at least that Onesimus was a runaway slave who abandoned his duty. And so there's this X next to Onesimus and Philemon, indicating there's something that's gone wrong there.

Okay, this is a really small world. Because Onesimus goes away and he finds Paul! He runs into Paul, and Paul is locked up and he's being persecuted for his faith. He's locked in prison. Paul shares the gospel with Onesimus, and now Onesimus gives his life to Jesus as well.

So all three of these people know Jesus, and that Onesimus also gets along well with Paul, so there's a tick next to them. Okay, is this making sense? Okay, so we go to slave owner, we've got an apostle, and we've got a slave. A motley bunch. That's the context of this letter. The book of Philemon is written by Paul to Philemon about uneasiness, because Paul is sending this slave back to his former master, and he wants his former master, who knows and loves Jesus, to receive him not as a slave, but now as a brother in Christ.

--- Break as the Bible reading is read aloud ---

All right, so as a church, this year we have been unpacking the image of the table. The table has been a metaphor that we've understood to be the space where we can bring our whole selves to meet with others. And so earlier in the year, we looked at how we can come to the table, and to bring our whole selves to meet with God.

And in the current series that we're looking at, we're exploring how we can bring our whole souls to meet with one another, the gathered people of Christ. In other words, right now we've been exploring the ways that God calls us as a community to do fellowship together. It's bringing colour and life to the top line on that wall over there.

We seek to be a community of people. What does the community of people look like that Christ is calling us to? Well, that's what we're looking at in this current series. Where have we been so far? On our first week, we looked at how we belong in fellowship with one another. And then in week two and three, we looked at the postures that Christ calls us to and also embodies as an example for us, the posture of serving one another and the posture of seeing the other. And today we're looking at the posture of welcome and inclusion. How are we going to do this? We're going to look through the book of Philemon, and we're going to explore how we as Parramatta Baptist Church are called to welcome and to include one another of faith.

Now, I'm going to put up a bunch of verses throughout the course of the next 20 minutes, but you're welcome to follow along in your Bible as well. So the big picture of the story of Philemon. Paul is writing to Philemon about how he should treat the former slave who is now returning as a brother. And although that is the point of the letter, he doesn't actually get to tell Philemon to do anything until halfway through, if not the end of the book.

Instead, Paul starts off his letter establishing what the heart of Christian Fellowship looks like. So let's, open up. Paul begins with a bit of an introduction. Hi, I'm Paul, and because of my faith in

Jesus, I have been persecuted and locked up in prison. And I'm writing to you with alongside my brother in Christ, Timothy. And then he addresses the letter to Philemon, our dear friend and fellow worker, also to Apphia, our sister and Archippus, our fellow soldier, and to the church that meets in your home.

This letter is a very private letter, a very specific letter for how Philemon is supposed to behave. And yet Paul addresses it to Philemon and also this person, and this person, and this person, and your whole church. What's going on here? Is just a passive aggressive thing that Philemon hasn't been living up to what he's supposed to do? Like, 'I'm going to CC a manager in and then also your church', just kind of like, make sure everyone knows. I don't think that's what's going on.

There's a contextual thing that when these letters were sent out to the church, they were read in a communal context. So he was addressing those who would be hearing it. But I think there's also this really sweet, subtle tone of how Paul desires for this to be received, and that is that this isn't just for Philemon in isolation, but he's welcoming in the community of believers to do discipleship together.

And so, Paul, he addresses all these people, and then he brings the focus down to Philemon. He kicks into a really large section here, where he's just encouraging Philemon in a bunch of different ways. *'I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers.'* The two things that Paul commends in Philemon are his love and his faith. Both love and faith are fruits of the spirit, things that the Holy Spirit builds inside of us, swells up inside of us as we continue to let the Holy Spirit and God be the dominant influence in our lives.

And so, Paul, he's seeing Philemon's love and faith, and he's affirming it, but he's actually doing a deeper affirmation of the way that Philemon is honouring and seeking to serve God with his life. Paul is kicking off this letter with a bunch of encouragement. The compliment sandwich is in the works, but it's not a trivial start. This is a really important foundation for what is to come. Paul is saying, 'I know the way that you've honoured God in the past. Here now is an opportunity for you to do it again.' But note he hasn't asked Philemon to do anything yet.

Paul then does something I think is quite interesting. This phrase, *'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. It is as none other than Paul, an old man, and now also a prisoner of Christ, that I appeal to you.'* Sounds a little passive aggressive. It's showing him who's the boss and the authority that Paul has in the church. But if we take Paul at his words, the really interesting thing that's happening here is Paul is choosing to take off the hat of 'apostle' for the duration of this letter. He holds authority in the church. His position of apostle holds weight.

People know who he is, and then he takes off the hat of apostle and instead comes to Philemon just as another believer. I think what he's saying here is he's really leaning on this phrase. *'I appeal to you*

on the basis of love. In other words, 'I don't want you to listen to me just because I'm one step up in the church ladder rung system, hierarchy, whatever. I don't need you to listen to me because I am an apostle. I don't want your standard of living just to be mine, because I'm in some sort of degree of leadership over you. Instead, I want to appeal to you on the basis of love, because I want to call you to the example of Christ.'

We're not going to go there, but I think that's just a beautiful way of capturing how we as a community actually come alongside one another and call and spur and encourage one another on to live and love like Jesus.

As we read, Onesimus enters into the letter. Now remember, this is the slave who ran away from his master Philemon. So as soon as Paul mentions in his name, the old master is going to know exactly who that was. That is the slave who wronged him. But Paul is very quick. He's very quick to emphasise that the slave who abandoned Philemon is very different to the man who is coming back.

How does Paul refer to the former slave? *'My son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains.'* Calling Onesimus son wasn't pointing to a biological relationship. Paul is not his father. Instead, son is pointing to a spiritual relationship. Paul was the one who had led Onesimus to Jesus Christ, evidently whilst he was still in prison and in coming to faith in Jesus. Onesimus, this former slave, has been radically transformed, but his former master has no idea. And so Paul stresses that the slave who is returning is different.

Now what is it that's actually changed about him? Onesimus has given his life to Jesus. And that means that now he is a child of God. I love Paul's letters, like Galatians and this phrase that he has in there. *'So in Christ Jesus, you are all children of God through faith.'* This is what has happened to Onesimus. He has faith in Jesus Christ and he is now a child of God.

The beauty is this — for anyone who has faith in Jesus Christ, we are children of God. It's true of Onesimus, it's true of Philemon, it's true of Paul, and it's true of us today. As we give our lives to Jesus, there's this vertical change. God becomes our father and we are his child. But there's also a horizontal flow out of this as well. That is, as you become a child of God, and you become a child of God, and you become a child of God, and I become a child of God, we actually enter into a family unit.

Through Jesus, I am your brother in Christ. We are brothers and sisters in Christ. And so Onesimus has been saved by Jesus. And he is returning no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. And so Paul uses his image of family, a brother and sister, to illustrate the fellowship that all believers are called to. What does a community of people look like? Brothers and sisters in Christ.

He references brother or sister about six times, I think, in these 25 verses of Philemon, which is a lot for 25 verses. This is foundational for how we ought to relate to each other, and for how Paul relates to these people.

Apphia is our sister, Timothy, our brother, Philemon our brother. And now Onesimus is a part of this family as well. And as we use the image of family, I'm really conscious that we all bring baggage and experience from whatever family experience we have. Like that's just the reality of it. For some of us, there's painfulness there, there's hurt there. For some of us, there's been healing in those places. For some of us, we've tasted the sweetness of family around us. I don't know what your experience of family is, but I want to point out what Paul's saying here. And that is that in the same way that you share DNA and blood with your physical family, we share something at our core with every single believer in Jesus Christ.

What is it? It's Jesus himself inside of us. We have Jesus inside of us, which means that my brothers and my sisters in this room, my brothers and sisters meeting in the church down the road right now, the people who are over on the other side of the world, who also call on the name of Jesus Christ, we are all brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus.

And so at this point in the letter, Paul still has not asked for Philemon to do anything yet, but he's picking up on a really essential element for what it means for us to be a community of believers. How we see each other matters. If Philemon sees his former slave as a slave, he will treat him as a slave. When he sees him as a brother, he will treat him differently. And so Paul could go through a whole list of things that he wants Philemon to do here. He wants him to welcome his former slave like this. He wants him to forgive him like this, love him like this. Speak to him in this way. Care for him in this way.

But instead of talking about all the different things that he would do, he got down to the core of it. How Philemon sees his former slave. It's true, isn't it? For all of us, the way that we see people is going to impact how we treat them. I think this is just profoundly true. On youth camp, the first night we arrive, we gather all the campers in the room on the Friday night, and we have to explain the basics.

You know, here's the out of bounds. Don't cross that line. Don't go there. These are your leaders. You know, if anything happens, talk to them. But there's also one rule that every church, every youth group has to work out how they talk about. And that is the purple rule. Boys are blue, girls are pink, and there's no purple allowed on camp. Oh, I see that was a new one for some people. Okay, that was my upbringing, that was what I heard when I was a youth kid.

But what I found is I, like, regurgitated what I had been told. Often teenagers take instructions of what not to do as a checklist of things to get to across the course of camp. So instead of telling them not what not to do, the last couple of years, I've actually used this image of brothers and

sisters. It affects the way that we behave. And so what we've done to have everyone look around the room and see everyone in this room as your brother or your sister. And there's two edges to that.

One is that you don't treat them as anything more than a brother or sister. There are boundaries, right? We're not going to find you making out with someone in the kitchen or in the main room, because there are boundaries to what you would do with a brother or sister. Okay. And also the flip side, like, yeah, there's a base kind of level for how we treat our brothers and sisters, that if something is genuinely wrong, we're going to have one another's back.

If someone needs something, we're going to look out for one another, okay? If you see one another as brothers and sisters, it's going to change how you interact with one another. If you see each other as strangers, you're going to feel just totally okay to walk away. The author of Hebrews, he urges us to keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters, see each other through that lens.

And in his letter to the church in Galatia, Paul, he wrote, *'in Christ Jesus, you are children of God through faith. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.'* You are unified through Jesus Christ. And so, if we are to be a Christian community, we ought to see one another as a unified brothers and sisters. These things still exist. There are still slaves and free people, male and female, like these things still exist, but wherever you stand in them will not change that you belong in community with believers. You are my brother. You are my sister in Christ. Whether you're a slave, Jew, Gentile, it doesn't matter. You are one with the person who is sitting next to you. You are one with the person who's preaching, the person who's playing bass. You're one with the person who serves morning tea. We are one.

And so we need to ask the question of how do you see the other people who are sitting in this room? Do we see them as people we just share physical space with, maybe a bit of oxygen, for an hour a week? Because that'll impact how we treat one another. Or I wonder, do we see the people in this space as our brothers and sisters in Christ?

We are one when we see one another not through the lens of what we were, but through who we are made in Christ Jesus. Make sense? Yeah. So Paul, he's helping Philemon recalibrate how he sees his former slave, but he moves from a place of about how you see him into a place of how to treat him.

We come to one of the most core asks of the book of Philemon. 'So if you, Philemon, consider me Paul, a partner, (which he does) welcome Onesimus as you would welcome me. If we're partners, welcome him as you would welcome me.' This is a really beautiful image of what fellowship of believers ought to look like. A people who not only see that they are unified, but treat each other in the same way without favouritism or partiality.

One of the things I love about the book of Philemon is we get a slave, the lowest on the social ladder of the Roman world. No power, no influence. We get a slave owner, someone who had considerable wealth and considerable influence, especially compared to a slave. And we also get Paul, an apostle, a key leader within the church, and all three of these people from completely different backgrounds and contexts.

All three of these people are treated equally as brothers, like there is no favouritism between one or the other. Paul is saying like the same way you would welcome an apostle, welcome this brother of ours. There is no favouritism or partiality that would happen in the world they come from. That is an incredibly counter-cultural thing that a slave owner and a slave would be treated as brothers, and the church leader, chuck him in there as well.

Why? You wouldn't see that in our world then, and I don't think you would see it in our world now. I think there's something in our world that actually leans towards showing favouritism. People can be treated based on their worth if they do something wrong. If public figures do something wrong, they are 'cancelled' and they are treated as abhorrent and avoided.

If people do something that's impressive, then they are praised and followed until they do something wrong, and then they're cancelled and they're abhorred. It just keeps on happening. Favouritism is a part of our world. People are treated based on how much they're worth to me and to you. That's just what happens in our world.

And we actually saw this happen in the early church, too. As Jesus came onto the scene and as the church started to explode, all of a sudden a cross-section of society gave their life to Jesus. And so all of a sudden, rich people and poor people, influential people and like nobodies in society, the powerful and the powerless, all were in the same room together, worshipping alongside one another. That just didn't happen elsewhere. That is quite radical.

And the heart of favouritism actually seeped into the church, at least in one context. And, let's be honest, probably in more than one context. There was a church where, over a period of time, people who were welcomed into the church context, the more wealthy, more powerful and more influential people, were given places of honour based on those criteria. And the people with less power, less influence, less authority, they were kind of pushed to the back or even outside as they were meeting.

James, he writes his letter to such a church and he says 'that is not right.' Not because this is what our society does, because that's exactly what our society does. Not on the basis of culture, but on the basis of Christ. That is not who we ought to be, the people who show this favouritism.

Imagine if we did that, if this morning, as you came in, you were asked to show your bank account, and then you were ushered to a specific seat based on the amount of money that is in your in your bank. Like, that would just not happen. That is not who we are, because that is just not who Christ calls us to be.

But there's something inside of you that just goes, 'that's not the example of Jesus.' Jesus, his example was incredibly different. He saw those who didn't neatly belong or neatly fit in, and he treated them with the same dignity and the same compassion as those who were respected and loved. He saw those who were cast out and those who were neglected, as well as those who were championed by society. Favouritism is not something that comes from Jesus. And so Paul says, 'welcome him as you welcome me, welcome your brother as you welcome your brother.' And so favouritism is one of those things that Paul calls out subtly.

If I'm honest, looking at the culture of PBC, I don't have a sense that we're constantly showing favouritism of one person above another. I don't think that's the culture that I see. Not saying that we can't get this wrong. We can definitely show favouritism in ways that are unhelpful and unhealthy. But I wonder if favouritism is showing one person favour over another person. I wonder if we're maybe susceptible to the opposite, because when we show favour to someone, that person becomes more, seems more more welcome, more valuable.

But the opposite would be that I wonder if there are people within our church community who go less seen, or can go less welcomed, or maybe less included. With the size of our church, a very real and sad reality is people fall through the gaps that can happen. I think that is potentially the flip side of favouritism that we might experience in our context, that people slip through the gaps. It's not out of our frustration or it's nothing evil toward those people who slip through the gaps, who are less seen and less welcome, but it's because our energy goes elsewhere.

This is what I mean. Kathy, I want you to face this way just where you are. The people Kathy is looking at? These are the people who she loves to hang out with. Remember this is just a thought exercise. These are her people. When they rock up to church, she goes, 'yes, my friends are here.' These other people, she knows them. She gets excited by them. Now, can Jim* stand up and face the other side of the room? Those are Jim's people. And so he gets excited for the same reasons when they rock up. These are his people.

Okay, now, this is what often what can happen in the context of a large church, or even a large community. These people, they're facing toward their friends, and we can face and give our attention and our energy to the people who are inside of our circles. But what happens is, if we solely focus our attention or if we solely see and welcome those who are our friends and in our circles, then the person who's standing outside those circles goes unseen.

Does that make sense? It's not that Jim doesn't like me. He's not trying to make me feel unwelcome. Kathy is not intentionally leaving me on the outside, but because everyone's attention is going elsewhere, the person who stands on the outside goes unseen. I have to say, I wonder if that is what we are most susceptible to, as a large church, people slipping through the gaps because our attention is focused on those who are within our context.

But the community that we are called to be, the brothers and sisters, the family that we are called to be, the fellowship we are called to be, is one where everyone is seen. What would that take? It would take those people just turning around every now and then. Well, turning around on a regular basis. It's not just up to individuals in the congregation, we can also assume that our pastors are going to look after everyone and make sure everyone is seen.

Steve, you remember so many names, it's ridiculous. But even he cannot welcome everyone on his own. Like, this is who we are. This ought to be part of our culture, who we are, what we do. I wonder how often do you turn around beyond the circles of your friends and close people to intentionally welcome, to intentionally include?

Having a conversation with someone who you don't know is a really powerful way to see someone, and to welcome and include someone. So maybe this is a challenge to kind of put on your radar, actually going up and having a conversation with someone who you don't know. Maybe they've been coming to church for five years, and that can be a little bit awkward.

But if you don't know them, then you need to know them. So say, 'hey, how long you been joining us for?' But sometimes you to come across people who are brand new. 'Have you joined us the week before? How did you come to be here today?' Brothers and sisters in Christ, let us treat one another equally, obviously not showing favour to one above another, but intentionally going out of our way to see, to welcome, and to include those who might fall through the gaps.

And now, Paul, he knows the complexity of community. He knew that if you put a people in the room together who come from different backgrounds and different life experiences, then we are going to see friction. We are going to see conflict happen. That is not good enough reason for us to abandon our mission of being a community of people, of fellowship, of believers.

But you know what? My ability to welcome you is going to be significantly limited if we're fighting or at odds. If we are fighting, then it will impact not just how I welcome you. It's going to impact how we worship together. So I just want to put it there. I wonder if there are relationships between you, a brother and sister in Christ that needs to be attended to, restoration that needs to be fought for, reconciliation that needs to be worked out.

Not all relationships are able or even safe to restore, but those are the minority. I think often we just either don't know how to be reconciled with those around us, or sometimes we just can't be

bothered. Conflict among the believers is unhealthy in the life of Christian fellowship, because it undermines the unity that we have in Christ. And so as we ask what kind of community we're going to be, what kind of fellowship to look like, addressing conflict and seeking reconciliation. Being at peace is really important.

And Paul, he knew this in the book of Philemon. He's sending a slave back to his slave owner. And there is something that is not right between them. And so he urges them to be reconciled. How does he do it? He even offers to pay some of the cost, whatever, debt has been caused on Philemon.

So some good news. Through the blood of Jesus, through Jesus himself, you are unified with every other child of God in this room, in this suburb, in this nation, in this world throughout time. And also, some implications that flow from that. May we see one another as brothers and sisters. May we reach across lines outside of our circles to welcome and to include, and may we seek peace and reconciliation.

These are some important postures that we need to bring if we're going to be a community of Christ, brothers and sisters, showing each other the grace that we have been shown by Jesus first.

Post-Sermon Prayer *Speaker: Ben*

I'm going to pray. Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for your lavishing, generous and genuine love that you have just poured over us. That we may be children of God, not because of what we have done, but because of what Christ has done for us. We thank you that we are children. And we thank you that that flows out into us now, being brothers and sisters in Christ. And so we ask for your wisdom and your power.

And may we see one another as the brothers and sisters that we are in Christ. May we treat one another accordingly. And may the way that we do community be a witness to the world of the beauty of community, the beauty of fellowship, which is just a beautiful taste of what you've created us for. We praise you in Jesus' name, amen.

Worship Singing

Song: Amazing Grace by John Newton

Post-Worship Prayer *Speaker: Kathy Bates*

How incredibly unique. The one place where every single person is welcome and included and on an equal playing field. Jesus, what a high price you paid for that to happen. And we want to say thank you. And we recognise that it's because of you, not because of anything we've done or created. It's because of you.

And so, Lord God, I just want to pray that we would enact the unity that you have paid such a high price for. God, I want to pray that we would embody what it is to be brothers and sisters well. So, Lord, I pray that we would be mindful of those who are around us, that we would cross lines of fear or shyness. Or even, Lord, just moving beyond our own overwhelm to be able to enter into the life of another as well. And so, Jesus, I just pray as we go, but may we continue to be one in Christ over morning tea. Amen.

Conclusion *Speaker: Kathy Bates*

But I do also want to invite up anyone here who would like prayer. Part of being body together is upholding one another in prayer. So we have a prayer team across the front. Anyone wearing a lanyard. You're really welcome to come. There might be something going on in your life, in your situation that we just want to bring to God with you, or it could even just be blessing into your situation as well.

Online Outro *Speaker: Kathy Bates*

Hey, thank you for joining us online today. We pray that you have been blessed and encouraged. And if there is something from today that you would like us to pray into with you, don't hesitate to let us know.

If we haven't met you, we'd love to hear from you. And you also welcome to come and join us in person as well. To know more about our church, please go to our church website and you can also find more details about who we are through our newsletter. And you can subscribe to that through our website as well.

God bless you and may you have a great week.

**Names have been changed to protect privacy.*