

A New Identity (September 7, 2025)

Grace to you and peace from God.

Philemon 1:1-21

Wouldn't it be a wonderful world if we received letters from friends with the same salutation of that of the Apostle Paul? Better yet, wouldn't it be nice just to receive letters rather than texts and emails?

But I'm not here to talk about the lost art of letter writing. I want to discuss the seemingly lost art of seeing one another as siblings who belong to the family of God and, as such, truly able to love despite flaws, failures, and fickleness.

Onesimus was standing in the need of such redeeming and accepting love. The runaway slave had returned to his master, Philemon, but Philemon was not willing to take him back. Enter Paul, who steps in to mediate. He urges Philemon to not only welcome Onesimus with open arms but to welcome him as a beloved brother, not a slave.

Paul knew firsthand how our true identities were not found in the roles we were assigned, nor do they rest in familial bloodlines. Our true identities are steeped in the blood of Christ, making us all siblings of one another.

By the grace of God, Paul himself received a new identity going from "Saul the Feared Persecutor of Jews" to "Paul the Great Spokesperson for the Risen Lord."

Why couldn't Onesimus' identity change as well?

Philemon does as Paul says, and while we don't have subsequent letters to see how this new friendship progressed, we do have the legends. One has Onesimus becoming an influential Christian leader in Greece. Another has Onesimus becoming bishop of Ephesus.

While we aren't certain what is true or not, this we do know: Onesimus, whose name means "useful," reminds us today, that we, too, are useful in the eyes of God.

Our identities are not wrapped up in who we think we are, what others say of us, or what we do for a living. Our very being is found in Christ, and as such, Christ urges us to take on a new identity. Perhaps you are really a peacemaker, or bridge builder, or even a compassion sharer? What divine potential is within you?

Creator God, free us from the roles we play in life. May this day we embrace new identities as your beloved children, ready to be used for your purpose in making this world a loving and just place for all. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

St. John's United Church of Christ

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WELCOME VISITORS! Thank you for coming! Please sign a pew card to place in the offering plate.

WORSHIP: When reading this bulletin Leader Speaks Plain Font, **Everyone Speak Bold Font**

Announcements

Nursery: There is no nursery attendant today so everyone is able to participate in Communion. Kids are welcome to quietly play in the back of the sanctuary or have their adult join them in the nursery.

The Belvidere Group (AA) meets at everyday at 7pm.



Delicious Fundraiser



Amazon List



T-Shirts

Announcements

- ✚ **Meals on Wheels** delivery is October 15.
- ✚ **Community Meal** every third Wednesday of the month from 5p-6pm. Come at 4:30pm for a Community Listening Session with the Hunger Coalition on September 17th, 2025. Participants will receive a gift card. If you would like to volunteer to help host this special event please speak to Pastor Muriel or go to <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C084FA4A929A2FBCE9-57399621-hunger>
- ✚ **Blessing Box** non-perishable are welcome. Make sure any items in cardboard have an inner layer of protection to prevent creatures from contaminating the food.
- ✚ **Share Table** please place perishable items here.
- ✚ **Paper Angel Closet** needs toilet paper, paper towels, women's deodorant, bleach, shampoo, and dish soap.
- ✚ **Menards Ministry:** If you have unused Menards rebates, or even receipts. We use these rebates for projects around the church.
- ✚ **Candle Crest Order Forms** can be picked up today from church. We will encourage people to sell from now until September 14th. We will put the official orders in together and have deliveries by beginning to mid October.
- ✚ **The Prairie Association 2025 Fall Meeting**
Theme: "Be the Church: Organizing the Body of Christ for our renewed Governance and Ministry
Location: Zoom (Online Only)
Sunday, September 28th, 2:00pm-4:00pm

Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayer of Dedication

Generous God, receive our offerings and magnify them to propel the ministry of this church. May the community and the world benefit from our generous giving. In gratitude, we pray with our contributions. Amen.



General Giving

Hymn #80 "Savior, Again, to Your Dear Name"

Benediction

Go, ready and committed
 To accept the cost and joy of discipleship,
 To be servants in the service of the whole human family
 To proclaim the gospel to all the world and resist the powers of evil
 To be the church in the world

Postlude

Estimate the Cost: Service Prayers for the Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost was written by the Rev. Dr. Cheryl A. Lindsay, Minister for Worship and Theology for the United Church of Christ.

"You Have Searched Me" Text: Copyright © 2014 by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette.

Words of Grace

Beloved, God's mercy is available and so is God's power at work in us. We do receive the grace of the Potter to be used to break down what needs to be deconstructed and reconstructed and to support what needs repair and restoration. A new world that reflects the realm of God is possible through us.

Gloria Patri

**Glory be to the Father, and to the Son
and to the Holy Ghost,
as it was in the beginning, is now,
and ever shall be,
world without end. Amen.**

Scripture Psalm 139
Luke 14:25-33

Sermon "The Deep Clean of Creation"

Service of Communion**Blessing and Sharing the Elements**

All are invited to participate in this Holy symbol of Communion. You are invited to eat the as a sign of your own personal faith and hold the cup to drink together as a sign of our communion faith.

Prayer of Thanksgiving**Invitation to Generosity**

Mission Moment Chicago, United, Eden (CUE)

Musical Offering**Doxology**

**Praise God, through whom all blessings flow,
Praise God, all creatures here below,
Praise God, above ye heavenly host.**

Prelude**Announcements**

Choral Introit "There is Bread for the Journey"
**There's bread for the journey and friends for the way.
There's hope for tomorrow and love for today!**

**The cup of forgiveness, all blessings release,
to heal and renew us and bring us God's peace.**

**O Holy Spirit, bind us together, now.
O Holy Spirit, bring us your peace.
O Holy Spirit, bind us together, now.
O Holy Spirit, bring us your peace.**

Responsive Welcome Statement

At St. John's United Church of Christ, we are Living Outwardly & Valuing Everyone!

We live and work amid God's love!

In that spirit, we extend love to all who come into our midst, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, race, nationality, skin color, culture, differing abilities, age or political affiliations, to participate fully in all aspects of church.

Our ministry is to bring the Good News of Christ's love to all.

We work in God's name to tear down walls and build community,

to walk with each other through all of life's circumstances,

to provide for those in need,

**to offer comfort to the hurting and the sick,
and to uplift the brokenhearted.**

Where we fail, we ask for God's forgiveness.

May the Holy Spirit and our siblings continue to challenge us to do better.

No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here!

Call to Worship *(Inspired by Jeremiah 18 and Psalm 139)*

We come into your house, Divine Potter. We are your clay.

We praise you, O God. Wonderful are your works. Mold us again!

We bring our burdens and concerns, our hopes and dreams, our doubts and our delights.

We praise you, O God. Wonderful are your works. Hold us in your sure and righteous hand!

We seek your wisdom. Reveal your direction and our path.

We praise you, O God. Wonderful are your works. Rebuild and replant us!

Invocation

Sovereign God, you are the Potter who has fashioned us into being as a community. Dwell in our midst. Share your wisdom and open every point of receptivity within us. You are holy, gracious, and kind. As we gather, we recommit to accept the joys and the costs of discipleship. May you be glorified in our worship, and may we be transformed as we encounter you and your way anew this day. Amen.

Hymn "You Have Searched Me"

You have searched me, Lord, and known me!

All my life is in your care.

When I lie awake in evening,
you are always with me there.

When I rise to greet the morning
in an attitude of praise,

What I learn from you is humbling:
you already know my ways.

Lord, you know the song I'm singing
and my words before I pray.

You're behind me and before me

as I travel through each day.
You once knit me all together;
you created me by grace.
In your eyes, you see and love me
as you treasure all my days.

Lord, I try to learn your wisdom,
but I cannot understand.
Yet your love is all around me;
I am part of all you've planned.
Let me sing your praise each morning,
let me serve you all day through,
And in evening, make me peaceful,
knowing this: I'm loved by you!

Apostles' Creed #881

Children's Time "How We Shape"

Pastoral Prayer – The Lord's Prayer

Hymn #504 "You Walk along our Shoreline"
(Tune: The Day of Resurrection)

Prayer for Transformation and New Life

Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. We pray in the assurance that your mercy, O God, is available and near to us. And, we also pray in hope that your mercy will release us from inaction, apathy, and overwhelm so that we may be your instruments of redemption, reparation, and restoration in the world. Forgive us, perhaps most of all, for simply seeking your mercy for the ills of the world rather than your miraculous power to rise in us to overcome them. Grant us grace to pray boldly with our words and our actions in your name.