

Prayer for Illumination

Loving God, as we hear your Word, open our hearts to your love. Help us listen without judgment, care for one another, and live as one in Christ. Amen.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

Responsive Psalm 133

Acts 16:16–34; John 17:20–26

Sermon

Love That Opens Doors

What does it mean to love someone? We say the words often. We love our families, our friends, our church. But love is not always easy to practise. We may want the best for someone and still speak too sharply. We may care deeply and still fail to listen. We may find it hard to be patient with someone who sees life differently than we do. So how do we grow in love? What does love look like when life is painful, or when a relationship is strained?

Today's two readings give us pictures of that love in action. In Acts, we find Paul and Silas in a prison cell. In John's Gospel, we hear Jesus praying for his followers. Together, these passages show us that God's love can live in us, and shape the way we treat one another.

In Acts, Paul and Silas meet an enslaved young woman. She has a spirit that lets her tell fortunes, and her owners profit from it. We are told what she earns for them, but almost nothing about her own life. That is part of what makes her story so troubling. Her owners see a source of income. Do they see a person? For days she follows Paul, calling out about his message, until he grows tired of it and, in the name of Jesus, commands the spirit to leave her. It does.

We wish the story told us more. What happened to her afterward? Acts does not say. But notice what happens next: once her owners can no longer profit from her, they seize Paul and Silas and drag them before the authorities. A young woman's whole life has changed, and her owners are worried about their money. That is worth asking of ourselves too. When we meet someone, what do we see first? What that person can do for us? A problem, or an opinion we disagree with? Or a person whom God loves?

The crowd turns on Paul and Silas. The authorities have them beaten and thrown into the inner cell, their feet locked in stocks. And yet, at midnight, wounded and unsure what morning will bring, they are praying and singing hymns, loud enough for the other prisoners to hear. Then an earthquake shakes the prison. The doors fly open, and everyone's chains come loose. The jailer wakes, sees the open doors, and assumes his prisoners have escaped. Terrified of what will happen to him, he draws his sword to take his own life. That is the moment Paul calls out: "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." Paul and Silas have just been beaten. The doors are wide open. And still, Paul notices the danger facing his jailer and speaks to save his life.

The jailer rushes in, trembling, and asks what he must do to be saved. Paul tells him about the Lord Jesus. That night, the jailer washes their wounds. He and his household are baptized. Then he brings Paul and Silas into his home and sets food before them. Watch how love takes shape

here: someone speaks, someone listens, someone washes a wound, someone offers a meal. Love is more than a feeling kept in the heart. It becomes something done with our hands — which is exactly what our church has always tried to be for one another: the hands and feet of Christ, showing up for each other in practical, unglamorous ways.

That is where Jesus' prayer in John's Gospel meets us. Jesus prays not only for the disciples with him, but for all who will come to believe through their message — including us. He prays "that they may all be one," and near the end, he asks that the very love God has for him would live in his followers too.

Jesus knew his followers would need that love. We are different people, with different histories and habits and opinions. Even in one family, we do not always understand each other. Even in one church, we will not agree on everything. But being one does not mean being identical. God's love gives each of us room to be who we are, while still drawing us together in Christ. We do not have to make someone else like us in order to love them. We can listen, try to understand, and remember that they, too, are loved by God.

That is hard when we've been hurt. Trust can take time to rebuild, and Jesus does not ask us to pretend pain is small. Love can be honest. It can hold healthy boundaries. But it also asks us to be careful with our judgments, because none of us knows everything another person has carried.

We have felt that need very close to home this year. Tim and Pat's son, Timothy, died suddenly, and we grieve with them, with Beverley, and with Carrie. None of us knows all that Timothy was carrying. May his parents never feel that his death measures the love they gave him, or that they must carry blame for his pain. Let us set judgment aside, stay close to this family in their grief, and entrust Timothy to God's mercy.

Perhaps that is exactly why Jesus prayed for his followers to be one. He knew we cannot make ourselves loving simply by trying harder. We need God's love growing in us — especially when we are grieving, when we have no answers, when someone else's pain is beyond what we can fully understand. We need it to help us speak with care, listen with patience, and stay close to one another rather than pulling away.

So what might that look like this week? It may mean calling someone who has been alone too long, and giving them time to talk. It may mean bringing a meal, offering a ride, or sitting quietly beside someone who is grieving. It may mean speaking kindly to someone whose views differ from ours — we don't have to agree with every word to still treat them with dignity.

And sometimes love means letting others care for us. Many of us are used to being the helper, not the one who needs help. But the jailer needed Paul's voice that night, and Paul and Silas needed their wounds washed. We all need care sometimes. Letting someone give it to us is its own act of trust.

These may seem like small acts beside an earthquake that flings open prison doors. But for someone who is lonely, frightened, or hurting, a phone call or a visit can feel just like that — a

door opening where there wasn't one before. A patient conversation can be the start of a relationship healing.

We cannot fix every problem or mend every relationship on our own. But we can ask God to help us see the person right in front of us, and respond with care. Jesus prayed that God's love would live in his followers. That prayer is for us today — for our homes, our friendships, our church, and the wider community we're called to serve.

So this week, think of one person you can reach out to. Make the call. Make time to listen. And if you are the one who needs care, let someone you trust know that too.

The God who loved Jesus loves us. As that love grows in us, it can shape what we say, what we choose, and how we care for one another. And through simple acts of compassion, others may come to know that love as well. Amen.

Hymn 471

We are one in the Spirit

Invitation to the Offering

Doxology

Prayer of Dedication

Receive these gifts, loving God.

As your love grows in us, help us share it through these offerings and through the care we give one another. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Prayer of Thanksgiving and for the People

Loving God,

thank you for the gifts that sustain us: the earth beneath our feet, the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the food the soil provides. Thank you for the people who love us and for the joy of loving them. You have made each of us in your image, with different stories, gifts, and ways of seeing the world. Help us cherish one another as we are.

You know that love can also bring pain. Meet us in our grief, our regrets, and our wounded relationships. Give us wisdom when we need to protect our hearts, compassion when we are hard on ourselves, and patience where healing is possible.

We pray for people in Ukraine, Sudan, Gaza, and wherever violence has taken lives or driven families from home. Protect those in danger. Comfort those who grieve. Strengthen those bringing food, shelter, and care. Here in Canada, be close to families worried about work and the cost of living, to young people seeking a place to begin, and to newcomers building a life. Hold those facing illness and those who care for them. When hope is hard to find, help them know they are not alone.

We pause now to name in silence those near and far who need your healing presence. (silence)

We hold before you the families who miss their loved ones so deeply: Janice, Jessica, and Joel as they remember Jim; Diane and Jill as they remember Roy; Susan, Sarah, and Will as they remember Bill; and Pat, Tim, Beverley, and Carrie as they remember Timothy.

Meet each of them in the quiet moments when absence is felt most. Give them comfort without asking them to hurry through grief. Help us stay close, listen with care, and remind them through our presence that they are loved.

Loving God, there is much we cannot mend on our own. Give us your peace amid what remains uncertain, and open our eyes to the person before us. May the love we have received from you be seen in the care we offer one another. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Hymn 642

O Master, let me walk with thee

BENEDICTION

May God your Creator remind you that you are loved. May Jesus help you see and care for one another. May the Holy Spirit draw you together in love and peace. And all God's people said, "Amen."

Sung Response- Go Now In Peace

Postlude

We acknowledge that we meet on the traditional Territory of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe

ANNOUNCEMENTS

***Next Sunday Service, October 4, at 10:00 am at North Pelham**

***In Loving Memory of Timothy Norton:**

We continue to hold Pat and Tim Norton and their family in our prayers following the passing of their beloved son, Timothy. May God surround them with comfort, strength, and peace in their grief. Pat and Tim sincerely thank everyone for the many expressions of sympathy, prayers, cards, visits, and loving support they have received during this difficult time. They are deeply grateful for the care of their church family.

***World Communion Sunday:** Join us on Sunday, October 4, as we share Communion with Christians around the world.

***Thanksgiving Food Donations:** On October 4 and 11, we will collect non-perishable food and fresh produce for people in need. Your gifts will help fill our Harvest Table and care for neighbours in our community. Monetary gifts are also welcome. Thank you for sharing the joy of Thanksgiving!

***198th Anniversary:** Join us on Sunday, October 18, as First Presbyterian Church, North Pelham celebrates its 198th anniversary. Dr. Michelle Vosburgh will be our guest speaker.

***Tai Chi – Every Monday:** Our free Tai Chi classes continue every Monday as part of our church's community outreach ministry. Classes begin at 1:30 p.m. and 2:30 p.m., with no charge to participants.

***Wednesday Bible Study:** Our Bible Study meets every Wednesday at 10:00 a.m. at North Pelham. Come grow in God's Word, faith, and fellowship. Everyone is warmly welcome!

***Thursdays – Outreach Walking:** Join us for the Wellness Walk and Coffee Chat! We gather at 9:30 a.m. at Canada Games Park to start our walk together. After the walk, we meet at Rockway for a joyful chat over hot and fresh coffee at 10:45 am.

***Prayer Requests and Pastoral Care:** If you or someone you know needs prayer or pastoral care, please contact your elder or Rev. Jacob at 289-213-2797 or jacoblee0501@gmail.com. "Carry one another's burdens." — Galatians 6:2