



# for our common life

Tonight is Session Two of *For our Common Life* featuring our interview with the Rev. Dr. Lloyd A. Lewis. Dr. Lewis (who goes by Tony) served as a professor of New Testament and Greek at Virginia Theological Seminary for almost 25 years and continues to stay active in the Church as Assistant to the Rector of St. Paul's Parish, K Street, Washington DC. He is an accomplished author, theologian, and professor, and his Ph.D work was written on part of this evening's conversation, namely Paul's letter to Philemon and a consideration of the impact of family and social language in the letter.

Philemon is the shortest of Paul's authentic New Testament letters; it can be read out loud in about 90 seconds! It's a great example of Paul's writing style and clever arguments, this time with his friend Philemon on the topic of Philemon's runaway slave, Onesimus. Paul befriends Onesimus, brings him to the faith of the Gospel, and then shockingly sends him back to Philemon -- though, as he argues, no longer as a slave but as a common and beloved brother in Christ Jesus. For such a short letter, Philemon has had a tremendous and even controversial history of interpretation, with arguments supporting both pro-slavery and abolitionist causes over the centuries.

Today, we read it alongside a fascinating conversation about social status, baptism, and how we as Episcopalians approach scripture and interpretation. With ramifications for issues of justice, authority, Church conflict, and the nature of our love for one another, Philemon's short length has the potential for great consequence and significance for our common life.

We give thanks to the Rev. Dr. Sidnie W. Crawford and the Rev. Bruce Gowe for serving as our interviewing panelists this evening.

## SESSION TWO

JANUARY 13TH, 2022

---

### PAUL'S LITTLE LETTER: PHILEMON'S BIG IMPACT

WITH SPECIAL GUEST  
THE REV. DR.  
**LLOYD A. LEWIS**

# QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION SESSION TWO

## *ON PAUL'S WRITING*

### **PAUL TAKES A SMALL ISSUE AND ASKS "WHAT'S REALLY AT STAKE HERE, AND WHAT DOES THE GOSPEL HAVE TO SAY ABOUT IT?"**

- What are the limits of our Christian faith when it comes to social concerns? Or are there limits at all?
- What compelling issues in our time make us ask "how do I act as a Christian in relationship to other people?"
- How does our faith and the Gospel impact our daily lives?

## *ON OUR PLACE BEFORE GOD*

### **"PAUL SCRAMBLES ALL THIS LANGUAGE OF STATUS."**

- Through baptism, God makes a "new kind of family" in which our status is equal to one another before God. What does this reality mean for how we treat one another? Or when we disagree?
- What does it mean to be a child of God? How can we relate to one another as sharing this same status?

## *ON LOVE AND INVITATION*

### **PAUL DIFFUSES A "FIERY SITUATION" BY NEVER REALLY TELLING PHILEMON WHAT TO DO.**

- Why does Paul rely on invitation to fix this situation? Could Paul have forced Philemon to do as he wished?
- What can we learn from Paul about appealing to love instead of force?

## *ON STUDYING AND INTERPRETING SCRIPTURE*

### **"THE NEXT STEP IS YOUR STEP"**

- How can our consideration of a 2,000 year old letter help us today? In our conversations about social justice? Why is it important that we interpret the Bible as a community, together? And, why is it also important that every individual voice can contribute to that discussion?
- Scripture invites us into a world where mystery is the norm. How do we embrace this mystery? Why are questions sometimes more valuable than answers?