

Countdown

- Do the two Countdown numbers rounds
 - (explaining rules for those unfamiliar...)
 - Jesus used the number "77" to answer a question Peter asked him:
 - anyone know what Peter's question to Jesus was?
 - *Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times? (Matthew 18:21)*
 - *Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. (Matthew 18:22)*
 - Really, Jesus wasn't asking us to count how many times to forgive:
 - we are to keep on forgiving!
 - Today's story is about Philemon and Onesimus:
 - a master and his runaway slave
 - Paul wanted Philemon, the master, to forgive Onesimus for running away
 - and he reminded him of his own debt to Jesus
 - *Today we are going to be thinking about forgiveness, and how we have been forgiven (set free) to serve God and others*
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Blog It!

- Explain what blogs are!
 - Got four example blog-style postings:
 - with the person next to you, chat about how you might comment on these postings
 - not just what you "should" say, but what you might actually say if you or someone you know was in the midst of this kind of situation
 - *briefly!!*
 - Take some feedback, but don't really comment on it - just let it be...
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Freed to serve

- Paul, Philemon and Onesimus were all set free by God's grace:
 - free to treat other people with radical mercy and forgiveness, because God had treated them with radical mercy and forgiveness
 - each of them, in their reaction to God's grace, challenges us in how we respond

Paul's challenge

- Being in prison didn't stop Paul serving God (v.9)
 - he encourages Philemon (v.4,5), and prays for him and his service (v.3,6)
 - he also has the courage to challenge Philemon about his living for Christ (v.8,10,17)
 - and Paul doesn't just offer words, but costly action to back them up (v.19) - paying back costs incurred
- **Do we only serve God when it is easy, or also when it is costly to do right?**

Philemon's challenge

- Philemon, a wealthy man, wasn't above serving Christ:
 - with his home (v.2)
 - with his loving witness to others (v.5,6)
- But Onesimus was a challenge to Philemon!
 - runaway slaves in Romans times might be put to death - as an example - certainly not welcomed back, and never trusted... (v.16)
 - which is what Paul asks Philemon to do - welcome Onesimus as a Christian brother, not as a slave (v.18)
- Forgiveness of those who have hurt us - or those we love - isn't easy
 - and it must be shown in our actions to be real

Onesimus' Challenge

- Onesimus has been changed, transformed by Christ's forgiveness:
 - from a thieving, absconding, useless slave into a useful servant of Christ who witnesses to others (v.11,13)
 - if Philemon would forgive him too, he would set him free to serve God
 - Paul encourages Philemon, by his forgiveness, to release him into service - to view him as a forgiven, fellow disciple not as a let-down of a slave
- Will we release others into their service of Christ by forgiving them their past hurts of us?

Our Challenge

- How will we respond to these examples?
 - Jesus Christ died for us just as much as for Paul, Philemon or Onesimus
 - we have had mercy upon mercy extended to us - will we extend it now to others?

Gee Walker

- Liverpool mother Gee Walker drew on her Christian faith to find forgiveness for the two young men who murdered her son Anthony. After the trial, Gee and Anthony's sister Dominique spoke to reporters:
 - **Gee:** at the point of death Jesus said, "I forgive them because they don't know what they did" ... I've got to forgive them... we're a forgiving family... we don't just preach it, we practise it.
 - **Dominique:** seventy times seven we must forgive... that's what the Bible said, that's what we have to do. It's an everyday thing. It is... so hard, but you get through it. It eases the bitterness and the anger if you can wake up in the morning and think, "Forgive, forgive, forgive"
 - **Gee:** has my faith been tested? Yes, my name's Gee, not Jesus! It's been hard... but I have to follow what the Lord teaches. It is easy to say those things, but when it is you must do them, it is hard.