

A sermon “Hearts Refreshed: Beauty in the Broken”
Plymouth Presbyterian Church
St. Helens, Oregon
From Philemon 1–21
By Rev. Peter Blank
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Introduction: A Letter That Mends

There aren’t many sermons preached from Philemon. It’s only one chapter, barely a page long. It feels personal, almost like we’re peeking over Paul’s shoulder while he writes a delicate letter to his friend Philemon about a runaway slave named Onesimus.

And yet, in this short letter we see the gospel at work—not in lofty theology or grand sermons, but in the everyday mess of broken relationships. Paul is asking Philemon to do something bold: to welcome Onesimus not as property, not with punishment, but as a brother in Christ. To mend a relationship instead of discarding it.

That’s where the gospel lives—at the point where grudges could harden, but grace breaks through.

Illustration: Kintsugi – Beauty in the Broken

In Japanese art, there’s a practice called **kintsugi**, the “golden joinery.” When a piece of pottery breaks, instead of throwing it away, the artist repairs it with lacquer mixed with powdered gold. The cracks don’t disappear—they shine. The brokenness becomes the most beautiful part of the vessel.



Kintsugi teaches us that the value of the vessel isn’t lost when it’s cracked. In fact, the repair can make it stronger and more precious.

That’s exactly what Paul is urging in Philemon. The relationship between slave owner Philemon and slave Onesimus was cracked, broken by betrayal, failure, and resentment. Paul doesn’t

pretend the cracks aren't there—he names them. But he asks Philemon to let grace be the gold that mends what was broken.

Grace Beyond Grudges

Let's be honest: grudges are easier than grace. It's easier to stay angry than to do the hard work of mending. Easier to throw away a broken relationship than to try and restore it. But Paul dares to imagine Philemon seeing Onesimus not through the old lens of property, shame, or punishment—but through the lens of Christ. “No longer as a slave, but more than a slave—as a beloved brother.”

That's kintsugi grace. It doesn't erase the cracks; it transforms them into a testimony.

Application: Where We Need Kintsugi

Where do you need kintsugi in your life?

- Maybe it's a friendship that's fractured.
- Maybe it's a family story you'd rather not talk about.
- Maybe it's in the church itself—yes, even here—where grudges and old wounds can linger.

God doesn't tell us to forget the cracks or pretend they never happened. God calls us to fill them with grace. To let the very places of brokenness shine with mercy and forgiveness.

In St. Helens, I've seen it when neighbors rally for a Habitat build, or when a small congregation comes together to support someone in crisis. That's kintsugi—ordinary people letting grace stitch gold into the brokenness of community.

The Golden Thread of Christ

Ultimately, the gold of kintsugi is Christ himself. On the cross, Jesus took the brokenness of the world—betrayal, injustice, violence—and mended it with resurrection. His scars remain, but they shine with glory.

When we forgive, when we let grace overcome grudges, we live out that resurrection. We become kintsugi people—broken, yes, but made beautiful by the mercy of God.

Conclusion: A Vessel of Grace

So, friends, the call of Philemon is not just for him long ago, but for us today:

- To risk grace in place of grudges.
- To welcome one another as brothers and sisters, not as categories or enemies.
- To let the cracks in our lives shine with God's golden repair.

The next time you see a scar, a crack, or a broken story—don't see it as the end. See it as the place where grace can glow.

Thanks be to God, who turns our brokenness into beauty. Amen.