

“Fullness in Fellowship: Transformed Lives” (I)
Colossians 4:7-9 (NRSV)

Myra Brooks Welch tells a story in a poem of a **battered and scarred violin held up for bid** by an auctioneer who hardly thought it was worth his time. And apparently it wasn't, for the final bid was a grudging three dollars. But as he was calling out, “Three dollars once, three dollars twice, going for three,” a gray-haired old man came forward and asked if he could play it. He began by wiping the dust from the instrument, tightening the strings, and then he picked up the bow and played the most beautiful melody on it – “as sweet as an angel sings.” When the music ceased, the auctioneer, holding it up once again, with the bow, said in a different tone, “What am I bid for this old violin?” Instead of three dollars, it went for three thousand!

The people cheered, but some of them cried,
“We do not quite understand –
What changed its worth?” The man replied,
“The touch of the master’s hand.”
And many a man with a life out of tune,
And battered and torn with sin,
Is auctioned cheap to the thoughtless crowd,
Much like the old violin.

A “mess of pottage,” a glass of wine,
A game and he travels on.
He’s going once and going twice,
He’s going – and almost gone.
But the master comes, and the foolish crowd
Never quite can understand
The worth of a soul, and the change that’s wrought
By the touch of the master’s hand.

Such **transformational change** is incomprehensible for those on the outside. But for all who have experienced that touch perfectly understand. Some who have experienced the master’s touch are now mentioned in the closing paragraphs of the apostle’s letter. Even a brief study of these lives can bring a transforming touch to our lives and thus greater fullness in fellowship and greater fullness in service that continues to reach out to touch the lives of others.

1. **Tychius: a transformed life of full service** (Col. 4:7-8).

The first name Paul mentioned was **Tychius**.

Tychius will tell you all the news about me; he is a beloved brother, a faithful minister, and a fellow servant in the Lord. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts.

The Scriptures mention Tychius five times: here, in Colossians (4:7-8), in Acts (20:4), in Ephesians (6:21), in 2 Timothy (4:12), and in Titus (3:12). Judging by these passages, we can draw some conclusions about a number of his experiences and place in Paul's life. He seems to have popped up at the end of Paul's missionary work in Ephesus, and since he was a native of the province of Asia (Acts 20:4), of which Ephesus was the major city, we think he was probably a convert of Paul's long ministry there. Very likely he'd been born there; he'd lived there; and, he'd found new life there under Paul's ministry. Thus, he'd probably witnessed the Ephesian silversmiths' riot against Paul, which prompted the apostle to leave Ephesus for Macedonia (Acts 19:35-20:1). Even as a bystander, he would have experienced danger himself and also witnessed Paul's courage and bravery. A short time later, when Paul decided to return to Jerusalem, where he'd ultimately be arrested, Tychius was one of the seven who accompanied him as travelling companions (Acts 20:4). Very likely he'd have been one of those entrusted to carry the Ephesians' offering for the poor in Jerusalem.

When Paul was arrested, Tychius, along with Dr. Luke and others, would have stayed with Paul through the "thick and thin" of his arrest and imprisonment in Caesarea maritime, his dramatic appearances before kings and governors, his miserable voyage and shipwreck en route to Rome, and his residence there awaiting trial. Thus we see that Tychius was a man of intense devotion to God and to Paul. Paul told the Corinthians:

... I was shipwrecked; for a night and day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers and sisters; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold and naked. (2 Cor. 11:25b-27)

Tychius could have written the same thing about himself as well, due to his remarkable loyalty to the apostle

Because of this, Paul chose him to travel as **his messenger** back to the churches that he established in the province of Asia Minor. As such Tychius was **charged with two things**: first, **to deliver Paul's letters** to the Colossian church, another to Philemon in whose house the church often met, to the Ephesian church (Eph. 6:21), and quite probably, a last letter to the Laodicean church (Col. 4:16). His second duty was **to tell the churches in Asia about Paul's current situation**, in "chains" as he was in a Roman prison (Col. 4:18). Tychius was thus Paul's errand boy, Paul's gofer! Later references, in Titus (3:12) and 2 Timothy (4:12), confirm that he performed this humble function throughout Paul's missionary journeys. Unfortunately, he left no writings that survived. He performed no feats that were thought worth preserving by Dr. Luke in the Acts of the Apostles. **He was a very common violin; however, God used him as part of his divine symphony**, and the music was beautiful.

Notice, Paul called him **"a beloved [or dear] brother."** He was greatly loved by Paul and by countless others in all the churches he visited. That is no small thing. Many kings and queens, prime ministers and presidents never accomplish this.

Moreover he was called **"a faithful servant."** There is no hint of him being a great thinker or an orator, but only "a servant," a title assumed by our Lord as well (Lk. 22:27). Someone has wisely said, "The greatest ability in the world is dependability" and in this Tychius was an immensely gifted man.

Paul rounded off his description of him as **"a fellow servant in the Lord."** This term expressed equality in their relationship. It's almost as if Paul was saying, "Don't think because I wrote the letters Tychius is delivering that I am any better than he is. We are in this together. We are both servants of the same Lord who has given us different tasks."

Thus from the beautiful teamwork of Paul and Tychius we learn some great truths about fullness in service. **There is greatness in the smallest things done for Jesus Christ.** What would be the use of Paul writing a letter if it did not get delivered? What would be the use of his towering thought, say in the opening chapters of Colossians, and its compelling application, if no one ever read it?

Think of this ancient, yet true thought: “For the loss of a nail, lose a horseshoe; for the loss of a horseshoe, lose a horse; for the loss of a horse, lose a soldier; for the loss of soldier, lose a battle; for the loss of a battle, lose a kingdom.” Who was **John Furlong**’s administrative assistant? Who washes and repairs **Henrik Sedin**’s hockey sweaters and other gear? Who keeps watch over Premier **Gordon Campbell**’s or Prime Minister **Stephen Harper**’s calendar? So it is with the seemingly, small, unromantic things we do for Christ. Who visits folks who need a visit? Who invites new people to lunch? Who’s always around when there is some late night work that still needs to be done around here? Some of these things are absolutely indispensable to God’s work and we will never know how much so until we get to heaven.

When Tychius was doing the smallest thing, he was serving Christ. We postmodern people run the danger of dichotomizing our lives into religious/non-religious, or sacred/secular, or great /small things. But our Lord said and did otherwise: “I always do what please God” (Jn. 8:29). Jesus, living in a human body for thirty-three years, never once performed a non-sacred act. Life is a “sacred journey” (**Frederick Buechner**). God is in all our big and little deeds, and we ought to ask him to keep reminding us of it. We need to pray for this in our regular prayer times, as well as in “a thousand brief sighs” (A. W. Tozer, The Pursuit of God, 1982, p. 119-123). How liberated our lives will then be.

We must realize that momentary things done for Christ are eternal.

The letters that Tychius delivered to the churches in Asia would outlast the Roman Empire. Tychius’ name would be known until the end of time. The world may never see our part (it rarely does – the Order of Abbotsford or the Order of Canada isn’t for everyone -- but God sees what we do, and I’m sure **God says, “I will never forget your work.”**

The Colossian church now seems to be a failure. If you travel to the Lycus Valley today you will only find a few stones and some poor farmers. But in that day the church flourished, and it spread its life contagiously around the world with the blessed thoughts of the truth of Christ’s supremacy in all things. The Christian Church is now far richer because of what happened in Colossae with Paul and his fellow servant, Tychius. The life of this common, unremarkably gifted man, yet whose life was transformed by the gospel, served Christ and Paul loyally, and still graces all our lives today.

We now know of Tychius, but there are scores in our church, and hundreds, even thousands in other places, who have equally blessed our lives. And we will only get to know their names in glory when, with our Concert Master at the baton, we make music together in heaven.

2. **Onesimus – the full transformation of a life gone wrong** (Col. 4:9).

After speaking a few words about Tychius, Paul introduces another of Jesus Christ’s servants, “**Onesimus, the faithful and beloved brother**, who is one of you” (4:9).

We know from Paul’s remarkable, personal letter to Philemon that Onesimus was **Philemon’s errant slave**. From it we also understand that Onesimus must have been **a difficult person to manage**, for Philemon, his master, had become a Christian and if the gospel had gone deep into his heart and life, we think he certainly wouldn’t have been, or couldn’t have been, the overbearing, insensitive master that some slave owners were. His new theology would have taught him that he and Onesimus were equal before God and that would both have to answer to God for their actions. Moreover, Onesimus as **an unbelieving slave** was, to quote his own self-evaluation, “**useless**” (Phil. 22). **Miserable, ungrateful Onesimus had stolen from Philemon** (Phil. 18) and fled to Ephesus, and then on to Rome, to become lost in the anonymity of the huge faceless populace – yet, where instead of losing himself, he was found by his master’s Master, the Lord, Jesus Christ. Somehow, Paul had become his “father” in that faith (Phil. 10).

An amazing transformation had taken place in Onesimus’ life. And Paul wanted that transformation to further transform and touch Philemon’s life as well. Once restless and insolent, Onesimus was now clear-eyed and straightforward. Once ungrateful and unloving, Onesimus abounded with love. Once dishonest and lacking in integrity, he now was willing to make restitution. Once morose, he now entered joyfully into the psalms and hymns and spiritual songs of the persecuted church in Rome. Once a slave, to be ordered around, he was now Philemon’s brother, responsible to both God and his master. Onesimus had been revolutionized by God’s grace!

Anytime anyone voluntarily takes steps towards restitution, and practices restorative justice, we can be sure something radical has happened. Sometime ago I saw **a clipping that had appeared** in the “East African Standard” newspaper of Nairobi, Kenya.

All debts to be paid. I, ALLAN HARANGUI, alias WANIEK HARANGUI, of PO Box 40380, Nairobi, have dedicated my life and services to the Lord Jesus Christ. I must put right all my wrongs. If I owe any of you any debt or damage personally, or though any of the companies of which I have been a director or partner, namely: Guaranteed Services Ltd;, Water Pumps Electrical, and General Company Sales and Service, Ltd., please contact me or my advocates, J. K. Kibicho and Co. Advocates, PO Box 73137, Nairobi for a settlement. No amount will be disputed. GOD AND HIS SON JESUS CHRIST BE GLORIFIED!

Now that's what being transformed is all about! Here is a man with the spirit of Onesimus – he was so converted that it even touched his wallet and bank accounts. Christ does that, if you will let him have his way! It certainly impressed his mentor, Paul, and I can tell you it subsequently impressed his boss, Philemon. Onesimus became “a beloved brother” in the Lord (Phil. 16), a “partner” (Phil. 17) in God's kingdom enterprise.

God is still in the life changing-business today. I've been privileged to see lots of people transformed during my ministry. I've seen people transformed in this church. Sure, there are Christians who disappoint. Sure, there are young believers who never seem to take off. But some lives are changed forever, for the better.

Someone here today may feel his/her life is “going once, going twice, going – almost gone.” If so what you need is the transforming touch of the Master's hand. Talk to someone, talk to me about it. We can help.

Edith Schaeffer tells the story of how a young girl who did the cooking at the first “L'Abri” – a European retreat that she and her husband Frances established in the Swiss Alps for disaffected young people and searchers who came from all over the world. She was supposed to be making something for supper, but she made some errors in her application of the recipe until all she had left was **a mess of goo**. The logical thing was to throw it out. But in those early days of ministry, the Schaeffers didn't have very much extra money, and they had learned to be very economical in the kitchen. So Mrs. Schaeffer sat down with the girl, figured out what was in the goey mess, and by adding an extra ingredient was able to make what her husband described as “**the most marvellous noodles you have ever tasted**”

in your life.” If we place ourselves in the Master’s hand, he can shape us into something that has taste, usefulness and beauty (Lane T. Dennis, ed., Letters of Frances A. Schaeffer, Crossway, 1985, p. 108).

Full transformation awaits those who invite the Master’s touch. **Full, overflowing service** will be the characteristic of someone whose life has been really transformed.

Amen

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