

Sept 4, 2016

The Cost of Discipleship

Scriptures:

Jeremiah 18: 1-11 (God as potter – He can choose to destroy or exalt)

Psalms 139: 1-6, 13-18 (God knows his creation)

Luke 14: 25-33 (Giving up all for Christ – The cost of discipleship)

Sermon:

The title of my sermon today is “The Cost of Discipleship”. Sound familiar?

It should. Lonnie presented a sermon just a few weeks ago on July 17th using the same title. And, although he was referencing scripture passages from Colossians as the basis for his discussion on the issue, the subject matter is raised again this week in our Gospel passage from Luke.

In our Gospel reading today, we are faced with four strongly worded directives by Jesus.

Luke 14: 25-33

1. Vs 26: Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple.
2. Vs 27: Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.
3. Vs 28-32: Who does not first sit down and estimate the cost (in building) or consider whether he is able to oppose another (in battle)?
4. Vs 33: None of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

In our Christian journey, many of us have heard about Christ’s “once for all” sacrifice on the cross. A sacrifice sufficient in grace and power to provide forgiveness of all present and future sins. And, as Lonnie pointed out “What Jesus achieved in breaking the power of sin and death was utterly unique and complete – no one else can add to it. It is sufficient for our salvation.”

So, if Christ’s sacrifice was sufficient for all, why ‘O why are we being told that further actions are needed by us?

Even though God’s work through the death and resurrection of Jesus provides us the platform for “our” salvation, his work “through us” is not yet complete.

In **The Great Commission**, found in Matthew 28:16-20, Jesus says;

¹⁸“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and **make disciples of all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and **teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you**. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

I submit it is not enough that we simply become children of God by accepting the gift of salvation and grace, but that we “grow” to spiritual maturity by completing the substance of the Great Commission.

One cannot research the topic of “The Cost of Discipleship” without running into countless references to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German Lutheran pastor. In fact, he is best known for his book entitled “The Cost of Discipleship” which was published in 1937, just as the Nazi regime was coming into power in Germany.

One of the most discussed aspects of his writings revolved around what he refers to as “cheap” versus “costly” grace.

“cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline. Communion without confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ.”

“costly grace confronts us as a gracious call to follow Jesus, it comes as a word of forgiveness to the broken spirit and the contrite heart. It is costly because it compels a man to submit to the yoke of Christ and follow him; it is grace because Jesus says: “My yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Bonhoeffer obviously lived through a time period where Christianity received the biggest black eye in history through the warped proclamations of a lunatic who used it as a rallying cry to attempt the genocide of the Jews.

Bonhoeffer spoke openly against the Nazi regime and was ultimately executed for his association with a plot to assassinate Adolf Hitler.

Perhaps some would say that we simply can't draw a comparison between the atrocities of the Nazi's and the growing concerns regarding the zealot factions of today's Muslim faith that promote hate, fear and exclusion. Yet, I am troubled.

I am also troubled with the apparent growing trends in our own country regarding the ongoing silencing of the Christian faith while promoting acceptance of all other faiths, even if they do not promote love and tolerance. I have witnessed the removal of Christian faith practices in our schools, work places, sporting events and government. We have seen increasing removal of Christian monuments and references from public places.

In all my concerns, I am not saying that I feel that the United States or the world should be subject to Christian rules or faith, but I do believe that we, particularly as a nation, should be tolerant of all “peaceful” religions who promote and practice love and compassion, including Christianity.

Perhaps the most important aspect I can glean from today’s scriptures is that we cannot and should not simply rest in the assurance of our own personal salvation. To simply grasp God’s grace and then retreat to the safety and security of our own home while ignoring the needs of the world around us. To see suffering and need without the slightest thought of what role we might play or what assistance we might offer.

Bonhoeffer was quoted as saying: “Do not try to make the Bible relevant. Its’ relevance is axiomatic (self evident). Do not defend God’s word, but testify to it. Trust to the word.”

We are not, as disciples, to defend God, but to testify to how his love and grace has changed us for the better.

Also, “Silence in the face of evil is itself evil; God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act.”

“In normal life we hardly realize how much more we receive than we give, and life cannot be rich without such gratitude. It is so easy to overestimate the importance of our own achievements compared with what we owe to the help of others.” To return to our Gospel text in Luke, I believe that Jesus is clearly and succinctly declaring the difference between being a “believer” and a “disciple”.

A believer accepts the truth that is offered while a disciple turns this belief into action. A disciple accepts the responsibility and fervor to “stand up for Jesus”, not resting in our own confidence, but through the assurance gained in doing what we know in our hearts is right, through the indwelling and guiding Holy Spirit.

Let us not accept a “cheap” grace but strive for “costly” grace, through accepting Christ not just enough to “claim” him but enough to “proclaim” him.