

## VII TRINITY 2015

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

FATHER CRAIG LOONEY

**DIETRICH BONHOEFFER ROMANS 6.19**

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What is Grace? Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a Lutheran pastor and author of the book The Cost of Discipleship. Published in 1937 during the rise of Nazism in Germany, it is considered one of the greatest works about Grace.

Grace is “God’s love and mercy given to us because he wants us to have it...not because of anything we did to earn it.” Grace is God’s spontaneous gift to humanity — “generous, free and totally unexpected and undeserved.”

Pastor Bonhoeffer believed grace had to be active...so did Saint Paul. Outspoken in his opposition to Hitler’s euthanasia program and his genocidal persecution of the Jews, Pastor Bonhoeffer was arrested in 1943 and spent the last two years of his life in prison. On 9 April 1945 just one month before Germany surrendered, he was hanged by the Gestapo.

Bonhoeffer could have avoided all this and waited out the war in safety and security in the United States. In June 1939 he travelled to New York at the invitation of Union Theological Seminary. He immediately regretted his decision to come to America and returned to Germany on the last scheduled steamer to cross the Atlantic.

Bonhoeffer knew what he would likely face when he returned to Germany. He also believed in his heart in God’s free gift of grace...grace simply put is “God’s unearned blessing that rejuvenates us and makes us holy and complete.” Grace would sustain him in whatever he faced just as it did Saint Paul in his many trails and tribulations.

Waiting out the war in America was not an option for Bonhoeffer. He had sheep to take care of...abandoning them would have cheapened the grace God gave him to carry out his work, dishonored the cross and the price Jesus paid to set us free from sin and death. Dietrich Bonhoeffer followed the example of Saint Paul and both men understood what the cost of being a Disciple of Jesus could mean and they met their respective deaths with courage and conviction.

We hear that word sin used often in church. We don’t like being told we are sinners...we already know that...we know we tend to wander off like lost sheep and get ourselves into trouble. We also believe Jesus died for our sins and put us right with God. Knowing we are forgiven can lead us into complacency. Since God already sent his Son, Jesus, to die for us...we shouldn’t worry too much about sin...God has it covered. And the Sacraments are “outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual grace”...God’s grace...so what more should we be doing? Grace has to be active and costly...not complacent and cheap.

In the book The Cost of Discipleship, Pastor Bonhoeffer makes a distinction between costly grace and cheap grace:

*“Costly grace confronts us as a gracious call to follow Jesus, it comes as a word of forgiveness to the broken spirit and a contrite heart. It is costly because it compels us 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.’”*

*“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.”*

He goes on to say that cheap grace is like preaching a Gospel that goes something like this:

*“Of course you have sinned, but now everything is forgiven, so you can stay as you are and enjoy the consolations of forgiveness.”*

What Bonhoeffer is saying is it is not enough to just claim to be a Christian. If we really want to enjoy the consolations of forgiveness...then we must realize it is impossible to stay as we are. In our comfortable world of the *1928 Book of Common Prayer* and our beautiful hymns and historic building, it is far too easy to forget why we are here. We are here to tell others they can enjoy a relationship with God our Father who has been revealed to us by Jesus. Forgiveness of sins and eternal life is a reality that starts now. The price for that forgiveness was expensive...it cost the Father his Son...it cost Jesus his life...its cost to us is the willingness to follow Jesus in word and deed.

Grace is at the core of Saint Paul’s Letter to the Romans. He challenges us to rethink what it means to be in a right and good relationship with God by his grace. Our response to God’s “generous, free and totally unexpected and undeserved” gift of grace is our faith...will it be an inward Faith of words that presumes God’s love and forgiveness regardless of what we do...or will it be an outward Faith that shows God’s love in positive and productive actions? Saint Paul makes it clear...Actions do speak louder than Words!

God has already given us his free gift of Grace. It is unlikely any of us here today will face the same choices Saint Paul or Dietrich Bonhoeffer faced. But we can learn much from them. We have been put right with God by his free gift of grace...how will we respond to his grace...will it be a cheap response...or a costly response?

In the Prayer of Humble Access we say we do not trust in our own righteousness, but in God’s many and great mercies. The answer is clear...we must happily embrace the costly grace of following Jesus.

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