

VII Trinity 2020
Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish
Father Craig Looney
Romans 6.19-23



Grace...is God's love shown to those who don't deserve it. Grace...is God's inner peace given to us who live in a restless world. Grace...is God's special favor he gives to those who respond to his call to become his children. Grace...is God's free, generous, unexpected and undeserved gift he wants us to have...not because we have earned it...we can't...it's free!

Saint Paul was a man who didn't mince words. He tells the story like it is...and he wants people to pay attention to what he has to say. In this morning's Letter to the Romans, Paul tells the people he's talking to them in everyday language so they could understand. Wouldn't it have been interesting to sit in on that conversation!

The KJV translation in this case is admittedly difficult to understand. What Paul is talking about is...God's free gift of Grace. Since we have been put back into a whole and complete relationship with God through Jesus, Paul tells us, we experience a new life of grace through him. We are supposed to take God's free gift of grace seriously and apply it unconditionally to every aspect of our lives.

Paul is writing to counter a dangerous distortion of truth that was spreading in the Church in Rome and elsewhere. Some members of the Church were saying because Jesus died for our sins once...sin was no longer something we needed to worry about...how we live our lives was unimportant. That way of thinking leads you to conclude there are no consequences for bad behavior...we can do anything we want.

Lutheran Pastor and anti-Nazi dissident Dietrich Bonhoeffer shared Paul's visceral understanding of God's free gift of Grace. He has been the subject of numerous sermons and it is worth hearing what he has to say again.

In his book *Cost of Discipleship*, Pastor Bonhoeffer makes a sharp distinction between "cheap" and "costly" grace. Paul would have agreed. The way we use God's free gift of grace determines whether it is

"cheap" or "costly"...whether our faith is active or passive. Pastor Bonhoeffer speaks to our hearts...just as Paul does. Let's hear again what he has to say.

Cheap grace, Pastor Bonhoeffer writes, 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. 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."*

The problem with this kind of thinking is that it is defective...and dangerous...because it puts us right back where we started...we remain, as Paul writes, slaves of sin and death. It means we like the idea of being forgiven, but we do not want to make the effort to repent and reform our lives. Discipleship means we are willing to follow Jesus. The "costly" part of God's grace for us is we have to admit we sometimes make our lives messy and then ask for his help and forgiveness.

Pastor Bonhoeffer goes on to say: *"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.'"*

God's free gift of grace is not a paycheck for a job well done. But it is his stamp of approval we have been put into a right relationship with him through Jesus. His grace is free and unearned, and it does come with the "costly" price of being his disciple and experiencing new life through him.

Paul reminds us since we are now free from sin and are "slaves" to God...we are free to live as he really wants us to live...free from sin's own wage of death and darkness...free to embrace life!

Grace...God's gift of love...is eternal life with Jesus. That's better than a paycheck any day. Let's start living new life of God's gift of Grace. After all...it's free!

