

# The Cost of Discipleship

Luke 14:25-33

September 9, 007

*Now large crowds were traveling with him; and he turned and said to them, "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. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.*

*For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, saying, "This fellow began to build and was not able to finish."*

*Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace.*

*So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions*

On April 9<sup>th</sup>, 1945, a true Christian martyr was executed in Flossenbürg Concentration Camp. He was killed just one week before Adolph Hitler committed suicide. It was just two weeks before World War II ended throughout Europe. It was just three weeks before Allied troops liberated the city and the prison.

He was executed at dawn, along with his brother Klaus, and his brothers-in-law Hans and Rüdiger, for their part in a plot to assassinate Hitler. You would think that as he faced execution, he would have been sad, despondent, and terrified of his fate. But he wasn't. Just a week before his execution he wrote to his fiancé and told her that instead of being afraid, he felt more alive and filled with God's grace than he had ever felt in his life. The words of his letter to his fiancé have been turned into a much-cherished hymn in the German Lutheran Church. The man I'm talking about is Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who is a hero to many Christians around the world.

Bonhoeffer was a pastor in the German Reformed Church. He was considered a brilliant student in his theological studies, and eventually became a professor of theology at the University of Berlin. In 1934, because of his writings against the Nazi influence in the German Reformed Church, he was let go from his job. He also became part of the Confessing Church Movement, which penned the Theological Declaration of Barmen, a religious declaration stating the evil of the Nazis. This declaration was signed by 138 pastors, professors, and laity, and it was much like signing the Declaration of Independence in the sense that it made all signers wanted men. For two years the Gestapo dogged him. He was followed, monitored, and bugged. He had to clandestinely go from place to place, often preaching or speaking to small gatherings that were not publicized. In all of his talks he spoke about keeping faith strong and standing against the Nazi evil.

Eventually in 1935, he left the country to go to England for a year where he pastored to German expatriates. Over time, he realized that God was calling him back to Germany. He snuck back into Germany, and once again began activities that were religiously and subversively undermining the Nazis. He did leave Germany one more time, in 1939, to teach at Union Seminary in New York City, but after a month there decided that he had to be back in Germany to serve God in both helping Jews and standing against Hitler. In 1942 he was captured by the Gestapo for his work in smuggling Jews out of the country into Switzerland, and for his role as part of an assassination attempt against Hitler. It was odd that Bonhoeffer, a strict pacifist, would try to kill Hitler, but he explained that it was similar to watching the driver of a car careen toward a group of children. You have no choice but to do anything to stop the car. He saw killing Hitler as an attempt to save others.

For two years he was imprisoned. He first was sent to the Buchenwald Concentration Camp, and then to Flossenbürg. He spent months in a small, dank cell, with little clothing, yet in notes spirited out of his cell he stated that he had never felt so alive. He knew that he was serving God with his whole being, not just his mind. On April 9, 1944, Bonhoeffer and five other conspirators were taken out of their cells, stripped, and hanged to death. Even in his death Bonhoeffer inspired others. Many witness said that they were moved watching this naked man kneel in prayer before his hanging, and then confidently go to his death.

Through his writings, faith, and death Bonhoeffer gave modern Christianity a gift. He rediscovered and recaptured a simple, but disturbing Christian teaching. It's the teaching that Jesus gave us today: "*Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.*" Bonhoeffer wrote about this idea in his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*. What he wrote was simple, troubling, and essential to Christianity. He wrote that becoming a Christian requires that we pay a price. Most of us may believe that in becoming a Christian, life should become easier and that we should only receive God's blessings. That is true to an extent. But Bonhoeffer also pointed out that there is a cost to following Christ. We are blessed, but we are also called. We are called to take our faith into areas that may cause us to struggle, to be criticized, and to be attacked. For instance, at work the cost of discipleship may mean being criticized, penalized, or fired for our unwillingness to do things that are unethical. It can mean losing friends who don't share our values. It can also mean taking on tasks, lifestyles, and ministries that change our lives in both good and painful ways.

The idea that discipleship has a cost isn't just for martyrs like Bonhoeffer. And to be a disciple doesn't mean we have to die like Bonhoeffer, or even like Jesus who died on the cross. That's the extreme, but for most Christians the cost of discipleship simply means making some of the more basic sacrifices for their faith that I just mentioned.

Bonhoeffer rediscovered Jesus' teachings on sacrifice, but Christians have known about the need for sacrifice from the beginning. For centuries, Christians of every denomination have born their crosses for Christ. For instance, since the beginning of the Christian faith missionaries have risked life and limb to share the gospel throughout the world. They've given up a normal life to live in sometimes hostile areas. Monks, nuns, brothers and sisters in the Catholic faith have given up careers and families to live in communities as they serve God through pray and service. Roman Catholic priests have given up the prospect of marriage and family life to serve

God in their ministries. Protestant pastors have given up more lucrative and less demanding careers, while also calling on their spouses and children to give up, in order to serve God. You have everyday laypeople who have given up time, money, and so much more in order to serve a higher calling to God. Everywhere you look, you see Christians making sacrifices for God. They are picking up their crosses daily and following Christ. Simply put, to be a Christian means having a cross to bear. To make a sacrifice means literally to make something sacred. The word “sacrifice” comes from the same word as “sacred.” When we sacrifice time, money, effort, and our lives to serve Christ, we make the world sacred.

Of course, bearing a cross for our faith isn't all gloom and doom. The good thing is that bearing a cross for Christ often means doing things that bring joy, love, hope, and celebration, even if they require sacrifices. It's this kind of sacrifice we celebrate today.

The sacrifice we celebrate today with our building addition and renovation all got started in the spring of 1998. We were in the midst of an earlier capital campaign that renovated the sanctuary, that led us to buy Faith House, and that led to the creation of an endowment fund. As part of the campaign we created something called the Phase 2 committee. This was a committee dedicated to peering into the future and determining what to do if the church continued to grow at the same rate. We hired an architect to help us get a handle on what kind of space or construction we might need. As part of that, we identified properties that we would need to purchase, which turned into purchases of Charity and Hope House.

Over the years, the Phase 2 Committee merged with the Long-Range Planning Committee. They looked at all sorts of plans: building a new sanctuary, adding a smaller classroom addition, adding a larger addition, expanding the sanctuary, etc... All along, Bill Frank guided the process. For almost ten years he has led us in our efforts to peer into the future and prepare for what is coming. Not only that, but he came with an agenda: that whatever we do would be of such a high quality that members fifty years from now would say, “Man! They really knew what they were doing when they built this building.”

I was a pleasant victim of that strategy. Back when they were designing the offices, I said to Bill that I didn't need as large or as nice an office as they were building. Bill's response? “Graham, we're not making it nice for you. We're making it nice so that we will have an easier time attracting your replacement whenever you move on.” That's the kind of foresight he brought to this project, even if it did make me wonder what other plans he had that he wasn't telling me about 😊.

In the process, all of us have sacrificed. All of us, members, staff, Building Expansion Task Force members, and more have sacrificed time, effort, and money. And it shows. In this expansion, we have picked up our crosses and followed Christ. It has not been easy. For example, most of our staff got very sick in the fall from all the dust in the air. I went without an office for over six months, moving from place to place to do my work; the sanctuary, Starbucks, the Market Caffé, etc... We had to move the church office into my old office, which was difficult because we all bumped into each other and got in each others' way, but I rarely heard a complaint. For me, as it would be for almost any pastor, the worst part was losing our bathrooms for six months. It is so embarrassing to have visitors come, and to have the only bathroom be a

heated port-o-pot out front, a port-o-pot that was rarely heated because we kept forgetting to turn the heater on before worship. Yet you, our members, kept coming for worship despite the inconveniences. We had a construction crew, that, to quote Bruce Smith, “if they only tried a little harder, could actually block *all* of our parking spots with their equipment and material.” Our parking was limited, but people still came for worship. We sacrificed time, effort, money, and comfort, and the payoff is that today we have a building that allows us to enhance our service to Christ in every way.

This building we dedicate today has been a sacrifice, but it’s also been a joy. Most of us have paid some sort of price to serve God in doing it. In so many ways we have lived what Bonhoeffer rediscovered and Jesus taught. We have picked up our crosses and followed Christ by being his disciples. We’ve stretched, struggled, shared, and served. And in doing so we have done something really tremendous: we’ve created a place for people to learn and grow in Christ for generations to come.

Amen.