

Sermon for January 26, 2014

Third Sunday after Epiphany, Matthew 4:12-23

BLESSINGS TO YOU AND PEACE FROM GOD THE FATHER, OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

The **life** of a disciple of Jesus Christ is **not** always an easy one—**not** in Jesus' time **nor** is it today. This morning I am going to talk about a **20th** century disciple of Jesus as well as taking some thoughts and quotes from this book, "*The Cost of Discipleship*" by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The book was **first** published in 1937.

For those of you who do **not** know who Dietrich Bonhoeffer was—he was a **well** known German Lutheran pastor and professor of Theology at the University of Berlin in the 1930's. During World War II he became known for his **staunch resistance** to the Nazi dictatorship as well as being **opposed** to their **oppression** and **treatment** of the Jews. Born in **1906** his life up until the time of WW II had been **consumed** with theology. He was devoted to **learning** about God and Jesus Christ. He taught theology **not only** in the universities in Germany but in the United States as well. In **1933** Hitler imposed new church regulations which Bonhoeffer **could not** go along with and in **1934** he organized an underground church movement called the *Confessing Church* which represented a **major** Christian opposition to the Nazi government. In **1939**, for his own safety, friends

got him out of Germany; although, he **soon returned** to his beloved country. **1940** brought about a time when the Nazi authorities **harassed** him, they **forbid** him to speak in public, he was **not allowed to publish** any books, and he was required to **report his activities** to the police. In **1943** he was imprisoned by the **Gestapo** because of his long standing **opposition** to the SS and Hitler. Bonhoeffer was put in military **prisons and concentration camps**. During his time in these places Bonhoeffer **continued** to lead Sunday worship services, his faith in God remained constant, and he **ministered** to the sick as well as **comforted** the anxious. On **April 9th, 1945** he was executed in the **Flossenburg** concentration camp **2 weeks** before it was liberated by Allied forces.

The **guiding belief** underlying all that Bonhoeffer did, what he **worked** for and what he **suffered** for—was his **faith and love** of God in whom he **found peace and happiness**. According to Bonhoeffer: *“Christianity has its place in this world and the Church as the body of Christ, and the fellowship in Him can only be the visible Church. The Christian must be ready for martyrdom and death. It is only in this way that one learns faith.”*

Now don't get me wrong—I am **not** saying that to be a disciple of Jesus' we have to be a **martyr and die**—even though **10 of the 11** remaining original disciples of Jesus were martyred—but there is **some cost or response**, if you will, that comes with being a **disciple** of Jesus. But what I **am** saying is that to be a

disciple of Jesus' there are some **decisions** that have to be made and **with** those decisions does come **some** form of **price/cost** to be in relationship with Him.

As we look at our **gospel** reading for this morning there was a **price** involved for Peter, Andrew, James, and John. **Each of them** left their livelihood, their homes, and their friends **immediately** when Jesus came by, and we are told that in James and John's case they left their **family** as well. For them Jesus' call to **come and follow** took priority over family commitments, which was a rather **startling** idea in an era when **family connections** were the primary source of both identity and honor, **and** when the responsibility to **care** for one's parents was rooted in both the **culture of the time** as well as **biblical law**.

The **remarkable** thing about this story though is **not so much** *what* the disciples left behind, but that they left it *all so quickly*—without **any** hesitation—at all. There was **no reason given** for their immediate following of Jesus as He had **not yet begun** his ministry of teaching or healing. These men had **not been given** any instructions or promises of reward for following him. **All** they received was a command to follow and they obediently did it.

In Bonhoeffer's book "*The Call of Discipleship*" he puts this calling of the disciples this way, p 61-63.

This story of the **calling** of the first disciples of Jesus is maybe somewhat hard for us to comprehend today in our world where we have **so many**

responsibilities that **rest** upon us. We may have a **job** which brings income to the family, we may have a **mortgage** and **bills to pay**, we may have **health** issues, or we may have **people relying on us** to be there for them in times of need.

Nonetheless, as disciples of Jesus we are called into a relationship with **no less** than the **Son of God** himself. A relationship when Jesus calls us to *'follow me'* is a call which is **hard** to ignore. It is a call that needs some type of a response.

As disciples in this place and time we may **not be called** to serve God with the **intensity** of a Dietrich Bonhoeffer; but we **are called to serve**; to serve the **poor**, to serve the **needy**, to serve those people whose **voice is not heard** in our world, and to serve **those who come to us asking** for help and guidance.

We Christians are all **called by Jesus** to 'follow me' and **each of us** has our own **distinct** response to the call. We disciples of Jesus are no longer able to sit on the sidelines and wait for something better to come along. **The kingdom of God has come near. Jesus is calling you.** I pray that you **listen** to His call. **Respond and follow** Him wherever He may lead you; wherever you might be **called** to serve. **Amen.**