



Sermon, February 12, 2017  
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Coburg and Junction City United Methodist Churches

Sermon Series: Where Do We Go from Here?  
**“The Price of Struggle”**

Opening question: When you transitioned from one phase in your life to another, what did you have to give up? What did it cost you?

**Scripture: Exodus 5:1-9** New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

5 Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘Let my people go, so that they may celebrate a festival to me in the wilderness.’”<sup>2</sup> But Pharaoh said, “Who is the Lord (YHWH), that I should heed him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and I will not let Israel go.”<sup>3</sup> Then they said, “The God of the Hebrews has revealed himself to us; let us go a three days’ journey into the wilderness to sacrifice to the Lord our God, or he will fall upon us with pestilence or sword.”<sup>4</sup> But the king of Egypt said to them, “Moses and Aaron, why are you taking the people away from their work? Get to your labors!”<sup>5</sup> Pharaoh continued, “Now they are more numerous than the people of the land and yet you want them to stop working!”<sup>6</sup> That same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people, as well as their supervisors,<sup>7</sup> “You shall no longer give the people straw to make bricks, as before; let them go and gather straw for themselves.”<sup>8</sup> But you shall require of them the same quantity of bricks as they have made previously; do not diminish it, for they are lazy; that is why they cry, ‘Let us go and offer sacrifice to our God.’<sup>9</sup> Let heavier work be laid on them; then they will labor at it and pay no attention to deceptive words.”

**Book on my shelf: *The Cost of Discipleship*, by Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

On my bookshelf in my office, I have a little green book that I have had for 30-40 years entitled, *The Cost of Discipleship*. It is written by the German pastor and theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was martyred at the end of World War II for his active resistance to the Nazi government. The book was written in 1937 at a time when the pastors who opposed Hitler had gone underground, even forming an underground seminary to train pastors for serving the members of the few Confessing Churches, who had officially condemned Nazi doctrine, and faced closure and persecution by the government.

## **Bonhoeffer and His Time**

The Nazi movement in Germany arose as a reaction to Germany's defeat in World War 1 and its humiliation in the 1918 Treaty of Versailles, and the subsequent economic depression. The charismatic Adolf Hitler was seen by many people to be an answer to prayer. One pastor, Hermann Gruner, even said, "Hitler is the way of the Spirit and the will of God for the German people to enter the Church of Christ."

Bonhoeffer and others vehemently disagreed, but when they spoke out against Nazi propaganda, they were relieved of their church positions, or even arrested. But many churches embraced Nazi doctrines and politics, and even willingly displayed the swastika in the front of their churches, often covering up the cross. It was over against this social situation that Bonhoeffer wrote about the true costs of following Jesus.

## **Cost of Discipleship quote**

Listen for a moment to how Bonhoeffer describes what he calls "Cheap Grace," a term he learned from a brief period working in Harlem, New York, with Rev. Adam Clayton Powell, Sr.:

"Cheap grace means grace sold on the market like cheapjacks' wares. The sacraments, the forgiveness of sin, and the consolations of religion are thrown away at cut prices. Grace is represented as the Church's inexhaustible treasury, from which she showers blessings with generous hands, without asking questions or fixing limits. Grace without price; grace without cost! The essence of grace, we suppose, is that the account has been paid in advance; and, because it has been paid, everything can be had for nothing. Since the cost was infinite, the possibilities of using and spending it are infinite. What would grace be if it were not cheap?...

Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.

## "The Price of Struggle"

Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy which the merchant will sell all his goods. It is the kingly rule of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble; it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him.

Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock.

Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son: "ye were bought at a price," and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon his Son too dear a price to pay for our life, but delivered him up for us. Costly grace is the Incarnation of God." (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*.)

### **Following God costs us**

This story from Exodus tells us that following God costs us. Moses tries to get Pharaoh to release Hebrews to travel and worship in the wilderness. This costs the people extra labor (who didn't ask for it themselves). That cost can be exacted from us in at least two main ways:

1. Something is taken away from us, perhaps forcefully, or we may experience pain, persecution, death:
2. We may have to give up something, get rid of something in order to follow God. We may need to give up comfort, or we may have to give up something – personal privilege, attitudes, a way of thinking - we have inherited from our culture or society in order to follow God. (Think of the situation in Nazi Germany, the difference between the churches that embraced Nazism, and those that resisted.)

### **Questions:**

## “The Price of Struggle”

- In responding to the call of God, what do we give up in order to end our enslavement to the old way of doing things?
- What things do the people who follow Jesus need to give up in order to become what God wants them to become?
- What do you need to give up in order to follow Jesus?

### **Closing quote from Bonhoeffer**

“To be called to a life of extraordinary quality, to live up to it, and yet to be unconscious of it is indeed a narrow way. To confess and testify to the truth as it is in Jesus, and at the same time to love the enemies of that truth, his enemies and ours, and to love them with the infinite love of Jesus Christ, is indeed a narrow way. To believe the promise of Jesus that his followers shall possess the earth, and at the same time to face our enemies unarmed and defenseless, preferring to incur injustice rather than to do wrong ourselves, is indeed a narrow way. To see the weakness and wrong in others, and at the same time refrain from judging them; to deliver the gospel message without casting pearls before swine, is indeed a narrow way. The way is unutterably hard, and at every moment we are in danger of straying from it. If we regard this way as one we follow in obedience to an external command, if we are afraid of ourselves all the time, it is indeed an impossible way. But if we behold Jesus Christ going on before step by step, we shall not go astray.”  
(Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*)