September 4th 2022

Luke 14: 1 (2-6) 7-14

There is a cost to Christian discipleship. Is the cost as straightforward as Jesus suggests when he informs of the need to scope the works? What is it that we are called to? The straightforward answer might be good works. And pursuing those even when the times are tough. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote: “cheap grace is 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. [[1]](#footnote-1)

What are we called to give up in order to embrace discipleship? Jesus doesn’t try to sugar-coat the cost. He challenges us.

Following Jesus is actually demanding. It is not an easy path. Where do we turn for help? Which possessions are we asked to let go of? Perhaps the possession is not so much about material objects but about our ideas and attitudes. How much am I able to let go of? We can ask God to help us grow in the necessary freedom, to enable us to be ready to follow and serve in new ways.

How do we find the nub of the challenge between what we think is our life’s work and the cutting edge of discipleship? Richard Rohr warns that the hardest thing we may have to do is let go of what we perceive is our personal path or truth. For that in fact may limit our ability to grow and to trust the ongoing guidance of the Holy Spirit. Our task is to look for ways to serve those on the margins. Uncomfortable!

Looking to those on the margins may cause us pain. It may be the pain and fear of uncertainty or the loss of agency. Perhaps it is when **we face personal challenge that we really move into the space where we allow the experience and God to change us.**

I talk often about Daniel O’Leary who is an uplifting spiritual teacher. He faced a long battle with cancer and found that the experience changed his ideas about his life’s work. In his own words he asks “am I sure of anything anymore? I kept relentlessly busy as I avoided facing the doubt and meaninglessness of my clerical life. How do I get to know my true self before its too late and the flawed weak-self can’t recognise the incarnate God?”[[2]](#footnote-2).

O’Leary talks of a night when he thought he was dying. Then he vaguely saw that without his demons the angels could not come to comfort him. Then he concluded it is in the darkest part of his soul where God lives.

That is why for many of us, our inner shadowland is the fearsome place to go because for decades we have defined our goodness and truth by other criteria-our petty successes, our religious performances, our roles and titles our public persona – all those utterly false indications of our real worth before God.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Last week I told you about the experience of praying with a dying colleague and her husband. I told you that I was looking around me for God’s presence. I desperately wanted to feel that God was there, but there was nothing. It was only after continual return to that experience imploring God for insight and wisdom that I came to see that I was called on to be the one who came in the name of the Lord. This was hard-fought knowledge that only came with being in the place of the demons of uncertainty and fear. I came to realise that this was where God was waiting to teach me.

I had to know myself at my most inept. These have been the places and times when God has been most clearly revealed to me. I don’t need to hide these parts in shame because as O’Leary explains, where these demons are the angels will come. **So I suggest the place of struggle is the cost of discipleship.** In Bornhoffer’s words we must drop religious pride and repent. It is necessary to confess our sins and ask for God’s forgiveness. Here is the bed-rock of discipleship.

So what might the discipleship that Jesus asks us to scope out look like? It might require us to think something different. Last week’s gospel called us to humility. Another discomfort to be embraced.

We are asked to allow ourselves to go to the place where we fret about the contradictions in our life, its restlessness, its incompleteness, hidden loneliness, and unrequited desire.

I can share another personal example. In recent weeks in this community I have been experienced my powerlessness in the face of tragedy and illness. It is only when I go to the shadowlands that I find God in my inner-being. His presence is in the words of Jesus’ promises: lo I am with you always even to the end of the age. I came to bring life-that you may have it abundantly. I am the bread of life, I am the resurrection, I am the good shepherd.

It remains for each of us to find our preferred way of working with the images and the emotions that these words evoke in us. How does healing come to you? Is it with images? Do they give you the courage to know that **in uncertainty we find the call to discipleship**?

This is what Bornhoeffer concludes: “costly grace is the hidden treasure in the field; for the sake of it a man will gladly 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 disciples leave their nets and follow him.

Costly grace is the source 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 costs a man his life and it is grace because it gives man the only true life”. [[4]](#footnote-4)

Jesus’ own words call us to prepare to stay the course. The possessions we are called to give up may be our puffed-up view of self. Passivity is not an option. Jesus calls us to discipleship are you listening?

AMEN

References

Bonhoeffer, D. The Modern Spirituality Series Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Templegate Publishers Springfield US 1992.

O’Leary, D. *Treasured and Transformed* Garratt Publishing Vic. 2018

1. Bonhoeffer D. *Modern Spirituality Series Deitrich Bonhoeffer.* p71 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. O’Leary D, *Treasured and Transformed* pp80-81 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. O’Leary D. *Treasured and Transformed*. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Bonhoeffer, D. Op Cit p71 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)