

# Sermon: Pentecost 13

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Year C  
Deuteronomy 30:15-20  
Psalm 1  
Philemon 1-21  
Luke 14:25-33

I struggle sometimes... resisting the craziness of the world outside these walls... in favor of the sanity within them... I struggle sometimes... with whether I've become a lazy Christian... I struggle sometimes... knowing as Oskar Schindler did... that there's more I could have done... but the Gospel invites me... over and over again... the Gospel brings me back... over and over again... to embrace deeper truths... invites me to a more enduring reality... to the One which cannot be shaken...

In our reading from Deuteronomy... Moses speaks God's words... which convey that what has been set before us... are life... and blessings... and prosperity... but also curses... and adversity... and death... and God calls on heaven and earth to witness to these choices... to the diamond we've been given... and it's not difficult for me to imagine God as a parent... who fears her children will not make the wisest choices... and God urges us to choose life... but that doesn't mean that choosing life is always easy... or cheap...

In his 1937 book... The Cost of Discipleship... Lutheran Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer makes a distinction between "cheap grace" and "costly grace"... cheap grace... he writes... is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance... it is communion without confession... baptism without discipline... and let's remember too... that in the early church... those seeking baptism had to undergo three years of instruction... prayers... and fasting...

Cheap grace is grace without discipleship... grace without the cross... grace without Jesus... cheap grace... Bonhoeffer says... is to hear the gospel preached as follows: *Of*

*course you have sinned... but now everything is forgiven... so you can stay as you are... and [simply] enjoy the consolation of forgiveness...* the main defect of such a proclamation... is that it contains no demand for discipleship...

Costly grace... however... confronts us as a gracious call to follow Jesus... it comes as a word of forgiveness to the broken spirit and the contrite heart... it is costly... because it compels us to submit to the yoke of Christ and follow him... and it is grace because it gives a person the only true life...

Jesus asks us to consider the cost of discipleship... but who of us ever really knows what we're saying Yes to... or how it will unfold... or what it will look like... when my former wife and I decided to have a child... we really didn't know what we were saying Yes to or how much I could love our daughter... when I became a Christian... I really didn't know what I was saying Yes to or how that would change my life... when I agreed to serve as church treasurer in 1993... which I did for three years... I really didn't know how much work it would be or that I would whip those books into shape... when I finally mustered the courage to come out... I really didn't know what my life would look like or how contented I could be... when I said Yes to God's call to ordination... I really didn't know what I was saying Yes to or how challenging and wonderful it would be...

Jesus asks us to consider the cost of discipleship... the cost of building a tower for example... and I'm reminded of those HGTV home makeover shows... where the couple buys a house and has... what seems to me... a lot of money to remodel it... and in the approved designs... they squeeze all the bang they can get out of those bucks... but then they discover that the electrical isn't up to code and it ALL needs to be replaced... or the wall they want to take down is a load-bearing wall and their open-concept space isn't so open-concept any more... or the man-cave that Hilary promised is not longer possible and compromises must be made... and it becomes clear(er) that they haven't budgeted for all contingencies... and what about those who build towering homes on beach front property... and pray the hurricane goes somewhere else...

affects someone else... I wonder what contingencies they have made... and then there are the poor...

But we live into the choices we make... and we learn about ourselves... maybe about where we put our treasure... and we learn about others... how they respond... but especially... we learn about God... and so if we don't really know... when we start that tower... what we're saying Yes to... we can at least say Yes to God...

Three years ago... I explained that the word we hear as hate... that we must... *hate father and mother... wife and children... brothers and sisters... and even life itself...* but really... would a God of love tell us that in order to love her... we must hate those who love us... and let's remember that at this time... family didn't just come first... family was just about all there was... and so if we look at the Greek word that's translated as *hate*... we see that it also means... *to love less*... and so this passage makes more sense when we read it as... *Whoever comes to me and does not love those in these relationships... less than they love me... cannot be my disciple...*

Jesus asks us to consider the cost of discipleship... a tower needs a strong foundation... else it will flounder or fall... and in Matthew 16:18... Jesus talks about another kind of foundation... a spiritual one... when he says... *and I tell you... you are Peter... and on this rock I will build my church... and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it...* Jesus discerned great maturity in Peter... to entrust him to uphold the church... and in our Epistle... Paul entrusts Onesimus to Philemon...

The Rev. David Adams has written... Onesimus... a slave... has run away from his master Philemon... a convert of Paul's... and has absconded with funds or property of some sort... he has made his way to Paul... who is in prison... and in that unlikely setting... Paul has converted Onesimus as well... now Paul composes a letter on Onesimus' behalf... attempting to persuade Philemon to take his slave back as a full...

equal... and free brother in Christ... without punishment... and promising to make restitution for anything he has stolen...

And it's easy to see Philemon's quandary... if he agreed to this... his standing in the local community would have been compromised... because by law and in the presence of his peers... he could have punished his slave... made an example of him... and if he didn't... he would effectively be rejecting the Gospel... so he too had to consider the cost of discipleship...

And like Philemon... we must discern our individual paths... and the cost of following them or not... do we place more value in what others may say or do... and relent... or are we willing to pay the cost... and we must ask... how do we discern our two parishes' shared path... and the cost of following it or not... what kinds of costs are we willing to pay... when those costs many not even be financial... and how do we discern our nation's path... and the cost of following it or not... by... just for example... accepting or rejecting scientific evidence which points to the likelihood of global warming... and what are the prices we're willing to pay to protect the earth for future generations...

Like some of the disciples... who may have been in their late teens or early twenties... and full of youthful exuberance... who may have felt invulnerable... or who may not have yet comprehended the true cost of discipleship... we too are spiritual adolescents... convinced that no harm can come to us... that's why discipleship and what it exacts from us... must be regularly assessed... so that we come to own a more enduring reality... One which cannot be shaken...

As human beings... we have been given gift beyond measure... and if we don't see what we have... and reach out for it... and protect it... then we have sold a diamond at the price of spinach... Pierre Teilhard de Chardin... was a Jesuit paleontologist and mystic... whose writings were suppressed by Catholic authorities during his lifetime... his work brought science and religion together... and even now mobilizes us to

participate with God in the process of bringing the universe to its fulfillment in Christ... the nugget of insight... is that the universe forms one natural and indivisible whole... which can finally subsist only by dependence on Christ... but too many are sleeping... and do not awaken quickly... Teilhard said... the day will come when after harnessing space... the winds... the tides... and gravitation... we shall harness for God the energies of love... and on that day... for the second time in the history of the world... we shall have discovered fire... Holy Spirit... come... and enkindle your fire within us... that we may burn brightly... but be not consumed... Amen...

Mike+