

## 2.18.2024 Lent 1 (2 Corinthians 6:1-10)

In his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, German pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer discussed the concept of cheap grace, as opposed to, costly grace. Bonhoeffer drew a sharp distinction between these terms, defining them in this way. He wrote, "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..."

"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, which to buy, 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..."

Bonhoeffer's words encourage Christians to recognize the truth that while the unearned, undeserved, amazing gift of God's grace is freely given - it is not cheap. His grace came at the greatest cost. Grace is the treasure hidden in a field, the one pearl of great price (Matthew 13:44-46). Grace is the gift of intimacy with God, a personal relationship with our Father through the precious Blood of His only-begotten Son.

The vast difference we recognize between cheap grace and the costly grace of God reminds us of inspired words written by St. Paul in our Epistle this morning. In a letter to the Corinthians, Paul stated, "We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain" (2 Corinthians 6:1). In this statement, St. Paul is pleading with

Christians not to receive what Bonhoeffer would describe as cheap grace - grace without repentance, grace without church discipline, grace without discipleship. In essence, grace that doesn't fulfill much of the purpose for which it was given.

When we think of grace, we often have a tendency to think of it first and foremost as it relates to our Salvation. If someone speaks of grace, the words that quickly come to

mind for many people are those familiar, comfortable verses which assure us that it is “by grace you have been saved through faith” (Ephesians 2:8), or that “the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people” (Titus 2:11), yet both Bonhoeffer and St. Paul want us to understand that the grace of God is given to us now, in this world, that we may live (to use the language of the prayer book) “a godly, righteous, and sober life” to the glory of His Holy Name, and these men not only present that truth in word, but also in deed. Their lives demonstrated the fact that God provides us with His grace that we may be, according to St. Peter, “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession...” declaring, here and now, “the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9).

Grace is not a cheap get out of jail free card. The grace we have been given cannot be cheap, because - “it cost God the life of His Son,” and therefore we must not receive His grace in vain. We must not be among those who gladly accept Christ as their Savior, but then choose to continue on the broad path rather than walk the narrow way (Matthew 7:13-14), those who continue to live just like they did before their conversion instead of plucking out the eye that causes them to stumble (Matthew 18:9), or those who cling to “the cares and riches and pleasures of life” (Luke 8:14) rather than lose such worldly life that they may gain life everlasting (John 12:25).

Instead of continuing on just as we were, we must recognize grace is given to us that we may live holy lives which glorify God, and that grace comes to the authentic Christian with a demand of discipleship. In other words, if we, through faith, receive the gracious gift of salvation, life eternal in union with God in His heavenly kingdom, if we accept Christ as our Savior who bled and died on the Cross to provide us with His grace, then certainly love calls us to also accept Him as our Lord, and to live this life as He commands.

Listen to these words that St. Paul wrote to Titus, and consider the way they reveal that truth, Paul wrote, “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works” (Titus 2:11-14).

Again, in these verses, we hear the Gospel message, the good news that the grace of God has brought salvation, and yet, St. Paul doesn’t stop there. He tells us that the same grace which saves us, trains us, “to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age.” The grace of God saves us, and the grace of God instructs us to live in a new and godly way, teaching us to turn away from sin and continually providing us with the strength to do

so (1 Corinthians 10:13), and Paul agrees with Bonhoeffer's claim that such grace is costly. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, St. Paul declares the truth that our Savior Jesus Christ "gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works."

Our Savior Christ gave Himself for us to make His own people holy, zealous for good works, This is one of the purposes of God's grace, given through the sacrifice of our Lord, and therefore to turn away from this calling to belong to God, to be His own possession, and to live "a godly, righteous, and sober life" is to receive His grace in vain. The words of the Bible, and the lives of the saints, clearly reveal the vast difference that exists between such cheap grace that doesn't change our lives, and the costly grace of God that not only saves us, but trains us, and transforms us completely.

The season of Lent is a time for self-examination. As we journey toward the Cross with our Lord, we are called to examine our lives, and this morning Bonhoeffer's words help us begin that process by encouraging us to ask the question: What type of grace is exhibited in my life - cheap grace or costly grace? "Grace without the Cross," or grace that "cost God the life of his

Son." Jesus gave His life to give us grace today. May we never receive His costly grace in vain. Instead, may we respond to His priceless gift of love not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to His service, and by walking before Him in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.