

23rd Sunday C (Luke 14:25-33)

On April 9, 1945, a short time before the Allied troops conquered Nazi Germany thus ending World War II, a heroic and holy Lutheran pastor and theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, was executed by his Nazi captors, as were many other ministers and Catholic priests. Thus ended tragically the earthly life of a man who had dedicated himself to a life in discipleship to the Lord Jesus Christ. In his book, Letters and Papers from Prison, he writes of his experiences in Nazi concentration camps, his experience of the cost of discipleship, which, by the way, is the title of another of his books, The Cost of Discipleship.

In this book he speaks of the uncertainty of the one who answers the call to discipleship. Where will it lead us? What decisions and partings will it demand? To answer these questions we shall have to go to the one who calls us to discipleship, to be his follower, for discipleship means following. Only Jesus who bids us to follow him knows the answer. Only he knows what is in store; only he knows the journey's end. A disciple is not one who is a pupil in relation to a master or teacher, one who receives instructions. A disciple is one who shares a relationship. The journey of discipleship is a journey of faith and trust. It is a journey of joy. For us it will lead probably not to death in a concentration camp as it did for Bonhoeffer, but to some other way of suffering, and paradoxically to joy with Jesus.

The point of today's Gospel according to Luke is not that Jesus wants us to reject our family, our father and mother, our wife and children, our brothers and sisters, and our own life, but he wants our heart. He wants our total committed love as his disciples, and in this committed giving we find joy beyond measure.

He asks us as his disciples to reach out to our brothers and sisters in need of compassionate love. He asks us to make ourselves aware of the needs of hurting people who may enter our lives, people in our community who may be having a hard time. The call of discipleship is a call to each one of us to tune in to the needs of those around us, from the global scale of nuclear disarmament, to peace in the world, to racial injustice, to the needs of families with problems, to substance abuse, the high incidence of teenage suicide, pregnancy, to the physical and emotional abuse of children. The call to discipleship is a call to take personal responsibility for the elimination of injustice in our community, to heal the wounded people in our midst, and not to stand apart and say that is someone else's job.

Discipleship means joy, for we find a deep spiritual joy and fulfillment in reaching out to others as we follow Jesus, who leads us joyfully on the way. Our joy is in trusting him, the eminently trustworthy one who will never lead us astray or let us down. He is the way, he is truth, he is life, and he will not fail us. He has gone before us and his way inevitably leads to life, a new life that will endure. And so we give thanks for our call to discipleship, as we journey on the way with him leading us, in the service of our brothers and sisters. Amen.

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