

Title: The Cost of Discipleship

Text: Matthew 10.37-39

Theme: Counting the cost of living for Christ

Occasion: 60th Anniversary of the Death of Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Prop Stmt. Living for Christ and like Christ will bring a collision between the world and the church.

Imagine with me what life would be like if the Arab/Muslim world united their resources and armies and defeated our armies in Iraq and Afghanistan. In the negotiations for peace, our nation was required to pay a fine of \$4 trillion dollars that devastated our economy. Our once powerful country is defeated by its enemies and humiliated by the Peace Treaty. Hunger and poverty surround you. What little money your family has is worth less every day. Inflation is out of control. Some of your friends live in the street because they can't afford to pay the rent, and you wonder if your family will be next. Things continue to get worse and the government seems unable to stop the downward spiral. The government leaders are inept, and demoralizing. A once proud nation has been brought very low. But then, something happens. It seems almost messianic but suddenly, a man enters the political arena and promises to change everything. And while you are skeptical at first, you soon change your mind because you see that poverty and hunger begin to ease as more food and jobs are available. Once again Americans can hold their heads high and be proud of their country and their heritage. Patriotism runs high and Americans can once again unite for a common goal--the good of their country. Who is this man? What I am describing is not something that simply could happen, it is something that has already happened. The country is not America, the country is Germany and the man, is Adolph Hitler. However, Hitler's brand of prosperity comes at the cost of persecution and eventual death to those who oppose or disagree with him.

Why do I bring this up? Yesterday, April 9, 2005 was the 60th anniversary of the execution of Dietrich Bonhoeffer by the Nazis. He died at 39, but left a legacy in his writings that now, 60 years later, still provide valuable insight for Christians seeking to live faithfully to the Gospel in a culture dominated by hostile ideologies. I am charged with the wonderful and challenging privilege of teaching you THE Christian Faith. Genuine Christianity is not a Sunday only religion. It is the air that we breathe. It is the pulse of our hearts, the blood in our veins, the very sustenance of our lives. But genuine Christianity comes with a cost. There is a cost of discipleship. There is a cost to follow Christ. But here is what is so confusing. The church is supposed to follow Christ. In the 2000 year history of the church, there have been times in which the church has followed Christ. But so often the church while it uses the language of following Christ, has in reality followed the world. When someone from within the church, calls upon the church to repent, that person is often viewed as the enemy of the church, when in reality he is what the church desperately needs. The church has historically sought the approval of the world and when it has, it has usually surrendered its message and therefore its hope.

In the early 1900's liberal theology (specifically the denial of the inerrancy of the Scriptures, the denial of the virgin birth of Christ, the denial of the miracles of Christ, the denial of the sinless life of Christ, the denial of the deity of Christ, the denial of the

atonement death of Christ, the denial of the bodily resurrection of Christ, the denial of a literal hell, etc.)...these ideas began to take root in the church in Germany. Germany still had a state church which called itself Lutheran, although in so many ways it had long since moved away from what Luther had taught. Hitler's rise to power was not a smooth ride. His grip on power was at times very tenuous and he was looking for every means possible to give him more control. He therefore, sought to win the allegiance of the church. When the church allows itself to be ruled by a political organization it is stepping onto very, very dangerous ground. Little, by little, the church traded in her conscience to help support a God and country idea. It seemed like the expedient thing to do at the time. The compromises were small, weren't they? But in the end, when all of the dust of W.W.II had settled and the German people looked back on what had happened, many of them looked with amazement at how such culturally refined, and educated people could so systematically pursue such colossal evil. What happened to us? How could we become this way? And where was the church? Where were the prophets? Where were the warnings? In an exchange for influence, and then in exchange for their lives, the church remained silent about the atrocities, or in some cases, the church actually supported Hitler's policies. So that, after the war, the church had no message. The church had no gospel. Today, the ancient church buildings are museums, and tourist attractions. The church in Germany betrayed itself, its message, its Christ, and the future. But in the middle of that darkness, God placed a light. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was by no means a perfect man. His own theology was initially influenced by the popular liberal rationalism of its day. But I am convinced that he discovered the gospel and that it changed his life.

The Life

Feb. 4, 1906--Dietrich and twin sister Sabine were born in Breslau, Germany on February 4, 1906. Dietrich and Sabine, were two of eight children born to Karl and Paula (von Hase) Bonhoeffer. Karl Bonhoeffer, a professor of psychiatry and Neurology at Berlin University, was Germany's leading empirical psychologist. When Dietrich announced to his family at age fourteen that he wanted to become a theologian, they were somewhat dismayed. They had been hoping he would become either a doctor or a lawyer and viewed a career in the church to be beneath him. However, their protests did nothing to shake his resolve, and his family eventually accepted his choice. Dietrich received his doctorate from Berlin University in 1927, and lectured in the theological faculty during the early thirties. He was ordained a Lutheran pastor in 1931, and served two Lutheran congregations, St. Paul's and Sydenham, in London from 1933-35.

1930-1931, Bonhoeffer spent a postgraduate year at Union Theological Seminary in New York. Bonhoeffer went to the United States as a guest of its best-known seminary. Union Seminary was a liberal seminary, and my guess is that they invited Bonhoeffer because he was a young German theologian who was already making a name for himself in Germany. Since Union was enamored with the German liberalism, this would be a fine addition to their school – at least they thought. It appears that God had other things in mind. Bonhoeffer took theology seriously and he was dismayed at the frivolity with which American students approached theology. At one point he informed the pastors-to-

be, "At this liberal seminary the students sneer at the fundamentalists in America, when all the while the fundamentalists know far more of the truth and grace, mercy and judgment of God." What had happened to this German? He was sounding more like one who believed in the fundamentals of the gospel, not like a modern German rationalist theologian.

Now, keep in mind that Dietrich at this time was 24 years old. His own theology was still in transition. His world-view while very German from his childhood, was being enlarged. When he went to New York, he did a very unusual thing. He went to church in Harlem. People, remember, this is 1930. This is Great Depression, pre-civil rights time. It was not chic, cool, or hip to go to an inner-city black church. But Bonhoeffer did. Here was this man, very white, very German, very young, without much rhythm, but with all of this education going to a church that was culturally and even theologically quite a bit different than he was. Although Bonhoeffer taught a ladies class, it was during this time, that Bonhoeffer came to understand the full impact of the gospel and how the gospel was not simply a theology to be understood, but was truth that had to be personally embraced. He later came to view this year as a turning point in his life. In America, God became real to him as never before and it wasn't at the seminary – it was in this church. When Dietrich returned to Germany after his year in America, his friends could immediately see he was different. "What is different? What happened in America?" they asked. His answer was simple. He told them, "I became a Christian in America."

Harlem had a tremendous impact on Bonhoeffer. It was here that he learned the spirituals. These were not the great hymns of the Lutheran church that had often been sung for tradition's sake, these were songs of the soul, born in adversity, sung in difficulty that spoke of a hope that transcended the inequities of this world. Bonhoeffer was so taken by the spirituals, that after he returned to Germany to teach in his seminary, he actually taught some of them to his German students.

Coming to America from Germany he was able to see things that perhaps others had become used to. He saw the unfairness of racism that his black friends in Harlem had to endure. Eventually, he was able to see the parallels between racism in America and racism in Germany, although it was easier for him to see it in America than it was for him to see it in his own country. Eventually he did. He returned to Germany.

On Aug. 1, 1931, he became a lecturer in theology at the University of Berlin. But even though he was a gifted scholar and professor, he remained a pastor at heart. By 1933 he had left university teaching behind and was the pastor to two German-speaking congregations in London, England. But by now the life-and-death struggle for the church in Germany was under way. As the power of the Nazi Party increased, persecution of Jews became common. The Civil Service Laws of 1933 stated that no one of Jewish descent could be a pastor, hold political office, or be a part of the German Christian church (Lutheran). The Nazis claimed that Jews had been cursed by God because they were responsible for killing Jesus. While some Germans thought this was absurd, many were looking for someone to blame for their country's problems, and the Jews were a convenient scapegoat. Jewish businesses were boycotted and Jews were openly harassed

on the streets of German cities. What would the church do? Would it speak out against this? Would it embrace this? Would it be silent?

Did the church live from the gospel only, or could the church lend itself to the state in order to reinforce the ideology of the state? Bonhoeffer argued that if the church became a tool of the state that it would render the church no church at all. But Lutheran bishops remained silent in the hope of preserving institutional unity, while most pastors fearfully whispered that there was no need to be rash and try to play the part of a hero. In the face of such ministerial cowardice Bonhoeffer warned his colleagues that they ought not to pursue converting Hitler; what they had to ensure was that they were converted themselves. An Anglican bishop who knew him well in England was later to write of him, "He was crystal-clear in his convictions; and young as he was, and humble-minded as he was, he saw the truth and spoke it with complete absence of fear." Bonhoeffer himself wrote to a friend about this time, "Christ is looking down at us and asking whether there is anyone who still confesses him."

How could the church compromise itself so much? Keep in mind that Bonhoeffer was young and single. He had no wife and children to think about, no home to worry about losing. He, in the minds of the established religious and older leaders could risk being daring and dangerous for he had nothing to lose. An older professor of theology who had conformed to Nazi ideology in order to keep his job commented, "It is a great pity that our best hope in the faculty is being wasted on the church struggle." The older men had salaries to protect, and, of course, pensions to guard. How many of you approaching retirement would be willing to stand for Christ if it meant losing your pension and health care coverage that you had worked for all these years? Do you begin to see why Bonhoeffer wrote about the cost of discipleship? "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

As the Nazi Party continued to gain power and popularity with the church and the German people, Bonhoeffer realized that he could not remain in the German Lutheran church. In 1934, 2000 Lutheran pastors organized the Pastors' Emergency League in opposition to the state church which was now controlled by the Nazis. This organization (Pastors Emergency League) evolved into the Confessing Church, a free and independent protestant church, which opposed Nazi policies and ideas. None of the seminaries in the country dared to join the confessing church. So...

Apr. 26, 1935- Dietrich established an underground seminary for the Confessing Church at Zingst, which in June moves to Finkenwalde.

The struggle between the national church (which supported Hitler) and the "confessing" church, intensified. The confessing church was called such because it confessed that there could be only one Fuehrer or leader for Christians, and it was not Hitler. The activities of the Confessing Church were virtually outlawed and its now five seminaries closed by the Nazis in 1937. As Hitler's power increased, so did the danger of disagreeing with him. Eventually, many members even of the Confessing Church chose to remain silent on Hitler's treatment of Jews rather than risk the consequences of openly

disagreeing with him. Bonhoeffer was both saddened and discouraged by the failure of his contemporaries to take a stand against the atrocities committed by the Nazi party.

1937--Finkenwalde Seminary closed by Gestapo; 27 former Finkenwalde students imprisoned; Dietrich publishes *Cost of Discipleship*

Feb. 1938--Makes first contact with conspirators in connection with political resistance against Hitler

Bonhoeffer became increasingly convinced that the Christian church had been "captured" by the Nazis. The Nazi symbol of power, the swastika, was glorified in the church. Pastors were considered state officials and in 1938, they were required to swear allegiance to the Nazi party. Many who refused to take this oath were arrested. Dietrich Bonhoeffer refused to take the oath because he believed Hitler was requiring allegiance from the church that only God had the right to claim. The Nazi party was turning the church into a political organization, but Bonhoeffer's objections were not merely political. The German Christian church of the Nazi Party made "cheap grace" available to all at no cost. They had watered down Christianity to such an extent that Bonhoeffer had to take a stand.

The racial violence peaked on the eve of November 9, 1938. Kristalnacht (Crystal Night) will be forever remembered as a night of violence against the Jewish people. Their businesses were looted and destroyed, their synagogues burned, and "patriotic" Germans attacked any Jews they could find on the streets. The fact that the violence was condoned by the German government and the German church appalled Dietrich Bonhoeffer and others who agreed with him.

Jun. 2, 1939--Leaves for New York City

Interestingly, Bonhoeffer had safely escaped the troubles in Europe and gone to teach in New York in June, 1939. He abruptly returned less than a month later saying: "I have had time to think and to pray about my situation, and that of my nation, and to have God's will for me clarified. I have come to the conclusion that I have made a mistake in coming to America. I shall have no right to participate in the reconstruction of the Christian life in Germany after the war if I did not share in the trials of this time with my people. Christians in Germany face the terrible alternative of willing the defeat of their nation in order that civilization may survive, or willing the victory of their nation and thereby destroying civilization. I know which of these alternatives I must choose. But I cannot make that choice in security." Bonhoeffer never regretted this decision.

Jul. 27, 1939--Returns to Germany and joins the political resistance

As violence against German Jews increased, Dietrich began to realize how much his beliefs differed from those of many of his countrymen. For him, Christianity meant community, and a Christianity that allowed and encouraged violence toward God's chosen people could not be true Christianity. Bonhoeffer condemned the church for standing by while Germany committed atrocities against innocent people who could not defend themselves.

Mar. 27, 1941--Forbidden to print or publish

Sep. 1941--Becomes part of Jewish rescue action (Operation 7)

Because Bonhoeffer was originally a pacifist and did not believe in war or violence, and could not with a clear conscience support Hitler's regime, he refused active service in the military when the Nazis instituted the draft. In an attempt to shield him from the wrath of the Nazi party, his brother-in-law Hans von Dohnanyi recruited him to work for the Abwehr, the German military intelligence agency. Dietrich soon discovered that many within the Abwehr were also part of the German resistance movement and were actively working against Hitler and plotting his assassination. He was greatly distressed, because while he hated what the Nazis were doing, he was committed to pacifism and did not believe that violence was the answer. How could he become involved in a plot to murder another human being?

He wrestled with this moral dilemma for many long days and nights. He believed murder was wrong, but Hitler was guilty of unspeakable atrocities against the Jews and others. When Bonhoeffer learned of the horror of the Nazi death camps, he came to the conclusion that he could no longer sit idly by while millions suffered because of Hitler's evil. Ironic as it may sound, part of his official government job was to represent the interests of the German state-religion to the other state-religious leaders. In reality he used this freedom to travel to make contacts on behalf of the struggling resistance. He was successful in helping to smuggle 14 Jews out of the country, 11 of whom were followers of Christ. He was also aware of a couple of plots to kill Hitler. These activities eventually caught up with him. On Apr. 5, 1943, at age 37, he was arrested and taken to Tegel Prison, Berlin; Dohnanyi and Dietrich's sister, Christine, also arrested.

While in prison the case against him was being established. He may have escaped execution, but when Admiral Canaris diary was discovered, which contained the information on the plots to kill Hitler and the people who were involved, Bonhoeffer's fate was sealed.

On April 9, 1945 (2 years and 4 days after his arrest) Dietrich Bonhoeffer was stripped naked and hung. A few days later, Allied forces reached that prison. And 21 days later, Hitler committed suicide.

While in prison, Bonhoeffer lived as a pastor. Those who were with him spoke of the ministry that he had not only to fellow inmates but to prison guards as well. In a letter smuggled out of prison Bonhoeffer showed no bitterness but rather explained how, "We in the resistance have learned to see the great events of world history from below, from the perspective of the excluded, the ill treated, the powerless, the oppressed and despised... so that personal suffering has become a more useful key for understanding the world than personal happiness." Captain Payne Best, an Englishman, survived to bear tribute to the prison-camp pastor: "Bonhoeffer was different, just quite calm and normal, seemingly perfectly at his ease. . . . His soul really shone in the dark desperation of our prison. He was one of the very few men I have ever met to whom God was real and ever

close to him." Bonhoeffer went calmly to his death. This morning as he was led out of his cell, he was observed by the prison doctor who said: "Through the half-open door I saw Pastor Bonhoeffer still in his prison clothes, kneeling in fervent prayer to the Lord his God. The devotion and evident conviction of being heard that I saw in the prayer of this intensely captivating man moved me to the depths."

Tonight, I will expose you more to what he taught and believed, particularly from what he wrote about the cost of discipleship.

But, for now I will conclude with these 3 important lessons.

When the church loses the gospel, the church loses its message, its heart and its future. As millions mourn the death of the pope, it is clearly not popular to point out that what he believed was not the gospel. That is hard to swallow and I do not relish saying that. I say it with a heavy heart. But there is something else that gives me a heavy heart. I appreciated the message that James White preached here last Sunday morning. But do you realize how few churches who claim to want to reach people for Christ, would allow that type of a message to be preached out of fear of offending someone? Why has the evangelical, protestant church become afraid of its own message? The answer is, the church is desperately trying to use the culture to win the culture.

When the church loses faith in the gospel, it surrenders itself to the message of the culture. These series of compromises rot away the foundation and then the future of that church. But God does not live in one denomination. The preaching of the gospel is like an awesome, roaring river that cannot be dammed up by liberalism, silenced by oppression, choked by bureaucracy or deadened by apathy. When one church loses sight of the true gospel and the priority of preaching that gospel, God raises up another church, another generation, another people. When one historic denomination caves in to the culture, God raises up another for the truth. God does not need America for the sake of the gospel. America needs the gospel and she needs to see it in her churches. Your world needs to see the gospel in your life, in your habits, in your marriage, in your values, in your priorities, in your passion.

Bonhoeffer died at 39. A tragedy? No, the tragedy is that some of you may live past 89 and never live for anything greater than yourself. Don't waste your life. Eternity is too long, and the glory of God is too great for you to live for self-protection.

"When Jesus bids a man come and follow him he bids him come and die."

"Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."
(Matthew 10.39)