

The Real Cost of Faith

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

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Like most things of faith, we find ourselves in a contradiction when we speak of the Kingdom of Heaven. It is clear from Paul's teaching that we have no **right** to heaven; nevertheless, we can experience the promised eternal life through God's gift to us. This is referred to as Grace, and it is a concept that underpins our understanding of the teachings of Christianity. We can not merit this through good works, although faith should drive us to undertake these, but simply put: If we believe in our hearts and confess with our lips that Jesus is Lord, then we will find Salvation.

God has made the offer, and it is up to us to respond – This is not about joining the church but rather personally receiving salvation. As some would say, accepting Jesus as our Lord and Saviour. But then we read today's Gospel.

Jesus is teaching about the Kingdom. And what does he say... It is like a treasure in a field or a pearl of incomparable quality. This kingdom is something that we discover, and it demands a response – Sell all in order to obtain the Kingdom. This gift that is the free blessing from Grace is not without Cost. Isaac Watts in his hymn – *When I Survey the Wonderful Cross* puts it this way.

Were the **whole** realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

The free gift (GRACE) has the cost - everything at its core. Need we say more?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer who was a German Lutheran martyred towards the end of World War Two by the Nazis wrote about what he saw as "Cheap Grace" in his book the *Cost of Discipleship*.

Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our Church. We are fighting today for costly grace. Cheap grace means grace sold on the market like cheap knock offs. The sacraments, the forgiveness of sin, and the consolations of religion are thrown away at cut prices. Grace is represented as the Church's inexhaustible treasury, from which she showers blessings with generous hands, without asking questions or fixing limits. Grace without price; grace without cost! The essence of grace, we suppose, is that the account has been paid in advance; and, because it has been paid, everything can be had for nothing...

Cheap grace means grace as a doctrine, a principle, a system. It means forgiveness of sins proclaimed as a general truth, the love of God taught as the Christian 'conception' of God. An intellectual assent to that idea is held to be of itself sufficient to secure remission of sins.... In such a Church the world finds a cheap covering for its sins; no contrition is required, still less any real desire to be delivered from sin. Cheap grace,

therefore, amounts to a denial of the living Word of God and the Incarnation of the Word of God.

Cheap grace means the justification of sin without the justification of the sinner. Grace alone does everything they say, and so everything can remain as it was before. 'All for sin could not atone.' Well, then, let the Christian live like the rest of the world, let him model himself on the world's standards in every sphere of life, and not presumptuously aspire to live a different life under grace from his old life under sin....

Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is preaching forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, and Communion without 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 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 disciple leaves his nets and follows him.

Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and 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. Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon his Son too dear a price to pay for our life but delivered him up for us. Costly grace is the Incarnation of God.

Costly grace is the sanctuary of God; it has to be protected from the world and not thrown to the dogs. It is therefore the living word, the Word of God, which he speaks as it pleases him. Costly grace confronts us as a gracious call to follow Jesus. It comes as a word of forgiveness to the broken spirit and the contrite heart. Grace is costly because it compels a man to submit to the yoke of Christ and follow him; it is grace because Jesus says: "My yoke is easy and my burden is light."

So, the Gospel then begs the question – what has my faith cost me? I am prepared to accept the benefits, but am I challenged by the price? What have I given? What have I given up for the sake of the Gospel. We are so privileged to have our Sister Frances (Cook) as one of our own. She illustrates for us the call upon the Christian searching for the Treasure. But do not be fooled – this is not a special calling to limited individuals. It is the calling for each of us seeking the Kingdom, demanding my soul, my life, my all. Anything less is not acceptable.

AMEN