

“Don’t ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.”  
– Howard Thurman

Consider for a moment, what would it take for you to turn to Jesus and see, to dwell deeply into the secret questions, fears and frustrations of your heart.

He asks simply what are we looking for? What does it mean to be a disciple? What does it mean to be the church? What does it mean to turn, learn, worship, pray, bless and to be sent into a broken world?

The way of love, the invitation Jesus presented his disciples was with risk: the risk of leaving their families, their occupations, whatever comfort they had. He offered them a new identity, a transformed way of being, one that was not tied to their privilege, language, homeland, color of their skin or their class.

He offered them a transformation of self and community, he asked of them a willingness to take a journey, to begin a pilgrimage, to come and see.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote the Cost of Discipleship during the rise of Nazism in Germany. He was critical of German Christians, who rallied in support of a state organized Aryan Christian Church of the Reich. Bonhoeffer wrote of them ‘the most understanding people here have lost their heads and their Bibles’. He continued:

Like ravens we have gathered around the carcass of cheap grace. A people became Christian, but at the cost of discipleship, we poured out rivers of grace without end, but the call to rigorously follow Christ was seldom heard. Our church’s predicament is proving more and more clearly to be

a question of how we are to live as Christians today. Bonhoeffer was hung in April of 1945.

Preachers are taught to hold the gospel in one hand and the news of the world in another. I am confident that you share with me an overwhelming sadness and anger at this time of a constitutional crisis in our country.

I have turned to Bonhoeffer often these past few weeks. What can we offer each other in these times of crisis, what are we called to do or to preach?

Bishop Tutu wrote:

I don't preach a social gospel, I preach the Gospel....when people were hungry Jesus did not say now is this political or social, he said I feed you, because the good news to a hungry person is bread.

Tutu helps me understand what Bonhoeffer means by cheap grace. We must be fed with the bread that we are hungry for, if it is not about love it is not about God. We are hungry for the bread of courage, wisdom and perseverance.

I remember clearly the news of the assassination of MLK. I was in college and had been making phone calls for the Bobby Kennedy primary campaign in California, it was around 5 PM. The campaign center came to a dead stop when the news was broadcast; we wept; we were angry, we were mesmerized with the news on TV.

The following day Bobby gave probably the most significant speech of his career when he stated:

For there is another kind of violence, slower but just as deadly, destructive as the shot or the bomb in the night. This is the violence of

institutions; indifference and inaction and slow decay. This is the violence that afflicts the poor, that poisons relations between men because their skin has different colors. This is a slow destruction of a child by hunger, and schools without books and homes without heat in the winter.

This is the breaking of a man's spirit by denying him the chance to stand as a father and as a man among other men. And this too afflicts us all.

As we know, RFK was assassinated two months later.

These deaths were pivotal in my life. I was clearly against the Viet Nam conflict, recognizing that it was both morally wrong and in direct conflict to my faith. How was I to push back against the violence of our empire and our own institutions. Was my radical political nature to become violent and disruptive, or non-violent and confrontive in the ways of MLK, Gandhi?

The summer following these deaths I began my process with the support of All Saints Episcopal in Pasadena to become in the eyes of the empire a conscientious objector, with a lifelong commitment to non violence. I remember praying with one of my mentors Malcolm Boyd, priest and poet the following:

*Help us to learn from you Jesus, how to keep on loving when we feel like hating. It's hard. Some of us have turned your cross into a symbol of hate. When the Klan burns a cross Christ the blasphemy of it startles me. Doesn't this mean in a very real sense joining the ranks of your own executioners?*

*The way of the Cross seems to be for every Christian the reality that dictates style of life, defines mission, and brings a person into communion with you.*

*Help me to bear my cross on the way of the cross.*

I chose the path of non-violence and make every effort to choose that path each and every day.

We Listened to the writings of a willing agitator of the gospel... excerpts written by Dr Martin Luther King JR in April of 1963 while in the Birmingham Jail. He left all that he had, followed Jesus, and showed us his courageous heart. He understood the cost of discipleship.

What does it mean to you to be a disciple of Jesus and to follow the way of love? Are you willing to become a thermostat, a Gospel Agitator?

Are we ready to become disciples? Are we willing to be put to work to transform a broken world and King suggests outside agitators?

Jesus offers an alternative path, a path of liberation. -- breaking the chains of social oppression, building a radically different sort of community.

It's a radicalizing journey of personal transformation: no longer simply observers on the sidelines.

Discipleship requires that we speak out, no longer standing on the sidelines, speaking out against all forms of violence, loving and confronting those with whom we disagree, and continuously beating our swords into plowshares.

Discipleship requires risk, releasing our status, letting go of the false security in our addictions to class, consumerism, and to a singular white privileged cultural experience.

Discipleship requires solidarity with the poor, the dreamers, the immigrant, the alien, abused and exploited women, those who have lost their way with a diet of cheap grace.

Discipleship requires confronting white privilege, dismantling racism in both our own selves as well as the deep seated and systemic racism of our society, corporations and government. It requires reparation for the benefits we have claimed provided by the servitude of others.

Discipleship requires prayer and worship, listening to the word, gathering around this table, and walking as a child of light in a dark and broken world.

Robert Heaney writes in his recent book, Post-Colonial Theology, “repentance is not about optics, is not about broadcasting a better message to society, it is not about managing a problem, it is not about progressive politics, it is not even about guilt for a community’s sin. It is about being humbled by the convicting work of the Holy Spirit.”

Discipleship is much more than cheap grace and a Sunday social club.

The gospel dares us to let our lives be disrupted by Jesus. We will feel the sting of discipleship, the gospel will come alive, and we will know what it means to be a disciple. As James Cone wrote in our reading for this morning, blacks and whites are bound together in America by faith and tragedy, we were made brothers and sisters by the blood of the lynching tree.