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The Rev. Lisa Graves
The cost of discipleship

In Paul's letter to the Galatians,
he writes that the freedom Christ
gives is not permission
to do whatever we want.
It is the ability to be
what we could not
be otherwise.

The power and guidance
of the Spirit produces
a different kind of life,
one marked by the qualities
Paul lists in this reading.

“Paul makes a radical call
to the people of Galatia
to be open to God's spirit
as a means of salvation.”
(Sundays and Seasons, June 2007)

Jesus also issues
a radical call.
He sets his own face
toward Jerusalem
and his purpose there.

He turns the faces of the disciples
away from their own
desires and interests
and toward their neighbors,
and the world.
With urgency.

Proclamation comes first
at the expense of family,
friends and personal wishes.

In short, our gospel tells us
that discipleship is costly.
Following Jesus may cost us
Our family relationships and ties,
It may cost us society's approval
It may ask us to do things
that are counter cultural.

This was certainly true for
The early Christians
Who lived on the fringes of
a Jewish culture that found
Jesus' claim to messiah ship
crazy at best
and criminal at worst.

And the ancient communities
Argued amongst themselves.
Take Galatia, which is now
central Turkey.
In Paul's time,
there were some
that claimed that
those who wanted
to follow Christ
must first embrace Judaism,
observing the Mosaic law,
being circumcised
and celebrating
the Jewish feasts.

Paul rebuts this argument
in the letter we read today.
He insists that Jesus'
life and ministry
unfettered his church
from the law and gave them
union with God
through Christ himself,

not through ritual
and obedience.

Anglican author Chris Haslam,
believes that “the book of Galatians
is a charter of Christian liberty;
it was instrumental
in transforming Christianity
from a sect of Judaism
into a world religion.”

But this liberty has a cost.
You are freed from the Law
But not freed from
the call of true discipleship.
In today’s gospel Jesus
Tells his disciples that to follow him
Is to be a nomad of evangelism,
And takes priority over
Those we love and the duties we claim.

To follow Jesus
meant leaving behind
your family alliances,
your inheritance,
your heritage
even the security
of your livelihood.
You were an outcast.

Today we are increasingly finding
that being a Christian
is radically different
from our own cultural norm.

Our Secular society views
religion and faith with suspicion --
and those who profess their faith
are seen as freakishly zealous or
hopelessly naïve.

To truly follow Christ
is to live the life
of a resident alien
in the world.

We are both a part of the world,
and apart from the world.

For as Christians
we should make our choices
about marriage, parenting,
money, charity and life priorities
based on the vows of our baptism
and the deeply held
tenants of our faith.

Living in this way
makes us vastly counter cultural
in a world that values
money over people
and success over outreach.
But Jesus tells us
that if we are living our faith
we will be in conflict
with the ones we love
and the world we live in.

Jesus did not come into our world
to make everybody happy.

He came to give us life --
He came to give us freedom,
to fill us with courage and faith
and to set us on a mission
of world-wide,
earth shattering importance.
Proclaiming the good news
To all people.

He asks us to renounce
all that we love,
all that we love
and to love all that is left.

To go out into the world,
the world that does not
welcome us or know us
and care for his suffering people.

What he asks of us is costly.
Often in the church
when we talk about
the high cost of discipleship
the talk about Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a
Lutheran pastor and theologian,
and a leader against Hitler
and the Nazis in the 1930s and 40s.
He was a popular preacher
and teacher in his ministry.
And he spent several year-long studies
in the United States
at Union Seminary in NY.

Each time he left
to go back to Germany
his colleagues would urge him
to stay in the United States.
Each time he would
admit his regrets --
for he loved New York,
and the church
he attended in Harlem
and his colleagues
at the seminary --
but each time he left
saying his place in life
was in his country,

helping his countrymen
escape the madness that was coming.

When Hitler took control of Germany
in 1933 he took over
the Christian churches as well.
Bonhoeffer was dangerously
vocal in his opposition.

In 1934 a group of Lutheran pastors
Including Bonhoeffer,
organized themselves
in opposition to the Nazi run church
Creating what they called
the confessional church,
an independent protestant church
that resisted both
collaboration with the state church
with the Nazi government
and the racist nationalism
of the Nazi movement.

Later Bonhoeffer joined the resistance
and was part of a plot
to execute Hitler
and negotiate peace.
The plot failed.

In April of 1943
he was arrested
and spent his last
two years in prison,
doing some of his best,
and most acclaimed work.

He was executed on April 9.
Bonhoeffer was an advocate
of grace discipleship,
costly grace, and costly discipleship.

What does this mean?
The easiest answer is to
first look at the opposite.
Let's consider what cheap grace
or cheap discipleship might be.

In his book "The Cost of Discipleship"
Bonhoeffer says that
"Cheap grace means
grace as bargain basement goods,
cut-rate forgiveness,
cut rate comfort,
cut rate sacraments.
Grace is doled out
by careless hands
without hesitation or limit.

It is grace without a price,
without cost.
Cheap grace means
justification of sin,
but not of the sinner.

Because grace alone
does everything,
everything can stay
in its old ways.

Thus, as Christians
we can live
the same way the world does.
We can go along with the world
and not even try
to live a different life
under grace
than the life we might live under sin.

Writing from prison,
Bonhoeffer said that
cheap grace is

wanting forgiveness
without repentance;
it is seeking the solace
of the lords' supper
without the confession of sin;

Cheap grace is grace
without discipleship,
grace without the cross,
grace without the living,
incarnate Jesus Christ.

So what then is costly grace?
Bonheoffer says "costly grace
is the hidden treasure in the field,
for the sake of which
people go and sell with joy
everything they have.

It is Christ's sovereignty
for the sake of which
you tear out an eye
if it causes you to stumble.

It is the call of Jesus Christ
which causes a disciple
to leave his nets and follow him."

To leave his family
without a goodbye,
To leave the burying of bones
to those not called.

Bonheoffer says "it is costly
because it calls to discipleship;
and it is grace because
it calls us to follow
Jesus Christ.
It is costly because

it costs people their lives;
it is grace because it
thereby makes them live.

Above all, grace is costly,
because it was costly to God.
because it cost God
the life of God's son.”