

Do justice. Love kindness. Walk Humbly.

I am nearing the end of my assignment here at All Saints. So I wanted to take this opportunity to tell you how much I have appreciated the warmth and hospitality you have shown me here. I thank each of you for making me feel so welcome and your kind words of support as I move to my next assignment. Thank you for being my teachers. And, thank you for putting up with my gaffs and stumbles. After all it only took me 16 times to finally get the whole Gospel reading right. I do not believe this is the end of ministry with All Saints. I have no doubt that we will be together again as we continue to do Christ's work in the world.

When Fr Flowers asked me to do the homily for today, I happened to be right in the middle of a biography of Dietrich Bonhoeffer - the German theologian who was executed for his opposition to Adolph Hitler and the Third Reich. Since the Sermon on the Mount was central to Bonhoeffer's Theology and I was immersed in it - it only seemed right for that to be my starting point today.

In considering the Beatitudes, Bonhoeffer asks us to take the perspective of someone hearing Jesus' teaching for the first time. As we join the crowd coming to hear this itinerant teacher and healer, we see that his companions are with him. They seem to be ordinary men - no different than the crowd waiting to hear their leader. Jesus sits and begins to speak to the crowd.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit...

"Blessed are those who mourn...

"Blessed are the meek (or humble)...

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness...

"Blessed are the merciful...

"Blessed are the pure in heart...

"Blessed are the peacemakers...

Bonhoeffer suggests that Jesus is speaking of the disciples here. He is holding them up as a model for us of ideal discipleship. But they are just an ordinary group of people - nothing obviously exceptional. Yet, Jesus uses them for an example. Does this mean I could be one, too?

It seems an impossible. To give up everything; to be humble; to make peace; to mourn; to suffer... And we know the disciples did not always live up to it either. Remember Peter - always wanting to be the favorite? Or Judas? But, this is what Christ asks of all of us who love him. This is what Bonhoeffer calls discipleship.

According to Bonhoeffer, discipleship is not a pathway to heaven. The use of the word "will" may make it seem that way. But salvation still comes by grace. Just a few verses earlier Jesus tells the disciples that the Kingdom of God is near. So as we strive to be disciples, we are bringing the Kingdom into the present. We are drawing it near. The result of this striving is what Bonhoeffer calls *costly grace*. Costly grace results from action; cheap grace is the result of belief. St. James said something similar - that faith without works is dead faith.

A few years ago I was at a political event where the keynote speaker was Stephen Black, the grandson of Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black. The subject was social justice. As he talked about the role of churches in a call to action he asked a question that got my attention. He said, "When did charity become a substitute for good works?" That is the difference between cheap grace and costly grace. Cheap grace gets us no closer to manifesting the kingdom. But each time we reach for the ideal - each time we take discipleship seriously - we move closer. That is what is important.

No one likes to admit settling for cheap grace, but I think we all do at one time or another. I read with a student at an elementary school. Right now we are reading a book about

space aliens who look like Coke machines who make contact with a sandlot baseball team for the purpose of learning to play baseball. The aliens had been observing Earth for quite a while and decided that baseball was the only thing we had to offer that they wanted. The team members introduced themselves to the aliens, as well-mannered children would do, and then asked for the names of the alien team members. The leader explained that their names were unpronounceable in our language, but they had chosen names that the team could relate to based on their observations of us. The leader then introduced himself as McDonald. The next one was named Domino. Hardee was next, followed by Taco Bell, Burger King, Pizza Hut... You get the point. I hate to think what an alien would choose from observing my life. I probably wouldn't like it. Cheap grace shows.

But we can continue to embrace the ideal even though we too often fall short. Henri Nouwen put it so eloquently:

Wherever we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the lonely, listen to those who are rejected and bring unity and peace to those who are divided, we proclaim the living Christ - whether we speak about him or not. It is important that whatever we do and wherever we go, we remain in the Name of Jesus, who sent us. Outside his Name our ministry will lose its divine energy.

What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? Amen