

Donnybrook

19 September 2021

Welcome

As we listen to Mark's teaching on being a follower of Jesus in Mark 8-10, you could be tempted to think of a handbook on how to lose friends and not influence people. He makes it all sound so tough, so costly, in a word so unattractive really. You might think, if it's going to be like that, why bother?

Topic

A story from recent history may inspire.

Steps

In Germany, during WWII, there was small but significant Christian opposition to the barbarity of the Nazis. One figure was outstanding: a Lutheran pastor called Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He was against the Nazi regime from the very start. At one point, the official German Christians (Deutsche Christen) wanted to remove not only all pastors of Jewish descent but also the Old Testament from the Bible. A Bonhoeffer himself wrote: to do nothing is to act. Under extreme pressure, a church union called the Confessing Church was established, supported at great personal risk by Bonhoeffer. That risk took the form of underground seminaries, preaching and publishing. From his experience he wrote a Christian classic: *The Cost of Discipleship*. He knew what he was talking about.

Eventually, towards the end of the war, there was a plot to kill Hitler on 20 July 1944. Bonhoeffer was found guilty by association and sentenced to death. He was led away to his execution as he conducted his final service in prison and he left a message with a fellow English prisoner: "this is the end: for me the beginning of life." Eventually, his letters and papers from prison were published, a great Christian classic and very moving to read. Today, a statue of Dietrich Bonhoeffer stands in façade of Westminster Abbey, a symbol of Anglican generosity of spirit.

Bonhoeffer was willing to be a disciple to the very end. At the centre of his faith, stood the figure of Jesus: his joyfulness, his penetrating teaching, his compassion, his freedom, his capacity to cut through nonsense, his vision of a renewed humanity and, above all, his vision of God as Abba, father. Bonhoeffer believed in salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus, the great events that give us new life in Christ. And finally, as a good Lutheran Christian, Bonhoeffer believed all was grace, all was gift, in spite of the evidence to the contrary.

The vision is there: upending the usual way of seeing things – a paradox, which brings with it the deepest way of being human, that is unbounded love, a new horizon and a decisive direction, leading ultimately to life-affirming witness which still speaks today.

Conclusion

As we ponder our own path of discipleship, the teaching of Jesus stands before us – visionary yet daunting. Figures such as Bonhoeffer illustrate the cost of discipleship in an extreme historical context. In less dramatic circumstances, each one of us is called to unconditional love, to permanent conversion of heart and life, to service without counting the cost, in a word, to the following of Jesus with our whole being. Why is it like this? Discipleship goes deep because God loves all that we are and desires a response from deep within ourselves/myself, “costing not less than everything” for the love of God and neighbour.