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Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Community and Discipleship, As Emphasized and Applied in the Life and Mission of a Covenant Church

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DIETRICH BONHOEFFER
COMMUNITY AND DISCIPLESHIP

**As Emphasized and Applied
in the Life and Mission
of a Covenant Church**

**A Thesis Presented to the Faculty of
Luther Theological Seminary
and the
Minnesota Consortium of Seminary Faculties**

**In Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirements for
The Doctor of Ministry Degree**

by

Ronald F. Christian

1979

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RuthAnna Walker--a typist of no common ability, a translator of what often seemed a manuscript written in some foreign language, a happy office partner

The parish members of Lord of Life Lutheran Fellowship--they have graciously let me continue to experiment risk, and drop the name of Dietrich Bonhoeffer in many classes and sermons. Especially named for assistance in this study are Bill Bangert and Bill Garrett

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Forrest and Charlotte Christian--my parents, who were first used by God to call me to discipleship and who first taught me about community in a family of love and forgiveness

Judy--my wife and gift from God, whose praises I affectionately sing, and for whose support, through all of this and more, I offer genuine thanks.

RONALD F. CHRISTIAN

May 1979

PREFACE

As a young college student in the late 50's, I first became acquainted with the name Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The first of his books that caught my eye and captured my attention was The Cost of Discipleship. Like so many others, that book made a lasting impression on my thinking. I read more of Bonhoeffer, first in the less technical volumes of Life Together and Letters and Papers From Prison, and later, in elective classes at seminary, I worked my way through his more difficult material, The Communion of Saints, Act and Being, and Ethics. Now I have read all the Bonhoeffer writings that are published in English and, in the process of completing this thesis/project, many of the secondary sources as well. It is very apparent to me that while I may have scratched the surface in one area of this thought, there is much left to be understood and much more of his theology with which I have yet to be confronted. One never knows while studying Bonhoeffer whether he or she is affected most by his life or by his words. It is certain, however, that they do not conflict with each other. Bonhoeffer's life was his theology and vice versa.

As both a seminarian and now pastor, I have been continually impressed with his two best known books, Life

Together and The Cost of Discipleship. These two books have, to a large degree, shaped my theology and understanding of the church. They have affected my preaching, my pastoral ministry, and my personal life. They have also shaped the nature and style of the parish I serve as pastor. It is my opinion that through this parish, these books, and therefore Bonhoeffer's theology, have also affected the lives of many who have been a part of this congregation through the ten years of its history.

There is good reason to suggest that one should not limit the study of a theologian to a portion of his writings. That reasoning infers that without the whole corpus of an individual's writings, misinterpretations are possible and false information is likely. Surely Bonhoeffer has been misinterpreted in the past as a result of just such an error. Yet, parameters must be set unless one is attempting a definitive work. My parameters are the two volumes which have had the most use and impact for me in my work as a parish pastor.

The Cost of Discipleship is a book of Biblical studies done in homily fashion of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5, 6, and 7. In addition to these studies are the essays on the nature of Grace and the Church. These Biblical studies form the bulk of the works and the basis of an ethic of discipleship. My reflection on discipleship, in addition to a theological assessment in Unit I, will consist

of an essay on the importance of preaching and Biblical studies done in homily style on the same text with implications on the meaning of discipleship today. Those sermons, though not in their original form, were delivered as part of a special study/emphasis program at my parish, Lord of Life Church.

Life Together is a book of reflections on what the community at the Bruderhaus in Finkenwalde was like. The chapters are simply essays from the pen of Bonhoeffer on the meaning of community. The section on community in this thesis/project includes a theological discussion of the setting and situation about which this book was written. In addition, four essays are submitted which are the compiled oral and written comments of a majority of congregation members who willingly restudied this book during a special class. The essays are not theological discourses as much as they are the common impressions of people who struggle daily with the task of living together. In those common impressions, however, there appear some weighty theological issues. Like the book, these essays simply reflect this congregation's ideas as recorded through the filter of my listening, rewriting, compiling, and editing.

Having set the parameters of the task, you are invited to share my experience with the works of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the exposure of one congregation to his compelling theology.

Ronald F. Christian

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INTRODUCTION

For what reason would a parish in Fairfax, Virginia, United States of America, make the study of a deceased Lutheran pastor of Berlin, Germany, a part of its history and life? Are there not other more prolific writers? Are there not other more contemporary authors? Are there not other less controversial and more main-stream thinkers? Why would Dietrich Bonhoeffer be the name heard on the lips of these non-trained theologians and the book, Life Together, on the book shelves of every member? There can be but one; Dietrich Bonhoeffer challenges one's faith by his words, life, and death like few other human beings have. He has not been elevated to deity and would (this writer thinks) not be happy to have his name included on the list of "saints." He simply sought to live out the Christian faith and to be true to his interpretation of discipleship. That he did is for all readers to judge for themselves. This writer has judged that he did.

There is no more stirring tribute to Dietrich Bonhoeffer than the one delivered by his friend, confidant, co-worker, and student, Eberhard Bethge, on the occasion of three lectures he delivered on the topic, "The Challenge of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Life and Theology." One cannot say of

Bonhoeffer that he was a teacher,

. . . for the officially licensed professorial chair was his for only two years. At the age of thirty he was barred from his academic post; when he was thirty-four, the pulpit was closed to him; at thirty-five, written publication was forbidden; and, with his imprisonment at thirty-seven, even conversation with his friends was denied him. Yet, each time this narrowing circle came closer, his acting and thinking gained power and stretched into new dimensions. When he was silenced for good at thirty-nine, he began to speak more loudly than ever before.¹

Bonhoeffer said that "cheapness was blasphemous" (a concept about which more will be said), and if that word can be strongly said in the life of the Church today, we will have learned a great lesson and Bonhoeffer will have had his circle of influence enlarged one more time. Little did he know that a group of young struggling Christians in a suburb of Washington, D. C., would be touched and influenced by his life and words.

This thesis/project seeks to reflect on the influence of Bonhoeffer in the life and mission of a congregation. That influence has been felt most keenly in the areas of community and discipleship. The source for this emphasis has come from Bonhoeffer's two books, Life Together and The Cost of Discipleship. The thesis is that through the significant emphasis that has been placed on those two concepts during both the formative stages of this congrega-

¹Ronald Gregor Smith, ed. and with Introduction by ed., World Come of Age (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), p. 22.

tion and the present, certain results occurred in the congregation that would not otherwise have been accomplished. Those results are seen in the communal life and the missional discipline of the parish. This thesis/project is not a sociological study of this church. Nor is it a statistical evaluation of the church with control groups, random sampling, and comparative analysis. It is the story of one congregation and the story forms the background for the thesis. The project is reflected in the group studies that took place on both themes, community and discipline. These special studies are included here as the essays on community and the sermons on discipleship. The studies were done during the years 1976-78.

The results of this thesis/project are less quantitative than qualitative. Nevertheless, statistical reports, magazine articles, and personal testimonies will be included as evidence to support the thesis. These evidences will also show the value of this project to the ongoing life and mission of this congregation.

To accomplish the task, critique and challenge the thesis, and evaluate the project, a team of six individuals gave their valuable time and considerable talents. They are listed below with the appreciation of the author.

Peer Advisors

Rev. Arne Christianson,
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DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

A Brief Biography

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was born February 4, 1906, in Breslau, Germany (now Poland), to Karl and Paula (von Hesse) Bonhoeffer. His early home, after the family moved from Breslau, was suburban Berlin. Here he was educated in that city's famed university. He was a scholar, theologian, pastor, and friend. He died a martyr on Sunday, April 8, 1945.

This abbreviated vita gives enough information to tell anyone who might read it some of the important facts of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's life. Interested individuals have written volumes in the attempt to understand better, learn more, and somehow experience, if not first-hand at least vicariously, the mind and thought of this German Lutheran pastor. The only one who could adequately write a thorough biography of Bonhoeffer, Eberhard Bethge, has done just that in the monumental work, Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Man of Vision, Man of Courage, a volume which New York Times' essayist, George Steiner, said "is one of the few assured classics of our age, inexhaustible and uncompromising, . . ." ¹

It is not, then, the intention of this writer to

¹New York Times, 9 December 1977, p. 38.

escape a task since a complete or even lengthy biography of the man is not proposed. That has been done, and any reader who desires the complete Bonhoeffer biography should consult Bethge's work. The pursuit of Bonhoeffer in this thesis really settles squarely into a period of four years, 1935-39, and so to make this study realistic in its scope, it shall be confined to the time of Bonhoeffer's life that lie within those years. This is surely not to suggest that other periods are unimportant or even less important. Certainly, a case could be made for saying the final two years of Bonhoeffer's life were the most crucial, for they were the ones spent in Nazi prison camps and from which comes perhaps his most widely read material, Letters and Papers From Prison. While reference may be made throughout this study to that collection of letters, the concern here is really with two early books, both of which come out of the 1935-39 time frame, The Cost of Discipleship and Life Together. There are few people of whom it would be more accurately stated that to know the writings one must first know the man. In truth, Bonhoeffer's great contribution to the Christian faith and thought is that he lived out what he wrote. His life and thought are inseparably intertwined. He walked his talk. Brief biographical information follows.

Following a two-year pastorate in London, Bonhoeffer returned to Germany during the Easter school recess in 1935.

There was to be a new seminary begun, a preachers' seminary as it was called, and the first vicars were already arriving. The preachers' seminary consisted of a group of candidates who were preparing themselves for ordination and who would now live together in a "communal setting" to study, read, reflect, and, in general, ready themselves for the task of pastoring a congregation. Bonhoeffer had been selected to be the "theologian in residence" for this small group (twenty-five) of candidates. Bethge says that this "compact, closed circle of students enabled him to devote all his energies to his new theological theme, discipleship."² The style with which he led this seminary was a unique feature for all those who participated. Students were surprised at the availability of the director. This seminary was in stark contrast to the old and well-known "establishment" seminaries, such as, Loccum, Wittenberg, or the Berlin Cathedral Seminary. Because this preachers' seminary had been set up by the "Confessing Church"³ in opposition to the state-controlled Deutsche Church Seminary, they were banned on the day of their official inauguration, November 1, 1935, and so

²Eberhard Bethge, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, ed. Edwin Robertson, trans. Eric Mosbacher, Peter and Betty Ross, Frank Clarke, William Glen-Doepel (New York and Evanston, Ill.: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 341.

³The Confessing Church was an alternative to the Deutsche Church brought about by the controversy surrounding Jewish participation in it.

operated from the outset in an underground position. That position became its very strength for soon this and other seminaries like it became important centers of theology and were able to carry on their work, initially, rather unmolested and with few interruptions. While banned, they were considered to be of no threat to the state or the German Christians (Deutsche Church). It was during this time that the Confessing Church reached its peak in organizational development.

During Bonhoeffer's pastorate in London, the Sermon on the Mount had become of particular interest to him. It is natural and understandable, then, why the theme of discipleship, which was the mainstream of the community in the Finkenwalde experiment, became the basis of Bible studies, sermons, and other discussions for the students. Later, these studies and sermons were compiled in a book, published under the title Nachfolge in 1937. Written during the 1935-37 years, it is a response to the nationalist furor and irresponsibility to social concern, though it never directly mentions the political upheaval of the time. The seminarians not only listened to Bonhoeffer exegete the Sermon on the Mount through this study, they learned something of the meaning of it in the lifestyle of their mentor himself. They in turn took on some of the characteristics themselves.

Following the demise of the seminary at the hands

of the Gestapo in September 1937, the next months were engaged in relaxation, study, and some family visiting, so that one year later, September 1938, Bonhoeffer was busy in the study of his brother-in-law writing a little book which was to be a reflection on the days at Finkenwalde. The volume was never intended to have widespread distribution. Not even considered to be altogether necessary or important by Bonhoeffer, it later became the single most widely read and popular book from Dietrich's pen. Entitled Gemeinsames Leben, it was published in English in 1939 under the title, Life Together. It is a book which has become both a theological classic and a devotional gem. Read by clergy as well as lay, it has had an impact on people's lives and thought far beyond either its size (122 pages) would indicate or its initial purpose would dictate. The entire volume was written during a three-week period. It was done at the insistence of the Confessing Church since it was feared that all records would be confiscated or destroyed by the state authorities. Indeed, the pressure from those demanding it and the fear of what could happen if he didn't write it probably are the reasons we have it at all. It is doubtful that Bonhoeffer would have thought such a reflection to be necessary or useful were the decision left entirely to him. In the midst of a national crisis, as well as the ecumenical pressures, it hardly seemed to him to be a valuable use of time. Nevertheless, at the insistence of some, he fulfilled

their request, and we are the grateful beneficiaries.

If this thesis were to include a thorough biography of Bonhoeffer, the period after 1939, because of its importance, would have to be sketched. Indeed, occasional reference will be made to the letters and papers of the war years, but the purpose here has been to note the setting for the two works critical to this project. Beyond this, let it suffice to make note of the tribute made to Bonhoeffer by Payne Best, the British officer imprisoned with him. He said, "Bonhoeffer always seemed to me to spread an atmosphere of happiness and joy over the least incident and profound gratitude for the mere fact that he was alive. . . . He was one of the very few persons I have ever met for whom God was real and always near."⁴ He died at the gallows on April 8, 1945, at the Flossenburg prison camp. It was Sunday, and the text for the day read, " . . . and with his stripes we are healed."⁵ And so it is that on the small marker at a village church in Flossenburg, these words are inscribed:

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a witness of Jesus Christ
among his brethren. Born February 4, 1906, in
Breslau. Died April 9, 1945, in Flossenburg.

⁴Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together, trans. and with an Introduction by John W. Doberstein (New York and Evanston, Ill.: Harper & Row, 1954), p. 13.

⁵Is. 53:5 (RSV).

LORD OF LIFE

A Short History

In the summer of 1969 the Home Mission Board of The American Lutheran Church determined through the customary demographic studies that a congregation could and should be formed in the Burke section of Fairfax County, Virginia. Upon receipt of a Call from the Mission Board, the writer began his new work. His last responsibility had been in the academic field as pastor/teacher in a parochial high school. The task was made difficult because the student body was largely comprised of students from urban areas whose educational interest was not in books, but in life. That background, however, provided a reservoir of experience for the new endeavor. At Burke, there was a job to do that had a clearly discernible goal and purpose: to gather a community of people together where no community henceforth had existed and to do it within the perimeters of Christian discipline and the Lutheran confessions.

The early stages of mission development proved to be largely public relations which involved contacting as many people as possible. Worship began on the second Sunday of September 1969 in a building that was nearing completion. This congregation was one of the last "package missions"

which meant that a group of people found themselves with a pastor and a building at about the same time. With the cooperation of those who wished to affiliate with the church, the building was painted, tile was laid on the floor, altar furniture was constructed, and the outside landscaped. It was in the experience of working together, as well as worshipping together, that a strong community was formed which became the basis of a style of fellowship for the future life of this congregation. Indeed, the very name of the church speaks about both the community and the discipleship of Christian living--Lord of Life Lutheran Fellowship.

Growth was not slow in coming. Vitality, it is true, cannot always be documented in statistics. In this case, however, the figures representing both people and dollars indicate a steady increase from which one could deduce, among other things, that the needs of some people were being met through the ministry of others bonded in fellowship at Lord of Life. Comments from people who were part of the original thirty-five families indicate the priority that community spirit and fellowship had for them.¹

The facts and figures of the congregation's growth can be substantiated and summarized.²

¹These comments, together with other statistical information will be a part of Unit IV, Chapter 7, and the Appendixes.

²Graphic charts and capsule-sized descriptions are found in the Appendixes.

A major difference in this congregation and others was the "covenant" style of membership. At planning meetings of the initial Advisory Committee, it was decided that this congregation, made up of relatively young (median age in 1969 was thirty-three years old) people, should experiment with various forms and styles of worship, stewardship, education, and membership. To reach that goal a covenant was drawn up by the committee stating the meaning of the Christian faith in simple and concise terms which would speak to the disciplines that were involved when one espoused that faith. The covenant was intended to be re-evaluated yearly and was, therefore, not given "cannonical" status. That covenant is as follows:

Accepting each other as fellow creatures of God and seeking to be God's people and do His will, we hereby make this covenant of intent making us one with the fellowship which confesses Jesus Christ as Lord of our lives:

1. To faithfully worship and commune together,
2. To participate in and financially support the activities of the fellowship and the American Lutheran Church,
3. To make a personal commitment to become involved in the needs of the community, and
4. To maintain a relationship with God through prayer.

The characteristics of a congregation using a covenant are many. One is that a high number of families of religious plurality are a part of this congregation. Those mixed families may well have one partner Catholic and the other Protestant, as well as combinations of Protestant denomina-

tions. As a matter of fact, this congregation has been recognized by our denominational office for its effective ministry with and to non-Lutherans.³ During the years these families are in this area they have found this community of Christians to be a place where they can share their faith with others and grow personally as well. Time and time again couples have offered the opinion that for the first time in their married lives they have been able to worship together. The freedom the Covenant provides to join a congregation, worship together, and still retain ties with one's former denomination has been a factor in the growth of the parish.

Another characteristic of the covenant membership has been that the commitment is for a one-year period of time. The four disciplines are to be maintained for one church year. Advent offers the opportunity to decide whether or not to continue membership in the fellowship. That factor has been freeing for both member and pastor. The member knows the tenure of his or her commitment, and the pastor never has to exercise the responsibility of "cleaning out the dead wood" from the congregational roster. While the Covenant has been useful and beneficial to Lord of Life, it is not the sine qua non of the church

³The Office of the President of the ALC indicates in a letter that Lord of Life was one of ten congregations which has showed significant increase in membership through non-Lutheran accessions.

at large. It has its drawbacks and limitations (i.e., the mechanics of a large congregation having each of the 5000 members renew a covenant each year might be unworkable), but the shortfalls do not seem to outweigh the strengths.

The Covenant is explained to each prospective member at a "covenant meeting." The explanation, while not lengthy, covers the statement of faith and each of the disciplines to a greater or lesser degree. For instance, each person is reminded of the fact that while each one is expected to follow the disciplines, no records are kept of worship attendance, pledged amounts, community involvement, or personal meditation. That should not relieve them of their responsibility, but increase it. Commitment of financial resources is put on an equal level of importance with commitment to regular worship. Each is important and each is to be taken seriously. A very clear delineation of these responsibilities is set forth at this meeting. Joining the congregation, then, consists normally of being introduced at a worship service and publicly signing the covenant board which includes the signatures of all members.

The theological component of this covenant has never been taken lightly. Part of the task of the original members who drafted the covenant was the reading of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's little book, Life Together. Since that time every person who has been a part of this congregation (now something over

twelve hundred in number) has become acquainted with Bonhoeffer through the reading of this book. One paragraph in particular has been the devotional piece with which each covenant meeting has begun. Its impact on this congregation has been so great that the entire paragraph is included here to set the stage for the remainder of this thesis:

In the Christian community thankfulness is just what it is anywhere else in the Christian life. Only he who gives thanks for little things receives the big things. We prevent God from giving us the great spiritual gifts He has in store for us, because we do not give thanks for daily gifts. We think we dare not be satisfied with the small measure of spiritual knowledge, experience, and love that has been given to us, and that we must constantly be looking forward eagerly for the highest good. Then we deplore the fact that we lack the deep certainty, the strong faith, and the rich experience that God has given to others, and we consider this lament to be pious. We pray for the big things and forget to give thanks for the ordinary, small (and yet really not small) gifts. How can God entrust great things to one who will not thankfully receive from Him the little things? If we do not give thanks daily for the Christian fellowship in which we have been placed, even where there is no great experience, no discoverable riches, but much weakness, small faith, and difficulty; if on the contrary, we only keep complaining to God that everything is so paltry and petty, so far from what we expected, then we hinder God from letting our fellowship grow according to the measure and riches which are there for us all in Jesus Christ.⁴

For those who availed themselves of the special opportunities for learning and growth offered from time to time, a quickening of theological interest and insight has occurred. While it certainly is true that other theologians have been introduced to the congregation, it can be said

⁴Bonhoeffer, Life Together, p. 29.

unequivocally that none has had the emphasis of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

From the outset, the congregation took on the characteristic of persons honestly caring for one another. Caring has great Biblical basis (John 15:12-17), as well as a strong basis from Bonhoeffer's theology. Bonhoeffer seemed to add a third "means of grace" in addition to the two classical "means" by which God's grace comes to people (Word and Sacraments). The third, for Bonhoeffer, was community. It has been suggested (by Bethge, among others) that such an assumption is not far wrong, if at all. The Apology to the Augsburg Confession hints at such a stance itself throughout Articles VII and VIII.⁵ Indeed, more will be said about this, but for now it should be noted that Bonhoeffer put "community" into practice at the Bruderhaus in Finkenwalde. Bethge quotes a letter to W. Staemmler wherein Bonhoeffer outlines the responsibilities of those who wish to become a member of this community:

There are two things the brethren have to learn during their short time in the seminary--first, how to lead a communal life in daily and strict obedience to the will of Christ Jesus, in the exercise of the humblest and highest service one Christian brother can perform for another; they must learn to recognize the strength and liberation to be found in brotherly service and

⁵Theodore G. Tappert, trans. and ed., The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, Muhlenberg Press, 1959), pp. 568-610.

communal life in a Christian community.⁶

The conviction of this writer is that a sound theology is necessary before one establishes a good stewardship emphasis, youth programs, or homiletical style. We have attempted to take no short cuts in reaching this sound theological stance, and it is rooted in Bonhoeffer's Life Together.

The other great theme of Bonhoeffer, which we, as a congregation, have tried to take seriously, is discipleship. While it appears in his writings at many places, it gets primary attention in the volume The Cost of Discipleship. That book clearly ushered Bonhoeffer into the company of the more popular devotional writers and great theologians of this century. For the Lutheran community of believers to read the statement of Bonhoeffer's, "We Lutherans have gathered like eagles round the carcass of cheap grace, and there we have drunk of the poison which has killed the life of following Christ,"⁷ is to leave an indelible mark on their minds. One may or may not agree, but nevertheless, if heard, the statement must be contemplated. In this writer's formative theological life, the statement has left that indelible mark. If the congregation that was about to

⁶Bethge, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, p. 385.

⁷Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, 2d ed., with a Foreword by Bishop G. K. A. Bell (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1959), p. 44.

be born had any right to life or could find any justification for the expenditure of funds to get going, then that right and justification had to be found in what it meant to be a disciple of Christ.

In the same metropolitan area of this congregation, there is a church which has received national publicity. Its impact on Washington is far greater than the number of members would normally make possible. Its involvement has included a well-known coffee house ministry (The Potter's House), a corporation which refurbishes rundown city houses and sells them back to owners for the purchase price plus the cost of materials involved in refurbishing them (Jubilee Housing), and the authorship of many books and pamphlets by people of the parish, the most well known of which, perhaps, is Elizabeth O'Connor's Eight Days of Creation. Membership in the Church of Our Saviour has always been by "covenant" with rather strict and demanding disciplines. It was this kind of witness to the community exhibited by this covenant community that stretched the imagination to say, "If there, why not here?"

Still another community of faithful gathered in a store-front church off Dupont Circle in Washington, D. C. This community, too, had an impact that went far beyond the relatively small number of people attracted to it in membership. It was organized in a fashion similar to the Church of Our Saviour with a covenant that was renewable on a

quarterly basis. The pastor, John Schramm, led the community into areas of both social action and evangelical witness that could not possibly go unnoticed by a fellow Lutheran pastor, or people outside the church. His book, authored together with parish member, David Anderson, Dance in the Steps of Change, is a description of the community and the disciplines involved in membership.

It was, therefore, the call to discipleship of Bonhoeffer with his stern comment about Lutheran "eagles" and the witness of the two parishes mentioned above that led us into encouraging a covenant style of membership in a suburban mission congregation with disciplines for living out the Christian faith as part of membership. Those disciplines of regular worship participation, financial responsibility, community involvement, and serious meditation on a personal level grew out of much discussion and reflection. Chapters 1-2 of The Cost of Discipleship were required reading for those drawing up the covenant and prayerful attention to those words was given before every meeting. Half the meeting time was devoted to this theological study and devotional reflection. Then, out of many sessions, much debate, and great care, a consensus was agreed upon for the preamble to the covenant and the statements of discipline contained in it. Bonhoeffer's book, The Cost of Discipleship, like Life Together, is a volume of some familiarity with the members of the congregation.

In addition to familiarity on the part of congregation members, these books have been constantly referred to in classes, sermons, and discussions, and have become even more familiar to this writer. The value of these volumes is almost without measure, and the result of their use can be seen in the quality of the parish life of this congregation. Indeed, these books have been hoisted to a level of importance nearly reserved for the Bible itself. They have not taken its place, but they have helped exegete the Word, which, it seems to this author, is the task of good theology.

Therefore, it is the purpose of this thesis to show the significant value these two books have been to the life and mission of this congregation in the areas of stewardship, fellowship, and deeper theological concern. If that significance can be translated and documented, then, perhaps, this effort can be useful to others who are also engaged in the ongoing task of building a congregation.

UNIT I.

COMMUNITY AND DISCIPLESHIP

THE THEOLOGY OF

DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

CHAPTER 1

COMMUNITY

Its Meaning and Implications

It has already been stated that the time about which Life Together was written covered the years 1935-37. The setting has been mentioned, also, but some expansion on the simple statement of location is necessary. At the outset the preachers' seminary, established by the Confessing Church for young ministers who had completed their course work and vicarage and who were now about to be sent into parishes, was located at Zingst on the Baltic Sea. A move was necessitated shortly after the arrival of the twenty-five seminarians, so the first few months were unsettled because their "permanent" home was not certain. Following the forced departure from Zingst, the community's new home was in Finkenwalde, a small country town just east of Stettin, which is now in Poland. The site was an old estate of the von Katte family in an area which was just south of the Oder estuary and north of some fertile rolling hills and woods. The setting was idyllic; and while the events that were to take place could have happened in other locations, the physical surroundings are not unimportant for the life of a commune such as this. The

facilities themselves were not in great repair, nor were they in any way luxurious. The grounds had been disrupted with construction, and the buildings had been added to and rebuilt by the previous tenant which was a private school. The buildings were furnished by the ordinands, and they decorated the interior, as well as painted the exterior. With the addition of a small library, which Bonhoeffer had provided with his personal collection of fine reference works, the community was set to begin the routine of living, working, studying, and learning together. Life Together is about that community.

Bonhoeffer was a theologian and a good one. He had been trained in the disciplines of the philosophy and a mix of sociology and theology under the renown Adolf Harnack of the University of Berlin. His abilities were unquestioned. Karl Barth would later write of him:

The matter (of Christian discipleship) is handled with such depth and precision that I am almost tempted simply to reproduce them . . . in an extended quotation. For I cannot hope to say anything better on the subject than what is said here by a man who, having written on discipleship, was ready to achieve it in his own life, and did in his own way achieve it even to the point of death.¹

To be recognized in this manner by a recognized giant in the field of theology is to be in good company, indeed. Yet, what Bonhoeffer really yearned for was to put the kind of

¹William Kuhns, In Pursuit of: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, with a Foreword by Eberhard Bethge (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., Image Books, 1969), p. 94.

personal emphasis on discipleship into the community of which he now was a part. That the presence of the Word and Sacrament were characteristics of the Christian Church was acceptable to everyone espousing the Christian faith. He had studied and written concerning the latter himself. It was to the other characteristic of the Christian Church, namely, the presence of community, that he would now direct his attention in this common life setting at Finkenwalde. The very style and discipline of life convey as much about the person of Bonhoeffer as do his writings. One has missed a sizable picture of the man if only his works are considered. There are some common areas that will shed light on both the community and the man that will be my concern. It is to these areas that our attention is addressed.

It is true to this day that the German tradition in education is one of strict respect and formality. The familiarity that is apparent in classrooms and churches of this country today would never be the standard of conduct in German classrooms and churches. An appropriate title for a seminary professor such as Bonhoeffer in a situation similar to the Finkenwalde community might well have been "Herr Studiendirektor," if not "Herr Professor." The atmosphere of Finkenwalde, however, was anything but starchy, for Bonhoeffer was simply "Brother Bonhoeffer" to his students, a situation which was decidedly difficult to become accustomed to for the students.

The routine of the seminary community was rigid and disciplined. The day began and ended with two long services. The morning service was followed by an hour of quiet, personal meditation. The services themselves did not take place in the chapel, but rather were held around the table which served as their dining table as well. The liturgical order invariably had a psalm at the outset, a hymn specifically chosen, an Old Testament lesson, a New Testament lesson, a long period of extemporaneous prayer, and the recitation of the Lord's Prayer. In between the two services were lectures or discussions or general study, and while the schedule seemed to be stringent, Bonhoeffer did not look kindly upon individuals who tried to evade the discipline of participating in these two worship opportunities. Indeed, as students continued their studies in the "Bruderhaus," there was less and less attempt to find reasons to be absent. This became the heart of the experience around which everything else revolved and had meaning.

While life was disciplined at Finkenwalde, it was also informal. There was a schedule, but there were no rules except one. Bonhoeffer asked the ordinands never to speak about a fellow seminarian in his absence, or, if he did, to tell him about it afterwards. Bethge, himself a seminarian, could say about this rule, "Almost as much was learnt from the failure to observe this simple rule and from the renewed

resolution to keep it as from sermons and exegeses."² That one rule could be imposed, and the discipline of this community kept, because of the nature of Bonhoeffer himself. There was a way by which he could sense the need for relaxation, and so quite unannounced or planned, he would break off the discussions or lectures, or whatever was in progress, to hike with his students in the woods or engage in some physical activity in which he would almost always prove himself to be superior to the other participants.

Music was a part of the community, and while Bonhoeffer's personal choice would be Chopin or Brahms, Bach's concertos were never forgotten or relegated to a status of lesser importance. Hymns, of course, were part of the community's life, as has already been mentioned, and he would even break out into his own rendition of some of the more "upbeat" numbers with which the seminarians were most familiar.

Perhaps the best example of the kind of person Bonhoeffer was is shown in the incident that Bethge remembers in his biography of Bonhoeffer concerning the opportunity to demonstrate what he meant by community. In the personal interview the author had with Bethge, this illustration was sufficiently important for him to describe it in great detail. The event took place on the second day of existence of the community at the Zingst location. After dinner, there was a

²Bethge, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, p. 349.

need for some volunteers to assist with clean-up chores. Upon giving the request and receiving no response, Bonhoeffer rose from the table, went into the kitchen (locking the door behind him), and proceeded to handle the clean-up duties himself.³ This was not an isolated incident, for on numerous occasions, Bethge reports, "a student was to discover with shame that someone else had made his bed in the big dormitory."⁴

Bonhoeffer could accomplish the same amount of work in a two-to-three hour period that another could have done in eight to ten. He never worked at night, and while neatness was not a particularly strong characteristic, he really had no great need for an orderly file system since his memory was so keen. His writings were not always done in the hope that they would some day be published. However, when the time came for the publication of nearly everything he ever wrote, it was discovered that much of his material could stand pretty much as it had been written. Perhaps the greatest of lessons can be learned from the fact that no matter how busy and how involved in the writing of a lecture, or even a book, he could always be interrupted for conversation and exercise. Indeed, it is possible that it was this very discipline that allowed him to be so prolific. If it cannot be said that this ability is the only reason for the quality of his writing, it surely had something to do with it. Bonhoeffer had a zest

³Ibid., p. 350. ⁴Ibid., p. 350.

for life that is something to be reckoned with when we consider the decisions he made regarding his involvement in the "Confessing Church's" struggle against Hitler and Nazi Germany.

It is necessary at this point to say something of the academic setting of this community as well. For two to three hours a day, the community gathered for lectures by either Bonhoeffer or his assistant, Wilhelm Rott, which would be followed by a seminar or discussion on the topic presented. Bonhoeffer's specialty was teaching the confessions of the Church which had ecumenical concerns and which built upon the common life that the seminarians themselves were experiencing. In addition, of course, he led them in Bible studies, particularly around the Sermon on the Mount, which later became the book, The Cost of Discipleship. Those studies, as has already been suggested, were more homiletical in nature than exegetical, and for good reason. Bonhoeffer was, indeed, an expert theologian, but he was a pastor and a preacher first and foremost. When a relative discovered that she had only a short time to live, Bonhoeffer wrote to her saying, "What would I do if I learned that in four to six months my life would reach the end? I believe I would still try to teach theology as I once did and to preach often."⁵ Homiletics were a great part of the curriculum of the seminary,

⁵Clyde E. Fant, Bonhoeffer: Worldly Preaching (Nashville, Tenn. and New York: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1975), p. 4.

and preaching was an important part of Bonhoeffer's life. His thoughts on preaching will be considered at length in a separate unit since the structure of this thesis, following the pattern of both the community with Bonhoeffer's emphasis on Matthew 5, 6, 7 and his basis for The Cost of Discipleship, takes on a homiletical posture.

The uniqueness of this community cannot be overstated. The idea of ordinands living together in the fashion that has been briefly outlined here was, to say the least, unique. But, to add to this community which had engaged in a disciplined and regular worship schedule, had a "family" spirit among participants and leader, and had emphasized a style of preaching that was more evangelical than scholastic, a doctrine of confession that was put into daily practice was just another startling discovery in the long list of non-traditional positions of this seminary and its leader. The seminarians first learned of the significance of confession from their mentor when, on the first occasion the seminary community was preparing for communion, Bonhoeffer mentioned the upcoming event each morning and evening at worship services for a full week before the occasion. There was no study or lectures on the day before communion, and since the celebration required confession and reconciliation, Bonhoeffer suggested that they might make their personal confessions--to one another! No one took the statement too seriously, and no one could muster the courage to ask another to hear

his confession. Communion soon was celebrated on a monthly basis instead of the prescribed and normally accepted basis of festival Sundays. That, too, was something to get used to, and as they gradually accepted this new rubric, they, also, began approaching their brothers to make their personal confessions. Bonhoeffer himself would on occasion seek one of the seminarians out and ask whether or not he would hear his confession.

Like worship services which were held around the dining room table, there was no strong liturgical order of confession. Nor was it done in any liturgical garb. It was not, however, taken lightly. Bonhoeffer gave thorough instructions in the method of confessions which would thereby allow one to unload his conscience on his brother. Absolutions from a brother were considered to carry more impact on the confessor than a proclamation in liturgical fashion by the pastor. Indeed, this really is nothing more than taking Bonhoeffer's incarnational theology of preaching and applying it to confession. When a brother speaks the absolution, Christ was confronting him and offering his forgiveness. Bethge says that some understood what Bonhoeffer was saying in a sermon on forgiveness delivered at the seminary in 1935:

My dear brethren, anyone who has ever had the experience of being wrested away from grave sin by God and then receiving his forgiveness, anyone to whom God in such an hour has sent a brother to whom he can tell his sin, anyone who knows the resistance put up by his sin to that help because he does not really want to be helped, and has

nevertheless found himself absolved from his sin by his brother in the name and at the behest of God--will lose all desire to judge and to apportion blame. All he will ask is a share in his brother's burden, and to serve, to help, to forgive, without measure, without conditions, without end.⁶

Bonhoeffer's concept of community and the significance of it in the life of a disciple had begun to take shape at least four years before the Finkenwalde experiment and at least six years before the writing of Life Together. In the notes gathered together and edited by Bethge from Bonhoeffer's lectures at the University of Berlin in 1933, we have the outline, if not the full description, of the place of community in his Christology. He says:

Just as Christ is present as the Word and in the Word, as the sacrament and in the sacrament, so too he is also present as community and in the community. His presence in Word and sacrament is related to his presence in the community as reality is to figure.⁷

Later, he asks:

What does it mean that Christ as sacrament is also community? Christ the sacrament is also there in and as the community. The sacrament already in itself has a physical form which goes beyond the Word. The community is the body of Christ. Body here is not just a metaphor. The community is the body of Christ, it does not represent the body of Christ.⁸

⁶Bethge, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, p. 384.

⁷Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Christ the Center, with Introduction by Edwin H. Robertson, trans. by John Bowden (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 59.

⁸Ibid., p. 60.

In Life Together this concept comes out into a full-blown statement when Bonhoeffer says, "Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. No Christian community is more or less than this."⁹

To backtrack a bit in Bonhoeffer's theological development and the origin of this strong position on community, we catch glimpses of its significance even in his early work, Communion of Saints. Toward the end of that work, Bonhoeffer discusses the Church as an independent sociological institution. (He had already thrown out the belief that the Church was somehow synonymous with either the "gathered church" or the "national church" concept.) That was not to suggest, however, that the Christian would not be a member of a congregation. The Church was simultaneously the community of the holy as well as the community of sinners. For Bonhoeffer, the Church was not an association that could be banded together or disbanded by agreement. It was not an institution of society that dispenses grace and gifts to dues-paying members. It was a community, and yet, even that term was not fully adequate to describe the nature completely, for the Church is one of a kind. Its uniqueness lies in who is its head and not in its purity of doctrine. Bonhoeffer summarizes this by saying, "the church is a community

⁹Bonhoeffer, Life Together, p. 21.

sui generis, a community of spirit and of love."¹⁰

The last word on the Church is an eschatological word. It has yet to be spoken, but the Church will be redeemed collectively and individually. Since the Church is always assessing itself, the study of Bonhoeffer's understanding of it, with the strong emphasis on community, is as relevant today as it surely was then. Does the style of Finkenwalde and the report of the experiment in Life Together contribute to a better understanding of our responsibilities, privileges as Christian members and participants in the Church? The task is to look at the model without legalistically following the style. If we do that, the answer to the question is "yes." Life Together cannot be read like law, for if it is, it is worse than of no value; it is detrimental to the Christian life. It was never intended to be a step-by-step approach to living out the life of discipleship for all people in all times. But, if read like gospel, there is much that can be gleaned from its pages that will help each of us individually and the community collectively in fulfilling the obligation of a disciple.

It is out of a community such as this that Life Together arises. Each chapter is a reflection on that life and is an emphasis on some form of the disciplines that the

¹⁰Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Communion of Saints, with Foreword by Eberhard Bethge (New York and Evanston, Ill.: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 185.

participant lived under. Its uniqueness lies in the style of life made possible by, in fact, "living together." But, it is greater and goes beyond just those who share the same roof. Community exists wherever people gather together, and Christian community exists wherever people whose minds are set on Christ and whose goals are to follow him gather together.

CHAPTER 2

DISCIPLESHIP

Its Meaning and Implications

There appeared on the shelves of German book stores late in 1937 a volume entitled Nachfolge by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. That it did not sell well was not due to the fact that it was poorly written, the substance unimportant, or the title not "catchy" enough. The German economy, which had been heating up through the late 20's because of a high inflation rate, reached an intensity which could be described as "white hot" during the 30's. Bonhoeffer's father cashed in a life insurance policy in the early 30's and found that it would buy a quart of strawberries with a little left over. There was little money for anyone to buy books. There was hardly money to publish them, so it was with great effort that this volume ever reached the hands of its readers. Furthermore, with the conditions of the government as they were under Hitler, any published word had to be scrutinized by the censors before publication could be approved. Bonhoeffer was well aware of this regulation having had personal experience with censorship four years earlier when he had been cut short in a radio broadcast. One must be aware of this ever present

threat before delving into this book.

Germany's history was one that had its roots in the Christian faith with laws established to insure support for the Christian Church. That situation had changed dramatically so that now men and women continued to attend churches and "holy" days were strictly kept as civil holidays, but the real spirit of the Christian faith, the commitment of the heart, and the "following" of Christ had reached a low ebb. It was into that situation that Bonhoeffer wrote this Christian conscience-probing book. Translated into English, it reached this country in 1949 under the title The Cost of Discipleship.

It has been called an "angry book."¹ Others might claim it is an unfortunate shift from his former position as outlined in the sociological view of the church, The Communion of Saints. The argument is that there seems to be more stress on the individual whereas corporate sanctification had prior to now been the theme. Detractors would allude to what appears an aloofness to the world. They would also postulate that there is a "religiosity" that borders on a too personal faith which contrasts sharply with the great champion of "religionless Christianity" which comes out so strongly in his latter thought. All that is

¹William Kuhns, In Pursuit of: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, with a Foreword by Eberhard Bethge (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., Image Books, 1969), p. 94.

argued from one passing statement in a letter dated July 21, 1944, and after fifteen months in prison. It says:

I thought I could acquire faith by trying to live a holy life, or something like it. I suppose I wrote The Cost of Discipleship as the end of that path. Today I can see the dangers of that book, though I still stand by what I wrote.²

It is the opinion of this author that to make the jump from a position of corporate to individual sanctification, involvement to aloofness in the world, religiosity to "religionless Christianity,"³ cannot be done through one quotation in one letter, particularly given the stress of the times from which the letter came. It is true that The Cost of Discipleship represents a different style of writing than the labored theological work, The Communion of Saints. That does not automatically render the new technique useless nor even less significant than the former. Indeed, The Cost of Discipleship can be read by those not trained in theology. It is more homiletical in style and, undoubtedly, for this reason has enjoyed great popularity among many readers. The tone of the book is always serious for it deals with what for Bonhoeffer was the most serious of matters, "What does it mean to follow Christ?" The answer for him was in that often quoted phrase, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him

²Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers From Prison, enl. ed., ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Macmillan Paperbacks, 1972), p. 369.

³Ibid., p. 280.

come and die."⁴ That phrase of Bonhoeffer has its roots in the "arcane" discipline which is something central to his theology and about which more will be said.

Much of the book centers around the Sermon on the Mount from Matthew, chapters 5-7. It is, therefore, a Biblical study and exposition of these verses and words of Jesus, as well as good exegesis. This study is remarkably free of cross-fertilization from other academic disciplines, such as sociology, anthropology, and philology. The absence in no way suggests that nothing was being done in these areas. Nor does it suppose that Bonhoeffer was unaware of those things that were being done.⁵ On the contrary, Bonhoeffer's sole purpose was to let the Scripture speak by itself in such a way that it would interact with some events. In a lecture given to the young seminarians at Finkenwalde, Bonhoeffer says:

With this, the key to the exposition of Scripture is put into our hand. Just as in a secular writing we can distinguish the genuine words of the author from spurious additions, so now in the Bible we can distinguish the Word of God from the word of man and can separate the one from the other. We have the criterion for the Word of God, it is in our reason, in our conscience, or in our experience, fashioned by our nation or in any other way. The

⁴Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, 2d ed., with a Foreword by Bishop G. K. A. Bell (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1959), p. 79.

⁵Communion of Saints addresses the church from a perspective of those other disciplines. In fact, this early book is a sociological study of the community of believers, the church.

criterion for the Word of God lies outside it, in us--the norm of presentation lies in us, the Bible is the material in which this norm finds its application.⁶

The whole purpose of the study of Scripture for Bonhoeffer was to find out what Christ was saying to him. His exposition of the Sermon on the Mount is not cluttered with much interesting, but irrelevant, material. It is, instead, a hard look at this great section of Matthew and the exposition of the same. It is not primarily thorough exegesis, but rather a homiletical stance from which one could learn the meaning of discipleship. Indeed, it comes precariously close to being a book of sermons with a preliminary discussion on "grace" and addenda on several matters of concern to the church as the "body of Christ." This is not the only writing of Bonhoeffer that exhibits this style, but it is, to be sure, the most widely known.

The important question for Bonhoeffer is, "What does it mean to follow Jesus?" In the midst of the church struggle of Bonhoeffer's time and national difficulties of the 30's, overtones of conflict between allegiance to Christ and State are apparent, though never overtly presented:

Wherever a group, be it large or small, prevents us from standing alone before Christ, wherever such a group raises a claim of immediacy it must

⁶Dietrich Bonhoeffer, No Rusty Swords, ed. and with an Introduction by Edwin H. Robertson, trans. rev. by John Bowden and Pastor Bethge, vol. 1 (London and New York: William Collins Sons & Co. and Harper & Row, Fontana Library, 1970), p. 309.

be hated for the sake of Christ.⁷

Or:

The Antichrist also calls the poor blessed, but not for the sake of the cross, which embraces all poverty and transforms it into a source of blessing. He fights the cross with political and sociological ideology. He may call it Christian, but that only makes him a still more dangerous enemy.⁸

There is never the slightest hint, however, that discipleship should be done anywhere else than in the midst of the warp and woof of daily activities. In that situation he proceeds to say that it is his purpose to tell us "how Jesus calls us to be his disciples."⁹ Discipleship is for the disciplined, but it is not to be reserved for the spiritually elite. It is nothing less than the path to sanctification and joy in the Christian life.

Bonhoeffer begins his discussion with the now famous attack on the Church's dispensation of grace as "cheapjack wares." "The sacraments," he says, "the forgiveness of sin, and the consolations of religion are thrown away at cut prices."¹⁰ The sharpest of his statements in this attack on the church and its theology and practice are in the introductory chapter, "Costly Grace," and constitute a frontal blast at Lutheranism when he says:

We Lutherans have gathered like eagles round

⁷Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, p. 86.

⁸Ibid., pp. 97-98. ⁹Ibid., p. 30.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 35.

the carcass of cheap grace, and there we have drunk of the poison which has killed the life of following Christ.¹¹

He proceeds to suggest, then, that:

The upshot of it all is that my only duty as a Christian is to leave the world for an hour or so on a Sunday morning and go to church to be assured that my sins are all forgiven. I need no longer try to follow Christ, for cheap grace, the bitterest foe of discipleship, which true discipleship must loathe and detest, has freed me from that.¹²

All of that is opposed to the costly grace which Bonhoeffer sees as the call to discipleship. It 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.¹³

While those statements are theological in nature, they are largely homiletical in style. They flow from the preacher's heart which Bonhoeffer surely had. They result from what was apparently all around him as he watched the Church abdicate its moral leadership to the State. These thoughts stem from the national Church's formalism and lack of earnest preaching for disciplined living. The introduction to the book gives the picture a bit more precisely when he says, "Does not our preaching contain too much of our own

¹¹Ibid., p. 44. ¹²Ibid., p. 42.

¹³Ibid., p. 36.

opinions and convictions, and too little of Jesus Christ?"¹⁴

For Bonhoeffer, the matter of discipleship given the costliness of grace can be summed up in one word, obedience. Indeed, one cannot come to grips with the thought of his book if his promise "only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes"¹⁵ is missed. Therein lies the heart of the matter for Bonhoeffer. Obedience is at the heart of his preaching pastoral concern. It is to be at the heart of every Christian. From that statement some understanding can be gleaned from the events of his own life, though, surely, one can never fully understand another's actions or thought. Obedience was the keystone of his discipleship structure, and for Lutherans, who traditionally emphasize the word "freedom," that emphasis comes as something of a shock.

Bonhoeffer has no misconception about the nature of salvation. He is not returning to the law of our Judaic background. Discipleship or obedience is not putting the Christian under a new moral law, but, as he says, "It is nothing else than bondage to Jesus Christ alone, completely breaking through every programme, every ideal, every set of laws."¹⁶ Bonhoeffer's purpose is to simply reassert Luther's dialectic of Christian freedom and bondage. He says the same thing in another way, namely, only those who are bound

¹⁴Ibid., p. 30. ¹⁵Ibid., p. 54. ¹⁶Ibid., p. 49.

to Christ are truly free.

So, then, what is this obedience about which he speaks so much and with such fervor. Perhaps it can be said that it is a "new law of life,"¹⁷ a phrase which is worthy of some study. This law of life is associated with the "first step" of faith, which for Bonhoeffer, is the initial act of obedience (one side of the dialectical formula). The initial act for Matthew in following Christ was simply to get up. That is the first step on the way to the new "law of life." The difficulty here is that Bonhoeffer knows that an argument of this sort in Lutheran circles is bound to raise concern, if not challenge. The position and confessional stance of Bonhoeffer's Church suggested that faith precedes obedience, and that out of faith come deeds which can be seen as obedient acts. He makes that very clear when he says that if we have the false idea that our "first step" is prior to an act of grace, then we have been judged by our own act of obedience apart from grace. So, for Bonhoeffer, this new "law of life," or, as we might refer to it in today's language, this new lifestyle, qualifies as obedience only when it is done out of obedience to Christ. Even giving away one's wealth may or may not be a "first step," for it may or may not be obedience, depending on whether or not it germinates out of a call from

¹⁷Ibid., p. 56.

Christ or a release from the pressures of tending to the wealth. Thus, even in the discussion of the law of life, Bonhoeffer steers his ship carefully through the Scylla of faith and the Charybdis of works. The message of justification is kept clean and held up as ultimate, while the matter of obedience and first or second step is always placed in the penultimate position.

The nature of Bonhoeffer's understanding of discipleship took him in many directions. An example of his discipleship was in the realm of resistance and pacifism or, in this case, disobedience to government. This is clearly shown in the fact that the German edition of Letters and Papers From Prison was entitled "Resistance and Submission" by his close friend and biographer, Bethge. Larry L. Rasmussen, in an author's note, says of that title, "It carries both Bonhoeffer's picture of the Christian life and his own living of it; not least of all does it characterize the movement in Bonhoeffer's acts of active and passive resistance."¹⁸ He goes on to note that "the fact that Bonhoeffer stakes disobedience and resistance at the very edge of normal Christian existence does not cause him to shrink from such action as commanded of Christians."¹⁹

¹⁸Larry L. Rasmussen, Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Reality and Resistance (Nashville, Tenn. and New York: Abingdon Press, Parthenon Press, 1972), pp. 43-44.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 49.

Much could be said (and has been said in numerous books and articles on this very subject) concerning the shift in his stance from a clear position of pacifism in The Cost of Discipleship to an acceptance of and responsibility for guilt which is found in the pages of his incompleted Ethics.²⁰ Any discussion of discipleship for the Christian apart from the difficult questions of pacifism and disobedience would deal only partially with the issue. Nevertheless, the point of The Cost of Discipleship seems to center on discipleship within the communion of saints and not on resistance. It does not do so to the exclusion of the Christian's commitment to the world, for Bonhoeffer often reminds the reader that "the only way to follow Jesus was by living in the world."²¹ It is true, however, as he also writes, "We must face up to the truth that the call of Christ does set up a barrier between man and his natural life. But this barrier is no surly contempt for life, no legalistic piety, it is the life which is life indeed, the gospel, the person of Jesus Christ."²² Indeed, for Bonhoeffer, the Christian's "true" home is in the world.

²⁰During the years 1940-43, deeply involved in the Abwehr and in the plot against Hitler, Bonhoeffer began writing what was to be his Ethics. The book was never completed since some of the parts which he had finished were lost or stolen and destroyed by the Gestapo.

²¹Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, p. 40.

²²Ibid., p. 85.

Perhaps that is why Bonhoeffer's call to discipleship has had such interest for Christians both in this land and others. There is always that constant struggle, the tension of having two citizenships and two allegiances. When Bonhoeffer calls for us to consider death as the outcome of our discipleship, he clearly is not thinking only of a "death to selves"²³ or a death to values, egos, or whatever psychological and symbolical term one could think of. He is thinking of nothing short of death itself, physical and real. If Tertullian said, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church," then Bonhoeffer only re-echoed it in the Berlin sermon of 1932:

. . . Must it be that Christendom, which began so revolutionary, is now conservative for all time? (Must it be) that every new movement must break ground without the Church, that the Church always comprehends twenty years later what has actually happened? If it must really be so, then should we be surprised if times come for our Church when the blood of martyrs will be called for?²⁴

So, then, how does one become a disciple? For Bonhoeffer, first there is a call to follow Jesus. He would suggest that a doctrinal system, or a church structure, or anything other than the Lordship of Christ, is nothing more than a rendering of discipleship to an irrelevant status. This is something akin to the first step that has already been

²³Rom. 6:6-11 (RSV).

²⁴Rasmussen, Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Reality and Resistance, p. 54.

discussed. Immediately after the call there follows obedience, which, to omit, is simply to dodge faith itself. Theoretical questions about the law or hypothetical situations about the application of an ethical standard are simply methods to avoid the call to discipleship. There comes a time when one must say to oneself, and to others as well, as Bonhoeffer himself did, "Only those who obey believe. . . . You are disobedient, you are trying to keep some part of your life under your own control."²⁵ There is a way in which we can say that we must obey, and then we will know what it is to believe.

At this point some discussion on the "arcane" discipline ought to be interjected. Bethge suggests that "the question of arcane discipline was not as peripheral for him as the infrequency of the phrase might suggest."²⁶ (The phrase occurs only twice in the prison letters with the English translation using the word, "secret.") There is no doubt, however, as Bethge says strongly that "Bonhoeffer regarded an arcane discipline as the essential counterpoint of non-religious interpretation."²⁷

This "arcane" discipline has more to it than just "secret," as the English translation of Letters and Papers

²⁵Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, p. 59.

²⁶Bethge, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, p. 784.

²⁷Ibid., p. 785.

From Prison says. It has within it a mysterious quality, a knowable, but unknown, style for the Christian disciple. It would be as if the arcane discipline were behind a locked door for which there is a key since some people are seen going in through the door. The key, however, is not in everyone's hands, nor is it obtainable by some quick and easy means. In fact, no one really knows how to tell another where to find a key. More than any other method, one must simply watch those who do have it, and soon, perhaps, they also will find it.

There is within everyone the need for a quality of life. The ancients talked and wrote about it. Certainly, the Sermon on the Mount addresses the same issue, and Paul and Peter deduced it from Jesus' teachings. The human is a happier being when discipline rules the life. One might enjoy the pleasure of immoral activity for a moment while engaging in it, but the result will eventually raise havoc in the mind of the participant. Conversely, there is a peace that passes all understanding when, in discipline, life is lived out in what a society calls a moral life.

That certainly is true in one's religious life as well as one's personal relationships. Bonhoeffer would never have been one to sever his connections with the traditional words and customs of the Church, but "in a

world come of age,"²⁸ a non-religious interpretation of the faith must be adhered to, and at the heart of that interpretation is the arcane discipline. He wished to preserve genuine worship as opposed to mechanical rituals. The gathered community would still worship together, share Word and Sacrament, but the individual discipline of prayer, meditation, ministry, and praise would constitute a genuine form of worship. When that genuine worship is mentioned in the individual, that is "an 'arcane' affair."²⁹ There is no way to learn it except by doing it. There is no way to get it from another; it must be done by oneself. There is no way to force it on another; each one must watch and acquire it for him or herself.

It is this arcane discipline that has captured the attention of the writer, shared in the parish, and is the spark behind the lifestyle of this parish. It is not that the writer or the parish members claim any perfect obedience to the words of Jesus; we don't even claim perfect obedience to the discipline of Bonhoeffer. Some, however, have both learned that in "arcane discipline" there is a joy that is not easily expressible and a peace that is not easily described. Indeed, Life Together is an expression in a real life setting of the arcane discipline which was for

²⁸Ibid., p. 785. ²⁹Ibid., p. 785.

those who lived it (Bethge, at least) a non-religious interpretation of the Christian faith. It is the first station on the road to freedom:

If you set out to seek freedom, then learn above all things
to govern your soul and your senses, for fear that your passions
and longing may lead you away from the path you should follow,
Chaste be your mind and your body, and both in subjection,
obediently, steadfastly seeking the aim set before them;
only through discipline may a man learn to be free.³⁰

The insights from Bonhoeffer into discipleship are enormous. Discipleship places us in an insecure situation which, in the end, turns into the safety of Christ. Following Christ means leaving behind the finite or the tangible and entering the arena of the infinite or the intangible. It means attaching ourself to the person of Jesus so that all attacks from the foes of reason, personal desire, or self-adulation do nothing to prevent us from complete obedience and, therefore, discipleship. We are not, however, contemporaries of the disciples and should, therefore, not seek to mimic them. To give up possessions and wealth, to live out life in a monastery, may be the absolute opposite from what it means for us to follow Jesus.

For Bonhoeffer, being a disciple is bearing the cross. Suffering and rejection are integral parts of what

³⁰Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers From Prison, pp. 370-371.

it means to bear the cross. But, each one taken separately will produce an illegitimate form of cross bearing. Taken together, they each protect the other from illegitimacy and produce an honest example of discipleship. Every Christian must bear the cross, and to bear it means (1) to abandon attachment to this world, (2) to die to self, and (3) to, perhaps, face death (solemn feast) itself. But in that path of suffering and rejection, there is triumph and victory.

Discipleship makes of people rugged individuals, whereas they were only people related to the world of responsibilities and duties before. Bonhoeffer says in this regard:

Christ stands between us, and we can only get into touch with our neighbours through him. That is why intercession is the most promising way to reach our neighbours, and corporate prayer, offered in the name of Christ, the purest form of fellowship.³¹

Somehow, all relationships are mediated through Christ, and so the most direct route to another is through Christ. Prayer becomes a central and integral part of discipleship. It is for this reason that community (the Church) is so important to Bonhoeffer, for Christ has called us into a relationship with others where he is the mediator and stands between the members. The fellowship of the Church takes precedence over the fellowship of the house (family, friends, etc.), but the reward for this precedence is many times

³¹Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, p. 88.

greater than that which is forsaken.

Bonhoeffer seems to lean heavily on Petrine theology. In the first letter of Peter, the themes of obedience, suffering, and joy come through with striking force. I cite a few of the verses which support this assumption and which corroborate Bonhoeffer's theology of discipleship:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.³²

As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance.³³

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere love of the brethren, love one another earnestly from the heart.³⁴

For the time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?³⁵

In a word, it could be said that for Bonhoeffer a true disciple is one who is willing to pay for costly grace. It is one who is, with stubborn dedication, obedient to Christ. It is the person who is not pulled to and fro by public opinion. It is the individual who makes decisions, anticipates suffering, accepts responsibility, and lives in community. Bonhoeffer tries to make the reader face squarely his or her own Christian life and question its validity and

³²1 Pet. 1:3 (RSV). ³³1 Pet. 1:14 (RSV).

³⁴1 Pet. 1:22 (RSV). ³⁵1 Pet. 4:17 (RSV).

vitality, but to do it without reliance upon any props of law, duty, or personal achievement. From the position of hindsight, to do that in the years of Nazi rule was courageous. To do that in the face of rising secularism and pressures from would-be Christians accepting the cheap grace dispensed from most churches is still courageous.

So, the question we ask is the one Bonhoeffer asked, "How can we live the Christian life in the modern world?"³⁶ The answer he gave was in a paraphrase translation of the Beatitudes:

Happy are they who have reached the end of the road we seek to tread, who are astonished to discover the by no means self-evident truth that grace is costly just because it is the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Happy are the simple followers of Jesus Christ who have been overcome by his grace, and are able to sing the praises of the all-sufficient grace of Christ with humbleness of heart. Happy are they who, knowing that grace, can live in the world without being of it, who, by following Jesus Christ, are so assured of their heavenly citizenship that they are truly free to live their lives in this world. Happy are they who know that discipleship simply means the life which springs from grace, and that grace simply means discipleship. Happy are they who have become Christians in this sense of the word. For them the word of grace has proved a fount of mercy.³⁷

What are we to learn from his theology of discipleship and how can it be translated into the 70's or even 80's? Is a person's very life always a requirement of true discipleship? How does one learn obedience and thereby become a

³⁶Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, p. 47.

³⁷Ibid., p. 47.

disciple? These are valid questions that really form the heartbeat of any congregation worthy of calling itself Christian. If we are to learn anything from Bonhoeffer's book, the answer to these questions, realizing the norm of interpretation lies with us, is in the constant, regular, disciplined study of the Bible and, particularly, the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. Since that study formed the basis of Bonhoeffer's community at Finkenwalde and his post-community reflections, Life Together, it is the basis for study here, as well as in the parish community, Lord of Life.

UNIT II.

COMMUNITY

THE LOCUS OF THE GOSPEL

CHAPTER 3

THIS COMMUNITY CALLED CHURCH

Since the earliest days of the Reformation, community was the key word in the attempt to describe the nature of the church. For Luther, "the Holy Christian Church" and "the communion of saints" were identical. The church was the communio sanctorum or the sanctified community, and for Anglicans, Reformed, and Lutherans alike, the classic definition of the church carries this central idea. The Augsburg Confession states the definition in this manner, "The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered."¹ For Lutherans, this is the universal and fundamental confession.

That may have been the way the reformers thought of it, but the question that is posed for us is, "How is the relationship between the church and community understood today?" Or, in other words, "What is this community called the church?" While all Lutherans would accept the definition of the Augsburg Confession, many would separate into many divergent paths when getting to the specifics. Before a

¹Tappert, The Book of Concord, p. 35.

description of community can be accomplished, an understanding of the church and its heritage must be achieved. To do that, a brief summary of four major schools of thought concerning the nature of the church will be given. These descriptions of the church, though brief, are intended to set the stage for the more detailed look at community to follow.

Luther says quite early in his work that a definition of the church is not easily discovered. The word, church, had lost its meaning. Indeed, it was often confused with a building, institution, or organization. He was much more comfortable with the German "Gemeinde" than he was with "Kirche" as a translation of the Greek word Ekklesis. He thought community said it better than church. Luther might suggest that a sufficient statement of faith in the church would be "I believe that there is a holy, Christian people." One can quickly see Bonhoeffer's connection with Luther in his understanding of the church. To say, as Bonhoeffer does, "I believe that Jesus Christ exists as community" (Gemeinde)² is to say the same thing as Luther. The church is the object of faith as well as the subject of faith. Luther used the words, spiritual, inward, invisible, and internal, when he spoke of the church. But the church was more than that. As the subject of faith it was also corporal, outward, visible, and external. Luther also sought to keep the

²Bonhoeffer, The Communion of Saints, p. 180.

dialectic of the visible and the invisible in tension. For him, the church was neither a fairy tale nor an institution, but a community born out of the intervention of God with the characteristics of God acted out in the daily and common life of people. The locus of the community is always the Gospel.

From that understanding several emphases developed. These emphases have helped shape our understanding of the church whether or not we have known the precise reasons for its development. Descriptions of four emphases follow. These brief descriptions are intended to shed light on this community called the church.

The first pattern of community which developed out of Luther's understanding is "repristination theology." This theology seeks to maintain a pure and unblemished approach to confessionalism. The Christian religion is absolute, and there is no possibility for improvement, supplement, or even development. It is absolute because it has a perfect book (the Bible), and it has a perfect salvation (the atonement of Jesus Christ). The true church is always invisible and therefore there can be no description of the church in a visible manner. The church is universal in scope, spiritual in nature, and is constituted only by faith which is a gift of God. A particular aspect of the church is seen in the local congregation which has as its primary task the dispensing of grace. As a group of people, as a community, it is

nothing, for everything depends on the individual.

The second understanding of Luther's phrase, "I believe that there is a holy, Christian people," is discovered in the inclusive category, Pietism. That word in itself needs a definition for it carries much unwanted freight. It has as its central meaning the proper mix of both God's action and the human's response as they relate to theological inquiry and the summons to faith. An "inner experience" is an important part to a pietist's faith. The church consists of individual Christians gathering together with a common bond and as such it is a sociological entity. It can be seen. It acts and reacts. It has mission and purpose. The individual is the key, the cornerstone of the church.

In Lund, Sweden, two scholars by the name of Gutav Aulen and Anders Nygren sought to correct what they thought were misunderstandings of the real Luther on the part of both repristination and pietism. For them and the "Lundsensian" theology, the church was the "new age" which had already broken in upon us. An individual was made a part of this new age by baptism, and the church was created every time and every place that the Gospel was proclaimed. Essentially, the church is not comprehensible. It is not so much to be observed for its quality as for its presence. Indeed, for the Lundensians, the church is to be equated with salvation.

There is a last description in this overview of the

church. It may be called the dynamic community. The church is an "event." It is active in character. It is a dynamic, not static, community. Further, the church is a community where God is acting. It is real, visible, and sociological in nature. It is both local and universal in scope. At one and the same time, the church is both an institution that is analyzable and a spiritual fellowship which can be seen only with the eyes of faith. In this context, God has no greater gift in store for a person than the faith and love of a fellowship. The church is a foretaste of the feast to come.

None of these views of the church are all wrong. None, certainly, are all right. Each individual has found a blend of two or more to be a satisfactory interpretation and understanding of the community that is called church. It is in the best interest of everyone to continually leave open the question of the nature of the church. To do this is to remain in the reformer's tradition, and it will insure vitality on the part of the community called church. With this background of the church, we look at Bonhoeffer's description of community through essays incorporating both the book, Life Together, and the reflections of those in the Fellowship at Lord of Life.

CHAPTER 4

ESSAYS ON COMMUNITY

ESSAY ONE

LIVING TOGETHER IN A COMMUNITY

There are several communities to which we belong. They are as broad as our national citizenship or as narrow as our filial community. They can be vocationally orientated (the military community) or related to an avocation (the community of skydivers). One such community is the church to which a person claims membership. On a broad scale, one would claim membership in the Christian community or Jewish community, and within that predetermined boundary, one would affiliate with a denomination of grouping and have still another community (i.e., Lutheran). Within this division there is still at least one more such community, the local congregation. It forms a community to which many are closely related. And yet, within the congregation, there may still be small or large groupings which form yet another support group we may call a community.

We have outlined in the foregoing material the description of the type of community about which this chapter is written. Few of us are members of a community that has such rigorous discipline or is so dependent upon

other people. Because we rarely call our family a community, we don't think of it as one. It is, however, a community nonetheless. The family unit, whatever its composition, is as close a description of the community from which Life Together is taken as we can know. Family members are utterly dependent upon one another. Every household worthy of the name "family" has within its structure some disciplines--things to do and not do. They may go under the name of chores or responsibilities, but the end goal is to teach discipline. There are times for learning, times for relaxation, times for exercise, times for lectures (usually from parents, but sometimes from the children), and times for worship and meditation. Confession is heard by one another, and absolution is granted. Is it any wonder, then, that Jesus uses so much imagery that helps us relate the kingdom of God to the family? We must become as little children;¹ the prodigal son may always return to the loving father.² Nothing so typifies heaven itself or so resembles what life eternal is like than a family which lives together in peace and joy. Conversely, nothing gives us a clearer picture of hell than a community which breaks apart or lives together in hatred and contempt. So, out of this book, written in special circumstances, directed at an audience which claimed membership in the special community, we find lessons and suggestions

¹Luke 18:17 (RSV). ²Luke 15:1-10 (RSV).

and helpful hints on how the smaller community, the family, may live together in harmony.

"Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!"³ With this verse from the Book of Psalms, Bonhoeffer begins his section on community. Clearly, that verse could be taken more for family orientation than a "Bruderhaus." It is not always true that such a good and pleasant thing does occur. When it does, it is occasion for rejoicing. Nothing exemplifies so much a gift of God's grace than people dwelling together in unity. It is the Christian's great privilege to live with other Christians in a visible community. That is as true for the family as it is true for the Church. It is only by the grace of God that a congregation is permitted to gather together to share God's Word and Sacraments. It is not the case for everyone. There are Christians in families who are not permitted the joys of dwelling together in unity, and their lives are anything but good and pleasant. There are people, who, because of sickness, imprisonment, or the lack of proclaimers, do not gather together in unity, and to be in such a situation is not good or pleasant. There are still other situations where people do not gather together in unity, where fighting and squabbling over quite inconsequential matters steal the fellowship right from their midst,

³Ps. 133:1 (RSV).

and there is no pleasant or good community. People in any of these situations know that vital fellowship is a blessing and something for which we can and should give our constant thanks. The gratitude of a Church where brothers and sisters gather together in harmony should be heard frequently. It is only natural then that Christians yearn for and search out the presence of one another with whom fellowship might be enjoyed.

Such a gift as this is easily forgotten or taken for granted by those who enjoy its availability regularly. It ceases to be a gift of grace, but rather something we accomplish by ourselves. To the one who does not have the opportunity of enjoying the gift, it is never forgotten or even misunderstood. Indeed, the lonely are the ones who would enjoy the gift of fellowship, but they are the ones quickly forgotten or even disregarded by those who possess its easy availability.

Whatever the Christian community is, the community is Christian only through and in Jesus Christ. For Bonhoeffer the implications of this are three in number:

. . . first, that a Christian needs others because of Jesus Christ. It means, second, that a Christian comes to others only through Jesus Christ. It means, third, that in Jesus Christ we have been chosen from eternity, accepted in time, and united for eternity.⁴

In the first place, each person is a bringer of the message

⁴Bonhoeffer, Life Together, p. 21.

of salvation. For the family, that means that each member has a word to say about the meaning of salvation. We know that is true from experience. The child often conveys the simple message of the gospel far better than the eloquent adult. The adult must demonstrate the maturity that a child does not have, and so becomes the gospel incarnate for the child. The parent may even resemble God for the younger child. In the end, each member of the family needs the other, and the community is never whole when a member is missing.

In the second place, we really can only come to each other through Jesus Christ. In the family, one member can hurt the other too often for relationships to continue. There is no reason to go back and be hurt again, except that through Jesus Christ, a mediator has been established. The way to fellowship is always blocked by our own ego needs, but through Christ we are able to live together in peace.

Thirdly, the incarnation says that we belong to him and that we share in the cross and the resurrection. Indeed, the family's fellowship in this life is a foretaste of the fellowship in the next. Anyone who wants something more, who is looking for something better, or who gripes that this is not what he or she expected, may desire some extraordinary social, physical, or emotional experience, but that one does not desire Christian fellowship. Christian fellowship is not a goal to be aiming at, but rather a reality to be enjoyed.

There are those who have some idea of what fellowship should be. Perfection is their goal, and they spend all their time living in the dream that one day they will achieve it. Such a state is, for Bonhoeffer, a "wish dream."⁵ When such a wish dream is placed into the fellowship, it hinders the fellowship from becoming what it ought to be. In matters of family, this becomes especially true as the human wish dream sees love in some fantasy. Husbands and wives lose their "fellowship" over a wish dream of how things "could be." Children and parents become estranged when they want something other than what they have because of their wish dream. Bonhoeffer would say that "God hates visionary dreaming."⁶

That which is an essential component of Christian fellowship is thankfulness, thankfulness for the small, often inconsequential (or, what we think is inconsequential) things of life. When we fail to give thanks for those things, we prevent God from sharing with us the great benefits that Christian fellowship can have for us. It is not, then, that God has somehow decided to punish us, but rather we, because of our wish dreams and our ungrateful spirit, live less than what we are. In this sense, community is like sanctification. It is a gift which we cannot claim, but which comes to us as we receive daily from God the gifts of his grace

⁵Ibid., p. 27. ⁶Ibid., p. 27.

with thanksgiving.

A family striving to live their lives in a posture of gratitude for one another, expressing the joy of their fellowship together, and de-emphasizing the wish dreams of what life could be like, would experience a life changed and reformed. That changing and reforming is not something that comes out of a psychiatrist's office so much as it results from a blessing being given. Christian fellowship exists out of love (the "agape" variety), and not out of some human powers over the psychic. Christians, in general, and pastors, in particular, have abdicated their roles as counsellors to psychologists and psychiatrists. This is not to say that those two categories are rendered obsolete or even ineffective. It is to say that too often the troubled persons stop by to see the pastor (usually, it is the first visit of this kind to anyone), and just as quickly as the person walks in, the pastor refers him or her to the "right" person to handle the problem. Many of these cases are theological in nature and need a theological response. The absolution after private confession can be the very thing that is needed. And, if in the midst of family disorders, the confession can be heard and absolution given, the reality of fellowship can often be attained.

If Christian fellowship is a spiritual reality and not human, then to maintain it is a spiritual task and not a human one. It is for this reason that retreat, going away,

being apart, is such a vital part of Christian fellowship. Nothing can stimulate the glow of fellowship so much as a few days of "life together," and nothing is more damaging to that fellowship than the steady routine of every-day life and duties without its being broken periodically with an experience in just living together.

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity." The Christian community finds Jesus to be that unity. It is through him alone that "we have access to one another, joy in one another, and fellowship with one another."⁷

⁷Ibid., p. 39.

ESSAY TWO

LIVING IN SOLITUDE AND RELATIONSHIPS

Life is lived out both by oneself and in companionship with one another. Both situations are needed and realistic if life is to be full and complete. Bonhoeffer recognized this necessity, and so devoted a chapter to each aspect. We live each day in the company of others as well as by ourselves. There is a thread of continuity that runs through these two chapters, so they will be considered together.

At the heart of our lives the Scripture is to be found. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, . . ."¹ is the way Bonhoeffer begins the chapter dealing with others. Perhaps more than any other chapter of the book, this one has the most unsettling quality about it. The time when the family gathered around the breakfast table for the reading of Scripture and prayer has given way to the age of commuters and fast living. A family lifestyle has given way to an individual lifestyle with schedules often set for us instead of being set by us. Consequently a fellow pastor and friend, John Schramm, could offer the unfortunate thought in a statement

¹Col. 3:16 (RSV).

made at an American Missions staff retreat that neither he nor his family know where to start to put together a good family devotions. Assuming that is true for more than just the Schramms, what shall we do with a section so heavily geared to the community sharing in God's Word? It is discouraging, indeed, for the family which wants to be serious about devotional life, but is confronted with the reality of schedule. It is easy to suggest changing, often more difficult to accomplish.

Perhaps the thrust of this section is more applicable for "The Day Alone," rather than "The Day with Others." It is entirely possible and even probable that an individual will reserve the time around sunrise for his or her own spiritual meditation, but it is less likely that it will occur for a family. Indeed, there are many individuals who do make use of their morning time in this fashion, but fewer families can see their way clear to arrange everyone's schedule in such a way that they all could meet together.

There is great value, however, in quiet reflection time especially when coupled with the use of the Psalter. The young people of Lord of Life have, for several years, arrived at the church early, before they head off to school, for breakfast and a brief devotional. As a part of the devotional, the final "Word for the day" has always been from the Psalms. In liturgical responsive reading fashion, we say together, "This is the day which the Lord has made; let us

rejoice and be glad in it."² This experience has been so meaningful to the young people that any suggestion to alter this plan is met with stiff opposition. Indeed, it is often the case that when these young people write back from college, they start their letter with the heading from the Psalm which they had said so often as a group. It is not inconceivable that a short Psalm could be learned for memory and recited daily by an individual or a group as the day begins.

Surely the Psalter is an underused book. Even when it is used, it probably is not used in the fashion intended for it or placed in the role that it originally occupied. Bonhoeffer would say that "the Psalter is the vicarious prayer of Christ for his Church."³ In another little volume entitled, Psalms: the Prayer Book of the Bible, he says this of the Psalms:

In response to the request of the disciples, Jesus gave them the Lord's Prayer. Every prayer is contained in it. Whatever is included in the petitions of the Lord's Prayer is prayed aright; whatever is not included is no prayer. All the prayers of Holy Scripture are summarized in the Lord's Prayer, and are contained in its immeasurable breadth. They are not made superfluous by the Lord's Prayer but constitute the inexhaustible richness of the Lord's Prayer as the Lord's Prayer is their summation. Luther says of the Psalter: "It penetrates the Lord's Prayer and the Lord's Prayer penetrates it, so that it is possible to understand one on the basis of the other and to bring them into joyful harmony." Thus the Lord's Prayer becomes the touchstone for whether we pray in the name of Jesus Christ or in our own name. It makes good sense, then, that the Psalter is

²Ps. 118:24 (RSV). ³Bonhoeffer, Life Together, p. 46.

often bound together in a single volume with the New Testament. It is the prayer of the Christian church. It belongs to the Lord's Prayer.⁴

There are at least three things we learn from the Psalms, therefore. They are:

1. We learn what prayer means
2. We learn what we should pray
3. We learn to pray as a fellowship

It is Bonhoeffer's contention that if we use the Psalms and pray them as our own prayers, they will deepen and enrich our personal devotional lives. That is just as true for the individual as it is for the community.

For anyone who enjoyed singing harmony, perhaps Bonhoeffer overstates his position just a bit when he strikes out at those of us who enjoy wandering off on the tenor or alto part of a good hymn. Singing ought to be an important part of the community's life, and within the fellowship of this Church we have tried to follow that precept. Lutherans have sometimes been referred to as the "singing Church" which may or may not be accurate. It is often the case, however, that the hymns we sing simply militate against lusty singing because they are set in a key that is too high and/or the tunes are too difficult to follow. Bonhoeffer was quite taken with the gospel songs

⁴Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Psalms: the Prayer Book of the Bible, trans. by James H. Burtness (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Publishing House, 1970), pp. 15-16.

of the black community when he was in New York teaching at Union Seminary. Everyone may be "impressed," but there has been an underlying current of thought that would have us believe they are not to be used in Lutheran churches. Lord of Life has surely not held to that thought. We have included some of those great gospel songs as part of our worship life.

It has also been Lord of Life's habit to have "family services" where children and adults are together for singing and worship. In smaller groups, families have met in homes for the same purpose, and in that setting families are really together in their singing. Perhaps one can fault another for harmonizing on a good melody. That would especially be true if the only purpose were to simply be heard by another. But, it is possible that such harmonizing can be the expression of real feeling on the part of the worshipper for that which is being said in the song. It is certainly true as Bonhoeffer suggests:

The more we sing, the more joy will we derive from it, but, above all, the more devotion and discipline and joy we put into our singing, the richer will be the blessing that will come to the whole life of the fellowship from singing together.⁵

One must, of course, think of prayer when considering family devotions. Whether devotions take the form of free prayer or the recitation of memorized prayer makes little difference. However, if it is free prayer, it ought to be

⁵Bonhoeffer, Life Together, p. 61.

the prayer of the community and not just the words of the individual. One prays as a "brother among brothers," and should take great care to guard against a free prayer being only the words and concerns of the one praying, instead of reflecting the heart of the group. Formal, memorized prayers can, therefore, be of great assistance to the family. (Indeed, when the disciples wanted to learn how to pray, Jesus taught them what we call the Lord's Prayer.) Bonhoeffer says:

Prayer does not mean simply to pour out one's heart. It means rather to find the way to God and to speak with him, whether the heart is full or empty. No man can do that by himself. For that he needs Jesus Christ.⁶

He goes on to say:

When our will wholeheartedly enters into the prayer of Christ, then we pray correctly. Only in Jesus Christ are we able to pray, and with him we also know that we shall be heard.⁷

So the day begins. The Christian family fellowship separates for its varied tasks. Praying and working are two different things, and one should not be hindered by the other. "Without the burden and labor of the day, prayer is not prayer, and without prayer work is not work. This only the Christian knows."⁸ Prayer puts the individual in the world of people, and work places them in the world of things. That is an interesting thought against which Paul posits the admonition

⁶Bonhoeffer, Psalms: the Prayer Book of the Bible, pp. 9-10.

⁷Ibid., p. 11. ⁸Bonhoeffer, Life Together, p. 70.

of to "pray constantly."⁹ While Paul surely had something other than the constant flow on words in mind, there is an honesty about Bonhoeffer's separation that probably is closer to reality for people than Paul's. There is a time to work, a time to play, and a time to pray, and, to be sure, work gives prayer meaning and vice versa. If " . . . work becomes a remedy against the indolence and sloth of the flesh,"¹⁰ then the Broadway musical was right in that line, "The idle mind is the devil's tool." Could it not be just as Bonhoeffer suggests, that "the prayer of the morning will determine the day"? Wasted time, of which we are ashamed, temptations that beset us, weakness and listlessness in our work, disorder and lack of discipline in our thinking, and our relations with other people very frequently have their cause in neglect of morning prayer. It is something for the community to think of as it faces each day together. But is it not just as true for the individual as he or she faces the day alone as well?

Solitude has a purpose. It is not just a time to get away from something; it is a time to get away for something. There are some who seek fellowship because they cannot stand to be alone. We must learn how to be alone, for if we cannot learn to be alone, we will be on guard when we are

⁹I Thess. 5:17 (RSV).

¹⁰Bonhoeffer, Life Together, p. 70.

in community, and if we cannot be in community, then we must beware when we are alone. There is a need in everyone to be alone for a quiet time, but one must learn how to use that time constructively. In the chapter under the heading, "The Day Alone," Bonhoeffer offers a "primer" in the use of solitude. It is not intended to be the last word in monastic living, but it does offer a guide in the use of quiet time. Since our times dictate activity and mobility, it is entirely possible that we all need a lesson in how to be alone and what to do when we are. It can safely be said that we are so afraid of being alone that the radio and TV are kept on simply to keep us company and to prevent us from feeling alone. The great classics of devotional literature were written by individuals who took solitude seriously. Bernard Christensen has done a great service in providing a summary of a few of these great devotional authors in a book entitled, The Inward Pilgrimage. One of the authors mentioned in that volume is Bonhoeffer and the book, Life Together.

There are at least three components in the right use of solitude. There might well be more, but Bonhoeffer highlights these in this primer. First, there is the individual use of Scriptures. It is important for the individual to take a given text, read it, and re-read it, reflect on it, and let it speak to him or her in the situation in which they find themselves. If it does not address itself personally right away, one should linger over it until finally it does.

This is the simplest of tasks, for the Christian is doing precisely what the Word was given for; " . . . we read God's Word as God's Word for us,"¹¹ not what the text has to say to others. For the pastor, it is not what a given pericope is saying to his or her congregation, it is what the Word is saying to him personally. Then, and only then, can the Word be preached. There must be no time limit in this process nor a goal for accomplishment (i.e., thirty minutes and three chapters). It may happen, as it often does, that a word or phrase will dart out at the reader, and that will be all the further the reader goes during that meditation period. It is significant to note that Bonhoeffer cautions against great expectations in our quiet meditations. "Above all," he says, "it is not necessary that we should have any unexpected, extraordinary experiences in meditation. This can happen, but if it does not, it is not a sign that the meditation period has been useless."¹²

Second, there is prayer. Since something has already been said about this as the community gathers together, little will be added here. It is important to note that our prayer is to be guided by Scripture. If we do that, we shall avoid the pitfalls of verbalizing our own emptiness. It always protects us from allowing our thoughts to wander which is a particularly difficult task in quiet meditation.

¹¹Ibid., p. 82. ¹²Ibid., p. 83.

Third, intercession needs to be a part of our solitude.

Perhaps a section lifted out of this chapter would put the emphasis where it ought to be:

A Christian fellowship lives and exists by the intercession of its members for one another, or it collapses. I can no longer condemn or hate a brother for whom I pray, no matter how much trouble he causes me. His face, that hitherto may have been strange and intolerable to me, is transformed in intercession into the countenance of a brother for whom Christ died, the face of a forgiven sinner. This is a happy discovery for the Christian who begins to pray for others. There is no dislike, no personal tension, no estrangement that cannot be overcome by intercession as far as our side of it is concerned. Intercessory prayer is the purifying bath into which the individual and the fellowship must enter every day. The struggle we undergo with our brother in intercession may be a hard one, but that struggle has the promise that it will gain its goal.

How does this happen? Intercession means no more than to bring our brother into the presence of God, to see him under the Cross of Jesus as a poor human being and sinner in need of grace. Then everything in him that repels us falls away; we see him in all his destitution and need. His need and his sin become so heavy and oppressive that we feel them as our own, and we can do nothing else but pray: Lord, do Thou, Thou alone, deal with him according to Thy severity and Thy goodness. To make intercession means to grant our brother the same right that we have received, namely, to stand before Christ and share in his mercy.¹³

The test of all this is whether or not the community has been served well or whether it has hindered some aspect of it. Just as the day was begun with a Psalm or Scripture or prayer, or all three, so the day ends with the same. One needs to leave the solitude and return to the community to

¹³Ibid., p. 86.

receive the joy and blessing, the strength and fellowship offered in others. Indeed, the simple meal-time fellowship is an appropriate place to recognize the gifts of each other, as well as the gifts of food. To pray, "Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest, / And let these gifts to us be blest," is to recognize God's presence in Christ at the meal where he desires to be, and to recognize, also, the gifts that are given. It is a European custom that when a toast is offered in a small group, each one captures the eyes of each other, if for only a brief moment, to recognize each other's presence and value. Perhaps that custom could be added to the meal-time prayer that we, in addition to looking at the good gifts of food set before us, we could, also, look at each other and the good gifts that God has given to us in our community. For it is in this community that we share the joys and hopes, sorrows and difficulties, and from which we always receive strength and refreshment.

ESSAY THREE

LIVING RESPONSIBLY WITH OTHERS

There has been within the Lutheran theology a strong emphasis on the priesthood of all believers. It has its origin for the Lutheran church in Luther, but has its roots in the New Testament. This doctrine has been supported through the years by the Church and its theologians. Its application can be seen in congregations today which are billed as having members who are all ministers and employ one or two who are the professionals. How this fits into the picture of "ministry," as Bonhoeffer describes it, is one of the tasks of the author in this section. It is the task of anyone who chooses to read the chapter that deals with "Ministry."

It is a temptation of the Church, or any Christian community, to use a sort of ranking system with regard to the participants. There is, first, the pastor, whose authority one must respect, but whose Christian faith is no different from any one else's. Next, there are the council members, or vestry, whose very elected positions carry with them the responsibility given them by both constitutional requirements and peer support. There are, also, the many volunteers, who

give of their time in the service of others and who are clearly visible to those who have an interest in the life of the community. They all rank on the top of the totem pole. In the local parish, however, the question which opens the chapter on "Ministry" and is taken from the disciples' own situation, "There arose a reasoning among them, which of them should be the greatest,"¹ often arises. No small amount of conflict stems from the "reasoning" among community members and the concern over their own performance in the kingdom. There is a struggle for advantage, and such a struggle is a rejection of justification by faith in favor of self-justification.

What is the greatest ministry, and who is the greatest among us? Bonhoeffer suggests some areas of ministry, not usually placed in the upper categories of importance in the individual's life or the community's life. To perform them with integrity, however, clearly puts the individual or community in a class by themselves. Not in the order listed in this chapter by Bonhoeffer, but each in its turn, let us look at the areas of ministry which Bonhoeffer singled out for attention.

"The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists in listening to them."² Perhaps this area of the community ministry strikes home first and hardest

¹Bonhoeffer, Life Together, p. 90. ²Ibid., p. 97.

at the professionals. The ordained minister is trained to talk, to voice opinions, to witness to the faith, and to preach the Word. Learning to listen is a vital ministry for all Christians, but perhaps especially for the theologically-trained leaders, known as pastors. Pastors have been known to chide people for not speaking a word about their faith. But, have they chided people for not listening to another's faith? Pastors hold classes on "how to witness." Few, if any, have a curriculum for the "art of listening." Christians are more inclined to contribute--to the point of prattling--than they are inclined to listen.

There is, of course, honest listening, and there is the kind that listens with half an ear, waiting for the right word or opportunity to exude the great wealth of information and knowledge welling up in the listener. That might be called impatient listening, and at its heart it is a form of despising the other person. Bonhoeffer would not only not limit listening to the therapeutic professional, but would bemoan the fact that the Christian community has allowed it to get out of its hands. Honest listening is a ministry of the disciple and has as its only purpose the sharing of another person's joys and sorrows. "Just as love to God begins with listening to His Word, so the beginning of love for the brethren is learning to listen to them."³

³Ibid., p. 97.

Listening is a kind of ministry that does not elicit from an individual an argument about who does things best. There is a quality to the ministry that is neither self-justifying nor rooted in pride. It is a ministry that needs to be taken more seriously than it currently is in the life of a community.

Of the same stripe as listening, but out of a different hue comes Bonhoeffer's opening suggestion for ministry: the holding of one's tongue. Certainly, this does parallel listening, but it has more far-reaching implications. Evil thoughts are defeated most effectively when they are not reduced to or converted into words. Under the cloak of advice giving, there is a great temptation to enter into the arena of criticism. The cloak is made more secretive when that which we do is called constructive criticism. At its heart, however, criticism is a technique that is used to gain advantage over another. But, the other person, like ourselves, is free in the image of God, and when that is recognized, there is a far less chance that we will engage in criticism of another. Bonhoeffer goes so far as to say that when the community is divided into the advantaged and the disadvantaged, that division will be the death of the community. "A community which allows unemployed members to exist within it will perish because of them."⁴ There are no superfluous or expendable

⁴Ibid., p. 94.

persons, and there are no persons that one must seek advantage over by criticizing their actions.

There is little doubt that a close association exists between Bonhoeffer's ministry of meekness and The Sermon on the Mount's "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."⁵ The latter will be addressed in a later section. Bonhoeffer quotes Thomas a Kempis in relation to the ministry of meekness, but the translation from the German is less than accurate. "To have no opinion of ourselves. . . ."⁶ is not really what is being said, and it leaves the reader with a negative thought. More correctly it would read in English, "To know oneself, and to think little of oneself, that is the highest and most beneficial task. Not to make much out of ourselves and instead always have a good opinion of others, that is great wisdom and fulfillment." The ministry of meekness has to do with learning to think others are deserving of the accolades given them. Seeking honor is detrimental to faith, and it is always the case that resentment of one by another has its roots in honor seeking. Bonhoeffer raises a poignant question in this section when he asks, "How can I possibly serve another person in unfeigned humility if I seriously regard his sinfulness as worse than my own?"⁷ The ministry of meekness,

⁵Matt. 5:5 (RSV). ⁶Bonhoeffer, Life Together, p. 94.

⁷Ibid., pp. 96-97.

however insignificant a ministry it appears to be on the surface, is of singular and real importance if individuals are to exist as a community. It would surely be good if we all would seek this ministry first and foremost.

On the heels of the ministry of meekness is the ministry of helpfulness. There is the tendency in the community to be the priest who passes by on the other side. The daily assistance in trifling matters is the beginning of the ministry. The hard-line statement, "One who worries about the loss of time that such petty, outward acts of helpfulness entail is usually taking the importance of his own career too solemnly."⁸ No community can exist without some participants taking the ministry of helpfulness seriously. Perhaps this is so elementary a statement that some would say it need not be said at all. On the contrary, it is to Bonhoeffer's credit and it is one of the reasons why this little book has become so popular. That the common, ordinary tasks of life and living are held up as being significant acts of ministry appeals to those seeking true fellowship. Everyone helps, but helping is not always thought of as ministry. But, no one ever helps enough, especially with the routine and monotonous chores of life. That Bonhoeffer himself would often make an unmade bed in the Bruderhaus is a small but significant testimony to that kind of ministry.

⁸Ibid., p. 99.

And, it was Bishop Martin Neimoller, a contemporary churchman of Bonhoeffer's, who advocated (as he himself did) that all parish pastors should clean the latrine once a week so they would know the meaning of menial tasks. It could even be argued that a Sabbatical leave on the part of pastors (now a coming idea) and even for seminary professors should not always be in the "heady" arena of intellectual debate, but in the humdrum existence of a "line" job or daily labor. This is not to infer that the ministry of helpfulness is limited to those who participate only in this style of life, but it is to say that such routine existence makes one keenly aware of another's situation and so helps in the task of performing a ministry of helpfulness. Bonhoeffer's comparison between the monk's vow of obedience and the disciple's commitment in service to another is a significant explanation of his definition of ministry.

As one makes a mental note of each of these areas of ministry, it is plain that there is little in them to distinguish a Christian from a pagan. Both can be helpful, meek, good listeners, and, in varying degrees, can hold the tongue. The one area that strongly differentiates the two is in the ministry of bearing. For Bonhoeffer, "Bearing means forbearing and sustaining."⁹ A brother or sister is a concern for the Christian, precisely because that person is a Christian.

⁹Ibid., p. 100.

Obviously, bearing was of crucial importance to Bonhoeffer. It is a thoroughly Biblical concept coming directly out of Isaiah in chapter 53: "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; . . ."¹⁰ It is the nature of the Christian, because of the cross, that we accept and experience another's burdens. It is the ultimate form of cross bearing. The sin of one is never the sin of only one, but the sin of all. Who can ever say that they have not neglected the ministry of bearing, and so have unwittingly contributed to the sin of the other. "'Behold, you bear them all, and likewise all of them bear you, and all things are common, both the good and the bad' (Luther)"¹¹

It is not coincidental that at the end of all this, there is the ministry of proclaiming (not to be understood as official preaching or pulpитеering). This ministry has to do with the sharing of the gospel in daily communication and on a personal level. This type of ministry is placed here because it is only when we have learned to minister on the other levels that we have the right to minister by proclamation. It certainly is true, for instance, that we have no right to speak the Word of faith until we have listened to where the person is. That can be duplicated for bearing, as well as the others. Without that ministry, our words would be contradicted before they were uttered.

¹⁰Is. 53:4 (RSV). ¹¹Bonhoeffer, Life Together, p. 103.

Nevertheless, we have a duty and a Christian responsibility. It is our obligation to warn another when he or she faces destruction. That is true within the community as well as outside. Bonhoeffer would say that reproof is necessary:

The practice of discipline in the congregation begins in the smallest circles. Where defection from God's Word in doctrine or life imperils the family fellowship and with it the whole congregation, the word of admonition and rebuke must be ventured. Nothing can be more cruel than the tenderness that consigns another to his sin.¹²

This is not to say we would encourage heresy hunts or practice excommunication, but it is necessary to say that rebuke is important to call back into the fellowship.

Through all this, there lingers the hankering for authority. That is the ultimate risk and temptation of the pastor, and it is the secret desire of many of the parishoners. In oneself, there is no authority. It is only when these styles of ministry are exhibited, one authority will be given, and it will be given to the ordained as well as the non-ordained. Bonhoeffer is critical of personality adulation in pastors even though there is probably no way to avoid it completely. The authority will always rest in the office and not in the charm of the individual. At the heart of it all is trust, which is also at the heart of confession and forgiveness, the keys to the kingdom.

¹²Ibid., p. 107.

ESSAY FOUR

LIVING UNDER THE CROSS

There is a rather schmaltzy bumper sticker-type phrase that says, "The family that prays together stays together." That was not Bonhoeffer's idea, and he never said it (at least, not in his published writings), but there is some truth in the phrase depending on how it is understood. "Therefore confess your sins to one another, . . ."¹ is how this chapter is introduced, and if one can make the transition from prayer to confession without losing anything in the move, then there is something in that phrase, whether we like it or not. It has validity and it is a basic ingredient for any community.

Is it possible that a congregation can have opportunities for fellowship, use name tags, employ "greeters," drink coffee, and have pot-lucks, but still be a congregation of lonely people? Or, is it possible that a family of five people, which camps together, plays Scrabble together at home, participates in a local church, and is involved in community affairs may still be a lonely family made up of lonely individuals? Bonhoeffer would suggest that such

¹James 5:16 (RSV).

situations are entirely possible. The reason for this is not that they don't have fellowship with one another as believers; rather, it is because they don't have fellowship with one another as sinners. It is often the case that for a congregation of devout people to discover that a real live sinner is in their midst is a traumatic occasion. The reactions are swift and sometimes lethal. And because most people have been involved in giving the reactions when others are found out, we are hesitant to let anything of our own past out for fear that we, too, would be dealt with harshly. "So," as Bonhoeffer says, "we remain alone with our sin, living in lies and hypocrisy."² It is to this situation that Bonhoeffer writes with a degree of importance and urgency. The truth of Bonhoeffer's assertions is as clear now as it was then. It is this writer's opinion that the crucial chapter which deals with the task of establishing a community out of what heretofore had been simply individuals with a common purpose is this chapter entitled "Confession and Communion."

If any section in all of Bonhoeffer's writing is more "Lutheran" than the explanation of confession based on his understanding of the gospel found in this chapter, one could not imagine it. "But it is the grace of the Gospel, which is so hard for the pious to understand, that it confronts

²Bonhoeffer, Life Together, p. 110.

us with the truth and says: You are a sinner, a great, desperate sinner; now come, as the sinner that you are, to God who loves you."³ Such an understanding puts us all squarely in the same situation. It makes us equals. It allows us to call each other sisters and brothers. With such an understanding, we can, therefore, speak of Jesus as our brother, for in him, God became one of us so that we might be able to be sinners and be able, also, to be helped. Bonhoeffer suggests that the truth of the gospel is to be in the misery of the sinner and the mercy of God. This was the truth Jesus' followers were to live in, and so He gave them, and us, authority to hear one another's confession. "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."⁴

The Church has known that since Jesus spoke it. The Church has even practiced it more or less through the ages. The Romans have held to confession with a greater emphasis than the Protestants. They have included private confession as a necessary part of being a church member in good standing. That is not to say that the Protestants forgot about this procedure entirely. One could name many churches which practice private confession, if not weekly, at least before Holy Communion. In some traditions of American Lutheranism, one was required to speak with the pastor personally and

³Ibid., pp. 110-11. ⁴John 20:23 (RSV).

privately before being allowed to the communion table. And, while all churches have maintained the public confession model, private confession has all but vanished from the Protestant scene and has even been reduced in importance in the Roman Church as well.

It is unfortunate that these practices have been shelved in favor of nothing better. It is in these confessional settings that a breakthrough to community takes place. That is true, of course, for a congregation, but for a smaller nucleus of people, like a family, as well. Sin requires a person to be alone, but confession brings persons together. The nature of sin is to be apart, but the nature of fellowship is to be together. It is in the confession of sin that the gospel's light is played on individuals, and in that light community takes place. There is very little self-righteousness exhibited in a confessor. Everything is surrendered; the pride goes, the sin is given up, and the heart finds its rest in Him. That all happens because now the sin is borne, not only by the individual, but by the community and the confessor's brother, Jesus Christ.

What happens, of course, is that community is established and strengthened as a result of the confession. Alvin Rogness reminds us of the result of confession when he says, "Forgiveness of sins will dictate a new and radical style of life. This is the life of the spirit within the

church of Christ."⁵ That new lifestyle will find itself in a new quality of life within the congregation and a deeper fellowship within the family unit. It means, in short, that no one ever is alone again if he or she has confessed to another. There is a bond of unity that will toughen with time and mature into a friendship like that of which Jesus spoke when he said,⁶ "No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you."⁶

Such a situation is not unique, for it involves each one of us. Anyone living beneath the cross knows the wickedness of sinners, including him or herself. But we will never find that cross if we do not go where it is to be found, and it is found in the confession of the sinner. Confession of sin is a profoundly humbling experience. It hurts one's pride and cuts one down to size. To confess before a brother, who is a sinner, is not something in which to find glory. Nevertheless, whether it is out of a family experience or a congregational situation, such confession is the root system for building a lasting community. It is in confession that one can say, " . . . the old has passed

⁵Alvin N. Rogness, Forgiveness & Confession: the Keys to Renewal (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Publishing House, 1970), p. 55.

⁶John 15:15 (RSV).

away, behold, the new has come."⁷ It is the beginning of the new life, the life with Jesus. It is the fulfillment of the baptismal covenant, and it is re-affirmed in the communion Sacrament.

There is the insidious temptation that would have us believe it is necessary to confess our sins only to God. Now, it is not that confession to God is wrong, nor is it even less than perfect by itself. It is simply easier, and in its ease, confession tends to lose its edge and its power. It is easier because one loses all too quickly the sense of verifying the sorrow and contrition which is to be seen in a changed way of life. One could confess to God in the secret of a closet, and most assuredly be forgiven, but the contrition which results in avoiding the error next time would not nearly be so strong as when confession is to a brother or sister who sees the life. There is the desire to simply grant our own absolution rather than to hear it from God through a brother. It is, no doubt, this easy absolution that accounts for reoccurrences and relapses back to the same patterns and deeds. "Self-forgiveness can never lead to a breach with sin; this can be accomplished only by the judging and pardoning Word of God itself."⁸ The certainty of forgiveness can only be given by another who hears our situation and speaks God's Word of forgiveness. For this

⁷II Cor. 5:17 (RSV). ⁸Bonhoeffer, Life Together, p. 116.

reason, the confession must include specific sins and not general sinfulness. Sinfulness is reckoned with at communion after being dealt with at baptism. Individual deeds and wrongs must be spoken, and self-examination on the basis of the Ten Commandments is an appropriate way to prepare for forgiveness. Luther reminds us of this in the answer to the question:

What sins should we confess?

Answer: Before God we should acknowledge that we are guilty of all manner of sins, even those of which we are not aware, as we do in the Lord's Prayer. Before the confessor, however, we should confess only those sins of which we have knowledge and which trouble us.⁹

In this process, the one to whom the confession is made is also an important concern. That one is not specifically selected out of a crowd nor someone especially designated to hear confessions. To be a "father confessor" is not one of the great spiritual gifts. It simply is any Christian brother or sister who is willing to listen. As Bonhoeffer says:

It is not experience of life but experience of the Cross that makes one a worthy hearer of confessions. The most experienced psychologist or observer of human nature knows infinitely less of the human heart than the simplest Christian who lives beneath the Cross of Jesus.¹⁰

That is an important and significant statement from one whose father was an eminent psychiatrist and who, undoubtedly, knew

⁹Tappert, The Book of Concord, p. 350.

¹⁰Bonhoeffer, Life Together, pp. 118-19.

the value of the profession and the service that could be rendered by it. He did not say it was ineffective or useless, but only that the Christian who has seen and lives beneath the cross is more adequately equipped to hear another's confession. The difference, Bonhoeffer goes on to say, is that the brother knows that the one who comes to confess is no different than the one who is there to hear, for we are all sinners. The confessor is viewed before God in the same light as the one who is listening is viewed. And, the one confessing is under the same mercy as the one who hears the confession.

Worldly wisdom knows what distress and weakness and failure are, but it does not know the godlessness of men. And so it also does not know that man is destroyed only by his sin and can be healed only by forgiveness. Only the Christian knows this. In the presence of a psychiatrist I can only be a sick man; in the presence of a Christian brother I can dare to be a sinner.¹¹

There are two cautions that Bonhoeffer raises in his encouragement for people to take seriously personal and private confession. The first is that it is not good for one to hear the confession of all the others; and, the second, that the one making a confession should beware of thinking the confession itself is worthy of credit. Each caution is there to offset the unlimited license possible in the right that is ours to confess. One cannot bear to hear everyone's sin, for it will soon cease to be personal.

¹¹Ibid., p. 119.

Nor, can one honestly listen to another if that one does not make confession a practice in his or her daily life. The second caution is the simple concern for not being proud of one's humility. It reminds us not to think our confession puts us into a privileged position as over against our salvation or faith.

All of this leads to receiving the Sacrament. The Lord's table was such a solemn, yet joyful, event in the community that at least a day's preparation went into each participant's work before it was finally celebrated. The members knew that it is only after confession of sin to one another that communion can be rightly received and understood. When such repentance and confession have taken place, there is great joy in heaven, and if there is great joy in heaven, so there is great joy in the celebration of the Sacrament. The fellowship of the Lord's table is the highest form of fellowship known to the Christian community. The promise is clear that as the members are united in fellowship at the table, they will also be united in fellowship for eternity. For a moment, for a brief instant, "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."¹² For that moment, the community is one in the Lord, and there is perfect communion. That is true of a congregation, to be sure, but

¹²Gal. 3:28 (RSV).

it is also true of the individual family which kneels together at the Lord's communion table.

Since, for Bonhoeffer, community was a means of grace, it is the thesis here that community often precedes discipleship. The call is not so much to perform some task as it is to join in community and experience the fellowship of Christian brothers and sisters. That has been the case at Lord of Life. But once a part of the community, discipleship--what one does with his or her life--is the pressing theme. It surely was Bonhoeffer's theme during the middle years during which these two books, The Cost of Discipleship and Life Together, were written.

UNIT III.

DISCIPLESHIP

THE SUMMONS OF THE GOSPEL

CHAPTER 5

PREACHING--A CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

A Discussion of the WORD and the Word With Homiletical Reflections on The Sermon on the Mount

That Bonhoeffer held the sermon and the preaching of it to be of importance for the life of the church is really an understatement. From the collected works of Bonhoeffer published in German under the title Gesammelten Schriften, there are several statements by Bonhoeffer that speak about his high regard for preaching and, therefore, homiletics. In Volume IV of those writings, which contains his sermonic works, he says, "Discipleship, suffering, silence, worldliness--all that does not take the place of the sermon, but serves for its enthronement."¹ Bethge mentions in that same volume that Bonhoeffer's "concern for the sermon 'was not a matter of fearfulness' but of confidence in the ultimate value of the sermon. . . . Bonhoeffer stands unshaken upon the irreplaceability of the preaching of the Christ."² Bethge also says in that section "'to preach often'" not only appeared meaningful for him, it was his most certain

¹Fant, Bonhoeffer: Worldly Preaching, p. 3.

²Ibid., p. 4.

reality in the face of death. The word of the sermon has, and is, the presence of Christ."³ Indeed, Bethge could say of him in his biography, "To Bonhoeffer nothing in his calling competed in importance with preaching."⁴

If those statements are true as we have the right to assume they are for they have been extracted from either Bonhoeffer's own statements or those of his closest friend, then we have some inkling as to why the courses on homiletics were so vital to the community and important to him. He might entrust the discussion of sermons to his assistant, but he always assumed the responsibility for teaching homiletics for himself. Those sermons which had been actually delivered before a congregation were not permitted to be discussed. Even those sermons given in class were to be listened to by the student, not with so much a critical eye, but with the eye of faith trying to see in that sermon the reality of Christ. Nothing was so concrete as the real voice of Christ speaking in a sermon.

Homiletics began, for Bonhoeffer, with lessons on what it meant to listen. Imagination, good expression, and the general attractiveness of a sermon were not unimportant qualities, but unless one learned to listen to preaching, one could not preach in a manner that would elicit faith. Bethge

³Ibid., pp. 4-5.

⁴Bethge, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, p. 175.

quotes him as once saying "that a good sermon should be like a lovely red apple which is held out to a child with the question 'Would you like it?'," and, he continued, "'Thus we should be able to speak about our faith so that hands will be stretched out towards us faster than we can fill them'"⁵ It was the preacher who held the red apple, and Bonhoeffer's purpose in homiletical classes was to move these young seminarians to a place where they believed they held the red apple and, in fact, did, each time they preached. His urgings went beyond the practical and realistic. "'Do not try to make the Bible relevant. Its relevance is axiomatic . . . Do not defend God's Word, but testify to it . . . Trust to the Word. It is a ship loaded to the very limits of her capacity.'"⁶

Bonhoeffer's understanding of the importance of preaching came from his acquaintance with Lutheran Christology. For Lutherans, the very presence of Christ had always been assured in the Sacrament of the Altar. But that presence was also assured in the preached word. Through Word and Sacrament Christ is revealed to us through elements of bread and wine and the words of the preacher. The Word of the Bible takes on form and substance as it is preached in the sermon. Such a Christology is rooted in the incarnation, for Christ is made real again and again as the proclamation

⁵Ibid., p. 361. ⁶Ibid., p. 362.

of grace is made. The pulpit was not the same as a speaker's rostrum. He thought that they were to remain independent of one another, though not in opposition to one another. He loved the speaker's rostrum too, but it was the pulpit that held his real interest.

Where did Bonhoeffer acquire this high regard for preaching? What shaped his life to allow an incarnational theology to so dominate his understanding of the sermon? While those questions are fair, there surely can be no certain answer. It can be said, however, that an earlier experience in his life did leave a profound effect. In 1931 as chaplain of a technical institute in Charlottenburg, a suburb of Berlin, he took on the added task of teaching a confirmation class of what was reported to be a group of difficult youngsters. In a neighboring suburb, Wedding, Bonhoeffer began teaching the class of some forty boys, most of whom came from poverty-stricken situations. Sometime during that year his life underwent a change. Evangelicals of our day might like to call it a conversion, and while that might be too strong a word, there clearly was an "incarnational" experience in his own life. Bethge quotes a letter he wrote to a girl friend which looks back on that time, and in it he alludes to his "experience" or change. It is of such paramount importance in the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer that I quote it at length:

I plunged into work in a very unchristian way.

An . . . ambition that many noticed in me made my life difficult . . .

Then something happened, something that has changed and transformed my life to the present day. For the first time I discovered the Bible . . . I had often preached. I had seen a great deal of the Church, and talked and preached about it--but I had not yet become a Christian . . .

I know that at that time I turned the doctrine of Jesus Christ into something of personal advantage for myself . . . I pray to God that that will never happen again. Also I had never prayed, or prayed only very little. For all my loneliness, I was quite pleased with myself. Then the Bible, and in particular the Sermon on the Mount, freed me from that. Since then everything has changed. I have felt this plainly, and so have other people about me. It was a great liberation. It became clear to me that the life of a servant of Jesus Christ must belong to the Church, and step by step it became plainer to me how far that must go.

Then came the crisis of 1933. This strengthened me in it. Also I now found others who shared that aim with me. The revival of the Church and of the ministry became my supreme concern . . .

I suddenly saw as self-evident the Christian pacifism that I had recently passionately opposed--a disputation at which Gerhard (Jacobi) was also present. And so it went on, step by step. I no longer saw or thought anything else . . .

My calling is quite clear to me. What God will make of it I do not know . . .

I must follow the path. Perhaps it will not be such a long one. Sometimes we wish that it were so (Philippians 1:23). But it is a fine thing to have realized my calling . . .

I believe its nobility will become plain to us only in coming times and events. If only we can hold out.⁷

From that letter we can sense some of the turmoil and struggle that went on in Bonhoeffer's life as he began to sift the wheat from the chaff and find a place on which to stand in his own theological understandings. A little

⁷Bethge, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, pp. 154-55.

of that struggle shows itself in a sermon he preached on January 15, 1933, using the text from Matt. 8:23-27. In a sermon which has more than the usual amount of imagery connected with it, Bonhoeffer says:

But now in the midst of this world of fear a place has been established which has as its own particular task--the task which the world cannot understand--to call out to men one thing, ever the same and ever new: Fear is overcome; do not be afraid; in the world you have fear, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world! O ye of little faith, why are you so afraid? Christ is in the ship! And this place which is so spoken of is the pulpit in the church. The living Jesus himself wants to tell the world from the pulpit that for those in whom he enters, fear disappears.⁸

The very premise on which the seminary at Finkenwalde was begun establishes the significance of preaching in the life of Bonhoeffer:

1. The pastor, and particularly the young pastor, suffers from being by himself. The burden of preaching is particularly heavy today for the solitary pastor who is not a prophet, but just a servant of the church. . . .

2. The nature of the Christian life is again being questioned by the younger generation of theologians. . . . The damage done to the credibility of our preaching by our life and by our uncertainty as to what Christian life compels us to think again and to embark upon new practical ventures.

3. There is a need for a group of completely free, trained pastors to preach the Word of God for decision and for discerning the spirits, in the present church struggle and in others to come, and to be immediately ready to serve as preachers at the outbreak of any new emergency. . . .

4. The pastor who exercises his office alone is in constant need of a spiritual haven in which he can strengthen himself for his office in a strict Christian way of life, of prayer, meditation, study

⁸Fant, Bonhoeffer: Worldly Preaching, pp. 15-16.

or Scripture and brotherly discussion. . . .

5. In full knowledge that every young pastor today is needed to serve in the parishes, and despite the difficulty of asking for anyone temporarily to stand aside from this service, it is nevertheless our view, tried by conscience, that the service of a number of young preachers in this work, which goes beyond that of an individual parish, is indispensable. In each individual case, the decision must be made with the full agreement of the Council of Brethren.⁹

His perception of preaching was not limited to reflecting on good sermons when he heard them, for he was not above commenting on those which he felt did not "hold the apple out." One such case took place in the United States when, on a visit to New York in 1939, shortly after the seminary was closed, he made this observation about the sermon in Riverside Church:

The whole thing was a respectable, self-indulgent, self-satisfied religious celebration. This sort of idolatrous religion stirs up the flesh which is accustomed to being kept in check by the Word of God. Such sermons make for libertinism, egotism, indifference. Do people not know that one can get on as well, even better, without 'religion'--if only there were not God himself and his Word? Perhaps the Anglo-Saxons are really more religious than we are, but they are certainly not more Christian, at least, if they still have sermons like that. I have no doubt at all that one day the storm will blow with full force on this religious hand-out, if God himself is still anywhere on the scene. Humanly speaking the thing is by no means unattractive, but I prefer the rustic preaching of Br. Schutz. The tasks for a real theologian over here are immeasurable. But only an American himself can shift all this rubbish, and

⁹Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Way to Freedom: Letters, Lectures and Notes 1935-1939, ed. and with an Introduction by Edwin H. Robertson, trans. Edwin H. Robertson and John Bowden, vol. 2 (New York and Evanston, Ill.: Harper & Row, 1966), pp. 29-31.

up till now there do not seem to be any about.¹⁰

Bonhoeffer was not particularly kind to that well-known church in New York. Later, in the same entry into his diary, he wrote of the Broadway Presbyterian Church and a sermon delivered that day, "The sermon was completely astonishing on 'our likeness with Christ.' A completely Biblical sermon--the sections on 'we are blameless like Christ, we are tempted like Christ' were particularly good. This will one day be an entre of resistance when Riverside Church has long since become a temple of Baal."¹¹ Clearly, Bonhoeffer held good preaching to be of almost singular importance in the life of any community which had as its goal to live a life in Christ. He not only insisted on it in others, he worked hard at doing it himself. That pattern started early, for in a letter to his parents dated December 27, 1928, he wrote, "Writing sermons still takes up a great deal of my time. I work on them a whole week, devoting some time to them every day."¹² And, less than a year later, he writes these words to a former fellow student, "Now during the summer, when I am alone for three months, I have been preaching once a fortnight. And I find the same thing as you. I don't know what to do with the precious half-hours which we have; I preach more different things than I would ever have thought possible."¹³

¹⁰Bonhoeffer, The Way to Freedom, pp. 230-31.

¹¹Ibid., p. 231. ¹²Fant, Bonhoeffer: Worldly Preaching, p. 9

¹³Bonhoeffer, No Rusty Swords, p. 34.

The sermon became such an integral part of the community of Finkenwalde in part, no doubt, because of the awe with which Bonhoeffer held it himself. In the same letter to his friend, Rossler, from his parish in Barcelona, Spain, Bonhoeffer writes:

For a long time I thought that there was a central point in preaching which, once one touched on it, could move anyone or confront them with a decision. I don't believe that any more. First, preaching can never apprehend this central point but can only be apprehended by it, by Christ. So Christ becomes flesh as much in the words of the pietists as in those of the churchmen or the Religious Socialists, and these empirical restrictions do not mean relative, but in fact, absolute difficulties for preaching; men are not the same even at the deepest level, but they are individuals, totally different and only 'united' by the Word in the church. I have noticed that the most effective sermons were those in which I spoke enticingly of the Gospel, like someone telling children a story of a strange country. The difficulty in principle remains; one should give milk, but one doesn't know what that means and wonders whether one isn't giving sugared water by mistake.¹⁴

It is not too much to say that to describe Bonhoeffer's concept of the Word apart from preaching is virtually impossible. For Bonhoeffer, Christ not only says the word, he is the word. He is present in the spoken word in addition to standing behind the sermon. Bonhoeffer makes it plain in his lectures on Christology, which we have in the reconstructed notes of his students compiled by Bethge, that:

Christ is not only present in the word of the church, but also as the word of the church, i.e., as the spoken word of preaching. "In the word"

¹⁴Bonhoeffer, No Rusty Swords, pp. 34-35.

might say too little, if it made it possible to separate Christ from his Word. Christ's presence is his existence as preaching. The whole Christ is present in preaching, Christ humiliated and Christ exalted. His presence is not that power of the community or its objective spirit from which the preaching is made, but his existence as preaching. Were that not so, preaching could not have the prominent place accorded to it by the Reformation. This place belongs to even the simplest preaching. Preaching is the riches and the poverty of the church. It is the form of the presence of Christ to which we are bound and to which we have to keep.¹⁵

The relationship between God's Word and man's words is the key to this part of his Christology. Bonhoeffer does not perceive it to be one of exclusiveness. "The human word of preaching is not a phantom body for the Word of God. But the Word of God has really entered into the humiliation of the word of man."¹⁶ Bonhoeffer is like Luther here in that he saw the Word of God in both the Bible and in preaching. "The Word is concretely present in the church as the Word of scripture and of preaching--essentially the latter."¹⁷ And, like Luther, he specifically saw the presence of Christ in preaching even more than in the Bible. Even as early as 1929 the preacher's heart of Bonhoeffer surfaces when, in his doctoral dissertation, he describes three sociological functions of the church. They are, "believing knowledge,

¹⁵Bonhoeffer, Christ the Center, p. 52.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 53.

¹⁷Bonhoeffer, The Communion of Saints, p. 161.

preaching knowledge, and theological knowledge."¹⁸ He described each of these briefly by indicating believing knowledge was knowing that one had been forgiven by God in Christ; preaching knowledge, on the other hand, was what the preacher knows about that which he preaches; and theological knowledge was simply the memory of the church. The preaching knowledge is certainly the facts that must be shared, but, more importantly, the experiential knowledge of the risen Christ seen in the preacher as a person.

So much can be said to support the premise that preaching, for Bonhoeffer, was the very life of a Christian community. The title of one of the chapters in Life Together bears this out when he refers to the "Ministry of Proclamation." Clearly, the preached word carried great importance to any student of his.

¹⁸Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Act and Being, trans. by Bernard Noble and with Introduction by Ernest Wolf (London: Collins; New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 125.

CHAPTER 6

SERMONS ON DISCIPLESHIP

SERMON ONE

A SUMMONS

Matthew, in his account of the Gospel, records the confrontation of Jesus and two followers, Peter and Andrew. It is an account that sheds light on the whole concept of discipleship, so some reflections on the Biblical "call to discipleship" is in order. The section of Matthew to which this refers is:

As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." Immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.¹

There is a suddenness to that call in this text that makes one's head spin. The whole text by any psychological standard is impossible. The account is rendered ridiculous by anyone steeped in motivational methods. And since we are all part of that following to a greater or lesser degree, we have through the years offered grand explanations

¹Matt. 4:18-22 (RSV).

as to how it was that Peter and Andrew decided to follow. "They knew of him already," we say. Or, "They had thought about his purpose and goals and so were all primed to respond affirmatively," we add. We do that because we are all "mini" Freuds, knowing something of egos and motivational skills for education, life, and even death.

We do the same for Jesus himself. He surely had interviewed several candidates prior to his selection of Peter and Andrew, we surmise. He had evaluated their performance on their present job (fishing) and had run a check into their political affiliations and personal lives. We assume all that because we cannot imagine that anyone would select someone for a job--however mundane or important--without going through the necessary bureaucratic procedures. One could not conceive of hiring workers and simply training them for the job that needs to be done. Indeed, the suddenness of the call in this text is enough to make one's head spin.

There is a quality about this text that resembles creation itself. God said, "Let there be light: and there was light." Light did not tarry a bit before coming into existence nor did light consult with darkness to see if it would be all right. There were not many options open to light when God spoke. So Jesus said, "Follow me!" And immediately they left their nets and followed. They did not tarry. There was no consultation first. There were not

many options open to the disciples.

There is a lesson for all of us in this text and that lesson is no respecter of age, occupation, rank, or station in life. It is the same for all alike. The lesson has to do with following Jesus. Or, to put it another way, it has to do with discipleship. And the lesson is: there is a summons out for each of us. That summons will not wait for one to tarry, consult with friends and family, or delay for job descriptions or the setting of goals. The summons comes from the Lord of life who created the world with a word, led the people out of Egypt with a cloud, brought them out of bondage through a fiery furnace, healed the sick, raised the dead, set sinners free, and by his cross assured for all time that real power will never again reside in kings or tyrants, prime ministers or presidents, bishops or queens. Rather, ultimate power rests in discipleship and its cost comes in suffering and in death. For "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church" as Tertullian has reminded us.

For Peter and Andrew there was no time to ask the simple question, "Where are you going?", albeit a logical question. One could almost say it could be expected, for everything in life is going somewhere. Everything has direction and purpose. We are taught to set goals and objectives from childhood on through our adult lives. We make plans and look toward the future. But for these disciples there was

no planning. There was no "where to?" They simply heard the summons, got up, and left.

It is possible that sometimes quick, off-the-cuff decisions are best. People have been known to stew over decisions to such a degree that they are rendered almost helpless in the process. They make lists with the pros on one side and the cons on the other. They try to study all possible eventualities and become so bogged down in the whole effort that they simply get nothing done, let alone make a decision. On the other hand, some people have the capacity to face a situation and simply make a choice. It appears that Peter and Andrew operated in this instance under the latter system. The response was simply incredible. While one might like to add his or her own thoughts about how it all took place, all we are given to know is that Jesus happened by one day, confronted them with a decision through a summons to follow him, and they took him up on it.

Other questions that could have been raised (and most often are today) were, "How much?" or "What does it pay?" Most of us today would argue that anyone who does not ask either of these questions must simply be short on mental abilities. It is doubtful that the world would last a minute without someone somewhere reflecting on the two questions, "where to" and "how much." Above everything else in life, that which takes place in outwardly reputable business transactions is totally contrary to and in direct

opposition to discipleship. The cost is considered in dollars and cents, but never in suffering and death. People who ignore the questions "where to" and "how much" do not succeed except when the summons of Jesus comes to them. One cannot understand why Peter and Andrew never asked those questions. They simply didn't. The "summons" somehow blocked out the response. That which would normally come to mind in a similar situation was strangely absent. The response was not reasonable as we consider reason. It was more like being obsessed or possessed. It was nothing less than creation happening all over again, for two people became new creatures in Christ.

The summons of Christ is still being offered in a not dissimilar fashion today. There is someone standing near, the sight of whom, through the eyes of faith, is so glorious and magnificent that one forgets the normal questions of "where to" and "how much." The very sight of this one is goal enough. This someone satisfies the questions of "where to" and "how much," and adds even more. For, to hear him and see him and love him and follow him is not only life enhancing, it is life changing. It is creation happening all over again. It is becoming a new creature in Christ.

The lesson is for everyone. Some have heard the summons in the past, but have decided to repeatedly ask "where to" and "how much" instead of instantly responding affirmatively. They have heard the word, but spend most of

their time adjusting their goals and establishing directions. They have taken their places with the vast company of middle-of-the-roaders who have exchanged a spontaneous "yes" for a lifetime of monotonous management.

There is a summons for all of us. The summons may come, perhaps, through the singing of some old "chestnut" of a hymn, or through the kindly deed of a friend, or in the spoken word of a neighbor. The summons may come when everything held so dear is blotted out and when all talk of goals and objectives disappears into the land of trivia. The summons may come when nothing except Jesus Christ is seen in all the glory and beauty and power and love that only he can bring, without strings or conditions. The summons may come so clearly that all discussion of "where to" and "how much" fades into the distance of irrelevance. A summons to nothing less than the cross itself. Bonhoeffer has said it best for all Christians: "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die."² But, the example of Peter and Andrew reminds us not to miss the opportunity when it is there. That moment is worth the rest of a lifetime. For what if it all happens to be true? What if following Jesus is all there is to life? What if everything else is just a bogus or cheap imitation of the real thing? How foolish to let it slip from our hands for a mess of porridge.

²Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, p. 79.

We are made for discipleship. We are summoned to discipleship. Discipleship is what theology is all about-- discipleship to Jesus. When that happens, it is creation all over again.

SERMON TWO

A CALL TO THE BLESSED

Years before the well-publicized Surgeon General's report of a significant incidence of lung cancer in dedicated cigarette smokers, there was a Madison Avenue type commercial featuring the slogan, "Coming Events Cast Their Shadows Before." The billboard and magazine ads featuring the slogan pictured slim people with fat shadows. And, there was another line to the commercial, "Reach for a Lucky Instead of a Sweet." The unspoken message was clear: Substitute cigarettes for candy in order to maintain your sylphlike figure. One could suspect the formula worked. In fact, one could still suppose it would work. Replacing sweets with cigarettes should be expected to be effective in weight control. The problem now emerges from more recent research that suggests cigarette smokers may die younger even though they remain thin.

"Coming Events Cast Their Shadows Before."

It's so true--and not only so with respect to weight control and death. It spills over everywhere. Decisions we make reflect not only our experiences from the past, but also our expectations of the future.

Shall one have another child? For some, that becomes a rhetorical question, but, for those for whom it provides an open option, the question of the future becomes significant in decision making. The joy of a young child in the home--but there are education expenses. The delight of an extension of one's clan--but, oh, the responsibilities involved. Future expectations condition decision making.

Shall one buy a new home? The future plays its role--salary expectations, job security, retirement income, and taxes.

Shall one ditch his or her spouse and try and pick up a new model? The divorce rate says something about human expectations in our culture, something like "hope springs eternal" or "tomorrow can be better."

The future may not be all that clear, but it clings to us like a shadow. What we expect from tomorrow, from next year--even from death makes a difference in the things we decide to do today. "Coming events cast their shadows before."

It was like that in Christ's life, too. As Bonhoeffer says, "All the wrath of God's people against him and his Word will fall on his disciples; his rejection will be theirs. The cross casts its shadow before."¹

There is a text from Christ's masterpiece, the Sermon on the Mount, which indicates the truth of that statement.

¹Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, p. 96.

It comes from the Gospel according to Matthew. The familiar portion, known as the Beatitudes, is the focus of our consideration here.

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you."²

First, it is the author's opinion that at the beginning of Christ's ministry, he knew where it led. Perhaps, with the introduction of the Sermon on the Mount, he had no clear picture of the rejection by which he would go to the cross, but he must have known he would be rejected. Speculation on how he knew--whether there was some unexplainable prescience or some special revelation that he may have had as the son of God--is not germane. All he really needed was a normal brain to know he would face rejection because his goal was

²Matt. 5:1-12 (RSV).

enunciating his precepts, he would put his own life on the line. He, also, knew that those who followed him into discipleship would be blessed in the faith and persecuted for it.

One further observation concerning the Sermon on the Mount before looking at the Beatitudes which are as sublime a series of statements as appear anywhere in literature. We are not going to worry about such things as whether it actually was delivered as recorded or whether Matthew did some editing along the way and re-assembled statements from Christ into the order in which they appear in the Gospel story. We will not try to harmonize his account with the parallel report from St. Luke, or bother ourselves over any apparent inconsistencies. We are not going to raise some questions that could be raised because we will have enough about which to be concerned simply by beginning in the fifth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew where it is reported of Jesus that "seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying, 'Blessed . . . '"³

Blessed! It is the first word in each of the verses, four through eleven. That is why we speak of this text as

³Bonhoeffer states in an extended footnote on page 96 of The Cost of Discipleship that there is no justification whatever for setting Luke's version of the Beatitudes over against Matthew's. One is not to be interpreted as original and the other as spiritualizing.

containing the Beatitudes, the pronouncement of blessedness destined to rest upon a diverse group of persons culturally described for the most part as unfortunate. They included the poor in spirit, the mourners, the meek and hungry, the merciful and pure in heart, and peacemakers, the persecuted, and men reviled. For a mere twelve verses the text covers a lot of ground with this introduction to Christ's great sermon on Christian moral attitudes and behavior.

The Beatitudes! We learned them as children. Most of us surely could recite them by the time we were confirmed. At Luther League conventions we heard them and speakers always posed the question, "If circumstances require you to make the ultimate decision for Christ, will you be willing to die for your faith?" That was back when Communism was first being felt as a threat to the Church, and it was popular to predict hard times ahead for the faithful. Many believed it when we joined the great majority and stood up to be counted. We were ready to die for our faith. That is what being Christian was all about, and, then, there was that comforting Beatitude, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." That was comforting. In fact, all the Beatitudes were comforting. We liked the idea of being blessed. The Beatitudes still ring pleasantly, even though with changing times, we actually do not anticipate suffering persecution unto death for faith today.

Neither did those, however, who first heard the words

spoken. The hearers had no inkling of the Christian persecutions so shortly to follow. They didn't know the expectations of discipleship or of the price some would have to pay on account of their emerging faith. They simply listened and marvelled, and by the time Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority. Little did they know what lay ahead.

It was Christ who sensed the unavoidability of conflict. As surely as he recognized that which had to lie ahead for himself, he also knew of the cost of discipleship that would be paid, at least by some of his followers. Convictions are dangerous things when they are out of step with the majority view or when they antagonize heads of the existing power structure. "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth" may sound innocent enough, but the Caesar in Rome and the Herod in Jerusalem knew they had not arrived at their positions of authority through meekness. Thrones would be jeopardized if the meek were to replace the mighty. Christ was a radical. In time, his disciples would be willing to follow him even to death, and in the Beatitudes Christ spoke a benediction for them to remember when the going got tough. "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." He said a lot of other things in the Beatitudes, for he envisioned blessings falling not only in trying times, but in difficult times as well. "Coming events cast their shadows before" and, surely,

the Lord saw in the future not only the pain, but also the joy of discipleship.

Still, these verses mystify us when we attempt to bring them to our times and apply them directly to the situation in the life we live. The words of the Beatitudes create some problems. Even the promise of heaven pledged in relation to three of the verses can't stand too much scrutiny because the Jews, to whom Christ spoke, had ideas concerning heaven which were quite different from ours. The Christians' heaven was unknown in their times. Their vision of the coming kingdom of God,⁴ in any event, their expectation for the future was one of a time when their Messiah would come, restore glory to Israel, and wear the crown of David as he sat upon a throne in Jerusalem and ruled the world. Our perception of heaven isn't like that at all.

"Blessed are the peacemakers"? Who are they in our times? Christians in the western world will likely answer Menachim Begin and Anwar Sadat, one, an orthodox Jew and the other, a practicing Muslim. "They shall be called Sons of God." This is not the way we learned it in Sunday school.

"Blessed are those who mourn." We would rather be joyful. "Blessed are the meek." We would rather be enthusiastic. "Blessed are those who are persecuted." We would rather be honored. "Blessed are you when men revile

⁴Luke uses the phrase, kingdom of God, rather than the kingdom of Heaven, as we have the record in Matthew's text.

you." We would rather be approved. One would be thought of as a bit strange not to think this way. The Apostle Paul himself did. He could never be accused of meekness, and he forever called his audience to the joy of the Lord rather than to the melancholy of the Christian life. At the end Paul suffered martyrdom in preparation for which we can be confident that these Beatitudes of Jesus strengthened him as he moved toward his Christian destiny: "Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven."

The point cannot be argued. The Beatitudes provide wonderful reinforcement for us as Christians when things go wrong. And, whether we like it or not, we will sometimes need them for that very purpose because things will go wrong.

But that is not enough to satisfy us, and the Beatitudes do satisfy us. So, we must sit back and ask ourselves what is going on. How is it that these verses can minister to us? Our lives are different from those for whom these words were spoken. It is hard for us to believe that we will experience persecution and rejection comparable to that which Christ saw ahead for his disciples. With the Beatitudes he provided them with something both useful and beautiful. In time they would answer in reality the question, only hypothetical for us, "If circumstances require us to make the ultimate decision for Christ, will we be willing to die for our faith?"

Today, we are to be thankful for the life of the here and now. We may have other questions to answer and other decisions to make. As Christians, we want our answers and decisions to be consistent with the will of Christ in whom the present assumes special meaning.

Of course, our past contributes to our decisions. We have taken some actions consistent with our faith and have been blessed by our doing. We have done some things inconsistent with our faith from which, though forgiven, we retain emotions of regret. The rights and wrongs from the past provide guidance for the present.

We, also, are guided by our expectations of the future. In all that we do, our hopes and our dreams are involved. They are the coming events that, though often merely hazy shadows ahead, still exist to encourage and to guide. Future goals are involved in every-day decisions.

But there is more to the present than just the past and the future. Christian decision making is influenced not only by what we have experienced and by what we hold as goals and expectations for the future, equally, or even more important to our attitudes and actions, is what we really are--in our hearts and our emotions, in our minds, and in our thinking. It is academic at this point to argue whether such things result from experience, from genetic endowment, or from divine gifts. The fact is that we are more than merely the product of our experience and our dreams, and the Beatitudes

speak to that extra dimension of inwardness that we describe as our souls. For that extra dimension the Beatitudes provide meaning and life and give peace and harmony. The Beatitudes are orchestrated like a symphony in which individual notes standing alone may seem useless or irrelevant, but, when brought together and internalized within the hearer, create a harmony and a beauty in the hearer's life.

So we reach the end in our consideration of these verses we call the Beatitudes. We could ask in reflection, what is their value in a community of Christians? What place do they have for us? Bonhoeffer reminds us of the value and place when he says:

Clearly, there is one place, and only one, and that is where the poorest, meekest, and most sorely tried of all men is to be found--on the cross at Golgotha. The fellowship of the beatitudes is the fellowship of the Crucified.⁵

Lord of Life Lutheran Fellowship must find its life and meaning in and with the fellowship of the Crucified, and in that fellowship there is peace and joy. And, "the echoes of this joy reach the little flock below as it stands beneath the cross, and they hear Jesus saying: 'Blessed are ye!'"⁶

⁵Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, p. 103.

⁶Ibid., p. 103.

SERMON THREE

A CALL FOR EXTRAORDINARY VISIBILITY

If one wanted to choose a word to summarize all of Bonhoeffer's concept of discipleship, that word might be extraordinary. The life of a disciple, the call to follow Jesus, is a call to the extraordinary, not to the ordinary. The call to the ordinary comes from every front and by every concern, but the call to the extraordinary comes only from Jesus. So extraordinary is the call that alms giving, praying, and fasting ought all to be done in secret and not for personal reward. The profile of the disciple is to be low. The visibility in the community ought not to be one of personal piety, viz., what one does in his or her own religious life. That is not to say that the community to which the disciple belongs should be invisible. Indeed not, for a flight into the invisible is a denial of the call itself. To be a disciple incognito is to misunderstand what it means to be a disciple. To be part of a community that so smoothly melts in with whatever else is around it that it goes unnoticed is simply to miss the whole point of what the Christian community is. Bonhoeffer would say that "flight into the invisible is a denial of the call. A community of

Jesus which seeks to hide itself has ceased to follow him."¹ Invisibility is precariously close to conformity, and conformity (to be like the rest), in this case, is to be outside the community.

The section of this great sermon of Jesus which addresses this issue follows:

"You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden under foot by men.

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."²

In this text a call for visibility is paramount. An extraordinary visibility to be sure, but a visibility nonetheless. These verses were addressed to the disciples, the same group to which the Beatitudes were spoken. They were not spoken to "the crowd" as were the later words of the sermon, but to the select few, the disciples.

These chosen few were to be salt and light. If any comprehension of the value of those commodities is achieved, we understand something of the importance of the disciples in the world. If, somehow, the blessed of the Beatitudes seemed too pious to live anywhere but in heaven, we cannot

¹Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, p. 106.

²Matt. 5:13-16 (RSV).

escape the fact that they are to live in no other place but in this world and to do that in such a way, as salt and light, that their visibility is unquestionably made known. So visible, in fact, are the disciples that they are the sustainers of the world. Without them the world would not exist and could not exist. Without them and their visibility, the world would surely destroy itself.

They are the ones who through their daily activities and style of life, their humility and caretaking attitude, make life a bit more joyful for someone less fortunate.

They are the meek ones who, though they never seek power, often find themselves in powerful positions. They are the ones who, though they don't seek fame, often find themselves beloved by many.

They are the ones who hunger and thirst for righteousness, justice, and that which is right--often a lonely job. Jumping on bandwagons is an over-simplification of true assistance on a personal level. To fight for the disenfranchised, to support the oppressed, and to visit the old and the shut-in is not as easily done. Yet, strangely enough, when this is done a genuine feeling of satisfaction comes which does nothing but confirm the Word of Jesus.

And, they are the peacemakers--not just the Begins and the Sadats, but all the lovers of peace. The ones who give in when they could or should fight; they are the ones who back off instead of charging; they are the ones who act

in such a way that it is difficult to even consider a fight; they are the lovers of peace.

This overt visibility is the extraordinary kind that the disciples and the discipleship community must exhibit. The visibility is in what is done for another instead of in what is done for oneself. The less noticeable one is in regard to contributions, personal prayer life, demeanor at church, actions, fasting, and other disciplines of life, the better. These ought to be invisible to the community, yet visible, not because you want it that way, but visible because of the joy experienced by others. What is seen is not the person so much as what is done. In the action or response to need, the salt is tasted by another and the light is seen. That is an extraordinary way of life, but, then, Christ's call is not to the ordinary.

What are the risks for us today in the call to discipleship as an individual and as a community, the Church? The risks are many. There is, first of all, the possibility of simply choosing to be invisible in lifestyle and piety. That is a way of saying thanks, but no thanks. It appears, then, that a person who takes on no special opportunity for growing in faith, but has as his or her primary goal the advancement of self, may be nice enough, friendly enough, and even likeable. But those qualities are not what he or she has been called to be and not part of the discipleship community to which Jesus summons us all.

There is another risk. That is to maintain an invisible lifestyle with personal piety visible. An example of this would be the individual who takes advantage of all growth opportunities, who makes of Bible study a law unto itself, who prays in such a way that all can see, who gives up not just one thing for Lent, but three, and who drops coins at different times into the poor box so that many will notice. All this is plainly visible, but the life that follows is invisible because piety gets in the way of any real accomplishment.

There is still another risk. This one is such a good-looking temptation that it tricks most people at one time or another. There is in the Lutheran theological perspective the sinister little notion that in opposition to Pharisaic visibility, a little modest invisibility is preferable. That sounds very nice, even something worthy of support. In practice, however, that notion conforms to philosophy and practice of the world and is certainly contrary to Christ's call.

Obviously, there is a fourth risk. That is the situation in which the lifestyle is visible and the piety is invisible. Here what one does is plainly visible for all to see, but how one gets the resource and strength to accomplish it is hidden. There is an unawareness that the good word had been spoken at all. If there were, a tendency to be proud of the thing that had been accomplished would take away some

of the blessing that was received. That which is the light of the world and the salt of the earth are those things mentioned in the Beatitudes. They all show up under the strange light of the cross. The extraordinary thing is that the salt-of-the-earth types are not the proud, the haughty, the conceited or the arrogant of this world. Those who radiate a certain glow of beauty are not the ones who are quick to tell how much they read the Bible or to show their tremendous piety in genuflecting and prayerful poses. Salt-of-the-earth people and those aglow with the spirit are those whom Christ described as "blessed." When one sees the cross and stands beneath it in the shadow caused by the light of the resurrection, it makes for an extraordinary experience and leads to an extraordinary life.

It is in this light that the good works of the disciples are meant to be seen. Men are not to see the disciples but their good works, says Jesus. And these works are none other than those which the Lord Jesus himself has created in them by calling them to be the light of the world under the shadow of his cross. The good works are poverty, peregrination, meekness, peaceableness, and finally persecution and rejection. All these good works are a bearing of the cross of Jesus Christ. The cross is the strange light which alone illuminates these good works of the disciples.³

How does this become known to those at Lord of Life? "It is by seeing the cross and the community beneath it that men come to believe in God. But, that is the light of the Resurrection."⁴

³Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, p. 107.

⁴Ibid., p. 108.

SERMON FOUR

A CALL TO A BETTER RIGHTEOUSNESS

There is an interesting twist to the place and purpose of the Old Testament law and the part it played in the teachings of Jesus to the New Kingdom. Jesus addresses this in the following manner:

"Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."¹

A misunderstanding on the part of the disciples must have existed for this text to have been necessary. A group of heretics evolved in the early days of the church who followed their leader, Marcion. Marcionites, as they were called, would have translated this verse, "Think not that I have come to fulfill the law; I have come to destroy it." One can well imagine that the disciples thought the law had been abrogated, for if this sermon of Jesus were not delivered

¹Matt. 5:17-20 (RSV).

in sequence, then what follows was probably already known to the disciples through the teachings and conversations which they had previously had with Jesus.

All the popular notions of what was right or wrong were reversed. All the former teachings were now accorded the place of honor. The whole religious structure was turned upside down. It would be only natural to think that in this new structure, where the disciples possessed all things through God's grace, where they were heirs to the kingdom of God, where they enjoyed perfect communion with God, where they were the salt of the earth and the light of the city set on a hill, and where the old life was dead, Jesus could give the coup de grace and repeal the law. The disciples surely must have thought he would throw out the old covenant and give his followers the freedom and liberty of the Son of God himself. However, that is not what happened. Jesus came not to destroy the law, but to fulfill it. And, in that saying, he validates and verifies the law of the old covenant.

It could be suggested that the Ten Commandments are not needed by the Christian except for civil order. The great commandment² fulfills them all. Indeed, this argument has broad support. If the great commandment is kept, then none of the others will be broken. But, here, Jesus tells his

2" . . . You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. . . . You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Matt. 22: 37-39 (RSV).

disciples that the law is fulfilled in his presence and certainly not destroyed. For Pauline theologians (which Lutherans are but which the disciples certainly were not), that strains a bit at our understanding of freedom. If there is anything desired, it is to be free, and if discipleship is anything at all, it is an adherence to Jesus Christ alone. Here Jesus adds that we are bound to the law as well as being bound to him. At a minimum, that has a twofold significance: (1) adherence to the law must be different from adherence to Christ, and (2) any adherence to the person with a disregard for the law certainly is not discipleship.

The natural question follows: Which is our final authority, Christ or the law? And, what exactly does he mean? Answers to those questions are difficult to acquire.

The law about which Jesus speaks is the same law of the Old Testament. It is not a new and different law. Bonhoeffer suggests that " . . . the law is not a 'better law' than that of the Pharisees, but one and the same; every letter of it, every jot and tittle, must remain in force and be observed until the end of the world."³ And beyond that there is a "better righteousness" that is to be observed by the disciples, and without that better righteousness no one can enter the kingdom of heaven. The fundamental presumption and the whole purpose of the Sermon on the Mount was to have

³Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, p. 110.

the disciples understand that standing between the law of this life and heaven itself is a better righteousness, and that better righteousness is none other than Jesus himself. He has nothing to add to the law; it is adequate as it is. He deletes nothing from the law; it is all necessary. In fact, Jesus keeps the law--down to the last jot and tittle. And the jot and tittle of the law here means the totality of life itself. It means giving until exhaustion will not allow further giving. It means sharing until one's innermost desire is to take for a while. It means constantly loving others while receiving nothing in return. It means holding on to the faith in the face of suffering until the ultimate price is extracted, life itself.

Without this better righteousness no one has a chance of entering the kingdom of heaven. Without adherence to it, no one excels in anything, least of all, righteousness. It is an extraordinary kind of life, but it is no ordinary kind of call. The law is still present. It is still to be followed and obeyed. There is no short cut, no by-pass, and no detour. There is no curtailment of the Jewish law. If one keeps the law, it is still not enough. One must exceed it, and the only righteousness that exceeds the law was seen in the life and witness and person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the better righteousness. Jesus was the disciples' righteousness just as he is our righteousness. He is what makes us "right," for he has kept the law. Our

righteousness consists precisely in following him, for the call to follow is a call to be righteous, and not to become righteousness. What makes one right is in the decision and desire to follow and do what is right. It is not in the actual doing or the not doing of right or wrong.

What does it mean to be a disciple? What does it mean to hear the call and respond affirmatively? Answers to these questions are related to this better righteousness and not to the issue of being good enough. This righteousness is always seen under the cross. It belongs to the poor in spirit and the meek. It belongs to the tempted and to those who hunger for what is right in the face of what is wrong. It belongs to the peace loving and to those who suffer in their lot of finding and living a better righteousness life.

Examples concerning this new law and the better righteousness follow. One has to do with the brother (or sister) and how we treat him/her. The other has to do with woman (or man), and how we exercise our freedom with them.

As for the brother, there was absolute clarity with regard to the old law and the brother's life. Only God, the giver of life, had the right to take life. Murder was forbidden under the penalty of divine judgment as well as human judgment. Jesus came not to destroy the law, but to fulfill it, and to fulfill it in the case of murder means no false interpretations. A false interpretation of this law today would have us think it has something to do with heart seizures,

brain waves, or some other medical definition of life. But, to fulfill the law, we must understand that anger is also life destroying. Anger is an attack on another's life, and, therefore, anger is a breaking of the law no less than life taking. Anger is an attack on a brother's life for it refuses to let him or her live, and its aim is destruction. It wants to alter the personality just as an attack on his body would alter the body's appearance. "The angry word is a blow struck at our brother, a stab at his heart; it seeks to hit, to hurt and to destroy."⁴ One never gets angry at another and has things return exactly as they were. The disciple of Jesus Christ is to be innocent of anger, and while that is humanly impossible, it is spiritually possible, for our righteousness is in the One who gives us the call.

The illustrations are numerous, but how often we wrong a brother with hatred, anger, and contempt. God will not be separated from our brothers and sisters. If there is no honor for our brother within us, there is no honor for God within us either. The reason for this is surely seen in the incarnation. God became our brother in Jesus. If we want to worship Him, then first we are to be reconciled with our brothers.

The other example here is lust. Lust can be for many things, and it surely is not limited to a male sin, but some

⁴Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, p. 116.

things need to be mentioned about this specific area before we generalize in other areas. Jesus came to fulfill the law and not to destroy it. Again, to fulfill the law here means there can be no false interpretation. A false interpretation is to assume that because one has not gone to bed with another, the law has been kept. Adherence to this law allows no free rein of passions. A will dominated by lust is never free to do what it likes. Even a momentary desire is a barrier to following Jesus. "Lust is impure because it is unbelief, and therefore it is to be shunned."⁵ It trusts the tangible and visible instead of the intangible and invisible.

Perhaps President Jimmy Carter set the record straight in that now famous interview in which he admitted he had lusted after women many times, but had not committed adultery. It received all kinds of notoriety because of the guilt that surfaced in the writers and readers who recognized themselves in their President. The difference was that while the others knew it was true, no one of Carter's position had ever said it before.

A disciple of the new law would say the same as President Carter since the righteousness of a disciple is in Christ and not determined by his roving or non-roving eye. The law has not been destroyed, but the interpretation is clarified. Except for those who live their lives in a cloistral state,

⁵Ibid., p. 119.

the same can be said for everyone.

Jesus does not impose intolerable restrictions on the disciples. He does not say, "Don't look at anything." He says only to look to him. Somehow, he knows that if one does, his or her gaze will always be right and pure. If one does not, then other images become important and that better righteousness will become a weedy path.

The same can certainly be said of everyone. One can be angry and one can lust, and anyone who will not or cannot admit they can does not sense the need for the righteousness of him who calls all to discipleship. For while most have not killed, nor have most committed adultery, it can certainly be said that such statements do not mean that the law has been kept. Our righteousness is in Jesus who did not destroy another with anger and who did not lust after another with passion. His thoughts were always under control. Therefore, he is the righteousness which exceeds that of the Pharisees. Bonhoeffer says:

To serve our brother, to please him, to allow him his due and to let him live, is the way of self-denial, the way of the cross. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.⁶

Bonhoeffer also reminds us, " . . . it is not enough to teach the law of Christ, it must be done, otherwise it is no better than the old law."⁷

⁶Ibid., p. 118. ⁷Ibid., p. 114.

SERMON FIVE

A CALL TO HIDDEN DISCIPLINES

Lent is the time of the church year which had traditionally been associated with greater piety, more opportunities for reflection, less pleasures, and a higher concentration on prayer and the things of God. Traditionally, that is, for while services are still held in churches during Lent, particularly Ash Wednesday, for many life continues to be one Mardi Gras after another, regardless of the season of the year. That is not intended to be a judgmental statement, for times change and, perhaps, it is true that the need for Lenten services has passed. Some churches have abandoned the traditional evening meetings in exchange for some other form of worship. Many people have long ago quit "giving things up for Lent." Special donations for alms are nearly abandoned. Perhaps it has to do with our change in lifestyle, but regardless of the reason for the change, change has occurred.

The call to discipleship is still the same, however. There can be no sunrise without a sunset, no morning without night, no joy without sorrow, no pleasure without suffering, no friendship without risk, no Easter without Good Friday,

and no discipleship without commitment. We have in this great Sermon on the Mount a statement again that says something about that discipleship. It is a lengthy statement, but worth quoting in its entirety.:

"Beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them; for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

"Thus, when you give alms, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by men. Truly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

"And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

"And in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this:

Our Father who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
And forgive us our debts,
As we also have forgiven our debtors;
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.

For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

"And when you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your

fasting may not be seen by men but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you."¹

This passage is really very confusing. Just when it is learned that our light is so to shine before men that they may see our good works and glorify our father in heaven seemingly new instructions are stated which are to give our alms in such a way that no one knows. Prayer is to be done by and for ourselves. When we choose to give up that which pleases us most, we are to do it so that no one is aware of our action. We are to do all of this because our treasure is not in what is tangible and corruptible, but because it is in heaven.

What is one to say about this hidden character of the Christian life? Much could be said, but the emphasis is on one important word, extraordinary. It is in this extraordinary life that we are asked to participate. It is for this hidden character of life that we risk everything of value when we follow Christ. It is extraordinary, but Jesus calls a halt in this text to any personal satisfaction that might come to us in making the Christian faith vital in our lives.

Alms giving is the first point for consideration. If, somehow, one's left hand becomes conscious and aware of what the right hand is doing, or, if one becomes conscious

¹Matt. 6:1-16 (RSV).

of a hidden virtue in doing what is right, then that one is after a reward in his or her time instead of awaiting the reward which is ours in God's own time. (The reward might be as simple as a word of praise.) That is an extraordinary concept since most of the world is structured on the reward system. As Bonhoeffer says, "If we want publicity in the eyes of men we have our reward. . . . if we become conscious of our hidden virtue, we are forging our own reward, instead of that which God had intended to give us in his own good time."² The call to discipleship is a call to the extraordinary.

Or, consider prayers. Praying is not dependent on others hearing our words or our posture for others to see. We would like to think that the better the words, the more effective the prayer; the more one kneels, the higher quality the petition; or, the longer one keeps his or her eyes closed, the greater the personal reward. That would be the ordinary way to think, but we are called to the extraordinary. And the extraordinary thing about prayer is that our Father already knows our needs before we pray. So, we are given a model in the Lord's Prayer and asked to live the extraordinary life of believing our Father knows and will do for us what is best. "Prayer is the supreme instance of the hidden character of the Christian life."³

²Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, p. 143.

³Ibid., p. 146.

Fasting is considered next. Christ takes it for granted that the disciples would practice strict self-control. It is difficult to commune with God on a full stomach. The ordinary way of life tries to shame another by expounding on personal virtues. Only thin people talk about losing weight at the supper table. Only teetotalers talk of their lack of alcohol consumption. It is well that one lives a life of discipline, but if one's discipline is done in a way that is openly apparent, demeaning or condemning of others, that one might be rewarded now, but the real reward from the Father which is given in His own time is in doubt.

That is an extraordinary style of life, but Christ did not call anyone to the ordinary. The call to the ordinary is evident all around us. It is to the extraordinary that we are called. The ordinary wants praise; the extraordinary praises God. The ordinary wants glory and fame; the extraordinary gives God the glory. The ordinary stocks up on treasures; the extraordinary knows the pearl of great price.⁴

Lent is still an important season of the church year. It is a time for alms giving and for doing that which is known to be right, but giving and doing by and for oneself. It is a time for praying more than usual, but praying by and for oneself. It is a time for self-discipline. It is a time for giving up some of the pleasures of life, if that is

⁴"who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it." Matt. 13:46 (RSV).

necessary, so that one is more able to discern the things that are right. But this is always to be done by and for oneself.

The life of discipleship can only be maintained as long as nothing comes between Christ and the individual. Neither the law nor the passions of this world ought to come between Christ and the disciple. Even personal piety, as good as that may be, can be the cause of separation because it is true that "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."⁵ If our treasure is in reward for some deed we have accomplished, then our hearts are fixed on ourselves and not on Christ. That may appear to be ordinary. Indeed, it is the common and accepted way of life. But the call to discipleship is a call to the extraordinary.

SERMON SIX

A CALL TO A NEW STANDARD FOR LIVING

Implicit in the first two chapters of this Sermon on the Mount is a call for separation. That call has been stated in previous chapters in terms of living the "extraordinary" life and in terms of seeking the "better righteousness." Although it is not explicitly stated, there is implied in those two terms a call for the disciples to sever their old ties, to leave their old friends, and to give exclusive allegiance to Jesus. A gulf was to be established between the old and the new. It surely can be assumed that anyone reading this sermon of Jesus senses that gulf. The questions can be asked, "What about the unbeliever?" and "What should my relationship be to him or her?" The verses of the sermon to which these questions are directed are:

"Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

"Do not give dogs what is holy; and do not throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you.

"Ask, and it will be given you; seek and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man of you, if his son asks him for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him? So whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them; for this is the law and the prophets."¹

An audiovisual supply house recently advertised a new film entitled The Unbeliever. The caption underneath that title described the situation of a young girl who was a believer and her boy friend who was not. Her dilemma was what to do with this situation. The brief film description left no doubt that her decision was to separate herself from the unbelieving friend. That may not always be such bad advice, and it may not even be a bad film. But, one would hesitate to use that as a standard for the Christian lifestyle and Christian discipleship. One cannot play games with friendships the way kids play games with a ball. The ultimate power in a ball game is held by the holder of the ball. It is not unheard of to see young people play such power games with their friendships, so that if another is not of their kind or if the other plays the game differently, the threat is to remove friendship. Such games often are devastating to the one who desperately needs the assurance of the other's friendship and the pain from such removal can sometimes last

¹Matt. 7:1-12 (RSV).

a lifetime. It is not psychologically healthy, and it certainly is not Christian. One needs to ask, "Does a Christian really have some unique power or gift or special standard by which he becomes the expert and the authority to pass judgment on others? It is terribly easy to adopt an attitude of superiority to others because of who we are, and, therefore, condemn others and their actions. It seems that this section of the Sermon is placed here to take away all reasonable doubt regarding such judging and condemning. The disciple is not to judge the believing status of another, for the criteria by which we evaluate another is the criteria by which we will be evaluated.

The life of discipleship makes it impossible for the disciple to look inwardly at his or her deeds and actions with any degree of objectivity. It is impossible, for as soon as the disciple tries to be objective about the self, all that is seen is the sign of the cross. The same is true if the disciples look at others. In the shadow of the cross, where the light is not good for viewing faults and errors, all the disciple sees in another is that sign of the cross. This sign is emblazoned on the forehead of an infant at baptism, and with that sign each worship service is closed. As we confront another during the week, we first must reckon with the "brand" of a disciple--the cross.

On the other hand, non-disciples can detach themselves and see their own deeds and actions, and, using the criteria

of the law, proceed to make judgments about themselves and others. A popular criteria is the comparison technique for grading oneself. It is a particularly unfair system, for we all can find someone whose life is much worse than ours. And, to keep us somewhat humble, there is at least one whose life is more exemplary than our own. This is not possible for the disciple, for the disciple is seen only by Jesus, judged only by Jesus, and is acclaimed righteous only by Jesus. The disciple can never meet another objectively and enjoy a simply "platonic" relationship. Always there is that cross to remind the disciple who the other person is. That person is no one else than one for whom Jesus came, died, and now offers forgiveness. We have no standard of conduct that is unfailing and unbending and can, therefore, be applied to every situation. And, if we ever devise a system to evaluate another's behavior, then we do not approach them with the love of Jesus, for love has neither the time nor the opportunity to devise systems and make judgments.

There is a little theory that has some merits, but is tricky in its application. Its thesis is that we must remind others of the folly of their ways and request a change in their behaviour because we love them. It is hard to argue against, but when one approaches another with the hope of a change, love is already misguided. Pure love, Christ's love (agape), is for us personally, period! In the

purity of that love, sin is condemned not so much because Christ said this or that, but because he loved so much. Disciples are to love unconditionally instead of judging conditionally. Sin is always corrected in the life of love. One may make judgments for oneself, but as Bonhoeffer says, "Jesus Christ is not a standard which I can apply to others."² When one does devise such a standard for the purpose of making judgments, that one has been blinded already to his or her own needs.

This text contains a word about evangelism as well. It would not be a text that would often be chosen for an evangelism concern, but there is an interesting thought in it about the disciples' vocation of witness. Jesus said we are not to give dogs what is holy and neither throw our jewels before the pigs.

The nature of discipleship is to be aware that we have neither the power nor the right to force our beliefs on another. We may sincerely think that our faith is helpful to us and would be beneficial to another. But any attempt to impose the Gospel by force or to cram it down another's throat, or any attempt to proselytize individuals from another church because ours is better, or make use of Madison Avenue type resources to arrange for another's salvation, or any action that uses psychological techniques to heap guilt on

²Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, p. 164.

another and thereby scare them to heaven, is both futile and dangerous. It is futile because some do not recognize the difference between pearls and stones, and it is dangerous because it profanes the word of forgiveness. There is no cheap grace as Bonhoeffer suggested. Forgiveness is not preached in broadcast fashion over unsuspecting and unsoliciting people. If one wants to profane the Word of God, it can be done in more ways than by just swearing or cursing. Forgiveness without repentance is surely profaning the word of grace.

It is not the disciple's intent in evangelism to simply add stars in his or her own crown. To have that as an aim will only result in frustration for ourselves and anger from the one we are so earnestly trying to woo. The truth is that we are to shake the dust from our feet and move on if people do not hear or respond.³

The text is set in a culture and time when Greek gods provided some of the competition for religious commitment. Today we have cults and ideologies of every stripe and hue. But, the Gospel is not a cult or ideology. Cults and ideologies demand fanatics for disciples, and a fanatic is only someone who has redoubled efforts when the aim has been forgotten. Fanatics see nothing but their own way and will badger anyone to be one of them. Disciples want no flowers pinned on their

³And if any one will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. Matt. 10:14 (RSV).

coat lapels, and they listen to no harangue from someone who will not listen to them. That is why it bothers disciples so much when we see well-meaning Christians confused and begin to use the techniques of the cults for their own purposes. Christians ought not to "leaflet" people to death on the street, nor should they corner individuals and scare them with a canned plan. That is manipulation of the finest variety, and it blasphemies the Word of God which is not power but weakness; it is not might but suffering. We are Christians and believers in the Word of God, and that Word is best shared as we suffer with others out where life is lived. And, in that suffering and meekness, the Word becomes sharper and more powerful than a two-edge sword piercing to the division of the soul and the spirit.⁴ We would do well to tell the story of our faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the God who made himself known in the flesh of Jesus and who, in that flesh, lived, suffered, died, and rose again for all. Judgment and forgiveness are in the hands of God and, for that, we can thank God.

Therefore, we seek, we knock, we hope, and we pray without ceasing that we might know God in Jesus Christ and the power of his resurrection.⁵ This admonition of our Lord is not a heavenly line of credit for celestial blessings and earthly possessions. We seek the God of our faith in whom

⁴Heb. 4:12 (RSV). ⁵Phil. 3:10 (RSV).

we have found the teachings of life and death, and the promise of the resurrection in Jesus. When we seek, we find, and when we knock, the door is opened to us.

"So whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them; for this is the law and the prophets."⁶ When one says that, one forfeits all privilege over another. Bonhoeffer says, "The mainspring of his life and work is the strength which comes from the fellowship with Jesus Christ."⁷ In that strength, we can no longer excuse ourselves when we condemn another for the evil in that other person that is the same evil in ourselves. One even becomes as strict in condemning evil in ourselves as we were strict in condemning it in others, and conversely as lenient with others as we were lenient with ourselves. The commandments and standards are gone, except for two:

. . . "You shall love the Lord your God with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets."⁸

⁶Matt. 7:12 (RSV).

⁷Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, p. 167.

⁸Matt. 22:37-40 (RSV).

SERMON SEVEN

A CALL FOR "DOING" THE GOSPEL

It has been our task to reflect on the extraordinary life of the disciple. The key to living the life of a disciple has been this better righteousness which has been referred to throughout these chapters dealing with the Sermon on the Mount. The blessedness of the meek and long suffering has been addressed. But, we have also learned that we have no unique vantage point from which we may make judgments about others. Any withdrawal to the security of a Christian commune is clearly not acceptable. In this last section of the sermon, Jesus gives his final instructions to his disciples concerning the manifestation of their discipleship to others. There are some things to be learned from this section. It reads:

"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? So, every sound tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears evil fruit. A sound tree cannot bear evil fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will know them by their fruits.

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not

prophecy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers.'

"Every one then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And every one who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand, and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it."

And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.¹

It can be surmised from this text that although there are not many in this community of discipleship today, it is not a select organization which weeds out the undesirables through intellectual criteria, physical prowess, or the ranking of ability. It is simply a small group of people and as such, they will not rule the country, the Church, nor even the local community with any great authority. Any disciple who pins his or her hopes on having large numbers of people in this camp has missed the point entirely. There will always be an appeal to be impressed with numbers. Many people desire to get lost in the crowds and remain anonymous, but this anonymity is not the nature of a disciple. On the contrary, to be unrecognizable in one's discipleship is clearly not discipleship at all. For the "path is narrow and the way is

¹Matt. 7:15-29 (RSV).

difficult." It is easy to miss-step or to stray from the path even after years of walking it. One may ask, "How easy is it to stray?" and to that question some answers might be given.

"To be called to a life of extraordinary quality, to live up to it, and yet to be unconscious of it is indeed a narrow way"² is a tenent of discipleship that is very easy to omit.

"To confess and testify to the truth as it is in Jesus, and at the same time to love the enemies of that truth, . . ."³ is a dictum easily pushed aside.

"To believe the promise of Jesus that his followers shall possess the earth, and at the same time to face our enemies unarmed and defenceless, . . ."⁴ is a most unsettling thought and readily forgotten.

"To see the weakness and wrong in others, and at the same time refrain from judging them; . . ."⁵ is a path difficult to take and just the opposite of what comes so naturally.

"To deliver the gospel message without casting pearls before swine, is indeed a narrow way."⁶ So narrow, in fact, that travelling the path would be impossible if we took the trip alone. It is possible to travel only if we keep our ever

²Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, p. 170.

³Ibid., p. 170. ⁴Ibid., p. 170. ⁵Ibid., p. 170.

⁶Ibid., p. 170.

present reminder of the cross before our eyes. Christ, too, went this way. He, too, made the tough choices. With that knowledge, we too go, and if we worry that we might not be able to walk it, at that point, we have already detoured from "the path" for the One who clothes the birds of the air will also care for us. The journey is hard. It is not unpleasant, but it is difficult. It is right, however, for the way which the Son of God travelled on earth is the way which we must travel as citizens of this present world and the kingdom of God. We can hardly expect it to be easy.

The second thing to be learned is that everyone looks alike, at least until the harvest. Consider, for instance, one's next door neighbors. They look just like anyone else. They come and go, get all dressed up for an evening out, have children, go to church, and while they have bad habits that irritate us a bit, it is reasonably certain that we have some they do not appreciate, too. All things considered, they are pretty much like everyone else, and since some of those who look alike are Christian, we surmise mistakenly that all must be. This may be so, but not necessarily. The difficulty is, we will never know, not, in any case, until the harvest. It is only by fruits that we shall have an inkling of where a person's loyalties are.

This "sameness" is even more evident when people gather together for worship. Everyone looks pretty much alike when all are wearing their middle-class finery. Everyone looks

alike and talks alike and acts alike. One could assume that all must, therefore, be disciples. This may be so, but not necessarily. Some, we are warned, are ravenous wolves on the inside whose words are full of trickery and whose lives are full of deceit. It will not be known until the fruit begins to appear in how their lives are lived. To look at fruit is not judging in a condemning sort of way, but it is being a "fruit inspector" of sorts who evaluates how the words match up with the deeds. Worshippers are to do that with and for their pastor, and the pastor also does that with and for his or her parishoners.

Thirdly, in this series of lessons from the Sermon, there is the business of confessors and doers. A separation of sorts exists. The separation consists of two camps. One has the appeal to deeds done and the other appeals to words spoken.

All of Scripture is unanimous in its agreement on the premise that to say the right Christian formula, to speak the right phrases, or to verbalize one's faith is not the only mark of a disciple. It may not even be the best mark. Not everyone who says, "Lord, Lord," enters the kingdom. Indeed, we enter the kingdom when we "do it to one of the least of these my brethren, you do it to me."⁷ The possibility always remains for a demonic-inspired faith. It is a faith that has

⁷Matt. 25:40 (RSV).

been called into existence by the power of evil. It says all the right things, produces works of charity, performs miracles, and genuinely looks authentic, but it is not costly discipleship. If we need verification on this point, one only needs to read the great thirteenth chapter of I Corinthians to know that Paul understands this tenent of faith very clearly:

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.⁸

It is possible to preach, to prophesy, to have all knowledge and to even have faith so as to move mountains, yet do all that without love (or without Christ). One can even give away everything that is owned, including life itself, but do it without love (or without Christ).

What that says is that without love (or Christ), all kinds of words may be good and worthwhile, but they do not necessarily prove discipleship. If the deeds do not emanate from a life of love for God and for one another, while they may be good, they do not pronounce validity upon one's discipleship.

So, Jesus' Sermon ends where no good Lutheran sermon would ever end. "Depart from me, you evil doers." That is a hard and difficult saying, but it leads us right back to

⁸I Cor. 13:1-3 (RSV).

the beginning and the pronouncement of Gospel in the Beatitudes. Jesus knows us only through and by his grace. We are known not out of our great confession of faith, nor because of our superior obedience, but only in his eternal word of grace. Therefore, with conviction a disciple says, in the words of the old gospel hymn, "His eye is on the sparrow and I know he watches me." This is his world, his day of judgment, his word of forgiveness, and his grace. Bonhoeffer reminds us of this:

The word of the last judgement is foreshadowed in the call to discipleship. But from beginning to end it is always his word and his call, his alone. If we follow Christ, cling to his word, and let everything else go, it will see us through the day of judgement. His word is his grace.⁹

⁹Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, p. 174.

UNIT IV.

LORD OF LIFE

A DISCIPLINED COMMUNITY

CHAPTER 7

OBSERVATIONS

There are many variables that must be taken into account when reading a report of someone's observations. One brings a certain bias to every task. Indeed, it has often happened that two individuals have observed the same event only to report the outcome in quite different ways.

The observations of those who participated in the Fellowship at Lord of Life are, as we might expect, varied. Each individual came with a bias (or, as we may call it, a theological framework) out of which he or she had heretofore operated. These observations on the life and mission of this congregation are responses from individuals whose involvement with the congregation was significant and who graciously consented to share their attitudes and feelings. Their observations are an important part of this thesis/project since they are the tangible evidence which supports the thesis. The observations are listed and footnoted with the author's name.

--That Commitment to involvement, more than anything else, was the beginning of spiritual growth for me. And to think that an ex-Presbyterian, an Army chapel non-denominationalist, would be asked to work on the Covenant Committee and become concerned about the worship service and the still unfamiliar liturgy forms--and then later to head

this committee! This Fellowship was remarkably different--not to be concerned about one's religious background, but to orient upon the now experience and to enrich it.¹

--We took advantage of a study group that you were leading on what it was to be a Lutheran. In that group, we first began to learn what a Christian fellowship was. We had met friendly people at LOL. It was not until our experiences with this group that the joy of being part of LOL began to have meaning. It's been almost four years since that group first met, and we can still recall our discussions and the bonds that grew stronger each time we met.²

--The togetherness and harmoniousness of the congregation was also very evident. Perhaps being a new mission church fostered this, but it certainly made Lord of Life a distinctive church. People took part and worked. One did not have to be shy about asking people to do things, because one seldom got turned down.³

--As a boy, I used to sit in church at home--a huge church with a large congregation and lots of money--and a droning preacher--and imagine how I would change things if I were the pastor. I'd use non-traditional liturgy, relate the Church to real world problems, involve many more people, etc. All these things were done at LOLLC.⁴

--In view of the most happy association, it is not hard to talk about Lord of Life. It is, however, very difficult to try and put priorities on the many things that went into our decision to join Lord of Life. I think first would be the spirit of giving and sharing. Everyone seemed to be involved in giving of their time and talents. Secondly, would be the emphasis on family worship and the atmosphere that made doing things as a family a value. This, of course, found special meaning in everything from the way the service was conducted to the emphasis on activities in which the whole family could participate, such as camping weekends. Thirdly, was the community of

¹Gen. William Tuttle. ²Major Fred Shirley.

³Mr. Fred Anderson. ⁴Col. John Moellering.

shared interests as most of the congregation was statistically homogenous; that is, most earned similar amounts of money, lived in the same types of neighborhoods, had similar types of educational background, tended to be upward mobile, placed emphasis on educational values and respected limited amounts of individuality. Fourth, is a somewhat more of an intellectual approach to commitment to the church than strict doctrinaire obedience. For example, the covenant approach emphasized individual's responsibility not only to the church but to the community, and while guidelines for giving were used, the general approach was based upon giving only what a person could comfortably give without a resort to tithing and heavy handedness. The effect of this was to place personal responsibility on the individual and the consequence was that people, I believe, gave more than they otherwise would have, both in terms of money as well as their talents. Fifth, the emphasis of the church in fostering special learning experiences through the special programs that were brought in, for instance, the speaker who had worked in Southeast Asia for 17 years, Spiritborne, and the P.E.T. courses. Sixth, the dynamic Youth Group program.⁵

--Why or how does a group of people come together and develop a spirit of togetherness as exists at Lord of Life? Before anything else is said, the Spirit of God is very active there and all those things attributed to the men, women, and children of Lord of Life have occurred through His Grace. Probably three quarters of the families of Lord of Life are transient in their occupations and their residency in Fairfax. This temporary status causes people to search for threads of stability. These people were not tradition bound nor are they slaves to history. They are openminded, willing to work, open to new ideas and thoughts and with some pushing at times, they are able to throw their actions on faith. This spirit is a product of their diversity of background and their overwhelming desire and need to have a handle to hang onto as life rushes along with them in its midst. The risk taking, which is so important for a Christian, is not a common characteristic of a congregation. An established church in an established community is not required to take as many risks nor are its people

⁵Mr. James Weissenborn.

oriented to that aspect of life. Taking risks is more prevalent in Lord of Life than in so many other places because so many of the families there are in the middle of living out a risk laden life. They are middleclass or upper middleclass, middle-aged parents with well fed kids. They are in the midst of climbing through successful careers. They have moved from the home towns, broken close family ties and have taken risks in pursuit of the good life for their families. Tradition and custom have not been overwhelming in their lives nor in their religious development. In fact the absence of any overwhelming obsession with traditions at Lord of Life may well be a most attractive feature for the newcomer from this segment of the Fairfax community. The risk taking family have taken many risks, they have fought the insecurity that goes with such action and they have found success or at least assurance that faith and one's efforts do work. This testing and winning (or believing we are winning) gives strength in spirit and will which frees one up to take more risks. The people at Lord of Life are at that stage in life. They risk embarrassment to say hello to one another, to propose the impossible, to care for people, to tell someone they love them, to hug if they want to hug, and to confess Jesus Christ if that is what they mean and choose to do.

The people there are a group of highly educated individuals who have so much to offer of themselves to others. Many of them have shown an openness, willingness, and desire to grow in their faith. They care enough to study, read, listen and discuss. Those at Lord of Life who have the potential for learning and growing in faith but have not caught the spirit of the place, do move when they get in the swing of the spirit. Development of their individual faith in a way that is meaningful for each individual is most important to the people of Lord of Life. No pressures are placed upon them to recite a party line beyond the essential confessions of a Christian. The greater family of Lord of Life is supportive to the individual in his development. A free expression and trial of ideas and thoughts is encouraged and accepted by the people there.⁶

The worship experience, I think, was one of the greatest strengths of Lord of Life. The variety in forms of liturgy said to all of us, "Your prefer-

⁶Mr. Joel Carlson.

ences will be respected." The guitar singing and use in the worship service captured the young and gave them the reality of participation. The use of the guitar services also told the young that their wishes were important too. And the contemporary folk hymns became ones which our family sings at home and in the car on long drives. The "children's time" part of the service was a part which our minister managed to make relevant to the kids--and to the adults! Then there were the many non-Sunday opportunities for worship and study--from a re-enactment of the Passover and Last Supper to the Lenten service series. Always many opportunities for growth were there.⁷

We signed the Covenant on Palm Sunday, 1974. This Covenant was a unique reminder to us of the sacrifices that we had to make to be part of the Christian fellowship of LOL.⁸

The people at Lord of Life are not for the most part devout in the sense of being cloistered. They have very complex and busy lives to lead which hardly permit an intensity of meditation and study. They are inclined to place more value on a sincere searching, growing, and living of their faith on their way toward becoming disciples of Christ. Some of the people have committed themselves to giving of their talents and treasures, but so many have fallen short of doing what they really would like to do. With college kids (and all Lord of Life kids are given the opportunity to be a college kid) and the other demands of status, the pragmatic approach has caught the church short. It is good to say that Lord of Life and its people are overflowing with love for others even though the coffers, though far from empty, are hardly overflowing. A strange characteristic of the place is that when a special need is known by the people, it is met. Christ does show through so often at Lord of Life in the actions of its people.⁹

We loved and enjoyed so much the spirit of the people at Lord of Life because of its vibrancy, boundlessness, sincerity, openness and its true

⁷Gen. William Tuttle. ⁸Major Fred Shirley.

⁹Mr. Fred Anderson.

reflection of love. More accurately the Holy Spirit did show through the people at Lord of Life. All we knew about Christ seemed to show in our relationships with people at Lord of Life. It was so freeing to those of us who have formally served the church in its legalistic structure to find that love and faith are all that really matter in making the whole thing work. There were no declarations of "inactive members" by the church council, no pledge cards, guilds with no purpose, required attendance, standard services and routines, stewardship "drives," acceptable or approved interpretations of the Bible, etc., etc. The lack of legalism frees one up to love and care and show Christ to those around him. In the place of old traditional approaches to "running a church," we found the individual could covenant with God in his responsibility to the Church, he could think and explore thoughts about his faith and the Bible and test them without fear of rejection, and he was given the responsibility to make his membership as meaningful as he, through God's grace, chose to make it. Being a member of Lord of Life was exciting because it was alive, open and meaningful. Much of this worked at Lord of Life because of the type of people that belonged there. They are well educated, have little concern about basic needs, are devoted to their families, are interested in adding dimension and depth to life and wanted to show love and concern for others.¹⁰

The signing of the Covenant was another unique way of initiating membership which we had never experienced. The Covenant was a simple and direct way of formalizing the membership act and at the same time giving it the feeling of a contract between the individual, his God, and his church. It is a meaningful ritual, and I hope you have maintained it.¹¹

Let me at least attempt to prioritize several things at LOL which were important in our Christian lives.

1. The LOL Covenant is still an important philosophical statement for us. It is short, simple and easy to recall in daily activity. That's great. In addition, and much more significant, one can live by it without it becoming a problem as it seems to aptly include the secular as well

¹⁰Mr. Joel Carlson. ¹¹Cdr. Ray Basley.

as the church world. I encouraged people here at our current church to use it, and two years ago it was used on our main pledge card.

2. The feeling of informality existed at LOL even tho we were liturgical. The seating, the number of people, the music, the pastor--all led to this sensation which was a rewarding one for me.

3. The concept of a fellowship vs. a congregation. Maybe that's just an intellectual exercise, but I believe great strides were made to help it happen. The concept of a fellowship automatically includes everyone--not just the active ones. I think it makes more people feel welcome and a part of the parish or fellowship.

4. It was a community church. It was open to all types of groups and was well utilized--especially prior to construction of the local school. Again, it encouraged many people in the neighborhood not to be "afraid" of LOL. We performed some effective community service just because of that.¹²

¹²Mr. Barry Peterson.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

Any attempt at a summation of either the principal Bonhoeffer material or the voluminous secondary resources would fall far short of what has already been done by his student/friend Eberhard Bethge. It is appropriate, however, to attempt a conclusion to this thesis. That which occurred in the developing ministry of the people at Lord of Life can occur again. Crucial to this reoccurrence is the theological foundation upon which the congregation is built.

It is the firm belief of the author that a clear understanding of the Church was, for Bonhoeffer, the key in the development of genuine community and discipleship. Franklin Sherman sums up well the distinctive understanding that was Bonhoeffer's concerning the relation of the transcendent with ecclesiology.

It is in meeting my neighbor, that is, in encountering him as a person within the personal community of the church, that I encounter my limit in its most tangible form. The undeniable objectivity of the other man, both in his claims and in his gifts, at last convinces me that the meaning of my life does not arise from within me, but comes to me from outside of me.¹

¹Franklin Sherman in Marty, ed., The Place of Bonhoeffer, p. 92.

Sherman correctly recognizes that, for Bonhoeffer, the Church is the sphere of genuine encounter with God because here the neighbor himself is not recognized as an entity alone, but is Christ to us. Indeed, Bonhoeffer himself called the Church "Christ existing as community."² It is imperative that the members of a congregation and certainly the pastor have a clear understanding of the kind of organization or institution to which they belong and with which they work. It makes quite a difference in how one approaches that which takes place in a community of believers we call a congregation. James Woelfel does a creditable job in approaching an understanding of Bonhoeffer concerning the reality of the Church. He says:

Clearly, then, Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology is not the simple identification of the church with Christ, which is the historical tendency of Catholicism. Nor is it, however, the ecclesiological "Nestorianism" of Reformed Protestantism, which tends in various ways toward the transcendentalistic and tangential in understanding the relation of divine and human in the church. Bonhoeffer's doctrine of the church takes a middle position, the intimately dialectical interpretation of what might be called "original Lutheranism." Following Luther, he understood the church in vigorously concrete terms as simultaneously the actual, literal presence of Christ on each and a sinful, broken, compromising religious society.³

It is this dialectic of holding the Church to be both divine and human at the same time that is so much a part of Bonhoeffer's theology and which, therefore, has also informed the life of

²Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers From Prison, p. 155.

³James W. Woelfel, Bonhoeffer's Theology: Classical and Revolutionary (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970), p. 169.

this congregation. For Lutherans this dialectic is paralleled by Luther's "simul justus et peccator" (simultaneously justified and sinner), which is both profound and subtle and, therefore, difficult to hold in proper tension.

If "fellowship" could somehow be charted or placed on a graph by statistical comparison, the thesis stated in the Introduction could be easily proved. Statistics will be shown as appendixes to this thesis/project and will add weight and impact to the argument, but they do not, in fact, prove the premise. Proof is difficult to document, but it is not difficult to sense in the kind of fellowship that exists at Lord of Life. The responses of the people who have found this congregation to fill their spiritual needs and the commitment to the disciplines of living in a community are the only documentation available. The responses have been included to cite specific proof of change and impact in individual lives. The commitment to discipline can be noted in those who covenant together each year and who, thereby, form a community. Indeed, the presence of Christ is seen and made known to others in the human lives of this parish.

It has been the joy and privilege of the writer to have led this group of people in the walk of faith. It has been the purpose of this thesis and also the task of the writer to show that joy and offer through it a challenge to other communities of believers, the challenge to take

seriously the call to discipleship as those communities live out their lives together.

APPENDIX I

The following statistical information is submitted as evidence in support of the thesis/project. It consists of the budget history of Lord of Life Lutheran Fellowship from 1971 through 1978 with special attention to income history. Significant figures to note are the average weekly offering figures and the steady increase they show except for one year. The remainder of this appendix is a summary of the stewardship approach used in this congregation as it relates to the second discipline of the Covenant.

FINANCIAL DATA

Budget History 1971-1978

Category	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978
Sharing the Gospel with others	\$2,850 (9.0)	\$2,500 (7.0)	\$3,413 (8.9)	\$4,175 (8.5)	\$6,500 (10.4)	\$7,983 (9.4)	\$9,456 (9.3)	\$9,999 (8.9)
Proclaiming the Gospel among ourselves	10,500 (33.1)	11,516 (32.2)	12,720 (33.1)	15,500 (31.5)	17,370 (27.7)	31,114 (36.6)	33,535 (32.9)	38,554 (35.0)
Christian Education	750 (2.4)	750 (2.1)	850 (2.2)	1,150 (2.3)	1,130 (2.1)	1,900 (2.2)	2,300 (2.3)	2,625 (2.4)
Administrative Expense	2,780 (8.8)	2,610 (7.3)	4,260 (11.1)	5,340 (17.8)	6,210 (9.9)	10,325 (12.2)	9,468 (9.3)	11,245 (10.2)
Care of Property	3,290 (10.4)	4,748 (13.3)	4,170 (10.9)	5,230 (10.6)	7,246 (11.5)	7,740 (9.1)	11,250 (11.0)	13,170 (12.0)
Debt Reduction	11,562 (36.4)	12,312 (34.4)	13,271 (34.6)	18,175 (36.9)	24,180 (38.5)	25,908 (30.5)	35,908 (35.2)	34,689 (31.5)
Total	\$31,732	\$35,736	\$38,383	\$49,270	\$62,806	\$84,970	\$101,917	\$110,171

Numbers in parenthesis are the per cent this item is of the total budget.

Income History 1970-First Quarter 1978

Category	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978
Offerings	\$19,998	\$25,747	\$29,848	\$39,792	\$46,362	\$64,651	\$72,217	\$86,618	\$23,680
Building Fund	--	--	--	3,200	3,000	957	--	--	--
Special Improvements Fund	--	--	--	--	--	4,424	1,248	7,063	1,048
ALC Subsidy	3,113	5,395	1,030	--	--	--	--	--	--
Other	2,347	1,693	929	4,600	3,933	10,883	16,737	12,510	3,759
Total	\$23,458	\$32,835	\$31,807	\$47,592	\$53,295	\$80,915	\$90,202	\$106,191	\$28,487
Average offering/week	337	489	544	765	900	1,243	1,388	1,665	1,821
Average number of FAMILIES	50	59	64	78	100	115	140	160	170
Average offering/family/week	\$6.75	\$8.30	\$8.50	\$9.80	\$9.00	\$10.81	\$9.92	\$10.41	\$10.72

Our Lord of Life Lutheran Fellowship Covenant contains item

-
2. To participate in and financially support the activities of the Fellowship and The American Lutheran Church
-

The following information was provided for the membership during home meetings held for discussion of the proposed 1978 budget prior to its adoption:

Income received from regular contributors has increased 146% in five years.

Lord of Life annual contributions to activities of The American Lutheran Church have increased from \$2,493.00 to \$7,893.00 (217%) in five years.

39% of our regular family giving units contribute \$15.00 or more per week to the parish program at Lord of Life.

* * * * *

Stewardship is an ambiguous word. During eleven months of the year it carries broad connotations. During November it relates to money and it means giving at Lord of Life.

Nowhere is the parish Covenant concept more discernible than in stewardship presentations. Although a budget committee develops a proposal and the Church Council acts upon it prior to any widespread discussion, the entire parish reviews it in small-group situations two weeks before it is submitted for final revision and/or adoption by the congregation.

Each small group (six to eight couples) is hosted by a member of the Council who first provides a "state of the parish" message for his assigned and invited guests. Next, he details the budget line items with appropriate explanations.

A discussion period affords parish members an opportunity to react to the proposal over a cup of coffee in the comfortable atmosphere of their group. The small Covenant group retains a sense of community during the time its members discuss the life and the program of the parish. Individuals are led to reflect upon their appropriate levels of support.

Since a thorough budget discussion is carried out in parish homes prior to the official congregational meeting, the formal budget consideration/adoption meeting is cast more in the structure of a "can do" victory celebration than a hesitant "must try--maybe" event. The people share the Covenant collectively; they share the budget collectively. They respond individually--and they do respond.

The parish has prospered and has met its expanding objectives without ever having requested member pledges for budget purposes. That is not written to demean pledging, but to affirm the spirit of cooperation and participation that has been engendered within the Covenant concept.

At present, a building committee is studying needs with a view toward possible expansion of local facilities. Every concerned parish group has been asked to provide guidelines for committee consideration. Without exception, the overriding concern has been expressed: Be sure to retain the community atmosphere currently prevailing at Lord of Life.

Community is what mutual covenants are all about. They are good for lots of things--including budgets.

APPENDIX II

The following article was printed in the April 17, 1979, issue of The Lutheran Standard, the official church paper of The American Lutheran Church. It refers to and highlights some of the themes relating to community and discipleship that have been raised in this thesis/project. The article is included here as an exhibit for information purposes.



**'We need
to spend
time with
people...'**

This girl is one of the 90 children in the preschool of Lord of Life Lutheran Fellowship in Fairfax, Va.

by Paul Pallmeyer

For many people, "evangelical outreach" conjures up images of rallies, workshops, committee meetings, and neighborhood calling. Such activities are part of the outreach efforts of most congregations. But usually they are not the most important part of Christian outreach. Perhaps nine-tenths of genuine evangelical outreach finds expression in the everyday contacts Christians make at work, home, school, and church.

Lord of Life Lutheran Fellowship in the Washington, D.C., suburb of Fairfax, Va., is just one of many congregations that have learned to view evangelical outreach as a way of life. Several things reflect the desire of Lord of Life's members to reach out to one another as well as to others with the good news of Jesus Christ.

First, the congregation puts a high priority on education for all its members. About 100 adults regularly attend Pastor Ron



1. Linda Wilder is director of outreach. She organizes congregational calling and coordinates volunteer services.

2. Col. Bruce Wilder says the American Lutheran Church's emphasis on evangelical outreach helped him to be himself and to witness to his faith.

3. Every member signs a covenant each year, promising to be faithful at worship, provide financial support to the congregation, serve the community's needs, and pray regularly.

4. The Rev. Ron Christian is pastor.

Christian's Bible study during the Sunday education hour. Adult Bible study groups meet on Tuesday evenings and Wednesday mornings.

Seminary intern Greg Pagh leads youth groups on Sunday evenings and again on Wednesdays at a 6:30 A.M. before-school breakfast fellowship. Friday evenings there's open house for youth at Pagh's home. The church operates a nursery school, attended by 90 preschoolers and run by a paid staff of six.

'Lutherans Involved'

A program called "Lutherans Involved" also indicates the congregation's understanding of outreach. Through the program, funded in part by funds gathered during the ALC's United Mission Appeal, Lord of Life and three other area congregations help ex-offenders in the Washing-

ton metropolitan area find jobs. The *Washington Post* commended that project in an editorial.

The congregation thinks evangelical outreach is important enough to warrant having a "director for outreach" on the staff. Linda Wilder, a member of the congregation, currently fills the position. She coordinates the congregation's visitation program and personally calls on all local visitors who sign the church guest register.

"If a person signs our register, it must mean that person would like someone to be aware of his or her presence and would welcome some kind of response," reasons Linda. She regards her contacts with visitors as excellent opportunities for getting to know people and their needs. "I find that when I'm open and honest with people, they respond in the same way."

Linda's husband, Bruce, also is involved in

'It is too easy to make small talk in church. We need to spend time with people to hear their problems and hopes, and to share with them how Christ has affected ours. . . .'

evangelical outreach. A colonel in the office of the army inspector general at the Pentagon, Bruce says that evangelical outreach has radically changed his life. "I used to be able to change masks real fast, from good officer to good father to good husband to good Scout leader. Sometimes I got my roles mixed up. As an officer, I couldn't admit I was wrong, and I found myself acting like that when I was playing father. Now I try to be who I am wherever I am."

Still, Bruce found himself uneasy when talking about his Christian faith, even to fellow church members. But in February 1977, Pastor Christian asked Bruce and Linda to pinch-hit for him at an evangelical outreach workshop in Petersburg, W.Va. Bruce found the reception he and Linda got from the people in the mountain community very moving.

Personally sharing the gospel

"Until that first meeting, I had never talked to anyone about what the gospel meant *to me*. I had taught Sunday school, but I had always just 'taught the lesson' without sharing my personal feelings. I returned from Petersburg knowing that I had gotten far more than I had given. We had shared the gospel with each other!"

In May of the same year, Bruce was invited back to Petersburg with Pastor Arne Christian-son, then also serving at Lord of Life. For a week,

the two visited churches in the eastern part of West Virginia to talk about evangelical outreach and to share Christ with their brothers and sisters there. In Moyers, Bruce addressed a joint Sunday morning service of all four congregations in the parish there. Bruce casually agreed to meet with a class during the education hour following the service—and he was surprised when everyone attended his class!

Their West Virginia experiences convinced the Wilders that evangelical outreach is desperately needed in the church. Says Bruce, "It's too easy for us to make small talk in church—how the kids are doing, the price of housing, or whatever. We can easily talk to people for 30 minutes and not say anything of any depth. What we really need is to spend time with people to hear their personal problems, their hopes, and their dreams and to share with them how Christ has affected ours."

What's the biggest difficulty in witnessing like this? Linda answers immediately, "Doing it is easy—unless you start thinking, 'I'm going to witness to somebody.'" ■



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