

Another tough gospel today—Luke isn't a bowl of cherries! Today we are challenged to make a total commitment to the will of God, putting God first in our lives. And Jesus warns us to count the cost of being a Christian, because the cost will be high. Discipleship means that we must renounce both possessions of the earth and possessions of the heart.

I would like to share two stories with you today, which may shed some light on what Jesus is saying—one is about a theologian, one is about a monkey. (Although, when I was a student in the seminary, some of us questioned whether you could tell the difference—theologian? monkey?)

During World War II, the great German theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, wrote his landmark work entitled *The Cost of Discipleship*. “Cheap grace,” wrote Bonhoeffer, “is the grace we bestow on ourselves... grace without discipleship, while ‘costly grace’ is the gospel that must be sought again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock.... It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life.”

As a religious scholar in a country where the Nazis were bent on expanding the ideology of national and racial superiority, Dietrich Bonhoeffer struggled within himself and chose to resist the Nazis as a true disciple of Christ. He joined the underground on the conviction that it was his duty as a Christian to work for Hitler's defeat. His convictions inspired many people to resist, but this cost them their freedom and even their lives at the hands of the Gestapo. Bonhoeffer's theologically-rooted opposition to the Nazis made him a leader and an advocate on behalf of the Jews. In fact, his efforts to help a group of Jews escape to Switzerland were the cause of his arrest and imprisonment in the spring of 1943. He

was hanged in the concentration camp at Flossenburg on April 9, 1945, on the false charge of plotting to assassinate Hitler. It was exactly one month before the Nazi surrender. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, truly paid the cost of discipleship—with his life and his death.

Now to the monkey.... There is a tribe in Africa that has an imaginative way of trapping wild monkeys. They hollow out a large pumpkin or gourd and then cut a hole just big enough for a monkey's hand to slip through. Then they fill the pumpkin with peanuts, which monkeys love like candy. They then tie the pumpkin to a tree and leave.

When all is quiet, the curious monkeys come to investigate. They smell the bait, and reach through the hole to grab the peanuts. But the opening is not big enough for the monkeys to pull out their clenched fists, and they refuse to open their fists to let go of the prize, so they are stuck. The Africans then pick up the trapped monkeys and ship them off to live in a zoo forever—all because they didn't know enough to let go!

It seems to me that maybe we aren't a lot different from those monkeys! How often we refuse to "let go" of things that are making our lives so much less than we want them to be. We cling to the things that enable us to have the trappings of a *lifestyle*—but at the cost of a *life* in which joy, love and fulfillment are the center. We live in our own zoos. As we have heard for the last several weeks in Luke's Gospel, the gifts of God can only be grasped with the open hands of humility and prayer; the closed hands of materialism and self-centeredness condemn us to a lifetime of emptiness.

On this day when the focus is on the cost of discipleship for those who truly want to follow Jesus, I thought it would be appropriate to conclude with the great Prayer for Generosity, written 450 years ago by St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus:

O God, teach me to be generous:
to serve You as You deserve to be served;
to give without counting the cost;
to fight without fear of being wounded;
to work without seeking rest;
and to spend myself without expecting any reward,
save that of knowing that I am doing your holy will. Amen.