

"Ready to Run?"  
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*Please Note: These are notes to a lively sermon, hopefully more akin to poetry or spoken word than a lecture or academic paper. Physical movement and delivery cannot be captured on the page, but I hope this gives you a glimpse of what was shared in worship.*

One of the questions from last week was:

"How do we respond to extremists?"

The question came out of the recent terrorist attacks in Paris.

Unfortunately, this isn't the only place or time extremists have resorted to violence.

I invite you to join me in exploring how scripture and history can guide our response today.

## PRAYER

Our Bible story today takes place when the Jews are under Roman rule  
and previous armed revolts have failed to lift the burden.

In the midst of this, the disciples drop everything to follow Jesus.

Since the scripture notes the presence of hired hands,

we can guess that the brothers were well enough off.

They were not desperate youth fleeing to a cult or gang in hopes of finding belonging.

Rather, in encountering Jesus they totally re-oriented their lives.

We may like to speculate how they did so

- maybe they knew Jesus previously

- maybe Jesus had a longer conversation with them, before calling them to follow

But, the scripture does not suggest either of these,

instead it is merely the presence and call of Jesus that motivates the disciples to follow.

They would follow him to the cross

and after his death some of the disciples would be sent to prison

or persecuted for their decision to follow Christ.

A great many disciples have followed Jesus to the cross.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer is one whose commitment to Jesus brought about his imprisonment.

Bonhoeffer was a theologian and pastor during WW2.

As he watched the rise of Hitler in his home in Berlin, Germany,

he became convinced that the church was preaching a cheap grace -

essentially forgiveness and pardon without repentance or any effort to change.

He believed this because the Church was becoming a pawn in the Nazis propaganda.

So he famously preached about costly grace -

in which God's forgiveness and love so overwhelms us that

we are moved to discipleship,

as the first disciples left their nets and followed Christ.

As Europe was falling under the extreme terrorism of the Nazis party,

Bonhoeffer was calling for costly discipleship to Christ.

In 1933, when Hitler began implementing discrimination laws against Jews,

Bonhoeffer wrote a letter of opposition,  
with three actions of costly grace and dedicated discipleship for the church in Germany  
we may find these helpful in discerning how we respond to extreme terrorism today.

1. He urged the church to stand up against the state.

Bonhoeffer was part of a segment of the church called the "Confessing Church"  
which did resist the Nazis party's discrimination.

However, most of the church was usurped by the state in support of Hitler's ideology.

As time went on, Bonhoeffer's "Confessing Church" became too much of a threat and  
the Nazis state closed the seminary at which Bonhoeffer taught  
and many of his students were imprisoned or enlisted into the military.

As discrimination and restrictive laws rose,

Bonhoeffer reminded Christians to drop everything, quell the fear inside,  
and follow Christ in reshaping the world,  
the first step was proclaiming something of what that world might look like.

2. Second, he asserted that the church was called to aid the victims of state action.

To this end, he worked to bring Jews to safety outside of Germany.

As the safety of his neighbors became increasingly jeopardized,

Bonhoeffer joined with others in dropping everything, quelling the fear inside,  
and following Christ in reshaping the world  
into one of safety and love for all.

The Nazis suspected Bonhoeffer was helping Jews escape so in 1943 he was arrested.

However, in doing this work, he knew more needed to be done:

helping Jews escape was like pulling people from a raging forest fire,  
the fire needed to stop, so...

3. His third call was for the church to put a spoke in the wheel of the immoral actions of the state

How one does this was up and still is up for serious debate.

It does not mean throwing yourself in front of the wagon,

but rather looking at the system and finding out how to put a wrench in the operations.

like the counter sit-ins of the civil rights movement -

by sitting together they thwarted the discriminatory laws.

Bonhoeffer struggled to figure out how to put the spoke in the wheel of Nazis Germany.

When Bonhoeffer was younger he attempted to live in an intentional Christian  
community, as a means to embody a different way of life.

Later in life, Bonhoeffer joined a conspiracy group attempting to overthrow Hitler.

In 1945 the Nazis discovered his role in the plot and he was executed on April 9 at 39.

While he lost his life, he undoubtedly did his best to follow Christ and

for that he is remembered and reverently studied.

**In all three of his points, the main call is drop everything,  
quell the fear inside and**

**follow Christ in reshaping the world into the image of Christ:  
a beloved community of different people.**

What that looked like to Bonhoeffer in Germany in the 1930s and 40s  
is different than what it will look like for us today.

The theology and life of Bonhoeffer has captivated countless Christians  
and his work was hugely influential on modern theology.

The three actions of costly discipleship he lifts up  
may give us some guidance in addressing the questions of

How do we follow Christ today?

What does costly discipleship look like in today's world, with "homegrown terrorism" and suicide  
attacks?

1. To drop everything, follow Jesus by standing against immoral actions
  - vigils, prayers, letters to the editors acknowledging the suffering,  
especially as people of faith,  
the world needs to know of a God that does not desire such suffering.
  - In Nazis Germany the state usurped the church for its violent schemes,  
today our news reports extremists using Islam for its violent schemes.
  - So, may we stand with our muslim brothers and sisters who are horrified by the use of  
violence in the name of their tradition
  
2. drop everything, quell the fear and follow Jesus by aiding the victims of injustices
  - Bon. literally brought Jews to safety
  - today we can send resources to support those who have lost one to violence
  - we may also seek to support those susceptible to terrorist organizations,  
by providing food, housing, and a community of belonging  
they may be less likely to turn to extremists for such resources.
  
3. Put a spoke in the wheel of terrorism
  - terrorism is grounded in fear and misunderstanding
  - Governments may use force or military might,  
but the Church has a different sort of power that can undermine the fear of terrorism  
We are called to construct communities of peace and understanding;
  - abroad it may mean supporting an organization that brings together Israeli and  
Palestine youth to play soccer and in doing so builds relationship.
  - today there is a threat of homegrown terrorism, so building relationships at home is just  
as important
    - so, we can also build those relationships here in East Hartford:  
through the east hartford interfaith ministries and  
spreading the compassionate community we have here at first church  
with others in our community:  
through joint efforts and programs that build relationships.

We respond to extremists by dropping everything to follow Jesus:

follow Jesus in proclaiming the word  
follow Jesus aiding those who are suffering  
follow Jesus in the reshaping of our world.

We name the pain, put on a band aid, and then try to stop the source of pain.

May we have the courage and the vision to do so. Amen.

*Information on Bonhoeffer primarily based on the introduction and anthology of his works found in Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Witness to Jesus Christ, ed. John W. De Gruchy, 1991 Fortress Press. Particularly "The church and the Jewish Question" and "The cost of discipleship". As well as lecture notes from Professor Willis Jenkins' ethics course at Yale Divinity School.*