

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Pastor, Theologian, and Martyr

1906-1945

Community @ Community

March 7 and 14, 2018

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was only thirty-nine years old when he was executed in a Nazi concentration camp in 1945, yet his courage, vision, and brilliance have greatly influenced the twentieth-century Church and theology. His legacy includes a poignant body of work that documents his struggles to determine the will of God and his exemplary calm and concern for others as he faced the prospect of his own death. Posthumously he has become a source of inspiration for people like Desmond Tutu, Vaclav Havel and Martin Luther King, Jr.

March 7 – an overview of the life and times of Bonhoeffer, along with the context for his key writings.

March 14 – a closer look at Bonhoeffer’s response to the the conflict between the church and the German state in the 1930’s. Look at one of Bonhoeffer’s key ongoing questions: “Who is Christ actually for us today?” What are the messages of Bonhoeffer that resonate with us in our times today?

Additional Resources - visit: <http://communitypeaceandjustice.net/> and click on Dietrich Bonhoeffer for bibliography, articles, videos and more.

Selected Quotes

Judging others makes us blind, whereas love is illuminating. By judging others we blind ourselves to our own evil and to the grace which others are just as entitled to as we are. – *Discipleship*, p. 185

When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die. – *Discipleship*, p. 89

Cheap grace means grace as a doctrine, a principle, a system. It means forgiveness of sins proclaimed as a general truth, the love of God taught as the Christian "conception" of God. An intellectual assent to that idea is held to be of itself sufficient to secure remission of sins.

– *Discipleship*, p. 43

Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock. Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ.

– *Discipleship*, p. 45

We are not to simply bandage the wounds of victims beneath the wheels of injustice, we are to drive a spoke into the wheel itself. – *The Church and the Jewish Question – April 1933*

By judging others we blind ourselves to our own evil and to the grace which others are just as entitled to as we are. *Discipleship*, p. 185

Dietrich Bonhoeffer - Selected Quotes

The Church is the Church only when it exists for others...not dominating, but helping and serving. It must tell men of every calling what it means to live for Christ, to exist for others.

- *Letters and Papers* – p. 486

How would you expect to find community while you intentionally withdraw from it at some point? The disobedient cannot believe; only the obedient believe. *Discipleship*, p. 67

Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ. *Discipleship*, p. 59

While it is good that we seek to know the Holy One, it is probably not so good to presume that we ever complete the task. - *God Is in the Manger: Reflections on Advent*

Suffering, then, is the badge of true discipleship. The disciple is not above his master. Following Christ means *passio passiva*, suffering because we have to suffer. - *Discipleship*, p. 91

In short, it is much easier to see a thing through from the point of view of principle than from that of concrete responsibility. The younger generation will always have the surest sense of whether an action is done merely in terms of principle or from living responsibly, for it is their future that is at stake.

- *Letters and Papers* – p. 8

It is worse for a liar to tell the truth than for a lover of truth to lie. - *Ethics*

The Incarnation is the ultimate reason why the service of God cannot be divorced from the service of man.

-*Discipleship*, p. 129

This is the end. For me the beginning of life. – *Dietrich Bonhoeffer to a fellow prisoner, the day before he was executed.*

God loves human beings. God loves the world. Not an ideal human, but human beings as they are; not an ideal world, but the real world. What we find repulsive in their opposition to God, what we shrink back from with pain, namely, real human beings. . . this is for God the ground of unfathomable love.

– *Ethics* p. 84

The first service one owes to others in a community involves listening to them. Just as our love for God begins with listening to God's Word, the beginning of love for others is learning to listen to them. God's love for us is shown by the fact that God not only gives God's Word, but also lends us God's ear. . . . We do God's work for our brothers and sisters when we learn to listen to them.

– *Life Together* p. 97

Dietrich Bonhoeffer - Selected Quotes

The community of the saints is not an 'ideal' community consisting of perfect and sinless men and women, where there is no need of further repentance. No, it is a community which proves that it is worthy of the gospel of forgiveness by constantly and sincerely proclaiming God's forgiveness.

- *Discipleship*, p. 287

Christianity stands or falls with its revolutionary protest against violence, arbitrariness, and pride of power, and with its plea for the weak. Christians are doing too little to make these points clear rather than too much. Christendom adjusts itself far too easily to the worship of power. Christians should give more offense, shock the world far more, than they are doing now.

- *Sermon on 2 Corinthians 12:9 – London, 1934*

How wrong it is to use God as a stop-gap for the incompleteness of our knowledge. If in fact the frontiers of knowledge are being pushed further and further back (and that is bound to be the case), then God is being pushed back with them, and is therefore continually in retreat. We are to find God in what we know, not in what we don't know. - *Letters and Papers – p. 396*

The great masquerade of evil has played havoc with all our ethical concepts. For evil to appear disguised as light, charity, historical necessity or social justice is quite bewildering to anyone brought up on our traditional ethical concepts, while for the Christian who bases his life on the Bible, it merely confirms the fundamental wickedness of evil. - *Letters and Papers – p. 4*

There remains an experience of incomparable value. We have for once learned to see the great events of world history from below, from the perspective of the outcasts, the suspects, the maltreated — in short, from the perspective of those who suffer. **Mere waiting and looking on is not Christian behavior. Christians are called to compassion and to action.**

- *Letters and Papers – p. 16*

I discovered later, and I'm still discovering right up to this moment, that it is only by living completely in this world that one learns to have faith. By this-worldliness I mean living unreservedly in life's duties, problems, successes and failures. In so doing we throw ourselves completely into the arms of God, taking seriously, not our own sufferings, but those of God in the world. That, I think, is faith.

- *Letters and Papers – p. 471*

While we exert ourselves to grow beyond our humanity, to leave the human behind us, God becomes human; and we must recognize that God wills that we be human, real human beings. While we distinguish between pious and godless, good and evil, noble and base, God loves real people without distinction.

- *Ethics p. 84*

If you want my (God's) loving kindness to stay with you, serve your neighbor, for in him God himself meets you. - *Sermon on Psalm 63:4, October 1931, Essential Writings of DB, p 197*

God became human so that humans could become truly human, and humane. - *paraphrase of Bonhoeffer*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer - Selected Quotes

I often ask myself why a 'Christian instinct' often draws me more to the religionless people than to the religious. ... Religious people speak of God when human knowledge has come to an end, or when human resources fail. It always seems to me that we are trying anxiously in this way to reserve some space for God; I should like to speak of God not on the boundaries but in the center, not in weaknesses, but in strength, and therefore, not in death and guilt, but in man's life and goodness. The church stands, not at the boundaries where human powers give out, but in the middle of the village.

- *Letters and Papers* – p. 355

As much as the Christian would like to remain distant from political struggle, nonetheless, even here the commandment of love urges the Christian to stand up for his neighbor. - *Draft of a Catechism, DBCW, Vol 11, p 262*

What keeps gnawing at me is the question, what is Christianity, or who is Christ actually for us today?

- *Letters and Papers* – p. 353

The task is not to turn the world upside down but in a given place to do what, from the perspective of reality, is necessary objectively and to really carry it out. – *Ethics p. 225*

It is grace, nothing but grace, that we are allowed to live in community with Christian brothers and sisters. – *Life Together p. 20*

The exclusion of the weak and insignificant, the seemingly useless people, from a Christian Community may actually mean the exclusion of Christ; in the poor brother Christ is knocking at the door. – *Life Together p. 38*

Seek God, not happiness - this is the fundamental rule of all meditation. If you seek God alone, you will gain happiness: that is its promise. – *Life Together p. 84*

A Christian fellowship lives and exists by the intercession of its members for one another, or it collapses. – *Life Together p. 86*

I can no longer condemn or hate a brother for whom I pray, no matter how much trouble he causes me. – *Life Together p. 86*