

1 Peter 3:8-9 (KJV) *Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.*

This passage from Saint Peter reflects the passage in John where Jesus commands us to love one another as he has loved us. That is a pretty tall order. As Father Bill Weston, who was with you last Sunday, used to say, "Let us love one another, even those who are difficult to love."

That is true. There are those who are difficult to love. But we are called to love them anyway.

Why? Because Jesus tells us to just like when we admonished our children when they asked, "Why do I have to do this or that?" We answers, "Cause I told you so!"

There's not any difference. It's just because Jesus basically said "Cause I tell you to do it."

But, that is not what I'm going to talk about this morning. It has a relation to my subject and is part of what I am going to say but there is more to it.

What I am going to talk about this morning has more to do with the Parable of the Talents. You know the one where Jesus talks about the five talents, the two talents and the one talent the Slave buried in the backyard.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer called this business of burying ones talent in the backyard, *Easy Grace*. Easy Grace is grace without commitment, grace without cost.

Let me quote Bonhoeffer, *Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession.... Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.*

St. John's is at a crossroads in its life, in its existence. We have been around now some, I believe, some eight years, give or take, most of those years spent here in this facility. Lilianne and I have been here now with you some five years plus.

We grow but we don't grow. We gain new members but we lose old members, but are growing in membership, slowly but certainly. But we don't grow in commitment. We don't grow in our desire to know God in His fullness not to make the effort to make this parish a viable, active witness for Him.

In other words, we are not committed, committed to Jesus in the sense that He used when He said, **Luke 14:26-27 (KJV)** *If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.*

It costs to be a Christian. It costs to be a Christian in time as well as in talent and in treasure. It may even cost you your life.

Ask yourself. Ask yourself just how committed you are to St. John's. to the Church, to Christ.

It appears that St. John's has embraced *Easy Grace* instead of committed Christianity or *Costly Grace*.

Again. Let me quote Bonhoeffer, *Costly grace is the sanctuary of God; it has to be protected from the world, and not thrown to the dogs. It is therefore the living word, the Word of God, which he speaks as it pleases him. Costly grace confronts us as a gracious call to follow Jesus. It comes as a word of forgiveness to the broken spirit and the contrite heart. Grace is costly because it compels a man to*

submit to the yoke of Christ and follow him; it is grace because Jesus says: "My yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Saint Peter tells us in this morning's Epistle, that we are to have compassion, to have love for each other. I think we do a pretty good job of that here at St. John's but when it takes an effort to go beyond just attending the 9:30 Sunday morning service, we have a problem.

Father Mark, Father Sam and I cannot do it for you. We cannot hold a gun to your collective heads and force you to become active in your parish. You are going to have to get off your pews and work if we are to have a church in the future.

Our job here at St. John's is to spread the Gospel not to come here to be entertained by our beautiful music and outstanding sermons. We are not called to crawl in here on Sunday morning at the last moment, spend an hour or so, enjoy some fellowship and leave until we repeat the same pattern the next Sunday and the next and the next.

We offered a Thursday noon Eucharist which no one hardly ever attended. We have now a Wednesday evening Eucharist which only a faithful few attend. The Vestry is supposed to be the Lay leadership of every parish including this one, but there is not one vestry member that attends regularly on Wednesday.

We have had a Wednesday evening discussion group whose purpose is to help us all grow spiritually and in our knowledge and understanding of our Church and our faith now for nearly five years. There again, we have a faithful few that attend, a very few.

Our Senior Warden has asked for volunteers to participate in a committee to explore ways to increase our numbers and to explore ways that we can outreach into our community as witnesses for Christ. Only a couple of people have responded. The ladies of our Altar Guild need some more of you to help. We need Acolytes and Lay Readers.

What is it that will take you all to get more active? We haven't tried dynamite yet but that has been contemplated. Believe me.

Like I said, we are at a crossroads. Your clergy can't do it all. It is up to you.

We have both an aging clergy and an aging congregation. If we are to be here in twenty years from now or maybe even ten years from now, we are going to have to work at it, both you and us.

We are blessed to have both Father Mark and Father Sam but they are both more than busy with their day jobs. However, down the road not to far is a time when all three of us may have to retire and St. John's has really nothing to offer a young priest and his family to come here.

And the days of finding a semi-retired priest are drawing to a close. There are none in the pipeline as far as I know. All of our seminarians either are young with families or already committed to the parish where they live.

We have tried this experiment of joining St. John's with All Souls, Asheboro, in an effort to, by combining our resources, have the means to bring in a young priest, but St. John's did not want to make any sacrifice to do it.

That pretty well leaves St. John's to stand alone... without a building, without the prospect of attracting a new priest... I know that many of you feel that you have already done enough, that you are old and do not want make the effort but who is going to if you don't.

Think about it.

Amen.