



DISCIPLE

Week 03: The Call to the World

Dwelling in the Word

1. Prayerfully read through Matt 20:28, 28:16-20; John 1:14; 20:21 then ask: 1) What words, phrases, or images stood out to you? 2) What does this say about what God desires to accomplish in you? 3) How could you respond to what God says in these passages?

Beginning the Conversation

1. In your experience, what has the church's relationship to the world (including the government) been like in your lifetime? What should that relationship look like in your opinion?
2. Bonhoeffer came to understand that "The church is only a church if it is there for others." Discuss.

Digging Deeper

1. Bonhoeffer understands Jesus Christ as "the man for others! The Crucified One!" Not only does he highlight Jesus' love and concern for others that he exhibited throughout his ministry, but he specifies how this is uniquely exemplified in the cross (see John 15:13). How does this fit with how you understand Jesus?
2. Bonhoeffer argues that if Jesus was there for others, this should also be the attitude of his disciples (and the church). The Apostle Paul makes this same argument in Philippians 2:5-8. Reflect on this passage and consider how you can "have the same mindset as Christ Jesus."
3. In the sermon, Pastor Tyler suggested three ways the church can "be there for others." The first way is to be an incarnational witness to the world and through the proclamation of the Gospel. How do you think this is best done?
4. The second way the church can be there for others is through loving help and service toward others. In this regard, Bonhoeffer commented that it needs to be done by "not dominating, but helping and serving" and speaking and living with "moderation, authenticity, trust, faithfulness, steadfastness, patience, discipline, humility, modesty, contentment" (*Letters*, 503), and by being a blessing. Can you think of ways together as a church we can be this helping and serving presence in our community?
5. Finally, the third way is through advocacy for the marginalized (or victims of state policies) and working towards the common good. This way is more complex and wide-ranging. Can you think of some ways the church has or should be involved in advocacy for others and education of the public? (a potential example includes the housing crisis in Edmonton).

Living it Out

1. What are some practical and concrete ways that you, as you follow Jesus in a life of discipleship, inspired and enabled by the Holy Spirit, can be there for others? And are there ways you can bring other Christ followers along with you as you seek to live out your discipleship in this way?



THE CALL TO THE
WORLD

John 20:21
Tyler Williams | February 2, 2025

The Church & the World

Bonhoeffer's understanding of the church's relationship with the world is complex and develops over time.

- The Early Bonhoeffer
- The Later Bonhoeffer

The Early Bonhoeffer

The early Bonhoeffer: the church and the world are separate “spheres” and each have their God-ordained role and generally they don't interact.

- In *Discipleship* and earlier writings, Bonhoeffer is concerned with the church itself, the “church against the world,” a church with clear-cut boundaries.
- “The followers are the visible community of faith; their discipleship is a visible act which separates them from the world – or it is not discipleship” (*D* 81).



The Later Bonhoeffer

The later Bonhoeffer questioned the “two spheres” and saw instead a church that lives for the world, in the midst of the world.

- “The church does not... exist just for itself, but its existence is already always something that reaches far beyond it” (*Ethics*, 63).
- The church must enact that “the love of God really lived in Jesus Christ” (*Ethics*, 83).



Our Understanding of Christ

Question: “Who is Christ for us today? (Letter to Eberhard Bethge, April 30, 1944).

Answer: “The human being for others! The Crucified One” (“Outline,” Aug 1944; cf. Matt 20:28).

- To follow Jesus as his disciple, is to also follow him in being there for others, not by being religious, but by following him in incarnational relationship.

CHRISTOLOGY

Our Understanding of Church

If the church is “Christ existing as community” (*Sanctorum Communio*, 141), then, the church should have the same outward orientation as Jesus.

- As Christ lived for the other, so the church must likewise live for the other.
- The church does *not* exist for itself — “ecclesia curva in se” (“a church bent in on itself”).

ECCLESIOLOGY

Our Understanding of Mission

“The church is only a church if it is there for others” (“Book Outline” dated to August 1944; *Letters*, 503).

- Christ is Christ only with and for the other, in the same way, the church is church only *with and for the other*.

MISSIONOLOGY

Our Understanding of Mission

The Church as an Incarnational Presence with a focus on being sent to the other.

- “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14).
- “Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you’” (John 20:21).

MISSIONOLOGY

“There for Others”

1. Incarnational Witness & Proclamation of the Gospel

- “The church is the place where it is proclaimed and taken seriously that God has reconciled the world to himself in Christ (2Cor 5:19), that God so loved the world that God gave his Son for it (John 3:16)” (*Ethics*, 63).
- “So the first task given to those who belong to the church of God is not to be something for themselves... but to be witnesses of Jesus Christ to the world” (*Ethics*, 64).

“There for Others”

2. Loving Help and Service toward others

- The overall emphasis is on service, not domination or power, on demonstrating by example what new life in Christ means: “Not dominating, but helping and serving” and speaking and living with “moderation, authenticity, trust, faithfulness, steadfastness, patience, discipline, humility, modesty, contentment” (*Letters*, 503)

“God’s response to the world that nailed Christ to the cross: blessing. God does not repay evil for evil, and thus the righteous should not do so either. No judgment, no abuse, but blessing.... Blessing means laying one’s hand on something and saying, Despite everything, you belong to God. This is what we do with the world that inflicts such suffering on us. We do not abandon it; we do not repudiate, despise or condemn it. *Instead we call it back to God, we give it hope, we lay our hand on it and say: may God’s blessing come upon you, may God renew you; be blessed, world created by God, you who belong to your Creator and Redeemer. We have received God’s blessing in happiness and in suffering. Yet those who have been blessed can do nothing but pass on this blessing; indeed, they must be a blessing wherever they are*” (“Daily Meditations for June 7 & 8, 1944,” *Conspiracy*, 632).

“There for Others”

3. Advocacy for the Marginalized & Working towards the Common Good

- “The church has an *unconditional obligation* toward the victims of any societal order, even if they do not belong to the Christian community. ‘Let us work for the good of all’ (Gal 6:10)” (“The Church and the Jewish Question,” *DBW* 12, 365).
- A public theology that is concerned with speaking toward common issues that are of the interest of society as a whole.

Invitation

Prayerfully consider Jesus' call to discipleship.

How can we, as we follow Jesus together in a life of discipleship, inspired and enabled by the Holy Spirit, be there for others?