

# PAPER CHURCH

## **On the Shoulders of Giants - Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

*Sunday 7 June 2020*

### **Some Tips**

Our hope is that this is a resource that will help us all to engage meaningfully with God's word for us and invite an open and experimental sense of worship today. Use it in a way that feels comfortable and helpful to you. Here are a couple of suggestions that might help the process.

#### ***Get prepared for worship***

Have your Bible close by, perhaps set up some favourite music to listen to, find some food and drink to have during communion. It doesn't have to be bread and grape juice; it could be whatever is available (tea and a biscuit) to use in this symbolic time.

#### ***Get into a 'sacred' space***

When we are not physically in a dedicated worship space (like a church building), it is important to mentally and spiritually shift into a sense of worship.

Be intentional. Sit somewhere where you feel receptive and responsive to God (e.g. a cosy chair or outside in the garden). Have some visual representation of God (perhaps a small cross, your Bible, a symbol or image). Start with a few moments of silence and deep breathing.

#### ***Consider your environment***

Consider your environment and what will work for you. If you have others in your house (house-mates/family), consider sharing this time with them, each reading or participating as appropriate. You might simply reflect individually, in your own time and space. Afterwards, you might connect with others through technology to share your reflections, or an encouragement, with them.



## Music Worship

If you have access to YouTube and would like to engage with some sung worship today, click through to [rngwd.com/76playlist](http://rngwd.com/76playlist).

## Bible Reading: Luke 9:57-62 (NIV)

*If you are with others perhaps take turns to read different sections*

<sup>57</sup> As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.”

<sup>58</sup> Jesus replied, “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”

<sup>59</sup> He said to another man, “Follow me.”

But he replied, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”

<sup>60</sup> Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”

<sup>61</sup> Still another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family.”

<sup>62</sup> Jesus replied, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”

## Message

*Penny Martin*

Today marks the beginning of a new series that focusses on the lives of four very different people and what they might be able to teach us today. I wonder if you, like me, can think back to people of faith, whose shoulders you have had the privilege of standing on. It is an often underestimated gift to be able to see with broad and deep perspective because of people who faithfully went before us. These four people are certainly not the only giants of faith that we could talk about and learn from and they certainly are in many ways not so different from you or I. They provide a signpost if you like. They draw our eyes away from just the context in which we find ourselves daily bogged down in and point to the profound power of faith in action in diverse circumstances and experiences throughout time.

One of my favourite topics of teaching and writing has been about the integration of belief and behaviour. Steven Garber in his book *The Fabric of Faithfulness* says we cannot divorce belief from behaviour, we need to integrate “belief *about* the world with life *in* the world – in the most personal arenas and the most public arenas”. I suspect as we make a journey throughout June we will be inspired by stories and characters who embody this commitment. We will learn some new things, and I pray be empowered to press more deeply into God, and step boldly into more active and transformative faith practices.

### Bonhoeffer himself

Dietrich Bonhoeffer – how can one do justice to this incredible man in a short 15-20 minutes. The fact is I can't. As I said, this is about signposts. I can give you some ideas and shape some direction but each of us has to be interested to learn and walk the path. There is a lovely memoir at the beginning of *The Cost of Discipleship* and, for a more in-depth look, books by author Eric Metaxas.

Born in Breslau, Germany, into a prestigious family, he was privileged to receive a high level of education and encouragement. Despite being raised in a family that was not particularly religious he declared his interest and intention to become a pastor and a theologian at a young age – a goal which he pursued with rigor.

At age 21 he was a doctoral graduate and at 23 the youngest person ever appointed to a lectureship in systematic theology at the University of Berlin; in 1929. His contemporaries saw his career as made in heaven.

Bonhoeffer's promising career was dramatically altered with the Nazi ascension to power and he was a vocal opponent of Nazism from its first days. Two days after Hitler was installed as Chancellor, Bonhoeffer delivered a radio address in which he attacked Hitler and warned Germany against slipping into an idolatrous cult of the *Führer* (leader), who could very well turn out to be *Verführer* (mis-leader, or seducer). He was cut off the air in the middle of a sentence.

In April 1933, two weeks after Hitler's enactment of the Aryan Civil Service legislation banning people of Jewish ancestry from public employment, Bonhoeffer raised a voice of resistance publishing: “The Church and the Jewish Question”, in which he famously said “We (the Church) are not to simply bandage the wounds of victims beneath the wheels of injustice, we are to drive a spoke into the wheel itself.”

Bonhoeffer would become well known for his vocal and active resistance against the Reichskirche – or the German Official Church - Christians who were largely submissive to and complicit with the National Socialism. Bonhoeffer could not stand by and watch the seismic efforts to skew Biblical interpretation and theology to the position of the German Official Church (Nazi ideology) of passive quietism at its best and of outright oppressive anti-Semitism at its worst.

He ... established his Confessing Church which, before being finally suppressed by the SS in 1941, produced much of the leadership of the German Resistance. Internationally, Bonhoeffer spent from 1933 to 1939 seeking to unite the International Christian Movement into a global pacifist movement that would oppose the aggression of his own state. After the failure of these efforts, in 1940 he joined the German Abwehr (military intelligence) as a double agent and until his arrest in

late 1943, he collaborated with the armed forces' conspiracy against Hitler – and, at the same time, organised the secret evacuation of a number of German Jews to Switzerland. Bonhoeffer's was a muscular Christianity. (Rudd, 2006)

### Points for today

The text from Luke's gospel today is entitled the cost of following and right at the end Jesus says this: "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God...", and earlier in the same chapter "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me." (6:23). These are some of the most challenging words of the call to discipleship.

Bonhoeffer wrote a classic book called *The Cost of Discipleship* – an exceptional work that emerged in the midst of his enormous struggle for ethical consistency and to live integrally the demands of sacrificial discipleship.

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*"In the midst of the goodness of creation there is a fundamental flaw or fracture that runs through each of us. It is this fracture of self-interest which allows an individual to see himself or herself as beyond the community framework. Which allows the autocratic view from on high to prevail over the people's story, and which justifies the exploitation of others."*  
(Tim Costello, Tips From A Travelling Soul Searcher, 12.)

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The essence of Bonhoeffer's ongoing challenge to people today – particularly people interested in discipleship is what it means for Christians to be standing by and standing up for the people who were, and are, the direct victims of oppression. This was the key theme driving Bonhoeffer. It was not enough to say one loved God and wanted to follow the ways of Jesus – one had to LIVE that costly reality day by day by day.

### Hon. Kevin Rudd

(Excerpt of an interview with Stirling Theological College – used with permission)

*"The first thing I would say thinking about Bonhoeffer's life is that if we take our Christian faith seriously then what Bonhoeffer teaches us is that it requires of us not a partial or episodic engagement with the public space but a comprehensive engagement with the public space and by public space I mean the great public debates of the age. Bonhoeffer rails against what I would describe as a privatised Christianity, that is a narrowly defined spirituality which is about narrow forms as of Christian and or church observance. In fact, he says perhaps echoing the sentiments of Charles Wesley or John Wesley in an earlier age, I should say, when he said "The world is my Parish." The world meaning the physical world and beyond national boundaries, and the world also in terms of material needs of human being and not just their spiritual needs. Remember Wesley and that tradition would be categorised today as definitively Evangelical, in fact was ridiculed by the established Anglican Church at the time for being so. Remember that Bonhoeffer's theology would also be regarded as evangelical, but at the*

*same time he sees absolutely no contradiction in that on the one hand, and a call to social justice on the other at all levels. I think in this age what I would say is that if Bonhoeffer was with us today he would be leading global activism on climate change, he would be leading global activism on the injustices of global capitalism and the need to rewrite the social contract. He would be leading global activism on the continued impact of authoritarian states around the world on oppressed minorities. And so my overall conclusion from the life and work of Bonhoeffer is that his applied Christianity was comprehensive, it was not compartmentalised into something narrow, into some sort of tiny sacred space.”*

This past week has largely been defined by images emerging after the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis and the spread of messaging and information and the escalation of protests and the escalation of anger around that some lives matter and need to be profiled and understood in different ways. It just astounds and flabbergasts me and breaks my heart that we live in the kind of world where we *have* to say things like “Jews matter” or “lives matter”.

The reason I am so glad we get to stand on the shoulders of people like Dietrich Bonhoeffer is that the resounding legacy of his life and death, the cost of his faith and following and the cost of his activism - is that we have an invitation today to take very seriously what it means to be an active and faithful part of the solution. To be an active part of hopeful transformation. To look close to home and to ask where Gods spirit of hope and love is being made manifest. To not just pick people up and bandage them up – although that is an act of loving compassion - but to be proactive in thrusting a spoke in the wheel of the machinery of oppression.

***A prayer written by Bonhoeffer in Flossenburg Concentration camp where he was executed:***

O God,  
early in the morning I cry to you.  
Help me to pray,  
and to concentrate my thoughts on you:  
I cannot do this alone.

In me there is darkness,  
But with you there is light;  
I am lonely, but you do not leave me;  
I am feeble in heart, but with you there is help;  
I am restless, but with you there is peace.  
In me there is bitterness, but with you there is patience;  
I do not understand your ways,  
but you know the way for me ...

Restore me to liberty,  
And enable me so to live now  
that I may answer before you and before me,  
Lord, whatever this day may bring,  
Your name be praised.  
Amen.

## Prayer

God of radical scandalous, graceful love, God of justice and compassion give us the critical humility needed to be able to see where we are complicit in oppressive systems and when we are too forgetful of our own context and the people in our own backyards and communities who are not accorded the same rights and opportunities that we enjoy.

Help us to seek you, to seek for the ways of peace and reconciliation that your son Jesus of Nazareth embodied.

Help us to resist blindly thinking we have acted for you because we have simply acted on social media – instead help us step into the daily and costly spaces of action, of being educated, of taking responsibility, of confessing and collaborating towards a more transformed and more just world.

AMEN.

## Quotes from Bonhoeffer

*Pause to reflect on these, prayerfully*

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*“We must be ready to allow ourselves to be interrupted by God.”*

*“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.”*

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## Prayer

***Would you like someone to pray or chat with you?***

There is power in prayer and in the experience of being prayed with. You are encouraged to take this opportunity, even if this isn't something you have experienced before. Or you may be feeling particularly lonely or disconnected today and would love to speak with someone. Please call or email the office, on 9870 8169 or [office@ringwoodchurch.org.au](mailto:office@ringwoodchurch.org.au), and someone will call you back between 9am and 1pm this Sunday 7 June 2020.

## Communion

*Have some food and drink prepared for this time*

If you're able, join us at 11am Sunday through Zoom to share in communion together at [rngwd.com/communion](https://rngwd.com/communion) or after you have shared in communion below, consider who you can call to have a chat as you would on a Sunday morning after a church service.

One of the things that we can be actively doing to embrace the idea of spiritual formation is to press into spiritual practices. Communion is a dedicated practice that we do week to week – to set aside time to pause and remember Jesus' death on a cross and the loving sacrifice that he made for each of us. As we pause for a few minutes and take simple food and drink – we remember Jesus meeting with his followers:

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*Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it saying,  
"Take, eat, this is my body".*

*Then he took the cup gave thanks and offered it to them,  
and they all drank from it.*

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Please share in your version of communion.

Communion is usually a time of being *in* community, breaking bread together as a symbolic remembering of Jesus' last supper with his disciples and followers. If we are not in our normal community it might feel strange to do this alone, as a couple or with only a small group of people.

Intentionally consider who you are communing with:

- Think of the people in close proximity to you e.g. neighbours. Give thanks for them.
- Consider and visually bring to mind friends in our church community who would normally be sitting close by at this time. Give thanks for them.
- Consider the community of the Trinity – God the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit – a divine community into which you are embraced today as a beloved child of God.

## Connect cards online

*Click this link or enter it into your web browser [rngwd.com/connect](https://rngwd.com/connect).*

We love to know that you have been able to connect through worship today. Please click on the link (or enter it into your web browser) to our online connect cards letting us know which ways you have been able to worship, and if you want to let us know how we can praying with you.

Thank you!



## **Benediction**

*Adapted from Mekdes Haddis*

AS WE GO ... LISTENING AND LEARNING AND LIVING AND LOVING

A BLESSING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE ADVOCATES

May God bless you with the courage to speak truth in love, to pray for the provoker of injustice and to walk with wisdom and grace as you advocate for the oppressed.

May the word of God wash over your heart and mind and guide your peace as you encounter the news and social media, may your eyes remain fixed upon Jesus.

May you walk with integrity carrying the torch of truth and justice even in front of those who may mock, abandon or mistreat you.

May God give you the joy of experiencing the honour of identifying with His Son in suffering as you suffer with the oppressed.

May you be able to love, honour and care for the fellow image bearers of Christ as you advocate for them.

My you not fall into the trap of oppressing the very group that you mean to protect and speak for.

May your heart always be tender towards the sweet love of Jesus, and when you're weary may you return to your first love who is Christ for rest and restoration.

When you're tempted to give up, to shut down, to build a wall and not let people into your life anymore THEN, may the Lord remind you that "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law."

Galatians 5:22-23 THERE IS NO LAW against loving, and being joyful, and seeking peace and patience, being kind and good, being faithful and gentle and having self-control ... NO LAW ... so may your heart always abound in love.

As you help others realise their privilege to help the marginalised, may you be aware that God is interested in sanctifying you through the process as much as he's called you to point out the sin of culture. I pray you would abound in love and forgiveness so you may see the face of the saviour who loves relentlessly.

## **References**

- Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 2001.
- Kevin Rudd, "What can the modern state learn from a World War Two German theologian?" *The Monthly*, October 2006.
- Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy*. 2011.
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, (First Published 1937).