

**Sermon September 6, 2009 #28 Last in series on What is a Progressive Christian? Point # 8  
Scripture I Corinthians 13 Rev. Dr. Thomas L. Hall, Salem United Church of Christ, Denver,  
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**Point 8 *By calling ourselves progressive, we mean that we are Christians who...  
Recognize that being followers of Jesus is costly and entails selfless love,  
Conscientious resistance to evil and  
Renunciation of privilege*** ([www.tcpc.org](http://www.tcpc.org))

**Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote a book titled "The Cost of Discipleship" in which he describes what it really means to be a disciple of Christ. This is summed up by Bonhoeffer's statement that Christ calls us to "come and die." Christ wants all of us - nothing is to be held back. One is either a disciple of Christ, or they are not. There is no middle ground. The true disciple is dying to his or her life as a whole, and their old life is being replaced with the life of Christ.**

**The rise of Adolph Hitler ran parallel to Bonhoeffer's own rise and it was opposition to the evils of Nazi-ism that compelled Bonhoeffer to put his words into actions, actions that cost him his life. Bonhoeffer understood immediately that Hitler and his national socialist ideology represented a grave threat to Germans, to Christianity, and to western civilization. In a radio address he gave in February, 1933 Bonhoeffer denounced Hitler and denounced his fellow Germans for accepting a corrupt and inhumane leader and system as its idol. Although Bonhoeffer spent a great deal of time living in England, safe from harm, he understood that he could not in good conscience "participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share the trials of this time with my people." Bonhoeffer returned to Germany in 1939 to take up the struggle against Nazi-ism. He was arrested in 1943 after being caught assisting the escape of a number of Jews from Germany. He was imprisoned and later moved to the prison at Buchenwald concentration camp. On April 9, 1945, with Allied troops only days from liberating his prison, Bonhoeffer was executed on the orders of Hitler by the S.S. Black Guards.**

**We come to a conclusion of the series on What Is a Progressive Christian? The parts that jump out at me are**

- 1. it can be costly;**
- 2. it means giving myself up, via selfless love;**
- 3. it means a conscientious resistance to evil and**
- 4. it means renouncing my own privileges for the sake of others.**

**For Dietrich Bonhoeffer it meant all of these things and the ultimate sacrifice.**

**What would we be willing to sacrifice, to let go?**

**What risks would we be willing to take?**

**How would we define evil today and how would we resist it?**

**Tough questions!**

**I still hold to the vision that the work of the Church, and my work as a pastor is to foster and encourage people within and outside of the church to "connect with this God of love and compassion." At the same time we are to connect with all of God's people, in love.**

**Genuine concern for other people includes resisting any forces that drain them of energy, deny them sustenance, rob them of dignity or destroy their hope. A Progressive Christian believes that the resistance to evil in society, rather than the enhancement of oneself has an obligation and an opportunity for those who follow Jesus. As an obligation it is a way to test our commitment to the path; As an opportunity because it puts us at risk on behalf of another simply because of our compassion.**

**In our Tuesday discussion the question was raised regarding barriers we have here at Salem. Discussion followed on physical barriers such as the walkway, lighting , bathrooms the structure of the sanctuary and the exit to back yard. We have emotional barriers in which we fail to share who we are, where we are, how we feel, respectful of all opinions and differences. We are learning how to deal with differences; we are learning and growing, to use the words of Venita Carroll, and to move beyond our set ways.**

**We also have communication barriers: people fail to share programs until the last minute and then expect participation; we are working on that too by using the newsletter, bulletin announcements, email, and web pages to keep everyone informed.**

**For those gathered on Tuesday these 8 discussions on the 8 principles and the sermons have reinforced their belief that Salem is a church that values the Great Commandment and the Golden Rule: to love God with all one's heart, soul, might, and strength and one's neighbor as oneself. To do unto others as one would do unto oneself.**

**Love is the goal. In that is respecting the journey, sharing the journey, sharing the faith, encouraging the faith, walking with each other.**

**So now having heard these sermons on a progressive Christian, where do you see yourself? Can Salem call itself "progressive" according to the 8 point definition? What is the next step? More discussion?**

**A value of Salem's is love. Another is hospitality. Jim and Barb Geer were here from Phoenix. They wanted me to share with you that they truly felt welcomed, affirmed, uplifted, loved. They said that Salem was much like Shadow Rock, a progressive church there. The message, music, and warmth of the people made them feel right at home.**

**As I Corinthians 13 in the Bible Translation from The Message reads:**

**If I speak with human eloquence and angelic ecstasy but don't love, I'm nothing but the creaking of a rusty gate. <sup>2</sup>If I speak God's Word with power, revealing all his mysteries and making everything plain as day, and if I have faith that says to a mountain, "Jump," and it jumps, but I don't love, I'm nothing. <sup>3-7</sup>If I give everything I own to the poor and even go to the stake to be burned as a martyr, but I don't love, I've gotten nowhere. So, no matter what I say, what I believe, and what I do, I'm bankrupt without love.**

**Love never gives up.  
Love cares more for others than for self.  
Love doesn't want what it doesn't have.  
Love doesn't strut,  
Doesn't have a swelled head,**

**Doesn't force itself on others,  
Isn't always "me first,"  
Doesn't fly off the handle,  
Doesn't keep score of the sins of others,  
Doesn't revel when others grovel,  
Takes pleasure in the flowering of truth,  
Puts up with anything,  
Trusts God always,  
Always looks for the best,  
Never looks back,  
But keeps going to the end.**

**<sup>8-10</sup>Love never dies. Inspired speech will be over some day; praying in tongues will end; understanding will reach its limit. We know only a portion of the truth, and what we say about God is always incomplete. But when the Complete arrives, our incompletes will be canceled.**

**<sup>13</sup>But for right now, until that completeness, we have three things to do to lead us toward that consummation: Trust steadily in God, hope unswervingly, love extravagantly. And the best of the three is love.**

**Amen.**