



Conference on World Mission and Evangelism

Moving in the Spirit: Called to Transforming Discipleship

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I Have a Dream to Share with You

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I dreamt that in these past days Jesus came to Arusha. Jesus came to the World Conference on Mission and Evangelism. And as he wandered around, looking, listening, he heard our conversations, he sat in on our workshops and plenaries. Along the way he stopped many of us and his gaze challenged us. He looked into the eyes of each one of us; and in that moment perhaps we each heard again the same transforming invitation he addressed to his first disciples so long ago: "Come follow me" (Mt 4:19).

I felt uneasy and even hurt. In my dream, I dared to say: "Lord, I am following you. I am your disciple, I am a missionary of your Good News!" And Jesus smiled and nodded in assent. But there was a sadness in his eyes. It seemed that he realized that, for all our claim to be his followers, there was something we had not fully grasped or understood about the mission he had entrusted to us.

There is a poem, written by an Anglican priest about a hundred years ago in the context of the terrible upheaval of the First World War. The author called it "*Indifference*". It tells what happened when Jesus came to Birmingham, in England, or maybe to Arusha, or to wherever Christians are gathered together:

When Jesus came to Golgotha, they hanged Him on a tree,
They drove great nails through hands and feet, and made a Calvary;
They crowned Him with a crown of thorns, red were his wounds and deep,
For those were crude and cruel days, and human flesh was cheap.

When Jesus came to Birmingham (or wherever!), they simply passed Him by.
They would not hurt a hair of Him, they only let Him die;
For men had grown more tender, and they would not give Him pain,
They only just passed down the street, and left Him in the rain.

Still Jesus cried, 'Forgive them, for they know not what they do,'
And still it rained the winter rain that drenched Him through and through;
The crowds went home and left the streets without a soul to see,
And Jesus crouched against a wall, and cried for Calvary.

(G. Studdert Kennedy, 1883-1929)

There is no cheap grace; there is no cheap mission or evangelism. Too often, we and our churches have failed to see what Dietrich Bonhoeffer so deeply experienced in the drama of his own imprisonment: God does not come to our help, does not save us, from his omnipotence, but from his weakness. And "what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us". In his weakest moment, on the Cross, Jesus redeemed the world. Too often, we and our churches want discipleship without the Cross, we want to evangelize without the cost of discipleship!

Because we and our churches have resources, because we have ideas and plans, we trust that we will succeed. The deadliest challenge to discipleship and evangelism is to stop relying on grace in order to rely on our human and material strengths. Essentially, we make God superfluous, all the time saying that we are doing his work.

Not all our sisters and brothers make this mistake. The martyrs of all times, and those of today, in Africa, in the Middle East, in Asia and Latin America, put their trust solely in the saving grace of Christ. In their moment of greatest weakness, in their humiliation and their pain, grace is made real and uniquely effective. In “losing” their lives, they are able to generate Christ again in our world. They bear witness that without the Cross there is no Resurrection.

As the World Mission Conference was coming to an end, I dreamt that the sadness had almost gone from Jesus’ eyes. He heard us talk about “embracing the Cross”, becoming “transformed disciples in order to transform the world”. He seemed reassured that we would go back home to remind our churches – that grace is offered in weakness, not in earthly power: “God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong” (cf. 1 Cor 1:27).

It seems to me that, as a result of the Arusha World Conference, Jesus expects us to call our churches:

- to be communities of missionary disciples who “go forth”; communities which boldly take the initiative, go out to others, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the crossroads and welcome the outcast... that touch the suffering flesh of Christ in others; communities that care for the grain and do not grow impatient at the weeds;
- to be communities that bridge distances, that walk and work together, and do not use their differences to remain separate and self-sufficient;
- to be evangelizing communities filled with the joy of the Gospel that warms the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus, because those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness.

(cf. Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel*, 1 and 24).

When we see Jesus leaning against a wall and pining for Calvary and the Cross, let us never be afraid; let us gather around Him and lift Him up, and go forth with Him, in the Holy Spirit, to preach the Gospel to every creature. Amen. So be it.