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PACE Devotional 5 Jul 2020

during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Free by Grace

In 1776, the colonists found their circumstances intolerable and decided it was necessary to declare their independence.

While today we don't need a revolution, I think we can take this opportunity to look at some intolerable circumstances within each of us; circumstances sometimes of our own making, but intolerable nonetheless.

There are times when we feel imprisoned.

Certainly in this time of COVID-19 "stay at home" we feel imprisoned in our own homes. Let's look at 2 other **2** examples of being imprisoned:

- the Apostle Paul was put in prison 5 or 6 times for preaching the Good News of Jesus Christ. As Paul says to the Romans: "In everything God works for good". Paul preached the Grace of God to his jailers and prayed for them.

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer was one of a minority of Lutheran pastors to oppose the Nazis. He joined the Abwehr plot to kill Hitler, was put into prison and was killed not long after he wrote **3** this poem “Von guten Mächten” (By Gracious Powers). We have sung Bonhoeffer’s words **4**, #517 in our hymnal, to an ancient tune; but a more singable tune was composed by Siegfried Fietz. **5** Here the songwriter performs some of Bonhoeffer’s poem in German.

I hope we have the opportunity to sing Bonhoeffer’s words to this melody someday together!

Bonhoeffer invited his jailers to worship services he conducted in prison. He also prayed for his jailers.

Both Paul and Bonhoeffer **6** were imprisoned; but in a certain sense they were more free than their captors. Both Paul and Bonhoeffer declined to escape when they had a chance to go “free”. They

truly knew “The Cost of Discipleship”, which is not free. They were disciples of Christ who suffered as Jesus suffered.

Our founders also knew about the cost of resolving intolerable circumstances.

There is something powerful about a declaration. If our founders had not faced intolerable circumstances and made their declaration, would there be a US now?

If you are feeling **7** imprisoned, if you are facing intolerable circumstances, I invite you to declare your own independence:

- freedom from fear
- freedom from bigotry
- freedom from pride

Freedom is not “free”. **8** The heavens are full of the vast clouds of brave souls who have lost their lives to defend our freedom.

In our UM church we often emphasize how free

and undeserved is God's Amazing Grace. But how "free" is it? **9** Bonhoeffer talks about "cheap grace", where we do nothing and still God is graceful to us. But Bonhoeffer suffered "costly grace", where he gave up his life for his faith.

In the liturgy we have often shared as the **10** Prayer of Confession in the UM Service of Word and Table, there is a phrase I have always liked: "free us for joyful obedience". Today I invite you to find ways you can be free to be joyful in your obedience to God. Never forget that you are a very important part of God's Kingdom! Amen.