

Coffee to Go | Proper 10, Year B

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SPEAKERS

Blake Smith, Karin Peter

Karin Peter 00:27

Welcome to Coffee to Go, where we center ourselves in the scriptures, seasons and holy days of the Christian tradition. I'm Karin Peter. I'm with Blake Smith, and we welcome you on the journey. We are still in Ordinary Time, which is the period of time that we walk the path of the disciple. I think we have a hymn in the Community of Christ hymn book that sings about that. And we learn what it means to be a disciple. So normally, we would say, well, where's Jesus this week, and we'd find out where we are, as we are with Jesus. But this is a little bit different, because Mark's narrative of Jesus' kind of journey, it gets interrupted right now, by this piece that describes the murder of John the Baptist. It's very disconcerting, where it's placed in Mark's gospel. But we find ourselves with Herod of all people. And this is a different Herod than what we learned about in, in the birth of Jesus narrative. But we find Herod wondering, if Jesus might be like, the reincarnation of John the Baptist. I mean, not in those words, but that's basically what's going on, "is this John the Baptist come back to life?" And that interruption, if you will, of the gospel narrative brings us to this. So what can we learn about why we find this in the middle of Jesus teaching, Blake?

Blake Smith 01:58

Yeah, and this is one of those passages that probably in any other circumstance would get a disclaimer: "This passage contains scenes of graphic violence, and may not be suitable for all audiences." It's not something you would expect in the Scripture, and talking about discipleship and how does that matter for us, but let's give it a shot.

So it comes from Mark chapter six, and it is the 14th through the 29th verse. We're following, of course, right after Jesus has told the disciples to go out, two by two and continue to share the message.

King Herod heard of it, for Jesus's name had become known. Some were saying, "John the baptizer has been raised from the dead, and for this reason these powers are at work in him." But others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old." But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised." For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because Herod had married her. For John had been telling Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." And Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to kill him. But she could not, for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed, and yet he liked to listen to him. But an opportunity came when Herod

on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. When his daughter Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests, and the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it." And he swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom." She went out and said to her mother, "What should I ask for?" She replied, "The head of John the baptizer." Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter." The king was deeply grieved, yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

Why in the world, could this possibly matter? It's obviously a gruesome scene, but it is an absolutely perfect example of how when the prophetic voice is calling those in power to accountability, it can be very costly. And it's definitely the case. So, we look at, of course, John and Jesus and the prophets of old. We see that time and again, but we also see a lot of maligning of current-day prophets, people that we might not really associate as prophets. But when we think about the the work that they're doing, and the voice that they have against the powers that be so like, Greta Thunberg, who has done such great work in climate and environmental justice, and Malala Yousafzai, who, in Pakistan, a world where women have so little significance, to stand up against power and create educational opportunities for young girls, becoming the youngest, I believe, Nobel Peace laureate, so, willing to stand up against the potential even I would imagine of execution when we really push these powerful authorities, these people all suffered repercussions because they threatened privilege and power by using their voice. Now Herod was driven by self-importance, Herodias was consumed by hatred, Solome was manipulative, the rich guests who are gathered, I mean, they all create this example of a privileged, corrupt, immoral system. And here, they were all gathered together, and they seek to hold on to power. And even though the Scripture tells us that Herod was a little hesitant to do so, I mean, he kind of feared what might happen to do damage or, or to do harm to such a righteous man. And yet, once he promised, and to hold his status among his people, he had to follow through. And, they will, they'll do it at any cost. But they stand in direct contrast to the disciples, who in the passage just before this, are going out in ministry, without money, without food, without an extra tunic, just the bare necessities. So it's two very different communities in contrast here in these passages. And so we need to, we need to think about that, because as disciples, we are called to be voices against injustice, to speak out. And, and that's hard to do. That's hard to do. And it seems to be getting harder and harder as voices of the opposition seem to have more and more courage to speak out themselves. So some questions we might ask ourselves, as we're on this journey this week is, "When have I felt the need to speak against an injustice?", and it doesn't have to be something like climate justice, or the education of young girls in a completely different culture. It can simply be something that you experience in your everyday life. Because injustice has happened in large and small ways. But when have you felt the need to speak against an injustice? And when have you been afraid to speak for fear of repercussions? Another question is where are the systems of power found in my community? And how can I work with them for common good?

Karin Peter 08:54

I find that interesting, Blake, because sometimes, we don't think about systems of power where we live and serve. And you're not saying here, negative power, you're just saying power. So there's civic power, right, with municipalities and, there's social power with HOAs. And, those are homeowners associations, if you're not familiar. And, there are all kinds of ways that power, it can be used in a corrupt manner, and ways power can be used for the benefit of a community.

Blake Smith 09:30

Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. Speaking of HOAs, my wife just came home yesterday saying that they had gotten a notice from a community... my wife works in residential living for developmentally disabled adults, and one of their group homes got a notice from the HOA that if they didn't cut their grass soon, they would be fined. And the question was, at what point does the grass, you know, it'd been a week and there'd been a lot of rain, but at what point does the fine come? I mean, that's a system of power.

Karin Peter 10:05

It is. It is. Yeah.

Blake Smith 10:09

So the the final question I would suggest would be, Where do I see abuses of power in my community? And how can I do things to help make a change? What can I do to help bring change?

Karin Peter 10:25

Well, this week, maybe, Blake, we can have a response to that with how we experience this scripture this week. What do we do? What do we do? So there's a hymn in Community of Christ Sings called "What does the Lord Require of You?" And I forget if it's Joel or Amos, do you remember what prophetic voice that comes from? I can't remember.

Blake Smith 10:47

It's from Micah.

Karin Peter 10:48

Oh, Micah, there you go. And the phrase is, in the answer to that is, you seek justice, you love kindness, and you walk humbly with God. So wherever you were, wherever you are in life, there are ways that each of us can seek justice. There are ways that we can both love and share kindness. And we can always remember to walk in community with deep humility for the privileges that we have. So this week, let's seek justice, love kindness, and walk humbly.

Blake Smith 11:34

So, I want to just say real quickly, because last week, as we talked about Jesus in his hometown, and being, and the tall Poppy, and being cut off, I just want to say that I knew that was Micah, but that's one of the few scriptures that I can name off the top of my head, most times I would have to look it up.

Karin Peter 11:53

I'm not gonna call you out as a tall poppy Blake, I needed the help.

Blake Smith 11:57

Lest you think I'm one of those who can quote Scripture, and name where it comes from... No, I just got lucky.

So here's our blessing for today. And it comes from Alan Patton...

Open my eyes that I may see the needs of others. Open my ears, that I may hear their cries. Open my heart, so that they need not be without succor. Let me not be afraid to defend the weak because of the anger of the strong, nor afraid to defend the poor, because of the anger of the rich. Show me where love and hope and faith are needed. And use me to bring them to those places. And so, I open my eyes and my ears that I made this coming day, be able to do some work of peace.

As always, we thank you for being with us here at Coffee to Go and we invite you to join us next time for the next part of our journey through the liturgical seasons and holy days of the Christian tradition.