

Coffee To Go | Proper 16 Year B

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SPEAKERS

Blake Smith, Karin Peter

Karin Peter 00:00

Karin, welcome to Coffee to Go where we center ourselves in the scriptures, seasons and holy days of the Christian tradition. I'm Karin Peter here with Blake Smith, and we welcome you on the journey. So where are we with Jesus? This week, we are still with John, and John has us overhearing the teachings where Jesus is continuing to use the analogy of bread that brings eternal life. And this teaching has been going on for several weeks now with us in the lectionary, and this right now today, turns into a critical moment for followers of Jesus. Who will go on? Who will turn back? Reminds me of that hymn, "I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back." This is, this is that moment, people, and let's hear, let's hear what that looks like.

Blake Smith 01:24

Alright, as Karin said, this has been a journey with John in the sixth chapter, and specifically on this topic of bread and blood, but this will be the last passage in that series that we've been looking at so, and it is, as Karin also mentioned, kind of a critical point. So we're in the Gospel of John, and it is, again, the sixth chapter, and we will be hearing the 56th through the 69th verse. Those of you who listened in last week may notice that there's a little bit of an overlap here. So we'll hear a couple of the ending verses from last week, as we pick up for this week.

"Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in Me and I in them, just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate and they died, but the one who eats this bread will live forever. He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum, when many of His disciples heard it, they said, "This teaching is difficult. Who can accept it?" But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, "Does this offend you? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? it is the Spirit that gives life. The flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life, but among you, there are some who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe and who was the one that would betray him. And he said, "For this reason, I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father." Because of this, many of His disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. So Jesus asked the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

When I first read this passage, if you read it slowly, you don't read all of Peter's response. It's like, Lord, to whom can we go? We don't have any other options, so I guess we'll stick around here, right? But we get the end of that, and he acknowledges, as he has before, you have the words of eternal life, and that those who remained had come to believe and know that he was the Holy One of God. It's a complicated teaching, as we have mentioned several times in this conversation about the blood and bread of life, and it forces us to ask the tough questions, as we talked about last week, and to identify what we are really willing to believe. So following Jesus, eating the flesh and blood, the true essence of Jesus, means living in a new way, a challenging way, and this is indeed a hard teaching to accept. It is not just about belief. It's about living as a follower, or a student or a disciple of Christ, I'm a very visual, tactile person, I guess, and so I think sometimes, not that the bread and the wine are the physical body and blood of Christ. They are emblems that point to something greater than themselves and remind us of Christ. But sometimes I specifically and intentionally think about receiving Christ into my life as I take that, and I should, I say sometimes, I should say all the time, but there's sometimes where it's very intentional that I'm thinking about, okay, I want to, I want to really integrate Christ into my life. I really want to feel this taking Christ into my life. And so that's for me, where some of this connects, is that, it's not about flesh and blood or bread and wine, it's about receiving Christ, taking Christ in internally, not always just journeying and keeping Christ at a distance, but truly integrating. And that brings us to a model that really explains where people are. There's kind of a spectrum, if you will, a better word for it, but in that culture, and even in today's culture, but there are typically folks who are observers. They're kind of out on the fringe watching things. They're very curious, perhaps, but they don't want to get engaged, don't want to get involved. And then there are the questioners that we move in a circle closer to the event that's taking place and they're the questioners. They're the ones that are. They want to debate, they want to push back, they want to ask the questions, but they're they haven't decided where they are. They're not necessarily asking because they want to be a part. Sometimes it's antagonistic. And then that inner circle are the abiders. And I mentioned that last week in our Coffee to Go about this, the importance for John of abiding and having taken in and ready to move on with Christ in this case. So again, a abiding and dwelling in Jesus, and allowing Jesus to dwell or abide in us is a transforming act. It changes who we are. We can stand at the edge, be an observer, watch. It doesn't really affect us. We can even move in a little closer and ask some questions but not commit. And then there are those of us, of course, those who want to be, there was a commentary, actually, on this passage where a woman shares her story of having not been a church goer, really kind of out on the edge, actually received some criticism by friends for why she went in? But she said she went in and she took communion for the first time as an adult, and in that moment, she can't explain why, but she was transformed. She had truly taken Christ in and that abiding began to take place. And from that point on, she left there and started opening food pantries and serving people and that kind of thing. So it's that kind of transformation that changes us from within, that we're being asked to consider, I think, in this passage.

Karin Peter 09:03

But it's, it's not a passive. Abiding isn't passive, as you said. Abiding is a choice that changes the course of life. So abiding, in this context, means you're going to live with Jesus. You're going to walk the same path, you're going to go on this same journey. You're going to struggle the same struggles as Jesus does. It's a ...

Blake Smith 09:30

You're going to see the world differently.

Karin Peter 09:31

Yeah, it's a very active form of discipleship. It isn't, it isn't enough to just say, I believe in something. To abide in Jesus is to actually go walk in that path with Jesus, which is what we try to talk about each week here on Coffee to Go. Where are we on the journey? Yeah,

Blake Smith 09:55

yeah. So some questions that we might ask ourselves, are you. Where are we? So I'm going to put this in a, where are you in your life? Are you an observer? Are you a questioner, or are you an abider? It's important for us to kind of acknowledge that for ourselves. Another question, when have you faced a place in your journey where you've had to choose, do I stay or do I turn back? Do I hang in there, or do I walk away? And finally, what aspects of a life of faithful following offends or challenges you?

Karin Peter 10:45

Yeah, that's an interesting verse in this scripture. Isn't that when Jesus says, What Does this offend you? Hmm.

Blake Smith 10:54

Yeah, yeah, so we might think of that as what seems to go against our thinking, what offends our senses.

Karin Peter 11:05

I think we saw some of this during the Me Too movement and the Black Lives Matter movement as they came to importance in the life of the United States, at least, where people got offended by social justice and racial justice. People were really uncomfortable with the Christians, people in our own faith community. It offended them. It challenged them and their way of thinking. And none of us are immune. We all have bias. We all have baggage that we take on our journey. But I think we really saw some offense taken during that period of time.

Blake Smith 11:46

Yeah, there were some who were responding and and folks on the inside of the issue would say, maybe there's a little bit of guilty conscience there. We don't like things pointed toward us that might

Karin Peter 12:01

No, we don't once we identify ourselves as an abider. We don't like people pointing out our issues

Blake Smith 12:12

Exactly.

Karin Peter 12:14

So, I was thinking about how we can experience this this week and and what I really came to was this: Maybe, we talked last week about selecting a question and just asking yourself what matters today or

what matters this week? Today, it's or this week, it's more of, select a question or a doubt or an idea about faith and belief and divine presence that really challenges you, maybe even offends you, and write it on a on several pieces of paper or post it notes, whatever you have, I'm going to send it to myself in an email and on a text, because then it will pop up and I will look at it, but live with that doubt or that challenging piece of, or idea about faith and belief, and put it where you see it, in your car, on your mirror, next to your bed, on the refrigerator, all those places where we notice things. And let that question sit with you this week and see how or if it transforms you as you really look at it.

Blake Smith 13:30

Right. Well, our blessing today is going to be real familiar to some of our listeners, and those of a certain age or lower, we'll probably have to Google it. I am pretty sure that neither one of my children would have any idea that this song ever existed. But it comes [K: who the Hollies are], yeah, or who the Hollies are, the what? Right? So our blessing is from the song by The Hollies, "He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother."

The road is long with many a winding turn that leads us to who knows where, but I'm strong, strong enough to carry him. He ain't heavy, he's my brother. So on we go, his welfare is of my concern. No burden is he to bear. We'll get there, for I know he would not encumber me. He ain't heavy. he's my brother. If I'm laden at all, I'm laden with sadness that everyone's heart isn't filled with the gladness of love for one another. It's a long, long road from which there is no return while we're on the way to there, why not share and the load doesn't weigh me down at all. He ain't heavy, he's my brother. He.

Well, thanks again for joining us here at Coffee to Go. We invite you to join us as always next time at Coffee to Go for the next part of our journey through the liturgical seasons and holy days of the Christian tradition.