

Coffee to Go | Proper 17 | Year B

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Sinkers and floaters, God, Jesus, tradition, relationships

SPEAKERS

Karin Peter, Blake Smith

00:20

Music.

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 here with Blake Smith, and we welcome you on the journey. We are still in Ordinary Time, Blake, which seems to go on forever and ever in the Christian calendar, and we're at week 17, what's called Proper 17, and we are still with Jesus. And we have been in John's Gospel for the past several weeks, but today we are back in Mark's gospel, and we are going to overhear Jesus as he talks about living one's religious beliefs. And I'm assuming Jesus has some interesting things to say about that.

Blake Smith 01:17

Yeah. So we are, as you said, in the Gospel of Mark, the seventh chapter. And essentially, we're going to be listening to verses one through 23 minus a few here and there. But rather than give the the long list, I'll just say verses 1 through 23. Now, when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is without washing them, for the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the traditions of the elders. And they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash. And there are also many other traditions that they observe the washing of cups and pots and bronze kettles and beds. The Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?" He said to them, "Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written this, people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. In vain do they worship me. Teaching human precepts as doctrines, you abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition." Then he called the crowd again and said to them, "listen to me, all of you, and understand there is nothing outside a person that, by going in, can defile, but the things that come out are what defile. For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, debauchery, envy, slander, pride, folly, all these evil things come from within and they defile a person.

[Wow] Why does this matter? Yeah, that's quite a list, and some of those things are not the things that we point out as major sins, and yet these are things that are evil, according to Jesus' words. And so when we ask, why does this matter? Well, it matters because these things are debated every day, every day, and even within Community of Christ. Which are the most important things? Is it religious standards and traditions, or how we interact with others?

Karin Peter 04:10

So, this reminds me of something, and we might have talked about it before. I'm not sure, but in this passage, it, I want to go back to verse eight. Can you read verse eight again?

Blake Smith 04:26

Yes, You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition.

Karin Peter 04:31

So this is something that we skip over. I think when we go through this scripture, what was the commandment they abandoned? And so we have to go back to what the Scriptures tell us. What is the greatest commandment? When the Pharisees are trying to trick Jesus, right? What's the greatest commandment? And he says, You know what it is? It's love God, love others. So we have to have that in mind when we have this scripture, because Mark didn't write it out because he didn't need to. Everybody knew what the greatest commandment was. Love God, love others. So they've abandoned that, and I think for a while we did too. I hate saying that, because I want everybody to think Community of Christ just wonderful and perfect. But when I was growing up, I was taught what I've kind of nicknamed avoidance, salvation. And by that I mean if we avoided bad things and bad people, we were good to go. We were on our way to the celestial kingdom and God's salvation. And it went from not just avoiding people who did quote bad things, we even had like a list of what the bad things were. It was drinking and smoking and swearing and gambling and having sex with people you're not married to. Those are like the bad things that you avoid, and then it...

Blake Smith 05:57

Let's not forget card playing, dancing and revelry, which were on the preaching chart.

Karin Peter 06:02

Thank you, your southern additions are very helpful. [yes] But we did kind of get in this, I mean, we got into this thing where, if you did those things, you were on that Shoots and Ladders game straight to hell, right? So not just don't do those, but avoid people who do which became judgment. It almost became this, you're not only avoiding the bad things, but you're avoiding people who do bad things because they will infect you, influence you, you know, whatever. That's not healthy, and it's not a good way, really to look at this, because it abandons that commandment, right? It? It abandons loving others. So I just want to name that, that we have, we have lived in that space, and I think we've come a long way from it, although the judgmental part still raises its head periodically, I think, if we're honest, so I don't know. What do you think, Blake?

Blake Smith 07:15

I definitely think that the judgmental piece raises its head, even in as simple things as what people wear to church. And that one's not as big as it was for a long time. But you know, some of the things that we've chosen to judge are very, very interesting. And another interesting piece is that, if I'm remembering correctly, Joseph Smith, III probably came somewhere down in the middle, because he didn't, there were leaders in the church who were drinking or hanging out in the bars. They were on the frontier, a lot, whatever. I don't know if that's the main reason. What's a hangout now would be a pub or or that kind of thing. [Or a bar.] And still, instead of saying, Do not drink, there was, one might perceive it at least, and I would perceive it as, maybe, and maybe I'm giving him more credit than is deserved. I don't know, but choosing the relationship over the rule, and saying to those leaders, the apostles or whomever was doing that to, it's okay if they drink, but just drink at home, not in public, where they would be judged by others, and perhaps influence others. But I think it was kind of meeting them halfway. So we have to decide every day, are we choosing relationships and the love of other and love of God, or are we holding to a tradition or a standard that has been set typically, I think, to draw lines in the sand between righteous and unrighteous, to make us perhaps feel better about ourselves, so that, however, when we look at the this laundry list of things that we find in verses 21 and 22 there are probably some of those that even folks who consider themselves pretty righteous so they don't do the big sins, and I say big sins in quotation marks, but are engaged in things that are just as harmful and perhaps even more harmful to others. [Yeah], so I think it's important for us to recognize and acknowledge, and I would say in general, young, younger people are tired of Christian hypocrisy. I mean, we don't see people in the younger generations going to church out of duty and responsibility. They're wanting to connect to communities that are authentic and living with integrity. And that's just not been the perceived perspective of our young people, and I think it's beginning to spread even into older generations who are finally recognizing some of the hypocrisy. I know as a minister who has worked on the streets, some working with folks in hard living situations and asking them about their faith journey, many have said, well, I don't go to church because I wouldn't be accepted there. So the perception of their being judged and not welcomed for who they are. So...

Karin Peter 10:51

Which is a really which is a really good lead in for our listeners to remember our Enduring Principles of, Worth of All Persons, and yeah, Unity in Diversity that we are trying to remember that greatest commandment, if you will, then we love God and we love others, and we hope that that will guide us as a people and as individuals.

Blake Smith 11:15

Yeah, so some questions we might ask ourselves that would kind of help us remember our own place and our own participation in some of these things. The first would be, am I one who points out the sins, the failings, the unsuitability of others? Another is, Have I limited being a good Christian, to attending church or to not swearing or to not smoking or to not drinking, or whatever that list, long or short, is that defines who is a Christian. Maybe, oh, doesn't have tattoos, doesn't have piercings, where's the right clothes. There's so many things that we can put on that list. And finally, what things that come out of me are edifying and which are discouraging, what might need to change in me so that I am remembering this commandment to love others and to acknowledge the worth of all persons as as you've mentioned, being one of our Enduring Principles here in Community of Christ.

Karin Peter 12:35

So that number three question really resonated with me, Blake, and so our experience for this week is not out of my own imagination. It actually came out of a practice from a much loved minister here in the Greater Pacific Northwest named Ken Fernandes, who worked in the with the singles community for a long time. He's a High Priest and just a lovely person, and he he did this practice with kids. He'd be like the camp pastor at the, you know, 11 year olds camp, and he would teach them this, and adults, and he would teach them this, and that is called "The Sinkers and the Floaters." So on his watch, Ken always had attached with a little fishing line, a little tiny lead weight, a sinker. If you're a fisherman, you know those little lead sinkers and a little floater, one of those little not a bobber, but a little floater that helped hold the the line up. And if you asked him, What is that?, he would tell you about the sinkers and floaters. And he would say that people hear. I forget what it was. I'm making this up now, but you get the idea people would 10 times more sinkers than they heard floaters. Like every day, people would hear 10 times more sinkers than floaters. And he would explain how sometimes sinkers were kind of couched as humorous, right? "Oh, you put on that green pants thinking you'd look good." Hahaha. You know, that kind of a thing, and those, that's a sinker. Or you can think of the many things that people have said that make you feel more discouraged than feeling encouraged, and so he wore that sinker and floater to remind himself to give floaters instead of sinkers when he interacted with people. And there's much, much more to it, you could probably ask a lot of people in the Western Washington, Oregon area who went to camps and reunions and retreats with Ken about that, because he affected many of us with that teaching. So how can I experience it this week? Well, you can do the actual tangible thing like Ken did, get yourself a little piece of fishing line and a sinker and a floater and attach it to your watch or wear it in some other way. Maybe pin it to your lapel, if you're one who wears anything with a little people wear things with lapels anymore. Or I don't know, or you can do it metaphorically, and you can figure out another way to remind yourself about seekers and floaters. But this week, try to give more floaters in your interactions with others, more comments that uplift and encourage and edify people, than you give sinkers and see how you do this week.

Blake Smith 15:27

Well as a fisherman myself, it makes a lot of sense, and I can imagine that, so I'll have to give that a try. Our blessing this week is from a young minister that we have used before, it's Terry Stokes. And this comes from a book that I believe, if I remember correctly, Karin, you highly recommend for folks. [I do] and it's called, Prayers for the People: Things We Didn't Know We Could Say to God, Prayers for the People: Things We Didn't Know We Could Say to God. And, this particular blessing is called, "When One is Tempted to Gossip" Something that might have been on that little list [I think it is], that you just mentioned. Oh God who brings to light all that is done in secret, we pray for thy restraining hand upon our tongues and hearts to preserve us from gossip. Keep us from the foolish justifications we invent to ease our conscience. Help us to issue the social capital of self bolstering sought by our flesh. And instead, speak with humility and prudence or not at all. If we must speak to a sensitive issue, help us address the concern incisively without dishonoring others, and let us season our speech with the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who reigns with God and the Holy Spirit, one God in glory everlasting, Amen. I like that.

Well, thank you everybody for joining us here at coffee to go. 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.