

Coffee to Go | Proper 21 | Year B

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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SPEAKERS

Karin Peter, Blake Smith

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 Karmin Peter, and I'm here with Blake Smith, and we welcome you on the journey. So, we're talking about where Jesus is this week, and we are in the Gospel of Mark, and we find ourselves overhearing a conversation Jesus has with some disciples who are pretty pleased with themselves for confronting a and I'm doing going to do Air quotes here, not really a Jesus follower, unquote. So, they feel pretty good about themselves, that they have identified someone who is ais a not authentic Jesus follower, and it sounds a little bit like when we listen to the conversation some Christian behaviors we hear today. So, let's listen in.

Blake Smith 01:20

Yeah, this may cut close to home for many. Our passage today comes from the Gospel according to Mark the ninth chapter, and it is the 38th through the 50th verse,

John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him because he was not following us." But Jesus said, "do not stop him, for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able to soon afterward to speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us is for us. For truly, I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward. If any of you cause one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and go to Hell to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell. And if your eyes cause you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell where their worm never dies and the fire is never quenched, for everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good, but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another."

So, let's think about this for a minute. Why does this matter? Some of you may want to grasp on to all of that talk about cutting off and growing in hell, but we're not going to go there today, because,

Karin Peter 03:21

Wait, I want to go there just for a second. [No, no] wait, I want to go there just for a second. Because, really, what's happening there is hyperbole. So, Jesus is trying to refocus people, right? They're tattling on someone, and he's going, Hey, deal with your own stuff people. Right?

Blake Smith 03:38

Exactly.

Karin Peter 03:41

Little bit of hyperbole, you know.

Blake Smith 03:47

Yeah, yeah, he does. He does that a lot. But I want to pick up on, is this idea that John interrupts Jesus in the middle of his teaching. And one commentary writes that, if we think about it, you know, we've just been at verse 36 where Jesus has taken a child and put him in his lap. So, Jesus has probably got this child still there. He's in the middle of this teaching about, you know, following the children and being like children and that kind of thing. And so, John, like a child, comes up, interrupts Jesus, and tattles. So, you would think Jesus would be happy because he is being like a child, but no, the bigger thing is, in that phrase, we put a stop to it, or we tried to put a stop to it because he is not following *us*. And that emphasis on *us*, we need to remember that the purpose of our discipleship is not to have people follow us. It's to have them follow Jesus and to have us follow Jesus as well. So, the very fact that John is pretty clear, he doesn't understand here with this reference to, "they're not doing it our way Jesus. we need to stop them. There's a problem there." John seems to move this power of Jesus' name and message right on to himself and others, and these are the same folks that were just bickering about who would be first in God's kingdom. So quite a bit of childish behavior, but not the kind of being like a child that Jesus is talking about. And also, something that I think that we occasion, we certainly see a lot of, and I would have to say we probably do sometimes... I, if I'm being honest, think there are times when I'm thinking, well, they're not doing it the way I think they ought to do it, rather than using Jesus' example as the basic way of determining whether someone's doing something, right? So, but John is proving by his tattling to Jesus that he still doesn't get it, and he's not, therefore, a shining example to be followed. One has to wonder how many times that we also fall into that category, as I've already said, because sometimes, like the disciples, we miss the mark. Another piece that's important in this is somewhat through the use of hyperbole, as you've already mentioned, Jesus responds with words of caution. And he starts that by saying, you know, let's think about this. If they're not against us, they're for us. So why would you stop someone who is doing something in Jesus' name, even if you're not sure that it's, you know, they've met all of the qualifications to be a part of your group, what's important to Jesus is that we don't cause the little ones to sin. He's still making a point here of welcoming the littlest and the last among them, the, and that would include not just little children, but people who are young in the faith. There's a caution there not to make discipleship difficult or out of reach. Uh, Jesus did not make following him, he did not make following him difficult. That doesn't mean following Him is not difficult, but for him it was a simple thing of following. I think we're counseled lots of times to not put challenges or roadblocks in front of people who are trying to figure out this, this way of following, and this is a good example of that. [absolutely]. He also tells them to be at peace with one another. Don't sweat it. We spend a lot of time looking for divisions and fractures that separate us from others and

those who claim the name of Jesus. And something to remember is that, you know, we're all on a journey. We're all trying to learn, so we need to not look for the divisions first, but try to be at peace with one another. Ultimately, we hope at least, our goal is similar. And, in the middle of that, he also talks about salt, and I want to finish here, because I think that's where we want to kind of focus on our experiencing. It's important that we understand the importance of salt in this culture, and it wasn't just used for seasoning foods, so it might taste a little better for us. I mean, it goes as deep as having been a form of currency in that culture. So, Roman soldiers might have been paid in salt because it was so important to many things in life, not the least of which was the need to preserve food and have refrigerators and freezers to hold things for long periods of time. And here, some scholars would say that Jesus is indicating the disciples need to preserve faith, clarify their own reasons for faith and worry about their own actions as disciples, if we get wrapped up in ourselves and focus our attention and energy on finding the ways that others don't measure up, we lose our "flavor," and our ability, and what I mean by that is our ability to influence, to encourage, to preserve faith, to provide dignity for others who are on that journey. So, we look at that example, with Jesus sitting around, having the child in his lap, and John coming in, imagine what some bystander might have thought of the disciples, of what appears to be John's pettiness, and this is kind of the point that I'm getting to with the salt and flavor. So, some questions that we might ask ourselves are, When have I fostered division rather than unity? Another is, Why is it so much easier to point fingers at others rather than scrutinize our own behavior?

Karin Peter 10:04

Ouch, ouch, ouch. Don't like this question,

Blake Smith 10:07

And especially in regards to our faith, religion and our spiritual journey. And finally, What does it look like for me to focus on my own faith path and be at peace with how others choose to walk their own journey?

Karin Peter 10:25

That's a really, really good one for all of the different ways we experience faith and spirituality in the world today, to be willing to just honor people's right to walk that path as they see best for themselves. So, I'm thinking in one way we can kind of live well, there's a lot of ways we could live in this scripture this week, there are so many really good mini lessons that we could focus on, but let's stick with salt as our key this week. So find a salt shaker in your house and put it in a prominent place where right where you put your keys before you leave the house, or where you hang your coat when you come home, somewhere where you'll see it, and each time you see it, take a moment to kind of clarify and preserve, and by that, I mean to reflect on your own spiritual path, and don't go stomping around on somebody else's path. Spend a moment every time you see the salt or use salt this week to clarify where your spiritual path is heading, and how do you preserve the integrity of that in your own faith journey. So hopefully that will bring some interesting reflection to us this week, as we kind of live with that salt, preserving and clarifying.

Blake Smith 11:52

Alright? Well, our blessing comes from the hymn number 342, in *Community of Christ Sings*, "Too Often, God, Your Name is Used," and this comes from verses three and four. The text is by Thomas J Troeger, and it's administrated by Oxford University Press.

Keep us ready to receive the good that others do
that helps expand what we believe and why we trust in you
for where deep love and justice meet, we see a new your face
and for a moment, glimpse, glimpse complete the world transformed by grace,
That vision opens wide the church to look beyond its walls,
to honor all who ask and search for where your Spirit calls
their questions and their wondering help us more fully claim
our mission as an offering that glorifies your name.

Well, thanks for joining us here today at coffee to go, we invite you as always to join us next time for the next part of our journey through the liturgical seasons and holy days of the Christian tradition.