

Coffee To Go | Proper 24 | Year B

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SPEAKERS

Blake Smith, Karin Peter

Karin Peter 00:28

Welcome to Coffee To Go where we center ourselves in the scriptures, seasons, and holy days of the Christian tradition. I'm Karin Peter, and I'm here with Blake Smith. We welcome you on the journey. So we're still in the Gospel of Mark as we look at where are we with Jesus this week. And as we've noted, Jesus is talking about some serious topics as we travel with Jesus towards Jerusalem. And what often happens in these settings is the difficulty of understanding the truth of Jesus message becomes more and more apparent as we, as we walk with the disciples here in Mark. So let's listen in.

Blake Smith 01:12

So, our passage today is again from the 10th chapter of the Gospel according to Mark, and we are at the 35th through the 45th verses this week.

James and John, sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." And He said to them, "what is it you want me to do for you?" And they said to him, "appoint us to sit one at your right hand and one at your left in your glory." But Jesus said to them, "you do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They replied, "we are able." Then Jesus said to them, "the cup that I drink, you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized, but to sit at my right hand or my left hand is not mine to appoint, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared. When the 10 heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. Jesus called them and said to them, "you know that among the Gentiles, those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you. Instead, whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many."

So why does this matter? Well, James and John are, of course, trying the oldest trick in the book that is used by children everywhere. Certainly no adults would really ever try this, right? You know, when kids go to their mom and then Mom and Dad, will you promise me something?

Karin Peter 03:14

Oh, I hate that. You want so badly to say yes, but, you know, there's an ulterior motive there.

Blake Smith 03:23

I've had times when my child would come to me and say, "Dad, how much do you love me?" [Oh, yes.] Like, oh, put a lock on the wallet. Here it goes. Where one was seated in this culture really mattered a lot. I mean, it was, it was a huge thing, and to sit at the host right or left announced elevated status. We see that throughout the Gospels, in different banquet stories and the status of seating. And James and John know this, and they want very much to have that status, not just as a disciple in the moment, but permanently. So they get Jesus alone and try to beg a commitment out of him. But of course, Jesus is wise to them. It's interesting for me, though, that when the others hear about it, which the news would travel very quickly, they weren't happy. What we don't know is what they weren't happy about. Now, were they not happy that John and James were so bold as to ask for a place and not consider where their place ought to be? Or were they just mad that James and John did it first?

Karin Peter 04:42

Oh, that's such a human reality, isn't it, that I didn't get there first, so I didn't Oh me, and I didn't think to ask, yeah.

Blake Smith 04:50

Well, of course, then we know that Jesus takes this opportunity to remind them again about servant ministry. It's not about status. Nobody here is going to hold power over others. Status in God's realm is servanthood. The greatest of all is the servant of all. It's not what we see sometimes modeled in Christianity. I mean, I think the whole structure of Christianity in the early days was based on power, and you know, the government getting power, and who was the emperor, and who was the Pope, and who was this and who was that? But Jesus constantly reminds us that it's not about status or holding power. So some questions we might ask ourselves are...

Karin Peter 05:38

Well, hang on, hang on a minute, Blake, but I want to go back to that, because if, if you're just now tuning in to Coffee to Go, you might not realize that we've been talking about this a lot through ordinary time this year, because a lot of Mark has to do with Jesus trying to get this through to the disciples, and them not understanding it. And we are long into the association of Jesus and the disciples, and they're still concerned about status. So I just want to remind our listeners that this is a constant battle, if you will, that Jesus is fighting, trying to find ways for them to get beyond the quest for status and power.

Blake Smith 06:26

Yeah, that's a great point, Karin. Thanks for for bringing that up. I know that you and I talked about the fact that when we, one of the benefits of us going through these series and hitting passage after passage and seeing how they line up, we get a better idea of just how much Jesus is hammering at certain things that the disciples aren't understanding because, but that's something that we miss when we only take a passage at a time, you know. And maybe get around to it another one from that area a couple of years later, or whatever it is, but there are some patterns here that we see in Mark that really make that clear. So, yeah, very important point. I know that one of the things that you brought up after our conversation last week that was really caught my attention when they were talking about the rich

and getting into heaven and the disciples' response of, kind of, well, if they don't get in, who does get in? Which, yeah, it's kind of revealing of what they what their expectations were.

Karin Peter 07:40

They thought the rich would just slide in. Yeah, that's no problem. They got it made.

Blake Smith 07:45

And how much more could Jesus have talked about the oppressed and the poor and those who were needed, and yet, the disciples, who were his closest confidants and his, you know, walking with Him every day, were just in a completely different place. So, and this, this reference to status, is yet just another I mean, it's almost like, well, they heard him say that the rich might not get in or those with status, but we still want status, because that's what's important. So some questions we might ask ourselves are, what symbols of status do I covet? Corner Office, high fashion clothing, fancy car, the latest phone, and why are they important to me? [Yeah] Another question would be, how do I measure success? What would it look like for me to measure success by being a servant to others rather than having the right hand or left hand place at the table?

Karin Peter 08:52

I think it was James and John. They would actually be competing to see who was the better servant. I can already hear them. I'll be a servant. I'll be a better servant. No, I will. But I do think that, I do think it would be really interesting to measure success by that metric look like, yeah, so maybe this week, a way to live in this scripture would be to take note, if you will, about how you are claiming or viewing status by where you sit and where you want to sit. So take note of it, where you sit, where you want to sit, and what does it say about how you view status when you are at work, when you are at school, when you are visiting and in your own home, what does where you sit or where you want to sit, how does, how does it address how you view status? So I can honestly say that I often will sit with my back to the window, because I know that that camouflages my facial expression to people sitting across from me. I don't know if that's about status or about my own being an introvert, but either way, I know I'm conscious of where I sit, and so I'll be pondering this as well this week.

Blake Smith 10:21

Great. Okay, our blessing today comes from Arianne Brethwaite Lehn, and it's called, "When I'm Bound Up in Jealousy,"

Generous God, you've created a universe of infinite blessing. You never stop creating good. The reserves are endless. So why have I made such a small house for my heart, with windows tinted by envy, I look out and see the gifts in others lives, and I am angry. It's shameful and embarrassing, but this is the view from my tiny house whose walls are greed and whose foundation is fear. If they have this, I won't, or can't, or will have less. With your hands around mine, I hold the lie at a further distance, observing it for what it is, letting it teach me the road my heart has yet to travel. The heart house needing a remodel with patience not judgments and relentlessly gentle love. You never stop telling me, God, of the freedom there is in celebration rather than competition, of the ever expanding joy with you. Blessing has no limit. My cup runneth over. Outside the window, I see the jealousy, envy, insecurity,

threats. They turn to a mist, now swallowed by the rumbling storm of your voice. You invite me outside into a strong cleansing rain, bringing my soul to rebirth. Today, I will give thanks for the goodness I witness in others lives, believing it illumines a gracious God and universe whose core is goodness. I will mark with joy the flourishing I see with a huge exhale of relief and anticipation. I will step through the threshold of my new house. Amen. [Amen.]

Well, thank you for joining us here today, 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.