

Coffee to Go: Ash Wednesday

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

ash, wednesday, god, jesus, humility, ashes, week, fast, humble, psalm, david, dust, karin, lurking, cross, celebration, life, spirit, important, listening

SPEAKERS

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Josh Mangelson 00:17

Welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. This podcast explores the unique spiritual and theological gifts Community of Christ offers for today's world.

Karin Peter 00:34

Welcome to Coffee to Go, where we center ourselves in the seasons and holy days, and scriptures of the Christian tradition. I'm Karin Peter, and I'm here with Blake Smith. And we welcome you on this journey. So one of the things we look at here at coffee to go is where are we with Jesus this week, and this particular podcast will post for Ash Wednesday, and Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent. It's a Christian tradition that goes back to the second century. It's a day of penance, a day of repentance, and humility and recognizing that we are mortal. From dust we were made, and to dust we return it's a day where we are starting the Lenten season where we're going to, we're going to walk with Jesus through this time of preparation for what is to come in Jerusalem, in the period of Holy Week. And, it's not meant to be extremely celebratory. It's meant to be a time where we really recognize our own humanity, and recognize that Jesus was not just fully divine but fully human. And there is there was a solemnity to this period of time. And that's what Ash Wednesday start. So during Lenten, the tradition has been too fast from something. And traditionally, it was too fast from rich foods or luxury foods, which in the 12th century is that what I said? Century century, that meant to fast from the rich foods that came from animal products like butter, and eggs, and those kinds of things, we tend to make it nowadays, you know, I'm going to fast from sugar and lose 10 pounds, that was not the point of Lent. It was meant to, to deny yourself something so that you made space to focus on the Lenten experience. But because you were going too fast, the tradition began that there would be a day of feasting before the beginning of the fast and Blake, you know more about this than many of us because you lived in a place where it was celebrated. So what's the feast before the fast with Ash Wednesday.

Blake Smith 03:00

The feast before the fast is Fat Tuesday, and also called Pancake Tuesday by many. And that I believe is because of those products, the dairy, the butter, all of that. They took what they had, and they made pancakes with it and use it all up. That's not exactly I don't think the reason why Pancake Tuesday was popular where I come from, and I mentioned before, I'm from the southeast right near the heart of real Mardi Gras celebration. And so Fat Tuesday is a is a big, big, big feast and celebration that's not

necessarily connected to the liturgical calendar. But it's quite a celebration and a feast, you know, we might look at that and say it's a celebration to be able to celebrate where we are, but recognizing that now we're going to go into this time and make space so let's get this all out of our system, and really set aside some time for God.

Karin Peter 04:03

Yeah, yeah. And for our journey with God in this and we are going to journey with Jesus through this period, of lengths. And, and, and the whole Lenten experience prepares us for the events of Holy Week, which culminate in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. And so during this time of fasting, making this kind of room or making space in our lives, allows the Spirit to live and breathe in us in new ways. And it really prepares us to walk with Jesus as we and Jesus in the language of Scripture, turn our faces toward Jerusalem. So what's our scripture for Ash Wednesday today, Blake?

Blake Smith 04:49

Well, our scripture this week comes from Psalm 51. The first through the 17th verse, it's important to note that this is one of David's Psalms and given today's culture, I think it would certainly be countercultural. And when we start talking about relevance, this is countercultural, because our culture does not encourage us to be humble and to lay all of our stuff out on on the table for everybody to see. We want to put on this perfect image in church. And we've got it all together just like Jesus did. We talked about that in our introduction, this perfect Jesus. So Psalm 51. David is crying out to the Lord. Listen to these words from that 51st Chapter of Psalm one through 17. Have mercy on me, oh God, according to your steadfast love, according to Your abundant mercy, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me, against you, you alone have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment. Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner, when my mother conceived me, you desire truth in the inward being, therefore, teach me wisdom in my secret heart. Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean, wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness. Let the bones you have crushed, rejoice, hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right Spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence and do not take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to meet the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing Spirit, then I will teach transgressors your way, and sinners will return to you deliver me from bloodshed, oh, God, oh God of my salvation, and my tongue will single aloud of your deliverance. Oh, Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. You have no delight and sacrifice. If I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased. The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken Spirit, a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. Wow, really powerful words and not something I've, if I'm being honest, it's not something that I have done, often not comfortable. But you know, one of the messages for me that comes right to the top is here's this man of God, everything is hinging on on David, the lineage of David is going to bring us the Messiah, everything. He wasn't a good guy.

Karin Peter 07:53

No, David had some serious issues.

Blake Smith 07:57

When he talks about his transgressions. If he just started listing them, the scripture would have been a whole lot.

Karin Peter 08:03

Yeah, if you haven't listened to the Hebrew series with Tony and Charmaine, there's one on David that gives a a real good depiction of David's a broader character.

Blake Smith 08:13

So one of the important things for me in this piece is here is this guy who was laying it out there, he is still chosen of God, God can still use him, even though he's not a good guy. And so, you know, sometimes we beat ourselves up for the things that we've done wrong. But there is a healing that comes in being honest with ourselves as much as being honest with God. I mean, we talk about it a God knowing everything we do, and everything we say, God knows, before we know and whatever your understanding of that is, but here is an opportunity to find healing for ourselves, when we can just be honest with ourselves, and then receive the blessings that God has for us and understand that God can still use us even in our brokenness. So I mean, so important, as we talk about Ash Wednesday, and we begin to think about what in our lives needs to be dealt with, what needs to be removed from our life or maybe just reconciled. And we're to do these things not to boast or to be pious, we're not doing this so that everybody will think, oh, look what great Christians they are and how wonderful they are. But we do it with humility, you know, the sackcloth and ashes. We are mortal. We make mistakes. We want more than we need. And we unfortunately, but quite honestly, often revel in our privilege. I mean, we can say good things about what we want to do. But, we when it gets right down to the nitty gritty, we don't want to do anything that reduces the amount of privilege we have, because we've we've learned to enjoy that and we come to Ash Wednesday, ready to lay those burdens down at the feet of the Divine and to ask for mercy and grace. It's not that, well, I'll just say from my perspective, I don't know that we have to do that, for God. It's offered. But again, that healing that comes when we can be honest with God, and be humble in the presence of God is just really, really, really powerful. We are human from dust, we came into dust we will return. So how might we experience that this week Karin?

Karin Peter 10:30

Well, traditionally, in an Ash Wednesday service, the ashes that are used in the service would come from the palm fronds from the years before from the Palm Sunday service, and those would be saved and burned. And the ashes would be mixed with a little water or a little olive oil. And then they're used to mark a sign of the cross on each individual worshiper's forehead on the Ash Wednesday service. And you may have friends whose whose tradition still do this, the Catholic tradition and some other traditions, people go and get the sign of the cross on their head on Ash Wednesday. But you can do this at home, you can take some ashes or a piece of charcoal, or even just oil or water, and mark the sign of the cross on your forehead or maybe on the back of your hand. As a symbol of contrition and humility and making space for God in your own life. You might want to remember that phrase "from dust I was created to dust I will return." Every time you deal with dust this week. If you're vacuuming or dusting in your own home, if you're sweeping something up in the kitchen, recite that from dust I was created, and to dust I will return just use it as a as a reminder a symbol of who you are and to whom you belong. Or perhaps even each morning, as you rise during Lent from Ash Wednesday on, you can prayerfully visualize yourself with Jesus and the other followers as you all turn your faces toward

Jerusalem to begin your Lenten journey. Those are just some of the ways I think that might be helpful to take a moment and experience that the Ash Wednesday message through the week.

Blake Smith 12:27

I just want to clarify one thing, especially with the practice of putting the oil and ashes on your forehead or on your hand or you know, growing up. I remember seeing folks in public places on Ash Wednesday with the cross. They'd been to mass. Because for me at that point in my life, it wasn't a Christian thing. It was a Catholic thing, right. But it didn't seem humble. I mean, this is an outward sign. And yet we went as I hear you talk about it and mentioned it. And it's not really it's not for the world, this cross, or the symbol and so on your hand or on your palm or water versus oil and ash is just something it's because it's for you. Right? It's it's personal. It's a connection, and it's out of humility to remind you, remind us, not you what it's all about.

Karin Peter 13:21

Exactly. And I think we talked about hypocrisy, maybe it was in the introduction, that there tends to be a little hypocrisy and Christian faith and practice. And I think this is a way to remind ourselves that we might get away with not always being our best self in the world. When nobody knows that we're supposed to be acting as a follower of Jesus. But if we're going to wear the sign of the cross, if we're going to make an outward profession of who we are, then we need to be aware of that our intervene and and how that comes across in the world has to match this outward profession that were followers of Jesus. And so it is it's a deep reminder for each person on the commitment that you've made to walk this journey with Jesus.

Blake Smith 14:12

Right. All right. So another thing we wanted to do through this coffee to go podcast was to consider some questions that we might hold with us through the week. And perhaps our listeners have already come up with a million questions through the things that we've mentioned, but want to just give a couple suggestions of things that might get us thinking in a particular direction. So the first one would be what is lurking in the crevices of our hearts, my heart, your heart, what's lurking in the crevices of my heart that needs to be dealt with? If dust is the same in my house, as it is in everybody else's house, there's always something lurking in the corner and in crevices we don't see it. We don't notice it. But this is a time for us to be able to really take an honest look at that.

Karin Peter 14:57

So to give to give a real life example on that question. And I know that when I sweep and mop the kitchen floor, I don't pull out the refrigerator, just see what's back there. I don't even want to know what's back there. So this to me is like that. It's like when I, when I talk about, you know, being repentant, or trying to, or even reading the psalm, create me a clean heart, I'm talking about the rest of my heart, not behind the refrigerator, because you know what lurks there, I don't even want to acknowledge myself. And I think Ash Wednesday, this particular time with this particular psalm is the time to say, You got to pull the fridge out and get it what's back there, too.

Blake Smith 15:38

I can't help but think when we moved not too long ago, and we were cleaning up and trying to get the house ready. And apparently, for the first time, and we'd lived in this other house for about six years, we pulled the stove out, and not only behind the stove were things from our time, there were things from the previous owner. So yeah, we're a little bit more careful about that. That's a great example of a place where things can just hide and put away you know, and you don't even think about pulling that out. And so now's the time, and what is it that we need to remove in order to make space for God during the Lenten experience? You mentioned giving something up, and that's maybe part of it, maybe there is something in your life, you need to give up and put away because it commands more of your time than it ought to. And it might then provide space for that. But it's, it's also not always about giving up or removing, but there might be something you need to add to your life just to make space for God. So that's, that's really important. And then I would say what, when have I allowed my ego to overwhelm my ability to be humble? And that's probably the hardest for me. I mean, I want to be humble. No pun intended, I pride myself on being humble. You know, but that sneaks up on us. You know, I think about relationships, where I have placed all the blame on someone else and thought that I was righteous in my action or that kind of thing and not allowing humility to step in there and say, "Okay, how did I add to that? How did I participate in this?" Anything you want to add to that? Any thought or question before you bring our blessing?

Karin Peter 17:26

No, I have my own issues with my own ego. I'll let your comment be the one on that. But I think it is a good question to ponder on Ash Wednesday, When have I let my ego to overwhelm my ability to be humble? That's a that's a good that's a really good question. So how about I read the blessing and then you can sign us off? That'd be blessing is gonna come. It's a couple of lines, couple of verses from that same song, Psalm 51, the ones that we want to live with for the rest of today. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right Spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence and do not take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing Spirit. And on that we can say amen.

Blake Smith 18:18

Amen. Amen. Well, we really hope that this conversation has been helpful for you. I know it has been for me. And on that we invite you to join us here at Coffee to Go for the next part of our journey through the liturgical seasons and holy days of the Christian tradition as we walk them with Jesus.

Josh Mangelson 18:46

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