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SPEAKERS

Josh Mangelson, Blake Smith, Karin Peter

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.

Blake Smith 00:28

Welcome to Coffee to Go, where we center ourselves in the seasons and holy days of the Christian tradition. I'm Blake Smith. I'm here with Karin Peter, and we welcome you on the journey. I want to say if you haven't been with us before, we call it Coffee to Go because this is something to hopefully, help prepare us to walk with Jesus through the liturgical calendar. So, good morning Karin.

Karin Peter 00:57

Good morning, Blake. I don't know why we do these in the morning when I'm not fully caffeinated. But here we are again.

Blake Smith 01:04

As we ask every week, "Where are we with Jesus this week, Karin?"

Karin Peter 01:09

So this is the second week of Lent. Lent is that period of preparation, when Jesus was preparing for ministry preparing to make the journey to Jerusalem. So in this particular week, Jesus is teaching about the natural and spiritual birth that God desires. He's teaching about the complete restoration of the fullness of God's creation and humanity and in the world itself, that it's, it's not just the physical. It's the physical and the spiritual, that we're born as human but we're also born in Spirit in new life, in God's eternal reconcile to creation. And this is complicated stuff. And Nicodemus doesn't understand it. That's what he's talking to. And some days I don't understand it either. There are days I really don't understand some scriptural theological concepts. So I resonate with Nicodemus that he doesn't quite get what Jesus is talking about.

Blake Smith 02:16

It's easy to get lost in that because our our Christian culture, not just our culture but our Christian culture, has worked so hard for so long to separate the two, you know, Spirit and flesh.

Karin Peter 02:28

Yes, and that the the flesh is evil, and the spirit is good. And we we make this a real divided sense of self. But this passage where Jesus is talking to Nicodemus, Jesus is referring to the whole of creation, physical and spiritual. And, and I know for myself, it's easier to separate what I can experience as real, as tangible, as physical and neglect kind of the deeper spiritual side of my discipleship, my life in Christ, because it doesn't seem as pertinent some days than what I'm actually dealing with in life. And so if I have a tendency to do that, anyway, and I have a hard time kind of understanding, as Nicodemus did, how do we live in that space? How do we live in this space as Christians have not fully understanding what's going on? And is it okay as Christians to live in a space of not fully understanding? So let's hear the Scripture and let's see what, what we think after we hear that,

Blake Smith 03:34

So I can't help getting to the Scripture without remembering one of my seminary professors affectionately calling this Nick at Night, when she referred to this passage. Now, some of our younger listeners might not even, this may not be relevant, but our older listeners who are familiar with the Nickelodeon channel and Nick at Night, but anyway, at that time, it was irrelevant. I just can't help. But think of that every time I hear this. But the passage comes from the third chapter of John and it's the first through the 17th verse. Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews, he came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one can do these signs that You do apart from the presence of God." Jesus answered him, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." Nicodemus said to Him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit Spirit, do not be astonished that I said to you, you must be born from above. The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus said to Him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel? And yet you do not understand these things? Very, Truly I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen, yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things, and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things?" No one has ascended into heaven, except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man and, and just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of God be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life, For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish, but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.

Karin Peter 06:27

This is such a wonderful conversation that Jesus and Nicodemus are having. And I can feel myself at times resonating. In that conversation, trying to understand what Jesus is talking about. And when I think about living day in the second Sunday of Lent, and living in this kind of place of not fully understanding, "what does that mean for us?," there are a couple of things that that comes to mind.

And one is the the end of this passage, John 3:16, and 3:17, John 3:16, has been used in a lot of different ways to exclude others. Just reading John 3:16, if you believe you have eternal life, which implies that if you don't believe you don't. And yet, John 3:17 says that God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order for the world to be saved through Him, and so that includes everyone. And so I think it's important when we look at this scripture, right now and the second Sunday of Lent, to not fall into just looking at John 3:16. And thinking that this is excluding people who don't, who don't yet believe or who don't yet understand, because that's not what's happening. It which is important, because their days, I don't understand, and yet we all want to belong, we all want to be included in in what is happening here with Jesus. And that's why Nicodemus came and asked the questions.

Blake Smith 08:10

That's just such an important point. You know, I remember growing up... if I knew any Bible, scripture, it was John 3:16. I mean, you see it in football games, references, it's just kind of thrown around. But it's a completely different passage when you read it in the context with verse 17. So that makes such a difference.

Karin Peter 08:30

Or even in the context of the conversation with Nicodemus, it's really trying to explain. And really, we all want to be loved, we all want to be welcomed, we all want to be wanted in some way. That's just human nature. And this passage speaks to that. Nicodemus wants to understand, and this ending of this passage that God so loved the world, we want that, but we forget that God too wants that, because God loves. We want to be loved and God loves. God welcomes. God yearns for each person and really the fullness of creation, to be reconciled with God. And we don't always understand that. And we don't sometimes know how to deepen it, how to close the gap between the physical and the spiritual realm. What does it mean to bring those closer together in my own understanding, so that I'm not so unfamiliar with the spiritual side of my experience in my life? So I think that's really relevant today, especially nowadays, when fewer and fewer people want to have a traditional church experience. But more and more people want to have some kind of spiritual experience. And so we want to be able to defined ways to close that gap and to have those experiences that fulfill that yearning in us. So some of the ways that we can experience the second week of Lent, and God's desire to love and reconcile the whole world to God is try to make a mental note on the times during this week, when you are allowing yourself to fall into negative self talk. I don't know what it looks like for you, Blake. But I know that there are times when you know, I'm thinking, I am not enough to do this. I'm not good enough to do this. I'm not worthy enough to go here. I'm not social enough to be with these people, whatever it is, I'm just not enough. And that's negative self talk. And at the end of the week, look back at when you did that, and empty those phrases out of your life out of your experience in in some way, note them and then just excise them from your own conversations with yourself.

Blake Smith 10:59

You know, something that comes to mind real quick in that eliminating this self talk about what's not good about us. Many times I've heard this passage talked about it. And we want to criticize Nicodemus as a teacher who comes at night when nobody can see him. And, you know, so it's not that great of a thing that he did. And yet imagine the amount of anguish, it probably, he probably experience to get to the point of knowing I need to go and have a conversation. And so just making that step. So we often

are self talk about we're not good enough, we haven't done enough, or, you know, I can't do this out publicly, or I'm not confident enough to do this in front of my friends, but any step...

Karin Peter 11:47

Like is shouldn't be doing podcast episodes, because...

Blake Smith 11:50

Right. Just to say the effort is also recognized. And I think Nicodemus needs to get some credit for even having made the effort to go and talk with Christ.

Karin Peter 12:03

Well, and that's what 3:16 says, right? God so loved the world. And so we need to love and that includes ourselves. And so we empty out that that negative self talk, but also we need to notice when we engage in negative thoughts toward others. So for example, I'm pulling into Trader Joe's and somebody takes that parking spot that I had my eye on, I will have a negative thought about that person that that happens in my life. It's a minor negative thought, but it's going to happen, there are others. There are other major negative thoughts I have about other. But the reality is, if I'm going to read John 3:16, I have to also read John 3:17. So I have to empty those negative thoughts that I have about others, I have to excise those from my life as well, because God reconciles, redeems and restores all the world, not just the part I feel comfortable about.

Blake Smith 12:59

Just real quickly, thank you for admitting the parking thing. Probably my most negative self talk self talk about others, or talk about others is, while driving, so thank you for that.

Karin Peter 13:10

Many of us, for many of us it is. And when we exercise those things out of our life, we have space. And in that space, we can make choices that contribute to the health and the wholeness of all of God's creation. We can take those freshly cleaned out spaces, and we can harbor goodwill in them towards the created world that God loves, towards the whole creative world that God loves. Those who believe those who don't believe those who understand those who do not yet understand everyone the whole world God loves. And when we remove the our patterns or negative patterns, we make a place to foster that goodwill towards God's whole creation. So those are some ideas to experience the conversation with Jesus and Nicodemus this week. So what questions came to mind Blake?

Blake Smith 14:09

Well, I'm challenged my this idea of making space and being aware of the others. So I have to ask myself, you know, am I more interested in those who think like me or look like me or act like me, than really the whole of the world? Also, you know, I want to ask, how is my spiritual health? How am I nurturing new life, body and Spirit in my own life? And so you know, like Nicodemus, sometimes I don't understand the importance of it. Maybe I don't get it. Maybe I just tell myself, I don't get it. Because I'm caught up in all the stuff of life. But taking a moment to pause and say, How am I nurturing my own spiritual health, body and Spirit so not just not separating out this Barrick from the flesh but my whole self. And finally, what is my relationship to the world? Am I invested in its goodness? Or am I contributing to its deterioration?

Karin Peter 15:15

Good questions to reflect on in this second week of Lent. Yeah. So we've got a blessing today from Psalm 121. I'll read the blessing and then you can close us up today. Like I lift up my eyes to the hills, from where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth. God will not let your foot be moved. God who keeps you will not slumber. God who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is your keeper. The Lord is your shade at your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all evil. God will keep your life. The Lord will keep you're going out. And you're coming in. From this time on and forevermore.

Blake Smith 16:19

We're not alone. We invite you to join us here again at Coffee to Go for the next part of our journey through the liturgical seasons and holy days of the Christian tradition.

Josh Mangelson 16:39

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