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SPEAKERS

Karin Peter, Blake Smith

Karin Peter 00:27

Welcome to Coffee to Go, where we center ourselves in the seasons, scriptures, and holy days of the Christian tradition. I'm Karin Peter here with Blake Smith, we are your hosts, and we welcome you on the journey. So our question every week is this: Where is Jesus this week? Well, this week Jesus is traveling and we are hanging with Jesus as he teaches, heals, confounds, maybe people who are following him, people who are gathering around him. And one of the things that is happening, at least according to Matthew's Gospel is that as Jesus travels around, he begins to note that there are some areas where there's a lack of leadership in the religious communities, the Jewish communities that he's visiting. And sometimes we forget, when Jesus uses images from the surrounding context and culture, we try to take them literally, whereas Jesus is trying to make a point with what everybody is seeing around them. So the lack of leadership in this text is, is talked about as a sheep without a shepherd, that sheep without a shepherd don't have that kind of leadership and guidance. And that's what he's trying to point out. And it brings out this, the Scripture says, His compassion. And Jesus sends the disciples out to do the same thing. That's kind of where we are here. Jesus notes a lack of leadership. He's sending the disciples out. He's preparing them for leadership, and really, he's expecting them to mentor leaders as well. And so they go out to teach and proclaim that God's reign has come near, and they heal and bless for God's idea of restoration, wholeness and shalom. So the kingdom has come near. What's that mean? And Community of Christ kind of speak and it's God's reign. It's God's way of being. For God's purposes, for all of God's creation, God's generosity. So we're not, we're not so much talking about is coming here because we're all going to go to heaven, but rather God's kingdom has come near here on Earth. And we'll talk more about that later. So let's hear the Scripture, Blake and find out how Jesus addresses his teaching this week.

Blake Smith 02:49

All right, our scripture comes from Matthew chapter nine, verses 35 through chapter 10, verse 13, it actually the lectionary scripture actually goes to 23. But we're going to stop today at 13. Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few, therefore, asked the Lord of

the harvest to send out laborers into the harvest." Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. These are the names of the twelve apostles. First Simon, also known as Peter and his brother, Andrew, James, son of Zebedee, and his brother John, Philip and Bartholomew, Thomas and Matthew, the tax collector, James, son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, Simon, the Canaanean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him. The Twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions, "go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news, the Kingdom of Heaven has come near. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons, you received without payment, give without payment. Take no gold or silver or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics or sandals or a staff for laborers deserved their food. Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy and stay there until you leave. As you enter the house greet it. If the house is worthy let your peace come upon it. But if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you." So why does that matter? You mentioned this idea that the kingdom of God has come near. And for us, that's really important, even though we believe will go to heaven, whatever that looks like for everyone. What's important for us today is that we help bring the kingdom of God near, in the lives of those we serve and work with and engage with. And when the Kingdom of God comes near, things aren't going to be the way we think they ought to be.

Karin Peter 05:41

What?!

Blake Smith 05:41

Nope. You know, we hear we hear sometimes the kingdom of God referred to as the upside down kingdom. And there's a reason for that, you know, the first will be last, the last will be first. Sinners are welcome. Women are honored (heaven forbid). Children are raised up as examples. We want things arranged in ways that makes sense to us. But unfortunately, that's not the way God does it. Things in God's reign don't always make sense. I mean, where we want fairness, God wants reconciliation. Where we would demand restitution, God wants redemption. Sometimes we want others well, maybe more often than sometimes we want others to suffer consequences for their poor choices. God in that case, offer Shalom and restoration, peace, healing and wholeness. It goes against the definitions of justice that we've been taught or the way we've been brought up. No wonder the disciples were warned that they would be rejected by many. There's a commentary on this passage that points out that one meaning of calling someone a righteous person means something like "they show mercy and compassion beyond the normal levels of their culture." It's not about being holy or perfect. It's about what you do and how you treat others. That is what God's reign is all about. God's norms, not our cultural norms. We are called to proclaim the kingdom of heaven, which is all about God's purposes. And we're to proclaim that it does come near. When we act in alignment with God's purposes, God's reign is near Doctrine and Covenants 141:5b says, The Zion conditions, which for us we would define as the presence of God's reign, "Zion conditions are no further away, nor any closer than the spiritual condition of my people justify."

Karin Peter 07:46

Yeah, that's an interesting way of tying it in with kind of Restoration/Community of Christ understanding Blake and it's, it gets really hard for us because I think a lot of us grew up thinking we knew what Zion

was, and it was a place. And here, it's reminding us that it's a spiritual condition. Yeah, one way I think about it is God's reign is near when I act like I'm part of God's reign, with mercy and compassion. I mean, that's when it's near. If I'm not doing it, there's, it needs to get done. So we need to do it. If I'm not doing it, we have a void. We all have to be doing that. So how can we experience the nearness of God's Kingdom this week? What does it mean for us to walk with Jesus the peaceful one, proclaiming the nearness of God's reign? Well, it's pretty basic this week, we can simply extend righteousness or righteous kindness. So that's mercy or compassion, beyond our the norm of our culture. So we can extend righteous kindness this week, beyond the normal level of your context, wherever you live, hearing this, whatever you're doing, if you're in school, or work or home. Imagine you are extending the kingdom of heaven to each person you meet this week with righteous kindness, and note their reaction. And maybe more importantly, note, your reaction to intentionally extend mercy and compassion beyond what you normally would be expected to do. If you're a journaler. Journal, your thoughts on it? If you're a ponderer, which is what I am, then ponder that for a little while, what it means for you to extend righteous kindness this week.

Blake Smith 09:38

Well, that raises some questions for me, but the first question is, let me just clarify does that mean I only have to be kind this week?

Karin Peter 09:46

Well, we'll have a new thing next week. Like don't you're not off the hook yet. None of us are.

Blake Smith 09:51

I might be able to handle it for a week. No, I'm just kidding. That's that's not my question today. Here are some questions though, that I think would be good to ponder this week. When have I received mercy beyond my expectation? When have I maybe deserved consequences or some of those other things? And yet, through God's grace, I've received mercy beyond expectation. When have I caught a glimpse of shalom, peace, of wholeness, healing and restoration? What does that look like? What does it look like for me and my circumstance? And finally, and you mentioned this about Jesus, calling the disciples to go out and be leaders to be shepherd with the sheep. So we might ask ourselves, what kind of leader am I? Would I qualify as a shepherd leader in God's peaceable kingdom? Or some other kind of leader? What kind of leader am I? It's important that we think about because we have that calling to be leaders. So we need to be intentional about how we go about that. Our blessing today comes from John O'Donahue's, Bless the Space Between Us. May your soul find the graciousness to rise above the fester of small mediocrities. May you welcome your own vulnerability as the ground where healing and truth join. May integrity of soul be your first ideal, the source that will guide and bless your work. Amen.

Karin Peter 11:29

Amen. As always, thanks for joining us and we hope you'll join us again here at coffee to go for our next part of the journey through the liturgical seasons and holy days of the Christian tradition.