

Coffee To Go | Proper 18

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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 Karen Peter, and I'm here with Blake Smith. And we welcome you on the journey. So our big question, as always, is where is Jesus this week? Well, we are in Ordinary Time, and that means Sundays that are numbered accordingly, and where, on Sunday or Proper number 18. And this part of Ordinary Time we are, we are still trudging along following Jesus as he makes his way to Jerusalem. And as he goes, he's teaching and healing the people he encounters. So this week, he is having a conversation that really is about in our modern language, we might say, dealing with conflict or even dealing with difficult people. And many of us have that in our lives where we are learning how to do that. So let's hear what the Gospel of Matthew has to tell us about that. So hi, Blake, what does the Gospel of Matthew say?

Blake Smith 01:43

Hi Karin. Yeah, this is from the Gospel of Matthew, the 18th chapter, and it's the 15th through the 20th verse.

If your brother or sister sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If you're listened to, you have regained that one. But if you're not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If that person refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven. And whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, Truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth, about anything you ask, it will be done for you by My Father in heaven, For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.

You know, I find it, I always like to look at the headings for passages and kind of see and try to figure out maybe why the writers or the interpreters, or the translators, if you will, have a Text user particularly and in this in the NRSV. The caption for this passage is "Reproving Another Who Sins." And it's interesting to me, because when you take it in the larger context of chapter 18, it's really more about going the extra mile to forgive and make space for the offender and reconcile them to community.

Karin Peter 03:25

What, it's not just about me getting to go to somebody and go, "you offended me, buddy." (No), you should you should ask why forgive this? What?

Blake Smith 03:33

You do not have permission to go and reprimand someone? No, you do not. That is not what that's not what's happening here. You know, we might we might be attracted to the passage, even because it appears to justify putting the offender or the one who sins against us on the judgment seat. But when you take it in the context of the parable that comes just before it, which is the parable of the lost sheep. Here we have the shepherd leaving behind the 99 to search for and rescue the one that has gone astray. Right. And so Jesus says the shepherd then rejoices more over the one that was lost than the 99 that never went astray. Those of us righteous ones in the flock. So there's this process that Jesus lays out, and that says that we need to make every effort to reconcile the offender to the community before moving on. And we need to make sure that we catch that, that this is not just about individuals. It's for the sake of the community and the community identity, the body of Christ. This process is ultimately a community responsibility. So he says First, we make an attempt to reconcile one on one so it's a private thing. It doesn't shame anyone. It's just a private conversation. But he says if that doesn't work, then we take it to a couple of witnesses. We expand it a little bit, and we try again. And if that doesn't work, Then we try another time with the church. And none of this happens from a perspective of judgment, but rather in an honest attempt to reconcile that person to the community to bring the last one back into the fold. So it's important to note that in each of these steps, there's an element of truth telling, and a call for repentance. It's not about sitting down with someone and saying, Oh, it's okay. Just don't do it again. Because it's not okay. It's not okay, that the offense happened. Forgiveness is inseparable from truth telling, and accountability. So we need to hear that as well. But then there's another important thing that happens here. Jesus takes it one more step. He says that, okay, so the one on one didn't work, the two witnesses didn't work, the church didn't work. So let's try this, let such a one be to you as a Gentile or a tax collector. Now, we might hear that and read it, read into it, this the passage from Mark chapter six, where Jesus tells the disciples that, if any place won't listen to them, or welcome them, they can leave that place and shake the dust off their feet as a testimony against them. But that's not what he's saying here. What he's saying here, is treat them as one who has not yet heard the gospel, and start from scratch, start over because reconciliation and forgiveness are key to the community. So kind of different than we might read it if we especially if we take just a piece out of context.

Karin Peter 06:36

Absolutely. And we do tend to do that don't we, we take the piece that affirms what we already think or what we want to what we want to hear. But that's not what's happening here. And to me, it's fascinating. At the end of that, wherever two or three are gathered, in my name, I am there, right? So it's, it's not even that, okay, you're supposed to reconcile this, you're supposed to go and do that. But it's also Jesus is with us. When we do that. Yeah. And that's right. It's meant to become we, we take just that verse 18:20. And we use it everywhere going, Oh, wherever two or three gather. That's not what's happening. He's like, I'll be there. Listen, I'm watching. I'm with you. Yeah, I'm with you. But let's make sure this is reconciliation and not just exacerbating the problem. Right? Well,

Blake Smith 07:25

"I'm watching" may be meant to be comforting. Depending on how we're acting, it may not be.

Karin Peter 07:33

So when we're dealing with issues of reconciliation, and we don't want to go to the point where we, you know, experience our own humility and our own sense of compassion and mercy, we need to remember that as well that Jesus is there with us. That's important.

Blake Smith 07:50

So that leads us leads us to some questions we can ponder for this week. And the first would be with Jesus watching, perhaps, how do I handle disagreements in my personal life? Or my work life or my school life, my family life? How do I handle disagreements? Another one for me is when have I stood in need of the forgiveness and grace of God and of others? Because this isn't just about what others have done to us, but what we have perhaps done to others. So we also stand sometimes in need of that forgiveness. But another question that comes to mind for me is when have I experienced the joy of reconciliation with another because I was either forgiven by them or willing to forgive them? And how did it free me to begin again, and my understanding of what it means to follow Jesus? And then finally, who are the ones in my life that I have lost due to hurt feelings or perceived wrongs that they may have done to me? Or that I may have done to them? And what can I do to repair or reconcile that are those relationships? So how might we live that out this week, or experienced that this week? Karin? Well,

Karin Peter 09:06

uncomfortably, I think, because whenever we're talking about forgiveness, for many of us, it makes us a little uncomfortable. We tend to Christians, we tend to rest better in judgment and self righteousness than we do and forgiveness, and humility. But one way that we can experience this is in your disagreements this week. And we just have to acknowledge yes, we're going to help them. There's always disagreements and conflicts. And when we have them, whether it's that guy at work, doing whatever that guy does, which makes us crazy, or whether it's a cranky neighbor complaining about your dog, or maybe it's your spouse or housemate lashing out at you, or you at them, whatever the disagreement is, make a choice, make a conscious choice to restore that relationship and anticipate that Jesus will be present in your conversation of reconciliation. Pay attention to how this affects you and your responses to that situation to the disagreements that happen when you think of them in this way, and ask yourself, did I sense the divine presence with me? And what small steps Am I taking with each of these reconciled disagreements? What small steps Am I taking inside myself to move more closely to Jesus, the peaceful one as I go forward on my own journey? So lots of ways to experience this the first acknowledge disagreements happen, but make an intentional effort to reconcile them and acknowledge Jesus is with you in doing so. So we need a blessing to do that. Like Do we have a blessing today?

Blake Smith 11:00

Yes, we do. Our blessing today comes from Rumi. It's translated by Coleman Barks. This being human is a guest house. Every morning a new arrival, a joy, a depression, a meanness. Some momentary awareness comes as an unexpected visitor, welcome and entertain them all. Even if they're a crowd of sorrows, who violently sweep your house empty of its furniture, still treat each guest honorably. He may be clearing you out for some new delight, the dark thought, the shame, the malice, meet them at the

door laughing and invite them and be grateful for whoever comes because each has sent each has been sent as a guide from beyond. Well, thank you for joining us here at coffee to go this week. As always, we invite you to join us again next week here at coffee to go for the next part of our journey through the liturgical seasons and holidays of the Christian tradition.