

Coffee to Go | Proper 19

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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, and we welcome you on the journey. So where is Jesus this week on our journey? Well, we are still headed towards Jerusalem. Jesus, his group of intimate disciples who learn from Him and walk in His footsteps, as well as crowds of people who are interested observing or maybe perhaps in seek of healing, and Jesus touches each as we move towards the city of Jerusalem. So last week, the disciples learn that Jesus expects them to remain in community, even with those awful folks who are surly and don't understand how to live the community identity and cause disruption and discord. And we treat them as ones who have not yet heard the good news. So we act in those cases with hospitality and understanding a hard lesson last week, from the scriptures. So we're never thrilled about these kinds of things. It's life changing and transforming and a little bit uncomfortable. But that brings us to this week, where they begin to question more deeply about this whole idea of reconciling and forgiving. I mean, do we really just keep forgiving them forever? Blake, what did the Gospel of Matthew say about this?

Blake Smith 02:07

Well, yeah, it does push us a little bit. So this week's passage is again from Matthew chapter 18. But it's the 21st through the 35th verse, and it is labeled in the text, the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant. Well, that's verses 23 verses 21. We first have Peter responding to Jesus about the forgiveness. So then Peter came and said to him, Lord, if my brother or sister sins against me, How often should I forgive as many as seven times, Jesus said to him, not seven times, but I tell you 77 times. For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him 10,000 talents was brought to him and as he could not pay, the Lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children, and all his possessions and payment to be made. So the slave fell on his knees before Him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything. And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. But that same slave as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him 100 denarii. And seizing him by the throat, he said, pay what you owe. Then this fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, have patience with me and I will pay you, but he refused. Then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay his debt. When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed. And they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his Lord summoned him and said to him, You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me, should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave as I had mercy on

you. And in anger, his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister, from your heart, that a lot of stuff going on in this passage? First, I want to say that if you're reading directly from the NRSV version of the passage, and specifically verse 21, it says, if another member of the church sins against me, when the new updated version came out, it was changed back to what a lot of other versions say and that is, Lord if my brother or sister sins against me, but the intent is still the same because the Greek word for brother and sister here is a *doll. post* which means a fellow disciple. So it's someone who understands and knows the requirements of being a disciple. The other thing here is that when we listen to this parable, it's important that we understand that this is super hyperbole, obviously, I mean, just starting off at the very beginning, owing 10,000 talents would be more than anybody could ever repay in multiple lifetimes. And we also don't want to come out of this seeing, God who is represented by the Lord in this parable as being one who would torture. So it's all hyperbole just to kind of, I think to, in this case, wake Peter up and say, look how, look how crazy your question is. I mean, yeah, God is so forgiving beyond your wildest dreams. So I want you to be so

Karin Peter 05:55

We forget that don't we Blake, we forget sometimes that just like we use hyperbole, so did the writers of the Gospels, just like we use little comedy? So did the writers that we read from the scriptures?

Blake Smith 06:09

Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. So in last week's passage, Jesus uses the parable of the lost sheep to teach the disciples how important it is, when one who has gone astray, is returned to the herd, if you will. And in today's passage, we have Peter, pushing back a little bit, I guess. It's almost like Peter is trying to test Jesus, he probably thinks he's being smart. And he offers up his own exaggeration, or probably what he thought was an exaggeration. What? Am I supposed to forgive them seven times. But of course, Jesus says, not just seven, but 77. In other words, keep forgiving, don't stop, there is no limit to God's mercy. God doesn't stop forgiving. And we ought to offer the same amount of grace and mercy to those who we might think owe us. Because, as we've said many times before, life in the kingdom of God is different. It's not about in this case, what you're owed. If we got what we deserved, or what we were owed, we might not like it. (So true.) Right? So in the kingdom of God, Grace flows abundantly toward us from God. And Grace ought to also flow abundantly from us. I think that's the heart of the message here, for me at least.

Karin Peter 07:34

And, like, it's so hard for us to do that, in our modern kind of mentality because we live in a fast paced world where we can simply just move on. Right? I'll move on with a new friend, a new place, a new job, a new whatever. And so we don't have to, we don't have to deal with the conflicts, we just leave them behind and that this passage creates a dilemma for us.

Blake Smith 08:00

Yeah, it's not easy. It takes time. It takes effort. It's a it's a heavy task, but it's God's way of doing it. That's what we're called to. So we might ask ourselves this week, I know I asked myself if I ever resented or felt compelled to forgive someone when I really didn't want to. And I would answer to that question. Yes. But how did I feel? How did I feel then? And how do I feel now? About that? And now I

look back at it with a completely different perspective, but I wouldn't feel happy about it at that time. Quite honestly. When have I received God's grace and forgiveness when I probably didn't deserve it? And how did that feel? Now that felt pretty good, right? Somebody else might like that feeling too. Another question would be when someone else forgiven me for a hurt or indiscretion or a horrible mistake, or an intentional, even an unintentional slight that I might have done or engaged? We really need to, as I've said before, as we've said before, look at how we're participating in things, not just what other people are doing to us, but what what we are doing to others. And then finally, what might need to change in my heart in order to extend forgiveness, to another? Because, I think sometimes we need to recognize that it might take change within us rather than requiring change with someone else because we're obviously right.

Karin Peter 09:44

Yeah, absolutely. So in parenting, from the time my son was little to now he's a grown adult. When we've talked over different ways to handle conflicts. One of the things I've always told him is, as a follower of Jesus, it's our job to put goodness and mercy out into the world. That's our job. And even when there's conflicts, that has to be our primary goal is to put goodness and mercy out into the world. And, and you get that back in weird kind of ways. It's not like, Oh, you put out good karma, you get good karma back, although, you know, that works, too. I'm just, I do believe that if you put goodness and mercy out in the world, that comes back to you, it doesn't make the bad things disappear. All those things still happen, conflict still happen. But when you send out mercy, and goodness, it changes you. So when I do it, it changes me, it doesn't change the situation or the other person. But I begin to think in terms of in this situation, where can I contribute goodness or mercy and I begin to look for that intentionally in situations. And you do that enough and it becomes second nature, you become a person who naturally works to send out goodness and mercy. So in this context with this, forgive, forgive 77 times, a way we can experience it is that dinner time, light a candle. And you can do it by yourself or in your family or with roommates or friends. Go around the table, and ask each person to name someone that they can send goodness or mercy to. Someone they wish to forgive someone where there's been a conflict or altercation that they think they can send goodness and mercy to. And then after each person is named everybody is silent and we focus on sending goodness and mercy to that person for 10 or 20 seconds, and then go to the next person in the table. Who do you want to send goodness and mercy to? And, that person names someone and we all silently, 10-20 seconds, concentrate and focus on sending goodness and mercy to that person. It's a practice. It's a spiritual practice called holding in the light used for prayer time, if you want to look it up as a classic spiritual practice. But here's the way to just do it in your family. Another way to experience it this week is for me, this is what I'm going to do when I'm driving. I'm going to think only good thoughts of fellow drivers. Whether they cut me off whether they're going to slow in the fast lane, whether they didn't merge properly. I don't care. I'm gonna send good thoughts to all my fellow drivers.

Blake Smith 12:44

I don't know Karin.

Karin Peter 12:48

You live in Chicago, I understand your dilemma.

Blake Smith 12:51

You tell me sometimes I ask some tough questions. That one, that one's going to be tough for me. I have to admit I do live in Chicago.

Karin Peter 12:57

Okay, well, I'll be sending goodness and mercy your way as we do this. And maybe at work or if you go to school, during your school day. Look around and think of one good thing about each colleague or team member, or classmate, just spend a moment and just look around the room you're in and just send good thoughts to them. So I get to read our blessing today. And it has to do with this. It comes from a text called Woman Prayers. And edited by Mary Ford Grabowski. And this prayer, I've adapted it from an anonymous 20th century Japanese prayer that was translated by Mary Teresa McCarthy. And here is the blessing. Lord when I am famished, give me someone who needs food. When I'm thirsty, send me someone who needs water. When I'm cold, send me someone to warm and when I am hurting, send me someone to console. When I am poor, send someone needy to me. When I have no time. Give me someone to help for a moment. When I am criticized give me someone to praise when I am discouraged. Send me someone to encourage when I need another's understanding. Give me someone who needs mine. And when I need somebody to take care of me, send me someone to care for. And then to this prayer I would add for today when I need forgiveness. Send me someone to forgive.

Blake Smith 14:51

Hmm. I really really like that. What captured me about that Karin is is the two way nature of it. It is It's, you know, we, sometimes we feel overwhelmed by all the things we're called to do as a disciple, but that acknowledgement that, you know, sometimes we're discouraged or sometimes we need help and, and being able to, to acknowledge that in the same blessing, that's, that's really powerful. Thank you for that. Everybody, thanks for joining us here at Coffee to Go this week. And 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 holy days of the Christian tradition.