

# Coffee to Go | Proper 20

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Jesus, justice, fairness, God, Kingdom of God, fairness, judgments

## SPEAKERS

Blake Smith, Karin Peter

### **Karin Peter** 00:27

Welcome to Coffee to Go, where we center ourselves in the season scriptures and holy days of the Christian tradition. I'm Karin Peter here with Blake Smith, and we welcome you on the journey. And our journey is with Jesus. So where is Jesus this week? Well, we are still in Ordinary Time, we are still learning by observing and participating in what Jesus preaches, and teaches. And so we are with Jesus on the way to Jerusalem. And our Scripture today is part of that journey, and part of the teaching that Jesus does. And it's really helpful as we listen today, to understand that at this time, Matthew is writing this gospel. So I think Blake has said that many times Jesus didn't write this. Whoever Matthew was, wrote this, and or whoever claimed to be Matthew, or whoever this was attributed to gave the name Matthew, whoever wrote this was writing in a period of time where identity was forming. And the Jewish community no longer considered Jewish Christians to be acceptable. And so there was a separation and a division that was happening. And at the same time, Jewish Christians who were forming into communities weren't too thrilled about welcoming Gentiles, kind of late comers, in to community without establishing who was here first, who was not here first, if so, the little status, what's happening there. And so questions were emerging about who was more authentic, who was the more authentic Jesus follower, who was the more privileged, Jesus follower. And Jesus, as was his custom to quote the New Testament, addressed this with a story or a parable. So keep that in mind when you hear the parable. So, Blake, did I set that up? Okay.

### **Blake Smith** 02:31

You did indeed. Actually. Yeah, I, when I read this, I think about the thief on the cross beside Jesus, who just at the last minute goes, Oh, my gosh, forgive me, God. And Jesus says, Today, you will be with Me in Paradise like, whoa, whoa, whoa, wait a minute. (I know.) You got to do a little bit more than that. Right?

### **Karin Peter** 02:52

Okay. So tiny little tangent. I had a friend who we were having a conversation, like, who gets to go to heaven? And I'm like, well, everybody, like everybody goes, doesn't matter what it's what about people who do that everybody goes, you know, God loves and wants to be reconciled to everybody. That's God's purposes. Those are human judgments. We make human mistakes, we blah, blah, blah, go through the whole thing. And, and she was so frustrated with me, she goes, Are you telling me that I

have been good my whole life for nothing? So I think sometimes as Christians, we kind of get that, who get that perspective, don't we?

**Blake Smith** 03:29

It's not like you lost out because you've been good.

**Karin Peter** 03:32

I think it's the same thing. I get it ,

**Blake Smith** 03:35

I could have been having fun. I could have been getting drunk and having fun, (whatever). Anyway, all right.

So our passage does come from the Gospel according to Matthew, the 20th chapter, and it is the first through the 16th verse. And it is the story we know so well as the laborers in the vineyard and it does raise hackles a little bit for those of us who think about fairness in particular ways. So here we go. For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard. When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw other standing idle in the marketplace. And he said to them, you also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right. So they went when he went out again about noon, and about three o'clock, he did the same. And about five o'clock, he went out and found others standing around. And he said to them, Why are you standing here idle all day? They said to Him, because no one has hired us. He said to them, you also go into the vineyard. When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last And then going to the first. When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received a denarius. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, these last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat. But he replied to one of them, friend, I am doing you know, wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you and go, I choose to give to this last, the same as I gave to you. Am I not allowed to do what I chose with what belongs to me? Or Are you envious, because I am generous. So the last will be first, and the first will be last?

You know, without being direct over the last couple of weeks, we've been talking about things of justice and mercy and the kingdom of God. And so we ought not to be surprised when we read this passage, that God's justice is not what we often think about when we hear the word justice. For us, I think sometimes justice is when people get what they deserve, like when good people, or should I say people we see as good, get just rewards and bad people or people we see as bad, get just punishment. That's justice. That's fair, in today's world, but that's not God's justice. And that's not God's fairness. In God's kingdom, everyone has access to abundant life, because it's God's to give. It doesn't matter. When folks sign on to be disciples, it just matters that they sign on. And all of the benefits of being a disciple are theirs, because again, it's God's to give. I remember seeing a cartoon one time that made the distinction between reality equality, equity, and justice. And in the cartoon, there are three people standing outside a privacy fence, or a baseball game is in progress. One person is tall enough to see

over the fence and one is almost tall enough to see over the fence. And the third one is nowhere near tall enough to see over the fence, they're all standing on the ground, and they don't have any support. This is reality, one person sees the other two don't. In the second panel of the cartoon, each of the characters is standing on a crate of equal height. And now person one and person two can see over the fence. And this is equality, they all have the same thing, they all get the same. But in the four, in the third panel, each character is given the support that they need to see over the fence. So the short one gets three boxes, and the tall, one doesn't need a box and the middle one gets a couple of boxes, but now they can all see over the fence and in this panel, that is equity, that they're getting what they need. In God's kingdom, it's, it's even more in the fourth panel of the cartoon, no support is needed, because the privacy fence has been replaced by a chain link fence. And all can see without obstacles. Everyone has what they need, because fairness is deeply connected to compassion and generosity, about making everything available to everyone. And so it has nothing to do with what we deserve. And it has everything to do with God's love and care for all of creation. This is justice in the Kingdom of God.

**Karin Peter** 08:48

That's such a good example. Like of what you don't even think about, right, what justice is, is dismantling the fence or making the fence see through, you know, think about that. Sometimes we get caught up in what's already established without thinking, what are the systems and institutions that are keeping an unjust system alive or an unjust practice alive? And we need to change that not just the immediate need?

**Blake Smith** 09:12

Right? We don't know why the workers I mean it were this a real story. We don't know why the workers didn't get there until five o'clock. Maybe they were your family, maybe they didn't have transportation, may all of these things

**Karin Peter** 09:26

So we make assumptions, right?

**Blake Smith** 09:28

Exactly. Well, they're just lazy. They didn't want to be in the eat. They're just lazy. So but in the kingdom of God, take away all the obstacles and just make everything fair in God's eyes.

**Karin Peter** 09:39

I think we do that so much right now, because we're such a divisive society, right now a divisive culture that we're making assumptions about the others, but we also make clear divisions. I was here first. So I I deserve whatever right so. Ray and I lived in in the hills of Arkansas for a short time. In Wall short time, we were there for five years. And after we had been there probably two or three years, I felt like part of the little community on our hill, there were five or six families on our hill. And I felt part of that. And we were invited to come to dinner at one of the neighbors. And we went, and we were having a conversation. And all of a sudden, I heard the word newcomers. And I said, who you're talking about, and the person got kind of red faced? And it's like, well, we're talking about you. And I said, newcomers. We've been here for two or three years. And she said to me, Oh, honey, you know, from

here, you'll be a newcomer all your life. Oh, and I think about that we make those judgments about people. I was here first. And that's how it's going to be no matter what you do, right? Yeah, yeah,

**Blake Smith 10:53**

Well, I have to, yeah, I have to make a confession. My wife and I work at a food pantry, on a weekly basis here in our community. And there are people who I know have the ability to probably get to the pantry at about three o'clock and get in line. And they're always the first person in the door at 530, when we open. And then there's a lady who comes in regular basis, and she comes in in her work uniform. She barely gets there before closing time. And in normal circumstances, she would get what's left over, but because we're regulars, I now tuck some things away that I know that she'll like because it's not her fault. She can't get there, you know, and it's like, well, I got here first, I should get the best choice. Well, you know, that's not always the case. So I mean, those things helped me to remember that.

**Karin Peter 11:47**

Yeah. And if we're talking about the Kingdom of Heaven, the next logical step is that is that we dismantle the systems that make it where people who are working for us simply do not have enough to live on, right, so we want to talk about fair and minimum wage, which brings up all kinds of red flags for some people, because we're not supposed to talk about those things. But if we're going to see how this scripture affects our life, we have to learn those things.

**Blake Smith 12:13**

Yeah, yeah. So one of the Yeah, one of the places that started that, I think because we're dealing with with pay and stuff is to just look at the issue of, of the economic factors that shape how we perceive others. And so how do we have one of the questions we might ask ourselves this week is how do economic factors shape my perspective about others? How they dress or, you know, whatever about them? Do I make judgments about them and their choices without any knowledge? And then what's fair for them? And for me? Another one is, how is God's fairness different than my own? And finally, I would just say, are there things that I am doing that seem fair to me, but might actually be unfair to others?

**Karin Peter 13:02**

Well, now you're gonna make us look a little deeper with that, aren't you? Like, oh, yes, there are. And I guess, the next thing is what I do about that. And I think one of the things we can do this week, as we try to experience this scripture, is looking at how we define our own status or position because that drives what we think is fair, what we think is just we have a tendency to really perceive ourselves based on what our status or position is. So this week, identify one thing that you do, or one thing that you were, or one thing that you say, that actually reflects your status or position. So on my emails, when I send an email, it says, you know, Karin, Peter, president of 70, something blah, blah, blah, well, that's, that's a, that's a position. Or if I want to extrapolate a status, right, so why is that on my email? Why is that important to have on my on my email, maybe it's something that you were that declares you a fashionista. And you want everybody to know that you know all about the latest fashions or maybe there's an expensive piece of jewelry or an expensive watch that you wear that proclaims your economic status. Maybe you always have the latest cell phone or the latest laptop or the latest

technology, whatever that may be. And that that proclaims your economic status. So this week, whatever that is, whatever item you're identifying. Leave it behind. This week, don't wear the watch. Don't use that email signature. And then at the end of the week, reflect how did leaving that behind? effect you work or not? Maybe it didn't have an effect on you at all, on how you see yourself and others. If I take that off my email signature, and I'm just Karin, with my contact info. How does that affect how I see myself when I send that email?

**Blake Smith** 15:19

It's funny that you say that I just this last week, I noticed in an email, I had had previous conversations with an individual where they had said, you know, titles aren't important, important to me. But then I happened to notice in an email that I received, that the salutation at the end their name was like in font size 10 font. And their title was like in size 20. Oh, my voice as big as their name. It's like, oh, well, titles might matter a little more than you think. But it was really telling to me so.

**Karin Peter** 15:56

Yeah, absolutely. So that would be a good thing to not not do this week, if we're going to really try to experience what it means to look through the lens of God's realm and God's sense of justice and God's sense of fairness. So I think we need a blessing to do that. Do you happen, right?

**Blake Smith** 16:15

Absolutely. Let's do that. So here's our blessing for today:

Together, may we dismantle systems, privileges, reactions, and rules that benefit those with plenty and beat down those who go without? Let us spend our resources, energy skills, ideas and finances to lift up fair trade and a fair wage. May we give our voice and vote to provide access to health care, childcare, education, and affordable housing. Let us move from caring most for our own abundance, and care as deeply for all to have enough. Amen.

So that wraps up another episode of Coffee to Go here. We're glad that you joined us and 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.