

Coffee to Go | Proper 24

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

God, Image of God, Jesus, heart, passage, graven images, compassion, journey, discipleship

SPEAKERS

Karin Peter, Blake Smith

Karin Peter 00:27

Welcome to Coffee to Go, where we center ourselves in the seasons, the scriptures and the holy days of the Christian tradition. I'm Karin Peter, and I'm here with Blake Smith, and we welcome you on the journey. We have been on quite a journey, Blake, as we've been traveling through ordinary time. And the past few weeks, we have been hanging out in Jerusalem at the temple, where Jesus has been fielding questions from religious leaders who are bent on tricking Jesus into condemning himself. And those tricks keep backfiring and keep pointing out that the religious leaders are not living up to their purpose. So where's Jesus this week? Well, we are still in Jerusalem. We've been traveling a long time through Ordinary Time. And the past few weeks, we have been in Jerusalem at the temple with Jesus where Jesus has been fielding questions from religious leaders who are bent on tricking Jesus into condemning himself, but it keeps backfiring against them.

Blake Smith 01:36

As hard as they may have tried to crucify him with words, he just wanted to let that happen.

Karin Peter 01:41

Boy, that's a really powerful way to say it. Absolutely. So today, they set a trap. And for us to best understand this trap, it's helpful to note that the coins that were used at the time would feature the image of the Emperor of Rome who would be understood to be referred to as Lord even more what we would call religious language at different times has appeared. And you can kind of delve into that if you get yourself a good annotated NRSV Bible that will help you understand that a little bit more. But basically, the Imperial leader would be equated with being a deity of some kind, and this book religious folks in quite a quandary. So what do we do with such coins? Does the use of them equates the practice of idolatry or or fall into this? What about graven images that were not to have greement, graven images of other gods and, and even questions like, does my financial tax support Roman occupation and oppression? So there are all kinds of issues going around about the idea of coinage and, and taxes and deity in the Christian community as they tried to navigate their way through a really horrible minefield of issues in their particular context? So looking at that from that context, Blake, what does Matthew say today?

Blake Smith 03:15

All right, well, our passage today is Matthew chapter 22, pick up at the 15th verse and go through the 22nd verse. Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap him in what he said. So they sent their

disciples to Him along with the Herodian, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are sincere and teach the way of God and accordance with truth and show deference to no one. But you do not regard people with partiality. Tell us then, what do you think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" But Jesus, aware of their malice said, "Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin use for the tax, and they brought him a denarius. Then he said to them, whose head is this, and whose title?" They said, "Caesars." Then he said to them, "give therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God, the things that are God's." When they heard this, they were amazed, and they left him and went away.

Another thing that catches me about this passage just real quickly, is that it actually mentions the Pharisees and the Herodians, which, within the Jewish tradition, were kind of warring factions. The Pharisees were the loyalists of the Jewish tradition, whereas the Herodians were loyal to the Roman Empire. And so they're using this thing that actually divides them, as a way to trick Jesus. So it's something that has divided them becomes a uniting factor for them because they're so desperate to trick Jesus because he's is a threat to all of them. So how we spend our money does matter whether we support charities or NGOs or churches or any kind of circumstances that we feel led to do so. Those are important. They're important to the life of generosity. But that's not what's in question here in this passage, we can easily get sidetracked by the idea of this is money that's involved and get into all kinds of debates. Jesus acknowledges that money is, and coins in this case are the stuff of this life, while compassion and mercy, grace and humility, one's heart, and soul, all of those things belong solely to God. So we need to give those without reserve to foster healthy relationships with God and others, their own well being and the Earth itself. It's where we render those things to. And so what's important to remember, in the passage we're talking about, on the coin is the image of Caesar. But the reality is, is that the image of God has been imprinted on all of us, who have been baptized and call ourselves disciples. So if we are to render everything to God, that is God's that means everything that we do and who we are, belongs to God. That's kind of what Jesus is not saying, but saying, I think here in the passage. So it raises some questions. And one for me is on what do I place a higher value, my money, my word or promises? My appearance? What I own? My friendships? My sense of compassion? How does this come across to others? And do I carry the image of God imprinted on my heart? And if so, to whom should my heart and life be given? We can say were baptized, but that doesn't mean that the image of God is imprinted on our heart we are created in the image of God, but I think it says a little more to say, we've imprinted the image of God on our heart. So

Karin Peter 07:27

That's a really hard question, though, Blake. Because when we think about where do we place the most value, as humans, we immediately go to financial stability, or a healthy relationship with our partner, or you know, sometimes we do tend to go to you know, I place having power as the most valuable in my life, or we my appearance and you know, I think people get caught up in fashion and Instagram and looking the absolute best on social media with all of the photoshopping that can happen because they're placing appearance as the highest value, but I know, for me, when I read through that list, what do I on what do I place a higher value money, promises, my appearance, my belongings, my friendships, it ended with my sense of compassion, I would never put that on my list of what I considered of highest value and yet, that really, when it when it really, you know, all the layers get peeled away, that is what is most important, my sense of compassion is framed and employed as part

of my discipleship and that has to be what I what I consider of highest value. So even the question helps us reframe what that is, and if, if my sense of compassion is of high value, how am I showing that to others? That's how is that imprint really living out in my life? I don't know. That's a tough one.

Blake Smith 09:00

Yeah, just reflecting on what you're saying. I reminded of that story of the guy that's baptized and he keeps one hand out of the waters. He goes in and thinking okay, what is that piece that you're keeping out there so that the full imprint of God is not on your heart, your safe room for some other things to be there in priority? So yeah, I think that's really helpful Karin, as we've talked about peeling away those layers and finding what truly matters and what is imprinted. So finally, I would say considering my own journey, what do I offer to God in divine relationship? And am I holding back some aspects of my heart or mind? Am I allowing God to imprint God's image on my heart and why or why not?

Karin Peter 10:07

Yeah, really, it gets down to that basic fact is, is are we going to live as disciples or not. So the different ways to experience this this week, but the one I'm going to recommend is a spiritual practice of give three. So there are three ways to spend your resources wisely this week as a spiritual practice, one, give extra money to a charity, a kids activity group, or to your religious denomination. So that's give three, number one. Number two, give time to helping someone in your neighborhood or community. And then, finally, three, give attention to your spiritual wholeness this week through prayer, meditation, or other spiritual practices this week, but give three in the sense that you are discovering how to use what you hold as valuable in your life as an expression of the imprint of God on your heart.

Blake Smith 11:30

Our blessing today comes from "For Tax Day." It's by Mehta, Herrick Carlson, we have had some blessings from her before.

Perhaps it got lost in the details, the credits and calculations, but you are a civic miracle. Today is as good a day to behold the schools you fund, the roads you build, the natural world you protect, the neighbors you love, with action. Today is a good day to behold the benefits of this solar revolution, your dreams and protests that move the needle, like a deep breath. Today is a good day to behold the ways your bottom line holds power in a nation trying to calculate love.

Thanks for joining us again here at Coffee to Go. We invite you to join us next time on Coffee to Go for the next part of our journey through the liturgical seasons and holy days of the Christian tradition.