

Coffee to Go | Proper 22

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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 Blake, where's Jesus this week? Well, where did we leave him? I think we left him in the temple, didn't we in Jerusalem? (We did.) So we're still in Jerusalem. And Jesus is still responding to questions from the religious authorities. And they're referred to as chief priests and Pharisees. And we need to remember we talked about groups of people, we're not talking about all the chief priests and Pharisees. That's not really what the gospel writer means. But simply there were chief priests and Pharisees who were they're upset about Jesus and what Jesus was doing and trying to figure out what to do about it. So is that a fair way to kind of picture that?

Blake Smith 01:31

Yeah, I think it is, I find myself thinking when I see this, of course, we don't know a lot about Jesus's life, from the temple at 12 to his ministry, but I'm thinking he probably healed himself pretty well in middle school if he if he could respond to bullies like he does here.

Karin Peter 01:49

Yes, absolutely. And, and the result is they get more and more frustrated with Jesus, because their intent is to trap Jesus and have the population turn against him. And, they're just really getting stymied at every turn. So here, as part of their question of Jesus, Jesus relates a parable, and then asks them to interpret it. And they give it a shot. And in doing so, as they answer, they basically condemn themselves, they end up in their own trap. So we've, we've probably all had instances like that, where something we said was turned around and back at us, and that's an ouch. So let's, let's hear how that went. Blake.

Blake Smith 02:36

Our Scripture today comes from the Gospel according to Matthew, the 21st chapter, picking up with the 33rd verse, and going through the 46th verse,

Jesus says, "listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built the Watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants, and went away. When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. But the

tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other slaves. More than the first. And they treated them in the same way. Then he sent his son to them, saying, they will respect my son. But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, this is the heir. Come, let us kill him and get his inheritance. So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" Then they said to Him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time." And Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures? The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in your eyes. Therefore, I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces its fruits. The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, and it will crush anyone on whom it falls." When the chief priests of the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

For me, now, this passage, it's an allegory and in the allegory God is the owner and Israel is the vineyard, the Jewish leadership are the tenant farmers who don't get it right and the messengers are the prophets who come to try to help them and get what belongs to Go. They turn them away, and then the Son, Jesus, comes in. They just time after time, don't get it. But one of the things for me this passage seems to be describing is not only how the scribes and Pharisees respond to Jesus, but the way in which Christianity today is lived out for a lot of folks. And it all comes down to perceived ownership. We planted it, we nurtured it, we developed it, (and hopefully you're catching the we), we did all the right things to bring it to fruition, therefore, it's ours. We own it, we need to protect it, we get to determine how it's used, and with whom it is shared. And we'll do whatever it takes to maintain control. Because what if it gets in the wrong hands, there's no telling what they'll do with it. They might crossbreed it or start making all kinds of hybrid versions or start giving it out to people who don't deserve it. You know, I mean, I read this, and it's like, yeah, we're doing it all over again. We're doing it all over again. I think that too often, Christians become proprietary and self-sufficient. Kind of this attitude of, you know, we know what's best. We've been doing it for a long time we know who's in and who's out. We know what God meant. But the parable points to God's purposes becoming manifest in a people other than the Jewish leaders, because they didn't bear the fruit of the reign of God, which we understand to be kindness, humility, compassion, justice, peace. God's love is without bounds, and it's freely given. But the fruit of God's love are the fruit of living in concert with the Divine Spirit is what transpires when we respond to the grace and mercy and love, in kind, by serving others. It's the bounty of God's realm laid out as a feast for everyone. So that leaves us with some ... leaves me with some questions I, when I think about how I might continue to consider that through this week, What can be harvested from my interactions with others, my attitudes, my relationships? What fruits are evident in my daily life? Another one is, When does my pride or my sense of ownership, my sense of things, how things are supposed to be done, get in the way of producing God's good fruit? A fruit by the way, that, like I said a minute ago, is for all of God's children to share without bounds. So what changes might I need to make to nurture and grow good fruit? In the parable, the owner made quite an investment in the vineyard. So we might consider what gifts skills, awarenesses, or understandings, God has invested in us or in me? How am I using those gifts to bless others? And am I hoarding those gifts for my own benefit? Lots to think about!

Karin Peter 08:12

it really is Blake. It's an awful lot to think about. We can get caught up in this scripture and then just use it as a way to blame. Those who don't understand Jesus as represented by the religious leaders and blame people who don't understand Jesus the way we understand Jesus, or, or even rationalize our own behavior. And yet, this is all about the fruit. It's really all about the fruit. It's about recognizing what it is and who it belongs to is as part of God's realm. So it's a little tougher scripture to live in this week as we go forward. But this falls in the in the Christian calendar, it intersects with the secular calendar and the fact that it falls right after Canadian Thanksgiving, and several weeks before American Thanksgiving. So if you are in the North American, the north of the North American continent, then a picture of a Thanksgiving table that has all your favorite dishes on it, or lay a feast on a small table, or some objects that represent a feast on a table or shelf in your home. Instead of traditional foods, use objects that symbolize fruits that you feel are part of God's bounty. So for example, on this feast table, you might put a heart to symbolize the love that comes from God, or a glove that symbolizes the hands that serve others as we respond to God's mercy and grace. Or, maybe a coin to represent the financial offerings that you share with others through a religious denomination or charitable contributions. Or maybe even with your family or household, ask each person to bring an item that represents a fruit of God's realm, a fruit of God's vineyard, if you will, and what can be harvested when we live lives as disciples, but some kind of representation to tie in the feast table that comes from God's harvest. Or, you might want to make a list of the ways the fruits of the Divine Spirit are evident in your life? What are some aspects of your life now that you can say, ah, that happens in my life because I'm attentive to God's Spirit working with me. And maybe you can add something each day this week as kind of a spiritual practice. So different ways to look at what it means to really be a good tenant of God's vineyard and look to sharing that harvest with others.

Blake Smith 11:02

My mind is already racing with what are the things I might put on the table. Appreciate that.

Our blessing is adapted from a prayer by Julia Taylor Ebel in the strong soil.

Plant seeds of dreams. beans, tomatoes, squash, with patience, water, hole with hope, weed out doubts. Imagine green, yellow, red, and company with sun, Whispering Wind and robins free song. Tend a hallowed place in your soul. And when harvest comes, give more than baskets full from the soil. gather strength, touch live in the vines, taste the fruit and know it holds the seeds to bring forth life.

Thanks for joining us again this week at Coffee to Go we invite you to join us again next week at Coffee to Go for the next part of our journey through the liturgical seasons and holy days of the Christian tradition.