

# Coffee to Go | Third Sunday of Advent

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

light, advent, John, witness, Christ, spiritual practice, preparing, blessed justice, waiting, wilderness

## SPEAKERS

Blake Smith, Karin Peter

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

Welcome to Coffee to Go, where we center ourselves in the scriptures, seasons and holy days of the Christian tradition. I'm Karin Peter, and I'm here with Blake Smith. We're your hosts and we welcome you on the journey. So on this third week of Advent, where are we with Jesus this week? While Jesus has not yet entered the frame, if you will, because last week, we listened to what Mark's gospel had to say about John the Baptist's ministry of preparation. And this week, we are hearing from John's Gospel kind of what came next. And so John the Baptist has crossed the river gone into town because he's been hauled in to give a defense of himself. Now, being a person who has been hauled in to give a defense of myself periodically, I feel for him, but he's defending his ministry, his preaching, his baptizing. Because remember, he's a bit of an outlier, a rebel, who wears animal hides and eats bugs, and the religious leaders don't quite know what to make of him. So what does John have to say for himself Blake?

### **Blake Smith** 01:44

Well, let's find out. Our scripture today comes from the Gospel according to John, it is the first chapter, and it is the sixth through the eighth verse, and the nineteenth through the twenty-eighth verse. There was a man sent from God whose name was John, He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem, to ask him, Who are you? He confessed, and did not deny it, but confessed "I am not the Messiah." And they asked him, "What then are you, Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." Then they said to Him, "who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as the prophet Isaiah said." Now they had been sent from the Pharisees, they asked him, "Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" John answered them, "I baptized with water, among you stands one whom you do not know. The one who was coming after me. I am not worthy to untie the thong of His sandal." This took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing. We talk about stubborn. (Yeah.) And we've talked before about Jesus turning the tables on the Pharisees, and John's not really turning the tables, but he's just not giving in to the pressure.

### **Karin Peter** 03:35

He is not. He is not he's pretty straight talking isn't he?

**Blake Smith** 03:40

Yes. And what he's straight about is, this is not about me. This is not about me. This is about Jesus. This is about the one to come. And I am here simply to witness to that light.

**Karin Peter** 03:55

So, which is really what Advent is all about, isn't it? Blake, is that we are waiting for that light like John.

**Blake Smith** 04:03

It is absolutely it. I actually one of the commentaries that I read David Bartlett, he put it in a way that that I've been thinking about all week, and I really like it and I'm not sure exactly what it means for me completely. But he says there's two ways of of saying that he wants to during Advent remind us that again, it's about pointing to Christ and not about pointing to ourselves. So he says, Advent is about our waiting for Christ. It is not about our waiting for Christ. And okay, so obviously, in the first the emphasis is on Christ, it is about us waiting, because ultimately, it's not about what we do. It's not about putting the decorations up and getting ready and having everything a particular way but it's it's preparing the way for Christ's to come and focusing and giving witness to Christ. It's not about who we are. It's about who we point to. (Right) in our lives. So I mean, that's that I think is really important because John, he doesn't talk about who he is, he says, Who is not essentially, who he is, is simply the person who has come to witness to the light that is coming, the true light of Jesus. So this Advent is a time of waiting and preparing and hoping for the light and believing that the light will come. It's not about the busyness. It's not about the lights, and the presents and all of that. It is a time of hopeful waiting, with, because we have the faith to know that it will come.

**Karin Peter** 05:57

Yeah, and it's waiting for that true light of the world. There's, there's, especially in our world now, there's a lot of things that we could kind of classify as light, whether it's like a spiritual awakening, or whether it's an epiphany moment that we might have. But we're talking about the intense trueness of the light of Christ as one who comes to point to the kingdom of God, the reign of God, the Commonwealth of God. So, yeah.

**Blake Smith** 06:31

Right. And there's no doubt that, you know, during the Advent time, there is a time of prepare, preparing a preparation or so. So some of it is about how we are doing and what we are doing to prepare. But it ought to always be with the focus on that witness for Christ. And so we might ask ourselves this week, in what ways do we bear witness to the light that is in us, whether that's spiritual light, whether we consider that spiritual light or the light of Christ or divine light, however, you see that? what ways do you bear witness to the light that is within you? Now, John, of course, refers to himself as a voice in the wilderness. When have you heard or sense the holy presence in your own place of wilderness? And then, this actually comes out of a spiritual practice Holy Illumination, but there are a couple of questions that come from that. Are there aspects of my life, that I should shed some light on to better understand? In keeping with this theme of witnessing to the light, what is it in our own life that we might need to shed some light on to better understand? And are there areas of darkness in us, that we might shed some light on to dispel that darkness?

**Karin Peter** 07:57

Yeah, that can be personal. It could be community, it could be a lot of different ways when when we talk about where there might be some darkness. Yeah, especially when we're trying to live into justice and peacemaking as a as a way to be. So here's an idea for experiencing this scripture this week. We are we are in the third week of Advent. So we are coming close to Christmas, the fourth week of Advent begins actually with Christmas Eve, I think is the fourth Sunday of Advent this year, so we're pretty close to Christmas. So take a little bit of time to view the seasonal lights that are up maybe in your neighborhood or in your zoo, or other place that's well lit for the season. And go and view them as a family activity or as a group activity or even on your own if you simply walk through the neighborhood or drive through town and do it as a spiritual practice as you view the lights. A lot of times you do it just as part of our festive seasonal thing. I like to get my festive Starbucks beverage, and drive around and look at Christmas lights. But this this year, I'm gonna do it as a as a spiritual practice and view those seasonal lights as representation of preparing for the true light to come. So then when you get home, take a moment to share with those that went with you or if you went by yourself, take a moment to write in your journal or just copy down some notes for yourself. But think about the feelings and images that came to mind as you viewed the lights. And what does a celebration of light feel like? So I guess it's kind of a spiritual practice for this week for our experience. And we'll call it the practice of the celebration of light for this week. So as you process it, contrast how you feel when you think about Jesus, the embodied God as the true light or one light, or anticipated light, whatever works for you. And contrast those feelings to what, what feels different about the celebration of light, the practice that you did, as you view the seasonal lights? Do they feel the same? Do they feel different? And why? And what does that have to tell you about your experience in this season of Advent? So I don't know Blake, for me, it feels a little bit like if I can connect this feeling of the seasonal festivity and the joy and celebration I find in it, and connect it more effectively, to how I feel about my own preparatory behavior, to clear the way for justice, and peace and the light of Christ to come, those sometimes live in separate parts of me. And this year, I'm hoping the practice of seasonal light will, or celebrating the light will help connect those more effectively. So we'll see listeners if that does the same for you.

**Blake Smith** 11:21

That is a great task to take on here and Advent. Our blessing today comes from Jan Richardson, and it is titled "Blessed are You who Bear the Light." I don't know. All of our listeners might not have been with us in a recent episode where we actually looked at the Beatitudes. But talking about what does it mean to be blessed. It doesn't always mean that life is jolly and great. As a matter of fact, as we look at the Beatitudes, many of those who are named as blessed are those who are in the thickness of life. And so, just kind of keep in mind the Beatitudes as you hear this blessing today because it calls us to have hope in the midst of that struggle as well. Blessed are you who bear the light in unbearable times who testify to its endurance amid the unendurable, who bear witness to its persistence when everything seems in shadow and grief. Blessed are you in whom the light lives and whom the brightness blazes, your heart, a chapel, an altar, where in the deepest night can be seen the fire that shines forth in you in unaccountable faith, in stubborn hope, in love that illumines every broken thing it finds. Whether you're finding yourself in a place of joy, or in a struggle against justice, or in a struggle for justice for others, may you be blessed as you seek to be the light. Thanks for joining us again this week at Coffee to Go

we invite you to join us as always next week for the next part of our journey through the liturgical seasons and holy days of the Christian tradition.