

Coffee to Go | Epiphany 1

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

wilderness, Jesus, hovering, Holy Spirit, dove, God, presence, Epiphany

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 here with Blake Smith, and we welcome you on the journey. So our question each week and actually twice this weekend, as we had Epiphany yesterday and the first Sunday following Epiphany today is, where are we with Jesus this week. So on the first Sunday, in the season after Epiphany, the season of light, the Spirit illumines, the baptism of Jesus, this is where we read the baptism story. And it's where we kind of skip a little bit from infant to toddler to now Jesus as an adult, and is being baptized. But that's all poetic license in the Gospels and in the Christian calendar, and so we will go with it. So we are back out in the wilderness with John the Baptizer today. But today, John is not just talking about Jesus, Jesus is present, as well. So let's look in and see what's going on.

Blake Smith 01:41

All right, well, Our Gospel passage today comes from the Gospel of Mark the first chapter, the 4th through the 11th verse, and as you mentioned, we're going back to John the Baptist and where he joins Jesus.

John the Baptizer, appeared in the wilderness proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem, we're going out to him, and were baptized by him in the River Jordan, confessing their sins. Now, John was clothed with Camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, the one who is more powerful than I is coming after me, I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals, I have baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. In those days, Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart, and the Spirit descending like a dove on him, and a voice came from heaven, you are my son, the beloved, with you, I am well pleased.

This passage is one of those passages that opens up that debate of fully human fully divine for us, it's important for us to remember that, actually, we believe that Jesus is both fully human and fully divine. And in order to have the wholeness of that we have to be able to see and accept and have in our overall system, this recognition that Jesus was, in fact, fully human, in order to fully understand and live in our circumstance and be able to say, I know what your life is, I have I have lived it with you that

Jesus probably experienced some of the emotions and the physical hurts and the things that we do. And probably some doubt, maybe, I mean, I think we see that we don't really have time in this episode to, to go through those instances. But I think if we look carefully, we can, without diminishing the value of Jesus as being fully divine also see Jesus as fully human. Maybe he didn't need to repent, maybe he did. But he needed to experience the fullness of life in the human perspective and as a human so...

Karin Peter 04:26

well, that makes it easier, easier to understand, like why we would go through a baptismal scene for Jesus, because I know for a lot of people there was that why would Jesus need to be baptized? So that helps us process that a little bit today?

Blake Smith 04:38

Yeah, yeah. Another thing that we see in this passage, we were again reminded of the wilderness and wilderness comes out a lot in the passages we see it. One of the things that I think that is important is that it takes us back to the Exodus. And why is that important? Because it was in that time in the wilderness that the Israelites had difficulty acknowledging God's presence. As matter of fact, at times wanted to just go back to Egypt because they thought they had been abandoned. And but the reality was that God had never left them that God was always with them in the midst of that. So that's important. I think for me, if I'm being honest, I'm one who in the past has quickly gone to this idea of oh, well, the wilderness wreck represents this time of, of chaos or core turmoil or being lost or uncertainty of wandering. But I found a piece from a theologian by the name of Dolores Williams, and I found it to be really, really helpful, and it comes out of the black church tradition. And this is what she has to say about that. Again, this is Dolores Williams, and she says, "rather than a place to be feared, we reinterpret the wilderness through the lens of the biblical Hagar. Wilderness is a place of struggle and Spirit, both the problematic and promising, for it is in the wilderness that Hagar meets God." She goes on to say that, "this symbolic wilderness enables us to hear the sounds of ancestors who navigate a difficult terrain, preparing the way for generations to come. It is a space where faith is cultivated and strengthened." So it gives us a little hope, for times that we might consider wilderness in our lives, but also not to see it as just a bad time, but a time of faithful journey and discovery. I think is really helpful for us. And that's where all of these people were, these throngs of people, were going to the wilderness to meet John to discover something new, they were on a journey. And finally, from the passage we see at the end, this hovering of the dove, hovering of the Holy Spirit. We're familiar with that image of the dove the dove makes an appearance as the symbol of the presence of Holy Spirit throughout the scriptures. The dove hovered over the seas at creation. The dove hovered over Moses when he was told to call the 50 elders. The dove hovers over the waters of baptism. And you and I, Karin have talked about that hovering, why does the Spirit always hover? question, a question to ponder for future episodes, perhaps

Karin Peter 07:47

There is a lot of hovering when this Spirit appears in kind of a symbolic form of dove or otherwise. And I don't think I ever realized it until we started talking about this episode. It's like, Wait, there are a couple of things going on here. There seems to always be water and there's always a lot of hovering. So I, I need to look into this. Yeah, there's an episode in our future.

Blake Smith 08:10

There you go... or listeners, if you have insights into that, feel free to write us and let us know. I'd love... I'm gonna have to do some looking into that. But ultimately, this this hovering, the presence of the Dove, the Holy Spirit is a signal of God's eternal presence again, that looking back to the Exodus and acknowledging, maybe in hindsight, but acknowledging that God's eternal presence is always with us. God does not abandon us. So three things in the in the passage, and and some questions that we might consider one, one for each of those pieces. The first one would be as we think about this, Jesus as being fully human and fully divine, we might ask ourselves, who is Jesus to me? Are there particular points in or life circumstances that might be more meaningful for Jesus to be more of one than the other? And what is that and why? With regards to the wilderness, we might ask ourselves, when have we found respite? Or even challenge? So if we see the positive and the negative of wilderness, when have we found respite or challenge in the wilderness? And how have we, perhaps grown from that? And then finally, with this idea of the hovering Spirit, when have I felt the Spirit hovering over or near me? Because if one thing is for sure, we know from our experience that God is always present.

Karin Peter 09:52

So I, I love that idea of hovering. It's going to stay with me for a while. And so when I think about how we can experience this scripture this week ... it goes there, my brain goes there. So this week maybe each day we can make a choice, make an intentional choice, to look for signs of that Spirit hovering. What catches your attention this week and signals for you that God is with you, signals God's holy presence? How do you sense that this week? Try to make a point to look for that. It may not be a dove, but it may be some other kind of signal or symbol that triggers that for you that you sense God's holy presence. And then you might even want to reflect on or, if you're a journaler, to journal about, what is your response when you see that that symbol or that signal of God's holy presence hovering near you.

Blake Smith 10:52

All right. Well, let's close out with a blessing. It's a Celtic blessing for everyday life by Ray Simpson. Into the life of the Spirit, I immerse you, that the Spirit may light up your night and give you power to do right. Into the endless life of your soul friend, I immerse you. Into the life of the three, I immerse you, that they may fill you with love, lift you to heaven above, into the selfless love of the Trinity, I immerse you. Well, as we travel through this Epiphany season, we pray that you our listeners will find evidence of God's appearing in your presence and we invite you as always to join us again next week for the next part of our journey through the liturgical seasons and holy days of the Christian tradition.