

Coffee to Go | Ash Wednesday

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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. I'm here with Blake Smith, and we welcome you on the journey. So we're going to just mention today, Blake, that this year Ash Wednesday is on Valentine's Day. So St. Valentine. There are a ton of legends that surround the name St. Valentine. And they all tried to establish some kind of romance connection between an actual Saint Valentine and why St. Valentine is kind of this sweethearts, holiday. So there's legends like he used to marry people who, who couldn't get married legally by cultural rules, and he would break those and he would do the marriages anyway, or he would provide dowry or he would do these other things to help romantic relationships go forward. Those are really iffy because during this time that marriage wasn't romantic relationships. Marriage was women were chattel. So I have a hard time. I have a hard time kind of buying into that. However, none of those are really considered provable by by scholars. But we do know that in the 13th, about 1370-1380, Chaucer wrote a poem called The Parliament of Fowls, F-O-W-L-S, and it contains this line, "for this was on St Valentine's day when every bird comes there to choose his mate." So, you know, a botanist or a zoologist could probably say, hey, they're just talking about normal, you know, birding, mating, whatever, not St. Valentine, but whatever. It happened to fall, birds fall in love on say Valentine's Day. So we're gonna, go with that today and say, however it came about this, the feast day for St. Valentine is associated in modern culture, with matters of the heart. And that brings us kind of to the question we asked, which is where are we with Jesus this week? Now, Ash Wednesday uses the same set of scriptures every year, whether it's an A B, or C cycle in the Revised Common Lectionary. And since this year, Ash Wednesday falls on Valentine's Day, we thought we'd go ahead and highlight the reading from the Psalms for today, and it is often referred to as a Psalm of the heart. So Blake, let's hear it in your best in your best Valentine's Day. Voice let's do it.

Blake Smith 03:21

What in the heck is a Valentine's Day voice? I don't know. I'll try. This is Psalm 51. It is the first through the seventh verse.

Have mercy on me, oh God, according to your steadfast love, according to Your abundant mercy, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you alone have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight. So that you are justified in your sentence, and blameless when you pass judgment? Indeed, I was born guilty. A sinner when my mother conceived me. You desire truth in the inward being,

therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart. Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean. Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

I don't know if that was a Valentine's voice or not. I have just ...

Karin Peter 04:30

Psalm 51 which is for many of us a familiar Psalm, at least parts of it, right? Yeah. Yeah.

Blake Smith 04:39

Yeah. So why does it matter? Kind of like the story about St. Valentine's and the questions and debate over what the connection is. There are some that would say that the psalm is associated with the David and Bathsheba story. David has some darker sides and in Psalm It seems like he recognizes that David's sins against Bathsheba her husband, and against God. If you want to hear more about that, check out He-brew episode 388. For more of that story, we're not going to focus on that particular side of that today. Because while this may or may not be how the song came to us, ultimately, it's a Psalm of confession and repentance and forgiveness, which sets us up nicely as we enter into the Lenten season. The writer of the psalm yearns to be restored in loving and healthy relationships with the writer's self, with God, with others, and with all of creation. And the language used here speaks to the restoring of loving family and tribal or community bonds, which only God can do. So it is, as you mentioned, a heart language like the psalm being a song of the heart. This is heart language, and heart language in Scripture is about more than emotion. In this time, the time that this was written, the heart was understood as the core of our humanity, where our will and our character and our intellect are all centered. So to pray for a clean heart was to pray to be made into a new person with a clean new character, a new will, making new and responsible choices. Words and actions, all new because of the transformation of the heart. So some questions we might ask ourselves this week is, when have my actions or the actions of others tested or strained, loving family, tribal or community bonds? We might also say or ask what needs to be made new in my life, what needs to be cleaned? How is a yearning for restoration or healing manifest in me? So some questions we might consider as we listen to the psalm, asking, acknowledging that which is in us that needs to be cleaned and removed so that we might be able to receive what is yet to come.

Karin Peter 07:27

So thanks, like I think about that. That yearning and that is a really appropriate way to enter into the Lenten season on this Ash Wednesday, the yearning for some kind of renewal and heart-centered, self-centered, relationship-centered renewal. So I'm thinking about how we can experience that this week. And it made me think of something I learned from Barbara Howard years and years and years ago, at a women's retreat, probably the first women's retreat I ever went to as a young adult freshly back into church life. And she talked about this kind of formational practice that she did, where she would take post it notes, and she would write on each note something that needed to be just cleaned out of her or something somebody had had said about her that had harmed her Spirit may be and she wanted to just not think about anymore, or even all the self-doubt and for self-image concerns she might have had. And she would write them each on a post-it note and then she'll go in front of a mirror, and she would stick them all over herself. And look in the mirror with all of this kind of covering her. And then one by one, she would kind of read each one out loud, and just remove it and discard it. So at the end of that

practice, she has come to restored renewed self. So that came to mind as we were talking about Ash Wednesday, and this yearning for renewal.

Blake Smith 09:07

I can't imagine that Barbara would need too many post it notes.

Karin Peter 09:10

I know I was thinking the same thing, but you know.

Blake Smith 09:16

The things we don't know...

Karin Peter 09:17

That has stayed with me for 40 years. So it was quite meaningful at the time. I also thought of, of something we call "Castle of the Heart." And it's a spiritual practice for children that you can find at all things are spiritual.org under spirituality for young people, Castle of my Heart, and it kind of walks through a renewal cleaning out the corners kind of kind of practice. But if we were going to do it maybe in a group or as a family or as individual formation, we can do that as well. We can use our holy imaginations and we can think of our heart or imagine our heart as a castle, and we can kind of center ourselves entering the darkness of the castle with our flashlight in hand. And we can see ourselves exploring the gate, and the Great Hall and the tower. And, and as we explore our heart Castle, if you will, you begin to see all the things you keep in there. And as you explore deeper into the castle, there's less and less light and you find yourself using your flashlight to peer into the shadows and the corners to see what's there that might need to be swept up and disposed of. And you can imagine yourself completing that task as an Ash Wednesday venture into the castle of your heart. So those are some ideas for this Ash Wednesday as we enter in to the Lenten season.

Blake Smith 11:02

I like that idea of the castle of my heart. But I was immediately taken back to the day when we had to move my parents out of the home that I was raised in after they'd lived there for 30 years. Now, that was down in Florida and we didn't have basements so everything stored when in the attic. And yeah, there were a lot of things after 30 years that were stored in the deep corners of the attic that needed to be swept.

Karin Peter 11:30

We might want to explore the attic of our heart if the keeper of the castle doesn't work for us to go. Yeah,

Blake Smith 11:37

yeah. Our blessing today comes from "Our Hearts," by Anne Calodich Fone, and it's adapted.

Dearest God, wherever our hearts choose to call home with Your love and Your grace, keep these bonds unshakable. With our love for each other, keep these bonds unbreakable.

Well, thanks for joining us here on this Ash Wednesday. Join us again here at coffee to go for the next part of our journey through the liturgical seasons and holy days of the Christian tradition.