

# Coffee to Go | First Sunday of Lent

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Jesus, Lent, fasting, focus, yearning, preparation, urgency, wilderness, presence

## 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, and we welcome you on the journey. So today is the first Sunday of Lent. So as a review, Lent is the 40 days between Ash Wednesday and Easter. So wherever Easter falls in a given year, you count back 40 days, plus Sundays, because Lent is a time of fasting and preparation and yearning and pondering and facing our discipleship. But on Sundays, we get a little relief, and we just can all go, yay, Jesus is here and loves us and all is good. And then we go back to Lent the following Monday. So, don't count the Sundays, but count 40 days from Easter, and you'll get to Ash Wednesday, and that's Lent. During this time we center ourselves and our attention on Jesus as we remember the life and ministry of Jesus. Lent provides a means to also sharpen our focus on our own lives in relationship to Jesus. And the Lenten season encourages us to turn away from whatever distracts us or blocks our commitment to be disciples of Jesus. That's where the kind of practice of fasting came from, to remove those distractions that block our commitment. So in this season of Lent we walked with Jesus, even though we realized the path leads to the cross. So, Blake, let's hear where we are in this first Sunday of Lent, in our scriptures.

### **Blake Smith** 02:19

All right, I just want to say as a young man, having met and married someone who (excuse me) was from the Catholic tradition, at a time when we weren't really heavily into Lent as a denomination ourselves. That was I was really excited to know that you got Sundays off a long time to be without chocolate. I say that. And I started that with as a young man, because as a young man, when that was new to me, I mean, that was either.

### **Karin Peter** 02:52

Yeah, yeah, it meant giving something up. Yeah.

### **Blake Smith** 02:55

Now as a maturing, I will say maturing not mature, maturing adult, I can't understand why chocolate would even be a choice. If it's a time to turn away from what distracts us. Chocolate brings me closer to God.

### **Karin Peter** 03:12

I think a lot of our listeners might agree with you. But isn't it that's a thoughtful thing to bring up like that. Sometimes we associate language just giving something up and kind of this sacrificial manner, but it's really about replacing what distracts us with something that helps us focus.

**Blake Smith** 03:29

Right? Right, and that that's what the Lenten time has become, for me at this point. So our Scripture today comes from the Gospel according to Mark, it's the first chapter, the ninth who the 15th Verse, And this is not a flowery, fluffy feelgood passage this is a get it done, kind of passage.

**Karin Peter** 03:54

Mark is kind of that kind of writer.

**Blake Smith** 03:55

Yeah, he is. He is. We'll sense, hopefully, as you hear this, you'll sense the urgency that is behind Mark's writing.

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 upon him, and a voice came from the heavens, "You are my son, the beloved with you, I am well pleased." And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness 40 days, tested by Satan, and he was with the wild beasts, and the angels waited on him. Now, after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the good news of God and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near, Repent, and believe in the good news."

This narrative is so different from the baptism narratives in Matthew and Luke. As I said, there's a sense of urgency. And even a sense of desperation. I think. We hear in this particular reading of the passage that the Spirit immediately drove Jesus out into the wilderness. But some versions of the passage also say, immediately, as he came up out of the water, where this version from the New Revised Standard uses the word "just" as he was coming up, but there's this sense of urgency. The Markan community, being very familiar with the Hebrew Bible would have been reminded in this reading of prophecy from Third Isaiah, which also expresses some desperation. Here is that passage from the 62nd chapter: "Oh, that you would tear open the heavens and come down so that the mountains would quake in your presence. And when fire candles, brushwood, and the fire causes water to boil, to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence." In today's passage, the heavens are torn apart, and the Spirit descends not as a dove, but like a dove, and drives Jesus into the wilderness. It's not an invitation. And it's not the result of a choice Jesus made to have some alone time to prepare for ministry. This passage tells us that the Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness. David Jacobson, a commentary writer, points out that "Jesus' temptation is not some theological conversation with the devil. Instead, it is a 40-day life or death, Spirit authorized struggle in a place of vulnerability." So, this would have been understood this, this tearing open of the heavens would have been understood as a moment of wrenching spiritual liberation, born from what was and entering into what is to be, without chains, unfettered, unhindered in any way. So that's the kind of desperation and urgency we find in Mark's gospel. Again, it's no fluff, there's no hovering dove,

there's no wasted dialogue, it's more like a message that would say enough is enough, it's time to get down to the business of bringing about justice and God's reign. So.

**Karin Peter** 07:29

I appreciate that so much, Blake, sometimes these passages that we're familiar with, we don't recognize the differences that the gospel writers offer from their perspective. And I think sometimes we treat the stories of Jesus as these kind of meek, gentle narratives. But this is not that. This is a cacophony of noise and image and, and off field terror, almost at what was happening. And yet at the same time, what comes out of it is this sense that God is fulfilling God's promises. So really powerful description of the passage, thank you. I love that Jesus is driven out into a place of vulnerability because as humankind we have experienced them.

**Blake Smith** 08:26

Right? And because it's not that flowery, feel good, pretty picture of that we like to paint or in the old days, put on our flannel boards, it makes us have to think about this in a new way. So some questions that we might ask ourselves this week are, What has the Spirit torn open in me? Is there a sense of urgency in me to which I need to respond? Another question would be, Are my spiritual experiences quiet and gentle, or are they thunderous, and awe-full, full of all? I have to wonder, how does the ripping and shredding of the status quo to make space for something new sit with me? If I'm being honest that I'm not sure, I have to think about that. So that's another again...

**Karin Peter** 09:22

Are we part of the status quo to some extent, and that brings some of that uncomfortability with us?

**Blake Smith** 09:27

Yeah, that really pushes really pushes the comfort level. So again, to ask ourselves that question and, and then be honest with ourselves about whether or not we're comfortable or uncomfortable with the Spirit working in that way. I think we like the comfort or view (of the gentle... mmm hmm) This is not a this is not the comfort or hat that the Spirit is wearing in this moment. Yeah,

**Karin Peter** 09:54

I'm not sure I want to be driven into the wilderness. Life and death contemplation and vulnerability.

**Blake Smith** 10:04

Yeah, so finally, I would just say another question would be when have I needed to be pushed into a time of spiritual reflection? And this one I don't even like to say but when have I been pushed into a time of work life balance or personal reflection? Because that's again what Lent is about.

**Karin Peter** 10:25

Yeah, that is well, thanks for bringing me right down to earth with Lenten questions there, Blake and thinking and experiencing this week, it brings about the responses to those questions, what might need to be torn apart to liberate our own sense of self more in a more authentic spiritual encounter and not keep putting those in boxes? So what needs to be torn apart? Think about that this week. Is that old habits? Is it fear or uncertainty? Is it doubt, anger, complacency, what might need to be torn apart to

liberate your own self and identify that and then symbolically rend it R-E-N-D, rip it open, like the heavens were torn open and you can illustrate this you can take a piece of cloth and tear it in half, you can shred paper, you can shatter a ceramic plate on the patio, whatever it takes to symbolize that liberating awe filled presence of the Divine touching your life.

**Blake Smith 11:43**

All right, well, our blessing today comes from "For Lent by Ariane Braithwaite Lehn. The Lenten path puts before me the questions and realizations I so often stuff away. With each step, I'm recognizing barriers built through my rote habits and unrealized prejudices, my baseline grudges and routine neglects. I must acknowledge compromises that drew me further away from my own soul, and your calling. But I'm coming back home. Hone my desires to that pure focus you held helped me fast from self-absorption, finding my substance in the rich profundity of suffering love. Draw my heart and feet forward on this path. That's both total mystery and innate to who I am in You. Amen. So thanks for joining us again this week at Coffee to o. Of course, we invite you to join us next time for the next part of our journey through the liturgical seasons and holy days of the Christian tradition.