

Coffee to Go | Fourth Sunday of Lent

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

light, God, hymn, obstacles, journey, shanty, condemnation, christian, love, text, passage, darkness, lighthouse

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 welcome you on the journey. This is the fourth week of our Lenten journey. And we ask the question every week here on Coffee to Go, where are we with Jesus this week? So the first part of Lent, we were in Mark's gospel, but last Sunday, and this Sunday, we're in John's Gospel. And so today, we're going to hear a scripture that is familiar to a lot of folks who maybe even aren't real biblically literate, but who grew up in Christian community or simply those who might not know the text, but they're going to recognize the verse and the number from growing up watching football games and baseball games in American culture where there's always somebody right behind home plate, or right up in the endzone, holding up a sign that says John 3:16. So John 3:16, is in the middle of our Scripture text today. So let's hear our Scripture today. As we try to answer Where are we with Jesus this week, we're not so much with him as we are talking about him.

Blake Smith 01:54

Absolutely. And as you mentioned, John 3:16 kind of comes in the middle of our passage today. Our passage is from the Gospel According to John, the third chapter, but it is the 14th through the 21st verse. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish, but may have eternal life. And I want to pause here just to say, I've got a friend and colleague, if I could hear her preaching this and what she would say, right at this point, would say, "Now catch this, catch this." Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him. Those who believe in Him are not condemned. But those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment that the Light has come into the world. And people loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil, hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true, come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God. First thing we have to say about what's important, and you've already mentioned it Karin, is that we've got this familiar verse, not a passage, a familiar verse that we see referenced many times in our culture, because it's probably one that anybody who's done any Bible study at all has learned. But it's so important that we don't stop there because, in and of itself, John 3:16 is an exclusive

passage. And it's not the point. And when it's taken alone, it can be very exclusive. And that's not the point. In fact, it's the exact opposite to the point of this whole passage. And that is that the light has come to the world to the whole world. And so we ask ourselves a question, and that is, do all people get in on God's love, or only those that believe in the right way? And the answer is, as far as we understand, and believe here in Community of Christ, all people, get into God's love, get in on God's love. It's just that some don't accept it. The passage is very clear that God did not send His Son to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. Any condemnation that occurs is self-inflicted, not God-inflicted. And, it's an, It's not really a condemnation, it's just the absence of that grace and light that God intends for all of the world. We separate ourselves from that. We limit ourselves from being able to receive that. It's not a condemnation of God. We all have areas of darkness in our lives, parts that we want to hide from the light, because that's just human nature. We don't want others to see the darkness that resides in us. I mean, it's almost as if we think that if no one knows about it, it doesn't exist. But all along, God knows, and God still offers redemption, God still offers light that is, for all of the world, that light came for the world. That light, which is Jesus, came for the world, and all are offered spiritual renewal, because we're all in need of it. And another piece is just that none of us are entitled to the light through any way. Anything that we've done, no way but grace,

Karin Peter 06:05

Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, I can't earn it? [No], I can't get it by just believing the right things.

Blake Smith 06:15

You cannot, and you don't need to earn it. That's the gospel. That's the whole message. You, not only can you not earn it, you don't need to earn it, because it is God's gift, unconditional gift. Our responsibility, though, as those who have received the light as those who carry the light, according to John, is to bear the light to others. So it's not to do something to get the light. But once we have it, there is an inherent responsibility as disciples that we bear the light to others. So some questions we might ask ourselves are, Do you feel entitled as a Christian? Do you? Is there something in what you've heard or learned about being a Christian that makes you think you have a priority seating on the journey to heaven? Or, on the other side, do you resent Christian voices that exclude others? And then, how do you seek to include rather than exclude? And finally, how are you bearing light to others? This divine light, this light of peace, or however you perceive the light, this light that John is suggesting we as disciples are called to share? How do you do that for others?

Karin Peter 07:49

That's such a good place to talk about, like what what our experience this week might be in this fourth week of Lent. And as you were talking about the light, there's a hymn and it's a seafarers hymn called "Let Your Lower Lights be Burning." And that's what comes to mind is the whole idea that even a small light, even what you might call running lights on a boat or on a car, or this the small light of a pen light or a book light. Even those lights in darkness can be seen at a great distance. So regardless of how large or small, bright or dim you think your expression of God's love would be shining on this week. Let it out as an expression of your willingness to bear light to others. In whatever way you understand that. If you're not a super churchy person, that's perfectly okay. It can be light of peace, or light of acceptance, or light of welcome. But this week, whatever we shine as our light, let's let it not be one of judgment, but one of love. Not be one of rebuke, but one of refuge and not be one of condemnation, but

a light of welcome in what we do this week, so we'll celebrate John's Gospel that the light has come and that we are light bearers this week.

Blake Smith 09:41

So it's appropriate that our blessing this week comes from the refrain of a hymn text called "Let Your Lower Lights be Burning. And the blessing is going to be the refrain from this hymn which comes from Fisherman's Friends, classic British Shanties, and Pirate Songs.

Karin Peter 09:41

Perfect place for a blessing. [Pardon?] Perfect place to find a blessing.

Blake Smith 10:12

Right, wouldn't it? Yeah, it wouldn't you want to go to a shanty to get a blessing? So it's by Clover and Campion are the publishers. You know, real quickly before I read the blessing, though, is such a neat analogy that I that I hope you'll catch on. And it's so important that I would encourage our listeners to go and google this or find this, read the lyrics of the full text, and if possible, find a rendering of the of the song where you can listen to it sung. It's a beautiful hymn, first of all, but the analogy in it is so powerful. So just to give a little quick background, you know, all along the sea coasts, there are lighthouses that help guide ships toward the shore in storms and times of low visibility. I mean, we're all familiar with those, I know that I was not aware, however, that there are other lights engaged in that process of helping guiding ships to the shore. So, in addition to the light at the top of the lighthouse, there are also lower lights that are placed at regular intervals along the shore. And what this does is, as the ship is approaching the shore, the lights shine an even light across the water, and across any obstacles that are there. And so if there are dark places, the ship knows to avoid those dark places, because that's something that is interfering with the light's ability to shine, so probably a rock or something in the way. And so in this analogy, God's light or Christ's light is this light at the top of the lighthouse leading us towards safe and solid ground. And it is something that we can see, something that the world can see, it's evident. But what we know from our own journeys and discipleship is that as we move closer to God, there are obstacles that get in our way, maybe it's persecution, or our our fear of the possibility of persecution or ridicule, whatever it is. And so, in this analogy, we are the lower lights, the bearers of light, as you've mentioned, Karin, that helps in those in those moments as folks become as they move toward God, to help to guide them and to navigate those obstacles. And so that's kind of the general context. But again, I would encourage you to go and Google that and find a playing of the full hymn. So here is our blessing, which again is the refrain from that hymn. Let your lower lights be burning. Send a gleam across the wave, some poor fainting struggling seamen, you may rescue you may save. So, if you've got any wayfaring semen or see women in our listenership this one was for you. We hope that you've enjoyed this episode of Coffee to Go and we invite you to join us again next time on this journey through the liturgical seasons and holy days of the Christian tradition.