

Coffee to Go | Fourth Sunday of Easter

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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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, and I'm here with Blake Smith. And we welcome you on the journey. So we are moving towards the end of the Easter season for this year. Today's episode is posting on April 21. And so for those of you who are holiday followers, tomorrow is Earth Day, April 22. So, we want to remember that as we are a people who believes in the sacredness of creation, and are spending time discussing the climate crisis as part of Community of Christ. So, and this march towards Pentecost, and also where we are with Earth Day tomorrow, where are we with Jesus in our journey? And, we have been in John's gospel, and that's where we're staying this week. We're hanging out with Jesus, he is continuing in teaching, and trying to help the disciples of kind of all the last things that need to be taught to the disciples before Jesus ascends to be with God. So, let's listen in and see what Jesus is talking about.

Blake Smith 01:50

All right, our passage today, as you have said, comes from the Gospel according to John, and it is the 10th chapter, the 11th, through the 18th verse,

I am the good shepherd, the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep, The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away. And the wolf snatches them and scatters them, The hired hand runs away, because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep, I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold, I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason, the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me. But I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.

So much going on here. First, I just want to mention, and we talked about in a previous episode, of course, that John's Gospel is written long after the resurrection. And so the readers are hearing this word, I lay down my life for the sheep, Christ has already laid down his life for the sheep. So this is, again, some reassurance for the listeners of John. But the thing I want to focus mainly on is this use of the word, good. And what does it mean to be good? We have our own ideas of what that is, but when

we look at the Greek word, Kallos, which is the Greek word here used in this translation, it means honorable and noble. Not just checking off a list of things and being good.

Karin Peter 04:01

It not just following the rules and staying out of trouble.

Blake Smith 04:04

Right, right. It goes beyond that, to being honorable. And so, when we look at the characteristics of a good shepherd, which are outlined here, it includes watchfulness, and devotion and courage and care and responsibility and leadership, and protective. It's, it's not just about not doing harm. It's about doing good. [Right] Being proactive and intentional. There's an image from culture, and I know that we, in our current world like to think that Christianity has always been pure and of its own accord, but there are a lot of images and things that have become part of Christianity that came out of other cultures and one of those [What!?] Yeah.

Karin Peter 05:02

Christianity influenced by culture. What are you talking about Blake?

Blake Smith 05:07

Well, we and we don't like, we don't like to make that connection. And how many times these days do we hear? Oh, we're just being influenced by culture, we're going the way of culture as if Christianity has never done so. So I think it's important for us to just be honest about that and, and find what is good in our culture that helps inform who we are.

Karin Peter 05:29

Well, that's the Christian tradition. And that's what we're all about here at Coffee to Go. Right. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. So take that in context.

Blake Smith 05:38

Yeah. So when we talk about this image of good shepherd, we might think about Hermes, who was a patron god of flocks, herds and shepherds in the Greek culture. And there was a yearly festival that commemorated an event, during which a lamb would be carried around the city by the most handsome boy, and then sacrificed in order to purify and protect the city from disease, drought and famine. So okay, we've got this handsome boy, we've got the lamb sacrificed to protect. And we begin to see some of that being portrayed as we make connections with Christianity. There's numerous depictions of Hermes as a good shepherd carrying the lamb on his shoulders, you've probably seen pictures of that. And they've been found throughout the Mediterranean world. It's possible then, that this iconography of Hermes, as the good shepherd had an influence on early Christianity, specifically in this description of Christ as the Good Shepherd in the Gospel of John.

Karin Peter 06:48

Okay, Blake, so you know, I'm going to do this because I can't help myself. So, here's, imagine the situation, right, where the early Christians, they're living in a place where people regularly go to temples to sacrifice to the patron kind of Saint, if you will, in Greek and Roman cultures, trades people had to go to their particular trade temple and, and perform certain rituals. So, this whole Good Shepherd thing, it wasn't just you went to a temple if you were sacrificing for that particular thing, like you're a shepherd. But this young man toting a sheep around, you know, the city for a festival is kind of like, you know, the homecoming queen, riding the float around the football field. It's like, okay, everybody sees that everybody knows what that image is. And I can just imagine Jesus, they're talking and trying to make a point, just like you and I, do we pull an image to make a point. Jesus is like, okay, pointing at that. Okay, let's, here's the statue of, of Hermes. And the thing, well, you know what, that's me. That's me. I am that good shepherd. And then having this conversation, it makes way more sense than just out of the air Jesus, you know, all of a sudden proclaiming, I am the good shepherd. It's like, oh, no, that makes totally more sense.

Blake Smith 08:14

Right. Yeah. Let me take an image out of something that is meaningful to you and make that connection. So you see who it is that I am?

Karin Peter 08:22

Well, it has all these positive attributes assigned to it. Right? The watchfulness, the devotion, the courage, the care. Yeah, that's a marvelous image for Christianity to borrow, and make part of, of our whole package of what it means to be a disciple.

Blake Smith 08:41

And here, I thought you were going to focus on the part about the handsome young man. And that's why we have images of a blond blue eyed Jesus

Karin Peter 08:50

Blonde boy, Jesus, because that's our image of handsome young man. Somewhere else that is not gonna play for them. So yeah, not even gonna go there, because that's gonna vary by culture. Besides, we had that, we had the lovely young man in white in the tomb version that we did. So, we don't need to wait. Right there. Yeah.

Blake Smith 09:11

Well, in all seriousness, and before I get to the questions, I just want to lift up. One other note that stood out for me in this passage. And that's Jesus' comment that he says, I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. And we're going to return to that in in a couple of weeks, as we continue to go through these passages. So, but I just want to lift that up. So, our listeners begin to catch that, that this isn't just for those who are in the fold. Jesus is already thinking about the sheep that are out there who belong and need to be part. [Yeah] So, but going with it going with the idea of image, which I think is really important for this passage. Some questions that we might ask are, what images from our context or culture, describe or illustrate how I see or understand Jesus? So, is it the big business CEO? Or it's the still the shepherd? What is it? What is that image from context or culture? And that may vary depending, of course, where you live if you're in rural, or if you're in an urban setting, or, or otherwise.

So. Another question that we might ask is, what are the characteristics of this image? So first, we decide what is the image that we hold? And then what are the characteristics of the image that we aspire to or wish to emulate? Because we are supposed to be like Christ.

Karin Peter 10:47

Those are really interesting questions. They're not ones that you just to have something pop in your head, right off the bat, maybe some of our listeners have, but I certainly haven't. It's going to take some contemplation on my part, to really whittle that down and think about what, what am I associating with as an illustration of how I see Jesus? So maybe we can revisit that later in the year. So how can we experience it this week, as part of our pondering these questions, Blake that you've asked? Maybe we need to do some holy imagining, and do some drawing, some prophetic drawing, and simply allowing ourselves to engage creatively in drawing an image about what we see as a kind of an example of the characteristics of Jesus. Or maybe you have an idea in your mind of, of who you kind of see and use as a contextual image of the characteristics of Jesus will Google it so you can really look at it and then maybe in a group or family setting, everybody kind of bring your image either that you drew or that you googled and share it? And why do you see this image as illustrating how you understand Jesus. Or maybe you want to ask a friend to be your accountability partner, I have a friend she and I've been accountability partners for a long time on work life balance. So you can have an accountability partner to serves as your image consultant to reflect back to you how you emulate that image. So, if my image that I kind of associate as having the characteristics of Jesus is, we could say, one that's very well-known would be maybe Mother Teresa. I could ask my image consultant friend, Blake, to reflect back to me. Am I emulating these characteristics? Do you do you see them in how my behavior is and to be open and honest, in conversation with one another? That's a little deeper. That would take more time and relationship. But for some of us, that's a really good way to really get out what we're trying to do, which is, do I think I'm walking with Jesus? Or am I actually walking with Jesus? We need to have some clarification here. So, let's give that a shot.

Blake Smith 13:30

And that's really, I mean, the part about having an image consultant is, is really hard. Because, you know, we like to decide for ourselves, whether we're doing something, and sometimes getting honest feedback can be kind of like a slap in the face, if you will, not intentionally if you've got the right partner and person to do that, someone you trust, but you have to be willing to be able to hear what they have to say. So

Karin Peter 13:57

Yeah, it's, it's a it's a trust issue. You're very vulnerable in that kind of relationship. But hopefully some of our Project Zion Podcast coffee to go listeners are up for that challenge. And we'd love to hear from you. If this is something you engage in.

Blake Smith 14:13

That would be great. Well, our blessing today is a combination, both of picking up on the characteristics of goodness that we've talked about here today, but also incorporating this idea of Earth Day, which is

tomorrow. So it is a Ute prayer called "Earth Teach Me to Remember." So the author of it says at the beginning, "I can't remember where I found this, but it comes from my father's people, the Northern Ute." Earth, teach me stillness, as the grasses are stilled with light. Earth teach me suffering, as old stones suffer with memory. Earth, teach me humility, as blossoms are humble with beginning. Earth, teach me caring as the mother who secures her young. Earth, teach me courage as the tree which stands alone. Earth, teach me limitation, as the ant which crawls on the ground. Earth, teach me freedom, as the eagle which soars in the sky. Earth, teach me resignation, as the leaves which die in the fall. Earth, teach me regeneration, as the seed which rises in the spring. Earth, teach me to forget myself as melted snow forgets its life. Earth, teach me to remember kindness as dry fields weep in the rain. Amen.

Karin Peter 15:53

That's a beautiful Earth Day blessing. [Yeah.]

Blake Smith 15:58

So thanks for joining us here again this week at Coffee to Go. As always, 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.