

Coffee to Go | Fourth Sunday of Easter | Year C

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 here with Blake Smith, and we welcome you on the journey. So, we are in the Easter season, and we've talked about this the last couple weeks. Easter lasts from Easter day 50 days until Pentecost. And so, we spend several weeks in the Easter season celebrating resurrection of Christ. We have post-resurrection appearances in the scriptures. We have final teachings and promises of comfort being made in this Easter season. So, what's happening this particular week, and where are we with Jesus? We are in the temple this week, and more specifically, we are on the east side of the temple, the older side of the temple, and we're in what's called a portico. And in fact, an older portico. No, I think they have porticos in the south Blake, if I'm not mistaken. It's like a big open porch that kind of wraps around deal.

Blake Smith 01:38

Absolutely.

Karin Peter 01:39

So, in the temple, the portico would have a solid back to it. So, imagine, like being on a sun porch kind of thing that would be a portico. And you have the solid back where the house is, but then you have, like, open space and windows and columns that you can peer around and look at what's happening in the interior. So, we could say porch, an interior porch, if we wanted to. But this is on the east side of the temple, the older portico, and it's called Solomon's portico, and Jesus is there. It is winter. It is a festival time in winter, and that festival is what we know as Hanukkah. But surprise, there's more to it than what I learned and I told you earlier, Blake, I think everything I know about Hanukkah I learned from children's books. So, surprise, surprise, I had some new learnings this week.

Blake Smith 02:28

I don't think you're alone on that.

Karin Peter 02:29

Oh, but let's hear it. What's going on?

Blake Smith 02:32

Alright, well we're going to step back a little bit. Last week, we were in the 21st Chapter of the Gospel According to John. We're going to step back to the 10th Chapter, and today's passage comes from the 22nd to the 30th verse of that 10th Chapter in John.

At that time the Festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. So, the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." Jesus answered, "I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me, but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. My father, in regard to what he has given me, is greater than all these, and no one can snatch them out of the Father's hand. The Father and I are one."

So, before we get to why does this matter, and maybe part of why does this matter, we do a little history lesson here that, as you mentioned, we kind of hear what we hear about Hanukkah, at least, you and I can agree that we can learn that probably in children's books, and there's maybe a little bit more to it. So, in 164 BCE, the Syrians seized Jerusalem, and they had desecrated the temple altar by making sacrifices to the Syrian gods. So, Judas Maccabeus, who if you have certain Bibles, you'll be able to read these stories. But Judas Maccabeus rallied an army of rebels who pushed the Syrians out, so reclaiming the temple. But what they then did was tear down the altar and rebuild a new one, which they dedicated. And this became known as the Festival of Dedication, which was observed each winter. And then that became the Festival of Hanukkah. So, the rededication of the altar was an act of community renewal, of kind of reconnecting the community and giving honor to the altar and to the practice of Judaism. And to observe the festival was an act of reflection and renewal. So, when Jesus here in this passage speaks words of rededication and renewal to the followers, he's saying true followers know me. They know my voice. And in this way, they know the father, because the Father and I are one. As we read this, we find ourselves needing to decide how we are going to commit ourselves to the ministries and message of Jesus, how we're going to rededicate and recommit. And we need to think about then, what does it mean to rededicate ourselves to Jesus, the peaceful one, and what does it mean to recommit to participating in dedication as an act of communal renewal. And when we talk about communal renewal, this is not just about us individually or even us in our congregations. It's about communal renewal in our neighborhoods, in our cities, in our cultural groups, in our families, basically in all of the places we find community and in our circle of influence in our daily lives. So, it's really this call to dedication, this Festival of Dedication and renewal and recommitment, has some deeper implications for our life than just a Festival that we celebrate once a year in the wintertime. So, it's a little bit deeper than the Festival of Lights, which is one way we might have heard the season of Hanukkah. There's a real depth to this.

Karin Peter 06:57

I think it's really interesting, the communal renewal aspect of this, that they needed as a community to rededicate the altar, to rebuild it and rededicate. I think sometimes we forget that. So, we have

Communion once a month in Community of Christ or that partake of the Lord's Supper, and that's an act of renewal that we do in a smaller community, so our congregational community. It's a personal renewal, but it's actually also this community renewing. But to take that further and to say discipleship is participating in communal renewal where I live, that extends that in a different way. It's like doing spiritual practices that help me connect with God. That's great, and it's important for my discipleship. But until I add that, that reconnection to God then impels me into the world to love and care for others, I haven't really participated in renewal until I coordinate it. Right?

Blake Smith 08:07

Right. If we can reconnect to the passage that we talked about last week in which Jesus is focusing Peter on feeding and tending and loving my sheep, that's part of loving Christ, that's part of recommitting. And so, their world has been torn apart. In the passage, the Syrians have taken the altar and desecrated it and that was the center of their life as community. And so, they need to rededicate. Christ is the center of our life in community. And we kind of, you mentioned communion, and I think often we step in on the first Sunday of the month, and we take Communion, and that's done, and we'll do it again next month. So, we might ask ourselves, is that the center of our Communion in that of our communal living in that instance? Do we really take that seriously? This communal covenant that we're also making, you mentioned, that's a renewal of our individual covenant, but it's also a renewal of our communal covenant. And then we take the imperative of Jesus from last week's passage, that to live that out in love to others is what we are to do. It begins to come together and be more than just the piece that we do on that first Sunday of the month.

Karin Peter 09:36

Yeah.

Blake Smith 09:38

So, some questions we might ask ourselves are even those that follow Jesus had a hard time understanding who Jesus was. I mean, these are, again, we've talked about this many times, disciples were with him somewhat around the clock. Certainly hours and hours and days on end. And they had trouble understanding that. So, we might ask ourselves, who is Jesus to me? Who is Jesus to me? There's actually an interesting video that has been produced by Community of Christ where several members from around the church answered that question. We'll put the link in the show notes to that. So, you might go to that this week and hear what other people saying, maybe help spur your thinking. But who is Jesus to you? Another question is to what acts of renewal will I dedicate myself? And finally, what would it look like for me to have a Festival of Dedication?

Karin Peter 10:44

Yeah, in my neighborhood, in my community, and yeah. Well, this week we can experience a little bit of that, perhaps, and we'll have a ritual, if not a Festival of Dedication this week as our experience. So, wherever you are, wherever you live, build yourself a little altar and dedicate it this week towards pondering one of these questions. And it doesn't matter what you build it out of. You can build it out of sticks, rocks, blocks, Lego, whatever works for you. Just build a little altar, a little cloth over it, or a little napkin over it, and then place something on it that symbolizes renewal to you. So maybe it's a butterfly, or a flower bud, a rosebud, maybe it's a cup of water, and whatever it is that symbolizes renewal to you,

place it on that little altar and offer a blessing of renewal. The one that's our blessing today would be a good one, but you can make up your own if you want. But make it a little altar. Put something on it that's meaningful to you, symbolizes renewal, and have a ritual of dedication and blessing of your own renewal and the renewal of your community.

Blake Smith 12:08

Well, speaking of blessing, our blessing today comes from *Ash and Starlight*, by Arianne Braithwaite Lehn. "When I Need to Release and Receive.

Dear Jesus, Today I release. I release my worries. I release the anxiety that's gnawed a tender spot in the bottom of my soul. I release my fear that the future is uncertain because it is, and that's okay. You'll be with me in it. I released my simmering bitterness that's bubbled on the back burner for way too long. I release my unfair expectations of others and myself too. I release the frustrations and shameful secrets I've carried under my arm for years. I release the story, or stories, I no longer want to live. Jesus, I release. And today, Jesus, I receive. I receive your love, promising I am your child. That I am good. I receive your peace, reminding me all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well. I receive your voice as the whisper I follow. I receive a new story. Thank you, God for receiving me and this world in a giant embrace. And for receiving this prayer, you release me to freedom and receive all to love. Amen.

Thanks for joining us here at Coffee to Go this week. We invite you to join us again next time for the next part of our journey through the liturgical seasons and holy days of the Christian tradition.