

PROJECT ZION PODCAST, Episode 241, Percolating on Faith: The Church

Transcript of podcast conversation between Host: Carla Long,
and Guests: Tony and Charmaine Chvala-Smith

Josh Mangelson 00:17

Welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. This podcast explores the unique spiritual and theological gifts Community of Christ offers for today's world.

Carla Long 00:29

Hello, and welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. I'm your host, Carla long. And we are back with two, no with four of our favorites, percolating on faith as a favorite. More specifically God shots as a favorite. And with Charmaine a favorite. and Tony... a favorite. So welcome back to everything percolating on faith God shots, Charmaine and Tonisha Bella Smith, thanks for joining me, you too.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 00:56

Oh, and our favorite host?

Carla Long 01:02

You know, you had to say that right? You really did.

Tony Chvala-Smith 01:05

You are the best host from Kansas we know.

Carla Long 01:10

Gee, thanks. And also, ouch. So, we're back on percolating on faith. And more specifically, we're talking about our God shot series, where we talk about systematic theology. And since it's been, you know, maybe a while since we've had listeners, listen in on what we're talking about, maybe we can just remind them what God shots is... are. Yeah, one of those two. Yeah. Why are we doing this? Yeah, exactly.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 01:45

So this harks back to a couple years ago, when we were at reunion, and one of the folks there came up to us and said, You know, I'm at a place in my life, where I just need to let go of a lot of the things I used to believe. And I need to start from scratch and kind of hear what is classical Christianity about. And so that kind of inspired us to say, you know, I bet there's a lot of people who, or maybe some people maybe not a lot, but some people who would like to kind of look at those pieces of Christian theology, that are part of what's called a systematic theology, that kind of look at the different dimensions or aspects of Christianity and dig deeper into them, to see what they have to say to us.

Tony Chvala-Smith 02:42

So you can define systematic theology as something like the methodical explication of the contents of the Christian faith. And the tradition here goes back centuries and centuries for how to do it. And we've been following that tradition, as Migliore, in his textbook follows it. And the tradition goes back to preparing Greeks and Romans for baptism, like in the late second, early third century, and part of that preparation included walking them through step by step, the basic confession of the Christian faith that was available at the time. That particular confession in the western part of Roman Empire became what we call today, the Apostles Creed. And so I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth, so it started with faith, and then God and creation, and then Jesus Christ, etc. And eventually, in the Creed, it comes to, and in the Holy Catholic Church. And so what was meant that then was in the universal community of believers in Christ, that's what Catholic meant. And so we're at that point in systematic theology, where today we're going to talk

about what's called ecclesiology. That's the fancy theological word for one's understanding of the meaning and purpose of the church.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 04:09

And you may hear us referencing Migliore. And this is Daniel L. Migliore. And that spelled M, I, G, L, I, O, R, E, and his book faith seeking understanding and introduction to Christian theology. And we're kind of using his chapters as the outline for the topics that we're covering, and we're dipping into his approach at times, but also kind of freewheeling and letting that just be our guide on the topics. So we may not say everything he would say and may not always agree with everything he would say, but it's a really good text to use as you're wanting to go deeper into the elements of Christian theology. So we would highly recommend And it.

Tony Chvala-Smith 05:00

And we and I can say about Migliore that he's retired now. But I had him for one class when I was a seminary student a long time ago, he was an absolutely spectacular lecturer I loved going to his classes. And so when Charmaine and I worked through and read through the book, and we use it for lots of different things, by the way, in our teaching work, but I can hear military's voice. And that's always delightful when you can do that, but it's a it's definitely a great textbook. And what we're trying to do along with working through the system of Christian theology is add where we can important Community of Christ bits and pieces and flavorings.

Carla Long 05:43

I love that. And I do want to be clear, though, when we talk about the church, so I, my whole life, I have mostly been in the Midwest, right? So and when I started working for Community of Christ, so when I talk about the church, I'm really talking about Community of Christ. When I moved to Utah, and people started talking about the church, they were talking about the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. But when you're talking about the church, in this podcast, you will not be talking about either of those episodes, you will be talking about something different, correct, right?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 06:15

And sometimes it's referred to as the big C church, meaning all of Christianity. The, the Universal Church, yeah. And sometimes if we need to make a differentiation, we might say, little C, church, meaning denomination, our denomination, or others, and or big C Church, the whole scope is Christianity.

Tony Chvala-Smith 06:38

And just so we're clear, right from the start, Community of Christ does not believe that it is the totality of the church, we have actually canonized a statement that says that it's in Doctrine and Covenants 161, "claim it says claim your unique and sacred place within the circle of those who call upon Jesus Christ." And so that's that wider circle is actually what the Creed was talking about the Holy Catholic Church, and we in Community of Christ have a unique and sacred place within the circle. And our church also believes it's important to be in constant conversation and in ministry and fellowship with the wider circle. So that's kind of a unique aspect of Community of Christ.

Carla Long 07:27

Alright, so now that we have that out of the way, we've talked about Big C versus little C, let's, let's go ahead and define the word ecclesiology. It's a little bit of a scary word, I think. But it does not have a scary definition.

Tony Chvala-Smith 07:41

No, no, I mean, when you say the word it almost sounds like a very bad medical procedure.

Carla Long 07:48

I'm going in because... for my ecclesiology, that's so true.

Tony Chvala-Smith 07:53

So actually, the word is two words in Greek. And the first word is ecclesia, which is the New Testament standard word in Greek for the assembled body of followers of Jesus, the ecclesia. The word in Greek literally means those who are called out or summoned. So the term church in the New Testament never refers to a place or a building, it always refers to a people. So ecclesiology, then is Logos, careful reflection, thoughtful, logical reflection on the nature of the ecclesia of the community that is shaped by and committed to Jesus Christ. Does that help Carla?

Carla Long 08:40

It does. I mean, I like it. When we talk about self awareness. You know, I think about the meta thinking, like thinking about your thinking, it's kind of like that, right. Like, you are aware that you're part of an organization. Is that right? Yeah.

Tony Chvala-Smith 08:53

I mean, it's like all of the branches of theology. It's thinking about what we believe. It's faith seeking understanding. And so in this case, it's thinking about our MP we, we say we, Charmaine and I this past summer, they preached at a congregation, local congregation, and ecclesiology would be us standing back and thinking about what were the dynamics of that congregation? What does its leadership look like? What is its mission? Its self identity. Ecclesiology is, yeah, that that self reflective cogitation about the nature of the church?

Carla Long 09:35

Well, that's not so scary. I mean, it's not as scary as the doctor's appointment, I had to get an ecclesiology.

Tony Chvala-Smith 09:45

And we're glad it's not as scary as that.

Carla Long 09:48

No, it's not. So let's talk a little bit more about it. So we were talking a little bit earlier about this, and we've talked about how Christianity is not necessarily unique how we had to do this kind of work of self awareness work from the beginning. Right? Can we talk a little bit more about that? Sure.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 10:05

I mean, ecclesiology... if it was an individual, you would be talking about self awareness. But as with an institution, it's the church looking at itself. And it's kind of an interesting history, because as the Christian church developed, it was part of Judaism. It was a little sect within Judaism, for the first few decades, that the church existed. And so, but even then, this group of people who saw themselves as believers that the Messiah had come and followers of Christ. Already were identifying that they were, there were some differences between them and most other Jews. And as Christianity then was kind of pushed, pushed out of the nest of Judaism, and became its own thing. It was constantly having to identify who are we how is this different from, from the faith that, that bore us, and pretty quickly, very quickly, immediately, as Christianity was no longer part of Judaism, in the late 80s, early 90s, the first century, they had to justify themselves to the Romans, who were really suspicious of new religions, Judaism was an old religion. And so while Christians were there, they were, they were safe. But as they became their own group, their own faith, they had to name for themselves what this emerging thing was, the church, but they also had to justify to the Romans, who they were and what they weren't. And, you know, they would, and you'll see this in the New Testament, the Gospel writers are

showing that this is, in a way a continuation of Judaism, because that would have also given them safety within the Roman Empire, but they're, they're having to be very nuanced about how they're different from and, and yet connected. And so this self awareness, self definition, has really been a part of the Christian church from its very beginning.

Tony Chvala-Smith 12:43

So in that first generation, we have Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, which is the, I would say, it's the most I'll use this term, ecclesial centric of the New Testament books, it's focused on the nature of the church. And I think if you want, if you want a real good lesson in ecclesiology, start by reading first Corinthians and what you'll, what you'll find right away, is a certain paradox of the nature of the church. So on the one hand, this community in Corinth is, is marvelously multi, multicultural, inclusive. It's the kind of Kingdom of God community, Paul was planting around the Eastern Roman Empire in the mid first century. And he refers to them as saints, that doesn't mean that they are holy, it means that they have been set apart, called by God to reflect the kingdom of God in Corinth. On the other hand, when you read through First Corinthians, you find out this is the this, if you feel bad about your own congregation, read First Corinthians, and you will quickly discover one of the most dysfunctional Christian communities that has ever existed. And so it's kind of this paradox. On the one hand, they are the bought Body of Christ in Corinth, on the other hand, they're pretty messed up. And so that that paradox of the church as the representation of Christ in the world and a human community that's always struggling with human flaws and faults, those two things together, really make up the nature of the church from the first century on there. There wasn't, there wasn't a magical point where the church up to that point had been all full of pure, wonderful people, and then all of a sudden it fell away. We need to we need just kind of dropped that idea completely. The church has always been made up of frail, flawed, finite people. For example, Peter, all you have to do is read the gospel stories. By the way, it's also important to know that in the New Testament, Christianity, from its star is intrinsically communal. There's not there's not an option for private Christianity and then a communal one in the New Testament. It's all communal. You get the message of Jesus survives in and through the community, even in its messed up-ness. And so, that that is that is the story of the big sea Christian Church in a nutshell really, always trying to represent and, and make room for encounter with Christ and at the same time completely, completely made up of human beings who are full of their own stuff. Their own self love and ego and misguided apprehension of things and self righteous self righteousness and, and in our time, sadly, racism and nationalism in so many church bodies, it's like, so anyway, that's kind of a we just gave you a quick a quick kind of historical overview of the nature of Christianity.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 15:55

An ecclesioscopy.

Tony Chvala-Smith 15:57

That's a new word. Charmaine has just coined a new term. An ecclesioscopy.

Carla Long 16:05

I 100%, do not want one.

Tony Chvala-Smith 16:08

And I neither, however, we're happy, we're happy to perform one. And that's what we're going to do today.

Carla Long 16:14

That's right, everyone who's listening, get prepared. So I love I just want to restate this again, Tony, I think something you said is just so important. I'm worth a restate that you have to have Christianity in community, you cannot do Christianity all by yourself. That's impossible.

Tony Chvala-Smith 16:36

It's it really is impossible. And even in the monastic traditions, where there is a calling to be a hermit, which is to live in a life of solitude, that hermit is connected always to a community, always responsible to community shaped by the, you know, for example, in the Benedictine tradition, the hermit would be shaped by the rule of Saint Benedict and is responsible to an abbot and a community and so on. So

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 17:01

And would partake of sacraments in community?

Tony Chvala-Smith 17:04

Absolutely. And so, Jesus did not create a religion of soloists Jesus, Jesus is the start of a what, you know, Mubarak calls the new community, the new humanity, and we belong together in it, in spite of how difficult that can be. It's, it's easy to say I love everybody, when, when, when there are irritating people around you. Right? It's much harder when you're working, when you're when you're worshipping, and making, you know, congregational business meeting decisions and trying to figure out mission. So it's much harder when you're surrounded by people who are equally as committed as you but have different points of view and different experiences. That's, that's complicated, but it's supposed to be that's community.

Carla Long 17:57

Well, I just I do want to get back to one more thing you said, it's very easy to love everyone in your church, when you're the only one there. It's much, much, much more difficult to love everyone in your church when they're challenging people. So I appreciate that very much. Thank you for saying that. We were also talking earlier about four different models of church. And I think that this is really important to talk about, especially where I live here out here in Utah, when people may have left their, the church they have grown up in their entire life. And it it is one model of church and they find themselves yearning for something else. And there's a lot of guilt and shame and hurt and pain that is heaped upon them. And that and also that they that comes from themselves, that that they are even yearning for something else. And so, let's I just, I think it'd be really cool if we could put a name on some of those models of churches, so that we could say, hey, you know, you're not alone. people yearn for this kind of stuff all the time. Yeah.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 19:15

Yeah. And actually, I was thinking earlier about the journey of seekers that I've known, who come from various traditions, and sometimes come to this church and stay and sometimes moved on to other places. But I thought about how for many of them, there was almost this feeling of being a little bit maybe not living up to their own initial convictions, because their initial convictions were "I am done with the church." You know, "I I see its weaknesses. I see how it's been used for power or I've seen how it's hurt people" depending on you know, what, what kind of situation they found themselves in. And, you know, they've said I am done with the church. But then they find themselves being drawn back to church, another church typically, and, and they almost feel like they're being untrue to their conviction that they're, they can cut this off, you know, and be done with it, walk away from this thing that has maybe hurt them or told them that they are not loved or that they are not worse before God or control them in ways that diminish them as individuals. So one of the things I was thinking about was how it might be helpful for people to know that there's several different models and Migliori does a nice job of both describing these models, and then showing what the dangers of them are. But these different models, and I'll just go through them briefly kind of feed different parts of who we are. And so the idea that we might want to leave church, one of these models, but still seek a different model means that the church can look a lot of different ways, and understanding those different kind of, under those different names, those different ways of constructing church might be helpful for people who are seeking, or who have found a place and, and are afraid to commit to it, because it's still church, if that makes sense. So, so the models he talks about, the first one is the institution of salvation, and this is kind of institutionalism this is

where our rightness with God comes from being in the right institution, having the right officers having the right structure, having the right sacraments, having the right rules, keeping the right rules. And for some people this is this is a very effective way of living out their, their spiritual life. But it because it can, because things are structured, they can help make God be part of all the parts of their life. But the problem with it, of course, is I think we can already see some of the possible problems is that because it's concerned about structure, it can become very hierarchical, and then depending on a culture, very patriarchal, if that's the power system in that culture. And it can be more about the rules and keeping the rules or looking like you're keeping the rules than it is about connecting with God. So that's, that is one system that probably all of us or one model of the church that probably all of us have seen and can kind of relate to. Another one is called Community of the Spirit. And this one tends to be more about it tends to be more focused on small groups, sometimes more informal. Think charismatic, and Pentecostal groups whose goal is experiencing Christ, or, or denominations that are more involved in spiritual formation and awareness of God, connection with the Spirit, self awareness, personal growth. And one of the things that really nurtures people in this model is the idea that they have a safe place, a place where they are known, a place where their journey with God is valuable, valued, and they are valued. And that's encouraging them to grow. The next one is sacrament of salvation. And in this model, the sacraments themselves or the church's sacrament is seen as the way to connect with Christ. To go deeper into the meaning of the sacraments, to let them be those meeting places between us and God. And the danger there is that we can become to rule based around how of what the sacraments must mean and how we must do the sacraments. But at another level, it's letting the sacraments, which are symbols, take us deeper into our understanding of God, and our experience with God. And you see this in parts of the Catholic Church over the last several decades, but you see it in other denominations as well. A fourth one is Herald of good news. And these would be primarily churches or denominations for were preaching the good news, doing missionary work, converting people, baptizing people, would be the primary thing and everything else just kind of bend towards that. So there might be a lot of sacrifice expected of people, personally, but it's about proclaiming the good news there. There might not be as much work on personal self awareness and recognition of brokenness. It's more about preaching the good news of Jesus. The problem with the danger with that one is that it can be the good news about Jesus can get filtered down to a particular person's view of who Jesus is. And so the message can become narrow, and, and not inclusive. The other problem with it is that how we share it, how we share the good news, and the structure around that can overshadow real, creating real relationship with God or with Christ. So it can, the focus can get too much on the manner of delivery of the message, rather than on who it points to. And the invitation that God gives us to be in relationship can be about ideas, the and then there's a fifth one, the fifth one is servant of the servant, Lord. And here, the focus is more on serving those things that are connected to how Jesus served the people around him when he was here. And so working with the poor, with the oppressed, with those who are unjustly incarcerated, those who are the victims of national governments that are unfair and oppressive, racism, sexism, and the idea here is that you're working, these groups would be focused on doing the works of the kingdom of God, and that Jesus spoke about and that Jesus demonstrated in his own life. And the danger here is that you can become an agent of social improvement, and leave behind what is the message of who Jesus is and what God is doing in the world. And that the church is something different from a social service group, you could that's a dangerous that you can begin the to can begin to look the same. And, and the recognition that the kingdom of God is something we can only partially experience here on Earth, that God brings the fulfillment can get lost. So those are five different things, five different aspects, all of them, have some really rich things to bring to the big C, church identity, but any one of them too narrowly implemented can really be deadening to the overall development of a Christian disciple. And so you know, for those who might find themselves leaving an institutional method, yeah, model sorry, I said method. You might actually be longing for a small group, where you can explore, where you can ask questions, where you can discover that God loves you, even if you have questions, or even though you're not doing things the way you were told you must as you were growing up. Or, You might be looking for some a place where people are living out peace and justice, in the name of Christ. And so, you know, if you're finding yourself in a seeking place, you might take a look at

those models and see is one of them in particular drawing you. Is there a dimension of the church that you're, you're still looking for and need to be fed by, as you grow as you keep seeking God? And to, to let it be an adventure, and not a failure of any kind. Anyhow, I don't know if that helps. But I thought it was an intriguing way to, to start looking at people's journeys, and the shifts and changes that we make throughout our lives.

Carla Long 30:54

So that I do find that very helpful for a lot of people who walk through the doors, at least in the Salt Lake congregation, and in all churches here in Utah that I'm a part of. I mean, I will say that here in Utah, a lot of people come in and, and never come back. And so I, you know, it doesn't make me feel bad, because I know that they're on this journey, and they're trying to figure out where they belong. But it helps me to realize that the these four or five different models of the church, that maybe they're just not looking for our type of model of the church. And so I really appreciate hearing that as a pastor,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 31:28

yeah, that you know, what we have to offer, which typically, I would say fits maybe in community of the Spirit, and maybe servant of the servant Lord, isn't is, is too freewheeling are not structured enough for some people, to have the confidence that to just recognize where God may be at work or where the Spirit is? And that's okay, you know, maybe people are, I think all of us on our spiritual journey. It is, it is a journey of discovery, but it is also a journey of kind of ruling out what we need, you know, it's like, oh, no, this isn't it is kind of like, oh, no, this is, oh, this might be it. And, and so to just have be able to name the, maybe the part of us, that is, is needing a church community, what kind of model will feed the dry places in us are the wounded places in us? Anyhow, I think it can be a helpful way. So that, you know, ideas of loyalty don't surface, you know, that, well, you know, I went to this church for a while, and, and now I don't, and I feel bad that I've, you know, gone away, or I've deserted them or, but it's, it's, it's a simple recognition that there are, wherever you are, that there are some barriers to a growing relationship with God, with Christ, or in community, and that you might not be really needing or wanting to ditch Christianity completely. But you might need a way to have a, a safer place, a more nurturing place, maybe for some a more intellectual place. To explore that.

Tony Chvala-Smith 33:39

I think Migliore makes a really good statement at the end of that section, where he says that no single model of the church is adequate to capture the whole, rich, unique variety of Christian community. And so there is not one true model of the church. There's multiple models. And Migliore's five he was borrowing from a Catholic theologian named Avery Dulles who, who wrote an older book called models of the church, then Migliore is doing kind of his own riffs on them. But that older book by Avery Dulles is still worth reading simply called models of the church. But I love the idea that the nature of Christian community is so rich and multifaceted that there is not one way to capture it in a communal model. And so there's a large variety of communal ways to live without I think the key thing though, is that one way or another following Jesus takes a community has to be done with other people. Or it loses it loses its center, it loses its power. I'm not the first one who said this. I'm I think, in our own church, Fred M. Smith said this and I think he got it from Walter Rauschenbusch, the great social gospel preacher. But when Jesus was teaching his disciples to pray, he did not teach them to pray. My father who didn't have any teeth and to pray our, our father, so the Lord's Prayer, which is the quintessential Christian prayer is a prayer of community. It's a prayer about us, but how we, how we, how we put together the "us"es, into a community, there's many, many ways to do it so.

Carla Long 35:31

Well, I love that that's what we're talking about here. I think. Like I said before, when people leave their, perhaps their denomination that they've had, since birth, they there's a lot of guilt and shame that is heaped upon them for doing that. And this just makes me feel like there's kind of the this is the math major part of my brain, a logical reason for leaving and a logical reason for looking for something else. So I think it's really cool

that there's a lot of different models of church. And I have no idea which one of those models community Christ fits most in. And we're probably spread across the board. But I do think it's interesting to think about,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 36:12

yeah, yeah, I was just thinking of a simpler way to, to see what each of the models is offering. Each has an avenue or a path to God. The first is the institution one is the church's structure as a way, as a path to God. The second one community of the Spirit is this idea of community of being in community and experiencing what it means to be loved to be forgiven. And to be reminded of that, to go deeper into that. The third one sacrament of salvation is this the sacraments as avenues, ways, paths to God. And then the Herald of good news, it's the message, it's that's about the message being an avenue to God. And they're probably, I did mention it earlier would be those who are who would value scripture, probably more than some of the other methods. And then the last one, the servant of the servant, Lord is action, action is the avenue to relationship with God. So, you know, having structure, having community having sacrament, a message and action as different elements, probably we need all of them. But we may need them in different in different intensities in different doses, from person to person, or depending on what your life journey has been this far, there might be a great big deficit in one or two of these areas. And so you're longing to grow with God and a new setting might be based on that. So it's kind of a fun way to look at it.

Carla Long 37:58

It really is, actually. So I love talking about the models of the church. I think that that is a super important point. And thank you for making that point for, for me specifically, as a pastor, I don't care about anybody else right now. It was really important for me, you're welcome. But Yeah. So I do want to go jump back in 2019, as pastor of Salt Lake congregation, we have named that year to be the year of relationships, because we think relationships are like the most important part of what it means to be church. And it sounds like Tony, you're agreeing because the church is intrinsically communal, as you have said, and I wondered if there was just a little bit more to that, that we could talk about?

Tony Chvala-Smith 38:38

Sure. Migliore is very helpful here. And I can think of other theologians who tack with him on this too, that he refers to the church as use of the phrase Imago trinitatis, "in the image of the Trinity." And if you think back to our earlier discussions in an earlier podcast about God as Trinity God is triune. Essentially, the doctrine, the Trinity, among the many things it's trying to explicate is that when we say God is love, we say that God is, in essence, communal. That is to use the traditional language, Father, Son, and Spirit are three ways God eternally is God's self in these three ways of being are in a kind of a dance in, in kind of a mutual reciprocal, interchange and dance with each other. And so, community is written into the very fabric of creation because the whole creation reflects its creator. And so human beings are created in the image of God, which is the image of the Trinity were created for relationships. It's not good for me to be left by myself for very long Carla.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 39:54

Do not leave him alone.

Carla Long 39:56

Amen.

Tony Chvala-Smith 39:57

I think if we're honest, that's true of all of us. We, we, we find ourselves most fully in relationship with other people as, as my "my-ness" bumps up against your "you-ness" and we come to understand ourselves and each other better that's kind of the that's the nature of human relationships. And so not surprisingly, Jesus creates a fellowship a community of women and men in his historic life that continues after his death and

resurrection, in which relationship is central thus in the New Testament. You know, the word agape that self uninterested love of the other is so central to Christian community. And so relationship is what the church is about. And I think sometimes that's why people gravitate from say, an institutional model to some of the other models is because sometimes in the institutional model, it's really hard to find intimate relationships with others who are trying to journey the way you're journeying to. And so that doesn't mean that institutional model is incapable of relationships. It's just something I think sometimes people have trouble finding that there. So, in the New Testament uses this great word Koinonia, which you may have heard, it's, the word is used to be translated fellowship, I think, quite nice in Greek means common. And so Koinonia is the commonality, or community. And so, you know, when Paul is one of his letters, he says, "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the Koinonia of the Holy Spirit, be with you all," so quickly that that unique bond across a group of people that makes them into a new a new whole, a new a new entity, that's, that's relationship at its highest, and so, yeah, relationship. Every year should be the year of relationship in church. It's also difficult, isn't it? Because relationships are always going to be between broken selfish, irritating, self centered people. Like the three of us, right?

Carla Long 42:25

Oh, well, yes. Tony, I do just want to bring up another perhaps medical word you brought up you just said my "me-ness" and your "you-ness."

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 42:38

I was thinking about that. What is the equivalent there?

Tony Chvala-Smith 42:42

I know, the my me-ness and your you-ness. Yeah. Right. The uniqueness of me and the uniqueness of you.

Carla Long 42:58

I like the you you-ness.

Tony Chvala-Smith 42:59

As you notice, I didn't say Your Highness. But I say you know, you could I could have. But yeah, so I mean, this is a problem in Western cultures that are so individualistic. We, we think that my individuality is this, this complete, intact thing that needs nothing from outside. Gracious, it's so wrong, who I am as a person has been framed and shaped and stamped by so many other yous so many other thous in my life. And likewise, back and forth. And so the old, the old, the old saw's really true. No, no one is an island. Because you'd be really messed up if you were right. It's we need, we need the uniqueness of the other to understand our own selfhood. And so yeah, that's what I was getting at with the you-ness and the me-ness, but I was trying to find good abstract words for it. And those may not work quite as well as I hoped.

Carla Long 44:05

I actually think they're very memorable. So let's keep moving on. I really like how we're attacking what we're talking about here. Although we're, we are running a bit short on time. So I'm going to keep us moving, because that's my view. And you talked earlier about how the church is provisional. Can you talk a little bit more about that? What does that mean?

Tony Chvala-Smith 44:28

So Migliori uses that term, and he doesn't say so. But he may have borrowed it from Hendrikus Burkhoff, a Dutch theologian, kind of in the same reformed tradition that melioration but, but so the church is provisional in the sense that it's not ultimate. Though community is intrinsic to Christianity, the church in whatever model it is, will always be incomplete. Always be "on the way," always be in pilgrimage, and therefore the church Just

not the ultimate, it's not the final thing. Leaving a church is not leaving God. God is the ultimate for Christian faith. And the church, though created by Christ, we could say, and the pointer to the kingdom of God, the sign of the kingdom of God is not itself that. That's when we realize that it helps us. It helps us be more circumspect in our judgments of the Church, which usually are deserved. But also, if we're not the ultimate, then of course, there's going to be failings and flaws within the community.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 45:39

Right? I mean, another way to say it, or to think about it is to say the church is not the goal. It's, it's a vehicle of the relationship with God. And it's the platform for relationships with others, and for building community, but vehicles and platforms change, you know, what might have been a horse cart that carried people into relationship with God, you know, today might be a surfboard, or, you know, yeah, you know, the vehicle can change. And so the church can change. And how the church sees itself can change, because each generation each decade each century, has, has the challenge for the church, Big C church, and little c churches, to translate itself into the moment. And that means that there has to be some level of flexibility to see the church not as the end, but as one of the ways in which God is at work in the world. And, you know, I think, in in Community of Christ, this has been really on the forefront for us, the last few years, the recognition that we're at this moment, in the history of this country, yes, but also of the world, as far as Christianity is concerned, where the church has a new, a new moment. Yes, you know, as we look at all kinds of Christian denominations, in North America, we see smaller congregations, a lot more white hair, fewer children, churches, closing, all of those kinds of things. So that's not just at with one denomination or another. And, and also this kind of a growing resentment towards the church, because it hasn't been what people felt it promised to be. And so you know, the misdeeds of clergy and, and church leaders, the misuse of funds, the judging of whole parts of the population by clergies, clergy people. All of these things have made Christianity at least the view, the Christianity that everyone might have been familiar with three decades, decades ago. Not appealing, not actually very relevant in, in the world today. And so whether it's in North America, whether it's in the southern hemisphere, and any parts of the Northern Hemisphere. Everything is changing. There's a willingness and ability to critique Christianity. But there's also a recognition of this deep longing that people have for meaning, for purposefulness, for making a change, for being connected, something that is bigger than them and deeper than them. And so church leaders in many denominations and in ours, as well have said, this is a moment of possibility. This is a moment to if we're willing, if we're able to here, this is a moment in which we believe God is asking the church to become something not necessarily different, and not necessarily new. Not necessarily relevant, but something that is integrally involved in this moment with the needs of people... with the spiritual needs of people today. So in the reunion materials this summer called "Calling hope and Possibility." And it's a set of adult lessons that we found to be very helpful. One of them describes this dynamic of our time, and the possibilities that are there for us if we're willing to do here, God calling us to be the church in some probably partly new ways, but probably partly ways that are already in our, in our genes in our sense of ourselves, but to be open to the church being playing a different role, a richer role in the world around us. Anyhow, it's my little plug for the summers reunion materials, which actually would make really good Sunday school lessons to, to look at and talk about.

Tony Chvala-Smith 51:11

And I might say, you know, just following where Charmaine was going there that that old phrase, Latin phrase, *semper rethramunda*, always being reformed, always in need of being reformed. And which I think some lots and lots of people think of the church as somehow the sort of timeless, safe haven, when in fact, that wasn't even true. In the New Testament, the church was ever changing, ever evolving, ever responding to its new, new social setting. So that the church is the church is provisional, and that it's always in need of being reformed, always. It's like our lives, we're all we're always in need of transformation and changing, and so is, so is the church, the community, and so that it should take new forms, new should that it should experiment, that the church should be a place where we, we, we try in brand new ways, to kind of restate the pretty much

old central truth, God is love, and you are loved. That's going to be part of our, our ecclesiastical journey from this point on, always, always changing for the sake of the coming Kingdom of God.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 52:24

And that may mean letting some things fall away, and picking up new responsibilities in the world. It might mean that there's not just five models, there might be six or seven models of the church, because this time, invites us to explore what it can mean, in in a circumstances of our time, for God, to be revealed, for Christ to be present for the Spirit to guide.

Tony Chvala-Smith 52:55

So Christianity in all of its ecclesial forms, is, is currently facing, from one perspective is facing a crisis. On the other hand, it's facing the other side of that, of course, is that it's, these are profound opportunities for, for church life, to reconfigure itself in in very creative ways to make Christ real and, and visible and tangible. In this amazingly wonderful, complex, postmodern world we live in.

Carla Long 53:29

You know, I think this is so relevant to what is happening right now in Community of Christ as well, that, you know, we're a small church. And we, I think that we have actually done a really good job so far, in the last couple of decades, so far of, of trying to do what we need to do and be where God is calling us to be. And I just was at the world church Finance Board this last weekend. And President Veazey spoke to us on Sunday morning, and this will be in the January, February 2020. Herald, so you'll be seeing it been too But President Veazey talked about how the church will be going through a discernment process, about how Community of Christ is structured, and what it means to be church and all of these things that we're just talking about. Now how, you know, sometimes it's really hard to like, build the firehouse when all you're doing is putting out fires. But we have said, we're not just gonna be putting out fires, we're gonna be building this firehouse, we're going to be saying, what makes this church relevant what makes this church important and why? Why are we a church? So there's going to be a pretty big discernment process happening and Community of Christ, I think in the year 2020. And if you're listening to this in 2020, and if it's not happening, call your Apostle. But, and I don't know when, I don't know how it's going to look like. But I am excited and a little bit nervous, of course about what that's going to look like how it's going to be different. And yeah, because as you said, you know, we are always called to reform ourselves. I was thinking here in Utah, you know, we have like kind of a very structured church in Salt Lake City. And then we have like the smaller house churches in Logan, Utah and in Provo, and how incredibly different those are and how incredibly different the experiences are, that I walk away from, in the smaller house church, where we have a lot of discussion versus the Salt Lake congregation where we have, we sit in pews, and we sing hymns, and we listened to a sermon a lot of times. And I wish that everyone could feel both of those different experiences. And maybe that's what's going to happen, maybe we will be looking at the way we structure church, maybe it's not going to happen on Sunday mornings anymore, who knows? Like it could be whatever is the best way to reach people. And I really hope that we can be vulnerable and brave enough to, to move in that direction.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 56:13

That's exciting. I'm so glad you shared that. Because, you know, I think many, many church leaders have been saying this. This is a moment, this is a moment. And I'm glad to hear that there's a decision to make to take action. Because one of the things that we actually haven't said very, I think, specifically, is that one of the main goals of the church is to pass on the story to the next generation. And there are endless ways of doing that. And, and yet, that's we're not only passing on the story, we're inviting people to be part of it. And so we have to invite people to be part of the story in the time and place where they are. And that happens to be, you know, somewhere in the 21st century, where lots of things are an upheaval. And yet, there's so many signs that people are longing for the kind of peace, the kind of joy, the kind of purposefulness that comes in

relationship with God in our community making a difference in the world. So the need is there, obviously for what the church can bring the big C church. But what will the little c churches look like? If we're listening?

Tony Chvala-Smith 57:40

And Carla, this reminds me to a couple of titles to suggest to listeners if they want to just read more about the ecclesiology. And I can suggest to Community of Christ titles if you can find them, they're out of print, but you might be able to find them in a church library. The classic book is Herald snapback, we use it in seminary, we use it in undergrad theology classes. Herald snapbacks 1968 book, Body of Christ, written over 50 years ago, is a blueprint actually for what Community of Christ is becoming, it's still a highly provocative and relevant book. And another book written by Jeffrey Spencer, who was a theologian, member of the Council of 12, passed away about 15 years or so ago, and was a personal friend of Charmaine's and mine, he wrote a book called strangers and pilgrims, which is its own kind of exploration of different models of the church. And you might still be able to find that one on a bookshelf in a Community of Christ congregation somewhere to two really good books on ecclesiology. And then I think I would recommend, if you if you do some background, reading around it, Bonhoeffer's book, "Life Together," which is a profound meditation on the nature of Christian community, of course, he's writing it oh, he wrote it in around 1937 or eight, as he's part of an underground seminary that's living in close community, but trying to find ways to train pastors to resist fascism and Nazism in Germany. It's a it's a marvelous meditation on the, the nature of being together. And it needs a little background reading in terms of his it's very Lutheran, which for me is not a problem. I love it that but it's it also is you need to know something about the first life before you read it. But it's a small book, and it's it will you'll find it a very provocative read on the nature of the church.

Carla Long 59:42

Oh, well, thank you for that. I appreciate that. And yes, I actually still have my copy of Herald Schneebeck I think, unless I've already given it away to some poor seminary, because you always request that they have it and actually I see on some of our Facebook groups that I'm on committee, Christ's Facebook groups that people are all He's looking for that book.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:00:01

Interesting. All right, well, well, we'll keep gathering them up when we can find them and, and people can let us know if they're if they're needing them.

Carla Long 1:00:12

Absolutely. Well, thank you so much for this awesome conversation about ecclesiology. And I, I really appreciate, especially talking about, you know, thinking self awareness about the church. You know, I think a lot of times in a lot of different churches, perhaps the institutional church, they don't want people to think about the church, you know, they just want people to continue living their life, doing what they're doing, and don't think about the church just keep on doing what you're doing. But I think it's really important for us to do

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:00:45

and, and that is actually one of Migliore's descriptions of kind of what is the role of members in an institutional church and they're, they're there to maintain the institution, but not necessarily to be that involved themselves in the in the journey. So yeah, very well said.

Carla Long 1:01:08

Yeah. So for Community of Christ, we want people to be in the journey. It makes it super messy.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:01:14

It does make it super messy. But you know what, I think one of our greatest current ecclesiological texts is actually Community of Christ sings, for goodness sakes, find that find the hymns in there that have to do with the nature and mission of the church. And they will they will bring tears to your eyes tears of hope and joy. There's so many amazing hymns in our new hymnal, that that are, are trying to speak us into a new ecclesial reality and, and so that's kind of exciting to be able to, to sing a potential future every time we sing those hymns.

Carla Long 1:01:48

I just did a podcast with Jane Garner about our hymnal and she said something exactly what you just said. We sing our theology before we do our theology. Yes, yep. Very true. That's awesome. And a great place that to close unless you have something else you want to say that I didn't ask, is there anything else about ecclesiology? That you want to say? Except don't forget your yearly ecclesiology?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:02:10

Yeah, your please. Your "Ecclisioscopy".

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:02:15

Yes, we promised not to forget it. And if anybody needs another one, we're happy to do further work on that. So.

Carla Long 1:02:27

Well, thanks again.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:02:29

We're not really doctors, we only play them.

Carla Long 1:02:35

I'm afraid I'm really afraid our listeners are gonna realize how much coffee we've had today.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:02:41

Well, that will be good for them to realize that.

Carla Long 1:02:44

It'll be good and, and exactly how little we've spoken. You and I, we usually speak at least once a couple times a month, and we have needed some catch up time. So that's probably why we're having so much silly time on this podcast. But thank you again, Tony. I appreciate it.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:03:00

Thank you, Carla. Our pleasure.

Josh Mangelson 1:03:02

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