

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 00:30

Hello, and welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. I'm your host, Carla Long. And today you're listening to Percolating on Faith, but not just Percolating on Faith, no, no, no, this is even hotter and stronger shot of it or espresso because you're listening to a subset of Percolating on Faith: God Shot. I'm here with my guests, Charmaine and Tony Chvala Smith to talk about the good creation, and why God calls it good. I mean, what does that actually mean? But we're jumping into that really soon. But first, Hi, Tony. Hi, Charmaine. Welcome back.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 01:05

Hi, Carla, good to hear you.

Tony Chvala-Smith 01:07

Hi, Carla. We're happy to be here.

Carla Long 01:10

I'm so glad because really, this podcast would be pretty bad if it were just me. So, thank goodness, you'd say yes. Every single time.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 01:17

I doubt that. I think it would be fascinating to have these tables turned and for us to ask you questions.

Carla Long 01:23

Please, God never let that happen.

Tony Chvala-Smith 01:26

Yes, I propose a new subset called Carla shots.

Carla Long 01:30

I think that's a horrible idea. Well, what I'm going to do to start this off is, since we're talking about good creation, of course, we have to go straight to Genesis, Genesis one. And I'm going to read just a couple verses, about five verses. And I think we can jump in it from there. But I want to get your mind all ready to go about this good creation stuff. So, I'm starting at verse 26. And I'm reading from the New RSV. "Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in Our image, according to our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.' So, God created humankind in his image in the image of God, He created them male and female, He created them. God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it, and have

dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.' God said, 'See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of the earth, and every tree with seed and its fruit, you shall have them for your food, and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the air and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life. I have given every green plant for food.' And it was so. God saw everything that He had made, and indeed, it was very good. And then there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day."

Okay, so my first question is a little bit has to do with that. But really, I mean, we're talking about why does that, I'm just gonna say, what does this have to do with systematic theology? Why is this in a systematic theology lesson?

Tony Chvala-Smith 03:25

So, if we think back to other things we've shared in the series and other podcasts, systematic theology starts in the late second, early third century in the Christian Church, as a form of preparation for baptism. And the primary texts that was used in preparing Greeks and Romans, to become Christian, was a text that at least in the western part of the Roman Empire, ultimately became what we call the Apostles Creed. And so that that text is, it was basically going to be the, the Pledge of Allegiance, so to speak, that these pagan converts to Christianity had to learn how to say and sign up for. And so systematic theology tried, try very hard to explain every single aspect of this text. And that text begins very simply, we believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth, that's its first line. And so that part of the Creed had to be explicated to people who for whom it was really strange and foreign. And also, Carla, why this was so important in Christianity in that period, is because in Christian communities, there were other voices, who were teaching a view of the world and the universe and of human beings, that was really contrary what that text was trying to save, we will introduce you to the term Gnosticism. Gnosticism was a trend in religion in the Greco Roman world that was highly dualistic. And it treated the physical world as a giant, a big giant mistake. Matter was considered evil and a problem. And what was what really counted was spiritual reality, which really had nothing to do with material reality. And so very early Christian theology said, "No, that's wrong, we we've inherited this thing called the Old Testament. Christ became flesh and blood, we celebrate that in the Lord's Supper, we think our bodies matter, we think the creation matters." And so, the reason creation became an important doctrine, right from the start in Christian theology, was as a way to counter this dualistic idea that somehow, matter is bad, and Spirit is good. The church was trying to say, no, no, no, God is the creator of the whole thing. The whole, like Genesis says, is very good. Plants, animals, stars, fish, sea, everything, every created thing, including human beings are very good. So that's how it got started Carla, and why it's so important when we still have to try to uphold that today, that the creation is very good.

Carla Long 06:36

So, in the passage I just read it, I mean, there's a lot of things to unpack in there, for me, and one of the things that I feel like I need to unpack is some of the language that was used, for instance, the word dominion. That and I'm quoting here, "man has dominion over nature," and also the word image, God talked about creating in our image, or in my image, or so I kind of wanted to unpack those words, if that's okay, can we talk about the word dominion and also the word image?

Tony Chvala-Smith 07:14

Sure, actually, let me reverse them. Let's start with the word image first. And this is a place where you have to be careful not to go to dictionary definitions of words, but you have to let the story and what we know about its cultural context, explain what the words mean. And so, when the Genesis story, actually Genesis has two creation stories right at the start, right, Genesis one, and then Genesis two and three. Two different, two very different stories, two very different settings and authors, woven together into this book we call Genesis. So, when the Genesis one creation story ends with, or towards the end of it, when it talks about human beings being created in that image of God. Here's what it doesn't mean. It doesn't mean that there's this like thing inside of us. That is the image. And it's not referring to our rationality, it's not referring to some part of us, it's actually referring to a role. So, the Hebrew word for images, Selim, and the Hebrew linguists will tell you that it's connected to an older word. I think it's an Acadian word, much older word, Salum, which meant, which was the word that was used to describe an image that an emperor set up in every village and city of his empire, basically, to remind everybody of who was in charge. So, the first Genesis creation story takes that word over and applies it to human beings. Human beings, not emperors, human beings, have a God given role. It's to represent God, everywhere in the world. That's what it means to be in the image of God. We, our role is to image God in the world. And the idea of dominion here again, you don't want to do a dictionary definition of it. That's been a constant problem in Christian ethics to treat creation like this thing we get to trounce over. Actually, the narrative gives us the meaning of the word. And so human beings are created to image God everywhere around everywhere. And God's dominion is a dominion, not a force or might, but a dominion of generosity and abundance. God simply creates, there's no, there's unlike the pagan creation stories, there's no conflict. There's no contest. There's no enemy that God has to defeat, and then in and turn its body into the creation. God simply makes room for others, and brings them into being. And so, dominion here means making space, it means making space for others, and tending, guiding, shepherding caring for each other. So, the Genesis one vision of the world and creation is that we're an interconnected whole. Human beings are images of this abundant and generous and gracious God. And our role is to tend, to take care of as God would take care of. So that's kind of what's going on there.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 10:38

And so, what we see here is one of the problems that often happens when people read the Bible, because they want it to be about us, to make it human-centric. And so, in the reading of that passage, that's often what has happened. Is that it Oh, who are we, you know, what do we get to be more than above, dominating over? When actually the story is about Who is God? What is the nature of God, that we as holders of that image are to be responsible for in the world. Instead, we take the words that give us the sense of prominence and being better than the rest of creation, to then excuse us, for abusing the world around us for our own sake. So, as so often happens, when we read the Bible, we have this tendency to think it's all about us. And actually, no, you know, this is about trying to express, what is the nature of God? How does God see God's creation, whether it be humanity, whether it be animals, whether it be the cosmos? So, I think that's a good a good place to remember that our egocentrism is a bit of a problem when we come to the Bible. And that's true, not only of Genesis, but of a lot of other places as well.

Tony Chvala-Smith 12:21

Yeah, absolutely. Carla, the passage you read, at the end, it says, "And God saw everything God had made and called it very good." I think sometimes, we kind of want to read that, read the story in Genesis one. And we think that it ends with the creation of humanity, and then that's very good. But that's not what it says, before there were ever human beings in this storyline, there are, you know, there's the lights in the sky, and there's the seas and the fish, and each thing, and there was evening, there's morning, and there's the first day and the second day, and each thing is good. And then in the storyline, God doesn't, it doesn't say that human beings are very good. It says God saw everything God made, and declared it very good. In other words, there's this kind of instinct in the story to say that humanity and fish and micro-organisms, and water, and everything else, we are supposed to be in this together, there's a kind of an organic connection between us all. And that's what's very good. So yeah, we have to be really careful not to insert our egos into this text, which has unfortunately been a problem.

Carla Long 13:36

Well, that's kind of the direction I want it to go next, Tony, it sounds like to me that humans want to separate ourselves out because we're better than, we walk on two feet, we have opposable thumbs, so on and so forth, we think that we are very, very good, rather than just very good. So, but what it sounds like we're saying is that we are not at all separate from creation, we are all interrelated. And we're not independent of creation, either. And I'm guessing that's what's causing a lot of problems right now. We see ourselves as separate from everything around us.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 14:12

Yeah. And, wow, we can see that in so many places. And, you know, it seems like we don't ask ourselves. So what is our relationship to the physical world around us? Whether we see that as nature or the Earth or the cosmos. It hasn't been a strong part of our Christian ways of thinking to ask ourselves, what is our relationship, and what should be our relationship with the rest of the world, with the rest of the world, the rest of creation? And you know, I just want to kind of put out there the idea that, what would it be like, if we thought about our relationship with the natural world with creation, as a relationship? You know, we kind of frown, and rightfully so on relationships between people, where one person is the user, you know, one person just is me, me, me, me, it's all about me, and I want you to be there for me, and I want you to listen to me, and I want you to take care of me, and, you know, all of those things. And, you know, we recognize that is not a healthy relationship. But isn't that exactly how we often treat the natural world? And if we were to think of it as an entity, that we have a relationship with, a two-way relationship, I think that would really help us get our minds around some of the aspects of that passage about how God intends or how God sees all of creation, including us. That it's not just about us taking and getting resources, and that God is using the natural world to take care of us, but that part of our role, as followers of Christ is to take care of, care for, appreciate, be accountable to the created world, the natural world, however, we want to look at that. How different would that be? In how we use water? How different would that be in what we consume, or what we do with our trash? Or, or what we do with land that has been misused? You know, with people who have been misused, we, we find ways to bring healing, and, you know, all kinds of psychology, and, you know, sociological changes to try and help affect those parts of our culture or our worlds that have harmed people. But what if we did that same thing, as part of our relationship with the earth? So, I mean, that's one place to start is,

you know, in that story of creation, that we're interconnected. But we often see the natural world either as our, our store, our basket, that is for us to use, and we get to use all of these resources, or sometimes we see it as the enemy, that thing that needs to be subdued. And that's one of the words that was used in that passage. And it's good to remember that in the time that the Old Testament was being compiled and written down and is that people's relationship to the natural world was often one of fear. It was recognized as a power as a force, that they could not affect, in some ways. And so, the idea of subduing that's a very human perspective of, you know, we have to take, we have to control this. And over time, that idea that we have to control whether it's the water or whether it's the winds or whatever, gave us this idea that somehow what was comfortable for us was superior to what was good for the creation. And that egocentrism, that sense of superiority is, I think, toxic. But anyhow, just it's another way of saying what would it look like to interact with creation as we would a person that we loved and respected? What would it cause us to ask about how we use the resources of the world and whether or not we're willing to be accountable.

Tony Chvala-Smith 19:40

I like to play off of that statement about looking at ourselves as being in relationship with creation and not outside of it and trying to stamp it down or use it up. Migliore, in the chapter we have for today, he wants to say, and I think this is really good, that the statement, when we refer to the world as creation, what's behind that is if you have God is Creator, and the God who is the creator of the world is none other than the Triune God, the God who exists in an eternal relationship of lover, beloved, and loving. And so that mutual, that relationship of internal mutuality, that is God's own being--Father, Son, Spirit--that's out of which God creates the world. So, relationality is like woven right into the structure of Creation. Creation is meant to reflect interconnectedness and relationality because that's who God is too. And so, when we do stuff, when we act towards the natural world in ways that try to separate, divide, dominate, destroy, use up, there's something significantly wrong with that. It does not reflect at all the God in whose image we have been created, and the God who creates an interconnected world as a sort of reflection of the divine being. So, there's this whole ethical side, to our doctrine of creation, that's something that Migliore gets that really well. And that's also very, very much aligned with Community of Christ theology of creation.

Carla Long 21:34

Yeah, I mean, when you and Charmaine are talking about this, the words that keep coming back to my mind are the scarcity mentality. We have to take and take and take, and because we have to have our share, I don't care so much of you get yours, but I have to have mine, so I can get ahead or whatever. So, I just keep thinking about that scarcity mentality. And so, the more we continue to take the, the less that there is actually, when you have that mindset.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 22:02

Absolutely. And it, there's two different avenues where we are being destructive with that. One is, you know, the greed, I need to get mine, and so there is little respect for where we're getting it from. And then there's also the sense that we are in competition with other people. And so, you know, we live in a country where use of resources is irresponsible, for several reasons. One is that we use so much of the Earth's resources, which means that now or in the future, it's not going to be available for people in other parts of the world. And the idea of the resources being there for humanity is for all humanity. It's

not just for people in one or two places where they know how to get a whole bunch of resources and use them up quickly. This is intended to be for the good of all humanity. And yet, in some of our cultures, we have equated the number of resources with our superiority over others. And lack of care, you know, to making sure that there's clean water for everyone, that there's a fair sharing of natural resources, and of resources within the earth. And that land be something that be available to those who need the land to live from, rather than it being made into, you know, mega farms to produce one thing, and not be available for the people who actually live there. So, there's all of these different aspects of exactly what you're saying about this, using up resources or hoarding them for ourselves, that does, that creates injustice among people. But it also is an injustice to the world itself, the earth on which we live and the systems that have to work together to thrive.

Tony Chvala-Smith 24:37

So, this is something Migliore points out in that chapter. And I think it's a really important connection to what Charmaine is saying that is that the creation is not divine. The creation is not infinite. The Earth is not infinite. Water is not infinite. Charmaine and Tony are not infinite. Carl is not infinite. We are finite beings. God creates this amazing universe as an "other." But it has limits placed on it. The universe is expanding, and it will, it will change the solar system will die. This is part of the nature of things. Finitude is the word we want here, it's a theological word. We are finite beings. And actually, our resources are finite, there is not an infinite amount of oil. And so, the idea that you can drill baby drill is actually a kind of... it's a claiming of, it's a form of idolatry, because it's a claiming that we, and our needs are, are infinite, and we can do anything we want to. We can claim the prerogatives of God, and not even the real God, it's a God who's a tyrant, actually. So, we need to claim our finitude, it's the only way to make sure that we know how to make space for each other and make space for creatures and live together in a kind of shalom.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 26:10

Yeah, and actually, that's a great lead in, Tony, to I was gonna say there is a corrective within the Christian tradition. And it's something that I think our church has really lifted up in really positive ways. And that is the, is what Jesus preached, at least in the Synoptic Gospels, which is the kingdom of God, that that is what God's desire for all of creation is, is this living together in peace and justice. And I especially think that that aspect of the kingdom of God that we sometimes think of as the peaceable kingdom, is brings to mind images that help us see that this thing that God wills, and that Jesus preached and told us to look forward to, but to be a part of, really helps us to imagine with our minds and our hearts, what this feels and looks like. So, for those listeners who may not be familiar, you might want to take a look sometime at some of the pictures that often come up when you say the peaceable kingdom. And it's from Isaiah that has the image of, you know, the Lion and the Lamb and the child, these venomous snakes, and these things, these predator animals, living together, in the same space in peace, and not devouring each other. But having a kind of, as Tony said, shalom, a wholeness in their relationship with each other. And so, I think within our movement, we have this corrective that could remind us, what is it that God calls us to? And if we go back to those images, with a clearer understanding of the language that you read about, we begin to see a bigger picture. It's, you know, Jesus' message was, was not about how do I get to heaven myself and be secured, that I've got golden sandals or a harp or whatever. But that, how I live, and how I believe and how I pray, affects the animals around me, the trees and the grass. The relationship I have with my water source, the

relationship I have with my neighbors, and the land that we grow things on. It just really can help if we can keep saying this is an image that the prophets from the Old Testament and Jesus, were trying to give us, 'z to give us some glimpses of what it means to, to live in God's will to live towards God's call to us.

Tony Chvala-Smith 29:26

And I think Charmaine was something you're pointing out here is that in Christian theology, the doctrine of creation and the idea of eschatology, the god's endgame, these things are connected, which is why we speak about creation and new creation. And a really, a really bad eschatology and really bad doctrines of creation tend to go hand in hand. So, I won't name names, but many years ago, there was a certain Secretary of the Interior, who was some kind of fundamentalist Christian who said that, I mean his way of viewing natural resources was, and he said this publicly, we need to use up the Earth's natural resources so that Jesus will come back. It's a kind of a, it's a kind of ecological, Russian roulette game. He was thinking there.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 30:18

Let's force God's hands so we can get salvation. Yeah.

Tony Chvala-Smith 30:23

And, and what a horrible eschatology, what a horrible view of creation, and what horrible ethics come from something like that. So, these things are connected, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth." Earth is the theater of God's action. And so, gosh, taking care of creation, viewing God as the Creator of the good creation, and ourselves as stewards, caretakers, nurturers of creation. That's really important to our ethics, and to our eschatology, our view of the end game of things. So, these things are all kind of interconnected, Carla.

Carla Long 31:02

Well, they absolutely are. And, and you kind of lead led me into my next question about, you're talking about the Secretary of the Interior and government. And so, I was thinking about, like, science can help us here, right, like science is not the enemy of this. And I think that some people probably think that it is, but science is not. We know a lot more than we used to know. And we know that some things are not good, and some things hurt the earth. But you know, I was just thinking about that anti science, creationism kind of stuff, which people think that they're doing exactly what God is wanting them to do. But that's not what we're saying here at all, is it?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 31:49

No, no, we are saying that, that science is not the enemy. It may be an inconvenient reminder of our irresponsibility. But thank God for that. And it literally, you know, I, science has, science in many ways reinforces this whole idea of our interconnectedness, our need to be responsible to and in relationship with the world around us to be responsible for our use of things. Yeah, I, you know, in thinking about our talk today. I was it's like, we know things, and they're provable now. You know, we know that there are things that we do, that are harming the bees and the pollinators. And we know what some of those are. We know that some may not have a direct cause. But like, certain pesticides and herbicides, we use, destroy the gut enzymes in bees that then endanger their immune system, and lead to, you know,

premature death of our bees. And that may not be the only thing. But we know that, that's there's recent experimentation that has been, you know, acknowledged. We know that when oil companies start doing sonic blasts in the ocean, to look for pockets of oil, we know that that harms the mammals, and even the phytoplankton, that basic elements of life in the oceans, that it's damaged. We know this, there's all kinds of studies that show it the government reports indicate yes, we know that using the sonic blasts, as we allow oil companies to do this in the oceans, will affect the marine life. We know it, but we don't change our behavior, even with the knowing of it. And that's one of the things that, you know, it just really hit me as we're thinking about this is why is it that we don't feel like oh my gosh, we now know this, we need to react appropriately. And this is one of those places where science is our best conscience. Because it keeps proving to us showing us that we are connected, we do have a responsibility to other elements in the ecosystem. But we do need to ask ourselves, I think it's a really hard spiritual question, is why are we not responding to these things that we know are harmful to other parts of creation? Why are we not pulling back? Instead of insisting that oh our need for oil is more important than all that then the whales? I mean, they're connecting some of these beachings of whole pods of whales to the use of these Sonic blasts that deafen mammals and that cause them to try to escape it from their own homes, their own places in their ecosystem, because this is harming them, or killing them in some situations. But why is it that we don't think that that should be stopped? Why do we let it go on unchecked? And that's our own, our own egocentrism, I think as individuals, but also as cultures that, that we need to ask ourselves about.

Tony Chvala-Smith 36:20

So that the doctrine of creation definitely has ethical and political consequences for us right now. It's really, really important that the Community of Christ statement, basic belief statement says, as an expression of divine love, God created the heavens and earth and all that is in them, and called them good, everything belongs to God, and should be cherished and used justly, according to divine purposes. So, if we're going to talk about God is creator, and the world, His creation, and creation is interconnected, we have to, we have to accept that whatever is in the honeybees is in us. Right. And, and whatever's in the fish is in us, and what we what we do to them we're doing to ourselves and to our children and our grandchildren. So, it's an interconnected world. That's the way it reflects the divine interconnectivity. And so, we have then in the doctrine of creation, a really solid ethical principle, or ethical kind of fulcrum for, for action that is responsible towards the future of Earth. Yet Christian, good Christian theology and really good science are not enemies of each other. Good theology and good science ought to be enemies of faux science and bad theology. Right. And so, you know, by faux science, I mean, science that's, that's sponsored, to try and ideologically prove things that are beneficial to stockholders in a corporation, or science that tries to establish things that that majority opinion, peer reviewed, worldwide science has established as the case for example, climate change. This is no longer up for grabs. This is no longer a matter of your science versus my science. This is this is scientifically established. And therefore, in the interest, this is a place where good science and good theology share common concern for truth, for truthfulness, and not for ideology to kind of forestall efforts to make changes that are good for whales and sparrows and little kids. Right, so yeah, and, by the way, the doctrine, the doctrine of creation can make lots and lots and lots of space for evolutionary science, evolutionary biology. These things are not enemies. I believe in God. And I believe that dinosaurs really existed. These are the things are not, these things are not contrary, you just you have

to just be careful not to work with a kind of literalistic hermeneutic of the Bible. That's, that's the source of the problem for lots of this,

Carla Long 39:27

I want you to know before you go on that I made a note that faux science and bad theology are both excellent band names as well.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 39:40

Well, let us know when you when you play your first gig, we want to be there.

Tony Chvala-Smith 39:44

Right. Bad Theology. That could be, that could be the name of a kind of like a current punk band, that could be like,

Carla Long

It would be perfect.

Tony Chvala-Smith

A new phase of punk.

Carla Long 39:57

Every time I think about climate change, like my stomach just goes into a knot. Because I know we're in a countdown, we're in a countdown, what, 10 years, 12 years, we have just a few short years to change this before things are, you can't turn them around anymore. So, I mean, calling all Christians, right? It, it's time to get real about this kind of stuff. This, this is actually going to affect our children, my daughter who's almost one year old, it's going to affect her life in deep, deep ways if we don't do something about it. So that just, I'm so glad you brought that up. I think that's a really, really important point.

Tony Chvala-Smith 40:37

It's, it's, we're threatening ourselves with ecocide. Right, and the reason we're threatening ourselves with it is because of greed, and malice and ignorance.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 40:53

And I think it's partly because we really have come to believe or at least not question whether or not money or consumerism is the norm for our lives. And so, we end up valuing richness, rather than responsibility for the world around us. We value the ease of getting some resources over the complications that it will make for the those who are least able to make the adaptations who have the least money, who have the least ability to move when, when the oceans are rising. It's about profits. You know, it's about consumerism. We're in this consumer mentality where the more we consume, the stronger our economy and our nation will be. And that's not accurate, there is a cost for our consumerism, there is a cost for what we would say, are cheap resources or getting resources cheaply. And, you know, little things that, again, science is telling us, oh my goodness, you know, areas that have had lots of fracking, and have had lots of water forced down underneath and then drained away, there are earthquakes happening there. And, you know, who does that harm most? You know, that

harms most the people who live there and can't move, who don't have the resources to go anywhere else. It's affecting, you know, the groundwater in places where, again, the people with the least flexibility, have the least chance of avoiding it. So, it's driven by our sense of consumerism, and what we need, what we must have, and that we must have it cheaply. But we are unwilling to look at what the real costs are, both in this generation, and as you've noted, in the generations to come. And, you know, this is one of those places where, as you've said, we have to make some decisions, and we've been avoiding making decisions. Because it would be inconvenient, it would be uncomfortable, it would mean we would have to change some of the ways that we see what's good for the economy, and what's good for profit, and what's good for cheap. And but those are all money, things and we forget to figure in, calculate in, what is good for people, what is good for the water, what is good for the air, what is good for the land, what is good for animals who are wild animals, who are dependent on the systems as they are? What, you know, what does it do to make healthy the oceans? What does it do to help establish this interconnectedness? And so, yeah, there's a, there's a whole bunch of pieces at work here. And we that we may not be able to change them all right away, unless we're willing to be aware of them, we won't be able to change them.

Tony Chvala-Smith 44:39

I think that what we're tapping on here is a there's a spiritual problem. And, you know, we're in this podcast, we're talking about the good creation. At some point we would probably need to talk about what in Christian theology is meant by sin. But just to kind of, I'm not going to go there yet, but we're actually talking about it right here, we're touching on it in terms of greed and selfishness and an unwillingness to act as a refusal to learn, actually. One of one of my spiritual mentors is the Anglican spiritual writer Evelyn Underhill, who lived in the first part of the 20th century. And she wrote some wonderful books, and one of her books I love so much is just simply called *On the Spiritual Life*. And she makes a statement, I've always remembered it, she says, "We human beings spend most of our life conjugating three verbs: to want, to do, and to have. And all the while we're doing this, we are forgetting the most important verb of all, which is to be." We're so afraid of just being. We want stuff, we got to have stuff, we need to do stuff. And part of that grasping, clutching-ness is what's at play here in terms of the good, the good creation and the danger that is to it. I noticed the passage, you started this off with Carla. God just wants things to be. God makes space for a rich multitude of creatures just to be and doesn't really tell them you need to be productive. He does say Be fruitful and multiply. But he doesn't say you also, you also need to drill the oceans and make money. So, we're so afraid of just being. We probably need to explore that, you know, at a later time, because it does fit into systematic theology in terms of the human condition. But yeah, we are having, wanting, and doing our way into a major disaster if we don't, if we don't change course.

Carla Long 46:59

And we in Community of Christ, recognize the sacredness of creation as one of our Enduring Principles. I think earlier you read from our basic beliefs, Tony. Do you have? I think you said you have something in front of you about the Sacredness of Creation? Have you read that yet? I think that's important for our listeners.

Tony Chvala-Smith 47:15

I haven't read it, I've have it in front of me. It's just a statement of the Sacredness of Creation. That's from the Enduring Principles. And it's just some bullet points. "In the beginning God created and called it good. Spirit and material, seen and unseen are related creations. Creations power, to create or destroy, reminds us of our vulnerability in this life. God is still creating to fulfill divine purpose. We join with God as stewards of care and hope for all creation." That's kind of our basic, our Enduring Principles related to the Sacredness of Creation. I love the idea that God's creation is not something God wound up once upon a time and then God's like an absentee landlord. At every moment. Creation is related to God in every way. I, I do not have, I do not give myself being I have I have borrowed being from God. And so do the honeybees. And so does the cat out on the porch waiting for my attention later. And so do the plants in our yard, everything that is has its being as a gift from God. And so, gosh, that has a lot of ethical and spiritual power when I think about it. So yeah, that statement on the sacredness of creation is really important to Community of Christ.

Carla Long 48:38

It is and you, you keep bringing me back to that idea of the word image, and how that word image has to do with the Empire, the Emperor putting his image in every single city, so people remember that that's the Emperor. And like, if we just saw God's, I don't know, face. God in every single tree and blade of grass, like what a powerful and wonderful reminder that could be, I just keep going back to that idea that God is within every single thing that we see, every single part of nature. I love that.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 49:15

Yeah. And, you know, we were also doing just a little quick search before we started to kind of look at, you know, what does Jesus say about the natural world? And one of the first things that comes to mind is how often Jesus uses analogies that people would have recognized as they observe the world around them. But some of them are really poignant in that they give us these little glimpses of how God sees the creation. And in Matthew, there's the passages about the sparrow. You know that God notices when a sparrow falls. And a similar passage in Luke. I'm not gonna get it quite right, but this is Luke 12. It says, "Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one is forgotten in God's sight." Just to sit with that for a little while, and say, what is it that Jesus is saying about God? Is that, you know, these birds that fly over us, God is supremely aware of each of them. And, of course, this is intended in the gospels, to help people know, especially those who had no voice, and who were invisible in their culture or who were considered to lowly to notice. It was used to help them know that God notices them. But it's also affirming, again, giving us these little glimpses of how Jesus wanted people to know that God saw creations, saw the birds and the animals, and the grasses and the lilies. If you remember those stories, those parables that how God sees them, and values them. And, you know, that's something again, that I think, can be those reminders for us.

Tony Chvala-Smith 51:36

Yeah, a lot of our seminary students find themselves attracted to St. Francis, when they're doing ancient medieval theology with us and St. Francis. St. Francis of Assisi is a powerful figure for us in terms of the good creation and our relationship to creation. We already quoted, cited that famous article by Lynn white back in the 1960s. Which this historian Lynn White, is trying to account for the why, what's the source of the ecological problems in the modern world? And he very thoughtfully argues

that, in some ways, lots of Christian theology has been a source of that problem. But even Lynn White somewhere in that article, I think it's been a long time since I read it, but towards the end of that article, he says, this is a place where Christians need to rediscover St. Francis. St. Francis, who thought of the birds as brother and sister, the sun and moon as brother and sister, who thought of, in his very Jesus centered piety, thought of the world, the physical aspects of the world of creatures as having every bit as much a right to have a place as he had. And so yeah, he's a great figure to teach us about that. And to open our spirituality up to a kind of creation centeredness that, that could really be beneficial to us.

Carla Long 53:12

Well, I really appreciated this conversation. I really have. I mean, and not only have I learned a lot as I usually do, but I do have a new band name, just in case I ever need it. Is there anything that you wanted to speak about that I forgot to ask?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 53:33

I think we went in lots of interesting directions today. And I'm sure there's more that could be said about many of them, but really appreciated the many avenues that you opened up.

Tony Chvala-Smith 53:44

Yeah. I can't think of anything except to say, to call God Creator, and the universe as Creation is a big thing. It's a really big important thing. It's a statement of value. If this thing is true, then it is utterly wrong to rape, pillage and plunder the world and its resources. There's something desperately wrong about that. So that's the only thing I would add.

Carla Long 54:15

Well, amen. Charmaine, did you want to say something?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 54:18

I'm good. We're just going to kind of let you know where we're going for the next podcast. And in the Migliore book, which is called *Faith Seeking Understanding*, his next topic in his approach to systematic theology is the providence of God and the mystery of evil. And so, we figured that would be a very fascinating one to take on for next time. God's providence or another way of saying it is God's will at work in the world and the mystery of evil.

Carla Long 55:00

Well, yes, evil is a word that I don't use very frequently because I don't know if I completely understand it. And I don't know if people I'm talking to completely understand it. So that'll be really interesting.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 55:11

Yeah, yeah. And there's lots of places to go with it. So, it could be fun.

Tony Chvala-Smith 55:17

Could be fun. For us. This stuff is always fun, Carla, but you know, we don't get out much so.

Carla Long 55:22

Oh, I know. Well, thank you again for being on the podcast and thank you for sharing your thoughts. I really appreciate them.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 55:30

Thank you.

Tony Chvala-Smith 55:32

Yes, very much. We're very glad to share these with you and very glad to talk about things that matter.

Josh Mangelson 55:39

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