

ES 74 | Sunstone 2020
Project Zion Podcast

Katie Langston 0:17

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Karin Peter 1:00

Welcome to Project Zion Podcast. I'm your host Karin Peter, and today is an extra shot to talk about the upcoming sunstone symposium, which begins the evening of Wednesday, July 29, at 7 Mountain Time, and runs through Saturday, August 1 and includes a sunstone worship at Community of Christ hosted by the Salt Lake congregation on Sunday, August 2 at 11am Mountain Time. So our guest today is Lindsay Hansen Park, and many of you are familiar with Lindsey from other podcasts as well as earlier projects. I am episodes. Lindsay is the executive director of sunstone, and an all around good friend of Community of Christ. So hello, Lindsay.

Lindsay Hansen Park 1:44

Hi, thanks for having me back.

Karin Peter 1:46

We're so glad you're here for a lot of reasons, but first, because some of our Community of Christ listeners might not be familiar with sunstone. So to start off with let's do like a brief couple sentence recap. cap of what the Sunstone symposium is all about.

Lindsay Hansen Park 2:04

Okay, so sandstone has been around for almost 45 years now. And it started off actually at Berkeley. And there were a bunch of young theological students who were Mormon, LDS Mormon, and they wanted to study their faith tradition in the ways that they saw that their classmates were doing so so they saw the vibrant studies in Christianity and Islam and all of that nice and they thought, why aren't we doing more of this in Mormonism? And so that's kind of how the idea of sun sun was born. They started off with a magazine where they could have students submit articles on a more deep and thoughtful, intelligent discussion of Mormonism than you would get at church, for example. And so over the course of the 45 years, Son Son has had an interesting relationship with the institutional LDS church and depending on what generation you come from in the LDS church, Depends on how you view sunstone. So, there are generations that think that sunstone is anti Mormon. And there are generations that think sunstone is to pro Mormon, and probably everything in between. And I would say yes, we're all of those things. And more and more, we're an open forum. We've been around for a while now. And we are one of the only places that I know about in LDS Mormonism where you can talk and interact with other branches of Mormonism without fear of judgment or center or anything like that. So, there there are other more LDS organizations, historical organizations and things like

that. But Sunstone is broader than just the history. We talk about art, politics, social issues, all of that at our conferences.

Karin Peter 3:50

So when you say other branches of Mormonism that includes Community of Christ, probably on one end of the spectrum all the way to fundamentalist sects on the other end of The spectrum so when you say all varieties of the restoration tradition, you mean all varieties?

Lindsay Hansen Park 4:06

Yes. And it's actually historian Steve Shields doing really good work. He was the one that identified over I think he said over 487 extant expressions of of the restoration or Mormonism, and I mean, I would say and counting I hear about new ones every day and part of my one of my weird hobbies is following different branches of Mormonism. I just think it's so interesting to watch new break off groups emerge. Community of Christ is one of the front runners for the original church right? Everyone thinks that they have the original church, this direct line from Joseph Smith church. Growing up LDS we certainly think that ours is just this continuation. But really, there is no original church. Joseph's church, you know, in Missouri was a different church and Nauvoo. It evolved. It was different And out of that, you know, are born new traditions and new things and so Community of Christ is one branch and LDS is another branch and then of course there are lots of fundamentalist branches and that's been an interesting experiment to get folks like Community of Christ in the same room with folks like the LDS the polygamous group, considering your long history with those topics of polygamy, it's very controversial.

Karin Peter 5:31

It's been it's been a wonderful experience to be able to meet folks from all of those different branches and to sit across from them and to engage in conversation and and, for that matter to buy all my sister's Christmas presents from their booth at sunstone which I'm going to continue to do.

Lindsay Hansen Park 5:48

We have the FLDS so FLDS is kind of an umbrella term for all fundamentalists. It stands for fundamentalist Latter Day Saints but there is an actual church incorporated in the 1970s called the LDS and that was run by Warren Jeffs, everyone knows them and the prairie dresses and the terrible documentaries of you know, him being in prison and being a pedophile and things like that. But there are folks from his church who are good, you know, kind people that want to live their religion and so they come to sunstone and they make delicious jams and jellies and crafts and, and cool aprons. And apron Yeah, they can so they're very much people have compared them to the Amish. I guess if you have no point of reference, they are very isolated as far as they don't have internet or television. Although they all have smartphones now. So I would say they do have internet I've seen a lot of FLDs on Facebook, which is a new

Karin Peter 6:50

I have friends and other fundamentalist friends on Facebook, which is odd for me to even think about at this point.

Lindsay Hansen Park 7:01

We have a tagline that we say there's more than one way to Mormon and the strategy behind that catchphrase is to try to invite people to rethink Mormonism. Everyone associates it with the LDS church. And it's not historically accurate to just include the LDS Church. Mormonism is a umbrella term for the restoration but Community of Christ, do you guys have a really complicated relationship with that term Mormonism.

Karin Peter 7:34

Yes, we do. We're more comfortable with the with the phrase. We're not Mormon. So that's part of our DNA we're working on on on how kind of negative that might sound?

Lindsay Hansen Park 7:48

Well LDS aren't Mormon either according to her. Well, that's true. Not anymore.

Karin Peter 7:51

Not anymore. According to your new prophet. That's true. Okay, let's get back to the symposium because we could banter like this forever. So What's happening this year at the symposium? That's of note for people who might be wondering about it?

Lindsay Hansen Park 8:08

Well, why don't we talk about the thing that I've asked you to do it? Karin knows that if you're my friend then I just asked my friend

Karin Peter 8:15

You do that. That is true.

Lindsay Hansen Park 8:17

Karin is on our board along with Robin Linkhart. And so it's been so lovely and comforting to have a Community of Christ women who I just value and look up to be on our board at sunstone and kind of model model how to be women and leadership. And so I've asked Karin to chair our keynote. We every year we opened the symposium with a lecture hosted and sponsored by the Smith Pettit foundation and what they do is they give us a grant every year to pay for a Gentile or a non Mormon speaker to come and address a Mormon audience and the idea is that we can have you know, this new seed of information from you know, from Non Mormon thinker. And so this year, our Smith Pettit lecture we're really, really excited for is Dr. Bart Ehrman, who is one of the leading New Testament scholars. And Karin is going to share that for us and introduce him. So

Karin Peter 9:16

I'm really excited about,

Lindsay Hansen Park 9:18

Yeah, he's going to talk about the history of heaven. And hell, we're actually really lucky because he was going to address the Smithsonian with this talk. And then because of COVID, they cancelled and he said, should we just do that one? And I was like, Yes, that's the one we want. We want your Smithsonian talk. So that's what we're gonna get. And I feel really, really lucky. And I'm so glad that, you know, you get to introduce him.

Karin Peter 9:43

Oh, gosh, and I've read several of his books in the past and I am starting the book that we're talking about where he talks about heaven and hell, and hope to get it done before Wednesday night when I introduce him. But yeah, that's a very exciting thing. So why why Dr. Ehrman?

Lindsay Hansen Park 10:00

Well, he has been someone we've been trying to get for a long time his his studies on the New Testament have been really influential to a lot of faithful Mormons and a lot of ex Mormons as well. His studies of Jesus in the New Testament and and just the Gospels in general have been kind of radical thinking for some someone who grew up I grew up in a very literalistic Mormon view of the Bible. And yet it's also compatible with faithful Mormons because it does take a different quote, translation, if you will, of the of the Scriptures. And I would just point out that that lecture is going to be free. The Smith Pettit lecture is always free and open to the public. So always Wednesday night, our opening lecture is open to all this year since it's virtual is going to it's going to be hosted on our sunsense Facebook page. And if you register for the conference on our app, so anyone can tune in, if you're listening, I would tune in seven o'clock. Mountain Time on Facebook and you'll see Karin's beautiful face and Berman's beautiful face.

Karin Peter 11:07

Excellent. So other than having to be on video, I'm looking forward to that. So sunstone symposium is different this year, obviously, because we are responding to covid 19. And all of the restrictions that we have and you guys went with an all online conference this year. So what can I expect from a symposium as this giant seminar online? What, what's happening there?

Lindsay Hansen Park 11:36

Well, every year at the end of July, we always have our conference. So it's become, you know, for 45 years, the symposiums been going on for almost 40 years. You have people It's a tradition at the end of summer, they come to this conference, and it's usually you know, 2000 people in the mountain America Expo Center and you have a program there's eight concurrent sessions and you have to pick one and miss the others. And with COVID, we were thinking, what do we do? Do we just cancel? Or do we make online and I have to give a shout out to our events manager Grace Poole, who is literally a miracle worker, how she's been able to pull this off and transition. It is wonderful. And she's done that with help with the help of a volunteer complete volunteer Trace Rogers. So Grace and Trace those are and they have moved to all online so we, you know, initially I'm not very creative, I guess, because I was like, well, we can have people pre record it, and put it up there. And, you know, people can choose what videos they want to watch and Trace and Grace felt like doing it live would be more interesting and capture what the symposium is about. The symposium is not just about hearing a lecture having

new ideas exposed to you. It's about interacting with Mormons like you or Mormons. That are not like you different Mormons. And so we tried to find a way that we could do that. So it's going to be all online. It's \$75 for the three days. So after the Smith Pettit lecture that's free, then you register, and you get 120 sessions. And instead of choosing one, concurrent one and missing the rest, you can choose your live session that you want to watch at each time block. And then you can go back and watch all the sessions. And we're going to keep the app live for you know, several weeks after so you'll have plenty of time it's going to be like, you can go interact live with everyone those first three days. You can ask your favorite scholars and historians questions and the Q and A's. We're going to have social events on it too. We have some what we're calling decaf classes, coffee classes, where you can pay \$15 and have a one on one with Greg Prince you know or me there's going to be one with me. But yeah, we're trying to find ways to make it social. So we have a huva app, which would be on your tablet or phone. And on the Hoover app, you can

Karin Peter 14:08

Spell Whova. So that's W H O V A.

Lindsay Hansen Park 14:11

Yeah, it's Whova. And what's really great about that is that's our regular conference app. So it's the app that we use every year. But this year, you can stream all the sessions through the app. And you can start chat rooms, let's say you're hearing a Greg Prince presentation. And he says something that really intrigues you or makes you mad or whatever, you can ask a question in the app live, or you can create a discussion group around it. And so our discussion groups are always really popular on apps, and you never know what you're going to get. You're going to interact with all different kinds of people. So that's going to be really cool. We're going to have some contests and some, you know, fun, fun things going on. And then we're going to end with sort of a concert of a bunch of different Mormon artist. Who have submitted their musical talents. So it's just a fun way for everyone to be introduced to Mormon scholars, thinkers, poets, artists, musicians. And then at the very end of the conference, we usually do local church at the Community of Christ. Do you guys host us in your Salt Lake congregation. And that's become a really meaningful thing to a lot of people because a lot of LDS people don't have a lot of interactions with Community of Christ outside of sunstone. And so they come and then they attend your service. And it's always really great. So you guys are going to be hosting that virtually as well.

Karin Peter 15:39

So maybe we'll Carla Long is the pastor at the Salt Lake congregation and she has been planning that and like other years, it will include the sacrament of communion. And we do online communion in Community of Christ. So we the church has made provisions for that. So it was will be a wonderful experience.

Lindsay Hansen Park 16:03

Yeah, I'm excited about that. And I think I mean, I don't know how it's going to be virtually. But with any of this, it's going to be an experiment for all of us. But I do think so far, I've been really,

really impressed with the technological capabilities that we do have. I think we, I mean, having 120 different sessions, which means there's at least that many speakers having to figure out the technical side, we're talking every age range and generation every sort of capability. I can't believe we're going to pull it off. So everyone fast and pray that will pull it off. Community of Christ, we have some sessions. You want me to talk about some of the session?

Karin Peter 16:48

Yeah, I was gonna ask you for our community Christ listeners who may be thinking why would I do that go to that I'm not Mormon. How does Community of Christ how are we represented at Sunstone?

Lindsay Hansen Park 17:01

Well, like I said, Our goal at this symposium is to have people under the restoration tradition interact with other people from the restoration. So we have all different kinds of representation. So this year, just as an example, we have Lach Laughlin, MacKay who's going to present on Nauvoo polygamy and the RLDS church, which I'm really excited about because normally we just hear about polygamy from an LDS perspective. So that's going to be a big deal. I believe John Hamer is presenting, can give you the should have had this up. We had well, so Robin Linkhart is going to host an interesting panel of former LDS apologists, have you heard about this, Karin?

Karin Peter 17:52

No, tell more about it.

Lindsay Hansen Park 17:55

Okay, so we in LDS studies, we have Mormon apologists. who, you know, argue and sort of defend the church? There. It's a vibrant community, a lot of money and scholarship was put into funding, things like polygamy and our race, a ban with the priesthood in the temple, and things like that. Well, we have a panel of former apologists, so people that worked in apologetics and dedicated a lot of time, energy and commitment to it and now have changed their mind. And one of them is in the stake presidency of his LDS board. And so I was trying to think, you know, it's a very male dominated space and I was like, who do we know who could? Who could navigate the discussion and knows all the issues and it was Robin, so Robin is going to host that which I think is going to be a really interesting crossover. Mm hmm. So she's going to be involved there. Like you said, Carla Long I'm trying to see should have had this First thing we have, we have a lot of things talking about the history of the early church that will appeal to Community of Christ members. And we all have shared history. So we have there's going to be talks on different accounts of the first vision. There is going to be Mormon poetry, there's going to be talks about navigating faith crisis crises. Let's see.

There's also one that I think is really interesting with Gina Colvin and Katie Langston, they're going to be talking about growing up LDS and then converting to a different tradition. And as you know, Gina Colvin is Community of Christ now. So she's going to talk about that, you know, transition for her. Yeah, there's just all kinds. I'm just looking through the program it's like,

Karin Peter 19:54

Historically, we've had lots of different folks participate in presenting right Bill Russell has praised It Sunstone for years and years and years, as you say, Steve Shields, Dale Luffman. Lots of different people have participated in different ways.

Lindsay Hansen Park 20:09

Also, we have things that appeal to across the spectrum we have Thursday night we're going to have our first ever keynote in Spanish by Marta Vasquez who is going to talk about being a refugee to the United States and her work with refugees now, and that's something that we haven't done before because we haven't had a large Spanish speaking audience so we worried about about having no one come to that you know, the presentation but now that it's online, we have actually have two presentations in Spanish this year. One is also by Anya Tinajero Vega who's in Mexico and she's going to present there. And that's kind of cool is we have people presenting from all over the world we have Ken McFaden who I met at sunstone uk, who is from I think Scotland and he's going to talk about his experience with actually and Community of Christ. We have people presenting for Simon Sotherton on Book of Mormon. He's wonderful. Yeah. You You met him in Australia?

Karin Peter 21:16

Yeah. Yeah, he is. He is really wonderful. I really enjoyed him and Community Christ people, you really should tune in for that.

Lindsay Hansen Park 21:23

So yeah, and then we have Gina Colvin from New Zealand. Some, you know, Anya from Mexico. A lot of people from Europe, and I mentioned John Hamer, but I just I, I have this title now and he's talking about Restoration Scripture as a Lens to View the Bible. So anything John Hamer touches is fascinating and turns to gold. So I'm excited about that. But yeah, we have representation from Community of Christ from LDS and then we have Christ's Church who is a fundamentalist group that always participates. They're giving so presentations on their history and their interpretations. We actually have people talking about Freemasonry and early Mormonism and how it affected Mormon morning tradition. And I say morning with a you because our, our theme this year for our symposium is grief and gratitude. And so a lot of people are going to be talking about that and I would recommend on Friday evening our keynote is going to be Fatimah Salleh. She is a woman who started out LDS she's now moved on to a different tradition. But she's she is a Reverend classically trained at Duke University, theological school and she's going to be preaching on grief and gratitude and Mormon doctrine in general with the Book of Mormon and so if you haven't heard her, she's absolutely worth listening to as well.

Karin Peter 23:00

So lots of things that withdraw folks, not only from the Mormon community, traditional Mormon community, but from Community of Christ and other groups as well. So hopefully some of our listeners will tune in for the free Smith pedot lecture on Wednesday night and

decide to register for the symposium as a whole. It's a wonderful opportunity at a great price this year to really participate in Sunstone. If this is your first time, I did want to ask you, you've given us a great overview of what it's going to look like. But I wanted to ask you this, what's your greatest hope for this 2020 symposium?

Lindsay Hansen Park 23:40

Well, as I feel about every year one of my greatest achievements that I have helped bring to Sunstone but I also think that our staff has worked hard at is helping more more people understand people that are different than them. When I first came to Sunstone, inherited Sunstone our staff was working with a community of maybe 300, LDS people who had been doing the same thing, talking about the same topics, which is obviously important to them because it remained in existed. We decided to shake it up a little bit and include more of fundamentalist churches, for example, and that was very controversial. Of course Community of Christ helped us with that, because you guys have had your own growth with dealing with Mormon polygamist. And so, one of the things that I think that I am most proud of is that we have people who couldn't disagree more on foundational topics of faith, but they're both speaking of faith language that they recognize which is Mormonism or the restoration. And the stakes are so high for them and yet they find ways to be in community together. And I've had, honestly, Karen, this is the truth. But I've learned how to do a lot of that from the struggles the Community of Christ have overcome and sort of gone through and your own church in the way that you guys have navigated conflict. And all of that has been such good roadmaps for the rest of us. So we've tried to incorporate that. So in the past that I've been really proud of that this year. I don't know what to expect, but I would my greatest hope this year is that people will, will dip their toes into the online version because it's the most easy, accessible, safe way for you to do it. So you can disengage if you're uncomfortable, you can engage at your, your own speed. And my hope is that when you're listening, you realize what maybe you can bring to the table. The beauty about sunstone is it's an open forum and we want to amplify voices that need to be heard. And so if you are Listening as a Community of Christ member, and you think, gosh, there's no one's talking about this subject or I want to talk about this subject, do it, we want your voice we, you, it gives you a whole year to prepare. We have our call for papers, which opens September 1, and is open till March 1. And the call for papers is basically where we say, submit your presentation, whatever your topic is, I submitted between September and march and there's a very good chance we'll allow you to present next year, which we're hoping will be in person. But I think this year, it's just an opportunity to bring it to more people all around the world in a very accessible way. So you don't have to fly to Salt Lake like you normally would. You can, you know watch Greg Prince in your pajamas and interact with Mike Quinn in your pajamas and interact with Robin Linkhart, you know, eating lunch or whatever it is that you want to do. So I would say Just experiment with it, give it a try and see if you have something you can bring to the table if there's something lacking. Or if you feel really strongly that someone said something incorrect or that you disagree with or something that's missing. Well, it's not going to happen unless people bring it to the table. And that's what's so great about a call for papers is we curate some of our sessions. But I could never imagine half of the stuff that we that people submit, because that's the beauty about this community is everybody has their own unique gifts to bring. And we hope you bring into sunstone.

Karin Peter 27:41

Beautifully said Lindsay. And so on that, I'm going to thank you again for participating this morning. I know you're busy. It's the last week before we start, and there's lots to do. But I want to thank you and thank our listeners today and hopefully some of you will Participate in sunstone symposium that starts next week. So this is Karin Peter. I've been with Lindsey Hanson Park. This is part of project science podcast. Thanks for listening. Thank you.

Josh Mangelson 28:21

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