

Josh Mangelson 0:17

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 0:33

Hello, everyone, and welcome to the Project Zion podcast. I'm your host, Carla Long and today, as I do at least once a month I have my dear dear friends Charmaine and Tony Chvala Smith on Hi, Tony. Hi, Charmaine.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 0:47

Hello!

Tony Chvala-Smith 0:48

Hi, Carla!

Carla Long 0:49

And today, we're going to be talking about the pandemic. If this is years later, the right now we're sitting in September 2020. So if this is years later, and you're like, oh, the pandemic, those were tough times, then take yourself back to that place, because that's where we're sitting right now. We're still in the midst of it. All right now. So we're going to talk about how the pandemic has kind of had an effect on the church, and theology, maybe in general, and so on, and so forth. So we're just going to have a little conversation about that. So I know this pandemic has been actually kind of amazing for some people like me, who had a baby. So I've had my husband's been here, I've been here. So it's been like an extended maternity leave. So it's been a pretty good pandemic for me. But other people have had a really difficult time. And I you know, like, what how's it been for the church has a church had an amazing maternity leave extended time in the pandemic? Has the church been like, lost its job and had a horrible pandemic so far? What do you guys think?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:53

Well, as as with anything in life, there's always a mix. And so, you know, I think, I think the pandemic has propelled the church into a whole new era of asking, questioning, what is worship, what is community? What does it mean to be called, in this time, to seek the kingdom or to create the kingdom or to invite the kingdom. So there's all of that, then there's the the isolation and the people who are suffering from not having a tangible community to be a part of and to be affirmed by and to, to reflect back to them, the image of God that is in them. So it's a mix, and but I think, if we let it be, it can be kind of like a diving board into the future, where we can, we can choose to let it propel us into something that's hopefully not a belly flop. It's one of those one double spirals and something else on the way down. Hopefully, that but, you know, and so we want to kind of explore what are some of the ways that it has been calling the church forward, asking us to let go of some things without letting go of some people. And the

questions it's a it's causing us to ask about, where's God? How does God work in the world? How do we pray in a pandemic? All those kinds of things?

Tony Chvala-Smith 3:40

What one of one of my spiritual mentors at different times in my life has been the 14th 15th century writer Thomas Aquinas, his book, Imitation of Christ, it's kind of a Christian classic. And somewhere in it, I can't, I can't quote book in chapter but somewhere in it. He says, occasions, show, show us what we are, by what she when he uses the word occasion, it means things that just happen. He's not talking about God doing something to estimate things that just happened in life. They have a way of kind of showing up what we're really made of. And so, in a sense, the pandemic has become an occasion for the church to see what church is about. And, you know, for example, I think we've we've been learning that church, this is a hard thing to learn or to relearn, because Christianity has been connected to buildings since the third late third century. So I think we've we've begun to learn that. Really, the church has always been a people and not a place per se. And so what's been interesting to me is How quickly so many congregations went to Zoom worship.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 5:07

So we're worshipping Zoom?

Tony Chvala-Smith 5:07

Not worshipping technology

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 5:13

Sorry, it catches me, I couldn't let it go.

Tony Chvala-Smith 5:15

Worship on zoom.

Yes, we're worshipping technology might be the topic of another podcast, or less. So yeah, yes, the great, the great golden calf of the iPhone, right. So that's a topic for another time. But how quickly congregations switched over to worshipping on zoom, and in many cases found their attendance going up. Right. So this, let's be honest, the pandemic is absolutely, this is a horrible event in world history. And it is a world historical event. And it's absolutely brutally horrible in the United States where you would expect it not to be. And there are lots of political reasons and social reasons for that. But right in the middle of what is devastating, the the church is rediscovering that it is a people and not a building. I'm not dissing buildings, because honestly, it's also showing us how much we miss being face to face, how much we miss hugging each other and being there and sitting next to each other. I mean, we totally miss that. So I'm not dissing place or buildings. I'm just saying, We're re, this occasion is showing us how much it's easy to forget the church is a community of people before it's anything else. So I think that's something we're all learning from it.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 6:40

Yeah, and, and I think, along with that, and, and I might be jumping the gun on some other things that Tony and I talked about earlier that he might want to say. But I think we are reconnecting to the importance of words. Having to be more intentional about the words we use, not just because they might be recorded on zoom for eternity, though that may help, but also the power of words to get us in touch with our own story of God. When we don't have the presence of each other physically, to hear always, as much as we might often hear, see someone and what comes to mind is their testimony. God in their lives, if we've, if we've known people for a while sometimes just seeing people brings that home to us. And so words are becoming that bridge of how do we intentionally say what we're about, and whether it's like online worship. Again, worshiping online, (laughter) it doesn't look as good as with Zoom. So, you know, we are able to, which is another one of those amazing things, we're able to go to like two or three worship services on the same morning, or actually, we sometimes do on Saturday night, and then we'll go to one or two on Sunday morning,

Tony Chvala-Smith 8:20
Total church geeks we are.

Carla Long 8:21
Church nerds!

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 8:24
But you know, what's amazing, we see some of the same people in those different places. So it's not just us, that is finding it, that it is soul nurturing, to be in these different places worshiping in different ways sometimes, but but the it means that the message, we think Tony mentioned this last night, we were chat about this, he thinks the preaching is getting better in the church, because of being online, because of that added level of intentionality. And maybe because some congregations are able to reach farther and wider for who will speak. And so they can, they can ask guest speakers to come and speak, you know, on a particular topic or a particular scripture. And, you know, typically we couldn't have done that and had people moving across the country every weekend. I mean, lots of that happened with church employees, but small congregations can now have a guest preacher. And so that's one of those those benefits for us to be more conscious and intentional about.

Carla Long 9:35
Speaking of that, I have something to talk to you guys about after this.

All 9:37
(laughter)

Tony Chvala-Smith 9:39
So you know like in the past month to six weeks, Charmaine and I have spoken in Ontario, and I've spoken in Australia, and where else like it we've we've spoken in southern Missouri, in Farwell, Michigan, So, in other words the boundaries, between jurisdictions and so on have become much more fluid with that. And when Charmaine was talking about, gosh, we get to go

to two or three, two or three, zoom worships, you know, it's like, you know, I knew barhopping was a thing who knew that zoom worship hopping was a thing?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 10:20

It is though!

Carla Long 10:23

It is a thing! You know, that, that makes me wonder a couple things. What is it going to be like more back in person church? Like, will people miss going to different church services? Well, Will our worship services change? Because they're like, Well, you know, how they do it here? It's kind of cool. You know, how they do it here? And, like, Will our numbers swell, because people are so excited to be back? Or will they be down to like, this core group, because everybody else is like, I like being wearing my pajama pants on a Sunday morning. So will it be just one core group who was like, dedicated to doing something and changing the world. I don't know. Like, I just, I have no idea what's gonna happen.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 11:05

Yeah. And you know, that's something I haven't heard very much actually not heard anything about. And that is, how do we follow up with the people who come to worship in an online setting on a Sunday morning? Because one of the realities is that, you know, people are saying, oh, my goodness, I saw so and so's name in the worship on Sunday. And they haven't come to church for years. And, you know, maybe there were a relationship problem. But they've been longing to be able to worship with the community again. So this is a place we can plan ahead and start to say, so. So who's here that wouldn't be here on a, previous to the pandemic? And how can we make a bridge? How can we make a way for them to continue to be here, even if it's simply making sure that whatever we do when we're face to face, zoom, or some other platform where people can continue to join us, even if there's a strange moment between family members, or between members of the church? Can this this allows there to be community, even in the midst of conflict? And but we have to be intentional about that. We have to seek out the people who are self worshipping in our midst, and say, oh, we're so glad to see you're here. Welcome. Welcome. Welcome. And, and it may be a door for some kinds of reconciliation and healing. But it's also Yeah, just like you said, congregations are going, Oh, my gosh, we can do this. We actually have cameras and microphones and technology. And, you know, we have some people who, now they know how to use Zoom. And, but they can't drive to church every Sunday, you know, they're older or they they are physically not able to do that, or they're not able to come drive at night. So they've not been to Wednesday evening, fellowship or prayer service for years. Now we have people who can be present in ways that they've never been so but we have to be intentional. We have to keep making those, letting this be a bridge thing time, rather than a consolation prize.

Tony Chvala-Smith 13:38

You realize that with with worshipping on zoom, we never again can cancel church because of snow and ice. So I you know, one of the things Charmaine was saying we she and I talked about earlier was that there's something about being on zoom that gives us space, a little a little bit of

anonymity that can be very helpful in healing processes, right? So it's sometimes people if people have had a bad experience at church, and it was bad in your personal experience, but it's still their community and still their congregation. The body memory of going back to church can be overpowering sometimes and really keep you from ever getting any further with it. But they having the safe space of being able to worship with the community on zoom with say your video turned off is a way to say I'm still here. You matter. I hope I still matter. And somebody reached out to me. Yeah. So it's just one of the one of the byproduct you know, back back to something Carly mentioned and related to the preaching getting better is that congregational life, week to week is so siloed in that particular area, that location, I mean, more or less as it should be. But by being able to get out and see what other people are doing in worship, I think in the classroom, we would call it cross pollenization. But it very, very likely could have a long range effect of making worship more fruitful, more open ended because people are more willing to try things that they have seen on zoom in other locations, so

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 15:36

I'm wondering if our message as a church might become more consistent, I would never say uniform, because that would not be us at all. But more consistent, we might, we might be able to share powerful language with each other about our sense of shared call that I hadn't thought about that. But that might be another benefit.

Tony Chvala-Smith 16:01

Earlier Charmaine and while we were getting started, people watching wouldn't know this, but we're processing where we're going to go, I mentioned that I find it helpful to apply the image of exile happening now most of the Hebrew Bible, in its current written form, came into existence, because of this horrible and difficult event called the Babylonian exile. When the remaining tribes of the people of Israel, Judah, and Benjamin, mostly Judah, lost their homeland, lost their temple, lost their city were taken into exile, and thought they would never ever regain it. And during during the battle in exile, the only way to preserve identity was to write and was to figure out a new way to be God's people again. And the result of that was, essentially, you know, I'm compressing a lot of complex history, but the result was really the Hebrew Bible. And so exile is both difficult and potentially fruitful. And in a sense, the church right now is going through an exile period, in multiple ways. The pandemic forces us into physical exile from each other, and especially from our reunions and camps, it's like that was real hard blow the summer, I think, to lots of us. I love those experiences every summer. So we, in a sense, we've had we've gone into an exile moment. But the cool thing about the exile moment is that we have decided, it's quite clear, we have decided that what we're doing and who we are matters so much, we're going to do anything we can to preserve it and make it grow. I think that is just a that's a marvelous God thing. In the midst of this.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 17:56

Yeah. And an example of this is two mission centers, combine their efforts and their vision and their creativity. And they said, you know, we're not going to be able to have our regular reunions in July, but you know, what we're going to do, we're going to have 31 days of events, for the people in our mission centers, every day, there is going to be something, there's going

to be somebody presenting something. So they might be a sermon, it might be spiritual practice, it might be a Bible study, it might be so for 30 for all of July, every single day, they had, and they would, you know, they would contact people. So like, they contacted us and said, Oh, would you do something, an hour, an hour and a half, something you're passionate about. And so they have people doing all these things that they love, and that that mattered to them, and that are about the church about God about what it means to be community. And, and there's activities for kids and, and so they created and so I was just talking to someone a few days ago, who said, I got so much more out of that I love reunion, but I got so much more out of being connected with not just our own mission center, but these people I never met before I've seen in passing. And now my community is bigger. Now I know more people now I've worshipped in all these different ways or, or had discussions with all these different people about topics I would never have done. So it you know, there's new things that are richer and deeper, and, and perhaps more inclusive, perhaps less inclusive, as well. And that's, that's one of the things that that is a warning, I think, is that if people don't have the technology, either because they're uncomfortable with it. are unable to, to manage it learn it, or they don't have access because of the cost of, you know, having Wi Fi, of having a phone that can connect you of having a computer or even, you know, have Wi Fi coverage. I mean, it's there is a real chance that there, there can be a narrowing of, of who we are. And so that's, this is the balance we need to have.

Carla Long 20:33

It's a little bit scary. And so like when we do kids activities, were very aware that the kids activities can't be going on at the same time as the church activities or whatever or different age groups giving time for families might have one computer or their Wi Fi signal isn't strong enough. And you really have to be careful not to exclude, or to try to exclude as few people as possible if you have to do that at all.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 20:55

Exactly.

Carla Long 20:56

What it sounds like to me what you're describing. I'm sorry, Tony,

Tony Chvala-Smith 20:59

No you're good.

Carla Long 21:00

It sounds like what you're describing to me is that, like the, and I really hate to use this word. So I think it's a loaded word. But the true nature of the churches kind of showing itself, who we truly are, is kind of getting distilled down that place. Because it kind of has to, and it sounds like who we truly are, is a body of people who believe that relationships are very, very important. People who believe that everyone is called to do something, you can talk on zoom, you can talk and someone who believes that a people who believe that we need to be together and worshipping is an important part of that. That's what it sounds like to me. I don't know if that's what it sounds like.

Tony Chvala-Smith 21:44

Absolutely. And I think that's exactly what what Thomas Aquinas was getting at back in the early 1400s. occasions, show us what we are. And then I was it's not it's not helpful to see the occasion itself as as good or evil. It simply is what it is. And it just shows us what what what's going on in us. And so this is showing us that Community of Christ, the small international denomination with big dreams, a passionate vision for just future for a different kind of world, an inclusive church that wants to make space at the table for everybody who want who wants to follow Jesus, that, that this is not that we're not going to be we're not going to be put down by this we're going to we're going to survive our way through this. I forget which prophet it was Jeremiah, Ezekiel, I'm sorry, I'm my, my classic prophets are kind of fuzzy in my head at the moment here. But one of those those two, Jeremiah, Ezekiel had this vision of the glory of Yahweh leaving the temple and going into exile with the people. And so God God is in exile with us. Right? It's a way to think about God, God didn't cause the pandemic, right? This, this pandemic has actual, human and biological causes. God did not cause this and is with us, God, God has gone into exile with the church and the Divine Wisdom is helping us figure out that we still want to be the church, in spite of it all. So that's, that's, I think that's a an amazing side of this, even at the same time. Well, this is what this is deadly business we're dealing with it is. I mean, Charmaine, and I live here in the Kansas City area. And we can't stop spiking with cases here. Part of that is political failure, based on political and religious ideologies, which are trying to play this down trying to pretend it doesn't exist. Another another thing that pandemic shows up is all kinds of distorted versions of Christianity, right?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 23:56

If I can go ahead, and so, it also means that we can, it can help us hone our message of what, what is the kingdom of God? That, that we're called to? I mean, you know, I'm not sure if all your listeners would agree with this or not. But to me, it's, it's undeniable that this pandemic has revealed what has always been there in this country, which is racism, which is sexism. I mean, these kinds of things. It's, it's made them so obvious. You know, violence against minorities. Intentional violence, intentional marginalization. Suddenly, it's visible for everybody to see. I think. I know that not everybody's willing to see it or hear it but as Church, what the peaceable Kingdom can be, now has very concrete actions for us to take, in this time in this place. If we want to say what the kingdom is not, if we want to say what the kingdom is, it's visible, it's tangible. What does it mean that we lift up each other, the Worth of All Persons, All Are Called, not just as a nice thing to say, but to challenge the society that we have been part of that has said, No, this whole group of people, they don't have as much value. That's obvious, you know, and that's how it's been. It's been, it's like, well, that's just the way things are, or, you know, they don't work as hard or, you know, whatever. It's all of those things. And we now can say, That's not the kingdom of God. And we're called to say, help put the words and the, and the flesh on what the kingdom of God can be, and what we are called to be. Where we're called to say, this, you know, this particular narrative in our culture, it's wrong. It's evil. It's, it's diminishing of people, and it's intentional. And we want to challenge that. So we have the opportunities, we have opportunities, like we've seldom had to have a more common language,

in the culture about what's wrong, these systemic forms of oppression. So I think our call becomes more obvious. In this time,

Tony Chvala-Smith 26:58

This this can be a liberation moment for the church, right? And when I say liberation, I mean, following a bunch of remakes of a liberation theology moment for the church for us to claim those parts of, of our current theology that have deep roots in theologies of liberation theologies of liberation, our Christian theology that seek to apply the best resources of the Christian faith to situations of oppression and marginalization, believing that Jesus is the Liberator Jesus, that all Jesus's and stands for. Is, is connected to lifting people up out of marginalization and oppression of Jesus sermon, and Nazareth is the key text here. So and a Community of Christ theology has some cool things to say right now. Right, so the theologies, which, which want to support political ideologies that believe that there's an acceptable number of deaths to that community of Christ says, No, absolutely not. The worth of persons is great in the sight of God. And you, you can't just you can't just say, well, we can accept a certain number of deaths and we just have to write we just have to let herd immunity run run wild. That's, that's a form that's a form of social Darwinism at its worst. Theologies, which wants to which, which are anti science, to that Community of Christ theology says, no truth from all sources matters. And we have to follow truth wherever it goes. And so we want to be connected to the best science, not faux science,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 28:35

So a little example here is that we were talking with someone recently, who was saying that their, their doctor, their chiropractor, was not wanting to be immunized because he was convinced that the vaccine is the mark of the beast in Revelation. And it's like, oh, my gosh, what, you know, these are the places where religion where the denominations can amplify the evil of things, by by saying things like, Well, you know, this is God's way of thinning out the population or improving the culture, you know, people and people say those things, this is a judgment against the US or wherever, because and they picked whatever their favorite topic is that they want to judge other people on. And so to choose to use the pandemic as a way to, to focus, you know, just laser focus on what are the changes that are needed in this time in this place, what is the good news that, that lifts all people that claims all people as God's children?

Tony Chvala-Smith 30:11

Absolutely.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 30:12

It how weak it can help us. And we also have to be speaking up to counter those religious voices that would use this for fear, would use it to cordon power into certain narrow avenues. So, and I think that's, that's another piece of this, I may be wondering on,

Tony Chvala-Smith 30:39

distorted theologies and how the pandemic is like, well, showing,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 30:42

It's showing us that it is also showing us the nature of power, in this culture and society. And the tendency of power is to keep power. And so, you know, in this pandemic, we're seeing all these all of these kinds of things, we're seeing, you know, voter suppression, with all kinds of excuses made, but it's still the same thing. To to limit who has a voice, we're seeing healthcare that isn't equally distributed, that, that, in an even the kinds of healthcare that have been available, are being taken away. So it's like people with power, reinforcing their power over other people, we're seeing the cases, and, you know, this is this was expected, and it has been happening, right, you know, higher levels of child abuse, higher levels of domestic violence, particularly against women. We, it's, it's helping us to see the violence that we have come to accept in our culture of those with power over those who don't, whether it's, you know, George Floyd, whether it's the number of recent killings, and or shootings of unarmed black men, recently, and women, you know, all of these things are helping us to see this misuse of power, and that certain people are trying to hang on to power at all costs. And that's really an important thing to be able to see in a culture is to see who, who has power, and wants to have power over other people. And, and until we recognize that we can't necessarily challenge it within ourselves. And that's this part of the spiritual formation, part of this is to start recognizing that, you know, we're surrounded by this culture that talks about power in certain ways, or holds on to power in certain ways. Certain people have a certain color and a certain gender, making sure that they can maintain power over other people. And then we have to look at ourselves, and where do I buy into that? Where have I not thought, where have I not spoken out? Where have I been the benefactor, that kind of power used against others. So there's, there's just a whole lot of places to go with the things we get to see. Because the pandemic has made them there, we're acutely aware of them because of the pandemic.

Tony Chvala-Smith 33:39

And so an upside theologically is that a church who's seal symbolizes safety for children and peace with nature, among other things, gosh, we've got something to say and be in the midst of this. It won't be easy to be it, I mean, we're we're trying to won't be easy to be it because the same polarized political divisions that are in American culture, certainly present in the church, but but our own theology calls us to something better and something different. So. So now the occasion is showing up all kinds of things it I think it shows the church, what we've got, how much we've got, it also shows us the dark side, the dark side of certainly American culture, but I think it's it, it's going to show up everywhere, too. It's just American culture, because that's what we're living in right now. So

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 34:34

I think it's also I'm sorry, we're just kind of, we're not letting you jump in here, Carla. Okay. So I think the other thing is really challenging us on is, what is what are images of who God is and what God does. And this is a this is a difficult one because a cultural Christianity basically says if you go Believe in God, sometimes they say if you believe in God a certain way, then God wants you to be prosperous. And to be on that top tier in this society. And, but even for those who don't buy completely into that most of us buy into, or have been, or have absorbed the idea that somehow God's job is to make us comfortable. Right? If you do the right things, if you

cheat, learn this from childhood, if you do the right things, then God is somehow obligated to make your life easy. And we're having to look at things and say that that's a God who's about this big, you know, that's a pocket God who's just for me and my comfort level. And how do I pray to that, cause that pocket God, I pray to God, to take care of me to my little sphere that you know, and we can't do that. We, if we're honest, we can't do that anymore. This is a this. If we, if we believe that God cares about all of creation, that's gonna, that's gonna mess with our prayer life. It's gonna make a struggle with what is it? Am I like my god be too small? Have I let God be my personal valet? Who know that God's main job right is to make sure I go through life comfortable, a well fed, you know, well dressed car, a house, mortgage, retirement, whatever it is. It's really bringing that into sharp contrast. And so we're having to figure out how do we pray? How do I pray for not only my brothers and sisters in Italy, or Spain, who are struggling with COVID, as you know, earlier on now, it would be our students and our friends in Iowa, where it's becoming a really, you know, they're really naming it as a dangerous place right now. What do I pray for? I mean, it helps us to go into some other places, in ourselves, and to, to build empathy, to have compassion for each other, that this spiritual journey is not just about me. It's about who we are, together, and who we are, I think this is also helping us to see who we are in the natural world to those connections, and the ways that we're all connected, we all matter to each other, what happens to each other happens to us too. And that's, that's a really good place to have to go theologically. Because then God isn't just my, my church is God, or the God who you're right with, if you believe these five things, this is a God who has to be bigger than that. And if this is a God, who we know through Christ in the Spirits movement in our lives, than our communities, this is the compassionate God who cares for every part of God's creation. That causes us to let our hearts be broken. That callsus to reach out and help to feed our neighbor, and have justice for our neighbor. And to challenge the systems that have told our other neighbor that they're not as valuable. So it's breaking down some things. Let's just build some things.

I will say, go ahead and take Tony on the second. That the prayer thing, I have never in my life, heard of technology being prayed for more. Thank you, God for taking this together. I hear I've heard that into prayer at least 50 times. Yeah, people are very grateful for technology. And I get

Once once per service is required. It's like a new liturgy.

But have you heard have you heard yet somebody say come out of that foul microphone.

Tony Chvala-Smith 39:35
Maybe not that

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 39:37
Might be the first Tony. (laughter)

Tony Chvala-Smith 39:38
I I just did the first deliverance on zoom. Have a bad mic. (laughter)

Carla Long 39:47

Thank you. No, thank you, God for this technology. No, thank you. (laughter) Okay, Tony, you go ahead and go.

Tony Chvala-Smith 39:55

I just wanted to follow Charmaine's really an excellent train of thought there on who God is in the midst of this. And the the God, the God of the good news, the God of Jesus Christ is a God who weeps for the poor, weeps for the disease, weeks for the conditions of the marginalized, the refugee, those who are without means and substance and hope. This is a God who seeks them, and is with them. And so that's the kind of God I think Community of Christ at its best knows and can represent. And if we believe in that kind of God, it does have political consequences. It does. It's always had political consequences. Jesus, preaching of the kingdom of God was a political act as well as a theological act. Let me just say, though, that the God that Jesus proclaimed and embodies, also called us to love our neighbor. And so, you know, what we're wearing a mask in public is that is a declaration of the good news. It's a theological act. I don't care if it's a political act, it probably is. But I don't care if it's a theological act, I am doing what Jesus told us to do love your neighbor, as yourself. This is this, this is where this is where science and faith come together, washing your hands, sanitizing things, this is not only for you, this is for the sake of your neighbor. And, you know, how are we doing on that? Well, in American culture very uneven, because the the the narrative of my individual rights, trump everything, that narrative has swallowed up, in many cases, the gospel narrative for people and so Community of Christ as a has the power, the capacity, the calling, and the moral obligation to uphold the other narrative in the midst of the one that we're just saturated with every day.

Carla Long 42:03

Even if a year from now, I've said this a couple times, they say, you know, it was really silly to wear a mask, it didn't do anything, it didn't do anything at all, I will still be really proud of myself for doing it and happy with myself for doing it because I wasn't doing it for me. I was doing it for somebody else. And that's the way I want to live my life. I don't want to live my life only for me. Like, what a, what a terrible life and shallow life that would be. So I even if I get made fun of now, and I will tell you in Utah, I feel stares of disdain at times when I'm wearing a mask and hardly anybody else is. I will carry that because I want people to know that I care enough about them to do that. And so Gosh, I just that, that, that wearing a mask not wearing a mask thing drives me completely insane. completely crazy. Because you're right, Tony, it is a theological issue, not a political one. And I just wanted to, you're quoting the Doctrine and Covenants. And just in case people don't know that that was section 163:4a says "God, the eternal creator weeps for the poor, displaced, mistreated and diseased of the world because of their unnecessary suffering. such conditions are not God's will open your ears to hear the pleading of mothers, mothers and fathers and all nations who desperately seek a future of hope for their children do not turn away from them for in their welfare resides your welfare." And I just wanted people just in case you didn't know that.

Tony Chvala-Smith 43:35

Thank you.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 43:36

It's such a it's such a relevant passage today. And I'm so glad you you read a big chunk of that piece. That's exactly what we're saying.

Josh Mangelson 43:49

To culture political forces who say this is acceptable suffering. That prophetic passage in the Doctrine Command says it's unnecessary suffering. And it's not God's and it's not God's word anyway. Right. I think it's just really, I mean, gosh, that little verse is a call to Community of Christ to be something different in the midst of this to, to let this occasion show up, who we truly are, as a people,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 44:16

Or who we want to be, in the space in which we want to move that direction that, that deep down, we know, we know, this is what God is calling us to and and this is happening for individuals, but also for congregations. So, yeah, there's so many places to go with this. And I know that we've been talking about this for a long time already. But but there's there's so many places to go. I mean, other things that this has has revealed is, you know, how do we care for those in our culture, who are doing the dangerous work right now? Are people who are risking their lives properly compensated? Is there a safety net for them? And the reality is that for many of the people who are who are called essential workers, and who have been in the most vulnerable positions in people who work in hospitals, whether they're nurses or CNAs, or janitors, you know, facilities people, whether they're, you know, EMT and emergency workers who are exposed all the time, how are we caring? For those who we are saying, are that we rely on that the people who make sure there is meat in our supply chain? Are they being respected? Is that are their lives being respected, even as they're being forced, in some cases, to work in unsafe places, where COVID is, is in some places raging? And it's causing us to raise questions about consumption? You know, it's not just that, that people are buying jeans, or a lot of nice clothes, and just sweat pants, you know, it's not just that, but people are seeing that, that we don't need all the stuff that we often find ourselves yearning for. Or we're seeing the emptiness of it, and that that's theological. And that's spiritual as well. What are we trying to replace our relationship to God, to ourselves to others to the, to the natural world with, you know, our a new shiny Bible, you know, a new a new flavor of something, a new thing that will make us feel good for a minute. All of that is starting to look a little bit tarnished, I think. And people are, are getting to live with less, and okay with it. And it's like, oh, little simplicity, a little space in my life. This feels good.

Tony Chvala-Smith 47:28

A little less use of fossil fuels. What could be wrong with that?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 47:34

Yeah. So there's lots of places to still go with this topic and with possibilities and with the signposts that it's, it's may it's revealing. But I think a way of looking at it is to say, and maybe a way to pray is to say, God, how can we partner with you to make tangible and visible your

preferred future? How can we bring justice How can we bring healing? How can we bring peace? How can we speak, use our voices, our feet, our creative signmaking, whatever it might be, to, to reveal another way, a way where, where there's room for compassion and love, and empathy, and solidarity. It's, it's potentially an amazing moment.

Carla Long 48:44

Well, it's, it's so good to hear somebody talk about it like this, you know, because mostly what you hear when you listen to the news, or listen, or read on social media is that this is a terrible moment. And it's awful. But it has been for a lot of people, I recognize that I sit here in my privilege, I have a house, my husband has a job, I have a job. And we are able to care for our kids like that. That is a definite privilege. Yeah, I know, people have had a very difficult time. But it's really good to hear that. This could be that diving board that you talked about the very beginning, you know, as a place where we could be jumping into something that could be really fruitful for us in the future. And letting us sit with that thing for a while instead of just like moving from item to item to item with it for a while find out who were called exactly who were called to be. And then get on board when when it's time to get on board. So that's that's kind of exciting to think of it like that.

Tony Chvala-Smith 49:47

Yeah, this is this is another moment for the church to choose to let the God Jesus incarnate to let them God, Jesus proclaimed actually be God for us. Come what may, right? Come on me. That's that's at and whether in COVID times or non COVID times whether, whether in good times bad times, that's always the call to the church, how will you let the God Jesus proclaims be God? How will you show that that God is God for you? Whatever, whatever is?

Carla Long 50:30

Well, that was, that was really good for me to hear. I hope it's good for everybody else. But it was really good for me to hear. And thank you so much for your conversation. Is there anything else you want to talk about before we sign off on the podcast?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 50:44

Just trust that God can walk with us through this and that God is walking with, with those who are struggling most, and can we let our God be the same God and walk with those who are struggling most?

Carla Long 51:01

Not that little pocket God,

Tony Chvala-Smith 51:03

Your little personal valet God, I love that analogy.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 51:06

That God's gonna get crushed by the, by the need by the needs and realities, and needs to be. Because it's not about us, you know, especially those of us who have been benefiting from

privilege from the color of our skin, or the fact that we have education, or able to get a mortgage, or, you know, or whatever. Yeah, that's, that's, that's the God, the God that weeps, that is asking us to walk with God, for the sake of everybody.

Tony Chvala-Smith 51:47

And I would say the only thing I would add is that the church is a living thing. The church is the body of Christ. And in that respect, the church is indestructible. And so but as a living thing, it will take new forms, new shapes, that's how living things live, is that they adapt to their environments, right. And so don't be surprised to see that the church will still in the future, we'll still meet in person. And, you know, find the person sitting next to us as irritating as ever, but it'll, it'll be a little more fun, I think, will still want to hug and have potlucks and, you know, and celebrate being together. But also, don't be surprised to see the church in its livingness take on a variety of new shapes because of this, this moment.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 52:31

I just had an image. So I'm not sure I'm going to be able to verbalize it correctly. But in the same way, the body builds up antibodies to fight against COVID-19. And whether those are only good for a little while, or good for a long while. And perhaps that's one of the things that we can say is we see the things that are killing people in our culture, those with the least voice and the least power. And maybe COVID-19 is allowing us inviting us to build up antibodies to fight against those things in our cultures that that want to kill and diminish and marginalize. That might be a way to think about what's what can happen. And what is happening in many places. Is it people are fighting it, recognizing it at work in and fighting it for the sake of not just themselves, but the whole thing.

Carla Long 53:44

It's a really good analogy. So the church is looking for a vaccine or not looking for a vaccine.

Josh Mangelson 53:54

For that there's, there's more. Right? COVID is a disease but the hearts and souls of of people are infected with diseases of hate and racism and power mongering and lying and deception. And so

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 54:09

Yeah, yeah, so naming the disease and being willing to, to build up resistance to it. short term and long term.

Carla Long 54:20

Awesome. Well, thank you so much. You too. You're always so wonderful, and I appreciate your thoughts. I appreciate you. Always being willing to chat with me about this kind of stuff.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 54:29

Well, thank you for letting us Yes. And for guiding us along the way.

Carla Long 54:33
Oh, you're welcome.

Tony Chvala-Smith 54:36
Thank you, Carla. Bye, bye bye.

Josh Mangelson 54:44
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