

Project ZION Podcast: Episode 81
Meggan Molgard Interview
Host: Brittany Mangelson

Brittany: Hello everyone, welcome to another episode of the Project Zion podcast. Today, we have on Meggan Molgard who is a recent convert to Community of Christ from the Salt Lake congregation, and she is also a gay woman - a gay young adult - and she serves as the president of the GALA affiliate for Salt Lake. You might remember she was on an episode a little while ago about the hymnal, and today we are just going to sit down and talk to her about her faith journey, growing up LDS, and converting to Community of Christ in her early adult life. So, I'm really excited about this and welcome Meggan!

Meggan: Thank you, Brittany.

Brittany: So we are just going to start at the beginning, and talk about your childhood and faith and Mormonism and all of that jazz...so you grew up LDS. Where were you located?

Meggan: So I was born in Tooele, Utah. Then, I lived in Ohio, and my dad was in military so we moved around a lot...and then Maryland, Georgia, North Carolina, Ohio again, which is where I was in high school, and now my family is in Washington state. I was there for a little bit before I went to BYU and now I am living in Salt Lake.

Brittany: Awesome. We're glad you're here! So what was faith like to you growing up? What role did faith play in your family life?

Meggan: Um, it was kind of just integrated into everything. Mormonism goes pretty far back into my family and most of my extended family is LDS so it was just kind of a natural, normal part of me growing up. We had family night, sang hymns a lot. My mom is very musical - we always had piano in the house and religious music was a big part of my musical upbringing, I guess. But yah, it was just kind of a normal part of growing up.

Brittany: So as a family, did you guys do family scripture study, or family prayer? Did you pray before meals? Did you have spiritual practices, or what I would call spiritual practices now - that's not what I would have called them as a kid. Did you participate in those kinds of things as a family?

Meggan: Yah, yah, we did pretty regular nightly family scripture study, usually right after dinner. We would pray before all meals, even in restaurants, which made me feel awkward as a kid sometimes. But yah, we had all those regular morning prayers together. My mom taught seminary when I was in high school for a bit, so we'd get up and have family prayer before we left at like 5:30 in the morning.

Brittany: Oh man.

Meggan: Early morning seminary, man.

Brittany: I did not relate to that, growing up in Zion.

Meggan: Utahn!

Brittany: So what was your relationship with God like, or Heavenly Father, as you would have known God at that point?

Meggan: Um, I had a pretty spiritual upbringing and so, it's hard for me, with my new vocabulary, to go and reflect back on my upbringing, if that makes sense. But, I don't know. I think reflecting back, prayer was kind of a struggle for me...Mormon prayer, where you pray every morning and every night...I didn't really get it. But I remember having very spiritual experiences growing up and encountering God in the spirit, and it wasn't really a complicated relationship. It was pretty simple. It fit into the guidelines that I had growing up and it made sense to me. It was very logical with the ideas that I had been taught. Um, it was when I started having different ideas that things got a little more complicated.

Brittany: Yah, I can relate to a lot of that. Especially prayer...and I didn't really think that prayer was awkward when I was growing up, but now looking back, I realize that it really was. I think part of it, at least for me, is that Primary song that all little kids learn and its this formula for prayer. And it literally says that I begin by saying *Dear Heavenly Father, I thank Him for blessings each day. Then humbly I ask for the things that I need. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.* That for me was kind of like, my funneled vision of what prayer was and I guess just religious practices in general for me growing up were like that. So would you say, I mean, do you relate to that? Was it just kind of a go-through-the-motion, like, you knew exactly what to do, you knew exactly how to read scriptures...it just was kind of all handed to you?

Meggan: Um, yah, I mean when I started high school, I kind of tired to make the practices my own, like I stopped kind of following the formula of the primary song and not even praying out loud. It was kind of more just like connecting with God, which is kind of more how I pray now, but yah, when I was younger, it was very formulaic. I'd just follow what you were supposed to do and it worked out fine for me. I didn't have issues with that when I was younger.

Brittany: So, when would you say that your thoughts and your feelings and your identity started to maybe have a little friction with the church?

Meggan: Um, so my senior year of high school is when I started kind of thinking "maybe I'm gay?" and I don't know, it feels weird that it wasn't until then my senior year of high school that I started recognizing that, because I hear a lot of other people's stories and they're like "oh yah, I knew when I was like 8 or 12"...and I'm like "I started recognizing that when I was 18?" But what really was instrumental in my recognizing that in myself was my English class where we did a section on gender, and part of that was discussing LGBTQIA plus issues and it was such a different environment to discuss those things than I had experienced in religious contexts when it has just been mentioned kind of as a glancing thing, and then no one really talked about it. You don't really talk about those things, but in that English class, it was such an open discussion and everyone - well not everyone, because I had LDS peers that kind of struggle with that unit - but it was such a casual discussion about "yah, this is ok! and we're going to talk about this!" It was that class that kind of was instrumental in my recognizing that in myself, because before, I think I kind of thought "gay doesn't happen to people like me", if that makes sense. Because, I just ...it seemed like such a different mindset or LGBT people seemed to not be in my world, which is ridiculous because I had friends in high school that were, but I didn't really think about it until that English class, when it suddenly became ok and normal and fine. So it was that class that started me realizing "I don't think I just like this girl as friend." (laughter) "I don't think other people want to, like, hold hands with their friends" and that's kind of when I started having problems because all of the sudden those issues that I knew all of the right things to say about it, that it was ok to have the feelings, but you couldn't be in a relationship, all the sudden that was ME. It wasn't just lines that I memorized. It wasn't just positions that I knew to take. It was me in those positions, and when it was ME, I was like "that's stupid! I don't like that! Why God would ask me to do that? Why would God make this way and then tell me, NO, you're just going to be single for the rest of your life and not be in any sort of relationship with anyone you care about." So I started having real issues with God, like what the heck? Why? I really felt that God hated me, because that

was the only explanation I could come up with for the theology that I had at the time and what I was experiencing.

Brittany: So, let's talk about, if you're ok with this, some of the messages that you internalized as a kid, not realizing that you were gay at the time...and those messages can be directly related to LGBTQIA plus issues, or they can just be worthiness in general or the role of women, etc. because all those things are tied into gender and LDS doctrine and theology, so what were the things specifically that you were kind of battling against when you realized this about yourself.

Meggan: I think one of the major things that played into my ideas was that no one really talked about it, and if they talked about it, it was hushed in whispers and you didn't talk about it for very long. It was very secretive thing that no one liked to talk about very much and so, I guess I kind of internalized that as "oh, we don't talk about these people, like, they have to hide away and we don't want to be around them and we don't want to touch them because of reasons..." So because it didn't get really talked about in my upbringing, I didn't internalize a ton negative things besides "we don't talk about that" so that played on me, in a way, that when I started realizing that I was not straight, that people wouldn't want to talk about me or be around me, and I was some dirty person that no one wanted to touch or be around or talk to. That's really most of what played into my really intense struggle with LDS theology and self-worth and all of that, because I felt less-than, and that people didn't want to talk to me and be around me because I was gay and I was some sort of filth, or disease that people could pick up on and even if I didn't say it or present myself that way.

Brittany: Well, and every lesson you have as a kid, every picture you see of temple marriage, etc. I mean it's such a heteronormative narrative that there is no way to break out of that and so, I guess I wonder, and I'm asking you, did you think that there was a way to break out of that? I mean, how did you see yourself going forward in Mormonism from the time that you realized, "ok this is who I am" to when you left...what was that like?

Meggan: When I was in Mormonism and an LDS mindset, I just didn't really think about the future, because if I did, I started this downward spiral of "I'm going to be single forever, and I don't want that" so I would just stop myself before I could continue that train of thought because it would just make me so miserable. I remember at one point, just after I had come out to my parents, having a conversation with my dad, and him just saying "I'm so sorry, this is a really hard thing that God is asking you to do." and I just remember both of us

just sobbing, because it's really hard. It's a hard thing to ask of someone. I mean, all the lessons in Young Women's, not all of them, but so many were about finding the right man to marry and "temple marriage is the best thing ever!"...and then to have that all be taken away from me, and to have all of that completely destroyed because I realized that I was gay was devastating. So I didn't really think about it until I had the ability to shift that theology. So I kind of just was in mega-denial for a long time.

Brittany: Yah, when you said you just stopped thinking about the future, my heart kind of broke a little bit because that's all they teach really.

Meggan: Yah, what you said, all or most lessons are about being a mother and about being a wife...the role of women is so prescriptive and when you're gay, as a gay woman, how do you fit that into that version of the gospel?

Brittany: So was this towards the beginning or the end of your senior year that you were realizing this? Like at the time did you realize that you were going to go to BYU?

Meggan: Um when I first realized that I was gay, no. That recognition happened pretty early on my senior year. For most of my senior year, I was just denying it. I was like "no, that's not me. I'm not gay. Ha ha ha." (laughter)

Brittany: (jokingly) "This is a phase. I'm going to wake up and like boys!"

Meggan: "I'm just crazy or something." I was just in huge denial for most of my senior year and then, when I started coming to terms with it, that was a little before I finally decided to go to BYU, and I think I was going to make it work. I hadn't come out to hardly anyone at that point. But at that point, I was thinking "BYU is my chance to have that normal Mormon life. Everyone can find a husband at BYU, right? That's what you go there to do. So, I would go and find a guy and we'd have a family and live happily after...because that's how it works, right?" No. (laughter) That's not how it worked.

Brittany: So what were the expectation of those who you had come out to? So there was an understanding, ok you're going to BYU, this is what God is asking of you, and I guess you can't speak for them necessarily, but what do you think the expectations or hope was, from their perspective?

Meggan: I hadn't really come out to very many LDS people before went to BYU, so because the people I came out to, I wanted to make sure were safe, and in my mind, Mormon people were not the people that I wanted. When I came out,

I wanted that affirmation from them, and acceptance and love that I desperately needed, and I didn't know if I would get that from my LDS friends. So I don't think I was out to anyone LDS before I went off to BYU, but I mean, I would think that their idea would be pretty similar to my idea of what would happen at BYU...I'd go and find a guy and we'd get married and we'd make it work! Spoiler alert. (laughter)

Brittany: So what did happen?

Meggan: So I went to BYU, and it started out great. I tried to very briefly date a guy. It did not work out very well. At one point, he kissed me, and I was like "nope, nope! so much nope!" I think I legitimately, like after that happened, I said "I have go!" and just left. It was awkward. So I just decided, "I'll do my studies and I won't worry about finding someone to marry," which is, in and of itself, kind of radical at BYU and in Mormon culture in general. But then, I started dating a girl...at BYU... and that was insane (laughter). Um, and when that first started, I think I just...it was kind of like living two separate lives because I was dating a woman, but then oh, I was Relief Society secretary and I went to church every Sunday, and I just worked really hard to build walls between me being gay, and the church, as much as that could happen. I was kind of just in denial that the church affected that at all, and you know, it would work. Something would happen to make it all work, and then, November of 2015 happened, and I realized that that would not work...at all.

Brittany: So we've talked about that date and the policy specifically on the podcast, I think a time or two. But do you want to say what it is? What happened that November?

Meggan: So, a policy from Handbook 1, which is like the administrative handbook, super top-secret, only priesthood leaders in the LDS church have access to it. Anyways, a policy from that got leaked early in November, that same-sex married couples would be deemed apostate, and any children in the custody of a same-sex married or co-habiting parent or children of a same-sex married couple would not be able to be baptized or have any of the ordinances that normally happen for a typical LDS kid...wouldn't be able to participate in those until they were 18 and basically disavowed their parents' marriage.

Brittany: So essentially, would you say it was kind of a wake-up call out of your denial and an in-your-face, this-is-not-going-to-work...is that how you interpreted that?

Meggan: Yes, because before, like I said, I was in denial and I was kind of like "it will work out" and I'd maybe heard stories of people making it work...question mark. But with that policy, it was a very big, what seemed to me, as church leaders saying "you don't belong here" which was REALLY heart-breaking. I think a big part of it was that it wasn't just me involved in the harmful rhetoric and positions of the church anymore. It was my future family, very directly, being excluded from what I had grown up with - a very typical LDS upbringing - what at that point I wanted for my family. You can mess with me, but you can't mess with the people that I care about - my future children or my future spouse. You don't get to mess with them. I just remember hearing about it and not being able to get out of bed and just sobbing because I didn't have a home anymore.

Brittany: So, I know that you also write poetry, among your many talents and you wrote something in response to this. Would you like to share it?

Meggan: Yes.

I cannot believe you.

You tell me I am loved.

You tell me there is a place for me, but come November, I am out on the streets, holding my baby girl to my chest. Both of us sobbing, outcast and alone.

I cannot believe you.

You tell me you speak for God. That this man in the sky condones this exclusion. That if I had more faith, I would understand. That it's out of love for my future children.

I cannot believe you.

You say I am needed. I am wanted and valued in this boys' club you have going here. Saying you care as you drive the daggers deeper into my soul because who I love is wrong and you are always right.

I cannot believe you.

Your lies do not control me. Your honey-drenched daggers flail at the sky because I have found my wings. Feather by feather. A feather for a God who does not condemn love. A feather for a God who is real and alive and within. A feather for a child who loves her mommas and her church. A feather for infinite, impossible, radical love. A feather for a woman who is always enough.

I cannot believe you.

There is no place for me here. I belong in the sky.

Brittany: Uhhh, beautiful. Oh, yah. It makes me cry, and it made me cry the first time that I heard you say it. That's raw.

Meggan: Yah.

Brittany: I mean, that's real and raw and it's not a movie. It's not a book. This is your life. It's hard stuff. So uh, with all of this, you said that your relationship with God was not super great.

Meggan: Oh, it was really bad. I was so mad at Mormon God.

Brittany: Yah, so, can you talk a bit about your journey, and I am assuming this is going to bring up Community of Christ, but how did you come to a place where you were able to accept God - because like you said, Mormon God - so how did God and your theology take on a new form? What was that process like?

Meggan: So after the November policy, I basically just cut God out of my life. I cut spirituality out of my life, as much as you can at BYU without getting kicked out, because you have to regularly attend your meetings, otherwise it raises flags and you get kicked out.

Brittany: And were you the Relief Society secretary at this time?

Meggan: Yah,

Brittany: Man!

Meggan: Um, but, basically I cut God and spiritually out of my life. I was going through the motions so I could stay in school and not cause a huge ruckus. But after, I think it was a good couple months of just going through the motions, not doing any sort of spiritual practice like I had done for the 18 years prior growing up, not really having any sort of connection with God, because the God in my mind hated me and condemned me and didn't want me. After a couple months of that, I felt really empty because I had had those practices and that connection and that spirituality my whole life before then. I wanted that, but I also felt that I couldn't have that in the faith tradition I had growing up, because I felt kicked-out - that I couldn't find a home there anymore with who I was and what I wanted in my life.

Brittany: It's just so tricky because you're at BYU, and you can't look into other churches. You can't, I mean you can, but you're not supposed to and if you get caught, you lose everything, and you were living in student housing...did you work on campus too? Ok, so this is literally your school, your housing and your job that were all at stake. But obviously you searched a little bit, because I picked you up from campus (laughter). So, what was that process like? Finding a spiritual home when you're not supposed to, like in secret, how was that?

Meggan: So, when I finally realized that the emptiness I had been feeling was a lack of spirituality in my life, I was like "I'm just going to do a quick google search to find what religious sects would be accepting of me as an out gay woman, which I wasn't at the time but I wanted to be eventually. I ended up pulling up a wikipedia page of LGBT affirming religious organizations, scrolling through and finding Community of Christ - it was in alphabetical order, so it was at the top, which helped. (laughter)

Brittany: Good thing for that name change! (laughter)

Meggan: Yah, and finding Community of Christ and all the sudden, going back to a youth conference in Kirtland. I grew up in my teenage years in Ohio, so we got to go tour various church history sites out east, and I remembered Kirtland and very vividly, I remember being in the Kirtland temple, which was in my mind, not like a normal temple that was "holy and sanctified" by the LDS church, and by Mormon God, and singing the Spirit of God in the Kirtland temple. One of the most powerful spiritual experiences that I had ever had in my life was that experience of singing that song in the Kirtland temple, and it confused the heck out of me because it wasn't supposed to happen that way because it wasn't "as holy" supposedly as other temples and places I had been because now it's associated with Community of Christ which is not "the one true church". So when I saw that name and I remembered that youth conference and that experience, and seeing the Community of Christ name, I felt like that could be a safe place for me. So I ended up sending an email off to World Church and being like "is there any chance that like, somehow there's a Community of Christ congregation in Utah county? I don't know?" Then I ended up getting connected with Seth Bryant and it just so happened that when I was going to be back in Provo, that Utah county house church was going to starting up...just so happened. So I showed up there with my then girlfriend. (laughter) And yah...

Brittany: So I have to ask, because I was at that first meeting, and I was so worried. I thought it was going to be just garbage. I mean, not garbage, but I

just didn't really have high hopes for it because none of us really knew what we were doing. We were all nervous. We all thought we kinda knew what we were doing, but really we didn't, and we admitted that and, we were just kinda flying by the seat of our pants! And I just was convinced, nobody is going to show up and if they show up, nobody is going to come back. But then you guys came! So what was your impression of that very first meeting? You can be honest.

Meggan: Well, I don't remember a ton of what actually happened. But what I remember is being able to walk in there with my girlfriend and people know, "this is my girlfriend!" and I think we held hands in the service and *just that* was so mind-blowing and I was like "I'm coming back. I like these people'."

Brittany: See and I remember talking to you after that first service and finding out that you were a freshman at BYU, and I just thought "oh, yep, she's never coming back! See ya later!" But you did. You kept coming back. Um, so I don't even remember what lessons or, I think we didn't have any structure, and I think that's what worried me so much. We weren't following a manual and we weren't walking through a particular book. We just were kind of rotating and everyone that was leading a service could kind of pick their own topic, so there wasn't a lot of fluidity or whatever, which made me nervous. But I have to wonder if kind of that randomness and freestyle whatever flow to it may have been helpful because people are so used to a correlated structure to church. I'm just curious what your thoughts were, meeting in the basement of the Masonic lodge. Like, that's so different from a singles ward at BYU! Like the crazy flow structure of it, the location, etc. I was really surprised you came back. (laughter) But thrilled! Just surprised.

Meggan: I just remember going every other Sunday and it being a breath of fresh air, that I didn't have to worry that someone would find out that I was gay and I was dating a girl, and report us to the honor code office, and then we would get kicked out. That fear weighed very heavily on me the whole time I was there, and so, to be in a place where I was accepted and loved and people knew all of me, and there wasn't a set structure at all. It was just, it was all a breath of fresh air, and very, very needed for me. And so I kept coming back!

Brittany: So word out to all the brand new house churches out there! Don't give up! You have something to offer. So then I bet you really felt like you were living a double life. You were going to your LDS ward, dating a woman, living and working and going to school at BYU, and now you were also doing this new secret church, in a dark basement twice a month (laughter). So what was your relationship with God turning into, I guess? How was that transition mode or

period of time? Were you coming to terms with God a little bit more? Were you able to see a different way to look at all of this?

Meggan: At that point, God became a very different entity to me. I talk about the god of my childhood as "Mormon God" now because it's a very different idea of divinity as to what I started coming to terms with, I guess, when I had that breath of fresh air and had the freedom to explore divinity for myself. That was kind of the opportunity that Community of Christ gave to me when I started attending, was figuring out "well, what do I think?" not "what am I supposed to think?" and I'm going to be honest, it was a lot more complicated! I wanted people to just tell me the answers because that's what I was used to. But that's not what I needed and it's not what Community of Christ gave me. They didn't give me answers. They gave me ways to find my own answers, and not only that, but to be okay not having answers and just having a whole bunch of questions, and not know the answers of any of them...and to be okay with that. I remember when I finally decided, after having left BYU, that I wanted to be baptized and confirmed into Community of Christ. I remember talking with Seth and saying, "I prefer having all these questions, not having answers. I prefer dwelling the questions, to having answers that don't work for me."

Brittany: So going on along with that, did you have to kind of face "one true church" ideas, and did you have to break all of those down before you were able to leave Mormonism?

Meggan: I mean, yah, definitely, especially because Restoration history was still up in my face because it was Community of Christ, so I had to deal with those issues pretty head on if I wanted to be in association with Community of Christ in any regard. One thing about the November policy that was pretty mind blowing for me was when I first heard it, my immediate response was "that's not right because that's not from God. That's not the church that I know. That's not the love and acceptances that I know." So I totally thought it was just some big hoax and it wasn't real. When I found out it was real, that immediate response kind of made me think, "well, if the LDS church can be wrong about this," that kind of opened the floodgates to "what else could they be wrong about?" And so, that policy and that almost visceral response to it from me kind of opened the door to me questioning everything, which was terrifying enough...I feel like it's terrifying enough for anyone to question the faith of their childhood, but I was at BYU while doing that, so it was even more of like, a crazy time.

Brittany: Yeah, cuz like we said, you lived there, worked there and went to school there! I mean, that's so much pressure. And it's not like you can be

lackadaisical in your belief. You have to get a ecclesiastical endorsement, which means to have to go so many times. You have to respond faith-promoting and in affirmation to questions on interviews to be able to get that endorsement, let alone if you want to have a temple recommend, so it's intense. It's really, really intense. So these are a lot of decisions, like huge life changing decisions that are coming at you really fast and abruptly, and not by your own choice, necessarily, well, not by your own choice at all, but your own choice in that you could choose to leave. Was there a defining moment or a straw that broke the camel's back that made you either decide to leave BYU or to leave the LDS church? What was that "I've hit the wall, I'm done" moment?

Meggan: So, after I had gone to Community of Christ for a little bit, it was my schoolwork and my employment and my church attendance all started a downward spiral. I kind of shut down to the minimum, less than that in some regards; I was not doing well, because it felt like everything in my life was falling apart. I didn't know what was happening. I was questioning all of these things. What is true? What is not? It was really, really difficult. But I was managing, and I thought I could just manage for a while and just keep managing until I got my undergrad and could leave, but I remember going up to Salt Lake for a bookclub and I don't even remember what book we were talking about, but after the bookclub, I ended up getting a priesthood administration (laying on of hands) and feeling so nourished and loved, not only by the people there but by God, which was still something I was really struggling to encounter as I was questioning divinity and theology and history. And I remember getting out of the car of the ride that I got back from the bookclub to BYU, getting out of the car and barely having the strength to walk up the flights of stairs into my dorm before I just collapsed on the floor sobbing, because as I was walking, I'm just up the stairs on campus, feeling an enormous weight put on my shoulders that I didn't realize was there until it had been gone, of not being able to be myself there...and I just collapsed on the floor, sobbing because I couldn't be who I was. I remember just texting a couple people to be able to get me through that mourning, I guess, of having to live a lie to stay at BYU, just to be able to get up off the floor and into bed and fall asleep. And I woke up the next morning knowing that I could not stay there because I don't think before that night I realized that that weight was there. But once I knew that weight was there, I couldn't ignore it, and I knew it would be there and keep growing the longer I was there. So I know I had to leave, even if it didn't make any sense whatsoever in any other regard...which it really didn't.

Brittany: I remember we were hanging out at the Provo Rec center and my kids were going crazy on that playground, and you were like "I think I'm done with BYU. I'm going to go talk to my professors." Because it was the middle of a

summer term, right? I mean, I was supportive of you, don't get me wrong, but I was also like "what is she going to do next?"

Meggan: I was too!

Britany: I went into total mother mode. I knew you would figure it out, because if you were that self-aware - I just kept thinking about myself at 18, and I just had no idea anything about life - so I was always really impressed with your level of self-awareness and being able to name it and to be able to understand and acknowledge when an environment isn't healthy for you. To be able to say "I have to leave" because I can't stay and try to change it. It's not going to - here's too many things against me. I've got to leave. So I admired that.

Meggan: Uh huh.

Brittany: But it worked out, it all worked out. Yah, so just continue the story. You went and talked to your professors...

Meggan: I went and talked to my professors. Luckily I had a very supportive therapist at the time that got me the letters that I needed to be able to basically not finish the summer term and just say "JK that never happened" on my transcripts. And got all the releases I needed to be able to leave my apartment. I had a contract for Fall on the apartment I was in, but I was able to get that released, so I didn't have to stay for Fall. Yah, I just...I left. And scrambled about trying to find a place to live in Salt Lake because I didn't have a car and I knew Salt Lake was going to be my best best for public transportation and finding a job, and a supportive environment, as much as you can get in Utah, for a gay woman. Yah, I got an apartment. I moved to Salt Lake and got a job, which was not the plan at all when I left for my freshmen year at BYU.

Brittany: So then, you started attending Salt Lake congregation pretty regularly, so I'm curious at how you would compare being in the Salt Lake congregation as oppose to Utah County house church? So a smaller group, actually Utah county is not super small, AND you continued to go to both (laughter) so maybe I shouldn't ask this question...but was there a difference being in a congregation that had little more structure, a bit more regular attendance, families, people that were actual members, not just a congregation or a group full of Seekers? Were you able to see Community of Christ in a different light? Do you get what I'm asking?

Meggan: So one of the things, interestingly enough, that I fell even more in love with Community of Christ attending the Salt Lake congregation was that it felt more like a Mormon ward, which felt more like home. I know that's kind of crazy, and some Seekers would be like "I don't like that it's more Mormon ..." - I've actually heard that from some people - but I liked that it had a little bit more structure and more of what I was used to, so it felt more like home. There were some familiar faces from Utah county house church, but there were even more people that I got to know, more people that were supportive of me and loved me. But yah, it felt more like a Mormon ward, which sounds kind of weird, but it felt more like home, if that makes sense.

Brittany: I think, it does make sense. I mean in Salt Lake, we have LGBTQ and several of the letters that would identify in the plus range as well, that are either permanent members of the congregation or regularly seek with us or if they're in the area, they come, etc. But there is, with a smaller house church, there's just a high turnover. Being in Provo, you're going to have a younger congregation, whereas in Salt Lake, there's more established families that come. I was just curious how the different was - if that helped you solidify wanting to join, or if you would have considered that in Utah county. Just a question I hadn't asked you before. So was there a moment that made you decide that you wanted to join then? I mean, by the time you came to Salt Lake, did you know you were going to join?

Meggan: No, and that wasn't ever a plan until all of the sudden, it was.

Brittany: That seems like a common pattern in your life.

Meggan: Yah, I'm really good at all of the sudden making really big decisions (laughter). I don't know if I've told you this story, but I didn't even think I was ever going to officially join. That wasn't a plan, I mean eventually maybe that would happen, but it wasn't something I planned on or was shooting for. I was just attending because I liked the people and I enjoyed a place to explore my own theology, and have people that were more well-versed in ways to explore it. But then, I remember waking up one morning from a dream, and that sounds weird...but it happened! I had a dream that I was at an LDS service, and it was all normal and fine, but it felt weird. And then it started shifting into a Community of Christ service and I remember feeling so at home when it started changing in the dream. And then I woke up from that, and I was like "well, I guess I'm joining!"

Brittany: Wow!

Meggan: So that was kind of the deciding factor because it wasn't really in the cards. I just hadn't really thought about it until I woke up from that dream and it made me reflect on how at home I felt in Community of Christ. And so, yah.

Brittany: I wanna have a dream like that! That sounds awesome! So joining a new religion is a really big deal.

Meggan: Yah.

Brittany: So how was that? How did you friends, family, etc...were they supportive? What was that like?

Meggan: I think we were just all kind of getting over the shock of me coming out and leaving BYU so suddenly, because none of that was the plan, and just kind of in the wake of that, I was like "by the way, I'm going to join this church!"

Brittany: Footnote...

Meggan: Yah, so I mean, I had family members come to that service, which was amazing...but it was just kind of crazy because I made a lot of big decisions all at once. But for me, the journey to that day, it was a lot of finding healing with a lot of things and reclaiming a lot of things that I had left behind. Kind of rebuilding my relationship with divinity and with organized religion and Restoration history that I had kind of just torn down and tossed to the side when everything came crumbling down. Some of that had happened before, but when I woke up from that dream and decided "this is what's going to happen", I had to really face those things. It was a lot of hard but good things, and I didn't think that I would freak out because I had deconstructed enough of it, but I remember a couple days before my confirmation date, I remember all the sudden panicking. What if I'm making the wrong decision? And it was actually right around the time that Tyler Glenn's album *Excommunication* had come out and one of the songs on there is called *Gates*. Basically, it's like "I don't think I'm wrong, but if I am, I'll see you at the gates of heaven." I remember listening to that song and that kind of freaking me out..."what if I am wrong? what if I'm doing the wrong things? what if Mormonism is right? what if I'm making the biggest mistake of my life?" And then forcing myself to breathe, and remembering everything that had led me to that decision and to that point where I wanted to claim my own home. And part of that journey also was a lot of what hurt about not being able to find a home in the LDS church was that Mormonism runs back in both sides of my family, as far back as it can go. I have pioneer ancestry on both sides. A lot of my family is still very active

LDS, and so to think of my ancestors looking down on me, who gave up so much for the faith tradition that I had grown up in - I didn't want to disappoint them. But part of my journey was realizing "I'm a pioneer, dangit!" That I'm doing what they did, leaving traditions and things that they knew, to follow what they found joy in. That was a really nourishing thing for me. That kind of helped me to let go of that final panic before the actual, official day happened.

Brittany: One thing, I had that happen too, and it was actually said to me that I was turning my back on my ancestors and they would be so disappointed in my, but one thing that helped with that though is learning the history of the reorganization in Utah and knowing and learning that some people went back. They didn't just stay here. A lot of them did go back, and if they didn't, they joined in with the Reorganization in 1860, and RLDS missionaries came out. They maybe didn't cross the plains again, but the RLDS church has had a presence in Utah pretty much since the Reorganization. So learning that, I was just like "I'm just a little bit late to the game!" Like "I'm going back too, just a little bit later." It's crazy though, the pressure that we put on ourselves, thinking that we have to live into something. I guess the ironic thing is that the gospel that they had isn't the gospel of Mormonism today. I mean, it's changed quite a bit, so I had to get over that too. Realizing that what they left behind and what they went for isn't comparable. They are two completely different paradigms, different worldviews, different circumstances. I had a lot of guilt over that for a while. So...ok, you got baptized and confirmed, and that was great. Even though, I forgot, I presided that Sunday and at the baptism, so I was super, super nervous and got up and completely forgot the Prayer for Peace...and it was awful. But it was great! (laughter) And now, you're just an active - really active actually - member of the Salt Lake congregation. Still regularly attend house church, and do a whole bunch of stuff - worship planning, and musical stuff. You're really involved.

Meggan: Yah! (laughing)

Brittany: So one thing that I'm curious about. You say that you were in denial when you were active LDS for a period and you just kind of thought you would make it work. Did you see yourself withdrawing either from church activity - I almost just said "dwindling away" but that sounds really dramatic and negative - but did you see yourself pulling back from church activity? And if you did, then you dove headfirst into Community of Christ, so has that been kind of alarming, or how has that felt? Because if you're new to Community of Christ, and if you want to be involved, you can be very, VERY involved, so how has that been?

Meggan: So to answer your first question, yes, once I started to come to terms with things in religion and all of that, I started kind of cutting back to the minimum that I could get away with attending things in my singles ward at BYU. So yah, it's kind of crazy to think about how incredibly involved I am with the Salt Lake congregation now. But I find so much joy in it - most of the time - sometimes it's a lot of work and it's crazy. But I talked to a couple friends that are really good about everything that I've gone through in the past like two years. I mention "oh, I'm doing this and I'm doing that..." and sometimes, they'll say "you do a lot of church stuff" and I'm like "yah, I do!" but I really like all of it, and I find so much joy in it which is such an incredible contrast from attending my singles wards at BYU, when I was just attending because I had to, and when I did, I felt so miserable and I felt myself putting up wall after wall after wall, and coming up with all these defenses in my head - not saying any of them out loud, but because I felt attacked - no one ever said anything that I can remember about LGBT anything in any of the meetings that I attended at BYU - but I felt attacked and I felt like an outsider. No one else knew that I was an outside, but I knew that I was, so attending church was miserable for me, and it's so not with Community of Christ. I love it, and I love all of the things that I'm involved with.

Brittany: So what would be your advice for an LGBTQ plus person, who's coming from the LDS tradition who is looking into Community of Christ. I know that's a question that has a lot of general...you know...

Meggan: I would just say, talk to people, because it was the people that really brought me into Community of Christ. More than anything, to find accepting people that were Christian, and not only Christian, but from the same tradition, the root of the tradition I had grown up with. So I would say just talk to people and get to know people and listen to their stories. Let them love you, because you need love, dangit! Because being LGBT and Mormon is really hard. So find people that love you for who you are and can help you find beautiful things in religion that bring you joy.

Brittany: So that brings me to this question...what do you think are the beautiful parts of religion? What are the things that speak to you, either from Community of Christ or the larger Christian gospel, as an LGBTQ person?

Meggan: I love the message of Christ in reaching out to the outcast, and kind of flipping things upside down in society, and empowering those who have felt outcast by society...because that was me. I felt kicked out by religion, by a lot

of things. And so, to find that Jesus in the scriptures I had grown up with was so incredible to me, and something that I love.

Brittany: I mean, yah, you have to re-write the gospel, and I'm assuming - I haven't done a lot of queer theory with religion - but at the GALA retreat we're going to in a little bit, which I'm really excited about - but you have to rewrite and reclaim what the gospel is. Because so many people think that being Christian and being gay, or being Christian and being supportive of the gay community is incompatible. Which is not true. So yah, there's a lot to take in, and you really did make a lot of decisions that were radical and awesome.

Meggan: Another thing that I really latched on to and still do is the idea of God's unconditional love and grace, in a way that I never really grasped until I let go of LDS theology that is very rule-based. Like I said, I felt condemned by God with all of the outlines for what being a gay woman in the LDS church looked like. I felt very condemned and tossed aside. But to then come to know a God that loves me with love that I cannot understand - that was a phrase that got tossed around a lot when I was growing up, but it didn't really sink in until I came to Community of Christ and started rewriting my theology - that God loves me no matter what and there are no conditions on that love. That has really saved my relationship with religion and divinity and spirituality. That I can encounter spirituality without fear of being condemned because of who I am - something that I can't change.

Brittany: Exactly. I think it's such a shame that that message has somehow been lost by so many. So I'm glad you found it. Ok, so how about you leave us with one more poem.

Meggan: Ok.

*Lord, I confess this day my yearning to know.
To feel with my hands and see with my eyes.
At times, I cry out in doubt, mourning the simplicity and certainty of my youth, when things were clear, and black and white.
God, with this confession, I offer up what I have.
Not a clear cut certainty, but a rainbow of faith.
A hope that you are there despite my doubt.
Shape this hope and hands I cannot see, for I do not need to know to be changed.*

Brittany: Love it! Thank you, Meggan!

Meggan: Thanks for having me!

Brittany: I'm going to continue to drink my tea. (laughter)