

Meet Ron Harmon final 1-6-2023

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SPEAKERS

Robin Linkhart, Josh Mangelson, Ron Harmon

Ron Harmon 00:17

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

Robin Linkhart 00:33

Hello, and welcome to Project Zion Podcast. This is your host Robin Linkhart, and today we are here with apostle Ron Harmon to get to know him a little better, as he steps into a new role of leadership for the church, as presiding bishop. That ordination will take place at World Conference 2023. And we are so glad to have Ron with us today to share a bit about his story and get to know him better. Hello, Ron, welcome.

Ron Harmon 01:05

Hi, Robin, great to be with you and everybody listening today.

Robin Linkhart 01:09

We want to start out today with just a brief introduction of you to our listeners, just the basics of who you are and where you live, and that kind of thing.

Ron Harmon 01:20

Well, I live in northeast independence. Actually I live about 12 minutes from the temple. And I lived here for about 11 years, and we moved here when I had a change of field assignment to the Western field back in 2011. So really spent most of my life outside of the Independence area. I've been blessed with a wonderful partner in life. Her name is Barb and we've been married for 38 years. And Barb's focus in her career has been early childhood development, and matter of fact she recently completed a master's degree in innovative early childhood development through University of Colorado, Denver. And she has taken a sabbatical from the classroom to set up grandma school for two of our grandchildren, Addy and Oliver. So she's kind of living the dream right now of being able to spend a lot of time with them. We have three children, Katie, and Daniel, and Lindsay, and three grandchildren. So I've already mentioned two of those. But our grandchildren are Emma, Maddie and Oliver. And we are just pinching ourselves every single day that they live in the Kansas City area. We don't know how long that will last.

But we are soaking it up while we are all in close proximity with each other. And I've worked for the church for 18 soon to be 19 years, and 17 of those years, have been serving in the Council of Twelve Apostles. So that's just a little bit of a sketch about me.

Robin Linkhart 03:04

Thanks so much, Ron. This is a great time to go deeper in your life story like where you grew up, what life was like for you in the places that you grew up, maybe a little bit about your interest and hobbies. And for sure, we want to hear about where God was in your life, where faith and God in the midst of all of that, in you're growing up time.

Ron Harmon 03:28

I grew up in the Cleveland area. And I didn't actually grow up in Cleveland. I'm always quick to point that out. Because back in the years I grew up in Cleveland, people used to refer to it as the mistake on the Lake. That is Lake Erie. Back in those days, Cleveland wasn't as nice of a place to live as it is today. They've done a lot of work to clean up the lake and just the whole area is actually a very nice area for families to live. I live very close to Lake Erie and about 45 minutes west of Kirtland. And my younger sister Julie and I we were so fortunate to grow up in a loving home with parents that were very engaged in the life of our small congregation, originally called the West Cleveland congregation and then later on called the Lakewood congregation. And you know, faith was just front and center at our family experience. And I really credit my parents to a large degree, but there were also other wonderful people in that small congregation that cultivated in me the desire and the quest to really want to know God. In many of my growing up years I remember my dad served as pastor and then later on served when I was growing up in the Kirtland Stake Bishopric as a counselor to the Stake Bishop. So this call is kind of interesting that I have in the life of the church. In lieu of that, I guess things just kind of come around full circle. My mom would have also most certainly served in formal leadership roles had they been available to her at that time in the life of the church. But she, of course, also provided significant ministry, without priesthood. And they both modeled whole life discipleship, so authentically in my life growing up, and that's what cultivated in me the desire to really want to understand or discover the source of what it was that drove them in terms of their level of engagement in the life of the church, and just in their lives of service to other people. And I remember, I used to go on errands with my father a lot when I was growing up, and my dad never met a stranger. And it had a real impact on me as a kid. Now, when I was a kid, it was kind of irritating, because it took us forever. I mean, even just to go get gas took forever, because invariably, my dad would get in a conversation with the person on the other side of the pump, pumping the gas. And as a little kid, I spent a lot of time waiting on my dad. But I realized later on in life, what a gift it was to watch my dad, and to watch how he created safe space for people to also be able to share their stories. And it was really formational for me, as a young child. I remember I had my first significant experience with what I understood to be God when I was 10, at our church campgrounds in western Pennsylvania, and that would be Temple Grove for those who might recognize that campground. I had been living with a question that I am quite sure has been the prayer of many people over the centuries. And the question was, "Is God real?" And I was really serious about that question as a 10 year old. There was something going on inside of me a stirring, because of what I was experiencing with my parents and in that small congregation, and the authentic love and support of that community opened up something inside of me that caused me to want to explore. When I would hear people stand up at the end of the service and pray, "We thank Thee, Oh God for the presence of the Holy Spirit that we felt today." And I remember standing there as a child thinking, what are they

talking about? What is this presence of the Holy Spirit? And so I went to a junior camp that year with that question on my mind, "Is God real." And I remember one night, after a campfire, I stayed behind, sensing the need to be alone. And I remember as though it were yesterday, looking up into the immensity of creation, under that stunning night sky. And I had this awareness that I was not alone. And whether it was a fleeting second, or a few moments, I can't say for sure. But I knew with certainty that I was known and loved. And that was just such a foundational experience for me as a young person. And it began the process of answering that question for me, but probably more important, because that question is never fully answered. It deepened my search for how I was being called to respond in my young life. And that's really, I look at that experience and everything that cultivated that, as what really put me on the trajectory in terms of where I am today. So I am so deeply grateful for that. I was a geek as a kid from a church standpoint. I had read the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, probably by the time I was 12. And read the Doctrine and Covenants multiple times. I was fascinated by that book. I was fascinated by the idea of Continuing Revelation as a young person in the life of the church, and I had conversations with adults. I knew every adult in that small congregation on a first name basis. And that was just the kind of relationships we had. And some of them took great interest in me and my growth and development and some of the times they would pick me up and we would go out for dinner even and we would have conversations about of the church about Scripture about Revelation. So I mean, I'm really revealing my significant geekness as a church kid. Growing up, but I was so captivated by this movement. I remember too, as a young kid, I had this little book that you get sometimes when you go places, it was like a little tourist book. And it was three and a half by five is almost like postcard size. And it had pictures of the auditorium in it. And I'd never been there. I was fascinated by the fact that people came together from around the world in this place. And I mean, it was really a time of discovery. And, and then, of course, in the midst of all that, I watched the way my parents gave themselves to other people. And it seemed like we'd always adopted someone, or we're adopting a family in a very quiet way that had significant needs. And my dad was always doing things for people. And I remember multiple times getting up going with him late in the evening, because somebody needed to be administered to or, and he wanted me to go, he wanted me to experience what the life and ministry of the church was all about in the lives of people. And I'll always be grateful for the kind of intentionality that was behind the way my parents cultivated a deep desire to want to know God, and to be engaged in this wonderful movement we call Community of Christ.

Robin Linkhart 11:32

Well, Ron, thank you so much for bringing us into the heart of your story, your early years, and I think many of us can connect with that sense of question, "Is God real?" And also, almost that companion stirring, the early times in our lives when we begin to feel that Holy Spirit presence and maybe don't have words to define that and bringing all the questions we have about faith and life. I love the way you frame your experience of the mystery of God and your search, that deep search that's linked to a sense of call and a question of what response to that call. I really appreciate it, how you are observing your family and the members of your congregation, which sparked a new this deep need to discover the source of what's driving them to be these lives of service to the church to be so fully present with the people and to live lives of mission as you describe your dad in deep relationship not just with the congregation, but his community and how that was reflected in his life of service, giving us a window to see that and really sense what part of your journey was like. I also know you are a musician, so and maybe that was part of an interest you had as a young child, or did that come later?

Ron Harmon 13:04

No, it was as a young child. Yeah, music was a huge part of my life growing up. And actually it still is to a large extent. And growing up I remember being tested as a young person, you know, the orchestra conductor came around and tested us all for what our musical abilities were. And he said, "We want you to play the viola." And I didn't even know what a viola was. He said, "We want you to play the viola because we always need violas." And he said, "No matter where you go, people will always need violas and string quartets or orchestras or whatever." And he's right. That's always been my experience. So I started playing the viola. One thing I remember about the viola is how self-conscious I was carrying that thing to school. You know how kids are, and it was carrying this viola case to school and I took a little bit, a little bit of teasing about that. But I soon really got into it, and played through orchestra my, all the way through school, through college, in high school was very involved in a string quartet. We played all over the city for weddings and different events. I had such a good time with that. I love music. I did some composition a little bit in high school. Actually, interestingly, my senior year of high school, right before that, the band director came to me and said, "Our first chair trumpet is graduating and I'm concerned about who's going to lead the trumpet section in the band next year. And have you ever considered playing trumpet?" That's like, w-what? I've never played a trumpet in my life. You know? He said, I think he could do it if you picked it up over the summer. Well, interestingly, one of the women, Mary Squire, who attended my congregation, played trumpet for the Cleveland Orchestra and was an amazing trumpet player. So I talked with her about it, she said, "If you're willing to put the time in, I get you ready over the summer." She helped me find a trumpet. I took trumpet lessons. And that fall, y'all get to try out figure out where you're going to be in the pecking order. And sure enough, I made first chair for the trumpets and learned how to play trumpet my senior year and actually play trumpet in the marching band at Graceland, when I went out there for a short time Graceland had a marching band. Also had a chance to play in jazz band, which I loved. I loved jazz. I love the creativity involved in jazz. So I still have a trumpet. I really don't play that anymore. But I still play the viola. In fact, I'm playing the viola next, this coming Sunday in my home congregation, Cornerstone congregation in Independence with my daughter, Lindsay, and Daniel's playing guitar. So we're doing kind of a little ensemble thing together. So I still pull it out every now and then dust it off and play it and just really get great joy out of music.

Robin Linkhart 15:59

That's awesome. I learned a few new things about your musical talents and experience. Wonderful. Okay, so you had a deep roots in the church Community of Christ you live not that far from the Kirtland area, which is a historic site. You had this wonderful loving family and you're multi talented. Now we want to hear about what happens when you go off to college, you find Barb and take us right up to right before you accepted an assignment to work full time for the church.

Ron Harmon 16:36

I attended Graceland. And the turning point for me on that was I went to Spec in high school, Spectacular, which is a youth camp experience for kids all over the United States at Graceland University where you just have this amazing opportunity to explore your giftedness and music and sports and theater and academics and just a tremendous experience. And I was overwhelmed by that experience and the people that I met. And I don't know if it was the first day but it probably wasn't long after that, at Spectacular, that I was like I'm coming to Graceland University back then it was Graceland College. **But I also** met this young woman named Barb Hollis, who I had started to have a relationship

with. And we'd actually met in high school and then kind of went different paths and reconnected. She was a year ahead of me. So she had completed her freshman year and that summer, before I was going to go to Graceland, we got pretty serious about our relationship pretty quickly. And I'd always planned on going to Graceland. So we decided together that I would go my freshman year. And if our relationship was what we thought it was that it would survive a year of long distance relationship, which obviously it did, because we've been married thirty-eight years. And then I would transfer to Bowling Green State University. And she was in journalism. Graceland did not have a journalism program. So I did exactly that. And the other interesting thing was, Barb, of course, was not a member of Community of Christ. And so that year that we were apart, she was part of a Christian group on campus called The Navigators. And they found out that we were dating and she found out what church I belong to, they began to do the work with her to help her understand more about the church only through their lens. And so Bob started asking me all these questions about the history of the church. Some of them were very obscure questions, or somehow they got their hands on a book by R.C. Evans. I think it was called Forty Years in the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and Why I Left It. Yeah. He was an early leader in the church. Many felt he would be in the presidency, that didn't happen. He ended up leaving the church somewhat disgruntled, and I'm giving you the extremely short version of it. But anyway, he wrote this kind of rather scathing book about the church. And so I spent a lot of time in the Graceland library in a place called the Derose Room, which was where all our historical documents were located. And I was investigating all these obscure questions about our history that I was being asked. And the other humorous thing about this time was, this was back in the day, and of course, I'm gonna be aging myself now. But on the Graceland campus in the halls that we were on, there was only one phone, and it was in the middle of the hallway. And so we'd have these late night calls, and this was before long distance was affordable. And so I was racking up hundreds of dollars in long distance phone call fees, and I didn't have the money to pay for it. And I was afraid to tell my dad about it. And so I'll never forget the first semester I was out there, all the guys on my hall knew what was going on. And they took up a collection for me to help me pay my long distance phone bill, but we continue to have conversations. And it was a reunion experience that Barb went to, I don't remember if it was that summer or the summer after that. Of course, I don't know anybody that's ever kicked the tires, more organization than Barb has on the church. She didn't take anything for granted, which was great, because we had lots of in depth conversations about the church. But it was an encounter with the Holy Spirit that really moved her to decide to join the church at a reunion while we were still dating and going into college. And she serves today as an evangelist in the church. And I can't imagine doing what I do without her support, and her counsel and her engagement in my life. So that was kind of the college years that we had. I moved to Bowling Green State University. And we were together during that time and actually got married my senior year, she'd already graduated. But it would have been my senior year of college. And then after that, I began my career in the Northwest Ohio area. I focused on business in my education, I started as a music major at Graceland. And then I had this idea that I would probably be a band director or orchestra conductor. And then when I transferred to Bowling Green State University, which was a big music school as well. They were really funny about transferring credits. And so I was getting like half credits for courses I'd taken. And I had my practical father in my ear saying, you really should go into business, you'll do better, you'll make more money and to support your family and all those things that Fathers say to their kids. And so I transferred my degree focus to business, and graduated with an undergraduate degree in business and started my first job with a bank holding company in the Toledo area, and then spent the next 14 years in the corporate world in a variety of different positions. Until this restlessness started to emerge in me about that. It made

absolutely no sense at all because everything was going great. So I'd moved on to another position. We were in Louisville, Kentucky. We loved it there. Our kids were flourishing. They were in a good school environment. They were doing wonderful in school, Barb was happy with her job. I had a fantastic job as a healthcare executive with a large health care system in Louisville. I mean, life really was going along really well. I was serving as a lay pastor for the Forest Hills congregation in Louisville. We were fully engaged in life, the church. Life was good in many respects. And yet there was this unsettledness that I felt inside and that unsettledness and questions that Barb and I started asking about our future and kind of where we wanted to place our emphasis in life led us to Graceland University in 2000. I made a huge move to Lamoni. What a wonderful journey. I love hearing about you and Barb, meeting each other in high school and then reconnecting and what an amazing journey of not just your relationship, but how your faith and Barb's faith together in that common shared experience, and hearing about how the blessings of community are manifest in the dorm when everybody pitches in to pay your phone bill. And, and that really, I view that in many ways is kind of the precursor to coming down to work for the church. And back then we were very drawn to the vision for the future of Graceland that president at the time Dave Kleinfelder had, I'll never forget our first trip to Lamoni because I think Barb maybe had been there one time, but we really hadn't spent any time in Lamoni and the whole process of us even considering moving there was kind of an interesting process. But I do remember getting on the plane and heading back to Louisville and Barb looking at me in the seat next to me saying you're not seriously considering this are you? And we got a pretty close up look at Lamoni and let's just say it was much different than Louisville, Kentucky. So but in the end, I remember taking many many walks together at night, having conversation about where did we really feel when we were being called to serve in our lives. And one night it would be we were going to stay, the next night we were going to leave. And finally we got to that place where we kind of felt like we were really being called to make a shift and a change in our lives. And so we moved the family to Lamoni and I had the privilege of working at Graceland for almost five years before coming to work for the church in 2004. And so that kind of brings us up to the church experience in terms of my employment. Yeah, well, and I also have to say this, I gotta give a shout out to my roommate out there, Jeff Naylor. He also took pity on me many times, we used to go over to the Swarm In and they used to have a sandwich over there called the Big G, which was kind of like a Big Mac, and we would go over there, and he would buy a sandwich and get a sandwich and fries or whatever we'd split it. And he shared with me, you know, I didn't have any money. So, you know, it's just little stories like that, that, you know, I look back on now. And I really smile and recognize that I was blessed with wonderful people in my life.

Robin Linkhart 26:20

So that stirring that you have talked about on and off through your life brought you to Lemond Iowa, very rural community, a historic location for the Reorganized Church. And it sounds like that stirring is continuing. So tell us about how you walked into full time ministry with Community of Christ and the various roles that you've served in.

Ron Harmon 26:45

When I was a child. Of course, we lived, you know, I said on the west side of Cleveland, but very close to Cleveland Hopkins International Airport. And as a result of that, anytime church leaders would come in, they would often stay with us. I also had the unique opportunity to get to know a variety of ministers and leaders in the church, at a fairly young age. And of course, I never missed a camp. And we never missed reunions as a family. I think one year we did, we went on a vacation that involved lots of travel.

And I remember, my sister and I complained so much about it, that we were missing reunion that we went back to reunion the next year. But yeah, I think that those early experiences, particularly having the chance as a young person to interact with full time ministers and leaders in the life of the church, cultivated in me a seed of desire to maybe do that. And so much so, that part of Barb, and my exploration of kind of where was she going to land in terms of the church came out of just some very deep conversation that down the road in my life, I could potentially see myself working for the church, and not that she necessarily needed to join the church, but kind of needed to know you think he could be warm to it? Because this, would this work in our relationship if I potentially did this someday. So even moving to Graceland, I had the sense within that wasn't the ultimate destination. And so anyway, we were going through some significant changes at Graceland and some reorganization. And it was kind of during that time that the church came to me and said, "Hey, would you consider working for the church?" And it was another one of those times a pause, where we had children and lots of things to consider. But Barb and I both kind of looked at each other and said, you know, if I jump back into the corporate world, and all that entails including, frankly, a lot more money and a career like that, the longer we do that, the more difficult it's going to be to ever make a decision like this. And if we're going to do it, now's the time to do it. And so we did, and it was just kind of the right opportunity at the right time when we were at Graceland. And I started as the Kentucky Indiana Mission Center president, which was kind of nice, because we got to go back to the area that we had lived before the general area. And Katie, my oldest daughter got to finish out her high school time back in an area where she was a little more familiar with the area. So it really worked out great as kind of a first assignment.

Robin Linkhart 29:36

So then, I think it's 2005 rolls around.

Ron Harmon 29:40

Two thousand... Yeah, well, I remember very distinctly when I was being interviewed, because there was an awareness of my corporate background and some of the roles that I'd served in and, you know, there was just discussion that there was opportunities for career paths in church and I remember very distinctly saying to individuals that I was talking to at that time, that was not why I was coming to work for the church. I wanted to be a Mission Center president, I really didn't want anything beyond that, because I really felt a call to work with congregations, and to help congregations. And thinking about how they could discern and live mission in a faithful way in the changing world we find ourselves in today. That really was my passion. That was what I wanted to be about. And I got to do that for about nine months, when I had a conversation with then, President designate Steve Veazey, where he shared with me an experience he had had about a call for me to the office of apostle, which I have to tell you, I mean, it was just not anything that was even anywhere in my stratosphere of thinking. So it was quite a shock when I had that conversation with him. And of course, that launched a time of well, World Conference this year, it will have been 18 years in the Council of Twelve, which I really can barely wrap my mind around that I cannot believe it's been 18 years. But it's been 18 years of incredible depth of experiences, and yes, challenges, but relationships and experiencing human suffering and ways that at times have brought me to my knees. But also unbelievable hope and possibility for the future. And seeing the difference that this relatively small movement can make in the lives of people has just taken my breath away at times. And so I have felt so, so deeply privileged, to have the opportunity to walk alongside so many amazing people in the life of the church that have been captivated by our vision, and give so much of themselves to the mission of the church.

Robin Linkhart 32:06

The span of history in the life of the church in the last 18 years has been so dynamic and challenging, but like you say, filled with possibility at the same time. And then in 2019, you stepped into the role of President of the Council of Twelve, which you've done for the last almost four years, it was going to be three, but we postponed our World Conference to this next year, and 2023, which brings us to your call to serve as the Presiding Bishop of Community of Christ. And our listeners want to hear all about that story.

Ron Harmon 32:46

Whenever we approach a World Conference, there's always a little bit of a time of uncertainty, maybe even unsettledness, because we know there's the potential for changes in terms of leadership roles and positions. And so I think we approach that time with a great level of interest. And I think also try to approach it with a level of discernment, with respect to our own sense of call about how we're feeling about our roles. As well as also other people that we are discerning that we see as potential leaders. And I've always said, there's always more people that I feel that are called to some of these roles than we actually have roles. And that's kind of always the challenge. But I had certainly been thinking about, you know, I've been in the Council of Twelve, for 16 years when I first started giving a lot of this consideration. And I was concerned about the need for us to continue to transition a younger generation of leaders into the leading quorums of the church, including the Council of Twelve, and had a conversation with the President of the church about that, and was just stepping back and kind of looking. You know, you do this, you you kind of step back and evaluate your time and how you feel about the contribution you've been able to make the things that are left undone that you'd like to be able to do that you haven't done yet. And in the midst of all of that self evaluation, Steve Veazey called me in to talk with me about this sense of call that he had for me to serve as presiding bishop of the church. And similar to the conversation that I had with them back in 2005 about apostle this also came as a surprise to me. It's kind of a funny story here. So he shared this experience with me and his thoughts and his deep desire to see funding and mission, generosity and mission continue to have this tighter integration in the life of the church in terms of whole life stewardship response and us really deeply understanding how we're called to be God's people in the world with fully open hearts to the suffering we see in the world around us. And how we can continue to generously respond in all aspects of our lives to not only the needs, but the unfolding vision that God is trying to lay before us as a people. So after he got done sharing, there was a pause as there often is, because he's kind of waiting for what your response is. I looked at him, and I smiled, and I said, "Steve, I thought we were friends." And uh, Steve got this grin on his face. And we both laughed. And of course, just to fill everybody in. One reason I would say that is because if you've kind of been connected with the church, particularly the last decade, you're aware of the fact that we've really had some financial challenges as a movement, and still have some ahead of us. And so I was just joking around with Steve a little bit about recognizing that those challenges were still there. But Steve takes the calling process so seriously. And I deeply appreciate that about him. The changes that occur in terms of the leading quorums of the church, I feel come out of this very meaningful and rich process of both discernment and wisdom. And so when Steve shared that with me, he encouraged me to take time with that. And I did do that and came back to him and shared with him of my continued deep sense of call to our mission. The way I've always kind of looked at these things is the First Presidency has a unique view of the church because of the issues and the things that they are called to address and their particular role. I have shared with Steve

on prior occasions that I would be willing to serve, where he felt my gifts and skills could be most effectively utilized at any particular time. Whether that was in a leading quorum, or whether that was drawing on some of my prior experience in human resources and strategic planning, or whatever that was that he was asking me to do. I did not realize that call was going to be to draw on some of my earlier corporate experience in financial services and operations. But as I gave that thought, and I contemplated that, once again, that deep affirmation of both my love for the church, but also an affirmation of God's engagement in this work that we are all involved in together, led me to go back to him and give him my affirmative response to serve in this way. And so I am looking to that role and some of the challenges that we face, with certainly one foot planted in reality, and another foot planted in deep hope, for where I believe God is calling us to go as a people.

Robin Linkhart 38:19

I love the image of one foot in reality, and one firmly planted in deep hope. So Ron, how has this new chapter in your ongoing adventure at times a wild adventure with God changed things for you?

Ron Harmon 38:36

Well, some of this comes with age, and some of it comes with just being able to serve in a variety of different roles, and sometimes being engaged in, yes, what has been at times a wild ride. But I feel like I know so much less than I did 30 years ago. And I actually think that has served me very well, because as I look at this role, as I look at the future, and not just my role as presiding bishop, but my role as a disciple of Jesus Christ, what we call God is just so much more expansive than the words that we use to try to describe it. It is so much more beautiful, it is so much deeper. It is so much wider. There's so much going on that we don't often see. And I am more drawn and captivated to the mystery of the Divine at this point in my life, than perhaps I've ever been. I probably have more questions than I've ever had about all of that. And I am more comfortable than I've ever been living with those questions. And recognizing that that is the journey that is the full abundant journey that we are called to. To journey with the questions as a prophetic people oftentimes not having the answer, oftentimes just having enough light shed on just that next faithful step that we are called to engage in and trusting that the rest will unfold as we faithfully and generously respond. So I think all of this, in particularly this call at this time in my life, you know, has, has really just once again reminded me of what an amazing, wonderful, expansive journey that we're called on individually and collectively as a people. I want to go back and reconnect with that image of one foot planted in deep hope, what are your hopes for the future, Ron? And how do you see God moving in the world in ways that connect with God's invitation to boldly follow into the heart of God's vision for all creation? And certainly, you have touched on some of those aspects. But tell us a little bit more about that? Well, I do, I have a deep and abiding hope for our future. And for me, it's not a hope that's grounded in just a passing optimism. But it's deeply rooted in my experience, with so many across the church, who respond daily to the call to serve and make a difference in the lives of other people. And they continue to serve in their uncertainty at times, because they have encountered something beyond themselves that defies descriptions, but nonetheless, has been deeply felt as this persistent presence of encouragement and hope and vision for what could be in our world. I see God prompting us to discover and embrace the full meaning of our identity and calling as Community of Christ, these deeply relational expressions of divine love that generously give all for the sake of creation. And I see also the rebirthing of Christianity if I can use that term, and our unique call, to do that through the lens of the Restoration Movement. These restoring ministries, the Restoration as healing and redeeming presence in the world, through these authentic and loving

communities that don't just proclaim, but actually practice Christ's transforming love and disruptive peace in ways that alleviate suffering, and point the way toward a better future. A more just and peaceful world, where everyone has a place at the table, and no one—and I truly mean no one—has to walk life's journey alone. And that is the vision, that is what stirs my soul that keeps me engaged in the life of this movement. And it's because I see, it's not just me, but it's us collectively, that are taking steps daily to live into that vision and in a sense, to kind of drag the present into the future. By living out of that future vision, even though it's not realized in the present, that I believe we are, in essence, actually co creating the future together. And that is where my hope is. That's what gives me hope, because I actually see it happening, one relationship at a time, one conversation at a time, one response to human need at a time. And I believe that's how we will step into the future, together with God and with one another.

Robin Linkhart 44:12

That's a beautiful vision, Ron, and thank you for the articulation that you give to that sense of hope that you feel and I know many of us feel with you. Ron, is there anything that you would like to share with us today that I haven't asked you about?

Ron Harmon 44:28

The only thing that I want to just share connected with what I just shared here is, the only thing that I find often that's missing in this amazing mission and vision that we've been entrusted with, these amazing small communities that gather all over the globe. This authenticity and loving community that can be so transformative. Oftentimes, the only thing I find missing in all of that is invitation. So you asked me about invitation. And I just want to come back to that because I believe so deeply that there are people seeking for both meaning and connection to something beyond themselves, which, in many ways, probably they can't even find the words to describe in this moment. But it is what we have come to accept as just part of our life experience. But so many still have this deep longing to have that kind of connection in their lives. And even though we are dealing with all of these trends in Christianity and in society, that are changing practices and perspectives on organized religion, and how people connect how people make meaning in their lives, I still think at the heart of it all, is this wonderful thing that happens when I think enough about another person that I would invite them into a conversation. That I would invite them into a relationship, that I would invite them to say, there's something here in my life that has been really transformative, and I want to share it with you. That's never gonna go away. And so, in the midst of all of our challenges, and thinking about the future and envisioning the future, let's not forget about the power of invitation in the lives of people where they can encounter the transforming power and presence of Christ in their lives.

Robin Linkhart 46:41

Thank you, Ron, your words remind me of the scripture that I paraphrase "...and always be ready to give an account of the hope that is in you..." and invite people to taste that. Well, Ron, thank you so much for being with us today. And I want to tell our listeners that if you would like to hear more from Ron Harmon, right here on Project Zion Podcast, you can check out Episode 73, On "Leading Congregations in Mission," Episode 199, "Toward the Peaceful One," Episode 306. "A Prophetic People." And if you want to learn more about how Ron nurtures his relationship with God, check out Extra Shot 30, "Spiritual Practice." And always you can go to CofChrist YouTube channel and type Ron Harmon in the search bar to take a peek at some of the things that are archived there that will connect

you with Ron's story, his message of hope, and what he wants to share with the world about how he has experienced God in his life in transforming ways. As always a very special thanks to you, our listeners for spending a portion of your day with us. This is your host Robin Linkhart. And you are listening to Project Zion Podcast. Go out and make the world a better place. Take care bye bye.

Josh Mangelson 48:22

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