

264 | God Shots | Percolating on Faith | Christian Hope  
Project Zion Podcast

Josh Mangelson

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

Hello, and welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. I'm your host, Carla Long. And today you're listening to the percolating on Faith series subtitled God Shots. And if you don't know what that is, then where have you been for the last 12 episodes? Friends. Where have you been? Seriously. Uh, God shots a way that we're discussing. Systematic theology using Daniel Migliore book, Faith Seeking Understanding. And we are on chapter 13 not file 13 Chapter 13 entitled Christian Hope. And as always, we have are amazing and wonderful guest Charmaine and Tony Chvala-Smith. Welcome back, you two.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

Hey, Carla. Good to talk with you.

Tony Chvala-Smith

Good, Good to be with you here at the end of the line. So to speak on this particular series the end of the line, so to speak.

Carla Long

The end of the line. What are we going to do next? The world may never know.

Tony Chvala-Smith

We're not invited back, huh?

Carla Long

So today we're gonna be talking about eschatology and I love the word eschatology because it makes me sound super smart. I actually like to just throw it into random conversations. Every once in a while, I will just try and figure out what I'm talking about. Just cause

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

What is she's talking about?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

It sounds so smart. But before we jump into eschatology and Christian Hope and Chapter 13 of Daniel Migliore's book, let's be kind I supposed to people and let's do a little recap. What have we been doing? Why have we been doing it? And, uh, yeah, tell us a little bit about what we've been doing.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

Great. Well, I think the first thing is that, um, we really get most of our best ideas from other people. And so, uh, part of this began at when we were at a reunion and talking with someone who was in a faith transition and was saying, You know, as I'm letting go of the faith that I was raised with, I realize there's a whole bunch of stuff about Christianity I don't know, and I feel like I need to start all over. And so in that conversation, this idea was born that it would be really cool to kind of step back and take a look at, um, Christian theology and one of the easy ways to do it is to do it in a systematic way. It's systematic theology that looks at the different topics that are that are integral to Christian theology.

Tony Chvala-Smith

And so we've said at different times that Christian systematic theology arose as a way of teaching Greek and Roman converts to Christianity in the late second, especially in the third into the fourth centuries. How to transition from their various pagan religious passed into this whole new faith and worldview. And basically systematic theology was about preparing people for baptism, one of the ways that emerge quickly in the late second century to help prepare people for baptism who had no experience with Judaism, The Old Testament with monotheism was a little teaching tool that eventually became what's called the Apostle's creed. Uh, originally was called the baptismal symbol, and it began, uh, I believe in God, Father Almighty, creator of Heaven and Earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only son, our Lord, was conceived by the Holy Spirit born of the Virgin Mary and so on and this this teaching device then became a way of helping people make this difficult transition from a completely different religious past into a monotheistic and monotheistic Christian religious present and future. So what happened was ancient Christian teachers started with, I believe. What does that mean? What is faith? How do we know anything about God? And then who is this God you are committing to? And what does it mean that God is creator of heavens and earth? Uh, and not just some sort of pagan deity who makes stuff of a pre existing stuff. And what? Who is Jesus Christ and what is he for us? What does he mean? What does it mean? That he was crucified? And then what is the Holy Spirit and why is it important to be part off the Christian community? And then ultimately, in the creed, the creed ended with on we believe in the resurrection of the dead and in life everlasting. And so in some ways, the this teaching tool went from beginning to end. And we happen to be at this stage in working through our systematic theology of Migliore at think this is the end of the train having to do with with future of things. So that's that's what we've been doing. Nowadays, Sometimes systematic theology is not used. The term is not used as much as constructive theology. But personally, I still like the term systematic or a methodical theology because it has, it has such great utilitarian value to the church. How to teach, you know who's God? Who's Christ was the spirit. Who are we? What is it? What does it mean to believe? What we call to what? What does the future hold? I think it's still a very helpful discipline, and lots of theologians still like to use the term systematic theology.

Carla Long

So that was excellent. Thank you. That was really helpful, I think, to remind people of where what we've been trying to do where we're coming from. All of that so, you have mentioned that we're at the end of the train right now and we're talking about future things, and I know that he

has titled his last chapter, Chapter 13 on as Christian Hope and it is discussing eschatology. So could we talk a little bit about, what does eschatology mean for all those people who have conversations with me.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

Maybe we should, maybe we should have you define it.

Carla Long

Oh, no, you should never do that and also we should, and why? Why would he name it?

Christian Hope, because eschatology can be a fairly scary word for a lot of people.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

And unfortunately, there are some forms of Christianity that have seemed like that's their primary task in life is to to make God's work in the future of frightening thing. But that's one of the reasons why I really appreciate that Migliore is calling this chapter. Uh, Christian Hope so. The elements that typically make up or that are associated with eschatology. Tony already said last things or final things. It's It's a pretty loose title because it's it's encompassing a lot of things. It's encompassing the questions of what happens after we die. Um, what? What is there beyond this life? Um, then then it also includes things about you know what happens at the end, The sense that there there may be an end, though I think, um, Migliore would really say it's not so much about an end in an ending. You know, people talk about the end of the world or judgment Day or whatever, but he kind of frames it more as, um, you know, another stage in this ongoing relationship with God that that the end is not It's more like a consummation or a fulfillment rather than some kind of, you know, fire and explosion ending. So includes that to what? What happens? Um what just what is it that God's will is in the in the fulfillment of people in creation story? It also includes, um, ideas of it picks up biblical concepts of final judgment. And, of course, Christ return the parousia, which is that the term that is Greek term. That describes, um, Christ full return, recognizing that Christ is already in our midst but that there is a promised expansion of Christ's presence with us for the future. I mean, what am I missing? Resurrection.

Tony Chvala-Smith

Resurrection of the dead is a as another symbol. We'll talk about symbols later, but what is what is meant by resurrection of the body? Resurrection of the dead?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

Let's not leave symbols too far. We won't leave, because I think we'll come back to it. But I think that's the the biggest, um, underlying theme in Migliore's chapter is that all of these topics are in many ways symbols, um, and our and the problems come when we try to be literalistic about them. Um, because they are all glimpses. We we don't we don't know, Um, And if we're going to be, if we're gonna let God be God and be humble in the presence of that reality, um, we need to acknowledge that what we what we see we see partially on. And symbols are the things that point to realities we can't fully explain, determine or even articulate. But they give

us away of pointing to to these things that we sense are part of this whole relationship with God, not on Lee in the present, but in the future.

Tony Chvala-Smith

So maybe it's just I'm just going to take off on symbols. So a symbol is not just a mere sign. A symbol is something that that tries metaphorically to capture a spiritual reality that's too big to be captured other than with the symbol itself. It's so you know, for example, in celebrating the Lord's supper, the bread and wine and the very, very ritual and rite itself ah, are not just simply about me eating a piece of bread, thinking about my baptism. Rather, this is symbolic, a symbolic pointer to a whole array of things of it points to Christ self offering self giving our participation in that through baptism, our participation as a community. So it binds the community together. It points towards our role in the world to live in self giving, other affirming love, which is Migliore term. So there's there's so much more. A simple, simple, simple has, like multiple points of direction. And it's trying to say, you know, what we're doing here we're talking about here is so rich. No single word can capture it. But we can at least point in a direction and and through the symbol, participate a little bit in that reality. And so, in the New Testament, these symbols of parousia, of last judgment of resurrection are trying to say something about God's hoped for an imagined future with us. What what new creation will ultimately be like? And even new creation itself is a symbol. So So, um, symbolic language is really, really important here. And I think one of the reasons why eschatology has become bad news for so many people is because so many types of Christianity have turned the symbols into sort of literal photographs of some particular thing. It's like they've ruined the symbolic nature of.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

Which reminds me, and I don't know if I mentioned these in that list of what eschatology includes, and that's the whole concept of heaven in hell. It's like, Oh, my gosh, for some people, that's the only thing that means and and yet, um, again, that is And and that's the one I forgot. But, um, but again, those at their best. And as we look at at both expressions in scripture and and and and people's experience with Christ, there's there are they point to something they don't describe something they don't don't, what was the phrase? That that some people are so worried about the furniture of heaven and the temperature of hell that they forget about who, about God about yes, what we're supposed to be focused on.

Carla Long

Well, I mean, I think that it's fear is a powerful motivator. It's it's a short motivator. But fear is a powerful motivator, and when churches have not developed this kind of theology. And they just want people to come through the doors and they just want people to show up. Then I mean, we use this very shallow theology and just say, Hey, if you don't want to burn in hell, you better get your butt in church, right?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

Right.

Carla Long

And and so it's It's a It's a much more difficult path in a much more. It's a much longer path to describe it in the way that you're describing it right now and that you will be describing it and it requires a lot more thought and theological knowledge.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

I mean in it. In some ways, it's it's tuning into your own intuitions in your own experience with God, which is seldom, um, one dimensional or two dimensionally often has multiple, multiple layers of meaning and purpose within your life, and then to somehow try and distill down. What God is all about is about whether or not you're going to get into heaven or hell. Um, it's a great disservice to to the to Christianity, the long story of Christianity, which at the very beginning had to deal with well wait a minute. We were expecting Christ. Return right away and it's not happened. And so how will we understand that? Because we sent some truth in it and, you know, already at the beginning of the Christian story, Um, the idea of Christ's return then becomes a symbol rather than a literalist it kind of thing. But, you know, I think you're talking about people who who want to scare other people into salvation, which that just sounds so wrong. You know, it's like, um but But the great disservice that happens there is that then the idea is that the focus is all on me on my individual relationship with God. That's really all that matters. And that's what Christianity is about. And and we've missed out on the primary purpose, which of of the Christian movement. It's about community. It's about how do we how are we responsible for the our neighbor and and our family, too, but also for the creation around us? And we're totally get cut off from that when it's all about me saying the right words or me, um, making a commitment to Jesus and those are important things, but they're beginning steps. They're not They're not arrival. And people miss out on the richness of the Christian life. Um, when When that's all we give them. Is this Well, if you say this or if you do this or if you hold this set of ideas, your eternity is set. You're good. Um, it doesn't leave anything in this world to do. And, you know, if we take the incarnation Christ becoming human and living in our world seriously, we we have to look at what he did and what he said in the kinds of changes that he brought attention to and began in people's lives. But if we way make it about, oh, fear of final judgment means I need to buy an insurance policy today so that I can have security. And then that's it. Um wow, we're really short changed people on on the richness of what it can be to be in relationship with this loving God who does create paths for us, but, uh, who mostly wants to be in relationship with us.

Tony Chvala-Smith

And let's think about what were some of that goes, for example, like if if Christianity is simply about you to use your language, Carla's getting your butt in church, saving your butt s so that it doesn't get burned, then essentially, Christianity is a religion about pure self interest, right? It's about what Augustine called self love, which is a negative terms. Like I love myself. I love nothing else. It's only about me that seems utterly removed from everything one reads in the Gospels. It seems utterly removed from the long story of Christian theology and from the best things we know in our experience of God. And so is that is that image of is either heaven or hell. You choose on and and it's it's all about you. Uh, you're not coming to a fiery end. And now let's take another step further. What is assumed about God exactly in that?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith  
Who is that God?

Tony Chvala-Smith

Right. That the God the God being imagined or implied there is that God, someone you want your Children to play with? It's like it's like God is sort of loving, but actually for kill you. Yeah, about mystic torture and kill you. It's like, seriously, is that is that what ultimate reality is about? Charmaine and I had a class we've been doing Graceland this semester. This is spring semester 2020 are we just had our students read a Elie Wiesel amazing and deeply disturbing book Night is a little bit of his story as a teenager in the Holocaust Jewish teenager, and it's like the the idea that Christianity is about not going to hell is implies that God runs concentration camps in it and that somehow, uh, you've got to say yes to the right things right now. Or if you die, you're going to go toe to some sort of eternal Auschwitz. And it's like, What? What kind of God are we? Is that really ultimate reality? One should say no to that kind of ultimate reality the way way way ought to say no to it in historic life. So I think scatology is really, really important for us in the church to reclaim and to take back from simplistic forces that create images of God and the future in the Christian life. There, like ethically reprehensible and untenable

Charmaine Chvala-Smith  
and inconsistent with the biblical and experiential experiential lives of most Christians.

Carla Long

Exactly like if you grow up, or like I have the God I know and understand is all loving is supportive is wanting me to live the best life that I can live, And then to get down to that last minute and be like, Okay, Carla, just kidding about all of that. I remember when you did this and this and this and this And didn't you swear in church one time? So

Charmaine Chvala-Smith  
Just just once, Carla?

Carla Long

Uh, we're this is hypothetical.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith  
Oh hypothetical. There's that. I got it.

Carla Long

So it does not drive with the God that I have known my entire life.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

And I think you know that one of the places that people who make consider themselves, you know, more liberal or progressive Christians They find themselves kind of distances distancing there, talk about God and and even future things distancing themselves from the idea of

judgment and and and all that because because the the more fundamentalist Christians have so created this picture, um, that that others are saying we don't have anything to do with that. And consequently, they've kind of given up the stage to just that language being out there and not giving any alternative. So, you know, what you were describing was, uh, the imagined view of many Christians about final judgment. Right, Carla, standing before Jesus or God or whomever.

Carla Long

We don't have to make this, Carla.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

You started It seemed like a good place to go, so but that whole idea of judgment, um wow, you know, in the Old Testament judgment and especially when it's coming from the prophets is it's a gift from God. It's to help people see things as they really are. So the prophets are saying to Israel or to Judah, look at what you're doing. Look at how you're treating the poor. You know, God is particularly concerned about the poor and look what you're doing. And you're thinking that you can just do more sacrifices in the temple and be really pious and religious, and you're good. Well, you're not good, because what God is asking of you is to raise up each other and you're not doing that. And you know, so if these examples of God trying to help those who who recognize God, know God to see things as they really are and themselves as they really are. And you know what you're saying is you know your experience with God and you know my experience with God is is that when God has encountered me, the thing I most no is that I am known and accepted and loved. And you know that deep, deep hunger that most, maybe all people have to know that there was is not determined by the titles they have or the money they earn or how they look. Um, it's so deep that and God helps us see things as they really are. It helps us to know that we are loved and were called to keep growing and be encouraged to share that love. So that if that's the God that we know is one who loves us, why would judgment be anything different than a God who loves us, helping us see ourselves, our our lives, as they really are? And so that and then that points to something else. That judgment is not then as an ending, you know, like putting somebody out on the end of a diving board and saying, OK, you know, you've come to the end. Judgment points to the reality that there's something on the other side off the judgment that judgments only purpose is to give you clarity of thought and clarity of sight so that you can move forward in new ways. And so it's it's, you know, it doesn't make sense then that judgment is unending, but that it's actually if you know, if that's a place people feel like they need to go as far as understanding what what who got is to see it as clarity for what comes be at what comes beyond that what comes after that so that we could do something with it. Um, yeah, so that's a whole another take on judgment. And I think it's far truer to both the old and New Testament understanding of God, Um, and God's great love for all of creation.

Tony Chvala-Smith

So, like, this is something you Migliore is trying to convey in this chapter. And by the way, we should mention Carla that I think I think I'm speaking for myself and maybe Charmaine would

would agree. But this this chapter in the third edition of Faith Seeking Understanding to me is worth the price of the whole book. His chapter on Christian Hope. It's just magnificent.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

We might have said that before about other chapters, but it's especially true about this one.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

So In other words, get this book.

Tony Chvala-Smith

That's a fabulous, fabulous introduction to Christian theology. But divine judgment always has redemptive purposes. It's always for the sake of. And, you know, I sure missed is talking about you know, who is the judge? The judge is the one who loves us beyond all telling and at the same time, a love that loves us beyond our are beyond all telling. We'll also be love us sometimes in spite of things that we've done instead, right?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

Use those as as ways of pointing us in some new direction.

Tony Chvala-Smith

Absolutely. I mean divine, divine judgment, whether in our present journey or in the future is about trying to help us see that we've got spinach between our teeth on and and so we don't know what we don't need. Just have illusions about ourselves. We're Migliore, says we are not Gods, and that's really important for us, because whenever human beings start to think their gods, they really follow up everything. So so Migliore is trying to reclaim the symbol of judgment. That's what we're doing here. It's it's it's really it's really important to be able to say God you know, Jesus Christ's judge of the living of the debt, But you have to put the emphasis on it's Jesus, the one who loves sinners and welcome them to his table. And so that's the one who is the judge who wants to wants to help us see things see us ourselves as we really are, see what we've done but also see that in spite of that, we are still loved that and familiarize perspective that ought to empower us in our dealings with other people. So I think that we just is. We walk through a symbol divine judgment and show how it's still valuable way, how we still need the symbol and yet not to not to treat it in a

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

Well not as an ultimate threat of some kind to people. But as God's invitation to us. Does that work?

Carla Long

that's perfect. What about those other scary words that kind of go along with eschatology like like you mentioned already mentioned the word resurrection and you know what does that mean? Not that that's unnecessarily scary one, But what I mean, what is it? What? What does it mean? Yeah,



Tony Chvala-Smith

This is a good place to go back to Migliore. He's very helpful here. And resurrection is a symbol that talk, that that speaks it inclusive and holistic terms. And let me explain what that means for Migliore. And I would say certainly for Community Christ theology too. One common way of viewing, uh, future life that has ancient roots in Greek Philosophy is the immortality of the soul, and Migliore says the problem with that idea, is that the immortality of souls like there's this indestructible, eternal thing in me that's the sort of caught in my body but not identical with my body. And that thing, in some sense will must must live on because it's already eternal itself. It's it's kind of taking a temporary journey in the here and now, but it's but it's essence has nothing really to do with this particular journey? It's immortality of the soul and, interestingly, lots and lots of Christians. That's what they normally think about life after death. But the primary question symbol, theological symbol of life after death, is future. Resurrection and resurrection is not about, uh, that you have some eternal thing inside of you that is sort of quasi divine that's going to live on notice that we are creatures were finite there. There was a time before which we did not exist in a time after which we will not exist. We are as a sold body and spirit were a whole unified thing. And resurrection refers to divine action. What future life depends on divine action, not on something that's eternal inside of us.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

So in some ways, um, resurrection can be seen as a new creation as, um as God taking the Who. We are both body spirit, soul or both, I guess all three. Or however you want to divide that all up and recreating us. So it's not a reconstituting, necessarily of everything from the past. Um, but especially, you know, the you know, the past when we were 13 or 14 I have really bad acne. But you know, which is that's one of the problems with some senses of resurrection is that people want to be so literal about it that, you know, they have a specific time in their own life, that they want, that they imagine themselves being resurrected back, too. But this is a symbol of of God's desire to continue a connection with us, continue a relationship with us. Um too, uh, give us life again in God.

Tony Chvala-Smith

And so it's really very points out that resurrection is intrinsically connected to Easter to Jesus. Resurrection. Um, it's resurrection of the dead is not independent of what happened to Jesus on Easter. And so if you think about it, the post Easter risen Christ has both continuity with the historical Jesus and discontinuity is that is the disciples. No, it's the Lord. At the same time, this this new form of being is raised and exulted into all things. It's cosmic in its scope. And so what Migliore wants say that's actually the symbol of future life for questions, that and here's the payoff with that, um, your your body you as a body yourself, you don't just have a body like it's a disposable wrapper, and thus the idea of the resurrection means that the whole person intrinsically is valuable to God. If that is true, there's an ethical consequences that that means that how we live our bodily life are embodied life, which is the only life we have in the present matters. urgently to God. How we treat the body, which is the earth, matters urgently to God. How we treat society, which is Migliore uses the term body politick. How we treat our culture, our society, our political and social choices. All of these things are tied up tight together in the symbol of the resurrection in which there will be a future transformation of what is into a new

heaven and a new earth. That's kind of where Migliore goes. I think it's a really helpful place to go with that.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

And this This is one of those places I think. E think it's true what we were just talking about judgment to the replaces where what we think about the future. Believe about the future or what God is going to do in the future really does shape how we live today. Um, and it may be said some caught some conscious, uh, it may be his subliminal, but that's why this topic matters. And thinking about this deeply matters because, um what it is we are saying about future with God or what? God, what future God is pointing towards shapes how we live in the same way that we think. Well, if we just, um, get baptized or we just say the right words that, um, were then good, good with God. Um, we've only let we've only let it shape us a little bit.

Carla Long

I'm really glad you said that, Charmaine, actually, because you brought back a memory about this documentary I watched probably 10 years ago called Jesus Camp. There's actually a place in Lee's Summit, Missouri. And, um, it was Ah, it was, Ah, a camp that Community Christ would have very little in common with. And one thing that I remember is that the people who went to this camp and participated refused to recycle because if they refuse to recycle, that means the Earth will die quicker and Jesus will come back that much sooner. And I was just floored by that thinking. I say I'm so like, that's another part of this eschatology thing, right? Like, is Jesus coming back like an end? What happens if that happens? And is Jesus gonna you know, come slide down our temple? As have jokingly said, uh, what's that?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

With a Big gulp cup in a plastic straw.

Carla Long

I gotta tell you, I have a little jealous of Jesus if he gets to do that.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

Well, I actually I'm really glad you shared that because that I was thinking. And I probably have shared this on one of our podcast before because it has it really, really affected me. And that was a conversation I had with a sister of mine who tends more towards Ah, conservative evangelical is, um and, uh, this is this is, I don't know, 30 years ago, um, but when our church was making some statements about a nuclear disarmament and making some statements for the world and for ourselves and and she said, Well, don't you know that that's how the how God is gonna cleanse the earth. You know, like in revelation, where there's the's fires and, you know, third of the earth is is put to flames. You know, nuclear weapons, weapons is how the God is gonna cleanse the world. So there can be a new creation. So why would you stop nuclear arms? And it's like, Oh, my gosh. I had no idea how different worlds how different our worlds were in relation to understanding. Um what God wanted in the world. But her belief about what came at the end strongly affected her what she would do, what she would vote for, what she would would before or against in the world around us, but that I just couldn't believe it. I

mean, it was just like, how can you? How can you think that? And of course, lots of people do think that. But I hadn't encountered it with somebody who I thought I knew.

Tony Chvala-Smith

You know, it's like bad bad theology, yields, bad ethics. And this is both of these were perfect example of that. You know, it's like this is a place where military can help us recognize that what has happened to Christian's ecological symbols in the past 200 years is something like a hostile takeover from the forces of this kind of simplistic liberalism and a religious religious views that seem completely incompatible with the light with with the New Testament's most basic affirmation that God is love. So we need to call that out Is a hostile takeover that rapture theology, this kind of how how disempowering and originally in, in both late the late late Old Testament, the origins of Judaism and an early Christian apocalyptic symbols were empowering symbols. They were hope producing symbols, not disempowering symbols. They gave you these symbols, gave you the capacity to resist and and to be defiant towards those things which were destructive of the creation. What's happened in a lot of Protestant Christianity, of this type of fundamentalist and evangelical types of Christianity is this reversal of the power of the symbols. Symbols have become disempowering, um, paralyzing. Absolutely. And you know, another place where this has been horrible is that in Middle Eastern politics, fundamentalist Protestants are involved because they have this this whole, like what they see is liner notes to how the future supposed to go and it involves. It must require a major like world war starting in the Holy Land. And so what they do is they pump money into the most conservative Jewish organizations in Israel and have no concern for for the lives and futures of Palestinians. And so what happens is it keeps Protestant fundamentalists on the basis of bad readings of the Bible and a horrible scatological fund endeavors in the Middle East that continue to increase tensions there. They're trying. They're trying to make World War Three come that they think it has to do. What? What kind? What kind of ethics are those? Really? What does that have to do with Jesus? What does that have to do with the love of God known in Christ? What does that have to do with love? Your neighbor as yourself? What does have to love your enemy has nothing to do with it. And so it needs to be called out. And that, you know, the church used to be a place where we reclaim as scatological symbols in all the power and glory as empowering symbols, symbols that give us a view of the future worth struggling for.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

And what if the people who are sending millions, perhaps billions of dollars too? Um to the most conservative and and reactionary of Jewish organizations. What if they used that money to address the apocalyptic view in Matthew of feeding the hungry? Jesus. Jesus is a picture of, you know, this'll is, um Matthew,

Tony Chvala-Smith

Chapter 25. Yeah. Yeah.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

You know where Jesus says, You know, um, you know those who who feed the hungry? Those who clothe the naked, those these are the ones who are with me. Um, and I think the

implication is already with me that they have already been letting me be with them as they are interacting in the world. What if that money were used to fulfill that apocalyptic view of Jesus? That the fulfilling of creation's purposes in reaching out to those who are marginalized to those who the society has said, You have no worth, um, you know, that's that's really biblical not only in the New Testament but the Old Testament that that's what it is that God is wanting us to do with our time. Our energies are resource is, is to to create that kind of space, not one that ends in some cataclysmic war between, uh, anyhow. So, yeah, it's It's like, Wow, very selective on which of the apocalyptic images they're wanting to make literalistic.

Tony Chvala-Smith

You know Carla in Community. Christ, we have a beautiful symbol of the future. Um, that is our church seal, and it's it's an eschatological symbol. It has ethical power. And that's the symbol of the line, the lamb and the little child, and you know an old RLDS Theology that was image of the millennium of the future. Science. Yeah, Zion of the future Reign of Christ on Earth. And it can still be that kind of symbol for us if we think of it as a symbolic. But think of how holistic that symbol is. Children, animals, creation, living in harmony, living in peace. And it's it's a It's deeply biblical not only from Isaiah but also in the New Testament. In Romans, Chapter eight, Paul Paul speaks of the future of God's redemptive work in creation as including creation, the creation groans, waiting for the revealing of the Children of God. In other words, the future of creation and the future of God's people are tied together. That's a that's a breathtaking symbol with all kinds of ethical possibilities. In other words, we should recycle. It's a It's an ethical necessity. It's not an option. It's connected. It's connected in some way to the reign of God, that's you're right. Community of Christ. People would not have been particularly comfortable at that Jesus Camp.

Carla Long

Oh, I was uncomfortable watching it from my couch. So So you've broken down a lot of these different symbols, and you've actually moved into a place where I wanted to move into when you started talking about Community of Christ. And so we have put a lot of thought in a lot of work into how we see what Migliore would say. Christian Hope, can we talk a little bit about us and as a movement, an organization, and and, um, we might have to even jump into something called a basic beliefs.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

That

sounds threatening, like I know, I know! But I think, actually, if it's okay with you, I think we probably need to back up a little bit and say maybe a little bit about what we used to believe, Um, because the things that we're saying now, I think we could say that what we used to believe we have. We have stepped back from and let that be symbols rather than a road map. So so where we where we used to be as a church?

Carla Long

Definitely. Go for that.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

For those who may have ever seen them, I have the preaching chart in mind from the like 1800 to, 1930's or 40's and on that there's a you know, we, uh we act is that we have a snapshot, Um, of exactly what's gonna happen after everyone dies and we show everybody where you know where they're headed. And if they take this path will be here. And and you know, if you're if you're baptized and you do all the things you're supposed to in the church, then you're gonna end up here. If you're not really a faithful, you know, you'll end up over here, it's still it's another glory, but it's a little lesser And, um, you know, but within that there is lots of room for grace that we would never have used that word at the time. It's still all about us as a church being the one true way. But it did point to the fact that God is always reaching out and trying to help us find other ways of connection with God. So even though it claimed to know more than anyone could and it claimed that we were the right way, there were some other pieces of it that we have the ideas a symbols we have hung on to, but not the not the plumbers chart as we used to call it, um who always going, where and when. Um And so as a church, we have moved a long ways from that. Uh, I've argued with people before that the problem of the main problem with that preaching chart is that it was mostly about us. Um, and it didn't leave much room for God. And and that's the main thing I would say that has changed is that we recognize and are willing to acknowledge that whatever it is that comes after, whether it's our own personal lives, whether it's this consummation or fulfilling of God's desire for all of creation or the ongoing life with God, um, we've had to acknowledge that, we have, we have been humbled by the greater Christian tradition and the symbols that were there to recognize that, um, we have, as I said earlier, just glimpses. So in the last 20 years, 25 years we have been far more intentional on this, the statements that we have for our basic beliefs and I think Carla, anyone going to our basic beliefs will probably be a little relieved to see that each of these segments is kind of short. Um, we're not claiming to know everything, but we are wanting to point to what we know about God in in relation to these. So in the basic beliefs, there's several statements that are related to eschatology one of them is the reign of God. What is what is it that we sense that God is working towards with us or or through us? And then resurrection and eternal life is another one. Judgment is another one, and in time is another, and they're both, they're all short descriptions of what it is we are glimpsing. I think it's a good way to look at it. And so Tony's gonna take us into some of them, I think.

Tony Chvala-Smith

So you, for example, that that old preaching chart Charming was talking about it had a little image of the millennium, but it said nothing really about the Kingdom of God, which was kind of curious because, you know, the movement arose, saying you to declare the Kingdom of God is at hand. Um so our current statement says of the reign of God, This quote, the reign of God is the coming triumph of love. Justice mercy and peace that one day will embrace all of creation. Jesus, life and ministry were the living expression of this promise. He taught his disciples to pray for the kingdom's full coming and sent them out into the world to be living emblems off that new creation. Zion expresses our commitment to Harold God's peaceable kingdom on Earth by forming Christ centered communities and families, congregations, neighborhoods, cities and throughout the world. That's the statement, um, it is profoundly aligned with the kinds of things Migliore is trying to talk about in his chapter, even though Migliore's coming from the

reform tradition. And yet there's a lot of alignment here. But think, Think about the positive vision of the future. Uh, and the ethical empowerment that comes from a statement like that that the Gods preferred future is about the triumph of love, justice, mercy and peace. Not about cats. Prefer Future is not about running death camps in the after life and destroying all of God's opponents. Very different visions. And then right after that comes a statement on peace. Peace is God, shalom, justice, righteousness, wholeness and the well being of the entire creation. Jesus, the Prince of Peace came to preach the kingdom and to be our peace through the cross. The Holy Spirit empowers us for the costly pursuit of peace and justice for all people. And there you see that that's just what, like two sentences long and its tributary in and structure God Christ spirit and sent the center of the divine. The divine communion of persons is the call to peace. The next one resurrection and eternal life. Christ has risen. So there's the Easter theme. Right at the start are our future life. Whatever involves is not unconnected to Jesus. Resurrection. So Christ is risen. Thus, we believe that God is God of life, not of death by faith we share in eternal life. Even now, in Christ, God's love finally will overcome all that demeans and degrades the creation, even death itself. Easter also gives us hope that the tragic suffering and death of victims throughout history is not the last word. We believe the Holy Spirit will transform all creation to share in the glory of God.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

And actually, that reminded me if you heard me go in the background. Um, that one element of eschatology is sometimes called realized eschatology, um, which suggests that the kind of life, um, that might be, um, beyond this life resurrected life. Or however we use that symbol that is actually something that we can live right now. And you'll find this mostly in the gospel of John, the idea that when we have encounter with God, when we are living with Christ, are in Christ. This life now is changed. Our our understanding of ourselves and the world is changed. We have the spirit to help us live in new and new creation like ways right now. And so resurrection and eternal life, or not just about whatever comes after, but they're about now that we can live a kind of eternal life now in in God with God's help. Um, and it's how we see the world. It's how we interact with each other. And that's all part of the idea of Christ's return being already and not yet of resurrection being already but not yet, um, that that we have these tastes of it, these partial experiences of it.

Tony Chvala-Smith

That I think of the word anticipations and I'm reminded when Sherman shares I'm reminded of a we Charmaine. I used to do a lot of youth camp ministry. I remember a particular Friday late afternoon at a senior high camp at Park of the Pines in northwest Lower Michigan. Absolutely magnificently beautiful campground. And I remember, you know, we're coming to Friday evening. It's the last full evening of camp, and the kids will be going home the next day by noon, and we're going to have a special service that even I remember sitting on a bench, looking out over the campground, looking down at Lake Charlevoix magnificently gorgeous, late and feeling this complete sense of absolute well being. That was not in me, but it was. I was fully enveloped by it. That was an already moment on already sensing what the Kingdom of God is about. And Charmaine said, It's it's also a not yet. We're you know, that's that has not fully come, and yet we have tastes of it. So yeah, so the next. There's two more statements here, one on

judgment and one on one time. Here's the judgment one. The living God whom we serve is a god of justice and mercy. God cares about how we treat our neighbors and enemies and how we make use of creation's gifts. It matters supremely to God how we welcome the poor, the stranger, the sick, the imprisoned and the rejected. We affirm in scriptures light that Jesus Christ is advocate and judge of the living and the dead. That that statement, I think, really captures in a beautiful form everything that mealy or he was trying to say about judgment, and it gives a kind of an ethical center to it. How we treat the abused in the poor and the unjustly incarcerated and rejected. That's that's that's the point of judgment. Finally, the very last statement that this this that you find in the basic beliefs document is on the end time way. Press forward together in service to God, knowing that our labor is not in vain. The future of the creation belongs to the Prince of peace, not to those who oppress, dominate or destroy. As we anticipate that future, we devote ourselves to seek Christ's peace and pursue it. We do not know the day or hour of Christ coming, but no, only that God is faithful with faith in God Christ in the Holy Spirit, we face the future in hopeful longing and with the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray by kingdom come thy will be done on Earth as it is in heaven. So that's how the whole basic belief statement ends. It ends with what we think about the end of time, and that last paragraph there that I just read is extremely, extremely rich. And it's worth a lot of reflection, prayer and meditation on I think so. So, yeah, so our community of Christ has a really rich eschatology that were we're just not yet learning how to really to learn how to mind this and live it and preach it and teach it and give it as a counter word to the the hostile takeover. A scatology is that abound in American religious culture.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

But I think one of the things that Migliore points to that that our basic belief statements also point to is that it is about hope, and it's about hope, not based on what we do, but about who God is. And I think that has always got to be the final final word in in any of these eschatological topics, isn't that a great word? Eschatological. It is that the final word is God, the nature and love of God.

Carla Long

And that sounds like a beautiful way to close down the podcast on. And I mean I mean, the final word is God. Um, but unless, of course, you guys wanted to say something else.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

No, I think I think we've You've given us lots of room to explore lots of dimensions of this, and and it can get so confusing and complicated. But really, um, you know, I think it's a church. Our view of God really allows us to let this be about God, about the God that we know that God who calls, who knows those who calls us to be compassion in the world. Um, who says let your heart be broken. Um, who says let the spirit help you touch those who need to know they're worth. So it comes back to that

Tony Chvala-Smith

Community of Christ has a hope that can be practiced. I think I think we should claim that for those who you know, for those who've been following along in the syriza have been worked

through military next places to go would be any Any single chapter of military is worth a re read. And then at the end of each of his chapters, he has a good bibliography. So you can see you can follow his bibliography and the other yeah, particular topics. And this this will This will be shameless self promotion. But you know what? If if you are, if you really want to pursue this further and want to do a Master's Degree, consider Community Christ Seminary, where we pursue as topics and think through and work through how to reflect on these. But above all else, practice, practice, practice our hope.

Carla Long

Oh, thank you so much you to thank you for your knowledge and for your encouragement in throughout this systematic theology that we've been going through. And I have been making jokes this whole time about this being chapter 13. I actually think this is chapter 14 isn't?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

I don't know, but I like the idea. I love 13. It's such a totally misunderstood concept, and it and it does point to the superstitions of our cultures that we know, you know, that we just let it be?

Carla Long

Oh, Charmaine I hate 13 so much.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

It's a prime number that doesn't want to do anything for you.

Carla Long

It's just the ugliest little number anyway. But I actually think this is Chapter 14 in Migliore's book. So I'm so sorry, everyone. I've been making jokes about it the whole time, but thank you so much for listening, Charmaine. Tony, thank you so much for your knowledge and being willing to share that with us. I really appreciate it.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

Well, thank you, Carla, for going on this part of the journey with us. And we'll look forward, Thio future conversations with you?

Tony Chvala-Smith

Absolutely. Thank you.

Josh Mangelson

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