

Josh Mangelson 0:17

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

Carla Long 0:30

Hello, and welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. I'm your host, Carla Long. And today I'm meeting with Matt Frizzell. I've known Matt for a long, long time, even though he used to get me confused with my sister Cara, which is normal because Cara I looked a lot alike and he went to Graceland with my sister rather than me, but we've known each other for a really long time. Sorry, Matt. I shouldn't have brought that up.

Matt Frizzell 0:55

No, it's okay. I it's it. I hear it every time. It's exciting.

Carla Long 0:59

Well, actually, that's a long story, but they accidentally gave one of my grades at Graceland to my sister Kara. So I almost didn't graduate because she took nature of science twice. Supposedly, that didn't happen. This is a very boring story. Let's move on.

Matt Frizzell 1:15

Fair enough.

Carla Long 1:16

Okay, so Matt's gonna talk to us a little bit about some stuff that I think that we all know about some some stuff that happens on social media, some critical thinking skills, things that it might be good to bring back to the forefront of our minds. So before we get started with all that, Matt, could you please tell us a little bit about yourself?

Matt Frizzell 1:37

Yeah, thanks. This is fun. I, I've been in Community of Christ my whole life. I've been a minister most of my professional life. Early on, I felt this deep desire to answer some of the questions that I had about life and about God about religion. And they were existential questions for me, right? They were kind of like defining about my whole orientation to the fact that I had a life and share it with other people. They were really important to me. So anyway, I went, I felt I felt led, I felt led by God to take advantage of opportunities that came along the way off and didn't see them until they came along the way. And I ended up going to seminary for quite a while. And anyway, it was really helpful because it was in seminary that I found people who were not only asking the questions, some of the questions that I had is that, but they were also doing it in a really critical environment where people were like, yeah, I have that question too and I think your answer is, is horrible. That's crap. Why don't you think about it this way. And I was like, um, you really helped me break through something. I really appreciated that. I went to schools

where critique and critical thinking and asking hard questions, was one of the most important tools to insight and growth and so I really appreciated that I loved it. Matter of fact, I, I needed it in my life. And so anyway, seminary was great for that. And so ended up, you know, studying basically in Community of Christ, what we would call Zion. But it was the intersection of theology and social theory. How does? How does, how does our understanding of God and faith impact how we understand life together? But how also does life together impact, how we understand theology? And what does that mean? I just want to give an illustration because I think this is really helpful real quick. Sometimes we, you know, we start from the one standpoint where we start with theology, and we're like, the world should be this way. Bla bla bla bla bla, because God's story tells us this and we should be harmonious and get along and everybody's equal. That's how theology informs social life. Sometimes, though, you need to go the other way around. So when theology does things like, Hey, isn't that great that men are superior to women? You're like, social theory tells you that's crap. And in It also means that we can't live that way together. So we really need to use our understanding of real relationships to criticize our really bad beliefs. And so it goes, it always goes both ways. And that's a dialogue that is so rich and so alive in what I find is that most people with any spirituality and religious black background, already have this conversation going on in their head all the time. We just don't name it. And so I found that just to be riveting, and so that's ended up being an area of study. And anyway, that's, that's kind of what led me here. It was my background and time spent with that.

Carla Long 4:36

What a good introduction. And folks, that was just the introduction. We're gonna dive deep into this. So, Matt, I feel like I should make a confession to you. I am one of those people. I'm a conflict avoider if I can help it. I'm a harmonious person. You know, like I love it when everybody in the room is happy, and I want one time We were doing like this personality kind of quiz. And while we were getting our results, the day we were going to get our results. It was this was in seminary, actually, I had gone around to everybody in the classroom and I said, Hi, everyone. Hi, nice to see you. Again. It's good to be here. But we thought, you know, making sure everybody in the room felt comfortable. And then the teacher said, Carla is such and such personality and you can tell because she went around to every single person and made sure they were happy. So I hate conflict. I hate it. But that's a problem, right? For if we are going to be the peace of justice church that God calls us to be we cannot have a church of Carla's that avoid conflict. We need to have that conflict because it's healthy, right?

Matt Frizzell 5:46

Absolutely. A matter of fact, it's one of those things that I think today is is really challenging because there's a lot of power struggles happening in the world, particularly if you live in the Western world. And in particular, if you live in the US context right now, conflict has actually become a product that We buy and sell everything from talk shows to Championship Wrestling to even the dramas that we used to watch when I was a kid on, on soap operas. Does anybody remember soap operas? General Hospital, As the World Turns, I mean, we we conflict is a product, it's something we actually buy and sell. And that it means it's something we consume. And so we're happy doing that as long as we are in a place where it's safe to do so. When you're

actually in a conflict. And when you're actually engaging in the power struggle, it is it is very threatening, and one of the things that I that I really appreciated about social theory and learning about sociology was that you know, how we handle conflict is is very much conditioned by several factors, one of which is where we are in the social organization, and so And it takes us some grossly over term generalizations, but people will know exactly what I mean when I say it. Middle class people generally live in this space where their livelihood is based on their ability to make harmony. It's they they are constantly navigating powers that they can't control in the power class above them, and organizing and managing things like labor and staff and others who often live in the worlds of poverty and chaos and difficulty who are much more vulnerable and live in conflict all the time. And we we make things work in this middle class, middle management middle place, by using the tools of organization and thinking and management to just constantly engage forms of conflict. And many of us make it or break it based on our ability to do that. It's an unconscious middle class fear to cause a conflict that is so bad that you either silently or overtly get rejected and banished. Because none of us want that shame. And frankly, it can impact our livelihood. And it happens in churches, it happens in families, it happens in the workforce. I sometimes sit around in church meetings where we're all supposed to love each other. But I can feel this oppressive feeling that's like nobody wants to say anything that's going to cause too much of a conflict because it is very emotionally disturbing. And it's not only emotionally disturbing, it can be threatening, so I don't want to make it just an emotional thing. It can actually threaten the relationships that sustain us. And so you come by it righteously. Carla, you're not alone.

Carla Long 8:38

Well, that's kind of good and bad to hear. I was hoping that everybody else was better at it than I was, then I wouldn't have to be good at it because they're good at it right. So what what are the what are the pitfalls of withdrawing from these conflicts of not engaging in these conflicts at all? Is conflict always bad? What are some How can conflict be positive You know, things like that?

Matt Frizzell 9:01

Sure. Well. And that's, I think that's a fascinating discussion that brings us to the edge of our comfort zone, especially when you think about how social media is a very structured environment to control conflict and control our engagement in conflict.

Carla Long 9:16

Social media! Uggggh.

Matt Frizzell 9:17

Ah, well, I think that's where a lot of people today actually experience conflict. Um, but I mean, we could also talk about how family is a very interesting place where conflict happens and doesn't happen. That's a whole nother conversation. But I'm thinking about social media, just because that seems to be a place people experience a lot of conflict. And one of the reasons why that is, is because we, we cannot control the conflicts that were in on social media, really, I should really say that we can't control the conflicts we engage but we can control when and

how we engage them. And that's really key. We, we can just shut it off and don't have to, we can walk away and nobody even knows whether we have we can block people we can turn we can stop following somebody we can unfriend. And one of the reasons why I think a lot of conflict happens on social media is because it helps us maintain a high level of control. I mean, who, for those of us who do get involved in conflicts on social media, we probably have somebody in our lives going, you should just let that go. Stop talking stop engaging. Why are you talking about racism in politics, again, on social media? Well, it's like, I do it because I'm deeply committed to dialogue. And I actually have no idea how democracy or community can work if we don't engage each other. And so, and I'm afraid of losing both community and democracy. And if I'm really afraid of that, I have to risk conflict. I have to risk being in dialogue with other people over controversial issues, over issues that in many ways the conflicts are constructed and by by very powerful Public Media are and and and news outlets and PR firms that help shape these political messages that really draw us in.

Carla Long 11:11

Or when something that is so, so huge that is just so over simplified into a tiny meme that is that like, it's only job is to make you mad, it's only job is to engage you in a way that you might not normally engage. Because you know, in your brain, these are complex issues. These are huge issues. They cannot be summed up in a pithy, little, tiny little statement. And yet, they people know exactly how to or companies, corporations, I don't know, know exactly how to get too emotionally involved.

Matt Frizzell 11:44

Absolutely. And that engagement is part of the product that they sell, but it's also a huge propaganda industry. And I want to say something a minute, I'm not talking about conspiracy theory. I'm talking about things that anybody can go study. And if you want to spend the money or even just Have the scholarships to go to university and read about these things in a critical, thoughtful way with standards for truth and standards for false. You can do this. So I am not talking about, you know, some sort of it's not that the Empire is out there floating in the in the stratosphere, you know, send beaming messages to control us. It's actually much more complicated than that. There's very real interests, which is what our democracy was based on. There is very real interests that are converging and conflicting over desired outcomes in our world, you know, who has freedom and who doesn't? And who gets the benefit of taxes and who doesn't? And who, who, who gets these contracts and who don't and, you know, how much do we put into defense and how much do we put into social services, all of those are very real issues. And they're all deeply entwined in our economy. And so there's very real, very real interest at work. So oftentimes, what people put conspiracy theories on are really a way of just kind of simplifying what is a variable complex interaction of interest, which is exactly what we designed our system to be. They've just become very powerful, and many of us are very feel very powerless and not able to do a lot about it. And so it's it's easier to kind of conjure up some, some explanations. And the funny thing is, is I think what makes them attractive is there's always a little bit of truth in them, and also a whole lot of false, but they're just truthful enough to kind of draw us in. So that makes conflict again, even harder.

Carla Long 13:29

I think what you just said, Oh, sorry, go ahead. Finish up.

Matt Frizzell 13:31

No, no, I was just saying it makes conflict harder, because you really don't know what what you're engaging. It might be a big conspiracy theory, or it might be a very real discussion about how, let's say racism, and sexism is very real. And it does affect people's lives and the people that it impacts nobody reports on because they're nameless, or they're poor, or they're on the margins in some way. And that's not a conspiracy theory. That again, is a convergence of interests.

Carla Long 14:01

I think what you just said a while ago about feeling powerless is for me, it's probably the heart of how I feel on social media I, you know, these these huge issues, huge issues of racism and sexism and other isms that are that are so destructive, and I just don't even know what steps I could even take to help that. And so they're I don't engage necessarily in those conflicts, because I just don't know what good that that they do. So how can conflicts be positive? And not just on social media? Like other places, too? How can conflicts be positive? How can they be destructive? So what's the what is the difference between those two?

Matt Frizzell 14:47

Well, that's that's an excellent question. It's also obviously really, really complicated and it depends to some degree on the person. I don't want to ever forget those, those very highly personal circumstances to consider where, you know, if I have a history of abuse and abuse, my tolerance for talking about sexism or violence issues is going to be different than somebody like me who's had the privilege of I'm six foot one I'm over 200 pounds I usually, I'm a white male, I have all sorts of privileges, I don't experience a lot of threats very often. And so my tolerance to engage conflicts is very different. And I want to be very, very sensitive to that. And so how can it be positive and negative to some degree we have to start with ourselves. What's what's healthy for us? You know, what, what, what can we engage and grow from and learn from? And to what extent do we need to pull back and heal? Seminary really brought that into, I had to deal with that in seminary because we dealt with a lot of privilege issues in seminary, and there were times when I felt like that is the conversation were destructive for me. I know now they weren't. They were incredibly enriching. And they were incredibly helpful. I had to abide with those struggles. I love the word abide because it just feels spiritual and, and religious to me. Abiding is a spiritual practice it's dwelling with and living with. And that's the one of the things that we do not want to live with in this world and dwell with which is conflict. But by by doing that in a structured environment, and that's really key, a structured environment, not a chaotic environment, where when the professor directed the discussion, we respected that, that really made the con, the the classroom, a, a laboratory space for having discussions that don't happen around coffee tables that don't happen, you know, in coffee shops, or at home, around family, dinner tables and such. And so that was really, really powerful. So one thing you have to Think through what's healthy for me and no to that sometimes if it hurts, it doesn't mean it's unhealthy. But sometimes it does. And having people on the outside of you who can

help you guide through that, like, you know, just give you feedback from a third party perspective is really important. But the other the other thing that's important that I, I think in terms of healthy and negative conflict in terms of when we're talking about peace and justice, is it starting with our own tradition, the prophets engaged conflict. The prophets spoke politically, they lamented and critiqued leaders, Walter Brueggemann is actually very good about spelling out this relationship between the king and the prophets in the Old Testament, where the king was kept to this covenant to lead and to have power and to keep covenant in a certain way the king, the king in in the Old Testament I lived under another rule, they were not above the law, which is a real struggle today. We kind of feel like there's sovereign powers out there that can do whatever they want. That is not the model of kingship in the Old Testament, and the prophets often were the ones holding the Kings feet to the fire. So when they made decisions that were, you know, threatening to the vulnerable, orphans, widows, foreigners, strangers, you know, there was there, go ahead and read it. Dig into the Old Testament, there is a lot of protest, a lot of conflict, a lot of indictment, and there is outright shaming. And this is where I think it becomes unpopular to talk about but our scriptures, the prophetic voices, outright shame, the wealthy classes, they outright shame the Kings for what they're doing.

If we're going to include the Old Testament In our faith tradition, we have got to engage conflicts. And we've got to engage the politics of power in a way that leads in the same direction that the prophets were trying to lead to, which is faithfulness to a kind of righteousness and justice under God. That was understood by the people was testified to in Torah. And we have to be willing to call people into account and be willing as privileged classes. And when I say we remember I'm always talking about Matt frizzle, white male, some kind of Protestant straight person, you know, people who have education, even if we don't have money, but if we do, we do have more money. It's always a matter of comparing to who, right. We have to be willing to be held accountable. So how do you have positive and negative conflicts there? That's the question I heard you asked, but I thought we really need to talk about why conflicts are spiritually valid. And have precedent for us. Before I jump into the next piece of it, I just wondered I've seen you nod a little bit I didn't want to know if you wanted to respond to that because I usually when you talk about the prophets of the Old Testament and in social justice, people's attitude about conflicts, all of a sudden change, like yeah, FIGHT the power, speak truth to power, you know, we get really excited about seeing the world set right side up again. Otherwise, why wouldn't we Why would we not watch the Hunger Games or Star Wars? I mean, we want to see the world set right up again, right?

Carla Long 20:31

You know, I was nodding along with you about the the prophets and things like that. And it reminded me This is a an anecdote that I use every once in a while, when I was working in Europe. I had the chance to go to Karlštejn Castle in the Czech Republic. And I found it very interesting because the king at the time, Charles, he sat in this chair with two windows on to a site and he Look, the windows are right behind him. And he wanted that because he wanted to see the person's face talking to him. But he didn't want them to see his face. So when the sun is shining in your eyes, he's in shadow, so you can't see his face. And it made it extra scary to speak truth to power. So whatever that person that person couldn't, was more scared to say

something to the king than otherwise. And so I think about that sometimes when have you mentioned that about speaking truth to power and getting after it, that's what immediately came to my mind is how scary it is and how the powers that be. Make it more scary, actually. So I don't know if that's where you wanted to get into. But that's where my mind immediately went to Karlštejn Castle in the Czech Republic.

Matt Frizzell 21:48

Go ahead, go. No, I'm done. Are you good? No, I'm not going to have a conflict with you, Carla. views.

Carla Long 21:53

Oh, we're getting into it. No, really. I'm all done.

Matt Frizzell 21:57

Well, it's funny. You made me think of another podcast. Thanks. About masks because you there's a not being able to see someone's face is actually a really, and the the philosophical and theological power of seeing a face. It's actually really interesting, late modern and postmodern philosophical theme. But again, I kind of just jumped into an academic rabbit hole there. But it's something that is very relevant and important, this concept of masks and seeing a human face, because we do in many ways social media operates as a mask, you do not nobody has to see your face and everybody gets a mask. And everybody the avatar is making your own mask. I mean, it's very interesting to, to think about how this works, because it's all about representation, confrontation, engagement, which ultimately is about relationships. And when we think of relationships, we often think about friends and family and people we love. The world is made up of relationships completely. That's one of the things sociology helps you see is that everybody is intimately and inextricably wound into something else and some other people and some other histories and some other people's stuff. And those relationships are masked as a key part. But you I, you said something about positive and negative conflict and and engaging those and I guess that is something that I do think we need spiritual tools and and kind of moral ethical tools to navigate and and I think it'd be a challenge to try to talk about that. So, in peace studies, we talk about two forms of of peace. This is kind of an intro to peace studies concept, you know, we have positive peace and negative peace. These aren't feeling terms. So don't do when I say negative, I don't mean like, negative. You know, I'm not talking about, I'm not talking about bees that feels bad. I mean it I mean in and and by the way positive peace actually doesn't often feel good. The irony, I didn't realize this until right now, the irony about those two definitions is we actually usually feel the opposite about them. Most of us prefer negative peace because it's based in security. And we don't like positive peace because it's based in vulnerability, conflict and risk. So, I had never kind of thought about it that way before. But anyway, you're hearing me thinking out loud. So negative peace is the absence of conflict. You know, it's it when it's when it's in a in a good way. It's, it's tranquility and serenity. And the world at peace kind of when I walk at five o'clock in the morning and the sun is coming up, and I hear the birds tweet and I'm still not hearing any cars move and the water is still and I can see the reflection of the the canopy in the tree tops in the water, that kind of tranquility and absence of all conflict that stillness is, is in many ways a good kind of negative peace because

there is no conflict. It's conflict free. And there's just kind of a beauty and, and a peace there, I guess now I'm using the same word twice. But negative peace can also be created with threat. You know, if you do that, again, this is what's going to happen. And so and this is often what people in peace studies will talk about happens to as the peace of Empire, you know, peace, we can create negative peace by just having a store ordinary law enforcement, a lot of money and military and violence, a lot of ways to suppress conflict. When you suppress conflict, you create a negative peace, a kind of peace that is forced, but it's also a kind of security. Do you hear how ambivalent it is I'm trying to talk about it in like positive and negative terms, to get us to think, because there are forms of negative peace that are really important when we really are talking about security and suppressing conflict, so certain things can happen.

Carla Long 26:12

What I hear you say, though, is that negative peace is really only peace for those in power. It's not peace for those who have been suppressed people who have been oppressed. Is that true?

Matt Frizzell 26:20

Absolutely. Absolutely. If it's, if the absence of conflict benefits the unjust order, then yes, that is a that is a negative piece that is part it's, it's positive in the sense that it's good and a benefit for some, but it's based on repressing conflict or, or holding power over others. And, you know, we even do this in our homes when you're a parent, you know, you we often want negative peace. Yeah. Mom.

Carla's a mom she knows negative peace.

Carla Long 26:57

Time out! You're in time out right now!

Matt Frizzell 27:01

Oh yeah, I grew up with it. And I and I and I really inflicted it to other my own children. I mean, there's in by the way, it's part of surviving. So it's really good that we're unpacking the negative piece because it's it's its pivot is the is the absence of conflict. So you can do that in ways that encourage flourishing and encourage justice. But you can also do it in ways that suppress it and hurt and cause a very, it's a truly negative form of peace because it's, it things look fine, but underneath the surface, there's injustice and problems. Well, then there's positive peace. And positive peace is usually based on a sense of conflict and and thriving. So positive peace happens because there's engagement and there's a there's a there's a form of justice and reconciliation and change taking place that is bringing peace that is dynamic. And it accommodates conflict. So when you ask, you know, when is there good and bad conflict, I have to talk about it in terms of positive and negative peace. There's kind of there's a kind of negative conflict that just reinforces negative peace reinforce it's a kind of conflict that doesn't lead to thriving in a positive form of peace. And there's conflicts that does that do lead to positive forms of peace, that we usually talk about Zion or the kingdom of God, or when we see a movie and there's a thriving city, and people are bickering, but it's not a bad thing. And they're all just kind of working out their space and enjoying their freedom. Positive peace is a



free space that's conflict positive, where all conflicts reach towards justice and right relationships. And that is a form of peace that requires conflict. So how do we know you know, how do we navigate conflict in terms of how we navigate positive and negative piece. I think that's the next question. That's important to answer in terms of conflict.

Carla Long 29:07

Do you want to go ahead and answer it?

Matt Frizzell 29:10

I wanted to give you a chance to give me your perspective because I mean, I it does that make sense to you?

Carla Long 29:17

It does actually, I'm it made me think about actually, what something that could have been a conflict on Facebook, I really don't. I really don't get into conflicts on Facebook. I use Facebook, more of like, Oh, look at my cute kid kind of thing.

Matt Frizzell 29:33

Here's a picture of dinner.

Carla Long 29:34

What's important in my life, kids have dinner, right?

Matt Frizzell 29:39

And hobbies.

Carla Long 29:40

And so it could it was something about a political issue and one of my acquaintances, I don't know if she's a friend, but one of my acquaintances said something that I just completely disagreed with. But I was surprised by it. So I already typed out like like, What are you thinking? That's ridiculous. Well Blah. I deleted it and said, Can you tell me more about what you're thinking? And it completely changed the conversation. And I walked away from that instead of feeling super mad. I walked away from it thinking, well, that's a different way to look at it something I wouldn't have done if I would have typed texted really, or typed in something while I was really angry. And I mean, this is very simple. Obviously, everybody has done this. But just the difference in the conflict of when somebody is more open to listen, and somebody is more open to a room, both parties are more open to listen, I guess. So. I mean, it completely changed the conversation. And I walked away feeling 1,000% better, and I think she did too. So I mean, just the just little things like that. That's all. That's all I want to say.

Unknown Speaker 30:51

Well, that's a big thing, because you just you helped us really see how our approach to positive and negative peace starts with our approach to positivity and negative conflict inside of us. That decision is usually made emotionally. And it's usually I guess one of the things I'm so grateful

about neuroscience in the last 50 years, we really do have greater tools to understand conflict and peace than we've had before. Because neuroscience knows more about how we handle conflict and the different biological pieces of the neurological pieces that feed conflicts that turn into life and death struggles and conflicts that actually lead to new insights, asking questions Carla Long like you did, and trying to, in trying to bring conflict into an open space, where rational processes and when I say rational, I don't mean Spock and Vulcan. I just mean you stop and make deliberate decisions. And right and wrong is not about winning and losing right and wrong is about collaboration and a mutual understanding. That form to that that approach to conflict is very, very difficult. And the reason why I think we see such failure at it in social media and even in the world today because our sense of conflict i think is heightened a lot. In my lifetime, I'm a Gen Xer, you know, that since the 1970s, and 80s. There's just been kind of a frothing of conflict politically and the culture wars and all this stuff we could trace out.

Matt Frizzell 32:20

Our political leaders, our President, Senate's, and senators and Congress folks, their comments are more visceral than they've ever been before. I mean, there's a lot more, there's a lot less restraint, a lot less mutual respect, and it's more like I'm gonna win this. So conflict itself has changed in the public square.

Carla Long 32:39

It's a gotcha!

Matt Frizzell 32:42

Oh, absolutely. It which just turns on the heat. So we all become more defensive. And I think we both know what happens when two people have their, their fear centers triggered. And all those hormones that that pour into either fight, flight or freeze. You know, those parts of our body brain that are that are very, very biologically simple. And they're a part of surviving, and they're a part of being human. And we all have them, you know, nobody's exempt, nobody has evolved to the point where they do not fight flight or freeze, you know, it's it's part of being who you are. Jesus had to face that. So, anyway, those, those parts of our brain are parts that are triggered regularly in this environment that we're in and when you don't feel safe, it's very, very difficult to have any sort of positive conflict. It's very, very, very difficult. And I think that's where we are in our public schools, and even in a lot of our churches and in social life.

Carla Long 33:41

And that goes back to what you kind of started this podcast out by saying is that, you know, I don't I didn't grow up with a lot of fear in my life. You know, like I'm, I grew up with a lot of privilege too. So you don't know what people are dealing with already. When you step into a conflict. conflict with them, you don't know what they're going to be bringing to the table, if they're already bringing a lot of baggage with them. So, I guess that's another thing to think about, like, people like you and I, who had happy easy childhood who were encouraged to go to school, who are cisgendered you know, things like that we, we just don't know. We just don't know. So I'm just taking you back to your very first point right now.

Matt Frizzell 34:28

Well, yeah, exactly. We, each one of us are different in should and, and should respect our different tolerances for conflict. Cuz like I said, conflict is, is or like I think like we're talking about conflict is very powerful conflict has to do with power essentially, again, sociologists are so helpful to just naming something we all feel conflict has everything to do with power. And one of the ways to approach conflict when because of power is to dominate That's the fight part of our response. When the power it's also part of Darwinian, you know, survival of the fittest. One of the ways to be fit is to win every fight. And, of course, don't get me wrong. Darwin's theory is very complicated. There are also a master chameleons and people who you can also run the fastest and you don't win but you survived. So I mean, survival of the fittest isn't always about winning. But that is one of the ways survival the fittest fittest works is that biologically we, we get into a fight and we that's how we stay safe as we dominate. And by the way, I think this is a very interesting time to talk about the politics around guns in America and even across the west. You know, there's there is there's this entire philosophy that's about I feel safe by winning and or having the biggest gun or having the most guns or I will protect myself. There's there is a lot there is that's part of our culture. And I'm not saying it's the only way to look at gun rights, I'm just saying it's I think it's part of the piece of it when you see the obvious intersections of masculinity and violence and security and protectionism and fear, there is there's a powerful concoction there to look at how we win and deal with conflict. I'm going to deal with conflict by beat by winning. And and that's just one piece of it. But that's not very positive conflict, I would think. I mean, that's probably not the way to resolve real social justice issues. Because of course, we go back to our old testament models, you know, in the Old Testament models, the ones who are suffering from injustice, they're not well armed. They're widows. They're orphans, they're strangers. So that means they're on foot and what they can't what they can carry either on foot or on their donkeys all they have. So I mean, those are the protected classes of the Old Testament and of the, the, the dreams of Zion. You know, those are the lambs that lay down with lion. And into to care about that we, you know, violence won't solve that. So there's got to be other ways to approach conflict, there's got to be other ways to win in conflict.

Carla Long 37:11

So I feel like we're moving into this part, this next question. And if we're not please, you can you can change the conversation. But it seems like what is being called for is some critical thinking is a way to say, Okay, I'm not going to get emotionally involved with this, I'm going to step back. I'm going to think about how I feel about it. I'm going to think about how you feel about it and think about why this is evoking an emotional response to me. And then I can respond.

Yeah, no?

Matt Frizzell 37:46

no, yeah, I think that's exactly it. So we're kind of meandering and in, by the way, this conversation I think, needs to be meandering because we're now when to talk about conflict is to navigate how we feel about what we Hear but then how we critically reflect on it too.

Because most of you, most of us can agree with conflicts bad. We don't need to think anymore about it. We don't like it. But when somebody says conflicts good, it's like, yeah, I guess I realized that there has to be some level of conflict to move forward. But I don't like how you see it. There's I really resonate with the philosophers who said, you know, pain and discomfort was the springboard of rational thought, why am I suffering? Why Does this hurt? What can I do about it? You know, that's, that's a springboard for it. And so, that also is an approach to understanding critical thinking. When we do experience pain, whether it's as rudimentary as being in a conflict and feeling like we're losing or feeling ashamed or feeling threatened. One response is to actually not think at all it's to fight flight, or freeze, you know, just just kind of either fall into a pattern of freezing. Hoping everything passes, because that's one way that you can deal with conflict or you start running away from it, the avoidance, you said, You're the avoider, you know, you probably are used to fleeing or other people who's you know, the hair in the back of their neck comes up and they come out to dominate. The alternative to that is to have enough presence of mind. And I'm not saying that simple and easy to have. Because again, neuroscience has told us when you feel threatened, it is very hard to think it happens when you get frustrated with technology and you can't see the solution. And if you were just not triggered, you would be able to see it easily. You know, I'm saying technology because I had one of those had to type in my password four times mornings. And yeah, how stupid is it? Why Why should I have to type in my password four times. I know my password, but my frustration level and my hurriedness In my inability to stop and critically think, is what caused me to not slow down and pay attention to each key click. So I did it four times incorrect.

This happen, this metaphor happens in real life on Facebook happens in the middle of marital conflicts. It happens on the Congress floor. It happens in congregations. It happens in our families, where we did, we don't turn on our critical thinking yet. And we think we're being highly rational, but we're standing on top of emotions that are driving every thought we're having. And again, I really think neuroscientists, for that to help us understand that when we feel threatened, it's very hard to critically think, but critical thinking is actually the way to transition to positive conflict and a positive peace. Because when there is difference, and there is even opposition in enmity if there is enough security and ability to slow down and step back those opportunities to reflect and to dialogue to converse, seek insight go below the surface, look at the structures that are making the conflicts what they are. That's actually how we have made progress over the last 500 years in the human world, that it has been returned to rationality in critical thinking. And that form of critical thinking is the engine of positive peace. Matter of fact, I'm making an academic point, part of the process of peace studies and one of the ways to approach it is to do critical thinking. Is gender biological, is are men and female wired that way? Our ability to critically think about gender and non binary binary terms has absolutely opened up our ability to think about gender and it all was driven or I should say a large part of it was driven by critical thinking. We were willing to ask assumptions That we had held as truths that were not true. Whether race is real, whether gender is real, all all sorts of assumptions. This actually does get back to religion too, because religion used to say some things that we thought were unquestionable part of the Enlightenment process was to question them. That's why Galileo, you know, really rocked the world because there was just all sorts of assumptions that needed to be questioned and alternative methods. And one of those methods

was critical thinking. So yes, critical thinking is key being critical is key stopping and saying, No, I disagree with that, or no, maybe that's not true. Or no, I need to stop and see whether I agree with you. It stops all the processes that are emotionally driven and starts moving into an ability to look again reflect, respect to look again, that really is part about doing it again. And and I think that's what's really key. And that was one of the things that I was taught in seminary is that a critical process of critical thinking and asking questions even about things that we thought were true, was key to positive peace and justice. It had to be, because oftentimes, the negative peace held in by the authority of assumptions was truly oppressing people, and erasing people, and suffocating people, whether it's slavery, or binary, gender or class structures, anything about the world. If we can critically think about it, we can open up opportunities and possibilities.

Carla Long 43:45

Well, I feel like that's where that vulnerability piece comes in. Because there are moments when you know, like, I'm sitting in a meeting, and I have a question, but I don't want to ask the question because I don't want to look stupid. You know? I don't want people to think that I don't know, something that I should know. But it goes back to that critical thinking, you know, gender is something that we've all known forever genders. There's two genders, and that's it. But as you said, somebody was vulnerable. Somebody asked the question, and now it's created a big conversation, a much bigger conversation. So that vulnerability piece, I think, is very, very important in this critical thinking. Because like, there are times when I stay silent, even though I might want to say something or ask a question, to try and burst things open, but I don't want to look dumb.

Matt Frizzell 44:44

Well, none of us want to be ashamed. And I mean, that's a whole nother conversation. Thanks. Thank you for Brene Brown who opens up a whole area of that for us, you know, to think about how shame works. And Brene talks about this. There's also a really key social function to shame you No shaming is what keeps us in line. That's why we don't say anything. That's why we don't deviate. It's very, very, very powerful social control, and it's a form of negative peace. I won't disrupt the waters because I don't want to risk being shamed. And shaming. shaming is a very interesting thing is emotionally, it's basically a way of saying you have no place here. There's no seat for you. There's, you shouldn't even be here. Life would be better if you were , you know, cut out, surgically removed. That's what shame is. Shame is like you, shame is that exact feeling when you walk into a room, and there's no place for you to sit? And usually we feel like we can keep our place as long as we just don't disturb the peace.

Unknown Speaker 45:45

And so we you know, that's why that's why shame is so powerful and it's also it took it was really an insight for me to realize my white privilege male middle classness is driven by that. Shame is though it's not, you know, I didn't grow up A world that was full of violence because shame did its work. You shamed yourself into conforming, you shamed yourself into acting like a true man or a true woman, or, you know, succeeding because you didn't want to be a failure that's shameful. All these things that are driven by shame. And you're right. This is not off topic.

Conflict requires a risk of that, because also the category of binary categories of right and wrong have to be opened up. And there is forms of critical thinking that open up right and wrong and that open up possibilities and open up new insights. And there's also a form of critical thinking that simply closes them all back down just reinforces old prejudices that reinforces old resentments, that reinforces old sufferings that are not open to any possibility of reconciliation or new movement, new insight. And that kind of criticism is just resentful and it's what we call in the political realm, hate. When you're critical of something because you're blasting it, to dominate it, and to shame it and to eradicate it, that's why we call it hate. And it's a very, I often have found that this term that when we use it, you know that people are like they're full of hate, or they're, that's hate speech. The people who are giving it often are like, this isn't hate. I'm not trying to be hateful. But it is hate because it suffocates. And it's intended to shut down possibility into reinforce old prejudices. And that's why it's hateful, and it's usually based on a power dynamic. It to reinforce a power dynamic to keep a power structure in place. I'm better than you or I deserve this and you don't or I'm entitled to this and you're not. That is usually where all the hate speech, people go into negative conflicts to reinforce a negative peace because I benefited from the old negative peace. So I'm gonna, I'm when I say negative the piece with P E A C E, you know, I like the old order, so I'm going to back it up, and I'm gonna sustain it. And usually that's when we start spewing hate speech. But to us, it's just normal. So, ya know, of course, it's always been this way, this is the way it's supposed to work. But we call it hate speech, because it's shaming and suffocating. I know what I just said is probably mind bending for some people or even numbing because it's hard to get your head around that but I've always been trying to your comment about shame is really key. And the way we talk about positive and negative conflict is key. It is possible to open up critical thinking to look at new possibilities and mutuality, but there's also ways to do it that is resentful and confirming of old biases and old prejudice and hate speech or using hateful language is one of the ways to use conflict in negative way like that.

Carla Long 48:53

Wow. That I mean that what is that? What is the term when you think about your thinking meta Thinking or something like that like that. That is I mean, that's just, there's a lot in there. There's a lot in there. We only have about 15 minutes left of the podcast. I don't I wanted to get to this point because I really want you to be able to talk about it. And we've we've touched on it every once in a while. But how does all of this talk about conflict and negative peace and positive peace? How does it relate to real life faith situations in the world?

Matt Frizzell 49:32

Yeah, so the conversation was pretty heady. Even at that point, I, I'm sitting here feeling my own shame and frayed I lost some people when I started taking all those steps jumping to talking about negative conflict and hate speech. But I think the insight is really important because again, in real life, we can use critical thinking we can use disagreement, and we can use even questioning like you did in this in the conflict you hadn't expected With someone on social media, you heard something that offended you or that just hit you sideways. And instead of coming out with fight or flight, you opened up a conversation by asking for more information. That's where this is all really, really important for understanding how things happen or how we

deal with conflict in real life. And, and we've heard this before, right? If we can, if we can ask questions and open up dialogue, then we can have positive conflict, learn to new insight, learn new insights, get to more deep get to mutuality and deeper justice and, and ways to live better and do things better. But of course, not a lot of us approach. conflict that way. A lot, a lot of especially in the social sphere. It's all about winning. And so navigating and finding safe places for where we can. This is one of the things I wish the church could be and and i I pray that it can be a place where we do open up safe places to have positive conflict. That's where I think this has everything to do with faith. Jesus is probably one of the most powerful examples of positive conflict for me. I know many people have inherited what we know now. And I guess I didn't know until I studied it was a very 19th century view of Jesus, which was an ideal person who never got mad, who lived out Victorian morality never deviated from you know what was right and perfect and never got angry and never swore or you know, and I'm trying to be colorful, but my point is, is that most many of us have inherited a very ideal view of Jesus. But if you read Jesus's interactions with people in Scripture, and you do so with a sense of cultural context, Jesus is very, very spunky. Jesus calls people into account. He says very controversial things that you shouldn't say in the streets. He does offensive things like talks to people that he shouldn't be talking to and asks for water for women at a well who shouldn't be there. And he tells stories that actually most people in a podcast would turn off because they don't lead to preconceived conclusions. They're designed to make people think,

Carla Long 52:22

Well, yeah, I've wondered every once in a while, like if Jesus came, like, I'd be like, I do not want to be friends with that guy. Like, I thought about that quite often. I'm like, I don't wanna hang out with that guy. He's annoying.

Matt Frizzell 52:34

Well, he would be annoying because he'd call you into account. I know one of the things that I often in my own scripture study and and I prepare for, you know, sermons or whatever. And I get led through the the lectionary, and I get to read even more and more of Jesus, these Jesus stories. Jesus kind of has a there is a principle that seems to run through it and Jesus consistently holds people account to their own judgments. And that's one of the things that's really interesting to me. We use Think of authority and have judge, you know, who has the right to have authority and judgment? Well, you know, we think that that comes from God. So it's outside of us and it's in its, you know, objective authority, like from the state or from our, from our fathers or from the church authorities or something. And actuality Jesus model is a kind of much more, it's almost a Plato, Socrates, Socrates type interaction, where it's like, well, what do you think, you know, how would you judge this? And then whatever you answer, you have to hold that standard up to yourself. And Jesus is constantly making people you know, it's like, look at that center. They're doing X, Y, and Z. And Jesus is like, I know what you did this morning. And you know, puts it out on whoever sins throw the first stone or it's not, you know, Jesus is constantly taking these do unto other principles and applying them back to the people.

Carla Long 53:52

One thing I didn't know about Jesus was that Jesus had a southern accent. that's new for me.

Matt Frizzell 53:58

Jesus has every accent there ever way. Jesus is the universal human. Jesus didn't speak English. So I mean, that's that alone should tell us something. But anyway, Jesus ends up becoming a really powerful model for actually getting back to real life and understanding conflict. Jesus was constantly engaging people in conflictual arrangements, going over going to people's homes that he maybe normally wouldn't go to if he was a good rule following Jew from Galilee. He's interacting with people in the streets. He's confronting people in Jerusalem. He's engaging lawyers who supposedly know the law better than him. He's a nobody. He's an uncredentialed. Nobody. And he is taking on people in authority and speaking truth to power by asking questions and engaging in conflicts. They may not be fights, there's a difference. Sometimes there are fights that he gets into. But there are certainly conflicts. And Jesus is our model for understanding that and you'll notice on the cross, you probably have one of the most important indictments of winning as an approach to fighting that I've ever seen. Because Jesus doesn't, win he does it, he ends up on the winning side, but he doesn't do it by winning. He overcomes he doesn't dominate. And that is an incredible model for understanding how spiritually conflict is important and how to navigate through it. And I think you see this in models of non violence, direct and non violent direct action, where you actually instigate it, conflict for the sake of justice, but you do it not to win and that is real, you do it to overcome and you Do it to expose, and you do it to kind of reveal the injustice that's there. This becomes a really, really important way to understand how positive peace comes about. And you did it. When you just had this simple emotional reaction, you stop and you critically thought, instead, I want to know more about this before I respond to it. And by the way, that's not the only reason to ask questions. I know sometimes when I went even when I taught, or while I still teach when I teach, I often ask people to explain more, not just because I'm interested in understanding better though that's part of it. Sometimes people come to the contradictions and the false hoods of their own positions if you just make them explain it. And you realize, Oh, this is based on an absolute prejudice that I feel but I didn't really make it into my mind yet. My critical consciousness yet so And that we did that in seminary quite a bit, there was a constant opportunity to dig deeper and to see the the expose structures of what we thought felt. And that became really, really important.

Carla Long 57:14

Well, I think one thing that you just brought out, is really an important piece as well. When we look at our intentions, like what are what are we trying to get to? Are we trying to get to that place in power? Are we trying to get to that? I got you. I'm right. And that is probably not the right way to go. You know, that's probably not the right thing to type. That's probably not the right thing to say. It's all what our intention, say, are saying to us. So I kind of we we only have about five minutes left. I want to ask you, and this is what I'm moving into, like what's some practical advice for people who want to engage critical thinking and dialogue as an approach to conflict rather than the other way? And I think that's one way the intentional, you know, being intention on thinking about your intentions is one way to do it.

Matt Frizzell 58:04



Yeah, I think Well, the first thing people should do is begin to, if you haven't self reflected or even written down what you what you feel like your own conflict tolerances, it's really important to kind of just have a self concept of that, you know, you maybe you like conflict, and there's not many of those. But but maybe, maybe you dislike conflict and you're a conflict avoider, getting to know yourself, this whole journey towards critical self consciousness is really, really, I think, essential. Excuse me. And I think it's very, very key to understanding how we work in conflict because the fact is, none of us hover above it. When we engage it, we engage it as ourselves and all of our history and you know, whether it's family history, cultural history, social history, we just bring it with us. The other thing to do is to think about is to spend some time and none of this is quick. This is these are spiritual practices. You don't ever do them and move on. You do them and you keep them up. part of your life. Where do you live in the social system? How much power do you have? Are you someone who's secure by winning? Are you somebody who's used to getting by by complying and being by deferring power in avoiding conflict? Understanding how that's another key to the first part of understanding who you are in the social system helps you understand how you shape your own emotional reactions and disposition to conflict. The third thing I think that people need to do is find, find a community of accountability but also have support where you can talk about things that are conflictual and that matter. You know, some people don't have a marriage like Margo and I do but we that Margo is a wonderful conversation partner for me because she is free to support me and she is free to disagree with me, and I often get both in the same sentence. And that's, that's been a really key part of our glue you know, we will We, we were willing to wrestle with life together, and it whether it's with your partner, and sometimes sometimes you need your partner just to be your safe space. And so I'm not saying that should be the model. I'm just saying one of many models, but finding them friends or people in churches or communities accountability where you can not only be heard, but also be supported and to find develop those relationships where people can ask you critical questions about what you really mean, what you really think, is a very important spiritual practice for engaging conflicts to change the world. Because I have not in my teaching about social justice and in my teaching about non violent movements and my teaching about how the world changes, Jesus is probably the only story that comes off, as if he changed the world by himself. But we all know in reality he didn't. He was surrounded by 12 friends. He was surrounded by even another community of women and of followers and disciples. And he was in a part of a community. So establishing a kind of safe community, where you can engage in conflict in a healthy way is really key. And then the last thing to do is to take risks is to go out and engage in conversations with people where you can, but also being free to test your voice and disagree and engage in public dialogue with other people. So that what so we can work towards a positive piece, where we ask questions and look for new opportunities. Part of that is something that people already have started doing. So what I'm about to say most people have already done without the other steps. And that is learning when you're engaging somebody who wants to engage you, and learning when you are engaging somebody who really just wants to shame you, and really just wants to dominate you and really doesn't give a crap about what you're saying. In other words, you can't make somebody have a dialogue. It takes two If somebody is just continually shaming and shutting you down and us them kind of threat, that's, that's a kind of biology that you can't overcome until somebody is willing to willfully do it. And so that's a really so becoming vulnerable with people who in

discerning Where can I have productive discussions and where I can't is key. I noticed you take a breath, Carl, I was gonna, I want to give you an opportunity to respond before I said, My next thing.

Carla Long 1:02:30

I know I want you to keep going I my mind, just go on. I want you to keep going.

Matt Frizzell 1:02:35

Well, I just wanted to lift up in this even though this sounds like a dog kind of statement to me in my ears. It's actually something that's very strategic. And I'm really glad. I'm really glad that the movie Selma kind of points this out in the life of Dr. Martin Luther King. If you if you read the Civil Rights, Civil Rights Movement as exactly what I just described a very strategic engagement with conflict You can see in many of the dialogues there, that King and the Civil Rights Movement were very tactical about who they engaged in why they they they were very they did not go to places to expose racism that in ways that was very veiled so there's there's a there's a story the one of the reasons why they were a they engage Bull Connor is because Bull Connor just he was a Bull Connor was was such a ruthless racist that it brought the news out, it created the conflict and expose the the injustice of racism that was there, it broke the negative piece. And so he was very, very, very, very conscious about how he engaged people. Now, don't get me wrong. That's not the model of conflict. I'm saying people should take but I'm saying the strategy is because when he went to the courts, and when he went to certain Congress folk, and worked for political change. That's where he was very targeted on who would work with Him and who wasn't. So in the streets, he worked with people who were against him, and who are who would expose the injustice of racism and its violence for the public. You know, in other words, he gave he engaged people who had no interest in dialoguing with him. And then when he went to the where the power conduct conversations are in the courts, and in Congress, he was very strategic about who he spoke to. And that's actually that is that is essential for political activity. And it's essential for strategy, a social strategy and social change. There is not if you if you're interested in social change, and you want to study it, there is not one example that I can think of where somebody doesn't use exactly that kind of strategic work, to have the kind of positive and negative conflicts that they need to have to make the change that they're after. And the same thing happens in our personal lives. So engaging those people in our lives that will help us build community and build justice and a more a more equitable and and, and peaceful world that people who will lead, you have to find out who those positive peace people are. And you also need to engage people who aren't necessarily on your side, but for different reasons. Because there's things that you can learn from them. And there's also things that you need from them to expose. This is just going from the Martin Luther, the Dr. Martin Luther King example, who exposes the injustice of the negative piece that really isn't peace at all. So anyway, I think those are some practical ways that we can think about use critical thinking as a tool to engage conflict in a positive way. Well, we always remember you need religion to get there. I mean, I like the Civil Rights Movement for that. Every time there was a song that saying every time there was prayer, where it prayer and worship, and every time there's a gathering, it was about pulling people together to support one another. And suffering. And that was key to

Carla Long 1:06:04

Oh, Matt, this is this is just so much information. This is this is a lot. Is this what goes on your head on a regular basis, this kind of stuff?

Matt Frizzell 1:06:13

When you teach classes on it, they have to be there. And this is Zion building!

And that's important stuff. Well, I just want to thank you so much.

No, it's not all the time. Sometimes I just have to make pancakes or lasagna or,

Carla Long 1:06:26

or work in your RV,

Matt Frizzell 1:06:29

or yes or Yeah, try to try to fix the floor on the 50 year old camper.

Carla Long 1:06:34

Well, I really appreciate what you have to share with us. It's for me, it's been a really mind opening. Because sometimes I yell at my husband, I yell at Kuzma for being too much of a critical thinker. And when I say critical thinker, I mean, he's being really critical. And so maybe I need to re shape how I talk to him about that kind of stuff. So I think you just helped my marriage

Matt Frizzell 1:06:59

Well good! That's exciting. Yeah,

Carla Long 1:07:02

at least Kuzma will thank you.

Matt Frizzell 1:07:04

Well, awesome. There is there is a there. Thank you Kuzma Yeah. Because he he he's helping us with this podcast he'll but yeah there's a dialogue between head and heart that we didn't really talk about but I think is really important here too and often that's, that's what happens.

Carla Long 1:07:24

Well I appreciate you very much your thank you so much and I'm sure we'll be hearing from you again.

Matt Frizzell 1:07:30

Blessings

Josh Mangelson 1:07:35

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