

Katie Langston 0:16

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Karin Peter 0:59

Welcome to Common Grounds part of Project Zion where we discuss all things liturgical calendar. The liturgical calendar takes us through the seasons and holy days of the Christian year, beginning with Advent and concluding with the last Sunday of Ordinary Time, which is Reign of Christ. Sunday in the Community of Christ tradition and in many traditions is called Christ the King Sunday. So today is part of a short series in common grounds where we are discussing the small group resource sacred space, and you can find that resource on the Community of Christ world church website on the worship page, next to the worship outlines and the sermon helps. Our guests for these discussions are the folks who have written pieces of the sacred space lectionary series small group resource for the Community of Christ website. sacred space includes several elements of group interaction and worship. There's prayers for peace and spiritual practices that's for children and sharing around the table, which is what we're going to be talking about today. We wanted to hear from our writers, how participating as a writer for the resource or maybe even if participating as a writer for this resource that's based on the liturgical calendar, inform them outside of the writing. In other words, have they become more conscious of the seasons and holy days, has the journey through the calendar impacted them and their discipleship. So today we're visiting with Nancy Ross from St. George Utah. Nancy is a professor at Dixie State University in the interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences Department. Nancy has a PhD in history of art. She is a prolific writer, including where we must stand 10 years feminist Mormon housewives. And you can get that text on amazon.com. So, with all that, hi, Nancy.

Nancy Ross 3:09

Hi, Kaien, it is great to be here.

Karin Peter 3:12

It's wonderful to talk to you today. And I've been looking forward to this particular interview about Sacred Space and your participation. So prior to working on sacred space and doing the chunk of writing that you did, what was your experience with the liturgical calendar?

Nancy Ross 3:33

You know, I had been in Community of Christ for a while at that point, but the liturgical calendar was something that I was starting to get more interested in. But also, I wasn't sure you know, as a LDS person. I really didn't engage with the liturgical calendar very much. In lesson manuals and things in the LDS church, there are sometimes Easter and Christmas lessons like

set aside for those things but there isn't. There isn't like a build up, there's no build up to Easter through Lent. You know, there isn't build up to Christmas through Advent. And so, and I remember as a child, sometimes going to church on Christmas or Easter and sometimes there would be almost no mention of these holidays. And so it was always hard for me to, to understand that. And so the liturgical calendar is really something that's fairly new to me. But I think that engaging in this particular project helped me feel my way into it a bit more, to spend more time with it. And to begin to work harder at overcoming my fear of Scripture, which I had been very devoted to me about 10 years ago, and then I'd gotten to the point where I as an LDS person, I just couldn't. I felt so trapped by the read And interpretations I had grown up with that it just all felt bad. And I put scripture down and let go of scripture, where, you know, about 10 years ago, I was reading scripture for about an hour a day. And that was part of my regular spiritual practice. But this working with this project forced me to begin to try harder to reengage in ways that were life giving. So yeah, it was it. You know, I say yes to a lot of things. So when you contacted me, I was like, Sure, let's do it. And I feel like some things really begin to change for me during this process.

Karin Peter 5:43

So the piece that you agreed to, right, so our listeners know, the liturgical calendar and the lectionary are intertwined. And the lectionary text is a three year cycle and the texts for each Sunday are supportive of where we are in the liturgical calendar and the calendars based around those texts. So in your be, you agreed to write the sharing around the table portion for the Advent Christmas epiphany kind of period in there and sharing around the table for those that have not engaged with the sacred space, small group resource yet. That is the scripture exploration piece. And it's done in a very specific way where we use good scholarly resources to really dig into the Scripture and get beyond the surface reading. But then look at it in a way that impacts how we live our life on a daily basis, and it's for small groups to kind of discuss and include some questions to help people kind of navigate how that scripture informs their own daily life. So that's a big way to get back into scripture from what, from what you were describing. So we're not talking about just re engaging to read, we're talking about re engaging to really dig.

Nancy Ross 7:11

Yeah. And I know, and that's, and that's what it was. For me. I would say that there were a couple of strong influences for me in that process. One of them was the Women's Bible Commentary, which I do reference and cite here. And that has been one of my favorite resources for getting back into scripture reading. It is a recently updated and extensive feminist commentary on scripture. And I have loved that resource more than, you know, I have a few other commentaries and for me, that one just has resonated the most. So that has been a very useful thing. I think there's a general sense that you know, I believe in a social justice gospel and that was and I've been feeding That interest in a variety of ways. And that was very influential. I am also a devoted listener of the Harry Potter in the sacred texts podcast, which at that began mainly using a Lectio Divina process, which is something I was I was loosely familiar with before. But it's a wonderful because it's a process that gets us from the literal interpretation of Scripture through to a sense of call or invitation about how we could use that

text to refocus our efforts somehow. And that process is something that was I was very cognizant of as I was writing these. Also, my congregation is a very small group. And so I have lots of very small group experience and we do a lot of Lectio Divina, and so I was trying to like, run these conversations through my head why I was working on this particular project.

Karin Peter 9:05

So that chunk that you wrote is as you were sharing about this process. And FYI, both of those resources, Harry Potter in the sacred texts podcast and the Women's Bible Commentary, our listeners, I hope you check those out if you have not done that. But the piece that you wrote the showrunner on the table, scripture, explorations every Sunday, for this period of time of Advent for epiphany is a time of preparation, a time of celebration, and then a time of revelation through epiphany. So tell us a little bit about writing, not just with the scriptures in mind, but in mind of where we were in the calendar. So first, tell us a little bit about how your small congregation experiences this this season. These are the seasons of Advent Christmas epiphany or how you've seen it experienced.

Nancy Ross 10:06

So my congregation is a little unorthodox. So our music director is an atheist. And most of our folks are non literal believers, or they just aren't really sure what they believe, but have come to a kind of peace with that. And so it's it's always, so and my congregation, so many people are Latter Day seekers also. So there is this sense that when we read Scripture, that we are automatically drawn into the interpretations that we learned which were pretty universal in Mormonism. And it is when you have a particular set of fairly literalistic interpretations that you come It is very difficult to break out of that, because it's not just an intellectual process. It's like an intellectual, social emotional process where I read the text. So like my process for doing this was to read the text, freak out a little bit. And then and then try to figure out how to dig myself out of a hole. And this is something we do in my congregation, is that if we're going to be doing lectio Divina with a text, the first thing we do is we acknowledge our constrained readings, and were constrained readings are like, what did this used to mean? And and I don't do that here, but that had to be a part of my process, because I had to know what I had to get away from, because there were just those interpretations didn't feel good anymore. So for example, then the constrained reading for this reading. So we're looking at John 2:1-11. And this is for the second Sunday after Epiphany. This is the story of the wedding at Cana, you know, where Jesus turns water into wine. It's a fairly straightforward sort of miracle story. You know, it's it's one of our first miracle stories. And when I first read this in preparation, if we were reading this as a congregation, we would read the scripture, and then we would acknowledge these constrained readings and the constrained reading for this scripture, and this story would be something like this story. You know, this is a very literalist interpretation. Something I, you know, was very much part of my Mormon cultural baggage was that this story was about the divinity of Jesus, and that Jesus showed his divinity in great power through the performance of miracles, and that that was literally true, and that the purpose of the story was to really show the miraculous difference. supernatural power of Jesus, and that that really is the purpose of the story that there's really no other purpose. And if you aren't sure if you believe in the divinity of Jesus anymore or if you know that you don't, then that interpretation that literalist interpretation has

no meaning anymore. Like there's, and then you can you might read this and say, Well, this, this is not something this is not a story I can hold to, or this isn't a story that has meaning for me anymore.

Karin Peter 13:31

So that would have been what Thomas Jefferson did. Yeah, forget Thomas Jefferson had that perspective.

Nancy Ross 13:42

Yeah, right! So then, it's like if the thing that I had or the way in which I constructed meaning with regard to this story, that just doesn't work anymore. And so there is one way in which you could say, well, then scripture doesn't work anymore, you know, and let's just throw it in the trash. But I really want to be able to recycled scripture for myself for kind of create new meaning. But that is that has been one of the hardest parts of my own faith transition is finding ways back into scripture to create meaning for scripture to create a new theology. That was that looks entirely different from what came before. And it's not like I can just read a book and be like, Oh, that was nice. I'll just accept that one. It has to feel like it resonates with me internally in order for it to really have meaning, if that makes sense.

Karin Peter 14:34

It does. And it makes sense that your congregation who have had similar experiences with scripture, would want to find pathways back to experiencing goodness and love errant in scripture, without the constraints of the dogma of that nature.

Nancy Ross 14:55

Exactly. And and I just want to emphasize that that's a really hard thing to do. And it is not purely an intellectual exercise. It is, it is it is a more complex interaction. And so then if I'm going to start from the point of view, because I personally do not believe in the divinity of Jesus, but I feel very committed to the message of Jesus. And the, the way in which Jesus has this very deep connection with God, and seems to understand God in a way in which other people in his time do not understand God. And so if I have like that as a framework, and I read this again, and again, and again and again, you know, and maybe then say, you know, I'm just not sure what's going on here. I'm going to get some help, you know, and then run to a commentary, you know, maybe get some suggestions, maybe listen to some other sermons, progressive sermons around this I have listened for years to a sermon podcast from an ELCA church, progressive Lutheran Church that I really enjoyed, you know, go listen to a few of those, try to see if there are any ideas that resonate, come back, read it again. So there's a lot of reading and rereading in this process. And there's also a sense, and this was new to me, because we would have these conversations in my congregation. And we would also make those connections to what happened last week. And that felt really new that was really the beginning of marking time, in this liturgical way. And with these readings, you know, how does what we read now relate to the past and when I was writing these, I was trying to make these some of these connections. So we start off by saying, you know, last Sunday in the first Sunday after epiphany, we discussed the baptism of Christ and trying to make some connections and time through these different

readings. Of course the baptism of Christ as the beginning of the ministry of Christ and noting that today you know we really look at this first miracle and after all that kind of wrestling and and this felt like a wrestle this did not feel like a happy easy thing even if I was quite glad once I was done with them because be like, Oh, I got somewhere that was nice. It did feel like wrestle and I think that's probably one thing that you may not be able to tell from from what I wrote is that you know, there was a lot of struggle for me here in this so I you know, summarize you know, Mary prompts Jesus to do something about the wine that is running out during the wedding feast with faith that Jesus can fix the situation you know, and I'm and in that I tried to think about I was recently at a wedding reception and there was some concern about the cheesecake and the cheesecake running out, you know, you know, trying trying to find, you know, some kind of relatable contemporary situation. So the Gospels don't tell us much about Jesus's life between his infancy and baptism. But there is a suggestion here that Mary knows something, you know, Mary has a sense that Jesus could fix this. Which in this story he does and even if we don't believe in a literal, you know, miracle of a magic thing of wine, additional wine, I think there are a lot of different ways that we could see the situation being resolved and it could feel like a miracle. When things work out in my life and I do not expect them to it feels like a miracle. Sometimes that's enough. And so I really feel like the story is, was about an after listening to other sermons after reading some commentary after reading again and again, and saying, you know, I want to get distance from an older, constrained reading. It really felt like the story was about abundance, and that with Jesus, and where Jesus points to God, there is an abundance and God's That we cannot see and experience, we have concerns about enoughness. And just saying that that really feels like it resonates with our contemporary situation, the pandemic, right with, we have a very strong feeling that there is not enough. And that so many of the hoarding behaviors we see, and it has been particularly bad in Utah, as my understanding is that, you know, there is a sense that our resources are limited, and therefore, we must collect them and protect them.

Karin Peter 19:34

And so talking about that in the context of the COVID-19 virus, yes, that's right. Which is Yeah, happening as we record this,

Nancy Ross 19:41

Right. So, you know, relevant for the second Sunday after epiphany, also relevant to a global pandemic. So a story about scarcity and abundance, and, and again, that feels very relevant to our present situation where we are hearing a lot of stories we're encountering sometimes when we go to the supermarket that the things that we need are not there that creates a lot of fear, right? We have a lot of fear around scarcity, because in ordinary times I trust that I can go to the supermarket, and and that when I want to buy the particular kind of pasta, it is there and it is on the shelf, and I can just kind of trust that it is there. And we could say that this is a story about wine and supermarkets and the availability of particular kinds of food for celebration. But I think there is a sense then of you know, that with with God, that there is abundance, there isn't a limitation, as there sometimes are in our material world. So in this story, Jesus transforms the water into wine and creates an abundance of wine where there was not So Jesus creates wine which is a value from ordinary water. So he creates something of

extraordinary value from something that is quite ordinary. Jesus shows us that in God's economy, there is abundance and abundance of grace to be found in the everyday moments of life. And, you know, that feels like a super relevant lesson for right now in our, in our time, where we are fearing scarcity, whether that is scarcity of food or toilet paper, whether we are fearing a scarcity of health resources, and ventilators whether we are fearing a scarcity of masks and protective equipment for ourselves for the doctors and healthcare workers and people who have to be out in public because they're essential workers. And so we often fear scarcity. scarcity isn't just about not enough. It's about that fear and the holding on to. scarcity seems to be about protecting me, protecting the people in my household, where abundance tells us that we all have enough that there is enough for me, and that if I can trust that there is enough for me and enough for my household, then I can go to the supermarket and just buy what I need, instead of out of fear, buying so much more. Yeah. And that's, you know, it is hard to trust that I can go to Costco and buy the flour. But in God's economy, I'm reminded that there is an abundance of grace.

Karin Peter 22:43

So Nancy, you've walked us through this process and where we are in a really beautiful way. And I appreciate that because it helps our listeners understand the depth of how just this piece Have the resource just to share it around the table piece of exploring the Scripture and applying it into our current context, can bring new life and new understanding and connection with God's Spirit.

Nancy Ross 23:17

Absolutely. And I feel like you know, in rereading this because this now feels like I wrote this a million years ago, because I feel like you know, like, emotionally and timewise you know, I, you know, life looks a little different now. And I am reminded of the way in which if we can be creative in our readings, and if we can find readings that that will resonate with us because they, we can kind of find a way to get into the scripture through whatever theological framework we are working with, that these very old stories do resonate with our with me with our contemporary situations. And yeah, I didn't know, it was all going to be about the wedding of Canaan this morning. So you know, there we go.

Karin Peter 24:04

There we go. Absolutely. So I want to thank you, again for being here with us on this common grounds miniseries about sacred space, you took us into a whole different place today that is so relevant for where we are. And so what I'd like to do is because you walked us through the process and where it went for you in this, if we could just go through this segment on sharing on the around the table, if you would just walk us through it as if our family were doing this around the dinner table tonight as we shelter in place. And then Okay, and then we'll close our conversation. Sure.

Nancy Ross 24:45

So one thing we might do or begin with is reading. You know, if we're going to have a discussion on a text, we probably want to hear it. And depending on your audience, you may want to hear

it once or twice. So we've got our scriptures And the NRSV text that is there. So this is John 2: 1-11 NRSV. On the third day, there was a wedding in Canaan of Galilee. And the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, they have no wine. And Jesus said to her woman, what concern is it to you and to me, my hour has not yet come. His mother said to the servants, do whatever he tells you. And now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding 20 or 30 gallons. Jesus said to them, fill the jars with water, and they filled them up to the brim. And he said to them, now draw some out and take it to the chief steward. So they did it. And when the steward tasted the water that had become wine and did not know where it came from. The servants who had drawn the water knew the servant called the bridegroom and said to him, everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine. Until now, Jesus did this, the first of his signs in Canaan of Galilee and revealed His glory, and his disciples believed him.

So that is our scripture. And then we have a couple of paragraphs which try to distill this interpretation. So first, we connected to what happened before last Sunday we discussed the baptism of Christ, which is an event that begins in ministry of Christ. Today we look at Jesus's first miracle. Mary prompts Jesus to do something about the wine that is run out during the wedding feast, and with faith that Jesus can fix the situation. The gospels Do not tell us much About Jesus's life between his infancy and baptism. But there is a suggestion here that Mary's knows what her son can do. The story is about scarcity and abundance, Jesus transforms the water into wine, and creates an abundance of wine where there was none. Jesus creates wine which is a value from ordinary water. Jesus shows us that in God's economy, there is abundance, and abundance of grace, to be found in the everyday moments of life. The story of water and wine foreshadows the way in which Jesus later talks about the peaceable kingdom of God. Jesus uses the symbolism of ordinary things, mustard seeds, orchards, olive trees, to describe the greatness of God's peaceable kingdom. So at the end, we offer some some discussion questions and I think that there's still a lot to get into, you know, I know there could be lots to be disagreed with my interpretation or Lots of words or phrases that you know you want to explore. But some broader discussion questions are, what are the ordinary things in our lives that hold value beyond what is immediately apparent? And then also the ever relevant question, Where does God's grace appear in our everyday lives?

Karin Peter 28:21

Thank you, Nancy, for walking us through that. I hope that was a good experience for people listening to this and that they will explore sharing around the table in new ways with their families, and household members during this time of isolation. So ever, the teacher and writer Nancy, thank you so very much for bringing your gifts today to project science podcast, and sharing with us from your home in St. George, Utah. This has been Common Grounds our series on the liturgical calendar, part of Project Zion Podcast. I'm Karin Peter. Thanks for listening.

Josh Mangelson 29:18

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