

Josh Mangelson 0:18

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

Linda Booth 0:35

Welcome to the 11th episode of Coffee Buzz, a podcast conversation with a member of Community of Christ First Presidency. My name is Linda Booth, and I serve many years with my dear friend Stacy Cram in the Council of 12 Apostles and World Church Leadership Council, and today Stassi wears several hats including serving as one of two counselors to Prophet President Veazey. And as the Presiding Bishop, welcome, friend, when we last had a Coffee Buzz conversation in May we talked about the impact of the pandemic on church life. And here it is August and people and families in the church and throughout the world are still struggling with the Coronavirus. And your family's been trying to plan a wedding that has also been impacted by COVID-19.

Stassi Cramm 1:28

Oh you're so right, Linda, this is such a crazy time. Our daughter Shannon and her fiancé Kevin live in Boston, and as you know, are scheduled to be married at a service on 22 August. The numbers of infections in Boston and Michigan are have been better than Missouri. And they're planning on getting married in Michigan. But as a doctor Shannon has concluded that she really needs to not just go along with the limited restrictions, but that she He needs to model what it really looks like to have a responsible gathering. So because of that their numbers are greatly reduced. They're only going to have a few people present with them in Michigan. Steve and I will get to be there and Kevin's parents and brothers will be there. Unfortunately, Shannon's brother Spencer who lives in Tokyo will not be able to make the trip to join and none of her grandparents can travel because of the risk and none of her aunts and uncles or cousins. So it's a little bit bittersweet, but they are anxious to be married and they want to do it safely. And they definitely don't want anyone to get sick as a result of their wedding. We're laughing because you know, all the things that you think about buying and arranging when you're doing a wedding. So weddings of 2020 are focused on what kind of fabric masks are you going to order for the bridal party and for your guests. It says selling special ladies For a small hand sanitizers that have the bride and groom's name, and so hand sanitizers, fabric masks, social distancing, that's become the cool thing for weddings in 2020. But their venues outside. So I think that they will be able to keep things relatively safe.

Linda Booth 3:20

It'll be it'll be lovely. It will be lovely. And you're also going to have Zoom right for the rest of the fam?

Stassi Cramm 3:25

Oh, yeah. Thank you for reminding me. Yes, we're going to have Zoom, our son in Tokyo will be the Zoom host. And we have been training grandparents on how to how to successfully join and watch in fact, everyone seems to be coming zoom experts these days. So yes, all their friends and at the end of the ceremony, they'll have a toast with all of the people that are on Zoom with them. So it'll be good.

Linda Booth 3:51

It will be good. And it will be a wedding they can talk about when we got married in the middle of the pandemic.

Stassi Cramm 3:58

Absolutely. In fact, Shannon was they are going to have a small cake for those who are there. And she goes, I know this is crazy, but I actually want this really fancy couple wedding topper that's custom made to match like the groom's suit color and stuff. And one of the options this year was actually to have the bride and groom in masks. Shannon opted to not have that, but I actually thought it would have been hilarious if she chose that one.

Linda Booth 4:26

It's good that we can laugh in the midst of this because it sure is difficult to plan our lives now. People especially living in Western cultures, we want to feel in control. And generally in the past, we've been accustomed to relative stability and predictability. But now our lives have been turned upside down by the persistent Coronavirus. It doesn't seem to want to go away. And as a result, there's a lot of uncertainty and unknowns about the future and anxiety seems to thrive on the unknown. As far as fear and disappointment and sadness, etc. And sometimes it's hard to find hope in the midst of a long lasting pandemic. So that's what this Coffee Buzz conversation is about finding hope in the midst of the coronavirus. And Stassi's a great resource about hope and its impact on our lives, because she studied hope. In fact, her doctoral dissertation was an evaluation of how pastor's hope, can influence the level of hope within a congregation, and therefore encourage members to share their witness and resources. Stassi, tell us about why you chose hope for your dissertation topic.

Stassi Cramm 5:46

Yeah, so back in 2005, when I was trying to figure out what my dissertation topic might be, I really had a hard time narrowing down my topic. I knew I wanted to research the influence of leader has on those who are following because I've done a lot of work on leadership. By exploring the influence a leader has I felt it would provide better insights into how to help people become better leaders. I know one of the proverbial leadership questions is always our leaders born or can they be developed? And my answer is always "Yes". Meaning some leaders are definitely born with natural attributes that make them seem like really successful leaders without too much work. And yet, I have come to understand that a person can be developed as a good leader if they find their authentic style and learn how to embrace that style for the good of the group. So I kept choosing topics and my committee chair kept laughing at me and telling me I had to narrow the topic. He kept saying that you will never get done with this dissertation.

If you do not get a more specific topic is failing. thing to say was your topic needs to fit on the tip of a pencil. Of course, I understood that he meant it needed to be really have pinpoint focus, but that really wasn't helping me in my struggle to find a specific topic.

Linda Booth 7:14

So, so you chose hope. And I believe our souls crave hope when we're faced especially with dire or terrible situations like COVID-19, and all the personal struggles associated with it, such as isolation and job loss and financial concerns and health issues. And then you add on top of that, the constant disturbing media news about politics and systemic racism, unrest and violence in cities and nation. It just seems to be too much. So we definitely need hope. And I don't think hope is just having a positive attitude or being pollyannish or effective. In a word, Stassi, perhaps it would be helpful to talk about what hope is. So what is hope?

Stassi Cramm 8:06

Yeah, so yeah, you're right. I did ultimately land on hope. And, and to be honest, I actually got there through a very prayerful discernment process. As I was, you know, going through that the attributes of Advent, joy, love, peace and hope kept coming, you know, to mind. And of course, these concepts are also found in our mission statement because we want to promote communities of joy, hope, love and peace. But in the midst of all of that, I kept thinking, Okay, I think I have a pretty good understanding of love and peace. And we seem to have done a lot of writing about that. And you know, lots of people have written about those. Joy also seemed to be a pretty straightforward concept to grab. But hope for me seemed a little elusive for all the reasons that you lifted up. It seems really important in the psyche of a person and psyche of a group and yet, it also seems like can be can be oversimplified. So I ended up doing a lot of research and there's lots of different definitions. And in fact, there's a psychologist, his name is Dr. Snyder, and he was kind of tagged the doctor of hope, because his research became really foundational in defining hope for, for treating depression, and for you know, treating people who have various mental struggles. But in the midst of researching about Dr. Snyder, I bumped into another researcher who was actively doing research on the east coast. He was a Catholic professor, and he had this strong sense that a person's faith, not necessarily religion, so faith in its broadest sense, also influenced hope. And so I ended up connecting with him. He helped me get the particulars of my dissertation. topic and he really helped me grow in my understanding of hope. Like the word love, we use the word hope, at least in English in a lot of different ways. There are 207 occurrences of the word hope and the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible. So that indicates how frequently we actually use the word in writing and in conversation. For instance, I'm sure you've heard people say, I hope to and then they fill in the blank. So the use of hope is a simile for wishing or dreaming, and often is just said in passing without any really deeply held meaning. And in certainly that's a form of hope. But I don't think that's the kind of hope that we all yearn for, or the kind of hope that we really speak about when we talk about having hope in Christ. Psychologists have really struggled to define hope, but it is clear that hopelessness is a debilitating disease. So it's not just a passing feeling. Although it can be, but for many people, hopelessness really can be quite debilitating in their life. As I mentioned, Dr. Snyder did seminal work. And in 1995, he used three points to define hope. He said hope is the process of thinking about one's goals. So that's point 1. Point 2 is that you're thinking about

your goals along with having the motivation to move towards those goals. So you have to have that internal drive. And he actually referred to that as agency, which is interesting, since we talked about agency in Responsible Choices in Community of Christ. And the third point was that in addition to having motivation, you have to have a sense of a way to achieve your goals. So that's the pathways. So you need goals, you need the agency to pursue goals and you need to be able to see a pathway that will help you get there. So to be hopeful, or hope filled is to have kind of those three elements, at least according to Dr. Snyder. And he would say in the absence of any one of those three points, hope starts to wane. Sometimes it's easier to define what is the opposite of a concept. And so there's been several writers who have tried to figure out well, what's the opposite of hope? So one researcher in 2006 described helplessness as the opposite of hope. You can imagine how helplessness might impact a person's ability to think about goals, or it might cause them to be demotivated to pursue those goals. and helplessness definitely comes into our being if we can't see the way to achieve our goals. So clearly, helplessness relates to Snyder's three point definition. Also, one of my favorite theologians Margaret Wheatley, which I know you've done some reading of. She looked at the book teachings and she used fear to explain what the opposite of hope is in one of her 2005 writings. Again, if we look back at Snyder's points to experience fear, you know, it feels really fearful if we can't identify goals, or if we can't find a way to meet our goals, you can imagine how that would generate a lot of fear inside.

But what's missing from all of this is that connection to faith and to the larger community.

Linda Booth 13:36

And yeah, and so that's really interesting. And I bet it was fascinating to delve into that understanding of hope, both with the definition and what isn't hope. You mentioned that professor who worked with you who thought faith played a part in hopefulness. Tell us about that.

Stassi Cramm 13:56

Yeah. So um, because that became really critical. I think to what I was learning about hope. So as I already said Snyder's definition really related to a single person. And that kind of made sense because he was trying to do work for how counselors and psychiatrists could help in counseling sessions, but to account for any belief in God or a power outside of oneself, and to evaluate what it means for people to be connected to someone else. instinctually felt really important to me as we explored hope, and the doctor skillfully the professor that I worked with, he defined a four part definition of hope that kind of accounted for both what Snyder had talked about, but these external elements as well. So his four parts was the first one was mastery, which relates to our sense of empowerment to function in the world. And that kind of captures all three of Dr. Snyder's you know, points. Do we have goals are we motivated towards those goals? And do we, you know, see means to get there? His second point was attachment, that to be hopeful or to be hope filled, we have to have healthy interconnections with other people's, you know, we need to have those deep relationships. His third point was survival. And that relates to our sense of resilience. So, how capable are we, when we're in the midst of a difficult situation of imagining a better tomorrow, and then the his fourth point was spiritual,

and that is if you have all these three things, but you're missing this sense of belief in something bigger than yourself. You still can live on the edge of feeling less hope. So that was what he described as state hope. So to have hope in a moment, you need to have some element of all four of those areas. He went on then to talk about trade hope, which I mean, so you can think of trade hope is looking at those people that you see and that say, Oh my gosh, they are so hope filled, you know, they always seem like they're hopeful. And that's really trade hope. So that's a, you know, this this ongoing ability. And he said that the fifth point that you really need to have that ongoing hope is a sense of being able to look towards the future. And imagine that future. So hope is found in our sense of self empowerment, the depths of our interconnectedness with other people, our resilience to move through tough times, and an underlying strength that comes in a sense of faith that allows us to make sense out of the unimaginable.

Linda Booth 16:46

Well, that's real, that is really helpful to think of those different points. But quite honestly, it's easy to be hopeful when life is easy or good. But in our situation today, it's not so easy to be hopeful. So I'm trying to figure out from the what you've said is hope, a choice we make? A decision to believe that no matter what happens that will get through this?

Stassi Cramm 17:14

Yeah, so like many aspects of life, I think hope for some people is more genetic. So I do think that that there is a genetic aspect for some people that make them more prone to hopefulness just like we talked about in leadership where some people have those natural attributes. But I also think that everyone was created with the capacity for hope. And and so that says that some of us have to work a little bit harder to exercise our hopeful muscles, so that when we find ourselves in difficult situations, we have the tools in place to to foster our hope. Now. If someone is clinically depressed I think it's really important to recognize that that is a legitimate illness that requires professional treatment, just like high blood pressure or heart disease or other illnesses of the body. I think our culture has to often put a negative stigma on depression and other mental illnesses. And it's, you know, that is not helpful. The human body and its psyche is complex, and there's many things we are still learning. So, watching all the confusion about the novel coronavirus, indicates that we don't know everything about health and wholeness because everything even about how this virus interacts with us keeps changing and changing and changing. So I want to be careful as I talk about choosing hope to not downplay clinical depression and the need to get medical support if someone is experiencing that because that is just foundational and critically important. But with that said, I do think that momentary feelings of hopelessness can be actively worked on by a person. Of course, it's always better to prepare before situations arise. But I think even in the middle of this pandemic, there are steps we can take to remain hopeful. And so I want to outline three steps. One, regarding our sense of empowerment, we can take control of things that we can control. So we have to be willing to let go of the things we can't control. But we can control things like we can choose to wear a mask when we go out. side, we can choose to practice social distancing, so that we are keeping ourselves and our family more safe. We can choose to eat healthy and not kind of slide into I heard someone refer to it as the pandemic 20. You know, slide into bad eating habits because

we're social distancing with our refrigerator. We can choose to find ways to exercise, even if it's not safe to go to the gym. And we can find new ways to like learn new skills. So there are lots of ways that we can empower ourselves to be healthy, balanced people. And so empowerment that's important to our helpfulness. The second one is related to our sense of connectedness. So, obviously, in many areas in the world, we're still having to practice physical distancing. But that doesn't mean that we can't be connected to other people. There's lots of stories in the news about how people are creating new ways of being connected. In fact, I was reading some statistics on the usage of cell phones and the amount of actual voice minutes has significantly increased during the pandemic. And so of course, researchers are saying, Well, obviously people are finding more time to make phone calls. We have zoom, we have email, we have FaceTime. And we have snail mail. So I mean, now's a great time to start a letter writing campaign or, you know, are to send handmade cards to people to celebrate important milestones in their lives. So that's that second way that we can work on our hopefulness is being really intentional about staying connected even as we stay safe. And then the third one is regarding our sense of resilience. I was at the doctor right at the very beginning, before kind of the lockdown started occurring on the pandemic. And he told me that he had to literally write on his prescription pad, a prescription for a woman to stop watching the news. He said he was limited her to 15 minutes a day, because watching the news was driving up her blood pressure to the point that he could no longer control it with medication. So as we think about managing our own resilience, we need to focus on what we're listening to. It doesn't mean to say that we can't watch you know, any bad news, because we need to be aware of what's going on in the world, but we also need to be aware that those who are selling news are trying to make headlines and so they tend to oftentimes focus on more of the negative. So we need to search out the good stories to go along with the bad stories. And we need to recognize that all is not hopeless. This is a really really morbid example. My kids think I'm insane. But when I start to feel like I'm really concerned, and you know, and that then impacts my hopefulness sometimes I have to be willing to give myself permission to imagine the worst case scenario. So our son, several years ago did this crazy monkey bike ride through Croatia. And I just knew he was going to die when he was over there. And, and I was like, so finally, I had to allow myself to imagine. Okay, so what happens if Spencer dies? And I had to think through the steps that we would have to go through to recover his body. Again, I know that's really morbid, but by allowing myself to go there, I could at least face that moment sort of recognizing how devastating it would be, but also recognizing that the world did not end. You know, yes, it would be terribly sad, but life would go on and to deny Spencer the opportunity to do something that he desperately wanted to do, he knew what the risks were and he couldn't take those. So sometimes we have to go to the dark and give our self permission to live there. But then we have to pull ourselves away from that and put it into perspective. So empowerment, connectedness, and resilience. Those are three things that we can work on right here in the middle of this pandemic that will help us continue to foster our helpfulness.

Linda Booth 24:25

Excellent, excellent. I'm so thankful that you were so specific about what we can do, to take control to be connected to be resilient. And in the midst of that now, how does faith bring or instill that hope?

Stassi Cramm 24:41

Yeah, I'm really glad that you asked about that, because I really should have said I have four examples. Because actually, the fourth factor of Hope is related to spiritual connectedness. And so the more we can see God at work in the past and the present the more we can envision God at work in the future, so no pandemic or tragedy will ultimately get in the way of God's purposes. So the more we have the sense of assurance that God is always present with us, and that God will help us get through every situation, even death, the more we are free to live with the hope of God's vision of shalom. So that kind of goes back to my morbid example of resilience. You know, sometimes, if we're honest, our fear, you know, come becomes really personal. And it really comes down to our own sense of, you know, not wanting to leave this earth. And that's, that's a, you know, a very real feeling. And yet at the same time, as people of faith, we have to ultimately trust in God's purposes, you know, and recognize that if for some reason through some tragedy, we are no longer able to be able part of God's plan on this earth, that our family and our legacy will live on and and that God's purposes will ultimately be fulfilled. And you know, as people of faith we don't know what happens on the other side of the curtain from the earth, we're kind of focused on building God's kingdom here on Earth. But we trust in God's ultimate, timeless purposes for not only you know who we are, but our soul as well. And and so faith plays a really important part of hopefulness.

Linda Booth 26:37

Absolutely our families facing a situation. We have a great cousin, my mother's cousin who has lived by himself all his life, he fell in his backyard broke his hip and his femur. They gave him 20% chance of getting through the surgery and several my siblings, were really concerned about it as well as us. We've all been praying, we can't be with him. And we're concerned about him. And I reminded me as I was talking with my brother and sister about when I was diagnosed with cancer and not knowing what the future would be, and I had this, this wonderful sense in which is faith, that no matter in life or in death, God's grace would be sufficient. And that's what I shared with my brother and my sister because I mean, that's what faith does. You don't know what the ultimate, we don't know of Jack's gonna die, you possibly will very soon. But we have to have that faith that God is with us that God's grace is sufficient no matter what.

Stassi Cramm 27:44

Yeah, that is that is so true, Linda. And in fact, just this past Sunday, the Hebrew Scripture lectionary scripture was from Genesis and it was the story of Jacob wrestling, you know, with God and we kind of laughed about the fact that, you know, Jacob was demanding a blessing. I don't think the blessing that he anticipated was that he was going to be crippled and walk with a limp the rest of his life. So sometimes God's blessings comes in ways that we don't necessarily invite or what but as people of faith we release our outcomes, you know, to God's purposes and just like Jesus said, on the cross you will be done and and so, you know, that's what it means to be a person of faith as hard as that can be. And I love your story about how you found that sense of peace in surrendering to God.

Linda Booth 28:40

Yeah, it's really important in my life, and I know it is in the lives of many of our listeners. I read recently in Forbes magazine, that you can't give a person hope. It said that there's no hope pill or hope icon that you just click on your computer. But it said that we What you can do is help a person discover hope for themselves. I guess I should first ask you if you agree that hope can't be given, but must be individually discovered. And if you do, as disciples of Jesus Christ, how can we help a person to find or discover hope?

Stassi Cramm 29:19

Yeah, so that's a really interesting question. I think I actually might word the sentence just a little bit differently. I think I would say hope can be given, but it also must be received. Perhaps this is really where the author was heading. I don't think a person is on their own to discover hope. I do think we can be involved with each other in building hope. I can help you explore the ideas of self empowerment, self reliance and interconnectedness and even about faith but I can't make you believe that they exist for you. This is You have to be willing to receive what I give you and be willing to embrace it. I suppose this could be a form of you discovering hope based on clues that I might give you. I also can share my testimony of why being a disciple of Jesus Christ has changed my outlook and engagement in the world, or like your testimony about your sense of peace that you had as you were going through your cancer treatment. You know, and so we can share our testimonies and we can invite another person onto the similar path. But it's really up to that person, to then open their hearts and minds and soul to the presence of the spirit and and to receive those blessings of faith. I can give you the theological concepts and the spiritual practices but ultimately you have to receive not only what I offer, but what the Holy Spirit offers.

Linda Booth 31:00

I really like that idea of receiving hope. It's very similar to receiving God's love to receiving God's grace. I mean, it is a, it's not just given to you do receive, which is one of the beauties of our relationship with God. I was reminded of something that Mr. Rogers, the children's television show host said, When I was a boy, he wrote, I would see scary things in the news. And my mother would say to me, look for the helpers, you will always find people who are helping. And so I'm thinking about receiving hope. And there's really a lot of scary things in the news today. But there's also wonderful stories like police officers shopping for the elderly and, and a chief football player who decides to drop out of the game, you know, his multi million dollar contract, because he's a doctor and he wants to give his life to healing. So these stories Have helpers awake and hope in me, and how can we surround ourselves with helpers, and also be helpers ourselves?

Stassi Cramm 32:10

Yeah, I think I think surrounding ourselves with helpers and being helpers ourselves, I love that I love that image. We can find people who help us be the best person we were created to be. And we need to surround ourselves with those kinds of people. And we need to help others be the best that they were created to be. We can find people who are willing to invest in developing healthy relationships with us. Those are the kinds of people you know, like you and me who are just connected at the heart and no matter how much you know, time or distance



goes between our connections, we know that we're there for each other. And so and we also need to be those kinds of people for others. We need to invest and developing healthy relationship with others. And I think that's really important right now because I read one time about how you know, people become starstruck. So we watch all these people on TV or in the movies. And of course, since we're all binge watching Netflix and Disney Plus and Amazon Prime, we're getting really connected to characters and to actors. But those are one way relationships. So the kind of relationships I'm talking about are very reciprocal. They're the kind of relationships where I'll be there for you and you'll be there for me, and and they take time and focus. But I think that is part of being helpers in building hope. The other thing is we can find people who are resilient, who will help us experience resilience in our life. And by that I mean people who are willing to cry with us when life is really difficult. We just don't want to like brush it off as if bad things aren't happening, but who are willing to, to struggle with us in the low points, while simultaneously reminding us that we will get through this that you know, and that God is present with us. I'm reminded of just a section of our part of paragraph seven in section 116. One that says the path will not always be easy, the choices will not always be clear, but causes share. So we need helpers. And we need to be helpers that keep us focused on that cause, which is sure because that's what helps us be resilient. And that means finding people who are spiritually connected, that have a deep faith and are willing to share that faith and share their connectedness with God with us in those moments when we are feeling alone and separated from God and when we're blessed enough to be the one who's feeling really connected to God, we need to be willing to share those connections with others who are feeling on the edge and are feeling like they're in darkness and having struggles connecting to the light. So I know that sounds like really simple, but in some ways, it really is that simple to be a helper of hope is to just focus on being the best that we were created to be. And that means both as individuals, but also as participants in community and in recognizing God's Spirit in the community.

Linda Booth 35:36

Yeah, God's up to something in our neighborhood in this pandemic, because our driveway we used to use it just to drive our cars in and out of the garage. And when we couldn't, when we were all isolated, we began to we put chairs out in our driveway and neighbors would walk by and we'd have chairs and they'd sit and we talk and we have neighbors across the street, Dave and Lavonne. We lived across the street from them for 25 Two years, and we've been friendly, but I've been traveling and they've been busy with their work. And when we were all in isolation, they came and sat on our driveway. And we've built this incredible relationship with them where we pray for each other where we share God's stories. I mean, it's been a huge blessing. Helpers lived across the street from us, and we wouldn't even have known it without this pandemic. Yeah, yeah. It's something else that has brought me hope in the midst of all of this is one Sunday I preached on the 23rd Psalm. And so every morning I would read that scripture, and I find myself during the day just saying the first line The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. And you know that psalmist says he's going through a dark valley, and we may each be experiencing our own dark valley journeys. But the psalmist gives us hope that God is with us to bring comfort and peace and that God Does restore souls. And the psalmist says that his cup overflows in the midst of all those issues. So that's gratitude. In those last few words,

my cup overflows. I believe that hope invites gratitude into our lives. Even in that dark valley being grateful for the most common things produces a sense of well being and hope and gratitude that God reminds us that our lives can still be joyful, when we're genuinely grateful. And I know you in the bishopric have often talks about generosity of our time, our talents, our treasure and our testimony. So how does gratitude during a pandemic release hope?

Stassi Cramm 37:46

Yeah, I love your story about the 23rd Psalm. I think that it really does in and point us towards gratitude. I also think that hope and gratitude are actually very symbiotic. I'm not sure which one comes first. It's kind of like the chicken or the egg. Does hope beget gratitude or does gratitude beget hope? When we are hopeful, we find lots of things to be grateful for. And when we are grateful, we can't help but feel hopeful. I know that really bad things are happening because of the pandemic. People are dying as a result of the disease. People are experiencing the loss of work, people are going without food, people are separated from family and friends, and the list just goes on and on. And I don't think we, you know, can diminish these negative realities. But, but even as we acknowledge the negative realities, when we look for where God is at work in the midst of these difficult times, I think that's where we start to discover how to be grateful and how to be hopeful. So some people are finding new ways to experience connectedness through online ministries that are popping up. And some people are learning that what's most important is being together, not where they gather. And some people are spending more time with their immediate family or their neighbors across the street, because they are getting a little bit more of a break from work, or others. Like I know a lot of the software engineers in the world are actually being more productive now than they ever have been. Because they're finding that being at home with their computer without specific work hours, really is creating like new innovations in them. So the disruption of the pandemic has created some opportunities that we need to recognize, and as we recognize those, I think that leads us to this space of gratefulness, just like the psalmist and and of course, as we're grateful and thankful for these positive experiences, That then also helps bring on hope.

Linda Booth 40:03

Absolutely. And and that generosity does help us to share our time talents and treasures and testimonies even during these Coronavirus times.

Stassi Cramm 40:13

Yeah, it absolutely does at the pandemic is forcing us in new ways to share. I love how people are being creative and how they connect with one another and support each other. I love your driveway, you know, discussions with your neighbors or like the drive by parades to, you know, the teachers were doing, you know, for their students or card showers through the mails to celebrate, you know, people's birthdays. I'm also grateful as a member of the presiding bishopric that people are remembering to support local and worldwide mission ties through a tithing in the US and other means. In fact, you know, we are outperforming what some of the early forecasts We're forgiving for nonprofits as a result of the pandemic. Early on, researchers were saying and actually, many are saying that it's going to be this bad or worse, that not for profits should only plan on receiving about 60% of their annual income, which is really low and

going to have a huge impact on many of the social services that are provided by not for profits. But in the church, we're outperforming that we're doing much better and we're trending towards 80% or more, maybe even 100% of our you know, giving for local and worldwide mission tithes. And, you know, I think that that is because people are recognizing that there is an importance to the ministry that the church provides, and they're experiencing it in new ways and that's making them grateful and a and they're responding. I'm also grateful that people who were afraid of, you know, their computer, maybe to some degree or online circumstances are venturing out and being willing to log in to zoom for a reunion experience or being willing to log into zoom for a book club. I was so excited to hear that there were like more than 100 evangelists gathered for the order of evangelists meetings on zoom. And so that's people sharing, you know, their time and their talents and their treasures and their testimonies. And it's also demonstrating people's resilience and willingness to try new things. They may be are having to be forced to do but they could be stubborn and choose not to. And so I think all of that is reflecting our hopefulness as a people.

Linda Booth 42:47

It sure is, and and our conversation has been filled with testimonies of hope. Is there another testimony that you'd like to share in closing?

Stassi Cramm 42:56

You bet you can't ever ask a minister, do you they have another testimony to share. We're fully testimony

Linda Booth 43:04

For sure!

Stassi Cramm 43:06

So recently, the First Presidency was having a retreat together, we have decided that at least once a month, since we are mostly separated from each other and meeting through zoom, we're meeting in one of the large rooms at the temple that people will know is the Continents Room. And so it's a big room, we each have our own table. So we're very far away from each other. We use microphones so that you know, we don't have to yell across the room, but somehow being physically present with each other. And of course, we have masks and sanitizers and Clorox wipes, you know, at all of our tables, but spending a few days with each other has felt important in the midst of all of this. So recently, during one of these experiences we were doing and dwelling on the word and we were using Doctrine and Covenants section 161, paragraph seven. I quoted a part of that just a minute ago. But now I want to read that whole paragraph. And I want people to listen for the four attributes of Advent. Love, peace, hope and joy. And I will underscore them as part of my reading, but it's really interesting to me how they show up in this section. So here's paragraph seven, section 161. The Spirit of the one you follow, is the Spirit of love and peace. So there's the first to the Spirit of the one you follow is the Spirit of love and peace. That Spirit speak seeks to abide in the hearts of those who would embrace its call and live its message. The path will not always be easy. The choices will not always be clear, but the cause is sure and the Spirit will bear with witness to the truth. And

those who love the truth will know the hope and the joy. There's the second two of discipleship in the community of Christ, amen. So, it really touched me when we were reading this, how those four attributes of Advent, which are also the four key identifiers of the type of communities that we're supposed to be building and promoting in the world showed up. So perhaps from everything we've discussed today about hope, I might summarize my testimony on hope in this way, hope and joy come when together we embrace and live the message of Jesus, the peaceful one who loves all people.

Linda Booth 45:57  
Amen!

Stassi Cramm 45:59  
Amen!

Linda Booth 46:01  
Thanks to your friend for reminding us of how important hope is that hope doesn't discount the realities of what we're facing, but assures us that God is in the midst of our hardships. And we'll walk through this dark valley together with God. And thanks to all of you who have listened to our conversation about hope during Coronavirus time, please watch for next month's episode of Coffee buzz. I'll be having a conversation with Prophet President Steve Veazey. And if you haven't checked out my last conversation with him on systemic racism, you can read it in the September October Herald or listen to that episode of Coffee Buzz on Projects Zion Podcast and tell we listen again. May hope reign in your lives. Amen.

Josh Mangelson 47:03  
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