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Project Zion Podcast

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.

Brittany Mangelson 0:33

Hello, everyone, welcome to Project Zion Podcast. This is Brittany Mangelson and I am going to be your host for today's fair trade episode, which is all about faith transitions. And we actually had our guest on not too long ago. We are going to be talking to Meredith Carr today and she is a relatively new convert to Community of Christ. And if I give her that title I have to give myself that title because we converted right around the same time. So that's exciting. And I am really looking forward to getting to know her story more because honestly, I didn't realize that you were a convert until I think the last Sunstone just last year. That's when you shared it with me and I was like, "Oh, I just assume that you are a lifelong member!" So, and speaking of Sunstone, we literally just a couple hours ago, wrapped up a weekend of digital Sunstone. So I kind of was joking that, you know, as soon as Sunstone ended, I put on a hoodie, I got to my comfy pants, and now we are podcasting together. So I guess the timing works great, because we just heard a lot about faith transitions and questioning God and all of that. So the timing on this just works well. So Meredith, I've talked enough. Why don't you introduce yourself! Who are you?

Meredith Carr 2:00

So, my name is Meredith Carr. I live in Rising Sun, Maryland. I attend the Wilmington, Delaware congregation. I'm a dental hygienist and I work with my husband. He's a dentist. So we have a dental office. So we work together and spend every moment together. And I joined a Community of Christ in 2016.

Brittany Mangelson 2:29

Awesome, I cannot wait to hear the story because I have a hunch it's going to be good. So I guess to start us off, and again, I don't want to frame it too tightly, but let's just start off when you were a little kid when you were a little girl, what did faith look like? What did religion look like? What did church look like for you?

Meredith Carr 2:50

So I grew up in a home that didn't have any, any religion, any church. We didn't talk about God. We didn't pray. We didn't ever go to church. My parents believe in God. My dad was raised Southern Baptist and my mom, I think, was Presbyterian. But it wasn't anything that was part of our daily life. They're wonderful loving parents, but we just church was not any aspect of our home life. I did, however, end up going to Catholic school for several years. And many things that happened during that experience shaped me for a very long time. When I was five years old, when I was in kindergarten, something happened to me that really affected me. My my

whole life. So our homework assignment was to go home and ask our parents where we were baptized. And of course, I was five But I went home and I said to my mom, you know, where was I baptized? I have to know that's our homework. And my mom said, You're too young to be baptized. When you get older, you'll decide when you're ready. And I thought that sounded like it made sense. So the next day I went to school, and when it was my turn, I told Sister Mary did say that I was too young to be baptized. And my mom said, I'll decide when I grow up. And her response was to kind of lean down to my level and make eye contact with me and she said, "You are going to hell." And then she stood up and walked away, and I was absolutely devastated. I mean, I, I burst out crying. I believed her completely because she was a nun in the full, you know, nun uniform, and I cried about that. And she never said like, anything. You didn't want to go to hell, you could do this. It was just so finite, you know, that's it, you're going to hell. And when I told my mom that night, her response was something like, oh, why did that woman say that to you? And I said, I remember thinking she's not a woman. She's a nun, you know, so, not only was she an adult, but she was an authority figure. So I believed her completely. Now, you know, I was only five then. But there were many experiences in my years of Catholic school, that kind of reinforced that for me that I was not somehow worthy of, you know, participating in church or having a relationship with God. So, I remember, like, I got in trouble. I got a detention once because I didn't know the words to a song they were singing, but where would I have known the words from so that, you know, they were like you're not singing? And I said, I don't know the words. And they said, detention, so, and just many things like that. I went to an all girls Catholic school. And one time I got in trouble because I had a turtleneck on without the V neck sweater. And I got called down to the office and they were like that's so sinful. And I believe them that it was sinful, but I didn't understand what was sinful about it. So I just always had this narrative that was that I was somehow not acceptable. And communion was like a horrible moment we had, every time we had Mass at school, there was a Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. And there was always that moment where they would stand up to file to the front. And me and me, I think there was like three other girls couldn't take Communion. So as everybody filed past everybody saw sitting there, and people would say, Well, how come you're not Taking communion, and where do you take Communion? And where do you go to church? And I would always have to say, like, I don't, I don't take Communion. And they, they would be like, you know, horrified. And

it was just really traumatizing. There were there were moments, when all the girls were going to Catechism. And I wasn't I didn't even really know what that word was. So I was just never part of the club because I was not Catholic, so, and yet, I didn't ever hear a counter narrative to that because we didn't have church in my home. So we once a year, we would go down south and visit family like at Easter, and I would go to church with my cousins. And that church was very much like God's very angry, and we're all going to burn in the fiery pits and you better repent, repent, repent, and I really wanted to repent but see repenting for me. Going to confession and I wasn't allowed to go to confession. So I felt like I couldn't even repent. I didn't really know what I was repenting of. But you know, so it was just like a really bad setup for me. And when I left school, I wanted nothing ever to do with church, again, everything that I knew, or maybe I should say the only thing I knew, was the Catholic narrative, that and I wasn't Catholic, so I just felt like something was wrong with me. I mean, I really felt like I was somehow

flawed. And I couldn't have a relationship with God. I always believed there was a guy, but just that I couldn't somehow go to church or have any kind of relationship with God. And I avoided church after that at all costs. Like, like, I would have great anxiety if I had to go to say a wedding in a church or something, I would feel like everybody there knew that I didn't belong there. I felt like there was a spotlight on me. And I always tease like, that's before I knew the light coming down was a good thing. But But, I mean, it was just that terrible of an experience to go to church. And my husband is grew up in Community of Christ. He's a lifelong member, but he had not attended for several years, maybe a couple decades. And he always says, I didn't really leave, but I didn't go. So he tried one time we were in Independence, visiting family, and he tried to take me by the Temple. And as we got closer, I got very, very panicked and he said, let's just turn in here. And take a tour and I think his mom was one of the tour guides at the Temple. And I just was like, No, no, no, no, no, don't fall in. I mean, it was almost like a full on panic attack because I just felt like I did not belong there. And it just always brought up those feelings of being unworthy. So I had no church for most of my adult life up until 2016.

Brittany Mangelson 10:23

So, just to comment a little bit on on that part of your story, when you were younger, it seems so wild to me that you were in a Catholic school and submersed in that culture, and no one stopped to translate? To try to include you to convert you even? I mean, hello, you're right there. It just seems Yeah, that that seems wild that you know, as a little kid, having not only God formed in a very Hellfire and brimstone way, especially when you include your family's version of God, but then to have the community aspect of it, you can't even be loved into a community because the community is just like, well, you're going to hell and then leave you to your own devices!

Meredith Carr 11:21

That's very much what it was. And I and I don't mean to sound like I'm bashing the Catholic Church, because there was a lot of years I really, really wanted to be a part of it. So, but I also didn't realize that what I knew was I was only Catholic, like, I just thought that was all churches, and all religions. And so it didn't occur to me once I was an adult to maybe explore other churches. I just didn't really think about that because I felt so internally flawed somehow, that you know from from God The beginning that, that I couldn't, I couldn't be included in that community was really devastating for me. And I know my mom has said that. She asked them, you know, is there a lot of religion or anything in the curriculum for Catholic school? And they said, Oh, very little. So, and, and I don't think that's true. It wasn't very little. But also, there's so many subtle ways. Like I remember one year at CAMH. The prize that you got to pick was like a table of Catholic icon. So I came home with this very ornate porcelain statue of the Virgin Mary, and I was so proud that I had that and to my mom's credit, she was like, Oh, beautiful, thank you. But, but there's just subtle ways that you're kind of indoctrinated that you don't really realize is happening to you as a child and my parents didn't really realize it because we never had those conversations. That's Oh, so it was it was not a good setup. I always say I got all of the guilt of the redemption.

Brittany Mangelson 13:08

Yeah, well, and when you have nothing to compare it to, and you are not only trying to learn about the world in general terms as a child does, but you're also submersed in this religious culture, that's not your own culture and you have no idea what's going on. I mean, gosh, my heart goes out to a little Meredith.

So difficult. So you said that, you know, even into your young adulthood, teenage young adulthood, you're very, very much not into church. Was that? Were you ever like solicited by any sort of missionaries? Or did you have roommates that were super religious or was there ever any pressure to convert to anything or any invitation to meet a different kind of God or anything like that?

Meredith Carr 14:03

No, well, I'll say no, but perhaps I shut down those conversations. One time I had a neighbor say, Meredith Satan is after you. And I said, I know. And she didn't even know what to do with that. So, so, um I do know that I would be aware sometimes that people spoke with a language that I didn't really ever speak with, like, they would talk about Jesus or something and I just or god bless or, you know, just things that I that was language I never used. And so I never had, like missionary show up on the doorstep. But perhaps people did try to talk to me and I just was not receptive. Like I just wanted nothing to do with that. So and I lived that way for a very long time thinking I was, you know, happy in my life. I mean, I had many good good things that happened to me as an adult, but church was not anything that I was ever going to participate in again.

Brittany Mangelson 15:09

Yeah, interesting. And honestly, I can't blame you. That does not sound like an easy way to be introduced to God or religion. So I don't blame you at all. But obviously, something changed. So you said that your husband was born and raised Community of Christ, but maybe not officially left, but just kind of stepped back. And so I'm assuming that that's was that how it was, you know, when you were first married, like just keep talking.

Meredith Carr 15:40

So that all started to change. For me my perception of church and Christianity and a very unlikely place. I have a friend His name is Hassan. He's Muslim. He's an immigrant to this country. He grew up in Morocco, came to the United States when he was maybe 19, I think, became a citizen in 2015. And he's become part of our family. He's a very kind, homesick person. And he is now included in always in our family. So he goes on vacations with us, he, you know, anytime there's a family gathering, we invite him. He celebrates holidays with me, and, you know, it's just been this relationship that developed and actually there's a large community of people for Morocco that I somehow ended up kind of helping to navigate some things in America like, you know, signing up for cable or, you know, medical appointments, things like that I kind of help out with, but with his son, because his life experiences were so incredibly different than mine growing up here. We always had a lot to talk about. And Hassan always had a lot of questions about Christianity, because he, he didn't really learn about that in Morocco growing up. So he would ask me all these questions about what it means to be a Christian. And I

found myself having to think about things that I had not thought about in a very long time. And his questions were tough, like he would say, how come there are two churches right next to each other? if everyone's Christian Christian, why don't they just go to the same church? And I'd be like, why? Hmm, you know, that was a tough one. But there was also scripture passages he asked about, and at one point, we had this app where we could pull up passages from the Quran and passages from the Bible using like key words or key concepts. And we did that to kind of find out how things were different. Although often we found out things were very similar, but it just suddenly I was reading the Bible. I was like, like researching scripture passages to try and answer these questions. I thought, How did this happen that I found myself, you know, in this process where I'm explaining in Christianity, but it was very clarifying for me because I kind of had to figure out, you know, what, what was it that I believed? And one time Hassan said to me, do you ever pray Meredith? And I said, No, I never go to church. And he said, No, not church. Do you ever prayed you ever talked to God? And to be honest, I didn't think about praying as talking to God. Because what I was familiar with with praying was just reciting like a memorize thing. And in the school setting, especially It was like you said the right thing at the right time, so they knew you were paying attention kind of thing. So if I knew ever thought about prayer as like having a conversation with God? And he said to me, I'll pray for you, Meredith. And I was like You will? And he said, Yes. Because you know what? There's one God. So if I created God and you pray to God, we're praying to the same God. And I was really, really touched by that, that to think that somebody was praying for me that somebody was talking to God about me. And I would ask him, did you did you pray about me? And he always said, I did I pray for you. And it was just really touching, in a way that kind of was disarming like, I didn't expect that I would respond that way. And then one of the other questions he asked me was, are you born a Christian?

And for just a minute when he asked that I thought about a little babies being baptized, but then I said, No, you have to choose that. And when I said those words out loud, I thought, why haven't chosen that for myself have I, you know, it just kind of really hit home. So here I was, you know, kind of on this journey on my own, just reading the Bible and, you know, trying to figure out what I believe. And that was about the time that my father in law passed away. Dennis' his father, and he was, you know, very, very much into Community of Christ. He, his whole life was involved in the church. And when he passed away, they just thought the family decided that the memorial service would be at the church. And I was like, Oh, no, cuz I have to go, right. I have to go to this church. There's no way to miss like a memorial service. So I have to be there. And I had just great anxiety about that, but I, there was no other option. I had to be there. And it was on a Saturday in April 2016. And I walked into that church, and the family was all there. And they all play musical instruments. And they, they played music. And it was just really a joyous moment to remember. Bob Carr, my father in law, and everybody was, was happy. And you know, it was just not at all what I expected. And that night at dinner, I said to Dennis, I'd like to go back to that church sometimes and see what they do on a Sunday and so he says, after he picked himself up off the floor, he said, Let's go tomorrow, which he did, and I thought, to be honest, I didn't even know I was gonna say like, what I want to go back until there's words came out of my mouth. But we did. We went back the next day before we had too much time to think about it and It was his first time also going to church there in a really

long time even though that was his home congregation. And I walked in there that day. And I always describe what I used to feel inside is like a combination lock. You know how when you're, you're spinning this way and you spin that way and you but when you finally get the right combination, you hear that click. And it was almost like that I just felt peaceful. I felt welcomed. I felt not like I shouldn't be there. And that day that Sunday was the first time in my life that I heard the message that God loves me. Because I'd never heard that. And that's what made the difference. And I'll tell you, it was a communion Sunday. So they were celebrating the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Now, I hadn't thought about that, or I might not have gone because that was always a moment that I, you know, hated that I was going to be, you know, singled out. And during the service, they were, you know, preparing for it. And I thought, Oh, no, oh, no, you know, we're gonna, oh, it's Communion shoot. And the pastor said, from the pulpit, that we are a welcoming community, and everyone is welcome to partake in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. And it just made me feel so included, that I wasn't going to be singled out. And open Communion was life changing for me. I mean, it really it could have been a moment that if it had been closed communion, I may not have ever come back because it would have just brought up all those bad feelings, but but it wasn't it was open and it was a wonderful experience that day, and we started attending regularly on Sundays after that. So then about May of that year I said to Dennis, you know, I'm gonna join your church, right? I've decided and he just cried about that he that he broke down with that, and I was baptized and confirmed in July of 2016

Brittany Mangelson 24:29

Wow, what a story and like you said it your reintroduction to Christianity did come at a an unexpected source I guess you know from an unexpected source. But what a what a journey and to understand that, you know, to have your friend say that if I pray to my god, there's one god so that's your God, it's all of our God, but to just be cared for that way, and what a what a pastoral way to be present with someone while they're exploring who God is, while they themselves are exploring who that is, like, I just love that you were on your little app trying to figure out the differences and similarities.

Meredith Carr 25:10

And Hassan was very supportive. Like he was really happy when when I found my spiritual home, because I think spirituality was important to him. And so he was happy and supportive. He's come to church with us. Sometimes I've gone to the mosque with him sometimes. Dennis and I both have, you know, it's it's a relationship that has a mutual respect of where we are. And even though we're on different paths, we both, you know, honor respect where each other is so, so it's wonderful. I tease them sometimes I'm, I tell them, I'm going to call my talk. How a Muslim brought me to Jesus. He always says, No, I don't think you need to do that.

Brittany Mangelson 26:00

It's got such a good ring to it, though I love it. So what was it about, so the open Communion that was really significant, but what else was there that kept you coming back? Because it sounds like you know, you were probably starting at a pretty ground ground level as far as like Christianity goes or what the Bible is, you know, as far as biblical scholarship goes, or is this

literal or I'm assuming you had a lot of questions. So what was it about the experience that kept you wanting more kept coming back and learning and all that stuff?

Meredith Carr 26:42

So it was complete acceptance of me just as I was without a need to do or be somebody different. It was upholding me despite the fact that I thought I was flawed, that's what made the difference for me. I'm going to say to my husband kind of returning to the church and doing this together, where we both felt like I knew I had a lot to learn. And he discovered that he had a lot to learn because it was not the same church he had left. You know, 30 years ago, there was so many new things with the theology and stuff. So we kind of did it together. And we're, we were really blessed to be able to do that together. But that definitely helped. discovering that I was part of a bigger community than just my congregation was really helpful for me. And then just the grace that I was shown when I didn't know things So, when I first went to the temple, Scott Murphy was giving me a tour. And right inside where it has the wooden cross, he said, and of course Jesus isn't on the cross, because, you know, we don't believe he's there. And, you know, he's, he's offended. And I was like, oh, oh my goodness, I did not know that. He was probably like this. I mean, I spent many, many years looking at like, bloody Jesus on the cross. But I didn't know that was just like, sort of a Catholic thing. I mean, I think other faith traditions do it too. But, you know, so just really basic stuff like that, that I didn't know but I was given the chance to to learn and nobody, you know, looked down on me because of that, or, or I felt like you know, that I wasn't judged because of that. And there were so many ways to be able to learn, you know, the world church. just such a fabulous job of putting out their resources to help me learn and discover my faith and and their space, a safe space for me to be able to kind of discern and, and develop my relationship with god that was critical to and I'll tell you, right after I was baptized, I was very worried that I would go back to my old life with no relationship with God, you know, all these amazing things happened, I got baptized, and it was like now, because I've lived a long time, you know, without church and stuff. So I was really worried about that. And Kris Judd said to me, go to the historic sites, and I was like, Oh, really? Hmm. You know, like, I didn't see where that was going to be something I should do, but at that point, I was just doing, you know, kind of whatever people suggested that would help me on my journey. And just a few months after that, Dennis and I went to Palmyra and walked in the grove, and I left there, just absolutely certain that I was in the right place in the right church. That was that was like a spiritual moment for me. And then the other historic sites that we visited kind of helped me claim our history as my history. So that's been really important for me, I remember, I used to say, your church to my husband, I'd be like, Oh, you know, we're your church. And there was a moment where I finally said, Wait, this is my church, you know, and once I made that switch, it was like, just indicative of how I was, you know, feeling and thinking about things. So that was a that was good advice; go to the historic sites.

Brittany Mangelson 30:55

I relate to so much of that this idea of number one feeling like you don't know a whole lot, which I just kind of assumed growing up in the LDS Church thinking, you know, that I did know, everything there was to know about Community of Christ after just, you know, a few months of attending. But no, that was not the case. And I still run up against you know, random little

acronyms and things. I'm like, Okay, everybody knows what's happening but me. Yeah. It's kind of, it's funny, but um, but also this idea of like, okay, now what you know, so you, you make the decision to join a new church. And then now what you've lived your whole life without it. You've lived your whole life with a different worldview with different whatever it may be framing your morals, how you interact with the world, how you think about really important topics. And I'm speaking from my own experience, and then after I joined it was like, Okay, now Do I have to? Do I change everything about me like do I do I still just keep changing? Do I? You know, I felt like I had to analyze everything and say like, well does this fit into the framework of this new church and and I personally realized that no like I could just be myself well being in the church but I'm wondering if you kind of went through that to just like, because Community of Christ is such a community driven church, an action driven church, we want to make the world a better place. How was it when you realize like okay, now what I have an idea of what your now what has ended up looking like but But how was that process?

Meredith Carr 32:43

So I was really blessed to have like, two years to explore, to travel and, and go to historic sites or go to reunions or go to events and kind of get to know my community and learn the history and make connections. One of the things I always noticed with my sister in law and my husband, when they would get together, they would be like, do you remember so until we met them that summer, I can't ever reunion, you know, and they always had all these connections and I never did. But suddenly I knew all the names like I and I'm like, Oh, I met their, you know, Uncle here or whatever. So, so I had like, a couple years where I didn't really have responsibilities in the congregation, like, I might. We attended every Sunday we were home, but if we were away, it wasn't like I had something I had to do and that that gave me space to, to learn about my faith community, to discern, you know, where I was being called, in my spiritual journey, and you know what it was going to look like and after a couple years then things started to change. And I started to have more responsibilities in the congregation with the worship and, and kind of gradually started doing that and started sharing my testimony, things like that. Eventually I was called to elder the office of elder. So that was right before World Conference last year. And actually, the first time I served Communion was at World Conference. So you're gonna go go big, I don't know.

Brittany Mangelson 34:38

That's the best. My jaw just dropped. I mean, really, for someone who had been, you know, kept from Communion your whole life, to then finding a new community that would offer you Communion even though you weren't a baptized member, and then to be able to be ordained and serve Communion but not only serve communion service Communion to a world wide congregation in the Auditorium. Like I'm just, I'm a fan of this story.

Meredith Carr 35:08

Yeah, it was an amazing moment. And kind of the, just the irony of, you know, that I was the one serving the sacrament now, when it had been such a source of pain in my early life, you know, that I couldn't even that I wasn't even more than enough to partake of it was, was one of those moments that hit me like, wow, look how my life has been transformed. And I have those

moments a lot now, like, like, sometimes I'll speak you know, in a language that I just never thought I would, you know, when I talk about spiritual practices, or Jesus or you know, grace of God, like those are terms that I met didn't have in my vocabulary for a lot of yours. And even just, you know, going to church on Sunday, like Someone that goes to church on Sunday now like that, sometimes that strikes me as like, wow. But I do feel like the Spirit was really kind of working in my life and and I was supported by so many members of my community and then also my, my family, my in laws were very supportive. So it's all been helpful and helped me and I'll tell you, there were things in my life that I changed, but it wasn't because somebody ever said you need to change this. It was because I came to that decision on my own. Like, maybe this is not the best thing to be doing. Or maybe I will not do this anymore. Whatever it was, it was because I had that awareness in me. Not because somebody you know, from higher up told me I had to stop that or whatever it was. So that was amazing, too.

Brittany Mangelson 37:01

I also relate to that a lot, just in my own life in seen and unseen ways and just kind of how I view the world. You know, there are some, some stereotypes about the community that I came from. And I definitely fit a lot of those stereotypes and they're not great stereotypes. And I feel like through things like the Enduring Principles, they've gotten me out of myself more, which then has caused me to examine how I interact with the world, how I interact with people around me, how I interact with creation, the planet, and that does change you it changes you when you live a life that's just a little bit more intentional. So for me it was more about intentionality and just being aware of the impact that my decisions were having. But again, that came from me like you said, it wasn't because I was told this list of things now you may not partake of blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, you know, it was just just a more on my, my own introspection and figuring out how I could best live out being Enduring Principles, so.

Meredith Carr 38:14

I will say one of the, the hardest things was not with sometimes not having like the answer, like just Can someone just tell me, right, you know, like, and that whole Oh, there's no wrong or right way to pray or whatever it is, it's like, can I have a little more, you know, guidance with that. And I remember I, I talked with Scott Murphy from the First Presidency about that and I, I said, you know, sometimes I just want the answer like, you know, and he said, Meredith, there answer churches and their journey churches, and we are a journey church. And I appreciated that so much. And I said, put it it's harder, right? Like you have to figure it out sometimes on your own. So, but but it makes it so much more meaningful that way.

Brittany Mangelson 39:10

Yeah, it really does. Oh, man, I'm gonna have to remember that. So thanks, Scott Murphy for that one, because that's really good. And it's really helpful because I think a lot of times people who are leaving one framework, whether it's religion or rejection of religion, if they are coming into a community, right, like you want to know the boundaries, you want to know, is appropriate, what's not and that's not to say that Community of Christ has no structure or no policy or anything like that. But there is a lot of ways that you can individualize your church experience, or your congregations experience. It doesn't have to look like what it looks like

down the street and, and that can be hard. You know, your beliefs don't have to line up with the person that's sitting next to you in the Pew or in these COVID times the person who is Square is next to you on zoom. And it can, it can be a little bit jarring because we, I think, especially now not to get on the soapbox, but now in the time of social media, and everyone is just given this voice, and it's, it's good. But to think that we have to convert everyone to our way of thinking, is an easy trap. And so I say all this, to say that being a journey church is difficult, because we want to get on our soapbox and say, Well, this is what you have to believe about Jesus and the Bible and the end of time and heaven and hell and you know, all these things that churches, a lot of times have really definite doctrines and theology around and there is more ability in Community of Christ to explore, which is scary, because then you have to do the work.

Meredith Carr 40:55

Mm hmm. Yeah. I found that to be true. But like I said, more, so much more meaningful than to just have someone you know, give the, the canned answer about this is how you pray, you must do this and that and you know, and I say praying because praying was probably praying out loud was like the hardest thing for me to get comfortable with. It just wasn't something I had ever done. And I have to say in Community of Christ, we have people that pray so beautifully, right? their prayers are just amazing. And I'm like, Whew, that was so, so that is something I had to be very intentional about. And, and I have worked on that, but that, you know, as silly as it sounds, that was like one of the hardest things for me to get used to it was like, Well, how do you do it? Just tell me Just tell me how you do it. Like what what do I start with? And they were like, no, there's no right or wrong way. And I'm like, I really just tell me the right way to do it. do it the right way. So

Brittany Mangelson 42:02

that does not sound silly at all because I grew up singing a song about how to pray. I mean, I can sing it right now I won't, but it looks very much like this is the first line you say, then you say this, then you say this and this and this. And then in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. So prayers actually still continue to be kind of a struggle for me just because, I don't know I feel like I should be better at it by now. I will say like, I have grown in the, in the genre of prayers, but it's, it's difficult and a lot of times if I'm asked to pray in advance, you know, all jot down little notes or if you know, during the joys and concerns, I have to make sure that I write things down because it just, it's just difficult to pray on the spot. So I hear you, yeah, I'm silly at all. That's exactly

Meredith Carr 42:56

I often will write some things down. So You know, just so I have like a framework, but and I'm not we have another new member at our congregation and her and I have shared together that that praying out loud, like that is anxiety producing sometimes. So it's something we had to really kind of develop and be intentional about. And still, if they say, Hey, will you offer the prayer for the cares and concerns? It's like, Yes, I'll do it but my heart is racing.

Brittany Mangelson 43:28

I will reluctantly say yes! So Meredith, tell us a little bit about what you are doing for your congregation and your mission center.

Meredith Carr 43:44

Well, um, so things are very different now with COVID. Our congregation is not open for in person worship, but prior to that I was often sharing the message I love all the connections I have with people in my mission centers. So I really feel like I am not limited to just you know, my own home congregation. So some Sundays I'll go visit other congregations. I'm actually the Invitational support Minister for the Mid Atlantic mission center. During COVID, we've had many, many online opportunities to gather and I've been enjoying that. And I'm actually starting seminary at the end of this month, so because I know I have a lot to learn still, so I'm looking forward to that, I think.

Brittany Mangelson 44:53

I am thrilled to hear that I didn't realize that I'm really really excited for you and I I will say that I'm not surprised that you are the Invitational Support Minister in your mission center because the few times that I have met you, or even just in any of our correspondence, you are always introducing me to people who are seeking and Community of Christ who want to learn more who live in my area, it's been pretty wild, the connections that you have given to me, which I really appreciate, and again, coming, knowing your story now coming from the background of feeling surrounded by religion, but nobody saw you like, I'm still kind of stuck on that. And nobody saw you that you you know, we're a potential convert for, an easy convert, right? Like you probably could have been loved into that community. If somebody would have just seen you and what I've just explained things to you and you know, now I'm kind of glad they didn't just so we could have you but So our paths could cross but it just knowing how Invitational and inviting you are, it just really brings to light to the contrast of what you experienced growing up.

Meredith Carr 46:13

So I often feel like I have discovered this church and it is so wonderful. And I am here because of our, our, our mission, message and beliefs and what it is now I'm not here because I grew up in this church, and I just think it is the best thing ever. Right? It brought me so much peace, like I don't have that churning inside that I used to have, I don't have that. That sense that I, you know, am not worthy. And I want to share that with everybody. I really do. And there are a lot of people that feel rejected, or have been made to feel unworthy Or they're just, you know, broken inside. And they might I say this a lot, they might not be, like living in abject poverty or, you know, it may not be like a really obvious kind of thing, but they are broken inside, you know, they have, you know, they're their jobs and their family and, and they're going along but they're hurting and I always kind of feel like I, I, I sort of recognized that in people sometimes because I lived that way for so long. And so I always want to invite people because I didn't ever feel like I had that invitation or that acceptance that, you know, we want you to be part of our community or, you know, here's a way that you can have some peace in your life. I very much respect if somebody has a path that is different than mine, and that feeds them and I am happy for them. You know, I don't need them to be on my path. But if someone is, without a spiritual home, that's when I always want to reach out.

Brittany Mangelson 48:12

I feel the exact same way I think I did have a community but it was so in a lot of respects, easy for me to leave. We weren't really chased. You know, nobody said, Wait, wait, wait, don't go yet. It was just kind of like, yeah, you guys don't fit in, see ya! So we we felt very rejected. And knowing that that happens with people all over the place from a lot of different religions, a lot of different just families, in general. Is, is really what compels me to keep doing this. And it's hard. I mean, it's hard to deal with these really heavy emotions of feeling like you have this dichotomy of heaven and hell or you're right or you're wrong or you know, just the binaries that religion has created. Walking that line of in between and saying like, actually, there's a third way there's a different way to look at it. It's really vulnerable. It's scary. It takes a lot of work. But I guess that Scott Murphy summed it up that we are a journey church and I really think that that has kind of been groundbreaking for me it we're hearing you say that from him? Because it definitely is a journey. And I think that that's one reason why I really appreciate the name Community of Christ because we're not on this journey alone, right? We're we're in it together, which is meaningful, so

Meredith Carr 49:43

I also think that I feel like sometimes if you've grown up in this church, there's like some baggage that's leftover from earlier years that make that hold people back from saying like, Hey, you know, Um Community of Christ are you know, it's great. You want to you want to come sometime? I'll go, you know, it just holds them back. I don't know why. And you cut this out if you want, but I don't have any other. I'm like, Yeah, right here. You need Grace? That's me, you know? Yep. Come look us up. Yeah, come with me, you know, you want to go I'll come with you. I mean, I just am excited because it has transformed my life so much. And I think, you know, maybe that's typical of new converts in, in all faith traditions, I don't know, but, but for me, that's where I'm at. And that's why I always want to share.

Brittany Mangelson 50:40

Again, your story is just so relatable. I feel the same way. I've actually had people in Community of Christ physically approach me like at World Conference or mission center conference, and they're very confused at why I converted from the "big church" to community. I like but you had such a good program for your kids, you know, like a children's program and you have that they have all the money. Like, what? Why do you want us? I'm like, Where do I begin?

Meredith Carr 51:11

Right? Our message is so beautiful. I mean, I just love the acceptance. I love that we share a message of a loving God. It's because, you know, it's not conditional. It's not fire and brimstone. It's a loving God, who has granted us grace, and that is what made the difference for me.

Brittany Mangelson 51:40

Yeah, I completely agree. 100%. Well, Meredith, usually at the end of our podcasts, I like to just ask just to make sure that we didn't miss anything. So is there anything else that you would like

to share with us about your story or about Community of Christ or about this wild time we find ourselves in. I mean, you've you've got the podcast, you can say what you want,

Meredith Carr 52:06

Oh man. Just that I am forever grateful to have received the grace that I have been shown and the acceptance that I have been shown by this faith community. And that's what drives me. That's why I want to share with others, that grace that I myself received, and Community of Christ is has been life transforming for me and I'm still on my journey. So you know, catch me in two years if I successfully complete seminary. We'll see how that goes.

Brittany Mangelson 52:58

You will and will be great and will love to have you back on the podcast and you can tell us all about it.

Meredith Carr 53:04

Sounds good.

Brittany Mangelson 53:07

All right Project Zion listeners. This, again has been a Fair Trade episode where we talk about faith transitions. And we are speaking with Meredith Carr and I will link her recent post that she did with other ministers in her mission center with children's ministry during this time of COVID. So be sure to look for that in the show notes. And Meredith, thank you again so much for being here today.

Meredith Carr 53:33

Thanks, Brittany.

Josh Mangelson 53:42

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