

**Josh Mangelson** 00:17

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

**Elray Henriksen** 00:33

Hello, and welcome to Project Zion. Today is the seventh podcast in a new international series Grounds for Peace under the auspices of peaceprojects.eu. I am your host Elray Henriksen joining you from Brussels, Belgium, and a member of the Community of Christ European Peace and Justice Team. Today we are looking at the very theme of the 2020 online European Peace Colloquy: Peaceful Humanity, A New Creation. The Colloquy has been an ongoing webinar series that started in July this year. For previous webinars and podcasts, check out the YouTube channel of Community of Christ Europe, or the Project Zion Podcast website. Our approach to this Peace Colloquy webinar series has been to explore seven dimensions of Christ's peace through speakers and experts who have provided light and better understanding on some of the issues related to peaceful humanity as we are coming to understand it. With us today is the man who launched the term "peaceful humanity" within Community of Christ, through his closing challenge to the World Conference of 2019, titled, Discover Your Future. Steve Veazey is the President of Community of Christ. Allow me to quote from this challenge, "Scripture testifies that all creation waits with eager longing for peaceful humanity to appear on the world stage to turn the tide of hate, agony and destruction. Are we moving towards Jesus, the peaceful One?" President Veazey, thank you for taking the time to be with us today and welcome to this podcast.

**Steve Veazey** 02:11

Thank you for the invitation and opportunity to have this conversation. I appreciate it.

**Elray Henriksen** 02:18

We're very glad and very happy and very honored to have you here. So let's get right to it then. In your closing challenge to the church at World Conference last year, you referred to Jesus as the peaceful One. I'm curious to why you would do that. You could have called them by another scriptural title such as Prince of Peace or referred to him as King of Kings or Lord of Lords. Why the Peaceful One?

**Steve Veazey** 02:44

I think in terms of the phrase, it was one I had thought about for some time in order to bring more emphasis to those aspects of Jesus's life and ministry and message that emphasized peace. Because as I read and hear expressions of Christianity regarding Jesus Christ, I find it's not often emphasized or it's downplayed, or ignored. So as I thought about how do we focus on this aspect of who Jesus was, the thought, the identity, the peaceful One, came to mind and it really resonated with me.

**Elray Henriksen** 03:37

So what stories in the New Testament do you think really reflect Jesus's peaceful nature?

**Steve Veazey** 03:43

Well, almost every human interaction, we see aspects of it; in forms of compassion, but also reaching out to individuals who were not experiencing peace within their lives, whether it was personal peace, or relational peace, or that relationship to God. That was one of being fearful. And so in all of the stories of Jesus's being with people, we see evidence of it. And then of course, the message of Jesus, particularly that collection of sayings called the Sermon on the Mount and related sayings, it's obvious that the focus is ultimately on a just and peaceful reign of God on Earth. Beyond that, as I've emphasized several times recently, even in my World Conference closing message, Jesus experienced the most excruciating suffering and and violence and yet he responded, basically in a peaceful way. He was still building relationships of reconciliation, even on the cross. And then after, in the resurrection, the resurrected Jesus, some of the first words were about peace and offering peace to people. So I just see a constant thread throughout his whole life and ministry.

**Elray Henriksen** 05:18

So my favorite story about Jesus is his triumphant entry into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey on what we now celebrate as Palm Sunday, which is immediately followed by what one could say an outburst against the injustices in the temple, which he called the den of robbers. He seems to challenge the religious, the economic, the military authorities of his day, and upset and expose their convenient arrangements. So how is that peaceful?

**Steve Veazey** 05:49

Well, I think we understand that in the process of making justice and peace, that's not just sitting back. It includes engagement in the transformation of situations and circumstances that contribute to a lack of justice and peace in the lives of people. So I take it as a as an inspiration, that Jesus would be proactive in challenging people in situations that were contributing to the suffering of others.

**Elray Henriksen** 06:32

Well, you explained in your closing challenge that and I quote, "When Corinthians 5:17 states, 'If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation, everything old has passed away.' It is talking about much more than personal salvation. It is proclaiming that if we truly are living and moving in Christ, we're becoming a new kind of human being within a new kind of humanity. Some authors conclude Jesus was the prototype or forerunner of a new peaceful humanity. They emphasize Jesus's peaceful manner." End quote, In our first webinar, we had Professor Richard Wrangham, a friend of Jane Goodall, talk about our evolutionary tendencies as humans, how we can both be incredibly kind, and yet also calculatingly violent and vicious. What does repentance from our violent tendencies look like for you?

**Steve Veazey** 07:30

Well, I think it's becoming aware, within ourselves of the capacity to be violent, understanding it, and then taking steps to make sure that that doesn't become the dominating tendency in our lives. So we can make choices, how we're going to respond to any instinct or tendency towards violence that may be a leftover from our long history. And we can choose to be peaceful in our relationships and interactions. And I believe that spirituality or centering ourselves daily, in the spirit of God, the love of

God, the peace of Christ, is a very important aspect of resisting those tendencies and setting them aside.

**Elray Henriksen** 08:31

Are there things that you think we must change as in like, emotionally, mentally, even, would you say spiritually, in order to become a peaceful person. So, so what what must change in us?

**Steve Veazey** 08:47

I think it's learning skills of peacemaking, some of which start with ourselves. I've been involved with the Children's Peace Pavilion curriculum, the Children's Peace Pavilion is a peace museum, sponsored by the church, and it teaches children about how to live peacefully. And one of the activities is very simple. And it is when you're feeling like you're angry and going to respond in a violent way. Stop. Think. Think peace. And so those simple steps actually interrupt whatever is going on in us, that may turn us to act in a violent way. And I think it's as basic as that. But then, our growing spirituality helps us become more and more and more that way. So that eventually we become centered in the spirit of peace and that defines our life.

**Elray Henriksen** 10:04

This is kind of a follow up question because it's, it's more about the practicality of it. I mean, can it be maintained this spirit this, this presence of the spirit in our lives, and at the center of our lives? Are there new rules or new principles by which we could live by? And if so, Which ones?

**Steve Veazey** 10:27

That's a very challenging question. In some ways, each person is a unique combination of different influences at work in terms of our makeup, and our psyche, our emotional makeup and mental makeup. So I would say, the key is regular spiritual practices that keep us centered in that spirit. It is difficult to maintain that. But if we have within our lives, practices or activities that cause us to pause, to think, to think peace, and then begin to reorient what we're feeling, and how we would have acted if we hadn't done that. That to me is a spiritual practice that I include in my personal resources of how I manage life. So I would say regular spiritual practice, spiritual formation, also having within our own minds, a technique to keep us from just reacting in the moment that causes us to question what's going on, to call on our higher consciousness to hold in check what some of our more basic tendencies may be.

**Elray Henriksen** 12:06

And you would do that even if somebody really pushed your buttons?

**Steve Veazey** 12:12

Well, I'm not always successful. But yes, I try. But it's not 100%. But at a maximum, it helps. And it keeps me growing in the right direction. So in life experience I've discovered that it is a way to live more peacefully and more justly in the world.

**Elray Henriksen** 12:37

So in talking about pushing buttons, the story of Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus can be helpful, don't you think? Paul goes from persecuting and killing followers of Jesus to being completely

transformed by God's grace towards God's enemies? Is there something to learn from Paul's conversion story for us collectively, as we come to better understand who Jesus is, like he did?

**Steve Veazey** 13:03

Well, of course, that's a very dramatic story. And I don't think we should measure all of our personal experiences to that experience. However, in that experience, we can find principles that will help us understand what it means to become a follower or disciple of Jesus Christ. So in Paul's experience, we can say, there can be dramatic change happen in our lives, as a result of becoming aware of Jesus Christ. And beginning to orient our lives in the direction of Christ, we can change and it's noticeable change, because some of the people who knew Paul couldn't believe even the Christians couldn't believe the dramatic change that had happened to him. But then over time, as he expressed his discipleship and apostleship, they came to understand that this was the very thing they had been talking about. That when we focus our faith, in, through, on Jesus Christ, people come new persons. And that's what the Scriptures are talking about. The old self dissolves—a new person—not that we look any different. Not that all aspects of our lives are disrupted, but we become noticeably new as a result of our encounter with Christ. And I think that's what we can draw from that experience of the Damascus Road and Paul's encounter with the light of Christ.

**Elray Henriksen** 14:56

So how does an understanding of the passion and concerns of Jesus Christ—so it seems to me that there is something about the relational aspect of our human nature that you just talked about without using that word. But it seems to me that that's, that's one of the things that is probably important in the new nature, the new creation, is is how we are relationally to others. And I'm thinking now to ourselves, to creation itself, and perhaps to God as well. So how does an understanding of the passions and concerns of Jesus Christ, prevent us from dehumanizing others and challenge our prejudices, or preconceived notions about that? How are we transformed in relation to others?

**Steve Veazey** 15:42

Well, from my perspective, and experience, a lot of the old ways with which we have stereotyped, and categorized and defined, people are disrupted, they dissolve. And that is the work of the Holy Spirit, in our lives. And in our relationships, I often talk about the peace of Jesus Christ in terms of all of our relationships. So the gospel is very much about relationships, not just personal lives, but relationships. And so those relationships are transformed because we begin to see people in new ways. And ultimately, we are able to see all people as children of God, from the same creator, and each being a unique expression of the image of God. And that's why there's so much variety and, and diversity. But instead of seeing human differences as a reason to separate, we recognize that human diversity is expressive of God. And so when we gain that perspective, through the gospel of Christ, all of our relationships change.

**Elray Henriksen** 17:14

From a European perspective, what seems to be happening in the US at the moment, in leading up to very decisive elections seems to be very divisive, very polarizing. I've seen many people complain about the polarization that is happening between people also between peoples in the church, and

where do you see us moving in, in the future in terms of not only loving our neighbors who might be politically opposed to us, but also in terms of loving our enemies, people we just don't get along with?

**Steve Veazey** 17:49

Yeah, that's a very challenging aspect of applying the teachings of Jesus to our everyday lives, including our politics, which in some ways, politics is about creating opposition, and creating animosity in order to rally a group of people to support polar direction in in society. It's not easy. But I know, in my own life, even in the current situation, in the US, I've tried to practice everything we're talking about. And at times, it is a struggle. But I've discovered that it brings a certain attitude and perspective that enables you to get beyond the polarization, while at the same time, staying focused on the priorities of the gospel. And so it enables you to move in that direction. And keep your focus there, which is where Jesus said our focus shouldn't be. So that is what I try to do. And if I'm feeling any anger, or animosity, I try to pause. I think about it. And I pray, I pray for those who don't represent what I stand for, as well as I pray for what I believe God is for. And I have discovered in my own life, that that's the best way to live in such tense polarized times.

**Elray Henriksen** 19:50

I'm very curious about this because I think that we live with systems that interfere with our best efforts on being peaceful humanity. As a church movement, what what do you see anything that we could we could do to provide and build bridges across political spectrums across political divides even?

**Steve Veazey** 20:19

Well, I can tell you what we're attempting to do. And maybe that points to what could be done. As you noted, such polarization finds its way into the church. And people feel very passionate in their political perspectives. In my personal ministry, I try to help people discover where their highest allegiance is. Is it to political party? Is it to nationalistic kinds of views, or is it to the kingdom of God, or the reign of God on earth. And of course, the gospel perspective on that is that our highest allegiance should always be to the reign of God. And so that needs to become the center, or the reference point for everything else in our lives. Secondly, we as a church try to demonstrate and help people learn the skills of civil conversation in the midst of conflict. And so those are practical peacemaking skills at a very interpersonal level that obviously apply to religion in the public forums as people are discussing issues. Thirdly, we have developed and continue to develop a common consent process where people from the nations of the world. So now we're including different cultures, different languages, different perspectives arising from throughout the whole world, in a process of dialogue and decision making. And I personally feel that one of our potentially greatest contributions is to present to the world an example of how people from all over the world can come together, and have civil conversation and eventually make decisions or maybe choose not to make a decision yet, in order to continue to explore issues. Those are some of the more practical aspects. Now, I guess one would hope from a gospel perspective, that if we are successful in sharing the gospel with others, and inviting them in to peaceful community, and that we have groups and congregations that demonstrate that people will be changed, in terms of how they engage in oppositional politics in the world. And so the very process of the gospel itself, of helping us lay aside our old selves, that have been defined by conflict and opposition and etiology, we become a new self, that still very much concerned about issues in the world. But now the

way we approach them, includes an emphasis on maintaining relationships, and healing relationships, not severing relationship.

**Elray Henriksen 23:57**

Yeah, it's very easy these days to just unfollow a friend or, or, or to start, you know, just to stop being friends with somebody—unfriend somebody on Facebook or whatever. And, and this is part of the the challenge we were faced with, I think in terms of, we make friends, but then we don't want them etc.

**Steve Veazey 24:19**

Our relationships need to need to come from a deeper level of the worth of persons seeing people as children of God. And that gives us the perspective that enables us to stay in relationship, even though we may have strongly opposing perspectives on certain issues. It's a challenge and as you pointed out in the United States right now, it is being tested severely. And in the midst of that our members and ministers are trying to keep people engaged in civil discussion and not sever their their relationships with each other.

**Elray Henriksen 25:08**

It's almost like politics is kind of like, you know, there are different ways to get to the kingdom of God. But then the question is, what does the kingdom of God actually look like, or, you know, the the reign of God on Earth look like. And, and this is just, I mean, as you as you talk, and I'm thinking about these things, because I think that this is also how we lead a conversation in terms of bringing us together, realizing that sometimes our goals might differ, and our means and ends to reach that goal might also differ. But it's a whole different discussion, I just want us to move over to the environment and creation itself. We are understandably worried about the environment these days, the climate, species extinction, ice caps, melting wildfires, serious droughts, and many more concerns. It's a crisis. Urgent, decisive and collective political action is needed. And our societies and economic economies will likely need to change as well to prevent catastrophe. How does your educational background in biology and environmental sciences influence your vision of peaceful creation?

**Steve Veazey 26:28**

Well, my background in environmental studies, biology, natural resources management, gives me a high level of sensitivity and awareness of what's going on around us. And, and one of the concepts, that's basic, to studies in all of those areas, is the concept of what's called carrying capacity. And that's the capacity of a local natural system, or one that's bigger, to support the number of life forms that are dependent on that natural environment. And when you exceed that ecosystem's or natural environment's carrying capacity, then bad things begin to happen. Species begin to die off. And that throws out of balance, a number of aspects of the system itself, which is all inner connected. Disease begins to be rampant. And so it's like, almost like nature is trying to rebalance, but it's doing that in its own desperate attempt not to go so far as all of life being destroyed in that environment. And that concept haunts me, when I think about everything I'm reading about what's happening globally, both to the natural resources of the earth, and the environmental resources of the air and atmosphere. We're seeing all kinds of signs that nature, the environment, the Earth, are extremely stressed right now. And we are being given indicators of that. In the biological sciences, there's another concept called indicator species. And that is you watch what's happening to that particular life form. And it'll tell you what's

happening in the environment, and what is likely to happen to other life forms. And so as we watch indicator species in the environment, we also see a lot of crisis and stress going on. Now, how does that impact me in terms of my theological perspectives? The relationship is understanding that the natural creation has a certain finitude to it, and that's a theological category, isn't it eternal? Or is it finite? and physical creation is finite, and is dependent on everything working as it's designed to work. Another theological concept is we have a tendency to view all of creation as being there for the use of humankind. And so that makes it a very human centered theology in relation to creation. And we're finding out that doesn't work. Because if we engage in activities of abusing natural resources, there's not an infinite supply. We run into the theological category of it's finite, and there's only so much. It's not limitless. And so we have to re-imagine, re-think how we approach all of this theology. And we have to reground our theology in a God centered view of creation. It sounds pretty simple. But when we think about our behaviors, a lot of our behaviors have to do with "this is here for me, this is here for me to use to consume to accumulate." We have to reset that—that's the word I was looking for—back to a God centered creation, and understand that when God said, through the different phases of creation, "it's good, it's good, it's very good," that God wasn't saying, it's good for the sake of humans, who are going to follow along. God wasn't even saying, it's good for me. God was saying, inherent in the creation is goodness. Goodness. And therefore, we, as one of the life forms—creatures who are dependent on that creation—need to respect it as such. That kind of got me going, didn't it?

**Elray Henriksen** 32:10

Are you saying in a way that the idea of peaceful humanity can actually address our relationship and impact on peaceful creation or on the rest of creation, rather?

**Steve Veazey** 32:22

Yes, given our place, and our capacity to impact aspects of creation, we have an unusually high responsibility and obligation: stewardship over creation. That we need to take very seriously. And that we need to focus on in terms of our own behaviors, and our group behaviors, or we're going to be overtaken by significant problems.

**Elray Henriksen** 32:57

I've been thinking about my favorite story in the New Testament, with Jesus coming into the temple in preparing for this particular podcast, I was thinking that, you know, is Earth our temple? And have we made it a den of robbers?

**Steve Veazey** 33:16

Well, I think that's a very, in some ways, not only powerful understanding, it's, it's accurate, not necessarily in relation to every human being, but in terms of overall attitude and, and behavior. That would be well within my understanding of what's going on in the world. And the concept of Earth as temple, in my study of scriptural theology of temple, the concept of temple can be applied in multiple ways. It can be a physical temple that focuses our thoughts on God, and represents God's connection with us on Earth. It can be your life, it can be my life. Jesus was referred to as a new temple through the incarnation. The early church, as a community was understood in some ways as a household of God, a spiritual household of God, the temple. And then as we move along in the New Testament, the idea gets broader and broader, to where in the book of Revelation as it begins to talk about everything

coming together, according to God's purposes and there being harmony, the images associated with temple become very symbolic to the explanation of what's going on and all of creation is God's temple. So, a long answer to your observation, but I would say yeah, I would understand it that way.

**Elray Henriksen** 35:00

So when you consider these words of the first verse of "We Limit Not the Truth of God" in Community of Christ Sings hymn 69, what comes to your mind? Let me read this first verse, "We limit not the truth of God to our poor reach of mind. By notions of our day and sect, prove partial and confined. No, let a new and better hope within our hearts be stirred—the Lord hath yet more light and truth to break forth from his word." What comes to your mind?

**Steve Veazey** 35:31

Well, what comes to my mind is our tendency as human beings, to try to define God in a certain way, because we want seritude in our lives. And that by doing that, we then limit our understanding of God to what we have thought, at that point in time. I think that does not contribute to our ongoing growth and understanding. So we come up with statements that we think contain God or that are God and and that often, well always proves not to be the case, because God is beyond any creeds. God is beyond any dogma. God is more than any attempt to describe who God is. And that's why ultimately, our perspective towards God is one of faith. But faith that seeks understanding so that we continue to grow. I often say to people, "Let God be God." And they say, "Well, what do you mean by that?" And I say, "Well, there may very well be insights, understandings and experiences with God, that are yet before us, and circumstances that we have yet to experience or that humankind has yet to experience, so don't limit God." I often refer to the experience of Jacob who was sleeping out in the desert with his head on a rock, having fled there thinking that he had moved beyond the reach of God, which he closely related to his homeland. And then he had the experience of a dream where he saw the ladder and angels descending and ascending and he wakes up and he says, "God is in this place, and I didn't know it." So he was being challenged to expand his concept of God beyond what he had previously thought was the case. And I think that gets right to the heart of "we limit not the truth of God to our poor reach of mind."

**Elray Henriksen** 38:12

And do you see that relating to peaceful humanity in relation to other things that we ought to be relating ourselves to?

**Steve Veazey** 38:22

Yes. And in the Community of Christ tradition, of course, we have a very vigorous belief around Continuing Revelation. And that is built on the very premise of, "We limit not the truth of God." And recently—I say recently, I'm talking about decades—we have been counseled, called, summoned, encouraged, to incorporate more and more into our lives and into our community of faith, those aspects of the gospel that relate to justice and peacemaking. And I consider that very much within the spirit of restoration, as trying to be as faithful as possible to who Jesus was, and and what Jesus was all about. And we remain open to adjusting our understandings in order to be more faithful to our best understanding of who Jesus was and what Jesus was all about. Yeah, so peaceful humanity and the desire and willingness of the church to continue to orient itself in that direction—it very much applies to



what you were saying. And that's why this emphasis of peaceful humanity following the peaceful one is moving to the fore of our thinking and discussion in the church. That's an area of growth for us.

**Elray Henriksen** 40:05

I'm just looking at my next question here, we're actually reading a bit from Doctrine and Covenants 163. And if you don't mind and our listeners are okay with it, I will read some of the words that were presented to the church. And then we will have a question about that. In Doctrine and Covenants 163, you encourage us to follow Christ in the way that leads to God's peace. Here are some of the excerpts that I've chosen, in that respect. "Follow Christ in the way that leads to God's peace and discover the blessings of all of the dimensions of salvation. The hope of Zion is realized when the vision of Christ is embodied in communities of generosity, justice and peacefulness. Above all else, strive to be faithful to Christ's vision of the peaceable Kingdom of God on earth. Courageously challenged cultural, political, and religious trends that are contrary to the reconciling, and restoring purposes of God. Pursue peace. It is not pleasing to God when any passage of scripture is used to diminish or oppress races, genders or classes of human beings. The church is called to confess and repent of such attitudes and practices." So when we read this, it sounds like a call to repentance to the church collectively, to a new form of engaging in social justice. So peace and justice making, and...but it is one that is birthed out of our new creation in Christ, would you be able to speak to that?

**Steve Veazey** 41:43

Sure. And I think you've already summarized it in what you've said. In my experience with being called upon to offer these words of counsel to the church that the church eventually approved for inclusion in the Doctrine and Covenants, there was a very strong spirit of connecting ideas in order for us to understand more clearly what it was that we were being called to be and do in the world. Obviously, as Community of Christ, we're centered in faith to Christ, that focuses on Christ, we're engaged in Christ inspired community endeavors. That's the spirit that infuses our fellowship together, and our ministries in the world. So the focus, which is very New Testament, on becoming new creation in Christ, drives all that follows in terms of who we're called to be, and what we're called to do in the world. And so this particular collection of paragraphs from the Doctrine and Covenants, says, this is who we are. So it gives us a strong sense of identity that goes beyond our own history, but that includes it. This is what we're called to do in order to be who we are. And that's in harmony with concepts of the gospel, and of our own history, like the concept of Zion. Maybe not all of our previous understandings of Zion. But in very basic principles of the Zion concept there is a consistency with those aspects of the gospel that focus on new humanity and new creation. And it's not a call to separation. It's not a call to quietism or just passive stance in life. If we're being true and faithful to the gospel, our own experience, then we engage the world with those values and characteristics that emerge out of that experience. And we try to bring about change in the world itself, some aspects of which are obviously contrary to God's divine purposes in the world. So in those passages, I see connections. I see connections all the way back to Jesus Christ. With our own history, and then what it all means in terms of today and tomorrow, and how we are to live our lives and conduct ourselves in the world.

**Elray Henriksen** 45:15

Another thought that has kind of followed from from Doctrine and Covenants 163, in terms of this call for social justice and to engage in it, is also what we experienced with Doctrine and Covenants 165.

And I'll quote from some of the passages (prefaces) that you provided, if that's okay. This one relates to John 17. "Following the approval of Section 164 in Doctrine and Covenants, I persisted in asking God about the meaning and implications of Paragraph 5 in that Section, and Galatians 3:27-29." So these are these are your own words to the to the world...

**Steve Veazey** 45:56

The preface to that part, yes.

**Elray Henriksen** 45:59

Yes. So, "I sought additional understanding of the spiritual that would allow us to see ourselves and others from the changed perspective, emphasized in Section 164 verse 5. My journey continued as I was encouraged to study John 17. So John 17, conveys the prayer of Jesus for his disciples as he approaches death on the cross. As I reflected on this text, the spirit urged me to invite the church to go much deeper in its understanding of the oneness with and among his disciples who Jesus prayed for. Catching sight of the possible future, I marveled at the blessings that could be enjoyed by the church as we respond." So what future do you see here for the church? And how would a better understanding of John 17 help us reinterpret the great and marvelous work for our own time and place?

**Steve Veazey** 46:53

Revelation is encounter with God. And when you have that encounter, you immediately begin to try to make sense of it, interpret it, you call upon your language, your past experience, other parts of the canon. And everything that follows is engagement with an experience that in many ways is beyond description. So the written account, or the written record, is an attempt to provide enough, or to the best a human can, words that will invite others and the church into that kind of encounter. I hope that makes sense. The idea is that more and more of us, if we have that kind of encounter, we will see and understand. And then our lives will be shaped by that. It's also my perspective that the Holy Spirit—when people read words describing that encounter—the Holy Spirit helps them understand in ways that are most helpful to them in their individual lives and circumstances. In this particular case, I found it powerfully meaningful that I was reflecting on this, that I was drawn in to focusing on Jesus's prayer towards the end of his life. It's like everything Jesus had said and done was coming to a focus, as Jesus understood that ultimately, this was going to cost him his life. And so he's praying for what will happen afterwards with his disciples. And he's describing the condition that he hopes and yearns for as one of oneness with God and each other. And there again is the relational aspect of the gospel. Oneness with God and each other is the fulfillment of Jesus's vision for creation and at the heart of his passion, which includes even his willingness to suffer and die in order for that to be the future reality. Oneness, as I've pointed out at various times, is not sameness. It's not uniformity. It's a spirit of relationship. We're able to live together in that deeper kind of love, which enriches our relationships, while not trying to force everyone to conform, or be exactly the same. Is the power of community. It's the very essence of community. But Jesus was praying for that, as the way forward after his crucifixion, and resurrection that his spirit would live on, in the oneness experienced among the disciples or followers, who were going to live out the vision of Christ in community. I think he was also saying that what he had experienced—what he was in terms of his own oneness of God, with God—is a higher level of spiritual consciousness, and awareness. So he wasn't just talking about the disciples getting along, because he had told them to, he was saying, in essence, that the disciples could reach that level

of awareness and consciousness, that he called oneness with God and that would be the transforming power in their lives. That would both equip them and compel them to live, as he had described they should live in his sayings, enemy love, and foregoing violence and so forth. That state of oneness would be the perspective and the experience that would, would in essence, empower and free them to live the very things he had taught,

**Elray Henriksen** 52:25

What difference has following Jesus, the peaceful One then made in your life?

**Steve Veazey** 52:31

All the different. I grew up in a culture that was defined, in some ways by separation between races, and socio economic levels. And following Jesus, the peaceful One has caused me to question the ways of the world, society around me. And to both choose to live differently myself, and try to share with others an alternative vision of the way life could be. And to share it in a way that they would feel drawn to it and attracted to it so that they could participate in and participate in creating that alternative, future, or creation. And all of that comes from my understanding of who Jesus was: the living Christ, and Christ as ultimately defined as the peaceful One.

**Elray Henriksen** 53:47

You called recently the church to metamorphosis. And this question is from one of my friends here in Brussels, in our congregation. Many of us are new members in Brussels, we've just joined the church in the last year or so. And when you call for change, we don't know what change we are changing from and to what we are changing towards. So it creates for us anyway, a lot of uncertainty. We are in the search of what this identity, this Community of Christ identity means. And we're trying to form these groups together that would realize the dream, this cultivating peace together. So how can we participate in this change, in the metamorphosis that you're talking about, when we only new members in the movement? This movement has been ongoing for already 200 years, and if not counting two thousands since Christ came to earth?

**Steve Veazey** 54:52

That's a really good question. And it causes me to begin to think about things from a different perspective, having been one very immersed in the church, since I can remember, it really reminds me to also try to gain the perspective of those who are just connecting with the church at this point in the journey, so the question has value in and of itself. So I'll try to make a preliminary response, but I'm going to think about it more. And it'll probably impact what I do, and perhaps say to the church, in the future. So I'm grateful for the question. Two things come to mind quickly. One is, from our perspective, as a church, there was a long period of time that our focus was on trying to prove ourselves as a church, as a legitimate church, and distinguish ourselves, other movements, that may have some similarities or similar names. And we were really concerned about that. And a lot of our approaches to teaching the gospel, to outreach came out of that perspective. We have to prove who we are, we have to prove our legitimacy. And then there's been a period of time since I would say, the early 60s, that we began to recognize that our call was not to prove ourselves. Our call was to be who God was calling us to be, and to recenter our faith, and our life together on Jesus Christ. Not the church, not some prominent historical figures from our past. And so we began to move, to focus on who Christ was, what

Christ said, and did. And as we have done that, we have experienced transformation in our understanding of the gospel, and how to express it in the world. So now we're involved in this remarkable journey of discovering just how strong the justice and peace making aspects of Christ's life and ministry were, and are. And so we're embracing that with enthusiasm in our pursuit of being as authentic and faithful as we can. Secondly, I would say, in terms of identity, look to our Enduring Principles. A group of people came together, about 80 people from around the world who were Community of Christ. And we tried to find a common language and common phrases that we could use that we would all understand that would help us understand ourselves, but also to talk about various issues. And the Enduring Principles of the church emerged as an understanding of identity. And why I say that is I'm aware of situations in various parts of the world where the church is just beginning, but the way it is beginning is to focus on the Enduring Principles, and then to develop community life around it. And so my suggestion in the kind of situation you're describing, the best place to connect with the Community of Christ experience is through the Enduring Principles, which carry with them, the best of who we are from our history, but also point to who we continue to become. And if you understand that, then you're right in the middle of the journey, and we welcome you. Because we need the perspectives of those who are coming from different life experiences, different cultural backgrounds, to contribute, to contribute to our understanding, of this remarkable journey that we've had with God.

**Elray Henriksen** 59:56

One of my favorite movies and perhaps illustrations of Zion in modern cinema is found in the Matrix movie "Reloaded." In this movie Zion is a diverse community of believers and doubters in the prophecy. They've been awakened from their deep sleep that has been induced by machines. And this community must fight both within the matrix and outside of it in order to resist oppressive forces and create an alternative reality. How do you see us revisiting the prophetic term of Zion today in our globalized culture? And does such a revisiting link to peaceful humanity?

**Steve Veazey** 1:00:45

Well, I would certainly hope so that it leads to peaceful humanity, because from my perspective, that is the aim of God's reconciling and healing activity in creation. But as you know, using the example of the Matrix movie, there are a lot of voices, influences, and powers and work in the world who have caused humanity to believe that our current reality is the only way to live together and to be together. The very nature of the concept of Zion or the reign of God is one of hopeful proclamation. No, what we're experiencing is not reality. Neither is it God's will, what we're experiencing is more of an illusion, even though we're very used to it, and what God has placed before us as a vision of possibility is the real reality. And so there is a process of awakening and becoming aware, and then turning our lives toward the vision of God's reign. Some would say Kingdom of God, as where we want to live. Now, here's the key. Once we awaken to that, and have the courage to begin to embrace that vision, we start living now, as if that reality already was in place. We live as if what will be already is. And that's the way people of faith and followers of Christ live in the world. And that's why it may seem at times that we're not in sync with what's going on around us. But in actuality, we're already inhabiting the kingdom Zion in our lives. And so that's the way I would connect it.

**Elray Henriksen** 1:03:18

Yeah, I love it. So we are asking all our guests this question, this key question for these peaceprojects.eu. So, President Veazey, what would you do for peace?

**Steve Veazey** 1:03:29

What would I do for peace? I can talk about what I'm trying to do. In a national setting where racial tensions are heightened, there are calls for racial justice. What I am doing on a personal level level is when I encounter people of other races, I take initiative, to be nice, to be friendly, to smile, to say hello, to engage them in conversation. And I believe in and of itself, that's an act of racial reconciliation. So I'm doing that. I also support organizations and movements that are focused on justice and peacemaking. I'm a supporter here in the United States of what's called the Poor People's Campaign. And that's a continued, that's a continuation of the civil rights movement, including the March on Washington where Martin Luther King Jr. gave his "I Have a Dream" speech. It's actually a resurgence, a continuation of that movement. And then in my ministerial role, I emphasize what we've been talking about, as needing to orient our lives and our church, to Jesus, the peaceful One, and that that is the truest restoration that could occur when we find that connection. So in the church context, in the Christian context, I talk about Christ centered, and Christ inspired peace. So that peace becomes very much a part of our understanding of Jesus Christ or part of our Christology in terms of our beliefs about Christ, I also am very intentionally teaching my grandchildren who range in age from about a year and a half to eight years old now to think about situations from the perspective of peace. And I've been teaching them what I mentioned earlier about the little technique. When they're in spats with each other or others, I'll say "stop", they'll look, and then I'll say, "think, think peace." And so I'm trying to teach younger generations, how to live in the world in a more peaceful way. So from personal to networking with other organizations, to ministerial, I try to make sure I have the focus of peace, clear and integrated through all of those

**Elray Henriksen** 1:06:26

Thank you President Veazey for joining us in this podcast in the series Grounds for Peace, and for providing us with ideas and ways we can make new creation a reality and move into that reality. You've been incredibly generous in doing both a webinar and now a podcast with us. This is a Project Zion Podcast and today I was your host, Elray Henriksen from Brussels, Belgium. Thank you for joining us today. May I in closing ask you, our audience to consider this question too, "What would you do for peace?" Do you have anything in closing you would like to say President, Veazey?

**Steve Veazey** 1:07:07

I want to thank you, first of all, for the opportunity to engage in the conversation. I find it's always valuable to receive questions to have to think more and harder about things I may be saying or teaching, so that's a gift to me. And then secondly, I would encourage people to really explore what Jesus said and did for peace. And then let's embody that in our lives and relationships because that's where hope comes from. Thanks.

**Josh Mangelson** 1:07:45

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