

Episode: 315 | Toward the Peaceful One | Matt Frizzell
Project Zion Podcast

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.

Karin Peter 00:33

Hello, and welcome to Project Zion Podcast. I'm your host, Karin Peter and today we are embarking on a series of interviews with all of the authors of the year long series of Herald magazine articles exploring the guiding question, "Are we moving towards Jesus, the peaceful One?" For those of you who are wondering what the Herald magazine is, it is the official Community of Christ magazine publication that comes out every two months, and you can find it to subscribe at Herald house.org under the our faith tab on the menu bar. In today's interview we're visiting with Matt Frizzell. Matt has served Community of Christ in many capacities, and is currently Director of Human Resource ministries. Matt is a former dean of the Community of Christ seminary. He holds a doctorate in theology and ethics from Chicago Theological Seminary. And more importantly, Matt is a dad, a husband, a colleague, and a friend. So welcome, Matt, and thanks for being here.

Matt Frizzell 01:35

Thanks, Karin. It's good to be here.

Karin Peter 01:38

So we're going to be talking about your Herald article in the Toward the Peaceful One series, and your article is titled "Jesus Christ in Restoration Perspective." And in it, we'll begin by referring to the crisis that Christian denominations, and more broadly, Christianity itself is finding itself. Can you give us an overview of what you're talking about this crisis in which we find ourselves?

Matt Frizzell 02:04

Sure, of course, you know, a good answer would easily take an hour. So I'll try to, I'll try to be brief and just kind of touch on some highlights.

Karin Peter 02:14

This is podcast land, Matt. So no hour answers.

Matt Frizzell 02:17

Well, yeah, and yeah, I kind of want to, I don't want to leave anybody out. But sometimes you have to just do your best. So um, so the beginning of the article is an attempt to tie a couple of things together. First of all, is is really trying to start with, I think, a tacit or very explicit feeling that a lot of people have, if they're, if they grew up, you know, churchgoers really have it doesn't matter what church and I'm thinking primarily of the North American experience, just because that's what I know. With that sense of, you know, just things are changing in they've, and they've been changing for quite some time. Um, even I even tell people throughout my entire lifetime, you know, I'm 47. So I mean, my whole lifetime, the church has been in just some kind of great wave of change. And whether it's the the graying of the

congregation, the shrinking numbers, the decrease tithing and attendance, there's just so many things that are changing, that people feel and see. And you know, we talked about it, but I often don't think we talk about it without or without, we don't often have a lot of answers, or even sometimes good analysis on why it's happening and what's causing it. So that I try to start with just that experience, but also, to tie it into a larger view of there there is there is change happening to Christianity and religion all over the globe. Whether we want to talk about fundamentalism on the rise in many different forms, it's easy to point out "the other", as you've heard it used, you know, we talk about Islam, that's not fair. It's happening in Christianity. It's it's happening in many other religions. Hinduism has a form of fundamentalism that's been that's emerging in India, or it has been there. And so fundamentalism is one way globally, things are changing it for religion. There's also just, you know, growth in things like Pentecostalism. And so that that's attracting people in a lot of ways. In many parts of the world. What I try to point out in the article is that it kind of changes depending on where you are, right? So wherever you're listening to or reading the article, I try to just bring out the fact that things are changing in a lot of places, and depending on where you are, defines what those changes are. But that sense of changes is really disrupting disturbing and it causes us to want to respond either naturally or thoughtfully. And that's kind of where the article goes.

Karin Peter 04:47

So in Community of Christ, we have entered into a period of discerning what this change means for us as a body of believers. And you write in the article that "prophetic people are awake discerning the essential questions and seasons of change." and then you go on to give examples, Moses, Jesus, even Joseph, who I'm assuming Joseph Smith, you're talking about in your restoration lens for your article. But the people that these individuals led, they experienced grief, dissatisfaction, confusion and fear as part of this process of change. So what does that have to say to us in our current journey?

Matt Frizzell 05:30

That's a great question. I think it's, I guess, one, one reaction I have, and one thing that I, I think I've shared this way before, so maybe it's way too helpful, say here, I have the personal opinion, this is totally Matt Frizzell's experience, speaking and analyzing, but I'm of the opinion that, in many ways, the Community of Christ in North America continues to grieve. We're in many ways, we're grieving people struggling still in the wake of some of the changes and the schism that took place in the 1980s. In 1984, the passage of 156, the, the beginning of the Temple, the inauguration of women in the priesthood, all were in my view, just just incredibly positive and changes and to be honest with you, they were a little late in the game, from my point of view, but at the same time, they, they they caused a ripple through the church in a way that I think just continues to be felt. And in many ways, I've I've said in my personal opinion, that we're we're kind of a traumatize people in the North American church, but I would even say that across the globe in many contexts in the church, so I guess I'm trying to put a word on that suffering and that struggle that that is just hits close to home for a lot of people emotionally, if you grew up RLDS or Community of Christ, you know that that grief in that struggle changes if you if you're a convert to the church, or if if you you have your own story of change that's just so deeply rippled through your life. It's connected, it's connected to just the the prophet's role and the original story, I keep thinking of that story of Exodus, you know, right? I remember the first time I was in seminary, and I was, you know, learning more about the story of Exodus and how central it was to the Old Testament and how it really is the story of the Old Testament, that really defines God's movement in history in

Moses as the archetypal prophet, which Jesus is even, but Jesus, the deliverer, Savior, liberators, modeled after, and I remember reading and the exodus story, you know, the that passage where the Israelites are in the wilderness, that's the really the spiritual model for prophetic people going through change, you know, as the wilderness that's that it's a metaphor for where we are, I think, in Christianity in general. And of course, the wilderness isn't, isn't always a peaceful place to go hiking and enjoy the weather, and the scenery and the water are depending on where your wilderness is. There's this point in the story where, you know, Moses has it has the people, the Israelites out in the desert, and, you know, it's got so bad in the wilderness, that some of them even want to go back. They want to go back to slavery. I mean, the wilderness has to be a bad place, you can't see the smirk on my face. That's the downside of podcasts. But I mean, it's got to be a tough spot when you're on the other side of liberation. And you realize, at least the world was certain and secure, lacking oppression. And so that's the kind of, you know, when I hear that exact same struggle, of course, my memories are dated now. But I've heard some of that struggle, as people reminisce about, you know, time, back when, before it change in the church, you know, I wish we could go back to and a prophetic people, I think, have to struggle with two things. One, recognizing that change does happen, God is amidst change. And at the same time, there's really no way to go back. And that's part of the grief. So anyway, trying to put my trying to put words on that and trying to put meaning on that to draw a connection between the sense of loss and struggle, and, and, oh, grieving just seems the right word, but struggle, this struggle and suffering that can happen in difficult times of change, and to connect that to the biblical story, because sometimes we lose sight of that. This is, I mean, we're in a story of biblical proportions that prophetic people always are. And so there's much to be learned from going back and recognizing this phase or this plot that we find ourselves in because there's, there's so much meaning to be found in mining through our faith and its story. So I just said a lot. I hope that kind of answers your question, but I think that the issue of the grieving and the struggle that happened in a prophetic time.

Karin Peter 09:54

And the whole process of what wilderness is, right? It isn't, it is not easy. It's is difficult and we often do want to go back. So a lot of our listeners, Matt, have been in a season of transition, a season of change a season of a faith journey that has been disconcerting, to say the least. So it's not just the Community of Christ folks who have endured change after change, some celebrating supplementing, but we're in this period, our our Project Zion listeners have been in a period of change and discerning together. And one of the ways that you help kind of center us in your article is that you, you begin to talk about how Jesus is central to our discernment at this period of time. And you even go further to get to the basic of how Jesus is understood in Community of Christ theology and practice that that is central to our discernment. Can you share some, some critical pieces about that, for our listeners, when we begin to talk about Jesus through this restoration lens? And what that means in times of change?

Matt Frizzell 11:01

Yeah, I think the easiest way to answer that is to talk about it personally, maybe and just and see how, you know, other people might relate to it or, or even disagree, which is a way of relating, we'll see. I grew up I grew up our LDS and in West Michigan and West, Michigan's a very religiously conservative place. You know, Independence used to be this kind of mythical place in my mind where there was a Community of Christ Church, and every corner. Well, West Michigan is a place where there's a Christian reformed or Reformed Church of America, church on every corner. And so I grew up in a kind

of a, I figured that it's kind of the Bible Belt, but it's the buckle that got tossed north. And, and Anyway, it was, my family lineage is actually made up of kind of this mix of reformers and many generation Community of Christ folk, my mom and my dad both came from different religious traditions. My dad was the, RLDS or the Community of Christ side of it. Anyway, long the short of it is one of the things that, you know, I I came to kind of learn is that Jesus was important to the restoration, but it was he wasn't central in many ways in the story that I grew up hearing. In seminary, we even will pull out the old 1920s preaching charts, where we'll show you know, Joseph Smith is actually about four times the size of Jesus on the preaching chart to try to make the case that really there,

Karin Peter 12:23

I remember those.

Matt Frizzell 12:25

Yeah, well, it's a wonderful illustration that just kind of makes this point that Joseph Smith and Joseph Smith's prophetic experience, in many ways for Restoration folks was the was the was really the key figure in the center of the Restoration story. And, of course, it's that story is not possible without Jesus. But it's it Joseph Smith was really kind of took center stage in many ways. That's not really the RLDS story I grew up in, though it's part of it. I grew up in a congregation where I was really blessed to hear less about one true church and much more about Zion. During Wednesday, prayer services, or Sunday morning sermons, we really talked a lot about church and we talked a lot about Zion, those were the things that were talked about the most, they were central to my kind of natural or folkish, RLDS theological thinking. But Jesus really wasn't at the heart of it. But if you went to talk to all my reformation as my reformation friends, whether it's Dutch Christian Reformed, or just Christian Reformed or Reformed Church of America, Jesus was central. And so in many ways, they were kind of two different themes. And they didn't come together for me. Well, the long the short of it is, after after just kind of living my life and spiritually being on my journey, and of course, seminary had had a big role to play in that. As I as I learned more about who Jesus was, from a biblical perspective, even after kind of having an allergy to Jesus talk, because Jesus was part of a formula that saved me to heaven from hell, because I was a sinner. And that's kind of the only Jesus I really heard about. I began to realize and discover that Jesus was a Jew. And the Jesus of the New Testament actually is on recognizable you can't understand the Jesus in the New Testament, without really understanding Jesus as a Jew in light of the Old Testament. And in its the prophetic stories, the story of the prophets in the in the Old Testament about the the the call to Shalom, the establishment of God's people in the covenant, and then eventually that kind of emerging idea of a Messiah who would come and set things right again, that I began to understand what Jesus was about. When I, when I when I was learning about who Jesus was, and I noticed it really didn't fit the salvation formula that I was taught from my conservative or evangelical Christian friends. It was it was really a different Jesus. Well, I'm going through years of seminary And studying more about Jesus discovering more about Jesus having my own personal experience understanding the Jesus of biblical scripture. And lo and behold, 163 is written. And I run across this passage that really, in many ways, it was already familiar to me theologically, but I've never seen it crystallized in Restoration scripture. So clearly, Jesus Christ is the embodiment of God's shalom. And all of a sudden, the biblical Jesus, the ancient Jesus, in his context of first century Palestine, to use kind of my hoity toity historical Jesus theological language, was actually the Jesus of the Restoration. Because that for me, Jesus Christ is the body of God's shalom brought together and

kind of this really crispy, trite little sentence. And I mean that in a good way, brief and pithy sentence, this thick, amazing and marvelous theology, about who Jesus really was in light of God's grand project, which is the fulfillment of creation in the establishment of God's reign, or shalom in creation in Jesus was the bearer of that revelation, not only the presence of God's Shalom, right there among the people in first century Palestine in the time of Jesus, but also he brought that message, he was the message and the messenger, the presence and the forthcoming of the the inauguration of the kingdom of God on earth, where the veil between heaven and earth is broken and revealed in Jesus, that amazed me, because all of a sudden, the two pieces of Zion and Shalom, on one side of the story, and Jesus on the other side of the story came together in fulfillment, and became kind of a center of my faith in a way that had been developing and growing. But now was, I could draw back to my own restoration roots. And so that was really powerful. Go ahead.

Karin Peter 17:07

I'm, I want to clarify here, because you're touching on something for, for listeners, both Community of Christ, and who listeners who come from an LDS background, I want to make sure that we're articulating clearly, yeah, is that we are not talking about Jesus, the Jesus died to save you from your sins, and I have to be good, so I can go to heaven, Jesus, you are talking about completely different picture of Jesus as central to the Restoration movement. So I want to make sure that that, that we've said that, because that's, that's an ouch point for many folks who

Matt Frizzell 17:44

Absolutely.

Karin Peter 17:46

,who may not understand that. That's what we're talking about here. So yeah,

Matt Frizzell 17:50

I'm sorry, if I didn't make that clear. That's absolutely what I'm saying in many ways. That, yeah, that Jesus of the salvation formula is actually not the biblical Jesus at all. It's a very narrow construction of Jesus. Can you hear me spin into my theological explanation? I could give you a history of that 18th and 19th century salvation formula that emerges.

Karin Peter 18:14

But I'll save that for another, we'll save that for another podcast discussion. I just want to make sure that we're not talking about joining that Jesus with the embodiment of God's Shalom, that we're actually talking about embodiment of God shalom is, is the restoration perspective of Jesus.

Matt Frizzell 18:28

Absolutely. The embodiment of God's shalom is not the Jesus of heaven and hell. That's, that's a, that's a different that's entirely different theological worldview. And frankly, it's not a very biblical one. My friends will say, it's absolutely biblical based on a few foundational passages, but leaving out like the entire narrative, you know, leaving out so much, that it's a very selective view, and it's just not sound. It's not theologically robust. It's not, you hear me kind of I don't mean to use that jargon. It's just in the world of argument. It's not a good one. I mean, it's, it's, it's it leaves, it leaves God's shalom away or out

of the central project of God's creation. And that is, that's like cutting off the whole Old Testament. So in many ways, it is and so anyway, that Yes, very much the restoration Jesus is not the Jesus of the heaven and hell, or the salvation formula Jesus, it's the Jesus. It's not even the Jesus of perfect behavior. It's not the Jesus of an angry God atonement theory. It's the Jesus of the Jewish scripture. That is, is looking for the Prophet Messiah to reestablish the covenant and right the wrongs of the people. And in many ways those rights and wrongs, you know, we can get into talking about it has much more to do with this longing for God's grace and presence and reign again, and its possibility. Of course, Jesus is that possibility, which is what makes Jesus soul revelation revolutionary.

Karin Peter 20:03

Thank you for clarifying that. I wish people could see your facial expressions when you are at times incredulous and other times, thoroughly delighted as you talk about Jesus as the embodiment of God's shalom. You, you talk a little bit in your article about how people misunderstand not only Jesus, but misunderstand scriptures where Jesus is speaking. You use John 14:6 in that way, then and that's the scripture where Jesus is. It's in quotations where Jesus says, "I'm the way that you send the life and no one comes to the Father except through me." And you talk about another Christian misunderstanding. So let's go there for a minute. If we haven't, we haven't thoroughly boggled some, some minds out there. Let's try to do it here and see what you have to say about God's shalom. In light of this scripture.

Matt Frizzell 20:55

Well, yeah, this is this is a challenge. So Matt, Matt, the Theologian and Matt, the preacher got to kind of make sense of this because of course, those people communicate very differently. Whenever I talk about this, I'm talking about myself, right, the two people within me. I think, on one hand, this is a passage where it's really important to be to be thoughtful and careful and how I kind of talk about it. Because there are some theological nuances that are important to bear in mind, there is some hairsplitting that John is trying to get Jesus to do. By putting these words in Jesus's mouth. That's really important to realize when John's putting the words, "I am away in the truth of life, no one comes to the Father, except through me" and John's saying, This is what Jesus said, that's something to pay attention to. And there's a reason why John is having Jesus say that, and why it needs to be written down. And there is some parsing going on there is this sense of you know, there's more than one path and Jesus is the right one. But at the same time, it is not it, I think it's completely out of context and unfair and even bad, it's, it's, it's bad theology, it's bad preaching to say that this is Jesus's argument for saying, "Hey, yo, I'm the center of the real religion in the modern world come in my camp, because all the others are wrong." No, I don't think that's really what's happening. And frankly, that rips it out of its first century context, rips it out of John, and it makes it, it basically brings questions to the, to the passage that aren't there, when John is writing the passage, you know, so, in what I mean by that is, you know, we come to Scripture with some assumptions and questions, and usually they're based in our modern 21st century experience, not in our Jewish first century or second century experience, which is where John's writing to, so by by doing that, of course, we can read the wrong answers, because we're asking questions. So in this passage, I've already kind of said it, you know, what some of my evangelical Christian friends would even use this as a way to talk about how, you know, I, I was going to the wrong church. It wasn't the right Christianity, let alone being not the right religion, you know, Hindu, Muslim, Jewish, whatever. And, and I don't mean that whatever, like, I don't care. But I mean, it's an argument against any and all non Christian movements, and saying, Well, here, the Bible

says that Jesus is the only way to heaven, as if going to heaven, is the only religious question worth asking or ever been asked, which is absolutely ridiculous. What's happening in this passage is, is several things and I'm only going to touch on a couple of bits and pieces. First of all, it's really important to go back and really look at what John is saying about who Jesus is. First of all, he begins by saying, He's the word is the word of God made flesh. And that's real theological mumbo jumbo to say, God had an intention at creation. And that's what the word is. And God, and Jesus is that word. So when he says, you know, the word was present at creation, what he's saying is that there is an intention and everything God was doing, there was an essence and a purpose and a reason. And that's what Jesus manifests. And so Jesus was there at the beginning and what we're seeing in Jesus Christ, as the gospel unfolds, is that happening, that revelation happening all over again and other excuse me, that revelation happening to us, which is what God's purposes and reason and essence and creation is. And of course, what is the way in the truth of the life according to Jesus, love and serve one another to death. And they say that that's that that's the preacher side of me okay, so I'm trying to play on those words, you know, love and serve each other to death. both literally and figuratively. When John is having Jesus making that statement, he's doing a couple things. One, there is a time, John is writing at a time where there's real contention between between the Jews and the Christians about who Jesus is and what Jesus means as the Messiah. And what it means to even start, you know, naming Jesus, and really embracing him as the Divine Word. And there are competing, there's competing interpretations of Torah, which is the Way the instructions, the teaching, that's what Torah is. And so when John is saying, I'm the Way, the truth of the life, in many ways, he's saying, Jesus is the rabbi whose way in which we should follow not only by teaching by example. And so that is the way in the for the way to God. And so putting it back in that context, it becomes much less about it becomes much less about what right religion we belong to, and much more about what way of life and teaching and understanding of the law that we understand because of course, that's, that would have been the world that that John was writing to. It was a world in which you know, understanding what God's word meaning the revelation of, of Torah, what did that what does that mean? and john is saying, Jesus is the Jesus is the one who tells us what that is. And by the way, it means loving and serving each other, to death, not the works, but the revelation of God's love and relating to one another, and loving each other in this way. So in many ways that in some ways, you can even make the case if you wanted to preach it, that it's, it's kind of the opposite of what you hear from other from other religious traditions in terms of what love really means.

Karin Peter 26:25

Focus less on the "I am the way" and more on "way." Is that what I'm hearing you say?

Matt Frizzell 26:33

That Karin, you're a preacher too, I think you hit it on the head. I think that's a great way to get at it. Yeah, it is about the way and it's not about religion, as I you know, systems of ideas that some are right and some are wrong, it's much, it's much more than that. It's a way of life and community.

Karin Peter 26:51

So the way according to how you've shared with us, and then in looking at your article, this whole idea of the way is living the embodiment, then the embodiment of God, Shalom, if Jesus is the embodiment of God's Shalom, than the way is to do likewise. And to be that so let's look at that a minute you go on

to talk about Jesus Christ, God's shalom in the Restoration today in light of Doctrine and Covenants 163, which was a seminal moment, you talk about in your own story, this can be challenging, there's a lot to unpack in Section 163. And you you did some interesting, work with it. And you're you refer specifically to 3c, "There are subtle, yet powerful influences in the world, some even claiming to represent Christ that seek to divide people and nations to accomplish their destructive aims." It goes on to talk about dividing one human heart against another, you unpack that pretty thoroughly in your article here. Let's talk about that for a minute. This is challenging for Christians, and for many Commedia Christ folks, to really look at this and what that means. What do you have to say about embodying God's shalom in light of that text?

Matt Frizzell 28:13

That passage is really important, because it gives a prophetic people permission to discern the spirits in the times, no matter where they are. I mean, you some of your listeners may remember the old term Ziongeist, you know, the signs of times. And this passage gives real, in many ways, it sounds like the way I'm saying it is in a soft way, it gives, you know, prophetic people permission to discern the spirits, actually, it that's one of the key roles of a prophetic people is to discern the spirit of a thing, a movement, a person, an idea, a message, a movement. And, of course there are, that's an incredibly important thing to do. Because in Jesus's time, Jesus has all the time calling people out who are saying, "Do this in the name of holiness", and Jesus is going, "Bull crap! No!" you know, saying "That's not in the name of holiness at all. That's the name of hope, maybe your holiness, but not God's holiness. Let me explain this to you. Let me break it down." And then Jesus goes into that kind of really rhetorical rebuttal right there in public, which would have been, you know, not necessarily uncommon in Jesus's time. And even I guess I want to comment a minute about the way I said that we often are most of us are unconsciously brought up with a very 19th century view of Jesus, which, which is a view of Jesus as the ideal human moral Victorian, never disturbed emotionally even keeled. He kind of floats around but you can't see his feet move. Perfect. Liz Clairol hair I take that from Rob bell. When first time he talked about Jesus hair is Liz Clairol hair I just I kind of lost it. I got distracted. But anyway, it fit it fit the image of this beautiful perfect guy, right? And that's really not a biblical view of Jesus at all Jesus is, is, in many ways, if you put them back the language that he uses, he's, he's kind of rhetorician, he's a good argue, or he calls people out in public. He's kind of tangling with the Pharisees all the time. And so he's doing exactly what this passage is talking about, as Pharisees, religious leaders, and others are doing X, Y, and Z in the name of holiness, in the name of fulfilling Torah, in the name of doing God's will. Jesus discerns, the spirit and says, you know, this is more about you than it's about what you're asking these people to do. Or this is more about keeping an order that benefits you. That's really then really about what this is all based on, which is really the fulfillment of God's purposes, because even the law points to something beyond itself, which is something that the Pharisees and others kind of miss. So anyway, this passage, in 163, calls us to do the same, and gives us really the opportunity to experiment on the word as the prophets did, and call out in justices and tell truth to power, the best way we understand and see them. And I think we live in a world where many religious forces are betraying their roots all the time in the name of power, in the name of dividing people, making people basically separating human family as if we have different images of God, some better than others. And I'm not sure that's even remotely close to what we understand God up to at creation, and what we understand by the worth of persons, and the fact is that, that you have to love your neighbor, because you both share the same image. And unless you see yourself and your neighbor or

your enemy, you don't see them at all. You know, that's kind of where Jesus takes us in His message. So it's the call of the prophetic people to do that discerning the spirits and in call evil as it is. And of course, that's highly divisive. It's happening all around us. The very fact that racism exists or not, it blows my mind, it's become a political issue as if there's a as if it's a question. And and that blows me away. And the fact that we, we, the fact that we're willing to erase history, silence others, and basically keep up the facade of domination when, when we don't let people speak for themselves. In other words, in a world where it says, Yes, racism exists, and I'm a victim of it, it's not our position to say that it doesn't exist, that just perpetuates an evil. And so anyway, those kind of it's the role of the prophet to call out those kind of self righteous claims, in the name of calling for the way that God intended us to live. And the way Jesus teaches us to live in the way in his own example. So anyway, that's I feel like kind of rambled a bit. But that's, that's what I'm trying to get at with that. And I think, I think it's an incredibly important aspect of our faith to embrace because it means that the gospel has to be political. It doesn't, it can't be partisan, but that the word Kingdom cannot become a private, pious term, Jesus, reign of God, Jesus is Lord Kingdom of God, those are all political terms in Jesus's context. And so embracing that again and trying to call upon others to live in the reign of God, if they're going to wear they are, you know, bear the name of Jesus Christ. That is something that I think a prophetic people need to do.

Karin Peter 33:39

So discipleship as a prophetic people, to love to serve until death, to quote, a theologian of the day. That's a that looks different. Yeah, that looks different from a restoration perspective, because the embodiment of God's shalom to be about that, to be on that way of discipleship is the restoration of human relationships, living systems and the earth. We know that from Scripture, you talk about it in your article. Let's not get esoteric here. Let's just be specific. What's that look like? For individuals who want to follow Jesus? What is this restoration of human relationships, living systems on the earth?

Matt Frizzell 34:25

Well, in many ways, hopefully, I'm repeating some things that I even many of your listeners would say. Joining the campaign to consume less, joining others who are embracing the call of justice to protect others human rights, anything we can do to bring back the purpose and even an understanding of creation as a living thing that is meant to thrive in which human beings are also called to live in harmony with I'm thinking about Earth the living systems is something that Christian are absolutely called to do if for no other reason, it's because they believe that God is the creator of it all. God has a purpose in what God has created. And frankly, it's all still God's, what part of stewardship don't you understand it's kind of where I go in my, in sometimes my rhetorical preaching to try to help, remember remind us that the steward owns nothing. The steward is the caretaker of somebody else's property. And when we talk about environmental living systems are the earth that is exactly the model of creation that every Christian embraces the moment they say, I'm a Christian, or I'm baptized, or I believe in the Bible. We really any sort of sense of our own private property is something that is an invention and for us to serve and manage a certain way of life. But really, the good Christian reminds themselves that everything does belong to God, and it's for God's purposes, that all things are created. So that's, that's part of what that challenge is. But that also, that that sense of the sense of Shalom and restoration in healing of God's purposes, obviously goes to every living relationship. And so anyway, that that, you know, getting concrete about that means starting about where you live, do you know your neighbor?

Are you involved in your school? Do you, do you? I say neighborhood school because that's often one of the last places in modern community, modern society that communities still meet, you know, there's still that in grocery stores and coffee shops, schools, grocery stores, and coffee shop are still local.

Karin Peter 36:40

If your coffee shops are open during COVID. Yes.

Matt Frizzell 36:42

Yes. Well, I have to add to that, you know, gyms, because that's also a place where people locally congregate, though I've been in many gyms where there might be a dozen people in there, and nobody's talking to anybody. So sometimes they're not very communal. But my point is, is that sometimes they are. And anyway, my point is, is that identifying those places of community engaging them is a key aspect of what it means to be a disciple of Christ. It even goes down further than that, and asking yourself questions, do you break out of the boundaries of your community? Do you have the privilege to do so? And if you do, can you do so safely for the sake of the kingdom, Jesus was constantly we, you know, he was an itinerant minister has another way of saying he was homeless. He went from community to community and village, a village and place to pay place, interacting with people that he shouldn't be interacting with. That's part of that restoration purpose, too, because we're called to me talk about what really going bringing back the issue of racism. Segregation has made us all of us ignorant, and just because legal segregation, and it doesn't mean economic segregation isn't rampant in in many ways, no different than it was 60 years ago, in many ways. And so my point is, is that being Christian and being disciplined means willing to see those on the other side of the tracks or the other side of the city, or, or downtown or out and even rural areas as my neighbor and engaging in relationships, those people, or if nothing else, being concerned about their welfare. Again, I think I'm still being really abstract to the point that, and I'm not, I guess what I'm trying to say is, those questions are best answered where the listener is sitting, and asking themselves, who's my neighbor? How much am I consuming? What's my daily practice about? How is my, how do I live my stewardship? How does g How can what I do? restore the type of community and I love I'm using that term on purpose because restoration for me means something conceptual, not just historical, how can I restore the kind of community that God intended at creation? I think of that, you know, that famous call in Jewish faith to heal the world. This, this, this, our call to discipleship brings that back to us also, welcome to stranger and care about before, give generously. All those are really concrete ways to be an agent of restoration.

Karin Peter 39:22

So I have to ask Matt, as a disciple yourself as a Jesus, follower,

Matt Frizzell 39:28

Aspiring, aspiring Jesus follower.

Karin Peter 39:30

How are you hearing and responding to the prophetic call? How are you sensing God's Spirit at work in your life during this crisis of change? What's that look like for you in your discipleship?

Matt Frizzell 39:45

That's a tough question. But it's also the right one. I have to honor that one of the things I learned studying basically theology and ethics is that I benefit from a ton of the world systems. I mean, if the world is a pyramid, white, middle class educated men like me, heterosexual men are near the top. And I say that that's not a political statement. But it's actually something that I think most people can easily trace, if they just thought about it as a thoughtful people, you know, we, the US does not have the, you know, the most of the world's population, yet much of the world's wealth. Anybody who travels into other parts of the world and recognizes that there's a lot of, there's a lot of, there's a lot of privilege that we have here in the US. So I'm part of that. And one way or the other, the other thing I learned is that systems are incredibly hard to change. They'll eat you up first. And so it's, even if I just decide, you know, I'm going to get a car with good gas mileage, or try to eat fair trade chocolate, in many ways. I'm just, I'm just a, I'm just, I'm just buying into accommodations of a system that needs to change completely. So let me say it's hard to be a disciple, especially in a world that is brand new, meaning we live in a world where human behavior, and I talked about this in other places, we live in a world where human behavior affects the global conditions more than anything, any time in the history of the world before and in a way that of course, the writers of the writers and readers of the Bible, the original readers would have never even understood My gosh, they didn't know the world was round. The fact that we live in a world that is driven by human systems and human behavior that are very hard to change, makes discipleship, a challenge. And I think people should take it seriously before they just say, I believe in love. Well, it's believing in the shalom is harder, because you can love your neighbor when they're like you. So what do I do, um, in the midst of all that, sometimes it's small things, I try to pay attention to the way I spend my money, we made a huge decision to adopt. That's its own story. Margot, Margot, Margot remembers, my wife, Margot, she, I don't know if any of your listeners remember that famous story of, of the refugee facedown on the beach. This was about in 2017. It was a young boy, I believe. And Margot couldn't let it go and who should be able to let it go? Anybody who is human should be affected by that. And I looked at her and I remember those things versus very specifically, you know, Margot, there's not a lot we can do about Syrian refugees. But there are refugees in our own country. In many ways, they're not quite the same, but they don't have they don't have a safe place to home and live. They're victims or Ward's of the state. And somebody needs to help. And so we became licensed to foster and adopt, and we adopted a lever 11 year old young lady who, who constantly is teaching us about what it means to welcome a stranger and welcome to poor into our home. That's one way that we very consciously live our discipleship, Margot, and I and Margot teaches, I don't see myself as privileged enough to be able to avoid the political world. You know, there's a lot of people who say, I'm just gonna get out of politics, because they can avoid it, it is a privilege to be able to avoid politics, some people have no other place to turn, except to fight for, in some cases, just generosity on behalf of the State, you know, equal protections under the law, those types of things, it's a privilege to be able to say, I don't have to worry about that. I don't let myself not worry about that. I think about the interests of those that I know who have left, less privileges than I do and try to, I try to make a spiritual discipline of saying what how do I put those interests at the center of my political views at the center of my vote, why I'm willing and happy to pay taxes and then fight that they get spent in the right places. Those are things that I tried to do to be a part of God's shalom to live my discipleship. We live in a three generation household because it's crazy to have a 1800 or I don't 1500 3000, square foot home, whatever you name it. And for it to be empty all day, because everybody's at work or at school. That's just bad stewardship. So we live in we try to live in the three

generation home and try to express community that way. And we've, we've lived in intentional community before. So those are different ways that we do it.

Karin Peter 44:38

I want to thank you, Matt, not just for answering my questions for our listeners to to understand more about your article, but also for opening yourself a little bit so we can glimpse a bit of who you are through your answers and help us to explore and discern together what it means to move As a community towards Jesus, the peaceful One, especially through a restoration lens. Thanks. So any closing comments before we sign off any last thoughts?

Matt Frizzell 45:13

Oh I always haev last thoughts. I, I just for any listener out there that you have, I pray they continue to keep their eyes and their hearts open to the search in the wilderness to learn who Jesus is, and what God is doing today. One of the things that I just in closing, I remember from a senior high trip that I took back when I was a youth leader, I realized in the wilderness, oftentimes, when you're really in the wilderness for the first time, which many of us experienced spiritually, there are no maps, you have a compass. And so sometimes direction is the best you can cipher, we all feel safer when we have a map right? And can follow the signs and go exactly where we need to go. But in the wilderness, sometimes a pointer is all you have. And that pointer can come in many ways. You know, somebody baring their testimony, somebody saying, hey, I've been to a similar one place you are, or sometimes it's just peripheral discernment and saying, Can I hang in there today? And, man, God is present in those moments. And I don't want to be trite or quaint about that, when I say that, because there's no feeling like, you desperately don't want to be alone or need to find some ray of light in the struggle. But once it's found, it's life changing. And I just want to encourage everybody to know that God is there and that restoration is real. And hope is beautiful. So thanks.

Karin Peter 46:49

Thank you, man. I understand that there along with the articles that are going to be videos and discussions online, after each article, in this yearly series, our year long series is published. Do you know how we find those?

Matt Frizzell 47:03

Yeah, IGTV and the church's Facebook page, there's going to be brief interviews with the author's and then opportunities to just join in discussions, you know, that discernment Community of Christ, kind of a collective process. And so people's reactions to the article, I think are important and join. They're going to be invited to answer questions and join in the dialogue.

Karin Peter 47:25

So go on cofchrist.org and you'll find that information. That's the church's official website. So Matt, again, thanks for being with us, or our participation in this series towards the peaceful one. I'm Karin Peter, your host today. You're listening to Project Zion podcast. Thanks so much for being here.

Matt Frizzell 47:46

Blessings.

Josh Mangelson 47:56

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