

326 | Percolating on Faith | Being LGBTQIA+ Affirming and Christian 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.

Carla Long 00:33

Hello, and welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. I'm your host, Carla Long, and today I'm back with two of your numero uno, favorites, mermaid and Tony. Hello, Charmaine. Hello, Tony.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 00:46

Hello, good to be here with you.

Tony Chvala-Smith 00:48

Good to be with you, Carla,

Carla Long 00:49

You are listening to Percolating on Faith. And today we're asking a question as our topic. And I'm really excited about this one. It's something that we've talked about before in the past, we're going to kind of talk about it in a different way today. And if you are a member of Community of Christ, you've probably been asked this question by somebody in your life or heard of this question being asked at least the question we will be discussing today is, how can you be Christian and LGBTQIA+ accepting? So it's a big question. It's a big, big question. And I, we talked a little bit earlier listeners about how we wanted to talk about this. And what we talked about is there's a lot of assumptions behind this question. When someone asked you that they, you know, remember when the Pharisees like went after Jesus, and they expected Jesus to answer in a certain way? That's what I feel like is happening with this question is being asked, How can you be Christian and LGBTQIA+ accepting? So can we first talk a little bit about those assumptions that might be behind that? And and why somebody would even be asking.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 01:58

Right. And And just to clarify, I think we're going to be answering that question, as if it's being asked of the church. How can you be part of a church that is LGBTQIA+ accepting? Is that that work? Okay, for you, Carla,

Carla Long 02:16

Thank you for that clarification.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 02:17

I think that's good. I think where we start with assumptions are some of those that are just floating around in our culture, that we may or may not always recognize, and, and one of them is that somehow,

a church is all about rules. And you decide which church you're going to go to by which rules you really want to keep. And so that's quite often what people think of is that a church has rules and so they're therefore there must be a "Thou shalt not" kind of long list of rules. And people tend to think that whatever's on their long list of "Thou shalt not's" is on every Christians list of "Thou shalt not" but there's really two presuppositions there. The one first is that the questioner knows what all Christians should think, or what their those rules are, that everybody should be, that should be on everybody's list. And then the presupposition that that's what churches are about, and, and that's that shortchanges all churches, I think, because what if you shifted and said, a church is not about telling you what rules you have to keep or not keep, in order to be good with God, and cut that part out completely. And say churches are about helping you know, God's love for you. The churches are about creating these places, these opportunities, where every person can know that they are of worse, that they are loved by God, and they're called by God to live life fully. Wow. That's a completely different place to start.

Carla Long 04:06

Yeah, amen. That was a great podcast. Thank you, Charmaine and Tony.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 04:10

See you later!

Carla Long 04:13

Like, churches should be a place where, you know, God's love done and done. I think that's a brilliant place to start. Yeah.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 04:20

So that's, you know, that's an presupposition to undo. And once you do start undoing that you're changing your image of what God is. And you're changing your image of what a church's role or purpose is. It's not to prejudge everybody. You know, it's like, cuz is that what happens churches end up saying, some churches, end up saying, you know, if you do this or that God can't accept you and you know, you should, the whole you should die for your sins, but Jesus is going to do it for you doesn't leave any room. For a God who I, and this is, you know, my deepest belief, and I always kind of set it up as a question. What if what God wants most is to be in relationship with us and wants us to know, our worth and our purpose in life? What if that's what it all comes down to? So, anyhow, that's the presuppositions that I kind see.

Tony Chvala-Smith 05:27

I, I hear that question i following up on that. There's a presupposition in the question about what Christianity is, right? And the assumption is that Christianity is a single thing. And that's simply an a false assumption Christianity has is many different responses to the person that Jesus, there's also an assumption in that question, that is an assumption about what about what the good news is about? Right? And so the assumption behind it is that Christian faith is first about behavior. Right? Or about the things

following Charmaine, things you should do the things you shouldn't do. I once upon a time in Community of Christ, that list included, real church members don't dance, they don't play cards, they don't go to saloons. They don't go to the theater, and so on.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 06:03

They don't drink coffee,

Tony Chvala-Smith 06:30

They don't drink coffee.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 06:31

Or tea.

Tony Chvala-Smith 06:32

They they don't mow their lawns on Sunday, seriously. So this, the question assumes that Christianity is about a list. But that would not be a Community of Christ's current assumption, instead of, instead of the starting point being things you must and must not do, what Christianity is first about a gift? Right, that what precedes everything else is the gift of divine love and acceptance in Jesus Christ. And I'll just, I'll name my source here. I'm channeling Paul Tillich, on this Tillich, to access this, so in one of his writings somewhere, sorry, I can't exactly pinpoint it. It's whether it's in the systematic theology or some other book he wrote,

Carla Long 07:22

Oh, Tony, I'm just so embarrassed.

Tony Chvala-Smith 07:24

I know, I'm sorry. Somewhere till it says, The gospel is always first about a gift, before it is ever about a demand. And so much of American Christianity has reverted that order. So that it's always about a demand, our church demands that you do this, this, this, this, this, and don't do this, this, this and this, and then your Christian, it's like, a gracious, it's too bad. Jesus didn't know that, because he would never have had anybody eating at his table with him. Right? So nowhere in the gospels does Jesus say, before, before you can come have dinner with me, you got to clean up your act, or you have to be this or not this and so on. So the assumption behind the question is, in my view, it's a false assumption about what Christianity is. But it it's an assumption, constantly perpetuated in American religion, that, that Christianity is first about a whole thing's, a whole list of things you shouldn't do and must do. And that, that the gift, the gift is only a prize you get for having all the right answers there, you know, and so it's like, No, absolutely not.

Carla Long 08:42

I mean, we are such a transactional culture. I mean, you don't get anything for free, you know.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 08:48

No free lunch.

Carla Long 08:49

No free lunches around here. But you do, you really do you get the best thing for free. I think that's such a beautiful way to put it that it's a gift, it is a gift freely given. We want you to take it, we want you to accept it, and there's not a lot coming on the back end. So that's a really beautiful way of putting it.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 09:13

And then and just to follow that is that, and then the response of the receiver is, is from the heart from the from, from their life, you know, of wanting to share that love to wanting to share that acceptance to want to share that value of self valuing with others so that they can know that they are loved by God that they are loved by others that they have worth. So it's it becomes a natural way of things spreading.

Tony Chvala-Smith 09:47

But there's also an assumption that question that, that Christianity is a destination at which the person asking the question has arrived. It's like, no. What if let's switch that What Christianity is about a journey we're all on? Right? And nobody's arrived there yet. I mean, I think I could actually support that with a quote from Philippians, maybe or something of that. So, so just Just so you know, Carla. Philippians 3, but we won't get into that right now. But I'm saying that that question assumes that the asker has some sort of moral superiority, some sort of having arrived knows some sort of sort of perfection that allows them to be able to, to say, laughs I know for sure that so and so hasn't arrived, because they're this or this or this false assumption.

Carla Long 10:38

Yeah, that actually, you know, every time I hear a question like that, I almost always think about, and this might be wrong. And I think this is where you're kind of where you're going, the self esteem or the person asking, like, they're feeling a little bit less than in some way and somehow, and so they need to make sure other people feel a little bit less than as well, I could be completely wrong about that. That's usually the first place I go to, though. I'm like, oh, what are they lacking? You know, in their lives? What are they? What are they stressed out about? That they have to try and attack me for my beliefs?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 11:08

In order for them to feel okay. Because if you're below them if you're of less rightness than them then yeah, yeah.

Josh Mangelson 11:18

I think also behind that question, certainly in American culture, right now, there's a whole a whole set of wrong assumptions about sexual orientation. Right that, well, gosh, we just, this will date this podcast,

but that's okay. We just, we just heard a nominee for the Supreme Court, without even flinching refer to, you know, LGBTQ, etc, people as having as following a sexual preference, and had to be corrected by a senator.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 11:54

Who said, this about orientation. This is not about preference.

Josh Mangelson 11:58

And so that so there's this this false assumption about gender, sexuality, sexual orientation that's built into the question, right, the way the way you phrased it to us, you know, how can you be Christian and LGBTQIA plus accepting? It's the assumption behind the question, and is that those people are sinners in a very specific way, and we're not and it's like, a where did you get that assumption? What's the basis of that assumption? And I guess that leads to another false assumption that's built into the question about scripture about what what scripture has, you know, like, maybe there may be the assumption behind it that, well, Scripture teaches as why is this this and saddens, therefore, you know?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 12:42

So, actually, Carla, that's one of the things that we wonder if it would be helpful to to just have some links that are associated with this one that that talk, kind of look at some of those things like, what are the scriptures that often get used? So anyhow, we can, if you think that would be helpful, we'll

Carla Long 13:06

Absolutely that would be helpful.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 13:09

And then, and then there are some scriptures, some Community of Christ scriptures that I think really address this as well. And in sections 163, 164, and 165, especially, but we can send those the different verses that we may or may not use, as we're talking about this, but ones that are good to know, are there because they help us to, to see how deeply this is built into who we are as a church now.

Carla Long 13:40

So. Absolutely, absolutely. So we we've talked about the assumptions behind this question, which I think is a really, really important place to start because I because like, sometimes when you feel attacked by things like that, you just your mind just goes crazy. And like, yes, that's really important place to start,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 13:57

Or are your fists, you just clench your fists or your jaw.

Carla Long 14:05

Um, so can we talk a little bit about, you know, now how to answer that question. I think it's, I think that it's really important to maybe have a few things in your back pocket. So you know that so they know you've been thinking about it. And you know, they know that you've been praying about it. So how do we even answer that question, if someone asked us?

Josh Mangelson 14:27

There's, there's different different angles, you can approach the question from and what one angle is with a device we use in theology classes all the time to help students start thinking about their theological frameworks. And that's the thing we call the quadrilateral. Those four, four voices of theology.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 14:49

So Carla, if you'd like to you're already on it Carla. Cool.

Josh Mangelson 14:54

Yeah, but those four voices of Christian theology scripture, reason, experience and tradition.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 14:59

So just a brief description of each each of these, we would say, first of all, that these four voices are part of anybody's theology. These are the pieces that help create a theology. Different people weight these in different ways. So for some scripture might be more important or reason or experience or tradition. So everybody's just a little bit different on that. But one of the things that we would, reinforces the idea that all of them are necessary. So just a brief description of each of them scripture, those writings that over time have become, have been given authority or become sacred for a particular group of people. Reason, the use of the analytical mind and questioning, of intellect. Incorporating science and other tools in the world, as we think about things. Tradition, those things that have been passed on to us. So things like hymnody, things like how we interpret scripture, things like sacraments, little things that we may take for granted like that there's a Sunday school, you know, there's a Sunday school program, that's not always been the case. But these are things that have been passed on to us, that shape, our understanding of Christianity or the Christian life. And then there's experience and experience here is not just talking about my own experience, it's talking about the experience of the culture that I'm a part of, and that includes the language that I use to try and communicate or that's, that is communicating to me, who I am or who God is, or what our relationships are about. So an experience can be our spiritual experience, but it's also our lived experience. The aspects of the culture, that that influenced us. So those are the four basic things, each of them has an important role to play in a theology. And so one of the things we would like to do is just kind of take a look at each of those four voices, and say, how do we, as a church, see those voices, as encouraging an acceptance of all people? Acceptance of diversity, whether that be in an ethnic background, whether that be in how someone identifies in gender, or sexuality, all, you know, all of those kinds of things. So where would you like to start?

Tony Chvala-Smith 18:07

I think we probably should start with the elephant in the room. One scripture, the Scripture.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 18:15

That's the one that us is most often weaponized. In, in discussions about sexual orientation, or gender identity,

Josh Mangelson 18:25

And so there's different ways to come at that one. One is, is the big picture way, which is to recognize that nobody uses everything in Scripture, because for the sake of this conversation, the Bible is not a book, it's a library of books. It says many different things sometimes about the same topic. And so in order to quote scripture on a topic, you have to have already picked out certain verses, and then the question becomes, how are you actually interpreting them or reading them. But I always love this great quote from the British poet Coleridge, we use it all the time with with our students, both undergraduate and graduate students.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 19:08

So anyone listening to the podcast may have heard it may have heard of it.

Tony Chvala-Smith 19:11

They may have, but but it's not, but it's on the test. So it's good for you. So the quote is simply that "Christianity is found in the Bible, but not everything in the Bible is Christian." And so in other words, we have to make as readers of Scripture determinations about what we will use and what we won't use, what we will apply what we won't apply. And then we have to decide what methods we'll use to do the understanding and application. One should, one should think that most readers of the Bible today would would not believe that slavery is a practice that is ethical. In fact, it's a practice that's a pourraient. And so many parts of the Bible, condone slavery. So we automatically know through our cultural experience through interpreting the larger story of the Bible. You know, through reason and tradition, we already know that there's those are parts of the Bible that don't apply to us today. Yeah, so that's, that's, that's the big, the big picture view. And then also part of the big picture view is, for us, as Christians, the heart of the heart of the Bible is not a text, it's a person. It's Jesus, Jesus himself, who is not for Christians, just a figure from the past, but I live in presence. That's the heart of what Scripture is all about. So in other words, you have to, it's certainly for Community of Christ, we're going to interpret scripture. Scripture as a whole in light of who Jesus is, and what he called us to do and be.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 20:54

And there's another element here that I think is really crucial, and that is, that in Community of Christ, we don't, at least in our official theology, there are individuals who might think otherwise. But we, we don't believe that Scripture is like, dictated by God. But these are individuals over time, different times in the long history of humanity, who are trying to write down their perception of God, their experience

of God in their time, with their understandings, which are often very different from ours as far as how the world works and things, but they're trying to write down, pass on their experience of God. And that, unfortunately, there's this, this is one of the biggest ways that Scripture gets weaponized, is to say, to assume that Scripture says, is the same as God says. And so then you can take these little pieces of Scripture from other times and places where the understanding of the world and human relationships is completely different. And you try to use it today to judge other people. So so I think that's a really important piece is that we don't see scripture as somebody just automatically writing down what, what came directly from God. In fact, most of the biblical authors don't in any way insinuate that that's why they're writing. There's a very, there's a few exceptions where that's the case, parts of the book of Revelation. Parts yeah, the Spirit says to right, we've just been doing a class on the book of revelations,

Tony Chvala-Smith 22:50

It's fresh in our minds.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 22:52

But most of the other books, that that's not the premise at all. It's a very different purpose. So that's an assumption, we have to put aside. That, I just want to say we're putting aside at least, so that there's not that assumption that somehow God said everything that's in the Old Testament and New Testament. And we therefore can, because that's really an underlying part of any of our explanations of those passages that do get used.

Tony Chvala-Smith 23:28

Yeah, Yeah Carla. Sorry.

Carla Long 23:31

quote you too, at one point. So I think in class, when I had you in class, oh, so many decades ago. I this has stuck with me. You said something like the Bible doesn't say anything. The Bible does not have a mouth. And yeah, with me really hard. And I think I've quoted you multiple times without any credit at all.

Tony Chvala-Smith 23:54

So let me let me let me help you with the footnote on that. That's that's us quoting the the Protestant theologian Paul Van Buren, he says that in volume, one of his four volume, so I could almost give you the page number, but I can't quite see it, but it's in volume. One of his his book is his four part book, the theology of the Jewish Christian reality. The Bible does not have a mouth.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 24:20

Right?

Carla Long 24:21

But I interrupted you, Tony, please go ahead. I know

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 24:24

You were gonna go into some of the Scriptures.

Tony Chvala-Smith 24:26

I just was going to mention. So on this, on this particular I even hate to use the word issue but on questions of sexual identification, gender identification, so on first of all, the Bible doesn't know anything about sexual orientation and gender identification because it had no it had no what concepts for that. But there's, there's like seven passages in the whole Bible, that have typically been used have typically been misused and weaponized on this particular issue, and sometimes the person asking the question, usually post to us would have one of them in mind. There's three potential passages in the Hebrew Bible. And then what four in the New Testament. In every case, we could show and we have shown that being attentive to context, literary and social, historical, and language, what the words actually mean, in Hebrew or Greek, doesn't really yield anything like a way to address our current understanding of gender orientation at all. And so that's, that's a link we can we can have you put up with this podcast, Carla, that the link to a lecture, Charmaine and I gave several years ago on those specifically, almost passages walking through them.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 25:52

Right. And, and the question, always, when looking at these passages, and the specific circumstances in which we were looking at these passages was, in regard to homosexual relationships. And so what we were saying, if this was when the church was trying to decide, you know, will we allow ministers to perform same gender marriages? And will, people who are gay or lesbian in a, in a same gendered relationship, be considered for priesthood ministry within the church, you know, in a committed same sex relationship? And so one of the things that we started with? And this, I think, is the question that really has to be kept to take into this kind of an exploration is, is what we're talking about, which in this case, was committed, mutual, loving, supportive, relationship committed, monogamous relationships? Is this is the scripture talking about that? Because that's what we're talking about. We're talking about are people in this kind of a relationship going to be accepted, embraced, affirmed and called within this denomination? And so that was the question we we took, it doesn't show up in in in a little things, the class that Tony was talking about, as much as I wish it were. But before each of those, those passages, we need to say what we're talking about, is mutual loving, all of those things, relationships. Is that what this passage is talking about? And yeah, and none of the cases is it? And so we're talking, what Scripture is talking about? Is something completely different from what what we're talking about.

Tony Chvala-Smith 28:01

Yeah, we try to show in that in that class that in pretty much every case of those, that very tiny handful of things in the Bible, in virtually every case, what's being what's what's what's being talked about, there

is sexual exploitation and abuse. Nothing, has nothing to do with orientation, with commitment, with loving relationships and so on. And so that that can be demonstrated from the literary historical context and from the language and from the things we know about ancient culture. So but but that would be worth worth a listeners, watchers of this, this podcast going back and taking a look at to to know how to approach each of those scriptures.

Carla Long 28:48

I'm so glad to use the the C word context.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 28:51

Oh, that one?

Carla Long 28:53

I mean, it is. It drives me absolutely crazy. That we as 21st century Americans think that we know exactly what a first century or before person in the Middle East was even thinking or what they were like! I'm barely understand my neighbors. How can I ever see someone that lived over 2000 years ago in a completely different culture? Like, it drives me crazy that we think that we understand exactly what the Bible means, in our first readings like, Oh, I get it. We're done. Ah, no, I don't I promise you.

Josh Mangelson 29:28

Carla, I've been married to a Canadian for almost 40 years. And there are things about the Canadian context that I'm still learning.

Carla Long 29:37

Um. Amen!

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 29:40

That's right. You have a similar situation! Yes. And I think again, that's another one of those assumptions about scripture that we have. If you're going to be an honest reader of the Bible, you have to let go of and that is that it was written for us. It was not written for us, these are, are things that were written over millennia. And they were written for the people in their time, they've turned out to be wonderful meeting places, to, for other people to come in and meet God in, because that's what they're doing. They're trying to point to God. And so if we let they're pointing to God, inspire us to look for God, then then scripture is a good meeting place, but they weren't written for us.

Tony Chvala-Smith 30:29

So that, you know, there's a, there's this larger hermeneutical or interpretative question there? Will we let scripture be a means of enhancing and enriching human life and relationships? Or will we will we turn scripture into what one feminist scholar calls texts of terror, that we terrorize those people with?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 30:51

Whoever we decide those, whoever we decide,

Tony Chvala-Smith 30:54

we have to decide how we will use scripture, and often behind that question you post is a previous decision that scripture is going to be used to terrorize some people. And so Community of Christ just simply rejects that we as a at least as an institution, we reject that approach to Scripture.

Carla Long 31:13

Scripture, scripture shall not be used as a weapon shall not be used as a weapon, right? And part of me picture is someone like beating someone over the head with a Bible like literally, that hurts way less than the kinds of damage that has been done to people by just by the Bible as a weapon. Yeah.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 31:32

And again, equating the words in the Bible, as if that's what God thinks, says how God views people. And

Tony Chvala-Smith 31:44

yeah, but first is first is coming of Christ. We could say, from a scripture angle, we have recent scripture, yes, in terms of continuing revel experience, that our communal experience of continuing revelation and the formation of recent scripture, we have recent sacred texts that direct us in an entirely different direction in terms of inclusion, justice, compassion.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 32:10

Can we look at some of those?

Tony Chvala-Smith 32:11

Yeah, we actually have some on that, on that PowerPoint. And so if you go to the next slide, the next one,, next slide, has a community in Community of Christ theology, how we see divine revelation, divine self disclosure, able to happen through any of these means.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 32:33

That revelation comes through our scripture, whether it's in that, as I was describing earlier, that meeting place where we may, may meet God, or in Community of Christ, and the idea of ongoing revelation of God's speaking in our time, and the body of the church, discerning whether or not this is God's voice to us. So and that revelation is something that gives us clarity and insight, in the reason part of our theology, in our understanding, and our, our analyzing, that it that revelation comes in our tradition, that there are things that have come through our tradition, that continue to reveal God's nature and purpose to us, and that God, God's revelation comes to us in experience in living today, in our interactions with others, and to us through the Spirit, sometimes quiet, and gentle voice and sometimes the kick in the butt

we get from the Spirit. So that revelation comes in all of these in all of these four voices of theology. And for us as a church, that's important, because that means that we, if we're always going to be open to this kind of Revelation, that there will always be room and necessity of growing and growing requires changing and so that we can't have the answer for all time, but that our continuing growth and insight from God keeps us moving on. So, but some if you go on down to the next one, Carla. So this is doctrine covenants, section 163, verse seven, and 163 was written in 2007 2007. So

Tony Chvala-Smith 34:42

"Scripture is not to be worshipped or idolized. Only God the Eternal One of whom scripture testifies is worthy of worship. God's nature, as revealed in Jesus Christ and affirmed by the Holy Spirit provides the ultimate standard by which any question portion of Scripture should be interpreted and applied." And then the next part of the paragraph C, "It is not pleasing to God when any passage of scripture is used to diminish or oppress races, genders or classes of human beings, much physical and emotional violence has been done to some of God's beloved children through the misuse of Scripture, the church is called to confess and repent of such attitudes and practices." End of quote. So that's a really powerful statement to the church, to Community of Christ about how we will use scripture and not use scripture, as we try to deal with all kinds of complex social and ethical questions, we're going to keep the image of the God whose nature is love, at the center of everything we do, and not try to turn specific passages into hand-grenades that we lob. That we lob it people, you know, which always will do not will do nothing for Christianity, but we'll do everything against it. So that's 163, she would go to the chef, it's, there's, there's a we have a couple more in their culture.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 36:15

So this is, so this is 164 verse five, "It is imperative to understand that when you are truly baptized into Christ, you become part of a new creation. By taking on life and mind of Christ, you increasingly view yourselves and others from a changed perspectives, former ways of defining people by economic status, social class, sex, gender, or ethnicity, no longer our primary. Through the gospel of Christ, a new community of tolerance, reconciliation, unity in diversity and love, is being born as a visible sign of the coming reign of God." And so it's kind of starting to name very, very specifically some of the things that we have tended to use as people to divide ourselves from each other and saying, in Christ, these are no, these are no longer valid primary ways of understanding who we are in relationship to each other. And if there's just one more down there, Carla, so we're trying to do this. We're, we're quoting scripture at you. But we're trying to do it in the context of the create the, creative process within the church as it has tried to discern what does what is God saying to us about our different illnesses and our sameness? And, and in the context of the church, being open, to asking God asking a spirit to help us think about some of the ways in which we have built up boundaries and barriers between each other. And the questions the LGBTQIA questions are the ones that have drawn us into this time as a church of saying, "God help us see this in a much bigger way, in a way where your love gets more room." So, "As revealed in Christ God, the Creator of all ultimately is concerned about behaviors and relationships that uphold the worth and giftedness of all people and that protect the most vulnerable. such relationships are to be rooted in

the principles of Christ like love, mutual respect, responsibility, justice, covenant, and faithfulness, against which there is no law. If the church more fully will understand and consistently apply these principles. Questions arising about responsible human sexuality, gender, identities, roles and relationships, marriage and other issues may be resolved according to God's divine purposes. Be assured nothing within these principles condone selfish, irresponsible, promiscuous, degrading or abusive relationships. Faced with difficult questions, many properly turned to Scripture to find insight and inspiration. Search the scriptures for the living word that brings life healing and hope to all embrace and proclaim these liberating truths." So in this little passage, has become, in many ways, the guiding principles for the church when we're talking about different kinds of relationships that may be that maybe have been on those lists those church's lists in the past. And so it's saying, you know, what makes a healthy relationship. That's what we're for is relationships that where there's Christ like love and mutual respect and responsibility and justice and covenant and faithfulness. And then what are we saying isn't helpful in relationship, you know, nothing that condone selfish, irresponsible or promiscuous, degrading or abusive relationships. So it's using a different set of criteria, what it makes for a healthy relationship, rather than what kinds of relationships are good, or what kinds of relationships are bad, as sometimes judged in, in gender kinds of terms or in sexuality, or orientation kinds of terms,

Tony Chvala-Smith 40:47

We could say, these, these texts of contemporary scripture arise out of our tradition, and out of our ongoing experience, so we don't, we don't treat these as like rocks dropped from heaven on us. These are, there's an element of mutual discernment in this that's that's going on in the church that is part of the revelation process. And, and so our, you know, our overall approach to Scripture and Community of Christ, and some of the questions and issues that we have to deal with today. It's always going to be done in the context of relationship relationality. Our relationship with each other with God with the creation, we were not going to approach these kinds of issues with juicy little juicy little Bible quotes on bumper stickers that somehow are supposed to settle things once and for all. So I think that's really important in terms of our our use of Scripture, versus the kinds of uses of Scripture, you would see behind the question you posed to us.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 41:53

And I think that kind of approach that we're just looking at, is also taking us very squarely into, you know, on the quadrilatero, with scripture, tradition, reason and experience, it takes us very strongly into the experience quadrant. And it's saying, what is our lived experience of what's a healthy relationship? What builds up, not what tears down? And so, in those cultures, where we have had the blessing of courageous people, living out their sexuality, being being public, and helping the whole population, whether they want to see or not, that, that the, these are loving, mutual, wonderful relationships, our our, our experience of other people's lives, and situations is expanded. And so these things that are written in those few verses there are visible to us. And so, and this is, this is where scripture and experience uphold each other, and where people are able to see in, in very natural ways, were these, these responsible loving relationships. And then it's really very difficult, though some people work at it hard, to to be

prejudice against biased against people, but But yeah, so this is where experience comes in to our theology as well. And we say, oh, my goodness, what an amazing couple, or look at how this person is living love in the world. And then those other categories fall away because they're not relevant anymore. So anyhow.

Tony Chvala-Smith 44:00

So the actual experience with human beings in Community of Christ is is viewed as potentially revelatory all the time. So encountering real life relationships with people who are differently gendered, who identify differently in that encounter, their humanity, our humanity become kind of reflectors of the Divine. And so that's part of our regulatory experience as a church.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 44:12

And another piece of it would be so this is another question that sometimes gets asked, and that is, isn't your church just giving into culture? Isn't your it? Yes, Carla's doing this, which means Yes, she's heard that. And that's another cool thing, though, is that as a church, we believe that the Spirit may be at work and the culture around us, and it may be helped it often is helping us to see what our blind spots are, as far as those places where we've been judging other people, or where we've not made God's love free to flow. And so, you know, as a church, we believe God is at work in the culture, there's some parts of the culture, and we always have to be discerning what parts of the culture are, again, building up and what are tearing down. But, you know, ordination of women would not have happened, if there had not been a women's movement to to help people see, the in justices and the oppression against women, issues of racism would not have been, have been addressed and changes would not be made have been made, though they've not been made enough. And they, and we're at another point where that has, we have to move forward on that. But if those if the culture had not been willing to change, to see goodness to seek goodness, lots of Christians would not have seen their own blind spots, and see where they need to grow. So we believe God can be involved in growth in progress and cultures, and that we then can learn from, from what the Spirit is doing there. So that's the other Yeah, that's another element of the experience part is that cultural,

Tony Chvala-Smith 46:32

I'm so glad you mentioned that Sherman, because it's the device, the device spirit, is, by the testimony of scriptures in and through all things is working everywhere. And so why wouldn't it be working in the culture, and it's, it's, it's not the Spirit's fault, or the cultures fault, that sometimes the, the church, the church has been blinded by its own certainties about its faith, so that it can't see what the Spirit is doing in, in culture. You know, if you, if you, if you jab a Bible in your eyes, you can't really see very far.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 47:08

And it hurts!

Tony Chvala-Smith 47:09

Don't try that at home, Carla.

Carla Long 47:11

Don't do that. That's a horrible idea. And, you know, back to the whole experience, experience, what we're talking about, I have found, and I could be wrong about this. But more often than not, it's experience that changes people the most, you know, if you have a son or a daughter, who lives a different life than you had expected, and you still love them and realize, oh, they're wonderful and incredible people, I raised them, they're incredible. And that changes them the most. So that experience piece is a really, really big piece. Yeah, so I think that that is, I love that we're, we're categorizing that as revelatory, you know, like, I don't think that people would ever necessarily think that's revelatory, but it is it is it absolutely, absolutely is. How exciting to say that.

Tony Chvala-Smith 48:00

Yeah, it's the, un-othering of, you know, of those that when we tend to build up these boundaries and have us and them, us and the other experience un-others us and makes us connected. And thanks, Carla, that was really helpful. Yeah, and tradition may seem like the unhelpful partner here. But actually,

Carla Long 48:33

I've been waiting for this one.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 48:35

Yeah. How does tradition help us here?

Tony Chvala-Smith 48:38

Well, it I mean, it depends on what parts of tradition you're going to, you're willing to look at. So if, if one goes to Christian tradition, looking looking for little juicy, juicy bites to prove pre existing beliefs, one can find all kinds of nasty stuff. But also, if one is attentive to the voice of Christian tradition, one, one can find all kinds of brilliant, brilliant things across the ages that are in alignment with these principles. And so, for example, this one isn't ancient ancient, but, you know, Bonhoeffer writing in 1937 in *The Cost of Discipleship* makes the statement about the doctrine of the incarnation, that is really powerful and relevant to us on this topic today. So the Incarnation is a Christian doctrine, though it's rooted in the Gospel of John. The Gospel John doesn't use the word Christian tradition developed the word incarnation to talk about the Divine Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us. And there's all kinds of reflections across the centuries about what that what that really means about how that how the Incarnation reveals divine divine love and care for the world and so on. But Bonhoeffer makes the statement in it 37 And remember, he's a German theologian working he's he's guiding an underground illegal seminary, because the Nazis have shut have have shut down and shut down seminaries that are not going to support Nazi ideology. So he's trying to teach, in this case, it was young men and a couple of women who are part of it. Things about ministry, on the QT, the Gestapo finally shut it down. But in

his book, *Cost of Discipleship*, he makes the statement where he says, you know, in the incarnation, Christ took on the human form Christ, Christ in his huge in his humanity, and loneliness became every one of us. Every one of us is, is represented in the incarnation. And then Bonhoeffer goes on to make the next really radical statement, an attack on any human being, is therefore an attack on Christ. And what he was thinking about in 1937, was the Nazi attack on Jews on using the Nazi word homosexuals, on gypsies, on anybody who is not aryan. And Bonhoeffer uses the doctrine incarnation to say wrong, wrong, wrong. The incarnation is a representation of every human being, no exceptions, in the person of Christ, and therefore, to to attack, assault, abuse, verbally abuse, other human beings, is to do the same thing to Jesus. I think that's a brilliant, brilliant use of tradition on the part of Bonhoeffer that's very applicable to the question you posed to us.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 51:50

So another piece, that would be tradition, and we can plot this back to the Old Testament, as being one of those themes that God cares about. And that is for those who are most vulnerable, and those who have been marginalized by their societies. And that that's what you speak out against. And that's what the prophets in the Old Testament are speaking out about and their time about the people who have been treated as though they are less, as though they don't matter to God. Because they don't matter to the society. And so the the idea that God's love is for them, as he as as importantly, as for for everyone else who's are doing okay, in fact, that maybe God's love is even more for those who are the marginalized and the victim, and that God has a special care that goes all the way back to the Old Testament prophets. And I think is something that well, I think Tony's gonna go there next, but that's what Jesus was all about. And so this is, this is scripture, this is tradition. But this is also reason if we're going to say, what does it mean to be Christian, a follower of Christ? What did Jesus do? You know, who

Carla Long 53:18

I've been waiting for the J word! Let's do it.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 53:23

Yeah. All right, Tony. Yeah.

Tony Chvala-Smith 53:25

Well, I mean, just following up on Charmaine saying, I mean, we, if we had time, we could work through Christian tradition across the ages and find examples again, and again and again, of questions following taking the justice path on behalf of those who are being exploited or abused in their culture and society. There were Christians in the Middle Ages, who protected Jews, especially during the Crusades. And there there were there were Christians when, when Christianity came to the, quote, "New World", when there there were some Christian thinkers who, who, in quote, "New Spain", who were appalled, by the way that their own Spanish people treated indigenous folks. So we can find examples across the tradition of people who, often it's a minority voice, but they're worth listening to who were very much in alignment with Jesus and the prophets, in terms of how it turned in terms of the mandate to

uphold those who, whose dignity is assaulted. So that's pretty important. And so as we're now we're coming down to the big j right? Big J Jesus. Yeah, there's the there's the Jesus angle, for approaching your question. And if Christianity is ultimately connected to the person of Jesus, in however way you want to understand it, it's in some sense, relatedness to Jesus as guide as teacher, as exemplar, as Savior, as Redeemer, as Christ, whatever titles you want to use for it, Christianity ultimately comes back to the figure of Jesus, in whom redemption, or salvation, or new life or how new creation, whatever metaphor you want to use is exemplified. And so how can you, how can you be Christian or call yourself Christian? And be LGBTQIA affirming? Well, the simple answer is because it's a Jesus thing to do. Right? It's, it's a pretty simple, it's a pretty simple, straightforward answer, that is, at the heart of our faith is Jesus, Jesus, welcome everybody to the table. That's pretty much the end of the conversation. That's the end of the story. And if, if the church wants to do what, I'll use this kind of language, if the church wants to do what its Lord did, then the Church must do that there's no, there's no alternative for us, except disobedience to Jesus dead. Right. So that's, that's, that's the big picture. I mean, the gospels are so full of amazing stories, where, where Jesus openly or subtly is, you know, take taking the side of seeking the well being of those who's whom the dominant culture had crushed, suppress, push to the side, marginalized, etc. And so in this culture at present, diff, people with different gender identities are in danger. And to be a Christian, is to place ourselves in, in, in a relationship with those who are endangered, and to try to be the bridge, to be the helper, the healer, to be present, and to make to make space for their humanity to flourish. That's the Jesus thing to do.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 57:08

And I would take it another direction to and that is that many of the things that, in some churches have been used to judge people have to do with sexuality. You know, whether it is women being treated as though they're not equal, that they can't vote, that they can't minister that they shouldn't be heard. That it's okay to beat them. Because the Bible says you can't I mean it, whether it's bad, or whether it is this this readiness to judge people whose sexual expression or identity is different. It's like, there's all of this focus on sex. And part of that comes from, you know, kind of a Puritan background and the, you know, unwillingness to talk openly about this important part of being human. And you just, it's always, it's always so fascinating to me, you know, we've talked about maybe there's seven passages that are talking about homosexuality, and yet in the Bible, there are dozens of references to those who seek wealth, the dangers of wealth, the dangers of accumulating, and in the process, ignoring the needs of others. There's, and, and what does what does Jesus say about the sexual lives of people? Nothing. He, he affirms the woman at the well, who's had five husbands in his living with somebody that she's not married to. He recognizes her value, and we're independent of any of that. You know, the the prostitute or the, the, the woman that anoints his feet, and accepts forgiveness as a gift. I mean, here's some of those things where you could say, Oh, Jesus is really concerned about people's sexual lives, or their sexual identity. No. And so this is another one of those places where if we're paying attention both to what Jesus did and didn't do, and to that whole the big scope of what's in the story about What God God cares about, we begin to see that these things that people have used as judgments against each other. That's as our own

culture's preoccupation. This is not God's preoccupation, and Christ as our as our best example of that, but hopefully, the church can be an example of that going forward as well.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:00:28

I mean, you know, if you want to play the rhetorical game with that question, how can you be a Christian and be LGBTQIA? Plus affirming? You can turn the question around, how can you be a Christian? and support white supremacy? How can you be a Christian and support environmental self destruction? How can you be a Christian and support the fact that most of the world's wealth is now in the hands of a few people, and that the poor keep getting poorer? it? I mean, you know, so if we want to, if you if you want to play the game, that way,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:01:02

there's a whole lot more support for these questions. Right, biblically and experientially, then,

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:01:08

How can you be a Christian and support the constant use of violence in, for example, in American culture? So anyway, I mean, you obviously knew where we were gonna come out on this.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:01:27

No surprise.

Carla Long 1:01:27

I knew I had an idea. Yeah, I had an idea. So I mean, this has been really, really helpful. If nothing else, you know, like, most of the people I know, and that I am associated with, fall on the same side as we do on on this question. But I do think that sometimes we can't articulate it very well. And it's just so helpful to have this kind of laid out and just say, this is why this is why this is why this is why and and then say, Okay, well, that makes a lot more sense to me. Because I for me, I do sometimes get really Tongue Tied when someone's coming at me with something like that. So I just really appreciate what you have to say, scripturally and that the Bible, the Bible is a weapon is the Yeah. Like, it's one of those, "How could you Carla? How could you believe this and still be bla bla bla." Oh, it's so hard. And the problem is, is that we don't have any, like quick little pithy answers. Like, it's a conversation. This is this is how we see it, because this is, this is how we understand God. Yeah. So anyway, I just really appreciate this whole conversation.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:02:41

Well, there's that one passage I can never remember it. It's It's from First John about love

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:02:49

Oh yeah, First John 4.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:02:50

And that's that's my go to if you need a little scripture is, "All who love are of God."

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:02:59

Yeah, yeah. Whoever loves is born of God and knows God. Yeah, somewhere in there, First John 4. Look it up, Carla.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:03:06

And so you know, for talking about loving relationships between people, then that's of God. And that's not a bad place to start or end, I think, in these kinds of conversations,

Carla Long 1:03:22

Right, if you need that pithy little answer. Jesus was so good at pithy little answers and I try to be like Jesus but I can't, gosh dang it!

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:03:31

Yeah, I know, me neither. I want to fight usually.

Carla Long 1:03:38

It is hard, it is hard to have love in my heart.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:03:41

Maybe you could just, you know, tie people to a chair and make them watch this podcast or listen to this podcast.

Carla Long 1:03:46

What a great idea. I should tie more people to chairs.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:03:50

Wait, there might be some violence involved there.

Carla Long 1:03:55

Well, we'll think about it. So we're almost to the end of our time, actually, um, is there did we did we hit all of the points that we needed to hit?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:04:05

Probably not. The beginning points for a future podcast, but hopefully, at least, is an exploration of some of the places we can go with this. And, you know, we didn't really specifically say on here's the reason section, but you could hear the reason section of those four voices coming through and we'll look at what Jesus did, and how you know, and the questions.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:04:31

We're trying, we're trying to approach it rationally. When we get to the tying people two chairs, then we've kind of stepped over the reason boundary a little fair bit. But I'm not saying I'm opposed to that, Carla, I just

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:04:42

Please, people don't take this too seriously on this.

Carla Long 1:04:44

I think people know us pretty well, by now.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:04:48

I would hope.

Carla Long 1:04:51

Well, thank you both for you know, just like I said, just kind of laying it out in a way that we can think about it and maybe even after we listen to this podcast, We can kind of formulate our own answers and be ready in case somebody ever comes at us. Because actually, just today on Facebook, I read a letter written to someone about having a rainbow flag in their yard. And it was so sanctimonious. And it immediately put me back and I just wanted to say, "AHHHH!" that's what I usually say, so maybe now I could be better at formulating a better answer.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:05:33

But we'll, we'll send you just a little short list of some of those scriptures, Doctrine and Covenants, and

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:05:39

A link to that link to that video that we did several years ago on those seven texts,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:05:45

And the First John Four

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:05:47

And First John Four, we can put that in there too.

Carla Long 1:05:50

Don't forget First John Four. That's a lovely one. So thank you so much. I really appreciate it. You both you're wonderful. And yeah, thanks again.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:05:58

Thank you.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:05:58

Our pleasure.

Josh Mangelson 1:06:07

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