

344 | Toward the Peaceful One | Dave Anderson and Robyn Luffman
Project Zion Podcast

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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 01:00

Welcome to Project Zion Podcast. I'm your host, Karin Peter. And we're sharing a series of interviews with all the authors of the year long series of Herald magazine articles exploring the guiding question, "Are we moving toward 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. You can find the Herald magazine at heraldhouse.org under our faith. In today's episode, we're visiting with Dave Anderson and Robyn Luffman. David Anderson is a distinguished graduate from the USAF Academy. That's the United States Air Force for our out of the United States folks. He has a Master's of international public policy, a Master of Arts in Christian ministry and a Doctorate in missional theology and spiritual formation. Additionally, he's on the Graceland University faculty and has served as a professor of aerospace studies at Oregon State University in Corvallis, Oregon. David has served as a full time field minister with Community of Christ since 2006, as a field appointee, the Director of Human Resources and currently serves as president of the quorum of high priests. Previous to his church career, he retired as an Air Force Colonel after serving 30 years. During his career, he served as an operational fighter pilot, diplomat, international affairs officer strategic planner for global issues and operations policy advisor to the US Ambassador at NATO. Dave most importantly, is also Robins father. So welcome, Dave.

Dave Anderson 02:47

Thank you. It's good to be here with you.

Karin Peter 02:50

Robin Luffman, after following her father all over the world, received her Bachelor's in nursing with a minor in religion at Graceland University, and a Master's in nursing family nurse practitioner at the University of Missouri, Kansas City. Robyn has spent most of her career overseas, where she has served as a medical officer and in international relations in Azerbaijan, Bolivia, Mali, Croatia, and China. She currently serves in Nairobi, Kenya, with her husband and three children. Hey, Robyn.

Robyn Luffman 03:24

Hello! Nice to be with you guys tonight.

Karin Peter 03:26

It's wonderful to have you here as well. So the first question I want to ask both of you and just feel free to jump in is, how was your project of writing an article together? How'd that go?

Robyn Luffman 03:38

It actually worked really well, we worked really well together. Be careful because we share many of the same religious and spiritual beliefs. Our work just sort of came together. I began with a story of Deborah because it's so strongly represented both of our beliefs and what it means to live by Christian principles. And my father, David, was able to easily phrase it in a more scriptural context.

Dave Anderson 04:06

Well, from my perspective, it was a wonderful experience. I'm a very proud Papa, grandpa. And that's was a real pleasure to do this project who has with Robyn, she's always been highly motivated, well engaged and well spoken. And it's truly a pleasure just to share this experience with her.

Karin Peter 04:27

Well, it's a delight to have you both here. So the article we are referring is the article in the Toward the Peaceful One series titled "Worth of All Persons". So if you would, in a sentence or two, identify what that means to you, when we say worth of all persons in this faith community, not the technical, official Community of Christ spiel. But what does that mean to you, Dave, we'll start with you.

Dave Anderson 04:53

Sure. When I hear the word or phrase, worth of all persons, I think it means beloved children of God, we are all loved by a wonderful, grace-filled, generous, loving God that loves each of us immensely, and that God wants us all to flourish. God wants to wholeness and body, mind and spirit.

Karin Peter 05:19

Thank you, Dave, Robyn?

Robyn Luffman 05:21

So I would say worth of all persons is synonymous with, we all have God's beautiful children. I know I'm going a bit outside of sentence or two. But, you know, this summer, we had a family project with my husband and children, where we made a family sign sort of a guiding principle for our family to hang on our front door. And the main Declaration was, we are all God's beautiful children. And below that we listed basic human rights we believe we must protect, so that all could have equal worth.

Karin Peter 05:53

That sounds like a marvelous project to do as a family. I hope parents and grandparents picked up on that idea. So Robyn, you began, as you said, in your part of the article with the story of Deborah. And we do want our readers to read the article. It's in the January, February edition of the Herald this year. But please tell us a little bit about Deborah and why you opened the article with her story. Sometimes we see an individual, but we don't understand the bigger kind of systemic issues going on. So tell us about Deborah.

Robyn Luffman 06:35

Well, to begin why I started with her story is I thought it was a good illustration of how addressing the wholeness of body, mind, spirit and relationships shows the oppressed that they have worth, that there is a worth of all persons. Deborah, even with institutional challenges that faced her really felt she did

everything she could to break the cycle of her youth. And the challenge that those barriers, the barriers that she faced, our research team really wanted to include Deborah, because as a victim of a unjust system, we hope to find ways to increase her self esteem in order to challenge the system that oppressed her and other vulnerable people. I included her story not because it shaped my career and working with vulnerable populations and with people in crisis. But also because I think when we talk about the worth of persons of as a faith community, we're talking about Deborah, as a faith based community, we're called on to challenge these unjust, oppressive structural and social systems that diminished human worth, like what was happening in her to her in the story.

Karin Peter 07:53

So how do we learn to not just see the systems that identify and begin to dismantle unjust systems that diminish human worth, Dave?

Dave Anderson 08:04

Well, from my perspective, one of the ways that we broaden our perspective is we need to be curious. We need to be engaged in the world around us ask questions, be skeptical to things that are going on, to do our research to have take make it and help offer educational opportunities with other cultures and other perspectives, be open to the differing ideas of a breadth of experience, we need to above all, really listen closely to those around us. And for me, those qualities of curiosity, learning to listen, being able to be open to different ideas are really helpful to engage in our world with all of its complexities and problems.

Karin Peter 08:53

So I just want to stay with that for a minute and maybe go off track just a little tiny bit. But I'd like to hear from both of you, in our current climate around the world, not just in the United States where it hits the newspapers on a regular basis, but around the world, there seems to be this unwillingness to broaden our perspective to only look at sources that confirm what we already believe or what we already know. Even within the church, we see some of that. So what can we look to to help us as a community, be willing to broaden our perspectives?

Robyn Luffman 09:34

You know, I would say it's welcoming diversity. And this is diversity of thought. This is diversity of culture, and in that it strengthens us and enriches us and so we have a fuller perspective of the economic and social influences that suppress others. So I do think it goes hand in hand what my dad David was saying was curious. It's being hospitable. It's being educated. And it's a diversity of different viewpoints. I think that helps us dismantle these systems.

Dave Anderson 10:14

And I would concur what Robyn was saying. And I think what's really important is to acknowledge the importance of community to listen to one another's perspectives, to welcome these differing opinions, because only as a community can we withstand, and be able to, in some ways, repel the misinformation and disinformation that's kind of ricocheting throughout our cultures and throughout the internet. So really, to be able to talk together in a community setting to listen deeply, I think, is really paramount.

Robyn Luffman 10:52

And it's, it's also about being an active, informed citizen.

Karin Peter 10:59

Thank you. With that, with all of that in mind, let's talk a little bit about what's discussed in the article, I'm going to term it as "othering". When we we turn, people who we do not want to know, we turn them into others we dehumanize in that way. And I think what I've gathered is that this is fear based, when we when we participate in othering. So what can we learn from the life and ministry and Jesus about others, and especially if we think about what it means if it's fear based, and how we overcome that?

Dave Anderson 11:35

I think when we talk about ministry of Jesus, and othering, you need to always recognize that central to Jesus is teaching Jesus preaching and his ministry was the reign of God. That was central to what God was saying, in the reign of God is, is God's love in action. So the reign of God is moving throughout our world, because God's love is there, and God is working. And so as this as we engage in this idea of worth of all persons in this kind of othering, in this fear based aspect, we need to recognize that love trumps and is, above all of that. And fundamentally, this God's loving action is a flourishing of life for everyone. And so it's particularly flourishing, concentrating on the flourishing of life for everyone, for those who are left out, marginalized and dispossessed demeaned. In other words, it's about the other. So Jesus was constantly inviting and associating with the others in his life, in their, in his culture, inviting them to his fellowship and ministry. So he was about radical love to and for the other, and therefore we must do the same. We must repel this fear mongering and welcome all of the others into ministry, and be willing to learn and to experience them also in our lives.

Robyn Luffman 13:11

Yeah, I think I'd also like to go back to the principle I mentioned before, when my family and I made that kind of family sign, you know, all are God's beautiful children. And we all have worth, and it's otherness that blesses us. And it's hard to fear that that you love and embrace.

Karin Peter 13:32

My dad used to say, and I'm not sure where it where he had heard it. But he used to say that the traditional thinking is that you do good things for those you love, that Jesus challenges us to love those we do good things for. So in his mind, the doing of good things brings about the love.

Dave Anderson 13:51

And I think it's also kind of natural for us to be resistant to things we don't understand, or that we just naturally are accustomed to. So it's a natural response. We just need to recognize it, and then learn from it and recognize that from this otherness comes a blessing to us, because we are able to learn and to experience other ways. So it's a natural response to repel something we fear, but we need to learn to overcome it and through community and through engagement through curiosity, through helping one another. Can we become blessed by a relationship with the other?

Karin Peter 14:33

I think our natural inclination is to think that the opposite of other in someone is to accept them, or include them but you actually go further in the article and suggests that the opposite or the antidote to other is hospitality, which is a word I think is unexpected in that paragraph. At least it was for me, so say a bit more about that.

Robyn Luffman 14:56

Well, so hospitality goes a step further than just accepting. Not only does it show generosity and kindness, but it opens you up to being changed and enriched by the gifts that they are bringing. It sends a very clear message that all are loved and that all are God's beautiful children.

Dave Anderson 15:18

For me, hospitality is really key, obviously, but it's an attitude. It's a practice, and it's a way of life. Hospitality creates a matter of openness and a spirit of welcome. And really a fundamental desire to be changed by those around us. So with hospitality comes a new relationship with some would call it reciprocal mutual sharing between people. So what we do when we're hospitable, we receive from the other, we give to the other, and that we're all transformed by my favorite theologians is Dietrich Bonhoeffer. And he calls hospitality a "reciprocal arrangement", where there's an openness and a mutual engagement, it stimulates not only the health of individuals, but the health of the community. And he argues that listening to one another is really one of the primary practices of mutual hospitality.

Karin Peter 16:25

So you go on in the article, to call us to a period of confession, or to simply admit our complicity in the mistreatment of others. That's hard for people to hear sometimes. So why is that important? Why can't we just work harder to be hospitable? Or work harder to include or work harder on behalf of justice? Why the confession?

Dave Anderson 16:52

Well, you asked a good question. And, you know, it's one that, you know, like, a lot of things in our world is complex. It's complicated, and it's difficult. But I think we all need to recognize that if we're not careful, we can be part of the problem. And it happens through inaction, or just plain downright ignorance. So we talked at the beginning of the podcast about the importance of being informed and being curious, we just need to acknowledge that in our human conditions, we to contribute to the problem. So you know, it's through our implicit or unconscious bias that we can really negatively impact others. So this leads to injustice and really inhibits our ability to pursue peace intact justly. And so when we talk about all of these issues, I think, for me, humility is key. We just need to confess that we're complicit into this, that we're human, we make mistakes. And through this humility comes the drive the action, the curiosity, that in order to do and work on behalf of justice, we need just to be humble and to accept the possibilities that we're contributing, and then learn from that and then engage on behalf of justice in our world.

Robyn Luffman 18:19

And I totally agree, I think, you know, the first step in this journey is admitting your own biases, you know, we can't work towards something until we identify our own bias and what can negatively impact

others. You know, it can be as simple as saying, we can't really get to a solution until we recognize the problem within us.

Karin Peter 18:44

Okay, now, this has given a great deal of food for thought for us. For our listeners, I include myself in that group of individuals, as we move forward to really, to really look closely at, "Are we moving towards Jesus, the peaceful One" you close your article by reminding us again, of Deborah, where we started, and her sense of hopelessness. And you issue a call to prophetically challenge those influences that mistreat. So what does that look like, for individuals who are seeking to follow Jesus? So maybe it's where the rubber meets the road kind of thing? What does that really look like for us?

Robyn Luffman 19:31

Well, as a faith based community, we absolutely want to address those individuals that are suffering. You know, followers can do that in many ways. You know, don't have to have a laundry list of specifics, but starting with admitting our own biases, so we can find those ways to challenge oppressive structural and social systems. But, you know, in the end, we all have to find our own path. You know, my way such as what I did in my research may not necessarily be right for someone else. And I would encourage everyone to find their own path to challenge the influences that mystery.

Dave Anderson 20:11

I don't know if I can say any better than Robyn, it was brilliantly, a brilliant reply. For me, it's it's a matter of just living out on a daily basis, getting up every morning, being informed, being curious, being humble, and then in our own lives, to discern God's desire in our lives and and how we can impact others. It's a matter of deep listening throughout the day, in just making the world a better place, one person at a time, so that all can flourish. As Robyn mentioned, every one of our lives circumstances are different. However, we're all called to share a Christ like love to all we meet might be somebody at the checkout stand, it might be someone crossing the street, it might be speaking up at someone in a culture of dealing with issues of injustice, it might be protesting. There are lots of things that we can do on a daily basis, that allows us to show Christ like love. And then we need just to learn to challenge each and every one of us, all of our colleagues all that we work with, that we can work together in a collective sense in a community to help those who are discarded and mistreated.

Karin Peter 21:45

So as we bring our conversation to a close, I want to again, thank you for sharing with us so articulately, I think that's a word on this topic of what it means to move towards Jesus, the peaceful one, especially through the lens of worth of all persons, which we we identify and Community of Christ as a primary Enduring Principle for how we understand our call. I want to ask each of you do you have any closing comments before we sign off any last things you'd like to share with us? Robyn, we'll start with you.

Robyn Luffman 22:21

First, I'd like to thank you, thank you for the opportunity to be here with you today. And I I just also wanted to say that I think we're all aware they're suffering in this world, you don't have to look too hard to see it. Our community is called to model the worth of all persons and reflect God's love. And by

starting with examining ourselves and confessing our own distortions, we can embrace all and support a flourishing world.

Dave Anderson 22:53

Well, I think we've talked about some important things here, and Robyn said it very well. So at this point, I don't have anything more to add, other than the importance of just humility, a desire for deep listening, a desire for following Christ, like loving our world and making it a better place. But I would like to just close my comments with a prayer, word of prayer that helps us engage in the worth of all persons as we move towards Jesus the peaceful one. It's a wonderful prayer taken from a book called, "Prayers for the New Social Awakening: Inspired by the New Social Creed." its editors are Christian Iosso and Elizabeth Hinson-Hasty and I've likely adapted it and put it in a plural tense. If you have just let me indulge in our prayer. "Lord, please guide our feet, that we may walk into the light of peace. Guide our hands, that we may stretch them out to those in need. Guide our arms, that we may embrace your broken children, and those that we do not know. Guide our eyes, that we may see the things that unite us with all the people of the world. Guide our years that we may hear the weeping of the world. Guide our tongue, that we may speak only kindness, never destruction, guide our dreams that we may see the hope of the future, to the despair of the night. Guide our thoughts, that we may learn how to create positive change. Lord, above all, please guide our hearts that we may love all the children of the world, seek justice for the oppressed, and live humbly under your hope. In the name of your grace. Amen."

Karin Peter 25:00

Thank you Dave. For our listeners, you can read the Toward the Peaceful One series of articles on the Community of Christ website cofchrist.org. In addition, theologian and former dean of Community of Christ Seminary, Matt Frizzell, discusses each Toward the Peaceful One article in a multi part series on the Community of Christ, YouTube channels. And with that, David Anderson and Robyn Luffman. Thank you for being with us for our series of episodes on Towards Jesus, the Peaceful One here at Project Zion Podcast. I'm Karin Peter. Thanks so much for listening.

Josh Mangelson 25:50

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