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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 I am really excited about today's podcast. I'm back with Matt Frizzell. Hi, Matt.

Matt Frizzell 00:44

Hey, Carla. How are you?

Carla Long 00:46

Good. It's so good to be here. So good to be here. And thank you so much for being here, too.

Matt Frizzell 00:50

It's fun. Thanks for reaching out.

Carla Long 00:53

So today, we're gonna talk a little bit more about conflict. Matt and I had a podcast, I don't know, five, six months ago about conflict. And we had some listeners reach out to us and tell us that they enjoyed it, and that they want to hear a little bit more from us, mostly from Matt, but I'm just gonna throw myself in there too. And, you know, it does kind of feel like things have changed in the last six months or so or a little less than that. You know, like, I find myself getting really worked up about stuff on social media. I find myself getting worked up about things that I see on the news. And, I mean, we're still in the midst of the pandemic. Right now we're still in the pandemic so I don't see a lot of people. And so this is how I interact with people, right? Like, there are times when I go on Facebook and look at specific people's Facebook's just to see what they're saying, they're like on an opposite political spectrum than I am, just to see what they're saying. So I, maybe so I can get worked up. I don't know why I do it. But I do it. So conflict seems to be part of our everyday lives, which is really, really sad. So I actually think this is a super important topic to think about and talk about and maybe we can even take a deeper look at ourselves and see why we do what we do. So, that's why we have Matt here, because he's the king of conflict.

Matt Frizzell 02:12

Well, you've been talking to my family members.

Carla Long 02:16

No, but Matt and I have discussed this podcast a couple times. And he always has something really interesting to say. So Matt, I'm going to toss the first question at you. You ready?

Matt Frizzell 02:24

Yeah.

Carla Long 02:26

So, since the election and the events at the Capitol on January 6, things feel different, like I was saying. It's not just politics. It's in the culture. It's in the church. Politically and religiously, people are divided. We're at opposite ends. And people express completely different worldviews. Would you change anything you said at our last podcast about the importance of conflict and the call to peace and justice?

Matt Frizzell 02:54

Yeah, so I revisited that after we first talked and got some feedback, and it's actually was January 3, on the Podcast Zion page, uh page, so I went back and listened to it again because I was, I was interested if, if things had changed for me. And the reason why am I here? Maybe it's because, I guess that's you, you raised that even in passing, and it's something interesting. Studying theology and social ethics, I approach them from, from the perspective of, from sociological forces. And social conflict is a fundamental idea in sociology, that conflict pushes the world forward and creates, you know, the whole that we call society. And so, whenever you have people together, know you, you, you have systems and, and, and you have conflicts, and asking yourself what the role of those conflicts are, is really important. And of course, the gospel is, is riddled with an, riddled with conflicts. And in, it, but it phrase, it, it kind of structures them in a relationship with God. But the conflicts are, are never just with God. It's with neighbors and conflicting factions and forces, you know, whether it's Israel and the kings and the prophets and, and the neighboring countries are, of course, in, in, in the gospels it's about Jesus in Rome, Israel in, in Roman occupation. So there's always conflict. Conflict theory is important. So I guess that's one of the reasons why I'm here. And it's also one of the reasons why I think about it and understand conflict in terms of power. Because conflict is never based on just kind of different ideas, or maybe feelings. There's, there's from a social perspective, there's power involved. So anyway, I went back and listened to that podcast and there's a lot of things that I don't think I would change. I still really liked the fact that we, that we talked about positive and negative conflict. Excuse me, positive and negative peace. That's what I meant. And, you know, positive peace incorporates conflict, right? Because we had talked about how negative peace is the absence of conflict, but it may be because of some enforcement of power or an order that privileged those in power, but not those out of power. And the other thing that we talked about that I think was really helpful is that critical thinking is a really important tool in moving into conflict or thinking or addressing conflict and approaching it. And one of the things I've noticed in, in the political environment, just in my lifetime, so I'm 47, so it's since the 60s, since 70s. Critical thinking kind of happens on both sides of the political spectrum. But in sometimes it's not critical thinking. I would describe it actually as just criticism. You know, it's, it's, it's a, it's, it's a distrust. It

begins with what we call a hermeneutics of suspicion. You approach something with a, with a suspicious point of view to, to peel back the layers, look under the rug and see what's, what's really going on there. And, and, and so critical thinking happens kind of everywhere, but it's kind of just a form of criticism. And we made a distinction that I think is really, really helpful and important for all of life as we approach conflict, and in the search for peace. And that is, there's a kind of critical thinking, that opens up possibilities. It questions assumptions. It doesn't just reinforce the same old stories, or the same old prejudices. One of those might be, you know, that just because you're a liberal, or just because you're a Republican, you're against me. You know, you're, you're just adamantly opposed to my agenda or objectives. And, and, and that's, of course, not necessarily the case. Critical thinking would say, Well, what, what, what do we have in common? Or what maybe my assumption about your perspective isn't quite what I imagine it to be.

Carla Long 06:51

And I think that that is, right there is something that, that stops people from connecting. You know, like, we want to win. So we find something in what you just said, whatever it is, and that's what we attack rather than taking in the whole, rather than being open and vulnerable to listen and to learn and to be a part of the process. And I find myself in that point all the time. It's like, I want to attack. I want to prove that I'm right. I want to be in this and I want to win. And, and that is not helpful for anyone. You, you misspoke a little while ago. You said positive and negative conflict. But I actually think that that's quite wise, I think there is positive and negative conflict. And what I engage in now, or what most people engage in now, it seems like on social media, for instance, is negative conflict. So, I, I kind of just want to throw it out there that I am definitely guilty of what, some things that you're talking about? And I'm feeling this already a little bit in my gut.

Matt Frizzell 07:51

I think, yeah, exactly. That's exactly where we do feel it. For me, it was really redeeming to learn that the part of our brain that that triggers, and we don't even know it, when it happens. It's part of our auto. There's a term for it, I just escaped me. But it's the part of our it's a part of our nervous system that operates on its own and keeps us alive. And the point is, is that when that part of your brain gets triggered, it really can't tell the difference between a posed or real threat. That's why when you're in a situation where the, the, the, the roof is not falling in, and it's, you know, you're not actually an immediate life or death situation, but your heart will still race anyway, your palms will get sweaty, or maybe you feel like you just are going to come launching out of your, your chair, or your voice raises, and you're not even paying attention to how you're returning a conversation or a comment. And anyway, that, that part of your brain doesn't, can't really tell the difference between a, a posed or a real threat. And that was really helpful for me to learn that because it helped me realize that when I feel threatened, it, it, it's something that I'm not in control of. And perhaps it's silly. Perhaps it's just plain silly, but it's triggered. And it affects my ability to think and where do you feel that? Right in your guts. I mean, it's not, it's something that we kind of localize in our guts, but it's actually something that's experienced throughout the body. And as I was telling you earlier before, in, when we were chatting outside the

podcast, I mean, I was, I had the same experience just about two or three weeks ago, when I, somebody had commented on one of the threads that I had, had started on Facebook or Twitter, and they interpreted it, in my opinion, the way I interpreted them was that they were interpreting me in the worst way possible. And I've given the example before because I just think it's funny. You know, someone comes up to you and says, Boy, you're wearing a really nice shirt today. And your response is, You're telling me the one I wore yesterday was really ugly. You know, that's what I mean by interpreting the worst way possible. And anyway, so I was, I stared at that comment for two hours. I literally, for two hours because it churned a response in me that I ruminated on. I wasn't, I didn't go into another world. I didn't really kind of flip out. I was just stuck. And it was in that feeling. I, I, it took me a while to realize I felt threatened. And I actually think that's why we're having, to some degree, that's one of the reasons why we're having this podcast. There is this experience that I think a lot of people are having, Why do we care about divisions? Why is it a bad thing? Because it's threatening. And it feels threatening?

Carla Long 10:40

Well, January 6, to me says that it is threatening and in a very real way at times as well. I mean, it can be threatening in the way that you're describing, too, it's like, I don't need to lunge out of my chair when somebody on social media says something annoying, or when I'm watching the news. But January 6, to me, changed a lot of what I've seen. You know, like, I've always expected that my life would be nice and peaceful and nice and normal, just like my parents' life, you know, like, they everything's just pretty nice and wonderful. And, and to me the insurrection at the Capitol, it scared me good. And made me think that maybe I need to rethink the way I interact with people. And yeah, so yeah, it changed a lot of things for me.

Matt Frizzell 11:29

Well, I think it did change things. And that, that was, that was where I was gonna' go next, I think, is you talk about, you know, has anything changed since that podcast? Watching the footage, and listening and reading the both conservative and liberal news. And I say that very loosely. I mean, that, that itself is, it's a, a, a conversation to have about what's, what do you mean by that? But, I mean, I, I try very hard to read across the spectrum because I'm very interested in the tone and the language that's used. I ascribe to this philosophical idea that words are like a house that you live in. And when you change the words, or the, depending on what words you use, those words, create a structure or a framework of meaning, which then you understand the world, understand yourself and interpret others. And so when I watch the media, I can get a, try to get a sense of what those, those frameworks are. ,What those, those word systems are and, and they, they're obviously diametrically opposed. I think, I think it gave me, I think, January 6, gave me pause to realize that, uh, some of the divisions that we feel in the U.S. are, are deeper than just words. And I think I already knew that, but it hadn't quite been televised in that way. It gets televised another way, like, when I, when I watched, or when, when we, we saw what happened with the Black Lives Matter movement. I mean, there are all sorts of forces at work in our culture where power is asserted and conflicts are real. And because of the nature of oppression, the, you know, the Black Lives Matter, in-your-face kind of violence that happens systemically is normalized. But Janu,

and I'm not saying that's a good thing, I'm saying that's part of the racism that exists in our culture, is that it takes multiple scenarios for us to kind of get woke in that whole woke culture that we talk about, to the problem, systemic issues. But on January 6, I guess for, you know, white middle class over educated people like a lot of us are, and I, I think it's important to name that to know where you come from, and to name yourself in the social system, this world that you're in. We're not used to seeing that. And some of us didn't live through the 60s we were born afterwards. And, and so it was, it was different and new. I, shortly after the January 6 experience, I wouldn't watch the Chicago Seven. I don't know if you're familiar with that movie, but it's, it's, it's a movie about, you know, the, the protests and the staging of violence that took place between protesters and Chicago Police Department during the Democratic National Convention 1968, which many people know, at least many people that I've read, sociologists, historians know is kind of a turning point. Because part of the, it, you got to remember 1968, matter of fact, it's probably hard to even think of the world before 1968 for those of us who were born after, but for those who have a memory that goes before, you know, the questioning of government, radicalization, protests, that wasn't something that came into people's living rooms on a, on a daily basis. Not only because it maybe, maybe it happened, maybe it didn't, but it was the invention of TV made that completely different. TV brought it into people's living rooms. And that's what happened again on January 6, just like it did on September 11. It brought this trauma into our screens and into our homes. And, um, I think seeing it in a, in a new way, I think created a deeper sense of fear and shock and concern because now these political differences were more volatile.

Carla Long 15:24

I, yes, I think that that is absolutely true. You know, like I, before the January 6, before the election, you know, obviously, people are angry. There's obviously people on both sides of the aisle who really wanted their voices to be heard. But seeing how that played out, for me, showed how deeply angry people are and how far they will go in order to do what they feel like has to be done was the scary part for me. I thought that they were mostly like me. It's like, well, you know, like, however, I wasn't happy with the election however long ago, but I got over it. I just assumed everybody could just get over it if they were upset about the election results. And I thought that people were like me. And it turns out people are not exactly like me and will go to, farther than I would in order to, in order to show what they think is right. So that's why it was so scary to me. I just thought more people were like me. I don't know if that makes sense or not?

Matt Frizzell 16:29

Well, I think it does. And it also, I, I say this out of a sense of self awareness and confession, in some ways, our, I mean, this is mighty white of us to have this conversation in this way. And I, what I mean, so some people listening might say, you know, What does he mean by that? That's just more inflammatory rhetoric. No, it's not. It's a confession that you and I live in a world. And by the way, a lot of our listeners do, too. And a lot of folks in our church do, too. And even those who are upset do, too, live in a world that by and large, there can be a lot of, a lot of froth, a lot of, a lot of anger, a lot of protests, a lot of words slung. But in the end, the system kind of benefits us. We're not alarmed all the

time. We can say, Those are words. Those are words. That's just more rhetoric, more PR spin, more negativity, more words, because we don't live under the heel of the system the way other people do. I often, I often remind myself, even though it's kind of a plastic thing to do, it's not, in other words, it's not authentic, but I try to remind myself, Man, how nice is that? That I have lived in a world where I can assume that the system has kind of worked for me. And so now I'm experiencing that kind of fracture. Wow, there's folks who have never been in my position. There's millions of Americans who don't live there. And, to some degree, this gives me a window into, again, critical thinking into understanding what's going on. And that's a whole nother podcast. But I will just say, many people note that there's growing insecurity in the U.S., and the middle class is shrinking. And there are reasons why. And all, a lot of that is getting lost in politics as instead, we're distracted by very important, but divisive issues that aren't necessarily getting at that insecurity. Because that, that insecurity has to do with the role of government, has to do with economics, it has to do with debt load both and family, but in families, U.S. families, but also in, in, in the government. All these things that are kind of really dry and you can glaze over, but they're actually a really important part of our systemic welfare. And people are feeling that disenfranchisement, and it's growing. Economic inequality is growing. And so anyway, my point in all this is to just say, as more people feel squeezed, more people are going to feel threatened. And that feeling that you have in social media, isn't, it's, it's not, it's triggered, not just because it's on social media. It's a part of life. And so anyway, you and I, I think, can sit back and say, Whoa, January 6, was a turning point for some of us, but for others, it's not. And of course, that was part of the media response, too, also, as they analyzed it from the perspective of race, and gender, and political position, and class, and all those other things. So we do live in an increasingly fractured world. And I think January 6 was a, was a reminder of that for some of us.

Carla Long 19:27

I think that that is so, so important, because it is so easy for me, especially since I'm not out in the world right now, I'm still in my home because of the pandemic, that I can get lost in my own little echo chamber. And just, you know, it's so important to remember that I am white middle class, as you said, probably over educated and that I, that I do, that not everyone views the world the same way I view the world and I think that that is an really important starting point. Super important starting point. If everybody started there, that not everyone views the world the same way I view it, not everyone has the same experience that I have, then we would probably cover leaps and bounds in this talk about conflict. There would be less conflict if we could all recognize that we're not on equal footing when it comes to those things. And it's so easy to forget. Because, you know, I, I, Carla Long have also struggled in my life. Yeah, it's true. I've, I've had to overcome some things. But I haven't had to overcome as much as other people at all. So that is really important for me to remember. So I thank you for bringing that up. I do want to ask you another question, because we keep saying the word conflict, and a listener noted that we have never actually defined the word conflict. So maybe it might be helpful if people hear what you think conflict is defined as?

Matt Frizzell 20:54

Oh, yeah, that was helpful, because I remember reading that feedback, too. And, in, and I kind of touched on a response to that, but that, I think it was, it was a good comment. Conflict, of course, your definition of it comes from the, your, your assumptions that you begin with, and I tried to share a little earlier that from a sociological perspective, I look at it in terms of power, because for me, it, for me, it's about a structure, a relationship. And it's something that ultimately transcends me. It's, it's, it's, it's different than the way a neuroscientist might talk about conflict and something that, you know, is experienced neurologically in the brain. Or a communication theorist who might say, Well, conflict has to do with different understandings and the way words are used or cognitive dissonance. It all depends from where you're starting from. Given the fact that peace and justice are things that, yes, are true to us internally, being at peace with myself, being at peace with God. Those are legit and really important foundations for understanding peace. Peace and justice also has to do, though, with the way we live together. Zion has to do with, you know, the state of the world, or the condition of our relations. And just peace has to do with, you know, having a kind of, of righteousness in those relationships, or just right relationships with one another. So I still go back to this understanding that conflict inherently has something to do with power. And, and we were just talking about it, because there are some of us who have more power than others. And sometimes it's the power to not care as much. You know, it's the power to kick back and not be as concerned. One of the things that some people who hear me more than once are probably tired of hearing, but we, we, we've always taught in thinking about justice and peace and social ethics is, is, is, is imagining what you just said, but not just an individual terms, but in social terms. So you and I do look at the world a certain way. And as, liberals are both conservative and progressive, so when I say liberals, I don't mean democrats or people on the left. I mean, people who think in individualistic terms, and think of their own rights and autonomy. That's what a classic liberal is. Looking from a liberal perspective, we kind of reduce that idea to that, Oh, you, Carla, you look, you look at the world differently than I do, because we're each individuals. But I'm talking about something else I'm talking about where you sit in a social group, and in a social history. You know, my family, I have to think about my social history and my family history, my education, my income, my wealth, my race, all these other factors, my, my physical abilities, my gender, and sexuality, that shape how I look at conflict. Because how I approach it, how I approach experience and understand conflict, is all shaped by those factors. And so when you and I talk about, you know, being aware that we're white, or middle class or over educated, and that's, that's kind of affectionate way of saying, we have the privilege of education and sometimes the blindness of knowledge, because there are things that we don't know because of our social location, but we think we know because we're quote, unquote, educated. So we sometimes can not be self aware, miss that speck and see that speck in somebody else's eye and miss the mote in our own. You know, that's, that's being, the way to develop critical self awareness is, is to, is to start taking inventory of where you stand as you approach anything. And, and that's very, very important. I, I, if this podcast has the impact of inviting any, everybody into that critical self awareness, I think that's desperately needed, because that was one of the things that happened for me when I was in seminary and also happened for me when I was living in the south side of Chicago, when whether we were talking about how you read the Bible, or how you understand God, you know, does God have

feelings or does God not have feelings? That's a question that is actually centuries old in Christian theology. Your perspective on that kind of has something to do with where you stand in the world and how you approach things and becoming critically self aware of that's really important. So power is always at work, because where you stand is a construct of power. And it's, it defines what kind of power you have. So anyway, that, conflict does involve power and I think the more we think about conflict and power and how we approach critical thinking, it, it starts with kind of understanding ourselves and then trying to understand the world from where we stand. So, does that, does that answer the question or did I just talk a lot.

Carla Long 25:29

I actually do more now than I did before. So I'm sure we'll hear about it if you didn't answer it.

Matt Frizzell 25:38

Yes. Some of those folks were like, What are you talking about? That's so crazy.

Carla Long 25:45

I'm gonna start a conflict with you, because I don't understand your definition of conflict. Like critical health, critical thinking is something that seems a little bit scary to me. And maybe it's scary to everyone. Because if I start evaluating and going in myself and saying, you know, why do I think this where am I at, that means I might have to change. And it might mean that I was wrong about something. And that is something that's a little bit scary. And because I don't want to be wrong, I don't want to be the person that gives in, especially when I so desperately want to be right and want to win. So, I mean, how do we do that critical thinking that is helpful and, and do we just have to do it? Do we just have to, like, do it? Or is there a easier way to do it?

Matt Frizzell 26:38

Well, I think what you're saying is, you know, how do you critically think well, and you know, how do you make it an effective tool? I mean, if you are gonna be, approach justice and peacemaking in this way, and we talked a little bit about that in our, in our June 23 podcast and about revisiting again, how critical thinking that opens up possibilities is very different than critical thinking that just closes possibilities. And I described the, the kind of criticism that says, you know, if, if, if, if you're, if you're, if you're pro choice or if you believe in a woman's rights to choose, you're just a baby killer. That's, that's a crit., that's a critique. And I'm choosing something that's kind of in your face, maybe it's too much, but I'm using it as an example to say, it's a negative form of critique. It says, No, I don't accept what you're talking about. And I'm challenging you on it, but it's from this, it's from a position of prejudice. It's, it's from a position of complete prejudice that says you, you, you should be ashamed. You have no foundation to talk from. And that's not the kind of critical thinking I'm talking about. It's not critical thinking to name call. It's not critical thinking to just say, This is your perspective, and it's wrong. Critical thinking that opens up possibilities is the kind of critical thinking that opens up the possibility of positive peace. And that's much harder to do, because it does require exactly what you said. I have to

open up the fact that I'm coming from a position where I don't see everything. I don't stand on top of Mount Olympia or Mount Sinai. I don't stand on the moon looking back at the earth to see everything. And even if I did, I don't see it all. And I, I have to be aware that I see that. What makes critical thinking a really powerful tool is when you're able to answer or ask the right questions. Are we both aiming towards the same ends and just starting from different perspectives? Is there something that's shaping your point of view that's threatening? In other words, have you, are you coming from a position where you're trying to stave off a threat? And I would say that's very true in our partisan politics today because in many ways, the, the last standing definition of being a Republican or a Democrat or right and left is just that you're not the other one. I'm certainly not a Democrat, so I must be a Republican. Or I'm certainly not a Republican, so I must be a Democrat. And those who say they're in the middle or independent, really don't tell us enough in a world where you just have to be one or the other. So that, that's one way to, to try to etch out a place to stand where there's possibilities. And so anyway, that that kind of critical thinking, I think, is really important to doing peace work. And as I, I was sharing, you know, in the podcast before, it's one of the most important tools because when you open up imagination, you open up possibilities. And why is this important? This may sound like just a bunch of gobbledygook and intellectual rhetoric. Read scripture and imagine again, what God is up to or what you are reading when you think about what Eden must have been like, or what paradise must be like or what a reconciled world name that we call the fulfillment of God's Shalom, must be like, or what new life must feel like. These are things we don't really know except through our imagination. And if we can open up the possibilities of reaching towards those possibilities, reaching towards new life, reaching towards Zion, reaching towards Eden, restoring the world to the way it was originally, when it was created, of course, this is all just a product of narrative. It's just a product of sacred story. But it's what gives birth to critical thinking about what's possible, because without that story, wouldn't, we wouldn't even imagine it being possible. That's how critical thinking becomes important. And that's how critical thinking becomes theological, because it opens up not just to possibilities, but to God's possibilities.

Carla Long 30:57

I really appreciate that. I also appreciate what you said about are we looking towards the same ends? Are we trying to go to the same places because I, I do think that in a majority of the conflicts that I see online, people are talking in their own echo chamber and other people are talking in their own echo chamber, and they don't care where they meet up. They just want it to be. They just want to make sure that they've said what they need to say. So I appreciate that point as well, that there does seem to be like maybe some rules of engagement when it comes to conflict and say, Are we trying to meet somewhere and be somewhere together? Or are we just trying to make sure that our voices are heard? So I, I'm really glad that you mentioned that. I think that's a really important point. I'm also glad that you brought up scripture because my next question had to do with Jesus. But should we talk about that guy?

Matt Frizzell 31:53

Jesus who?

Carla Long 31:54

I know you've heard of Christ, I believe his last name was? (Oh, no.) You love talking about Jesus? Don't deny it? (Amen.) So, I mean, we obviously are in the United States, we are in a time of a lot of conflict and division. And Jesus during the time of Jesus, they also were, had a lot of conflict and division. Can we talk a little bit about the parallels between Jesus's time and our time?

Matt Frizzell 32:27

Well, that is, I think that is helpful because it's easy to get taught, caught up in a bunch of conversation and concepts that are just really modern sounding and can leave the faith world that we are really here trying to get at behind. And we can leave it behind. And it, one of the, one of the, one of the outstanding questions, at least for me, and I think anybody who's younger than 47, and perhaps even older, whatever, but my point is, is that the younger you get to see, the, the, the, the, the kind of skepticism of religion seems to increase. And it becomes a really important question of, Is this old book even relevant? Is Christianity even relevant, or maybe it's addressing a world that is long past, and just doesn't matter anymore. And certainly, a lot of us grew up in churches and in forms of belief that kind of would tend us to lead, to come to that conclusion. It's just, belongs in a world we don't live in anymore. Boy, when I began to understand more about what was happening in the biblical situation, the more that idea that the Bible was irrelevant just crumbled. It's, it, it's hard to describe the kind of drama I want to put behind that. It's like, Boy, could that have been more, it couldn't have been more wrong. When I think about the world that Jesus lived in, and I confess, I'm not, I, I don't know everything about this. But the more I peered into it and looked into it, I thought, Man, there's so many important parallels here, that, that make the scriptures and even what happened to Jesus, come alive. And some of your listeners have already heard it before, but it bears repeating. You know, Carla, you and I don't know what it's like to live in an occupied country. We've just never been there. Matter of fact, the U.S. has just really never really been there. So your Joe and Sally American or whoever, you know, John Q. Public, whoever you imagine the typical American to be, which is itself a dangerous project. But Americans don't really understand that in the traditional sense. There are certainly people though, who live as oppressed groups and kind of live under siege and other forms of oppression. So I don't want to erase those Americans either. But my point is, is that it, the, the America, historical American citizen has not really lived in a country that has been occupied by another foreign power. And that's exactly the environment that Jesus is in. And in Jesus's time, they were trying to solve that political problem with the tools of their day, just like we are. And some people have made parallels. And it's good to think of them just as analogies, but some people talked about, you know, Torah, or the or the, the covenant that Israel had with with God is kind of the document that we would have parallels today with the Constitution. How you interpreted it, how you understood it coming about and how you applied it, were the heart of political drama. It was the heart of political controversy. It was the heart of division. And I think you can see that happening in our, in the U.S. today in, politically speaking, as people claim, you know, even argue about what the Second Amendment really means and gun rights are really about. And you hear all sorts of interesting parallels that you actually hear in what, hear when we talk about biblical interpretation. You know, do you understand it in its context, you understand it how it means today, and Jesus's world was full of factions

in his time that were approaching Torah differently. Why? Because the common objective was the same, at least in theory, which was, if we get the covenant, right, then we can get God's favor back. And if we get God's favor back, we can be free again. That was the objective. If we can fix the covenant, try to understand where sin is happening so we can address it, annihilate it, do, do away with it. And of course, just like in Jesus's time, in today's time, some people think the answer is just to get rid of sinners. You know, if sin is the problem, then get rid of sinners. Hey, sound familiar? You know, of course, the sinner is always the other party. But, but my point is, is that that was very much, you can read that into the drama of Jesus's, you know, walk, emerges out of Galilee, and, and, and his end of life in Jerusalem. There's these, these, these, these forces at work. The, the Pharisees interpreted the law a certain way and they looked at the written law and the Oral Law. And that's why they get into a debate with Jesus, because the law was central, kind of like the Constitution is central the, Jesus loves the law, is talking about the law, but they had very different forms of interpretation. The Sadducees also had another form of interpretation on the law and it was different than the Pharisees. And then in the same environment, you've got a whole different solution at work through the prophetic work of John the Baptist, who's not arguing about the law. He's on the outside of town away from the temple, or the temple would be the, the establishment way of making things right, you know, sacrifices, observance of the law, do what God asked. John the Baptist is a radical and outside of town going, It's not even important. You don't need all that. What you need is repentance. And he has this kind of beeline to God. You understand what I mean, my beeline, you know, like a straight line to God where you don't need the temple, don't need covenant. What you need is a contrite heart. What you need is to, to, to take this drama between this broken relationship between the country and God and put it inside of you. Find your role in it. Fix it by as, by going to God directly and becoming part of the solution. That's one way to interpret what, interpret what repentance is. And that's the, that's John the Baptist's approach, which is a whole different kind of way to understand. These are, you know, how to make it right; how to fix the political problems. Doesn't this sound at, at least just kind of a little bit like the divisions that could exist in the, that do exist in the world today where these, these completely disparate perspectives on pathways to correction, pathways to a solution, pathways to right, to righting, to diagnosing what's wrong and righting what's wrong. And all focusing in different directions and at war with each other over who's right.

Carla Long 38:59

Yeah, it sounds very familiar. And, you know, I know like when I read the Bible, I don't always put all of that context behind it. But that's super important that we do. Because when Jesus tells these parables about whatever Jesus is telling a parable about, this is all going on behind this parable in the disciples' minds and in Jesus's mind. And they didn't have it great either. Let's just be honest about that. So I think that's a really important point. Thank you so much for talking about that. And when you're talking about John the Baptist, I'm like, Man, I always thought John the Baptist was a little cray cray. But it seems like maybe he had it, right. He was doing, he was trying to hit it from his perspective. And it seems like what he was doing was pretty important.

Matt Frizzell 39:45

Oh, go ahead.

Carla Long 39:47

No, I'm not gonna say, I, I don't think it's the only way, but the way he's talking about it seems to be at least put some responsibility on yourself rather than putting all the responsibility on somebody else.

Matt Frizzell 40:00

Well, if you interpret repentance that way, I think that is a valid way to start to understand what John the Baptist is talking about. And from a biblical interpretation perspective, you know, starting from Mark going into Matthew and Luke, that's actually really important because Jesus emerges as kind of a follower of John the Baptist. So Jesus's way of repentance is what sets him apart from the Pharisees, Sadducees, and I didn't mention the Essenes, but that's a whole nother approach where you kind of just withdraw from the world. But that's a whole nother podcast. But my point is, and they created an intentional community and the dead sea scrolls and stuff and all that kind of emerges around that group. But anyway, my point is, is that you have all these different factions, and then John the Baptist is, is unique in the sense that John the Baptist kind of has this radical simp, and, and you could even argue it's more simplistic because it does away with these complex political systems; the sacrificial system of the temple or the proper interpretation of the law. Jesus is more about, I'm going to fulfill the law and show you what that looks like. And of course, he's doing that by fulfilling a set of prophecies that begin in the major prophets. And so it's not as if this is just something that pops up out of nowhere. Jesus is kind of a fulfillment of, of a prophetic line of predictions or possibilities that then Jesus fulfills. And, of course, what's tragic and powerful about that is that just as it's prophesied, it, it ends at the cross. I mean, that Jesus, Mark and the, the gospel writers take Jesus's words, put words in Jesus's mouth that are predictions of the prophets that say, The Son of Man, or the Messiah, is going to suffer and is going to die at the hands of the chief priests and religious leaders. And that's where we start to begin to ask questions about what does the gospel do to help us inform about how we approach now. You know, in a, in a world full of conflict, the cross does actually beckon all of us to kind of look past our sense of divisions and the call of repentance is to internalize the conflict and say, How can, how can I reconcile from where I stand in my social position? In my world? If it's about race, it's about being a white person. Or if it's about a man and having power or privilege as a man, it's about being aware of sexism. If it's, if it's (. . .) to sexual identity or class, you know, all these things that, how can I? How can I just embrace this and own it. And this is exactly what a lot of people politically rebel against, because they want to be individuals who don't have a history and can choose what they want. But Jesus doesn't do that. Jesus does not just stand and say, I'm going to assert my individualism. And none of this applies to me. He embraces the circumstances of the time, internalize them, that's what the Messiah means. I will take this on because I am anointed. And that's exactly what happens in, in Luke, when he takes the words out of the prophet Isaiah and says, The Spirit has fallen upon me. You know, in that famous wonderful passage of Luke 4:18, when he said, where he basically says, I anoint, being a Christian means to be among the called, to be among the chosen, and the chosen is to take on those circumstances, not to proclaim

yourself free above them, but to take on those circumstances and be in part of the solution. And as he does that, addressing the lives of the people, the political problems of the day, and embracing John the Baptist's approach, which is to repent, and to embrace and be a part of the solution. That's when he has to face the cross because of the world is adamantly opposed to him. And the world is adamantly opposed to the, to the fulfillment of the law the way he understands it. And, and that becomes his way of life and his path to Jerusalem. That's exactly what actually the turning to Jerusalem and heading that way is about, because it's politically going to the heart of the matter if Jesus was an American citizen, he would have been born someplace and said, he would have turned his head to Washington.

Carla Long 44:01

And that's actually my, my number one favorite scripture passage. Jesus turned his face toward Jerusalem, like, he made that choice. And he's like, I have to do this. I am called to do this. And I don't, I don't know if you brought this up because I was thinking while you're talking about the sacrifice that Jesus made, and how you said the cross beckons us all to make a sacrifice like that. And not to say, I'm only going to sacrifice if you sacrifice, because I think that comes out a lot in our conflicts, like, I'm not giving in unless you give in first. No. If we're gonna follow Jesus's example, we go towards the cross. We make that sacrifice in whatever way it is, whatever way God is calling us to sacrifice, and we try and make this world a better place. And I don't know if that's what you're saying or not, but that's what I'm getting from it.

Matt Frizzell 44:57

Oh, I, I think, so first, I want to note that to anybody listening this, this is actually the hard word of the gospel. I would even be afraid to say that, you know, some of this isn't safe to hear for some people, and I don't, what do I mean by that? This is deeply personal. We, we often romanticize the cross or talk about it as something that is, is, was God's problem, and God solved it. But when you look at it from the perspective I was talking about from the beginning, in terms of, you know, conflict and social power, the cross is not just kind of this cosmological drama about an angry God who demands pure sacrifices, and only God can provide that so he sends his son. And in some sort of strange way kills his own son because he has to be. I mean, this, that's how the story ends up kind of unfolding. You're like, Wwhhaatt? It's, it doesn't make, when you theologize it purely, it begins to just kind of, in my opinion, it begins to sound like nonsense. And what, what, what the cross actually is from a political and social perspective, is this the power of empire that says there are going to be winners and losers and the order of the world benefits those in power. Because empire always says, This is the way. Pax Romana. We, we bear peace, we bring peace. And, of course, what is Jesus constantly saying, No, peace I give. I, I bring a different kind of peace. It's not Pax Romana. And if you don't embrace Pax Romana, guess what you have waiting for you? The cross. Because the order in the which you are going to live where God is the, the, the rightful ruler, or Jesus is king, that's what's so heretical about what he says. When, when, when he gets accused of being called king, you know, that becomes a, that's, that's insurrection, that's rebellion, that's a cause to get somebody crucified. And that's what happens to Jesus. Of course, that's not something he claims about himself as much as people put on him. And so, when, when, when, when

he faces that reality, about being an alternative to the, to the, to the empire, in the, in the order that exists, that is what the cross ends up being for him and what waits for him. And that is complete and utter rejection, refusal, and to, to, to refuse to participate, but also the empire refusal to accommodate. And so the cross is pushing God and the Messiah way out to the margins, outside the city, because that's what death does. And that's, and that's, that's where crucifixions take place and that's where the bodies get dumped. And so from a political and social perspective, if you think about in historical terms, the cross is a very dramatic thing that Jesus faces. And I think in, for us in our lifetimes, we can take, we can, we can interpret that in a, in a literal sense. And for some people, that's ends up being the reality. We talked about those, those stories, yet Martin Luther King, in many ways, faced the, his cross, and did it on behalf of his people. But we can think of other examples. But for many of us, it's simply facing the power of empire, our benefits in it, and simply saying no. And taking on what Paul talked about is the, you know, he kind of talked about the foolishness of the cross, it's craziness, that doesn't make sense to anybody else, especially the Gentiles. But for those who are Christian, they, it's, it's an embracing another world, it's embracing a world that's not yet possible. And I think when we do that, and understand the cross is the burden of living in a world that makes sense in a certain way, where there are winners and losers, the powerful rule, and the powerless don't, and many other ways we could describe our world. Embracing the cross is embracing a different way of life, an alternative that the world is going to refuse. And if we, if we embrace that, then that's becomes an analogy and understanding of what the cross is. And that's where I was going earlier when I said this is not, you know, this is kind of not discipleship 101. It's kind of when you start talking about the cross, it's dangerous, it's hard, it's because in the end, no one can tell you what the cross is for you. No one in the end could have told Jesus what it was for him until it became his to embrace. And of course, that happened as, as soon as crucify him was being chanted by the crowd and Pontius Pilate made a decision about how to dispose of this unwanted Jew. So we all have to face that road to Jerusalem, that path of repentance and that call to embrace the world, not just as it is, but how it could be and live a different way. And that's the call and the story of Jesus and the gospel and then to say, I'm a Christian. I'm going to be baptized and follow that way of repentance. And I'm going to follow him. That, when you think about it, the church is probably gonna be pretty small in that way because that's a tall order. And that's something that is, is, is very hard to embrace. But luckily, God's grace, God's love, the community of, of believers, all of those possibilities, the power of the Holy Spirit that becomes very real, and, and manifest amongst those who embrace the cross, all those become not only a way of life, but a source of life that sustains us and, and, and calls us forward towards Zion. So anyway, I kind of just preached. Didn't mean to, but that's how that unfolds. If you think about the cross, Jesus is calling and opening up possibilities in real, social, political and historical terms to understand faith in that way. I think that's kind of how the story beckons us on.

Carla Long 50:58

Oh, that's a really heavy. I mean, that is, this is not Christianity, 101 either. You know, this is, this is serious business. And this is what we all say yes to in the waters of baptism in some ways, right?

Matt Frizzell 51:16

Oh, absolutely. That's why Paul talks about becoming a living sacrifice. Because it's not just about putting up more dead bodies. It's becoming about taking on a lifestyle, a cruciform lifestyle that moves towards a different possibility, a different way of life. So absolutely. That's a, that is what baptism does is it, it begins of a death of ourselves and being reborn, being reborn, as Christ in us. And hopefully this doesn't sound strange, because this is Paul, this exactly what Paul talks about. And in Christ, we all kind of take on a oneness. And that oneness is ultimately a restoration of God's image in every created soul, as it was intended, as God created and meant it to be, which is the fulfillment of God's shalom. I mean, the, the beauty of the Christian story is it does come full circle. And so it's full, it's riddled with light and hope.

Carla Long 52:15

So it sounds like what you're saying is that because I'm a Christian, and I've been baptized, that I need to be nicer on social, social media.

Matt Frizzell 52:33

No, you have to tell the truth, bear witness to the truth.

Carla Long 52:39

I mean, of course, it's a little bit more than that. But it does sound like our call, part of our call as Christians, is to perhaps take a critical look at ourselves. Perhaps look at where we come from and look at what we believe and why we believe it. And then may, there might be some sacrifice involved there. And then also maybe be a little bit more vulnerable and open to people who don't see things the way we see them. This is all very, very hard. This makes it really real. It's easy to say, I'm a Christian. I can take communion. I can pray. I can preach. But this is much, much harder. This is hard stuff.

Matt Frizzell 53:26

It's much easier to be a member than it probably is a disciple. And that's not a new thing to say. But at the same time, I guess it's really important to remember that there's the promise of new life in all of this. And what's really, what's really powerful and perhaps it's something that we've gotten away from over time, is that once we start tipping our toes in the waters of this different approach to life, a way of life that's not a way of death, God becomes very real in the witness of the saints of what's possible, and what can be manifest does happen. I mean, if you've ever been in, I mean, all's you have to do is sit around a campfire at a camp. All's you have to do is sit in a, in a Wednesday night prayer service amongst those who are trying to live their discipleship. Seriously, all's you have to do is be in a circle of even addicts who've decided that they are going to start a new life. And they're going to do it because they believe in a higher power beyond themselves and that's the only hope they have. You start hearing the story of new possibilities that have not existed before. And that in our closed, foreclosed mind before in the world we used to live in before that we understood the cross, before we understood the, the power of baptism, before, before we were inspired by the Spirit to see something possible and new, we didn't see it. But

that, that does happen and it, it does carry a power and that's what we sing about. That's what we worship for. And, and I, I guess I, I want to invite people to that because it is heavy, but it's also the springboard to new life and the, even the story of, of introspection that we're talking about, about taking inventory of ourselves and where we stand and, and not getting into the temptation of just enjoying our privileges, and standing outside of it all. I mean, that's modeled in the scripture too. And, and when Jesus goes out into the wilderness for 40 days and looks at all these possibilities that could be his. And, of course, that's, that's modeled by his time with Satan, but it's actually the adversary who would take him off path. That's the, I mean, that's the, the name Satan means, you know, the one's who against me or my adversary, you, you, you we all face that opportunity to look at these paths that could be ours so that would be easier, and maybe even our rightful place because that one of those temptations for Jesus was being able to just ascend to the powers of heaven right away and avoid the cross in the life and the walk to Jerusalem and the, the, the emergence out of Galilee completely, but he chose not to do that. So that, that is also a part of the cross. So I guess my point is, is it, for me, it all fits. For me, it's, it's a, it's a decision that we all kind of can face if we embrace the possibility of the cross in the new life that comes after it. There, that is what the, the Gospel story in that political environment is about.

Carla Long 56:18

I'm so glad you said that. I'm so glad you mentioned the new life that comes. I, I was hoping that you were going to say something like that I the hope of the Gospel is something that we all need to hear and the hard work that comes is work that we all must do in order to feel that hope of the Gospels. And so is there anything else you wanted to say that you didn't want to say?

Matt Frizzell 56:43

Thanks for being open to that exploration together. It's easy to kind of leave our faith and our world that we live in separate and, and, and kind of make the conflicts of our own faith journey, separate from the conflicts of the world. But, of course, that's exactly the opposite of what Jesus did. By embracing the world that he lived in, and then seeing the way of the cross within it as the fulfillment of the law and the, the, the, the, the call to new life. And, so anyway, I, I, I, thanks, thanks for that opportunity. It's, it's important to me, too, to remember why we engage conflict out of love.

Carla Long 57:28

Well, I really appreciate you walking through this with me. I, I, I say this on a lot of my podcasts, but I think I get way more out of these podcasts than maybe even the listeners, but I, because I feel like I've been changed through this podcast. So thank you, Matt, so much for being with us. And thank you for offering your wisdom with us. And maybe if you like these kinds of podcasts with Matt about conflict, maybe we could do a few more. So listeners, let us know if you like them. And thanks again, Matt so much.

Matt Frizzell 57:55

Thank you, Carla. It was great to be with you this afternoon. Take care.

Josh Mangelson 58:06

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