

382 | What's Brewing | Richard James
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.

Robin Linkhart 00:33

Hello, and welcome to another episode of Project Zion Podcast. This is your host, Robin Linkhart, and today is another edition in our series, What's Brewing, where we explore how God is showing up in the neighborhood and people of faith are living out mission and transforming ways. Today we're here with apostle Richard James. Richard is a member of the Council of Twelve Apostles in Community of Christ, and currently serves as the apostle for British Isles, Western Europe and Eurasia Mission Centers. Richard is also the Council of Twelve Apostles secretary. Welcome, Richard. It's really great to have you with us today on Project Zion Podcast.

Richard James 01:20

Well, thanks, Robin, really good to be with you and to have this conversation together.

Robin Linkhart 01:26

So, we'd like to take a little time to get to know you. So, please tell us about how you became connected with Community of Christ, what brought you to a life devoted to full time ministry or anything about you, Richard, that would be of interest to our listeners?

Richard James 01:44

Well, those that will know me know that I live in Wales, a part of the United Kingdom, let's say 200 miles west of London. I was born into Community of Christ, my parents became members, but five years before I was born. I think the interesting piece here is that my father was a coal miner, used to work in two-foot seams. He had a strong faith and was a lay minister in many churches. He found the Community of Christ, at that time the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, deep inside the coal mine. I think there's a nice little message there, that the Spirit works in so many different ways. So, my mother and my oldest siblings were baptized, and then my sister and myself were, kind of, born into the church. I'm really grateful for that rich heritage. Growing up as a son of a coal miner, things weren't easy. Money was short, love abundant. And I'm really grateful for that. We went to the local church in Penllergaer Community of Christ. My dad probably would now be seen as a church planter. He, a man of strong faith. And the other thing that I remember about my mother is that she always had our door open. So, people would come in and talk with her from the neighborhood and, whether that was four o'clock in the afternoon, 11 o'clock in the evening, two o'clock in the morning, there was always a place to sit and listen. And I think that's a wonderful gift, or legacy that I have. I think also growing up in this congregation, it was a wonderful, supportive congregation. A lot of activities going on for young people. And when I was 18 years old, I was the pastor of that congregation. Yeah, and that is young. But I think it's one of these situations where people love you and support you, can see your potential. And then, at 22 years old, I was a district president. That's a

slightly larger jurisdiction of the church we don't have anymore. I think for me, what is happening is that, professionally I was willing to bank, and so I was being recognized in my work profession with my career, my vocation, but also, so the church recognized that and I think that was good. And then at 25, I became a seventy. Loved, loved, loved being a seventy and just engaging with people. I think to say that life is easy, isn't a correct statement. Growing up in poverty teaches you many things, now not to take things for granted. But having sort of professional career as a banker, things were different than my parents' generation. But I definitely inherited their deep sense of faith, a simple faith, prayers, important relationships are critical. So, I feel I've been blessed in my life. Yes, I've had my struggles and doubts. And there have been moments when that sort of Spirit just blows you away. Where's the deep reassurance in your moments of questioning are just ways opened up. Maybe that's another podcast how sort of God's Spirit works in our lives. But for me, I have this sort of deep sense of, of faith that I don't ever feel that God has abandoned me. Or whatever I go, I do feel God's presence. And maybe that's a part of my Celtic tradition. The Celtic Cross is a cross with a circle around it. So, everything is connected. And as you know, Robin, one of the places I love going is to the ocean. You know, I just live, sort of, 10 minutes from the ocean. Whether it's just a nice calm day, or whether it's tumultuous winds and storms, it helps me reset my balance. It connects me again with the divine, resets my balance. So, I'm fortunate, where I live, that I have those places to go to, and feel connected with God. So, God speaks to me through nature, through people, through scripture. So, I think that's kind of a little bit of that. A little bit of family. My wife, Claire's school teacher. We have four children, very proud of them, as you would expect, as we all are of our children, and two grandchildren and one due at the end of, in eight weeks. So very, very blessed by my heritage and where I am. So, I don't know if that's a nice little introduction. I could drop off on a number of those points, and...

Robin Linkhart 07:12

That's wonderful. It's so good to hear about your family, your upbringing and your experience and how that loving connectedness of family was so open and welcoming to others in relationship. Community relationships were just part of the heart and being of your upbringing, which certainly, you have a gift for that in your ministry and just carried that right through. So, Richard, tell us how you became devoted to full time ministry. You were a banker for a number of years. And then, at some point, you shifted into full, serving the church full time. Tell us about that journey?

Richard James 08:02

Yes, interesting one. I think for me, being a sort of a disciple of Jesus, I see my, sort of, ability to serve in lots of different ways. And so, I can serve in my professional vocation as a banker, or I can serve in other ways. And as a family, we always made the kind of conscious decision that if the time was right, and it was appropriate, then we would consider giving some time to the church to work. So, working as a banker had a very, very successful career as a corporate manager. And I was in a phase of my professional career where we were due for another relocation to another part, another city. And it also coincided with the time of a vacancy of position opened up within the British Isles church. After lots of prayer and lots of conversation, we thought this may be a time to see, is it a good time to provide some ministry to the church? Never expecting where that would go. But having trust that this was the right time and place for that. So, 20 years as a banker and 20 years as a employee of the Community of Christ. And I've served in many roles in Community of Christ. I first started what we called an outreach minister. It's a role to help congregations re-envision the future, reaching into their community. And then

in 2005, the role was expanded to cover Western Europe. So, I was taking some visits to Northern Europe at that time, as well as the British Isles. And in 2007, I was called to be a President of Seventy and served for the Euro-Asian Mission Field. And then 2010, called into the Twelve, not expecting that call at all. It was one of those roles. I was very, very happy where I was in providing some ministry and enjoying the relationships that we formed. And then God says, "Eh, look at this one. Look at this ministry opportunity. What do you think of that?" And I have a quite a powerful testimony of my sense of call and my wife's sense of call, and it's probably leading into this. So, maybe we might indulge you a little bit in that. I think anybody receiving such a goal for the Twelve needs to have a personal conviction, this is right. And for me, there's two-part. One is, my own sense of call came in sort of over a three-year period in preparation, and you put it right in the back of your mind, where I was walking three times in the night, almost preparation for something, recognizing there was a call but didn't make any sense. And Claire, my wife, had a powerful experience as she was studying the scriptures, looking for meaning for this call. She had this strong affirmation that I would go to visit the countries where the early apostles spread the news, and has been called into the trial of and serving in some of Europe is definitely in the footsteps of giants and those early apostles. So, I have a strong sense of my call and Claire has that. And I think it's important for us to be in a very, very strong marriage. And we talk things through together. So, I've sensed I am called, don't have all the answers to know what's going to happen in the future. But I realized I have been called for this time.

Robin Linkhart 12:10

Thank you so much for sharing that story, Richard. You know, I met you first in 2007 when you went in to the Council of Presidents of Seventy, and I was called to Seventy in 2007 and was a Field Missionary Coordinator, which worked kind of in parallel with the Presidents of Seventy. And I remember what a powerful sense I had of the Holy Spirit resident in your ministry and your commitment to living out your discipleship. And many times, during the three years from 2007 to 2010, I had a personal affirmation that you had a call to the Council of Twelve. So, it was no surprise to me when that was announced. And I celebrated that. I thought, yes, this is so good! So, thank you for sharing a bit of your journey with us and your sense of call because that's so connected to mission. And, Richard, we know that there are many dynamic expressions of mission taking place in your field, the area of the globe that you serve and support. Tell us about what's going on and how those things came into being.

Richard James 13:32

Wow, how long have you got? Let's pull up a chair and let's talk about it.

Robin Linkhart 13:35

That's right, you do that?

Richard James 13:38

I think the bottom line on this is that God is doing something. So, when we look at the context of Europe, where people have this sense that they are spiritual, but not religious, and don't want to connect with organized religion. No, so I've just pulled up some statistics today. 8% in Germany, people go to church, 40% in the Netherlands. And in the stronger Catholic countries, like France and Spain, is 53% and 69%. But that's not fully participation in the latter two. So, in the context of Europe, I keep asking myself, what is God doing? How do I pay attention to that? And how do we respond? So maybe

the first thing I just want to, sort of, look at is that in Europe there are a number of immigrant groups that become, mainly because of the old colonies, and which many ways has been a bad thing, but there are gateways for people to flow through Europe and become a destination. So, in 2010, when I was called into the Twelve, I remember sitting in my office in Independence in the temple, and evaluating the number of inquiries we were getting from Spain. As a church, we've had a presence in Spain for about 50 years. We're very, very small in the Barcelona area. And, all of a sudden, we were getting these inquiries, and mainly from previous members of the Mormon church. And we had no formal way of connecting with these. And I can remember sitting in my office with Keith McMillan, and a powerful expression of the Holy Spirit, saying, "We need to go." I've never had such a powerful experience of saying, "Use new steps." And so, as a result of that, so this was in September, the next month, Keith McMillan went to Madrid, met some of the seekers. When we were in my office, we were the leaders meeting, and we happened to mention we have some inquiries from Spain. And a lady from the Philippines, Jennifer de Guzman, was in that meeting. And she said, I have family in Spain. We had no idea. And she said, "Let's talk with them." So, we went back to my office. We linked up with Skype in those days. And they were so excited to know that we were trying to do something with the church in Spain. So, Keith went in the October. And then in the February of the following year, I went with Keith. What does it look like to see tears running down people's faces, when they have been praying seven years for Community of Christ to come to Spain? There was joy. There was hope. There was definitely peace, and love. And as a result of that we worked to establish a congregation mainly of Filipinos in Madrid. Now, that really gave us the confidence to explore some of the other things that were happening. Again, there are a lot of Honduran church members living originally, now living in Spain. And we've made some connections with that. So, we had Apostle Carlos Mejia make a visit. Jim Slaughter, who was President of the Council of Twelve at the time, came over and helped us. Art Smith, Spanish speakers, and you know we have testimony after testimony of lives just being transformed. And again, of late, what we are finding is that through our developing relationships with Afirmación, Affirmation, we held a retreat in Málaga, in southern Spain. And there we had a number of seekers exploring Community of Christ. And the result of those relationships, we have new members who are so excited, about being part of the Community of Christ. They have regular meetings now online. Priesthood calls have been received in preparation for that. And in that small group, it's buzzing. And so, for me, this is about what God is doing when you pay attention, and just see where it all goes, and how it flows. So, that's one of the things that are happening in the southern part of Spain, and as well in Madrid. I think the big difference for me, when I look at my field is, that you have many cultures, many languages. Wars have been fought over a bridge for centuries, and cultures, and you have to respect the diversity. And so, Spain and southern Europe is all about relationships. Northern Europe is about punctuality and things being lined up right and said right, and starting at the right time. And so, adopting a different posture to what is happening in southern Europe has really helped us respond to the Spirit. Similarly, in Belgium, when the Belgian colonies has been into Congo DR, and it was in 2005, we had some inquiries from some refugees that were in Brussels. They had found Community of Christ. And they wanted to speak with somebody. So, what we are finding is that through Joey Williams and Elray Henrikson, Elray has been a regular guest on the podcast, as well as Joey, both French speakers, were able to develop relationships with these refugees, very much spiritual refugees. Many people can identify with that. They had come from Africa, had lived 17 years in a UN refugee camp in Tanzania, in East Africa, and have come to the strange and cold land. Didn't want anything to do with organized religion linked to states, meaning the government, and were found in a church there was

passionate about peace and teaching peace. And again, just to see their excitement and their enthusiasm of finding a church. So, Robin, I know you've been there to Brussels, and to see the absolute delight and joy on people's faces. And so, what we are finding as we are open to the Spirit of Where does your Spirit lead us? is taking us to unexpected places, but beautiful places. Also, you will be aware of we are having a number of people looking for meaning and faith, and if Community of Christ is a safe place for them. People are coming in from the Mormon church. And we've met some incredible people on our journey. And they are now sort of joining with us. And so, now, we have something happening in Italy. You know, we're having a service every three months in Italian. We will have another baptism in Sicily when we're able to travel with COVID. Who would have thought when I visited Rome two years ago, three years ago? I've lost track of when it was. Just stepping on the beach, as Michael Wright said, this is where tradition says Apostle Paul, Apostle Peter came to Rome. And that took me back to Claire's testimony about my sense of call to serve. And now, we have doors opening for us in places we didn't expect. What I'm really pleased is how people are finding a home and finding their voice and finding healing and restoration. And doesn't say the life is still easy. But they are now finding a safe place to live out their faith. If I jump forward a little bit, I think with the ways that people are not living close by, we've had to look at connecting with people through Zoom before the pandemic. And so, we have experimented with, sort of, different ways of meeting online. And due to COVID, this has accelerated completely. And so, we have many expressions in English, with young adults, with congregations, with mission centers and community circle, community connections. What I also love is the way that we now have a very active Spanish speaking, a very active German speaking online church. We have a Dutch, we have Italian and France. So, let me talk about France. We've had a presence in France for quite a while. And it was two years ago, I was traveling home from holiday in France. But, by the way, I love going to France on holiday, particularly Cour de Sol. But it has, one of those experiences where I was driving home, and I knew I'll be back here very soon, trying to see how can the church respond what is happening. And I had no idea what was happening. I just had this deep sense that I will be back very soon. We've invested in Europe by World Service Corp and there've been so many people. I'm not going to name them all because I know I can miss somebody out. But particularly Kahealani, from French Polynesia, provided some valuable leadership and support in Brussels. Then we moved into Tours in France. So, we've had a presence in France for a number of years, mainly people from French Polynesia, who have come to France, for medical, or for education, or for work. And for various reasons, we haven't had a lot of activity probably the last ten-12 years. And as I talked with Kahealani, and Joey Williams about my experience of driving home, we agreed that we would just visit some church members that we were aware of. So, we kind of did a grand tour of France before COVID. And it was amazing. People were pleased, were excited, were astonished that we turned up on their doorstep, realizing that they already had their confirmation experience that we will be coming. And so, we have a very, very active French online ministry now. Post-COVID we'll have online as well as in person. And it's really great to see the diversity of the French speakers, and the creativity of resources. So, which in Brussels and France, we announced we're producing resources in French, videos in French, that are available to the whole church. So, that's just one of, some of the things that are happening on one side. The other part that I'm really, really excited about is the, some of the peace and justice projects. One of our congregations in the British Isles there's got a really good food bank program. It's really bad that we have to have food banks in a country, an affluent country like the UK, over the austerity measures. It's one of the things that people have a sense of call to. And so, we have a congregation that are not only providing a food bank. So, I think context is different. In the UK, UK

Government will give you benefits, if you have no income coming in. It's on a point system, but nobody really needs to be homeless. Nobody needs to be without, but there's a delay in the paper processing. And so, the food banks work on the basis that you get a referral, you're given a voucher or coupon, and then the food bank would distribute that. So, this started in 2012. I find it's an interesting story here that somebody gets a sense of call, shares the vision, and it's taken like it did. You know, as a small, small church in this community, saying, how, how can we do this, engaging with other churches and businesses, low resistance from formalized churches, churches saying, we don't want anything to do with a small church down there, but persistent in our witness. And as a success for [inaudible] engaged the whole community, the government, the business, is this particular food bank has been mentioned in the House of Commons in Parliament. And it is making a difference. And not only they're feeding, they're looking at what are the underlying causes here in our community of this. And so, they've set up different projects. And they, this, they have meals. They have drop-ins on the debt counseling. So, I think that's a really, really good way of, what is the need in our community? And how do we respond to that? And [inaudible] aside, as I mentioned, food banks. I heard last week, that in the UK right now, there are more food banks than there are McDonald's restaurants. That is ridiculous. For me, that's, with austerity and the COVID pandemic, and we know the impact on people's lives, to have that number of food banks, is good that people have responded to a need, but it should never happen in an affluent country. Some of the other exciting things that I'm really, really pleased to see is centered around peace and justice. When I look at, sort of, my field, and maybe these are some similarities with where many of the listeners are, we are seeing things like a rise in nationalism. Fascism is rising. Racism is creating division between people. Immigration is also creating tensions amongst nations. A once strong European Union is questioned as its future, as each nation has responded to COVID with almost, "My nation first." And then we have the economic implications. There's homelessness, people trafficking, poverty, rising rich and poor divides increasing, gender and pay equality. Sexism is rife. And people are saying they're spiritual but not religious. They're not wanting to engage with organized religion, because it has failed them. And there's a growing threat from Russia. And Europe is concerned for its future. So, that's the kind of context that I find myself in. And at the same time, I know God is doing, is God is up to something here, and is trying to discern what is happening. So, one of the things that we did in 2005, was to set up a European peace team. This team would look at a basic question of what role does Community of Christ have to play in the European context? I'll repeat that. What role does Community of Christ have to play in the European context? And so, getting the team together, they've worked and explored different projects. One of the ideas was to look at a peace colloquy. We know we've had a International Peace Colloquy in the temple for a number of years. And in 2018, we held our first one in our field, held at Dunfield House, with over 100 people in attendance, with a theme of "Peace is Possible". We learned so much from that. Most of the presenters were academics and professionals in their field. Most were not church members, but it was amazing to engage with people. It was such a success we want to repeat that. But a pandemic really threw our plans out. So, it didn't stop us. We decided to go online. And so, going online, it goes to open so many other doors for us. And so, in 2020, we held an online peace colloquy centered around a new humanity. And there we were connecting globally with people. And again, what we are finding, as we build relationships with people, people just passionate about justice and peace. Our young adults are excited because, at last, the church is relevant in addressing things that they are passionate about, too. And so, we are finding that people that might be on the fringe of the church or edge of the church, are now engaging with us, because now we are more relevant. There are other projects. We've been able to

represent the church at ecumenical peace events and we have aligned ourselves with organizations around peace. These are sort of small steps forward, but in the right direction of what does it mean, to follow Jesus the peaceful One? I could talk all the time, Robin. There's lots of good things happening here. I think I overindulge. We try to stop what God is doing. But God is doing something and then in our better moments, we remove the roadblocks and let things happen. And that's just an example of what it is.

Robin Linkhart 33:08

Very, very exciting. And I love the way you took us on a journey through time of how things unfolded and the inter-connection of that. And the fact that mission shows up in some of the places we least expect it to, not just a little, but really powerful ways. So, you've touched on this a little bit as you've shared this story with us. Can you give us some more windows or stories into how you have witnessed the transformation of lives or communities as a result of some of these ministries?

Richard James 33:49

Yeah, where do I start? I think every life is important. And every story is important to be told and heard. And that's one of the things that I like to do is to listen to people's story. Listen to their, their passion, and some of the hurts and their hopes and in doing so, empowering them to do that. And so, one of our, sort of, goals as a field, is to develop indigenous leaders, particularly women. And that's been very intentional as we've employed, enrolled a number of our leaders in the church's seminary, that's the Master of Arts program. It's really, really helping give confidence and skills and knowledge as we empower local leaders. So, I'm not going to single out any one person here, but for me, empowering women, empowering, sort of, people that had no voice, whether that's because of their sexuality, the color of their skin. You know, when I look at Brussels, for instance, I will always remember what somebody said. He said, "Thank you for giving me my dignity back." Again, 17 years in a refugee camp, fled your own country because of war, treated as a worthless person, and then finding the safe place to express themselves, to have a voice, and to make a difference. And the words that they used was, "Thank you for giving my dignity back." That was powerful. There wasn't tears in my eyes, but it could well have been. Because in some ways that was about a person that felt worthless, was now worth a lot. And they found their own voice. And then a number of stories of that, of personal transformation, that I think are wonderful. I think of so, even the food bank I mentioned in the UK, the transformation in that local community, it's a small congregation. They are now fully aware of, in that community, who Community of Christ is, working alongside others, and making the community a better place to live. So, that that's a good example to me of how sensing the mission, and the need, and the community has been changed. I think the providing sanctuary for people that come in from the Mormon LDS Church takes time to heal, takes time to prepare just to open up and to share. And it is fair to say there's been transformation in people's lives. And I ache, my heart aches because of the pain that's been caused. And I just want to provide more safe places where that can happen. I think, when I look at some of the people that are now finding the church the first time in Spain, in Belgium, or Italy, or in the UK, it is this absolute joy of, where have you been all my life? I think of the, another example of transformed lives. I'll give you as the example of Belgium again. I was sent a picture image of people in a circle. There were different ages. There was male, females. There's young children, men and women, and they were just throwing a ball around. And for us, that might look like a normal picture. In the context of the culture, that was transformative, because the father, who doesn't play with the children, that's the role of the

women and other young, young girls to look after the children. Here was a father playing, engaging with his children. And he said, "Thank you for giving me joy." You know, that's a deep, deep joy. And so, these transformative steps of things that might be, seem so small to us, are very, very significant of learning a new rhythm, of learning peacemaking skills, and interpersonal relationships. I think another transformative way with our peace colloquies, when we've been engaging with the academics and professionals, they are so pleased that there is a church willing to journey with them on their passion. And that's transformative for us, you know, to know that we have the place that we can claim. Sometimes we feel we can't make a difference. But recognition of people who already leading the way for us, and say, "Come along to help us." And we are finding a voice. One of the taglines that came out from our first peace colloquy was, "What banner are you going to stand behind? That really spoke to us. So where do we stand on peace and justice? Where do we stand on racism? Where do we stand on equality? Where do we stand on violence? And the result of all these came the nonviolent resolution that came to the 2019 World Conference. I think maybe that's it for now. I think there are probably lots of transformed places. It's, it's a work in progress, it's always a work in progress. We're always learning. We're always seeing, seeing what God is doing. I think for me the challenge is to become more entrepreneurial, not to make profit, but to be more risk-taking for the kingdom. And that's the steps I think that we are making. So, the transformative piece for me is, we taking baby steps. We're learning from those. Now, there's some bigger steps we need to take.

Robin Linkhart 40:45

I really love the glimpses into these moments of transformation that that you have born witness to. I had the opportunity to travel to Brussels, Belgium in the fall of 2019, and experience that firsthand. And I love the word "joy" that you used. And the father saying, "Thank you, for this joy", because it was just effervescent in all dimensions, in all the ways that people gathered together the time I was there. Richard, you've kind of hinted at this, as you shared about mission and seeing people's lives transformed and recognizing these connections that we have, and many directions, including other people that are working for justice and peace, who may come out of the world of academia or other pathways. How do you sense God calling Community of Christ into the future?

Richard James 41:58

I'm pausing my response, because we don't know. We are sensing something has happened. That sort of tingling of excitement that there's something happening here. And so, discernment for me is a key part of discerning what is happening, I do feel really confident for Community of Christ. I do feel that God is with us. I think the future is positive. We are open, whenever people have put our stakes down and said, "This is it." We're always open for more light and truth. So, for me, I can see the future unfolding by following Jesus, the peaceful One. And what does that mean? We're still learning, but it's on the side of non-violence. It's on the side of standing for the oppressed, the voiceless. People are feeling worthless, they're marginalized. I see us having to work tirelessly to retrain ourselves in peacemaking skills, interpersonal skills. I can see that these communities or helps can become alive and they'll meet whenever communities, seekers, disciples just coming together, online or in person, meeting up, sharing story, maybe sharing sacrament. I don't necessarily see us meeting in a church building. There will be some doing that. But I think it's becoming more of a movement rather than an institution. And that's a cultural change for us. What does it mean to be focused on, be Christ-like? To be focused on relational, be spiritual, to be spiritually formed? And what I love about Community of

Christ is that we're globally connected. You know, we hold each other accountable to this great vision. I do see things as being done more contextually. That's a joy, and also a struggle. As I mentioned, some of the different contexts in my field, it's really hard to know what is best here. But what I do want is an authentic expression of Community of Christ in our culture, that speaks the language, that speaks the culture, that is relevant. And I, so therefore, I would say the Community of Christ in the future, God is calling us to be relevant in our context. And I think we are ready, we are good enough that we're, we've learned our story. And I think through our Enduring Principles, and I think we're in a good place.

Robin Linkhart 45:12

So, as you look into that future that we, as you say, so wisely, we don't know all the details of, we have a tingling sense of it becoming, stirring, even tastes of what the future might hold. In the midst of all of that, what are your hopes, your hopes for Community of Christ?

Richard James 45:40

I think for me, that we will have the integrity to be who we are, and not anybody else, and to form authentic community. And not to be the church that people like, but who God is inviting us to become. And there's some struggles in that. Because realizing that some people might not want to walk with us. For I do know that other people will, are just waiting to be part of such a community, because I hear it with people now who say, "Where have you been all my life?" And so, I think for me, if we can be authentic and create sacred communities, focused on Christ, the peaceful One, engaging in justice and peace, I think that's what I would like us to be.

Robin Linkhart 46:56

So, Richard, is there anything that you would like to share with us today that maybe I didn't ask you about?

Richard James 47:04

I think you've done very well, Robin, your questions and your reflections. When I look at what God is doing in my field, and in the church, I, I just marvel. Now, we've come a long way on our journey and yet, there's so much to do. So, I'm really grateful for the heritage, my personal heritage of my family, my local congregation and growing up, and the giants, the shoulders of giants that we've stood on, just peeping over into the promised lands that are in the future. So, this is a request and you haven't asked, but the future's good. And, as we say, there is a place at the table for everyone. We have to reset the table sometimes because the table isn't big enough. Or we haven't done that, right. So, we need to learn. Well, yeah, the future is good. God is doing something and we're learning what it means to, you know, to pray the mission prayer, you know, to, to awaken, to risk and to bless. I'm just, I'm quite at peace with what the future holds. I don't know all the steps, don't know all that, but I have this deep sense of peace that all is gonna be well, and it's gonna be wonderful, and glorious, and blessed. So, I think that's what I would say, in closing. It looks good.

Robin Linkhart 48:37

Thank you for that, Richard. It's been a bright spot in my day to spend some time with you and to, even though I have known the, the arc of the narrative for the field that you serve, you have brought that to living color and life and punctuated it with human experience, and the sense of hope and anticipation,

as you look to the future and a sense of certainty because of the peace that you feel that the future is bright. Thank you so much for being with us today, Richard. And, as always, a very special thanks to all of our listeners. If you would like to hear more stories about mission, check out our What's Brewing series. If you have questions for Richard, you can email him at rcnjames@cofchrist.org and we will put that in the show notes for you. To hear more about mission in Europe, check out Grounds for Peace in our series drop down menu. This is your host, Robin Linkhart, and you are listening to Project Zion Podcast. Go out and make the world a better place. Take good care. See you next time. Bye, bye.

Josh Mangelson 50:09

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