

438 | Cuppa Joe | Historic Sites Foundation Fall 2021 Lecture Series | Community of Christ
History in Wales
Project Zion Podcast

Josh Mangelson 00:17

Welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. This podcast explores the unique spiritual and theological gifts Community of Christ offers for today's world.

Karin Peter 00:33

Welcome to "Cuppa Joe" where we explore Restoration history. And I'm your host for "Cuppa Joe", Karin Peter. Our guest today is Richard James. Now, Richard is the son of a Welsh coal miner, and was born in, now I'm going to take a huge try here, Richard. I didn't ask you so we'll see how I do well, Penllergaer?

Richard James 00:58

Not too bad. Penllergaer.

Karin Peter 00:60

Say it again. Please.

Richard James 01:01

Penllergaer, Penllergaer.

Karin Peter 01:02

Okay. All right. I didn't mangle it too bad, thank you, Swansea, at least that's how I pronounce Swansea in the United States, South Wales in the United Kingdom. He is an associate of the Chartered Institute of Bankers in the United Kingdom, and has a Master of Arts and Religion from Community of Christ Seminary. Richard is also secretary of the Council of Twelve Apostles, which is the lead missionary quorum of Community of Christ. And he is assigned to the Eurasia Mission Field, which includes the British Isles Mission Center, Western Europe Mission Center, and the Eurasia Mission Center, a large, large area. So, hi, Richard, and welcome to *Project Zion*.

Richard James 01:48

Well, thank you, Karin and Dioloch yn fawr. Thank you, Croeso.

Karin Peter 01:53

Okay. Are we going to get more Welsh as we go along, Richard?

Richard James 01:58

One or two words thrown in.

Karin Peter 02:01

Okay. Alright. So, Richard, we're talking today, because you contributed a lecture to the fall *Historic Sites Foundation Church History Series*, which is titled "Without Boundaries". And your lecture is titled "Community of Christ History in Wales: From the hell of the coal face and the iron and tin-plate works to Zion". And that captured my attention as I ran through the list of lectures. So, to begin with, before we, kind of, start, based on what you've said already, our listeners probably picked up that you are Welsh. You live in Wales. And so, you are most qualified to tell us a little bit about this part of church history. But first, if you would, tell us a little bit about Wales.

Richard James 02:53

Well, I think the first thing to say, yes, I am Welsh, and I come from Wales. So, just to put a little bit of geography onto this, Wales is a part of the United Kingdom. Now, many people identify this part of Europe as being England, but in fact, there are four different countries make up the United Kingdom. And another term that we tend to use is Great Britain. So again, Great Britain is three countries, that is Scotland, England and Wales. And so, we're very proud nation. We have our own language, one or two words that I can speak. It's a Celtic nation. We're very proud of our Celtic Christianity, and connectedness with all of creation. So, I would say it's God's country, some beautiful countryside and ocean, but more importantly, beautiful people.

Karin Peter 03:58

Of course, we would expect no less knowing you, Richard. And thank you for the clarification about United Kingdom and Great Britain, especially for folks in the United States who don't have a working knowledge of the countries in the United Kingdom. That's very helpful. At least it's very helpful for me to, kind of, make that distinction. So, I promise never to use England when I'm talking about Scotland, Ireland, Northern Ireland or Wales. So, what made you decide, Richard, to do this lecture, to offer a Historic Sites lecture, on the history of the church in Wales? Have you done some of this before? Was this a new idea? What happened?

Richard James 04:43

Yeah, I think when I look at this, it always starts with invitation. Somebody sows a seed of, "Oh, how about doing something like this?" If I look back a little bit, when I was doing my Community of Christ Seminary, Derek Judd, who was an employee of Bishop of the church, and I did a history of the church in Wales, as part of our church history model. So, that was some initial work we did a little way back. But I think more recently, our online congregation community circle, had a disciples' toolbox in April this year. And the title was "History Happens Here: Stories of Community of Christ across Europe". We had multiple storytellers, and Barbara Walden was facilitating the conversation. As the Apostle, I was asked just to do an introduction, and just drawing a little bit of things together. And naturally, I looked at the history of Wales and just shared a little bit. And then I think Barb thought, "Ah, maybe we could get Richard to tell us something about the history of the church in Wales". And surprisingly late that I had an invite from Barb, to do one of these lectures. It's interesting. There's, I think the thing that really struck me is the rocks in Wales, and they have a story to tell. And maybe I can tell a little bit more about that later. What is in the rocks that make the Restoration message come alive?

Karin Peter 06:20

Okay, I look forward to hearing that story about the rocks in Wales. I'm assuming, since we alluded to the title of your lecture, that it has something to do with the conditions of the people in Wales, how people were living, what was happening historically at that period of time when the church message first came, etc.? But I know your lecture, we had the ability to go deeper and a little bit longer, we're gonna have to be a little more concise here, but I'd really like to hear more about that, on, what was happening in Wales? And why were the people conducive to, why was the situation conducive to the message of the Restoration? So, if you could just, kind of, share with us that and I'll raise my finger and ask questions if something comes up, and let's see where we go with that. So, share with us.

Richard James 07:21

Yeah, okay, I'll try and paint a picture. And I think it really is important to understand context, context, context, 'cause when you understand the context, you go, "Ah, ah, I get it. I see how there was such a huge response of people to this Restoration message." So, I come back to what I just said earlier, what is in the rocks? What is in this, the rocks around, particularly, South Wales, that created hell on earth, but created the opportunity for people to respond? So, I think you have to look at what was happening contextually. We have the Industrial Revolution making a huge turning point in history in almost all aspects of life. The Industrial Revolution, 1760, 1820, 1840, went from hand production to, sort of, mass production. And iron was a key part of that production. So, what we see in Wales, and very similar to other places in England, a movement of people from bringing in rural farmers to moving into the towns for work. And in the Welsh context, particularly in the South Wales valleys, we see iron ore, and a need, support the industrial revolution to production of iron. The raw materials were readily available. The rocks, there's coal deep within this place. There's wood. There's limestone. So, all the resources are together. What was missing was money. So where does the money come from? The money comes from the slave traders, who were stepping out of slavery because it was recognized not a good business to be in, and where did they put the money? They put the money into the ironworks in Wales and made more money. I think that's a really interesting link, really, between slavery of people in one place, and then find another place to invest their capital, and it created slavery in many ways for people.

Karin Peter 09:47

So, for our American listeners, in mining areas in the United States, we have the same situation in the north. We don't talk about it as much, the connection between slavery, abolition, and mining, but we, the same kind of situations. Okay?

Richard James 10:04

It is. And it's really sort of deep. So, you had these, sort of, merchant traders that set up these ironworks. And for some people, they would quote and say, the people have been deprived of their birthright. It was the resources of the nation of Wales, and they were being extorted by wealthy people for their own gain. And work was really, really hard in these places. Another sort of novel written around the time by Alexander Cordell said it was, "the rape of the fair country", and those are very provocative words. But when you, sort of, see what is done to the environment, to extract the work of the iron, but also the impact it had on people's lives. So, there's great oppression of people. The rich natural

resources are being abused, in some ways, to further the richness of these people. So, due to the oppression of people, we see a rise in the need for social reform. So, politically, across the UK, we are seeing movements like the Charterists, and other political reformers, looking for changes to the political landscape. So, that's going on in Wales, in particular, South Wales, so you've got oppression, and you've got a movement, looking for social reform. In some ways, what's more unique to the Welsh sanction is Welsh, non-conformist religious tradition. Let me say what that says. I'm a Welshman. I like to say, "Don't put words into my mouth. I can speak for myself." We tend to speak up if there's any oppression, or if we disagree then we will say our voice. So, you have this tradition of Christianity, which would be the institutional church, Church of Wales, Church of England, and Welsh people were resisting that because that was the religion of their masters, their iron masters, their coal masters. And so, what happens is that there is this Welsh nonconformity around Baptist, and not Southern Baptists. This is sort of Baptists and Anabaptists. And they start developing opportunity for expressions of Christianity that are lower hierarchy. And if you fall out with your leaders, you just start another church, just non-conform, just one. And so, what they were doing, they were offering social reform, but it was reformed, "There's a life to come. Let's get you saved now for the life to come." So, I see a place like Merthyr Tydfil. Merthyr Tydfil was really small town, a low population before beginning the Industrial Revolution, and dramatically increases. This is where the raw resources are. So, there's iron smelting going on in four major works. Ironically, one of these now is a UNESCO heritage site, same status as Taj Mahal. Merthyr's population suffered crime, disease and squalor, and no sewage system, so people were walking through sewerage on the streets. You had a massive immigration of people who are looking for work. These are farmers not used to urban living. And you also have people returning from the Napoleonic wars that were going on. And so, this is social unrest. Immigrants coming into a place not big enough to keep different people is busyness. There's work. There's grime. There's economic boom was happening. There was a slump. The pubs were sent as a community drinking was a major problem. Maybe from a US context, it was the frontiers. It was the wildest place to be. Thomas Carlyle was an historian and writer, says about Merthyr, it was a "vision of hell". Yet, in the center of this was radical nonconformity that practiced democratic decision making in the chapels and the vast majority of people could vote. We take for granted that most people can vote now. This wasn't happening in the UK at that time. Women had no vote. So, in the churches themselves, these nonconformists, they were practicing this equality of everybody, and everybody having a vote. So, also, we get great political agitation, and unrest and riots going. And we have the center of Charterism happening, a working-class movement, trying to promote change.

Karin Peter 15:27

Can you say a little bit more about that, this? Explain Charterism?

Richard James 15:32

Yeah, Charterism, it was a national, meaning across Britain, across Great Britain, at the time. It emerged in 1836, really active 1838, 1848, with the aim to gain political rights and influences of the working class. So, what we were seeing is that the governance was being done by the gentry, and by the Lords, really unaccountable. And this huge national movement was pushing back against the UK Government. The name Charterism came from the People's Charter that they developed six things. When you look at, sort of, English political history, it's a really important movement. It was put down by the government. There was the riots in London, but this was going on in South Wales. And so, you,

what you've got is a cauldron, really, of religious expression of equality, willingness to dissent, salvation in the future life, and you also got an environment going on of dissenters and wanting political reform. So, that's the cauldron that was happening. And then into this comes this Restoration message, and which way does it go? I think it's really interesting what happens. So, first of all, the message of the Restoration comes into North Wales. Early missionaries come into Liverpool, and they go to north, they pressed into Lancashire, and then they tiptoe into God's country, into Wales, into North Wales. And they have a little success in a place called Overton. So, 1837, first missionaries come. 1840, they come into God's country. They have some little success. Here it's mainly farmers. There are some coal mines happening. 1843, three years later, they stepped down into this cauldron of activity in South Wales. So, in Penderyn, we see our first baptisms in South Wales. Growth is really slow, but two years later, something dramatically happens. It happens because, as a Welsh speaker, somebody called Dan Jones, he's originally now in America. He comes back. He's charismatic. He speaks Welsh, and he takes leadership of the church in Merthyr and all of Wales. So, from 1845 to 1851, a six-year period, we see a rapid growth from single digit membership, to over 5000. That's very typical...

Karin Peter 18:40

That's huge growth. Yeah

Richard James 18:42

Huge, huge growth. And it's really, sort of, typical, really of, sort of, Welshness, I think. It was done in three ways. It was done by word of mouth. You had Welsh speaking missionaries. So, we're going to sound this time in the life of Wales. Wales was the, Welsh was the dominant language. Now, following suppression by the English government in the 1800s, Welsh language suppressed, but here, the main language spoken was Welsh. So, Dan Jones had Welsh speaking missionary speak their own language, understand the context, exactly what's happening in this cauldron, and started to address it. They had their own publications and pamphlets. The Book of Mormon was translated into Welsh and two periodicals, *Prophwyd y Jubili*, (*Prophets of Jubilee*) and *Udgorn Seion*, (*Zion's Trumpet*), they're promoting the Welsh message. And I think what is really interesting here, and I think it's a lesson to learn, the context of a Restoration message about equality for everybody, lower hierarchy, people have access to priesthood, people have a right to vote, and this four-letter word called Zion, or five letter word in Welsh, "Seion", the social reforms you're looking for, they can happen in this life. You can do something about it. You haven't got to wait for the next life, what the other religious expressions are doing, saying, "Now, you can make a difference. Let's shape this." As it really, really resonated deep with the context. So, as I started off saying it's context, context, context, and I think...

Karin Peter 20:32

Well, yes, it connected salvation to social reform, to all of the aspects of the political agony, and it connected to everything that was happening to their lives.

Richard James 20:45

Yeah, it did. You know, so we see Merthyr Tydfil as a strong center of the Latter Day Saint movement. In 1851, there were almost 2,500 members, 26 branches, just in one county. It's heritage. We have our own press there, printing press. You know, I think I shared with you before, Karin, when you look at the migration later of people from Wales and from England, to places like Kirtland, Nauvoo, what accent did

those people have? They had English, or Welsh speaking accents. Yes, there was some from Denmark and Sweden and Germany. But the dominant voice was an English or a Welsh voice being spoken. And there was a huge, huge growth. And a lot of, for me, it goes down to a Welsh speaking person understanding context, speaks the language, and connects the dots of what is happening in people's lives, and saying, "Look, here is a message for you." So, it's in the rocks. The rocks created a wonderful place for God's country. It was abused. And out of the cauldron of people saying, "This isn't going to continue anymore," comes the Restoration message.

Karin Peter 22:06

It also, as you're sharing about this, Richard, I know I was gonna ask you later in our interview, but you use the word several times, the dissent, the resistance, the nonconformity, the dissent. For our former LDS members, that doesn't resonate as much as it does with someone, maybe, who grew up in the Reorganization, because that's inherent in our institutional culture, is the dissent. And I have a feeling we can trace that somehow to our Welsh ancestry in the church.

Richard James 22:49

I think it's part Welsh. I think, in Britain, we have this, I think, loyal opposition. That it's okay to stand up to the crown, with our time and speak. I think in my Welshness and maybe my, sort of, biased lens, I would say, because as a nation, we've been oppressed for 800 years by English rule, we have a voice, and we're prepared to raise that voice. And so, we will speak up. And, as I said before, don't put words in my mouth. I will speak. And so, it is okay to speak out. And you still, I think, also part of Welsh culture is this strong sense of identity of longing and belonging. So, I would say, "No, I'm Welsh. You can't take that away from me." You know, that is who I am. So, I can raise my voice and say, "This isn't right," or "Can we try this? Can we do this?" That's, kind of, deep within our, sort of, psyche almost. So, the idea of dissent is strong within, sort of, Welsh culture. And it creates this cauldron, is one of the ingredients that made it such a remarkable, sort of, growth of the church.

Karin Peter 24:02

Absolutely. And affected the growth of all the Restoration traditions that we have expressed.

Richard James 24:12

Absolutely.

Karin Peter 24:13

That we participate in in the United States and around the world.

Richard James 24:17

Yeah.

Karin Peter 24:18

So, can, you talked about Dan Jones and his importance as a, kind of, charismatic leader who understood language, and context, and the importance of that? Can you tell us about some of the other original members, or leaders, or figures, if you will, in the church in Wales?

Richard James 24:39

Yeah, I think the research that I've done hasn't gone deep enough yet to draw at some of the stronger characters. I do want to draw on one because it has an impact on Community of Christ history, well, there are two, but let me stick on one, somebody called Adelphus Edwards. Okay, Adelphus Edwards, his family are from West Wales, here it's called Llanelli. We have a group there again, we're talking of a period when the South Wales coal field, there are so many congregations, and this is one of the western points. So, he's in Llanelli. And then, for some reason he goes to Cardiff. Cardiff's the city that I live in. Now, it's an hour's drive by car, so maybe on horse and cart, it might have been a few days, but he finds himself in Cardiff, and there he's supporting the congregation. And, this is what I love, something that's in our church history. It says he closed the door of the church in Cardiff and moved to USA. That's all it says, okay. So, he closed the door in Cardiff and moved to the USA. And about, maybe 15 years ago, I was in Dundalk in Baltimore, and I was sharing this part of the conversation about the connectedness between Wales and USA, and they said, "Adelphus Edwards' family came here. And here's some of his family." So, he closed the church in Cardiff, and started the church in Dundalk in Baltimore. And I think it's incredible how that, wherever his journey went, he stayed connected with the church. And then, as today, we have been blessed by the Edwards family as the Paul Edwards connection. Some people might know pretty, just general counsel, Karen Minton is an Edwards. And so, there's a number of people that claim that Edwards lineage as it were. So, I don't know a lot of what he did apart from wherever he went, he formed a church and then, kind of, moved on.

Karin Peter 27:02

That's marvelous. And it's delightful that you were there and all of a sudden, "Oh, yes, he was here."

Richard James 27:08

Yes. Yeah, very much so.

Karin Peter 27:10

So, one of the things you talked about in the church in Wales was this idea of equality and everybody having voice. So, I'm interested, did women participate in leadership in the church? Or was there still the social inequality of gender?

Richard James 27:26

I would say at this stage, my research doesn't identify that. What we do see is, sort of, priesthood, which is male at that time in the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, rather Community of Christ. So, I would anticipate in a Welsh setting that the women have their say.

Karin Peter 27:49

From what you've said, I would think so.

Richard James 27:49

They have the influence over the men. So, I wouldn't have thought there'd be direct leadership. This is slight digression here. There's something in Welsh history called the Rebecca Riots. Rebecca Riots is a

huge protest against the turnpike fees that were being charged. And it's called the Rebecca Riots, because the men dressed up as women, as part of Rebecca rebelling. And it's got this, so, this idea of women, sort of, protesting and saying enough is a part of the culture even though the men were dressing up as women, which is, from a historical point of view, the Rebecca Riots are an important part of our history.

Karin Peter 28:42

Well, I love the fact that masquerading as women thought they would, made them more effective as rebels.

Richard James 28:47

Yes, that's right.

Karin Peter 28:48

So, kudos to that whole aspect of it. So, you live in Wales now? What's the church like now in Wales?

Richard James 28:58

Right. Let me go back a little bit, and I'll tell you where we are now, 'cause I think from a history point of view, this is fascinating, [?] me anyway. So, first part of the conversation I was talking about the church prior to the departure of Joseph Smith, Jr. 1863, Reorganized, or Community of Christ, people come. They find a little disarray. The church is decimated at that time when, because the death of Joseph, but really because of polygamy, and Adam-God theory. Those did not sit well with Welsh people, not one bit. And also, some of the social reform messages that were trying to be enacted through Restoration movement already been done. We saw the rise in socialism, of unions, and later the development of a major political party, the Labour Party. So, what we see in church records is about, sort of, 1895, there's about 3, 5000 members still. And by 1929, that are just two families. You know, and you have to ask yourself, what happened? So, and there are three reasons. So, one is that there was a migration to the US. This is in part to do with the Depression era. And as bad as it was in the US, and it was bad, people were still migrating. We also see a time when the church had to lay people off, and they laid off two really significant missionaries and the family connections. So, people are upset at that. But the biggest thing that upset people was Fred M. Smith's Supreme Directional Control, as we call it. This is a time in the history of the church where the president of the church really took control of the leadership and, kind of, pulled the Council of Twelve to order, putting the Presiding Bishopric in a place of, and that Supreme Directional Control did not sit well with Welsh people. A lot of people left the church. So, we find ourselves with just two families. And those two families are back in this town where a Adolphus Edwards came is in Llanelli. And so, Llanelli is our oldest continuing congregation that we have. So, right now, we have two congregations and a small houseschool. We closed the congregation about two years ago. Where, there was some growth in the early '60s and '70s, as most of western world saw. But now it's a much smaller expression. I do think there's a sense of people understanding who we are and identify with our identity, message, mission, and beliefs with a much, much smaller presence than we had.

Karin Peter 32:01

So, when you talked about Supreme Directional Control from the Reorganization's history, after your setting the context about the Welsh people, it makes sense that that would not have sat well with that. On the flip side of that, in the United States, we understand that the whole notion of membership is changing what it means to align oneself with an organization or institution. Do you see that in Wales, that people are likely to participate, but not align through membership?

Richard James 32:36

I think that's a growing trend as I, right across my field, very much so a situation of secularization. People see themselves as spiritual, but not religious, looking for expressions of spirituality in many forms. So, we have this core of members that are very faithful and very committed. And yes, people would participate. If I look back in, sort of, my living memory, whilst there's a strong identity being a part of Community of Christ, we would definitely have an ecumenical interaction with other people. And we've been involved in, sort of, ecumenical activities. And so, people will go to other churches at that time, and not from a point of view that one was better than the other, but that was a place where community happened.

Karin Peter 33:31

Right.

Richard James 33:33

I think the growing trend is about membership, and again, resonates well with a Welshness of; Where do I belong? Where do I, where do I show up? Where do I get fed? Or, where does this part of me feed? And, I think, sort of, looking forward is identifying what are the cultural things that are happening, and what's the resonance of the gospel message?

Karin Peter 33:58

So, as you look forward, what do you see as the future of the church in Wales? How do you envision that?

Richard James 34:12

Let me say I'm very hopeful for Community of Christ. I think all the wrestles and struggles that we have been going through has enabled us to deal with the next part of our journey. If I look back, sort of, in Welsh tradition, there is a prophecy given, and at a time prophecy will be part of, and it is from a woman who said that once, this was in Llanelli, in this small sort of group, "That once again the hills and valleys of Wales will resonate with the sound of the gospel." So, a lot of people are aware of this older sort of prophecy, now, whether it's a prophecy or whether it's just wisdom. I can see hope for Community of Christ in Wales. We have a strong sense of community, and dissent, and protest, and then as we align ourselves with what is happening in our society around us, we have a strong sense of the movement in Europe Field about justice, and peace, and non-violence. And, if I look back as what resonated well in the South Wales valleys was a condition and oppression of people. And so, if we can find our voice, and we can stand with those that are marginalized or oppressed, then I think there is a hope and a future for us. It's about equality for all. You know, it is a place at the table for everybody. And Wales has got this wonderful sense of hospitality. It's rich within us. You know, a lot of cultures have hospitality as part of traditions. God's country hasn't missed out on that one. There's always a

welcome. You know, I look at my own upbringing in a home where our door was always open, whatever time of the day it was. And it was to say my father who hadn't been a pastor, it was to speak my mother, because she had this ability just to be present with people and just accept people, and they would share their story or what happened in that day. And sometimes the door will be open to two o'clock in the morning and a stranger might walk in. And so that idea of hospitality, invitation, I think, fits us well. It fits like a glove into our culture, and the sense of community and longing and belonging. And I think that the kind of message that we say we follow Jesus, the eaceful One in our context, what does that mean? And so, I'm very hopeful for Community of Christ.

Karin Peter 36:59

So, we have this Mission Initiative in Community of Christ; Abolish Poverty, End Suffering, which seems to resonate with the history of the church, the story of the history of the church in Wales. What can we learn from the story of the church in Wales, the history that we've experienced there? How can that inform us as we try to really live into Abolish Poverty, End suffering?

Richard James 37:30

Okay, if I look at through the lens of Welsh church history, I would say what is happening the context, context, context, context. And so, what was happening at the time in South Wales was a social movement and the desire for change. It happens, the churches or chapels were trying to do it. The political, sort of, Charterists, dissenters were doing that, but there was a link missing. When I look at today's culture and Abolish Poverty, End Suffering, I find it abhorrent that in a, what is the fifth or sixth richest country in the world, we have so many food banks, you know. I was reading a report that there are more food banks in the UK than there are McDonald's restaurants. That's absolutely abhorrent, you know. And the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer. You know, I look at my own upbringing as being a son of a coal miner. And yes, life was hard. And yes, there were strikes, a time when there's no food on the table. You know, and the community gathered around. It probably isn't as bad as that, but there's definitely an inequality in access to education, rights, and opportunities for women. So, once we live in a free society and access, and for marginalized people where their ethnicity, and, sort of, sexuality. I think we've just got all the right ingredients. It's got the right ingredients for change. It's got the right ingredients in our history. And, I think, in sense of Community of Christ, I think we have a wonderful message. So, it's aligning those dots as Dan Jones did. He spoke the language. So, he was Welsh in those sense, mostly well-spoken now. But if you can speak the language to people and, I think, the idea of Abolish Poverty, End Suffering is one of the ways that the Restoration message can be re-envisioned. And, you know, the hell on earth can become Zion on Earth.

Karin Peter 39:42

So, you've shared a little bit about some connecting points from the church in Wales. My favorite going forward from this interview is going to be the history of dissent. I'm thinking that would make a wonderful *Project Zion Podcast* interview, major dissenting contributions to the life of the Reorganization. But how do you see other aspects of the church in Wales? Has it had an impact on our, kind of, institutional personality or our global expression? I mean, other than the fact that the immigration to the United States was hugely impacted by the Welch church, but as we look at the church now, do you see a connection to the church in Wales?

Richard James 40:32

Before I answer that question, I've just, I think, just of interest, sort of, Wales is very strong in our culture is a singing, is a dancing, is poetic culture. And it's very rich and a part of that is, kind of, built and reinforced by local concerts, local competitions called eisteddfods, eistedds all day is a purer word for it. I have 100% certain that the start of the Tabernacle Choir, or the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, came from the Welsh immigrants, their sense of choral singing and close harmonies. And so, I think for me, part of the Welshness is our culture and the expression of the arts. So, you know, in a more digression way, you know, there are some very significant, I think, my eyes, some actors that take on the characteristics of Welshness. They are strong characters. So, people like, you know, Richard Burton, Anthony Hopkins, Catherine Zeta Jones, they are able to portray the character in ways that other people can't. And I think that becomes from the, kind of, rehearsals in these eisteddfods. And so, there's a confidence within us. So, coming back to the big picture of the church, I think we're willing to embrace the diversity across the spectrum of our global church. And what is Wales going to bring into that, I think, is a recognition of the role of the arts, how the role of poetry, not that I'm a lover so much of poetry, but of art, of music, of drama, of living a way of life, hospitality, and acceptance, you know. And not everybody is this way, but I'm a very tactile person, very touchy feely. We'll speak up. We voice our concerns. We're dissenters. You know, where things aren't right, we will dissent. And I think as a church, we can learn to have a stronger voice, or to stand up with those that have no voice. And that's what I think we can learn from each other. You know, I'm almost sure that a part of the faithful disagreement has its roots in people like Andrew Bolton and myself, and Jim (...) around the World Liturgic Council, loyal opposition from a Commonwealth that says, "Hang a minute, I've got a position. I have a voice have you thought of?" So, I think that idea of faithful disagreement, that there is, it's okay to dissent, you know, and sometimes it's the people that dissent that we need to listen to, the voice that they have. I'm trying to think what other aspects. I'm, most people like to talk, and we like to listen. You know, and that's a gift too, is to listen to people's stories. So, I think we have time for people. We like to engage in relationships that are very meaningful, and invest time in those relationships. And once those relationships are formed, they're deep, lifelong relationships.

Karin Peter 44:01

So, so many questions are going through my mind, one of them being when we began our conversation, you talked about the fact that Wales is Celtic. You come from a Celtic tradition and when you talk about the arts, poetry, music, dancing, all of those are inherent in Celtic traditions, as well. Do you see any connection in the church, not just in Wales, but in areas that have more Celtic influence in the Celtic religious tradition of nature's spiritualism, the different aspects that Christianity borrowed, and now more fundamental Christians, kind of, rebel against? Do you see expressions of that in the church in Wales?

Richard James 44:56

Yeah, so there's definitely a, kind of, willingness to embrace Celtic Christianity. So, when I look at, sort of, way back in, sort of, my understanding of Celtic Christianity, as the first Christians came to these lands, they borrowed the imagery of religious expressions by the Celts. You know, and they borrowed the image of the circle and put it in the Celtic cross. You know, so all of creation is sacred. All creation

is an expression of the divine. And so, that's something, when you are, sort of, Celtic, you just take that for granted, you know, that all of nature, I'm sure, you know, Karin, I just love being by the ocean. I just love being in the mountains. I love being around creation, you know. The ocean resets my balance. You have to give, yeah, you have to yield your own rhythm to the tide. You have to yield to the waves. So, whether it's stormy or whether it's calm, it's a recentering. So, I find myself in very sacred spaces when I'm in creation. So, in that way, I can see looking back to some of the sacred religious expressions of how people connected with the Divine can help. 'Cause people are looking at ancient ways of finding new ways. And that can be a way for people to connect.

Karin Peter 46:35

Yeah, thank you. That wasn't part of our conversation earlier, but it came to mind as you were sharing, and certainly with our own Enduring Principle of Sacredness of Creation, we can see those connecting points in Community of Christ. So, before we close, I want to shift gears just a little bit. I want to ask you a couple questions. So first, with everything you've told us about Wales and Welsh people, what about you growing up as a Community, RLDS/Community of Christ person in Wales? How has the church in Wales influenced you and your discipleship?

Richard James 47:16

So, for me, I would say that I am a disciple of Jesus Christ, and I will say the peaceful One, and I choose to live out my discipleship in Community of Christ. So, foremost, I follow Jesus. And I find the best expression of that, the best expression of me, is in community, in Community of Christ. So, I grew up in a place where, in Penllergaer, where my father and, was a coal miner, and he found the church deep within the coal mine. He was a lay minister that had gone around to different nondenomination, nonconformist churches. And there was somebody in this coal mine, a church member, and my dad was offering blessing upon his lunch, would have been probably jam sandwiches or very little, and the conversation started around a meal, and took, sort of, two years for him to find that this was something that he sensed a call to. So, my mother and father and my three older siblings were baptized probably five or six years before I was born. So, I was born into Community of Christ. So, I find myself born into a community that is extremely loving and support, and it's a time when the church is growing. It's vibrant. There's lots of activities going on every day of the week, you know, and catering for different voices and equality is right on the table. You know, there are women in leadership, women are there, you know, and it's very dynamic. It's very affirming. I grew up in this, where at eight years old, I was baptized. I can't remember a thing about my baptism. It's my birthday. I remember having a football or soccer ball for my birthday, but I do know I wanted to follow Jesus. And that's, was my decision. I grew up in a place where spirituality was lived. People laughed. They prayed together. They cried together. They, kind of, shared their heart and their hopes. It was a true sense of community. And probably one of my earliest memories is being in prayer meetings and falling asleep on my mother's knee, but having this sense of you're just bathed in love, you know, and acceptance. So, I was very privileged to have this kind of community. And, I think that probably when I was about 10, 11 years old, going to one of our church youth camps and meeting other young people around the British Isles, or UK, that were a part of this church too, and had a similar bringing, upbringing, That the God that I experienced in Penllergaer could be experienced somewhere else. And that was really a significant opening for me as a 10, 11 year old. And a similar experience, when I went to European youth camps, we used to have European youth camps every four years and finding in Germany or in Netherlands, finding people, young people

like me, didn't speak the same language, but have the same sort of understanding about God. So, I was really, really blessed to be in this. I find myself at 18 years old being elected, as being a pastor, a co-pastor in this congregation at 18 years, at 20 years old. And at that age, you're fearless. You think you can do anything. Professionally, I was in a bank. Things were going well. And I think this is what a loving community does. It supports you. It captures you, is encourages you. You're gonna make mistakes, but there's lots of grace abounds around. And that can help. But there's a willingness to embrace the giftedness that I brought. I was a district president and leader of an area when I was 22 years old. And I was a seventy when I was 25. But it came, in some ways my professional career was opening up as a banker, but also the church recognized that giftedness and was willing to embrace it. And that meant a lot to me. So, I have been fortunate to be brought up in community that values you as an individual, that realizes that you have something to bring, every else has something to bring to the table. And we're better because of it. I think a big shift for me, in my relationship with God, came when the bank needed to relocate me from God's country to the strange land called England. As a corporate banker, they move you around from location to location. And beginning of the '90s, there was a recession hitting the south coast of England, and they wanted managers to help that situation. And I found myself, our family found ourselves in a position where we were in church every day of the week, and it was good. But life was so busy. There was something going on, and life was wrapped around church and God and life was squeezed in the middle of all that. And we find ourselves relocated to this strange land called England. And it was only every two weeks that the small house group met, and that was a big adjustment for us. And at first, we felt guilty we were not doing, you know, we were not up front, or participating, or visiting, or, and it was a guilty feeling. And then we found that the rhythm was healthy. It was healthy for, physically for ourselves, but also the relationships. And it helped us to separate our relationship to, tween with God, and an institution like a church, or expression of community. And what we found that our relationship with God was more honest, more authentic, because we experienced God in a different rhythm. And it wasn't about busyness or doing, it was about being and now that's a big shift for us. And then identifying and finding Community of Christ has a wonderful sense of community and message that helps us be better people, helps us change our world, helps, recognizes our giftedness and wants to embrace that. And so, that was a significant turning point, you know, kind of, connectedness with Community of Christ and positively saying, this is the place where, for now, we want to live out our community, our expression. You know, and we used to have people just over for dinner. You know, even, we had a young daughter at home, Sarah, she's now 30 years old. But we had an evangelist come once a week and he used to feed her and that was his joy of his life. But we were blessed so much by that. And just simple things, like, we could do hospitality. We could invite people into our home. We could go to places together with friends, and friends in the church and outside the church. And, I think, sometimes our busyness can be a distraction to be authentic. So, as I say, I like to say, I'm a disciple of Jesus, the peaceful One, and I live out my discipleship in Community of Christ. Because for me the values, our identity, aligns very much with who I am as a person. And I think I'm a better person, by being in community, and in Community of Christ.

Karin Peter 55:24

Thank you for sharing that, Richard. In this day and age where busyness has been interrupted by a pandemic, many of us are discovering that new rhythm that we didn't have before, and experiencing similar epiphanies, if you will, as we're going forward. One last question about your own self going forward. When you were doing the research for your lecture, or even when you were doing the research

in seminary, originally for “The History of the Church in Wales”, is there anything that you learned, or relearned, or explored that has impacted you from your research going forward?

Richard James 56:11

Yeah, I think that the thing that resonates deeply with me, one is that the Restoration message resonated with the working class people. And it is context, context, context. So, you can have the most wonderful message you like, but unless it's relevant, and it can be interpreted in the context of people to hear it in their own language, or their own context, nothing will happen. So, I take away from this, the gift of our roots is alongside the people that have been oppressed, the people that want a better life, but need some help in getting there, or ideas how to get there. And so, the idea of Zion, at that time, was a reality that says, “What I'm looking for, I can have that here.” And I think as we look at the sense of building sacred community, we can have that here. You know, and that can be online, or it can be in person somewhere. And I think that was the kind of opener for me or identifying the core part of our message resonates with people. And then as I look through the lens of being a Welsh person, how do I use my culture and my giftedness to foster that even more? So.

Karin Peter 57:44

So, Richard, I want to thank you for being our guest today here on *Project Zion Podcast* and sharing with us so eloquently, not just about the history of the church in Wales, but about discipleship and mission. But before we go, I need to ask you if you have any last comments, or closing thoughts that you'd like to offer before we sign off?

Richard James 58:09

Well, I mean, I appreciate the opportunity just to share my story. I think it's important we listen to our stories, and everybody has a story to tell. When I was preparing this back in April, I deliberately went to the area, this cauldron area. And whilst there's no expression of the church there, I said, “The rocks almost shouted out. This is why, this is our story. Listen to our story.” And so, why is there scars now on that rock, where the coal has been hewed out of the limestone? You know, I look at people's lives and there're scars on people's lives. But they have a powerful story to share, you know, and I've just captured one or two individuals here. But it's in the art of the storytelling that we hear the heart. And I think that's what we just need to listen to, the heartbeat. So, let us make time for each other and to listen to the stories that we have to share.

Karin Peter 59:20

Well, thank you for making time for us today, Richard. And for our listeners, we encourage you to view Richard's lecture, part of the fall lecture series, “Church Without Boundaries”. You can find it on historic-sitesfoundation.org. It will be archived there for you to watch it as well as many other lectures. What date did it air, or does it air, Richard? Do you know?

Richard James 59:46

28th of October.

Karin Peter 59:48

Okay, so if you want to watch it live, you'll have to go on the [historicsitesfoundation.org](https://www.historicsitesfoundation.org) website to get that information. And you can participate live, I believe, by chat. You can ask questions as well at the end of the lecture. Or you can reach Richard via email if you have questions about the church in Wales or about the church in Europe currently. And you can find his contact information on the Community of Christ website at [cofchrist.org](https://www.cofchrist.org). You can just put his name in the search bar. I tried it to make sure you popped up and there you were. So, in the meantime, this has been "Cuppa Joe", part of the *Project Zion Podcast*. I'm Karin Peter, with Richard James. Thanks for listening.

Josh Mangelson 1:00:39

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