

**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.

**Brittany Mangelson 00:33**

Hello, everyone, welcome to another episode of the *Project Zion Podcast*. This is Brittany Mangelson and I'm going to be your host for today, and we are going to be bringing you an episode in our "What's Brewing" series, which is where we talk all about mission. So, I have one of my dear, dear friends on who is kind of a PZP veteran, he's been on before, but Tyler Marz. So, Tyler, hello, and thank you for joining us today. And why don't you just give us a little introduction about yourself?

**Tyler Marz 01:05**

Sure, yeah. My name is Tyler. I am a Latter-day Seekers Expansion Minister. I serve as a pastor of house churches in Utah, and I'm an elder within Community of Christ.

**Brittany Mangelson 01:18**

All right, so if you have not put two and two together, listeners, we are basically going to be talking about Tyler's job. And I wanted to give a little bit of background to Community of Christ here in Utah, just really briefly to, kind of, set the stage for what Tyler was walking into when he was hired in this position. But essentially, Utah has a congregation in Salt Lake, we have a congregation in Ogden, we do have a congregation in St. George, which is about four hours south of where we're at, and then we have different emerging groups that have popped up in various places in the northern part of Utah. And so, Tyler's job is to support those emerging groups. And right before the pandemic, there were several house churches that were meeting in rented brick and mortar spaces, and then the pandemic hit, and everything moved online. And as we all know, things just, kind of, shifted in church participation, both of the brick and mortar places were in college towns, and so, people frequently move and transition out of those spaces, etc. And so, when Tyler was hired on, were you hired on April of 2021, Tyler?

**Tyler Marz 02:33**

I was.

**Brittany Mangelson 02:34**

Okay. Yeah. So, it was still in the middle of the pandemic, we're still not out of the pandemic, but what I'm getting at is that Tyler walked into a bit of a challenging space, because everything was in that transitional flow. And so, Tyler walked into a position that he really realized very quickly that he needed to nurture and start from the ground up. So, that's what we're going to be focusing on today. So, Tyler, I guess, let's just dive right on into it. I know that when you first moved to Utah, you were more or less forced into a pretty big discernment process to figure out how to help build and nurture a support group for Latter-day Seekers in the midst of a pandemic. And so, what did that look like? What did that discernment process look like? And really, what did it look like to build these groups from the ground up?

**Tyler Marz 03:31**

Yeah, so my official title is Latter-day Seeker Expansion Minister. So, that's a big, long, fancy title meaning that my umbrella of the things that I do is huge and is ever, ever changing in the ways that I minister so, whether it's in the pandemic or not, I'm constantly looking at what are the needs of seekers, of people looking into Community of Christ, or even people in faith crisis and faith transition, and how can I best minister to them within the context of where they live. So, discernment, I, kind of, say that I'm constantly in discernment and I'm constantly in a liminal space. Discernment being this process of figuring out what, what's next and liminal space being the not quite there yet, not quite figured it out. And you have to get comfortable in that. So, the pandemic really changed what people needed within the seeker movement, within those looking into Community of Christ today. They wanted a way to connect right and they wanted to connect in person, but last year, we weren't meeting in person and so we were doing Zoom and that was meeting some people's needs, and it wasn't meeting other people's needs. And, but yet, we still wanted to offer something. And so, as we began meeting in person, I had to consider what do the people need? What do they want? What are they desiring? What are their struggles? What don't they like? And discernment is a lot about just listening, listening to people's needs. I looked at what was previously done, what had been done years ago when I used to participate in house church as an attendee, and what made that a thriving space, and what my abilities were to help people. And so, it's a bit of combining all of that. Some other things that I had to consider were that, before I was hired into this position, there were two people doing house church that would be at the various locations that we had. And the way things have been divided and change now is that there's one person running these different groups. And so, I have to consider my capacity as one minister to lead a group versus two being able to do that. And some of it is trial and error, is having things in your back pocket to be able to pull out in case conversation isn't exactly flowing, or people need something different, like, perhaps they might need a spiritual practice instead of just a discussion that day. They need something a bit, with a bit more spiritual substance to it. So, I try to always have some things in my back pocket as I'm discerning and figuring out what to do.

**Brittany Mangelson 06:34**

So, it sounds like a lot of listening had to happen, and to figure out the needs of seekers and to figure out your capacity, what was working, what wasn't, what folks are looking for, which for me, sounds very out of the box. I mean, I think that we have this idea of traditional church where you have a building, you have a full worship service, you have prayers, you have candles, you have music, you have a sermon, you have fellowship, you know, that's, kind of, the standard church, but it sounds like you're emerging expressions of what Community of Christ is, and what it can be, breaks out of that box a little bit. So, I'm wondering if you just have any thoughts on that? And then also, how Latter-day Seekers that you are encountering are responding to that. Or do people like that idea of going to quote unquote, "church" that looks just very different from what they expect?

**Tyler Marz 07:37**

Those are great questions. So, I see it from two perspectives, right. So, within Community of Christ, we have our quote, unquote, "traditional worship", right? What that looks like, those, the candles, the singing, the liturgy that we have, right, the traditional sermon, the Disciples Generous Response, those things are traditional elements of our worship. And in the LDS tradition it's very different in what a

worship looks like to them, and where they go, and the amount of people that attend, right. And so, I'm, kind of, stuck in the middle here, right, of bridging, sort of, two traditions in a way that is meaningful for people, and also not intimidating. When you visit, any sort of spiritual expression, worship service, whatever, and it's new to you, there's a level of hesitancy there, right, to participate, because it's new, and it's different. And so, some of those outside of the box things are that I really go with the flow of what people are needing in the moment. So, like I mentioned before, I have things in my back pocket, just in case that's what we need. But I largely, our services are not super structured like a regular worship service. So, discussion is always a large part of our gatherings that we have, so is prayer. That's, kind of, a minimum. At least once a month, we offer the sacrament of communion that is deeply meaningful for individuals to be able to partake of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and what that means to them, especially since we've been meeting in people's homes and doing this. That's, kind of, where the idea of house church comes from is that we're meeting in people's homes. Previously, we were meeting in larger buildings, in churches even, and that served a great purpose because we had a much larger group prior to the pandemic, of individuals meeting. But, as with all things, the pandemic changed just about everything in our life. And so, our group shrank quite a bit. People had different needs in their lives. And so, it's a lot more intimate of a group and so I realized that having a more intimate and homey space was important for people to feel comfortable, to be themselves and to share what they needed to share. So, meeting in someone's house is one of those out of the box things. Doing spiritual practices is a bit out of the box for LDS individuals, and even some Community of Christ congregations. And then just the flexibility and the, sort of, lack of structure and traditional style of worship as present in Community of Christ. We don't do that so much. And that just allows for a place where people can be themselves and share what they need to share.

**Brittany Mangelson 10:38**

And I just want to mention that, the importance of this space, because you're working with folks who are in the middle of a faith transition, right, like, people who are still sorting and sifting their own beliefs and lack of beliefs and their doubts and the nature of God. And, I mean, really, really deep theological things that people are being confronted with, belief sets that they have held on to their whole lives, and suddenly the foundation is just gone. And so, having an intimate space where you can work through those things with other people that are going through that as well, I think is really, really important. And then to have that paralleled alongside the Salt Lake congregation, because I know that a lot of the folks that you've met with, they kind of do both, right? So, they will go to the Salt Lake church if they want to have a more traditional church. But then the small intimate gathering really fills that need of being able to just, kind of, lay everything out on the table, and to just be themselves unapologetically with all of their doubts and questions and hopes, and just everything. So, I know that, again, like we're in the middle of a pandemic, and doing things face to face, you mentioned that we weren't meeting in person last year, but what kind of events, or what kinds of ways have you been able to contact seekers, because I do know that the people who are regularly attending your small group discussions weren't necessarily connected to Community of Christ before the pandemic. And so, and I know that you've been able to attend several events face to face, but just talk about some of those ways that you've been able to connect with seekers during this time.

**Tyler Marz 12:32**

Yeah, so, it's a, it's, kind of, all over the board. More or less people have heard about Community of Christ in some way, and they tend to contact us online, whether that's, they're searching for Community of Christ in the area that they live, and we have a couple Facebook pages for that, within Utah County, as well as up in Cash County. And that's usually our first contact, though I will say, in the number of circles that I run in within the LGBTQ community, and other spaces, the millennial crowd, people are curious about faith, specifically here in Utah, and either they're in faith transition or faith crisis. And so, whether they're reaching out to me, or I just noticed, sort of, a struggle that someone might be having working through their faith, I just tried to mention, like, hey, I have gone through that as well, and I have found, you know, a spiritual home, and I'm here to support you in whatever way you need. And so, like, as far as events and things go, we have our twice a month meetings that we have for our discussion groups, our quote unquote, "house church", but then it's my goal to do some larger spiritual practices and things like that with people that aren't specifically, like, a Sunday gathering or a discussion group type thing, because I really want to be able to help people to do some reframing, if that's what they want to do, if they want to work out who God is to them, because they've only learned God in one way. I want to provide an opportunity for people to do that, to help people through that. As a pastor and spiritual leader, so.

**Brittany Mangelson 14:20**

Awesome. And you mentioned the LGBTQ community, and I know that you went to Rexburg Pride. Did you want to talk a little bit about that at all?

**Tyler Marz 14:29**

Oh, great. Um, so I did go to Rexburg, Pride of 2021. It was their first, like, fully big event, sort of, post-pandemic at the time, at least it's what we thought was post-pandemic. And it's, how do I sum this up in good words? Honestly, it was one of the most beautiful things I've ever seen. To paint the landscape a little bit, Rexburg is an extremely conservative, predominantly LDS small town, that also is home to Brigham Young University Rexburg, and with that, just the culture that the church and people and southern Idaho bring to that area. So, to have a pride event there is a big deal. So, they met in a local park, and I was so impressed with the volume of people that attended. It was a wonderfully family friendly event, parents, kids, and it was just a great time there. And what I was surprised is that there was no sense of animosity there. I will say there were, I don't want to give them too much credit, but there were a couple people protesting across the street, but we didn't hear them. Their voices were out, overshadowed by the music, and the fun, and the laughter, and all the good things that were happening there. I was also really grateful to see the local law enforcement there, keeping us safe and making sure that we were able to have the good time that we were having there. But the significance of that event in Rexburg really can't be understated. I went to school there as a formerly LDS individual and it was a different landscape when I was there. Pride festivals were not the thing. The LGBTQ groups that were meeting there, USGA and some other support groups, were very much on the down low and not, you didn't hear about them unless you knew about someone who was in the group. They were much more secretive thing. Now those, that landscape has changed quite a bit. Those groups are more publicly known. There's more safe spaces for people to be authentically themselves, get the support they need. And so, Rexburg Pride was a great thing for that little town.

**Brittany Mangelson 16:54**

And when people at Pride found out that you were a minister, because I, you did have a booth, is that correct?

**Tyler Marz 17:02**

We did as Community of Christ.

**Brittany Mangelson 17:04**

Yeah, so, what was the response to people as they were putting two and two together of which church this was, and I'm assuming that you had, you know, a *Doctrine and Covenants* or maybe even a *Book of Mormon* out? And what was the response when people realized who we were and that we were affirming?

**Tyler Marz 17:21**

Yeah, so, one thing that I found unique, though not surprising given southern Idaho, is that we were the only church present at that event, the only affirming church within the United States, present there. And so, yeah, we did have our *Doctrine and Covenants*. So, we had various things that tried to signal to people that we weren't, we were our unique Restoration church, right. And so, people were really drawn to that. We had a cutout of Mr. Smith up and people recognized Emma. They saw the *Doctrine and Covenants* and said, "Hey, you have the *Doctrine of Covenants* too? What's that about?" And so, it started these conversations of how can you be a Restoration faith that is also affirming of queer individuals? And that was really meaningful for people to see that. They didn't realize that our faith even existed, that there was space for them in a church community, in a faith. They, for those coming from an LDS tradition, that faith is not affirming in the ways that our faith is. And many individuals don't even know where to look to find affirming faiths because, within their context, that just is unheard of, it's so out in left field. And so, people were surprised that we were there. They loved that we were there, that a Christian faith was present to let them know that it was okay to love Jesus and be themselves authentically.

**Brittany Mangelson 19:09**

Thank you for that. I always find it so, I don't know what the word is, but just striking to watch transitioning Mormon, struggling Mormon, ex-Mormon, realize that Community of Christ not only exists, because I think a lot of LDS folks definitely have Community of Christ on their radar to some degree, but to recognize who we are and where we are today. And you, kind of, see them processing it in their heads of, like, whoa, we were the same church at one point and yet Community of Christ is here, the LDS church is here, and I would actually be accepted over here. And if you haven't actually watched somebody process that in real time and see they're like, wait, wait, wait. What? Explain this. You know, and as you explain it, you just, kind of, see them shift their whole paradigm because it is so out of the left field, and I've heard so many people say things, like, man, at every chance that, you know, your community had to make a choice, they chose the right path, they made the right decision. And yeah, just seeing people connect those dots for the first time, which is, I'm assuming, what was happening a lot at Pride, is just such a remarkable experience. And if you haven't ever experienced it before, I hope you get to at some point in your life, because it truly is amazing. And that's not to say that everybody ends up walking with Community of Christ forever, but just acknowledging and knowing and understanding that there is a church that feels just familiar enough, but is so radically different and

radically inclusive, and accepting, is just a very awesome experience, so. And, Tyler, I am interested to know, because I know that you went to another conference, THRIVE, that is, well, do you want to tell us a little bit about that, and maybe how that compared, because it's my understanding that THRIVE is for folks who are maybe a little more on the journey of a faith transition, who are really questioning the LDS church or who have left the LDS church, who are trying to build community after leaving. So, what was that experience like going there and representing Community of Christ?

**Tyler Marz 21:34**

Yeah, so I will say it is pretty drastically different. I attended the Salt Lake, or Salt Lake THRIVE conference, their larger conference that they had last year, and the crowd is different. They, a lot of people have done a lot of work in their faith transition out of the church, and they're not necessarily looking for a faith after that, though some are. A lot of people, though, are just genuinely curious that we are a faith that comes from the Restoration tradition, the Latter Day Saint Restoration tradition that is affirming of LGBTQ, that does ordain individuals to priesthood regardless of gender, that has embraced modern biblical scholarship that has been allowed to inform our theology, that isn't stuck in the traditions of our fathers, if you will, this, our old theology of where we were, right? We recognize that God is there and growing, and people appreciate that. They appreciate the effort and the space that we hold for people that do want a faith community. So, we were warmly received, had lots of great conversations with people, largely about church history and different things, because they want to see where we are compared to where their faith was, and is, and how we're different.

**Brittany Mangelson 23:03**

Yeah, that's really interesting. And I know that, you know, the tagline was "Thrive Beyond Religion", and so, there was some question whether, you know, Community of Christ would be able to find a space there. And, but I, you know, I didn't attend, I have attended that conference before, but I did not attend this last year, and it seems like we're really well received. And we're, kind of, this, well, I've heard from several people, you know, "If I ever went back to church, I would go to Community of Christ," or "I consider myself a total atheist, but I love Community of Christ. And I could see myself, you know, worshipping with them." And I think that that's, like, I take such pride in those comments, to know that someone who wants to, quote, "thrive beyond religion", can still embrace where Community of Christ is because they see us actually living out our beliefs through Enduring Principles, Mission initiatives, etc. And so, we have a lot of respect amongst people who would consider themselves post-religious, which is exactly the kind of church that I want to be. So, I'm really glad that you were able to experience that.

**Tyler Marz 24:16**

Yeah, and you know, I will say one thing is that, while THRIVE is fully titled "Thrive Beyond Religion", they definitely make way for individuals who are very much still in religion and still within the LDS church. I know, at least at the conference, they had announced that, you know, essentially all are welcome, regardless of whether you're still in the church and still a believing member, the church being the LDS church, or out and no longer religious or anywhere in between, or family members, wherever they are in between, that they're welcome there. And so, there's this sense of inclusion and welcome, regardless of where you are in your journey, and I think that helped us to be well received there. And that led to these comments of, you know, "I'm not religious anymore, but if I was, I would be Community of Christ".



**Brittany Mangelson 25:11**

Yeah. And I think one thing is, I've thought about that tagline a little bit more, and I'm pretty sure that it's, I mean, this is *Mormon Stories* sponsored conference, right, like, the *Open Stories Foundation*, and they have a great respect for Community of Christ. You know, John Dehlin, interviewed President Veazey and has had John Hamer on and has really, really sent a lot of people our way. And I think this idea of "Thrive Beyond Religion" probably plays off of the idea in the LDS church that you cannot thrive after Mormonism. Recently, you know, that was said by a prominent LDS church leader, that there's nowhere for you to go if you leave, and you'll be giving up everything you have and love and all of your beliefs. And so, a lot of folks are taught this from a very young age. And so, leaving is very scary. And so, this idea that, no, you can thrive after religion. I think that, you know, not to, like, put words in their mouths, but I suspect that it's just trying to prove a point that you can live a full life with happiness, with morals, with values, outside of religion and the specific religion that that conference is based on. So yeah, I think Community of Christ is a great fit for that community, right? And just to underscore again, that even if, like, when we talk about "What's Brewing" and our mission, and going to where God is working in the neighborhood, in our communities, I think that this just goes to show that even if you're worried that Community of Christ would be too imposing on a place, or you don't want to seem too churchy, or you don't want to seem too forward, etc., there really is a lot of room for the message that Community of Christ has, and we're usually pretty well received, at least in my experience, and I think in your experience as well,

**Tyler Marz 27:16**

Very much so.

**Brittany Mangelson 27:18**

So, I guess with this, just, a general question of, what have you found that makes Latter-day Seekers interested in Community of Christ? I mean, we've already, kind of, touched on it, but what are the things that make seekers go, wait, what? This church? Like, what keeps them coming back? What keeps them asking questions?

**Tyler Marz 27:40**

Yeah, so there's a whole spectrum of things, but I'd say a couple of those big things are our views on church history, that we are super honest about where our church has been, where we've come from, our origins, our roots, how we've grown, how we've changed, the things that we denied, and the things that we embraced, and we're not afraid of that stuff. I will say, in the time when we were embracing those things, that wasn't without struggle, we know that. But as members of the LDS church, who have been taught church history, solely from the church's lens, in a very abbreviated version, depending on the church history event, they are truly impressed with the depth that we go and have been in looking at our history. Seekers are also very interested that we ordain individuals based on call and desire in their life and need within the congregation, or group that they're in, but also regardless of gender. So, we don't just ordain men to priesthood, we ordain all to priesthood as they're called. And then I would say one of the other big things is seekers appreciate our, what I call our embracing of modern biblical scholarship, and that we use that to inform our theology, that we aren't just using the theology that

started from our beginnings with Joseph Smith in the early years, but that we have found a way to mesh our traditions of what makes us unique Restoration faith, with modern biblical scholarship and letting that be the foundation of our theology, our Mission Initiatives, our Enduring Principles and just to be generally good, a faith that has good principles that are applicable wherever you're at in life, not just within our specific tradition. That is one thing that they really enjoy, especially our Mission Initiatives and the Enduring Principles, is that they're not, while they are uniquely Community of Christ, they're principles that a lot of people value, regardless of their faith or religious tradition or their spirituality where they're at.

**Brittany Mangelson 30:16**

Exactly. And I think that that's why there's been a bridge that's been built between the non-religious, agnostic, atheist, nones community and Community of Christ, because when I talk to my friends who are not churching, or not aligned with a community, if we start talking values, we are talking about the Enduring Principles and many of the Mission Initiatives. And I think that people recognizing their set of values in a faith community is really surprising when they're coming from a tradition where, a lot of times, they don't see their values in that tradition, or don't see them live out, like they would want to in that tradition. And so, I do think that those are really good talking points and the ability to find common ground within our Enduring Principles and Mission Initiatives, while having this backdrop of honest church history, and things like continuing revelation and biblical scholarship, I think, just, kind of, paint the whole picture, and we're able to have really meaningful conversations with seekers. So, Tyler, what are some of the struggles that you have faced since working in Utah? I know, again, we, kind of, touched on it already, but just in general terms, what are some of the things that you have had to really face as you've moved back to Utah and have become a minister?

**Tyler Marz 31:48**

Yeah, so I would say probably two big things for me. One of those is, sort of, the, I think it's a compounded issue, but it's, sort of, the apathy of, during the pandemic, people have grown accustomed to, sort of, being shut in, staying at home doing their own thing. And I, getting out and as much as they want to interact with people, there's a little bit of hesitation there. And so, I, finding ways to foster that connection that aren't intimidating, that aren't overbearing, right, so that people feel the desire and the need to connect whether it's not too much, I would say, one of the other things, kind of, similar to that is recognizing where people are at in their faith transition. While I have done my own work in my faith transition to find a comfortable space with God, having patience with other people in their journey. You know, I can't take someone's hand and lead them through their own faith tradition. I can be there to companion with them, but they have to do the work. And being patient wherever they are in that process is super important to have. And so, I wouldn't say that's a struggle so much, it's just something that I have to constantly remind myself is that I'm a companion with them. And then, I'd say, probably the last, and maybe biggest struggle, is staying plugged into LDS contemporary issues. And the struggle with that isn't so much that it is triggering for me or anything like that, though sometimes it does rub on some pretty close wounds that I've had, it's being ready to engage immediately with those things. Because when there are those issues, people are hurting, people are struggling, people are trying to figure out how do I make sense of this? Can I do these things anymore? Is this church my home? I mean, there are big questions that people are asking when these struggles come out from LDS contemporary culture, whether that's a talk that was given, a fireside, a devotional address, a



general conference talk, or something simply published in the news, or a change of doctrine that the LDS church has had. Being attuned to those things I call it, kind of, being in the trenches, right? Like I have to know what's going on and I have to be ready to work with the people that are struggling through this. And it's a mix of emotions going through that, right. It's, there's a sense of strength that I have in knowing that I can be there to help people because I share in their trauma and their struggle because I have been there. But also, it's hard to see people going through those things. So, it's immensely rewarding and it's heavy at the same time.

**Brittany Mangelson 34:53**

Oh dear, all of those struggles are so relatable and even from, you know, as you were saying, your first struggle about getting out, and it just almost sounded like we've all forgotten how to human, right. We've all forgotten how to be in community together. And we've all just, yeah, gotten comfortable just being at home and keeping distance and conversing on social media and on the internet, which is different from talking and being deeply engaged with someone face to face. So, that is, I think, a universal struggle, and you are not alone in it. And you're also not alone in the idea of needing to be plugged in to the LDS church. I know that that's been a struggle for me because there's this idea within the LDS church that you can leave it, but you can't leave it alone. And sometimes I feel like this job is almost proving that right, because, you know, we have to stay plugged in. I can't just move on and outside of, you know, the fact that this, in some way, is still our community. This, these are still people that we love that are in it. But the idea that people come to us because we have been through this, and we have had our own moments of crisis. And I think of, you know, my moments of crisis when Kate Kelly was excommunicated, there were ministers there ready to hear me and some of those ministers were former Mormon. And so, I think for me being on this side, it is a struggle. And it just gives me more appreciation for those who were doing this when I was early in my faith transition, because it can be a lot. And when you have your whole worldview just cracking in front of your very eyes, I mean, it's really destabilizing, and there's a lot of anger and sadness and hurt and fear. And so again, for you to be able to provide that space where people can talk about these things and explore an alternative, you use the word reframing, that takes a lot of intention, and a lot of paying attention, to be able to respond. And so, yeah, being plugged in and just being aware. I mean, it's almost like a form of listening. Like you were saying, listening to seekers, you have to listen to what their context is saying too because that definitely impacts the questions that will then come to you as a minister. So, it is a tough place to be in. I understand. But, Tyler, I know that you are a recent graduate of seminary, Community of Christ seminary program through Graceland, and so talk a little bit about that, and how seminary has helped you in your own personal formation through your faith transition, as well as prepared you to be a minister to walk with people who are going through a faith transition.

**Tyler Marz 37:50**

Yeah. So, I graduated with a Master of Arts in Religion from Graceland University Community of Christ Seminary and it, it's helped me on so many fronts. Our program, that we have at Graceland University, is a wonderful program that really equips individuals to understand the origins of our faith specifically, but a large portion of your classes that you're taking are understanding biblical literacy, Christian history from the time of Jesus until now, is looking at contemporary culture, and theology, and the context in which you are ministering, whether that's as a lay minister or an employed minister of the church. Looking at the area that you work, the people that are there, the dynamics, the cultures, etc., and how

that impacts how you serve, what you need to pay attention to, how that changes the dynamic of your congregation, or can influence that, the people who attend, so many things. And so, attending seminary has helped me in a few ways. It's given me a greater understanding of Christian history and how the theologies that are present in various Christian faiths, including our own, aren't unique, and the questions that led to them aren't unique and have been happening for hundreds of years. I think one of the other big things is that it's really helped me gain a greater voice and a level of understanding to be able to then synthesize down and explain that to the seekers. So, some seekers who come into Community of Christ are really surprised that we allow a difference of opinion on who God is, who Jesus Christ is, who the Holy Spirit is. And I'm able to share with them that there are numerous faiths that have belief in the Godhead or those individuals differently, and how they believe them differently. And that through Christian history, the understanding and the attributes that we associated with those individuals has changed as well, depending on the faith and the religion. And some of that stuff is really intriguing to seekers, because they, they've never heard anything like that before. So, they're intrigued. They're curious. But then I think it also opens their minds up to potential difference of understanding, right, that they can let go of some of these toxic images or theologies, images of God or theologies that they have held on to, and entertain different ideas. So, they don't have to, if they've had a traumatic experience with God and the attributes that they were taught of who God is, and how God acts, hearing that God is not that, or is more than that, or is different than that, allows them some seeds to begin to help them on their faith journey, to help them reframe, as the term I've used a couple of times, just help them on their journey.

**Brittany Mangelson 41:24**

And what a liberating experience that is, and for you to be able to have the theological education background that has helped put those pieces together for you, and then to be able to turn around and give permission really, and that sounds weird, but if you're coming from an LDS experience, you know, you need to be given permission to be able to do those things. And that's something that stereotypically churches have a tight control over, right, like control over your beliefs, control over how one views God in the Restoration tradition, this idea that there was this great apostasy and so it needed to be restored with Joseph, and so, therefore, anything outside of that is bad. And that was, you know, what Joseph was trying to correct, but to be able to put all of that in context and say, no, the Christian tradition has been growing and expanding and evolving, and there wasn't this break of authority, or this break of God's Spirit, or this break of God moving in the world, to be able to have, again, permission to look at that and to say, okay, that means that my faith and my theology, and how I view God and interact with the Divine can grow and shape and form. That's just liberation. It's just liberation. And so, to be able to walk with people, as they're figuring that out, and to be able to put those pieces together for yourself, and then to share that with others, and to help them figure out who God and Jesus and Holy Spirit is to them is really, really empowering and such an important point of reconstruction and reframing. So, thank you, thank you for sharing that.

**Tyler Marz 43:10**

Yeah, and if I can share one thing, one of the most pivotal things probably that I learned during seminary, something that I realized is that, in going through a faith transition, the work, the inner work that you have done really is never fully, is never done. You're constantly reframing and growing. And even those who have been lifelong Community of Christ members are still shifting and growing in their

understanding of spirituality and theology. And so, for me, one of the biggest things I learned was in my very first class in seminary. And to be honest, I thought I had done my own inner work and worked this out, but I hadn't when I read certain words on this page. So, it was the concept of justification and grace and how that fits in that. And coming from an LDS perspective, the concepts of mercy and grace or justice and grace, justice and mercy, are drastically different than we view them within Community of Christ. And while I had worked through those things, one of the terms that I hadn't fully figured out was this concept of justice, because I thought of it, Godly justice, if you will, I thought of it in a very modern way of viewing things, right. This, our modern legal system of justice is consequences for your actions. But that wasn't the case. When I read, the book that I read this in was *Faith Seeking Understanding* by Daniel Migliori, which I know has been mentioned quite a bit on other podcasts here within *Project Zion*, and this concept, what I learned about justice and justification totally transformed my view of it, but also my understanding of God in a reframing that. So, I had gone with this idea that justice is consequences for actions, right. So, like, if we do something wrong in this life or that isn't pleasing to God in some form, God's gonna say, "Hey, that wasn't good. This is your consequence," right. And that informed my, one of my images of God, that God was sort of a punitive parent or individual, if you will, right, enforcing these things. What I learned about justice and justification is that it isn't that, that it's essentially mercy in a different form. It's the essence of acquittal, of being made right, with no power or effort of our own. And that that is the core of, grace and mercy are at the core of that. And I remember the evening that I was doing my reading for seminary, and I read that on the pages, I, just doing my evening reading for the night, and I was dumbfounded a bit. I even got a bit emotional, because I didn't realize how much I needed to reframe those concepts to move forward in my own faith journey. And by that point, I had been out of the LDS church for a number of years and a member of Community of Christ for, gosh, I think about four years at that point, four or five years. So, I had definitely done my work. But this was one of those things that was just said in the right way that allowed me to sort of close the door on that, and fully embrace a new image of what it meant to see justice in God's eyes, that it really was mercy in another form.

**Brittany Mangelson 46:57**

Hmm, thank you for sharing that, Tyler. And just to underscore the importance of that because that touches on so many triggers, I would say, within the LDS view of atonement and the nature of God and worthiness and all of that, that you have done something wrong, and so, Jesus had to die for your sins. And so, every time you mess up, there's that layer of guilt, and there's a consequence. But when you shift your thinking to think that justice is God standing on the side of the marginalized, and God is standing on the side of the injustices that are in the world, and that that's where Jesus, that's where God will always show up. That is hugely transformative. And that turns so much theology on its head, and this idea that we will never be worthy because we're always sinners. I mean, it just touches on so many things. And it's the undercurrent and, of just so much theology that can be very harmful. And so, to have a concept like that totally transformed. I'm really glad you had that experience. So, as you have been working with seekers face to face here in Utah over the last year, what are some of the things that are most talked about? What are your go to points of conversation, if you will? What are some of the, you know, top questions? What are some of the concepts that you try to help people reframe when you're first talking to them?

**Tyler Marz 48:36**

Yeah. So, a big part of that is understanding where they're coming from and what their, what the core of their faith transition, faith crisis is at. Granted, they ask questions in a rainbow of ways, but some of those big points have to deal with church history, and how we deal with our past. Some of those are our theology, and where we have, how we have gotten to where we are now, versus where we used to be and what led to those changes, and what are those changes? So that, for some, that's understanding priesthood. In the LDS church, priesthood is a really big thing, because for them, it's truly authority, and is only given in a certain way and it's only given to a certain group of people, men. And so, for women, especially, and men, who come to Community of Christ, that is a super big and meaningful thing to understand that we have extended priesthood to all, regardless of gender, as they're called, in that. And then I would say, one of the other big things has to do with inclusion, LGBTQ inclusion, our care for the marginalized and oppressed, that this concept of worthiness or unworthiness, if you will, is not a thing within Community of Christ. So, there's lots of cultural aspects that are part of the LDS church that don't exist in Community of Christ. For instance, they, in Community, in the LDS church, confession is a big part of determining worthiness. That's not a thing within Community of Christ. They love that they are able to take communion once a month, without worrying whether or not they are worthy to partake of that. They love our intentional, our intentionality of why we only take communion once a month, that it has become this, we've made it a precious and sacred moment, to not make it a mundane and rote practice, but something that is treasured within Community of Christ. So, those are just a couple things. I'd say one of the big questions is always surrounding church history. They want to know our origins, how we feel about Joseph Smith, and what we've done with Joseph Smith, in spite of all the things that we have learned. But again, there are plenty of other questions under the sun. I don't know that we'd have enough time to even talk about all of them, but that's just a few.

**Brittany Mangelson 51:35**

Oh, I completely understand that. And honestly, a lot of those questions are what has sparked our over 500 episodes of *Project Zion Podcast*. So, yeah, there's so much to go through. And I will say that that whole, "what do you do with Joseph Smith" question is huge. I mean, I was recently teaching a little class with a bunch of Latter-day Seekers, and we spent over a half an hour just going around and asking what we thought about Joseph Smith, because until we can, kind of, get over that and figure out where we sit with him, and, you know, to be able to openly say that, it's really hard to move on to modern day Community of Christ until we, kind of, get church history on the table and talk about it and figure out, okay, so, you know, we started at A. How did we get to Z? And are we even at Z? And where does Z take us? But we have to address that foundational piece. So, that absolutely is a big one. All right. Well, Tyler, I mean, we, we've talked a lot about the Latter-day Seeker side of your job, and how you've been able to meet seekers, how you've been able to meet them where they're at, how you've been able to help them reframe, how you have been able to listen and stay plugged in to conversations and questions that seekers have, and to see how they're able to reframe, and rebuild, and take their own faith experience into their own hands, which, again, is just such an incredible thing to witness. But for these last couple of questions, I'm going to shift to maybe the Community of Christ side of things. So, what are some of your hopes for Community of Christ? You know, you're a convert yourself, like I am. And so, what were the things that struck you coming to Community of Christ and as you've continued to move through being a seeker, being a member, to now being an ordained minister? What are some of those hopes that carry you into the future with the church?

**Tyler Marz 53:52**

I would say, this is a great question. One of my biggest things is our message in Community of Christ. I love it so much. I love, and that message being one of inclusion that cares about the marginalized, the oppressed, to the unjustly treated people, and sharing that with the world. For me, that was greatly impactful. And I know that that has been impactful for other seekers, either coming from the Latter-day Saint tradition or other traditions, right? They love how we, in essence, strive to live Jesus. And then I would say, perhaps one of my other hopes is with young adults within the church. I'm a fellow young adult, you're a fellow young adult, and we are in the thick of doing ministry. And I hope that that continues, can continue to grow and create a greater sense of community within the young adults, within Community of Christ. But also finding a way to feed us a bit within all this ministry and all this giving that we're doing, is finding a way that we can be spiritually fed too in that journey, so.

**Brittany Mangelson 55:09**

Beautiful answer, and relatable answer. So, Tyler, I know that, you know, we have both lifelong Community of Christ members and seekers listening to this, and so, as someone who has been a seeker who is now working with seekers, what is it that you would say directly to seekers that are listening, whether they come from the LDS tradition or not?

**Tyler Marz 55:35**

Yeah, I would say, I would have to say, leaving a faith tradition, and specifically, I want to acknowledge the struggle of belief in God, that leaving a faith tradition, can leave you really raw and vulnerable in wondering if God even exists, right? Like, when you come from a tradition that views God in a very specific way, and you have been hurt by that God, what do you do? It's so easy to, and relatable, and even within my own desire, to want to just get rid of that, to say, I don't believe in God because God was toxic. God hurt me. And I want to let people know that there's space to work through that, if you want to within Community of Christ, that you can take some time to be angry with God, to learn some different characteristics about God, to potentially embrace a completely new image of God, or images of God, a whole new paradigm, if you want to. And if you don't, that's okay, too. But I just want people to know that we have a space where you can do that.

**Brittany Mangelson 56:56**

Thank you, Tyler. Again, I think that it's so important to have seekers hear that they are able to do that, that they have the permission to take their own relationship and construct of God into their own hands, because that's not something that ministers usually say to them, right? That they have the power and the ability and the inner authority to be the directors of their own spiritual path. I think that that's something that's really, really important to explicitly name. So, thank you for doing that. So, Tyler, is there anything else that you would want to leave us with today, and I also want to know if there's a way that folks can contact you if they want to learn more about Community of Christ or about the ministry that you're doing here in Utah?

**Tyler Marz 57:52**

Yeah, I would say, you know, be on the lookout on our various Facebook pages, whether that's in the larger Latter-day Seeker group, or that's in our local Community of Christ groups for seekers, Utah

County, or Cash County, that I'll be holding different events this summer, whether that's our discussion groups, that's outdoor spiritual practices, or things like that. So, I invite you just to try and stay tuned into that. And if you want to attend some of those things, you're more than welcome to. But then, as far as contacting me, you can also contact me in those same Facebook spaces, or you can email me at tmarz, tmarz@cofchrist.org.

**Brittany Mangelson** 58:35

Awesome, thanks so much. And if you are a lifelong Community of Christ member and want to learn more about this ministry, look for Ministry with Latter-day Seekers on Facebook. And Tyler, I just am so grateful for this conversation today. It's been really fun to catch up, even though, I mean, we're close colleagues, and so, we catch up on the daily. But it's really been interesting to hear your perspective on your ministry in Utah over the last several months, almost a year now, and to just see the work that you've been doing and to get a new job in the middle of a pandemic. Well, let me rephrase that, to get a new job who's, that's responsible for building community in the middle of a pandemic? Like, that is no small task and so I just really appreciate the intentionality that you've brought to your ministry and the way that you are showing up where seekers are showing up and being able to work with exactly where they're at. So, looking forward to more from you, and thanks, thanks for the conversation.

**Tyler Marz** 1:00:09

Thanks for having me, Brittany. It's been a pleasure sharing about things that I'm super passionate about and that I love so much.

**Brittany Mangelson** 1:00:17

Awesome. Thanks, Tyler.

**Josh Mangelson** 1:00:26

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