

Josh Mangelson 00:17

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

Carla Long 00:30

Hello, and welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. I'm your host, Carla Long and you're listening to God Shots, a subset of our series Percolating on Faith. You know, God Shots is a lot like Percolating on Faith. I mean, you still get to listen to some of the smartest people on Earth, but it's a little more focused on the theology part. So as always, I want to introduce our guests, Charmaine and Tony Chvala-Smith. Welcome back you two crazy kids, you.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 00:58

Hi, Carla how are you doing?

Carla Long 01:00

Good. Did you like the part where I called you guys, "the smartest people on Earth?"

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 01:03

Yeah, I made faces at that point, and grimaced.

Carla Long 01:07

Oh. So tonight on the podcast, we're going to talk about the Triune God. But first, before we jump into that, we're kind of worried that we haven't really discussed exactly why we're doing what we're doing, and in the order we're doing it. So, so far on God shots, we've talked about theology, we've talked about how God is self-revealing, and we've talked about scripture. And tonight we're talking about the Trinity. But Tony, Charmaine, can you talk about why we're doing this in this way?

Tony Chvala-Smith 01:41

Sure, Carla, this actually began last summer at a reunion. And it was a reunion in Utah, where a seeker said to me, "You know, I'm having to let go of almost everything I'm familiar with. And I really need to start over and I just need to rebuild from ground zero, in terms of a Christian faith and identity." And so that got me thinking that it might be, it might be useful for us to start a sub series, where we work through systematically, methodically, the basic doctrines of the Christian faith, starting with: What is theology? Why do we do theology? And then going on to: How do we know anything about God, i.e. revelation, and then going on to: Scripture as one of the witnesses or what a collection of witnesses to Revelation? And then the way the traditional order would go from there is basically God, creation, Christ's Spirit, salvation church, etc. There's a, there's a long tradition of kind of explicating, basic Christian faith in terms of this order. So that's why we're doing it this way. We're just, we're following a tradition that goes all the way back to the late second century, if you can believe that.

Carla Long 03:05

Oh, wow, that doesn't sound like us. I'm just kidding.

Tony Chvala-Smith 03:09

I thought you're gonna say, "oh, that sounds as old as Tony."

Carla Long 03:14

I only thought that. I feel very kind tonight, for some reason. I don't know why. So go ahead. Charmaine.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 03:21

I said, "We'll take it."

Carla Long 03:24

So what we're doing here is we're just trying to help people maybe find ways to rebuild, that perhaps something that has been kind of deconstructed for them,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 03:33

Right. Another way of taking a look at Christian theology. Kind of getting snapshots of the different elements that make up a theology.

Tony Chvala-Smith

Yeah.

Carla Long 03:47

Well, I love that. And thank you so much for being thoughtful about that. I, I work with a lot of seekers, and I see all the time how they have deconstructed their faith, and they are at kind of a Crossroads on how to build it back up. So I appreciate that. Thank you so much for being thoughtful on that. And for, you know, coming up with this idea. Because Tony and Charmaine came up with this idea, FYI. And it's a good one.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 04:14

It's all Carla's fault.

Carla Long 04:16

That's what I was trying to say. I guess I'm not being kind tonight. So back to the Triune God. And that's just a fancy way to say Trinity, right? And we're good. Yeah. So let's, um, let's jump into it. We've talked about the Trinity before, but I feel like we're gonna start in a different place than we had before. Where would you like to start when we talk about the Trinity tonight?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 04:42

Well, Tony and I were talking about this earlier. And I really think the thing, the place that helps us to maybe build some empathy and understand how and why it was necessary that this emerge is to start by thinking about the earliest Christians. So that's what we're going to start with the idea of, you know, here are, let's start even before there's officially Christians, to Jesus disciples. You know, for them,

there is, it's about God, it's about Yahweh, it's about the Jewish God that they've always, you know, learned about and known about. But in this Jesus person, there's other things happening, that have been, in their experience solely related to Yahweh, to God. And, you know, whether it's his disciples experience of healings or seeing the water stilled, you know, the Sea of Galilee stilled, who does that? Who has power over nature? God does. Who can bring healing and wholeness? God does. So, right from the beginning they're recognizing that the things that Christ embodies, his actions and his words, these are so closely tied to their understanding of who God is, and what God does.

Tony Chvala-Smith 06:26

So it's like the these first disciples, who are thoroughly and completely Jewish, you know, their whole, their whole mental framework is shaped by the stories and traditions and texts of Judaism. And so, you know, it's like, they knew Yahweh, they knew God as the One who delivered. And all of a sudden with this person, Jesus, they see him delivering people from all kinds of things, and

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 06:52

Whether it's illness or from demons, or from inner turmoil, health issues,

Tony Chvala-Smith 07:00

Right. And so they knew that Yahweh alone was the one who could raise the dead. And here's this Jewish guy from Galilee, raising the dead. And they knew that, or believe that, Yahweh would one day bring about the divine kingdom in the world. And yet, here's this guy going around saying, "The kingdom of God is at hand and if you see the things I'm doing, then you know that the kingdom has come near so." So, it's like, right at the start of this experience that becomes Christianity, is not a theory, it's actually a lived experience with Jesus that sets them to wondering. So often in the gospels, especially the synoptics, the disciples are like, "Who is this guy? What, what am I actually encountering here reminds me, it reminds me of creation, reminds me of the Exodus that reminds me of God's mighty acts." And so when we get to Trinitarian doctrine in the subsequent centuries, it's really important to see that as the continued working out of what started as, you know, worship and adoration and contemplation and being transformed, transfigured by being in the presence of Jesus. So that's, that's why it's really good to start with the disciples' actual experience to start thinking about the Trinity,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 08:21

Right. And so in as much as the idea of the Trinity, and that language is a later development, a theological development; you can see the earliest writers trying to put words to this, this experience. Whether that be Paul, identifying, I mean, how does Paul identify Jesus?

Tony Chvala-Smith 08:47

Well, like Paul uses terms like Lord and Christ and Son of God. And while these terms increasingly take on more meaning in the Christian tradition, you didn't just go around calling anybody Kyrios or Lord, if you were a good Jew in the first century. So they're using this language for Jesus. And then Paul can even say something quite astonishing in Second Corinthians, five, he can say, "in Christ, God was reconciling the world to God's self." That's astounding language. It's not. Jesus was some kind of guy talking about what God was doing. It's quite different. In Christ, it is Christ is the means through whom

God is acting, not just to reconcile individuals but reconcile the whole world. So there's this, this language of ultimacy is kind of connected to Jesus very, very early,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 09:42

Early. And so you're looking at, you know, Paul's writings being, starting...50...

Tony Chvala-Smith 09:48

50 to 63, the traditional dates for his undisputed...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 09:52

Within, you know, within 20 years Paul is compelled, as he's trying to explain to his congregations who Jesus is, he's using this God language, language that would have been reserved for talk about Yahweh. So and then you look at the earliest gospel, Gospel of Mark, and there, too, is the idea that, you know, this is the Son of God, this is God with us, so it's not some fabrication later on, it's already right at the beginnings with Mark being around 65 to 70 CE. And then, you know, Matthew and Luke, too, having the kind of language that requires us to have God and Jesus be almost synonymous. So they're already sensing that with the Christ part of this. So I think it's just helpful to see that it's there. It's, it's there already in seed form, and it's taking shape early on, as people are trying to describe and explain. Of course, it's also causing problems within the early church, in that all the earliest Christians the earliest earliest Christians are all Jewish and become Jewish Christians. They're still going to synagogues. And by the year 80, 85, the synagogues are pushing out these people who believe in Christ because not only do they believe that he is the, the Promised Messiah, they're believing more about who Jesus is, then Jews thought the Messiah was going to be and that is that they're equating Jesus with God. And that's part of the reason why Jewish synagogues pushed Christians out. And so it was very recognizable, even at that point, somewhere between 80 and 85, that this was a different religion, this had a different understanding of God then Judaism had. And they were right to assume that because, yeah, this was... Jesus was not just some Prophet. Jesus was not just a good guy who pointed to God, but he was somehow linked far more closely, more synonymous. So,

Tony Chvala-Smith 13:05

So yeah, I think that what Charmaine is referring to there in the 80s of the first century. It's what, what's happening is that faithful Jews are recognizing that their principle of relating to God is the Torah. But they also see in these people who are called Christians, that their principle of relating to God is through this person, Jesus. And so from that point on Christianity and Judaism, though we share in some ways, the same, the same monotheism and we share many of the same stories; at that point, we went different ways, I think I like to see. This is like Judaism, the the older, wiser parent telling these young Christians to move out of their basement and get a life, you'll get a life of your own, you know. And it's so, I don't see it as a negative thing, I tend to see it as an essential thing in terms of differentiating the new experience in ways that were authentic to it. So,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 14:12

But based around this concept of who is Jesus. And so, and already in that first century too, is the sense that the Spirit is somehow God as well. And you see that, you know, in Acts, so Acts is probably written somewhere between 90 and 100 CE. But here the Spirit is the same presence that Christ

brought, and the power of the Spirit comes with the tongues of flame, with the wind. Again these, these forces of nature that would have been identified as being reminiscent of God with the burning bush or with the storm around the mountain when the commandments are given. So the Spirit, very quickly too, another place to look is Gospel of John, which again is in that about from 90 to 100 is when scholars would say that the Gospel of John was written, where Jesus basically says, I'm going to be sending you something that will be a power with you like I am with you. And so he's equating the Spirit as being similar and of the same power in nature. So very early on, the idea of the Spirit being God, or an expression of God, is there as well.

Tony Chvala-Smith 16:06

So like in the, in the Hebrew Bible, the ruach, the Spirit of Yahweh, it's actually Yahweh in action, is the Spirit. And so now all of a sudden, these, these first couple generations of Christians are experiencing the Spirit as God in action through Christ. And so, all through the New Testament, God, Christ's Spirit, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, you see this triadic kind of expression; baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Ghost, from the end of Matthew. Already in the 80s, they're baptizing like that. This triadic experience of God as source and as Liberator and as empowerment, it's written right into the start of Christianity. So Trinitarian theology and language is a further constant outworking of that earliest experience, Carla.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 17:10

kind of a necessary expression of it.

Carla Long 17:13

Yeah, it sounds like it's, it's one of the things that kind of separated them out from the very beginning and said, you understand God through the Torah, we understand God through Jesus. And that's where we're gonna have to part ways. That's what it just sounds like it needed to happen.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 17:29

Yeah, yeah. It had to because it was the sense of Jesus being God was becoming very deeply developed within the Christian thought. And that was, you know, quite intolerable within Judaism, though, Judaism would have had that sense of the Spirit being an expression of God, the idea of a human being -that didn't, that was too much.

Tony Chvala-Smith 18:09

Yeah, in the Hebrew Bible, if you ask, How does God act in the world? You could say, well, sometimes God acts by word, and sometimes God acts by Spirit. So Word and Spirit are in different ways present in the Hebrew Bible as aspects of God. So the New Testament, God, word, Spirit have Old Testament roots, but now it's actually a concrete experience connected to this crucified and raised Jew. That's, that is what makes it unique there. So...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 18:43

Unique and discomfoting. Yeah.

Carla Long 18:46

Well, I would actually go so far as to say that it's still somewhat discomfoting to a lot of people. I know there's a lot of people that I work with that have some discomfort when it comes to Jesus *and* when it comes to the Trinity. So I was wondering if we could kind of move on to discussing the Trinity a little bit more. Yeah. So, you know, I know it's made up of Father, Son, and Spirit. And I know sometimes that word Father is a little bit difficult for a lot of people, too. It's actually it's a little bit difficult for me, and I don't want it to be difficult for me. But when I say it, I wonder what other people in the room are thinking.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 19:25

Yeah, yeah, completely understand. And I think it's one of those formulations of understanding and naming these three attributes of God that we haven't really come up with. As useful a term as the one that is used for Father, and that's part of why, you know, it still remains crucial in many Christian sacraments to say Father, Son, and Spirit; it's saying something about the characteristics of these three aspects of God, more than it's saying something about their gender. And I think that's the part that's hard to communicate to other people. And there have been lots of efforts over the centuries actually, to give some other ways of understanding it. And so, you know, there's some that are non-human, they don't use human relationships to do that. And some would be, Tony...

Tony Chvala-Smith 20:40

oh, yeah, I'm just thinking about this the gender language. Father language is problematic. And what I'm backing up here, just to think of, you know, what's different in Jesus' time, is that when Jesus refers to God as Abba, using that kind of curious Aramaic word, in that context, in that setting, that was a language - that was a term of profound intimacy. And in the ancient world, people always, I mean in some ways because their biology was deficient, they thought of males as the source of things. So, Jesus' use of Abba language, Father language, for God in that setting it conveys intimacy, closeness, sourcing. What happens though is it doesn't, you know, it kind of stops along the way through all kinds of patriarchal structures and turning the Father into a tyrant and stuff like that. It loses that meaning for us. And so...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 21:45

instead, it's become a reinforcing of commonly oppressive symbols of a patriarchy and hierarchy. But what I was trying to get to earlier is that there have been other attempts to use other phraseology, so like, instead of Father using the idea of the source, and this...

Tony Chvala-Smith 22:18

yeah, like Augustine refers to this back in like the fourth or fifth century, Augustine will refer to God, the One God as the lover, the beloved, and the loving. And so he's capturing that God is, the One God is simultaneously a threefold expression. This is eternal, it's not temporary. This is how God ever is. Or another one from roughly that same period is that God is the source, the river, and the flowing. And so these images are trying to capture that God is God's self three ways simultaneously,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 23:10

that are connected to each other. And even then, trying to find ways of not being totally dependent on these male images. But to look at what is the relationship of these three aspects of God?

Tony Chvala-Smith 23:28

Yeah, like Charmaine said, we sometimes we can't avoid Father, Son, Spirit, Spirit language for some kinds of things. But it's really good to, like, upload all these other metaphors and images into our minds and use them regularly, so that we keep reminding ourselves, as Charmaine said, that this is not intended to be gendered language, it's intended to convey relationship. Yeah, that's a good way to put it. So like, Community of Christ Sings, our hymnal, has a whole section on the Trinity and there's this one hymn called "Womb of Life and Source of Being," that to me so beautifully captures what Trinitarian language was trying to, has always been trying to, convey. So like the first stanza starts, "*Womb of life and source of being, home of every restless heart.*" So that's, you know, in place of the Father, that's the language being used there. And then the second stanza, "*Word in flesh, our brother Jesus born to bring a second birth.*" So there's, you know, in the traditional language, there's Father word, and then the third stanza, "*Brooding Spirit, move among us, be our partner, be our friend.*" and the brooding Spirit imagery that the writer of this hymn has taken right out of Genesis 1, where at the start of Genesis, you know, the Spirit of God was brooding over the waters, kind of trying to hatch something.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 25:00

So and then the last one. Tell the last one.

Tony Chvala-Smith 25:03

Oh, this is great the fourth stanza, "*Mother, Brother, holy Partner; Father, Spirit, Only Son: we would praise your name forever one-in-three, and three-in-one. We would share your life, your passion, share your word of world made new, ever singing, ever praising one with all and one with you.*" This is a hymn written by Ruth Duck. So Trinitarian language and experience in theology is really trying to capture that reality that goes back to those first followers of Jesus saying, Who the heck is this that the wind and the waves obey him? What's going on here?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 25:47

So there are lots of other analogies, analogous language, that can be used to try and describe that relationship. Typically, you know, throughout Christianity that the Father, Son and Spirit part is, you know, is traditional, it has meaning, you know, there is some really positive meaning in it. But it can, if it's the only ways that we are willing to ascribe this, then it can be limiting, and it can cause stumbling for people. But I think, you know, when we recognize that these are, these words are in some way symbols, they are not descriptive of, you know, male people. That, that these words, Father, Son, are our symbols to talk about that relationship.

Carla Long 26:53

So, what are they symbols of? Yeah, I want to talk more about those symbols then, is that okay?

Tony Chvala-Smith 26:57

Yeah, sure. I think you notice Charmaine just said, their symbols, she didn't say, "Oh, they're *just* symbols," right? Because symbolism is absolutely vital in Christian faith and theology. We're trying to deal with things that are infinite, and beyond our canon, beyond our everyday experience. And so we have to use symbolic language to try and capture these things. In the same way, we have to use symbolic language for all kinds of deep experiences of life just regularly. Love and childbirth, and growth and death - we have to use metaphors all the time to capture what's really going on there. So, it shouldn't surprise us that Christian tradition always has had to use symbolic speech to speak of these realities. The word Thomas Aquinas uses for this is analogical, these are analogies. God both is like and he is beyond all these things we are describing. So symbolism helps us connect in deep, experiential ways to kind of the ultimate things we're talking about and can just scarcely get our minds onto.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 28:20

So, the term, Father, would also be what would be referred to as source. And Son is his expression of tangibility, the idea of God with us in ways that we can see. And then the Spirit is that which affects us on a feeling level. So this God we are sensing, is beyond us, a source of its own; but reaching out to us in Christ as human presence, and able to touch our minds and our hearts, our feeling with the Spirit. So it's, I think it's a way of breaking down those three pieces. And looking at the names that are have been traditionally given as the symbols that try to capture something.

Tony Chvala-Smith 29:44

So the Bible constantly uses symbolic language or metaphorical language for God. And I think that's always an important place to go back to.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 29:54

So this is maybe a place where, you know, I am sure I've used this before when we've talked about the Trinity, but I think it helps us as we're talking about these three attributes of God, as well. And that's the analogy of the sun in the sky, and to use that as kind of the idea, God as the sun. So if you were going to do the Father, Son, and Spirit, a way to approach it would be to say that the sun is, we know it as a, you know, a ball of a star, of a ball of flame in the sky. But if we were to think of that as God, and think about the surface heat and light as the source, as what some people use as the idea of the Father, then we have to ask ourselves, how do we know that there is a sun in the sky? If we're talking about the sun as a star, how do we know that it's even there. And one of the things that makes us know that it is there is that it gives off light, and we are touched by that light, we are affected by that light, it is real, you know, it produces photosynthesis, it allows for in plants, it's what gives us vitamin D.

Tony Chvala-Smith 31:45

It's a visual.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 31:47

It is a visual but it also, it actually affects us physically. And so the idea there would be that's one of the ways we know there is a sun and in the analogy then, Christ is that visible thing, that light, that thing that affects who we are, in a tangible way. And then the other way that we know that the sun is in the

sky is the heat, the warmth, well, not today, because it's three degrees or something. But the warmth is like the Spirit that we can feel God's presence. And so, I think those are our ways of distinguishing the role of each of them. And yet altogether, they are one thing. They are, you know, in this case, the analogy is the sun, they are God as the whole thing but they are three expressions of that God. And so again, you have the source, the fire on the star, you have the light - Christ, you have the warmth - the Spirit. So, it's a way of thinking about those three elements as each having a purpose. But together, it's all still one.

Tony Chvala-Smith 33:18

We've experienced the sun as a unity, even though there's a threefold-ness to it. Right? And that's kind of another way to think about the same thing. So, so anyway, Carla, we're playing with images and metaphors. Images and metaphors are really powerful, or can be really powerful. And also, in theology we always want to be looking for new ones and trying to find new ways to capture the depths of our experience. So for example, in this hymn, *Womb of Life*, it's an amazing image for God. So, does that help a little bit with the symbols, or do you like to go further with that?

Carla Long 33:59

Oh, no, I think that was really helpful. And in fact, I wonder, you know, like, if our listeners could come up with their own, you know, kind of metaphors and let us know. I'm sure there's lots out there, a lot of different ones out there that people are thinking of.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 34:13

Yeah, yeah. And I think one of, you know, there's sometimes been a push in, in our church, but in other Christian movements as well to say, how can we rid ourselves of the Father language. And I think it's really more about understanding better why that language was used initially, and how it can still be very beneficial. You know, how it was intended to be used, to how so we can use it in that way and not being idolatrous towards the male, the male person in our society. Which is, the problem is when we start using a symbol and making it a concrete expression instead of just that.

Tony Chvala-Smith 35:13

It's kind of interesting when I think about what we're discussing right now. Classical Trinitarian language and theology has this amazing perspective of God, the three eternal modes of God's being, as partners in a dance. And the terminology used here is the Greek term perichoresis, which means a kind of dancing around. So just to use the traditional language for a moment, the Father, Son, and Spirit are three partners in this eternal interchange and dance that's going on. And the concept that's conveyed there is reciprocity and mutuality. So in other words, traditional Trinitarian theology really had the sense that God is a relationship in which there is perfect mutuality among the three persons. Nobody's higher, nobody's lower. So the use of Father language and culture to justify male hierarchy is not Trinitarian language at all. It's more like Aryan language. Arius, in the third and the fourth century, was a Christian priest who taught that there was a High God and that Jesus was kind of a less, a way lower less than, though higher than us. And so when you start going down that route, God does become a distant monarch who's not reciprocal about anything but uses a slightly lower figure as the go between. And so that whole image of God then just reinforces hierarchy, whether in culture or family or society. But the image of the source, the word, and the Spirit sharing together ever in a dance in which nobody's

leading, which everybody has their equal role; if that language had been allowed to shape church life and culture more through the centuries, then we would have had a potent weapon for combating patriarchy, in my view. So, so really good Trinitarian theology can help us actually combat some of the social hierarchies that just are rampant and still plague us in both culture and church.

Carla Long 37:42

I really love that. And it also seems like to me that, you know, this, this perfect mutuality, this relationship between Father, Son, and Spirit is the way that we should be living our lives and the way we should be living in communities and families. I mean, it's showing us how to do it.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 38:02

Exactly. And, you know, if we go back to when we were talking about God as being self-revealing. This is the God that God is revealing, is this God who invites us into this relationship of where there is equality, where there is mutuality among people. Yeah, so I think it's, it's an excellent example of what this can mean. Another piece about the Trinity that, for me, it comes when we talk about this, this dance, this mutual weaving in and out and dance among the three, is the idea that with the different kinds of people that we are, our different personalities and those things that touch us in different ways, that having these three aspects of God, all that are wanting to encounter us and as to encounter them, it's like, not just one doorway to God, but it's like three doorways to God. And so for those who are maybe more of a mystic orientation, the Spirit is a natural place for them to make this connection with God. For those who have a deep sense of desire to bring justice and peace to the world, then the person of Christ and that work is an invitation to them. And for others who have a sense of a creator, of connection with God self-revealed in nature, or in those instinctual understandings that we may have about there being something bigger than us, then the idea of the source is a place for them to connect and come to know who God is. So, it's like we have these different doorways into God, these different ways of knowing and being known by God. And yeah, just another aspect that I think is lived experience. You know, for some people, for Tony, at different times the intellectual pursuit of God has been the source, has been most important. Whereas for me in different times, it's been, it's been the Jesus part, the God with us that has, so anyhow, it allows different kinds of people to know that this is a God who invites them, too.

Tony Chvala-Smith 41:09

When Charmaine was speaking a minute ago about referring back to the dance, she was looking at me, which of course our hearers can't see, she was looking at me and I thought she was going to say something about when she tried to teach me to polka.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 41:27

That would not be a good example of God.

Tony Chvala-Smith 41:30

And so we're actually we're actually glad this is not a video. But, you know, growing up in Michigan, lots of people polka in Michigan, but my family didn't. So I didn't learn how to do it. Charmaine growing up in Saskatchewan, they did all kinds of dances like polkas. And so she and I years ago were going to be

involved in a wedding. And we knew that there was going to be a dance afterwards. And we knew, we just knew that the bride and groom were going to...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

They threatened us!

Tony Chvala-Smith

They were going to play a polka and make us dance. And so, so, a couple weeks before the wedding, Charmaine taught me how to polka, which resulted in us falling on the floor in histrionic laughter, but I did learn enough to do the polka with her. So...

Carla Long 42:19

I would pay a solid amount of money to have seen that, a solid amount.

Tony Chvala-Smith 42:25

Right, you would pay me a solid amount of money, if you wanted to see that.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 42:30

So how are you going to tie this this into the Trinity?

Tony Chvala-Smith 42:32

So yeah, we human beings in our imperfect communities, our imperfect dances, our reflecting in our own imperfect way; this eternal dance that, you know, and it's like, I think the thing is so cool is that, let's reflect on this for a minute. The ultimate, the source of all things, is a community of perfect mutuality, that then gives us a social justice lever, right? Because anything, anything in any culture that works against mutuality, and reciprocity, and equality of all the partners involved, is frankly it's running against the grain of the universe. And so it needs to be righted. So I think that the Trinity the doctrine of the Trinity has built into it this social justice component that's really important. And also for us in Community of Christ, the first part of our name, Community, and our beliefs in Zion and community and the kingdom of God, we're connected to the very heart of who God is. And part of our task, as a church in the world, is to create the best approximations we can of the perfect divine community that God ever is. I think , to me, it's kind of breathtaking. It's a cool mission to be involved in.

Carla Long 44:01

Well, absolutely. I mean there's a lot of people that are really surprised that Community of Christ is a Trinitarian church. And I'm always surprised that people are surprised because it makes so much sense to me to believe in God as Trinity. Yeah,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 44:19

Yeah, I think even longtime church members who haven't really been very involved in the theological discussions are surprised that we would call ourselves Trinitarian. But right back to our very beginnings, it's there. It's there. I mean, all you have to do is look at our sacraments. And it's very strongly there.

Tony Chvala-Smith 44:53

Yeah, and, you know, Joseph Smith Jr. in his earlier phases, I think, in my view before he theologically derailed, in his earliest phases, he was reflecting what he knew of the Trinitarian language that was available to him in revivalism. So he very freely speaks of Christ as God in different places. Later he, the more he tries to go it alone and pull away from the inherited language of the tradition, the more problematic his understanding of God becomes. So, Community of Christ recovered a lot of that Trinitarian language starting in the 1960's. So, gosh, if you go to Exploring the Faith, which was first published in 1970, but which was the result of 10 years of theological work, they went straight to the Nicene Creed to get language that they thought and believed, and I think they were right, best captured who God, Christ, Spirit are for Community of Christ, RLDS, in our best moments. And ever since then we've used and developed that kind of language increasingly. So yeah, people don't know us very well, Carla, they confuse us with others.

Carla Long 46:15

They do, indeed. I enjoy speaking about this stuff. I don't know if our listeners enjoy listening to this stuff, but I really enjoy speaking more deeply about who we are, and what we believe. I think it's so important. Knowing these things certainly enriches my sermons when I speak, it enriches when I speak to people, because a lot of people I talked to just have no idea what the Trinity is. And so you two have given me language to speak about that, and I really appreciate that a lot. Yeah, so I was wondering, I know that we're following a book throughout God Shots. Can we talk a little bit more about that book and what chapter we're on, etc?

Tony Chvala-Smith 46:55

Sure. We've offered two different titles for people to follow. Daniel Migliore's *Faith Seeking Understanding*, is the main title we're kind of following along. And where we've been right now is chapter four, his chapter on the Triune God and that's a great chapter to read. Those who are using Hanson *An Introduction to Christian Theology*, I forget the chapter number, but it would be his chapter on God in which he discusses the Trinity. Migliore is a Presbyterian, and Hansen's Lutheran. And I think readers would be surprised to see how much congruence there is there. In fact, the Trinity is a doctrine which binds Christians really together of all stripes, and so, I would recommend either of those as a good read for following up on stuff we've talked about.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 47:49

And coming up, as far as our next will be in Migliore, it's chapter five. And it's about creation.

Tony Chvala-Smith 48:00

So our next God shot will be on the Doctrine of Creation, God as creator. And I think Migliore titles that chapter *The Good Creation*, and gracious that's, that's really important for us right now at this particular juncture in the earth's history. So we'll look forward to that one next time.

Carla Long 48:17

For sure. Thank you so much. And, and so I think we're coming to a close on this podcast. Is there anything else that you wanted to talk about the Trinity before we sign off?

Tony Chvala-Smith 48:27

Yeah, one last thing. And we started, Charmaine started this off experientially with the first disciples. And, and really, the doctrine the Trinity didn't start in people's heads, it started as they prayed and worshipped, as they found themselves experiencing mystery and awe in the presence of this Jew from Nazareth, Jesus. The same awe and wonder that they experienced when they thought about the God of creation in Exodus, and so, so the, in my view, the best way to understand the Trinity is to pray your way into it. And so, where we would like to end, I have in front of us here a copy of this ancient Celtic prayer. It's called the Lorica, or the Breastplate. It's sometimes called the Breastplate of St. Patrick, though we don't think it went back that far.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 49:18

Some of the ideas may originate with him, but it wasn't written by him. It was written probably two or three centuries later.

Tony Chvala-Smith 49:26

Yeah. So think sixth century and after is how this, the written forms of this prayer developed. But this is very typical of Celtic spirituality which takes utter delight in praying to the Trinity and I think there's lots to learn from there. So I'll just read some selections from it as kind of our prayer for concluding this God Shot. So the prayer begins, and it's a morning prayer, too, it's meant to start one's day. I rise today through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity, through belief in the threeness, through confession of the Oneness towards the Creator. I rise today to the strength of Christ with His baptism, for the strength of His crucifixion with His burial, through the strength of His resurrection with His ascension, to the strength of His descent, the judgment of doom. I rise today to the strength of heaven, the light of sun, brilliance of moon, splendor of fire, speed of lightning, swiftness of wind, depth of sea, stability of Earth, firmness of rock. I rise today through God's strength to pilot me, God's might to uphold me, God's wisdom to guide me, God's eye to look before me, God's ear to hear me, God's word to speak for me, God's hand to guard me, God's way to lie before me, God's shield to protect me, God's host to secure me. Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right hand, Christ on my left, Christ where I lie, Christ where I sit, Christ where I rise, Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me, Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me, Christ in every eye that sees me, Christ in every ear that hears me. I rise today through mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity, through belief in the threeness, through confession of the oneness towards the Creator.

Carla Long 51:38

Amen. Amen. That was beautiful. Thank you. And thank you so much, Tony and Charmaine, as always for being on the podcast and for sharing your wisdom with us and for being so thoughtful about these God Shot episodes and why we do them. I really appreciate that. Thank you so much.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 51:58

Thank you, Carla.

Tony Chvala-Smith 51:59

Thank you, Carla.

Josh Mangelson 52:07

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