

Lindsay Hansen Park 00:37

Hello, and welcome back to another episode of the Year of Polygamy podcast. I'm your host Lindsay. Today we're going to talk about something a little bit different. I'm actually going to be interviewing people that come from the restoration or Joseph Smith's teachings who are not polygamists. Now, we've done this before, we've had some internet followers and LDS folks on here before, but because we've been covering all these different traditions in the restoration, I wanted to highlight one that I think that I've left out. I've had plenty of their members come on the podcast because their church puts out really great Mormon historians, but we haven't really focused on the Community of Christ before. Community of Christ most people will know as the RLDS church not FLDS, not Warren Jeffs' polygamist church, but RLDS who most Mormons would know are the people who stayed in Nauvoo with Emma Smith, Joseph Smith's wife, they never came across with Brigham Young. We've covered this history that Brigham Young and Emma had a very bitter struggle. Emma, of course, stays in Nauvoo and eventually founds this church or in her mind was, you know, keeping the lights on of the legacy that our husband restored. I have come to know members of the Community of Christ over the years, and they have what I credit, helped me retain my faith in God. So, when I went through my whole faith crisis as an LDS person with this podcast, you know, thinking well maybe everything in Mormonism is terrible and awful and weird and the Community of Christ apostles and leaders and congregants were really great to work with me and my questions on it, and although I'm not a member of their church, I really value their take on things because what I've seen them do is take some of the things that I found harmful, or harmful to me, in Mormonism and reinterpreted them in a way that I think is beautiful and healthy and inclusive and doesn't marginalize people and it also doesn't ask anyone to give up their Mormon identity or their restoration roots. Now, Community of Christ wouldn't, they don't like the term Mormon. I am lazy a lot and I lump them in with Mormons because I see Mormons as any one of the original Mormonite tradition, which was Joseph Smith and Emma Smith. But, Community of Christ for years and years and years were the anti-polygamy church and that's what they built a lot of their doctrine on and so you know over the years they've had to have their own sort of crisis of faith as a church realizing that maybe Joseph Smith actually was a polygamist, and some of their folk history was incorrect, and it's been really powerful for me to see this what I would say as a humbling experience for them. They are such a humble, beautiful people and going through that process of realizing they were wrong has turned them into such what I think is beautiful, understanding, inclusive people, it's sort of soften their hearts to use a scripture term. Going through this humility of realizing they're wrong has softened their hearts, and so I think you'll see that reflected today. I'm really honored to have two of the 12 apostles from their church. Robin Linkhart who is a dear friend and mentor of mine and Lachlan Mackay who is also a dear friend and mentor, and an amazing historian, and one of my good friends Seth Bryant who is not an apostle, but he is the Historic Sites Director of the Kirtland Temple and all of the sites over there in Kirtland, and he's great. So, what we're going to do is, I'm going to you know, I've interviewed all three of them and we're

going to sort of show you some of the basic history. Lach is going to cover the basic history of the church for us of the Community of Christ and how they got to where they are, and then I'm going to ask Robin to tell us basic general beliefs and then I'm going to have Seth talk about his conversion, because he's Brighamite like us, the LDS. I hope he doesn't mind I'm saying, this i bug him about this all the time, it's probably irritating but, Seth has the coolest tattoo I've ever seen on his arm and he has Community of Christ tattooed on his arm, but it's written in desert alphabet which honors both traditions because if you know the desert alphabet of course is the Brighamite tradition and Community of Christ is Community of Christ. And so he has both of those sort of as a symbol of both heritages, which I think Seth does a really great job at. Before we get started, I just want to say one shout out to someone, Logan Hill, who is helping do a project. We're doing a service project in Short Creek right now, and we would love your help. We're gonna give the FLDS their first prom, a lot of the adults never got to go to high school, and this is, of course, the Warren Jeffs' polygamist group, not who we're talking about today. They are going to be doing their first prom, and so if you want to donate there's a GoFundMe on my Facebook page. We need to, we're trying to help raise money to buy a wood floor for the reception center that they're going to hold the prom at, and then Margaret Cook who is the reception center owner is going to try to start a reception center business. So, you can support them and the Fundamentalists in Short Creek by donating to that and I want to thank Logan Hill for helping us get that off the ground. Okay, so let's get into the episode. I'm going to first start with the wonderful Lachlan Mackay.

Lach Mackay 06:12

My name is Lachlan Mackay. I'm an Apostle in Community of Christ. I was born and raised in Jackson County, Missouri, went away to the University of Missouri and got Russian studies and economics degrees. I was going to work for the US government, but accidentally fell in love with church history. As I was going through that extended interview process, I picked up a book called Nauvoo Kingdom on the Mississippi and was just captured by the story. I'd been raised RLDS slash Community of Christ, my dad's Australian and his family joined the church in the 1880's there. On my mom's side, I'd be a great, great, great grandson of Emma and Joseph Smith. So, you know, raised with the story, but for whatever reason that early expression of new Mormon history just captured me, and I spent a summer in Nauvoo doing a museum management internship at our historic site here, Joseph Smith Historic Site and I spent a second summer at Kirtland, at the Kirtland temple, and my timing was perfect. I was invited to stay and be the first full time site director there. After a number of years, I had the privilege of having responsibility for all our historic sites, moved to Nauvoo in 2007, managed the site as well, and became a member of the Council 12 in Community of Christ in 2016.

Lindsay Hansen Park 07:41

So, what that means is, let's back up so you have pioneer ancestry from Australia, and you're a direct descendant of Joseph and Emma. And you, obviously, you're very educated we, you have a lot of credentials, and you're a professional historian, and now

you're an apostle of what we would call an Apostle for the Community of Christ, which is formerly the RLDS. Correct.

Lach Mackay 08:07

Yeah, I think most of my credentials, so I have undergraduate degrees in Russian studies and economics. So really, I'm a self-taught amateur historian. And then I just love the story and passionate about the story. So, it's easy to get strange details to stick that most people aren't that interested in.

Lindsay Hansen Park 08:27

Did you feel a certain sense of connection to your ancestors, Joseph and Emma more, more than anyone else, because they're family is there any family lore that you were particularly attached to?

Lach Mackay 08:42

So, I got to say that my favorite place, particularly in Nauvoo, but maybe in a much broader sense, is the Smith family cemetery. Here in Nauvoo, I just love being in that place. It's wonderfully peaceful, the Mississippi River out in front of you. But having said that, I don't think I do feel any special sense of connection to Emma and Joseph. I love them and I admire Joseph but, you know, I read the same books as everybody else. So of course, know, my mom and my mom knew her grandfather, Frederick Madison Smith. So, I think I do feel some sense of connection to that generation, you know, my great grandfather, but beyond that, really is I read the same books as everybody else. So, I don't know that I do, can claim any special sense of connection. And maybe, maybe best case 3% of my genetic material might come from him and 3% from Joseph. Kind of funny people tell me all the time that that I look like a Smith, but it's a Mackay nose. It's not a Smith nose.

Lindsay Hansen Park 09:52

I was just gonna say that there's something in your eyes, but yeah, maybe it's just us. You've become this litmus or this Rorschach test, where we project onto you how much Smith we think you are, that's got to be strange.

Lach Mackay 10:07

That's probably some of it in a way, Joseph is described as a fine-looking man from the front. Not so fine from the side. I think I do fit that description. Well not defined from the front, but definitely not defined from the side. It is it is kind of uncomfortable. It's in no way am I embarrassed about those connections. But I'm really, really introverted. And it's uncomfortable to be the center of attention. So, I definitely don't lead with those family connections.

Lindsay Hansen Park 10:42

So, Lach, I was hoping, I know this is hard for someone who is such a, you know, a wealth of knowledge. But maybe there are so many misunderstandings about the

Community of Christ, especially from any Brighamite tradition, anyone that came over from the west. So could you give us like a brief, you know, 20–30-minute, 101 History of the RLDS, how they turned, you know, stayed back how they changed to Community of Christ, and where you're at now,

Lach Mackay 11:12

of course, Joseph is killed June 27, of 1844. And not immediately, but over a period of months following a number of conflicts began to develop in Nauvoo, and eventually between Emma Smith and Brigham Young and, and others. But when I think about the conflict between Emma and Brigham, I think about the three P's. I think that that they're struggling over the questions about plural marriage or polygamy. Emma, of course, not a fan. They are struggling over questions about papers, Joseph's diaries and journals and letters. Are they Joseph's and therefore Emma's, or are they the churches? Well, copyright rests with the family, but the church would have bought the paper and the ink and paid the scribes. So, I understand where both Emma and Brigham would have been coming from on that question, that that that was a significant point of contention. And then, of course, the question of property of real estate. The church used a mechanism here called trustee and trust to own property, it's all in Joseph's name as trustee. And so, you can't really tell what's Joseph's personally and therefore Emma's, and what's the churches in Joseph's name? So, Emma's worried about feeding your children, Brigham Young is worried about feeding folks as they cross the plains. Again, I, I empathize with both of those struggling with those things. But that developed into a pretty significant conflict. Emma, it seems ended up inheriting the debt, but not the assets, which would have been a very difficult position for her to be in of course, and what she did end up with in the Nauvoo area, it seems that she had to buy back at tax sales, pretty difficult. So, she chose to remain in the Midwest. She fled from Nauvoo in September of 1846, as the Battle of Nauvoo is breaking out. There are men, now I don't think I use the term mob lightly, but I think this would apply to this group of men coming in trying to drive the last of the Latter- Day Saints out. They are attacking with cannons. The remaining Latter-Day Saints and Nauvoo have joined with what are called new citizens, non-Latter-Day Saints who moved into by empty homes and businesses, were fighting back with cannons. But we lose as part of the surrender agreement. Every remaining Latter Day Saint had to go. Emma fled with her family as that battle was breaking out. They move north to Fulton, Illinois. She's there for about five months, with young Marks, who was the State President in 1840s. Now, Nauvoo was there, and some other church members who have chosen not to go west. So, Emma finds refuge there with them, but eventually discovered that the person who's renting her Mansion House Hotel is about to steal all her furniture. So, she rushes back, catches and throws them out and lives out her life here in Nauvoo.

Lindsay Hansen Park 14:21

Now do we, do we know her feelings about her husband? We obviously know about polygamy, one of the big contentions up. Is it fair to say that the biggest contention between those who stayed and those who left and came west was polygamy?

Lach Mackay 14:36

I do think that that was underlying almost everything questions about polygamy. So, there are other expressions of the disagreement things like succession, you know, who should leave, but even then, if you knew about polygamy and supported it, you probably chose to support a leader who knew and supported. So, if you knew and rejected, you chose to support a leader who knew and rejected. so, polygamy's tentacles really managed to grasp almost everything that's happening. It underlies the conflict in almost every way.

Lindsay Hansen Park 15:15

You know, so Emma has a rocky time after the death of her husband. Talk to us about her children and how that plays into the restoration

Lach Mackay 15:26

So, Emma once she makes it back to Nauvoo, she is quoted as saying in Fulton Illinois, I have no friend but God and no place to go but home, and so she came back to Nauvoo moved and raised her children here, raised them I think to be good Christian children. Joseph III talks about growing up here and he would attend church with his Catholic friends, and his Methodist friends, and his presbyterian friends' kind of the social life for young adults centered around the churches. But she did not raise them to be specifically Latter-day Saints after their father's death. By the 1850s there were representatives of the various Latter-Day Saint traditions, churches in existence by then who would pass through Nauvoo come back to see the Smith family, almost everybody who stopped to see Emma would ask her about polygamy which had to be pretty frustrating for her. But some of those people were also inviting the Smith family to join their particular expression of the movement. Missionaries for the new organization so groups of people in northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin who initially had followed either James Strang or William Smith become the new organization they call it. In the 1850's our legal name was the The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints but there was too many of them out there so the new organization. These groups of people really only had two things in common they believe that monogamy was the appropriate form of Christian marriages, and they believe that a child of Joseph should lead them. Painfully, for these people both James Strang and William Smith are publicly teaching monogamy, but it turns out, privately practicing plural marriage living. So, James Strang for example eventually is traveling the country with his nephew Charlie Douglas who it's discovered eventually is really his first plural wife dressed up as a boy. So, these people were just devastated by those experiences, they start coming back together in the early 1850s and they have president pro tem, but they're just kind of waiting for a child of Joseph to join them. They sent missionaries to Nauvoo in 1856 Joseph Smith III stop just short of kicking them out of his house but one of those missionaries stayed in Nauvoo for a year and continued to work with Joseph III and developed a relationship with Joseph Smith III of the next few years and a series of experiences in his life one of which is very reminiscent of his father's first vision that led him to believe he should join with the reorganization, a new organization. So, he and his mom, Emma in 1860 travelled to Amboy Illinois and formally affiliated, they joined on their original baptisms, so were not rebaptized but joined on their original baptisms, April of 1860. On that day, Joseph III says some interesting things. He said among other things, I believe in the

bible and the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants, which are exhilarates to the bible, which I thought was kind of an interesting statement. He also said that he believed his father was not involved in polygamy because his father was a good man and his understanding a good man wouldn't do that. but he also said if he did, I think he was wrong. So, Emma joined in 1860 and move back to Nauvoo. Emma lived out her life there dying in 1879 Joseph III ended up moving on to Plano Illinois in 1866 and then to Lamoni Iowa in the early 1880s and then finally Independence Missouri 1906, died there in 1914

Lindsay Hansen Park 19:42

how did people view him, and if you could compare, because you're familiar with the Brighamite tradition, how did people view his leadership as opposed to maybe how mormons traditional mormons mainline Mormons view their prophet?

Lach Mackay 19:57

So how do people view Joseph Smith's III leadership? Yes. He was much beloved; he was a pragmatist and so he wouldn't generally force his opinions on others, and he would select his battles very carefully and he had kind of an interesting take on what his father taught. So you know he's hearing all kinds of things that he would and he's he's only 11 and a half, but his dad is killed so Joseph III would turn to the scriptures and to the church newspapers to learn more about what his father taught and what that meant is that he learned what his dad's public teachings were not so much the private or secret teachings of the Nauvoo period and Joseph III again based on public teachings and the scriptures kind of reoriented the reorganization and we ended up and this was an intentional saying, if it happened after this date we don't accept it. But in fact, we become something like moderate mormons reflecting much better Joseph Smith, Jr.'s 1830s Kirtland teachings, so common consent is still very important, a temple based on the Kirtland model, a house for public worship with a strong emphasis on empowerment both spiritually and intellectually. So very much of pragmatist moderate Mormon and Joseph III if somebody disagreed with him, said that's fine you're welcome to believe as you do I'm just not going to give you the pages of the Saints Herald, our church publication, to promote your view. I'm going to ask you not to teach it in public ministry. So widely accepting of various beliefs and just didn't provide the resources of the church to promote the beliefs he didn't agree with and he knew that he was young and that he would outlive these people and he would win in the end and he did.

Lindsay Hansen Park 22:13

Yeah, and what book there's a book about his life what can you give us a title and recommend it for listeners

Lach Mackay 22:20

okay i think the best biography of Joseph Smith III is Roger Launius' Pragmatic Prophet the University of Illinois title

Lindsay Hansen Park 22:30

perfect and we'll link to that as well so walk us into the modern era from his leadership to where you guys are now.

Lach Mackay 22:37

So under Joseph Smith's leadership we grew from about 300 members to 72,000 by his death in 1914 and while Joseph III was concerned about the succession struggle after his father's death he wanted to make sure the same thing didn't happen so he put out a letter of instruction detailing very carefully how he understood succession should work in Community of Christ based on section 43 of the Doctrine and Covenants that talks about the prophet president designating their successor, and at 104 which I believe is, oh yes, 107 which talks about the leading quorums of the church being equal in authority so they can go in prayer and designate leaders as well so Joseph III designated his Frederick Madison Smith who was a psychologist studied under G Stanley Hall Clark university, a scientist really amazingly bright guy and Fred M, as we call him Fred M was very much focused on building Zion. He was very interested in this idea of a perfect community with no poor and no war and he was really interested in all kinds of interesting experiments related to collective farming and that kind of industrial Zion as he would have called it, and under his direction we start a number of programs like the sanitarium which would take off under Fred M and he was the first graduate of what is Graceland university or the church college in Lamoni Iowa. But, unfortunately the depression got in the way of many of his Zion building attempts and so he dies in 1946 and his full brother Israel A Smith succeeds Israel in some ways was more like Joseph Smith III and that he was kind of a kind and gentle soul kind of returned us to the much beloved Fred M thing most people didn't know this about him, but he couldn't see very well and so people would walk past him in the hall and he wouldn't acknowledge them and they'd be offended, they'd be hurt not knowing that he just didn't recognize them. Israel his brother on the other hand much beloved very gregarious, very friendly and Israel kind of focused us on building Zion wherever we're at. This idea of Zion is pure in heart, we continued our international expansion under Israel He was killed in a car accident that was in 1956 and he is succeeded by their half-brother W Wallace Smith. So, I have to back up and tell you that Joseph Smith the third is widowed twice, married three times having children in his 70s. He was succeeded by three of his sons in the office of prophet president in the reorganization, the third of whom became our president 98 years after his father had. So, again Joseph III to Fred M then Israel A to W Wallace Smith prophet president 98 years after his father had first assumed that role. W Wallace eventually designated his son Wallace B and there was kind of an interesting way that he did that transition. He chose to designate Wallace B Smith who was an eye doctor and then to step aside before W Wallace's death so, while Wallace B had a period of several years, kind of on-the-job training and then W. Wallace stepped aside and lived until 1989 so a grandson of Joseph and Emma alive until 1989. Wallace B became the prophet president 1978, I think that was, served in that role until he was succeeded by W. Grant McMurry. President McMurray then succeeded by Steven Veazey our current Prophet President, so the last two gentlemen W. Grant McMurray and Steven Veazey are not Smith's. We don't understand in the Community of Christ that our prophets have to be Smith's. Our position would have been lineage matters if all else was equal then and somebody is a smith descendant

and somebody was not, then let's take lineage into consideration but that doesn't have to be a Smith. It has not been a Smith since 1996.

Lindsay Hansen Park 27:31

okay so um that's a big controversy that people, or not a controversy, I'd say a stereotype that you guys have to have a bloodline so that is obviously changed. Was that difficult for members who had sort of attached their faith in their heritage identity to that idea that it had to be a bloodline of Joseph Smith?

Lach Mackay 27:54

So, yeah even though the position of the church was not it had never been has to be a Smith, I think that some of our members identity was probably built around the idea that we have smith, they were pretty excited about that, but I believe that for most of our members who felt strongly about that, they probably had stopped worshipping with us in the 1980 s when we began ordaining women to priesthood offices. So, the people who would be most uncomfortable with the fact that our leaders weren't Smith's probably had already disconnected from the church, so it really wasn't much of a ripple.

Lindsay Hansen Park 28:31

Let's talk about the big the biggest ripple. This is one that has really shaped your modern church and that is the ordination of women and I know that it's a big topic, and we're gonna have Robin Linkhart weigh in on that as well, but just give us sort of the brief historical points to what happened there.

Lach Mackay 28:50

So, you want me to start in 1830 with the elect lady revelation or jump to the 1980s?

28:55

Yeah, you can set it up, set it up for us, that's fine.

Lach Mackay 28:57

So, our Section 24, and I apologize I don't remember the LDS section, but in Harmony Pennsylvania in the elect lady revelation, Emma is called to expound scripture and she's called to be ordained the Relief Society fast forward to the Relief Society Organization in malibu in the river store here and Emma's counselors are being ordained and somebody says to Joseph, well what about Emma, and Joseph said well, Emma already was ordained back in Harmony, so I don't know exactly what it means, I don't believe it means that Emma and her counselors were ordained to priesthood offices, but I do think there's a compelling argument that priesthood authority was conveyed to them. The priesthood, but not the office which is an appendage to the priesthood and of course women in 1840's here in malibu were offering healing blessings. Joseph said things to the Relief Society like I turned the key to you, I'm going to make you a kingdom of priestesses and on and on, so very much priesthood related language. Fast forward in the 1930's in the then RLDS church now Community of Christ, Frederick Madison Smith, that our Prophet president started a discussion in the Saints Herald, or church

newspaper, about women and priesthood roles, and maybe an order of deaconesses, and should we talk about priesthood and women today, but he started that discussion, but it didn't go very far. In the 1960s, we would have had members again, raising those questions. And by the 1980s, there would have been women being called that the calls would not have been processed, meaning no action could have been taken, but church leaders would have been coming forward, saying, I feel this call for this person who's female. But again, we weren't able to take action on those calls. My sense is that when Wallace B. Smith came to the church in 1984, with what would become section 156, of our Doctrine and Covenants, which talked about building a temple in Independence, Missouri, but also talked about priesthood being available to both female and male. I think that was a surprise, even to President Smith, I don't think that was planned well in advance. And so unfortunately, that meant, we were not well prepared to give our members tools to process change. It was understood as kind of disjunctive revelation separate from what has gone before. But I think that there's good evidence to suggest that, that women were operating in priesthood roles in some form, in the early church. And of course, the same is true in the New Testament. So today, we would have handled the ordination of women very differently. When it comes to preparing members to process change, we would have the resources available that the best resources come from the best sources, the female Relief Society, minutes in Nauvoo, and those, of course weren't available to us in the 1980's. So, I think that that the way our members process change, and the challenging response, some had to it would be very different if we were to try and do that again today.

Lindsay Hansen Park 32:39

And just talk about some of the follow up, because I do think, you know, people want to know why RLDS to Community of Christ. So maybe explain that change and how this plays in?

Lach Mackay 32:49

Sure. So, I'm not sure that the RLDS to Community of Christ change does play in that Robin might have some interesting insights on that. But we, President Smith came to the church in 1984, with this document that our conference, so we elect delegates who go and represent us at World conferences. And the majority of those attending the conference, after prayer, debate, discussion, and meditation and probably argument, the majority there, voted to accept this document as Section 156, of the Doctrine and Covenants. So, to canonize it. But for some of our members, that was a very difficult change. And some chose to separate and worship separately. And they're still out there in many cases, kind of collectively, they're known as the restoration movement, which is kind of confusing, because we're all part of a restoration movement. But restorationists, sometimes known as a lot of really nice fine folks, including some of my friends and family. But they chose to maintain their membership on the RLDS rolls, but to separate and worship separately in their own buildings. And the hope would have been early that that RLDS leaders would at some point realized they had made a mistake, and would reverse that decision, and that these people would have hoped that they could then come back. And the restoration is smooth, that is still ongoing. They are still in existence today. More recently, let me talk about the name change. So, I read a letter in the Saints

Herald, which is again, our church newspaper, and somebody was writing in and they were really annoyed about the name of the church, and they said, you know, the name of the church was originally the Church of Christ. We should never have changed it. We should change it back now. For the date of the letter was 1860. We have been arguing about church name for generations, so when church leaders at our 2000 general conference, or World Conference, started a discussion about the name change, I didn't think much about it because we've been talking about it for so long, but suddenly President McMurray offered his support to the idea of changing the name. That kind of captured my attention, and after some discussion the church members voted to take that step and so we are still legally Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, but also known as Community of Christ, and I understand that what we have done is gone back to closer to the first name of the church, the Church of Christ, that we are stressing that Zion building or that community building heritage. A number of reasons for the name change, you know the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints is really long. Reorganized has negative connotations in some cultures that that word including in the us context, I've shown visitors videos in our historic sites in Kirtland and in Nauvoo that are 12 minute orientation videos which feature our Independence Missouri headquarters I'd spend an hour with them on tour, as we finish they would turn around and look back and say oh by the way I was in Salt Lake and I love your choir, you know what can you say at that point but thank you. So, there was significant confusion through the years and we often ended up defining ourselves by who we were not versus who we are, so that was part of the reason but not the dominant part. So we made the transition in 2001, I believe was so, Community of Christ and I think it really much more accurately reflects our mission we understand that we are called to be the hands and feet of Jesus in the world today, that Christ's mission is our mission, we're very much engaged in social justice, passionate about the worth of all persons, passionate about those who might be on the fringes, passionate about equality without regard to gender or race or sexual orientation.

Lindsay Hansen Park 37:23

Will you explain to us the relationship that your church has with the topic of plural marriage?

Lach Mackay 37:30

As I think many of your listeners probably know, polygamy in Nauvoo was top secret. There were very few leaders involved in it, and publicly they're always denouncing it and denying involvement while privately some are teaching and practicing. The people who would become Community of Christ in many cases were in the branches outside of Nauvoo, so they believed the public statements and even many of those in Nauvoo believe the public statements. But, of course, privately some were involved. So, I'm sorry, that privately some knew that church leaders were involved. William Marks, the State President in the 1840's Nauvoo, would say consistently even before he joined the reorganization though, no, Joseph did it, he was involved. But prior to his death William said Joseph decided it was a mistake and it was going to destroy the church if we didn't get it stopped, and so William said that Joseph asked him to press charges to those who were involved, while he Joseph spoke out against it, but shortly thereafter Joseph is

killed. William Marks is not the only one saying that Joseph was involved, but decided it was a mistake, or that it was going to destroy the church. People like Hiram Smith tell William Law, we've stopped, we're no longer involved in the practice. William Law didn't believe Hiram when he said that though, Brigham Young said, I know Joseph is tired of it as to his trying to get it stopped, I don't know, but again most of the 12 are out on missions at this point in time so they wouldn't know what was happening and if you read the minutes of the last Relief Society meeting here in Nauvoo, Emma is saying something to the effect of we should listen to what our leaders say publicly and if they are truly repentant, we should forgive them talking about plural marriage.

39:41

I love that.

Lach Mackay 39:42

Yeah, so Joseph III though remember, he's a child and his dad is killed, he believed his dad's public statements and he believed his mom who said Joseph didn't do it, and I think it's pretty clear that Joseph was not truthful with Emma on the topic, especially at times, so that many of the RLDS leaders believed Joseph was involved, but decided it was a mistake and was trying to get it stopped when he was killed. In fact, that's what the very first issue of the Saints Herald 1860 says, He did it, he repented, we should forgive him. Joseph III couldn't believe it, and he's young, so, he outlived those other leaders. And so eventually, most of the members of the reorganization, came to believe that Joseph didn't do it. They believed Joseph's public statements. Beginning in the 1960's, 70's, and 80's with the new Mormon history, many of our members have reconsidered that and now would understand that Joseph was involved, something he was involved wholeheartedly to the end of his life, something he was involved, decided it was a mistake was trying to get it stopped. Some still think he had nothing to do with it. Because they believe that when he said, I'm not doing it. So, we're kind of all over the place on Joseph and plural marriage and Community of Christ.

Lindsay Hansen Park 41:07

Has that been a struggle for members to grapple with, especially since a large part of your heritage has been based on the fact that he didn't practice plural marriage?

Lach Mackay 41:16

Yeah, I think it's been a really significant struggle, and I've actually compared it to, I think that, that we have gone through the stages of grief when it comes to Joseph and polygamy. So, I believe that initially, we are in denial. No, he didn't do it, and again, you can build a decent argument, because he said repeatedly, I didn't do it. So we were in denial, we, we didn't believe that he did it. And then we got angry. And some of our members are still in that anger phase. And I think because we were, we were angry and struggling, in some ways, we simply took our history and kind of set it on a shelf, it was just too painful to deal with. And we just didn't think about it. More recently, I think many of us have moved into the acceptance. I think we skipped bargaining, but it moved into the acceptance phase. And we're able to kind of take that heritage back down off the shelf, reclaim it, unwrap the package, recognize what is wonderful and powerful, and

reclaim it, but also call out what we think is problematic, like the way that women were treated, often in plural marriage in Nauvoo. So, I think it's a much healthier position, a much healthier place that we are moving into, to openly and honestly explore the past, claim what is wonderful, claim what is hurtful and painful, and learn from the past as we move into the future.

Lindsay Hansen Park 42:52

Well, this is really great. Thank you, Lach. Is there anything else you want to say? or want people to know about the Community of Christ?

Lach Mackay 43:00

It's been a joy to talk with you. Well, thank you. Thank you. Appreciate that. Thank you.

Robin Linkhart 43:06

My name is Robin Linkhart. And I currently serve Community of Christ. In the Office of Apostle as a member of the Council of 12 Apostles. My assignment is in the USA, and my field is called North Central USA mission field. I am a lifetime member of Community of Christ. I was born and raised in this church. My father was career military. So, we actually moved 19 times my first 20 years of life. And one of the things that provided for me was an opportunity to be part of this movement in a lot of different places, both in the USA and abroad. So, I got to participate in congregations that were large that had 100 to 150 people, and that would have been the congregation in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to little house churches that were congregations. We had a pastor and a financial officer and all the things that you need to be a congregation. But my family of six, my mom and dad and us for girls made up half of the congregation. We met in a pastor's home, and a little farm outside Sydney, Nebraska, a very rural area, and he and his wife would line up chairs in their living room and we would go there every Sunday and have our church experience together. I was first ordained in 1996, to the office of elder and I have served in the offices of high priest and seventy. I've also served as a president of the Council of Presidents of Seventy. I have now been in full time employment with the church as a minister for 20 years, this is my 20th year and have always served in the USA. I have made occasional trips out to other nations to provide ministry, but my assignment has always been here in the USA.

Lindsay Hansen Park 45:37

Okay, so, I am going to start asking you some questions about sort of just general beliefs of Community of Christ and, and things like that. But you mentioned that you are ordained and so I'm sure that's a question for people who haven't heard that because my listeners are predominantly either Mormon or non-Mormon, who are used to hearing about Mormon patriarchy and priesthood which is given to males only. So, I know that this is a huge topic, and we could talk for hours on it, but maybe do you want to share with us just maybe an experience about what it was like for you as a woman to be ordained to the priesthood?

Robin Linkhart 46:12

Sure. So um, Community of Christ provided for ordination in 1984. And that came to us through counsel to the church, which is now considered scripture and part of the Doctrine and Covenants. And that would be Section 156. I was a young mother at the time, and I had three kids that were very close in age, I had a set of twins, and a little daughter that was 15 months older than the twins. And my life, as I'm sure many moms who are listening can relate to was kind of chaos of day to day of diapers and feedings and trying to keep the laundry done up and food on the table. And all those things that we do as young mothers, and I remember, when this revelation came to the church, I was very surprised in some regards. And in other regards, not. And I also because I grew up in a time where women were not ordained, I didn't really have it on my radar as something that was a possibility in my life. We did have two women in our congregation that were called to serve in priesthood, one a priest and one an elder within a couple years of that time. And I was not called until 1995. And I remember having a sense of call to serve in an ordained capacity, pretty strongly about a year, maybe 18 months before my pastor came to visit me. And when I thought about office, I thought perhaps the office of teacher or priest, but nothing happened. And I eventually got to the point where I thought, well, you know, maybe this is just myself wanting to be more involved in the life of the congregation. And I certainly had many things that I could do in the congregation, there is never a lack of opportunity to serve. The only things that I could not do were to officiate in the sacraments or ordinances of the church. So, the day that my pastor asked to come by our house after church, I wasn't sure you know what he wanted to talk about. But I certainly did not anticipate that he would be presenting a call and when he did, to me felt in completely overwhelming. And I felt very unqualified and unprepared to serve in that role, and to be perfectly honest with you, Lindsey, that is pretty much the way I've felt every time I've received a call to a new office of priesthood. In the context of my congregation, people had been very supportive of women serving in ordained ministry. And I really didn't encounter any difficulty in that regard as far as like overt or pushback about women serving in that role. But what I did begin to realize is that patriarchy has been part of our world for over 7000 years, and it plays out in ways that sometimes, as budding feminists are new into awareness of what it looks like we can see in our day-to-day life. So, I was aware of that in the context of the congregation, but never for a minute did I feel like everyone there did not support me, including the men who had been serving in priesthood forever. I do know when the first sacrament meeting, I was going to be officiating, I asked for one of the older men to come over into the hall and go through this with me. And I remember him saying, well, you don't need that, Robin, you've been doing this all your life. And I said, I know Bob, but I've always been on that side of the pulpit, not up front, on the on the platform side. And I think that was an awakening to him that this was a whole new thing for women. And we, especially the first generation of women, who went into ordained ministry, we did not have opportunity to be mentored in the ways that boys and young men had, because there was an underlying assumption that someday they most likely would serve in priesthood, and that first generation of women, in many ways needed the side by side, mentoring and just helping us understand all the mechanics that go with things that we do in the life of the church that aren't necessarily written down in a manual, or a guide, but that we learn side by side with other veteran priesthood members. Most of the pushback that I've received as an ordained woman has been in the larger

community. And I know when I served as pastor in Longmont, Colorado, my hometown, for seven years that almost a week did not go by that I did not get some kind of pushback in my connections and encounters with the community. I served in an ecumenical group in the area, and it would happen there. I know a couple times someone would call the house because my number was listed as the pastor for Community of Christ, and I would answer the phone and they would say, I would like to speak to the pastor and I said, I am the pastor, and on more than one occasion, the other person on the other end of the line just hung up, because, clearly, clearly, it was the fact that I was female and not male that was off putting. So, those have been some of the curious ways that this has played out for me.

Lindsay Hansen Park 52:37

Thanks for sharing that. And it's hard for me to interview you on this, because I've talked to you so many times about this personally, and I've heard you speak. So, I forget what people don't know and what people do know about your story. And your story is really great. And didn't you do Why I stay for Sunstone last year?

Robin Linkhart 52:55

I did, I did was that last year?

Lindsay Hansen Park 52:59

So, I can link to that. And people can hear more about your faith journey. I'm hoping that we can talk about some of the doctrines that maybe compare and contrast your faith tradition with the tradition that I grew up in. I think we have a lot of things in common and we have some differences. So, let's start with the things that we have in common. What are some of the things that both of our faith traditions share?

Robin Linkhart 53:23

Well, I would say probably the first thing out of the gate is that we have shared the founding history of the movement. So, we count 1830 to 1844 absolutely common one in the same heritage, and of course, the life of Joseph Smith and his family leading up to 1830 would all be common as well. Where the paths separate is after the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum of course, there's chaos in Nauvoo, the things shake out and Brigham is chosen as the new president of the church, there are unsettled relationships in the midst of that, because different people have different feelings of who should lead the church, and as I'm sure your listeners know; we got a lot of splinter groups around that time as different people left and took small groups of folks with them or people would choose to follow them. And then Brigham and a large part of the group in Nauvoo and other places began to move out west. And I think that that period of time and because the Mormon Church moved so far away and really was isolated in a lot of ways that the two movements, those of us who stayed behind who had become the Reorganized Church, and the church that went out with Brigham and others that immigrated out west. That's when the real changes, I think began to solidify, as those two groups continued their path, each one, really attempting to be faithful to the restoration heritage as they understood it. So, some of the major differences that we would see today, and which had beginnings during that early time in the 19th century,

would be our understanding and use of Temple. I am sure most of your listeners are familiar with Mormon Temples and the ordinances and sealings that take place there. Community of Christ, we own two temples, one is the Kirtland Temple, the first temple of the movement in Kirtland, Ohio, and the Temple, right, I'm actually sitting right now in the Temple in Independence, Missouri. And we use Temple the same way that the early church used the Kirtland Temple. It is a place of gathering, even community gathering larger and beyond the church, but gathering, it's a place of education and learning. It's a place of worship and celebration. And it's a place where leaders gather, to do the work of the church, the kind of work that's associated with meetings and dialogue and deliberation around the business of the church, as well as planning for mission of the church. Our priesthood structures, if you were to look at a flowchart would look very, very similar. One of the differences in the offices is that the patriarch, as it used to be called in our denomination as well, in Community of Christ is now called evangelist. We used to call it patriarch evangelist, I don't know if you do in the LDS Church. But with the ordination of women, the term patriarch was not appropriate. So, we drop that off and call that evangelist. And the other difference is in Community of Christ, people are called to serve in priesthood, generally as adults, although from time to time, teens are called. And they are called to an office that the leader of the Congregation, a pastor, especially for the offices of deacon, teacher, priest and elder which are called at the congregational level, some teens are called into ministry. And we have a lot of people who do not serve in the priesthood and people are always, it is just fine to turn a call down. And that is received without any judgment. It is totally up to the individual. And, you know, on occasion, we do have folks turned down a call to priesthood for a variety of reasons. And so we don't have an automatic system, like the LDS church does, as long as a young man is active and considered worthy, we would expect to see young men serve beginning at age 12, you know, 12,14,16, Deacon, Teacher, Priest, and then Elder at 18, or soon after, that's not in any way how it goes in Community of Christ. So, we have adult folks serving in all the offices of the church, and what that looks like when a person magnifies their office of ministry takes on a whole different life, when that's in the context of an adult person. For example, my husband serves in the office of Deacon and that was his first call, and he has done that for decades. He feels like that is his office to serve in and he magnifies it and, and has served for many years in that capacity, and others are called to different office over the period of their life.

Lindsay Hansen Park 59:23

Okay, so, um, how do you guys view your prophet?

Robin Linkhart 59:28

Well, our our prophet-president is held in very high regard and is seen as our leader. We look at all of our leaders as human beings who have flaws just like the rest of us. And our prophet-president is very available to us. So, President Veazey visits all over the globe, he attends reunions, which are some of our family camping traditions. So, he will do several of those. Every summer he travels for different types of ministry. He came out to Salt Lake City for the Parliament of the World's Religions in the fall of 2015. And if anyone were to walk into, say, one of our campgrounds, on one day when he's there, you wouldn't be able to tell by looking, unless you had seen a picture of him,

which one was the president of the church because he—as we all aspire to be—are side by side with our brothers and sisters. He's incredibly humble.

Lindsay Hansen Park 1:00:34

And, I have to say that this is my experience, too. I've been at several events where I'll just be sitting, joking around having a conversation and then someone whispers that's an apostle from the Community of Christ. And it's, it's so interesting, that culture that the LDS people have versus a culture that you have around leadership, like you said, there's respect and adoration, but it's not. I would say, I mean, we have sort of the celebrity culture here amongst our leaders. It's not like that.

Robin Linkhart 1:01:06

No, it's not like that. But what President Veazey, the ministry that he provides for the church, and the council is deeply respected, and we take seriously the counsel that he gives to the church. But as you said, it's not a celebrity or hero worship at all, it's more the role and the mantle of responsibility that he carries. And

Lindsay Hansen Park 1:01:34

so what do you what do you see that role being what is the role that your prophet has?

Robin Linkhart 1:01:42

Well, that role provides visionary leadership for the church. And also, there is the expectation that whoever fills that office, makes themselves completely available to discerning the Spirit, the guidance of the Spirit. And so, part of what that role does is provide counsel to the church to be considered for inclusion in the Doctrine and Covenants, which is also taken very seriously. Continuing revelation is one of our Enduring Principles and in Community of Christ, that has been a very active part of us becoming as a people and continuing to be shaped and formed in the image of, of Jesus. So if you get a Community of Christ, Doctrine and Covenants, and you can see, because each one has a little preface that talks about, you know, when it came to the church, when it was approved, who, which President brought it, and maybe a few words about what's going on during that time. Um, you can see we have added from the time of Joseph Smith III on through to Steve Veazey. So that is part of that as well.

Lindsay Hansen Park 1:02:52

So, one of the one of the best ways I've heard it described to me is that your prophet doesn't function in the way that LDS people would understand our prophet. you consider yourself to be a prophetic people, that God speaks through the will of the people and then the prophet sort of, is the one that mediates that or makes the final decision. Is that an accurate way to say it?

Robin Linkhart 1:03:16

Yeah, that and that, actually, that way of looking at it was brought to us by Grant MacMurray when he was president of the church prior to Steve Veazey. And he invited us to think of ourselves as a people not so much as a people with a prophet, but as a prophetic people. And I think in a very tangible way, he was recognizing that the Spirit

moves in and among the body as much or more as it does through the one who carries the mantle of prophet president, and that that is a joint effort, and so, there are, are particular avenues through which that happens. Of course, we practice common consent in a different way as well. We are very focused on ensuring rights at the body and when we assemble in legislative sessions. People have vote and voice and at our World Conference, for example, we have lecterns with microphones can voice their perspective for or against, and then the body votes and we have a very lively dialogue around most issues, and the vote is not by a longshot unanimous on a lot of things. Okay, there are some things that would be you know, close to unanimous, but others, and I've even seen the vote to where they have to get the tellers out onto the floor, where we have 1000s of people who are delegates and hand kept hand count because that's how close it is.

Lindsay Hansen Park 1:04:48

And my understanding is each congregation has a delegate, it could be someone as young as eight years old, and then they send the delegate to vote for the congregation at World Conference.

Robin Linkhart 1:04:59

Yeah, actually mission centers are given a number that can come from that mission center. So, the mission centers that mission center conference, nominate and elect delegates to represent them. And then we usually have a delegate alternate list in case someone can't serve, the requirement is to be a member in good standing. And so yes, at age eight or older people can serve.

Lindsay Hansen Park 1:05:22

Okay, here's another question. Do you ordain black people? And do you ordain LGBT people? Yes, these are these are things in Mormonism, that doesn't happen. So, so go ahead and answer that again.

Robin Linkhart 1:05:39

Yes, so we ordain people of color, as well as LGBT, and they would be subject to the same criteria of anyone else who's eligible to be called to priesthood, which is people are expected to live an ethical life, moral life, and we have, you know, a variety of things, which are basically just common sense, things for how people choose to live.

Lindsay Hansen Park 1:06:08

Can you give us those values? Give us your shared values. So, do you your core principles? Sorry. Okay. Yeah.

Robin Linkhart 1:06:18

So, the enduring principles for Community of Christ are all are called, blessings of community, continuing revelation, grace and generosity, responsible choices, pursuit of peace on earth, sacredness of creation, unity in diversity, and the worth of all persons.

Lindsay Hansen Park 1:06:47

Is there one of those that particularly speaks to you in your role as apostle?

Robin Linkhart 1:06:51

Well, I think of these as a circle of principles or core values, and they are connected one to the other, the one that I think is very critical and has guided Community of Christ, on our path, since the very early days is worth of all persons. And I think part of the struggle of our journey is as we live, today, and into the future of going deeper and deeper in our understanding of what that means worth about persons is what brought us to be open to the ordination of women, worth about persons is what brought us to having national conferences to consider full inclusion for LGBTQIA so that one is very, very important. And it also guides us in our pursuit of peace and abolishing poverty and ending suffering. So, we have five mission initiatives, invite people to Christ, abolish poverty in suffering, pursuit of peace, develop disciples to serve and experience congregations in mission. So, for us to be engaged, actively engaged in making the world a better place at our congregational level, as well as that our rural church level.

Lindsay Hansen Park 1:08:10

Now, just a few more questions, and I'll let you go. What does your cosmology look like for more than heaven? What does the afterlife look like for Community of Christ? Do you still have the three degrees of glory? Do you have the plan of salvation or plan of happiness as LDS people call it?

Robin Linkhart 1:08:30

So, we certainly have the three degrees of glory in our scripture, because it's in the Doctrine and Covenants, that we have that as well. And we talked about that a lot. I remember as a little girl, I think, as we have lived into this call to follow Jesus that we have stepped back from needing to have a prescribed description of what afterlife looked at looks like. And for us, when we step back and really read that scripture and listen deeply and read Doctrine and Covenants and the Bible and Book of Mormon, I think what we've recognized is this prophetic impulse that Joseph Smith was discerning spoke more to a universal concept of salvation, as opposed to putting people into categories of good, better, best whatever, and, as we experience God in the world today and continue to receive God's counsel through the Doctrine and Covenants, that has taken us into even more focus in making the world a better place that we part of our call core to our call is to bring the world closer to peace, to bring the world to the experience the kingdom of God, Zion on this planet and as we focus on that we rest in the knowledge that god's love and grace are boundless and whatever the particulars are of what afterlife looks like we are confident in our relationship with god in all of god's creation the relationship with god that that will be with god and loved by god no matter what. Now, that sounds that can sound really weird because we think well gosh well why does anybody want to be good if they see themselves as saved no matter what and I think what we do on earth matters. I think it matters a lot, it matters a lot to the welfare of our world now and our world of the future and that is tied to salvation that is tied to liberation and god's love coming to full fruition for the world. So, it makes sense to us and we value choices, responsible choices as part of that and in a sense we taste

eternal life now as we live in close relationship with god and with each other and with ourselves. We can see glimpses of the already not yet presence of eternal life

Lindsay Hansen Park 1:11:30

i think one way that you phrased it to me that I thought was really beautiful as you said you know we spent so much time trying to think about what how to get to heaven that we weren't building moments of Zion now and so you're interested in building moments of Zion.

Robin Linkhart 1:11:45

Yeah, all of our energy goes into the here and now and communing with God here.

Lindsay Hansen Park 1:11:57

just a few other questions how do you view sin and repentance do people have to confess to bishops like they do here do you have worthiness interviews, how do you look at all of that?

Robin Linkhart 1:12:08

So, we do not have worthiness interviews and we do not in the context of not having worthiness interviews there's not an expectation that people would go to the pastor to confess. Now, everyone is fully welcome to meet with the pastor anytime and on occasion people have heavy hearts and they need to talk about what's going on in their life but that would not be an expectation and we have the sacrament of communion the first Sunday of every month usually sometimes we have at other special times and that's a time where all of us are invited to reflect on our lives and to have a confession or repentance to turn ourselves fully toward god to let go and repent ask forgiveness for those things that we feel have separated us from god. So, one definition of sin is being disconnected from God or choosing behavior or attitudes that separate us from God which means things that we choose that harm others or separate us from others or fracture relationship would be part of sin. However, sin also can be a corporate thing so for example, we all you and I live in a very affluent nation, and we make choices every day a lot of them we don't even think about that impact other people and impact our planet on a global scale. So, we can do things that impact poverty and oppression that we can make choices that either help improve that or contribute to oppressing others so paying attention to how we spend our money, what kind of companies we are paying our money to? Do they use fair labor practices, are they wise consumers? How we treat our planet? Do we recycle things? We know that those who live on the margins are hurt most by climate change and other environmental issues. So, sin is also a corporate thing and as a people we can choose to try to restore the planet to help we can make amends for relationships as a people we can confess and ask forgiveness for things we may have done. I know in the life of Community of Christ at one World Conference the prophet president of the church stated that are split, we have a lot of people that left the church over ordination of women and some of those were you know people in the same family split to different movements has confessed that you know, some of the things we did as a church were not the things that we would do now if we had to do it over again, and for forgiveness and anything that we have done to contribute to that fissure and

fracture of relationship and wanting to reach across the aisle, so to speak, and to be friends to at least be able to have dialogue and recognize, recognize our differences, but also recognize that in the context of Christian beliefs, Christ makes us one even if we attend different churches. So, sin can be individual, or it can be corporate, and I think fracture of relationship is a key indicator of how we sometimes get ourselves into a place that's not helpful and healthy. This temple that I'm sitting in right now is dedicated to the pursuit of peace, healing, and reconciliation. So, reconciling ourselves with ourselves and with others goes a long way towards reconciling and keeping our relationship with God.

Lindsay Hansen Park 1:16:13

Nurtured callings. this or something in the LDS church that we are given as an assignment to volunteer for our church, but a lot of people feel a lot of pressure around those callings sometimes, and, you know, at least growing up, I felt like we could never say no, if you were called to a position, whether it was cleaning the church or, you know, teaching Relief Society or whatever. You don't say no, how do you do callings in your church.

Robin Linkhart 1:16:41

So, in our congregations, we have lots of roles, and jobs and responsibilities to serving on the building committee to teaching classes to be in charge of fellowship to plan worship, I mean, the list goes on. And I'm sure it's not that much different than a ward. And most pastors invite folks to be thinking about what they would like to do, how they feel a sense of connection with a variety of roles, to consider their personal bandwidth. Sometimes people are going through really tough times or intense situations in their family or with work life, and they don't have as much time to serve as they might other times. So, we try to work with people and to help them discover what they feel called to do and what makes their heart sing in service. Also, another role of pastor is to help people get in touch with their gifts, giftedness and skills, and to help people grow in that way. So, to take classes to participate in different experiences that will help develop them and their leadership skills and their capacity to serve. So, but that would never be something that there was an expectation that they, the person would say yes, so people certainly can say no, or they can suggest, you know, an alternative way of serving. Our congregations tend to be smaller. So, we streamline a lot of the jobs and kind of collapse some together so that that are connected. And pretty much everybody has something they do to help out one way or another. Even the kids have little things that they do.

Lindsay Hansen Park 1:18:33

And I think I have just one more question, then I'll let you go. How do you view the Book of Mormon? This is a something I'm asking Seth about as well. But it's sort of, you know, the rumor is that Community of Christ doesn't, has rejected the Book of Mormon.

Robin Linkhart 1:18:50

So, the Book of Mormon is one of our three standard books. So, it is considered scripture along with the Doctrine and Covenants and the Bible, we do not see the Book

of Mormon as a test of faith or fellowship. So, we do not have a dogmatic understanding that everyone must say, I believe the Book of Mormon in or that I believe it as a certain whatever, we don't have to ascribe to a certain set of statements about the Book of Mormon. So, I would say that across the membership of the church, we have folks who have a very literal understanding of the Book of Mormon, the gold plates, Joseph Smith's interpretation how that document came to be to people who are very skeptical about the Book of Mormon and some I would say, would just assume that the church, set it aside and no longer consider it scripture to everything in between. So I think the fact that we do not have a literal, inerrant view of Scripture in general on any scripture and that certainly pertains to the bible that that also allows us to understand that the book of mormon can be inspired text any way that we look at it and it certainly is part of our early church part of the founding movement there are a lot of questions about how it came into being and I think the final analysis is god's hand was in the midst of that regardless of how it came to be, it spoke profoundly and prophetically to many people and it continues to. At the same time, it's not something that divides us as a people if people have different perspectives on the Book of Mormon.

Lindsay Hansen Park 1:20:52

So, it's also true that you have people that I don't know that are atheist is a good word but you have people all over the spectrum that you allow in your congregations that have all sorts of different views on god is that correct

Robin Linkhart 1:21:07

Yeah, so sometimes that would be said does do people have a high Christology or a low Christology or where are people on their understanding of God, yeah, it's very diverse. If you look online and read sharing in Community of Christ that document would say that we as a people stand behind some of us have different shades of understanding of some of what's stated in that book, and that's okay, and we also understand that faith is a journey and all of us, I certainly have a different understanding of all of these things now than I did when I was five, when I was 15, when I was 25, when I was 40, and I celebrate that. So, it allows us to be very open to talk, to discuss all kinds of issues, to learn from each other to really be open to growing and becoming an understanding that our relationship with god can change and that doesn't make it better or worse. It's the act of the journey, being on the journey together, being in relationship with god, with each other and with ourselves, and living life together and trying to be as much like Jesus as we can be. To be loving and respectful and to be aware that there are so many on our planet that suffer and that we can make a difference in the world

Lindsay Hansen Park 1:22:53

Well thanks so much Robin for coming on is there anything else that you want us to know about Community of Christ?

Robin Linkhart 1:22:59

Well, I just want to say, people are always welcome to come and visit Community of Christ wherever you are we welcome all and we would love to have you join us for one time or just to hang out for a while.

Lindsay Hansen Park 1:23:15

Great and I will link to all of that, so again thanks so much for coming on.

Robin Linkhart 1:23:22

Thank you, Lindsay, take care and thanks for everything you do.

1:23:44

so, Seth Bryant will you tell us a little bit about yourself

Seth Bryant 1:23:48

Alright, so I grew up in Sandy Utah, was in a Jack Mormon family so we went to church on Christmas and Easter. So, I started to rebel when I was 14 and I became active in the LDS church and that made my dad either concerned or angry in any case, he had me mow the lawn every Sunday just so i didn't end up like one of those Mormons in his words, yeah I love that

Lindsay Hansen Park 1:24:18

It's so funny, okay, so you became one of those mormons though didn't you

Seth Bryant 1:24:23

Yeah, I did. I went on a mission, and I actually met my wife in the mission field, she was also serving there I was the district leader when she first came out and then

Lindsay Hansen Park 1:24:36

oh are you one of those Mormons that meets their spouse on the mission.

Seth Bryant 1:24:40

Yeah, so I'm one of those Mormons, but we didn't date, there wasn't anything no sparks nothing until we got home, started dating.

Lindsay Hansen Park 1:24:54

right because you were one of those Mormons like you don't, you're not naughty

Seth Bryant 1:24:58

Exactly, no I was a really good kid, I really was, went to Westminster College and was an English major. And along the way, I started to have some pretty serious questions about church history. And I have a brother who's gay. And so, it's like 2003, 2004, then I, I'm beginning to be very frustrated. But I still think it's the one true church, right? So, I'm in this, this place of where I'm holding on with everything I've got, but I'm also really,

really frustrated. And I am headed towards a breaking point. And I know that I'm headed towards a breaking point. But no, I don't know, it doesn't seem like there's any other option. So, I go into a graduate program in religion at the University of Florida. And while I'm doing research, I end up in a Community of Christ congregation, I don't go to join, I'm there just to study the sacrament, which they call communion, I guess we call communion now. So, I'm there watching this take place, they use the same prayers out of the Doctrine and Covenants, very, very similar, with one really big difference, and that is that it's a woman who's saying the prayers. And as that experience happens, I am overwhelmed with what I would call the Spirit. And it's the first time I have had a spiritual experience in two or three years, and I had been pleading for something, anything anywhere, you know, elder's quorum, sacrament, meeting in the temple, anywhere. And it happens at what I, at that moment thought of, as this apostate little offshoot group. And so, I'm actually angry. I mean, I'm, I'm, there's this incredible sense of peace, but I'm angry and confused, like, why is this happening? And in that moment, I gain an, at least this is me reflecting back on it, but there is just this sense that that God's kingdom is much bigger. And that if I am willing to take the blinders off, I can be shown something bigger, but I can never go back. And I decided to open up to that vision.

Lindsay Hanson Park 1:27:58

And so, it's really beautiful.

Seth Bryant 1:28:01

Yeah, I mean, it is like watching her give that prayer that I'd given hundreds of times myself hearing, it was just, it was incredibly powerful. And it really was like that rooftop moment when there's that sense of me saying, you know, God is saying, Take and eat, and I'm saying no, that's I'm clean and God's saying, don't call unclean those who I love, and, you know, are part of my, my kingdom. And, you know, my, my world was so little in so many ways, and once I was willing to open my heart up, and I, for a while, I thought, well, I can still stay LDS, because I really think that the LDS Church is part of that kingdom. I just don't think they have a monopoly on it. But I couldn't deny the fact that I had this experience within Community of Christ. And so, about nine months later, both Jen my wife, both of us, were baptized into Community of Christ.

Lindsay Hansen Park 1:29:11

And I want to say something really cool, I got to receive Communion or the sacrament from your wife, Jen in Kirtland this spring and that was really beautiful experience. She blessed. She's an elder now. Right. Right. Yeah. So, she blessed the sacrament and I got to partake of it from her. And that was really, it was really cool experience because we were in the Kirtland temple. And we had Mormon fundamentalists, and we had LDS

and ex LDS and atheists and Community of Christ. And it's just this beautiful moment, I think, for all of us.

Seth Bryant 1:29:45

Yeah, some of the most moving and powerful experiences I have had, have been sharing in the sacraments with my wife like, officiating, I guess and what you would call ordinances in an LDS sense with my wife and you know, I just I wouldn't have had that experience and I, for Community of Christ, there's this awareness that God doesn't limit ordination to just half of the population and that if that were the case you would miss out on so much potential and giftedness.

Lindsay Hansen Park 1:30:23

Tell us what you're doing for Community of Christ. Now speaking of that giftedness because in your short time since you've been converted, suddenly been, how long has it been now?

Seth Bryant 1:30:34

just celebrated 10 years in April.

Lindsay Hansen Park 1:30:38

Yeah. And so, in 10 years, you've done a lot in the church. So why don't you talk about those things.

Seth Bryant 1:30:44

So, Jen and I were both ordained elders, about a year after we joined, and I did an internship with the church for about a year and went to school for a while. I ended up becoming a chaplain in the military. That was, I was endorsed by Community of Christ. I did that for three years. And I was a navy chaplain, assigned to the Marines. I served with Third Battalion, Seventh Marines, an infantry battalion, and I went to Afghanistan with them. And then I was asked to serve in, in Utah, and I ended up serving as the pastor over the Salt Lake congregation and helping establish some new congregations or revive some, some older congregations that that had been there for a long time, but it kind of dwindled and disappeared throughout the state, and so, I did that for a couple of years. And then now I'm serving as the director of the Kirtland Temple. So, I'm over the historic site, and I absolutely love being out here and being at the temple, the temple is such an incredible place.

Lindsay Hansen Park 1:32:03

Well, since you're a Brighamite and I don't know, what can we call you, Emma's Church? Where do you come from both? I thought it would be good to help you help us debunk some myths. because growing up, I heard all of these myths about Emma's church, and about Emma Smith, which we've tried to sort of debunk on the podcast. But let's talk about some of those. One of the biggest ones, the rumor that you guys have to talk about every single year is, is the Community of Christ going to sell the temple to the LDS church? And LDS people would say, are you going to give it back to us, as if it was ours to begin with?

Seth Bryant 1:32:41

Yeah, so I don't lose any sleep at night over this question. And if anybody should lose sleep, it should be me. Right? I'd be out of a job. No. There are absolutely no plans whatsoever. For that, and to go even deeper in the question, you know, about giving it back, I understand where that question comes from. Because the temple, Kirtland Temple means so much to all of us. And so, it just seems natural to think that, you know, it belongs, and legally, it does belong to Community of Christ, but it but in terms of its meaning, it belongs to all of us. And I don't think you have to have the title to it, to say that it's meaningful to you. So, you know, Carl Anderson, who is a Mormon historian, who has been here for many, many years, and responsible for a lot of the healing that's taking place between the two traditions, he points out that Mormons will go and visit the Garden of Gethsemane and have these powerful moving experiences, and then he'll say, well, wait a second, does he plans of returning it back to us? You know, because it's not necessary for the church to own everything in order for God's Spirit to be there. And what a small conception of God and of the Spirit, we must have if we think that it can only, you know, God can only be in places that are held the titles held by a certain institution.

Lindsay Hansen Park 1:34:21

Did the Community of Christ denounce the Book of Mormon?

Seth Bryant 1:34:26

No, the Book of Mormon is part of the canon. So, since the beginning, the Bible has been foundational scripture, the Book of Mormon has never been required. You've never been required to accept it as a test of fellowship. It's always been secondary to the Bible, as well as the Doctrine and Covenants has been secondary. So, with having that biblical Foundation, it puts Community of Christ or the reorganization on a different trajectory from post Nauvoo and well, it's I mean, we're well after Nauvoo by 1860. But it puts us on a different trajectory than the LDS church, which focuses a whole lot on the Book of Mormon. And it's using the Book of Mormon as proof of its one true churchness. We don't do that. And so, when Mormons look at us, and they're like, why aren't you using the Book of Mormon the same way, you must have renounced it. We don't believe were the one true church. And we don't use the Book of Mormon, to try to prove that we're the one true church, you know that that logical argument that will if the books true, then Joseph's a prophet, and if he's a prophet, then the church is true, and you should join, like that doesn't have any purchase within Community of Christ. But just because that's the case, doesn't mean that the Book of Mormon isn't part of the canon. And that, you know, the truth is that it's it is used maybe to varying degrees, there's a wide range of beliefs on it, anywhere from literal belief that Lamanites were running around on the American continent to those of us that would think that it's 19th century scriptural allegory, I really think that we need to move towards that latter opinion, because of the the damage against the indigenous peoples that the narrative can cause. But in any event, there's a wide range of beliefs. And like I said, it is part of our canon.

Lindsay Hansen Park 1:36:34

I'm trying to think of some of the other stereotypes that at least I held about that, you know, the RLDS growing up. One of them, I think, was the name change Community of Christ was you were rejecting all Mormonism in general, Joseph Smith, and all of that. And clearly, that's not the case.

Seth Bryant 1:36:53

Yeah, so I mean, originally, the church was named the Church of Christ. In some ways we've gotten, we've gotten even closer back to what the church was originally, the, the idea behind Community of Christ was to have a name that better reflects our mission for the 21st century. And the Spirit of the restoration back in the 1830's was to be living and pliable and responsive to where God was calling you. That's the whole point to the restoration. So, if you don't give us the kind of space to do that, but we have to be locked into one moment of time, well, then we're not living in the same way that the saints were living in the 1830's. But we've become a museum and like, caretakers to this museum exhibit. And, you know, I don't the churches name wasn't static in the 1830's. It doesn't have to be static in the in the 21st century.

Lindsay Hansen Park 1:37:53

Let me see, am I missing any stereotypes? We talked about that we talked about. the temple plot property? What else? What else is a common stereotype that I think Mormons have towards Community of Christ?

Seth Bryant 1:38:08

Well, they will ask if we've joined the National Council of Churches, and in doing so did we have to renounce the Book of Mormon or our identity in some way, as members of the restoration, we have to become Protestant? I guess in order to do that. And for a long time, our answer was no, we hadn't joined. But just a few years ago, we did join. And when we joined, it was really interesting that the other members said that our distinctives, like, restoration scripture, were essential to our identity. So for people who thought that membership would require us giving up the Book of Mormon, they were, you know, 100% wrong, that the other churches within the National Council of Churches said no, this is this is who this is what makes you who you are, and by having this unique journey, that you've been led by the Spirit you've been on and having you come and join our council, you actually add diversity and to our group, and that's a wonderful thing. So, we don't want you to change. We don't want some monolithic amalgam that we all look the same. That's not the point. So, you know, some of those charges that are leveled, even if we hadn't joined the National Council of Churches, people who level that charge, I would just ask them well, even if we hadn't, would you still accept the church Community of Christ as a true church? And the answer is almost always No, it is no, you know, if we hadn't changed our name, if we were still the RLDS church, would we be acceptable to you? answer's no. So, these points that they want to argue on. I mean, they're, it's just kind of their mute, right? It just it goes back to, they want to just fight over, who's the true successor, who's the one true church, and if you want to, you want to argue that and, and you know, and that's how you build your identity, then then that's fine. It's just being in the 21st century, Community of Christ has a vision, that we seek to be a true church, we don't deny that others can have an experience with God, and are

calling is to not to not have these kind of fights, but really to go out into the world to make the world a better place, to lift up a message of peace and to seek justice.

Lindsay Hansen Park 1:40:52

So, I think that's the last question I want to ask you, because I know it's a busy time for you in Kirtland right now. And so, I appreciate you even taking the time to do this. But, can we talk about the one true church narrative because you yourself admitted that you had that narrative? And, and I did, too. And of course, this podcast has really showed me that, that everyone thinks they're the one true church. And, you know, we all have these doctrines that are similar. And then we have these doctrines that are different. How has your idea of this one true church evolved?

Seth Bryant 1:41:27

So, when I first came into the church, I was, I really honestly, I struggled with the idea of it, in part because I had been treated so poorly as an inactive Mormon kid, I thought, how can this be the one true church when I was treated like crap? And my answer that I kind of came up with was, well, it's because eventually we'll get to Zion, right? We are just, it is the one true church, but we'll get there. So, I probably have a different experience. And I even early on I there very early on, there was an interest in looking is there another potential restoration church out there? And I and I even had a sense of that I should look into what was the RLDS church then because I had such an aversion to the LDS church after being treated the way that I was treated. But, but I eventually just, I don't know, drank the Kool Aid, got with the program, right said, Okay, fine. I see the potential within this, these are good people, I think they're misguided at times. I thought, I'll just try to help them to be better and hope, eventually, that will get to Zion. So I but along the way I there would be I, I would have this problem where I had no problem when I would teach about principles of justice and peace, of treating people well, that I would feel what I would call the Spirit, I would feel this affirming Spirit, but when I would immerse switch with slowly would slowly be damned in so my conversion to that idea was more social or intellectual than it was a spiritual conversion. And because of, you know, my, maybe because of what I had gone through, when I finally encountered Community of Christ, it was it was a lot easier for me to make that transition really, it wasn't one true church that that held me up for nine months. It was eternal families, you know, I that's, that was, that was the really tough thing. I, I knew that theologically, there was a huge difference in how the next life and salvation is viewed. And Community of Christ doesn't frame their answers on salvation, or at least they didn't then in a way that was really appealing for somebody who had been raised on this, this image that salvation and happiness is all around being with your family forever. And so that's mainly what held me up. And eventually I got, I got to where I could see that, if in Community of Christ, the ideas that God is reconciling and restoring all of creation. And if that's the case, then in the next life, of course, our families are going to be there that we don't necessarily need any sort of extra ordinances to access God's love.

Lindsay Hansen Park 1:44:56

But that's part of the one true church mentality right? As you get locked in, like if I leave this if I give up this doctrine, it will not be replaced anywhere else I mean I had that feeling to as an LDS person, like the thing that we say about our funerals are you know our funerals are better because isn't that sad people don't believe you know they don't know that they're going to be at their families in the next life but we do and then it turns out everybody else around the world never even thought that they wouldn't be with their families, right but I think that's a hard thing to give up because you think that you're walking away from that idea only to discover it already exists everywhere.

Seth Bryant 1:45:36

Well with the exception of when I was on my mission we taught the idea of eternal families to this one couple, and they were like I didn't realize it but they must have been having marital troubles because they kicked us out of the house. So, if you are telling us that we have to be together forever then get out because if this is it...

Lindsay Hansen Park 1:45:53

I love that well I can say that I know plenty of LDS people that feel the exact same way and they're very faithful, so I think that's the downside to eternal families, it's like are you kidding me I have to be with my family forever?

Seth Bryant 1:46:09

so most parents are okay with the idea of their kids right spouses sometimes can be a tough thing if there's been a strange moment so you're right I mean the one true church and the temple it's all tied in together you're absolutely right

Lindsay Hansen Park 1:46:24

Well, um is there anything else you want people to know about Community of Christ?

Seth Bryant 1:46:30

I guess the biggest thing I want people, and this is coming from my position at the temple is that Community of Christ really seeks to be a place of sanctuary and one of our ways that we see salvation is offering hospitality and so we're not, we're not interested if you're happy, we're not interested in trying to convert you. In fact, that's just not who we are we don't actively go out and try to convert anybody but I really want people to feel comfortable and coming and visiting the temple, it's a safe place where you don't have to worry that we're going to try to force a narrative or some sort of testimony upon you and if you don't fit a certain mold, you know, you're going to be judged, like this is a safe place and our congregations ideally and I think in most cases are safe harbors, and you know if you come for a Sunday or a week or you come for a month or you come for a year, I mean there the rest of your life you're always welcome and it doesn't it doesn't mean that you know you have to convert or whatever we just we really just want to be a transformative force in the world that offers sanctuary for people to gather in and then sends people forth out into the world to make the world a better place.

Lindsay Hansen Park 1:48:05

Well, that's beautiful thank you Seth. Thank you for taking time to come on the podcast today.

Seth Braynt1:48:09

well thank you

1:48:16

(music)

Lindsay Hansen Park 1:48:21

With that I would like to thank Robin Linkhart, Lachlan Mackay, and Seth Bryant, all dear friends of mine from the Community of Christ for coming on and explaining more about their faith and their church. As always thanks for listening, thanks for all those who are supporting me especially those on Patreon. If you're not a supporter consider donating or becoming one today and we'll see you next episode.

Lindsay Hansen Park 1:49:03

The song you just heard is called My Disguise by Mikelle Dowse, her album is available for purchase on iTunes or Apple music. Thanks for listening