

**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.

**Linda Booth 00:27**

Welcome to the 31st episode of Coffee Buzz, a podcast conversation with a member of Community of Christ's First Presidency. My name is Linda Booth. If you don't know me, I'm a retired Community of Christ Apostle, having served nearly 22 years in that role and as the church's Director of Communications. Today, I'm talking with a friend and colleague, Community of Christ Prophet/President Steven Veazey. Because Community of Christ is so relational, many of us call him Steve. In fact, I think he may prefer to be called by his first name rather than President Veazey. Welcome, friend. Did I get that observation, right? Are you comfortable with people calling you, Steve, and when you travel throughout the world, do people in different cultures feel comfortable calling you Steve?

**Steve Veazey 01:27**

Well, uh, thank you for the opportunity to be part of the podcast series again. I'm, I'm very comfortable with people calling me Steve. In fact, I often say to people, Just call me Steve, which seems to bring down some, some, uh, barriers. Um, although, I think I feel obligated to say if my mother, uh, was still alive, she would insist on people calling me Stephen Mark, which she always referred to as two good Biblical names. So, that's just ground in me from my very earliest memories. Um, in, in some cultures, it is, uh, difficult and awkward for people to just use your first name. The, the role has a cultural impact and obligation in their minds to address you in a certain way. So, I try to be sensitive to that and not make a big deal of it at all, and just whatever people are comfortable with.

**Linda Booth 02:37**

Yes. And that's one of the blessings of having you as a, a leader is that you're humble and you're just so easy to approach. And, so, Stephen Mark, uh, which is, as I've traveled in the south of the United States where you're from, they often refer to you as Steven Mark. Well, they learned the lesson of your mother, two wonderful gospel names, and they still use that to refer to you. Whe, when you and I first had our first Coffee Buzz conversation, which was the very first Coffee Buzz conversation that I recorded, it was soon after the 2019 World Conference and we talked about your sermon at that closing worship. Your sermon was based on the story of the Samaritan woman found in the fourth chapter of John, verses 1 through 28. And you focused on that last verse of that story which told about the woman returning to her city, following her interaction with Jesus. And she told everyone, "Come and see a man who

told me everything I have ever done." And the story says the people who listened to her, they left their city and went on their way to find Jesus. You challenged the church to explore what it means to be on our way to him, meaning Jesus. And you later presented a guiding question, uh, for the church. And that question is, Are we moving toward Jesus the peaceful one? Now, you've had three years to think about this question, as has the church. In retrospect, would you have posed a different question?

**Steve Veazey 04:23**

Well, uh, in relation to the journey over the, uh, recent three years, um, the original question wasn't, in my mind, strategically introduced as a, as a formal guiding question for the whole church. It initially just emerged in my mind as I was thinking about how to kind of wrap up my closing comments to the World Conference, and, and it emerged as a succinct way to take what I had been talking about and pose it as something for the church to consider. But afterwards, as it began to catch on and people read that message in church publications and on the web, it began to be identified, uh, by other leaders as a very helpful guiding question, uh, for the whole church to stay focused on. So, that's when I began to recognize that its emergence involved more than, than just my thinking of a way to close the sermon. Um, and that potentially, it, it, it, it had broader possibilities. In terms of the question itself, I've given that a lot of thought. I, I think there are various ways in which to pose it. But I don't know that I would change it, uh, per se. I've, I've tried out different versions in my own mind, uh, like, Are we moving with Jesus, the peaceful one? And I've made comment to that effect before. But as I continue to think about the gap, uh, between how, how humans and, and tribes and nations frequently act and what Jesus taught about loving God and loving neighbor and the implications of that in, in our daily, uh, behaviors, I think the question, Are we moving toward Jesus, the peaceful one? is still, still relevant. I see so many, uh, people who identify themselves as Christians who, and I admit, in my opinion, are not living lives congruent with what I understand to be the ethics and teachings and message of, of Jesus. So, I, I, I think the question keeps us oriented in the right direction and, and reminds us not to think that somehow we've arrived in the fullest sense in, in terms of, uh, em, embodying the message of Jesus in our lives and, and relationships. So, it's a, it's meant to create a, a, a tension that we respond to as we continue to explore how to grow, or go, uh, more with Jesus in our lives and into the future.

**Linda Booth 07:53**

Yes. Well, as you were talking, it made me realize over the last three years, you've probably thought a lot about even some of the phrases that you used in that closing sermon. Uh, you mentioned in that some authors, uh, who concluded that Jesus was the prototype or the forerunner of a new, peaceful humanity. Uh, what were your thoughts in 2019 about the phrase peaceful humanity? And how has your understanding evolved about the phrase peaceful humanity?

**Steve Veazey 08:28**

Yeah, that, uh, that concept and that actual phrase, uh, arose as I was reading, uh, a book called Servanthood: Leadership for the Third Millennium by, uh, Bennett Sims and Sims used that terminology, uh, to talk about what he perceived as Jesus's higher or deeper, uh, consciousness of, of God that related to the interrelatedness of all life, um, and what he described as relationships that honor the integrity of others and the dearness of the earth. So, those were his words. And, so, he said that, that Jesus is higher or deeper consciousness of, of God, which is what Jesus called oneness in his prayer in the book of John as he was headed towards the cross. He identifies that as the source of Jesus's, um, teachings, and, and ethics of love and reconciliation and, and peace. Uh, many of those are contained in what we call the Sermon on the Mount which is a, kind of considered, uh, a synopsis of some of the key teachings of, of Jesus. Um, and, so, he basically said that, that was the launching. That, that was, um, something forged from a, a new kind of consciousness in relation to God, uh, which, if we, uh, moved ourselves in terms of our own transformation in that direction, then peaceful humanity would emerge. And, so, it just seemed like a very, uh, intriguing and compelling way of, of thinking about all of that. And, and, uh, an additional way of understanding the ministry of Jesus Christ, who he was and, and what his mission is.

**Linda Booth 10:54**

That's a powerful phrase: peaceful humanity. And there's also a lot of social or societal implications about that phrase: peaceful humanity. Um, could you please explore for our Cos, Coffee Buzz listeners some of those societal implications of Jesus as a prototype or a forerunner? And, and what that might mean to those of us who have been focusing on the question, are we or am I moving toward Jesus the peaceful one?

**Steve Veazey 11:27**

Yeah, I, I think it's like, like most guiding images, or, or symbols. There's a lot of truth that it points to and it, and it helps us discover that. Uh, my understanding of the concept of peaceful humanity has caused me, first of all, to look at myself. So, in my journey of discipleship, I, I am trying to look at myself as a human being and then also look at the world around me in terms of others and, and the whole creation. And, and I see signs that there's movement in the direction of, of the emergence of peaceful humanity which, to me, is, is hopeful. Uh, but I also see, uh, uh, what at times is disappointing and causes me concern. Uh, are, are we, are, are societies and cultures or nations reverting back to warring humanity, which has been our legacy. So, obviously, you notice we look at wars that are occurring now and the political polarization that has reignited, um, and it's kind of a backlash against some movements toward, um, justice and equality and equity for people. I, I, I remain concerned. You know, do, have we really caught the vision of what our future could be, uh, and needs to be in order for humanity to flourish going forward?

**Linda Booth 13:36**

Yes, yep, for sure. And for it to flourish, I remember in your sermon, you emphasized that if we truly are on our way to Jesus, then we will embrace or live Jesus's passions and concerns which is reference to the Doctrine and Covenants, Section 164:9b. Um, "If you truly would be Community of Christ, then embody and live the concerns and passion of Christ." That inspired counsel prompts me to ask you this question. Is this faith movement's name, Community of Christ, a reflection or hopefully someday synonymous, synonymous with the call to be a peaceful humanity?

**Steve Veazey 14:23**

Yeah, uh, the short answer is, yes. I, I think that's, uh, very accurate and, and true. So, for me, uh, peaceful humanity is like the big overarching vision that's part of what Scripture describes as the new creation. Uh, it doesn't just involve humanity, but obviously, humanity has to be transformed in order for the new creation, uh, to emerge. And, so, our, our name and, and closely related mission reflect a vital aspect of how God is moving to fulfill that vision. Within the name itself, it shows us a way to move towards peaceful humanity. When I think about it scripturally like when scripture, uh, uh, Ephesians 2 says, He (referring to Christ) is our peace. Um, if we become communities, uh, locally and globally, that embody Christ's peace, we would offer the world a tangible, uh, witness or foretaste, or, or a glimpse of possibility that people could see as an alternative. And that's what I've always understood the, the purpose of community in Christ who has been identified in our scriptures as the embodiment of peace, we embody it in community, Community of Christ basically says that's your purpose. That's your calling. (Yeah.) And that moves us towards peaceful humanity.

**Linda Booth 16:19**

Yes. And as you were talking, I quickly pulled out my Doctrine and Covenants for Section 165, which is one of my favorite inspired paragraphs is, uh, Community of Christ, a divine vision is set before you (Yeah.) presented over the years through various inspired phrases and symbols. It is expressed now through the initiatives in harmony with Jesus Christ. (Yeah.) And there's all those wonderful, uh, the scriptures that tell us that we're poised, uh, we're poised (Yes.) to fulfill that vision that's been set forth. And, and even in that name, there's a vision of what could be.

**Linda Booth 16:19**

Yeah. So, I, I view our name as much more than a, you know, a, a title for, uh, of identification for legal and organizational purposes. It is a calling and vision that pulls us forward, uh, into the future.

**Linda Booth 17:19**

Yes. And it's invitational, too. It's a, a welcoming name that invites others to join us in that journey.

**Steve Veazey 17:28**

Absolutley, the kind of community we're talking about is not in isolation or a refuge from the world. It's always inherently, um, invitational and hospitable (Yes. Yes.) to people.

**Linda Booth 17:45**

Well, you've already mentioned that Jesus was often referred to as the Prince of Peace. And, of course, we know he had many radical thoughts about peace, about loving our enemies, about peaceful relationships in an unpeaceful world that separated and excluded many people with unjust categories of who was valued and who wasn't. And when I think about it, and you've kind of referred to this already, perhaps Jesus's world that separated and categorized people isn't much different than today's world of wars and attitudes that exclude and separate people. Um, and you mentioned this already, let's go into more deeply, though. Do you see a discernible change in human nature and behavior from Jesus's time? And, and do you have hope that humans are becoming or can be a peaceful humanity?

**Steve Veazey 18:46**

Well, um, a, according to some studies, the world is a more, is more peaceful today than it, than it was many centuries ago. Now, I, I think those studies are referring to what is the actual number of, of wars that are raging, either regional conflicts or, or global conflicts. It's kind of hard to see that right now as we've looked at the war, uh, in Ukraine and Yemen and Ethiopia and, and a lot of places we're not aware of, uh, necessarily in this part of the world. But overall, I was struck by this report saying the world is actually more peaceful, uh, than it was centuries ago. Um, I want to continue to gain an understanding of what that's, uh, speaking of. But, uh, and, I shouldn't say but, but and I, I see more individuals and groups and networks and organizations forming, emerging, uh, coalescing to seek peace and healing from conflict and to find ways to offer alternative, uh, pathways, uh, that are more peaceful. So, that, that gives me hope. There, there is a consciousness around the world that is happening in some individuals and groups, uh, that, to me, are like the signs of spring. If they're allowed to continue to grow, they'll, they'll come to fruition.

**Linda Booth 20:53**

Yes, yes, you're right. I'm glad you brought up about less wars or conflicts than in past, uh, ages. The same is true of poverty, too. I've read the reports that say there are fewer people around the world that live in poverty than there were even, what, 20 years ago, which is (Yeah.) remarkable.

**Steve Veazey 21:14**

I've, I've, yeah, and I've read some of those reports. Uh, unfortunately, recently, the COVID pandemic has thrown, um, segments of the population back into what's defined as, as poverty. So, I, I hope we can recover from that and continue to make the long term progress (Yes.) towards freeing people who are trapped in poverty.

**Linda Booth 21:43**

Yes, absolutely. As Christians, uh, we've just celebrated Easter. Uh, in the Gospels, Jesus is the divine agent of newness, salvation and hope. And Jesus's resurrection was the exclamation point to his ministry and his message. Do you believe a new future for humankind in the world was birthed as a result of Jesus's resurrection? And, if so, what does that mean and what might be the characteristics of this new birthed world?

**Steve Veazey 22:18**

Yeah, it's, uh, it's interesting to, to think about it two ways. Um, Jesus's message perspective, how he lived that out, um, caused the circumstances that killed him. So, we have to keep that in mind. (Yeah.) There, there's, the world reacts, uh, to new vision and new ways of approaching relationships sometimes in, in violent ways. Uh, but then the hope of the gospel and the message of the gospel is the story doesn't end there. So, from a faith perspective, uh, the resurrection was basically God saying yes to what Jesus was all about as opposed to the world's no to Jesus. Um, and, so, I, I, I think that's the power of the resurrection, um, in terms of how we understand its full significance, uh, that includes, um, salvation, but goes much broader than that in terms of its, of its implication. So, the resurrection basically says, violence and death are not the last word. And, so, the, the gospel then leads us into a broader, more hopeful understanding. Uh, and that's how I, I view the impact of the resurrection.

**Linda Booth 24:11**

Yes. And you mentioned salvation and salvation in Community of Christ Basic Beliefs might be a little bit different than some people's view of salvation. Would you explain to our Coffee Buzz listeners about how Community of Christ, um, believes, uh, about salvation?

**Steve Veazey 24:31**

Yeah. Um, we, we view salvation in, in very, uh, big, comprehensive, uh, terms is, is one of the ways I would try to describe it. Uh, maybe a better word is holistic terms. Um, our Basic Beliefs state, number one, that, that's ( . . . ) the gospel is the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. And that includes forgiveness of sin and, and healing from alienation and separation. But that the healing is, is for more than individual consideration, it, or application, it, it's not just a personal thing. It's, it's also for uh, communities, human societies and all creation. That's the ultimate vision of, of Scripture. Now, we, we tend to narrow in on what does it mean for me? And what assurance and promise do, do I have, but actually the concept of salvation that the Community of Christ affirms is very, uh, holistic. Um, but it's not just an individual matter. Um,



it's the redemption and transformation of the whole creation. Um, so, we believe in salvation in all its dimensions, in, in all its aspects. And we believe that that promise of salvation is, uh, is beyond our understanding because God's grace is so broad and expansive. We, we really can't tie it down in terms of our, uh, human minds. Uh, but it includes individuals, it includes people, it includes human societies and cultures, and it includes the whole creation.

**Linda Booth 26:49**

And, so, then salvation would also be fitting into this peaceful humanity (Exactly.) that, that is God's plan for all creation.

**Steve Veazey 26:58**

Yeah. It all. It all becomes part of the, uh, new creation that, that God has in mind and that scripture says is, is the ultimate, uh, outcome. A, and we're living in a in between time. (Yeah.) So,

**Linda Booth 27:19**

Yeah. Uh, several times as you've been sharing your insights and understandings about our call to move toward Jesus, the peaceful one, I've thought about the word incarnation, um, the active practice of humans, um, as disciples of Jesus Christ who embody or live Jesus so that God's plan for justice and peace can be fulfilled. And I think it was Barbara Brown Taylor who wrote that incarnation isn't about sharing more about God, but it is to be more God, which I think, uh, sums up incarnation in a very powerful way. Um, I, I'm pretty sure you believe incarnation is important to moving toward Jesus the peaceful one and, if so, how can the practice of incarnation create a peaceful humanity, uh, or a new creation?

**Steve Veazey 28:13**

Well, yes, as you a, affirmed, I agree that incarnation is foundational to the concept of the gospel. Uh, it's foundational to our understanding of God's peace, or God's shalom, which is a holistic peace as revealed and embodied in Jesus Christ. It's foundational to our understanding of the purpose of the church, uh, and what the church is as Body of Christ, as community through which Christ continues to, to live, um, and offer ministries that reconcile and that bring justice and, and peace. I, I like some of the New Testament scriptures that talk about, um, the, the, the gospel is about Christ living in you. (Ah. Yes.) And, and I turn that to always, Okay, how is Christ living in me? How am I growing, being transformed? Other scripture talks about being rooted and then built up in Christ. So, those kinds of words let me know, you know, it's a continuing journey of me being transformed in Christ and, and others also, and then having community with each other because that's part of being transformed in Christ. And as we embody that or en flesh it the principle of incarnation is, it's what we're expressing. So, yes, to all of that.

**Linda Booth 30:08**

It all, isn't it wonderful how it all just goes together so beautifully when you think about it?

**Steve Veazey 30:14**

It seems to and then there's always some mystery.

**Linda Booth 30:18**

Absolutely. The mystery is what makes us keep moving forward (Exactly.), uh, with the peaceful one. Yes. So, we've talked about a lot of theological and spiritual, covered a lot of theological and spiritual ground in this podcast. Is there anything else you'd like to share with our Coffee Buzz listeners?

**Steve Veazey 30:41**

Well, maybe as a, a summary, uh, statement, um, I just want to emphasize the importance of us, um, moving towards Jesus, the peaceful one, which in my mind, includes, um, how we are incarnating Jesus, the peaceful one, or enfleshing that in our lives in community with others. So, uh, my point is, we can't do it on our own (Yes.) as, as much as, uh, the world talks and, and, and reinforces the notion of individualism. You know, my experience is, and I think the gospel perspective is, if we can't do it on our own, if we're truly on that journey, it's bringing us into community with others, including others who may be very different from us. And in fact, that's the opportunity for continuing growth. So, we need companions on the journey uh, and they need us. And, and, and Community of Christ offers, uh, such opportunity, uh, such companionship as we move towards Jesus, the peaceful one. I think that's, that was longer than a minute as a, as a summary, but I, I hope people can sense the truth in all of that.

**Linda Booth 32:24**

Yes, absolutely. And I thank you so much, Steve, for taking the time, uh, to talk with me and for our Coffee Buzz listeners to hear what you have to say as you have thought about and prayerfully considered what it means to move toward Jesus, the peaceful one. And I, uh, am particularly thankful for your personal witness of what it means to embody the living Christ. And so, uh, Steven Mark, thank you very much for, uh, sharing all of your insight and understanding today. And I thank you Coffee Buzz listeners for joining our conversation. I hope this guiding question is also challenging you as you think about what it might mean for your life and your family and your neighborhood and your community in the world if together we move as a community toward Jesus, the peaceful one. Coffee Buzz listeners, please watch for next month's episode of Coffee Buzz. I'll be having a conversation with Stassi Cramm, who is a member of the First Presidency, a counselor to our Prophet/President and also Presiding Bishop.

**Josh Mangelson 33:51**



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