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Project Zion Podcast

**Josh Mangelson** 00:17

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

**Karin Peter** 00:33

Welcome to “New’Brew”, the *Project Zion* series that takes us through the New Testament by explaining, exploring and experiencing the text. Our guides through the New Testament are Tony and Charmaine Chvala-Smith, and I'm your host, Karin Peter. So, before we begin our episode, I will again remind our listeners that you can view all of the “New’Brew” episodes and the “He’Brew” and “She’Brew” episodes from last year, and see Tony and Charmaine’s slides and graphics on the *Latter-day Seeker Ministries YouTube Channel*. So, look for us there. Now, in today's episode, we're looking at the Book of Acts, and we talked a little bit about covering Acts when we did Luke, but we decided against it. So, why don't we start there and dive into the Book of Acts?

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 01:27

Great.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 01:28

So, I think we decided it, this book deserved its own limelight for a while because, well, for one thing it’s such a great read. This is a fast moving, really artful narrative, and so, it deserves to be read on its own and not just, kind of, lumped on to the Gospel of Luke, even though it is volume two, and the two should be read together.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 01:50

And it's really the only book in the New Testament that gives us any kind of a consistent look at the developing nature of the church. You know, the Gospels are these, you know, biographies of Jesus, and this is really the only book that gives us a little bit of a sense of a biography of the church and how it developed and some of its experiments, many experi-, you know, there's lots of different ways it tried to be something new, and some of them have carried through and some haven't. And I think that's, kind of, fascinating to see. We, in our, in the old RLDS tradition, we had an image that, you know, Jesus’ main job was to establish the church, well, the church is a long time in forming, after Jesus is around. I mean, it's not seen as its own religion for at least, you know, another 40 to 50 years after Jesus’ death and resurrection and so, to, you know, remember that it's a subset of Judaism for that long, is really important. And so, this emerging characteristics of what will become a freestanding church, it's an interest, it's a good way to look at it.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 03:11

So, if you take Luke and Acts together, and in your spare time, if you count Greek lines, which I know you like to do, Karin, in your spare time.

**Karin Peter** 03:20

Yes, my spare time, when I'm not reading the New Testament, again, for these.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 03:26

Well, if you counted Greek lines, you would discover that Luke and Acts together are about 1/4 of the total volume of the New Testament. So, this is a substantial work by one person. And this one person has made a significant theological contribution to the varied voices of the New Testament. And it's really quite important to learn how to read both works together, Luke and Acts, but also to read them independently so you get the differences in tone and theme, and what his focus is. But, you know, basically, what you've got here is this one long, kind of, master narrative. It starts with the conception and birth of Jesus, and that narrative of his life...

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 04:17

Runs through Luke.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 04:18

...runs through Luke. It ends in Jerusalem, with the risen Jesus telling the disciples to wait here, and then volume two starts in Jerusalem. And by the time you get to chapter 28 of volume two, you've moved all the way from this backwater province of the Roman Empire to the capital city of the Empire, you're in Rome. So, there's a, kind of, a massive sweep and also, I mean, you are legitimately left a bit in awe that this tiny little religious movement, in the space of a few generations, goes from being 120 people, that's what Luke, that’s how, that’s Luke’s number for how many disciples there were in Acts chapter one. It goes from 120 people to being a religion that is now spreading around the Roman Empire and drawing the notice of officials and all kinds of people, not just people of Palestinian-Jewish background. So, it's quite a lovely sweep. And so, but we're going to focus as much as we can on Acts today, to get a sense for this narrative.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 05:24

So, one of the things that we’ll have less transparency with in Acts than we did in Luke is that we don't have as good an access or sense of, what are the sources that this author is using as he puts together these, this, however named, Acts of the Apostles or Acts of the Holy Spirit, however, you want to take a look at that book? We do know that there are some, he has a source, was probably, it was likely written already of what we call the “We” passages and where the perspective of the author is that they are traveling with Paul, like to, on the shipwreck and on the island, but the author was not with Paul. So, this is a second generation’s gathering of some of the stories. There have been times when people have assumed that the author of Acts was obviously with Paul, but there's no sign that this author actually knew Paul, knew his theology, because those places where he has Paul speaking often are things Paul would never have said.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 06:49

It’s Luke’s theology, not Paul’s.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 06:53

And, anyhow, so, and the author doesn't acknowledge anywhere that Paul wrote letters, which is, kind of, a big factor, a really important element of who Paul was and how he interacted with the churches that he helped establish. So, there's all these little pieces. So, it's a little harder to tell where this, the sources are that the author of Acts is using, but we can tell that they're different sources. So, that's still part of the, you know, how did this come together? You know, some of it is probably written sources, some it is oral sources, and some is the author's glue that holds it all together and gives it a consistency and a narrative flow.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 07:41

So, yeah, we have to presume the author, because the author tells us at the start of Luke’s, of the Gospel, that he uses sources, we have to presume he's using sources here. It's just we don't have any controls, right. With the gospel we can lay Mark and Matthew side by side with Luke. We don't have those kinds of controls here. But, yeah, very likely, this author, by the way, as we mentioned, and we talked about him in the Gospel is, this is one of the classiest of the New Testament writers in terms of Greek style, in terms of his mastery of multiple styles. In the Book of Acts, the Greek style in the first part of the book, when the focus of action is in Palestine, the Greek style almost sounds like you were reading it from the Greek-Heb-, the Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint. He’s mimicked that style. But then when you start getting out into the Hellenistic world, style changes, and you are readings, elegant Greek that would have been the spoken and mostly written Greek of the Greco-Roman world in the late first century. So, he's really, this is a very, very, very clever and skillful author. We can surmise that this author is highly educated, and so puts all of his literary skills to work in creating this very compelling narrative.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 09:05

So, where we'll go now is just to take a look at, again, the New Testament timeline, to, kind of, see where does this book fit in in this bigger narrative of the New Testament. And so, you know, here again, just refresh, we're looking down underneath the line, Mark somewhere, 65-70, Luke and Matthew somewhere between 80 and 90, and then we see Acts down here, and that's roughly between 90 and 100. We know it was written after the Gospel of Luke, and since we put that 80-90, then 90-100 is the best that most, and the language fits with the language particularities and peculiarities fit within that timeframe. Again, we just remind people that Paul's letters are already starting at around 50 and go until 50-60...

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 10:12

Early 60s, yeah.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 10:14

62, 64. So, those are all the ones that we know for sure he wrote. Others that have been attributed are much later in this time period, 70 and beyond. But just to remember that the Gospels and the Acts, and Acts were not the first things written, but that Paul's letters were even before this, and would have been circulating in some places, though, as we said, the author of Acts doesn't note that part about Paul. So, just, that's, kind of, gives us a bigger picture.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 10:50

And while Charmaine has the timeline up there, it's quite important to remember that if Acts is written in, sometime in the 90s, we're now perhaps as much as a decade after the time when there tended to be something more like formal separations of this new thing, Christianity, from Judaism. Now that’s...

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 11:11

Which happened around 85-90.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 11:13

Right. Now, it, quite interestingly, though, one of the themes in the book of Acts is continuity with Judaism, and the whole narrative, Luke and Acts together, is very carefully written to express deep continuity with Judaism. And, very likely, there's a very, there's a practical reason for that and that is that in the Roman Empire, Judaism had a, kind of, sort of, a status as a legal religion. A religio licita, a licit religion, didn't mean that there weren't pogroms against Jews in places in the Roman Empire, but it meant that, alright, if you're a Jew, you can practice what the Romans thought was a stupid, monotheistic religion. You can practice it because it's way older than anything we've got and we’ll leave you alone. And you don't have to do the Emperor, you know, you don't have to offer a pinch of incense to the Emperor. We know that takes you guys off. So, there may be a practical reason why Luke is trying to show continuity with Judaism. That is, by the time Luke writes Acts, the church is now coming under imperial scrutiny more and more. Yeah.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 12:22

Because it’s a, it's now not an old religion, it's this brand-new, kind of, [inaudible].

**Karin Peter** 12:29

And it's no longer under a protected status if it's a brand-new religion.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 12:33

Right.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 12:33

And the Romans were not all that keen on new-fangled religions because they were unpredictable and you didn't know what the people who are in the fervor of this newness would do.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 12:47

I don't know if it's an irony or not, Karin, but just think of it this way; in the ancient world, people valued even more ancient things, unlike the world we live in where ancient things, like us, have a shelf life.

**Karin Peter** 13:02

We do have a shelf life, that is true, although there is this tradition of oppressive power valuing ancient things because they, for whatever reason, seem to have inherent power in them. I mean, you can look at Indiana Jones if you want to, or you can actually look at history and say, that happened in World War II with the Nazi party. They valued these kinds of ancient things because they felt they had power.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 13:34

Right? Yeah.

**Karin Peter** 13:35

That's part of human nature, I think.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 13:37

Yeah.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 13:37

So, I don't think it would be helpful to see the author's trying to somehow trick the Romans with this. I think Luke believes, and he's very skillful at showing how much continuity there is between Jesus and the Hebrew prophets, and Jesus and the early church, and the early church and Jesus, which means the early church is in continuity with Judaism. And it's in Acts where Paul later on is depicted as once shaving his head and doing some stuff for a Jewish vow. And if you compare Acts 15, which is the description of a, we'll call it the Jerusalem World Conference, this description of a conference, if you compare it with Paul's own account, or memory of it, which is, you know, decades earlier and closer to the event, there's some significant differences about what was decided there. But in the Book of Acts, the decision makes the allowance of Gentile-Christians to come into the church. It makes it feel like there's a few more Jewish stipulations put on them then Paul or his mission to the Gentiles did generations earlier. So, again, continuity is a big thing for Luke, trying to show that we are connected. And another thing about continuity in the Book of Acts is that the apostles are always laying on hands, right? And that's the symbol of continuity, of passing something on.

**Karin Peter** 15:10

Right.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 15:11

And by the way, for Luke, an apostle is someone who traveled with Jesus during his historic ministry. Thus, he's very reticent to call Paul an apostle. Paul did not fit that category. I think there may be one little spot where it slips out. But generally, when you get to the second half of the book, which is about Paul's ministry more, you know, Paul has to see what the apostles say about stuff. So, it's very interesting. It's, again, part of continuity, part of this continuity theme, so.

**Karin Peter** 15:49

So, I did want to ask a question about that before we move on, because it just came to my mind, and that is that in the Gospels, the different writers had different perspectives on those apostles, those disciples that were with Jesus. I mean, Mark wasn't a big fan of some of them. So where do, where does Luke come down with that? So, what bias are we seeing here in Acts? What did the author of Luke have to say about them?

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 16:15

I think, to some extent, Luke is a bit of a hero maker. But there, there's some limitations here. The heroes are made by this, by their openness to the Spirit acting with them and around them, within them. And so, Peter doesn't look like the bumbling fool that Mark would have had, or the, you know, the guy with anger issues. Peter's pretty much passed the test and is mostly seen as someone who now understands and is wielding this power of Christ in ways that echo so closely back to Jesus’ words, to Jesus’ actions. And he's proclaiming Jesus and the name of Jesus as having power. So, it's not, he's not a hero in and of himself. It's how he's connected to Jesus, and the, and where the Spirit is, attunedness to the Spirit, I would say.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 17:27

And I think that's a really good observation. And, you know, a quick way to see it is, in the passion story in Luke, you know, Peter says, I don't know the guy. I never met him in my life, right? And then not many chapters later, you get into Acts II and Peter's addressing, you know, hundreds of people at Pentecost, and standing up to the officials. So, the narrative, in its own way, tries to show how the Spirit can, I thought, to use Charmaine’s hero language, the Spirit can turn people into heroes of a different kind, not like the Hellenistic, quasi-divine hero figures, but heroes in the sense of being able to, their humanity has now been elevated, and they find courage and a voice and compassion. So.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 18:12

And Peter is still seen and recognized by officials as being this illiterate fisherman from Galilee. And so, there's not a rewriting of his story. He's still, in the view of the world, seen as, really? This fisherman thinks he can challenge us? You know, where does he get off thinking that's, you know, that's acceptable? And so, you know, he's imprisoned and the Spirit helps him out, you know, and so, it's an overturning again, which is a theme in Luke too, of overturning other authority, and being established in a new kind of authority, because of Christ.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 19:00

And, if you want to connect that, what Charmaine's talking about, to the plotline, you have to go all the way back to Mary's song, the Magnificat, where God elevates the lowly and puts down the mighty, and that that's God's game plan in history. And so now, the lowly, these illiterate fishermen, have been elevated and they're now the vanguard of the creation of a new world. So, it's an interesting and, I think, very compelling way to think about it. So, yeah, the apostle, I mean, the book got the title Acts of the Apostles, but in a sense, the book focuses primarily on Peter in the first half, with a few cameos, you know, of others, and then, in the second half, it focuses on Paul, the, sort of, not maybe the apostolic figure, but is he a real apostle? You know, you’ll have to read Acts and see what you think. But nevertheless, you could have titled this book, if you were a scribe back in the second century, the Acts of Peter and Paul, because in a sense...

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 20:13

No Mary?

**Karin Peter** 20:17

That just showed all of our ages, ‘cuz I laughed at that.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 20:21

She showed up in chapter one. Sure, why not? The acts of Peter, Paul and Mary. Yeah. So, there are two focal things, and by the way, this gets us to the genre, the literary genre of this book, and we're going to be inclined to call it history, but we have to be careful when we use the term history here because the history we're describing in the first, late first century, is a genre that's like, and unlike, what we call history. One scholar, Bruce Metzger, a long time ago, referred to the genre of Acts as an ancient genre called, you're not going to like this or it's going to strike you as funny, but pathetic history. It's a technical term. It's a story that creates pathos, right...

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 21:09

Empathy.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 21:09

...empathy, yeah.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 21:10

Feeling compassion.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 21:11

A sense of, right. A sense of feeling for the characters, and there are lots of ancient Greek narratives that were written that way. Bart Ehrman refers to it as the Hellenistic genre of general history. But in the Hellenistic world, general history did not tell everything it knew. It focused on key scenes that gave you a feeling for the ethos of this community. So, it's not, general history in the ancient world is not complete history. And also, one thing we know about historiography in the ancient world, and some of the great historians tell us that they, that this is part of their MO, they use sources when they could, and they made up stuff when they didn't. And so, the speeches, the Book of Acts is full of really powerful speeches or sermons. And...

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 22:09

That's what I call the narrative glue.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 22:10

Right.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 22:11

That holds the story together.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 22:12

They really, they hold the story together and for the ancient reader, those speeches in this book, or poetry in other kinds of books, and, you know, if, in the middle of a narrative, somebody breaks into a poem, an ancient reader’s like, ah, that's the key to the whole. And here, when different figures in the ancient church speak and give a sermon, for Luke, that's the glue. That's the key to the whole. But Luke, like an ancient historian would have, created those speeches. They represent Luke's theological understanding more than they do the figures that are represented.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 22:50

And the ones that you would find in Acts are Peter’s speech at Pentecost, Stephen’s speech just before he gets stoned to death, and where he has all of these, you'll hear the reminiscences of Jesus's words at his death, and then Paul's, it would be the third journey, his Athens’ speech?

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 23:17

Second journey.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 23:17

Second journey, thank you. So, in all of those places you're going to find some of those defining speeches that, and like I said earlier, where Paul says some things, the Paul who wrote the letters, would never have said, but the author needs Paul to say that at this place in the story.

**Karin Peter** 23:40

So, it's kind of like contemporary poetic license.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 23:44

It is. The author, and some of the ancient historians like Herodorus and Thucydides, tell us, when I had sources I used ‘em, when I didn’t, I created what I thought would have fit the circumstance. And so all of these speeches are designed to fit the circumstance. And by the way, I can tell you, in my third year of Greek, I had a class reading the speeches in Acts, and the Greek is really hard. You have to be in your third year Greek before you can...

**Karin Peter** 24:09

Oh, dear.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 24:11

It’s, yeah, it's refined and it's very, oh, it's very Hellenistic word order and stuff. It throws English speakers completely off trying to, so, anyway. Side note.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 24:24

Do you want to say more about this before I...

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 24:26

Yeah, we just, this is something we just created to show that the key scenes, and by the way, this ancient narrative genre, one of its traits was to focus on key scenes, right. Dramatic episode style, it's sometimes called, where a little vignette, kind of, gives you a clue as to the meaning of the whole. And sometimes you see that in modern cinema too. But, you know, this gives you a picture, a feel for the community. By the way, this was being written, not for outsiders but insiders. Remember it's written for Theophilus, who's a new convert, and this is helping him have a sense for, where did all this come from? You know, Theophilus is some high ranking, socially higher-ranking, Hellenistic dude in the late first century, who is becoming Christian. He wants to know where all of this came from, and what is it I really got myself into? You know, the dramatic scenes show you what you've got yourself into.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 25:28

And included here would be, you know, Saul's conversion, again, this changing of direction of Saul who wants to destroy the Christians, to now having an experience with Christ. There's Cornelius, you know, he and his whole family are these Gentiles, not just Gentiles, but he's a centurion. He's part of the invading, the present army...

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 25:56

Occupying.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 25:57

Occupying is the word I'm trying, invading was much earlier. But yeah, the occupying army and his connection to God leads him to his whole household being touched by the Holy Spirit, and coming to know who Christ is, Paul's first journey and all the struggles that are there, the Jerusalem Conference, which sometimes isn't the main scene that's picked up very much in our preaching and storytelling, but which, in this book, is a pivotal moment as to what the Spirit is doing in the bigger world, the Roman world.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 26:40

So, one other thing we can say about this whole narrative is that, let's call this theo-history, right? It's theologically, a theologically motivated telling of the story. And one of the things that Luke is trying to show is that, hey, God's been in this all along. That's a very simple theme through the whole book, and, you know, this movement of a group from within Judaism out into the whole world that's becoming this major inclusive force in the world, that's a God thing. That was always part of the divine plan. And it's very interesting, I'm borrowing off of the New Testament scholar Luke Johnson here, the last Greek word of the narrative is akolutos, which means unhindered. Paul, might be under house arrest at the final, in the final scene, but he's preaching and the word, the message about Jesus is unhindered, it's going forward. The Empire can't stop it. It has a power of its own, i.e., Spirit power. And there's probably something of value in that for us, that is we, in our current realities, live with, under the shadow of a variety of empires, some economic, some cultural, some political, and yet, the good news about Jesus, I mean, the real good news about Jesus, can't be stopped or hindered in spite of those political and social and economic forces that really do want to hinder the creation of an inclusive and loving community. So, Acts has some things to teach us if we look at the whole.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 28:21

Yeah, and just for those who are curious about the Spirit’s role, you'll find that many of these prominent scenes that define the whole book, are Spirit, they're grounded in what the Spirit is doing, and the nature of the Spirit.

**Karin Peter** 28:39

So, we talked about that a little bit before we started, so maybe this is a good time to talk about the title of it. We talked about the difference between this being the Acts of the Apostles, or what you called the acts of Peter and Paul, or the works of the Spirit, and I've heard both. So, what is it?

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 28:57

Well, scribes put, scribes created a name for this document, perhaps sometime late in the second century, praxis, which means deeds, right. And there's a lot of apostolic and quasi-apostolic deeds in it. But modern readers have said the real force behind the deeds, is the Spirit, right, the Divine Spirit, the mighty, that the Spirit is like a mighty rushing wind in Pentecost, has a force of its own. And it's creating this whole new reality in and through people's responses.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 29:37

And this is really important because this is another carryover from Luke. In Luke, Jesus filled with the Spirit. You know, this happens as he leaves the wilderness. This happens in his baptism. This happens as he goes out into his ministry, and there's these little stops along the way where Jesus is recharged, you know, and because in Luke, he's, Jesus is the praying prophet. You know, he's the one who prays, and so, there's this very intentional connection to the Spirit. And you'll see this through Acts. It's very, very intentional about naming. Here's what the Spirit did, and, you know, whether it's what somebody saw, Steven seeing the heavens, there's, there it's more implied that it's the Spirit that gave him this sight, but in Paul's Damascus Road surprise for him, you know, there's this, very much this sense that it's the Spirit that is both present and blinding. And then it's Jesus present, that he sees in some way. So, but the Spirit is the Pentecost. It's what gives Stephen words. It's what gives Peter words, and it keeps going back to that. It's what frees Peter from prison. It's, I don't know if it's named when Paul shakes off the snake that bit him, but it's very much the sense that the Spirit is at work to convince others of this Jesus message.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 31:33

Yeah, yeah. So, it's, I mean, I think calling it the acts of the Holy Spirit really catches who the primary actor is in the narrative. Everybody else, like Paul and Peter and everybody, they're riding the wave.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 31:49

I mean, in Luke, it's Jesus and what he's doing that is the focus, and here is this other dimension of God that is at work.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 32:00

And Charmaine has mentioned this a few times, it's just important to know that there's, Luke does this paralleling thing between the, what Jesus does, the apostles do, right, and what happens to Jesus happens to the apostles, and so he's trying to show this, again, this is a continuity theme, the early church is the continuation of Jesus’ ministry. This particular view is unique to Luke in the New Testament. You don't find it really elsewhere, but you can legitimately say, of the church in the Book of Acts, of the way the church is depicted, you can legitimately say that Jesus’ mission is its mission, alright? It's doing the same stuff that Jesus did, only now in a way that Jesus couldn't do it, not bounded by geography. So, that's just, it's a cool thing, I think, in this book, so. And then, one other thing that's worth mentioning is, we've hinted at before, inclusion, right. The, in this book, one of the primary works of the Holy Spirit is creating an inclusive community. And so, you get some, you get hints of a struggle in the early church to open the church ethnically, right? It starts off as you know, Palestinian, probably Aramaic speaking Palestinian-Jews, who are following this Jesus figure, and then it expands a little bit. You have Hellenized, Greek speaking Jews, who have started following Jesus. And then you follow as the book goes, increasingly, and you've got then you've got Ethiopian eunuch who we’ll meet later. And you've got increasingly people...

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 33:52

More Gentiles. It's more Gentiles than Jews. It's people who have known, come to know about this God through their Jewish contacts, or they hang out at the local synagogues, and they can’t convert but they're, kind of, hanging around and they, they've come to know this God. And then, it's Gentiles who don't know anything.

**Karin Peter** 34:14

All these Gentiles. We don't want them. They're not like us.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 34:18

They're not like us.

**Karin Peter** 34:19

Wait, was that said in the early church?

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 34:20

They don’t follow the rules. They’re not following the rules, you know.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 34:25

I can date us even a little further, Karin, by saying this book is full of all kinds of “Guess Who's Coming to Dinner” moments.

**Karin Peter** 34:31

Yes, there you go.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 34:33

And it starts right, really very soon. You know, we sometimes, I want to say fantasize, but about the early church having, being so wonderful and having all things in common. Well, right at the beginning, we find out there's a problem, you know. Yeah, they have things in common, and they're taking care of the widows. Ah, but you know what? They're not taking care of the widows equally. The Palestinian widows are getting more of the food and support than the Hellenistic widows.

**Karin Peter** 35:11

That can't be true, Charmaine. That can't be true because Acts 2:41-47 is the epitome of the perfect church to which we all are called to attain?

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 35:23

Well, you can belong...

**Karin Peter** 35:24

At least those are the sermons I hear. What Tony?

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 35:27

Well, you can belong to that church, Karin. I'm not, I...

**Karin Peter** 35:29

I believe, no, but this is a good time to talk about that. Let's talk about Acts II. In the Restoration traditions it gets held up as the model. This is what we're supposed to be here.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 35:38

But I think that, then that's one of those places where we need to read this accurately, historically, for, you know, as much as Acts might be historical, is, there's just a very short time that they try this experiment. And right from the beginning, this is very near the beginning that they have this problem, it's like, oh, cr-, you know, we're prev-...

**Karin Peter** 36:01

You almost just said, “Oh crap.” I know you almost said that.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 36:05

I did. Self-restraint.

**Karin Peter** 36:07

I’m watching your face. I’ve never seen you do that before? Okay.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 36:12

So, they're realizing, oh, crap, we've been biased. We are taking better care of the Palestinian widows who live here and who, you know, have deep roots in Judaism, then we are the Jewish widows from elsewhere...

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 36:31

Who speak Greek.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 36:32

Who are Greek speakers? And yes, they moved to correct that, and then they also moved for the apostles to, kind of, wash their hands, dealing with all of these issues. And the, you know, the seven men are, become servants of the poor. They're all Hellenistic Jews. They all have Greek names. And so, we're seeing this is like an intentional, oh, my goodness, we had a blind spot. Oh, we gotta watch that. And so, it's like, right from the beginning they're recognizing some of the problems and challenges of community together. And, you know, I think there's, some other pieces is, you know, Jesus brought his disciples from Galilee, a whole gang of them, men and women, if we're to believe Luke 8, which describes this wandering group of people who are not married to each other and...

**Karin Peter** 37:41

Traveling around together. Oh my.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 37:43

Exactly. And they came to Jerusalem for Passover, and they've stayed, you know, and it's like, the people who, their relatives who house them, thinking they would be gone after Passover, and now it's like, what? 40 days more? Oh my gosh.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 37:59

Uh, sorry, I didn't bring my checkbook from Galilee, sorry.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 38:05

And so, we begin to see some of the necessity of having all things in common, sharing your home, sharing your food, sharing your resources, because fishermen aren't making any money if they're not fishing, and there's not really a good place to fish in Jerusalem. And so, then, this is out of necessity, as well as choice of having all things in common in this group of Jesus’ first followers. I think that's important, as we realize that this doesn't last very long, and Paul doesn't try to reinstitute this in the other communities where he plants the church. You don't see that ideal being picked up in other places. I think it is an ideal. I think, you know, it gives us some ways of recognizing there's, we have a lot of things to work through, if we're going to live and share in those ways. But it's not the only example of what it means to be community in the Book of Acts.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 39:16

So, I know in the early Restoration movement, this kind of image was prized, but we also have to contextualize them. They were proof textures, right? They were looking for the, and they had this, they worked with this ideology that you have to get back to the earliest for it to be right. And so, but you mix those two things together, that and proof texting, and now you're gonna go back to Acts II. And we notice in our church's own history how poorly that worked at different times, right. But the one place that actually has worked for centuries is in Catholic and Orthodox monastic communities. That was going to be a hard sell for the early Restoration movement.

**Karin Peter** 40:02

For a lot of reasons.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 40:03

Yeah, but also, you know, so they, our ancestors in the church did not have the contextual apparatus to understand this. They were trying to get back to the original. I understand why they wanted to do that.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 40:17

But it wasn't the only way that the church was as it was growing and developing.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 40:22

And if we want to, we can contextualize Acts even further. By the time that Acts is written, the Qumran community has gone. It's, the Romans destroyed it in the early...

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 40:36

It's a Jewish, kind of...

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 40:37

...a Jewish, kind of, quasi-monastic Jewish community that lived out by the Dead Sea. They started living out there, maybe somewhere around 140 BCE, in the Maccabean period. They were there until the Romans destroyed the community, 70, 71, in the Jewish war. And that community practiced a, kind of, all things in common, a sort of somewhat monastic existence out by the Dead Sea. And that was certainly memorable that there were people sharing things in common. And, you know, it may be that that's in the background of Luke, Luke's description here, like, ah, we did that, too. We did that. And we did it in town. We didn't have to go out to the woods to do it. But, so there's various contextual factors, and I think, you know, if you, if you're going to literalistically focus on Acts II, my next question would be, okay, you want to do that, then why don't you jump over to the beginning of chapter 5 and focus on the Ananias and Sapphira story literalistically, where Ananias and Sapphira, they sell some property. They withhold knowledge of the proceeds from the apostles...

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 41:44

They only give part of it. They're not honest about how much they actually got for it.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 41:49

And they are both struck dead. And so, you know...

**Karin Peter** 41:52

No Mission Center President wants to hear this at this moment. Nobody wants to know this.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 41:57

It's like, tithe or die, you know, it’s like. So, you know, if you're going to be literalistic about all things in common, then you better figure out what you're going to do with that text too. Instead, I think we can say, let's understand that Luke is trying to show that early, earliest Christianity was trying to figure out the best possible way to live in koinonia, in fellowship and commonality, and there were different models. And, you know, Paul develops a different model as he goes out into Hellenistic cities. It's not quite like this at all. So, anyway.

**Karin Peter** 42:28

So, by taking this and idealizing this short passage, what is it six verses, it's another incidence of us taking something out of context and trying to make it something that we want it to be, as opposed to keeping it in context and looking at it in the greater narrative of the story. So, just a reminder, for all of us, we learned all about this when we went through “He’brew”, and “She’brew” so, let's not bring it back for “New’brew”. We don't want to take things out of context.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 42:55

And I think a positive way to use it is as glasses, as lenses, and to say, you know, if we were to think about what it would take for us to have that kind of equality, and patience, and long suffering with each other, then that gives us some places to start. If we think we've already arrived, all we have to think about is what if I had to live with these people every day, and I had to share my resources and my bad habits, you know. And I would have to be accountable for some of those bad habits and how they affect other people. And so, I think as lenses to say, how can we see some of our blind spots about the worth of all persons? It's helpful that way. You know, it's like, well, I want to share equally except for that person. That person's already had so many blessings in their life, they don't need this, you know. And so, there's a lot of things that might help us look at in our own personal development and what does it mean? How can we be more like community? Or how can we have different dimensions of community in our congregations or in our home? But to feel like this is the only way that we can truly be faithful, I think, is dangerous.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 44:31

You can put a, kind of, a spiritual formation lens on the text and say, yeah, in this scene, in this experiment that was going on in the early church, it looks like they're sharing everything together, and you know, where, what's, what do I find in myself that's most resistant to that? Or how do, when it comes to sharing what I have with others, where are my boundaries and limits? And why am I afraid to share more than I do? I mean, there's all kinds of places you could go with it without turning it into some kind of eternal blueprint for how to be a church. So.

**Karin Peter** 45:10

Okay.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 45:12

Good question.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 45:14

So, see if we have anything else Charmaine wanted to cover in terms of, I think I know something I want to cover. I think at this point, we're in the explore part, Karin. Oh, we’re sort of, running, we've been running back and forth.

**Karin Peter** 45:26

Oh, yeah, we have been.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 45:28

Sorry about that.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 45:27

Yeah, we have been famous for. But a difficult question to ask of this text is what kind of history does it give us? And so, one has to recognize that the author is decades removed from the events and also that the author has a theological thing he's trying to convey.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 45:50

60 to 70 years, I think that's important to put numbers on, probably second or third generation Christian.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 45:57

And so, he does idealize his portrait of the early church, and we have to be careful, as we read, to recognize that he's giving us, kind of, the very best spin on the early church. But between the lines of the Book of Acts, I think we can read that the ethnic conflict between Jews and Gen-, people of Jewish background and Gentile background, was really a struggle, it was a long struggle. And there were different approaches to how to make a lot of space for others. So, another thing too, is the author's portrayal of Paul. Here's, this is...

**Karin Peter** 46:35

Yes, let's talk about the author's portrayal of Paul, because we'll be talking about Paul soon enough.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 46:40

We will. This is, I think, you know, people often find Paul's letters hard to read, and they are. They're not narratives, right. And so, the tendency is to go to Acts and say, Acts gives us the story of Paul, and then somehow, we try to fit the letters into Acts. And on the one hand, while Luke's tracing of Paul's movements seems to be fairly accurate, his representation of Paul and Paul's thinking and ideas is Luke. It's not Paul. And he portrays Paul as a, kind of, man for all seasons. Paul can do almost anything, right, in this book. You know, he can speak elegant Greek on Mars Hill in Athens. He can speak Aramaic to an angry crowd in Jerusalem.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 47:27

He can tell sailors how to manage their ships so that not everybody is killed in the storm.

**Karin Peter** 47:34

Luke never met a sailor, obviously, in that.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 47:39

Paul is, in a sense, Paul is Luke's real hero, even though Luke is not sure you can call him an apostle, which Paul would have said, are you kidding me? I'm an apostle. What do you mean? We'll get to Paul talking about that soon enough. But, so, I other words...

**Karin Peter** 47:53

Yes, absolutely. Read Galatian. No, was that Romans or was it Galatians where he was all ticked off over that...

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 48:00

Galatians. You’re right.

**Karin Peter** 48:01

Was it Galatians? All right.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 48:03

Yeah, but, and then the so-called conversion of Saul in the book of Acts, it's a magnificent story, but remember, when Paul speaks of his experience, he never connects it to Damascus. He does not connect it to an experience of losing his sight for a while. When Paul reluctantly speaks about what that was, he'll use images of seeing. So, that's a connection. “I saw Jesus, our Lord,” he says in I Corinthians. “He appeared, last of all he appeared to me like he did to the other apostles, and he called me. He called me to go preach to the Gentiles.” That's pretty much the extent of what Paul will say about the experience. Luke, Luke's depiction of it makes a great icon, right. But one...

**Karin Peter** 48:57

It has all that glue Charmaine was talking about?

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 49:00

Right. But I think if you want to, you have to let Paul speak for himself, on his own experience. And remember that Luke, in a very stylistic way, is telling Christians two generations after Paul, hey, we had this great hero figure, and here's what he was like and here's what happened to him. And isn't it great that the Spirit has been doing this kind of stuff in our midst, and so on. So, in other words, there's a, you just have to, you take Acts as Acts, but then you don't make Paul somehow conformed to what's in Acts, right. It’s a portrayal.

**Karin Peter** 49:33

Right. So, I can feel you, kind of, moving around saying this, so I'm just gonna say it. Luke has an agenda.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 49:44

Sure.

**Karin Peter** 49:44

He’s writing for Theophilus. He has an agenda, just like all of us do, when we write anything. We sit down to write a sermon or to write a testimony, we have an agenda, because we have a point we’re trying to make to the people to whom we're speaking and that's really what is happening here with the Book of Acts.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 49:60

Absolutely.

**Karin Peter** 50:00

There's nothing wrong with that.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 50:01

No, no, but I think it's important to acknowledge that, because then you can, then this isn't just little historical facts, this has a purpose.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 50:13

And that makes us also take our time with the text, right? I want to figure out what's Luke's endgame here? What's Luke, what's he trying to get at? Because that's the God connecting piece for us. Let's, here's what Luke is doing, but what's Luke pointing to, or pointing at? That's where we want to go, right. And so, that's, that then leads us into, kind of, both theological and spiritual formational readings of the texts that are so important to us.

**Karin Peter** 50:42

We forget that when we're reading scripture, because we want to get so caught up in how we understand historical fact. And so, we look at all of, what you said, what's happening and we forget to look at what the point is, what it's pointing to.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 50:55

Yeah.

**Karin Peter** 50:55

We do that in the Gospels too, with Jesus.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 50:57

Exactly. It's that whole question of what is truth?

**Karin Peter** 51:00

Yeah. Yeah.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 51:02

Is truth what describes a reality? Or is it about facts?

**Karin Peter** 51:09

Yeah.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 51:10

And so, this is a place too, where you have to take the author seriously, when the author uses certain kinds of images, right. So, when Luke described the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, just, it was like a mighty, mighty rushing wind, right. Like Greek, [pos pare], as if it were, right, as if it were a mighty rushing wind. And so, simile, right, it’s a comparison, it's not a photograph.

**Karin Peter** 51:48

So, we can't say the Holy Spirit is a rushing wind?

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 51:52

No, I mean...

**Karin Peter** 51:53

But we can't say it isn’t. We can say, in this instance, it's described as.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 51:59

Right. And then, that may connect with some of our experiences of the ways in which the Spirit whooshes through our lives, or in a particular setting or situation.

**Karin Peter** 52:12

Is there a Greek word for whooshes, Tony?

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 52:17

If there is, [inaudible] I don't know it, sorry. But yeah, I mean it’s a, spiritual reality requires the use of analogy, metaphor, simile. We're talking about things that are not data, right? They're not material factoids. We're talking about, things that are beyond our normal realm of functioning, that are real, but that we have to use poetic images to get at.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 52:43

They are sensed, but not tangible, if that makes sense.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 52:49

Yeah.

**Karin Peter** 52:50

I think that's important to look at, especially as we go into Acts and we hit Pentecost, right there in chapter 2. And there's a lot of paranormal activity in Pentecost, if you want to look at it that way. Or we can look at it as poetic language and simile and descriptors and such. And, I think we have to do that throughout Acts.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 53:11

Because we don't want to limit what the Spirit is and how it works. We do want to discern what is the Spirit and what isn't the Spirit, but we don't want to so put the Spirit in a box that it can't surprise us. And that's something the Spirit loves to do. At least that's what Acts says. So, any more questions, Karin, or should I go on into...

**Karin Peter** 53:40

No, let's go on to experiencing the text.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 53:44

So, just always to begin as we're, the reason that we have the experience part with scripture is that we just, we want to provide this other way of approaching scripture than people may have approached scripture in the past. And we want to approach it as though the author is just trying to tell us about their experience of God, the Spirit, Christ, in their time, in their situation. And then, we then, try to see if aspects of their encounter with God can speak to us. And maybe it can, and maybe it can't, and the, either way is fine. But it's a way to connect with the human part of it. The process of looking at their experience, thinking about it as their experience, not as scripture, as some words dictated by God for keeping people in line, but looking at these people's experience as they could best describe it. It humanizes them, first of all. It humanizes us because we're connecting with them on our human every day, kind of, experience level, and it makes scripture an invitation rather than an inquisition. And so, that's, kind of, how we're going to be approaching the scripture. And just a little bit about the, I've got two scriptures, very short ones today, but they're both from Acts near the beginning. And so, the first one is when Christians are, kind of, kicked out of Jerusalem because things are getting a little hot there, and we follow Philip, who first goes to Samaria, and then is headed south and west, and along the way, he meets, he is drawn to this person who is reading from a scroll of Isaiah, and he, kind of, goes alongside to see if he can be helpful, I think, with Spirit. It's very explicit that the Spirit is guiding him along to see what can happen here. So, in this chariot is a eunuch who is servant of the queen of Ethiopia. And being a eunuch means that he has been sexually altered so that he is not a threat to women. So basically, de-testosteronized, I guess, would be a way to, kind of, look at that. And so, here's this eunuch who would not be able to be Jewish, but is obviously connected somehow to Judaism and the God of Judaism. So, he's reading the scroll and Philip comes alongside, and the eunuch says, “About whom, may I ask, is this prophet, about whom may I ask you, does the prophets say this, about himself or about someone else?” And so, he's, you know, this is part of Isaiah, and he's confused. And Philip then begins to speak. “...and starting with the scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus.” And, “As they were going along the road, they came to some water;” and, obviously, Philip had been talking about Jesus and about baptism, “and the eunuch says, ‘Look, here's water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?” Someone who could not enter into, fully into Judaism because of his, because he's a eunuch, is saying, is there anything that keeps me from being baptized into this Jesus group thing? So, “He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. When they came out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.” I just, this is just so wonderful. It's because we get this sense of the unpredictability of the Spirit and what it's doing, and how it will take this bad situation of the Christians being, Jewish-Christians getting kicked out of Jerusalem, to suddenly find new ways to be at work. So, then the next scripture, I'll just give a little background, is the story of Peter who has had this visionary experience about the animals being let down in this sheet and told to eat them and it's like, oh, no, God, I follow the rules. I don't eat anything unclean. And God says take and eat. “What I have created, do not call it unclean, do not call unclean. And so, and as soon as he's trying to process this, there's people from another city, from a centurion in that city who are saying, come with us. And he's still processing, whoa, this experience. And so, he goes to Cornelius’s house, and Cornelius, who again has had some connection with the Jewish God, has said, I’ve been told to send for you and you are supposed to tell me about things. And, you know, Peter’s already taken this huge risk. He's going with centurion’s servants, to the centurion’s house. He's a good Jew who doesn't, thinks he's not, he thinks he's gonna be eating kosher and he's now staying in these Romans’ house and...

**Karin Peter** 59:49

Don't you have a vegan option?

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 59:52

Exactly, exactly. And he doesn't know about his own safety and then we see, what is it that the Spirit is about here? We'll go on down to the next one. And so, this is from Acts 10. “While Peter was still speaking...” So, Cornelius says, tell us what it is, that it is that God wants us to hear. And so, Peter starts talking about Jesus and, “...the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. The circumcised believers...” so those who came with Peter, Jewish-Christians, are, “...astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit has been poured out, even on the Gentiles...” because they're hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God, so they can't deny what they're hearing. And, “Then Peter said, ‘Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” So, the Spirit is this equalizer? It makes these outsiders suddenly of equal value within this movement? How can we withhold the water to baptized? “So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.” And, “...they invited him to stay for several days.” I love these two passages because, it's, you don't get to make up the rules. The Spirit's gonna lead the way and do things. So, what do we see in these stories? Well, we see the Spirit working outside the church structures, ‘cause there aren't any yet. You know, there isn't a structured church. There's groups of believers who are trying to figure out how to be together, and the Spirit is working in people's yearnings and in their hearts and in their souls. And Cornelius, who's wanting to have a deeper relationship with this God he's come to know about, and this eunuch who's reading the, reading Isaiah and saying, there's something here for me, but I don't get it. And so, here's the meeting of what the Spirit is doing inside people, with what the Spirit is doing outside people, and stirring everything up. I think that's a great way to think about the Spirit, so, stirring things up. The Spirit surprised people with unprecedented action, not just ideas, or thoughts or feelings, but action. It leads Philip and Peter into these unknown and unexpected situations. Neither of them knew what was going to happen; Philip coming up to the chariot, Peter going to a centurion’s house. It could have turned out badly in either situation, these, and so then, these unplanned things happened that allowed others; the eunuch, Cornelius’s household, as well as them, as well as Philip and Peter, to experience God's power in unexpected, unimaginable ways and to feel God's acceptance. Both stories happened before there's a structured church, and it's outside of the rituals and beliefs of Judaism. The Spirit is creating something new in people, between people and with God, and doesn't seem to care about the rules that has, had existed before. Both stories include spontaneous responses to the Spirit by both the seeker and the sent. So, what do we learn about the Spirit? Well, it seems to enjoy working in unprescribed, unstructured, unformulated spaces, and it likes to work deep inside of us, where we don't even notice, until we notice. The Spirit excels in moving outside the formulas and expectations of society, churches or individuals to create something new. And here, you know, we think about the eunuch who would have been summarily uninvited to be fully Jewish. And the Spirit doesn't care about that. It's doing what it will do. The Spirit wants to stretch both the sent and the seeker to experience Christ's living presence in life-giving, and, I think, especially life-changing ways. And the Spirit meets us where we are, not where others say we should be. And its goal is to connect us with God's love and acceptance precisely where we are, not once we arrive, not once we've earned it, not once we've proved ourselves or got enough faith, right where we are. So, questions this passage can ask us, and there were so many, so I've got just an assortment, but I do want us to spend a minute on the last one. So, but I'll go through some of the others. So, a first question is, where do I notice Christ's Spirit wanting to work in unpredictable ways? And this might be where we work. It might be in our homes. It might be within our own minds or hearts. It might be at church. Where are we noticing Christ's Spirit nudging us towards the unpredictable, which I know is a dangerous thing? But it is how the Spirit works. Another question, where might the Spirit ask me? Oops, where might the Spirit ask me to relinquish my desire for people to behave within the rules, the predictable patterns or my comfort zone? And I, probably, if we're honest, most of us really, kind of, want the structures to be pretty closed and comfortable. So, listening to the Spirit, where its saying, oh, give me some room? Let, don't let all those rules determine who you are, or what you can do, or how you will judge others. That's the last one, because I got two others in here first. What does it mean? And I think this is a fun one for a conversation, a discussion is, what does it mean that the Spirit doesn't care about ethnic, sexual or national identity, or a whole bunch of other kinds of identity, or whether a person has met some standard of imposed righteousness before embracing them? And in these two stories, it's fully embracing them. So, what does it say about the Spirit that those things don't matter to it? And then this is a, one of those questions that's a self-question. How can I discern between the stirrings of the Spirit and my own desire for change or novelty? And that's just a place that we get to be honest, and check our own rebellion sometimes, and learn some things about ourselves. And then the last question, and I invite you to take a minute now and maybe in the next few days, as well, and, if you can remember, ask yourself how is the Spirit inviting me to be either the seeker or the sent today? We may have our identity as one or the other, but maybe we go back and forth between the two all the time. How is the Spirit inviting me to be either the seeker or the sent today?

**Karin Peter** 1:08:10

Thank you for that, Charmaine and Tony. The last question reminded me of a comment. I think it was Craig Van Gelder, who wrote a lot of books about mission and the church, and said that, “God is a sending God, and God sent Jesus. Jesus sends the Spirit and the Spirit sends the church.” So, as a person who spent most of her life in the ministry of invitation and being sent, that one has stayed with me, which might be why this appeals to me so much in the Book of Acts here. There are some themes that have stayed with me as I've listened to the explanation and the exploration and engaged in the experience, and you named one early on; the theme of the struggle towards inclusivity in the early church that we still struggle with, of course, today, and this tension between a Spirit that is described as a rushing wind, and our desire for things to be fixed. See that in the early church as well. And I love that definition of the actual Greek word for the last part, last word of Acts, which is the unhindered, that idea of unhindered, and I think sometimes what hinders the church is us. So, if we could get over ourselves, maybe we'd be less hindered there. Is there any last comment or any last thought that you wanted to bring up about the Book of Acts before we close?

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 1:10:01

Read the book and take your time with it, and let it, see where it goes, it takes you. I would say, probably of all the books in the New Testament, the Book of Acts is the easiest one to do a small group Bible study on because it's so self-explanatory. There's not a lot of complicated concepts in it. And so, a good scholarly study Bible that has some footnotes and a good introduction can give you pretty much what you need to do a small group study on it. And then maybe beyond the study, follow some of Charmaine's questions and also ask, what, how do I need to, you know, in Community of Christ language, let the Spirit breathe in my own life, right. So.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 1:10:47

I’d just say take the question to Acts. And that it's probably got three parts, but a question, which is, pay attention to what Acts is saying about Jesus, and about the Spirit, and about the church.

**Karin Peter** 1:11:09

Okay, so, some challenging words as we go forward and look at Acts. So, I found a quote I wanted to close this episode with and it's from a feminist theologian, her name is Virginia Mollenkott, and she's a prolific author. She was an English professor and LGBTQ+ advocate, and this is what she said. I think it fits our conversation about Acts today. “Because I am a Christian, and because I think my own family of faith needs to learn inclusiveness, perhaps more than any other, I must now utilize specifically Christian terminology, and here it is. It is my conviction that a conscious cooperation, infused with the Holy Spirit, calls us toward an all-inclusive attitude, a theology of the wind, a relationship to God in the world that does not try to make things easy by ruling out whole areas of human experience, and whole groups of human beings. This leads us not just to the wholeness of Christ's Body, the Church, but also to our own internal wholeness.” So, I think that's a good description of our conversation today. And so, we thank Virginia Mollenkott for that quote. That was out of *Imagining the Word*, the second volume. And with that, what's our next episode? Are we moving into Paul's letters?

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 1:12:45

We are. Hold on to that, Karin. We're moving into Paul. And I think that we’ve decided which book we're going to move into next. I think we're going to do I Corinthians which is full, I Corinthians is going to be, kind of, like, a, the Hellenistic world giving us a full frontal. Let's put it that way.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 1:13:09

Oh, dear.

**Karin Peter** 1:13:10

Oh, is this the one with the temples with the naughty things going on? Is that I Corinthians?

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 1:13:15

Yes, yes, right, right. We're gonna step into the most fun city in the Greco-Roman world.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 1:13:23

And, one of the most dysfunctional churches [inaudible].

**Karin Peter** 1:13:26

So, this is the, what happens in Corinth stays in Corinth episode.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 1:13:29

This is that one, exactly.

**Karin Peter** 1:13:31

Excellent, okay. Well, maybe I can more fully tolerate Paul if we're going to at least have some fun with the conversation. So, with that in mind, thank you again for being our guides through the New Testament, Tony and Charmaine, and I'm Karin Peter. This is *Project Zion Podcast,* part of “New’brew”, our series on the New Testament. And thanks so much for listening.

**Josh Mangelson** 1:14:01

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