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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.

Robin Linkhart 00:34

Hello, and welcome to Project Zion Podcast. This is your host, Robin Linkhart. And today is another episode under our Fair Trade series, where we discuss faith transitions and people share about their journey of faith and what brought them to Community of Christ. Today, our guest is Andy Fernuik, an incredibly gifted young man of many talents: linguist, actor, artist, musician, ski instructor, scuba diver, fencer, creator of divine culinary delights, and the list goes on. Welcome, Andy. Thanks so much for being with us today.

Andy Fernuik 01:16

Hello Love, good to be here. Good to be with you. Thank you.

Robin Linkhart 01:21

To start us off, Andy, could you please share a little bit about yourself with our listeners, and then we will jump into learning more about your journey of faith.

Andy Fernuik 01:32

Thank you for asking. I knew you're gonna spring something like this on me. You gave me a list of questions that might be asked so I could prepare the other day and I was looking over it. This is the one thing that's escaped me until just moments ago and I thought, oh, she's gonna ask me about myself. Oh, this is the hardest question. Thank you for that marvelous we introduction. Oh, man. You know, I commonly talk to a lot of people, and they say, "How old are you? You've had two or three lifetimes in only half a lifetime." It's been an amazing journey lived on multiple continents and work there. A number of times, I lived from New York to LA, originally from Texas. Few people believe that, but it's true. I'm not sure what else to add. I'd rather talk about the list of wonderful questions that you've gotten prepared for us and talk about some of these other subjects than me. It seems that in my life, if there's one thing that I look at, it's a reflection to me of the great miracles that the Creator can achieve, in even a simple life, anyone's life. I'm nobody special, and certainly nobody at all in terms of how the world likes to give self-worth and praise and such, but in a relationship with my Creator, I find great value and great miracle and great achievement in it, to the degree that surprises me. And then I look and say there's no other way that this could come about. I could not have had the life that I've had and perhaps will have the life I will continue to have without my maker unfolding the way before me.

Robin Linkhart 03:39

Okay, let's just get right to it. I would like you to share a little bit about what faith looked like when you were growing up.

Andy Fernuik 03:52

The first thing I laugh at is that when I was growing up, I still feel like I'm growing up quite a bit. So, the early years. I was born into the Restoration Movement. From the very beginning I heard stories of Joseph Smith and of living prophets. I had the scriptures talk to me, Bible, New Testament and Old Testament, Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants. Religion was a very central part of my life because of family choices, and the community that it created, the religious community to which I belonged in those formative years. What did it look like? That's a very good question because it changes perspective. Over time I discover new elements. I see new dimensions of what the formative years were and what faith meant to me growing up. It was very formulaic, but a lot of things are, whatever the subject matter, whether it be religion, or going to grade school and learning algebra and English and grammar and all of these things that we learn if we're learning a trade. At the beginning, everything seems to be a bit formulaic. There are lessons. There is memorization. There's kind of a plan laid out. We go to college even. And here's the rubric. This is what you must learn and study and do. Here are your requirements. Check the boxes when you get them done and here's the results. In that sense, faith looked a lot like that to me growing up.

In those early years, everything, because I was a boy, led me to the mission. When I was 19, there was a big mission awaiting me. I'd say goodbye to everyone and go for two years and give up everything and serve God. After that, you know that there wasn't necessarily a solid plan, other than the idea to get married, start your own family and continue a life of service in the church and for other people in the whole world. So again, very formulaic. Quite a plan laid out. Check the boxes when they're done. But that's not necessarily a bad thing. That's why I say, it's like so many other things we learn, I'm trying very hard not to be critical, because it's easy to be critical of any system, of which I'm apart, I suppose. But there are so many good elements that came from that, that still blessed my life and shaped my life. Most of all, it's the grace of God and the Spirit that illuminates me to those great mysteries and shows me and teaches me every step of the way.

Let me give you an example. Even this morning, as I'm sitting here thinking, how can I best answer this question? I could give distinct details. But if I did that, it would take 20 years of my life to go through and we don't have 20 years of a podcast here. So, I was thinking, what is it that most defines my faith in those formative years? This is what I find so powerful, and important in my life, more than any faith, any church, any religion, any doctrine, is the power, the living power of Jesus Christ and His Spirit working in the world today. In my life specifically, I was confused. I didn't know what to say about those years. I reached out to God's Spirit, and asked what do I say, how do I respond? In our day and age, we can say it's like a computer upload or download, there was this instant moment, how the Spirit works often with me, there aren't words even, there's just this beautiful illumination, this download of information and feeling and emotion and vision that come all in one moment. And it takes time afterwards to even sort it out, to learn from that and to examine it. What I was given this morning was very simple, and yet very special and profound to me. I said, "What do I say? What was it like?" I'm still trying to figure out what it was like. I knew in the moment, as the Spirit told me, "It was like my life, Andy." Now those weren't the exact words, but it gave me perspective on the life of Jesus Christ.

He was born into a system that was in place. He was a Jew. Now, I'm not Jewish. I wasn't born into a Jewish system. But there were rules and scriptures to memorize. There were teachings. There were

leaders of his church. There was a prescribed route to becoming a rabbi, things that you had to do, rites and rituals, requirements, and merit badges you had to pass to become a rabbi within that community. So just like Jesus, he was given a community as he entered the world, so was I. I was given a spiritual community to be a part of a faith community that was essential for my own training and preparation, it gave me many truths. I'm thinking of it now. And I would say it's kind of like a recipe for cooking, maybe we're making a cake or cookies or something, cupcakes, and [using] the recipe you have to have certain ingredients in a balance to get the right product. Now imagine, any faith community can add to that recipe, can have more ingredients than you need. Or it might not be so explicit on the balance of ingredients that are essential, but they are included in there. And there has to be a bit of experimentation in one's own life to be able to get that balance, right? You have to try it out a few times and say, "Whoa, way too much salt in that one, that did not work out." Why do I need all these other ingredients? Let's get rid of those poblano pancake spices. Why do I need poblano pancake spices? What am I going to use that for? You know, that doesn't go into cupcakes. So, you've got to weed through a bit and look. Much in the same way, this is why the story of Jesus, and his life is such a miracle to me, because at every step and at every turn it removes my shame, it removes my doubt, it gives me connection with the Creator of the universe who came down, took human form, and lived out the human story. One very much like mine. And he shows me, this is what happens to so many of us, whether it be Baptist or Catholic or Buddhist or Taoist or any kind of spiritual community and system of theology. It is a framework under which we can develop, and this is what was given to me. Without getting into too many details of what was good about it and what was bad about it, it gave me the necessary elements to be able to understand what is this concept of God? How does one pray? How does one study scriptures? How does one develop any kind of spiritual discipline in one's life? Does that give at least some answered your questions there? Is that satisfactory? If at any time it's unsatisfactory, you stop me and say, "No, I must have more information."

Robin Linkhart 12:42

Indeed, it was wonderful. I really appreciate that. I like the analogy with a cupcake. I knew there was some reason why I needed to eat a cupcake today before we did this interview.

Andy Fernuik 12:55

Did you? Oh, good on you. Best way to prepare for an interview.

Robin Linkhart 12:59

I knew you'd love that. So, when you begin to get a little older, maybe late teens early 20s, how did you come to question the religious understandings passed on to you through your family heritage? And maybe those questions emerged earlier than that?

Andy Fernuik 13:21

Oh, thank you. Brilliant. You're just full of brilliant questions, aren't you? Yeah, all the right questions. Just like with most formulae, that formulaic approach does not satisfy. I find there's no one formula that that fits everyone in this diverse, creationist world, everything living in it. There are so many differences. There are so many elements that are unsatisfying. Speaking of God, the Creator, there is no way of comprehending the full majesty and mystery of this character. And so, a formula will just never do. No, it'll never do, my dear. And this was my experience. The impetus primarily was in my own life. I had my

own secrets and questions. I was told that I was supposed to look forward to marrying a woman and having a family one day, but my own sexual attractions, my own orientation precluded that. From a very early age, I was told, and received the message, that there was something amiss with my creation, that it wasn't quite what was in God's plan, and for what God intended. There was such an emphasis in the faith community on eternal families as being the crowning element of God's glory and creation for all of eternity. But what was so hard about that was [that] in the same breath, I was told that this doesn't include you, or this is something you can look forward to after this life, after a resurrection. Still, that created a wrench in the gears, I suppose. But according to the formula, you know, if I still do everything, right, there's hope here, in my mind, as in many young men's minds, and maybe even young women's minds.

Let's go on this mission. Let's do everything to the letter. And let's see what miracles God can work. Maybe he will change my sexual attractions and orientation. This was a secret I kept, like many of us, for most of my life there. I remember in the missionary training center, I remember one day in a class, I was so disturbed. I couldn't hold back the tears any longer and I wept, and I wept, and I wept, because it disturbed me. Just because this is my interpretation of what was communicated and taught to me, does not mean it was the intention of the teachers, does not mean it was the published doctrine. This is the way it reached me through my human filters. And I realize for everyone, even within the same faith community, that can be vastly different. The message that had reached me was that unless people prescribed to the same checklist, to the same system of beliefs, and do the exact same things that I was taught, they could never achieve God's ultimate glory after this life. They would be limited. And I did not believe that. That disturbed me so much. I could not see how the God that I wanted to believe in, the one in my own heart that satisfied me, that was so incompatible with what and who I wanted God to be. Now we're getting into some dangerous ground. God is not who Andy wants him to be at all times. Certainly not. But there is that element of trusting my inner core being, my spirit that was made and created and brought into being by this creator that knows my Creator. And that is the place that [it] touched on and it did not feel right, it did not sit right in me.

My teacher at the time had to pull me aside and have a one-on-one visit with me. She was very enlightened in what she said. She told me that not everybody wants that. And it's okay. Again, the answer fully didn't satisfy me, but at least placated me to where I wasn't in hysterics, so shaken to my core and disturbed that this was the only way that God was going to save people or bring them back into his presence. What the real impetus was for questioning my religious understandings that were passed on to me through family heritage and through that faith community was [that] after my mission, I became very suicidal for a couple of years. I was in and out of the hospitals and locked away in Behavioral Medicine units. I had dozens of cocktails of psychotropics shoved in me. I was even forced into electro convulsive therapy, treatments, and such. All this while trying to attend school at university and my world was falling apart.

I had some enlightened bishops and counselors at the time that helped move me through the desire to end my life. They shared a lot of wisdom with me. One was a Mormon bishop who said, Andy, "What's worse in God's eyes, killing yourself or loving someone else? Killing or loving, whoever that person is? Man or woman or neither or both?" And it got me thinking, well, in that sense, sure, killing or loving. To me, it's obvious. God doesn't want me to kill myself. Let's try this other way. Let's see what there is. I

had a therapist that worked for BYU. Had a couple of therapists. One of them told me, "If going to church is the most spiritually draining and emotionally exhausting and depleting part of your week and your life, don't go." And I thought, well, you're employed by BYU here and you're telling me not to go. I'll lose my ecclesiastical endorsement. I have to go. He said, "There are ways around that. We can work that out. It's not a problem. What's most important is that you find peace." And these beautiful, enlightened souls helped guide me to empowering myself to make my own decisions and find my own walk with God, leaving prescription religion behind me.

The main point of this story, when I really started to question though, was a few years after my own suicidal tendencies had subsided, and I was learning to live and enjoy and love life, I noticed that in many ways, without those restrictions of fitting God into very specific boxes and categories and formulate of how God's going to show up in your life, I could find God. I could listen better. I was more open to the miracle and mystery of God showing up, however God wanted to in my life. So no longer is Andy trying to prescribe who God is but is more respecting that God can show up in any way in any time and any place that God chooses. And that is God's right. And that is God's majesty, and God's power. And that is the truth. That is what started to happen.

And I noticed that I had little questions. I remember on my balcony one night saying, what is this whole gay thing? What is this gay, lesbian, bi that doesn't even satisfy me? These words, nobody has any answers that satisfy. What is this about? And I got the very distinct impression, again, no words, just a download or an upload. That left me. If there are words, the words would be, this is about love. This is about seeing and understanding love on a much deeper level than just human gender. This is about other people in the world who cannot comprehend this, being able to see past the current mortal confines and constructs that we have assigned and labeled to everything, thinking that we understand God's complex creation, and we just don't. I thought, okay, well, trust you. I don't see exactly how that's supposed to work. There are kids killing themselves. And that's what the pointed moment was for me, when so many of those I loved were beginning to struggle with these same questions and dabbling in suicide and planning suicide or self-harm, losing complete faith in any God, anywhere, becoming atheist. I saw this happening. And it broke my heart. It still does.

But I said to myself, alright, if God can care about tobacco on the floor in an 1800s church house, and give a response to a Prophet, Joseph Smith who cared to ask and listen, what do we do about tobacco on the floor, why are our church leaders not getting a similar response from God when it comes to what to do about all this suicide. The youth that are killing themselves. I became aware of the suicide statistics in the state where I was living at the time. I was in Utah. And I found out that for decades, even still, Utah has led the nation in young suicides, specifically young male suicides, ages 14 to 26. And I thought, are you kidding? Why, the God I believe in does not care more about tobacco on the floor in the 1800s than he does about young lives in such despair, and such horror and self-loathing that they want to kill themselves. That does not make sense to me. That is not the God I believe in. Where is this God today? And I tell you, that God lives, and he exists, the one that cares infinitely more about young lives than he does about tobacco on the floor of an 1800s meeting house. That got me to question a lot, the concept of continuing revelation, and all I could see around me in the community at the time, was the desperate need, a long overdue need, for concurrent revelation. And we need

answers. We've needed answers for a while. Where are they? Does that answer your question, my dear, at least satisfactory? Okay.

Robin Linkhart 26:08

Yes, yes, yes, yes. I love what you're sharing about how the impression of God's voice to you is about love, not just about whatever we might bring to God, in your case, not just about gender. That's a captivating understanding of God and really helps us zero in on the nature of God. So, you have all this kind of rumbling around, some major, major life events and big questions. So how did it happen that you encountered Community of Christ?

Andy Fernuik 26:52

Ah, oh, I love that question. Again, I'd have to say my answer would be more along the lines of how I encountered the living God, Jesus Christ, in my life then necessarily how did I encounter Community of Christ. That was part of it, but far more important to me, I don't believe as I was taught early in life about a one true church, and many of us were, many of us were regardless of the faith community in which we found ourselves, to me, I cannot subscribe to that belief anymore. For me, the miracle has been much like all the prophets of old that I can read about in Scripture, Old Testament, New Testament, Book of Mormon, even in Doctrine and Covenants. It's about encounters with God, the real living God, wherever I find him, and trying to follow where he leads me, Jesus Christ. I asked these questions that I had just mentioned. I said, "What do we do? What's to be done? Why are all these people killing themselves? Why was I trying for so long to kill myself? This is not your will for your creation. I know this. What is going on?"

Now, I can't tell you exactly why or what was different about my questions in my prayers to this God at that time. I tell you; I've shaken my fist enough at the heavens over the years. I've blamed family. I've blamed church. I've blamed parents. I've blamed myself. I've blamed God. I've gone through many phases of faith, I suppose, but this time, for whatever reason, the best I can say is that there had to be a moment where I had to remove my ego and I had to be totally authentic. That's a better way of saying I had to reach down to my very depths. And sometimes I've prayed that way as well, I think and feel that I have, and haven't received the same sort of response. But to be clear, the answers that I got, and I'm not saying that I got answers that are for everyone in the world, [but] they were answers that satisfied me. I was so impressed growing up with the story of Joseph Smith, and still am, that a 14-year-old boy, a nobody from nowhere in particular, very little education, very little reason to go on a faith hunt other than for his own soul and his own satisfaction. It wasn't for his own monetary gain. It wasn't to impress anyone. He just had deep questions, and he wanted answers, and no one could give them to him. None of his religious leaders, none of the teachings of churches or faith communities that his time could satisfy. He was left unsatisfied. I mean, everybody had answers, it seemed, right. But, but none of them satisfied him. And this was much very much my story.

Everybody seems to have different answers in the world, in religious communities, outside of religious communities. Everybody's got an answer, you know, but nothing satisfied. And so, to be clear, the answers that I received, I'm not saying that they're for everyone. I'm not saying that I'm called to give the answers that oh, how arrogant that would be. No, I got answers from my Creator, about my creation and who I am. That satisfied me. And they weren't just answers that were terminal. This is not

how I find God works in my life, not the living God I've come to know. Much like Joseph Smith asking about, you know, the tobacco on the floor. What do we do about it? Well, he didn't just get an answer about tobacco on the floor, it was an answer within a much bigger picture that probably left him with additional questions. You know, it was about a whole system of health and well-being and an opportunity to get to know God and who God is. God also spoke to, in the Book of Mormon, another prophet, the brother of Jared, who asks, this character said, "Okay, we got a problem, we need some light, you've given us all of these plans and details for building airtight waterproof ships that are going to carry us to a promised land." What's interesting to me is the detail of this story. God gave them every detail, but one. They're like a recipe. I've heard people do that with recipes. Here's everything you need, but they omit one of the ingredients so it's not quite the same. That's not exactly what's going on here, but God gives every detail. God knows they're going to need light in these ships to cross the ocean, but he leaves that out on purpose. And of course, the brother Jared comes up with this [concern]. And I'm sure everyone that was working on the project had the same idea, 'Hey, we need some light, there's no light getting in.'

Alright, well, he goes back to [unclear word], what do we do about light. And what I love is that I learned so much about God's interactions with humanity and how I can develop that relationship in my life. God gives him the intelligence to be able to come up with a solution on his own. "What do you think?" He gives it some thought and says, "We've got these stones that I've taken out of the mountain and formed here, will you touch them and make them glow?" That, to me, is pretty incredible. What I like about it is, it's something that no one else can do. There's only one character in all of this story that can do that and that's the Eternal Creator, God, who can touch a stone and make it glow. It seems right in line with who God is and what God's gonna do and grants him that miracle. At the end of it he doesn't say, "Thanks for touching the stones. Got my stones. See you later." No, he doesn't. He falls on his face and he's on to 10 new questions. He says, "You've got a hand. What does this mean?"

The answer he gets is part of a much bigger picture. God always includes a much bigger vision and perspective when answering my prayers and my questions that I bring to the Eternal One. So, I asked these questions. I got a bunch of answers. Initially my reaction was, it's all true. It's all true. I couldn't believe it, so much of what I was taught, there is a God. God is alive. You can interact with this being. Jesus is real. I just wanted to scream or go running through the world and tell everybody, [especially] those closest to me, particularly one person who was struggling with his own sexuality and identity, a very dear friend of mine, somebody I love very deeply to this day, [who] had those same questions. I could see it was consuming him. I wanted nothing more than to share this with him. And I couldn't, I couldn't get the message across.

I felt I needed to start writing. So, I started writing. As I wrote, I also felt I should be looking through the scriptures for answers. The impression came to me that, this God, who has done this thing to the world, who has created individuals that do not fit into the norm, these outcasts, those that don't fit into the formula of marriage and family as it's prescribed by humans, God had to know what he was going to do and what was going to happen long before this ever started happening. So where is this in the scriptures? Where can I find more information?

I started to glean in the Old Testament, New Testament, Doctrine and Covenants, and Book of Mormon. This is what's really fun. The power of the Spirit brings such illumination that verses I had memorized throughout my formative years, is one way my early faith community continues to bless me. I've never been part of another faith community that has been so into memorizing and studying the scriptures, but it doesn't mean that I had the right Spirit in my own being to illuminate their meaning and their purpose in my life. As I was gleaning and reading and searching for any kind of answer I could find, I got more answers than I had ever seen before. I thought the scriptures are full of this very topic. They're full of this very topic and I had to write about it. I kept writing and writing and by the time I was finished writing, I looked, and I said, "Well, I have a book." Then there was a lot of editing. When I was done, suddenly out of nowhere, there were all kinds of opportunities to share it, most notably with the leaders of my childhood faith community. I was called a number of times to Salt Lake and even got to meet with several key individuals.

We got to speak about these things and have very deep and beautiful discussions. It was mutually edifying. The Spirit was present, and I learned a great many things about the community in which I grew up. I also started to see a different vision take shape. I published on April 13, 2010. There are just so many elements of this story, so many details I'm going to have to leave out, such as the whole process of writing and publishing was much like I suppose Nephi being told to build the ship, to take his family from the Holy Land in ancient times across the seas to a new promised land and save them before Jerusalem's destruction. He'd never built a ship before you know, and the whole process and how long it took him and the things he had to learn, became a bit of a discipline that even further strengthened his relationship with the divine God. This was so for me. There were just so many details and elements along the way that, that were the elements for God revealing God's self to me in greater detail and who this character God is, drawing me closer to, my savior Jesus Christ and his real living power in our world. Now I'd published on April 13, 2010. It was about five, six weeks later that I was on my little fire escape balcony in New York City, in Washington Heights. I was looking over the skyline downtown and my mind was totally clear, and I was at complete peace.

It's been a while since I'd felt that peace. It was an emptiness from all the chaos of life and everything that didn't matter had then been filled completely with peace, peaceful existence. No cares or concerns. No, it wasn't ecstatic joy. It was just full, deep peace. The sun was reflecting off the downtown skyline, all the buildings in this golden late afternoon, early evening light. It was just perfect. It was simple light. Right in the middle of that peace, came the instant download, the words were Reorganized Church. Reorganized Church, what does that have to do with anything? I wiped them away. I thought, well, that was weird. Again, after another moment, Reorganized Church, pre-Reorg. What's Reorganized Church? Again, I wiped it away and thought, oh, I'm not going to think about that. Again, Reorganized Church, I thought, oh, something's going on here. What is this Reorganized Church? I think the only recollection I have of them was as a small boy because I remember looking up at almost a 90-degree angle at some adult's face. That look was looking down at me, chin to chest and saying, "oh, that's the Reorganized Church," kind of rolling eyes, as if they were saying, "Oh, those are the crazies, you know." And I had never once again thought of the Reorganized Church for all those years in between. I'm thinking, well, how unfair is that, that I allowed somebody that early on in my life to transmit a belief or a perspective to me that I held on to all these years. I don't believe that way. Wait, wait a minute, Reorganized Church? Why does somebody reorganize?

Obviously, if you're going to go to that kind of trouble, you're going to have a very good reason for reorganizing. And then I thought, well, why don't I find out. Now I'm curious, why did somebody reorganize the church? They have the same beginnings that I do, so many similarities as to those that I have in my life, belief in Joseph Smith, in the Restoration, Book of Mormon, and Scriptures, Doctrine and Covenants. Okay, I'm gonna have to answer this question. So, I jumped inside my room from the fire escape, and I started researching online. It's hard to describe what happened next, floodgates of heaven, of light and knowledge, just started to pour out faster than I could receive it. I went online and I found the Community of Christ website. I didn't know that they had changed their name to Community of Christ, and immediately, when I learned that, I remembered the start of this thread. It has been unending ever since. And I thought, what a gorgeous thing. I remembered being on my mission in Italy. As soon as people would hear the word "church," they would run screaming the other direction. It was a relationship killer. People did not want church. They were so demoralized and ostracized by church of any kind. Church was a poisonous word on my mission in Italy. I started to see a bigger picture, how [for] many people throughout the world, even the simple word "church" had been removed from the name of this organization, Community of Christ.

Immediately, without even knowing more about Community of Christ, I thought that's what I believe in, a community of all Christians, whether the individual church organization is called Community of Christ, or whether it's talking about the greater community of Christians at large, an entire community of diverse faith and faith traditions who still call on the name of Christ. There is one true Christ. I don't believe there's one true church, but there is one true Christ. That I know, and that I'd come to know. The process of writing that book really helped me sift through all of the terms coming to me gratuitously, the extra, the unnecessary, the everything that I had been given as part of my human filters. That was not me. It helped me distill my own beliefs into written pages that I could reflect upon and say, "This is me, this is what I believe. This is what life has taught me, this is what God has taught me. And these are the things I believe." And as I started to see them, reflected on a faith community, I did more research.

One of the elements that I was pretty impressed with was the emphasis on peace. Because in my own scripture study, the Spirit impressed upon me - Isaiah is writing that Christ is called the Prince of Peace. Isaiah describes the new and everlasting covenant. I had been taught that the new and everlasting covenant was a covenant of eternal marriage and that did not satisfy me, it disturbed me, especially because I was not to be included in that eternal, everlasting covenant. I found out in my own writing that Isaiah calls Christ, the Prince of Peace, and that the new and everlasting covenant is a covenant of peace in Jesus Christ. And I found that reflected in the faith community online as I'm doing my research. This is all in the same night. It was just one thing after another. I was so excited [with] what I was discovering that I had to go online, to the directory and start calling on anybody I could find. So, I started calling one number after another. Nobody was answering. The first person that answered was a Mission Center president out of Pittsburgh by the name of Cindy Christian. She was the first one that answered. She said, "Well, isn't this a surprise, all my plans just fell through in the last half hour." It was a Friday night. She said, "I'm sitting here in the dark, my husband's gone doing his thing, my children out, and I was wondering what I was going to do, and the phone rang, and it's you." We spoke for a couple of hours. I immediately demanded and said, "send me the missionaries.," [She said] "Well,

you know, our missionaries respond more to natural disasters and help build communities who are struggling. We don't have a proselytizing missionary force like you're used to in your faith community." I had never heard words [like those] up until then, so beautiful, that were spoken about my faith community. I wept and I told her, I wished the members of my faith community would speak about others with that same depth of reverence and admiration.

Again, it's not about a true church. It's about knowing the true and living Christ. And there are people everywhere, part of every faith community that I found that know and have a relationship with the true and living God, Jesus Christ. And that's evident by their fruits, you shall know them. I was so drawn to this community, that by the end of the night and the discussion, Cindy Christian said, "Let me send you a document, a very special document. We were just at a World Conference. And we have decided to include this in our Doctrine and Covenants." She sent me an email with an attachment PDF version of Doctrine and Covenants, Section 164. I always wanted to feel that sensation that I'd read about in the Book of Mormon, of people who had heard God's voice that had shaken them to the ground, and they could not even stand on their own two feet. It was so powerful. And it's not even a voice that they heard with their human, mortal ears. It was a voice of the one who made them, who brought them into being, the kind of power that only a being like that can demonstrate. And this was the voice that spoke to me as I opened and read that document.

As I poured over other sections of Doctrine and Covenants, recent sections in the last 25 years, 163, 162, 161, I felt that I had found a community in this group that was hearing many of the things that I was hearing from my Creator. I felt that I was hearing the voice of a living and modern revelation that I had so longed for. All these questions that I'd had about, well, we need answers. Where's the modern revelation? We say we believe in it. Where is the living modern revelation, streaming from the Divine One on high that we can put into practice? We have so many questions about pollution, about human sexuality, about our lives and the world we live in. Where is the guidance, as clear and distinct as getting an answer about tobacco on the floor? What do we do? And here it is. I had no idea. Came to find out Doctrine and Covenants, [Section] 164, was published at the exact same time that I was publishing my own book describing human relationships and sacramental living. Mine is a mirror, echo of the distilled and beautiful, perfect version. Well, I say perfect. Nothing humans do and bring into being is as perfect as the God who inspires it, but I found that what I had been writing about is reflected in the Doctrine and Covenants by a group that I had no idea was even in existence today. Maybe that answers a few questions of how I'd first heard about Community of Christ and a bit of my own faith transition story into that group.

You know, I have to warn anybody, it's another human organization that has its own issues. It's not a perfect group or organization. But it has provided for me, it's still a struggle, but those are the struggles I find in my own life that challenge my ego, that helped me face myself, both to love myself and to better myself. This is the community that has primarily allowed that for me. When I came into Community of Christ, I noticed many things. The floodgates were still open and just streaming. Immediately after this, I looked up where the nearest congregation was. There was no such thing at the time in Manhattan, so I found one in Ridgewood, New Jersey. Boy, I'm on the first bus out there, next Sunday, and nobody was there. Well, come to find out that it was in the middle of the summer [and] a lot of people were on vacations and traveling and there really wasn't [going to be enough] of the

group present that they decided [not] to hold a meeting that Sunday. I happen upon a locked congregation. I'm walking around the building. I'm noticing all kinds of things. What a lovely old meeting house. It is turn of the century. I get back on the bus. I go home. Next Sunday, I'm on another bus going out there crossing the George Washington Bridge and heading out into New Jersey to Ridgewood. I get there, this time there are people there, not many, but they greeted me incredibly gregariously, very warmly, instantly, as one of them. Again, the fine threads of little things that happen that don't mean so much to everyone else, but they mean infinite dimensions inside of me, the way that God connects and speaks to me.

My grandmother, my dad's mom was Russian. She was born in Shanghai and Manchuria, grew up in these cities, post Russian Revolution, in an orphanage, [her] family was killed. Who knows about much of the revolution and what happened, but there were so many Russians from the gulag units that escaped China and anywhere they could find. She grew up there. In the mid-20s she came to the US. She was very strongly rooted in her Russian Orthodox traditions. She held fast to them, loved crosses, loved their mode of worship, [where she] would stand. The few times I've been to Russian Orthodox faith [churches], there were no pews. Everyone stood and sang for the whole service. She would often tell me your parents want me to join their church. She said, "I'm not going to because for one thing, you just don't sing enough." You know, it was beautiful, my little Russian grandmother. She was such an important part of my formative years. No one would understand how special it was when that congregation in Ridgewood, New Jersey chose Russian hymns from their hymnal to sing that day, as well as, *The Spirit of God, Like a Fire Is Burning*, one that was from my own beloved childhood faith community. And the way that the Spirit came to me and spoke to me, in those moments, not, I guarantee the rest of the congregation didn't feel the same way I did and have that experience. Those are the thousand infinitesimal threads that weave together to form testimony. It's not just one major experience, it's thousands of little breaths we take with the Spirit and each one that weaves together, meaning in a relationship with Jesus Christ. They are ways that God testifies and proves to me that I am His creation. I was made by Him. He knows me. He knows me better than I know myself and he is there. And he is with me through every breath, every day, every year of my life, every step I take.

There are too many of those to share in the scope of this program. Robin, what do I do? Where do I start? Where do I go from here? I remember that same day, though. On that first Sunday, afterwards, when we were visiting, I saw [something] posted on their bulletin, a little cork board near the exit. I said, "Oh, what's this building?" They said, "Oh, that's our temple, Community of Christ Temple in Independence, Missouri. Have you been?" No, I've never been. Of course, from my own faith tradition, we had many temples around the world. So, I asked questions. I said, "Well, what do you do there? You know, what? Do you perform eternal marriages? Do you have baptisms for the dead? Do you do anything?" They said, "No, the primary purpose for the temple is as a sanctuary for peace. It is a symbol of peace in all the world of God's peace for all of us. It is dedicated to have a prayer for peace every day of the year, and every day of the year a different nation is remembered. I said, "Well, who gets to go in? Do you have to have a recommend? Do you have to pass an interview?" They said, "No, anyone who wants to is welcome to enter and to feel the peace of God."

Now, in my studies, as I was writing, there was a very important section I found that the Spirit impressed upon me. Isaiah wrote this is what Christ said, when he touched down in the American

continent, in the Book of Mormon, he admonished everyone and said study the words of Isaiah. He says, "For great are the words of Isaiah and everything he prophesied will come to pass." Nephi wrote, even quoted some Isaiah, many prophets did, there were a lot of prophets [who did]. Jesus, even in the New Testament, highlighted Isaiah when Jesus announced his own mission in mortality to the world. He chose to do so by reading from the prophecies and scrolls [of Isaiah] in the synagogue. Isaiah kept popping up in all my study. I said, "So who is this Isaiah?" I was with a business client at the time in Manhattan, and I had taken her by the LDS temple, excuse me, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saint temple, near Lincoln Center, a beautiful building, but the temple worker who greeted us on the way in was baring testimonies about the Book of Mormon. And she had said to my client, who was from Colombia, I think, told her, "Oh, but you can skip over all the parts of the Book of Mormon where they quote Isaiah, because no one really understands them." I was disturbed by that. I thought, well, why is it that Jesus and Nephi, and so many of the others, tell us study Isaiah? It's very important. So, I delved deeper into Isaiah, and I found a very important section, an entire section, chapter 56 of Isaiah, that God makes many promises and prophecies to the eunuchs and the sons of the stranger.

Now, if we're talking hundreds of years before Jesus even, and I'm in that society, I thought, I don't like to be called the eunuch. But honestly, the words we have nowadays don't satisfy me either. You know, gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans and LGBTQ. LGBTQIA, I don't know if that's even current anymore. But they don't satisfy me. They just do not satisfy me, more human labels. And so, the word eunuch, I thought, well, that doesn't satisfy either. But if I'm living at the time of Isaiah, that might be the best word I have to describe who I am. Did Isaiah see me in vision and the Spirit, yes? So, you and everyone that has come to the earth, which was part of the gifts he had, and he got to prophesy. That was his calling. And he made an entire section on promises from God, and prophecies to the eunuch and the sons of the stranger. He says, "even them, will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer, their sacrifices and their burnt offerings shall be accepted upon my altar. For mine house, shall be called a house of prayer for all people." I hoped for that. I prayed for that. I believed that even when I could not see it anywhere or find it in the world around me. That was one of those moments where God touched my heart and gave me such beautiful hope through His Spirit. And I prayed for that.

And so that day in Ridgewood, New Jersey, where they're describing the temple to me, they told me that the temple in Independence, the Community of Christ Temple, was a place for prayer for peace, and that it was open to all people. And my question was, well, it's a linguistic question I had to Isaiah, was it an house of prayer that is for all people? The house of prayers for all people? Or is it an house of prayer for all people where the prayer is for all people? You see the linguistic ambiguity there. And come to find out the way that it was answered and presented to me that day, I knew in my heart and Spirit testified, "See my house is a house of prayer for all people, the house is for all people. And the prayer is also for all people." There are just infinite ways that the Spirit has responded to my prayer, even in ways that I didn't even know to ask God. God has provided for me, every step of the way. With every answer I get, there are 10 new questions. The answer is so satisfying, that it propels me on. This is part of what I've come to learn and understand is the great mystery and majesty of the true and living God, Jesus Christ. There's no end to that relationship. It's just a glimpse I have of eternal life, of the satisfaction, and the fulfillment that I experience in His presence and the presence of His Spirit.

Anyway, have we come close to answering that question for you? (Robin: We are doing so well.) Good, excellent.

Robin Linkhart 1:04:55

I really appreciate the way you phrased this, not about a one true church. It is about a true and loving Christ. And that just continues to reverberate through all the words and story of your journey of faith over and over again, that fine thread of things that may not matter to anyone else, how they weave together to form testimonies, how God places things in our life or connects God's Holy Spirit connects with us individually in ways that are deeply meaningful to us in the context of our lives. At the same moment, others around us, standing in the same place have no awareness of that. And yet, I am certain that the Holy Spirit does that for them as well and in different ways that are particular to them and their story. So, I happen to know, Andy, I'm just following along on your timeline here, that it took two times to get into the building where the church was gathered and it wasn't that long after that you were baptized and then confirmed, so what happened in between when you get to meet the people there and then you take the plunge, quite literally. What happened between those two points?

Andy Fernuik 1:06:36

Of course, I continued investigating published beliefs. I really connect with Peter who jumped out of the boat. We know that Christ walks out to the boat on the sea and calms the waters and here Peter's jumping out of the boat before he fully comprehends what is required to walk on water. What's going on? He's just like, oh, I'm gonna go out to meet Jesus. I feel a little bit like that. I'm quite impetuous. I couldn't be stopped. I said baptize me. So, they're like, whoa, whoa, whoa, slow down. Let's make sure you really want to join our group first, which is very wise on their part. Much later I learned the history that a couple of decades before, they lost half of their numbers worldwide and in congregations because of their decision to include, or to recognize the priesthood giftedness that women wield in our world. God's own power, streaming through women, just as through men in ancient times, and that lost them half their congregations. Understanding deeper their perspective and history, I can't blame them for trying to get me to reconsider, but I thought, "Are you guys crazy? You are crazy. Baptize me, I said, there's a river right outside. We can go there now. Dunk me. Let's get it going. What are you waiting for? What do you need me to say?"

And do you know Robin what happened? In the almost nine years that this has been, I cannot give you even the tiniest part of scope of all the details of how God has revealed Jesus Christ to me in my life, how I've met Jesus Christ, but it is so real what has happened to me. Every step of the way since those first encounters, God's Spirit has come to teach me, and still teaches me, and changing my perspective on how he was walking with me every step of the way, even when I didn't think he was, even in my own faith community growing up where I felt so separated from him. All I can do is say to you that I get it when Paul says he was knocked off his horse, and he went blind, and it changed his whole life. His whole life. [It changed his life] when Joseph Smith said he saw a vision of God the Father, Jesus Christ, he encountered divinity, in person, in front of him and could not deny it. When he says he saw angels, when any prophet of the ancient scriptures or modern scriptures has shared an experience of divine encounter, when somebody I meet for a brief moment of my life and never see again shares with me divine encounters, that has changed their life. That's what's happened to me. I will never be the same. I will seek for God, whether it's in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, whether it's in

Community of Christ, whether he leads me into a shoe store, if I find him there, I will join the shoe store until he leads me on to a new place. Christ prayed and said, "This is life eternal, that they might know You, the only true God and Jesus Christ who meets them." That is true. Wherever I find him, however, I find him.

Once you know, in your heart, you've met him, once you've been knocked off your horse and you go blind and then he heals you, once he appears to you in a grove of trees, once you see him walking on water as your boat is about to capsize in the night, how can you ever be the same? How can you ever seek for anything else? How can anything else matter even half as much as knowing and having new encounters with that God? Oh, it's the most delightful and frustrating thing in the whole world. And it is sometimes one of the most frustrating things because I still try and formulaically produce those encounters. It's been too long God, I need another, I need another encounter, I need you in my life. I need guidance and direction. I just need to be with you. I need to feel your Spirit.

Not that it changes everything about the circumstances of my life, but it sure changes my perspective. It sure changes the way I see myself from others. It is life without that light, without his Spirit, without his presence. That's the kind of encounter I'm talking about, however somebody has that, whether it be in a particular faith congregation. What I find most of all is like all the prophets that I've studied: Moses meets them out in the wilderness, Mount Sinai, in a burning bush that he doesn't even know he has to contemplate for the rest of his life. Was the bush really on fire? Did it just look like it was burning? Or was it really burning and just wasn't consumed? Joseph Smith, like who says, "Did I really see two different beings or one that was expressed as two different beings, which was it? Yeah, there are so many mysteries, even in the way that God does show up in my life. It will take the rest of my life and maybe even longer to fully comprehend the whole impact of that and the effect that it's had on my life, but I can guarantee you there is no denying that there is only one power that brought this earth and all life into being. There's only that one force, an entity that has power to show up in my life in that way. And that is what I live for. I love that. There's nothing like that. Nothing in this world can even compare. I can tell you though, community and faith community are very important. It's the unique way that Christ can make Himself known to us, through community, and it has been, despite the struggles of whatever faith community I belonged to. There are great blessings and unique ways that Christ shows up, manifests Himself in those circumstances, in those conditions.

In the faith community, I look for some very simple conditions. When I started to attend Community of Christ I attended in New York. I attended in Texas. I attended in California. I've attended in Utah and other places throughout the United States. When I was growing up, the faith community I was a part of would say, "Okay, Robin, you want to be part of us, here is what you have to do and change to be one of us." That was my experiences as I was growing up, here's what you need to do and change about your life to be one of us. But as soon as I entered Community of Christ, every step of the way, with very rare exception, my experience has been, "Okay, Robin, you want to be one of us here in Community of Christ? How does that change our entire community, just having you a part of it?" That is a condition. That, as is said in the Doctrine and Covenants, allows the Spirit to breath, allows the Spirit to move in all those ways that are undetectable to us, those that are very palpable and real to us and undeniable, and everywhere in between on that spectrum. Because that Spirit is so far beyond anything we can imagine, we've only begun to tap into its potential and capabilities in our lives to transform our lives.

God's own power, moving in the world to transform our very world. If we try and package it, if we try and prescribe it, if we give any kind of checklist and say, "This is what we have to do, it doesn't allow that." So, wherever that's found, whether it be in an AA meeting, whether it's in a quilting club, whether it's in a church, a faith community, that's what I look for. I look for those conditions. I keep getting off topic. Reign me in.

Robin Linkhart 1:16:59

It's so profound. I deeply appreciate the insights that you bring, this relationship with God and how God continues to invite us to go deeper in relationship. One thing you said, that just speaks volumes to me, speaks to the sense of universality that you have in your relationship with Christ. I think Community of Christ, in our journey as a people, we've gotten closer and closer to this understanding of Christ is the all of all, Christ is universal and how do we live in such a way that we can begin to break down these walls that divide us in countless ways. So, when you said, "Community is the unique way Christ makes Himself known to us," that gives me chills all over. It's through this community, this creating authentic community, wherever and however that happens. Christ will not be contained. God is not contained, in a sense of particulars, a box, if you will, or a building. God is this mystery that speaks to us and comes to us in all kinds of places and ways. But there is something about the mystery of God that lives so powerfully in the context of community, that human connection.

Andy Fernuik 1:18:41

Yeah, that's not that's not to deny in any way the one-on-one with God that is vital. As I started to say, Moses meets God in the burning bush in Mount Sinai. It wasn't in a synagogue. It wasn't in a temple. It was on Mount Sinai, right in the wilderness. Paul, he's on his way in the wilderness on the road. He's not in the temple or synagogue. He meets God there in a very powerful way. Joseph Smith, he's out in a grove of trees, alone, and meets God in the wilderness. Jesus, how many times does he dismiss himself from the masses to go be alone with God? He leaves and goes outside the city into the wilderness. He goes up onto a mountain and sends His disciples across on a boat and says he'll meet up with them. God leads him, Jesus, out into the wilderness for 40 days of fasting to be with God. There's this element that I learned from that, that God cannot be confined in any way, and I often meet him in the wilderness of my life, whether it's quite literally apart from the tangible world or whether it's in a place that I feel inside of me is a wilderness, that I am alone, despite being surrounded by people. Now, once that connection is there, there's also that connection through community, that unique way that God expresses himself, because I find, like ancient mariners, you couldn't just have one star in the sky [on which to rely], you have to have relative positioning, as well. And to really see God's expressions . . . , you know, you as a mother, you look at all your kids. Are your kids different?

Robin Linkhart 1:20:41

Oh, indeed, they are. Even identical twins are different.

Andy Fernuik 1:20:45

There you go, right! You have identical twins, even they are so different. I've met them, I've met your children, and they are so different. And in so many ways, they have a unique ability to enrich your life and your relationship, your relationship therefore is a tiny bit different with each one, it doesn't mean one's better than another one, it doesn't mean one's more special to you than another one. They're just

unique relationships, every one of them. And all of them together, even I'm sure at times, correct me if I'm wrong, have they reflected to you, yourself even, in ways over the years raising them?

Robin Linkhart 1:21:29

Yes, we do that for one another way, don't we, in a context of family and relationships.

Andy Fernuik 1:21:38

We do, I could imagine in the same way that we as creations of God, are each a different reflection, our true selves are individual reflections of the Creator that made us and therefore we've got to have all of us in community to be able to form a better understanding, picture of who this one God is, this one Creator, God. Christ prayed that we would all be one in the New Testament, when he was alive. He did this in the Book of Mormon. In the account that they have when he appeared to them, Christ prayed that we all be one, as he is one with the Father and one with the Spirit. They're all one. It's got to be for reasons, far beyond any of us. The glimpse that I start to see is [that] we need all of us to really form a more accurate picture of who this God is. There is such a unique expression of our creator in each one of us that we can only experience God in certain ways through community, [though it] doesn't mean that's the only way. So, if you're listening and you feel that you have no connection with any community, that does not preclude you from knowing God in any way. Correct me if I'm wrong, Robin, you have your own beautiful life and experiences to share, too.

Robin Linkhart 1:23:20

No, I concur with you 100%. It's a dance of relationships. So that relationship with God, our relationship, our individual relationship with God, the mystery of God, with Christ, Spirit, our relationship with ourselves in the context of that, and then our interconnectedness with all creation, so our relationship with other people, and that can look very different for different folks in different cultures and different contexts, different seasons of life and they're all part of that sense of one. As you say, Christ, prayed that we will all be one. What you're saying, as you describe it, I'm thinking of the Temple and Community of Christ, the way it's built to have this worshiper's path which draws us into the center of the sanctuary. And then we are sent out again and in very real ways, it's symbolic of that journey of relationship that we are called to draw into the center of being in relationship with God and that that relationship always sends us back out into the world to connect with humanity and all creation, not just the human part of creation, and that is a journey in and out, over and over again. And, of course, the different rhythms of our life, our own individual paths all take us on a different way of that functioning in our lives.

Andy Fernuik 1:25:00

Necessarily, I would say, yes, they necessarily take us on different ways. That reminds me of a couple of things. Isn't there in the Doctrine and Covenants a scripture [that] says, "Remember that the path of the disciple travels both inward and outward?" There's a balance I see that must be achieved, the deeper inward we go, the more expansive outward we can go and reach. Christ's life being the perfect example, again, the deeper he went inside of him to find his true self and his relationship with his maker, with our Creator, the deeper he went, the further outward he was able to reach in his own ministry.

Scripture has been used, especially in my life, to create a lot of discord, a lot of pain. I even call it, sometimes, spiritual genocide, the way that Scripture is used in our world, to diminish, to restrict and diminish and injure another human being. This is one way I love that the Spirit works is to heal and restore truth from scripture in my life. There was one section in particular, "Straight and narrow, be the way and few there be that find it." The interpretation that was given to me through the filter of my childhood was very painful. I thought, well, if God really loved us that much, you know, wouldn't he ensure that more of us could find it, especially when we're seeking and asking where, where is this one way? And how do we find it and get on it?

I remember one time I was hiking. I was living in Utah at the time. I was hiking up Mill Creek Canyon, one of my favorite places in the wilderness. I was alone. I went through this meadow up at the top of the canyon that opened from a grove of trees. I could smell the warmth of the sun in the air. As soon as I entered the meadow, the grasses were tall, almost up to my chest. As I was walking through it, I got to the other side and thought, look behind you, Andrew. So, I looked behind me. The grasses were just barely parted at the tops, you couldn't even see the ground, you could just see the path, the little winding path I'd taken through the meadow. I thought, well, that's interesting. And the Spirit came and said, "Now, would you call that a straight and narrow path?" I had studied linguistics and Italian and some Latin. I know that in the Italian Scriptures, the words that are used are *una via straighta angusta*. *Via straighta angusta* is a narrow, narrow path, straight in that old sense of linguistics. It is another way of saying straight that means narrow. The translation would be a narrow, narrow path. It doesn't mean that it's unbending necessarily. So, diving deeper into the linguistics, a narrow, narrow path [with] my understanding of it, the Spirit was saying would that be a narrow, narrow path. I said yes, that is a narrow, narrow path that is a very straight, narrow path. In the Spirit, again, another one of these instant downloads, I was given vision, understanding, greater perspective. I had to sort through it afterwards. I thought, oh, my goodness, of course. It's a straight narrow path because there's nobody else on it. I was the one making the path and few there be that find it. I look out in the world and few there are that trust themselves enough and the God that made them, to be able to carve out their own path.

Now, if there are lots of people on the path, if there were a lot of people walking through that meadow with me, they would have trampled down the grasses. It would not have been a narrow path. It would have been much wider, and it would have been obvious. I'm sure there would have been other people on the hike and say, "Look at that. That's obvious. Lots of people have gone there. Let's take that road." But why was it so straight and narrow? It was because I was the one that was carving the path.

How did I know that? Well, that's the point. I think in our own spirituality, to steal some words from my childhood faith community, if we are all going to fulfill the measure of our creation and fit into God's plan for making us and putting us here on this earth, if we're going to find true fulfillment and satisfaction in our creation and for why God made us and placed us in this one world, we have to I believe, this is not gospel or principle or anything, this is Andy speaking, we will have to get to a point where we trust and are in such a relationship with God, not a church, not a book of Scripture, not another human being, but one-on-one enough with God that we can carve out our own path and fulfill the measure of our creation, like Jesus. He was cast out of all his churches. He became a rabbi. He put in the work, did what he had to and then, all of a sudden, one day he's chased out by some faith community, they even wanted

to kill him because of the claims he was making as the Son of God, as the Messiah. A lot of people I talk to say, oh, Christ started the Christian church. Jesus was the first Christian. Well, technically, he was a Jew, but he had the courage to follow his own path that God led him on, to where there was a new creation, there was something new that came out of it.

Other people saw it, and they wanted to be a part of it. They wanted that same experience and followed him. As we were talking about earlier, there are checklists, but even after we graduate college, there's not always a checklist anymore, especially if you want to start your own business there's no checklist that tells you how you are going to absolutely succeed. You can get your degree by marking off all the boxes in the rubric, fulfill the requirements and bingo, get a degree. There's this [other] element. There is no handbook for you, Robin. There's no handbook for me, if I'm a unique creation and God has made me unlike anyone else to fulfill a purpose, just like he's done for all of us.

There's only one that can reveal that purpose to us. There's only one that can guide us and help us write the handbook for doing that. Getting to the point, no wonder there be few that find it and I don't see the world totally full of people that have come to that point. I know I haven't of living so closely in relationship with God, like Jesus Christ did, that I'm able to take every step and every breath to fulfill His purposes in my life and why I am here. That is the straight narrow that I'm looking for, that I'm trying to fulfill and find in my own life, the path that God has ordained me to carve out, the one that no one has carved before me. I think and believe that that is a potential that everyone has, the way that I've come to see it. Everyone has that type of a purpose to fulfill, being a unique and beautiful creation. That's for the whole community. We're talking about the oneness of creation. That's the level we have to get to, and I think ultimately is God's purpose in creating such diversity.

Robin Linkhart 1:33:50

Well, we are definitely going to have you back on Project Zion Podcast because there's so much to talk about. I do want to ask you one more question, and then we'll have to leave, bring this to a close. If you would, share your hopes and vision for Community of Christ as you think about this faith community, one of many faith communities, in our world, what hopes, and dreams or vision would you have?

Andy Fernuik 1:34:24

Thank you. Beautiful question. My hopes and dreams for the Community of Christ are that we continue to align ourselves in every way with God's purposes and plans in a way that we can fulfill his ancient prophecies and his modern prophecies and bring about his purposes on earth. It is one of the chief reasons why I've chosen to join myself with Community of Christ, and regardless of the struggles and the joys and the pains that come with being part of a community, with other human beings, I persist because I continue to find God's ancient prophecies for all of creation being fulfilled and brought to pass through this organization, not exclusively this organization, but truly this organization has, this church, the worldwide church has revealed more of these elements. To me, in my own journey, I see God alive in this community, and bringing about what he has promised to see them through for 1000s and 1000s of years. what he has spent so much time, and the lives of so many of those who have chosen to serve Him, and be His prophets, from ancient to modern times, I see their words coming to pass and being fulfilled in this organization, in this group. I hope and dream, and pray, that we continue that we can bring about . . . this is called Project Zion, correct? I hope and pray that we can continue

to work towards bringing about Zion and the community that God has described in God's own vision to one where there are no rich and there are no poor, where there are no sick and afflicted, and those that are without, where there are none that are marginalized and separated from God. It seems a little bit incredible to me, maybe to any of us living in the world that we do, but I hope for that, and I dream for that society, for that community, that worldwide community where the knowledge of God floods the earth, and saturates every heart and mind, the knowledge of the one, true God, whatever name we choose to have for that God, that every one of us, young and old, knows that God and can testify that that God loves me, and is active in my life, and in our world, because to me, there's nothing as satisfying as that relationship, and knowing that God, truly. That is eternal life to me. And my hopes and dreams are that this community can provide that environment that the Spirit can enter and touch everyone's life who wishes to have that experience and that relationship.

Robin Linkhart 1:38:07

That is a beautiful, beautiful hope and vision that speaks powerfully, not just to Community of Christ, but to all people. Thank you so much. Thank you for being with us today, Andy, for sharing a window into your life and your journey of faith, your relationship with God, and the deep love you have for all creation. I've known you for many years. I am very honored to call you friend and I really appreciate this opportunity to hear you share. So happy to be with you. I want to give a very special thanks to all our listeners. If you would like to learn more about Andy's journey, check out his book, *Dear Mr. Stevens, Letters of Love and of Hope*, available at amazon.com. If you want to hear more stories of faith, look for Fair Trade in the categories listed on our podcast website. This is your host, Robin Linkhart. You are listening to Project Zion Podcast. Go out and make the world a better place. Take care. Bye Bye.

Josh Mangelson 1:39:29

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