

3 | Redefining Faith Project Zion Podcast

Josh Mangelson 00:15

Project Zion Podcast explores the unique spiritual and theological gifts the restoration offers for today's world. We interview a wide variety of guests and panelists with roots in the restoration tradition from Community of Christ, and our friends in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. The music has been provided by Mark Abernathy. You can find his music at www.mark-abernathy.com.

Seth Bryant 00:56

Hello, I'm Seth Bryant, and this is project Zion. I'm excited to have our two guests, John Hamer, and Myles Fuller here to discuss redefining faith within the restoration. And we're actually recording before a live audience in the Salt Lake City Community of Christ. So this will be the one time that everyone can make some noise. You want to make some noise and show them I'm not lying. Alright, great. So this is going to be an exploration of how believers might navigate restoration faith apart from institutional definitions and the way that that faith is often defined culturally. And so for introductions John Hamer, you have appeared on just about every podcast that has to do with this sort of subject. So I'm going to invite you to introduce yourself and maybe give us something new that you haven't shared previously, if that's possible.

John Hamer 01:47

All right. Well, thank you for having me on your podcast. I'm excited about this podcast, this project. I've heard about it a lot. And yes, I have been on a lot of other podcasts before and so I have told my story a few times and to a few different panels. And so I'm just trying to think. So one of the things about me that I'm doing right now is that I'm Pastor which is like yourself or like Robin. It is functionally the equivalent of the bishop in an LDS Ward. I'm pastor in a Community of Christ congregation, the downtown congregation of Community of Christ in Toronto, and we are finishing up building a brand new building, and I'm really excited about it. It is two blocks away from where John Taylor was the very first pastor of the congregation back in 1834. This is right in the heart of the oldest part of the city of Toronto, and we're on the ground floor in a commercial condo, in a brand new 20 story tower, multi use tower. So it's in the best part of this, you know, like, destination place in the city, and I'm really excited about it. In terms of anything new to share, I was trying to think about this. Maybe I haven't ever had told people before in podcasts that I'm a huge Star Trek fan. And I'm actually launching my own podcast about how we can use Star Trek, you know, philosophy in order to explore gospel principles. So if you're excited about that ...

Seth Bryant 03:19

I'm incredibly excited about that, and I hope that we can have a conversation at some point about that. That's awesome.

John Hamer 03:25

Actually I'm not (laughter) but if you do have a podcast and you want to talk about it, I'm ready to talk about it. But I'm not launching my own But (Seth, "okay,") and that's it. I'm sorry.

Miles Fuller 03:36

It was like a major letdown.

John Hamer 03:40

After everybody wanted it so much. I'm like wait a second, no I'm not.

Miles Fuller 03:44

You'd better cash that check.

Seth Bryant 03:47

And Miles Fuller is a good friend of mine. We have known each other for about a decade now. We went to school together at Westminster College here in Salt Lake City.

Miles Fuller 03:56

It was a middle school back then.

Seth Bryant

Yeah. (laughter) It's a very expensive Middle School! So tell us a little bit about yourself and I hope that you can weave in some of that story about your upbringing with Mormonism and also kind of the unique elements to it and how it's helped shape who you are today.

Miles Fuller 04:16

Okay, so I was I was born in Salt Lake City and I have a multi generational Latter Day Saint family from restoration on both sides, but my parents are both painters and artists and my father was a jazz musician. And, that highly concentrated, of those endeavors of meaning have really impacted what I think that the experience of restoration churches in Mormonism and the LDS Church specifically is. So that I might not be equipped to be fully empathetic because my experience growing up with my parents was a shuffle between Myles Davis kind of blue and going to museums to find Rembrandts and then church services. And they all had equal meaning. So there was no way to say that when we're in church, or when we have family prayer, or when we're scripture reading that that's where we find meaning. And in some ways, my parents would kind of go on a roller coaster, with the LDS church and their devotion,

because they caught some flak from friends and family and neighborhoods there because at their heart, they were kind of bohemian artists and they learned how to draw nudes in art school, they were really kind of a thorn in the side of a lot of wards. And, so the fact that we couldn't have Rembrandt without some figurative drawing, and that tradition of art meant that if the LDS church members were thinking that it was sinful for what they did, then we needed to supplement our Mormon experience with our experience in the arts. So that I think has carried through where I don't feel a disconnect between my religion. My religion has always been high art and Mormonism. Mormonism is so much more than just the faith community, for better or worse. So it's a lot of structures. And so even though I identify as a Salt Lake City Mormon, my life is probably pretty secular. And I teach creative writing and graphic literature, comic books, at a university level. And that's because playing with language was even the step to go past my parents, and really upset my community. I mean, from the beginning, the one thing you can't play with is language, we're going to keep all the words in these cliches, and these are the only ways you can talk. And these are only ways you can write. And I immediately thought, okay, stand up comedians, and writers are the only identities that I don't see a lot in Mormonism. And those are the two things that I have done. So because language is so important to me, I sometimes ache for the limited language in a lot of Mormon discussions. But it's still essential to me. I'm a Salt Lake City Mormon, I can't depart from that. And when I met you at Westminster, we were working in our writing center. We were coaching people on their language. So, I mean, I think that sets the tone for a lot of things I've done since.

08:04

Seth Bryant

Great. Yeah, I'm just I'm so excited to have you guys here. And I wanted to start out our conversation with a story. And so just a few days ago, I was in Nauvoo and I'm driving past the temple at night. And so if anyone here has been to Nauvoo at night and seeing the temple and how it's lit up, I mean, it's absolutely gorgeous. And across the street is a guy in a lawn chair and he's holding a sign. And the sign has LED lights in it. And it there's only one message and it's www.Joseph lied.com. And so I slow down, I roll down my window, and I so badly want to say something. And words absolutely fail me in this moment. And what's interesting, I can hear in the background that the Nauvoo pageant is going on. And the Nauvoo pageant, I mean, it's blaring until about 10 o'clock at night, the whole month of July in Nauvoo. I can hear it in the background and I know that the message that it is sending is equally frustrating in some ways, because it's almost the exact opposite of the guy in the lawn chair. Right? It's like Joseph only tells the truth or never lied. And so in talking with a friend, I think the one thing I should have said when I rolled down the window was well, it's complicated. And so I want to explore that insistence of black and white thinking on both sides. And what you might say to the guy holding the sign. Or on the reverse, I was asked by an older sister missionary in the LDS church after a tour of actually the John Taylor home. "What is your or can you share your testimony of Joseph Smith" and I knew that what I shared was instantly going to be

problematic because it was so nuanced. But so what's your test? What do you share in that moment? Or what do you do with the LDS missionary or what do you share in that moment with the guy in the lawn chair holding the LED sign that says Joseph lied.

09:58

John Hamer

Nauvoo is really a complicated place to do any of this kind of stuff. Nauvoo is one of these wonderful places that is totally contested space like that and so obviously it has become way more LDS colonized and so for a very particular kind of orthodox Mormon who is especially there with their family on a pilgrimage for the specific, very particular experiences that that you're kind of going for and so like you say like the pageant which is definitely has a you know black and white picture or actually just very like clear picture of Joseph can do no wrong and then down to also all of the LDS guides are really as they're showing you any room, they're not so much telling you, okay, about how people lived in that particular time period or that era. But I mean there's almost always it's connected to a faith story. So in a sense like the wood burning stove is a thing so just in the same way that that wood had to be stored and collected for this so to God there's this in our lives or something like that and so it really becomes really stretched and crazy and so it's actually hard to experience that. For me I find when I'm going around and doing that, I mean, how would I how would answer her in terms of the in terms of like what's your testimony of Joseph Smith. I guess my inclination when I'm in those circumstances is to talk about the broader heritage. So I would say that one of the reasons why I actually came here is I kind of feel that we as a people, (my ancestors lived here, my ancestors had their house just up the street. Winchester street is named after my great great grandparents) that there were more people in this movement than just Joseph Smith. That I am interested in the whole heritage of what my ancestors built and did and obviously they were inspired by the message that Joseph Smith had. And the whole restoration tradition that they all formed together continues to inspire and continues to inspire me. But I think that our focus is too much on Joseph Smith but she would be very uncomfortable with me saying that but I guess that's my sense that too much we focus on Joseph Smith and that already is just a huge problem

12:21

12:23

Miles Fuller

Yeah I really agree and I like that we over emphasize a man instead of a movement and there are a lot of gestures and a lot of family stories and a lot of possibilities for belief and really creative if albeit impulsive and combative and misunderstood members of the whole movement of the restoration. So to do that progressing act and just eliminate everything but Joseph Smith is unfair to who we are now and who we've come from. I tend to like even the

most confused or negative, even stories over surrounding the prophet Joseph Smith because I want to feel like I've come from a tradition of eccentricity like I am somehow okay and validated being as bizarre as I am because I come from this record of people who didn't know how to act who were charismatic but really failing. And I love the idea of the early Mormon churches and congregations being this ragtag group of scamps that really couldn't inhabit an American landscape the way that other people wanted to. I mean if you can go into a space where people are living like outlaws and are trying to resist the structures of the east coast and you somehow break their laws when they have no laws you're doing something weird and I love that you can travel west and upset people who have virtually no rules and that's the legacy of our history Mormonism. So I see that...

14:19

John Hamer

It turns out they had rules yeah

14:22

it turns out they were just pretending that we don't have rules. There were rules we just (laughing)

14:28

Miles Fuller

crossed the line we didn't know it until you came with all your with all your Mormon behavior, misbehavior and so when I think of Joseph Smith being a truth teller or Joseph Smith being a liar though either is so oversimplified and they sort of validate each other. I mean if you have such a simple binary that Joseph Smith is either everything in the world to you or he is your system for disbelief then what are, where are these other sources where you're going to find meaning. And what about what stems from the ideas he had? I mean, he's so charismatic and articulate and functions in a bunch of different ways for different people in history. So why? Why do we have to accordion it down to our little Harry Potter savior or the worst person that ever lived? I don't need him to be a liar a or a truth teller.

15:29

Seth Bryant

Right? And that really is a good segue for a question I wanted to ask you Miles. So you've had friends and others who have left the LDS church are very angry, and are angry that you're not angry. And you know, for various things fill in the blank, whether it's blacks in the priesthood or polygamy or treatment of LGBT persons. And so my question for you is, how do you respond to them? And in saying that you, you're not upset and you're still claiming this identity? And it almost seems like in many ways, you've said in conversations with me that you're in love with

the ugliness of it. Like it's not warts and all, it's like, no, you love the warts. So, but how do you respond to them? How do you explain your journey to them and your identity to them?

16:19

16:19

Miles Fuller

Well it might be partly evasive on my part, because there are so many ways that the Mormon experience has been formative to my identity, that trying to be surgical, and excise all this and say, I'm done with this based on some faith tenants, I'm done with this, I want nothing to do with it seems impossible. There are too many integrated parts of my life that were formed only through a Mormon experience that was secular and economic and social and aesthetic and, and where we found meaning in really soaring spots. So I think I'd have to doubt myself too much to inhabit a space where I'm not also Mormon. And my lack of anger might come from the fact that that I have been very lucky to have a buffer. I have been insulated from some of these direct binaries because I felt like I had a space to express myself. I felt like I had ways to articulate what I felt. One of the first interactions you had with me, you mentioned that the first time you saw me on our college campus I was walking by with my, I was just another cross dressing 20 year old at a liberal arts college, I was walking by with my purse, and I said something in a way that you were like, I hate that guy, whoever that guy is, I hate that guy. And I loved inhabiting a space that where I was comfortable. I'm sure I was obnoxious. And then one of the next interactions you had with me was, I told you (I think I was about 20) so I was just deciding, like I said, I think I'm going to go on an LDS mission, or I'll become a Catholic priest in the same sentence right. And it was exactly in the same space in my headspace, is that you make these choices that are about intensity, they're about devotion, they're about finding meaning. and risking and investing yourself in something, it doesn't matter what it is. And so if I say I want to, I heard a lot of narratives, from counterculture, as you become a young adult in Salt Lake City, that was like, I'm not sure if I have a testimony. And then two weeks later, that friend would be doing lines of cocaine off a urinal in some public bathroom. I think that transition, we create these false dichotomies. And I just wanted to keep as much of my experience as possible. So anyone who is angsty about the sort of betrayal or that sense of, I didn't have the truth that I thought I had, in the Mormon experience, I really ache for and I know that I'm not equipped to fully empathize because I have been able to find meaning in other ways. And that was sort of the challenge from birth with my parents is that you find meaning through the Mormon cosmology, but also, it doesn't account for everything. And once it's accounted for everything, I think it's really easy to be hurt by it.

19:58

Seth Bryant

And so that that's really interesting because it brings up the question and I'm going to pose this to John first. In what ways do you see former disaffected Mormons still working within the parameters of Mormonism, frustrated at the very definitions that they haven't really given up?

20:15

20:18

John Hamer

Well so if I can step back for the question you've had previously for Miles. So when you're talking about the experience that people had where they're very angry, or they're very hurt, and they have just a lot of pain, and all those kinds of things, and like Miles said this well, which is that there's no way, because everyone has had different experiences, and no way anybody can minimize or discount or say, in any way that any of those experiences aren't valid, or that those feelings aren't real or they shouldn't be had or that because all of those things are very valid responses to a person's individual path and upbringing in a pretty extreme place, like Utah here. In some ways, you know, this dichotomy of the straight and narrow path or the extreme out of it example you had in the cocaine.

21:16

Miles Fuller

That's a real story.

21:19

John Hamer

But in terms of that, though, so for example, I talk a lot to every kind of one of the different podcasts. So I'm on podcasts that are much more inside the LDS orthodox circle, let's say if I'm on like a Sunday school podcast, just talking about scriptures or something like that, to ones that are way more borderlands where Mormon stories has been to Mormon expression to Mormon expositor, to you know, way out there on infants on thrones, the different audiences outside of the Borderlands or past the Borderlands or wherever. And I do find, I guess, that within that spectrum one thing that we don't think about often is how much we have a framework for the way we are thinking about things. So because you are raised within a Mormon framework, that is specifically a black and white framework, where everything is exactly true in a very literalistic way. And then you might get to a place where you encounter problems with that narrative that you've had, for whatever reason you encounter those that can be anything, either a truth claim problem, or something that's actually hurtful in a social way, or any other thing that can have happened that caused that disconnect, then there is a very ready narrative that also exists that has been built now over the last couple decades, and is very strong of the ex- Mormon narrative, which that narrative is through reason to exploration, you have been able to intellectually deconstruct the original faith claims. And so the point where

now you have achieved the truth, right. And so in some ways, this framework, though, is still very inherently Mormon, because at the end of the day, you still are the one with the truth, right. And I think it's not always understood that way, you know, where is as being that in one case it was a narrative, and now you have a new narrative. And we frame everything, and we think through narratives, those kind of ways, but it may well be that truth isn't a simple thing to have. There is actually empirical data and things like that there are claims that can be invalidated all those kinds of things. But when we're talking about like deeper meaning to life, and what it means to live life meaningfully, to be human to all these other kinds of things there may well be more thinking too, that can be done. And that's maybe something that one of the things I try to poke some people in the borderlands about when I'm on the phone talking to different people in the podcasts.

24:16

Seth Bryant

And so when somebody is in that place of pain, and perhaps they're inclined to just swap one form of the Absolute Truth or another form of it. So you're problematizing and trying to help them to see things in a much more complicated manner. But how do you know what advice and maybe this goes Miles to your earlier comment about counterculture? How do you help someone not go from I'm doubting my faith to I'm committing, you know, I'm doing something that's really, you know, amoral. So in that moment of doubting, questioning, you know, morally what grounding should or could a person seek out as they're as they're trying to hold on to maybe their faith or hold on to something and not completely go into what's been called a second adolescence. But in many cases for Mormons there hasn't been a full adolescence anyway in the first place without, you know, being pulled into the gravity of this second adolescence and just going off the deep end.

25:23

Miles Fuller

Well, I think that's tough when you have such a dominant culture that's comprehensive, and it affects your professional and your academic and your interpersonal and your family relationships. That it's easy to just be on the same conveyor belt. And so counterculture in Utah at least upholds the mainstream by announcing how it's not part of it directly. So you have to go checklist against the rules and the truth claims and the lifestyle practices, a lot of the mainstream culture in order to say, I'm not one of the club. Look at my face to tattoo, I promise that I don't go to church anymore. Like that kind of seems like a lot of work. And so one, easy response is do what you like, but you're not going to like extremes if you come from an extreme, if you're uncomfortable on one extreme and you go to another you're going to be uncomfortable. There are very small stages that you find what you believe and what you prefer. Like a linchpin thing in Utah is coffee, drinking coffee, when there's a mainstream dominant LDS culture that resists it. Adults or young adults starting to drink coffee to announce

that they are not participating in a religious cosmology. Not necessarily, it's not even a major, major part of the of the church, you find that my body can't handle coffee. Coffee makes me nervous, jittery and gives me diarrhea. And now that's incorporated into my life. And I'm supposed to like it because it announces that I no longer believe in this. And those are the gestures that I think make me sad but they're part of the growing pains. You can't see how bizarre your thinking is and how you mishandle what's available to you, beyond the most simplified, at least LDS Mormon experience or other restoration church experience, until you interact in a more secular way. And I think one way to take comfort is that the rest of the United States and the world do not think we're special. Other than being a little bizarre, a little eccentric, they do not want to discuss the same things we're discussing. So you can take some relief that you don't have to fight the good fight. Because it's irrelevant to a lot of the human experience. And that's how I find a lot of comfort in thinking that my Mormonism is at best a party trick, you know. It's something to bring up and seem a little more woo it's exotic . He comes from Salt Lake City. But it doesn't have to change my neuroscience every day.

28:43

Seth Bryant

So it's really interesting. I was in a coffee shop in Utah. And then a day later, I was in one in California. And I was struck by the fact in California that there were children in there with their parents getting coffee. And in Utah, it was like you had gone in a bar, you know, I'm surprised they didn't card me before I went in. It was a totally different feel. And I saw these kids inside of this coffee shop in California and I almost thought, what are these parents doing bringing these kids in here? Because I'm falling back in this old mindset of how I grew up, and then it instantly dawned on me like, no, this is actually normal. But yeah, so when your anti conformity is always 180 degrees from the things that you claim to despise, it's really not anti conformity. It's just reverse conformity. And so it's just very interesting to see the weird sorts of things that take place in Utah. John, you mentioned how Nauvoo is a strange place, a contested place, In Utah, certainly, you know, it was a very odd space as well. And having lived away for 10 years and then moving back just last year, I'm constantly struck by just how weird a space Utah can be.

29:54

John Hamer

I had to very deliberately teach myself to like coffee when I was an 18 year old and I decided I'm not going to be Mormon anymore. So I went out with a friend of mine and we just every night we would go to a coffee shop, you know, like go to Denny's or something like that and I was trying to drink Denny's coffee which is probably a problem right there. So on reflection I now know. Anyway I didn't like it at all for whatever six months but now I absolutely love coffees. But as a boundary marker that's probably not a very particularly problematic one and I also don't think that a lot of the delayed adolescence doesn't have to be a problem. I mean a

friend of mine has become addicted to vaping cigarettes for some reason as an adult and I think that's a little crazy. But you know you don't have to pick up all these particular things but I mean there's some things that you could do.

30:50

Seth Bryant

Yeah I've heard of people who will only try something that goes against their former moral framework, only try one new thing a week or a month. Just slowly enter into it, you know, rather than just going completely nuts as sometimes you see. So a lot of times as people are questioning their faith or having issues they will toy with the idea of what I'll call cafeteria Mormonism or simply saying we're going to go to church once, twice a month but we're going to do this and we're only going to believe this and not that. And so I myself have that similar thought but I guess the more that I reflect on it I wonder if that's really healthy or if doing the really hard work of redefining things for yourself tends to be a much healthier way of approaching it rather than just selectively saying well I'm still going to work within the boundaries or the parameters of the discussion but I'm only going to select, you know, A, C and F and not the entire thing. So I guess my question would be how can people navigate, as people are trying to navigate and redefine faith for themselves, identity for themselves there's going to be pushback from the community and so I'm wondering how people can navigate in the midst of that pushback wanting to claim a corporate identity when the body doesn't always want to claim you if you don't exactly look the same.

32:30

Miles Fuller

I think it's a natural response to want to participate as much as you can handle while you're questioning things but I think it's treacherous in the LDS church and perhaps a lot of congregations of many different religious contexts because so much of your life is dependent on appearance. I mean it goes back to some sort of protestant predestination. You show you're faithful by looking faithful and we don't know if you're one of the elect but you better look the part and so it might not be a way to authentically live yourself if you begrudgingly participate partway but it's a very natural transition. I see that so much but there's an emptiness attached to it that that makes me sad for the converse experience which is seeking in the most devoted faithful way and in the literature and a network of meaning that your faith has. It should be active and participatory and you won't always know where you're going to arrive. I feel like if you're going to be faithful and unless some network of meaning like a restoration era church and if it's just convenient and socially obligatory enough that you can be unhappy in it and without seeking, then that makes me sad. I mean there have been times when I have engaged to what seems like a sequential degree in the LDS church where I still knew that I was inhabiting my own ideas about the world and about the outside of the Mormon experience. So I was married in an LDS temple at one point and I don't feel different now than

on that day even though my life is very secular. I don't have that marriage anymore. My way of viewing that process was as independent to approach that experience as it was to leave some of those practices alone. And so I hope that anybody has the struggle of at least every day, I have to figure out what I like, every day, I have to figure out my narrative. We all wake up with these stories. I teach creative nonfiction, it's part of what my background is. And the students that I have who are uncomfortable with writing story, based on events, observation. It's not even their own memoir, but just observing, observing the world and writing nonfiction that is also crafted, is a sticking point for some, until I explain that when you woke up today, you had to craft a narrative about who you are and what you like, and how you interact. You have characterized yourself, just by waking up because if not life is too difficult. And I had an experience right before I began college, as a young adult where I was in a car accident. I got a brain injury. And the hardest part of that experience was not knowing the narrative of who I was before. When you start to struggle, and expand those neural pathways and heal, it's about saying, going out this door will take so many steps that I used to think were conventional. So if you're in a faith community, where there are a lot of conventions, a lot of cliché ways to move and think and speak. It doesn't mean that that is wrong, it means that the only way out of it is a new path that expands that previous experience. Going backwards in that same rut is not the same as healing.

36:52

Seth Bryant

No, that makes total sense. I mean, it's a very difficult, painful journey, you've got people on one hand, who would say, you know, it's just healthier to just give it up, let's just completely move beyond. And then on the other side, no fall back into the ruts. That's where the, you know, the best place that you could be. And so, to chart this own course, on your own and define your narrative, and who you are, and how this all fits, it is not no easy task.

37:17

John Hamer

When you're even bringing it up, actually, when you're asking the question about cafeteria, Mormonism, and I'm just trying to even put myself into the thought process of that of that metaphor, which, which for me still implies, so let's say is that you're still going to the cafeteria, and maybe you're only picking from this and that thing, but no matter what it is, is that the your portion of the process is simply choosing to accept, you know, like a smaller proportion of the menu that you were being given that is always going to be the same, you know, and your position in that is simply to take. I don't want any milk and I'm now a vegan, so I'm not eating this little pizza that you're giving me or whatever it is. And so I think that's completely, I guess, alien to where I am in the restoration and where my choice has been and take coming to Community of Christ, which is not to be a cafeteria where I'm keeping this in that little thing, but rather, I'm really have to be the cook. And so I am called upon to go in and I am like cooking.

And that's what I'm you know, and I'm making stuff and if people you know, I like to part of the job I have is to serve people and feed them like that. And then that was wonderful, because I've made this wonderful new thing, you know, and so I it isn't in any way, a cafeteria experience as a result. I'm also wonderful, I love it when other people are making other things and they're sharing that with me. And sometimes they're making stuff I don't like and that's fine. It doesn't mean that they aren't part of the feast here, you know, even if I didn't if And if that's not the kind of thing that I want.

38:52

Seth Bryant

So I like that a lot. So instead of cafeteria Mormonism, we have culinary restorationism.

39:02

Miles Fuller

John is the gourmet chef of the restoration.

39:08

Seth Bryant

So I got a question for you, John. It seems to be a recurring question online. people asking what's the point to claiming Christ if you don't believe in resurrection literally, or there's some other you know, way of wording that but it's the same basic idea, what's the point to believing if you don't believe in it literally. So would you be willing to share with us why a non literalistic religion and approach is meaningful in your life?

39:35

John Hamer

Right.

39:36

So yeah, this

39:37

is a complicated thing to get around, especially when you're coming from the LDS tradition, which is very literalistic and is very concerned with and having every all of doctrine and cosmology, and every I think other thing be being important as actual literal moments in history or something like that. There are events that happen there. physical things, physical properties. And so if you have if you already have that as a grounding, just even coming up with like you said, People ask me, okay when I say that my religion my faith has nothing to do with anything like that. And so it is a non literalistic. Religion is what I've tried to call it. But and I've tried to make this argument a couple places where, for me the opposite of literalism is not

fiction, which is where I think a lot of people would like to say that it's either literally true or it's a fraud, you know, and that is not the dichotomy that I'm believing it believe in. Because I actually think that if it's literally that something, if we're focusing on something, just being a literal thing that happens, or has happened, or anything like that, we are so focused in on an event or a thing, or a physical thing, that you are, you are talking about a thing that is therefore totally devoid of meaning. Because what's important to you is the thing, the material, the literal the thing that happened or something like that. And so what happened is it happened. And so therefore, it can't be having any, any particular meaning. And I know it's, so that's a complicated argument to make. But so even if we were going to have it, let's say, let's take it in cosmology, let's say that the Mormon plan of salvation, so the idea of it is the whole of life and everything like that is that we are Gods in embryo at some point or other, the males anyway will have a partner who, to whom they are God, and then that and they'll produce more spiritual children and more planets and all this kind of thing. And that is the point of the universe that, that there will be multiplicity of gods, and there's more and more and things like that. So the point of the universe is reproduction. So what but what's the meaning of that still? So in other words, just saying that you have an idea of a thing that's happening literally or something like that doesn't get you to the point of why is that important? Why is that inform the meaning of my life? That to me sounds like simply taking DNA replication and saying that that's cosmologically, somehow, a thing that is happening universally or something like that, but why is that meaningful? So in other words, the meaning question is still what's really important to me. And so this holds true for any of the things from a literal conception of resurrection, or any other thing I would rather focus myself on how does that archetype, how does that theme how does that narrative inform my actual life? So how many people have I encountered in life who deal with real loss? Who will deal with loss and pain? And how do you work through the healing cycle of loss, pain, regeneration, recovery, and that powerful actual life cycle? That is the idea and the archetype that is really meaningful. And I'm not I don't go around and tell people, well, you know, the literal thing won't happen to you. And that's not within what you know about human life. I mean, we don't know what's beyond, right. So that's fine. They can people can believe that I'm not trying to poke people and tell them that, you know, to deflate other people's views on things, but what's meaningful to me is the meaning of that archetype. And that can be true for any number of these other things.

43:19

Seth Bryant

Yeah, absolutely. So Miles and I have a friend named Chris, and Chris is Episcopalian, and he was attending, like a Bible study. And they were looking at the book of Job. And he came home from that, and his neighbor asked him Oh, so what do you learn at church and Chris brought up Job, and the very first thing out of the neighbor's mouth was, well, you know, Job was an actual person, right? As if that's the most important thing that you can take from the

book of Job and that was just so lacking in any meaning or purpose for our friend who's an Episcopalian. He's just like, Wait, what? Like,

43:54

Miles Fuller

right, like he would suddenly be relieved, like, Oh, thanks. So I was worried I

43:58

Seth Bryant

thank God job actually lived.

John Hame

And all of his children that got killed. Thank heavens, that those were real children. Exactly. He got new ones because for the whole thing, because there's a story of loss.

44:10

Seth Bryant

Well, it would be it would be Yeah.

But there's a real there's a real fear and Miles living in Kentucky in Louisville close to the Creation Museum. I mean, there is a real fear that if we doubt any part of the scriptural text as being anything other than absolutely literally true, at what point does that stop? So the earth has to be created in 6 days, we have these facts about dinosaurs, and so we get these odd conglomerations of trying to force facts or science into a Biblical narrative and demanding that the Bible is the only absolute basis for truth.

Miles Fuller

And the problem with literalism is that you'd have to apply it to everything And that's not how that's not how we create any meaning it has packaged and arranged and one of the problem in my, in world we have genres and not it's not about truth or untruth. So in creative writing, I studied nonfiction. And across the street somebody, you know a bunch of people studied fiction writing, and they were all literary genres. And the Latin root of fiction is fictus, to arrange. And so suddenly, I'm supposed to not arrange anything. And I'm the literal experience of the world to be writing nonfiction. And that's not the case, we're all crafting the story and the meaning that we like, and I've been just as impacted in my life by a novel as a memoir. And it doesn't matter the percentage of what is rooted in observable experience. And the same goes for those elevated scriptural texts, how useful is it to have reportage from ancient times? That's not useful. You wouldn't want the weather report from Canaan, 4000 years ago, but you somehow want to itemize the these literal scriptures. I'm not saying that nothing can be literal, not saying that nothing is not part of the observable experience. But it doesn't need to be what

you're after is story, stories, instructive stories impactful. And those are the ways that when I think about throwing, rejecting the LDS church or any restoration experience based on core faith tenants, I don't get frustrated on those sticking points very long. Because it's already here. I'm not one of the collaborators in the 1830s trying to, to work out that narrative. It already has impacted people, it's irrelevant for me to talk about something being truth or untruth, if it's already acting as a motivating part of a society. And after that, then you have to just be your individual inhabiting what's already established. I mean, if you want to go rogue and start your own ideas, then you collaborate, you find you find that new narrative, but how immersed I've been in the Mormon narrative means that I can't let it go.

47:49

Seth Bryant

So to bring things full circle, if you encounter the guy holding the sign in Nauvoo. And he says to you, the Book of Mormon is a lie. What do you say? What do you take from the Book of Mormon?

48:06

John Ham

Well I don't get into political arguments with people on the street. I do have the option to because I walk around in the city of Toronto, and there are evangelicals who want to scream about literal religion and like I could get into an argument with them all I want and there's little techniques that you can do to talk about why, in the case of evangelicals, about why the Bible has obvious contradictions that you could point out, that would affect their worldview, if they would actually pay attention to me but they won't. But so for the guy, the Joseph lied.com guy, so if I was, like, on a train with him, and we had to talk for a whole long time, and we were going to engage in conversation, I guess I would want to, I would rather just find out what his story is. So then I would, I would say, Well, so this is interesting that you're doing this, why is this a motivational thing for you? I find out if they if the person themselves has an ex Mormon background, or if they have an evangelical background, and then I'd probably want to engage them on either one of their own stories, as opposed to the Joseph Smith part of it. I'm also going back to the lady who I was telling her, I'm not only concerned about Joseph Smith, I actually wouldn't have confronted her about the Joseph Smith part. I actually would have just talked very glowingly about the heritage part. You know, in other words, I wouldn't have been confrontational with her about, we shouldn't focus so much on Joseph Smith, I would model behavior of not focusing on Joseph Smith. So in the same thing that I would have done with this guy. So in terms of the Book of Mormon itself, what do I draw from it? I think that the Book of Mormon has all kinds of wonderful, wonderful insights for us. That we have within our heritage, that allow us to because it's written new scripture, because it is 19th century scripture, it allows us to see, you know the Bible in a much different way than let's say, Protestants or Catholics or other people are able to, because for them, their scripture is so

alien to their present day experience, that they are much more liable than where I feel like I am anyway, with this with the insight that I have from the restoration inheritance, they are much more liable to fall into the trap of Scripture worship, where they really are getting to this point where they think the Scripture is this alien separate thing. And it isn't. It inhabits all of its own problematic things. So much of Scripture is itself sort of pseudographical. It is written centuries after the time it purports to be written in and all these kind of things. It is identical, therefore, to the Book of Mormon in as much as so in the same way that the Book of Abraham, let's say, is Joseph Smith, telling stories and new stories about Abraham. We have no stories at all about Abraham that are anything other than people centuries after, when Abraham would have lived, telling new stories about Abraham. That is the entire tradition we have of Abraham, there isn't anything more about Abraham than doing that. So in that way, we have that as a wonderful window into the whole scriptural experience. That doesn't mean that scripture isn't intensely meaningful in all kinds of wonderful ways. It just means that we shouldn't be worshipping it, or are imagining it as some kind of a literalistic history book. And when we are looking at it that literalistic way, we distort the text. So like the creationists, who was putting dinosaurs in their Bible Museum, which is crazy, because there's no dinosaurs in the Bible. And I mean, all of these ideas that they have about it in the same exact way, if we make a Book of Mormon museum where they're running around, and the swords are sticks with stones on the end of them, and they're wearing Mayan clothes, and they're riding around on tapirs, they have totally distorted the meaning of the text or the reading of the text. That's not within the text. So anyway you're misreading the text by doing that.

52:10

Miles Fuller

I still want to go to the museum. That's another thing that you created just through language, and I want it now, Star Trek quality podcast and book Mormon museum. Okay, we'll do it. My response to the Joseph lied, sign, and that gentleman or anyone who, who represents the angst, that that comes from disbelief or, or the research of early restoration face is that I celebrate, I mean, thank God, Joseph lied. That is, if that's the case, it's can't be streamlined for me as the only message. Because that's the same as I would have. If I believed Joseph Smith only lied, I would be just as apt to believe that he only told the truth. I mean, it's too consolidated for me to think that it has anything to do with the human experience, or the divine experience. So I celebrate the noise and the ugliness and the contradictions and the confusion of the beginnings of this restoration face. And it gives me the kind of motivation that somebody might feel that, you know, God loves them and sent His Son, Jesus Christ to atone for your sins. I take inspiration from humans, behaving like human beings, and trying to find meaning. And if that also accounts for divine inspiration, if that also accounts for messages that are beyond what's human. I certainly embrace that and hope for that. But it gives me the space to continue, if I know that people are making mistakes, and yet are being charismatic, and creating something that lasts, because that's all I want to do. And I struggle every day. So why

wouldn't somebody who is called the Prophet struggle and be a bunch of contradictions too. I celebrate anything that's human and messy. And that's why I like the 19th century, not the 20th century for Mormonism.

54:31

Seth Bryant

Well, I want to thank both of you. I mean, I think this has been an incredible conversation. It's one that I wish I had heard 10 years ago, because I really think there is the potential for a healthy way to approach doubt and wrestling with one's faith rather than just going to the extremes and so I you know, I appreciate your comments. And let's give them a round of applause. (applause)

55:03

Now does anybody have a question? We got a little bit of time. I'm happy to take questions from the audience if anybody has a question
(Silence)

55:15

Miles Fuller

That hurts.

Seth Bryant

So let me ask you a question John so John Dylan has called you Vulcan he's called you Spock, right? Yeah so what's your what's your very favorite Star Trek episode?

55:35

John Hamer

It's not even one that's on the list so it's already one of the most popular ones but my favorite one is the Next Generation episode, The Inner Light, which is the one where Picard lives this whole other life. And the reason why I love that is that there's something inside of me that when I just see the thing where the person's entire life cycle, where they grow, they age, they get older and they die you know like the ending of Six Feet Under like the end, the finale episode. I don't want to give it away for people but they go through the life cycle and I'm just bawling you know and through that whole thing that just makes me so anyway... So that that episode I just love too because I like just thinking about life in big perspective like that and so it just read resonates with me

56:32

Seth Bryant

So that emotional attachment is very un-Vulcan-like! Question from the audience from Robin Linkhart our pastor here in Salt Lake. So Robin asks, "Looking at Joseph's eccentricities as well as his failures, what specific behaviors does Miles find meaningful or relevant?"

Miles Fuller 56:57

Directly it's the struggle to find language and a creative story. When you got somebody who is un- educated and then moves through a life that creates literacy and creates not just through public speaking but some sort of written lasting word am so moved to say about that struggle of saying I still want to create the words. At some point it becomes about maintaining and reducing and destroying the language that's already there so that you can streamline the narrative but in the beginning it's really creative and that can often be the sticking point for a lot of people to resist the story of Joseph Smith but for me because if you looked in my computer of all the pieces of writing that I began I wouldn't want to own up to all of them but I need all of those in order to create the pieces that do work and I think that the fact that it becomes so much authority so fast in the Joseph Smith story that the language that he's creating and public speaking and his interpersonal relationships and is a foundation of a faith and it's written scripture that's where there's more at stake I can see why people being frustrated with invention when there's so much on the line in the immediate future not necessarily the hereafter just so much on the line but as far as if I think about him as trying to struggling to find the words, that's what I do and I really like that that eccentricity I think too many parts about the personal life and impulses I don't relate to but also all of my experiences don't show up in my writing and what we have most solidly from Joseph Smith is this lasting literature. So that's how I try to view them

59:25

Seth Bryant

And as you were putting that all together I was struck by the fact that some detractors will say that Joseph Smith or point out that Joseph Smith did not use the Book of Mormon especially the later period of his life and it almost seems like to me hearing what you're saying Miles that it's not that he didn't believe in the Book of Mormon but he believed in the power of creating narrative and so that became i mean that was what he was doing and so to go back doesn't make sense. He was always weaving a new narrative and presenting new ideas

1:00:00

Miles Fuller

And also the story, the context of how it originates. I mean, the translations that aren't translations and the magical artifacts to create those stories. I love that too. I mean I wish I could go back and say that it wasn't just tear filled nights that created my writing, you know, I

wish that I had some more imaginative origin stories. So I don't actually hold that against them either.

1:00:33

Seth Bryant

So the question from Monica here in the audience, mentioning that looking at fiction is nonfiction. So specifically, what in your lives. what fiction have you found meaningful?

1:00:53

John Hamer

Well you said that you found fiction is as meaningful as nonfiction. So I, what I actually am not a huge reader of fiction, I'm actually a huge reader of history. But there is a whole huge portion of history and historical documents and everything like that, that are not actual history. But so for me, actually, the difference for me is not the difference between reading stories from history versus reading fiction now, and being inspired by fiction now, but rather, the ideas, you know, coming up with the ideas themselves. So one of the things that is the alternate, so like, for example, philosophy. So what people in antiquity the ideas that they're proposing, behind these stories, why are we telling this story, which is not, you know, if we're talking about like the Old Testament stories, they're largely not history in any way. So why, though is the author telling this story, and in many cases is an oral tradition. So why is that tell story told? What is the idea behind it? What is the meaning for all of that? And so for me, I'm interested in those ideas I'm interested in, therefore, reading, philosophy, theology, reading story in that way. But I'm odd in that I actually haven't read a lot of literature. So

1:02:36

Miles Fuller

That's okay. It's a lot safer to stay away from the noise of literature. I was probably first moved by work of fiction that kind of carried through teaching writing and thinking about it is, is there's a Edgar Allan Poe novel called The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym, and it pretends to be a sea captains narrative, because that was the best selling work at the time. In the 1850s the only way you could get a book contract was to say, I was a captain, I saw some weird stuff. So and then you write about it, and is as sensational as possible. And people are, there's an island where people are carrying around their heads around their waist, and they're just nonsense, right? And they would make them as sensational as possible. So he wrote a novel that was flawed and ridiculous, like a memoir. And the parts in it that are the most truthful, are the sounds of birds are written out as a play that his mother was in before she died. Or the dog is his brother, or there are all these kinds of embedded personal truths in this fun adventure novel. Basically, they just go out to sea and try not to die. And that has always been meaningful to me in that just because something's crafted or engineered for your

digestion, just because you're going to go on this adventure with somebody with the story, doesn't mean that the most poignant and direct experiences of that, that craters that aren't there with you. You don't have to recognize it for it to still move you. And, and that's how I see scripture and that's how I see the narratives of my family members and friends who have participated in what I think Mormonism is, is that there's a very distinctive, personal experience that creates that wider story. And you might not perceive all of those, but it's there even if the story is uniform, and that's why I still kind of hang on to I'm a Mormon.

1:05:03

Seth Bryant

So we have three more questions. And rather than having me act as a filter, I'm just gonna have you come up, tell us your name and talk right into the mic here.

1:05:11

Skip Rynearson

Hi, my name is skip rynearson. And first of all Miles, I wanted to tell you that, I don't know if you've read it, or if you've heard about it, but there's a what I thought was a really good article in the City Weekly, written by a guy by the name of Mike for NASA, it's called the Mormon masterpiece. And a lot of your comments tonight made me recall it, because it talks about Joseph Smith, as an artist as a conceptual artist. And, and as you know, the different media that he developed his art through. And it's kind of an interesting perspective, it deals less with the question that you guys have talked about tonight, of whether or not it's true. But what was the product? And is it something beautiful? Is it something worth observing? And so I just wanted to make mention of that. Now, I have a question for John. John, you and I had corresponded one time online, and I had mentioned that, since leaving the LDS church, I've found a home in the Unitarian Universalist Church, and not to put you on the spot in a Community of Christ church, you know, or given that that's the faith you're a pastor in. But what made you choose Community of Christ over like Unitarian Universalism, given your beliefs, as you've explained them? And also, if you could try to tackle the question of what would you see as an ideal scenario for somebody to choose Community of Christ over Unitarian Universalism?

1:06:48

John Hame r

To begin with, I would say the Unitarian Universalist tradition is a magnificent tradition. And so everybody who finds themselves in a Unitarian congregation, and then finds that as a spiritual home or finds fellowship there, I applaud and I just think that that's wonderful. And I think that I very easily could have, could have gone that direction, and I could have easily have been in. I totally believe in converting and going all into new things, I am a convert to Canada. And I'm gonna stay there for the rest of my life, I'm committed to Canada, This is my place. And I'm

living in downtown Toronto, and I'm setting all my roots down there. And you would have every reason, just for the magnificent past and traditions of Unitarians have to draw upon. So for example, just being the real pioneers in the fight against slavery, and every other thing to be proud of in that tradition. And so I also think that it's important institutions like the Unitarian Universalist church and also Community of Christ, I think are critically important right now, in our where we are in the 21st century, to provide very positive wonderful progressive alternatives for people who are seeking a faith tradition. And that say, they just want to raise their kids, they haven't ever been churched for a whole long time they get to a certain age as a couple, they have a couple kids, they think, well, maybe it'd be good to have my kids grow up in some church, and they go down the street to a mega church that is more or less like a big shopping mall that is filled with all the games and things that their kids might do. And it's a lot of fun. But then it turns out that the messages and the political and social messages, the sexism, the anti gay messages, all these kind of things end up being really quite detrimental. And it affects the society. And so if we advocate having and creating alternatives for people to be able to go to, then how can we blame them for that's where they ended up? Right? So I actually think we should be very supportive of each other in terms of the two denominations. I think we are and know that the Community of Christ here in Salt Lake has a great relationship with the Salt Lake Unitarian Church. And same thing we're very ecumenical. So why did I pick Community of Christ over the Unitarians myself. So for myself, I, although I am a convert to Community of Christ, I am a seventh generation member of the Latter Day Saint tradition. This is in my blood. I know an awful lot about the tradition. I've studied it a lot. I actually enjoy it. I'm not particularly focused on Joseph Smith, but I do like the rest of them. And I do like the idea of all getting together making community. I like going to Nauvoo and seeing just the idea that we're all going to get together and build something. We're going to build Zion together. I think that it's an inspiring tradition in that way. And then I also think that in that same way that I talked about being able to provide this important social alternative in the entire world, that also within the restoration tradition, for people to have an alternative, a progressive alternative within their own heritage is so critically important that I feel called to devote my entire life to building that path, and intend to devote my entire life to doing that. So, so that's why.

1:10:38

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So there seems to be a common theme tonight about literalist and non literalist belief. And it's fair to say that you're both in the camp of non literal belief pretty firmly. And I just thought back to the example of Job, I think Seth had a friend that was talking about Job and saying, it's important that you know, that he's a literal person. And both of you think, Well, why are you investing in that, right? It's silly that you're investing in that. But I would say that, from their perspective, they don't have the resources to invest in the kind of non literalist belief that you two value. In other words, if I believe literally that there is a God He is real, and the the story of Job is literally true, then I don't have the resources to go into a non literalist route, I can't find

the meaning that you have, because what it means to me as I can walk down the street, and God can have the devil run a car into me capriciously, or on a bet. So do you see what I'm saying, so that's where all his resources are going. So it makes it tough to go into this other realm, because all your time is spent there. And I know people that are very literal, especially in the city, they're very literal. So all their time is spent there. So they can say, that's great that you're pulling an allegory from this. And that's really neat. And you can apply that your life in different ways. And you can relate it to literature. For them, it's like I got enough on my plate right now, because this has dire consequences to my life. So I mean, I'm in a non literalist camp too. But I also understand where they're coming from, because the consequences are potentially so catastrophic.

1:12:23

John Hamer

I completely agree with you that it isn't necessarily the thing that people immediately jump to, or are equipped to jump to, and especially like you say, when, when it's been painted that way, and that's where their focus has been. And Community of Christ didn't just come fully formed, as you know, in this kind of perfect system where everybody is out in the future land of perfection in terms of all of their thinking on everything. And so it's not like we're we don't have people who have struggled with this, and who are all over the place. And in my own congregation, you know, we have I have a lot of members who are very literal historicists, about the Book of Mormon and all this kind of thing. And they would feel the same way about Job or the Tower of Babel, maybe even I don't know, and so anyway it's just where they're at. But despite the fact that they may well be coming from it from that perspective, it doesn't mean that you can't, they aren't equipped to talk about the meaning of the story. I think that they actually are very equipped to do that. And I have an experience about that because I actually teach adult Sunday school, every Sunday. In my congregation, we just right now are on Old Testament, and we're just reading through the Old Testament. And right now we're reading the book of Judges, which is just filled with just horrible stories. If you were taking them all literally, they would, Samson is ripping people's arms off and all the different kinds of things that happen. So in the middle of let's say Job, the question that everybody can understand in that, the question that's being asked here is what is the problem of evil. Why do righteous people suffer? Why have I experienced this kind of suffering in my life? Why when I haven't felt like I had done this or that wrong, or I've known someone who is like Job of the story, completely without blame. And yet, these horrible things have happened to me. And so even though a simple answer is to have heard and preached the prosperity gospel. If you do this, and this and that, you'll be blessed, and you'll become rich, and you'll have a fancy car and all those kinds of things, even though that's the perhaps what the simple answer that we'd like to have be the case. It turns out that the problem of evil is actually seriously more complicated than that. And the book of Job, itself in confronting this problem itself has multiple attempted answers which in some ways isn't able to resolve all by itself and so I do think that when we

read that and when we read those things together we can... the thing i always do is after we read a section then i ask, what do you think of this proposition what do you think about suffering having this cause? What has been your experience of suffering in your life and people no matter where they're coming from are able to relate and tell their own stories, their own experiences how they feel, what they feel meaning is, where they have experienced meaning and we accomplish that every week. It's a wonderful discussion and it doesn't require that everybody's gone to graduate school to have it.

1:15:56

Miles Fuller

For my part not being a literalist just because I like the bhagavad gita doesn't mean that I don't understand why there are 10s of 1000s of different idols and altars in different villages. I am in discomfort most of the time. I am not happy but the inquiry is satisfying to me and the instability of meaning is satisfying to me. If that's not places people want to inhabit that's what I think is available in restoration churches or any other space where meaning can get created. If that's what's authentic to you, you might need the literal interpretation, you might need that figurine to pray to. I don't privilege the way I do things over how someone else approaches it. I only think that it's available within the tradition of Mormonism to not be literal. I think it's a possibility that I've taken in order to inhabit my own body and live through the world. And I can totally value how somebody needs to say look I can't do this without the story being ratcheted into this spot and I value that. The only way it causes a problem is if that literal interpretation keeps you from loving other people keeps you from loving yourself,. I mean that sounds really sentimental and I'm full of schmaltz but if it's not getting in the way then it is a tool and same way I've maybe been evasive and saying that I don't believe in literal interpretations and that's the tool I use to survive

1:18:00

Tammy

My name is Tammy and my question is for both of you. I went to reunion recently and that was a new experience for me, Community of Christ is very new to me. And one day our topic of discussion was Zion and so I of course growing up LDS have a very different notion of what Zion is than anything that seemed to be there in the in the class or the workshop that I went to at reunion. So I wondered if this being a Project Zion Podcast, you could tell me what each of you understand by the meaning of the word Zion.

John Hamer

So Zion has a deep tradition obviously within the entire restoration and there has been a little bit of a divergence in emphasis between the Reorganized tradition and the Utah tradition about how. But building Zion has continued to be...So in the early church there was an idea of building Zion and actually making the city that you're all going to inhabit together and it was

also very apocalyptic so they really felt that the end of the world was also going to happen very literally very soon after they quickly did that. But one of the things that they took though at the early times as their model was doing some kind of experiments of living together sharing property It's often described, we tend to try to describe all of those as being horrible failures because we don't like to admit that sometimes it worked kind of because it's scary to the idea nobody really wants to have to be called upon to share property. It's the hardest thing in the entire Christian tradition to even be thinking about. So how do you build it. So for Community of Christ the word Zion had continued to be really powerful and it got reinterpreted several ways. So Zion became an adjective in Community of Christ and so everything is as a Zion mission and there was a lot of talk of how to be Zion. In the early 20th century it got connected up with the idea of the social gospel. So again, how do we all build together by helping poor members of society so that they can be empowered so that we can all build a just society together. And so, that has continued to evolve forward. And so where I'd say I'm at now with the idea of Zion is that as opposed to being inspired by design, in a literal apocalyptic sense, as if the Millennium would be just around the corner, like it always has been. Instead of believing in a literal Millennium where the whole world to get destroyed and all this kind of thing, I tend to be the other focus that has existed in the Christian tradition the entire time, which is, the kingdom is here among us, it's at hand, you can't look for it in the sky, because you won't see it. It's here when we all are acting thoughtfully together, when we are all building a signal community. So even naming our church when we renamed the church Community of Christ, the word community there, in some ways is Zion. That's the Zion ideal that is right there embedded in the heart of the Restoration. We want to get together to build community for the purposes of improving society, in the ways that I talked about, like it the world at large, within the Restoration tradition, within our own communities. So all of our mission initiatives, all of our mission is about how are we together as a community, building community, building a peaceable kingdom, building justice, enjoying blessings of community together, continually learning and growing together. And it's both inward for our own congregation as we're trying to learn more, but it's also outward. What are we doing in the community around us. So for example, like I've mentioned before our congregation is actively engaged in providing social housing in the downtown, which is a very serious issue in any city. So in other words, whatever it is, that you feel called upon to do to try to build Zion right here and now.

Miles Fuller

For me, in the LDS tradition, I love it as an adjective I love Z ionic as a way of talking about a process and a goal that is continual. And in the LDS tradition, there is a separate apocalyptic version of Zion. But the way that it mostly functions is right where we are. This valley is Zion. This is the point of arrival, and whether it's prophetic foresight, or an accidental point of arrival under duress, this Zion, I really take to heart because to me, the concept of Zion is inhabiting an inhospitable place. And that's a lot of our experience just being alive. But this particular

space, the Salt Lake Valley, was not permanently inhabited by any human beings before the Mormons burned bridges enough to arrive here. So I love the idea that that even indigenous nations did not want to live here, because it's such a piece of garbage. It's a really awful space. And it's been made. I mean, it's basically like, it was like a big cat's litter box when they arrived. It was disgusting. And it traps smoke, even before industrialized cities. There's the only lake that's not life giving in the country. There are so many problematic spots to this place that I think that it follows everything problematic about the Mormon traditions that I love. And this is beautifying only to a point still, but beautifying an ugly space, and that's Zion to me. That the metaphor is built into the physical point of arrival for the LDS Church is that this, this creating your Vatican out of a place that nobody wants takes a lot of risk. And is something that I think is just waking up and being alive is that I'm really uncomfortable. And I'm going to beautify this. I'm going to take what's ugly and make it beautiful.

1:24:41

Seth Bryant

Allright, well thanks again to both of you. Let's give them another round of applause.

1:25:05

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