

**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.

**Carla Long 00:31**

Hello, and welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. I'm your host, Carla Long and you're listening to Percolating on Faith, where Charmaine and Tony Chvala-Smith talk all about faith, everything you wanted to know, and tons of stuff you didn't, right? No. Not only though is this Percolating on Faith, it's actually a subset. I'm always excited to use that word as a math major. It's a subset of Percolating on Faith and so a little series that we are calling God Shots. Now God Shots as we explained in our last episode is a perfect, divine, espresso shot. Something that some baristas say they get one out of every 100 espresso shots. Now luckily for us, you can have a God Shots anytime just turn on Project Zion Podcast. You're welcome. Anyway. So, our God Shot series is all about theology. Last time, in our last episode, in our first episode of the God Shots series, we gave an overview and mostly talked about systematic theology. But today, we're tackling a new question. This sounds super easy. I don't know why everybody just can't figure this out on their own. But gosh, okay. I mean, we might as we'll talk about it. Ready? What does it mean that God is a self-revealing God? Tiny question. Right, Charmaine, Tony, just a tiny question. No big deal. Oh, just a little was just a little one. Hi. Well, welcome. Thank you so much for being here. And maybe you know, I've talked a lot, maybe it's time for you guys to talk a little bit. So go ahead, say hi. Introduce yourself, all that stuff.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 02:18**

Great. We are happy to be doing this new subset. Love the math metaphor there. Carla. That's lovely. Very good. We're very happy to be doing this subset, which, in our mind is kind of a mini-introduction to systematic theology.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 02:35**

And a systematic theology is simply looking at the different elements that make up a theology. What are the views, for instance of who God is? who Christ is? What is the church? What is scripture? We will be going through these different elements, one at a time, and exploring them to see what might be helpful. (Carla: That's good stuff.) That's right. Yeah. That's why we're starting with, with God, and the idea of revelation, God as being self-revealing.

**Carla Long 03:13**

Yeah, I think the biggest first question that we could really talk about to tackle this is how do we know anything about God at all?

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 03:22**

Yeah, that's a really relevant question. And I think, especially in a time, in a part of the world, where there isn't necessarily a foregone conclusion that people believe there is a God. We need to become much better about addressing that question.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 03:46**

I think 100 years ago, 200 years ago, certainly in Western culture, belief in God, belief in a Divine Being or divine source of things, was generally taken for granted by the majority of people. But in the past century, that's changed a lot. Gosh, the 20<sup>th</sup> century is drenched in blood and the suffering, massive suffering of the world wars, the Great Depression, genocide after genocide, the rise of the nuclear threat, and then the rise of the environmental threat has made faith in God seem less likely. For example, how has faith in God ever stopped any of these things from happening? How has it ever kept a genocide from happening? Faith in God today is much more a question mark for lots of people. Christian theology really has to try and articulate how it is that we claim that we can know anything about this one that we call God. Why is that even reasonable to think about?

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 05:11**

When we try to answer this question, how can we know anything about God? we have to start, I think, from a place of humility, and repeatedly acknowledge that we cannot fully apprehend, comprehend God, that what we do have is partial, limited by our own capacities as human beings. On the one side, God is bigger than we are. That's certainly the commitment of Christian faith. We have to acknowledge that. On the other side, then, we need to say, but what is it that we do know? What is it that we have evidence of what it is? What is it that has been consistently witnessed, not just our lifetime, not just in the time of our denominations, but in the long history of humanity. The best places to start for those early ways of trying to articulate who this God is, is the Old Testament and then the New Testament, with the expression of God in the form of Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament, we have all of these ways in which God keeps revealing God's self, encountering people in their daily walk. It's not often that they're necessarily out looking for God, God gets their attention. Really classic is the burning bush, Moses and the burning bush, or Abraham, God speaking to Abraham and saying, "Are you willing to go on this journey with me?" They weren't necessarily looking for these things. God caught their attention and said, "Excuse me, I'm here." Those are the places that we go to first to say, what can we know about this God, and that is also the place then that we first get this theme that God is constantly trying to reveal God's self to us. I often say God is a chatty God. And if we tune into this God, we can hear, we can be aware that God is wanting to encounter us.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 08:13**

So, Carla, in answer that question, how can we know anything about God? I think it's really important to say that, generally speaking, over the centuries, Christian theology has been reluctant to say, well, we can just prove God, like a theorem. Now, there's another math metaphor for you, Carla. Right? Right. Yes, I knew you would like that. God is not an object among other objects, that the existence of which we can somehow simply prove. But instead, we find ourselves looking back over the whole tradition, going all the way back to the Hebrew Bible, with moments of encounter with something that is other than us, that seems immense, infinite, beyond us, mysterious, and yet at the same time, seems personal, engaged, and yearning for relationship with us, yearning to encounter us. Of course, we can't prove that God is, but we can say God is nevertheless experienceable. You can draw a similar analogy with love. In some respects, love is not provable, but it is experienceable. It would be very hard at times to say to prove that person X loves person Y. It kind of looks like it, but maybe we don't know for sure. But definitely for the parties involved, love is experienceable, regardless of whether you can prove it or

not. So, when we talk about God being self-revealing, in a way, we're trying to give a tentative answer to the question, how do you guys know that there is a God? Well, in our tradition, in our texts, in our personal experience, we have been encountered by this other, that the word God seems to fit.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 10:31**

And typically, theologians will look to some other sources too, where God is knowable. That would be things like nature. There are ways that we can comprehend aspects of God in the natural world. And I would say, in our more pluralistic tendencies, and in our society, there is an openness by many, to be able to recognize God in other denominations, other faiths, other world faiths, that God is, is expressed there, as well. When you start lining up all the ways that we can start to recognize aspects of who is this God? and what are the characteristics that we can see that are persistent and trustworthy?, we actually have quite an array of places from which to draw.

**Carla Long 11:41**

The idea of following something that we don't know is scary. We want to be comfortable, right? We want to know who God is, but, in Community of Christ, at least for a long time that I can remember, we've said many, many times that God is . . . mystery, and learning to be okay with that is actually something that I work with. I work with a lot of people who are ex-Mormons, and they are, at first, really uncomfortable with the idea that God is mystery. How do you not know anything about God? Well, we know a few things about God, but we can never say exactly who God is. And then they come to a place where they really like it, they find a lot of joy in saying, "Well, God is mystery. I don't know everything about God. And it would be boring if I did."

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 12:42**

Yeah, as a church we've gone from one place to the other as well, with, at times in our own history, wanting to define who God is within the parameters of who we were. I think that's a temptation for lots of denominations to say here's what we believe, therefore, God must be blank, blank, blank, whatever, fits that description. It creates, for lots of people a sense of security. I think about my sister, leaving this church, and looking for a church, which would tell her what God thought and what you had to do to be good with God, what beliefs you needed to hold and what actions you were to do or not to do. She needed something more concrete. That can be a place of comfort and security to say this is exactly what God is like, but it tends to make God very small, a God who can only do those things that we allow God to do because we can't see or be open to the other things God may be doing, because we've already defined the parameters in which God can work or be expressed. That transition to the idea of mystery, that's like pulling a rug out from under folks. It then gives this room to explore these other ways of not only knowing with our heads who God is, but experiencing God, letting God be in our questions, letting God be in our doubting or letting our doubting open doors into who God can be, letting our pain and our suffering and our unknowing be places where God is revealed, and where our suffering can be a place where we meet God's love, not God's judgment, those kinds of things. It's a hard transition, but as you say, it can become very freeing for people.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 15:26**

It's interesting to me that, on the one hand, human beings are faced with this infinite that is around us and then faced with our own absolute yearning for absolute security and certainty. When these two

things come together, human beings have the tendency to want to create things that will give them security and certainty and call them God or gods. Interestingly, the Hebrew Bible was all over this and called it idolatry, a god you can fully grasp, fully manipulate, fully control, fully see, fully understand, a God like the Canaanite storm god, Baal. These are what the Hebrew Bible refers to as idols. If I jump ahead many centuries from the Hebrew Bible to the French reformer John Calvin, John Calvin makes this wonderful statement. He says we human beings are a perpetual factory of idols. We love to turn all kinds of things into Infinities that can buttress our causes, and our politics and our lifestyles and so on. We want something that can be an ultimate, that we can control. The interesting thing is that there is an ultimate, but you can always tell false ultimates, for when people try to turn them into things that will control them, manipulate, and dominate others, then we're not talking about what the Bible, or the Christian tradition means by God.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 17:20**

I think one of the common places that this may happen, and be kind of natural that it does, but doesn't make it any less a problem, and that is that sometimes doctrines or dogma about God become the things that we worship instead of God, God's self. That's sometimes difficult for people to say. How do I make a distinction between what I'm told God is through the beliefs of my church, through my doctrine, the doctrine or the dogma that I've been taught, or that I believe? How do we make a distinction between that, and this actual God, this presence that wants to be in relationship? I think that is often the place where we see this kind of idolatry, where a thing that we think about God or a thing that we believe about God becomes a prison for who God can be.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 18:34**

Yeah. So, the idea of revelation in Christian theology, and in the Bible, is that God freely enters into relationship with human beings, freely seeks us out, takes the initiative to reveal the Divine Self to human beings in specific contexts and actions and points in history. And that revelation is unfolding over time. And then it comes to a climax in Jesus Christ. In Community of Christ theology, we say Jesus Christ is the revelation of who and what God is. That's where we turn to think about this, this one who has claimed us, God. And when we when we talk about revelation, then we're talking about a long history of experience of encounter with God that culminates in Christ, but then unfolds from Christ to the present time. Scripture is a witness to it. The traditions and experience of the church are witness to it. Nature, the natural world is a witness to it. And certainly, our personal experiences are witnesses to it. Reason itself can be a witness to it in that we find the universe we live in, often, not always, often intelligible. That must mean that there's something rationally involved in the universe, too. We're not just a bunch of atoms and protons and protoplasm, oozing around out here. There's order and structure. These things all suggest that God is revealing the Divine Self to us in many different ways.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 20:47**

To give some examples, I want to go back to the Old Testament to give a more extended list. And Tony, jump in too. This whole idea that God is self-revealing, that God wants us, wants humanity to know that God is there, and also, that God wants us to know, aspects of God's character, what is it that we can trust God for? How is it that God sees the world and wants to help us see the world? What is it that God desires for God's creation? These are all things that, starting in the stories of the Old

Testament, we can see this pattern of God saying, "Hello, I'm here." Even in the legends of creation, God shows up in the two different creation stories in the beginning of Genesis.

God is the one who initiates this contact. And God is the one who continues it. God is the one who is teaching. We'd have to go a little deeper on into Genesis to talk about that, but I think about Abraham, that whole encounter of God's invitation to him, as I said earlier. God knows that humans don't remember very long. We have kind of short memories. We need these refreshers about who God is. In the unfolding story of Abraham, Isaac, and Sarah, is this reiteration of God being made known to them. In the Old Testament, it's kind of fun, because God shows up in a lot of different forms. Sometimes God shows up in a censor pot, fire pot (Tony: the story in Genesis 17) where the covenant is made with Abraham, fire and darkness are part of what Abraham sees and recognizes this as God. I've mentioned Moses, the burning bush. Also back in Abraham's time, there's visitations of a couple of angels in one case, and three angels in another case, and these are seen as theophanies. These are seen as God making God's self visible and present to these different people. Sometimes God shows up as an angel, sometimes as people, sometimes it is a burning bush, sometimes as a pillar of fire, sometimes as a cloud. But God is unquestionably present, trying to teach these early people in the covenants with God what they can trust about who God is. One of the things that comes through is that God is present, that God is near, that God keeps God's covenants, that God cares. The whole story of Moses comes because God hears people's cries.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 24:58**

There's this trustworthy presence that accompanies God's people, and that trustworthy presence is a revelation of something more involved in life and in history than just the forces of nature.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 25:19**

In the developing story of Israel, as they settle in the land, God is there with them and before them. God being with them and teaching, and sometimes correcting, is all seen as part of God's faithful love to them, God's enduring love.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 25:56**

Over the long history of the people of Israel, throughout the Old Testament, they come to know different attributes of this other, who has called them and is with them. God is the God of steadfast love, of faithfulness; God who is a holy presence who you can't just manipulate; God who gets them out of binds; God who lets them be what they want to be, which sometimes puts them in binds, right?; God who is passionate about the poor, and the immigrant and those who are suffering.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 26:31**

In our Old Testament class, or Hebrew Scripture class, we've been talking about the prophets. We've been talking about Amos and Isaiah and trying to help students see why is it that the prophets feel like they have to come and speak to the people. We begin to see very, very clearly that the reasons that that God is warning them about their behavior is because they are taking advantage of the poor. They are not caring for those who are the least, they're taking the land away, and they're indenturing poor people to become their slaves. This is in Isaiah and, and Amos, too. God is saying, Yeah, you can come and worship me all you want, but because of your actions, your worship doesn't mean anything to

me. You are misusing the poor. You are not being faithful to your side of the Covenant. Widows and orphans are dismissed or ignored.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 27:48**

So basically, where we're going with what we're describing right now is, how do we know anything about God? Well, God is self-revealing. We learn about that, in the long story of Scripture. Scripture is not the self-revelation of God. Scripture is witness to the self-revelation of God in its varied and manifold forms. Over centuries, people come to know that we're not just alone in the universe, that there is another who turns out to be the source, and end of all things. That's where our knowledge of God arises, where it comes from. It's then for us to keep experiencing that as we go. It's still experienceable today.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 28:44**

We can start to claim to know some things about the character of God, God, for whom justice and equality of all people is important.

**Carla Long 28:56**

Well, that's kind of where I wanted to go next about God's characteristics. But before I go there, Charmaine, you mentioned the parting of the Jordan River when the Israelites came in. I just want to say, I was in Israel, and at one point I could have jumped over the Jordan River, easily. I'm sure it was a special little miracle, but FYI, I could have jumped over it very easily. I did go to State in long jump, but I think a lot of people could have made that jump . Okay, I felt the need so thank you for reminding me of that. Where I want to head to next, you mentioned about in the Old Testament, how God has revealed God's self to people through different acts that God has done through a myriad of ways. But how does a person like me, how does Carla Long know that God is revealing God's self to me? How do I know I'm not just making it up out of my brain and saying, oh, that's God? How do I know it's God? How do I know it's me? What's the difference? Yeah, that what's the difference? There's a difference, everyone!

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 30:12**

I'm glad you're pretty sure of that. That's a relevant question for all of us.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 30:25**

If we take the big picture here, Carla, I'm going to start with a paradox. And I guess there's paradoxes in math, but it's the kind of math I can't do. So, I guess I'm at home here. Here's a paradox. God is unknowable and unfathomable. And at the same time, God yearns for us to be in intimate relationship with God's self. How are those two things possible at the same time? Well, they just are. It's both things are true simultaneously. And one answer to your question is community, community is the place where checks and balances are applied. If we think God is trying to tell us to go rob a 7/11, we have a community to say, I don't think so, Carla. Not that you would, of course, Carla. But . . .

**Carla Long 31:35**

Well, if they had excellent Slurpees!

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 31:39**

So yeah, that's one of the things we have to develop a language for, being able to tell which of these things that we're thinking, or feeling, are us. It's partly about being self-aware, too, and then, what can those who have gone before us, who have had an encounter with God, tell us? What does it feel like? How do we check it? How do we make sure we're not making up our own God, but that the God that we're talking about and responding to is the one that is witnessed to in Scripture and in those who have come before us in their lives? It really takes learning how to talk about this, how to talk about the inner experiences that we might have when we're talking about spiritual experiences, as a way to know God, but also to recognize where God may be at work outside of our feelings, in the world around us. Where do we sense God's justice or God's love at work in difficult situations in the world, so that we can unite our efforts and our prayers to those things that are examples of God's will, trying to happen in the world?

**Tony Chvala-Smith 33:17**

So, there's community, there's scripture, there's the sense of what is just and true. Charmaine, keep going.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 33:28**

Then, for Christians, there is Jesus. This is the other gauge, the other measuring stick that we can use when we're trying to decide where God is calling us as individuals or as a people. What is it that God wants in the world? Jesus is the one who is our reminder and keeps us on track. Jesus reached out to those who were the marginalized, to those who had been already tossed aside, disenfranchised, and ignored, those who were suffering. When we want to understand what is God's heart like, we look to Jesus, not just what did Jesus say, though that's important, but what did Jesus do? Who did he spend time with? Who did he choose to reveal God's love to most? Who did he chastise? That's a form of love too, right, to say, "Hey, hey, you're on the wrong track. Look this direction." He did that with the scribes and the Pharisees, trying to say, "Hey, let your God be bigger, your God be bigger than the rules. Let your God be bigger than your status or a structure." Jesus is another huge one that tells us who God is and what God is like, and how to know what God might be calling us to.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 35:18**

Right. To bring this back around your question, Carla, an experience that I wonder is this an experience of God? I would bring that experience first before the biblical portrait we have of Jesus of Nazareth. How does my experience square with that portrait or that fourfold portrait that we have in scripture of who Jesus is? what in my experience is Christ like? what kind of attributes of Christ's likeness? Does it encourage me to develop or to walk towards God? What is the wisdom of the community about this? What is the wisdom of Scripture, responsibly interpreted, not just finding a text that somehow magically supports my experience? How does that help me make sense of, and perhaps even criticize, my personal experience? And then asking the question, does my experience promote justice? Does it call me to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with the one I've encountered? If my experience tells me, Oh, I'm now superior to everybody else, there's a very good chance that it has nothing to do with God. It has everything to do with my ego. These are different kinds of checks and balances that revelation, in the broadest sense, brings to our personal experience.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 37:07**

Yeah, I tempted to go off in a slightly different direction. But maybe that's okay. That going back to the idea of our own personal experience, our experiences with God, those can become idols as well, those can become our little gods. One of the things that often happens in our experiences with God, those moments when we know that we are seen, and known, and loved by God, is that we become aware of our own worth. Probably when we're younger, that comes across as knowing that we are special to God, and that is such a deep need and hunger in the lives of many people. That encounter with God touches the most needy, and not in a negative way, but this is part of being human, this place of knowing that we have worth and that we are special to God. The desire for that, to be special, can sometimes overshadow our experience with God. Our hunger then can be not so much for a growing relationship with God, but that feeling of being special. That's another one of those places where we need the community and we need spiritual mentors to help us sort that through so that our own experience doesn't become God, or a desire for spiritual experience doesn't become our primary focus because then we'll go to the spot that Tony was talking about, about feeling superior to other people or wanting encounter with God so that we can feel that we were closer to God, where we think I'm closer to God than you are, I'm more beloved than you are, or I know more about God and that makes me smarter, all of those kinds of things. It's the temptation side of any kind of relationship. It happens here, as well. There's another place where community is really important.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 39:39**

I think it's interesting that in the long story of the Bible, the primary thing God seems to be involved in is creating community that is God's self-revelation, communities of people who are responding to that revelation. When we get in the series to our podcasts on the Doctrine of God we'll want to want to show the connections between that and what we'll talk about as the Doctrine of the Trinity there, God as God as community. God's revelation creates a people who yearned to respond to this God together. I think that's a really important aspect of the whole discussion of revelation. We need a community to help us make sense of our encounters with this Divine One who's always trying to reach out to us. Carla, does that seem to respond to the essence of your question?

**Carla Long 40:44**

It definitely does. That really helps, especially thinking about that community aspect. You both have touched on this, too. Is that how we figure out those unhealthy images that we might have for God. Through those ways?

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 41:04**

I think so. If the community is open to realizing that it doesn't know everything about God, it can be a place where many different aspects of God are nurtured, where different images of God, whether they come from scripture or from tradition, can be upheld. One of the things in spiritual formation, that people often encounter [is that] when they start on this journey to be intentional about their own spiritual formation, they usually have to come to a point where we start looking at what are my images of God. If I'm wanting to grow spiritually, I need to figure out who this God is that I am wanting to grow closer to. Many of us grew up with an initial image of God as the ledger keeper in the sky, who knew everything that we did, bad and good, and who's going to punish us for the bad things, whether in this life or after. Quite often, adults find themselves with that image of an angry God, or a God who's potentially angry



with us and looking for fault and that will tell us our worth is dependent on how many times we messed up in life. This is not, needless to say, a place to build a loving, trusting relationship. That's something that lots of us have to begin to do, to say, wait a minute, there are dozens of attributes of God, aspects of God, both in scripture and in tradition of Christianity, why are we sticking with one? Why am I sticking with this one that comes out of the idea of judgment. Why is that the only one? There are all these others, the idea of God's faithfulness, God being with us and present, even when we do mess up and being there down the road, to invite us once again. Why aren't we using that? In the King James Bible, in the Old Testament, it talks about God's bowels of compassion. The word that's being used there for bowels is in the Hebrew. It's talking about the womb. This is God's womb, wombly compassion, this nurturing, very female image of God that has given birth to a people and that God's longing to be there to support and bring this new life. Those images are there. There's the image of God's love and persistence with King David when he messes up royally.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 44:54**

Nice. Love that. (Charmaine: Bad pun. Bad pun.)

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 44:58**

Gods says, "I will not take my love from you." Why don't we use those images? There's a lot of exploration that can be done. What are some of these images of God that are truer, truer, to my experience, truer to the long story of God's encounter with people that are inviting, that ask me to go deeper in this relationship and not the taskmaster who I have to please. That's part of the spiritual journey, to become aware of those toxic images of God, that I need to release so that I can make room for these other aspects of God that I'm feeling invited to take on to give room that I'm longing for. There's part of me that wants these other kinds of ways of seeing God. That's another part of this, not making God into whatever we want. Some people would say you just want a God who doesn't care what you do. Well, that's not the case at all. There's already all of these attributes and characteristics of God that we know about, that we can connect with, but it takes, it takes some intentionality, and often a community, to help us see what the detriments are to our psyche, to our spiritual journey, when we only hang on to one image, one that may not be a very accurate image of the whole character of God.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 47:05**

Charmaine just described positive attributes of God that are part of the story of revelation. I'm going to go to the other side, to the negating side, because I think this is equally important for helping us in our spiritual growth, and that is what's sometimes called negative theology. The technical term is apophatic, which is a Greek word, which basically means a theology of negation. (Carla: oh, that's fun.) It is. And the opposite of what Charmaine just described is called cataphatic. So, cataphatic, and apophatic. (Charmain: So, describe each of them.) Yeah, cataphatic theology refers to those things we can know about, those positive attributes we can know about God as they have been revealed in the story of revelation. The other one, apophatic attributes, would be those things that basically are beyond us. They are real, but they're beyond us. I'll give you an example. Here I'm thinking about one of the great descriptions of all of these as found in the seventh century Greek theologian John of Damascus, seventh or eighth century theologian, John of Damascus, where he has a about a half page long list of these. Here's an example of them. These are ones I remember. So, God is unfathomable, uncircumscribable, infinite, unbounded, inaccessible, beyond all concepts. I think this kind of language

is important because it helps us check our desire, usually an unconscious desire, to make anything we think we know about God, into God. Our un-terms, help remind us, back to the burning bush story. They help remind us, God is what God is. God simply is, and that's beyond all that we can know. God is a non-derived being. That's utterly, completely different from who we are. We're derived beings. There was a time when we didn't exist. And then a time when we won't exist again. We are not naturally eternal in any way. Whatever eternity comes to us will be by gift. But God is by nature, eternal, and undefined. That kind of language is part of revelation, too. It reminds us, all right, you guys be careful, . God is near and close, and God is love, and God yearns for you to be in relationship. At the same time, it's part of your maturing as a disciple, to not turn anything you've encountered with God into the final answer, the final word. One must tread carefully and humbly around the infinite.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 50:24**

Here's a good Old Testament story that illustrates the apophatic. And that is the story of Elijah when he's gone to hide out in the mountain. He's told that God is going to pass by. There's the fire and the wind and the thundering and the quaking of the mountain. It says God wasn't in the wind. God wasn't in the quaking. God wasn't in the thunder. Where God is, is in the silence, in the not, in the not sound, not in the speaking. Even there, in the Old Testament, there are these reminders that it's in the not. It's in what we don't know. It's in what we don't hear that God is.

**Carla Long 51:26**

I like that. I like that.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 51:29**

All of these things are necessary for our spiritual growth in our spiritual journey to keep us open to a continuing encounter with this one we call God. That, of course, leads us to something that's really important to Community of Christ people, continuing revelation.

**Carla Long 51:53**

Yes, that's where I wanted to ask next because sometimes when I talk to non-Mormons, non-Community of Christ, not people who have been part of this, and I'm like, Yeah, we have a book called The Doctrine and Covenants where we think that God is still speaking. We vote on it to see if we all think it's God's still speaking and they're like, what ...? It is just a completely foreign concept to a lot of people out there. It's a really big deal for us, this continuing revelation, the idea that God still yearns to reveal who God is to a group of people. So yeah, please talk about that.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 52:34**

I think that lots of Christians actually have a concept of continuing revelation, and they just don't know to call it that. One of the books we recommended that listeners could read along with us in this journey is the book by Hanson called, *An Introduction to the Christian Faith*. Hanson's a Lutheran theologian. He actually has a section in his part on revelation on continuing revelation. He thinks of it in ways that fit Community of Christ ways quite well, that is that, for us, continuing revelation is not getting new data. It's not like revelation is the dropping of info on us and we're getting some new info. No, continuing revelation is that the primary, the essential, the primordial, the definitive revelation of God is in Jesus Christ and that has unfolding meaning for us. Continuing revelation is how that meaning unfolds in our

presence. One of the ways we happen to experience that is through our distinctive structures of having a prophet and a Doctrine and Covenants, but other traditions too have ways of experiencing the unfolding meaning and application of the essential revelation. So, in that respect, we're not that different. We just differ in that we canonize these things, too.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 54:01**

Some examples might be like, within Catholicism, the things that come from the Pope, the different encyclicals . . .

**Tony Chvala-Smith 54:12**

Right, yeah, Papal encyclicals. Those things become part of the tradition of the church and tradition is an unfolding of the primordial revelation in Christ that's attested to in scripture. Tradition in that setting is part of the big picture of revelation. It's not unlike what we think.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 54:37**

Churches have different ways of doing that. For us, that's been one of our hallmarks. We want to be able to hear how God is speaking now and we want to be open to the direction that God may be giving us as to how we should comport ourselves in the world, what we should be involved in. There's always a tendency to want to have our beliefs, we talked about this earlier, concrete, have it about a certain set of beliefs. I think, if we let it, continuing revelation means a continuing relationship with God. It can help us from letting a list of doctrines or a list of beliefs becoming our God instead of the God that they point to.

If we let our awareness have an attuneness to God's voice still speaking, if we let that have room in us, if we trust that the Spirit can be working in the body of the church as people prepare with prayer and fasting and focus before our conferences, and that the Spirit can help us as a body come to decisions about who we're going to be and what we're going to do in the world, it's really exciting. I think for Community of Christ, particularly in the last few conferences, that has been exciting and sometimes very difficult to say we are trying to discern as a group of people, not just as a Prophet, but as a group of people and a Prophet what it is that God is saying to us, not just so we can write it down in a book and say, "Oh, look, God spoke to us," which, you know, that's been a tendency at times in our past and then looking for the next revelation because it goes back to feeling good about ourselves. Isn't it cool that God spoke to us? I think as a denomination we're becoming more mature about why it is we want to hear God's voice, and why it is that God is speaking. That comes more around to how do we want to make God's Kingdom, God's reign visible in the world right now. And we're going to need help. In doing that, we're going to need help like the Old Testament folks, reminders along the way of how to attune our hearts and our minds, how to use our bodies to make the kingdom visible. The kingdom is already in our midst, but how do we make it visible so that others can see it and be encouraged and get life from that?

**Tony Chvala-Smith 58:06**

For me, a fascinating thing about the idea of revelation, and this is borne out in Community of Christ's recent experiences, that you can sense it's revelation when you have the feeling that God is ahead of where we actually are. Right. In other words, revelation has a future component to it, not a predictive

component, but a sense of in the present, as God is self-revealing. God is nudging us in directions where God already is. And we're not yet there. Usually continuing revelation actually messes up our paradigms and our patterns and our certainties. Here's a good here's a good case study, the ordination of women. Ordination of women didn't just get dropped in the church in 1984. If you look at the church's history, and listen to the stories of people, calls for women had been coming in, in different jurisdictions, for years before 1984. And already people had been sensing that we needed to move in a different direction there, at least many people. And so, when finally, we had Section 156 in our Doctrine and Covenants, which authorized the ordination of women, it wasn't like God just had a new idea that day, but actually, God had been trying to help us get there for a long time. I think the same is true right now in terms of issues of peace and justice, and concern for the poor and the marginalized, especially as, certainly the United States, but other nations become so incredibly, nastily nationalistic. God is already ahead of the game on this, already trying to call us forward. Revelation is always trying to urge us towards the reign of God, which is God's endgame, God's hope for us all,

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:00:10**

. . . which is about breaking down the walls, which is about lifting up each person as having value, rather than the walls that nationalism and other kinds of isms create around and between people.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 1:00:27**

So, Carla, back to where we started a while ago, this evening. How do we know anything about God? Well, depends on what you mean by know, but we have lots of traces of God's presence and activity and we find ourselves drawn into a relationship of trust towards those traces. And over the long haul, they don't disappoint us. We can say, in that respect, we believe that God is, that God is real, that God is calling, that God is the source and end of all things and that a life lived in service to God is a life that will open us to our fullest humanity.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:01:22**

And I think one of the things that we haven't explored too much is how our personal experiences are those places that we keep going back to, to remind us about who God is. And they're really valuable for that. Earlier, I was talking about what some of the dangers are, but they're very, very valuable. I can't remember what year it was, Tony might remember, but it was an international youth forum or festival that was here at the at the Temple. I don't know if it was associated with Spec that year, before Spec, or after, but there were youth from many nations at the Temple for the festival. One of the very last things was a service in the sanctuary, where the youth were invited to be prayed for. Their chairs were set up in different places with two elders at each of the chairs. Many of the people who were by the chairs were church leaders. The apostles were there and some of the First Presidency, and others who were with the delegations. There's all these chairs and the youth were invited to come, and either be administered to for struggles that they had in their lives or to ask for a blessing as they returned back home. I wasn't standing by the chairs. I was helping direct people to chairs that were open, but it was just an amazing moment as I stepped back to look at what was happening. And instead of looking, I could feel in a way what was happening. I saw nearby an elder from Great Britain and an apostle, who I didn't always agree with, who both had their hands on a youth's head and there were tears streaming down everybody's face. And seeing that. I was moved to tears, as well. There was the sense of this swoosh of the Spirit moving all around within the sanctuary, and it sounds pretty mystical and kind of

hard to explain, but you could almost see it and you could definitely feel how the Spirit was moving. For me, that's one of those places that I go back to and say this is a moment where God, as the entity of the Holy Spirit, was moving in the midst, and yes, bringing blessing, but also bringing life and energy into this worship service and into the lives of the people who were there. These are the kinds of things that we hang on to that remind us of what an experience with God looks like and feels like. And what it is for. You know, that's the always like a good question to ask ourselves when we have spiritual experiences that inform us about who God is, or how God is seeing us and the community.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 1:05:30**

So very, very simply, the great documents of the Christian church, often start out with "I believe" or "we believe" and faith in the presence and reality of the one we call God is real. It's experienceable. This God is reaching out to us all the time and has been across history. Since along the way, Carla, we've had some math moments, I'll end with a math moment here. You, the mathematician, Carla, will know the name Pascal, I think. I'm sure you do. Pascal was also a man of deep, deep faith, highly rational, highly mathematical and a man of deep faith. I'm going to paraphrase something he says in his collection of thoughts. He says that the heart has its reasons, of which reason, or rationality has limited access. Rationality is amazing. It gives us penicillin. It gives us electric lights. It's awesome. And yet, there are some places into which it needs some help. It can't get there, but the heart can get there. Faith can get there. Trust can get there. And yielding ourselves to a self-revealing God can get us there.

**Carla Long 1:07:03**

I love that. And I especially love that we ended on Pascal even though he hated Descartes, and I love Descartes. I'm working my way through that. Well, thank you, you two for taking, I jokingly said, was a pretty easy question and of course, it's not. You two have a way of talking about things that even a mathematician like me can understand. So, I appreciate you very much. Thank you so much for discussing this. And I look forward to our next God Shot.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 1:07:39**

Our next Got Shot, technically speaking, should be on Scripture. Usually in theology, we start with revelation as a general concept. The next place we'll go to is to What is scripture? What is its relationship to revelation? and What is its role and place in theology? The chapter in Migliore, I think right after revelation, is the one on Scriptures should be (Charmaine: the meaning of revelation), that the one we've been on tonight, and so the next one in Migliore would be the authority of Scripture. And then Hanson has a lot of things in chapter one, which he calls faith in theology. He has both revelation and scripture in that chapter. So, for any of those who are working with Hansen's *Introduction*, you get to stay on chapter one. That will be for next time. The role of scripture in Christian theology would be our topic next time.

**Carla Long 1:08:47**

Sounds wonderful. Thank you so much. I appreciate you two, very much.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:08:53**

Ditto. We appreciate you for doing this.

**Carla Long** 1:08:55

Thank you.

**Josh Mangelson** 1:08:56

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