

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 00:29

Hello, and welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. I'm your host, Carla Long and you're listening to Percolating on Faith, a series where we all get to show you how smart we are. Well,

Charmaine 00:41

Some of us.

Carla Long 00:43

Except for me, that's what I was gonna say. This is actually a subset of our Percolating series. It's a little subset we'd like to call God Shots, where we speak specifically about theology and theological matters. And as always, you've already heard their voices, we have the stars of Percolating on Faith and God Shots, Charmaine and Tony Chvala-Smith.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 01:06

Hi Carla.

Tony Chvala-Smith 01:07

Hi Carla.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 01:07

Good to be with you.

Carla Long 01:09

Welcome back friends. Now, I have a big first question, like probably the most important first question.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 01:16

Okay

Carla Long 01:16

Here goes. Did you happen to have a God Shot since the last time we've spoken?

Tony Chvala-Smith 01:23

Hmm, I've had a lot of good coffee, but nothing I would call a God shot, with one exception. Go ahead Charmaine.,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 01:29

Oh, I have. I found a coffee, some whole bean that I ground up and made into cold brew. And it is delicious.

Tony Chvala-Smith 01:39

Mmm

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 01:40

Delicious.

Tony Chvala-Smith 01:41

Yes. That was what I was thinking of is a bottle of cold brewed that Charmaine made up. That was a chilly God shot. It was really lovely.

Carla Long 01:50

Would that be more of a goddess shot or still a God shot?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 01:53

Ooohh

Tony Chvala-Smith 01:55

Ahh, Yes. Well

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 01:56

Good question

Tony Chvala-Smith 01:57

Hah!

Carla Long 01:50

Good. It's important. It's important. So, I just want to help our listeners understand. This is the third in our God Shot podcast series. Now the first podcast, we talked about theology and what is theology? What it's all about? The second God Shot podcast, we talked about how do we know anything about God? How is God self-revealing to us? We talked about revelation. And tonight, we're going to be talking about, in a systematic theology what role does Scripture play? Right? Did I get all that right?

Tony Chvala-Smith

Right.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

Yep. You got it!

Tony Chvala-Smith

That is right.

Carla Long

And we're following a book called *Faith Seeking Understanding* by Daniel Migliore, Migliori? Migliore.

Tony Chvala-Smith

Uhm, *mil-eyor-eh, is how it's typically

Carla Long

Ohh, meal-eyor-eh.

Tony Chvala-Smith

Yah. It's Italian

Carla Long

Whoever's editing this, edit that out. Oh, that's why. I'm from Kansas. I don't know anything - I don't know any foreign language. So, and we're following, basically, his writings, right?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 03:06

Well, yeah. We're encouraging people that if they wanted to read some more for themselves, on a good systematic theology, a good, kind of classical, Christian systematic theology, that Migliore's is a good one to read along. If you wanted to read the book, the chapter, before we do ours, it would give you some really good background. We're not going to be trying to restate what Migliore is saying. We're going to go off on the same topic, though, that as he sets his up in his systematic theology, we're going to hit the topics. So.

Tony Chvala-Smith 03:49

His book is a really good introduction. We use it, we use it in Community of Christ Seminary. Gosh, it's now in its third edition. And it first came out around 90 or 90 or 92. So it's probably one of the most widely used introductory texts to Christian theology currently. And it's just a gem. It's quite marvelous. So, and I actually had this guy for a teacher when I was a Seminary student, I had him once. And for those of our listeners who know Dale Luffman, Dale had him a couple of times when Dale was a Seminary student, too. So, we like this book a lot. And it's just, it's good. But we're following this kind of traditional order for the topics of theology. But, Charmaine and I will at some places go our own kind of Community of Christ way on stuff. So that's important to know, too.

Carla Long 04:39

Well, I'd be disappointed if you didn't, of course. And it's not just we're following his book, right. We're also looking at the creed. And we're kind of following the

Tony Chvala-Smith 04:52

So, the discipline that's called systematic theology, actually is really ancient. And it arose in the late second, early third century, when Christian leaders had to find ways to teach new converts, that is converts from Greco-Roman religions. I mean, you can call them pagans if you want to. It's not a very nice term, usually but, but converts from Greco-Roman religions to Christianity needed to have

extensive instruction before they could enter the Christian way of life. And so, statements of faith, like what came to be called the Apostles Creed, arose as teaching tools. And systematic theology is a discipline that followed the order of articles in the Creed, teaching people as it went. So, for example, the Apostles Creed starts, we believe. And so, you know, in systematic theology, you start with how do we know anything about God, right? So, the question of faith, faith seeking understanding, revelation, that's all encompassed in that first phrase, we believe. We believe in God. So then after we deal with how we know anything about God, then we go to the topic of who is the Christian God, and then Christ and then Spirit, and then the church and so on. So systematic theologians have followed that order. It's a pretty handy order to follow. So that's why we do it this way. And where we are tonight, is on scripture, which is a subset of the category revelation we covered last night. So, it has to do with how do we know anything about God? And so that's where we're going tonight, we're going to the next level, under the topic of revelation, which is scripture.

Carla Long 06:44

So, we're kind of looking at scripture, like through a systematic theology. Would you say it that way or not say it that way?

Tony Chvala-Smith 06:51

You can say it that way, or say, what place does scripture have in systematic theology? What's place does or should scripture have in Christian theology? And you can extend it even further, what place should scripture have in the life of the church, in our spiritual lives and so on? All these things are related. Does that seem right, Charmaine?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 07:13

Yeah, that sounds good. All right.

Carla Long 07:16

Well, let's jump in. So, maybe let's start with the basics. What is "constitutes scripture." Let's just start right there. And then we'll move into the right more technical stuff.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 07:30

And this, we've said many times before, but it's just a good starting point. And that is that scripture are those writings that over time, have been given authority or have become sacred to a particular group of people. And so, when we're talking about scripture here, we'll be talking about the Bible. But in Community of Christ, also, the Doctrine and Covenants is really an important place in understanding God's self-revealing nature in Scripture. And then also the Book of Mormon. And so, this is the idea that God is self-revealing, is really important to our denomination. And, you know, we've tried to capture a lot of that sense that God is moving and speaking into our reality in various ways, and try to write it down, write down our understandings of who this God is, so that we can reference them. And I think all of Scripture is that in some way, it's someone telling about their encounter with God. And as the Christian tradition as a whole, we have passed those on to the next generations, and they have then become a compilation of sometimes disputed, I mean, kind of disputing each other. Some of these different accounts of attributes of God aren't always agreeing with each other, but they're all kept as

ways of recognizing that this God that keeps encountering us is something/someone to want to share, to tell the next generation about or to capture those pieces, those glimpses that we get along the way.

Tony Chvala-Smith 10:02

So, another part of that definition that Charmaine gave. It's like the question could be raised, well can just any old thing that somebody writes about some personal experience they had be scripture? And the first answer would be, well, not really, because there's another component to it. And that is what we call canonization. That is a whole community over time, it's like multi-generational over time, uses and references and comes to attribute authority to a particular text. So, that's an important part of what makes a scripture a scripture. There are lots of inspiring things to read in the world. Some not even related to the Christian faith at all, like lots actually. But for theology and for the church, those particular texts that have gone through this long communal process are part of what we mean by Scripture. So.

Carla Long 11:05

Okay, well, yeah. I love that description every time. You know, I think sometimes people might think, when I say what a scripture is, like, duh, everybody knows what Scripture is. But when you look at it in a way that you described it, it comes to mean something a little bit more. And you have to think about how Scripture came into be, it's not just a book that dropped into your lap one day. Like it has gone through a lot in order to drop into your lap.

Tony Chvala-Smith 11:41

Yeah, exactly. Exactly. Even the things we know about the origin of biblical books, you know, today, long, long, long, complicated processes of writing. And if you want to transfer this to Joseph Smith and the *Book of Mormon*, you know, long process around a kitchen table, in some respects. So, with lots of people involved in the process.

Carla Long 12:10

It's true, that's true. So why is scripture important?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 12:13

It serves as a corporate memory. This God that we believe in, we didn't make up. We didn't discover this God for ourselves. We are given language to describe God, to know God, to speak to God, because God has encountered those who have come before us. And though we live differently, speak different languages, have different cultural practices than many of those people whose writings we value, they were trying to comprehend and explain the same entity, the same God that has touched us, that has called us, that has let us know that we are loved. And so, scripture is really important because it is a reminder when we can't remember, or our feelings are in far flung places, or our present reality keeps us from being able to feel God, the words and the feelings of others remind us that God is there, even when we can't tell. But it also, these writings that have gone through this test of time and have been used by hundreds of generations of people before us, the longevity of those writings being used reminds us of the longevity, the endurance, the long-term relationship that God has chosen with people. And that's a good reason to dig into Scripture, is to learn what others know, knew about this relationship with God. This God who has a dream for the world, has a desire for equity and peace and

love and support for all people. So, it's a great reminder, but it also invites us to ... scripture of the past invites us to write our own chapter. And I think that's an important invitation.

Tony Chvala-Smith 14:58

That idea that scripture's important as a communal memory, reminds me of a real-life story that happened to a friend of ours many years ago. He was out driving through the country, somewhere in Eastern Michigan, and as he told the story later, he all of a sudden did not know who he was and where he was going. And later, after some medical exams, it was determined he had what's called temporary global amnesia. It's a very weird condition, it happens rarely. And for a short while he totally did not know who he was. And so, scripture as this big library that is our communal memory, one of its great functions is to help us not get amnesia, and forget who we are, the path we're on, what we're called to be in do. I think that's a pretty important task of scripture, especially today in an age when absolutely virulent nationalism passes for the sort of the Christian way in American culture. It's like, no better take a look at our communal memory on that one. That's not quite right. Actually, it's really wrong. So, another thing about scriptures value is that this great Old Testament scholar, Walter Brueggemann, has written somewhere that scripture gives us what he calls a counter world. You know, a picture of a world where the poor are lifted up, where outsiders are brought in, where aliens are welcomed, where strangers are fed, where the poor are exalted and the rich brought down to a more modest place. It's a different world. A world that is connected to the coming of the Kingdom of God. And we need that counter world. We need stories that can remind us that the way things are not the way things are meant to be. So those are some reasons why scripture is really important, Carla.

Carla Long 17:17

Well, yeah. Yeah, for sure. So, you've talked a little bit about this kind of order that we're following: What is theology? Then the knowledge of God? And now we're talking about scripture. So, you've already made a statement that scripture is, has a relationship with revelation? What is that relationship with revelation?

Tony Chvala-Smith 17:39

So, that's a really important question in theology. A common way that's viewed by a lot of different kinds of Christian groups, is that the two things are equated - that revelation is scripture, and scripture is revelation. Well, that actually becomes problematic on a whole bunch of levels. If you start thinking that scripture is literally revelation, that God is literally speaking in these books and these words, you run into all kinds of moral and personal and communal and theological problems with that. Generally, in Community of Christ, as in other mainline denominations, we tend to make a distinction. We say that scripture is a witness to and an interpretation of revelation. But it's not revelation itself. That keeps us then from elevating or worshipping scripture, or treating it as if it itself is God, which it's not. It's human speech, human words, human writings, human struggles, human interpretations of encounters with God.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 18:57

Yeah, it's derivative of relationship with God.

Tony Chvala-Smith 19:01

Yeah. That's a good way to put it. So, you know, I've heard a couple people say this, and I love the statement, the Word became flesh - that is a person, the word did not become printers ink. I think that's a nice way to put it.

Carla Long 19:20

I think that's a very kind way of putting it. It is just so difficult and hard, and it actually hurts me, when I think that people think that the Bible is God's actual words. Because there's a lot of really awful, hurtful things in there. And we're doing all kinds of stuff wrong all the time if those are actually God's words to us today.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 19:47

Yeah. Exactly. So, we're kind of working with this whole idea of the different ways in which scripture gets read in our culture today. And really, maybe more, what are some of the different options that there are for reading scripture that can help. So, scripture comes from encounter with God. And when responsibly used, scripture can lead us into encounter with God. But it depends on how we read it, how we use it. So, I'm going to read just a short passage, and this is from Mark seven, and it's just 24 to 30. And we're going to take a look at this passage through several different lenses on how one can interpret it, how one can look at it. So, starts, "From there, Jesus set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged Jesus to cast the demon out of her daughter. Jesus said to her, 'Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.' But she answered him, 'Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs. And then Jesus said to her, "For saying that, you may go, the demon has left your daughter.' And so she went home, found the child lying on the bed and the demon gone." So, this is a passage that sometimes gets avoided, because it's like, oh, what do we do with this? But we're gonna just use it as a place to try out some different ways of seeing how scripture can be used and useful. So, in our culture there's a kind of a default setting. And you mentioned it earlier, Carla, where it's the idea that somehow every word in the Bible was spoken by God, or is what God wants us to hear, or is God's instruction to us, or a rule book from God. And so people have a tendency to read it in a way that's called literalism. So, trying to think about what would be some of the dangers or some of the results of reading this literally. And one of the things would be to say, well, Jesus here is saying to the Syrophenician woman, hey, I came to take care of Israel, of the Jewish people. God doesn't care to help out other people. You know, this is what I'm here for is for the children, God's children. And so reading it that way, at least for the beginning part of this passage, you could say, well, you know, we don't really need to be concerned about how God may want to bless other people outside of Christianity. Even Jesus said God's primary concern is for the insiders, for those who already know God. And another way that this ... so that's the kind of literalism that could be used to exclude people. But there's sometimes people who are on the anti-Christian side of things, who also read the Bible literally. And so what you would hear them say after the reading of this passage would be, I can't believe that Jesus, this Jesus guy is a real jerk. How could he tell someone that they're a dog? How could he tell this woman that she's a dog? If that's what Christianity is about, I don't want to have anything to do with it. Sound familiar?

Carla Long 24:52

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. But Jesus was kind of a jerk in that one, but I mean. But continue.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 25:00

Yes, well, but that's using our cultural lenses and the assumption that somehow this is.

Tony Chvala-Smith 25:12

A text message.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 25:15

This is a text message from God. And this is who Jesus is and was. But both readings are literalistic. One says, okay, so God doesn't necessarily care about everybody and so it's okay if we're kind of isolationist and only have anything to do with insiders, those who already know God. On the other side, it can be a reason to toss Christianity altogether, because this Jesus guy is obviously a jerk. So that's the literal reading, or the literalistic reading, and it doesn't really get us anywhere, I think, as far as relationship with God. It can put us in a self-righteous place, or it can put us in a place where we're really disturbed by this image of Jesus' action. Doesn't really take us anywhere else. So, I think we've maybe mentioned this once or twice before, just using the idea that if you look at scripture as if it were imperatives, rules, commands, or what God is actually saying, then this is what we get. This is that literalism where what's on the page must be describing what God said and what God is like. So, we would encourage that there's a lot of other ways of looking at scripture and using it. And one would be descriptive, or the indicative. And in this way, this text, if we say what does this text describe, then we could start to say, Oh this text is describing the relationship between Jews and non-Jews in parts of Palestine, in what we would today call Palestine. And they had some divisions between them religiously and culturally. There were certain things where they didn't mix. And we can begin to see that. And then if we let Jesus be a symbol in this story, especially at the beginning of the story, for Israel, for Judaism in his time, we see him acting in a way that would be normal between Gentiles and Jews in that time. Where, hey, you know, we have made this commitment with God, and God blesses us and wants to bless us. And, you know, you've got your own gods. You wouldn't understand. And kind of that's what Jesus represents in the beginning of this passage. He's a typical, his depiction of the typical Jewish way of interacting with Syrophoenicians. And if we're looking at it then as descriptive first of the culture of the time and understanding that, then we get to see something new at the end of that passage, when the woman insists, and Jesus does something that is unexpected. And part of who God is is revealed in a new way. So, by being descriptive, using cultural understandings, social and cultural understandings of the day, that can take us some new places in the passage.

Tony Chvala-Smith 29:29

So, what Charmaine is doing here is looking at the passage through two different lenses, two different interpretation theories. And that second theory is taking the text as descriptive of certain realities from the first century, including the reality of the first Christians which is that they actually lived this out. They lived out a shift in worldview, a shift in how they viewed outsiders. So, that's quite different from the other way that Charmaine described, which is that the text is, the Bible is a collection of rules and they can be pieced together into some sort of, like system. And what Christianity is, is about keeping rules.

Well, actually, that's, that's neither faithful to the Bible as a whole, nor to the person of Jesus who is witnessed to in the scriptures. So, in theology what we call this, this is hermeneutics. This is interpretation theory. Texts don't just say things, we make them say things. And we have to be aware of the lenses or the methods or the approaches we're taking to the text, that gives us the ability to hear and make sense of it in different ways.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 30:57

So, there's some other lenses that one can use as they are reading scripture and particularly this passage. So, do you want to talk about the feminist lens?

Tony Chvala-Smith 31:08

Oh, sure. Yeah. Feminist theologians can read this text. And using the lens of feminist critical theory, they can say, actually the story of the Syrophenician woman models what it looks like to stand up to a male religious authority figure. So, she acts as a hero in the story. She pushes back on Jesus. And in the Gospel of Mark, we readers know who he is by the time we get to chapter seven. So, she's a wonderful model of pushing back,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 31:43

Right. And what happens when she pushes back is that God's desire to bless all people is revealed. And so it's her as a hero opens the door to revealing these attributes of God, that would not have been as visible otherwise.

Tony Chvala-Smith 32:10

So, another lens you can use on this text is a liberationist lens. And here I'm thinking of liberation theologies from Latin America. And with this lens, what we can gain from the text is that we the church, we learn from Jesus how to listen and then how to yield to people who are destitute and suffering, who are outsiders and aliens. And we learn, by following the story, that the outsider has an equal claim on God's goodness, too. So, that's a whole other twist on the story when you bring that lens to it.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 32:54

And so then, another one, another lens that one can use is the spiritual or relational lens. And in this one, we let the passage ask us questions about our discipleship. And so, a question that might come from this text is, when has Jesus challenged me to claim my identity as one of God's children? Because in the story that's what happens is that Jesus' challenge to the woman actually becomes a place where she claims her belief in God and her desire to be in relationship with this God. So, when has Jesus challenged me to claim my identity as one of God's children, would be another place to go with it.

Tony Chvala-Smith 34:00

And another lens by which you can read this text is, I'll just call it the historical critical lens. Which is that this story is not an isolated scene, it's within a gospel, in this case, the gospel of Mark. And in relation to that whole gospel, the story has a particular function. So, Mark's gospel is written for an early Christian community that's really suffering and struggling and tempted with not hanging in there with Jesus. And so, this story for that early, probably those first readers of the gospel, this story presents the woman as a model of, you know when Jesus is silent, when everything's like, really going bad and we're struggling

and suffering and trying to figure out why do we do this? Why do we baptize in the first place? Which certainly was the situation of the first readers of Mark. Well, the Syrophenician woman says, I'm not going anywhere. I'm going to stay here until you talk to me. So, you can make a whole different kind of sense out of the passage using those lenses of basic exegesis, too. So, what we've just done is we've given a handful of other lenses by which to read a text. And this, by the way, is why a text does not ever have a single meaning. It has multiple meanings depending on the lenses you bring to it. That's really, really important for theology. And it's really important for the church today. And it's very important for what we call in Community of Christ, responsible interpretation. Carla, does that make sense of the different ways that we can come to a scripture and draw different things from it?

Carla Long 35:43

Absolutely. And I actually have a question about that. But I just want to be sure that we are not supposed to come at this particular scripture from the lens of Jesus as a jerk. We're not supposed to do that. Because you know, Jesus, he could be like, fully divine, fully human, sometimes jerk. I just want to be sure that's not how we do it.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 36:13

Yeah, We have to bring our questions, the questions that our realities today would cause us to bring to the text. We don't have to let our cultural realities today determine what we will get out of it, however. And so if we say, okay, so what is Jesus' situation and what is he representing - maybe the humaneness of his time? And then he's also pointing towards the divine. So, in that one little story, there's both happening there. The limitations of our human culture and the expansive generosity of God. So, you know, I think that maybe that's another lens that we need to kind of avoid, is to put everything into our modern cultural understanding and determine the value of it by whether or not it's what we would do, or what we would like to see done. So yeah, that's actually another one is how do we keep from simply dismissing some parts of scripture because they don't fit our view of things. And we're not sure. It's like, is Jesus always supposed to be good? Or is it possible that Jesus is sometimes representing some of the narrowness of his own culture?

Tony Chvala-Smith 37:59

So, it's like a careful, responsible scripture use in the church and in theology is kind of like the studied, careful listening of a good therapist. Right, so exegesis as we teach it, you bracket a lot of your own stuff when you come into the text. You want to hear the text speaking its own authentic voice, or its own authentic voices. And so, in the same way that if a friend comes to you and wants to talk about a problem they have, you fail them if you start overlaying your stuff on them. Right? So that's not a friend and that's not good listening. And certainly, if you have a therapist like that, you probably should get a different one. So, the idea here is that we want to bracket our agendas first. Be aware of them and bracket them so that we can hear the text in all of its uniqueness and otherness and difference. And by the way, in the New Testament, Jesus seems to welcome challenges and welcome criticisms. It's probably too bad Carla, there's not a story in one of the Gospels in which somebody comes to Jesus and says, Jesus, Are you just being a jerk? That would be a cool story.

Carla Long 39:22

I bet his best friend Bubba would have told him that.

Tony Chvala-Smith 39:28

Bubba the Pharisee, right?

Carla Long 39:33

Oh, maybe it's cousin Bubba. Bubba Christ. I don't really know.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 39:37

Or it could be Biff.

Carla Long 39:40

Oh! Biff. That's it. That's what I meant. Not Bubba, Biff. Um, so I guess my question is how do we know that we are using a responsible lens when looking at these scriptures?

Tony Chvala-Smith 39:58

So one thing is, if our use of scripture is turning scripture into a tool of violence, or abuse, or coercion, or oppression, or racism, or misogyny, or heterosexism, that's our stuff. And we're probably not letting the text be the text. And that would be a sign where whatever methods we're using are not responsible methods.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 40:27

Right? And I think another way to gauge is to say, what is being produced by this use of scripture? Is it making more room in the world for God's love? Am I using it to judge others? Or am I using it to become more self-aware? And to be more honest in myself? Quite often, we use scripture on others in ways we would never think to use them on ourselves, when we do violence with them. But if we find, you know, that we're using them against others, or against ourselves even, then that's a pretty good sign that we're not actually trying to create avenues for encounter with God. We're living out our own desire to be self-righteous, or to be better than or, that kind of thing. So, you can kind of see what does it produce?

Tony Chvala-Smith 41:39

That reminds me of a statement from the fourth/fifth century theologian and Bishop, St. Augustine. St. Augustine was a great and thoughtful interpreter of scripture. And in his little book, it's titled *De doctrina Christiana*, which is something like *On Christian Teaching*, he has this statement about interpreting scripture. And even in his day, even in the fourth and fifth centuries, there are lots of different approaches to scripture out there. He says, you know there are better approaches and worse approaches to scripture. But he says, here's the thing that matters most. And that is if an interpretation of scripture gets you to love God, and love your neighbor as yourself, then even if, as an interpretation theory it's not very great, it's still got you there. So, I love that the end in mind here is the love of God and the love of neighbor. So, in Community of Christ theology, and actually Migliori who is not Community of Christ would align with us, too, we would say that an interpretation process or theory of the Bible has to have all that Christ represented at its center. In other words, how do we decide, you know, Scripture is a library, it's got a ton of stuff in it. And some of it, as we've said earlier, is not very savory, right? Some of it's pretty difficult, pretty hard. How do we find our way through that? Well, we

keep at our center, who is Jesus? What is Jesus about? What does Jesus reveal about the divine nature? That's kind of the big lens for how we interpret it. So those are some ways we can approach responsible interpretation, Carla.

Carla Long 43:52

Well, and Community of Christ actually has a really good way to do it, right? We have our Scripture Statement that kind of can help be a guide through that as well. Do you want to speak a little bit about the Community of Christ Scripture Statement?

Tony Chvala-Smith 44:05

Sure. The Scripture Statement was first published in 2003. And it came from what at the time was called the Theology Taskforce. And when that taskforce began meeting in 2002, all the people on it said, you know one of the most important things we have to do as a church in the current cultural setting, is articulate what is a authentic Community of Christ approach to Scripture. And so that's where that statement came from. It was reissued in 2006. And now it's part of *Sharing in Community of Christ*. And its point is to guide the church at all levels in how we use scripture responsibly. And so we would always say, gosh, if you want to understand if you want to understand how Community of Christ at least institutionally looks scripture, go there.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 45:01

Yeah. And I think you would probably recognize some of the things we've been saying if you were to read that statement. It's just called *Scripture in Community of Christ*. And we're asking Carla to go ahead and put a link to that so that people can follow it. But it tries very carefully to balance this as literature from a particular time, but also as a tested place where people can come to know who God is, to find a revealing God. Yeah, and the idea of it being a library of many voices, some that don't agree with each other. And, you know, all you have to do is look at the four gospels. Four different stories, four different descriptions of Jesus, and yet all of them were kept because they all helped to represent some aspect of who Jesus was and is. Yeah, so there isn't just one voice in scripture, there are many voices.

Tony Chvala-Smith 46:24

I think this statement, one of the paragraph says that scholarship and faith and tradition and experience - something like that, I can't quote exactly, I don't have it in front of me - but we're gonna bring every possible resource to bear on scripture. So, we will use and teach and affirm the best critical scholarship on scripture. At the same time, since we're called to love God with our hearts and souls and might as well as with our heads, we need to bring spiritual formational approaches, Lectio Divina approaches, meditative approaches, prayerful approaches to scripture. So, that's part of that statement, which is trying to be holistic in the very best possible sense.

Carla Long 47:07

Well, that was kind of my next question where I wanted to go. I wanted to talk a little bit about the interconnection between theology and scripture and spirituality. They're definitely interconnected. You know, we definitely want to study scripture with our heads, but we have to study it with our hearts as

well, and let it become part of who we are in order to fully live it out. So, can we talk a little bit more about that interconnectedness?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 47:35

Sure. I think one of the things that is really beneficial about the idea of Lectio Divina, or divine reading, taking time with scripture, slowing down with scripture; is the idea not that these words are words right out of God's mouth and God will tell us exactly how we need to live each day and make each decision, but that these words point to a reality that is near, is right here, whose vision of the world is still unfolding. And so, taking time with Scripture can do lots of different things. One thing is that independent of the words, we can let scripture take us into a quiet place, a place where we are looking for God, a place where we are listening for God. And I think the experience of many people is that when we take time and read through scripture, sometimes reading it in several repetitions, sometimes it's the actual words that are there fade away, but they connect us, they remind us of this connection with a real and living God. And peace comes to us. Inspiration comes to us. Energy comes to us. And then sometimes, again taking time to listen to a passage, we see things. The Spirit helps us to see things that we hadn't ever seen before. One of the ways that I like to do Lectio Divina, especially when it's a narrative or a story, is to have people imagine themselves there in the occasion, whatever is happening, and to let their feelings and their senses all come to play, and to see if they were there, what would this situation stir in them as far as their desire to be faithful, to grow in faith, to trust God, to trust Jesus with the places in their lives that need healing. So, you know if it was a healing story. So, it's this place where our lives, the lives of those who came before us, and the God that we're both thinking about meet. And when that happens, we are changed. In little ways we may see some things more clearly, we may be able to muster our courage to make some changes, to take some risks, to challenge some of the old ways we used to think. We may get courage to ask for forgiveness of God and of ourselves, trusting that the Jesus who lifted those who had been discarded by the culture, to show them that God cared about them, wants to lift us when we are in those places where we don't trust that we are loved or have purpose in the world.

Tony Chvala-Smith 51:44

I'm thinking of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. You asked, Carla, about the connection between scripture, theology and spirituality and how these things all hold together. And, Bonhoeffer was one of the most creative, revolutionary, theological thinkers of the mid 20th century. And, he had learned all of the critical exegesis methods that we would teach. At the same time, he also practiced Lectio Divina, and he spent a lot of time meditating on scripture. These things came together for him in very powerful ways, as increasingly he became one of the unfortunately few or rare voices in Germany in the 1930s, who discerned how evil Nazism was. And he wrote, it's a classic book, it's really like a Christian classic. Often, it's translated *Cost of Discipleship* but in German, it's *Nachfolge*, which means following after. It's a book about following after Jesus, and it's really, essentially a long meditation on the Sermon on the Mount. And so, in this one person lots of modern critical philosophy and deep awareness of modern theology and critical exegesis, came together with deep spirituality and a love of scripture and an openness to it, and created this form. This man who is known to us today as one of the real important voices for resisting Hitler in German churches in the 1930s and into the 40s. So, scripture, theology, spirituality, these are not like different realities, they belong together. And to approach any one of them without the other two, I think is a real significant loss and mistake.

Carla Long 53:54

Well, Tony, I'm really glad you brought up Dietrich Bonhoeffer. I've always just been a major fan of his and I always feel like I can never quite live up to what he calls us to. So, it's good to look at him in a different way, as well. So, I appreciate that. Well, I think that we've done a pretty good job of covering what we wanted to cover. But is there something else that I missed that you wanted me to ask or something else that we want to talk about before we sign off?

Tony Chvala-Smith 54:23

Yeah, I think maybe the last thing to say before we go on into the next podcast, would be, ultimately who is God, what kind of God do we worship? Because we'll become like the kind of God we worship. And if the God we worship is created literalistically and thoughtlessly out of a few obscure passages from scripture, especially ones that portray God as vicious and angry, then that's how we're going to be. So, how we approach scripture is connected to a larger issue in theology. And that is, what is our picture of God? Who is the Christian God? Who is the God of Jesus Christ? And so that's really, really important because everything flows to it and flows from it.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 55:25

And coincidentally, that will be our next topic.

Tony Chvala-Smith 55:28

Oy, yeah. Coincidentally, that will be the topic of our next podcast. So, our next God Shot will be on who is God? And for those who are reading Migliori, they can read chapter four. And chapter four in Migliore is titled *The Triune God*. And so, we will in our next podcast we'll talk about who is the God whom traditionally we call God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit? Who is this communal God that we've come to know in Christ and in the life of the church? So that's our topic for next time, Carla.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 56:08

Yep. And the only other thing I would say is, don't be afraid of the awkward Scriptures, the scriptures you don't know what to do with. And instead, try a different lens as you're reading them and see what questions you might find that help you to stretch a little bit.

Carla Long 56:32

Thank you so much. I appreciate that because there are a lot of very awkward scriptures out there.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 56:38

There are, aren't there? Yes, there are.

Carla Long 56:42

Some that when they come up, and I'm supposed to be preaching on them, I'm just like, No, no, no.

Tony Chvala-Smith 56:52

It's kind of like, I'm looking at a text in the lectionary and I say to Charmaine, "Charmaine, does this text make me look fat?"

Carla Long 57:02

And the answer is, “Yes, it does. Yes, yes, it does.” Well, thank you so much Tony and Charmaine, again, for your wisdom and your guidance and all the stuff that you give to us for free.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

I really appreciate your willingness to stick with us and ask us questions and dig deeper. Thank you, Carla.

Josh Mangelson 57:16

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