

Josh Mangelson 00:17

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

Karin Peter 00:27

Welcome to Project Zion Podcast. This is Cuppa Joe, where we explore restoration history. And I'm your host, Karin Peter. Our discussion today is part of a series of conversations about the historical and theological journey of Community of Christ. Our resident panel members for these discussions are Lach Mackay and Tony Chvala-Smith. Lach is an historian, the Director of Community of Christ Historic Sites and serves on the Council of 12 Apostles. Tony is a theologian who teaches scripture and theology at Community of Christ Seminary and Graceland University. Both Lach and Tony are awfully familiar by this point, I think you are Project Zion listeners. So in this series, we are following the development of the early church, the Reorganization and our journey as Community of Christ. And we're looking at important church events in their historical and cultural context, as well as corresponding theological developments and how they impacted the church. So in today's conversation, we're going to be talking about Joseph Smith, the third, and the church in Lamoni. AI, and also looking at Independence, again, as the church returned there, and then what we're calling the movement toward proclaiming peace, and the call to be peace makers. So we'll see how that unfolds. So we're gonna start with Lach for kind of an introduction to the historical aspects and some perspective on that. So Lach?

Lach Mackay 02:17

I'm going to be drawing pretty heavily this morning on Mark Scherer's, Volume Two of "The Journey of People". And when we last talked, we were in Plano, Illinois. Life was good there, the church had grown almost 4,000% in just over 20 years, things were going pretty well. But the move from Nauvoo to Plano was understood to be going in the wrong direction, meaning it was moving away from Zion or Jackson County, Missouri. And there were still a significant number of folks with this desire to redeem Zion. That seemed to trump the success of the church in Plano. So, as we talked about moving Lamoni, that's not only going in the right direction in Iowa, it was also on the border of Zion as they understood it. And there were attempts as early as 1870, to put together something called the United Order of Enoch, and joint stock company that very carefully and thoughtfully ended up pooling resources and buying land in Decatur, County, Iowa, around what would eventually become Lamoni. There's this desperate desire for folks to live in community. So Joseph the third understood the move to Lamoni, to be moving to the region's round about Zion, and to be a step towards redeeming Zion. But it wasn't initially, it seems a given that Lamoni would be the headquarters instead of just another church community. So there's a committee of location put together in 1877. Just the third is touring Northwestern Missouri in southern Iowa. Again, this idea of moving moving closer to Zion, looking for a new location for church headquarters. That spot one of my favorite stories from Joseph the third's life. I've talked about this

before, but when he had first joined the Reorganization in 1860, locals in Nauvoo and surrounding areas had passed resolutions, township by township, for bidding Joseph the third from preaching or praying in those places. As you know, folks were panicking thinking oh, here we go again marching invalids militias gathered community on and on. By 1877 as the Nauvoo locals understood that we might be exploring a new headquarters, they put together a petition scroll petition. Something like 375-76 people signed asking us to move our headquarters to Nauvoo. So 1860: you can't preach or pray here. 1877: please move your headquarters here. I love it. They had figured out that Joseph the third's version of Latter-day Saintism was, was not threatening, but this part of Illinois even today, I'm in Nauvoo was known is known as "forgottonia", meaning it is, it is forgotten by much of the development around us. So it's very difficult to get to today, and was even more difficult to get to in 1877. We lost the race for the railroad in the 1840s and 50s. It goes in on the Iowa side, so when you see a map, look at a map their towns all up and down the Iowa side of the Mississippi 10-15-20,000. On the Illinois side, you have to go two hours north to the Quad Cities or an hour south to Quincy to find any real development. So Nauvoo really not not a great place for missionaries to be coming and going. So they

Karin Peter 05:52

just want to intersect there real development means you actually have to go across the river to find a Starbucks. I just want to, I just want to note that about being in Nauvoo, it's a problem.

Lach Mackay 05:56

Starbucks and groceries and healthcare is an hour away.

Tony Chvala-Smith 06:09

And by the way, there's Thai food in downtown Burlington, Iowa, but you're not going to find it across the river in Illinois.

Lach Mackay 06:16

I didn't know that but I'm going to be exploring that shortly.

Lach Mackay 06:21

So Joseph the third eventually decided as did others that Decatur County in Iowa, Lamoni was the place to be. already home to the Lamoni branch and the Pleasanton branch, so that that was the decision, but that this idea of gathering was going to be very slow and cautious, and the development was hindered by by a fair amount of opposition from members, which became a great source of frustration for Joseph Smith a third. He and his family made the decision to move to Lamoni. They arrived there in October of 1881. And two miles west of town, they purchase a farm and develop something called Liberty Hall. Their home was contract constructed for the family it would serve as both church headquarters until more office space was found in the Herald Publishing House, and again also the Smith family home. According to Joseph the third Liberty Hall throbbed with life, teeming with the bustling activities of a large and growing family. Birth, death and marriage occurred within its walls, joys and sorrows

exceeded each other as days the nights the desks included three Smith children, particularly devastating for Joseph a 36 year old Bertha Azuba and an 1896 Joseph the third's wife, Bertha, who died following a wagon accident she'd been thrown from a wagon. Joseph the third would later marry in Ada Clark and she would also eventually call Liberty Hall home. Some important events during the Lamoni years, the traditions of reunions are established. So that grew out of an April 1882 General Conference, a resolution was introduced to hold our general conferences not twice a year any longer. But once a year, that was pretty controversial. And those introducing the resolution believe that having two conferences was expensive, and unnecessary and significant debate they ended up deferring the question that resolution passed at the fall conference of that year, the vote was significantly divided. And interestingly, Joseph the third was on the losing side of that vote. In the following April conference of 1883, which took place in the Kirtland Temple in Ohio, a resolution was introduced by Charles Dari and John Hawley to hold annual reunions of the church family. That resolution passed. I love it that one of the most beloved Community of Christ/RLDS traditions is, is started by Charles Dari and John Hawley, both who came to us from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Both converts or what we would later called seekers. The first reunion was held in September of 1883, in the Leland's Grove, Iowa, and this this idea of gathering together soon became a really important tradition, with 1000s of people turning up for some reunion services and reunions being held across the country and soon around the world. Other important events during the Lamoni years, the church began to open homes for the aged and homes for for children. They continued to advance identity claims, coming off of the Kirtland Temple suit just a few years prior to this time. They also then pursued a Temple Lot suit in Independence, Missouri and number of memorials to Congress related to our identity, the acquisition of the Book of Mormon manuscripts during this period. They also continued missions to Utah and Graceland College was established in 1895. While the Lamoni seem to be thriving. The church was also doing well in Independence, Missouri, and maybe an expression of that stakes were formed in 1901. In both Lamoni and Independence, independence was home to the Stone Church, something of a flagship congregation. And it seems like a rivalry begins to develop between the two for preeminence in the church. Joseph the third clarified that the principle place of business for the church is still Lamoni, but then he moved there in 1906, to be closer to the Presiding Bishop and others, but he's still stressed and also, again, very important as part of gathering again, returning to Zion redeeming Zion. He's still stressed that Lamoni was understood to be the principal place, at least for a time. But the Herald Publishing House suffered a devastating fire in 1907. That building was the primary church offices as well as record storage. And that sparked a pretty significant debate, as should we rebuild them about it or moved to Independence, they did decide to rebuild in Lamoni, but that I think, was a pretty significant kind of a devastating blow.

Lach Mackay 11:33

Among the important topics that the church would face during the early Independence years during Joseph the third's lifetime, marriage and divorce significant point of discussion at conferences. Participation in Freemasonry by members became a very heated debate even among Alexander and Joseph Smith the third against each other, eventually was tabled. Joseph the third addressed the question

of succession in the church presidency during this time, reaffirming his 1906 appointment of his son Fred M as a successor. Then he detailed in a letter of instruction 1912, his understanding of how succession should work based on section 104 from Kirtland talking about how the First Presidency and the traveling High Council and the Standing of Council and the Presidents of 70 are equal and authority. Although the Herald offices wouldn't move to Independence until after Joseph the third's 1914 death, the church was firmly rooted in Independence by the time he passed. I think, for me, maybe one of the most important legacies of Joseph Smith the third is his decades long pursuit of peace, and really turning us back to the path of peacemakers. And for the first almost 100 years in the church, that was really centered in Section 95 of the Doctrine and Covenants that we often forget about today. But this would play a pretty important role even for Joseph Smith, a third, he talks about this section 95 talks about turning the other cheek if assaulted, not once, not twice, but three times and even then you'd be blessed if you could restrain yourself, and even then you should only fight back if you're commanded to do so. That became important for Joseph the third. He had lived through significant violence of course, in his lifetime, in Far West, Missouri and in Nauvoo, Illinois. He's not quick to to criticize his father, but he does raise questions about Joseph Jr. and other church leaders involvement in the Nauvoo Legion. In Nauvoo, Joseph a third talks about how he was part of something called Bailey's Boys Troops, a children's version of the Nauvoo region. But he moved away from it, he thought probably due to his mother's wishes. He talks about the impact of people like MK Whitney on forming his understandings of peacemaking. That great story that I'm told many times as of others about Joseph Joseph the third being given by MK Whitney is writing desk in response to Brigham Young giving just a third of pistol and George a Smith giving him a buoy knife MK Whitney, in response gives him his writing desk saying, want to instill in us Spirit of peace rather than one of violence. At any rate does have a third remember, he believed that bishop Whitney's intent was to generate in him a passion for peace, and that was the result as well. Joseph the third talks about ways that he challenged injustice in Nauvoo, even as a teenager. Now this is this is looking back, this is reminiscing so you I'm just be aware of that. But he talks about seeing Austin Cowls being whittled and whistled out of Nauvoo. So after the Nauvoo charter is pulled by the state legislature in Illinois, the city has no way to govern itself. So the people here turned to vigilantism. So if you were an undesirable, they would surround you. And they would have machetes and spears and whistle and basically drive you from town. Joseph the third saw that happening to Austin Cowls, whose crime was that he was not supportive of polygamy, or Brigham Young. And Joseph the third is, as a teenager, he says, is shouting at the mob to leave that old man alone. He didn't do anything to you. Looking back on that, he says, "May God soon said the day when injustice and tolerance is found again in the land."

Lach Mackay 15:56

He talks about efforts to care for the immigrant community and Nauvoo, who he believes they are being taken advantage of because of the lack of familiarity with our language and customs. So he would often do their legal work for free. He talks about his efforts to overcome hatred that he had in his heart for others who had abused his mother. The Nauvoo congregation or the branch the RLDS branch here is named the Olive Branch. He forgives Thomas Sharp, the man most responsible for the death of his

father. And something that would have kind of a lasting impact on the church now again, kind of forgotten that he also spent significant effort trying to figure out what our response as Christians should be, to the draft during the Civil War. And he comes away saying, we should not enlist, but if drafted serve. So it's only been recently that I figured out that probably is what Fred M is rooted in when he is not supportive of conscientious objectors. I've always kind of admired Joseph the third's position, you know, don't have the list. But then the other side of it is when Fred hymn is not supportive and conscientious objectors, because Joseph a third said, If drafted, you should serve. One of my, well, the church seal that Joseph the third is part of developing in the early 1870s, The lion, the lamb and the child and "Peace" underneath. Again, and again, just the third read directs us on the path to peacemaking even supporting Fred M. Smith's participation in peace gatherings in the US, and the churches passing resolutions, supporting world peace in the pursuit of world peace. We're announcing war and proclaiming peace. I probably had thought that our emphasis on peacemaking was a result of a number of our church leaders coming of age in the 1960s. Until I really started to dig into the life of Joseph Smith the third and realized it is rooted much, much deeper than that. So Joseph the third and the pursuit of peace, maybe, for me, his most important lasting legacy.

Karin Peter 18:23

Okay, that's a nice whirlwind from Lamoni and back in the quote, "right direction" back to redeeming Zion. And I'll just, I'll just say it right up front, that language makes me really uncomfortable, even though it's historical. And in context, I still kind of get feel a little heebie geebie over that. So before we begin to talk about the theological implications, and by the way, I have several questions about that, Tony. So as you share, I'm going to be marking off the ones that you might touch on and then I'll, I'll ask the rest of them at the end. But I wanted to bring up this small text and get from Herald Publishing House, it's called "In Pursuit of Peace Community of Christ Journey". And Lach is a contributor to this text, as are the other folks on the church history team, and Andrew Bolton and John Hamer. So I just want to, we're not doing video on these, we're only doing audio so I can't even hold it up and show it but I want to point people to that "In Pursuit of Peace Community of Christ Journey", if you want to check out those peace genes that Locke talked about that go a little deeper than maybe what some of us first imagined. Okay, so Tony, with this kind of whirlwind of things happening here in the Reorganization, what are some theological developments that were taking place in the same time?

Tony Chvala-Smith 19:45

So to give a an overarching perspective here first, I would say that the theological identity of the reorganization is really firmly shaped in this period from 1860 up to up to up to Fred M Smith's time, so Joseph Smith the third ministry oversees and contributes to the formation of an RLDS self identity. It's in this period that a doctrinal identity develops that that becomes really firmly deeply established in the church. And one can understand the need for that in the context. And yet, by the time we get to 1960, we'll, we'll discover that that that firmly established doctrinal identity became somewhat problematic in different ways. But, but I don't want to get too far ahead. Let me back up then now to Joseph the third. So, when I look at this period, there's this unspoken, but overarching question that hangs over first the

new organization in 1851 to 1860, and then the earlier organization and and it's it's basically this question, on what grounds either implied or expressed, did this church this movement, not accept the whole theological legacy of Joseph Smith Jr. Right? What what what were the theological reasons whether express or implied for not just simply going to Utah, for not just simply accepting everything that Joseph Smith Jr. said and did? The Reorganization finds itself in the the creative, but also discomfoting situation of being a dissenting movement that wants to uphold part of the heritage, but has to critique other parts of the heritage, and yet wants to do so in ways that don't over implicate the founding prophet, and yet his thumbprint is on many of the things that the Reorganization is pushing away from, it's a complicated kind of situation. So basically, I think you're gonna understand theological development, Joseph Smith the third's era, as how do we find a navigable channel, up the river of all of this Restoration stuff, right? Think think of the Mississippi River, you can navigate down the middle, you get towards the shore, and there's snags and brush and sandbars and shoals. And so the church that we call Reorganization is a church that emerges trying to figure out how how do we find? How do we find the the principles that will endure that allow us to navigate up the middle of a channel so we don't get snagged? In the shoreline of polygamy, we don't get snagged in the shoreline of autocracy, we don't get snagged. Eventually, we don't get snagged in the almost the sandbars of divine plurality, and all the things that the Nauvoo Exposer justly referred to as heresies. Alright, so that's kind of the overarching theological picture here. Joseph Smith the third isn't a very endearing figure in in many ways. So as I as I look at him, and I look at things he wrote, for example, his hymns, what I see is what I see as a kind of Jesus centered piety in him. And in some respects, that comes out in hymns like tenderly, tenderly, right, you know, trusting the Savior to get me through these hard times. He had obviously had a deep personal sense of awareness of the Divine, and it focused for him around the person of Jesus. And so Christ centeredness was not something we dreamed up in the 1960s. It was already there in his actual practice as a church leader, way back then. Another thing about him that's very important to understand, and he contributes to the Reorganization is his own sense of moderation. Now, Lach has given us some great, great pictures of that already. Joseph the third is a is a love your neighbor, don't call them Gentiles kind of guy. Right? He works with them he,

Karin Peter 24:12

I just want to say that could be the title of a book. I mean, going forward. That's, that's great.

Tony Chvala-Smith 24:19

So you know, he, he's, he's got good relations with people outside the church. He does not he while the Reorganization theologically develops, in some ways, I think that run contrary to that he himself has this sense of openness to outsiders. Outsiders are not de facto wrong. And insiders are not de facto right and I think that's really really important. A little a little piece of a justice gene going on there. That's important for us to the to this very day. He he really sought the public good and the common good wherever he wherever he was, he wanted, he, he was really careful when when they were beginning to start the movement towards Lamoni towards gathering, he wanted to be very, very cautious that there was not a giant influx of saints to Decatur County, Iowa, which would throw off relations with the with

the locals there who actually the locals in Decatur county actually had good relations with Reorganize people who live there. So Joseph is concerned about his neighbor, right? I think that's really important. And that was a major, a major failing of gathering attempts in the early period. This is a little known thing Mark Shearer points this out in, in his in Volume Two in his history. Joseph Smith the third admired Frederick Douglass, the great abolitionist preacher, a man in American history, who justly deserves to be called prophet and met Frederick Douglass at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. And talked with him and, and said, You know, I really admire you. It's in a church in a church that was a big tent, and you had to honor all kinds of positions, it's really a shame, that his own love and sympathy towards Frederick Douglass abolitionism and the anti racism didn't make its way more deeply into the church of that period. I think that would have been good for us long term, but, you know, context, context, contextual factors sort of prohibited that, I think so. So there's the sense of moderation about him, respect for tradition, he, he wants to honor the tradition, and yet he is not a slavish inherent to the tradition. Right? He's, he's willing to make adjustments. He practices personal discernment with what we would call personal discernment. He's, as we talked last time, he's very, very cautious and careful about which, which church he will align with and wants, wants to seek the Holy Spirit's guidance in that. But this is something he carried with him all the way through his ministry. He's not, Joseph Smith the third, unlike the, unlike the very aggressive missionaries that that sprung up around him in his presidency, is not what I would call Bibliacystic, he really doesn't have a fundamentalist gene in his body. Now, I'm using fundamentalism kind of anachronistically here. Fundamentalism, as we know it today didn't develop until early 1900s. But it's the seeds were all over in American Protestantism at the time. He once called the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants, auxiliaries to the Bible. I love that language. I think that would have been helpful language if we'd retained it. That is, the auxiliary Fire Department is not the main fire department, right? They're backups if you need them. And I think that was helpful language. And another thing about him that is deeply impressive to me, is how he managed his faith and amidst horrible grief and loss, right, three, three little kids buried in the cemetery in Lamoni. His first his first wife was buried back in Nauvoo, is that right? And then, then one, one little child buried in Plano. And now three children buried in Lamoni. And then Bertha buried in Lamoni. This man experienced immense amounts of grief. And he recounts an experience that he had after after Zuba's death, I mean, he, he was really, he was really Job-like angry after Zuba's death. He'd been away at a reunion and finds out about the accident and hurries back only to get there in time for the funeral. I mean, gosh, think about that. What was she, she's like, six years older, it's just a little girl. And he, he went into a kind of God, why did this happen? And he has an experience in which he sees her in another realm, and she's happy and she's holding flowers that she he knew she loved in this life. And it helped ease his grief and it helped ease Bertha's grief. And then he says in his memoirs, that this this this experience of grief, which is the human lot enabled him to to be compassionate towards others who are experiencing grief. So he didn't he didn't need some kind of a meta theological theory about whether God has power or not power, God is all loving God is not all loving. Basically, he just, he just dealt with his grief and found consolation and divine presence in the midst of it and was able to help people, other people because of that. So he grief, processing grief in the presence of God's love helped him become a deep, more deeply compassionate person. I think that's really quite a telling part of his character

character. So what what kind of then is the theological legacy that develops up around him partly because of his personality and partly because of other of other factors going on in the church at the time? Well, some of the features of the church he helped form, one thing would be a culture of compromise. It is we have to somehow figure out a way to be together, even if, even if we lose votes at conferences. And so that culture of compromise continues to impact Community of Christ theology to this day. Centralized, I don't wanna use the word control, but but a centralized focus for the institution, and a kind of creation of institutional loyalty, that that grew up around Joseph Smith, the third. And that still impacts us today, many people who become completely inactive, and have been inactive for years as church members still identify the church as their church. Right. And so there's a sense of loyalty to the movement that he helped create. I think one of the most important theological things that happens in this whole period is, you know, back to that navigable channel, it's this identification of what are the first principles, right, what's the center of the message, versus what is the periphery of the message. And let's focus on the center. The the whole the whole series of events around Jason Briggs and Zenas Gurley Jr, which were really complicated and difficult, and resulting in both Briggs and Gurley withdrawing from the church in the 1880s. It's, it's like reading a, when you read about this, it's like reading a Greek tragedy in a way. But Briggs and Gurley both understood some things that actually came to pass eventually, Briggs Briggs famously said, "We have believed too easily and too much." And, and he was really, really critical of any ideas of local gatherings. He said, he would say, for goodness sakes, have we not learned anything from experience? Kirtland Independence, Farwest Nauvoo, this doesn't work. And every time we do it, we mess up. And so why don't we learn from that. And so Briggs was was critical that Briggs, Briggs was really, really concerned about if the Doctrine and Covenants, if all the things in the doctrine covenants that came from Joseph Jr. Were going to be considered doctrinal necessities, right, and that you're going to be held to them because Briggs and angrily Jr. Were like, there's their stuff that Joseph Jr. said, that is beyond the pale theologically, and we just can't. If we if we call if we call the Book of Mormon, Doctrine, Covenants and Bible, the three standard books, how are we going to use the standard, right? Are you going to make you're going to make us apostles believe some of the stuff Joseph Smith Jr. said no, because we're not going to because some of it was stupid. Which is a theological term, by the way. And so um, so this is going on, Briggs and Briggs in and Gurley are pushing back on this. Gurley he's pushing back on, we don't we don't want a Moses prophet, right. That didn't work this, remember, this is the shadow of Nauvoo still hanging over them, you know, 40 years later. And so they're trying to those, those two guys are trying to say, what makes this movement substantively Christian? And can we focus there and not on the weird stuff?

Tony Chvala-Smith 33:52

And Joseph Smith, the third, to his credit, I guess, will say, you know, what? A lot, a lot of people, a majority of members, like the weird stuff. And so if the majority of members, if that's where we are as a consensus, we can't just say, sorry, you can't believe that. So that's his own culture of compromise. But Briggs and Gurley were ahead of their time, and it was going to be a while, like 100 years or more, before their insights actually began to bear theological fruit in the Reorganization, where we began to say, right, baptism for the dead that has no place in our practice. It's theologically inadmissible out of the

doctrine covenants that goes, That was a mistake. Right? That that kind of thing. So that's the sort of thing Briggs and Gurley we're getting at, it just took a long time for us to get there. But I suppose that's the price of being a church that tries to compromise and tries to make space for people, right? So during Joseph Smith the third era, and partly I think owing to him, we begin to contextualize and reinterpret and recontextualize beliefs. So for example, the gathering, right, we've talked about that a few times. Go slow, don't all rush in at once, keep good relations with the neighbors, and pay fair prices for land and all kinds of things. We don't we don't want to do a gathering that results in creating hostility among neighbors. And then reunion becomes a way that the idea of gathering is theologically recontextualized. Right. I, it turns out to have been a brilliant idea whether Joseph the third liked it or liked it or not, at first, it turned out to be a brilliant idea. And that was a way to practice the principle of gathering without creating the mess of gathering. So another another thing that develops this period, you see it in Joseph the third, it's going to take a long time for to develop the in in the body itself, is an identification with the Protestant mainstream. These are the people Joseph Smith the third actually grew up with, and he didn't really know how to see them as enemies. Now, a whole bunch of very vigorous RLDS missionaries, will emerge here in the 1870s 80s and 90s, who are constantly arguing that the various Protestant churches that are in their purview are the churches of men and not not of God. They're gonna do all that kind of doctrinal stuff to try to prove that we're the one true church. But I think what's happening, though, underneath is that, the more the more we engage with people from the more engaged with Methodists and Presbyterians and Baptists and so on them, the more we become like them. And so this identification with the mainstream that is now very much part of who we are, is a movement, a movement away from the Mormon boundary, and toward the Protestant boundary, I think that's happening in this time. Non discussion of divisive issues, which is part of the reorganization and Community of Christ. experience that we've gotten better about that we've learned how to do it better. But you know, Joseph Smith, a third in in inherited a church in which there are people who still believe some of the Nauvoo theology. And he has to figure out how to hold all that together. And so sometimes it's a matter of just simply letting people have their private opinions and not push on it. I think that was one of his main points of contention with Briggs, probably with Gurley Jr, too, is that they wanted to get this stuff out in the open. And for Joseph, that's like, no, it's just going to create, it's going to create hostility that doesn't need to be there. And Briggs and Gurley, like, this stuff is just wrong. We can't we can't teach this stuff. And so but, you know, Joseph, the third, basically one out in that in that contest, and, and so, non discussion of some kinds of divisive issues became a problem, or became part of the church's identity, but also a theological problem, because, oh, look, what did we ever say about racism, and then in the 1900s, right, when we should have, right, so non discussion, we don't want to offend church members from certain parts of the country and stuff like that. So. So that had his downside as well.

Tony Chvala-Smith 38:44

Freedom of conscience, expressed within communal, communal limits, right kind of unity and diversity, that is, you are free to believe a variety of things, you are not free to publicly declare them from the pulpit. So some people might find that disingenuous, but actually, it's a way to maintain communal

unity, and then allow space for individual conscience with it within certain kinds of limits. And also, I think a really important thing about Joseph the third is that, hey, he has all kinds of spiritual experiences, but he does not see himself the prophet as an Oracle. And he does not see Scripture as inerrant. Now, the preaching chart theology, the old missionary theology that develops in this period, tended to imply that it itself was the gospel, and therefore was in some sense, inerrant. But you can't blame that on Joseph the third. That was the missionaries in their local several local contexts trying to argue with, you know, argue and debate in situations where they were being called Mormons and being called this and that and so, one can understand the development of that theology, but from Joseph the third's sphere perspective nothing that passes through human hands is can be said to be inherent that includes the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, our own traditions, and so on, that allow space for reform. right. So there is room for a reformist a kind of mild reformist gene in the Reorganization, because nothing, nothing, nothing is finally settled. Right, everything is reformable. So, just a couple of other points here to make some some some spiritual theological points to make. First of all, Joseph Smith the third and the church by moving, you're moving to Decatur County, just across the Missouri State lines. So you can kind of wave and make gestures at the state of Missouri, you know, from safety, the Iowa side, but there and then the move back to independence. In the spiritual life, one might call that movement towards the pain. You in the spiritual life, it's really important to learn how to head towards the pain not away from it. Because you head towards the pain, that's the only way you will resolve and reconcile it. So the church is doing that, and finds itself building Stone Church, not far from where I'm sitting right now. Joseph Smith, the third practice what I'd call a feet on the ground spirituality, hey, he had various kinds of mystical experiences. But he was very concerned about physical stuff, right. Taking, taking the apples he grew on the farm and in the might to sell in give and you know, finding places where the railroad went to get stuff done. And he is he's got a real kind of this worldly, "Thy kingdom come Thy will be done on earth" sort of spirituality that I think is quite admirable. I want one final thing. I believe this is a really, really vital part of Community of Christ spirituality, we don't talk about enough. And it really takes shape in this Joseph the third period, that's what I call a theology of place. Place, right, Kirtland, Plano, Lamoni, Independence, campgrounds and so on place keeps our spirituality rooted in the flesh and blood world we live in. I sometimes like to help seminary students understand that, that campgrounds and Community of Christ theology, they are to Community of Christ theology, what what sacred icons are Eastern Orthodox spirituality, they are physical, tangible windows through which you encounter the divine, and therefore they're not, they're not an essential, right, they're essential to the spirituality. They're not, they're not the essence of the spirituality, but they are unnecessary, unnecessary means of grace to the spiritual, to the deeper spiritual life. So that I think that takes deep shape in this period. And it's something that, in my view, we have to, we have to continue to struggle with in practice, so that we don't just end up with no places.

Karin Peter 43:42

It's interesting in the theology of place, that you find that in almost all world religions, you find it in Celtic traditions and other folk traditions, that theology of sacred place. And that our connection to that.

Tony Chvala-Smith 43:58

Yeah. And it's, it's important because it's a way to remind us of the central truth of the Christian faith, which is the incarnation, that word became flesh and blood as a Palestinian Jew in the first century in Roman occupied Palestine. Right, that's, that's the revelation of God takes place there and so place places not inconsequential towards spirituality.

Karin Peter 44:21

So that gives us a lot of jumping off points for what's to come in our in our next conversations, but I wanted to check in on just a couple of things and hear what you each have to say about that. And one, Tony, you kind of touched on when you talked about Joseph Smith the third and how he processed grief. I want to compare that to Joseph Smith Jr. and how he processed grief and, and what happened when you tried to doctrinalize your grief, any thoughts on that comparison?

Tony Chvala-Smith 44:57

Well, that's a really interesting connection Karin, and you one could say that it appears that Joseph Smith Jr, processed grief by creating elaborate theological ideas in some cases that began to go off the rails. He had no, he had very limited controls on him for doing that. And so before long you have before long yet you're processing grief by saying Oh, you'll be married again in the next life and on it goes right. And we guys we're going to be Gods we can control our own world, all this stuff right? That's that's what happens when you process grief, with speculative theology that has that loses its moorings in a wider tradition. So, but Joseph Smith, the third is moored in a wider tradition, thanks to his mom. And thanks to growing up coming of age and Nauvoo and, and being shoulder to shoulder with people from other Christian faiths, Christian traditions, and generally being a kind of moderate person himself and wanting to seek seek the well being of others. His processing of grief is is much more akin to what you would find among Methodists and Presbyterians and so on, as they deal with if you don't, you don't you don't create a whole new theological system to deal with your suffering, right. You you work you work with, with the Jesus story as you have it. And trust that there's enough there to get you through. And so I think that's a that's a very, very telling indicator of what's really guiding him versus what guided or didn't guide his father. That's a great insight Karin.

Karin Peter 46:55

So, Tony brought up Emma, and, and her influence on Joseph Smith a third and talking about this, how he processes his own grief. I want to ask you, do you see a connection between her influence with him? We've talked before about Emma Smith and her care for others all I mean, just across the board care for others, including people who had directly hurt her in numerous ways. Is there a connection between that and kind of this social ministries caring for the vulnerable gene that really started to blossom and Lamoni?

Lach Mackay 47:36

So I think there has to be that. But I don't know for sure. I don't know how you're not impacted by those that are caring and raising and loving you. Having said that, your question made me go the other direction. And think about how Fred M processed grief. And who was raised, of course, by Joseph Smith the third. And I don't know the answer to that, but I know how he didn't process it. In his journal on the day that Ruth dies, she was hit by a vehicle, his wife, Ruth. His journal entry is "Ruth died today. A terrible blow." And that's it. He clearly didn't process by journaling.

Karin Peter 48:32

And yet, Joseph Smith the third was verbose in his letter writing, he was detailed, he was passionate, He was compassionate. He was interested in others and, and funny in in his letters, and then to

Lach Mackay 48:46

brings up the question of the impact of parents on,

Karin Peter 48:48

Yeah, absolutely. Okay, I want to I want to just bring it to things that came out of kind of these conversations that I'm wondering about as far as our continued kind of theological bent and our connection to how that has been shaped and formed. The principle of gathering Yes, as that developed into like a reunion theology, is that literally what we're dealing with now, as we go forward, when we talk about gathering is that where it has really solidified?

Tony Chvala-Smith 49:20

Say more Karin, what do you mean like, is that Is that all there is?

Karin Peter 49:26

No, I mean, it's gone from everybody gathers in Independence, Missouri, and then it was everybody gathers and these other places and even in the 70s it was everybody gathers in communities and buys houses in the same neighborhood kind of thing. Now, it seems to be our gathering our idea of gathering really centralizes around reunions, when we talk about that.

Lach Mackay 49:47

Is that the last remnant of the gathering concept?

Karin Peter 49:50

Is it that or is it the most practical and pragmatic aspect of how we gather?

Tony Chvala-Smith 49:58

Well, that's a really good What you said and what what like to summarize with those are really trenchant observations. I think that we have a proper allergy to a whole bunch of church people moving into a

neighborhood. Because a whole bunch of church people anywhere are still human beings. And they still have, they still have endlessly creative ways to practice Original Sin. So. So, gathering.

Karin Peter 50:32

I'm a proponent of that, by the way, I'm just saying.

Tony Chvala-Smith 50:36

Gathering per se, doesn't solve necessarily solve problems. On the other hand, in our current hyper online environment, people do still express a longing to be with each other in person. Right? Zoom Zoom will never will never be a hug. Right? And zoom will never hold your hand and pray for you. When you're suffering and struggling so there's there's an aspect of physical being together that we long for in miss in our current environment. We still you know, World World Conference in to some extent Mission Center conferences, still are still kind of gathering environments, retreats are still gathering environments, Senior High camps or youth camps, still gathering environments. I think a difficulty is that we forget to hold up the theological reasons we're doing it. Right. And so and in in, in our postmodern, hyper individualistic world, hyper consumerist world. It's very easy to forget the theological reasons, reasons we're doing stuff and so trying to hold those up, and, and practice from the theology, right, not just from the act of gathering. That's what's that seems to be really important for us to maintain the connections back to, you know, 1880s in the first reunions. Curiously, when Charmaine I've traveled around the church, especially to campgrounds for different events over many, many years, something that happens almost every reunion or retreat we're at, regardless of regardless of the makeup of the group. Almost always, there'll be 2,3,4,5,6, usually youngish adults in their 20s, maybe early 30s, who never ever, ever darkened the door of a Community of Christ congregation, but they know when reunion is, and they know where the campground is, because it formed them as a kid. And they come back and they're there for a day, two days, three days, whatever. And so that that is the formative "Power of Place". But the formative Power of Place that is connected with the faith that made the place the place so so I don't, I don't know what the what the way ahead is there. But abandoning places is not the way ahead. I do know that. As much as I can know anything.

Karin Peter 53:20

Lach, any comments on that?

Lach Mackay 53:22

So I've lived my entire adult life in smaller versions of gathered community at historic sites. Now where we are intentional about inviting people to move here and live in community, sometimes it works well. Sometimes it doesn't. But it's still meaningful to me. And when I look at that our past, obviously gathered community have been a times disasters, but you know, Kirtland post 1830s was at its strongest when they were intentional about inviting people to, to live in the area about helping them find jobs, not supporting each other's kids as they went off to school. The intentionality I guess, is, I find that meaningful. And I can't remember the, you know, was in Texas where we were finding teaching jobs for

for Graceland graduates for years. And I think that's probably passed. But when we are intentional about trying to help each other, I still find meaning and that, obviously, you don't have to live in the other community to do that.

Karin Peter 54:35

But it's, it's kind of the tentacles of gathered community functioning in other ways. Okay, I have. I have one last point that that I noted as you were both sharing and so I want to start with the historical kind of piece first and then we'll go to the theological piece. I think from the outside the early, the early church looked anti educational, anti theological education, anti education and that that's not true. When you really start to look at the history of it. I want to talk about our educational DNA that sometimes people don't really notice. It flared a bit when we first started the seminary and people were like, Why don't we do that? So let's talk about our, our DNA of education. Where did it first start in the in the early part, and it starts to really kind of gel here in this period, and Ramona is so lucky first, do we have an educational DNA?

Lach Mackay 55:42

Yeah, I think it's very much present in 1830s Kirtland, I think the Kirtland Temple is built for two reasons. One of which was they needed a place to educate their ministers. So two thirds of Kirtland were classroom space, whether it's school of the School of mine apostles, I think it was the language they use for the temple, or the Kirtland, Ohio theological institution, one of the first five seminaries operating in the state of Ohio, meeting on the third floor of the temple. They're focused on Hebrew and Latin and Greek, very much present. And, you know, the high school is not just teaching, Sidney Rigdon. He's talking about why temples in Far West but what he says really applies to Kirtland as well, we're tired of our people being taken advantage of, and the more learned, we're going to use the temple to read, teach them to read and write so they can take care of themselves. So this idea of education as a means to empower the poor, very much there in the 1830s. It was gonna be here and Nauvoo in the 1840s, I think with the University of Nauvoo, but it just kind of got lost in the chaos. I've kind of assumed that we were infected by larger fundamentalism in the early 20th century. But Tony probably has much better insight on what happened to that it was definitely there. But I think it's lost and then has to be resurrected somehow.

Karin Peter 57:04

Tony?

Tony Chvala-Smith 57:06

Well, yes. Education has always had some kind of place in the history of the church. At the same time, because often, our the population of the church in different times has been working class. There's been suspicion sometimes proper, sometimes improper suspicion of, of educated people. I mean, for goodness sakes, Joseph Smith, the third's son, Fred M, gets a PhD. And he was he was totally shaped by his church life growing up. So Marietta Walker gives the land that becomes Graceland College and

Graceland University. And Marietta herself was highly educated, highly educated woman. Literacy was demanded. I mean, we have we have three standard books to read, not just one, right? So you've got to be literate to read those. The Herald, The Saints Herald function in some ways, like a theological journal, right? Where there could be, give and take in and if you're, you know, articles by Joseph the third, and by William Blair, and others, you know, these are these are these are heady kinds of things. In 1880s 90s, and early 1900s, missionaries began publishing doctrinal textbooks. And when you look through these doctrinal textbooks, where they'll give a topic, for example, baptism by immersion, you can tell that these guys have many of these guys have actually gone back and tried to study some ancient church history with whatever sources they had to see, well, how was baptism practice in the ancient church? And when did infant baptism begin and stuff like that? So they're reading, right? They're reading. This the suspicion of theological education we inherited from the Second Great Awakening the the frontier revivalists loved to pillory, the educated clergy from Harvard and Yale and Princeton. And that was part that was part of the side show of the revivals. Oh, by the way, it still goes on today in American politics, criticizing those elites, right. And so it's, it's a sad part of American culture, really. But we came out of the Second Great Awakening and so inherited some of that anti educated clergy stuff. But then again, along the way, we found that that the only the only thing worse than educated clergy was an uneducated clergy. So it's so so we had to we had to belly up to the educational bar so to speak, and, hey, by the way, Joseph Smith Jr. Started in a university and Nauvoo. Right? and so I think he's like the first president or chancellor of it. I don't think it gave out any degrees, not sure if they would have been worth much. But still, the idea that we that we need to educate ourselves is always been present in the church, along with the the other gene, which is the anti education gene. So, it's both of those things are there I don't know if that answers, but it gives it gives a perspective, we, I think we finally by will get to Roy Cheville eventually, I suppose in the series. Roy Cheville is highly highly theologically educated. And then we will discover along the way that church leaders were reading, reading, reading and reading from outside sources, and that was influencing their theological development to very importantly,

Karin Peter 1:00:58

so in all of these topics, the the kind of central message that I'm hearing, whether it's anti theological education, balanced with the need for theological education, or the problems of gathering balanced with the desire for gathering and the principle of, of gathering, and even earlier in your conversations, when you were talking about the, the kind of the influence of mainstream Protestantism, I think a lot of Methodism, a lot of influence, they're balanced with, wanting to remain a peculiar people, all of all of that seems to be kind of centered in Joseph Smith the third nature of compromise and mediation and peace and care for the other. So I think a period of finding some balance seems to be the main theme of our discussion today, as we've talked about Lamoi the church again, looking to Independence, and then this movement toward proclaiming peace. Any last comments either of you want to make as we bring our episode to a close?

Lach Mackay 1:02:09

I'll share a one of my favorite quotes from Joseph Smith the third, this is shortly after the end of the Civil War. And again, it's influenced by section 95, of the Doctrine and Covenants. So he says "As to the principle of war like saints, when God commands me to fight, I shall do so but not before. I'm strongly inclined to believe that he will not require me to fight. That God may or may not at some future day raise up a warlike people is a question open for dispute to those who may love discussion. But all are agreed that there is now no present commandment than the absence of the command peace is eminently our mission." I love it.

Karin Peter 1:02:51

Marvelous, an excellent quote for that, Tony, anything you'd like to say before we go,

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:02:56

Just quoting a line from Tenderly, Tenderly, a Joseph Smith the third hymn "Tenderly, tenderly lead thou me on on all the way where my savior has gone, bright on his pathway, the sunlight have shone tenderly, tenderly, leave thou me on." Hey, it's about following Jesus, it really is.

Karin Peter 1:03:16

So well, we'll end our episode today with thoughts that seem to be centered in moving toward Jesus, the peaceful one, how apropos for our life together at this point in the church. So I want to thank you both for the discussion. And next time when we come together, we're going to talk a bit about the social gospel, which develops on the next part of our journey, the auditorium the building of the auditorium in Independence, Missouri, and then we're going to talk about Fred M Smith and his period of time at leading the church and one of my favorite topics, of course, supreme directional control, and what that did in the life of the church. We're going to talk a bit about some of the other aspects of our life together in that time period, so be with us. And in the meantime, catch up on all the topics at Project Zion Podcast at projectzionpodcast.org. And thank you very much Lach and Tony. I'm Karin Peter. Thanks for listening.

Josh Mangelson 1:04:25

Thanks for listening to Project Zion Podcast, subscribe to our podcast on Apple podcast, Stitcher, or whatever podcast streaming service you use. Project Zion Podcast is sponsored by Community of Christ. The views and opinions expressed in this episode are of those speaking and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of Latter-day Seeker Ministries, or Community of Christ. Music has been gracious SLA provided by Dave Heinze