

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 00:33

Hello, and welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. I'm your host, Carla Long and you were listening to Percolating on Faith, where we talked about smart stuff all the time and I always end up feeling smarter afterwards and then it just kind of fades away.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 00:50

For all of us

Carla Long 00:52

I'm here with your wonderful, your wonderful people, Charmaine and Tony Chvala-Smith. Hello, Charmaine. Hello, Tony.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 01:00

Hi, Carla. Good to be with you always.

Tony Chvala-Smith 01:02

Same. Good to see you, Carla, and good to be with you.

Carla Long 01:06

And we are back talking about more theocracies and today we're gonna be talking about process theodicy. And I don't know if everybody has listened to all of this stuff about the theocracies and if you think I'm mispronouncing the word theology, I am not the theodicy is actually a word and theodicy actually means what Tony and Charmaine?

Tony Chvala-Smith 01:24

So the word was coined by the philosopher Leibniz in 1700s. And it combines two Greek words that often God and decay just and it basically is asking the question, how can we justify belief in God, given the reality of suffering and evil in the world? So theodicy, a theodicy is a way of responding to that question.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 01:48

Right it's trying to look at what is what is the relationship between who we see God as and why or how there is suffering in the world. And there have been lots of different ways of answering that. But one of the things that's pretty consistent with all the different theodicies is once we've talked about, and ones we will talk about, is that there's really kind of four different elements that the question gets at. And so if the question is, what is the relationship between God and the suffering and evil found in the world? So there's these four different sub questions that are part of that? One of them is why are suffering and evil

so present in human experience and the world? So like, what's, what's the origins? Second one, why did God create a world in which suffering and evil or even possible if, and this then is where, who God is and how God works is the focus of some of the Odysseys. The third one is, what does this say about the nature of God? Again, kind of what is the image or the nature of how God is at work? And then the fourth is, why doesn't God protect us from evil and suffering? Or another form of that might be, where is God when we are suffering? So, any theodicy is dealing with one or more of those four sub questions.

Tony Chvala-Smith 03:20

In, in systematic theologies, systematic theology as a kind of a way of somebody constructing Christian belief from beginning to end. In a system and in systematic theology, this question, this question is issued typically falls in whatever chapter or section of that theology would be on Providence, right? God's presence, care and activity in the world. And typically, in sections on Providence, there's a there's the theologian will have to deal with the reality of evil pain, suffering and loss in the world, and how does that fit into divine providence? So just so just so here's know that if you go looking in a systematic theology, that's commonly the place to look for it in the section on Providence, so, so that's really what theodicy is about. And we'll just keep reinforcing that. A theodicy is always going to be a construct, right? There's not there's not like one divine final revealed answer to this question. And so, theologians from different kinds of backgrounds, work together were they pieced together from Scripture and experience and reason and tradition, and science. However, they put these pieces together as how they will, will affect how they construct an answer to the theodicy question.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 04:37

So today we're going to be looking at process theodicy which comes is very much at the heart of process theology. And this theodicy poses the question in a very specific way, and this is kind of the trademark maybe a process theology and especially the theodicy part of process, a that is, if God is all powerful and all loving, how can God allow suffering and evil? And then the kind of the further explanation of it is an all loving God would not want their creation to suffer. And an all powerful, all loving God could keep that from happening, could keep suffering and evil from happening. So we must then conclude that since there is suffering and evil in the world, that God is not all powerful, but that God is all loving. So that's kind of the question and the answer in the process theodicy approach.

Tony Chvala-Smith 05:40

So maybe a place to go on and from there say, Where does this theodicy come from? And actually, the way the way Charmaine just construe to its, it can trace itself back to a philosopher and mathematician. Mathematicians are in Carla's bailiwick, so I don't know if you've ever heard of that British mathematician philosopher, Albert North Whitehead, 20th century figure, you've heard of him? Yay, good. Okay, so. So Whitehead is the originator, I guess, will say, the originator of the philosophy that that process theologians typically rely on. So he, as a philosopher, and mathematician, he was interested in that branch of philosophy called metaphysics. And traditionally, metaphysics is part of philosophy that wants to explore the nature of reality. What does it mean to be what, why are there things and so on? That's a philosophical question. It's sometimes called ontology, which is required for thinking about on purpose being, thinking about the nature of being, but so Whitehead, Whitehead was influenced by modern evolutionary science, as it was understood in mid 20th century. And what he came to think was that the whole western tradition of philosophy theology was dependent on old Greek

understandings of reality based on being, right being a sort of a static kind of category. And he said, well, that's not a good way to make sense of reality, because reality is we now understand it is always in the process of becoming so, yeah. Right. Everything's in process. So I don't want to confuse this process with like, processed cheese, that's a different, a different category of deliciousness. (It's not Velveeta?) No, no, this, this process has to do with evolution, and the fact that everything really is constantly in motion, and changing.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 07:45

And becoming, which became his, his trait, his way of trying to describe what this what reality is, it's becoming, it's always moving, changing, and moving towards something.

Tony Chvala-Smith 08:00

And so as a as a philosopher, Whitehead also held that, that this must apply to God too, right? And so, then what happened was, various theologians, primarily Protestant theologians pick up on whiteheads thought, and began to try to try it out in terms of explaining Christian, Christian beliefs about God, creation, and so on. They found it very, they thought applicable to the question of theodicy. So that's where this got started.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 08:32

And so one of the elements there is that since God is still becoming, then people creatures can have some input into what is becoming the how the world is. So, both God and people and the future is all still in the becoming form.

Tony Chvala-Smith 08:59

Right God in the world, or God of the universe, or are interrelated and interactive, and they affect each other. This was kind of this has been kind of a key theme and lots of process. Theology, God is not imagined as outside of this process, but inside it and affected by it. And we'll say more about what can and can't do here as we go, but this is the starting point for it. So, so be becoming applies to everything will say. So, so then a process theodicy, and there's different thinkers here, there's quite a few different thinkers, most of them, most of them are American. This has been a theology that's been popular by in certain American circles, but process theodicy response to the problem of suffering and evil by affirming first that God is absolutely good and loving, but is not all powerful. So in terms of that equation, they say this. It can't be both x and y one of them has to go and so if we say, if we say x is good and loving and why is is all powerful, then the equation won't work out and so we have to drop why. So. So that's part of part of the part of the of process, theodicy's way of thinking about it, so.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 10:16

So in this theodicy, love, which is God's nature, since God is all loving, this kind of love allows, always allows the freedom to choose, and the freedom of self determination. So, things are not predestined things are not, you know, like a puppeteer. Our lives and futures are not determined by something else. But love, this love that is natural to God allows us to choose freely, and to have self determination.

Tony Chvala-Smith 10:57

And so that that means, Carl, that if you if you step out of your backdoor in your house in Utah, and are bitten by western diamondback rattlesnake, God can't stop that. Because the rattlesnake is part of the ecosystem, you are part of the ecosystem. And the rattlesnake has its own self-determination, and you have your own self determination. And I'm just saying, why don't you check underneath the steps out behind your house. That's what you can do,

Carla Long 11:26

Wait a second. Even in Utah?

Tony Chvala-Smith 11:32

So, in other words, God is, is present in the midst of all things but does not intervene in things at all right? God is present. Now God, we'll say more about how God's presence can affect things, but not in any kind of way. So rattlesnakes, ticks, Carla, in the backyard, these things are each part of their own, they have their own integrity as beings and so like I said, check under the steps. So that's, that's part of it. Love, love is the central theme of process theodicy. And yet love is in no way coercive or determined determinative, or anything like that. So, process thought, and the theodicy is there derive from it imagine that God is developing with us through this journey, as ever more complex forms of life and relationship emerge in the universe. God and the world are interdependent in this model. So this theodicy does not believe that God has a kind of preexisting endgame in mind. Like this, somehow, there's going to be a final overcoming of evil process theodicy rejects that idea and it's an ongoing process. The universe and God are in an ongoing process in which potentially greater and more just forms could evolve, depending on how all the partners act in that in that relationship. So there's many, many possibilities, not a predestined final one. That's a way that the system preserves the idea of the freedom and self determination of creatures.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 13:17

So then there's a question about so what is this love that God is what's what are the what's the nature, what's the characteristics of it. And so these are very important in process theodicy, because God's love is, is kind of like a magnetic force in the universe. And it's kind of drawing things to itself. It's present in and to all things, but it's not coercive. So it's not forcing you to come towards it. But it it's very invitational that but that idea of you think of a paperclip in a in a magnet, and there's a place at which the paperclip is doesn't just snap right to the magnet, but it's affected by the force of the magnet, and it can slowly move towards the magnet. But it could just stay where it is as well. So it's the sense that it's invitational God's love is in Invitational, not coercive.

Tony Chvala-Smith 14:30

And so that means that you know, in the system, freedom, freedom, any integrity of things in the system is really important in process thought, and loving God then "gives" with quote, quotation marks around it gives things the freedom to choose and grow without any kind of compulsion. So now, the kind of power God has is not any sort of domination or power over or power to tinker or anything like that. As God, God's only power is the persuasive or invitational character of divine love. So, God doesn't force God's self on anything or anyone in the system. But always, it always kind of beckons or invites to greater possibilities, right? So, there's some process thinkers like Schubert Ogden, in his

book, "The Point of Christology", who would argue that the only literally true statement we can make about God is the statement God is love. And Ogden, I think means that literally God is Love that in this universe, there's this thing called love, and it coexists with other things. It's different from them. But if he would say everything else you would ever try to say about God, as is purely metaphorical, is the only literally true statement. So. So that's an image of what love and power look like in this.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 15:52

And so then how does this love work? So God's love or God as love means that God shares in creation suffering, this, this love wants to be in and through what's happening. So, in this way, all suffering affects God. And in process thought God is the fellow suffer, or, or our co-suffer. So when we are in times of struggle, when there's evil going on this, this, the awareness is that God is with us in that and that God's love gives us freedom to respond in new ways.

Tony Chvala-Smith 16:42

So when, you know, in process, what does it mean that God is creator? And here, it's not any kind of traditional view of creation, where, where God has said, Let there be and things are, it means that God and pre-existing stuff have been in a relationship forever and God's presence God's mind has lured or, or invited things into, you know, fuller, fuller and fuller degrees of development and in growth. Along with this, though, there always was the possibility for evil and destruction. So that's not something God can simply change. Right? It's part of the process.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 17:30

As long as there's choice, there's possibility, right, right, and evil or greed or hate or whatever.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 17:38

Are you sure?

Tony Chvala-Smith 17:38

And then also like for the nonhuman equation, the possibility of extinction and though increasingly possibility for the human creation as well, but you know, like the dinosaurs and stuff like that, the God does not stop meteorites from hitting the Yucatan Peninsula and wiping out, you know, utterly changing the face of things by wiping out vast scores of dinosaurs in whatever era that was not one I was living in, Carla, I just want to reinforce that. But you know, it was a long time ago.

Tony Chvala-Smith 18:08

Yeah. I'm pretty sure Charmaine. So um, so process thought, going back to Whitehead, and then process thinkers, they, they have rejected the classical Christian doctrine of creation, that creation was creatio ex nihilo, creation out of nothing. That the whole of being came, the whole of existence came into being out of a primordial not a primordial thing, but out of nothing, right? They reject that idea. And so, there's a sense in which process thought is a little more dependent on something like Plato, the philosopher Plato, whose view of the origin of things is more of a making, like Plato had this idea that there was a divine sort of mind he called the, the (...) or the craftsman, how you would translate it from Greek, that the craftsman was slowly taking preexisting stuff and, and kind of forming it into new forms and in, kind of a long artistic process. So that's a process views of creation seem to be more akin to

that, than to some of the classical Christian ideas. And then also along with us that the, the universe, just simply runs by its own laws and principles and integrity, its own processes. And God doesn't micromanage the universe, in a process thought, my God is their present embedded in it, but not as not as a micromanager. So, instead, God's love draws the universe towards possibilities forever greater levels of fulfillment development, which may happen which may not happen depending on how the systems respond, right? So, so there's a kind of a freedom but also real open endedness in this in this system.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 20:09

So yeah, just a couple more of the kind of characteristics of this theodicy. Migliore, who we've talked about many times, says of process theodicy, "There are some things God is unable to do in this theodicy, such as prevent the Holocaust, or stop a runaway car from killing a child in its path". And that's page 133. And so, really, Migliore is articulating one part of the process, the Odyssey, the side that says, Well, God isn't all powerful, God can't intervene doesn't intervene in a number of different ways. So it's not that God doesn't care, but rather, that God's power is limited in this theodicy. So this honors the integrity of everything that's other than God, it lets it be what it is. But, and, and that means that there's the risk or possibility of negative outcomes, of tragedy, of disaster. And then only in this way according to process thinkers, can there be anything like genuine freedom in the world. So that's an important element.

Tony Chvala-Smith 21:30

So finally, and we'll, Charmaine will give examples of this later, like in terms of prayer in, in a process theodicy, it's really a way of a tuning oneself to divine love, or, or choosing to move towards God's hopes for more just or loving future, or joining with God to be co-creators of that. Co-creators of and Co-suffers for that future. Prayer here, I think is my partnering really, prayer wouldn't be asking for specific interventions or anything in this in this theology, or specific actions from God. Because in this theology, God doesn't intervene or force God's self into the system that way, that God's not outside of the system. God's in it sharing the journey with us, but simply is not a like I said before, micromanager and so I mean, this is kind of an overview of process theodicy.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 22:28

And if you find yourself interested in this theology and theodicy, some names that you might want to explore would be John Cobb.

Tony Chvala-Smith 22:40

Or Catherine Keller or Marjorie Suchocki.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 22:44

David Griffin, Schubert Ogden that Tony mentioned earlier, and Bob Mesle, who is Community of Christ and has written some very foundational books that are very accessible on process theology.

Tony Chvala-Smith 23:01

So yeah, so there's, there's plenty of places to go on that. And if you want to read more about it, so so we'll pause here, Carla, and see if there's questions before we go on to how would you preach a process theodicy? And how do you pray process theodicy? So questions?

Carla Long 23:13

So yeah, um, in the past, in the past, we've talked about theodicy, as you've talked about some of their shortcomings. I don't know if this one has, like, I haven't mentioned a lot of their shortcomings. And does this one have any shortcomings? Or is it simply perfect as it is?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 23:30

I haven't found a theodicy yet that, that answers all the hard questions. And, and actually, the, one of the ones I would say with this theodicy is that, that question that it asks at the beginning, you know, if God is all loving, and all powerful, how can there be evil and you know, why hasn't got eliminated evil, if God is all loving, and all powerful, therefore, God must just be all loving? For me, there's presuppositions put into that question, that make it hard to address because, because loving someone, powerfully does not mean that we would take away suffering, that would we would take away those difficult times in their lives, I think about parents who sometimes have to let their children suffer consequences so that they can grow so that they can become more wise so that they can see the results of their actions. And so in that way, suffering by its very nature is not necessarily evil, or bad or should be eliminated. In fact, it's part of our growing process. And so I think that there's that a premise there that somehow an all loving God, who had all the power would take away all stuff Free. And, and I don't think that that that is necessarily true. I mean, I think for many of us, it's times when we've really had to struggle that the best growth has happened, the deepest growth, the deepest understanding, and

Tony Chvala-Smith 25:18

Think of your classes with us, Carla.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 25:24

Ah, there we go. Anyhow, so you know, there's that kind of thing that we don't have to necessarily think of all suffering as evil, and therefore, something that shouldn't have been eliminated if God had power. So I think that's a false equation and a false equality there, that God being all loving and all powerful, would have gotten rid of all suffering and evil. Because, I mean, that's another part of humanity is that we have in us both, right? We have in us, goodness, and we have evil, we have this, and sometimes there's more of one and more of the other. And, you know, that's part of what is the nature of humanity. So this would kind of rule that out as well, I think.

Tony Chvala-Smith 26:14

Yeah. And, you know, either theologian, thinking about this would say, a couple of other weaknesses of this whole approach. One is that one has to be very careful about letting an externally derived philosophy, tell Christian faith, what it can and can't say. And I think that's what's going on here. That's, I think that's a problem. And Rich, Whitehead creates a metaphysics that are interesting, and connect

certain kinds of dots. But then if you say out, we're going to, we're going to filter Christianity through that philosophical system, and anything that doesn't come out as is wrong,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 26:51

and anything that doesn't fit it (Right) that's it sheared away,

Tony Chvala-Smith 26:54

Right, exactly that that has always been a risk and a danger in Christian theology. And I think this this particular one, that's a that's a really serious risk with it. In other words, we let Whitehead tell us what power is, and Whitehead tell us what love is. And then and then we say, well, therefore, in Christian in Christian thought, Christian faith, Christian theology, we can't, we can't say x, we can't say y and can't say z. And it's like, well says who? I guess, says Whitehead, but why? And so that's one one of the one thing and then another, another problem is that if you take this system seriously, it doesn't solve the problem of evil, it internalizes it. Right, if there's no, if there's no imagined or hoped for fine, final, final resolution to the problem of evil, then that means evil just coexist with good forever and ever. And it's an ongoing struggle, and we'll see what happens. And it's like that, that's very unsatisfying, I would say. But anyway, those are some weaknesses I would see.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 28:01

And I think one other one that is a little bit more hard to nail down, is that it can, it can deny people's experience of God intervening in their life in some way. And so it doesn't really allow for miracles, it doesn't allow for those kinds of experiences that have, you know, where people have felt God's love, but also God's action in a way that has made a huge difference in their life. And so this can, it doesn't have to, but sometimes can demean those kinds of experience in people's lives. So that would be the other part of it is that, you know, the long Judeo Christian tradition has this sense of God. Being with us, yes, but also acting, to help us know who God is and to know how to live better in the world. Christ being an example. So I think it kind of mutes that part of the story. (Yeah.) And people story in particular.

Tony Chvala-Smith 29:28

Also, I can say that there are there are Christian theologians like William Temple, a famous Anglican theologian, Archbishop philosopher of religion and so on, who read and understood Whitehead but took him a totally different way and did not and saw were to say no, I don't think so here, right and so are nuanced. Yeah, more nuanced approach, who was able to use the good things from Whiteheads philosophy but also push back on things Whitehead claimed or said about God and so on that didn't really fit the best that we know of God's revelation in Christ so, so. But hey, you know what every theodicy we have gone through and the one we will go through in our final one in the series, they all have weaknesses, because they're all constructs. Right? Right. They're not final answers. There are ways that people construe the resources of tradition and experience, return and reason to try and deal with the real problem of massive human and now ecological suffering. How do we, how do we think about that if we believe in a God of love, and a God of grace and power? So any other questions, Carla that come up for you?

Carla Long 30:44

I don't think so. I think that you've done a really great job of describing what a process the theodicy is, and I appreciate hearing the shortcomings too, because, you know, people who are listening to this, you know, they might jump on the bandwagon to be like, Oh, this is exactly right, this is exactly right. And if they can't see that there are things that don't quite work out exactly right, then they might just have blinders on. I think it's super important to talk about the good, the bad and the ugly.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 31:13

That's one of the reasons we like to do to talk about theodicies is that they all allow us to, to look at our own experiences and struggles and say, Hmm, where can we find God in this? And where can we seek God's help in this and in not all of them, you know, one is not going to fit every situation in your life. And so some of these may illuminate some struggles, and not others. And then another time in your life, this one might fail you completely, and another one might, might take its place as being something that's helpful. So I think having at least a handful of working theocracies can be very helpful to people and, and allow them and God, a lot of room to be at work in the world.

Tony Chvala-Smith 32:11

And maybe we can see all these that we've been doing is like tools in the toolbox, right? And, you know, some tools work for some things, right? And so, rather than a one size fits all, so, so but hey, well, now we'll talk about how do you preach from this perspective, and then then some suggestions on how you pray from this perspective. And so we, each time, we start with this reminder that actually we don't preach a theodicy right. To put it very simply, in the life of the church, we preach the good news that is up and about Jesus and the reign of God and God's justice. That's the focus of preaching. But, you know, you're always going to have people in the congregation who are struggling with it with just horrible things in their life, or dealing with pain or loss or whatever. So you have to be careful in the pulpit about trying to give big theoretical theological we call them elixirs, you know, like, this will cure everything, this will fix everything for you. No, no, we don't do that in the pulpit, right. So as a particular lens, this theodicy would reject any promises of a specific divine acts that somehow will bail people out. Right, and so, so, especially in situations of trauma, or suffering, from this perspective, you're not going to make promises like that from the pulpit. That would be dangerous to do. And actually other theocracies we've covered we'd say the same thing. Instead, the focus here would be on, on the comfort of God's co-suffering presence with us in the world that God, God is God is here with us in the midst of whatever is happening, and won't abandon us, but it's always there. And there's the hope that the combination of goodness and love that are in the world in the universe, and our responsiveness is that might open up unforeseen outcomes, right? So situations of suffering loss are horrible. And we don't ever want to say that this happened for a reason. That somehow this was planned for us, right. But then, every situation of suffering and evil, we would want to affirm that there are possibilities beyond that we can't see it's a process that would always say there's movement and change and becoming that, that we can't yet to see in the, in the situation of our present moment. Another thing is that a process theodicy would work from the faith assumption that God is sharing in and experiencing the world suffering and always yearning for us to develop and grow in love. I mean, that's, that's a very worthwhile thing to uphold that, that we have a partner in our journey and struggling that's always beckoning or, or calling us to pursue new possibilities with God. Another, another aspect is that everything is in process everything. And therefore in this in this theodicy, the future is entirely open. It's

open to novelty, meaning totally new things that neither we nor God have yet imagined. So that that can move us away from the idea of, of predetermined outcomes that somehow we have to get to. And if we don't get to them, we somehow failed. Massive suffering like the Killing Fields of Cambodia, or racism, or misogyny, and so on, these affect God to as well as the whole world process. So in this with this theodicy, one thing that can happen, potentially, is that that feeling, feeling the suffering of others, and accepting that God feels the suffering to could awaken deeper compassion in us. That's possibility here.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 36:02

And I think one of the places that I've heard this most is the idea of in this theodicy of looking to the next generation, what is the world we want to create for the next generation? And so the awareness of the evil and the shortcomings of our time of our cultures of our world, create in us an awareness, but also a compassion for the next generation? What can we do? How can we make love more than look, the landscape in which the next generation will live? So that's a way that that works in us.

Tony Chvala-Smith 36:43

And then I mean, final suggestion here for preaching from this perspective is that, you know, it's, it's belief that the future is completely open and non predetermined, means that our that our actions do matter, and can create or co-create with God or effect a different future possibilities, I think that is a very positive way to go with this. That is, that is, especially currently, as we struggle with the reality of the climate crisis, it's, I think, very important to uphold that, that we, whatever differences, whatever things we do, to stop that can make a difference globally and environmentally, and, and so it's not a pre predetermined end that they will, but they can, and so if I can do something that will make potentially different, better future, then there's a kind of an ethical imperative in that, that I ought to. So those are some ways to preach from this perspective.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 37:41

And there's the kind of vibrancy and hope in it to that I think, can free up people to not be just under the cloud of doom. It's been pretty easy to be under, and to say, wait, how I think how I act in the little ways makes differences for what the future can be.

Tony Chvala-Smith 38:04

And one of the thing I just thought of here is that from a process perspective, you never longed for the good old days. Right? Because the good old days, weren't they were they were they were in a process of changing and moving and becoming too. So we have to be careful not to glorify a sacred past so much that somehow the future couldn't ever be that good. There's, there are endless open possibilities for where we can go from where we've been. So that's another possibility there.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 38:32

Any questions, Carla about the how to preach? Process, theodicy?

Carla Long 38:37

No, but I really appreciated that last point that you said that there's no such thing as a good old day. So that really helps to kind of cement in my mind what this actually means. So that was very helpful for me.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 38:46

It's like, moving forward. It's all about the moving forward. Yeah. Yeah.

Tony Chvala-Smith 38:51

I mean, would you really want to go back to junior high?

Carla Long 38:56

Well, me, not me. Well, no, but I will say that the older I get, gosh, I wasn't very kind to my younger body, was I?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 39:05

There is that, yes. So what are some ways to pray a process theodicy. And just as, as I was trying to write these out and trying to keep all those ideas in my head, I realized that praying for help, is not is not kind of foundational for this. And it kind of helped me realize how much that may be part of my language at different times. So that was an interesting exercise. So here's some that I think will capture a process theodicy. "Loving God, I sense your call to invest in the world, so that justice and peace for all can affect the lives and relationships of more and more people." That's kind of like a beginning sentence, you know, and you could go from there. Have another is "God in this time of suffering and pain, there is comfort in knowing that you are here and living it with me. May I be attuned to your love and give it room to bring hope and healing in each day, even, or especially when things are difficult." And another, "God, I am so angry at the injustice of fill in the blank for whatever it might be. I want to use what I know of your love, to replace hatred with hope in this situation, and to bring justice in this unfinished, unfinished world." Another, "As I look to Christ, and recognize his ways of connecting us to your creative and transforming love, may my heart and mind become more attuned to it, and give it endless places to take root in me." And then naming God, "Love with us, (o starting it with love with us) Thank you for accepting me as I am, and inviting me and all creation, to face the challenges of our time, and to be open to the unimagined possibilities." So those are some ways that this theodicy could enrich our prayer lives. And it's far more of thinking of what is God's love wanting to be a part of in the world? And how can I attune to that?

Carla Long 41:40

I think it's really interesting, you said, I think I heard you right, you said help is not part of the process.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 41:47

Because, right, when we ask for help, we're asking God to intervene or to do something specific in us or for us or to us. And though people who with a process theology or theodicy may ask that it's something I wanted to make sure I stayed away from, because it kind of takes away from the, the impulse here, to not assume that God can make things happen, but that we with God can help things to become. So it was it was a good shift inside of me to have to make

Carla Long 42:27

Yeah, I mean, I think it would be kind of hard. I mean, I don't know how everybody prays, but it seems like most people when they pray. And you know, there's a whole lot of ways to think about asking God

for something. Are you asking God for God's help? Are you asking yourself to be more aware? You know, whatever. There's almost in a lot of prayers I hear there's, there's that help aspect? (Yeah.) Super interesting to think that it shies away from that.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 42:55

Yeah, yeah. And I don't, you know, and that's why I think all exploring these theodicies can actually expand our understanding of God, and add some, some more facets to it, some other dimensions to it, and maybe help us realize where we are in ruts with our understanding of God or prayer or what, what we might be called to do or be in the world. So I it is fun, it's kind of a, something to think about challenging yourself to.

Tony Chvala-Smith 43:32

I suppose with this, this theodicy as with the protests theodicy we did a couple sessions back, there's an ultra high level of human responsibility for the future, that's assumed here. And while that's frightening, it's not it's not unreal. You know, it's we there's a sense in which we, we really ought to imagine that the future, we have extreme responsibility for the kind of future we create. So, so there's, as I mentioned, there's an kind of an ethical imperative in this for taking seriously what's happening and what ought to be different.

Carla Long 44:11

Well, this has been, as always, just fascinating to see where I fit in to this process, theodicy and see where I really am uncomfortable with it. And I just enjoy it, like you said earlier for me, like expanding my own understanding of God through this. So that's just been super important to me. Is there anything that you wanted to say that you weren't able to say?

Tony Chvala-Smith 44:36

I appreciate the image of God as our co-suffer. It's not the only image of God I would have but I think that it's particularly helpful, especially in moments where, where I, as a minister have to deal with the horrible suffering others may be experiencing and in my own life, I've had to deal with it myself. It different times, so to know, to know that I'm not somehow abandoned in an isolated universe somewhere, but that there is one who is there suffering with me, is actually helpful.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 45:17

And I, I appreciate that the forward looking part of this, and that there isn't judgment on people who are suffering, or who have had had evil in their lives in some way, however you wanted to find that. But I think that's, that's really helpful for people who may have grown up with a lot of, of guilt of not, of not being enough and that somehow they should have turned out differently, or they should think differently, or their faith should be whatever, you know, different. This, this allows for all the parts of our lives, the successes and the failures, to be part of the becoming that that, that God is a part of. And just because there's something bad happening in our lives does not mean God has deserted us. In fact, God is there trying to help us figure out how to let love affect it in ourselves. So I think that's, that's a very positive piece of this in a world where there's so much guilt and shame being passed around.

Carla Long 46:33

Thank you for that. Thank you so much for your knowledge on this and thank you for sharing that knowledge. I really appreciate it. And I think that we have one more theodicy to go.

Tony Chvala-Smith 46:43

Yes. Our last one will be on liberation theocracies, and we say theodicy is there because liberation theology is ought to be plural. There's feminist, barista, African American, First Nations Minjung from Korea, there's all kinds of, of liberation theologies, but they share some common features when it comes to the theodicy question. So that's what we'll deal with next time.

Carla Long 47:11

Wonderful. I'm really looking forward to as always, thank you so much for this. I really appreciate you too. You've been wonderful.

Josh Mangelson 47:18

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