

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 00:32

Hello, and welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. I'm your host, Carla Long and I'm joined by my favorite and your favorites, Charmaine and Tony Chvala-Smith. Hello, Charmaine and Tony.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 00:44

Hi Carla. Hi Carla. That makes us laugh. But you're our favorite interviewer, too.

Carla Long 00:51

Oh, you guys, stop. I want to blush, but I've never been able to blush in my life. So, for you listener, we're you're listening to our podcast series, "Percolating on Faith." This is actually the subset of that series called, "God Shots." It's a time where we take a systematic approach to theology using the book *Faith Seeking Understanding* by Migliore. And today, we are talking about something that makes me really, really, really uncomfortable. I kind of hate it, but here it is, we're talking about the Providence of God, which I'm actually okay with, and the mystery of evil. Evil, I really hate that word. I'm so uncomfortable with that word. It gets used all the time and thrown around all the time and I never, ever, ever know what to make of it. So actually, it's really good that we're having this conversation, because maybe I won't be so uncomfortable with it. So, when we're talking about the Providence of God and the mystery of evil, can we just have like a little bit of an overview of where we're heading? What direction we're heading in?

Tony Chvala-Smith 01:54

Sure. So, in Migliore's book, this is, and in theology generally, this is the next logical place to go after you've talked about the doctrine of creation. And basically, it's, how do we understand the presence and activity of God who is, in the theological tradition, goodness itself when there is so much suffering and evil within this good creation? How do we hold those things together? How do we understand that? And more importantly, how do we live with that very mixed reality?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 02:41

Yeah, this is a question that I think almost every Christian at some point, or every person who has any belief in a God has to address at some point. This is one of those big ones that comes up in our lives, often in times that make us feel most vulnerable. I think the place to go right

now might just be to say, what are some of the situations any of us can think of where this question comes up? Where is God in the midst of evil or of suffering? What is it that we can expect of God? So. Just brainstorm.

Carla Long 03:30

Yeah, that's what I was wondering. [Let's] get down to the nitty gritty here. (Charmaine: Exactly.) When do people ask these questions, when?

Tony Chvala-Smith 03:38

Yeah. They ask it when the medical test comes back with really, really dire results. They ask it when they get an emergency call and have to race to an emergency room to discover something that's not going to turn out very well.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 04:01

Yeah, this is a question that many women ask, in the face of violence against them, whether it be sexual violence or domestic violence or date violence. And often, children and youth who have suffered abuse, ask, especially if that abuse is at the hands of, of religious authorities. That's a huge problem. And it's a very difficult one to face. The death of a child, the death of anyone that's dear to you, but in the bigger picture, things like genocide, like the Holocaust, like wars that are based on lies and kill thousands of innocent people. Are there others you can think of? Carla, is this stirring some things for you?

Carla Long 05:05

Well, just what popped in my head is what always gives me the sickest feeling in my stomach. And this is on a macro level, climate change and issues with climate change. It scares me so much thinking that we only have 10 years or 11 years or 12 years, whatever it is to turn this around, so that my daughter will not starve to death because they can't grow food anymore.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 05:29

Right. Right. So, as we think of those things, what do we even pray for? What is it we think God can do, wants to do, should do? And how is it related to human activity? Or how is it related to forces of evil in the world that either want to ignore the realities and the need to make some changes or are planning to perpetuate the things like toxins in the air that are quickening the process of climate change? So, yeah, that's a perfect one because that's going to affect us all. And if we believe in a God who loves us, and is active, what does our prayer life look like? What is our willingness to commit to activities that might change that going to look like?

Tony Chvala-Smith 06:43

Right. Another one I'm thinking of is the stubborn and insidious reality of racism, which is not just an American thing. There's racism all over the world, but here in the United States, it's profoundly evil and this continues, it goes on year after year. How do we understand our relationship with God in the midst of that? To throw a little complicating piece into that is that I know lots of loving, wonderful church people who are quite happy to imagine that God helped them find a parking place, or help them find their car keys or something like that, and yet, how do we, if we imagine God is intimately involved in the micro level of our life like that, how do we then imagine God is involved in the world in which racists can still bring profound harm to people? How do we hold all these things together? And so, that's really the topic of Providence and evil that we're going to deal with in this podcast.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 08:05

And this comes in a kind of a logical way, right after the one that we did last time, which was the good creation.

Tony Chvala-Smith 08:15

Yeah. In our, in our last podcast, and also then in Migliore's book, in the previous chapter, in Christian theology we want to uphold the profound goodness of reality. Creation is not a mistake, as it was in ancient Gnostic mythologies. Creation is not the mistaken kind of off scouring of an Evil Deity. Materiality is good. It's not bad. Life is blessed and deeply good because it is grounded in God, who is goodness itself. That issue, that conviction of Christian theology then bumps right up against our experience of suffering and evil and so we have to then try to make sense of, how do we think and work with God in a world in which these other things happen, the stubborn reality of evil?

Carla Long 09:30

I feel like so far we bounced around the Providence of God and Mr. Evil. We talked a little about specifics, but I want to jump into what do you mean when you say the Providence of God. Are we talking about Rhode Island, or no?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 09:51

We could be, but let's give a definition and then you can figure out . . .

Carla Long 09:57

I'll try to figure it out. Okay. Okay. What do you mean when you say the Providence of God?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 10:03

All right, so the idea of Providence. And we'll give some examples here in a minute. But it's the idea. Providence is a Christian term that was probably I don't know how it shows way back.

Tony Chvala-Smith 10:19

It's medieval term, but it's used heavily after the Reformation.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 10:23

It's the way in which God acts in and through events, to achieve the divine purpose.

Providence is the way God acts in and through events to achieve the divine purpose. Now, that is open to at least a couple of very different interpretations, however. We're going to lay out two of those. One of them, and it's one that you hear a lot in popular Christianity, is the idea that everything happens for a purpose, or whatever happens is God's will. This definition of Providence could be used in that way. But that is not the way that we think about it.

And I think it's fairly accurate to say, theologically, as a church, we don't think about it that way because if you go with that idea that whatever happens is God's will or everything happens for a purpose, then you're saying that it's God's will, that there was a Holocaust, that it's God's will, that half of a population is oppressed simply because of their gender and are paid less. That's not God's will. We know from the long history of Christianity and Judaism, that God is a God of justice, and fairness. And we may be blind as people to what that can look like and where it needs to happen, but our continuing journey with God and with Christ keeps revealing to us what that looks like, that there is worth for all people, that all people are equal before God. That's what we know about who God is, and what God wants. And so many of these things that happen, that brings suffering, that brings loss, that brings a degradation of people, that brings that we can call evil in the world. We don't think that that's compatible with who God is and what God wants.

And so then, how do we then understand this idea of Providence in a different way, and how would say Providence is the way that God acts in a through events to choose the divine purpose, with and in spite of humans' choices and human systems that are evil? Here's a good example, the story of Joseph in the Old Testament. Joseph was an annoying boy. He had this way of thinking he was better than his older brothers and that's not a good thing to do when you've got a lot of older brothers. When they were out together, they put him in a pit for a while, and then they sold him to the Midianite slave traders as they were coming by. It's like, let's just be done with him already.

There's nothing in the story that indicates that that's God's will, either in the moment that that's happening, or later, as they're reflecting back on it. There's nothing in the story that indicates that these brothers selling their youngest brother into slavery had anything to do with what God wanted; however, God used the situation. Joseph ends up in Egypt. He becomes well trusted by the Pharaoh. He's given all of this control because he can interpret dreams. He's given control over stores of grain and when there's a famine back in what we call Palestine today,

and his family is starving, they come to Egypt to buy grain and he is able to help his family and help those who have covenanted with God to survive. God uses that really nasty situation between siblings and uses it for the good of people. That's the way that we would want to talk about Providence, about the ways in which God uses even our mistakes, even our bad decisions, even our intentional meanness, how God wants to use all of that to keep nudging us towards the kingdom of God.

Tony Chvala-Smith 15:41

A very traditional way of looking at Providence then is to see God as a puppet master. What Charmaine is describing is not a puppet master view of Providence, the idea that somehow God makes everything happened for a reason. There's no way around looking at God then as domineering and using this rhetoric of control to describe God. That somehow God is just pulling all the strings, that makes absolutely no sense of human experience. It actually doesn't make much sense of large swaths of the Bible. If you think of God like that, you will become like that. We think that a more faithful way to understand Providence is that God is fully, actively present in the good creation, struggling with and suffering with us, using everything to direct us all towards the kingdom of God. People say, well, God has a plan, as if they understand Providence as God's business plan, and everything's written out and worked out and it's all laid out in steps, a blueprint of the future. It feels like a kind of a puppeteering sort of way of looking at things.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 17:24

This is a place where I would probably push back just a little bit, because I think you can say God has a plan. With our individual lives, there are possibilities before us that God would open doors for us. I guess I always think God's main plan is that we get to know God's love for us, and we get to love God. I think that's God's main plan, and that God keeps finding ways to keep putting us on that path. (Tony: Yeah.) So, I think, I wouldn't totally reject the idea that God has a plan, but it's what we mean when we say it. So, if you mean that there is this one plan, and this is something that we hear with young adults a lot . . .

Tony Chvala-Smith 18:32

What's God's plan? What's God's plan for me? And,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 18:35

What's God's plan for me? They're so worried and anxious because it's like, what if I miss it? What if I get it wrong? What if I miss the right road, and then I will be out of sight of God's plan? But what we're talking about is that God's plan is to help us know our worth, to help us know God, to live in the awareness of God's love for us. God can keep doing that, even after we've messed up. There's not just one path. There is, in the biggest idea, a plan, but not like you said, a blue a blueprint.

Tony Chvala-Smith 19:20

Right. I think your plan is larger, as if we talked about it in terms of divine purpose. I'm thinking of a plan in terms of God's got my life mapped out for me . . . (Charmaine: That's all predetermined), right. Yeah, that's what I meant by plan.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 19:35

Yeah, I understood. Yeah. I'm just saying that sometimes with that language [one wouldn't] want to dismiss what that may mean to some people.

Tony Chvala-Smith 19:46

Well, we're trying to nuance. (Charmaine: yes we are.) Trying to, you know, purpose and plan. There are nuances we're trying to capture here. The idea is that some [ways to] use of Providence tends to [lead one] to think of the whole future as predicted, completely predetermined, and mapped out and that Providence is God moving you from step to step. And that often turns out to be really unhelpful in people's lives. I think so.

Carla Long 20:14

It actually raises more questions than anything for me. So, all of those horrible things that we've talked about before, if that's the way people think of it, then they're like, Well, God wants me to have cancer, or God wants my child to die. And why would I follow a God like that? It's pretty problematic once you just step below that surface, it seems to me.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 20:36

Yeah, yeah. I will drop the name of another book that we've been reading in preparation for a class we want to teach at Graceland next year. The name of the class is Making Meaning of Suffering and Loss. This book is by Kate Bowler. She's a theologian, young theologian with a child. She discovered she had stage four cancer and has written a book about it. It's called, *Everything Happens for a Reason, and Other Lies I've Loved*. She struggles with this in a very good way. If anyone out there is wanting to read a book and is struggling within, this in a very specific person's life, trying to explore what are the different ways of understanding where is God in this, how can I sense and live in the assurance of God being with me, even though this really awful thing is happening.

Carla Long 21:48

So, what you two are saying, and correct me if I'm wrong, is that what you believe and what it I sounds like, I also believe, is that God doesn't have a plan for our lives? God might have a purpose for us, but not a plan. What's important to God is that we always return back to God or [that] we are continually listening for what God calls us to do.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 22:21

It's not so much what God calls us to do. but that God calls us home every day. God wants to be with us and wants us to know God's presence with us. So, it's about the doing, but it's about the being in God as well. Yeah.

Tony Chvala-Smith 22:43

So yeah.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 22:45

That's a really good direction.

Tony Chvala-Smith 22:47

So, what if we imagine our lives and our relationship with God to be something like, what God yearns most from us is to be in loving relationship with God, growing in a commitment to God's just reign in the world, and learning how to share that in community, working for the well-being of creation, and especially learning how to deepen in love. What if that's God's purpose for each of us? And then there are all kinds of possible ways to get there, right?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 23:25

If you look at the both the close-up picture and the step back, big picture of the Old Testament and New Testament, that's what God's will is, that's what God wants for us. God is always trying to create new paths for us when we get it wrong, when our ego gets in the way, our anger gets in the way, or our slow self-esteem gets in the way, or our striving for success. All of that gets in the way. God keeps trying to find ways and doors to invite us back into an awareness of who we are, that we are beloved, that we are known, that our suffering is not ours alone, but God's as well, to remind us that there is a community that we are a part of that loves us, that wants to support us. We can say pretty confidently that we know that this is part of God's will, God's purpose for all of us. And so, if we can look to those things, as evidence of God, rather than comfort, because sometimes we have this tendency to think that if God and I are good, then my life, my path through life should be really easy, right? I should be happy, rich, and secure and all of those things. That's not really the Christian message. The message is that even in the struggles and the hard times, and even death, God has let us know through Christ's life, death, and resurrection that we aren't alone. So anyhow, does that help fill out the picture of it?

Carla Long 25:53

It definitely does. I no longer think that Providence is only about Rhode Island. I now understand it a little more, which is good for me. But we haven't gotten around to that word that really makes me uncomfortable. (Charmaine: Evil.) Yes. Oh, it's an evil word. It is. It makes

me really uncomfortable to say it because I don't know who I think I am to call something evil. And I don't know if that makes sense or not. Can we talk a little about that?

Tony Chvala-Smith 26:27

Sure. It's a complicated concept, actually. In a Christian theology, evil typically is used to refer to those things that cause profound suffering. Usually, it's divided into natural evil and moral evil, natural evil being the earthquake that takes thousands of lives. But then moral evil is the choice of certain people to do things, to adopt ideologies that will result in significant, even massive suffering for others. Robbing a bank at gunpoint is a moral evil. A tornado striking a trailer park is considered a natural evil. The problem is that both kinds of things create all kinds of suffering. And so, you don't really want to spend a lot of time and energy parsing the word evil there. The result is that people are suffering and in Christian theology and practice, the first response is always how can we help those who are suffering? That's a starting a starting point, Carla. Evil and injustice are those things which destroy the dignity of people, that mar the good creation . . .

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 28:10

that put up boundaries between people, that make some have more worth than others, that instigate acts of violence. Moral evil is often, in our world, seen in systems, systems that are intended to keep some people in a lower position and some in a higher position. And, you know, we can see that with racism. We can see it in some kinds of economic policies that are intended to disenfranchise whole portions of the population in order for another portion of the population to benefit. We're not talking about the devil. We are talking about what is in people, what is in humanity and human systems, and moral evil. In some ways, the study of moral evil is ethics of various kinds, how do we make choices? Tony, you're gonna go . . .

Tony Chvala-Smith 29:31

Yeah. . . . how do we find and do the good. (Charmaine: Right.) In in the midst of situations in which there's evil, how do we discern the difference between those? Those are all kinds of ethical questions. So actually, Migliore does not, he's very careful not to somehow try to give a definition of evil. It's this intractable reality in our human experience that yields suffering, loss, damage, the reduction of dignity, the diminution of people in their worth, all of these kinds of things can create that. And then the question in Christian theology is, how does God respond to that? And how do we work with God, align with God in responding to that, so that we do the good. Does that help a little bit, Carla?

Carla Long 30:36

Yeah, actually, it does, but I'm still really just uncomfortable with it. I don't, I don't know how to continue wrapping my head around it. Who am I to say that something is evil? Who is the person that says something is evil?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 30:55

We were chatting about this before we started this interview. We went to a Celebration of Life service today for a woman who saw and named the evil of nuclear weapons. That became very clear to her in the understanding of not just what they could do to people, but what even the manufacture of them already does. It puts into our disposal system, into groundwater, into the air, toxins, even in the manufacture of the weapons. And if they were ever used, what they would unleash in the world, she just saw very clearly that as evil and the proliferation of nuclear weapons as a threat to all people. Some parts are made here in Kansas City area. She named it and became a part of a group that wanted to bring attention to the fact that this is going on around us, to bring attention to the fact that we can say something about it, that we can try to make a difference about how these things happen in the world.

In the service today, people remembered how she said, "This is not something I am doing for myself, I'm doing this for my grandchildren, so that they have a safer world." She was arrested four times, I think, for stepping across the property line to hold her sign, to say this is not a wise choice for the world. This is the potential for evil here and existing evil. She might not have used those words, but it really fits into this category. She would say I am speaking out against potential and present evil in the world. I think we sometimes are really hesitant to name these kinds of things, because we have different opinions about things. That may be true, but sometimes, like you were talking about climate change, to ignore that, [is that evil]. Would you agree? Does that fit into a category of evil? [Is it evil] to be inactive, to let something happen that could be [stopped], not that it could be stopped, [when] the stopping of it could benefit generations of people. [Is it evil] not act or to obscure the facts? I don't know but I think that fits into that category of moral irresponsibility. Like you, I'm hesitant to use the word evil because it gets used in ways I don't like.

Tony Chvala-Smith 35:13

I think it's easier to use the word suffering to describe certain realities. Evil is a difficult concept to use. It gets used too easily, sometimes for one's political opponents, or that the Tigers didn't win the World Series in a given year. It is not a moral or natural evil. Another problem with the concept of evil is that, thinking through Jesus' sayings, it's very easy for us human beings to say those people over there are evil or they're doing evil, not realizing all the ways that we are complicit in evil. In human cultures, things that the theological tradition might identify as evil, get normalized. The worst example of this is the concentration camp. Commandants and guards who went home to their families in the evening, celebrated Christmas with them, played with their kids, and then went and gassed Jews the next day, as if that were part of their normal routine. In some ways, evil, as it's meant theologically, you have to step away from emotional concepts of it. Evil is much more insidious than emotions. It reaches down into all kinds of things. And we participate in it, usually ignorantly. We support systems that bring

harm elsewhere. You can tell there's a problem if when it is brought to our attention, we resist it and don't like to hear it.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 37:18

Yeah, yeah.

Carla Long 37:21

So, I don't know, you've already answered this, necessarily. I think there's probably a bigger answer, but how does God interact with that evil? Is it only through us that God interacts with that evil and God counteracts that evil?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 37:40

That's a very good question. And I would say that there's a very deep question. Yeah. I think we can only partially answer that, anyone can only partially answer that, because, in some ways, God is inscrutable. There're some aspects of what God is doing that we will never perceive, that we will not be aware of. If we believe that what we know of God is that God is outreaching, in love and in justice, and in peace, and in hope, and for the kingdom of God, then God is doing a lot more than we can see and sense. Part of what God does, and you know, this is part of the role of the Holy Spirit, is to call people to respond when they see, when they can start to name those things that are destructive to the world, to nature, to human relationships, to human dignity, to human respect, that dismisses love as a possible way of interacting and instead institutes hate, or fear, or anger. The structures of this are a place where religious organizations and understandings of the Christian story, or the Jewish story, and the long history of a relationship with God comes in handy to help us be able to see and recognize and name those things that are not what God is wanting in the world. I see Tony about to start to say something. (Tony: Nah, Go on. It's good thought.) Part of it is how do we build communities that make part of who they are, a response to suffering in the world, to hurt in the world, to evil in the world, so that the communities build into who they are, and what they do, and how they pray, and what their sacraments are, this corrective to these elements in our societies in our world that we know on an individual basis as hate, or fear, or greed, or desire for security or desire to be more important than other people. Then we see it and recognize it in the bigger world, as well, that those are the things that often drive harm towards individuals, groups, or the natural world itself.

Tony Chvala-Smith 40:53

I think what I would offer up to that question, Carla is, in addition is that, in the cross of Christ, what we can see is how evil affects God. In a later podcast in this series, we'll deal with questions of atonement, and all the different models of atonement, ways to think about atonement, but for now, where is God in the midst of the suffering, struggle, and evil that is prevalent in the world? What's God doing? The cross of Christ was a one-time event in the

past, but in some ways, you can look at it as it externalizes that God is always suffering with us, always taking into God's self the evil and misery that human beings can create. God is always doing that, and that particular historical event can be seen to reveal that. In other words, we can see that human evil brings suffering to God, as well. God is not remote from the suffering human beings create. There's a scene in the movie, *Selma*, that's really powerful. It's where Martin Luther King is talking to Jimmy Jackson's grandfather, I think it's his grandfather, after Jim Jackson has been murdered by a state trooper. King, in that scene says to, I can't remember if it's his father or grandfather, says to him, God was the first one to cry. It's such a powerful, powerful scene. What is God doing in the midst of evil? God such shares in the suffering it creates. God weeps with us. God is present with human beings as we struggle along. God is there, always trying to offer us a new vision of the kingdom of God so that we can press forward to create a different kind of world than the one that we have created,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 43:29

Right, and you just used the word I was gonna use about God. And that is [that] there are many ways of understanding God as creator, not only as somehow in the origins of the world, but that God is ever creating. And so, in this whole question of Providence, and suffering and evil, we can affirm that God is creating new pathways, even in these difficult times and places for people to recognize the power of love in all of this, to recognize the staying power and courage and strengthening that the Holy Spirit can bring to people as they stand up to these kinds of forces in our world. And the idea that God is creating with us, asking us to be partners in bringing change to these kinds of circumstances in the world. It's a, it's a whole other way of affirming the creative nature of God, not just in the past, but in the present and future as well.

Carla Long 44:47

Well, that goes back to the Providence of God that we talked about before, the very first way of understanding God [where] our whole lives are planned out and God doesn't really seem to care all that much, doesn't need us either. Right? And the God that you're describing right now is a God that deeply, deeply cares for us and deeply wants what's best for us, and weeps. As you said, weeps when we make poor choices, or when something horrible happens when evil does happen.

Tony Chvala-Smith 45:24

Right. And I think it's in our Doctrine and Covenants, Section 163, where God W weeps for the poor of the world, which is just so breathtaking and so beautiful, so profound, instead of God saying, well, they brought this on themselves, which is a miserable, rotten thing to think or say. Instead, God shares in the suffering that poverty creates. God yearns for a different way for them, for all of us to live differently. Yeah, so Bonhoeffer said that only a suffering God can help. I think that's a really profound statement. It's a suffering God who's a loving God. That love is extremely powerful for creating a different kind of future if we will

respond to it. You know that the word, I was just thinking, back the word Providence, besides being a city in Rhode Island, which you've reminded a couple of times . . .

Carla Long 46:35

You're welcome.

Tony Chvala-Smith 46:39

The word comes from a Latin word, *providere*, which in the first order of meanings of that word is to foresee things. Often, when people think about the Providence of God, God has foreseen and planned out everything in advance. Our word, provide, comes from that same Latin word. That's a second order of meanings of the verb in Latin in that God provisions us. Right, God provides, God provisions us for the journey. That's what Providence really is, God provisioning us, with none other than God's self for the journey, God's presence, love, grace, and mercy, God's vision of justice that we see through the prophets, God's hope for a different kind of world, that we will join with God in creating a different kind of world. That's what Providence really ought to be. It's being provisioned by God to journey towards and create a different kind of world.

Carla Long 47:49

Well, I feel like there's about four sermons in there that we've talked about so far.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 47:54

And all in less than 40 minutes, or less than 50 minutes. So that's pretty good. Fantastic.

Tony Chvala-Smith 48:00

And for free, Carla, you learned a Latin word today.

Carla Long 48:03

I, I did. I've already forgotten it, but I did learn it at some point.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 48:10

There are so many different avenues to go down in this in this set of ideas. We haven't really touched on the idea of personified or societal evil, is it a person? Is it? Is it Satan? Is it something that's mostly within us individually and in culture? We haven't gotten there, and I think, for good reason. It is its own kind of conversation. I think we've indicated where we see the sources of evil coming from, primarily. That's an interesting conversation, perhaps, for another time in another place. This is a way to begin to have some language for lots of Christians where they first start to encounter counter doubt. If we grow up with the idea that if we're good everything will be good for us and God will make an easy path for us, we're going to have to face these questions at some point. I'm not in any way suggesting that doubt is a

bad thing. I think doubt is the place where our faith grows, because we start to ask questions. These are the kinds of circumstances in life that force us there.

Tony Chvala-Smith 49:52

Yeah, something that you said reminded me of another part of Migliore's analysis of all this and that's that we human beings are finite, and we don't want to confuse our finiteness with evil. We have limits. We are prone to stubbing our toes and breaking our legs and we will all die. This aspect of finitude is part of what it means to be creatures. We're not divine. We're creaturely beings. We are contingent beings, as the Scholastic theologians would have said. We might not have been. There's nothing evil about being finite and contingent. That's part of being a good creature and we have to be careful not to assume that somehow the fact that we will live a lifespan and die is an evil thing. Other realities in our experience can then be fit into evil and suffering, but we shouldn't try to fit that one in there because it robs us of a sense of our proper proportions. Right.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 51:17

So, the world's not all about me? What?

Tony Chvala-Smith 51:22

I wasn't created an infinite being. No? I have trouble sometimes seeing students fiddling with their cell phones under the table. So . . .

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 51:32

you think that attention should be totally on you?

Tony Chvala-Smith 51:35

I do think so. I should be omniscient enough to see them. They're texting somebody. But I can't always see that. So, I'm a finite being, Carla.

Carla Long 51:47

It's news to me.

Tony Chvala-Smith 51:49

And who knows what I couldn't see you doing in class many years ago!

Carla Long 51:54

Let's not discuss that. Well, my dear friends, we have come close to the end of our time for the podcast, and I do feel slightly better about the word evil, however, I'm gonna need some, I think I'll need some brain time with it for a while to figure this out a little bit more. But is there

something else that you wanted to bring out about the Providence of God and the mystery of evil that we didn't get to, or we didn't get a chance to discuss?

Tony Chvala-Smith 52:22

Oh, one more thing in terms of Providence. It's all about the community. God's provisioning us is not a private affair. God has provisioned us, as Christians, with the communities we belong to sustain us. It's not a solo act. We're not in this alone. We often find God's care expressed most deeply and profoundly in the care of others that come to us in the circle of people we worship and serve with.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 53:00

And that come to us in those extreme moments, when we are trying to sort through the grief, the pain, the tragedy, the suffering in our life, who sometimes bring God's presence simply by being with us. I think that's really an important thing to think about with these seemingly complex ideas about Providence. God uses the community, if we are willing, to help make God's presence known, especially to those who are suffering, sometimes simply by praying with, being with, silently witnessing that love can enter into these times of suffering.

Tony Chvala-Smith 54:00

Just a quick example of this from our experience. Many years ago, we were in a stuck pattern, Charmaine and I, were in a stuck pattern in Michigan. I was unable to find a teaching job. It was a really difficult three and a half years of lots of struggle and soul searching and trying to figure out what to do to create any kind of future for ourselves. We were so stuck. We were getting by, but not very much. We were just making ends meet. And this happened a couple of times to us, where we got a letter in the mail with no return address on it, and simply a \$20 bill in it. We knew it must have come from church, people who knew us, but nobody claimed that they had sent it to us. We could say that someone in the community was aware of our struggle in our situation. In response to God's love and generosity in their life, they shared with us. And it helped us feel like we weren't alone, that we were known, and that we were cared for. It didn't fix our situation. It just helped us know that God was still traveling with us. That was a providential experience, in the sense that God was still providing, provisioning for us, through the love and care of a very thoughtful church member whose name we still don't know, to this day, 25 years later.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 55:41

In the same ways, they're getting the same results, the action of activists who speak out against systems and systemic evil, which helps those who have been victims know that their value is recognized, that they are not alone, that their suffering is appreciated, and people are sensitive to it and want them to find healing. So, I think loud voices speaking out against

systemic evils has the same effect on individuals, but also whole parts of the population who may feel invisible, rejected, or unimportant.

Carla Long 56:39

Well, thank you so much for discussing this, what I find is an incredibly difficult topic to discuss. And listeners, if you could have heard our conversation before this, it was a little bit nerve racking to talk about, but I think it's a really important subject and I'm really glad that we got the chance to do it. So, I'm really grateful, Tony and Charmaine. Thank you so much for being willing to discuss and be vulnerable and to you say some things that need to be said. I appreciate it very much.

Tony Chvala-Smith 57:08

Our pleasure, Carla. For next time, if we follow Migliore's chapter order, we'll do chapter seven which he titles, "Humanity as Creature, Sinner and New Being in Christ." The next one is on what we call Christian anthropology, on who are we as human beings.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 57:27

What is the nature of humanity? Yeah.

Carla Long 57:31

Ooh, sounds like fun.

Tony Chvala-Smith 57:33

So, if you ever wanted to figure out who you were, Carla, next time, you can tune in.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 57:38

We want you to confess that's what we want.

Carla Long 57:43

Oh, that would be very interesting discussion.

Josh Mangelson 57:53

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