

Feb 16 2024 | Grounds for Peace | Social Justice and the Prophets

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SPEAKERS

Robin Linkhart, Linda Stanbridge

Robin Linkhart 00:27

Hello and welcome to Grounds for Peace, a Project Zion Podcast series where we explore what it looks like to follow Jesus the peaceful One, and ask difficult questions about how people of faith can make a difference in today's world. I'm your host, Robin Linkhart. I'm here with Linda Stanbridge. And today we are talking about her recent DMin dissertation on social justice and the prophets. Welcome Linda's. So good to have you with us today.

00:58

Hi, Robin, thanks so much for having me.

Robin Linkhart 01:03

Linda, you have been a guest on Project Zion before, but it's always good to take just a few minutes for a brief introduction from you. So tell us a little bit about you.

Linda Stanbridge 01:13

Sure. My name is Linda Stanbridge. I use the pronouns she/her. And I live in Lexington, Michigan, which is right on the shores of Lake Huron in its beautiful place. Right now we are looking at some enormous snowflakes coming down. So we look forward to that this time of year. I have two kids, they are nine and six. And they probably are wishing that they have a snow day right now. But they didn't get one today. I work for the Michigan Mission Center. And I am the Invitation Support Minister. So I do some stuff with communications and new expressions. And I work with pastors and congregations. And right now we're doing a big focus in Michigan on getting a lot of our congregations through Harmony's, Welcoming and Affirming Program. So I've been spending some of my time on that, which has been really fun. And what else? I have four cats and a dog. And yeah, that's— for the record—is too many cats. I can confirm.

Robin Linkhart 02:22

Well, I can certainly relate to having lots of cats. I love cats. And our youngest daughter—my eldest daughter, periodically calls me and says, "Mom, are you sure she's not becoming a cat woman." So, cats are wonderful. Well, today, we're here to talk about your dissertation on social justice and the prophets. But before we get into that, tell us a little bit about your journey with ministry, what took you to Community of Christ seminary to complete an MAR, and how that led to your decision to complete your most recent doctoral degree.

Linda Stanbridge 02:59

Sure. After...shortly after my husband and I got married, we started going back to a Community of Christ congregation and I like telling this story because we had tried a Methodist Church, as we were looking for a place that had more young folks, but someone from this wonderful little rural congregation invited us back. And we came back to that congregation really specifically because she invited us and we didn't want to let her down. And that started us kind of on a new journey with Community of Christ, after we had taken some time away and tried some different things. And I learned a lot more about where Community of Christ was at and how much, you know, after 2000, how much Community of Christ was growing and changing. And I was really excited about who we were becoming and who we were trying to become. But I sat in a pew one Sunday morning and listened to a guest minister, who was preaching about how he was against LGBT, not just LGBTQ inclusion, but folks in general. And I was so upset that morning, and I really could not believe that nobody was standing up and speaking out against this. And this would have been in, I'm gonna say this was 2015-ish. So it was after national conferences. But we were way out in rural Michigan. And I don't know how much it had made it that far. But I was so surprised that no one stood up. And as I went to different congregations and started kind of exploring other, other congregations, I realized that there were things that were getting said in church or that we're not getting said in church that bothered me. After there would be. say, a mass shooting because unfortunately, we've had to navigate a lot of those in the last several years. You know, if that didn't get mentioned on Sunday morning, it would really bother me. And my primary frustration was that nobody was standing up and doing anything about it. And one morning, God kind of tapped me on the shoulder and reminded me that actually I had a voice too. And I was as responsible as the people whom I was judging for not mentioning these things that I thought the church should be worked up about it. And, so I got a little bit involved in the Mission Center. And, I was lucky enough that the Mission Center leaders at the time nominated me for—I don't know if they still do the emerging leaders grant or what they call it now through the seminary, because this has been several years, but I was lucky enough to receive that. And so the church helped to support my my journey with seminary at the Community of Christ seminary. And more proof maybe that I've I've lost it is that my daughter was, I think six or eight weeks old, when I started at the Community of Christ seminary. And so I have a lot of pictures where I've got that what do they call those, the Boppy pillow, where it's like the, the horseshoe shaped pillow that goes around your waist, and my daughter's just tiny laying on that, and then on my lap in front of me is my is my laptop, and I'm typing with a Boppy in my lap. But it was also really cool to become a mom again. I had an older daughter at the time, but to go through that experience while I was in such an intense spiritual place. Like that was a really, really cool experience. Yeah, so that that was a firehose of information. But that's how I got, first got involved in the Community of Christ Seminary. And how I came back to Community of Christ was really that I was invited, I was invited back.

Robin Linkhart 06:38

So once you came out of Community of Christ Seminary, and that is no small thing. It's a very rigorous program, and people do it while the rest of their life is happening, like you did. What led you to your decision to pursue a doctoral degree?

Linda Stanbridge 06:56

Yeah, I have always been a person who loves to learn, I've always been a reader. I'm a person who will read an article or a book about anything, I just, I really love to learn, and being back in seminary kind of reignited that for me. But it also got me kind of excited in a direction. And it was like amazing to connect with people who were also really passionate about some of the same things that I was excited about. It really, like encouraged me. And so I had a lot of personal growth in those two years that I was in seminary. And that was an amazing experience for me, I mean, in my faith, and in what I knew, but also just as a person, and developing myself and my ministry and my confidence. And then I kind of mentioned to Tony, like, don't you know, what are what are the programs that are out there? I still have like, a lot of questions, and I still have some things I want to navigate. And I think I want to keep learning. And so then he did this trick where we talked about different doctoral programs. Now there's a PhD, or a DMin, which sounds like demon, but it's Doctor of Ministry, which the irony is not lost on me. But we talked about some of those different options. And then he would, for the next I don't know, rest of the semester, he would make little notes on my paper that would be like, "Linda, this is PhD level work, I think you can do it." And so he would give me all these kinds of encouragements. And again, that really helped to build me up as a person and believe, you know, that was something I might really actually be able to do. So that was really, really cool. He encouraged me a lot and so did Zac Harman-McLaughlin encouraged me a lot, and helped me to find, you know, a seminary that would be close to home that I could navigate. That also wouldn't be, you know, theologically too, too difficult to manage to where I couldn't be either authentically myself, or really make you know, that continued personal growth that I really wanted to look for. So yeah, I owe a lot of that to those two guys for giving me so much encouragement.

Robin Linkhart 09:05

That's exciting. Seminary has been transforming in many lives, including mine way back in the day.

Linda Stanbridge 09:15

And you did it when it was like the three week program right where you did the super long one.

Robin Linkhart 09:22

Yeah. Yeah. Three weeks in session at Community of Christ Temple and of course doing stuff in between and online classes mixed in with that, and I did the MACM, which was a 66 hour degree but it added in the practical application, theology kind of courses, so it was just amazing. I really connect with with what you're sharing about that. Just that it was like a divine synergy that expanded in the group that you're journeying with in this mixture of learning and ministry and just rocked my world information that you're like, Whoa.

Linda Stanbridge 10:04

So you have these amazing people who are kind of willing to be that vulnerable to and you kind of catch each other. And yeah, that's I mean, some of my closest friends are my seminary folks.

Robin Linkhart 10:14

Yeah. Isn't that the truth?

Linda Stanbridge 10:16

Yeah. And so then when I came to my next seminary to get my doctorate, I came with that expectation. I'm like, we're a family, we're gonna be together. And I was paired with two other there was just three of us in our in our little cohort group, but with two other people who had the same mentality. And so we really kind of approached that the same way. And so I felt like I got to bring kind of a little bit of the CofC experience to my, to my new, my sat next seminary with my group, and it was really cool, really cool experience.

Robin Linkhart 10:47

That is exciting. How else was this doctoral program different than the MAR degree journey?

Linda Stanbridge 10:54

Yeah, so I went to Ecumenical Theological Seminary in Detroit. And they talked about themselves as being really enmeshed in the Detroit prophetic tradition. And that was one of the things that grabbed me from their website was that they were talking already language that felt familiar to me, but it's in an ecumenical context. And really honoring, you know, the change that has come out of, um, some people who've done really hard work socially in Detroit. And so that was cool. It's predominantly, a black seminary, which was an experience that I really wanted was to be with folks that would have come from a different life experience and viewpoint. And because it's ecumenical, there are people from Oh, my gosh, like every every Christian tradition. And then we also had folks who were Hindu. And we had a few Muslim folks as well. And so it was really interfaith, and because of the way the learning is set up there, you really do get an opportunity to benefit from everyone else's research, as well. So it's sort of similar to the Community of Christ Seminary where you do like a semesters worth of work. And then you have an in person week, and then a semesters worth of work and an in person week, which was great, because then I felt kind of prepared. I'm like, Oh, this rhythm feels familiar. And you're in groups by where you're at with your cohort. So you're all kind of taking classes together. And so you're all working on your individual topics, and doing sort of your own research, that you're doing it together. And so you get to hear about where they are in their research, and what's the outcome and who were they reading. So it's kind of a surface level understanding, but you get to see what everybody else is working on from their viewpoint. There were some people who were doing, like a chaplaincy program that were in our cohort. And one person was developing an outline for how she could be doing hospital chaplaincy, for people who are Hindu in the hospital. And it was from her experience as a chaplain. And so that was something that was just, I've never done hospital chaplaincy. It's a faith tradition. I know almost nothing about. But I got to glimpse just a little bit of her work. And in through a lot of instances like that, that really grew my understanding. And that was something I didn't get from going to, you know, a CofC specific seminary. So I feel like I got kind of the best of both worlds. I got a little spoiled on that. But it's really, it's a really cool program. And again, the hybrid nature felt really comfortable and familiar. And I liked that.

Robin Linkhart 13:35

So I'm not even sure the timing of when you have to make a decision about the topic of your dissertation. But how did you get interested in that topic? Or, like what drew you into that?

Linda Stanbridge 13:47

Yeah. So that that's an interesting, interesting story. I think I was raised. And I think I've talked about this on Project Zion before, I was raised in a Pentecostal tradition, which was very, very conservative. And I can remember a lot as a kid actually thinking that God was really pretty scary. And, and a lot of that was because of what I had become familiar with in the Old Testament, that I didn't have good context around because of the religious, you know, environment that I was in. But also I was little. There's some stuff in there that's just really not like easy for kids to navigate. And when I came to the Community of Christ seminary, and I got into Hebrew Bible and that class Hebrew Bible, and I started digging in. It just completely captivated me. I was so caught up in the stories, and I felt like I had an opportunity to like meet God all over again. It was almost like I had never read the stories before because I had done so much unpacking and other ways, but I had never taken the time to like, really sit with those scriptures and piece them apart. I mean, who has the time for that, unless you have a professor breathing down your neck to do it, I needed that, right. And I had this amazing team of people who were like, it was just such a cool experience. But I fell in love with it all over again. And, or for the first time, I really fell in love with it. And I was fascinated by prophets, and what that meant to be prophetic. Knowing that as Community of Christ, that's something that we talked about all the time, we're a prophetic people. And my mind was kind of blown. I'm like, Oh, my gosh, maybe this means something even different than I thought it did. And, and that was kind of the point where I was like, I think I want to keep digging, you know, I'm kind of excited about this. So after I finished the Community of Christ seminary, and Tony pushed me along a little bit, which I needed, I took about a year off. And then I always say God was still kind of being a nag about it, which not everybody likes that language. But that's how it felt. God was still being a nag about it. And so I took, took the risk and applied and I was totally shocked, of course, when I got in because I, oh, my gosh, what did I do, how's this gonna be, but it was just such an amazing experience, I would totally recommend it. For other folks. It was awesome.

Robin Linkhart 16:14

So I think that brings us to the meat of my why we want you to talk with us today. And that is to, with you, as our guide, just take us on a journey. Tell us about your research, your thesis, your conclusions, we can't wait to hear about it.

Linda Stanbridge 16:34

Sure, I will be glad to. So I was I was really excited to have Tony working with me on my defense, Tony Chavala-Smith, I shouldn't assume he's the only Tony anyone knows. But in Michigan, he's just Tony. But he served as my content specialist, which was great, because I wanted to, you know, when you're preparing your research, it needs to be something that's relevant to your ministry context, and your practice what you're actually doing and what's going on with the people in your faith community. But it should also add something to the body of knowledge that others would benefit from too. So I was really lucky to have Tony helping me navigate that and giving me tons of great sources. And then you get a

few other people assigned to your team too. You get a faculty chair, a faculty mentor, and at my seminary ETS, you also have a peer reader. So you have someone else who's going through the program, who are all there to support you. And it felt for me, at first, like oh my gosh, you have these like five people who are going to sit behind probably like a big scary table. And they're probably going to write a lot of things down while you're doing your presentation. But it was not like that you really feel like they want this for you. And they're there to support you. And they don't want any surprises. But it was just a really cool experience to have, that many people kind of surround and support you. So that was one really cool aspect, especially when it comes to building out kind of your bibliography. You know, you have all these people with tons more experience who who can guide you. So, you know, it kind of goes back to talking about having that experience of God tapping on my shoulder on a Sunday morning and pointing out to me that I also had a voice and could be speaking up about these things that I kind of wanted to maybe judge others for not mentioning on a Sunday morning and and gets good at pointing out the log in our in my own eye once in a while. But then I stumbled on this survey that came from Barna Group. And it's a 2021 survey. So it's post COVID, which I always like to mention when we're especially when we're talking about churches, because as we all know, and we're living in this, it is so different before and after. So we always want to keep that in mind. But this survey found that 40% of adults think, at least somewhat, that Christian pastors are focused only on growing their churches and not really on community transformation. And it was from the same survey they said 40% 41% of US adults agree, at least somewhat, that pastors are out of touch with the needs of their community. And I thought that was really kind of a tough indictment. But in some ways, and this might not make me popular. It did reflect what I was seeing in some of our congregations where we are struggling so hard to get by. And we do have so few people and so few resources. And so sometimes we do turn inward and it feels like we're a little bit in survival mode. And so you know that that survey kind of confirmed for me what I was already afraid of a little bit, which was that we were turning inward and sort of losing sight of what's going on in the community around us. and that kind of that moved toward my, my dissertation question, which was like, how do we break out of that? How do we get to where we are close enough to marginalized communities close enough to oppressive communities, that we can actually be effective agents for change. And so what I wanted to explore was, you know, would learning about the prophets, that thing that had really kind of shaken me and opened my mind in my eyes? Would that maybe also help other people to become more interested in being sort of active participants in social transformation and social justice in their communities? So that was that was kind of how we got to, I guess, the initial question there.

Robin Linkhart 20:45

So what were some of your largest challenges along the way, and, and were there any surprises,

Linda Stanbridge 20:52

Probably the most significant challenge was in and I mean, this with love participants, if you're listening to this, because there were, I can talk about the research body in a minute, but there were tons of wonderful Community of Christ, people who volunteered to be like my own little guinea pigs. But the interesting thing was that we have, which I could have told you before this, we have like the best people in Community of Christ, but it was a very interesting demographic group. Um, it was 81% female, which is very interesting. I think that's probably pretty reflective of what we see, in most congregations, the majority of participants are female. And it was a pretty broad age spread, except that there was very

little representation of folks between like 25, and 34, which again, I think is probably pretty representative of what we see in congregations. But that was worth kind of noting. And then the other interesting thing was that more than 75% of the participants had at least a master's degree, which is insane. More than 75% of them had a master's degree. And I think this is a little bit of a bias because the topic was, you know, social justice and the prophets. And so it's going to attract people with a certain interest. And I know a lot of the folks, many of them hold more than one master's degree. But a lot of folks who had a master's degree who signed up for this class that I taught as part of my dissertation, they were seminarians. So when it was time to kind of evaluate how much do they already know about the prophets, because I want to see if I can teach them more and change their mind about some things, they were already rating themselves really high, because we had some really, really highly educated folks who signed up to do kind of this research part of my program. And so I think, if I could do this research again, I would want to do it in a congregation, where most of the people haven't been to seminary, or, you know, it's more of our lay ministry, or our more hands on people in congregations and not just leaders. Because, obviously, our leaders have some and I hope, hopefully, they have interest in social justice, the folks who signed up for this rated themselves as really interested. But how do we get that to kind of carry down into congregations? So I would love to teach this again, to more folks in different, you know, aspects of church life. But I think that was one of the challenges was, we've had some really amazing people sign up for the class that I was offering.

Robin Linkhart 23:29

When you surveyed that class, were there any questions about their involvement in the advocacy and becoming in relationship with marginalized folks? I mean, you spoke to that earlier as being part of the transformative journey of becoming actively prophetic.

Linda Stanbridge 23:49

Yeah. And we can talk about sort of like the, you know, what things that we that I represent that I presented as evidence between, you know, rate yourself now, and rate yourself after the class, but participants were asked to just tell us about their current social justice participation, so and the options were like, Yes, I often participate in social justice. Yes, sometimes, yes, rarely, or no. And they still they rate themselves before. And then we go through this class, and they rate themselves after but it's only like a six week class. So I sort of thought the answers would be the same between the pretest, you know, in the post test, because they're just evaluating themselves and their their current participation, but there was an increase, a pretty significant increase. And so I'm looking at this data and thinking, did everybody go and sign up to like, serve on the Board of their local community, you know, whatever action group, or how do we get here, you know, from from this week to this week. But I think what it was was that a lot of people as they started to understand more deeply what it meant to be prophetic, and to be to be doing that in their own communities. And you see this in sort of the qualitative data where they have the opportunity to share like a paragraph or a few sentences about their work is that people began to understand that what they were already doing was prophetic. But they weren't. They weren't realizing that, oh, my gosh, what I'm doing is part of this greater prophetic tradition. And this is part of my faith journey. And so some people talked about kind of being renewed in that sense of call. So I think it's really neat that they were able to kind of revision what they were already doing as well.

Robin Linkhart 25:27

Were there any big surprises for you, as you journey through this whole process of study and research? And I mean, your class was kind of like a test group sample.

Linda Stanbridge 25:39

Here and listen to me talk for a lot of hours. Yes, and these, I mean, these poor people were everybody was so wonderful. But so the program was, you know, sign up to take this class from me. And it's about social justice and the prophets. And that's really all I told them. I didn't, they didn't get a lot of info at first. And it was like an hour and a half, six Sundays in a row. And I made the biggest mistake, because the first class I scheduled for Superbowl Sunday. And so not very many people came and I'm like, what is what is going on? And finally, someone was like, I can't believe you put this for the middle of the Superbowl. I'm like, well, sports are not my priority. I had absolutely no idea. It was Super Bowl Sunday. But these wonderful people gave up some of their Super Bowl Sunday. And we did all kinds of group work and study. And then at the end, evaluated, you know, what, from these classes was most beneficial in kind of what we were hoping to achieve together. And they were able to read it. And it was, I will say I was lucky because some of the people who were doing research, you might go through and your thesis doesn't work out. And I get disproved. And it doesn't mean that you won't graduate and still become a doctor. But you always want to be right. Like we want our thesis to come out, right. And mine worked. So that that was exciting. But what was surprising was the things that people were most found most meaningful from the classes that we were together. So the things that they were most excited about by far was group discussions, the time we did it over zoom. So the time they spent in those little breakout groups, kind of we would do some activities. Maybe I gave them an article and some questions or discussion or something. Sometimes he watched a video, those were the things that are most valuable to them. And I think that's cool. I mean, we're Community of Christ, Chatter Day Saints, all those nicknames were known to love to chat. So I guess that shouldn't have been surprising to me. But that was what they were most excited about. And that made me think you know, this could work in a classroom too or in a congregation because people are enjoying that being together and discussing aspect. And then they were also excited about just learning about the prophetic tradition. We, like I said, it's a word we throw around a lot what is being a prophetic people. But we don't often take time, just sit down and look at that word, and what does it mean to be prophetic. So those are the things that participants were most excited about when they got to go through the class that I had created. And that was exciting to me to see those outcomes.

Robin Linkhart 28:13

That is really exciting. So you've done all this work, and how many years were you in this by the time you have completed your thesis, and then you had to go and defend it? How many years,

Linda Stanbridge 28:24

Um, it works out to be just a little bit more than three years. So it's six semesters, wvll. Because I started in December, I won't walk across the stage until probably June whenever they have their they just do one graduation a year, but it's six semesters total. And every semester, you have some online and independent work and like cope, you know, work with your cohort group, and one week in person. So you do that six times. And there are people in the program, there's always, you know, one group who's on their first week, one group who's on their second week. And so it's cool that you're you're all kind of in overlapping in different parts of your journey. And some of the people who are ahead of us

were just so wonderful. Like, you could email them and be like, I don't know what this I don't know what Dr. So and So means on this. Can I see your old draft? And oh my gosh, yeah, you know, some of that just collaboration and stuff. That was really neat. But it'll end up being just a little over three years, top to bottom.

Robin Linkhart 29:24

Yeah, that's a, that's a big commitment. So I remember when this was all coming to an end, and you had completed your dissertation and submitted that and then the day to defend it. And you know, there were different announcements on Facebook that you're getting ready to go. And a bunch of us were just, you know, sending you love and hugs and praying for this experience. So tell us what it was like to defend your dissertation and what kind of questions or comments you got from your board.

Linda Stanbridge 29:53

Oh my gosh, I thought it was gonna be and it was like so scary. Do you get the adrenaline sweats because even if I'm not nervous at all, because the adrenaline sweats I was a mess, I'm not gonna lie, I was a mess. And then they have this silly rule that you have to bring your own snacks. Do you have to like a brand? I'm like, can we, like, can I could someone else in my group bring the snacks, and I'll do it on your day. And so, you know, we brought some snacks down, and I just kind of got up there. And I was so nervous. And I just thought to myself, you know, I am going to choose to own this room, I'm going to just decide, you know, this is my topic, I've done all this work for three years, there's nothing that I didn't do in the last three years that can mess up today. You know, there's nothing I can do today that's going to undo any of that. I'm just here to tell my story of what I've been working on, and what are the outcomes, and what are the some of the positive things I think can come out of this research. And so I chose to just kind of own the room and be excited about it. And it was, it was such a, like empowering experience, but it was also terrifying. And then when it came time for them to all, you know, ask questions at the end, more than one person brought up the fact that I didn't have any sweets in my snacks. We I had just brought like a veggie tray and cheese and crackers. And more than one person was like, I can't believe you didn't have cookies. And then later, I overheard my mom whispered to my aunt, oh, it's just like Linda to make us eat vegetables. Excuse me I have a little cold. That was that was one negative piece of feedback I got. But that kind of helps, you know, just break the ice a little. And then ask good questions about some of my sources. You know, what were some of the main works that you rely on. And in your presentation, you talk a bit about, you know, your literature review, and who are the authors that you're leaning on. But there's never time to list, you know, all 75 or 100, folks whose work you're using. So if a little bit about that. And Tony asked a good question about, you know, how you kind of deal with the people getting uncomfortable, you know, when we're talking about some stuff that it's really challenging, or where we might have some deep disagreements? You know, how are we navigating that. And I was, first thing that popped into my head was thinking about Rachel Held Evans. And I think this is from Searching for Sunday, where she says, you know, church should be a place where everybody is safe, and nobody is comfortable. And so I kind of leaned back on her and she's also a person who came from an evangelical faith tradition and went through a faith transition. So it felt nice to lean on her. And, you know, just to let us figure out how to be okay with being uncomfortable, that we can still keep each other safe, where we do those things and ask each other hard questions. We don't like being uncomfortable, but it doesn't necessarily mean that we're not in a safe space to, to push and explore and be creative and have questions. And then there were a few,

a few questions about, you know, how would this apply to this other faith community, my research was really focused on Community of Christ, there was a whole week of learning that we did with the folks in the group that was about specifically about Community of Christ history, with social justice, which a lot of people don't know, we have actually a pretty robust history with social justice, even from our very early days. And I had done my capstone during my during CofC seminary days. And so I was able to go back and thank past Linda for all of her research and notes. And I was able to use that. But, you know, so one of the questions was like, this research is really, really CofC. You know, does this apply to other faith traditions? And, of course, you're in an ecumenical school. So that's a good question. But yeah, it was, it was a really awesome, awesome experience. I felt so supported by the staff. You know, Tony Chvala-Smith flew all the way in from Kansas City, which was such a cool experience to be there, he only stayed in town for like, I don't even know if it was a full 24 hours, so that he can be there. That made me feel so supported. I got like a card in the mail from Art Smith was getting like messages from you, Robin. Good luck today. And so, you know, that's just one of the amazing things about Community of Christ is all these connections that you make, and how many people remembered that morning, hey, I think your thing is today, I'm thinking about you. And yeah, I just felt really, really loved and empowered. It wasn't a really a cool experience.

Robin Linkhart 34:44

So if you had to boil the message and findings of your dissertation into one or two paragraphs, and I know that's asking a lot. But what would you say?

Linda Stanbridge 34:57

Yeah, you know, I I'm not going to be able probably to put it in a few paragraphs. But I think what I really loved learning about was really piecing apart what it means to be prophetic. And what is a prophet. And Walter Brigman is probably the most useful voice for me on this. And he's talking about, you know, prophets kind of have to operate two ways, and a lot of us operate one way or the other. But we have to be critical of what's happening around us. That's not in line with God's vision. And we have to be vocal about that, right? And we rely on God for that. But that aspect of being prophetic, isn't so much about predicting the future of what might happen. It's about looking around and reading the signs of the culture, it's about being close enough to oppressed people to know what's really happening, and to say, this is not in line with God's vision. And actually, God has a better future for us. Doing that criticism, and maintaining the hope that allows us to envision something that's completely new, that's possible with God. And we have to stay in that rhythm of managing both of those things. How do we stay critical, and say, "This is not what God wants for us in our shared life." And stay hopeful enough to rely on God and be able to imagine something that's that's never existed something that's actually truly new, to get so far outside our worldview, that we can imagine a world where everyone has enough. And so Walter Brueggemann really relies on Jeremiah for that critical piece. And I fell in love with Jeremiah. There's like, a half a shelf over here. Just just all books on Jeremiah, I went down a really deep Jeremiah hole, which I don't actually recommend. But he relies on Jeremiah for that criticism piece. And he relies on Second Isaiah for that hope, piece. And so there's just so much Biblical stuff there. And like I said, I fell in love with the Hebrew Bible. So you know, it's easy for us to get stuck in this criticism piece. I think a lot of us know how to do that. But we forget to do the hope piece. And actually, that's something that Community of Christ talks about a lot. We can look back in these scriptures and see how consistently God is on the side of the oppressed. And that can give us hope to keep moving

forward. So that wasn't one or two paragraphs. But if I was going to boil it down, I guess I would say, you know, that would be my, that would be my thesis.

Robin Linkhart 37:37

That was really, really excellent. And very inspiring. So you have touched on this a little bit, but how does your work connect with Community of Christ? And maybe even how does your work challenge us to go deeper in our identity, our mission, our message and our beliefs?

Linda Stanbridge 37:58

Yeah, one of the cool things that I got to do as I was doing some research for this was to email a little bit back and forth with President Veazey. And some questions about you know, what is because I can't imagine the responsibility that comes with that mantle of prophet. But you know, how does he view our, you know, our way of thinking about prophecy and prophets? Is that in line with what's happening in the in the Hebrew Bible, or is that something that's separate, and exploring, it sort of through his eyes was really helpful. And I think that, you know, if we were to lean into that a little bit more this aspect of what it means to be a prophetic people where we all take responsibility together. Because, again, being a prophet is a pretty big mantle. It's the responsibility of all of us. So I think if we were to really embrace what it means to be prophetic, that can call us out of our congregations, I think it can call us to be living a little bit closer to the people in our communities to embrace what's happening there to shake off some of the fear and get outside and start doing the real work that needs to be done. I think that, you know, this work can help us explore a little bit deeper, a little bit deeper into our past, you know, we were just chatting about what a strong history Community of Christ has. We've done some amazing stuff together. And I think that what you can really see is how consistent God's call is across time, not just for Community of Christ, but for all people of this faith. And so I think my hopes for Community of Christ are really that we just continue to dig deeper into who we say we are, that we deepen our understanding of, you know, how we stay critical of what's not right but how we also manage this hope and our vision for peace, that we learn a little bit more about how we're prophetic in our own lives and in our congregations. I just want to keep us keep seeing us to be who we are. But even more authentically, me even more deeply.

Robin Linkhart 40:10

Yeah. And as you're talking, balancing that that critical lens of Jeremiah and the hope that's cast in Isaiah and living that out as we seek to go deeper in the prophetic tradition, to truly be prophetic people, is also that tension of maintaining community and in diverse, very diverse peoples, like your experience with the guy that got up and spoke out against the LGBTQIA plus community, which I'm sure was shocking when you first first heard that. We can be in deep friendship with people. And sometimes we don't always know the ways that we're different from one another, or the perspectives that we hold any one minute that may not match. Yeah, that that's a big part I think of, of what you're talking about. Do you have any comments on that?

Linda Stanbridge 41:11

I think maybe that's maybe one of the one of the most important parts of church relationships is that we do learn to love deeply people we disagree with it when we do it, right. I can think of a few people who, gosh, I love them. And I just couldn't disagree with them more on a lot of things that are really important

aspects of my life. But I am willing to stay in the struggle with them because of the love that I have for them. I'm not remembering off the top of my head, which enduring principle it is. talks about how we commit to staying in that conversation. Practicing that in intentional communities, I mean, those just picking up those skills and relationships, I really think that can transform our communities. It's a hard and amazing thing to learn.

Robin Linkhart 42:00

So I do want to ask you for reading recommendations. But before we move to that, I think we've dovetailed into the question: what are your hopes for the future of Community of Christ, and and the world I mean, the world that we're sent out to share the peace of Jesus Christ.

Linda Stanbridge 42:19

Yeah, man hopes for the world. I think, you know, as a parent, it is kind of, and maybe parents have felt like this forever. It's, it's kind of scary out there. And I really hope that what we can continue to do is think about how you know, an international church can be speaking, continue to be speaking to peace. What's unique about our story? I think, I don't know enough about how to solve so many of these problems. And it makes me feel frustrated and isolated. But being in community with other people who really want to see change, and then figuring out how we can do those small things together, continues to make me feel like I could get up in the morning, and do another day, because I know I'm not out here wrestling it alone. I think the way that we develop those relationships is something that's kind of unique to Community of Christ. I hope that we continue to grow that aspect. How do we continue to remain hopeful, with so many hard things that are happening in the world. At least for me, it's kind of easy to get swallowed up by that sometimes. But my faith community keeps pulling me out. The relationships and all those amazing people who just kind of wrap you up when things are hard. Those amazing relationships you develop and community. I think that's something really special that we have in Community of Christ.

Robin Linkhart 43:53

I do too. And I think when we're at our best, we live into that in such a deep and meaningful way. And I would love to be able, you know, you've talked about community as our church community congregation, but you've also addressed community as outside our walls, you know, interconnected, not just city and nation, but but globally. And I think we have the capacity to learn how to do that better, and to teach other people what that looks like, and how we can all do that, in this diverse world, which would certainly lend itself to that holding on to that hope.

Linda Stanbridge 44:32

Absolutely.

Robin Linkhart 44:35

Yeah. So Linda, what reading recommendations do you have for us today?

Linda Stanbridge 44:40

Well, the work if you only could read one book about about this topic about the prophetic tradition and becoming prophetic. Walter Brueggemann, The Prophetic Imagination. This is a 40 year old book and

they just did another edition of it and if you were if this was a video podcast, you'd be able to see that my copy is absolutely destroyed and it's covered in post it notes and highlight. This is an excellent book. It gives you kind of just the basic outline and and this book is sort of how I organized with the research would be like how do we learn about the different aspects and break down such a big topic of the prophetic tradition and wrestle it into something that you could manage in a six week class. And so this, this book is awesome. Another one that's kind of out there. Maybe a different pick that others might not have heard of, is Where Have All the Prophets Gone? It's by Marvin McNichol. And the subtitle is "Reclaiming Prophetic Preaching in America." And this is written kind of specifically from the perspective of the Black Church. And so I think it provides a perspective that's unique to a lot of Community of Christ congregations in the US. I could go on and on. This was another really great one. American Prophets, and this is by Albert J. Raboteau. And this is this book is really neat. It talks about prophets from kind of this modern day, which was a cool connection that we tried to make throughout this class. This idea that prophets are the idea of a prophet isn't bad, right? God continues to call prophets throughout time. So who are the prophets who have been speaking recently? This book talks about Dorothy Day, talks about Howard Thurman, Martin Luther King, Abraham Joshua Heschel, really, really cool and pretty concise book. And then, oh, gosh, I really could just go on and on. But this is kind of a newer book, this one came out in 2022. It's called The Prophets very creative title. It's by Stephen Cook, John, Strong and Steven Tuell. And this guy, Steven Tuell is someone that Tony Smith had gone to seminary with it. So Tony knew this book was coming out ahead of time, and he's like, you've got to get it, I think it's gonna be really helpful. And it was, if you're interested in like, the weird kind of cultic version, or kind of aspect of prophecy, which I totally like, I love a cult documentary. So I was like, tell me everything about how this kind of gets started. What is this? And it just opened my mind. It's really weird old book by just by Robert Wilson who taught at I think Yale for a long time, Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel, Robert R. Wilson, really, really interesting book that I love to read. So we better stop or I'll just keep going and going.

Robin Linkhart 47:36

Yeah, me too. I'm thinking, Oh, my gosh, I've got to get that one. I do have the Prophetic Imagination. Great, great book. Yeah, these other ones are new to me. So I can't wait to explore some of those myself. So Linda, is there anything that you would really like to say today that I haven't asked you about?

Linda Stanbridge 47:56

Well, thank you so much for having me and giving me a chance to talk about my, you know, my dissertation. I guess the last thing I'll mention is that I'm no longer on the Harmony Board. I, my term is ended. But I'm still an active participant. And so I always want to invite everybody to our Sacred Pause worship, which is the last Sunday or the last Monday, excuse me, of pretty much every month. And it's an opportunity to get together and worship for folks who are in the Queer community and also allies. I look forward to it every month. So if you're one of those people, you are very much invited. We'd love to see you.

Robin Linkhart 48:34

Thank you so much, Linda. Thank you for making time to be with us today, and to share your life and adventure with DMin with us. And of course, a very special thanks to all of our listeners. If you would

like to hear more stories about peace, check out our Grounds for Peace series in the drop down menu of our website projectzionpodcast.org. If you want to hear more from Linda Stanbridge listen to episode 119, where Linda talks about her personal faith journey and what brought her to Community of Christ. Also, check out our show notes for today's episodes where we will link several episodes that feature Linda sharing about mission in today's world in a wide variety of contexts. This is your host Robin Linkhart And you are listening to Project Zion Podcast. Go out and make the world a better place. Take good care. Bye bye.