

Extra Shot | Sale of Historic Sites | Perspectives from the Field

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

History, grief, historic sites, Christ, community, Kirtland Temple, journey, process, relationships

SPEAKERS

David Howlett, Blake Smith, Kellie Brady, Christian Skoorsmith, Kris Judd

Blake Smith 00:28

Hello, and welcome to this special Extra Shot episode at Project Zion Podcast. I'm your host, Blake Smith, and I'm going to be sitting with some friends of mine from around the church, who will be sharing their perspectives on the recent sale of historic properties, and how they've processed through the emotions and feelings, and all of the things that have been going on surrounding that event.

My first guest for this series of reflections from the field is Christian Skoorsmith. Christian is joining me from Seattle, Washington. Welcome, Christian.

Christian Skoorsmith 01:02

Thanks. I'm glad to be here. Thanks for inviting me.

Blake Smith 01:04

Well, Christian, before we begin, we always like to have our guests just introduce themselves so our listeners can get to know them a little better. Would you mind? Tell us just a little bit about yourself?

Christian Skoorsmith 01:14

Sure, sure. So I'm Christian Skoorsmith. I live in work in Seattle, Washington. I am a lifelong member of the church. I grew up in the church in Arizona. And my father is several generations deep. My mom was a convert. So we had a lot, a lot of really good, a lot of good family history there. I grew up in Arizona, went to Graceland. And I served I worked for the church for about 10 years in the Pacific Northwest and in Europe. And now I'm a I'm a hypnotherapist in Seattle.

Blake Smith 01:53

I read a post that you wrote on Facebook after the news about the sale of the properties. And if I'm remembering correctly, it was a response to someone else's post. [Yeah] You might have written others. But

Christian Skoorsmith 02:05

Yes, yeah, I haven't written like a post myself. It was a response to someone else's post. Yeah.

Blake Smith 02:11

Well, I really appreciated the post, and the insightful way that it at least came across, that you're dealing with the news, and I thought it might be helpful for our listeners. So I want to just turn things over to you and let you tell us your story as it pertains to the historic sites, I know you've got some connections with historic sites, and then maybe if you would be willing to also let us in on your journey or process of making sense of what this means or what might mean for us as a people.

Christian Skoorsmith 02:44

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, of course, that's an ongoing, you know, still open ended thing. It's still so early.

Blake Smith 02:52

Raw. Yeah.

Christian Skoorsmith 02:54

So the post that I responded to was from a young adult, who had just been guiding it to Kirtland, this last year. And, and so they, you know, they, they were they were feeling it, and lots of feelings, lots of disappointment, sadness, betrayal, you know, the whole the, all of the stages of grief all at once. And since I knew them, and I knew their family, I'm good friends with their family. I felt like it was able, I was able to slow down, you know, not have like a big reaction, I was able to, like, slow down and consider what I was saying. Because I really, I felt it. When, when my wife and I heard the news. We were at work, and we could hardly, you know, continue through the day my wife came home in tears. We, yeah, well. So a little bit about my my background, and like why we were so affected by this is that well, so I guided at Kirtland when I was in Graceland, and my wife guided at Nauvoo, and in Kirtland different years. But we both guided there, they were like, profoundly formational events for us. They were to this day, we still describe those as some of our favorite jobs, like of all the jobs we've ever had, those were our favorite, among our favorites. And we imagined that we would go into retirement and guide again, as as a retired couple. We looked forward to the possibility of our kids if they chose to do that, having that same opportunity to guide when they were in college. So it's, it was and part of our relationship, we really bonded over church history and our love for that and our reverence for that, even at the same time as we're transforming that story, right, but just having that reverence for the story and, the depth of history that that that our church, particularly it was really bringing to those sites, both Nauvoo and Kirtland sites and on a personal level, that's so my wife and I, we, we had our first kiss at in Nauvoo on the on the historic properties. My father's childhood home is on the, the Nauvoo, the lowland there, the flats where the historic properties are, and he grew up there. And that's where my mom and my dad first met, my dad asked my mom to marry him in the foundations, the ruins at that point, of the Red Brick store, it hadn't been restored yet. And my dad regularly was a guide, a handyman at Nauvoo. And so it was, it was a deeply it was it was the loss of our family home, as well as the historic property. So there was a lot of grief, there are a lot of a lot of feelings that came in, of course, there was the shock, there was the being stunned by it. So, my wife's doing her Doctorate in Business Administration, and she's actually taking a class right now about negotiations. And so even in the midst of like, the grief and the loss, she did not have the same kind of reaction that I that a lot of people were having about the surprise, the suddenness, I mean, she was reacting to the sadness, the shock, but not the secrecy aspect of it. Because for her, she that totally makes sense, from the business perspective, when you're

dealing with sales of you know, in the hundreds of millions of dollars, or like really intense negotiations, it's regular business practice, to for those negotiations to be secret until everything's done. And there's all kinds of not just financial reasons, but like legal reasons, social reasons. There's all kinds of reasons why you would want those to be secret until everything's said and done. So the, the secrecy I totally understand, in that regard. Still, the surprise, the shock, that was, it was troubling, as well, I think it was forever. But I think probably that's, you know, like, we're all just like running up against a brick wall of grief here, because we haven't had time to process it. Well, so having had time to a little bit to digest that, and you know, us walking through it, I felt coming out of you know, bubbling up inside of me, like the possibility of looking at it as if I was a historian 20 or 50 years in the future. Looking back at this at this difficult time in the church, the last, you know, the last 10 years. financially, socially, politically, there's been really, there's been a lot of a lot of difficulty, a lot of turmoil, a lot of tense, difficult decisions. And looking back at it, I was like, as like, as if I was a historian, 50 years in the future, I wonder if looking if there might be a way to see this as a turning point. Not a turning point, not a pivot point. But as certainly as something significant, let me back up and just say that, so I'm, I'm almost 50. And so I was growing up in the 80s and the 90s in the church. And I think, at that point, there was no, there was, of course, a lot of reassessment of our history of our story of our identity, we are moving a lot, we are becoming more progressive, theologically, we are orienting toward mission and peace. And, and so our history was becoming less of our theology. Whereas before, I think for like the generations previous to mine, our history was, to a large degree, our theology, the story was, was our talk about the revelation of God in our lives. Whereas Community of Christ was taking this different turn where we were actually very forward looking into trans, like our priorities, were transforming the world into a bionic place. Right, not just creating it for like a gigantic bubble for ourselves, but actually like making the whole world Zion and bringing those non ionic relationships and understanding our history as not an isolated thing that happened that like a single revelation, but actually just as like a starting point on a trajectory that we are still continuing toward, toward this very sort of outward looking very progressive sort of forward looking theology, identity, as opposed to seeing our identity as rooted exclusively almost primarily in the the original revelation and experience of Joseph Smith, Jr. and Joseph Smith III. So we take if we take that trajectory, and sort of put it into the lives of lived people. I realized that I was growing up in this in this time where it was becoming less and less important, and I noticed that my wife and I, for who The story is really important, some of the most formational experience of our lives were spent at these sites that we really dig church history, right? We love it. And yet, we were not telling these stories to our children. I mean, we told them a little bit, but that the conversations we were having with our kids, who are now young teenagers, they were all about the mission of the church, about transforming, about peace, about how we understand how the world is becoming, and how like our Church takes part in that have like the role that we can take in transforming the world. So when Christy and I realized and reflected on the fact that the true story, however powerful it is, has not been a part of what we thought like intuitively was really important to pass on to our kids, about the future of the church, and what it means to be Community of Christ, what it means to be Christian in our particular expression of that. I started to think of it differently. And that we've been making this sort of progression. And however important and delicious and good and, and like a great story. Our history is, it's not as important as where we're going, and what we're feeling and what we're being led into. And so from the perspective of this future historian, looking back, it might be like one way to look at this sale is not us, like finally jettison or being free from the shackles of our history. And like that, that's that's that's not the way I think it's going to be seen, I think, it's that when it came down to making a choice between

where our priorities were going to be, we had a choice of, we could be a church that was a museum of this particular period. Or we could be a church that was oriented toward transforming the world in whatever way it's becoming, moving forward, and when push came to shove, and let me just say, I cannot imagine how difficult this decision was, I do not envy the First Presidency, discerning this and walking through this. And that, you know, I'll never know all of the factors they were considering. But I can only imagine how powerfully troubling the situation, the decision must have been, in order to make the sale of the Kirtland Temple primarily be the option, the preferred option, rather than whatever they were facing. I'm glad it was them. And not me, I really feel for them in that regard. But from the perspective of this future historian, seeing this as a moment where like when push came to shove, when it really came down to decide where we're going to put our our time, our efforts, our money, our mission, and we decided that it's going to be in the future. We've been holding on to our historic sites, and being over the past 40-50 years really transforming our understanding of ourselves, even in the context of those sites. And that's been a really great journey. And that's going to continue. And they've been anchors in the storms for so many of us. But instead of seeing them as anchors. Now, I think we can look at them as having been safe harbors. For us in those difficult decades. The thing about harbors, they're not meant to be lived in harbors are meant to be, to come back to they're meant to be to be to be places of safety, and refuge and refitting. But for a journey that takes us out. And I know, this is like I don't want to be pollyannish. And I don't want to dismiss people's suffering, people's genuine hurt. I know that feelings of betrayal that for me, it's mostly shock and loss, grief. So I don't want to belittle that. But I think in the future, we will be able to look back at this really difficult time and see it, not as losing something as much as us making a really brave choice, and what in what our discipleship really fundamentally looks like. And it'll be in faithfulness with the journey that we've been on for the last 180 years.

Blake Smith 14:11

I really, really do appreciate Christian, your time and being willing to share your thoughts and perspectives with me and with our listeners. and I know that time is very valuable. Thank you.

Christian Skoorsmith 14:21

Thank you so much for the invitation. This is a really important conversation I really patient you guys like being on the ball and and want to tell this to have this conversation. Like let's let's have the conversation. I really I really appreciate that.

Blake Smith 14:36

All right, Christian, take care.

Christian Skoorsmith 14:37

Thank you. You too.

Blake Smith 14:38

My next guest is Kellie Brady and I'm just really glad to have Kelly with us on the podcast when reflections from the field after the sale of the historic property. So welcome, Kellie.

Kellie Brady 14:50

Thank you. It's good to be here.

Blake Smith 14:53

It's really good to have you. I will be honest and say I did not know Kellie before our getting to talk about being on the podcast. I met Kellie, if you will, through her posts during the worships that were held Monday night after the sale of the properties. And part of the reason that I've asked Kellie to be with us tonight is because I could sense from what she was writing, that she had a deep connection with the historic sites, and yet she had had some time to process through that. And as you know, with our other guests, we're really trying to get a sense of things that might help us through that process. So, Kellie, first, before we get into your story, if you could just take a couple of minutes to introduce yourself, so our listeners could get to know you better.

Kellie Brady 15:38

Certainly. Well, as we've said, my name is Kellie Brady, I grew up in Oklahoma, I am now in Kansas City, Missouri, specifically Lee's Summit, Missouri. So I'm very close to the Temple and World Headquarters and auditorium, which is very lucky. And I have a husband named Charlie, I have four children, and two dogs, one cat and an axolotl. So that's a little bit about my family and where I live. I also have strong roots in my native culture. So I raised my sons to know where they come from. So that is something that is very strong, rooted thing in my life that we lean on, and that we have a lot of practices in that place into how I have processed this news of the selling of the historical sites and artifacts and what I'll be speaking about today.

Blake Smith 16:39

Oh, great. You also serve as an associate pastor, right?

Kellie Brady 16:43

I do, I apologize. I should talk about my Community of Christ life, because that is very important on this podcast. So I serve as an associate pastor for Norton Heights Community of Christ congregation in Kansas City. And I am new to that position. And I'm loving it, I'm on fire for it. And I am green. So I'm learning a lot from my more seasoned individuals that are serving on that team of three with me. So yes, I'm an associate pastor. Another neat thing about me is that I have a long, long history and Community of Christ. My family goes back to being members all the way since literally the beginning. So we are descendants of some of the first people who, you know, were the grassroots who started the back then it was, well RLDS and then forward to Community of Christ. I like to say Community of Christ now because that's who we are. But we have been in this church since the beginning. So I grew up in the church, and it is where I belong.

Blake Smith 17:52

So when Historic Sites Foundation talks to us and says that your story is church history, for you, that's really, really true.

Kellie Brady 18:02

That is really true. To your right. So when I was a little girl, I have a different history with the historic sites. Well, I would, I would like to think a rather different history than some people may think I don't have a long history, but I do have a brief history. Just in my lifespan, my family are descendants. However, I had just a brief interaction with the historic sites and artifacts as a little girl. My parents took us on a trip my sister and myself, I was about I believe, eight. And I had just been newly baptized by the, I'm sorry, my church in Oklahoma at the time, and my parents decided to take us on the church caravan, all the way up through all of the historic sites go on the tour. So we could see everything, learn everything, be exposed to all of our rich history of our RLDS church at the time, and that we would be impacted by that as little girls. And it worked. I remember that trip. And as I experienced it, I learned that this is the church that I want to be in forever, for the rest of my life. And I have really stuck to that. So that experience while it was my only experience with all of those sites and artifacts, it was that impactful that it was very difficult for me when I read that we had sold, we as a church have sold historical sites and artifacts, and I will say the biggest thing that stuck out to me was the artifacts piece. I thought why why would we sell artifacts, those are so important. You know, I can understand a building we it's no surprise to me as a 45 year old member of this church that we're in the financial crisis that we're in, it's been spoken about so much through World Conferences that I've attended. It's it's known when I've traveled to Tahiti and stayed with my Tahitian family there. It's, you know, talked about everywhere, you know, even in our home congregations, it's been spoken about for years, how, you know, please, we must give almost a pleading for all of us as members to give something so that we could, you know, stay afloat, remain a church and not wither, and, for lack of better terms die. And so, it came as a surprise to me in one way, just the abruptness of it. And I was angry. I was, I was more hurt than angry, I think is a better word for it. But it did evoke tears and evoked just an immediate response of grief, which was surprising to me. I, I did not know why it evoked that at the moment. But my mom, Tammy Lay, I spoke with her and she's my confidant, my best friend. So I, of course, turned to her anytime I need some guidance. And through conversation with her, I was able to step back a little bit after I allowed myself that space to be angry, allow myself that space to grieve and be confused, and to have my knee jerk reaction to be angry at leadership and think, why didn't they tell us? Why did we not know this? Why would they just do this without even speaking to any of the membership, allow myself that space to do all of those knee jerk reactions, but then in a mature way, keep those to myself in my own space, without lashing out on social media or, you know, in chat groups or chat threads on zooms, and just realize and process through that. And then upon doing that, I realized and came to the, to the point where I was, I was bitterly sweet, comfortable in a way with what had happened, I realized that I understood why it happened. I also knew that leadership took it upon themselves and shouldered this difficult, difficult process of doing something, you know, that I'm certain most of them had difficult, difficult time doing, because they're all tied to this as well. And I also realized that, through this, we are all allowed to feel how we should feel or how we, I'm sorry, we're all allowed to feel how we feel. And we're all required to respect one another in that process. And as I spoke more with my mom and processed through more, I started to simultaneously grieve, while being excited for this new change. My neighbors next door are from Ukraine. So, well, not both of them. My neighbor next door married someone who, who was born and raised in Ukraine. That person's children were in Ukraine when the war broke out. And they lost everything, as many know anybody listening to this podcast who's familiar with what happened in Ukraine, a little over, I believe, a year and a half ago, knows that it was their, their place, there were places that were just demolished. I mean, places where your baby was born, gone, places where you got married, gone, a home where you brought your child into the world and all

of those deep memories, gone. family homes have generations and generations and generations, gone. So those individuals were forced to pick up, hold those stories and those memories within themselves in their spirits, and have them live on that way when structures had been demolished, and they had no choice. And what that did for me was when I looked next door and saw the Yellow and Blue Christmas lights that my neighbor has turned on every single night for the past year and a half since the war has broken out. And they fly their Ukrainian flag next to their American flag. It hit me and it made me realize that, how honestly egocentric some of us can be in this country to have anger and lash out because we have to sell structures and artifacts. While that is important and I myself have the permission to grieve and be upset about that which I am. I also have the fidelity to understand that it is my duty to realize things had to happen. And I have to glean out the positivity and in the sale of these historical sites and artifacts, and realize that our story in our history does not live in a structure. It doesn't live in an artifact, it truly does live within the membership of all of us. And so that is my story of how I am simultaneously grieving. While being excited for this new era we're entering in, I truly feel like we're entering a new era, I say that, not lightly, I feel like we have a rebirthing of our church, I feel like we have been moving forward with making great strides to where we reach marginalized groups, we accept them, we are a church that is one that breaks barriers, breaks glass ceilings, and I don't know another church, that's a vehicle that I can hop into, and ride through my life that meets all of the all of my beliefs and my core values. as closely as this one does, as Community of Christ does. I would like to add that I am open to supporting or listening to any, any one of the listeners who need someone to just sit in whatever they're in, sit in the grief, sit in the moving forward process, to just listen to process through with someone to vent to, I hold the office of priest, I can be a good listener. And I just want to offer that if anyone ever needs somebody to just companion with upon their journey through this.

Blake Smith 26:50

Well, Kelly, thanks so much. I really appreciate your candor and honesty, it sounds like it has been a process for you, both dealing with your own emotions of of the loss of things that were important to you and have been important to you, and yet being able to process through that through relationships through folks that you know, who represent other cultures who understand these types of things in a different way. All of that helping you through a process. I hear grace, offered toward leadership in the fact that they've had to shoulder a very difficult decision, even at the same time wondering, why did they do this? Why didn't they tell us? So, really a mix of emotions, which I think really well represents a number of folks in the church and in Community of Christ. So thank you so much for being with us on this episode, Kellie, and we hope to see you at Project Zion Podcast again in the future.

Kellie Brady 27:54

Thank you so much, Blake.

Blake Smith 27:56

My next guest on the podcast is David Howlett, and David is coming to us from Northampton, Massachusetts. Welcome, David.

David Howlett 28:04

Thank you. Glad to join you today.

Blake Smith 28:08

It's really good to have you on this podcast where we're trying to get some perspectives on how people are processing the information about the sale of our historic properties in the church. But before we get into that, could you just give us a little introduction of yourself so that our listeners know who you are?

David Howlett 28:25

Yeah, I think in academia, people always start with something about themselves and their jobs. We live in a culture of work. So I'll talk first about work even though that shouldn't justify us. So I, I'm a visiting assistant professor of religion at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts. I'm a scholar of religion in America. Beyond that, I'm a dad. I'm the spouse to an Episcopal priest, and Reverend Anna Woofenden, St. John's Northampton, and I'm a dad to my daughter, Turina. And beyond that I am an eighth generation member of Community of Christ. So I am an elder in Community of Christ. And I guess I've been part of various congregations over the years as I've moved around for jobs, and been a friend to many congregations to as I've moved around for jobs as they've been far away from where I've lived as well. So I've spent parts of 12 summers in Kirtland, part of three summers in Nauvoo. So I'm really well acquainted with the sites and they've been up a large part of my adult life.

Blake Smith 29:34

And if I remember correctly, David, you've had some connection with at least one other restoration tradition at some point in your, in your journey. Is that right?

David Howlett 29:44

Yeah. So I have a journey which is a little unusual and Community of Christ because I was born into the RLDS church and blessed as an infant and then baptized in 1986. And that, for folks to know something about Community of Christ history will know, that's a hard period of Community of Christ history in which conservatives are upset about women's ordination and in general liberalizing trends in the RLDS church at the time. And among those were my parents, and they got me baptized and we left. And so I grew up in my kind of teen years, in the Restoration branches movement and I, I was a deacon, I was a priest, I was even an elder, in the Restoration branches movement. And in my early 20s, I kind of made the move to Community of Christ, which isn't the typical move of Restorationists. But for me, it came through a kind of like, of an experience of realizing over time, that when I read the things from the 60s and 70s that church leaders had written, they already believe those things, as a Restorationist, I come to those conclusions, just from being a college student. And being a high school student, honestly. And so that that was part of my transition actually was finding and Community of Christ, people interested in my questions. And then finding a community that could affirm things that I really value Restoration heritage, and to be do that with in a progressive kind of Christian setting, and with a progressive Christian orientation, which was also meaningful to me. So I love that those two could be combined in Community of Christ.

Blake Smith 31:29

I want to just turn it over to you now, David. So if you wouldn't mind just sharing your story a little bit more about those connections that you have with those sites in Kirtland and Nauvoo, and then tell us whatever you think might be helpful in terms of your process.

David Howlett 31:45

Yeah. The first time I visited the Kirtland Temple, I was a 16 year old, with my Restorationists, that's Restoration branches. Restorationist youth group, we were on a classic van pilgrimage out to the East Coast, visiting historic sites and Washington, DC, a bunch of places, we went all over the place and saw things that would be familiar to a lot of folks who grew up in Community of Christ that made similar trips. We were Restorationists doing that. And I remember going into the Kirtland Temple. And I remember the feeling, it just made me happy. It made me happy to be there, to actually be in that place and to touch. I mean, the railing of going up the stairs, I remember that experience, just even the physical touch. It's kind of the joy of helping at a site. And we had a, for me, it was an experience of talking to a guide, who was really well informed about the history and knew a lot more than I knew. I thought I knew a lot. I was a 16 year old, right 16 year olds think they know a lot. Right? [Right. Exactly.] And like, it was using sources that were like well researched sources and parts of this where I wasn't familiar with and that, that made an impression on me about how that was really helpful. And here was this group that, you know, I had certain prejudices as a Restorationist, that I wanted them to be confirmed on that tour. And I mean, I was surprised by the professionalism and kindness but also the knowledge of the guides there. So that was a really good experience. In 2004, I was visiting World Conference, and I went past the historic sights table, in the basement of the Auditorium. And Lachlan Mackay was there, he struck up a conversation with me and right then and there recruited me to be a guide that summer at the Kirtland Temple. And so I was about to enter my first year as a PhD student at the University of Iowa. So I was a little older than most guides, by like this, to me was a great opportunity. I was in grad school, I had the time, I could do it. And so I went to Kirtland, became a guide, and in the process, I went back a second year was another guide. And then my third year, I was teaching the students because I, at that point, have passed my comps comprehensive exams, towards a PhD as a PhD candidate. And so I was teaching the college course, offered through Graceland for the historic sites internship for the interns, about Kirtland history, was a fantastic opportunity for me, to reconnect with the history, go more in depth with the history but also interact with the guides and, and help them through this process. In the process of that, too. I was taking a pilgrimage seminar in grad school, and I realized that I wrote a paper on Kirtland Temple as a as a pilgrimage site. I realized as I was thinking about that course, this was a good paper. I thought it could be a good paper potentially. So I was thinking about what I would write for this course. I wrote the paper and thought, this could be a dissertation. And then when i wrote the dissertation, I thought, well, this can be a book. And so I mean, it became that eventually. So but it became my first book to thinking about the dynamics of, of how the Temple has been contested over time between groups, but also shared. And so these kinds of like dual things of cooperation between groups of the temple and subtle in some ways over contestation, or like conflict, and both of those things have always been present, will always be potentially, if there are multiple groups actually value the site that's inevitable. So that became kind of my first kind of big academic work was thinking about the site through the lens of pilgrimage studies. But I mean, it's obviously, when you are at a place over time, things you begin to have a relationship with places. So I also for three parts of three summers, was at Nauvoo doing the same thing with teaching at the course. I probably feel more connected to Kirtland just because I spent more time there. And I feel more

connected to the narrative of Kirtland too than Nauvoo. Things aren't just things, things on a standard between, a continuum between thing and person, and, you know, persons can become things. Slavery is an example of that, right? And then things can become personlike too. And like, it's not every person who experiences this. I mean, for instance, if I were to sell my grandparents, wedding rings, I probably feel guilty about that, because they're not just things, they're connected to people. So I mean, that illustrates, we all experienced that, and the Kirtland Temple is certainly been both a thing and sort of person, like in a sense. Beyond that, but it's not just about stories, but about what it becomes. And I've also thought about another way of thinking about is like, the Temple has gone back and forth between these two poles of like, commodity and something beyond that almost like person in the sense of like, in 1874, Emma told Joseph Smith III, why don't you sell, tried to selling the Temple to pay off your debts, in which he had inherited debts from his brother, Frederick, who had died tragically early in life in 1862, and had all these debts from his farm. And Joseph Smith III assumed those debts, and he was struggling, and needed something and was told, Well, why not try that? And that begins the process of the RLDS church saying no, no, Joseph Smith III, you don't own the Temple, the church owns it. And then a process of trans-valuing it, going from something which is potentially a commodity, to something that's different. And became then a place of course of telling us why we were the "one true church" for a good long time, it became kind of a place for that as well. But over time, I think people too begin developing a relationship of care with the Temple. And what I mean by that is like, you can think about ownership as something about legal deeds. And it truly is because we live in a system which decides it in those ways. And the Kirtland Temple certainly was part of that. But ownership could also be thought of in a different way about care. And what I mean by this is like, the claims that Lakota have to the Black Hills, are certainly by treaties, legally, that they made with United States government. But the claims they have to the Black Hills aren't just about treaties, it's about care, about care for the land, relationships with the land that they built over generations and time. And so I think the Temple became that to have beyond just the deeds, and its potential as a commodity, which had always had that potential as a commodity, for money. But it was about care. And it entered that realm of ports where it wasn't just a thing. It wasn't just you know, a place or, you know, wood or an old building that needed maintenance, which it is. Expensive maintenance, which is true. But, it also became something of a member of our family, at least my family, and for other people too. So that creates this kind of like then really the tension that we've experienced at different points in Community of Christ history with the Temple, and are now facing with now the Temple became a commodity, and is now helping to fund the future of the church. But it's also now owned by and will be operated by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints that has a very different understanding of temples, and I mean that creates also sadness and concern for the future for me. I remember so I did. I did this book on the Temple. So a lot of research interviewing people. I remember I don't think it's, it's in my book, so I think I can share this story. Burt Van Buskirk was a, one of the Temple caretakers and Temple site leads in the 1990s. After a time of great turmoil in the Kirtland community, related to Jeff Lundgren. A tragic, tragic time in the Kirtland community, Burt was brought in, helped to get things together helped make things work again, or the tempo on the tours. And he would look at the temple every morning from the Sydney richten house and say to his wife, Glenna, isn't that the most beautiful thing we've ever seen? And Glenna said, you know what, over time, because he cared about it, I began to care about it. So I think that there's something about that, too, with our denomination that sometimes people begin caring about things because they care about other people too. So the Temple has been a lot of things, but in part, it's been a way that we can also share have experienced care for each other. Obviously, it's not the

only way we've done that. But it's been a part of that system of care that we've experienced in Community of Christ, and have used to care for others. I think about for instance, as I researched for this book too, we looked at, like the LGBTQ Mormon or LDS group Affirmation. These are folks that are, feel very alienated and rejected by the formal policies within the LDS church. You know, they've held conferences and worship meetings in the Temple. LDS feminist groups have done the same thing. And Community of Christ offered them a safe place, a literal safe place, which they could do that and reconnect with their heritage and ministry. And I, it's unclear how that will work out in the future. But it's unlikely they will find a place in the Kirtland Temple to do that. And it's possible, but very unlikely. And there's sadness I have for that, too, of like, this was a way we could offer ministry to not just us and connect other people, but it was a way that others from other places that weren't even us could come and find a safe place as well. A literal sanctuary. So that it does give me sadness. So that that part of that ministry in Community of Christ has ended.

Blake Smith 42:22

I hear that sadness. But I wonder if there are points of hope that you have found that you might share with us?

David Howlett 42:32

I mean, I think, Okay, this is a harder part. I think some of the sadness, people felt the sale the temple was the realization of, of the larger forces that are colluded to put us in a position where that was possible. So to give an analogy, I have a friend who was diagnosed with stage four cancer, and she's written a book on this, six years out from that diagnosis, one of the parts of her book, yes, the cancer is awful. It is awful. So there's, there's no way around that. But in those six years, she's done a lot of things. She's written three books, academic books, even. She's moved. She's raised kids to be teenagers. She's changed jobs. A lot of great things, good things have happened. And something she underscores is like, hope really does work. Even in desperate situations, it's people, it's just not a cliché, it is actually an important part of life. And I think people who are terminally ill have shown me that you can be helpful. So I think organizations maybe could be too, and they don't have to just have one feeling. They don't have to just have just hope. There can be sadness, as well as hope. So I mean, like all of us have to negotiate those multiple feelings at once in real life situations. So I think we can navigate those multiple feelings as a church too.

Blake Smith 44:01

I really appreciate you taking the time to be with me, David, and with our listeners to help express your journey. I know, again, that you've had a deep connection with these places. And so that type of connection, and the understanding of how to how to cope in the midst of this is very helpful. So thank you so much for being with us.

David Howlett 44:24

Thanks for having me on Blake,

Blake Smith 44:26

Well, my last guest for this episode is a very dear friend of mine, I would say colleague and actually a mentor as well. Kris has been a mentor for me. I don't know whether she recognizes that or not. I'm so

excited to have Kris here to help me wrap up this episode and kind of bring things together. So welcome, Kris.

Kris Judd 44:47

Thank you. It's good to be with you.

Blake Smith 44:50

Before we get started, Kris, it would be helpful I think if you could just give our listeners just a little background you've you've worked for the church and been in several priesthood roles etc. . And that might help them get to know you a little better.

Kris Judd 45:04

Sure. Well, I am currently serving in the office of evangelist. And that came about after having served as the President of Seventy. And prior to that, as an elder, in a congregation in Kansas City. And prior to that, as a priest in Des Moines, Iowa, which is where I grew up. And that's where I'm living. Now. We've Peter and I, my husband, we moved back here five years ago. And at that time, I had been serving as staff pastor for Community of Christ for about six years, and some life changes happened for us, and we moved back home. And so my ministry has shifted from being a staff pastor to more of a focus in spiritual formation and spiritual director, and, you know, supports continuing support for staff around the country, in particular, I in my role as the President of Seventy, and with Peter, I had the opportunity to, to visit a lot of parts of the church. Not all by any means, but my assignments took me to Canada, and Australia, and French Polynesia, as well as places here in the Midwest. And so I have a deep love for the church, deep love for the members. And I think that's how, that's how becoming a pastor to the staff really came to be, it was out of a sense of desire to be with them. And to see healing for them. Even at times when healing wasn't, what the overall goal was, maybe that's what pushed me into the evangelist or "Sevangelist" is I would say, because I still am always looking at the outside of the church to say, Where is there need for people to know how loved they are, and invited into sacred community. So that's, that's a little bit. That's a lot about me. And I'm also a private investigator. And that's a cool part of my ... I know, your look surprised.

Blake Smith 47:24

I didn't know that.

Kris Judd 47:26

That's that that came out of ... that's just a little that's a whole nother podcast. But I can tell you, that there is definitely an aspect of ministry, and of spiritual direction, and of listening, and if companioning others in grief through that kind of work, but that's for another time.

Blake Smith 47:49

Okay, listeners, heads up, there's going to be a podcast episode. And we're going to hear that connection between private investigator and spiritual formation.

Kris Judd 47:58

Kris Judd, Pastoral PI.

Blake Smith 48:03

Well, I know, it is because of your pastorals hills, Kris, that you and I have been so connected, I wanted to invite you to come on and have a conversation, maybe share some of your perspectives on what you have observed and how we might move forward as a people together in sacred community.

Kris Judd 48:25

Well, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to that, because we have been through a pretty traumatic event. For some, it's been more traumatic than for others. When I heard the news, I was shocked, I was surprised, didn't see it coming, so to speak, and yet certainly aware of the changing financial status within the church. And so not surprised by perhaps the need for the sale but, but surprised that it would actually occur, because I know that those sites are beloved parts of our history, beloved parts of, of our story. And so I quickly moved from kind of that surprise and shock and, and felt my own sadness, because Nauvoo and Kirtland in particular have have held sacred memories for me and significant experiences. I quickly try to then focus on how are people doing? And I reached out to leadership just to extend support to them because I imagined that anyone who was involved in having to make that decision that that was extremely difficult, and and there was an awareness of the pain that would come. And so I wanted to support them. And then I started to read on that Tuesday afternoon to read comments that were being placed into the chats and into questions. And within those next few days, it was so apparent the level of anguish that people, some people were feeling, the level of anger, the sense of betrayal, the sadness, the loss of identity. It was It has been a death. And as we know, from any kind of a loss in particular deaths, grief takes various forms. And that's what we have seen among us, those different emotions, representing different people's different ways of processing their grief, some of which was related to the sale itself, but others that are deeper, deeper wounds that have come to the surface that I'll talk about in just a second. But one of you know, one of the ways that people process grief too is, is okay, let's go we got work to do. Let's move on. And I know for people that are that don't process that, that can feel really dismissive. It can feel like you're telling us not to grieve, you're telling us we should be happy about this, you're telling us and that's not what's being said. But that's how that in those individuals are processing is. I don't have time to worry about this. We've got a church to build, we've got mission to live out, we've got money to raise, we've got lives to impact. And so one of the sadnesses I think for me has been watching, and even receiving comments between people that have felt, they have missed the mark, and have felt accusatory at times, definitely accusatory, accusing the church of a misuse of funds, this accusing leadership of not being trustworthy, accusing all kinds of things, which comes as a way of under trying to understand what has come before us what has happened. And so there's been a sadness at seeing, I would say, the level of unkindness that has come out from us. We're better than that I, I believe we're called to be different than the different than the larger community and climate in which we currently live, where it seems like you can say whatever you want, and walk away and like dropping bombs all over and not not sticking around to mend the relationships. Now, that's pretty, that may sound harsh, but that is what I have seen. And that's what I have felt in some ways,

Blake Smith 52:58

We seem to have found this permission to just say whatever. There seems to be an inability to hear one another. We're so caught up in either our emotion, like you mentioned, to just pick up and move on, this is great news, to the other side of I'm just absolutely devastated, and I don't know how to even take a step forward. Exactly. I was in my 40s, before I ever went to a historic site. But when I got to Kirtland when I was assigned to Kirtland in 2004, and spent 10 years there in the presence of saints who are giving their lives, their time, their energy, to the upkeep, maintenance, sharing the story and all of that, my personal response was more about hurt for those who are hurting, I realized that for me, that our history is paid to the storytellers with whom we have relationships. Then, this last week, and I had out on one of my weekly tasks, it took me two hours to get 15 minutes down the road, what would normally be 15 minutes. And as I slowly made my way to get to this point, a couple of miles ahead, I heard horns honking people wanting to just move faster, get out of the way. And even someone who went around on the shoulder to go down the shoulder to get to where they wanted to go. And there were others who were just kind of taking it easy. This isn't there's nothing we can do about this. We'll we'll get through this. When I got to the head of what was stopping it up. There was a major crash with a small vehicle and a large truck and it probably had been a while since it had happened and yet there was debris still spread across the road. But in that moment, it was a realization that we've kind of had our own collision Absolutely. In the church. And there are those who want to hold their horn and go around on the side. And there are those who are slowly just make their way through it. And then when things open up, they will make it to their destination. [Yeah.] But it's going to take a while to clean up the debris. Yes. And there are those who are in the midst of the debris. And there are those who have the ability, the calling, the desire, to stop and help pick up the pieces. [Exactly.] We are we are all of that in community. And so how do we listen to one another and find a way to do what is necessary to move together without creating more debris or hurting one another?

Kris Judd 55:42

Wow, what a powerful example that just describes really, so Well, what we've been through. Yeah, a trauma, that and that stopped you stopped you in your tracks, was not part of the plan, to completely disruptive to you and hundreds of others. And you were powerless to do anything else. But wait ... together! So I think that's a beautiful example. And I you know, how do we travel? How do we make this journey? We are people of the journey, right? Not the destination? How do we make ourselves remember that we are community? That whole that whole quote, you know, "if we have no peace, It's because we forgotten we belong to each other?" [Yes] You know, so I think one of the first rememberings is that we do belong to each other, in a in a culture that has divided us and I'm just speaking North America, but in a culture that is divided us into colors, not not black and white, but red and blue. And in a culture that is divided us into, you know, your this, your pro this or your anti this or your whatever. How do we move past those dividing lines and say, "No, we are united in Christ, we are united by Christ, we are a people on a journey, to bring restoration to ourselves, to our relationships with God with others the earth, this is our message. This is a purpose of our journey as a people of faith." How do we get back to that? You mentioned listening? Yeah, how do we sit with each other, especially when we know we see the things differently, and really try to hear the pain, the sadness, the excitement, the experience of another, and know that their experience is not being shared to change our experience, but simply to hear it and to bear witness to it. And that we are not called to fix another whose experience is different than our own. You know, we're not called to fix those that are that are in deep grief, but to be with, to sit with, to let them know, we know that you're hurting, and there's a space

for you right next to me, let me or let me come and sit next to you. I think also, you know, outside of the listening in the relationship is maybe a larger perspective even than that which is, and this is a quote by Henry Nouwen, and of course he uses masculine language for God. But what he said was, "everything that happens is part of our way to the Father." So I would say, everything that happens is part of our way, you know, to God, to Christ to Spirit, whatever language you need to use or want to use, but that every that doesn't say that this is part of God's plan. And that's how someone had interpreted what this quote was about. But the truth is that everything that happens, that accident on the road, the harsh conversation online or witnessing someone weeping as they sing, the Spirit of God like a fire is burning, everything that happens can lead us into an encounter with God, if we if we recognize that is invitation. You know, my hope is that whether it be as a congregational leader, or Mission Center leader, world church leader, be it as an evangelist, as any member that we can listen for where the woundedness is, that has caused the separations that has caused the distrust and the sense of betrayal and find ways to restore those relationships. In the end, what we have as the church is one another, and that there will be things that are stripped away, there will be things that are taken from us there will be things that It float away in the wind. But, what's most important is how we are with each other in community. And are we caring for each other? Are we loving each other? Are we, as Ram Dass would say, "walking each other home?" We have experienced a trauma in the church. How are we being with one another in the midst of that, no matter what, no matter whether we're planning how that money is going to be spent, or whether we're grieving that the buildings were sold in the first place? How will we be with each other? I think is the question before us.

Blake Smith 55:48

Well, I think that's a great way to conclude, except that I believe you have a blessing that you'd like to share.

Kris Judd 1:00:50

I would like to and I think this is especially for those that are that are really struggling and it's comes from *The Cure for Sorrow: A Book of Blessings for Times of Grief* by Jan Richardson. And this blessing is called "Stay." I know how your mind rushes ahead, trying to fathom what could follow this. What will you do? Where will you go? How will you live? You will want to outrun the grief. You will want to keep turning toward the horizon, watching for what was lost to come back to return to you and never leave again. For now, hear me when I say all you need to do is to still yourself, is to turn toward one another, is to stay. Wait and see what comes to fill the gaping hole in your chest. Wait with your hands open to receive what could never come except to what is empty and hollow. You cannot know it now, cannot even imagine what lies ahead. But I tell you the day is coming when breath will fill your lungs at his as it never has before. And with your own ears, you will hear words coming to you new and startling. You will dream dreams. And you will see the world ablaze with blessing. Wait for it. Still yourself. Stay.

Blake Smith 1:02:23

That's great. I love Jan Richardson. And Kris, thank you so much for taking the time to help me bring this episode to a close. We know this is not the close of our healing and our hurt. But I pray that everybody will find it in their hearts to listen to one another and be kind to one another as we journey through this because we are a people with a calling and we are not done.

Kris Judd 1:02:54

No, We are not done. Absolutely. Thank you so much Blake.

Blake Smith 1:02:58

Thanks, Kris.

Thank you so much for joining us for this Extra Shot episode in Project Zion Podcast. I'm your host Blake Smith. and I want to give a special thanks to our guests, Christian Skoorsmith, Kellie Brady, David Howlett and Kris Judd. I also want to give a special thanks to you all of our listeners. We invite you to join us for more episodes on your favorite podcast platform.