

Fair Trade | Andy Markle

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Christ, community, Mormon, LDS, faith, deconstruction, temple, spiritual practices, Seekers, life journey, space

SPEAKERS

Robin Linkhart, Andy Markle

Robin Linkhart 00:27

Hello and welcome to Fair Trade, a Project Zion Podcast series where courageous people share the candid stories of their faith journey, and what brought them to Community of Christ. I'm your host Robin Linkhart. And I'm here today with Andrew Markle, and he grew up in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Today he is a member of Community of Christ, and his home congregation is Salt Lake City. He was confirmed a member March 10 of this year, and today Andy will share the story of his faith journey. Welcome, Andy. Thanks so much for being with us here today on Project Zion Podcast.

Andy Markle 01:12

It's great to be here, Robin. Thanks for inviting me on. Appreciate it.

Robin Linkhart 01:15

Sure, thanks. Well, let's take a minute to get to know you. So just please introduce yourself to our listeners as you would maybe somebody you just met for the first time.

Andy Markle 01:28

So I'm Andy Markle. I currently live in West Jordan, sorry, South Jordan, Utah. I live with my husband, Matthew, he's also a confirmed and baptized member of Community of Christ. I spend my time mostly traveling all over the world for various leisure and work purposes. We have an office in London for my work, and then we have an office in Tokyo. So I'm constantly back and forth between Japan and the United Kingdom. And we're big Disney, Disney folks. So I'm constantly in wherever there's a Disneyland or Disney Resort. That's where I am. I'll actually be there on Thursday in France. So, should be fun. Yeah, as far as that goes, I'm currently the Vice President of Sales and Marketing for a technology company called Empowered Systems, its governance, risk, and compliance software for the world's top 20 banks. We do a lot of that work as well. So yeah, that's a brief introduction to me.

Robin Linkhart 02:27

Thank you so much. That's a great beginning. And speaking of beginnings, let's start at the beginning for you. So tell us about faith and God and church during your growing up years, beginning... Let's just begin, where were you born and just take it from there?

Andy Markle 02:45

Yeah, so unlike most Mormons, I was born in Pankow, in Berlin, near Berlin in Germany. But it was before the wall fell, so I was technically born in East Germany. So it adds a whole level of complication to my existence that wasn't there before. So I like to joke around with most people and say, I was born in a country that no longer exists. As a result of that, my parents converted to Mormonism before I was born, obviously. So, their journey is really interesting and how they got to that point. My dad was basically looking for a consistent faith journey. His mother was basically a Celtic Druid. And his father was a Calvinist Presbyterian. So that combination is wildly different for most people. And then my mother's parents really just didn't have faith just because of the nature of the government systems in Germany at the time. So it was a bit bizarre to see how they got to their end result I suppose. So yeah, I basically formative wise 18 months. I mean, everybody knows the drill. You start with. You start in primary, you go through primary. My, I was basically born into Mormonism, so I'm not really, I wasn't really outside of it for any given time. My entire family is mixed faith. So, there are people in my family that are Catholics, there are people that are Presbyterians, there are people that are Methodists, Baptists, whatever you want to bring into play there. My, there's only one part of the family that's currently LDS and I would say that they're on their way out for the most part. So there was some exposure points to things that probably most LDS folks did not really get a huge amount of exposure to, and especially when you're a tiny, you're a tiny kid and you're navigating your way through things. It's interesting. Faith was interesting at the time, I would say, because I was pulled in a multitude of directions. So, my grandparents thought that I belong to a cult. And they were trying to save me in some aspects. So there was like this weird twist that was being pulled in this space. And then I had aunts and uncles that were worried about me. So like on certain birthdays, I would receive books like Mormonism and the occult, and like random, things like that they were super strange, but I couldn't really think there's anything outside of it because it was just a large part of my beginning history, right. And so I was, basically I grew up in the German LDS Church, the German LDS church is very different from the US LDS church. Things mean different things. I don't really know how to explain that other than when we came to the United States, when I was eight years old, I did not really have a good grasp of what US Mormonism was, if that makes any sense. I've heard from a lot of people that have served in missions overseas, that there are two different words. And I knew that when I was growing up, but I didn't really understand it, too. There's an English word, and then there was a German word, and we bought into the German word. And in the German word, things are presented differently than they are in English. And I think it's because you have to be able to palate that appropriately based on the culture and how that shifts, but it was very, very different. So when we came to the US, my brain did not know how to actually process a lot of stuff. So I tell people that I think my faith started to unravel around eight, nine years old. And then it's because a lot of this didn't make sense anymore. And I also wasn't really good at English. So I think a lot of it was disconnected for me. Going to predominantly English-speaking words in Pennsylvania, and Indiana, it was really hard for me to kind of understand what was actually going on at that time. So around 13, we moved back to Germany. So that was another shift. And then it kind of like restored a little bit, but also kind of messed me up even more. Because I started going to school with non-LDS kids. And I was an international school, and they all spoke English. They were all

from different religious backgrounds. And they started asking me questions. What is this? What is that? What is this? What is that? And, I couldn't really answer them. So I started to get confused. And so a lot of that stuff started to break down even at that, that age, right? Like things were, it was just really hard to explain. So, I keep laughing because I keep remembering things from my past, like kids sitting me down and asking me questions like, Oh, do you guys worship Joseph Smith? And like random things like that? Obviously, no, but it was very much part of that, you know, conversation and you had to, you had to really just push through a lot of it and understand it. So yeah. And then after 15, yeah, at 15, we moved back to the United States. And then when I was 16, we moved back to Germany for a year, and then moved back to the United States at 17. There was like whiplash between wards repeatedly. And then, when we got back, I started to feel really bizarre. So I came out when I was 16 to my parents. I had a bishop's interview really to go through what that meant. And this may be a trigger warning for most people. So I'll stop there before I say anything, but I was forced into conversion therapy at the time. And that portion of my life really was difficult. And at 16 years old, when you were put into conversion therapy, and you're really forced to come to grips with your sexuality, you really don't understand how LDS theology matches your life. So, prime example is sitting in Elder's Quorum at 18, hearing all of these things about eternal, eternal life with your wife, and all of these things make absolutely no sense to someone who is gay, right? Like it's just not part of our, we're never going to achieve those results. We're never going to achieve what the church is telling us. And so it's, it was, it started to break down more rapidly at that time. So yeah, that's kind of the breadth and through high school, we moved again. So halfway through my senior year of high school, I was moved to another place. And I went to a private school for I think it was from 16. Yeah, around 16 to halfway through my senior year of high school, so about 17 and a half. And when that happened, I went to an Independent Baptist private school and then I was really faced with questions like extreme, extreme questions about everything to do with Mormonism. Like a was an entire Bible classes at that school were spent just grilling me on Mormonism and how I could keep a faith in something that did not have any root. Like it was the first time I had heard of what's it's called... just lost it ... View of the Hebrews right and Book of Mormon and how that works and how, how the similarities between the two. And then I also, this is kind of funny, I don't know if this needs to be edited out, but I'm gonna say I would cheat on the Bible verse exams with the King James version from the LDS church. And it was different from what the King James Version was they used at the school. So all of my stuff would be completely would be wrong every time. And I would fail type of class by pop quizzes because of that. Those it was kind of funny in that in that in that realm, but yeah, that I guess takes me through high school and graduating and then having figured out my life from there.

Robin Linkhart 10:58

Wow, that is a lot, Andy, really, really heavy. I mean, just the international travel back and forth, would be a lot on any one young person and then adding in all the complications of growing up in a Mormon faith, but being, Gosh, really just drilled on your faith from other people, not just once or twice, but over and over again, and then coming out at actually a pretty young age for some folks, especially folks who grow up LDS that is a lot. So you're, you're finishing high school. And are you back in the US at that point? Or are you in Germany?

Andy Markle 11:49

No, I'm in the United States yet.

Robin Linkhart 11:52

And so what state were you living in?

Andy Markle 11:55

Indiana at the time,

Robin Linkhart 11:56

Indiana, okay. So I'm going to assume you're finishing college and you're, excuse me finishing high school, you're ready for college? So take us through those years. And, you know, how is this faith journey that's already beginning to unravel continuing to go forward?

Andy Markle 12:16

Yeah, so again, I don't know if it's a perk or not, but having not been surrounded an LDS community for quite a while in my formative years, you naturally don't go to BYU or any sort of LDS sponsored University. So I went to Indiana University, Herron School of Art and Design in Indianapolis. So first off, I'm enrolled in art school. So that adds a new layer of complication to managing a faith journey, because it's not typical. Which is ironic because it did have professors that were LDS. So it's like a weird, it was a weird mix of things. But it did happen there. And then, yeah, so as far as that goes, I went right into it at 18, I was called to mission. And I actually declined to go on mission, which is not popular in the LDS Church. I was called to go to [...] in Mexico. And I complained very loudly, that I speak four languages fluently, and none of them are Spanish, you could have literally sent me anywhere in the world, but you chose to send me somewhere that I don't even know how to communicate with the populace. Explain to me why this is legitimate. So that was kind of the bigger parts. So that was another part of the faith unraveling, but it was separate. Because to me, it was like, how was their spiritual discernment? If you don't actually know, the person that is being sent to these places, right? Like, to me it was, it was kind of hurtful, because my bishop and stake president, they all knew me personally enough to know that I had basically 90% of the world covered with languages that I do speak. And then the rest of it, I was just basically it was basically thrown away. And perhaps maybe that was part of it, is, Oh, spirits discerning need to learn another language. But I for some reason, at that time, it just did not buy that. So college years, basically, all of that was consistent. Still pressed a little bit on faith, but I stopped talking about it. So that kind of changed things. I did not go to the Fall Creek Ward, that had been in Indianapolis, I was invited by the bishop several times, but chose to avoid it. I only went to church when my, when I visited my parents, so it was a little, a little different from that point forward, and then I went to get my master's degree after I graduated from Herron with an MFA in Visual Communications Design. And when I went to get my master's degree, I ended up moving back in with my parents and then it started to redo the whole process. So I went to Vanderbilt University to get my MBA. I went to Vanderbilt, my parents only lived about a half hour and a half, I would say from Nashville, so it was easy to go back and forth. And, when that happened, I got much more involved, in fact, even almost ended up with a wife. That was an interesting, weird little part of the story that I don't really tell most people, but it is, it is very much part of this journey, where I was like, well, maybe this could be something else, right? Like maybe, maybe I should try something else. But then I ended up going, No, this is not right. She and I actually had a long conversation about it. And I basically told her

that it was not great. We shouldn't do that. But that being said, it really started to unravel after denying the or declining mission, because they actually started making me teach converts to Mormonism, or to the LDS faith. And I was getting pressed by them on why I believed these things were happening. So these are people that came in, I called it Mormonism 101 as kind of a joke. But the reality is that I had to teach not only the history, but it had to teach how the church operated and what those things look like. And I kept getting pressed constantly, on every little aspect of everything. And people were like, Well, how did the, How did ancient Jews sail to America to use a paraphrased version from Book of Mormon musical? Like, how did all of these things occur? How do you have a testimony in the Book of Mormon? What is this mean? What are these things? Why are women relegated to the back seat like, and the worst part came when one of my friends joined the class that I knew outside of the church, and she joined the class because she, her husband, her husband to be was LDS. And in a weird way, she outed me to the congregation at what my life was outside of the ward. And that was not great. So that fast-tracked my excommunication at a speed in which we would ordinarily not have seen before. There were other reasons for the excommunication, too. But that was the primary one. And one of the major reasons for it was that I created a website for LGBTQ Mormons to connect with one another, called Origins. And it was designed as a way to have anonymous connections so that people could talk to each other about the things that they were experiencing. And at one point, we were asked by the LDS church to hand over our database, and we refused to do so. And that was when I was actually disfellowed. I started, that was the process in which I was not cooperating with the church any longer. And so I think that honestly, probably was the best and fastest way to excommunicate me, But that was that was where that but so yeah, the unraveling was just consistent. It just kept it kept being automatic. Throughout my life, I think I tried really hard to maintain and manage it for my for my dad, really. It was more or less not wanting to disappoint him in the space that I was in, and trying to make sure that it was, I was upholding the values and virtues that he wanted us to live by, considering he didn't really have much of a framework of his own. So in a lot of ways, I can't blame him for what happened in that space, or why he chose to convert to Mormonism. It was basically he was looking for a schematic for his life. And, it offered him one that he needed at the time. So yeah, that's the Reader's Digest version of everything in my life.

Robin Linkhart 18:43

That is fascinating. And I'm kind of hearing this, this weaving back and forth on this journey of faith, of really feeling at odds with the church, but then trying to make it work in various ways. And there at the end, you know, a sense of purpose for trying to make it work. To try to stay in for your dad. But, just so many, so many things weren't fitting. And, you know, probably one of the deepest not fitting is that the authentic self did not fit the program. And that's a big disconnect. What year did you found Origins? When was that website up and running? That's interesting because it was about that time and Community of Christ, as we were really trying to find ways to prepare Community of Christ ministers for the number of seekers that we were receiving and expecting to receive. And when we were doing research of, you know, how can we help people understand the extreme disconnect and ostracization or pressure for anyone in the gay community. And I believe that, that website, Origins, was one of the ones that we were looking at to understand the journey.

19:35

I think it was in 2013, if I'm not mistaken, was when Origins was part of it. I was dis-fellowed at the time. I need to find this again. I believe it was 2013-2015 was my excommunication. There was a lot of news articles about it. It was carried actually by my friend Nico Lang in Chicago. He worked for NPR in Chicago and he carried the story when I got dis-fellowed. And if there's anything the LDS church doesn't like, it's bad PR, so it was very much like a instant hit. I was called in almost immediately when it hit the wire, I don't even know, I think they got it before it even hit if I may, because I was called in super fast. Yeah.

21:04

I was also on a team for Core Invictus. So that might have been another one that you were around. Yeah, those two were really strong. And we were very active in thwarting the church's needs to get those databases.

Robin Linkhart 21:18

Yeah. Okay, so we're about 10 years ago or so. How did you eventually find Community of Christ? And what did that look like for you?

Andy Markle 21:32

Yeah, so that was really an interesting journey. So for about five years, I didn't have anything to do with the LDS church or anything associated with it. I went to Methodist churches quite a bit. I was really involved in the Indiana Conference of the United Methodist Church. I enjoyed my time in the United Methodist Church, but there was still really bizarre and heavy disconnect. And I couldn't really put my, I really couldn't put a finger or pulse on it. And it it drove me to search for something else. But around the same time that I was exploring Methodism, I ended up going to an Episcopal Church, which is completely outside of all of this. And I met with a lady who I'm still friends with to this day, Mother Whitney, she's now the ecclesiastical primate for the Midwest, for the Episcopal Church. And she's phenomenal because she was LDS that converted to Episcopal. But from Missouri, though, she was able to relate to me in a way because you know, being non-Utah Mormons, it's wildly different from Utah and Idaho, right? We have a different perspective on things. And we were challenged quite a bit on our faith, right, like there was not an insular community protecting that faith system. It was very much like you were constantly attacked for what you believe. And so she helped me a lot with my deconstruction process. But then she told me, she goes, there is a very different version of the restoration movement that exists, and I would like you to research it. And she goes, I think it would fit you better than Methodism or Episcopalianism, because it's called Community of Christ. And I had no idea who you guys were. And so I researched you online. I didn't find a whole lot of information. But then I started going on to Reddit, and I was reading the Reddit pages, and I was reading what you stood for. And I was reading all of these things. And about five years later, my husband and I moved to Salt Lake from Philadelphia. When we moved here, I Googled Community of Christ congregations in Salt Lake area. And I was curious if there actually was one. Because I had never actually put the effort into going to one in Pennsylvania, which is super ironic, because now I've gone to four in Pennsylvania, which is even weirder, but that's a whole other story. And in that space, I was able to find Salt Lake and I walked through doors the first time and I was terrified. I was so scared. It wasn't funny. I sat in the parking lot for a few hours before church started, crying on the phone with my husband, going, I don't know if I can walk in here because what if it's really Mormon and it triggers me really bad, and I don't

know what to do here. Come to find out that it's not what happened at all. It was a completely different scenario. And it was very scary. But I did it. I walked through the doors, and I had wished there had been more resources five years prior to get me in the door that there are today there are a ton more resources to allow for seekers to actually get in the door and understand things like the "find a ministry" page is extremely important. I've now found, again, multiple congregations known as that through that have different experiences. I went to Bloomsburg, for instance. It's very RLDS in its functions, right like if it's very awesome to experience because it was the first time I had had been anywhere that was not super Mormon but yet felt very familiar to me. And that's what I really liked about Community of Christ is that it allows me to bring in my restoration faith tradition, while also combining things that I like about Protestantism in a really nicely put package. So that's how I found Community of Christ.

Robin Linkhart 25:15

So when did you walk into your first Community of Christ in Salt Lake City?

Andy Markle 25:20

So I walked in January, I don't remember sometime in January, it was a Sunday in January, I walked in for the first time, I sat in the far back view, I didn't talk to anyone, Jason was the first person actually, to talk to me. He welcomed me to church. And he was it was a very, he was very kind. And so it was one of those things where it's like, okay, this is not Mormon, either, because there are people with T-shirts on so I don't feel like I'm out of place. Like I dressed up, I think even to go when I was like, I didn't even have to do this. And it felt weird, a little bit. And it was, it was nice, because I felt okay. And then I was like, I called my husband afterwards. And I was like, Matthew, I don't, I don't know, if I'm gonna, I don't know, if I'm gonna go back, I hope. I don't know if I'm gonna go back. And then I ended up going back. And I was like, again, and I kept going back. And then after he came with me, and he was like, this is different. And so then we both made a conscious decision to, I made a decision to get confirmed. I, as much as the LDS church hurt me in many, many ways, I did not want to erase that baptism, it still has significant meaning to me. So I chose to be confirmed. And then Matthew, unfortunately, because of the church's rules on infant baptisms for Catholics, he had to be re-baptized. But he actually enjoyed it. He said, It was really fun. And he wanted to do it again. And I was like, well, you only get to do it once. But, he enjoyed his baptism. So then that's how we, we just kept coming back. I mean, so and then made the decision and joined really quickly. And actually seekers class that we held was the real, real crux to get us in the door, the seekers class was taught by Brittany and Jason really just nailed it in for us where we were able to really express ourselves, we understood the faith traditions, we understood what was going on. And we were able to really push that forward. So it was basically, that was the, that was the core is the seekers class that really got us, because it allowed us the space to think and also answer our questions that were pertinent. So that was just January of 2024, that you first walked in the door? Yeah, that's correct. Yeah.

Robin Linkhart 27:33

Wow. That's amazing. That is amazing. So, as you well know, this journey of faith is always unfolding, that, I think, you know, it's a journey, not a destination. And we learn so much along the way. It's full of joys as well as sorrows. So what are or were some of the challenges is for you, as you stepped in to Community of Christ and just kind of lived into this new faith tradition, which is very distinctly different than the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, as far as an expression were a path of the

restoration movement. And yet there is this shared DNA and sense of familiarity, even in the vastly striking difference. Tell us a little bit about that.

Andy Markle 28:33

I think it's interesting because it's still a process, right? Like this is this has become so much more of a process, right? The more I get integrated in Community of Christ, the more questions I had, and not necessarily about Community of Christ, but more about my own deconstruction process, things I hadn't even thought about that have come up as a result of used conversations that I've had with him Community of Christ and then other stuff. So it's, it's funny to me, because it feels comfortable like Methodism, and it feels comfortable, like Mormonism. It's like really hard to explain this intense feeling of fitting into a group of people that fit both things that my personal theology actually created. Through my journey in my life, right? It was like finally, it all clicked and I felt awesome to be there. The challenges that have arisen have been more so around things like priesthood where most males are just given priesthood, right and the LDS church and Community of Christ. It's a very different expression. And I find it to be a much more beautiful expression of priesthood. Because the reality is, is that it isn't based on age, it isn't based on progression. It isn't based on a system of progression. It's based on calling, need, the way it feels in the congregation and it feels good to have the pressure of being an elder right off the bat as an 18 year old, right? Like, it feels good to not walk into a congregation and like I have all this pressure and responsibility and all these things that I have to do. Just as somebody sitting there, like I didn't have a choice in the priesthood. And actually, this conversation came up in church Sunday where I said, those of us who didn't have a choice, don't really know what to do with it, right? Because like, I wanted to be in Relief Society, I didn't want to be a different situation for me, right. And that, that's kind of interesting. But that's, that is a challenge for me to deconstruct how priesthood works in Community of Christ. So one thing has been really helpful for me is going to the Graceland courses on priesthood. I've been taking them electronically, just to go through them and understand them more in depth, and understand a lot more about how Community of Christ interprets priesthood. The interpretation of Book of Mormon in Community of Christ is so intriguing to me, because there is a wide variety of viewpoints on the Book of Mormon, in Community of Christ. And one of the things that actually helped me was your view and Seth Bryant's words that said that it some people view as a spiritual metaphor. And that was the first time I was able to actually connect those dots and say, Okay, I can bring Book of Mormon with me, because it doesn't hurt me to do this. And then the crazier part about this is that I've actually understood the Book of Mormon for the first time in my life by reading the revised authorized version. But in German, for the first time, the German version actually made sense to me. And I bought it from Herald House because I was curious. And if anyone knows this, the LDS version of the German text is written as if it was written in the 1800s. And it makes absolutely no sense to most Germans, they're like, I don't even understand what this is good to read it and my native tongue, revised authorized versions were actually made more sense, actually created a deeper connection with it than it had even as LDS, which was different. So those are kind of the single things that have been that I think more of the challenges that come about, because of my husband and him deconstructing Catholicism in Community of Christ, which is a wildly different experience, right? You know, questions about the Marian Doctrine in Catholicism and how that applies to Community of Christ. And I'm like, I don't think it necessarily does. But those things have been part of our faith journey together, as the way that we kind of experience the difference in the restoration movement. But I think, all in all, it's been really positive for both of us, in the space as well.

Robin Linkhart 32:39

As you talk about living into Community of Christ and continuing that deconstruction for both you and Matthew, even though it comes from a different origin, What about spiritual formation and spiritual practices, because I know for a Mormon coming into Community of Christ that can just feel, it can feel really Catholic, actually, we light a candle and ring a bell. And yet, for many people coming from the LDS faith there is, there's this deep sense of spirituality that was expressed in a very different way, but a longing or desire, even a curiosity as to what that might look like. What has that journey been like for you and for Matthew?

Andy Markle 33:29

I think from a spiritual practices standpoint, it has very much aligned with what I experienced in the United Methodist Church when I was exploring that and the Episcopal Church. So when you when you look at it, it wasn't foreign to me necessarily. I was almost walking into something that was controversial on both sides of the aisle. What I love the most about Community of Christ is the willingness to try spiritual practices that are not just rooted with inside of Community of Christ. Prime examples are, I went to the Provo congregation yesterday afternoon, and there was a silent prayer that was done. And it was a breathing exercise. And I was like, wow, this is really powerful and intense to feel this space, and we were inhaling the things that we wanted to have spiritually and we were exhaling the things we wanted to let go of. And I was like, this is a beautiful expression of how you experience something different in worship. And then earlier in Salt Lake when we had the Pentecost service, I think that's probably the bigger one. For me. It's the liturgical calendar. I'm used to it from Methodist, but it being applied in a Mormon adjacent space is very bizarre. Wholly incongruent. Matthew likes it though. And he actually wished that there was more pomp and circumstance in Community of Christ. We'd like I missed the real rigid like call and responses, and I was like, Well, Community of Christ congregations have call and response like Bloomsburg has call and response, but they do it by song, which I think is also an interesting expression. So yeah, I think that's really what it is spiritual practices for us. I don't my spiritual practices haven't changed that much. Actually, I've brought some of them back, my personal spiritual practices. One of them that I brought back pretty significantly was Book of Mormon reading. And I actually tried to evangelize, the Book of Mormon by creating devotionals, around Book of Mormon scripture, which has kind of made it my own in a weird way where I'm now owning that space. But I've also taken kind of a different approach as well, on some of the other stuff that I like to do. I was introduced to labyrinths by the Harmonists in Indiana. And as a result of that I had brought that in and you guys seem to be really into labyrinth. It's kind of a good, good, good breadth of space there. So yeah, I think that's really where the spiritual practices have coincided, and how we've adapted a lot of them in some aspects, and I think it's comfortable in a lot of spaces. I think we don't give Community of Christ, enough credit for how much it actually bridges the gap between Protestant and non-Protestant traditions. It does a really good job of doing that. And it makes a lot of people feel comfortable. It took a lot to make Matthew feel comfortable, but he hadn't walked into a church in 20 years, and then felt connected to Community of Christ. That is an impressive feat for someone who is now bringing home literature from church all the time and reading it and consuming it and doing all kinds of things. So it's good.

Robin Linkhart 36:31

Was there anything that you had to give up Andy, that has been difficult for you?

Andy Markle 36:38

I'm gonna sound really weird because I have a really strange relationship with the temple. But giving up the temple was, has always been difficult. And I don't necessarily think that is a Community of Christ function. But I would say it's been difficult, it's not Community of Christ difficulty, it is just general difficulty. Handing in my temple recommend was difficult because it felt like now I'm fully unworthy of everything, right? And the relationship in Community of Christ to temples is not quite understood by me yet. I think I will get there eventually. But at the moment, right, like, it's not something that is the predominant element of faith in Community of Christ and the temple deconstruction process has been difficult because it was ripped away, to come back into a faith community that does have temples or a temple now, it makes a difference in the way that you express that and you understand what it is. And I think it's evolving. It's an evolutionary process, because the temple is not... I've started to change the temple's meaning. The temple is now the body of people in the church versus the physical buildings. So it's flipping itself, in my own spiritual bent where I'm taking, I'm taking what I liked about the LDS temple ceremony, and I'm placing it in a completely different light, where I'm saying, now, in an effort to build Zion and the faith system that I want, the people are helping me create my own temple in a weird, strange way. It's almost like Community of Christ enables everybody to become their own version of the temple and their own spiritual set. I don't know how to explain that. But that's kind of how I feel right now. It's very much like, we are our own temples, we are our own people. And we are, you're able to carry that with us wherever we go. So that I think was difficult, but it's starting to fix itself.

Robin Linkhart 38:46

That's very interesting. It's a great reframing, a very symbolic reframing, with a lot of power. And what you just said is, is scriptural because we are invited to become a people of the temple. So we become ensigns of peace, healing, reconciliation, all those temple functions. Awesome. So Andy, as you walk with church members, friends of the church, and new seekers and I know in Salt Lake, we always have a plethora of new seekers. What do you see people looking for in their church or faith experience? I mean, what connects for them in meaningful ways? As they maybe they choose to journey with us or spend time with Community of Christ? I mean, like in a sense, what are the big life questions for seekers that you encounter? Yeah,

Andy Markle 39:46

I would say that, in general, Salt Lake is really different when it comes to seekers, right. It's mostly people looking for a soft place to land because they've deconstructed really fast, or there's something that happened that occurred to get a catalyst for someone to come in and visit us, right, Kirtland Temple sale was a really good example of a lot of people flooding in trying to figure out what Community of Christ was. It kind of reminds me actually of what happened with the Book of Mormon musical, and the LDS faith where people started going in just to learn what it is, or when Mitt Romney ran for president, same thing. I think that people are actively seeking community and to be with people who are like-minded, and who seek to challenge each other on those fronts. The seeker program at Salt Lake is so interesting to me because it doesn't just attract former LDS folks, right? It, you know, you have my husband who's ex-Catholic, you have, we have a wonderful member, or a friend of the congregation who grew up in an evangelical faith. Like, it's, it's very different. But everyone's looking

for something very similar, which is a community of people that believe similarly to each other, but are able to connect on a deeper level. And I think that's the beauty of what Community of Christ brings to the table. And the reason I say it as a whole, and not just Salt Lake in its purpose is that every Community of Christ I've visited has welcomed me the exact same way that Salt Lake did. They all do the same, even if you are not LDS or your any of these functions. Basically, every Community of Christ bought into has welcomed me the exact same way, I have felt the exact same way. I mean, each each one of them have different expressions. And I think every single Community of Christ congregation is beautiful in the way that is expressing itself. But that connection point that you make, as a member, is wildly different than what I've experienced in other places. If I go to United Methodist Church, for instance, I might not be welcomed, I might not be there. But Community of Christ has such an insular community that a "outsider" (quote/unquote), is immediately identified. But it's with this welcoming hand, right? Like, when I went to Bloomsburg, for instance, they were all, they were like, can we take you to lunch? And can we do this? Can we do it? I was like, wow, this is crazy. Because even a member of another church, that would not happen, right? Like, you would just wouldn't experience that. And they basically took me under their wing, they made dinner for my parents, like because my mom is currently ill. And it was just, it's just weird to like, These people don't really know my parents, but they they are willing to be helpful in that scenario. And it's beautiful to really see that. It's I think, that's the part and that's the element that seekers are looking for is a community to belong to a community that will love them and a community that will support them. And I think Community of Christ does that across all of its congregations, not just in Salt Lake, not just in Provo, not just in Ogden, not just in Bloomsburg. It is a beautiful way that the church expresses itself everywhere that I've gone. And it's also beautiful to see the way Salt Lake interacts with Provo and Ogden. For instance, there's people that need meals because they're undergoing surgery in Salt Lake is coming through and providing them for Provo. And it's the same thing is happening in Ogden, right? And you see this sharing back and forth. And doing that. And it's just, it's, it's wonderful to see like, I don't know how to express it any other way. And I think that's really what people see when they come through the door, is that real sense of community? As far as their life questions, I think it varies. A lot of questions really just push themselves in a way that if you're looking at it from a purely LDS function, you're gonna see people who are actively deconstructing in many different ways. There are lots of questions that are coming up about the veracity of the Book of Mormon, Temple, Temple stuff, it's people who are LGBT that have been ceremoniously asked to see the door. It's these types of, these types of functions that you see. And then you get these heart wrenching, theological questions that people are asking that you really have to spend time thinking about. Like, Mormon cosmology, for instance, unraveling the entirety of Mormon cosmology to really comprehend the reality of situations for women, for LGBT folk, especially, especially lesbian women who had been married to men who are still grappling with what happened with their temple sealings. These things are really big questions that take a lot of time to answer, and they take a lot of support. And I think that's also why people choose to spend time on this because we take time to listen to them, to talk to them and help them understand what they're experiencing. And we may not know exactly because I definitely don't know some of the stuff because I'm not in that perspective, but I can, I can empathize and I think they're looking for a group of guys People that empathize with what they're dealing with. And I think that's really what does it. I think the other part is, is that when you have a lifelong Community of Christ congregation that a seeker will walk into, they open themselves up in a way that you haven't seen before. I, again, I'm going to use Bloomsburg as a prime example of this, they actually had the most beautiful way of asking me if I was LDS or Community of

Christ. Because when I said that I was visiting from Salt Lake, they automatically assumed I was LDS. And I told them, oh, no, no, I'm a confirmed member of Community of Christ in Salt Lake. And they, that like shifted the entire dynamic to a point where it was almost like, Oh, tell us more about how this went down and what this looks like and how you joined us. And it was, it was really nice. And then their big life questions about how I grew up became part of the narrative and conversation for what that was, because they were seeking to understand, and that is so huge for me, is that people are willing to sit down and seek to understand what it is that makes us tick, and why we came to Community of Christ in the first place. And as I tell people all the time, I wish I had walked through the door sooner because there had been a lot of healing that would have been done faster if I had walked through quicker.

Robin Linkhart 46:21

So Andy, what are some of your hopes for Community of Christ as you look to the future?

46:25

This is a really good question. Um, I think my hopes for Community of Christ is that it will continue to develop and evolve. I hope that the seekers program continues to really bring people in from not only Latter Day Saints tradition, but also from other traditions. I think this place brings together people from all over the Christian diaspora and helps bring them into a sense of community that is just absolutely enormous for people. I'm watching it actively unfold. Like I said, with my husband, and with one of my dear friends, watching them evolve their spirituality, their understanding of spirituality, their religious experiences, their community of people, has been so amazing. And I hope that continues. I think my bigger hopes for Community of Christ are to really provide more on that theological question set, right? Like if you're, if you're LDS how do you, how do you reconcile these things? And a lot of it, I could argue you need a therapist for, but the other side is, we need to have, we need to have a sincere conversation, because that shared DNA, as you discussed before, creates this familiarity that makes you want to ask these questions. And that familiarity then prompts more questions. And it continues that and I think my hope for it is that those types of things continue to be addressed and understood. And that there's some clarity on some certain things, which I, which I recently received with Book of Mormon and things like that, which were beautiful. And it really helped me in my personal journey. And I think that just needs to continue. And I think that's in the works. So.

Robin Linkhart 48:12

You mentioned that you would argue a therapist would be good, and I would concur. And I think we're finding a lot of human wreckage, spiritual damage done to people in, in many, many ways in in different religious settings, which is gut wrenching. And, you know, it's just like physical health, some things need a professional that can help us with that. How do you see that maybe fitting in to the church setting? Or would it always be a referral out? Or?

Andy Markle 48:55

No, I don't, I don't think it's always a referral, I think inviting deconstruction psychologists and to communicate with people in a more effective manner and do it frequently is helpful. I realized that it comes with a cost. But in reality, there are people that are willing to prime example is I'm going back to school for my PhD in Psychology right now. So that I can offer those types of things to assist that space. And that timeframe, so that people are able to really just put themselves in a good situation and

deconstruct in a safe place, but also assisting them through psychological components. As someone has been in therapy since I was 16 years old. My mental health is just as important as my physical health. And I don't know that I would have made it through all of the things that we talked about earlier, had I not had some sort of therapy in that process. It is so important as you're deconstructing to understand that process and not all therapists are going to understand what you're going through but they understand the emotions that you're experiencing. And that's the part that has to be focused on is, in deconstruction, those emotions are important. And it's how you deal with those emotions that make a difference. And I think that's, that's a huge part of it. Because with deconstruction also comes a myriad of other life changing events, right? Sometimes it ends in divorce, sometimes it ends in a lot of other things that are very hard for people to understand. But I firmly, firmly agree that therapy is a necessary component when you are deconstructing it. And the spiritual damage that has been done is immense. I would say that I experienced some extreme spiritual damage, but had I not been in therapy, and had I not had a 10-year break between my excommunication and coming to Community of Christ, I don't know that I would be in a spot to actually adopt new spiritual practices or adopt and join a community like Community of Christ, if I had not done the work upfront. Oh, that's not to discourage anybody from doing it. But it is to really say like, sometimes you do have to put in the work in order to make it work for you.

Robin Linkhart 51:08

Yes, very delicate balance there. So I want to ask you a question. And I would encourage you to be as honest as you want to be, what do you need Community of Christ to hear you say?

Andy Markle 51:25

I don't know. I think being, continue being a refuge for spiritual refugees, I guess that's the best part, is that there are tons of faith traditions that are alienating people. And this is one that you can feel at home in. I really want to encourage Community of Christ to understand and adopt itself in a way that makes it easier for seekers to come in and be part of the community in a way. While there's a lot of embracing of the LDS side, again, I'll reiterate the other traditions that are seeking the same format, do find refuge at Community of Christ. And that is an important part of this discussion, is continuing to breathe, and put in the effort towards those extra functions. Because, again, Catholics and evangelicals things that do have very, very, very, very close ties to what they're experiencing, are finding that love and hope in Community of Christ. And that, that is pervasive. And it is important to not just focus on the LDS side, it's also important to focus on other people who are coming in, who do want to learn more about it, and who want to find the same love and peace and safety that you feel within Community of Christ. And I think that's what I need Community of Christ to hear me say.

Robin Linkhart 53:04

Thank you, Andy. So is there anything that I have not asked you today that you would like to share with our listeners?

Andy Markle 53:15

I don't think so. I don't think so. I think we've, we've gone through the gamut. I think, I think the big thing is, is that our themes throughout this this interview have been really, really pervasive and really interesting. And yeah, I appreciate the time.

Robin Linkhart 53:34

Well, I want to thank you very much for being with us today, Andy. It truly has been a joy, and a deep honor just to spend time with you and to hear your story. And I applaud the courage that it takes to share so vulnerably and authentically with us. Thank you.

Andy Markle 53:55

Thank you, I appreciate it.

Robin Linkhart 53:57

And always a very special thanks to all of our listeners. If you would like to hear more from courageous people willing to share their candid stories of their faith journey and what brought them to Community of Christ. Check out our Fair Trade series on projectzionpodcast.org. You can find that on the "series" drop down menu on the top bar of our website, or you can click on the link listed in today's show notes which will take you to all of our fair trade episodes. 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.