

Chai Can't Even | Mike Sherman

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SPEAKERS

Mike Sherman, Blake Smith

Blake Smith 00:28

Hello, and welcome to Chai Can't Even, a Project Zion Podcast series where we chat with young adults about life, faith, struggles and joys, and why they choose to stay active in Community of Christ. I'm Blake Smith, your host for this episode, and I am here with a friend of mine and a current member of the congregation where I grew up. So that's kind of special for me. His name is Mike Sherman. Welcome, Mike.

Mike Sherman 00:55

Hey, Blake, thanks for having me.

Blake Smith 00:58

It's good to have you with us. Mike, we like to start off all of our episodes, giving a chance for our guests to tell just a little bit about themselves so our folks can get to know you better. So would you mind sharing some things about you?

Mike Sherman 01:12

Yeah, so like Blake said, I'm Mike Sherman. I live in Pensacola, Florida, and I'm a lifelong member of Community of Christ. I'm married to my wife, Kara, and we have a two year old little girl, Noah Kate. So life is pretty busy for us. For my job, I work as a registered nurse. I work in mental health, and just really have a passion for serving that population, and doing what I can to help just make their life's journey a little bit easier. So that's kinda who I am and what I do. So

Blake Smith 01:57

That's wonderful. And certainly mental health is a major issue in our country ... probably all over the place. Do you work with a particular age group? Or is it facility that serves...

Mike Sherman 02:09

I have worked with different age groups. Right now, it's adults that I work with? I work at a. it's an inpatient facility, but we are a stabilization unit. It's a crisis stabilization unit. And we, Florida has what's called the Baker Act, which is the term that you use for somebody who is involuntarily sent to a mental health facility because they're going through, whether it be a mental health crisis, whether they're suicidal, homicidal, whatever they may have going on in their life. And then we also have just our voluntary patients who choose to seek treatment themselves. Right now we have, we max out at 15

patients, but our facility's being renovated. And once the construction is finished, we will have enough beds for 30 adults, both males and females. So , we kinda see a variety of things, both mental health and substance abuse, because a lot of times those two go hand in hand. So yeah, I mean, it's a, can still be a pretty wide range of people because I mean, we have teens and adults. So we have from 18 year old all the way up to people much older in age. So...

Blake Smith 03:30

Well, thanks for doing that work. As a person who has had to admit a couple of people involuntarily over 30 years of ministry, I appreciate that there are facilities like that because I certainly know we have a need. I wanted to ask you, you're in Pensacola now. Did you grow up in Pensacola, or are you from ... are you a transplant to Pensacola?

Mike Sherman 03:54

I am it's a cold transplant.

Blake Smith 03:57

All right.

Mike Sherman 03:58

I grew up in South Mississippi really not too far. Only about an hour and a half away from Pensacola. So kind of the not far across the Alabama line going into Mississippi that stretch of a I-10 that if you've ever lived or been to this area you're very familiar with. So I grew up in the south Mississippi area. Originally in Pascagoula is where I was born, and where I was for the first part of my childhood. Then I moved up to Vancleave after Hurricane Katrina, so that's where I grew up was in that area. So

Blake Smith 04:35

And what got you to Pensacola? Was it Kara or was it job?

Mike Sherman 04:38

I guess it was Kara. Yeah. When we started dating, I came to Pensacola pretty frequently. So I was in college at the University of Mississippi or Ole Miss as it's more commonly known, and the drive from there to home and from there to Pensacola really wasn't too much of a time difference. So then a lot of time coming to Pensacola. And whenever I finished up there, I had kind of applied for a few jobs at both places in in both areas and one worked out here in the Pensacola area and that was really my first experience working in mental health. So it's kind of where I found I guess my passion and Kara was here too, so...

Blake Smith 05:20

Both of both of your passions all in one place. That's all well and good for North Pensacola because I know they're glad to have you guys there. And speaking of North Pensacola, let's talk a little bit about your church background and upbringing. What was, what was church like for you as a young child growing up in Pascagoula and Vancleave?

Mike Sherman 05:43

Yeah, so the, like I said, the first part of my childhood, I was in Pascagoula. So that is really the first church that I ever remember going to, or being a part of, that's where when I was eight years old, where I was baptized and confirmed, for the majority of the time that I went there, my my uncle was the pastor. So I grew up in a very close family, and a lot of that congregation, probably half or more than half was related to me. So. So, growing up there, that was really where I first remember learning about the church, the history of the church, where I really just became, I guess, engrossed in what the church was all about. And, I was there till I was in fifth grade when Katrina hit in 2005. And unfortunately, that congregation got a lot of damage to the church building. And they chose not to reopen that congregation. So the members of our congregation there kind of, most of them stayed in the church, just kind of split and went to some of the other surrounding congregations. You had some that went to Escatawpa, Mississippi and a big chunk of my family went to Ocean Springs. And then, we moved because we lost our home there too. We lived with my grandparents at the time, so we all relocated to Vancleave, which is where my grandparents grew up. So for them, it was kinda like going home and have a lot of family there too. And Vancleave's only about 20 miles or so from, just a little north of Pascagoula. So, we moved there. And that's where I was from the time we moved back there when I was in fifth grade until I graduated high school in 2013. And in Vancleave, I was blessed to be a, an active part of the congregation. Vancleave itself is a very rural small town, but the Community of Christ congregation there, when I was there was a pretty large congregation for what a lot of our congregations are. And I was an active part of the youth that was there, which for a good chunk of my time there, it was a, we had a pretty large youth [group]. Not all were really necessarily even members of the church, but Vancleave still utilized Zion's League, and the way that the Vancleave property is you have the church and then across the road, the church still owns that property. And there's like a pavilion over there and a basketball court. So it was just a place where a lot of the kids in that community would come and gather on the Thursday nights that they did Zion's League, which I think eventually we did change to Wednesdays, but actually being an active member within the life of the congregation. I mean, I'm a, I'm a singer myself. So, I actively sang in church on Sunday services and was utilized to be able to, to pray, read scriptures, whatever, they did utilize me. I'm the oldest of five. So I have a lot of younger siblings. And we all grew up just being a part of the church, not just sitting in the sanctuary listening to somebody preach. So, it was always just a good experience to actually feel like you were wanted and to actually be utilized. So, I have been, I was blessed to grow up in congregations like that, that did allow us to actually be a part.

Blake Smith 09:13

Great! For some of our listeners who might not know what Zion's League is, That was kind of the senior high youth ministry at the time, right?

Mike Sherman 09:22

Yep, I think we had, it was pretty much opened up to just kids in general. [Okay] We had and it was just a, I mean, we normally were fed, played basketball, whatever we had going on, we always came together for a devotion. And it was a, I mean, at one point we had, we had a bus, an old school bus that they had bought and turned it into the Church Bus and they were going around and picking up the kids that live too far from the church to walk but didn't really have somebody to bring them, so they even ran the buses to go pick up kids. So I did grow up in Vancleave at a time where we had a lot going on with the youth. And that was always something good to be a part of.

Blake Smith 10:04

Yeah, yeah. And sounds like the congregation just did a really good job of incorporating the young people and not just in a token way, but really, really incorporating the young people in the life of the church. That's great. So that gets you through high school. What was the experience in college and what was church like during that time?

Mike Sherman 10:29

Yeah, like I said, I went to Ole Miss, University of Mississippi, and that's up in Oxford, Mississippi. So, I stayed within the state, but Oxford's a good six hours north of Vancleave. So Oxford is, I grew up in very southern part and went to college in the northern part of the state. And we don't have a congregation in Oxford, or really in north Mississippi. There is a small group that meets but the closest I guess, congregation, formed congregation is, was in Memphis, Tennessee. So it was about an hour and a half north of Oxford. So I would actually, whenever I got to Ole Miss, somebody who that I grew up going to camps with, she was our lifeguard for many years, used to be Jessica Goodson, now, Jessica Coleman. She was working in the intramural sports department at Ole Miss. So, my freshman year was kind of, I didn't really have anybody from my high school that went, so I was kind of by myself, in a sense, but Jessica was there and she had invited me to go to church with her because she had been going to church in Memphis, so I started out riding up there with Jessica and it was my first time go into a congregation where I didn't have a lot of family there. So it was a different experience. But then when I got there, you would have never known that I didn't know any of the people, because they were just so welcoming and hospitable towards me. And Jessica eventually accepted another position back closer to home in Pensacola and I, I continued to go on my own, drove to Memphis, every chance that I got. It wasn't an every Sunday type of thing. Because I mean, I was a college student. So it/s not always set aside, but ended up being five or six hours by the time I drove there and went to church and ate and everything else. But um, I did go up there every chance that I got, and it was when I was there, when they, when they realized that I sang, I was, they utilized me in services in that way. And they just always, I was invited to either to go eat with somebody after church, whether it was to go to their home, or to go out to eat at a restaurant. So just my time there as just was something that I will always remember. They even threw me a graduation party when I graduated from Ole Miss. So it was just a very special experience to me to be able to go and even though I wasn't a, I guess, full time member of the congregation and somebody that was there every single Sunday, it was if I, if I wasn't there for a few weeks, I'd get a phone call, asking me how I was doing just checking in and making sure things were going okay. So that was I guess, just my first experience of being a part of a congregation that my parents weren't at, or my grandparents or my uncle wasn't the pastor. So it was a change of, change of pace for me. But it was a just a good experience to have that kind of church family when I was there for my time when I was at Ole Miss. So...

Blake Smith 13:45

Yeah, that, that, I really love hearing stories like that where we see that hospitality being spread. And so here you were in another congregation and creating a different type of family and knowing that they were, they were loving you and accepting you for you, not because you were family, but because you were part of their family. That's great to hear. Right

Mike Sherman 14:08

And, and I still I came home pretty regularly on weekends and at that point, Kara and I were dating so I did spend a lot of time in Pensacola. And so I would, when I went home to my parents house, I would go to church with them in Vancleave. And, whenever I came to Pensacola, Kara was in the North Pensacola congregation. So that was when I started to become a pretty regular attendee there and started making connections with the people here which is where I now attend on a regular basis. I am a member at North Pensacola. So,

Blake Smith 14:44

Mike, how would you say that being a part of a religious sacred community has been an influence in your life and getting you to where you are today.

Mike Sherman 14:54

I mean, for me, it's hard to talk about myself or my life's journey without talking about my church... Community of Christ is the only faith community I've ever been a part of. And just through my experience, every congregation that I've been a part of, or that I have attended, even if it's just for a Sunday, it's just a special feeling when you walk into the doors of one of the, one of our congregations, just the connections that you have with people. And for me, just, it's hard to explain the bonds that you have with people that at least the people that I have either grown up with or have encountered in my time in the church. So just having that has really just helped to form I think, who I am today, the relationships, the communities, because I mean, I do feel like a lot of time, I mean, going to the name of the church Community of Christ, just our congregations that what they are or what they, well, I think we aim to be our sacred community, sacred spaces. And it's just a, it's hard to explain because I mean, I have never been a member of another church, but I have attended other denominations, and just the feelings that I have, when I go to one of our congregations compared to going somewhere else, it's just a different type of feeling that I guess unless you have had it, it's just a hard, it's a hard thing to explain to someone else. It's just a, just a special, just a special feeling to have, and to be with the people.

Blake Smith 16:30

So my next question might, you've probably kind of already answered, but I still would like to ask because I know that there are people that I have known all my life that have been a part of Community of Christ, and would say, you know, this is their forever church, and then something has come up for some reason that has made them make a shift, you know. They might have said, there would be nothing that could make them leave the church. So I'm interested in what is it about Community of Christ that would make you say, you know, this is, this is my church. What's kept you in the church?

Mike Sherman 17:02

Kind of to what I just touched on. I mean, a lot of it is the people, to me, being around the people in the church, whether it be at a church building, or at a campgrounds, or just going out to eat and fellowshiping together, it's like a warm embrace it a lot of times just feels like the Spirit just carries through the people, I mean, the church is not the building. It's not what makes the church. It's the people that, that come together and make up that body, that community. And I've just, have always felt loved and supported and welcomed, wherever I have been in the church, whenever I've had my times

of life where I've struggled, it's always been obviously to my family, but then also to, to other people within the church that I have a bond with that I would say is the bond like you have with your with your blood family. In a lot of senses that I'm like, they're just the people that I turned to. So, and I've just never been a part of anything else, another organization or group or anything that has given me just that feeling of being loved, accepted, wanted. And being able to be who I am using my gifts, helps others find their gifts and utilize the gifts that God has blessed them with. So yeah, I mean, it's just, it's hard to think of anything that would make me say, "Yeah, I'm not going to be a part of this church anymore." It's just, I feel like, I mean, it's just part of, of who I am. It's a big piece of me and just blessed to have been able to grow up and still be a part that.

Blake Smith 18:39

Really good to hear. I like, I like when I hear that folks have had that kind of experience growing up in the church. I know that's, that's part of why I'm here as a lifelong member of the church as well, although I don't qualify as a young adult anymore. My oldest child is almost not even a young adult anymore, unfortunately. So. So, you know, we live in a time where church is not as important for folks and there's lots of things that are dragging people away. And we as a church have been through a lot of our own struggles. I'm interested to know what do you see as some of the biggest struggles that the church faces going forward as we try to reach out to new people and new generations?

Mike Sherman 19:26

I guess at least in the area of the church that I'm familiar with, which has primarily always been in the southern US, we just we live in an ever-changing world. I mean, even, Kara and I were just having this conversation that even from the time I mean, I don't consider myself very old and even from my time growing up and my time as a high schooler. I mean it's, which was within well, a little over a decade ago. So it's a different world today than it was then and I feel like in Community of Christ, especially in the congregations that I've been a part of in the southern US, many of our people are very big on traditions. And there's certain things that people, they always want to do, just because it's always been that way. And it's hard, because used to, I mean, getting people to come to church at least didn't seem like a very, it didn't seem as hard as it is today. And people are different. People are raised different. There is just in society today, I guess, church is just not at the forefront, like I guess it, it used to be. And so I think the biggest challenge is just figuring out ways to get people to want to be a part. And I think for some of our older generation, it's just we'll just ask them to come to church, but for I know, people my age that grew up in the church that no longer come, and people younger than me that grew up in the church that no longer come. And sometimes you hit that point in your, I mean, sometimes you're still a senior, senior high age, sometimes it's after you graduate high school, that you just feel like there's nothing for you anymore. So I just think that we have to learn to be creative in the ways that we invite people not only to church, but invite people to Christ. And that might not be just inviting somebody to come to church on a Sunday, that sometimes involves going to people, meeting people where they are, letting them have that experience of having church that's not in a church building and...

Blake Smith 21:29

You're talking pure heresy.

Mike Sherman 21:32

So I think just, I think that's just the big challenge that has really been heavy, on my mind, at least recently is just accepting the challenge of being different, of obviously, it's okay to hold on to tradition. But we also have to realize that some of the traditions that we have had for many years, or that we still try to continue, even now, in 2024, may not be what the world needs today. So, just figuring out ways to keep, I guess, everybody happy, which a lot of times seems like an impossible task, but just to have those that are heavy on tradition, be able to still maintain that sense of identity that they have in those traditions, but also embracing the present, and looking to the future of what can we do to make people say, I want to be a part like that Community of Christ. I like what they have going on, I want, I want to be there, I want to, I want to be a part of that community. And I know it's easier said than done. That's why it's a challenge. But that's really where I see, that is something that can be a big struggle moving forward in both my area and I believe both nation and worldwide, through the church. So

Blake Smith 22:48

Right, thanks for sharing that, Mike. And, again, this is something you've touched on a little bit, but what are your hopes for Community of Christ going forward?

Mike Sherman 23:00

My hopes is just that the Church continues, continues to grow, and is able to be as important in the lives of other people as it has been for me, and allows other people to grow spiritually, to grow as individuals, just to be able to find a church or a group that that they can call home, that they feel that they feel love, they feel welcomed, and just to continue to be a faith community, that shows people what it truly is to embrace the Enduring Principles of All Are Called and that all people have worth. So I think that is my hope is just that people can continue to have those experiences and grow.

Blake Smith 23:44

That's great. I would agree. 100%. So Mike, if you could have the ear of the church or the church leadership, what is it that you would want them to hear you say,

Mike Sherman 23:55

Something that I've shared in a few sermons that I've preached recently is, the church is too small to pick and choose who comes through the doors, the church is too small to limit who sits in our pews. And we as a church, I believe, do a good job of embracing, like I said earlier, the Enduring Principles of All Are Called, and, the Worth of all Persons. But I do feel like we still have work to do. I feel like as a community, as a church, as our individual congregations and mission centers, I still see a lot of divisiveness, I still see some. Sometimes I feel like we try to create too many groups, too many separate groups like smaller groups within the big picture within the church as a whole. So obviously, sometimes it's appropriate to have your young adults, your youth, your older adults, but to me, I feel like the big picture that we should focus on is the church as a whole. Every person, every age, male, female, young, old, we all have a place in Community of Christ and I just encourage everyone to continue making strides in that department of opening your doors to everyone to those that have been a part of your congregation for a long time, and to those who may have never walked through the door. Just make your church buildings a place where people come when they feel like they need a hug, or they feel like they need to come and to see people, and to be among people who love them and care for them. And a big focus, I guess, of my ministry of late. I'm going to refer here to Doctrine and

Covenants section 162:7d, where it talks about looking beyond the walls of our congregations to go to the far flung places within the church. And that, just that part, right there has been something that has been heavy on my mind and something that I've been brainstorming different things that both I can do as an individual, and that our congregations and mission centers can do together to get out of the normal routines that we have of just showing up on a Sunday morning, and maybe on a Wednesday night, to have church and to be with the same people every Sunday and every Wednesday. So I just encourage the church, myself, to start really embracing that passage of looking beyond our buildings, looking beyond our people and figuring out ways to go to the far flung places, the places that we may seem like we don't want to go, that may be out of our comfort zone and to help to find those people that are out there that long for a community like we have, that may not know where to go to find it, and kind of what I was saying earlier about sometimes we have to go to people, we have to meet them where they are. And so, that's probably what I feel led to share with you tonight, is just to start looking beyond the walls and go into those far flung places to see what kind of work we can do there.

Blake Smith 27:04

That's great stuff. That's great stuff, and as one who grew up in North Pensacola, I am encouraged that North Pensacola is in good hands. So I really appreciate you sharing that, Mike. Before we close out. Is there anything that I haven't asked that you'd like to share?

Mike Sherman 27:24

I don't think so. Um, but I guess I'm just to the other young adults in the church that may be listening, just remember that you do have a home here.

Blake Smith 27:36

All right. Well, Mike, thank you so much for taking the time to sit down with me and chat. And it's been really great to hear your story and to hear the things that you are hoping for and you're doing there in North Pensacola. Like I said, being one coming from North Pensacola originally, it's good to know that the congregation is in such good hands. So I just really appreciate you being with us tonight.

Mike Sherman 28:00

Thanks for having me on. Join it.

Blake Smith 28:05

So I want to say Special thanks to Mike Of course. And special thanks to our listeners. Thank you for being with us for this episode of chai can't even if you'd like to hear more from the chai can even series you can go to projectzionpodcast.org and go to the series drop down menu. Scroll down to Chai Can't Even, and you'll get a list of all of the episodes in that series. You can do that for any of the series that we have here at projectzionpodcast.org. There are over 700 episodes are available on our website, and you can always find us on your favorite podcast platform. So until next time, have a great day!