

Percolating on Faith | Marriage

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marriage, polygamy, monogamy, sacraments, Christianity, Christ, community, Jesus, culture, celibacy, Joseph, God

SPEAKERS

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Robin Linkhart 00:28

Hello and welcome to “Percolating on Faith” a *Project Zion Podcast* series where beloved Community of Christ theologians, Tony and Charmaine Chvala-Smith, take us by the hand and guide us through the ins and outs of all the questions and doubts. Thinking about God and growing in faith is a journey that never ends. I'm your host, Robert Linkhart, and our topic today is the Christian institution of marriage. Welcome, Tony and Charmaine.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 01:02

Oh, hi, Robin, good to be here.

Tony Chvala-Smith 01:04

Yes, it's just lovely to be with you, and I don't know about taking people by the hand, but we'll do our best.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 01:08

We'll try not to mislead anyone.

Robin Linkhart 01:12

Well, the topic that we are exploring today is indeed deep and wide, and in current times is not without controversy. We will need to touch on several aspects of the whole, things like scripture and history, culture, laws of the land, covenant, and relationship ethics of mutuality and equality. But, as we always say on this wild adventure, context, context, context. And, of course, in a diverse global community like Community of Christ, it gets even more complicated. But, I just have to say that I have complete faith in our trusty guides to help us navigate the marriage topic and leave us with lots to think about. So, Tony and Charmaine, take it away.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 02:05

Well, that was a long list of things to explore concerning marriage, and hopefully we'll get to all of them. But, yes, it's a very complex subject, partly because, in, at least in Western culture, there's, we seldom ask, where did this come from? Where did marriage and our view of it come from? And there's often a mistaken idea that somehow it emerged out of Christianity. And, and of course, it did not. Christianity kind of took in this structural aspect of Roman culture in the first century, and let it be the guide, the,

and then, and then Christianized it. But, you know, we want to kind of explore different, different aspects of what marriage was, for instance, in the first century and second century, that we can, those glimpses that we might be able to get from the New Testament, and then to look at the progression of the development of Christianity, and where did marriage fit in the midst of that development, or marriages. Where did the idea of marriage, different, its different forms, or the elements that make it up, where did they go? Or, how did that, how did that develop?

Tony Chvala-Smith 03:25

So, what we're calling marriage predated Christianity, predated Judaism, predated the patriarchal period in the Hebrew Bible, way, pre-Judaism. In fact, some scholars say it's, it goes way back in evolutionary history to what's called pair bonding. So, you know, pair bonding emerged in our human evolutionary history because, because, because human children take a long time to nurture and develop and be prepared for adulthood. That was true in ancient evolutionary history, apparently still true today. So...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 04:03

There needs to be a structure...

Tony Chvala-Smith 04:04

Right.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 04:04

...for, for children to grow and develop in.

Tony Chvala-Smith 04:08

So, in the religion of ancient Israel, and subsequently in Judaism, and then subsequently in Christianity, marriage customs already existed culturally. And so, what happened was, these religious traditions took existing customs and then tried to, to modify them and reread them through their own particular spiritual, theological lenses.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 04:31

So, that's where the question of context is super important.

Tony Chvala-Smith 04:36

So, I think we have to say that, that there's not like *the* biblical view of marriage, and there's not *the* Christian view of marriage, there's multiple views, and that's because like, for example, scripture doesn't like give a complete, finalized theology of marriage. And so...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 04:54

Well, and if it did, there would still be several...

Tony Chvala-Smith 04:56

Yeah, right.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 04:57

...because there would be some Old Testament images of marriage that included polygamy, multiple wives, typically, and, and then other sexual partners, concubines, others like that. And so, so those who, those who are literalists, and looking to the Bible to tell you about marriage, it's probably not, it's probably not a good place to go, because what's being represented there is actually the cultures in which, first Judaism, and then Christianity emerge.

Tony Chvala-Smith 05:32

So, Christianity, then, from the start, has always had to kind of construct a theology of marriage. Marriage is a pre-existing institution, and so in a Christian context, what, what will, what will we take over from the culture? And, how will we interpret it? And, how will we run it through the Jesus lens, right? So that's always been a thing that Christianity has had to do, and it has done that in quite varied ways through the centuries. But, you know, if, if we're going to talk about a, a Christian, or a Community of Christ theology of marriage, we have to realize that a theology is a construct, and that it always uses the four voices: Scripture, experience, tradition, and reason, you know, critical rationality. It uses all these to help construct its best, its best current sense of the nature of marriage, and how, how the values connected to Jesus might best be lived out in that particular social, personal arrangement, so. So, and also, it's really important to note there that in, in different parts of the world, different cultural contexts...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 06:43

Where the church is present.

Tony Chvala-Smith 06:44

...where our church is present, of those four voices there's different foc-, you know like, focus on one voice over others. For example, in some African contexts, the focus will be on the scripture voice, whereas in some North American context, the focus would be on the experience voice. But you know, a, a more carefully thought out theology of marriage has to make use of all the voices as it tries to understand what marriage is and can be through, through a Christian lens. So, we'll, we'll do a little of that as we go today, but we wanted to get all that out on the table first, so, so.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 07:22

So, what can we figure out from scripture? And again, what we're doing is we're kind of peeking into the past and saying, what, what are the patterns that were common in the cultures in which first Judaism and then Christianity develops? And you know, I've already said that in the Old Testament, there is, there are mult-, polygamy, multiple wives, it, the more, more powerful and, and richer you are, the more, more you are likely to have. And so...

Tony Chvala-Smith 07:53

David, Solomon, and yeah.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 07:54

Right, and in these situations, women tended to be seen as property with few rights, some that emerge in Judaism over time.

Tony Chvala-Smith 08:06

So, you know, we going to have to do some, some big picture view things here when we say that, you know, Christianity has an inheritance, both from the Jewish tradition, and from the Roman cultural world, right. Both of those cultures come into, come into play as Christianity is trying to figure itself out. We could say that the trend in the Hebrew Bible is towards monogamy, right. So, by the time you get to the Hebrew prophets, the Amoses and Hoseas and Isaiahs, one way you can tell that the trend has been moving towards monogamy is those prophets use marriage as an analogy for the relationship between Israel and God. And so...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 08:48

And they're quite...

Tony Chvala-Smith 08:59

Yeah.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 08:49

...critical if, if Israel has any relationship outside of the one with God, in worshipping other gods. And so that, that's showing that this one commitment, this marriage of one to one, is, is becoming normative, that the prophets are assuming that people would say, well, of course one should have this committed relationship to one other person. And so that's, that's one of the places we can see that this is emerging as the, the more dominant way of understanding marriage.

Tony Chvala-Smith 09:25

Thus, for example, you know, in Hosea and Isaiah, and so on, adultery becomes the metaphor for Israel's faithlessness to Yahweh. And so...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 09:36

Going, going after other gods.

Tony Chvala-Smith 09:38

Right, right. You can't, you can't worship Yahweh and then date, date other women, so to speak, other gods.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 09:45

[inaudible], Baal or...

Tony Chvala-Smith 09:47

Right. So that, behind that then is a social reality that Israelite and then Judean culture have moved towards monogamy. And that continues in Judaism, you know, down to the time of Jesus. It doesn't, doesn't mean that there weren't some polygamous people, it just means that the trend was in the direction of monogamy.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 10:07

And, and you can see that there's still the, either the memory or maybe existing vestiges of polygamy in Jesus' time, when some of the Pharisees and scribes throw the question at him, well, what about a woman who marries one man and he dies, and she marries the brother, and, which is, these, this would be levirate marriages that were quite common in at least the Jewish past. They might still be happening during Jesus' time, but everyone's familiar with that part of their tradition, and so, even in that time, there's a familiarity with some other configurations of marriage. But, but it's, it's not at all clear that that's still practiced widely, but it's part of their understanding of their long story of Jewish long story...

Tony Chvala-Smith 11:00

Yeah.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 11:00

...and, so it's just a reference point. So, you know, there's, it's possible there's still polygamous relationships going on during that time. But it's not, it doesn't appear at all to be normative within Judaism...

Tony Chvala-Smith 11:12

Yeah.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 11:12

...in the first century.

Tony Chvala-Smith 11:14

And even in first century Judaism, at the Dead Sea Scrolls, there's celibacy being practiced, which is rather unusual in Jewish history, too. And so, we, I mean, it's, I think it's fair to say, in terms of the New Testament, monogamy is generally the underlying principle of marriage. It's certainly, that's certainly clear in Jesus's teachings about marriage and divorce, and it's, it's clear in, in Paul's comment on marriage in I Corinthians. And then, in the, the later Pauline tradition, Colossians and Ephesians, it's, it's assumed, monogamy is assumed. There's, there's a text in I Timothy, which is the latest Pauline tradition, you know, couple generations after Paul, which, which says, the bishop should be husband of only one wife, or can it be translated bishop should be married only once. It, it can be translated either way. But if, if it were a husband of only one wife, it would imply that there were still some polygamous relationships around. But, generally, it's quite accurate to say that the New Testament presupposes monogamy as the kind of marital standard which would be common in the Roman world.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 12:19

Right, and that's what I want to emphasize is the structure of the Roman world that is determining that, that monogamy is the primary form of marriage. And, you know, there's really, there's very little evidence that early Christianity tried to subvert or change the understanding of marriage that was, was the primary one in its culture. It worked with it. It worked with the reality of the structures that were around it just like it did with the economic structures, and even the governmental structures, that Christianity figured out how to, how to move and grow in the midst of all of this. So, within Christianity, there isn't a sense that these conventions of the day are tossed out. They are, over time, given different kinds of meaning, and I think that's what you'll see developing over time.

Tony Chvala-Smith 13:16

Yeah, there's, there's, what's, what's happening is that in the Roman world, you know, as Christianity is moving along, they've inherited these Roman marriage, custom-, Greco Roman marriage assumptions and customs. But there is an attempt to kind of run them through the Christological filter, the Jesus filter. You can see that in Colossians and Ephesians, you know. So, in Colossians 3 there's this statement, "Wives be subject to your husbands as is fitting in the Lord." By the way, that, any, any pagan Greco Roman moral philosopher was saying that stuff. That's, there's nothing unusual about that. Then it goes on, "Husbands love your wives and never treat them harshly." Well, there were some philosophers who were saying that. But, you see, here's the problem, you got to read that verse in light of everything that came before it in chapter three of Colossians. And then, and then what you see, and then what you see is that those statements, which are kind of common, run of the mill statements, any moral [inaudible]...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 14:11

And they get pulled out, and in our time get pulled out and used against women.

Tony Chvala-Smith 14:17

Which is a real misuse of the text, because the, the literary context there is where you see the author of Colossians saying, first of all, in the Christian community, mutual love and kindness is, is the basic...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 14:29

The first rule.

Tony Chvala-Smith 14:30

Is the first rule. And so, so, I might, I might just gently disagree with Charmaine's use of language a minute ago and say...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 14:37

What's that?

Tony Chvala-Smith 14:37

...say that there is a little bit of subversion there.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 14:40

There is subversion, I mean, yes, yes.

Tony Chvala-Smith 14:43

Right. So, in other words...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 14:44

But it's still relying on the structure.

Tony Chvala-Smith 14:46

Yeah, it relies on the structure but then tries to, Chris- Christologize it a little bit. In other words, run it through the Jesus mill, which changes it. So, any yanking of that one text, you know, out of context, using a wedding is horrible because, and this is what's the crafty thing that's going on there where the author of Colossians is saying, hey, in Christian community, mutual love and affection and support, that's the rule. All right, yeah, wives be submissive to your husbands. Husbands love your wives. Like everybody, you know, the culture says that, but remember the basic rule here. So, then, Ephesians goes quite a bit farther. Ephesians act- *[audio disruption]* Colossians, the author of Ephesians had a copy of Colossians in front of him. But Ephesians 5:21 says, "Be subject to one another." So, there's mutual submission in the community out of reverence for Christ. And then it says, "Wives be subject to your husbands and husbands, the head of the wife," and so on. Again, you got to read the whole section it's in and understand that the author is repeating conventional wisdom, but then really, really, really hyper filtering it through the story of Jesus.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 16:00

Preceding it by the story of Jesus and, and what's expected within the community. And then, and then saying what the culture expects. So.

Tony Chvala-Smith 16:09

No, no Greco Roman philosopher that I can think of would have said you have to practice mutual submission, right. And so, in other words, the, the equality that's in Christ, that Paul, a generation or two earlier, articulated in Galatians, "In Christ there's neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male and female," that kind of equality is still a norm in the Christian church. But the Christian church, Christian churches are now having to kind of adjust to a long, a long stay in the Roman world. And so, they, you know, they repeat some of the common Roman wisdom, but then they, they still, they still are trying to maintain that radical equality in the household that, that Paul first glimpsed, and that was part of Jesus' ministry.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 16:53

That Paul talks about a couple of different times. But in Galatians, the, the whole idea that in Christ there is neither, you know, Jew or Greek or male and female or slave and free. And so, there's that. That's still the premise.

Tony Chvala-Smith 17:12

Yeah. So, what, the Roman, some things that, that are important to know about the Roman world at this time is that, that during the time of the Emperor Augustus, there's a bunch of marriage rules, laws passed. And so, Roman marriage custom from those laws required mutual consent from both parties. In other words, there wasn't a father arranging, necessarily, arranging a marriage for, for his daughter, that, I mean, it's not that that thing still didn't go on in the wider Hellenistic world. It's that by Roman law you had to have consistent between the...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 17:49

The two parties had to consent.

Tony Chvala-Smith 17:53

And in Roman law, either, either party could initiate a divorce. So, you see some of that in the New Testament, right. Paul, in, in I Corinthians 7 imagines that either party could initiate a divorce. It's imagined in Mark, not in Matthew, I think, if I remember, right, and...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 18:13

One is, Matthew and Mark, one is relying more on Jewish tradition. The other is relying more on Roman tradition, as far as dissolving a marriage. And that's often where you get the clearest images of what marriage, the legal aspects of marriage is, what is required, in order to, for divorce to happen.

Tony Chvala-Smith 18:32

Yeah, and some of the issues behind that had to do with property rights. What property did the woman bring into the marriage? Does it go back to her family? Does it become the husband's property?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 18:41

And what, what will the offspring inherit...

Tony Chvala-Smith 18:44

Yeah.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 18:45

...and keeping that within either the maternal or the paternal family's legacy, estate.

Tony Chvala-Smith 18:51

I think it's, I think it's interesting that, that marriage almost always has had some kind of economic dimension to it, which would be interesting to explore. I had a professor once who knew a scholar in France, who's, who's a scholar of medieval history and religion, and that scholar's whole academic specialty was medieval marriage contracts, which sounds, which sounds like absolutely zero fun to me. But with that, that scholar's, long patient analysis of medieval marriage contracts, they, they were almost universally about economic stuff, right.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 19:27

Right. And that gave a lens to the actual day to day living of people and, and decisions and structures that, that shaped their lives.

Tony Chvala-Smith 19:38

Yeah. So, one thing we could say then, generally, in, the in the New Testament, which is a library literature, it's varied, but you can see, you can see New Testament authors in different ways. And here's our language, trying to, to reroute the culture's patriarchal assumptions about marriage, trying to reroute it through the Jesus narrative. And by, when, in doing that, even when they keep some patriarchal assumptions, like, "wives be subject to your husband", they, they add things that create a dimension of equality and justice that wouldn't have otherwise been there. So that, we'd say that's the trend in the New Testament. And it's a trend that Community of Christ today wants to pay careful attention to. We, we, we don't want to overlay marriage with ancient or even modern patriarchal assumptions. The, the equality and justice aspect for, for the partners is just really, really vital for it to, in

other words, we, we want to reroute our own, our own culture's marriage assumptions through that lens too. So, I think that's pretty important. So where else can we go? Well...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 20:46

Maybe a little bit about Christianity in the Roman Empire. And, you know, for those who are aware of the history of those first few centuries of Christian development, Christianity, at first, is a religion under suspicion, and is its intent to overthrow the government. Do we need to squash it, you know. And, and wait! Making martyrs doesn't seem to be squashing it. It seems to be growing. And going from that to Christianity being accepted as a legitimate religion within the culture, to eventually being the official religion of the culture. So, what happens to marriage in this process, and what we're seeing in those first three or four centuries, is still that marriage is mainly being defined by the state, by the government. Some parts of the marriage, what, there's, marriage becomes more of a ritual. It, first, in some places, the priests might go and do a blessing on the marriage, but then leave before the raucous partying and the, and the questionable plays that would be put on about sex and romance that were happening as part of Roman weddings. And, but eventually, the clerics have more say in, in what's happening in the solemnizing of marriage, or these, these consents.

Tony Chvala-Smith 22:22

I would have been defrocked. I wanted to stay to watch the plays, and.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 22:27

So, they're, in some places, I think this is mostly in the east, the bride and groom would have little crowns, and the blessing of the crowns became kind of the first step for the church having some part to play in the, in the marriage process. Eventually, there's this, the, there are these other parts that are blessings, or a conferring by the church, that this is an, a kind of a recognized union. But then it, but it takes two or three hundred years, actually, before the church has a fully developed ritual in which the state definition of marriage is confirmed and affirmed within a religious setting.

Tony Chvala-Smith 23:15

And we should add there too that, that in the western, western church, in the Latin speaking western church, marriage is not really officially identified as a sacrament till the 800s, and then from the 800s to the 1300s that it increasingly is considered part of the seven sacraments, and then officially, officially named one of the seven sacraments in the 1500s, during the Catholic Reformation. But, but it's, its road to being a sacrament was laid early. It just took a long time for it to be declared that. But, but, you know, the church, it's interesting, the ancient church, especially as it became, becomes the imperial church, has to serve ambiguous relationship with, with marriage. It's, the Roman customs are still there and preserved, what should the church's role be in that, right.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 24:04

And so, some of the little steps along the way were the church saying, well, the bishop should, should affirm this, this marriage between the two, or the bishop should be asked before this marriage happens. And then slowly it's brought into the building, you know. But, but initially, this would not have been done in church buildings, which weren't really common till about the third century anyway. But, yeah, it's, you know, it's kind of slowly, you know, brought to the, the church door and then, oh, well, we have, we

have a bit of a liturgy for this, and then you can go party and do those other things elsewhere. But it's, it's just a very slow process, which indicates that, to some extent, Christian, Christians structures were not antagonistic towards the Greco Roman understanding of marriage that had been passed on to it. It's not changing it a great deal. It's just, just kind of attracting more and more parts of it.

Tony Chvala-Smith 25:07

There is this increasing ambivalence of, of the church about the sex part of it, right, because it's, as we, as we move further and further into the, you know, fourth, fifth, sixth and later centuries, celibacy is often treated as the, the high, the, that's the high bar, right, and marriage is kind of a low bar.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 25:31

Well, if you have to. You know, If you must, okay.

Tony Chvala-Smith 25:34

And so, there's, there's some of those...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 25:36

You can have sex and have children.

Tony Chvala-Smith 25:36

Yeah, there's some of those, yeah, in the late ancient church, rules emerged about, well, asking the bride and groom not to have sex for, for some days after the wedding because of the nuptial blessing that was given. So, it's like a variety of, a variety of things, these are, and these are partly connected to Christianity's inter, inter linking with Hellenistic culture agreement.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 26:05

Separation of the body and the Spirit and that the body stuff is ew.

Tony Chvala-Smith 26:11

And the Spirit stuff is like, oh, that's where we unite with, with the universe. And so that kind of dualism, which generally Christian theology opposed. It, but it did sort of seep in.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 26:21

Some, some periods...

Tony Chvala-Smith 26:22

Yeah.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 26:23

...that, that was a default.

Tony Chvala-Smith 26:25

So, we can, I mean, we should say that through this period, monogamy is definitely, definitely the standard, and.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 26:33

At least in the western church.

Tony Chvala-Smith 26:34

In the western church, yeah. And in that, second and third marriages were looked, looked down upon with, with, with increasing, looking down upon this, right. In other words, it was like a sec-, if your, if your spouse died, a second marriage is like, okay. That's, it's, it's better than fornication. But if the second spouse died, a third marriage is like, oh, geez, I don't know.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 27:00

It's just dressed up fornication.

Tony Chvala-Smith 27:01

Yeah.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 27:02

There are some of the really uptight theologians in the, what, fourth and fifth centuries.

Tony Chvala-Smith 27:08

Yeah, and later. And so, in other words, the western churches kind of struggle, its ambivalence and struggle with human sexuality, based on coming out of Roman culture. It lingers in the church for a long time. And so, yeah.

Robin Linkhart 27:26

And I just want to ask you a quick question, because that shift, and I think I was hearing it a little bit before too, in some of the New Testament passages, of looking down on subsequent marriages after a death of a spouse, is very interesting, because, because that kind of is a sense of looking at life in a here and later, perhaps way. But what would that be tied to? Because I think part of controlling women and the whole esteem of virginity was already there before Jesus' birth. So, it's controlling the DNA pool. Of course, they wouldn't call it DNA pool then, but it seems like there's a familial kind of piece that might be playing a part in that. But I don't know that for sure on the valuing the first marriage and not really getting married again after that.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 28:28

It would make, it would certainly make those aspects complicated. You know, if you have two households, you know, if the woman is still tied to her father's estate, in effect, and, but a second wife is what I'm thinking of. You know, the first wife has died, or perhaps there's been divorce, and then, so that might complicate the inheritance of the children from the first or from the second union. So, there would be some of that. But part of it is also perhaps going back to that passage in I Timothy about the bishop only being married once. I think the question would be more like, well, you've already had that sexual part of your life explored. You really don't need to go there again if you're, you know, if you're really devoted. I, at least that's the sense that I get is that there's almost a, it's considered a weakness

to need to be married again, and maybe even a third time if your wife dies. And I think that's another little piece here that most of us don't have a good sense of how often maternal death happened in...

Robin Linkhart 29:46

That's right.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 29:48

...in the past, even within, well, and it's growing again now, but in the, especially before *[audio disruption]* years ago, and, and so remarriage was not uncommon. But there's a very much the sense of not being so tied to the bodily lust or needs. So that's developing already in this fourth, fifth century, and then it develops even more later.

Tony Chvala-Smith 30:16

Yeah. And, but, and by the fourth, fifth century we now have the New Testament canon, right. And so, Jesus in the Gospels is single. Paul, the historical Paul, is single. And this isn't, these are noncanonical texts. And Paul in I Corinthians 7, he's not against marriage, he just says, basically, I wish, I wish you guys were like me, single.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 30:37

Because Jesus is coming any day.

Tony Chvala-Smith 30:38

He's coming any day.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 30:39

And we don't want to complicate things.

Tony Chvala-Smith 30:41

And, right, right. Your life would be way easier if you were like me. And he said, but, but marriage isn't bad. And so, if you, if you need to get married, yeah, go ahead.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 30:49

If you're on fire.

Tony Chvala-Smith 30:51

Yes, if you're on fire, go ahead, get married. So, in other words, Paul in, you know, an original context is lost by this time. And Paul's, Paul's functioning inside of his own framework in which the end of the age is about to happen. So, you know, whatever state you're in, it's probably best to stay in that state. But if you have to go ahead. And so, by the time we get to the fourth, fifth century, and that's now canon, people are saying, well, Paul's the ideal, and Jesus is the ideal, therefore celibacy must be the ideal. And, and if you have to, you can do a less than, which is marriage. But, and by the way, in the late Roman Empire, a lot of women in Christianity chose God, chose the higher bar, it was...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 31:35

Virginity and devotion to the church or to Christ.

Tony Chvala-Smith 31:38

It, in some ways, it was probably a better bar given, given what your marriage was going to be for...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 31:43

You're going to live a lot longer, and you're gonna get an education, so.

Tony Chvala-Smith 31:47

You're gonna hang out with other women and you're gonna learn, you're gonna read and, and, yeah. So, it was a better life in many ways. But, so all that...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 31:55

But I think, and all the authors will say this, that, you know, in the scholarly material is, yes, there were a few who could do this, the celibacy piece, but most of the population wasn't. They were forming families. They were getting married. They were doing all of these things. So, a large portion of Christians were, were using the practices of marriage and the institution of family.

Tony Chvala-Smith 32:27

In the late fourth century, into the fifth century, there was an argument in the church about whether marriage was good at all. And some of the extremists, like St. Jerome, are like, oh, it's horrible.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 32:36

These are all guys who aren't married, okay, first of all.

Tony Chvala-Smith 32:38

That's right, right. But it's very interesting that St. Augustine, North African Bishop and theologian, who had had a 12 or 13 year relationship with a woman, he writes a treatise called *The Good of Marriage* in which he argues that, some of these other guys were arguing, oh, sex and procreation. That was a, that was a result of the fall, right. Before, before the fall of Adam and Eve, nobody had sex. Nobody's gonna, right. After the fall, right, then sex was necessary to have children, so it's a bad thing. But Augustine, who had had a sexual relationship with a woman for 13 years said, no, just, I think that there would, sexuality is part of the good creation, and it would have been something Adam and Eve had done anyway. He says the good of marriage, he has a, there's three things that make up the good of marriage. The first thing he calls fidelitas, right. Marriage is a place in which faithfulness gets to be practiced. And then the second thing, procreation, this is the basis for having children. And by the way, Augustine did have a son through that woman. And then the third good of marriage, he uses the word sacramentum, sacrament. And that old Latin word had to do with an oath, a permanent bond between, you know, a soldier took a sacramentum for the empire, it was a permanent bonding with the empire. Well, that term gets taken over into Christianity and becomes the term sacraments. There's a, there's a permanent bonding that takes place in marriage that is, that is good in itself. So, so even in a cult- even, even in a context where celeb-, celibacy is seen, seen as like the, like the, like the marathon that everybody should try to win, right. Augustine saying, no. A virgin, a virgin with bad thoughts is not somehow morally better than a nonvirgin who seeks justice, right. So, he tries to moderate that a little

bit. But, you know, going into the Middle Ages then, in the medieval period, marriage becomes a sacrament and marriage is still, by and large, there still by and large are arrangements. It's not until the late Middle Ages where romantic love becomes a sort of ideal that the upper classes can, can pursue. Then you get to the Reformation, and the reformers are like, where's the celib-, celibacy thing coming from? Peter was married. All the first disciples were married. So, so they, they push back on the celibacy of clergy thing. Martin Luther, the Augustinian monk turned reformer, takes a wife. And John Calvin is married and so on. So, so Protestantism, as it emerges in the 1500s, has a, a pro marriage thing for clergy. And now we're going to jump ahead then to the American context, right.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 35:24

Actually, one piece, I'd like you to add in...

Tony Chvala-Smith 35:25

Oh, yeah, sure.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 35:27

...sacrament as a form of grace.

Tony Chvala-Smith 35:30

Oh, yeah.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 35:31

Say something about that.

Tony Chvala-Smith 35:31

Yes. So, like, Thomas Aquinas, 13th century and then subsequent theologians, the sacraments, these sacred rites that were in some way commanded by Christ, they come to be understood, understood as a vehicle for the giving of grace, right. Baptism confers grace. Confirmation confers divine, a divine grace or divine power.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 35:58

Grace meaning...

Tony Chvala-Smith 35:59

Grace meaning God's, God's unmerited goodness in the form of a power that enables you to do things, right. So, so marriage as a sacrament, then, is, is starting to be seen as...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 36:13

A place where you meet with God's loving presence, forgiveness, acceptance,

Tony Chvala-Smith 36:18

Right. And, and, and the sacrament itself confers the, confers the grace of faithfulness, and so on, on the couple, which they then, through their free will, have to, have to, have to choose to...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 36:31

Which they'll need.

Tony Chvala-Smith 36:32

Right. Which they'll need.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 36:33

...they'll need for the journey.

Tony Chvala-Smith 36:35

Right. And so, in Catholic tradition, and to some extent, in Anglican tradition, the sacraments are still seen as a means of grace and that, and that goes into Community of Christ theology. We see the sac-, we see our eight sacraments, as in different ways, gracing people with divine love and power for particular aspects of their journey, right, so.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 36:56

Great, thank you, thanks for going there. So, we're kind of been going, in some ways, hitting the historical elements. And we're going to kind of jump ahead, as Tony said, to the American frontier, and all of the experimentation that's happening there, in those first, that first, yeah, first 100 and 200 years in, of the, the U.S. culture and government structure being formed. And this is really an important piece, because, for our context in Community of Christ, because Joseph Smith is surrounded by all of these different kinds of social experiments, and there are groups that would have seen themselves as grounded in Christianity, that are experimenting with all kinds of things. So, you have...

Tony Chvala-Smith 37:54

The Oneidans and the Owenites and, and other utopian groups, and some of them, some of them practice a kind of open marriage in their communities. On the other hand, you have the opposite, like the Shakers, who practiced celibacy in their communities. And so, but there's all this different marital experimentation going on.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 38:12

Marital as well as raising families. So, in some of these, raising of children is a communal activity. It's not separate households of a married couple with their children, but children are in one building, where they are cared for by a variety of adults. So, it's, it's fascinating to, because, you know, here's the, it is a, you know, an open frontier in lots of ways. There aren't laws in place, at least the further west you go. And so, there's all kinds of the sense that we're no longer under the, the burden of long tradition and forced understandings of morality and social structures. It's like you said, that we had in Europe or in other parts of the world and so here we are, we can, we can start over. We can start fresh. Let's, let's take this scripture and go with it. Let's take this image and see what happens. Yeah,

Tony Chvala-Smith 39:11

It's, it's, it strikes me as kind of like a senior high camp without any rules at some point, which seems like a bad idea to me, but.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 39:20

But, but it does, you know, there are these, some very, some extended, like the Shakers, but others short lived experiments in how will we be together? What, what do we commit to, as we grow in love, as we grow families, as we grow individually and spiritually, and it's just a really fascinating time. But it's also important to know that the conventions of Protestantism or Catholicism are not the overpowering structures at the time, and so people are open to all kinds of things. They think some things are kind of weird but others, you know, they're up for the challenge. And, and Joseph is, is growing up in this time period...

Tony Chvala-Smith 40:10

Yeah.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 40:10

...when these are happening and there's, there are polygamous groups. There, as we said, there're also totally celibate groups...

Tony Chvala-Smith 40:18

Yeah.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 40:18

...so, all over the place.

Tony Chvala-Smith 40:20

And, and so, a lot of these groups have a kind of Restorationist mythology behind them. It's, we want to, we want to do what was, we want to go back to what was original and right.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 40:30

We want to restore the church as it first was.

Tony Chvala-Smith 40:32

Right. Or, restore marriage the way it used to be, right. All this kind of language is going on on the American frontier. And that's part of Joseph's own inner mythology too. And so, there's different ways to understand this, but one could argue that Joseph, Joseph has, Joseph pursues what you would call the Restorationist fallacy, that is that which is most ancient is most true. Restoring, you know, so it's pretty easy then to understand inside of that framework why you'd say, well, prior to Jesus, way back, and there's, there's polygamy in the Hebrew Bible. And...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 41:09

So therefore, it must be authorized by God, and it's fine. And if we want to get back to the originalist...

Tony Chvala-Smith 41:17

Yes.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 41:17

...as we can go, then apparently that would be, that would be a great place to go.

Tony Chvala-Smith 41:23

Yeah. So, spiritual marriage and polygamy, these start to emerge 1840-ish on, in Nauvoo, though, it's really important to remember that our section 111, from *The Doctrine and Covenants*, which comes from the Kirtland period, and it's 1835, there is very, very straightforward on one man, one woman, two, two partners, nobody else. "You both mutually agreed to be each other's companion, husband and wife, observing the legal rights belonging to this condition; that is keeping yourselves wholly for each other, and from all others, during your lives." So that had come out of difficult experience in Joseph's life in Kirtland. But nevertheless, by the time we get to Nauvoo, there is...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 42:05

They've left that behind.

Tony Chvala-Smith 42:06

...yeah, there's this experimentation going on, and this, there's a variety of dynamics going on here. But, you know, but spiritual marriage and polygamy become, you know, part of the, part of the culture of Nauvoo, part of the underground culture of Nauvoo. And then that sets up the possibility of reaction against it, which happens in 1844, when, when a few dissenters who stayed in Nauvoo, published a paper called the *Nauvoo Expositor*. And one of the things they really pushed back hard on there is spiritual wifery, polygamy and the abuse of young female, single converts coming from England and other places. They push back hard on that. And so, so, the Reorganization, coming out of that experience a decade and a half later, but, you know, monogamy is going to be a real, exceedingly important principle then. It's a principle of dissent and a strong principle of, of community identity for the Reorganization that emerges.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 43:16

Yeah, there are times when we're teaching Community of Christ theology where we talk about *Nauvoo Expositor* Day is really, in some ways, the identifying day for where Community of Christ, eventually, RLDS before that, emerges and takes its stand. And so, some of our students, when we first mentioned this, when Tony mentioned this in class one day, made up a button that we have that says, "*Nauvoo, Expositor, June 7, 1844*", and then a big, "1", "1 Wife, 1 Church, 1 God". And, you know, it's, it's talking about the social, about one wife, the ecclesial the one church, and the theological one God. So, in many ways, RLDS church and then Community of Christ, really has its beginnings as dissenting against these things that they would have seen as anomalies and really headed down the wrong road. You'll see in the *Nauvoo Expositor*, the, the list of, of things they're worried about, that Joseph seems to be promoting, or behind the scenes doing. And this is, for some people in this burgeoning community in Nauvoo, and this rapid growth and, as well as the conflicts, is, is eye opening for many people. And so, there begins to be an outward division within the Church. But in many ways, in many ways, RLDS-Community of Christ are the inheritors of those dissenters, those people willing to say, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. This isn't Christian, you know. And their, their roots are much more deeply in mainstream Christianity with understandings of who God is, with understanding of what marriage is, with understanding of what the Church is supposed to be about, and not, it's not about a man. It's about God. It's about Christ. And so, so in many, many ways, we are an outgrowth of those dissenters. And

so, right from the beginning of the Reorganization, the RLDS church and then Community of Christ, we are, we, we took our stand as in opposition to things like polygamy and eternal marriage, multiple gods.

Tony Chvala-Smith 45:47

And spiritual marriage.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 45:48

And spiritual marriage.

Tony Chvala-Smith 45:49

Yeah.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 45:49

So those, those kinds of things, right from our beginning, as, as a movement, they shaped our identity. Because the Reorganization was a little group, compared to a big group that moved west, identity was really, really important because they were always being confused with the group that moved west. And so, articulating what we did believe in and what we did *not* believe in especially, was really, really important. And so, for our first 150 years, almost I would say, our preoccupation was in telling people that we were not Mormon, that that was not our theology, that we, these are the things we don't believe in. We don't believe in multiple gods. We don't believe in polygamy, and some of the rights associated with those things. So, so, it's really, you know, for people who are coming into the conversation in Community of Christ today about the form of marriage or different possibility forms of marriage, I think it's so important to realize that our very identity was built on aligning with mainstream Christianity on these issues of marriage identity, of God, in some, to some extent, the afterlife, and that that has really, really been important to us. For a very long time, during that 150 years, we, we believed as a, as a denomination, Joseph couldn't have had anything to do with polygamy. You know, Brigham Young was just a bad influence, and poor Joseph, it was just slightly misled.

Tony Chvala-Smith 47:43

Which may have been true, but still.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 47:45

But, but the big issue here is that once, once, as a church, we became open to looking honestly at the historical materials and, and hearing the testimonies of people that, that weren't part of the Restoration, we were able to say, okay, yeah, probably Joseph was involved in polygamy, and he may have even been one of the initiators of it. But the cool thing is, in my mind, is that that allow, it allowed us to let Joseph be far more human. And it opened the door for our focus not to be us and our rightness or Joseph's rightness, but to tear down some of the walls about our own self pride, preoccupation, and look to the God who is so evident in our sacraments, to look to the Christ, who walks with us, and chooses to help us grow in our, in our spirituality in our community, and affecting the world in, in new and peaceful and wonderful ways. And so, rather than weaken us as a denomination, the recognition that Joseph may have been involved in polygamy actually freed us, freed us to not have to worry about, not, not letting our history be our theology, not letting Joseph and, and his purity be what makes what we're about right or wrong. And that, that need, that opportunity to rely on God, and to again, listen to

God in some new ways, to what is our, what is our call in the world. So, so not just at the beginning of our identity, but even in this pivotal moment, when we're saying, you know, our, our, our way of being against polygamy and those kinds of things that defined our identity, that even the recognition that that probably wasn't valid, lets us define our identity even more clearly, and that we don't have to prove purity in order to be useful to God.

Tony Chvala-Smith 50:05

One thing I said is that, what, what you, what you get out of coming out of this, what Charmaine has narrated here, is that monogamy is a, what you'd call a deep structure in Community of Christ identity and thought. It, that's why, you know, decades later, 1972, you would read in *Doctrine and Covenants* section 150, that monogamy, you know, is the basic, the basic principle of Christian married life. Well, that's articulating this deep structure that has been part of our identity ever since, you know, 1860, but even before.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 50:40

Now, I'm going to talk a little bit about that moment in our story, because what's happening is in the '60s and '70s, this little tiny church, Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ, is being pulled into other countries in the world, without them, without those being official plans on our part. Really, God is pulling us into other places where we can share the good news of Christ, we can share the good news that we think is embodied in the Church. But we're discovering, oh my goodness, we're going, we're being invited into cultures where, that understand everything differently than we do. And so, here's the church growing in India and, and the message is connecting, and people are having experience of God, of Spirit, of tying into this. But oh, some of them are polygamists. Oh, oh, no. We've, we based our identity on being against polygamy, and yet, God is doing something here. And, and so this is really important, because we have to understand the context of that moment. Yes, we have this really long and rich tradition of being against polygamy, and yet, this is also the time in which we are being open to our history, and honestly, looking at Joseph, and realizing, oops, you know, he, he maybe wasn't what we thought. And, and for some people I have to say, that some people did distance themselves from the Church when they realized that Joseph was involved in polygamy. There was a disillusionment for quite a few people. But, now there's this open door to say, are we, are we about being against something, or is it we will be for something? And so, you know you think about many Church members, many generations in the Church, and our identity being, you know, defining ourselves against Mormons, divining, defining ourselves as being against polygamy. This is a place where God is doing some new things, and where, I would say, grace, as is being understood in the Church in a new way, and the idea that it is not whether you're monogamous or polygamous to whether or not you can have a relationship with God. And the fact that the Church accepted this revelation in 1972 that says, we extend membership to these folks in India who have heard the gospel and are wanting to join it, this is really, I mean, it's a tricky spot. For lots of people it's like, what are we doing? Are we giving up on our identity of being against polygamy. But there were other people saying, it's not about us anymore. It's about what God is doing in the world. And so, you know, there, there are some who would say that this, who, who want to look at this moment in our history, and who have said, Oh, it's, it's...

Tony Chvala-Smith 54:19

It's colonialism, right.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 54:20

It's colonialism, and...

Tony Chvala-Smith 54:21

Yeah, right.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 54:22

...condescending and, oh, but, but in the context of that moment, this was a big shift within Community of Christ.

Tony Chvala-Smith 54:33

Let me give you a quick analogy there. So, Paul, in early Christianity, makes the case that Gentiles who are Gentiles, who are culturally and everything Gentiles, don't have to become Jews before they first become Christians. That's what justification by faith is about. And it doesn't mean that Paul will accept all their Gentile practices, because he doesn't, right. But then by analogy, that Section 150 is saying the polygamous tribes people of India don't have to stop being polygamous to become Christian, but we, we will hope that, you know, eventually they will find some new ways to have marriage relationships. And so, that's, you have to understand sect-, that section in its context, and you have to be aware of presentism, like our present understanding of stuff, overlaid...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 55:25

You can't, can't project that backwards and judge them by what's happening today or how we see things, but to recognize what's happening in that moment, which is...

Tony Chvala-Smith 55:36

Yeah.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 55:36

...even within 150, which is accepting baptism, it's reaffirming the, the basic...

Tony Chvala-Smith 55:45

Right.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 55:45

...of marriage as being...

Tony Chvala-Smith 55:46

Right.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 55:47

...monogamous.

Tony Chvala-Smith 55:47

The deep, the deep structure is retained as the basic principle. And yet, that section says, but we're going to welcome these polygamous tribes, we'll then baptize them, and then subsequently, we will, we will teach and we'll do what we can. And that's exactly what we've done other places too like, like Africa. I think, given the trajectory of the, of our Church from 1844 to 1972, that was an absolutely remarkable moment that needs to be understood in its own time and place and appreciated as a grace moment in the Church's life, I think, so. Let me mention Africa then. So, there's, you know, polygamy is practiced in different parts of Africa. Recently, it was made legal in Kenya, Bunda Chibwe tells us. So, but we asked Bunda recently, so if polygamous, a polygamous family comes to the Church in an African context, what do our field leaders tell them or teach them. And, and Bunda says, well, they take pre-baptismal classes, so they learn the Church's identity, message, mission, beliefs, and the polygamous couple here will typically be a husband with two or three wives, they will be baptized and confirmed into Community of Christ. And then field leaders in Africa have them promise to teach their children that monogamy is the foundation of Christian marriage, right. So, in other words, it's not, it's accept, and then teach that this is not the way it's going to be going forward, right. And so, then the, the family has to promise that if one spouse dies, the husband, or the wife...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 57:18
One of the wives.

Tony Chvala-Smith 57:19

...if one of the wives dies, the husband won't get a replacement, right, right. So, and that, and they also understand that they won't be called into priesthood. That that's, that, that while they're not second class citizens in the Church, ordination of the Church is compatible with monogamy and not polygamy. So that's what they do, that's what they do in Africa to this day, based on the wisdom of that section of *The Doctrine and Covenants* and subsequent practice in Africa. So, the basis in Africa for, for saying you, you, if you're in a polygamous relationship you can't be ordained is that, you know, remember the four voices in the African Church relies heavily on scripture, especially the New Testament, and so that line from I Timothy, the bishop, the bishop must be the husband of only one wife, depending on...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 58:11
Or married once.

Tony Chvala-Smith 58:11

...or married only once, depending on how you translate it, that's the text by which they, they argue, you know, priest, priest, priesthood is not compatible with, with polygamy. But, hey, everything else, you're a full member of the Church here, so, so come on in. That's how they do it there, so. But no, notice how they retain the deep structure of monogamy that's part of Community of Christ's historical journey, and then kind of tweak it for the African context a little bit, so.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 58:39
Yeah.

Tony Chvala-Smith 58:4

So that's kind of a quick run through of a lot of, a lot of history of marriage. And, obviously, it's not, obviously comprehensive, but it's a quick run through. But now let's, we're going to shift gears now to, you know, your original question about, so let's talk about a, what would go into a, a, what are some signposts for Community of Christ theology of marriage right now. So, I mean, the starting point, we identify marriage as a sacrament, and in our theology, a sacrament is a sacred rite that in some way goes back to Jesus, and it has three necessary elements. It has a sign, some kind of symbol, it has word, usually proclamation or prayer or scripture, and it has a covenant. Those three things make a particular rite a sacrament.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 59:34

And when it comes to marriage and some of the others that they also are public,

Tony Chvala-Smith 59:39

Right, yes. Not little private ceremonies. So, we see sacraments as a means of grace too, means of grace, both for the persons, the individuals, and the community. So that's why it remains generally pretty important in Community of Christ that marriage celebrations are public. Well, that doesn't mean you have to have 500 people, but, right. But so, this, this basic sacramental understanding connects us to Christian traditions that look back to text like Ephesians, in which there's like a mystical bond between Christ and the church, and that somehow, in marriage, the partners, the partners are drawn into that mystical bond and through their life together will try to reflect that mystical bond, right. We still use *D and C* 111, "You both mutually agree...?" Which then is, again, the, the monogamy deep structure texts in our, in our tradition. I think it's, it's really important to say, given the difficulties, I mean, let's just face it, marriage is hard, right? It's hard work. And in American...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:00:51

I'll say. Sorry, I just needed to *[inaudible]* you.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:00:56

Thank you. Just ask Charmaine how hard marriage is. She's married to me, for goodness sakes, right. So, in American culture, which is highly individualistic, highly focused on feelings, and emotions, the, the overstress on the romantic idea of love sometimes has made the actual give and take and tough work of marriage kind of difficult, extra difficult.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:01:18

Because it feels like it's wrong somehow or there's something wrong if it's this hard.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:01:22

Yeah. We, we, we constantly refer to love as an act of the will not as a feeling,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:01:29

Just a feeling.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:01:29

...feelings, not just a feeling, it doesn't, you know, so. So that, that's important in our understanding of marriage, that that love is something we choose to do and be, not, not just reducible to a particular feeling. I've started saying that monogamy and monotheism are equally hard, right. It's...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:01:52

That can be read in so many different ways. But within our culture, there are so many things that vie for being our god, whether that's, that's money, or status, or security or comfort, or how others see us. You know, there's so many things. And so, you know, what does it mean to, to worship one God?

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:02:14

Yeah.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:02:15

In the midst of all of that.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:02:16

Right. I think that's, I think we automatically think of ourselves as monotheistic. But, for goodness sakes, we, we all have got lots of split loyalties all the time. And so, for that reason, you know, monogamy, monogamy is analogously as hard as monotheism. In, Community of Christ theology of marriage, I want to say that, marriage is a place to, to practice Christ-like community. It's a stable, it, it needs to become a stable place to, to practice discipleship, spiritual growth, growth, forgiveness, equality, mutuality, gender justice. And so, in Community of Christ theology of marriage, we would say marriage is not a hierarchy. One, one, one, I would be very, very nervous if, in a Community of Christ marriage service, I heard the officiant talk about the husband being the head, using those passages from Colossians or Ephesians, out of context.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:03:10

Which are, which are drawing on the culture, not, not the testimony of Christ, not the living out Christ's equality.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:03:21

And you know, we might also say that, that marriage, marriage can be a reflection of the very nature of God, which is the triune community of the One God, who is one eternal essence, in, in, in three, co-equal, co-eternal modes of being, right. Father, Son, Spirit, source, word, breath, I mean, there are all kinds of analogies we could use, but, in other words, that, that as, as God's very nature is communal, so marriage is one, one place in which the communal nature of God gets to be reflected, always imperfectly, but where we get to, you know, work at reflecting what we know God to be like. So, those are some, anything I should add. I mean, those are some pieces too, that could be part of a Community of Christ theology of marriage, so, so. So, that brings us up to this moment, Robin.

Robin Linkhart 1:04:17

Well, it's just fascinating and I have all kinds of things in my mind, sparks going off and, and making connections. And I do wonder, as Community of Christ was coming into this realization of Joseph Smith Jr.'s life and choices, you know, it's about that same time that we're embracing the greater Christian

tradition and really going deeper in the inheritance of that, that tradition, which kind of helps sustain us talking about who we are and not who we aren't. So, it's been really, really rich. I think one question I have for you for today is, what do you see as the most common challenges when it comes to marriage in our context today? Anything that kind of jumps out to you? I think you've touched on it a little bit when you were talking about theology of marriage, and the struggle of monotheism and monogamy, how they parallel one another.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:05:26

We think of the individualistic tendencies of our culture, where wanting what we want, I would say, a culture of want, not as that we don't have enough, but that we want everything. And I think that that makes the hard work of a committed relationship even harder, because of that whole idea that it shouldn't be this hard, I'm not getting my wants addressed right now, and so, the seeking for those things that will give me that, that sense of ease or, or pleasure or whatever. I think that's actually, that that's normative. That's, that's become normative, that, you know, if I'm hungry, I can you just go out and eat at a restaurant and I don't have to worry about growing things, and cooking things, and doing the dishes afterwards, but it's just all there and accessible, and I can follow my wants everywhere I want to. And I think that, that follows over into relationships, and the hard work that relationships can take, and then the not, not realizing it's worth it, you know, because our immediate desires or needs aren't being met. We can't necessarily see the long-term value of, of long-term commitments. So, I think that kind of, that following our momentary wants, is one of the things that, as on a social level, makes that difficult.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:06:56

I agree with that. I think connected to that would be the increasing economic disparity, for example, in American culture, makes permanent faithful relationships harder, right. So, I'm bridging over into economics for a moment here, but, but you know what, let me say, this can be, this can be documented, proven, and shown on graphs, that for 30, 40 years, the wealth in American culture has been being sucked up, and so, into, into the hands of fewer and fewer people. And so, since we're embodied beings, and paying bills, and mowing the lawn, and taking care of kids, and all these kinds of things that are embodied activities, that require sustenance, they become harder and harder. So, it's, it's much harder to sustain, I think, long term, loving, faithful relationships in a culture where there's immense and increasingly growing economic disparity. There's a connection between the two, so. We, also we treat, we treat vows and bonds differently than, than our ancestors might have. I would never be one to say that one must maintain a vow and a bond in, in the presence of an abusive relationship, so I wouldn't want to be misunderstood there. But, but generally, in our culture, we, we see those things as much more fragile and breakable than our ancestors did, I think, too, so.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:08:29

Which has its good, and its bad sides.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:08:31

Yeah.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:08:31

You know, there's hopefully less shame...

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:08:34

Yeah, absolutely.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:08:35

...when, when there's need to dissolve a relationship.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:08:41

And also, maybe there's a, oh, I'm sorry.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:08:42

...more opportunity, sorry, more opportunity to do that in ways that are equitable. So, yeah, there's, there's different sides to that.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:08:51

Also, a sense of the greater good. There's what, what, what is the greater good of, of marriage, right? And so, if you have a vision of life together as a place in which struggle with this, struggle with spirituality, with relationships, with sexuality, we're going to keep struggling with that, because there's a, there is an intrinsic good to that that, that yields something bigger, that maybe we can't see, that helps. But if you don't have that sense that there is a larger good to which your, your relationship struggles somehow contribute, it's, it's, it's, it makes it difficult, right, I think, so conveying that sense of this, this larger end towards which. Now, our ancestors might have said, well, child rearing, of course, you know. Maybe, but not everybody chooses to have children, so...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:09:41

Or can.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:09:41

...or can, right. So, living, living life together for the sake of the larger community can be one of those mechanisms. But yeah, I think you have to have a larger vision too for what your life together is about. So that's another part of it.

Robin Linkhart 1:09:57

Well, and in a place like the U.S., the lifespan is much longer, longevity. So, that struggle goes on a bit longer than maybe it had to in the past.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:10:09

Yes, yes, yes. And Charmaine is, Charmaine is in a bad situation. She's stuck with a guy whose family has a lot of, like, people living to their late 80s and early 90s.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:10:22

It's all right.

Robin Linkhart 1:10:24

Any other challenges you wanted to share today?

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:10:29

I can't think of any, I can't think of anything else to share at the moment.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:10:32

We'll think of things as soon as we finish recording.

Robin Linkhart 1:10:37

Well, for those who are really captured by this topic and want to take this study deeper, what resources would you recommend for our listeners?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:10:46

Well, for those who are interested in kind of the historical development of marriage, going from Greco Roman culture, and then being more, becoming more Christianized along the way, I'd encourage you to take a look at the *Cambridge History of Christianity*. And it comes in...

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:11:05

Oh, gosh, it's like, I don't know, six volumes. It's a lot of volumes.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:11:07

...six volumes. You probably would find it in a library that has a good theological section. But it has, in several of the volumes, a chapter on marriage, family, sex, in each of these time periods. So, it's broken up by, you know, every few 100 years, what's the development of Christianity in this regard. So, it's a fun place, and from what, the ones that we've read so far, are very accessible and interesting. They're well written, and it just gives you this kind of bigger view of, so what is the relationship between the culture and Christian marriage. And it keeps reminding us that even today, it's the state that determines what marriage is...

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:11:52

Right.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:11:52

...and who can perform it. You know, in the U.S. it happens to be that the, the government allows ministers to solemnize these legal contracts. But marriage itself is not Christian. It's not, it's, it's not, didn't grow out of Christianity, didn't grow out of Christianity, and it's, and, and it's related to Christianity, again, in different ways in different countries. So, I think just getting a sense of how that's developed over time is really beneficial. So that's a really good resource, *Cambridge History of Christianity*. And how many of our volumes go to, but the first two or three volumes, at least, to get a sense of that early development and connection of these two bodies, these two identities.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:12:42

And footnote alert, we, we found, we found especially Volume II that, quite helpful for helping us pull a lot of thoughts together for today and we worked with a number of resources. But that was a particularly helpful one.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:12:54

Which is from like the time of Constantine...

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:12:56

To 600.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:12:57

So, that's like 300 to 600, so.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:13:00

So, the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* has an entry on matrimony, and it's, it's good. It's probably not the best one I've ever read, but it, the bibliography at the end can point you in directions about other texts on the history of marriage in the Christian tradition. In terms of Community of Christ, we have a few resources, and I'll mention the, the, the commentary that's called *Exploring Community of Christ Basic Beliefs: A Commentary*. There's a recent chapter that's been added to that on the sacraments, and in that chapter, "The Sacraments", not only does it lay out fairly systematically our sacramental theology, but also has a section on marriage. So that'd be, you know, a Community of Christ resource that you can actually find on the website. And I think you had one you thought of too that, or that you've used before. Is that right, Robin?

Robin Linkhart 1:13:48

Yes, this one was published around 2012, but I think it was developed during our journey to National Conferences across the Church. It's very accessible, a brief overview of some of what you talked about today, and then has a few lessons where you can kind of dive into some of that content. The title of that is "What Does the Bible Really Say About Marriage?" And we'll put a link in the show notes to that .pdf resource.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:14:20

Also, there is a book on the sacraments, I'm not sure if it's, it's available in other than electronic form, but it was originally by Peter Judd and then Jane Gardner, and I think maybe then Andrew Bolton does a subsequent add-ins to that too, but I think you can find that on the Church website. I think it's simply called "The Sacraments of the Church", but it's there on the Church website. If you, if you go to "Beliefs" and click on the "Basic Beliefs" and it's down towards the bottom there, I think. So, that's another place to go.

Robin Linkhart 1:14:48

Okay, we'll be sure to get a link for that too in our show notes. Well, thank you so much, Tony and Charmaine, for being with us today. It has been a joy to take this trip down history lane and theology and the unfolding of all of the different lenses. I especially appreciated how, in the New Testament, we are putting on the Jesus lens and reinterpreting, and reframing, and trying to understand as the

continuing presence of the Holy Spirit journeys with us on that lifelong journey of faith, seeking understanding. So, thank you so much. And, as always, a very special thanks to all of you, our listeners. If you are new to our podcast and want to learn more about theology, check out the whole lineup for this series called “Percolating on Faith”, including the “God Shot” mini-series. To learn more about how Community of Christ reads and understand scripture, check out “He Brew”, “New Brew”, and “She Brew”. You can find all of that on our website. Just check out the link in our show notes. 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.