

**ANOTHER
NAME
FOR EVERY
THING**

with

RICHARD ROHR

Season 3, Episode 4
Jesus and The Empire

Brie Stoner: Welcome to Another Name for Every Thing. So, full disclosure, when it came to this episode, I was super tempted to start this by singing the theme song of the Empire Strikes Back because today's topic is "Jesus and The Empire."

Paul Swanson: Now is your chance, Brie.

Brie Stoner: [singing] Okay, I'm not going to keep going that's good enough you guys can do the rest.

Paul Swanson: Sorry, Lucas Films, if we owe you \$100 million now. I'm just kidding.

Brie Stoner: Oh, crap. I didn't think about that.

Paul Swanson: No, no, I'm sure it's fine, because it's your interpretation of it.

Brie Stoner: Right. Yeah.

Paul Swanson: Yeah, for me, this is when we really see our own skin in the game. How does faith become a living, prophetic thing and not just something that we talk about on Sunday mornings for an hour and a half, and get weak coffee and delicious cookies afterwards?

Brie Stoner: Yeah. The nice Christianity that we grew up with, with like the Jesus, the flowing hair and the perfectly white clothes, where did that come from? He's wearing white clothes and a blue sash. That must be somewhere in art history. There was value assigned to that. Anyway, the Jesus who's sitting there with the blue sash, and the little lamb, and the children, and he's looking so sweet, obviously, is a construct of certain cultures and traditions. I did not grow up with the badass Jesus. The Jesus who was not afraid to stand up to Empire, the Jesus who was actually prophetic and a radical activist, not in a zealotry-- Let me say that again. --not in a zealous way, but in a very powerful, creative and non-violent way.

Paul Swanson: Do you remember when you discovered this kind of wild, radical, deeply rooted Jewish rabbi called Jesus, that one that kind of lives and breathes and not the one of like the pasty?

Brie Stoner: The pasty Jesus?

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Brie Stoner: The pasty, Swedish Jesus?

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. No, I think somewhere in my own trajectory, while I was still in a mega evangelical church, we started a conversation about the history and the context of Jesus. It was like the contextual historical studies movement that was sweeping all the mega churches, it seemed. But that conversation of beginning to understand what was happening historically, in Jesus's time, like what was really taking place, to help us relate to his life and the Scriptures in a new way. I remember it blew my mind. I was probably, I don't know, nineteen-years-old at the time, and it felt like I was just encountering Jesus for the first time.

Paul Swanson: Yeah, it's funny you say that you were nineteen, because that's when it for me when I was at Bible college, and I had a professor who I always give her credit for ruining my life because

she helped me see a Jesus who was much more different than what I felt like I had been raised with. And what does it mean to find a Jesus who speaks truth to power? Who is not uplifting in an empire, but is creating alternative community outside of empire, living simply, healing as a political act. Yeah, I felt like the scales fell from my eyes. And I was like, this is a Jesus I've been looking for and longing for, I just didn't know existed.

Brie Stoner: And it has huge implications for us, right?

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Brie Stoner: Because if the Universal Christ is alive in the example of Jesus, then we have to kind of look to that personal gateway to understand what are the universal implications of that? How are we supposed to be living? And how do we relate or choose not to relate to the empire of our own times and in our own context.

Paul Swanson: That's so well said. I'm grateful that our conversation on the Universal Christ took us to a place where we can look at Jesus's own relationship or non-relationship with empire and the implications for today. And, Brie, I have to acknowledge that there's a weight and a heft to this conversation as we think about how we live inside of an empire, where we know that there are injustices at play, and it's not something that just happened during Jesus's time, but that we're living inside of empire now. The weight of that you can kind of feel it in the air in our conversation.

Brie Stoner: Yeah, this stuff isn't easy.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Brie Stoner: I mean, but nor should it be. At the end of the day, I think we're all longing to really live this out and understand how we can live this out. And I really appreciate that Richard highlights the fact that there is a cost. There is a cost to actually living this out. There's a cost to wanting to live into this type of prophetic imagination that Jesus is showing us is somehow the christic way.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. And there's also a joy there, too, in that community that decides, "Actually, I feel called and compelled to live a different way, from a different set of values." There's a joy in going on that journey together even if it is outside of the norms.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. And you know, Paul, something that I kind of wish we had talked about in the episode is the role of joy in Jesus's life. He's not exactly described as somebody who was heavy or morose. He's being described as somebody who was fully alive and had dinner parties with the wrong people. I want to just share that because this is hard. And as we talk about it, I think it's important to remember that joy has a role to play in this too. That being together with the people you love, and laughing, and sharing meals together is going to be a part of how we live into this christic path together.

Paul Swanson: Yeah, I love that. I mean, there's something about like, whatever your own internal monologue is, if one of you get down, Jesus would have invited you to a meal.

Brie Stoner: "What Would Jesus Do?" bracelet, but then what would Jesus do, he would have wine.

Paul Swanson: And appetizers.

Brie Stoner: Appetizers. That's awesome. Jesus takes down the empire, one appetizer at a time. Okay, just cut that out. No, but in all seriousness, we hope that you enjoy this episode and that it helps you understand maybe some ways that we can look to Jesus to see the ways that we can live into our own prophetic role with the empire now.

Paul Swanson: So, here's our conversation with Richard on Jesus and empire.

Brie Stoner: Okay, Richard, we've talked about this value of public virtue, and if Jesus is our central reference point as an exemplar and embodiment of the Universal Christ, then there's a lot that we can glean about the nature of the Universal Christ or the character of Christ, if I can say it that way, through looking at Jesus's example.

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Brie Stoner: Especially as we consider the ways that Jesus creatively resisted the oppressive empire, and the religious exclusion of his time. Could you tease out some of the

Brie Stoner: character traits of the Universal Christ through Jesus's lived example. And by that, I mean, besides being a really good walker on water and good at making more wine.

Richard Rohr: Okay, this is important, because some people naturally think I'm over drawing the distinction between Jesus and Christ. Remember, unity is first you distinguish and then you reunite. We just lumped them together too quickly before we distinguished. But my final goal isn't to keep them separate. So, you're absolutely right saying we believe Jesus already revealed the Universal Christ. In other words, Jesus's image of God. I preached on the Prodigal Son this Sunday, and I said, "This is as close as we're going to get to Jesus's image of what God is like." So, we would still believe Jesus leading us to universal truth, but without the Christ, you don't know that the goal even is a universal truth, a universal metaphysics. These are just nice stories that Jesus taught here and there.

So, I think the main way it's been rediscovered, is our re-appreciation of history. That we're all historically limited, and we forced this historical limitation on Jesus himself. Example No. 1: we pretended he was not a Jew. We acted as if he was a European, a white man, a Catholic, a Christian, I mean, it's laughable, but it's very true, even art revealed it. He was painted like a Dutch man of the 14th century or 17th century. So, lack of appreciation for Jesus could only take the particular moment of time, understand, and factor that in. Like when he reveals—we're all bothered by this text, probably the most problematic one—reveals the patriarchal assumption of a Jewish male toward a woman, and doesn't treat her very nicely actually. It's almost as if to reveal this is where culture was at that time.

Brie Stoner: That was the context.

Richard Rohr: That was the context. But what we have there in that story is he apologizes, he recognizes his mistake, so it's a full teaching. It has the step backward and the step forward, which I think is true of the whole Bible, that the problem is included in the

solution. The problematic texts are in there. Wow, just to know that is a wonderful piece of hermeneutic, that not every line is a three-step- forward line. In fact, a lot of them are two-step-, three-step-backward lines.

So, I say in the book, *The Universal Christ*, Jesus represents the personal, the relational, the devotional, the individual; Christ represents the universal, the metaphysical, the tendency toward the big story, and that's why you have the Christ in John's Gospel, making these strong, universal statements.

And you leave them in the mouth of Jesus, and let's be honest, we're a little bit embarrassed. Jesus seems to be so self-centered, "I am this. . . I am that. . . No one comes to the Father, but through me." It's like, "Oh, do we have to defend this? Was Jesus really egocentric?" I know you don't want to admit that, but you can't help but wonder that. Once you know it's Christ making metaphysical

Richard Rohr: statements not personal statements, then we're not talking about joining the Jesus club. We're talking about seeing the universal patterns of reality, that death and resurrection are always true in Hinduism, or in India ten centuries before Christ. It's still true. It's always true. Among the Aborigines, among the natives, among the Buddhists, you can't say that's not true.

So, we could play this out. Really, you could write a whole book just on this subject, the interplay between Jesus and Christ, how they regulate and balance, in my opinion, one another, if we have them both. Let's go back, let me say it one more time, you first must distinguish before you can unite. Uniting isn't uniting two things that are the same. They're uniting two things that are different. Yeah. Okay.

Brie Stoner: I wonder if it's possible to make a connection between what you just described as the personal and the metaphysical—Jesus and the Christ—as meeting in the center point of the social?

Richard Rohr: In other words, Jesus personally seems to manifest the universal metaphysical in his actions at the social level, his social critique.

Richard Rohr: Oh, that's right on. Good interpretation of what we're trying to say. And because we didn't have that tension held, most of us missed the social implications of Jesus's teaching.

Brie Stoner: That's it. Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Very well put. Exactly. We made him entirely a teacher of individual salvation and didn't recognize how often he was socially critiquing his own Judaism, his own culture, his own gender. I mean, when you think, for example, of the fights about gender today, and Jesus is already saying things in the final image, there will be no marriage or giving in marriage, but all will be children of God. That's a great big, huge, genderless world. If we just took that and put it in creative tension, he never once talks about homosexuality. And you'd think it was a defining image of him by contemporary Christianity. But that's, in my opinion, we didn't hold the bandwidth that universal and personal creates for us; and, therefore, didn't come to the social

universal meaning, just the personal, and it became saccharin and silly. I don't know what else to say.

Brie Stoner: Yeah, it was the sweet, nice Jesus that—

Richard Rohr: Sweet Jesus.

Brie Stoner: --you know, just held children and a lamb. Why were there always lambs? There were always lambs in the pictures. It was kids and then a few lambs.

Richard Rohr: They're cute, and they're clean. Once they get dirty you probably don't see them. [laughter]

Brie Stoner: Jesus doesn't touch those ones. But that's the thing that is so missing, at least was missing in my childhood, understanding of Jesus is this social radical.

Richard Rohr: Radical social now you're ready for it.

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: And holding Jesus as that radical social. I love the way you talked about the personal and metaphysical coming together in the social because, Richard, in your latest monograph, *What Do We Do With Evil?*, you talk about Jesus and the radical lifestyle that he lived. And in today's terms, we probably say his radical lifestyle of activism. There's four things that you named, I want to just raise to our listeners, and ask if you can unpack these terms because they seem to have ready application for our world today.

Richard Rohr: Oh, if I remember. What are they?

Paul Swanson: I'm going to read them right now. It seems, to Brie's point, it holds that social space. So, you talk about Jesus's refusal to participate in systems of oppression, how he lived a simple life, a life of non-violent resistance, and forgiveness and healing of individuals. Can you take a minute to unpack each of those as how they were kind of living in that place of the universal and the personal and how the Christ was manifesting through each of those modalities of activism? Again, that may be the wrong term because in our language of today, images of protest come up, but it's more encompassing than that.

Brie Stoner: It's like the prophetic mysticism that he was living into.

Richard Rohr: That's the word to use, yeah.

Paul Swanson: There you go. There you go.

Richard Rohr: Let me start with the last one, because I'm going to reformulate it a little bit. Maybe only a mystic can see this, but he's not just forgiving individuals, he's forgiving Judaism for being legalistic and ritualistic. He's forgiving the Romans for being oppressive. He's forgiving the world. And that's where union with God leads you not just to individual forgiveness, but to universal forgiveness of reality for being reality.

Paul Swanson: Absurd.

Richard Rohr: Yeah, absurd.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: We all have to get to, “Damn it. I wish it wasn’t this way.” I mean, aren’t most of us feeling that these days? It’s just, “How bad can it get?” And if you can’t do that, or you think you’ve got to make it un-absurd, you’re going to go crazy. My prediction would be on the last day, if there is such a thing as the last day of the world, I think it will still be absurd. And that’s very different than the Western philosophy of progress: everything’s getting better and better. No, reality is marked with a cross, which means it’s marked with a radical absurdity. And to forgive it for being absurd, to forgive it for being tragic, keeps the heart space open. It’s beautiful once you understand it, you know? Without it, I’ve just seen so many activists become so disheartened. They throw out all religion. They don’t need to do that. I’m not saying they have to be like me or follow my religion, but we do have a recipe for how to keep your heart and your compassion flow open toward everything.

Brie Stoner: So that you can then creatively act and do your activism from a different place.

Richard Rohr: Engage with it. Very good. Very good. Thank you. Now, what was the first one?

Paul Swanson: So, the first one was “refusal to participate in the systems of oppression.”

Richard Rohr: Yeah. Because we never had non-cooperation, non-participation modeled for us really, until the 1960s, just like the word non-violence didn’t exist, non-cooperation didn’t exist. Didn’t I talk about this though earlier on the town down the road from Nazareth? That wasn’t here.

Brie Stoner: Mm-mm (negative).

Richard Rohr: Okay.

Paul Swanson: No, no, wasn’t that John Dominic Crossan’s point about how Jesus did not participate in that economy?

Richard Rohr: No, what’s the road down the road? Nine miles down the road from Nazareth?

Paul Swanson: It was like the imperial center.

Richard Rohr: Yeah, Sepphoris. Did I talk about Sepphoris in this? Oh, no? Okay, well then let’s use that as the stirring example. Nine miles down the road from Nazareth, which is really tiny—it’s still rather tiny if you go there today—is what was the growing town where all the building was happening in Jesus’s lifetime, called Sepphoris. It was a regional Roman capital. If what the Bible says is true, Jesus’s father, Joseph, was a workman. We translate that as carpenter, which is fine, but it was more construction worker, really, with any tools or with any materials. The fact that Sepphoris was never once mentioned when it’s very likely that’s the nine-mile walk they would have taken to do much of their

Richard Rohr: work, there’s no condemnation of it. There’s no praise of it. There’s no mention of it. --you could use that not as a definitive example, but a likely example, that Jesus just ignores the

Roman oppressors, because he can show friendship with them, as he does with the centurion when he heals his servant, he doesn't bring up the subject that he is a Roman, "Why are you doing this to our people?" He should have said that to the Roman centurion. In fact, when he gets home, his servant is healed. And then has, at his death, another centurion who is the first one who asserts his divinity, "Truly, this was the Son of God," Mark's gospel, I think.

So, it's not direct confrontation. It's sort of non-violence 101. We used to use damning with faint praise, "Okay, those Romans, that's what they're about, but I'm not going to get you into an anti-Roman frenzy, because I know where that leads. I know that the scribes and Pharisees are hypocrites." Now, he does say some pretty strong things about them. [laughter] But he certainly, in general, is telling you to clean your own cup before you attack others.

So, it is non-violence training 101. Don't make the problem out there, or you never get beyond it. You keep thinking other people are the problem. You have to change, and he won't allow that, rather consistently. So, it's non-cooperation with stupid systems, ignoring them, and building up a better system by his teaching to his disciples.

Now, his name for the better system was the kingdom of God or the reign of God. That's a unique approach. The best criticism of the bad is the practice of the better, "Hey guys, we're just going to do it better. And I'm going to give you the rituals, and the keys, and the teaching to how to do it better, but let's not be anti-people. Let's be for something."

Brie Stoner: It's like a creative resistance then, right, because it's not-- There's something about oppositional resistance that's just in reaction to, but the prophetic quality of his resistance to the empire was a creative, "Look, there's so much more than this. There's another abundant paradigm. You can stop this fishing for the empire, and come with me, and let me introduce you to this other paradigm, this kingdom way of being." I don't know, that's helpful for me to think about as we consider what we can glean from his approach to dealing or not dealing with the empire.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. That's true. Who's the wonderful poet teacher in Kentucky?

Paul Swanson: Wendell Berry?

Richard Rohr: Wendell Berry. Yeah. I mean, just his whole life, he says, "I'm just going to take one piece of land and do it right." It's almost Jesus saying that, although Jesus talked about the big piece of land should do it right, but to be patient with one piece of land, which is respected, and honored, and protected, and made fruitful. Boy, that's beautiful. Small is beautiful.

Paul Swanson: Yeah, what a prophetic voice. And with that, there's the element of a simple life that he also named of Jesus, one of the ways that he also, in this modality of activism, can you further unpack that? I know this ties to part of the value of yesterday to of simplicity. How does Jesus exemplify that?

Richard Rohr: I think if you would try to communicate what Jesus's social justice teaching is, you won't find a highly rarefied explanation of justice theories, and so forth. You will find the same in Francis, the way to most do justice, is to live simply, which is building on the other one, to not cooperate with consumerism, with militarism, with all the games that have us trapped. So, the fact that it mentions things like a common purse, for example, what do Christians

do? They call that Communism. It's rather clear. He just does it differently and does it very simply. And you could say, largely, except for groups like the Mennonites and the Amish, that hasn't been taken seriously, simplicity of life, certainly not by Catholics.

Brie Stoner: At the common level of community.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. When you live simply, you're un beholden to the system less, the simpler you can live. Like, we all maybe know a couple people who try to live below the taxable level. And there's some right here in Albuquerque, you say, "I don't know how to do that. But I sure admire you for doing it." Because we see the higher you go up, the more beholden you are to the rewards of the system. Look at our whole Congress. Its capacity for truth and justice seems so severely compromised. It always sells out to money. So, we're not saying you need to take a vow of poverty, but you better give money a severe critique, or it will become demonic in the sense that anything un-critiqued in my judgment soon becomes demonic. And that's capitalism for us now, un-critiqued.

I think I've told you the story. First week, in the novitiate, August of 1961, we're sitting in the classroom and our novice master says, trying to sort of rile us up, "Now, I hope you all know you've just joined a Communist organization." This is '61, when you didn't talk that way, and he said, "You're all wondering what I mean." You never questioned a novice master, but he said, "We really are. We share all things in common. And if you take vows a year from today, you're giving up your right to own anything." And then he taught us, I have it on my early books, everything that we possessed in our room, we had to write in Latin, *ad usum simplecem*, Friar Alexander, that was my name then "for the simple use of" just to remind us, you don't own that. And when you leave, it's somebody else's.

I've still got one or two books with that written in it: "for the simple use of." How else do you teach things unless it's almost that severe or that concrete? This book is not mine. And it was especially true of books because that's a tendency of academic people. We were setting up for eight years of academics. I think after a while I stopped writing it, though.

Brie Stoner: Which is interesting.

Richard Rohr: I'm sorry to say.

Brie Stoner: As we're talking about the different ways in which Jesus creatively, prophetically resisted the empire, one of the things I've been fascinated by in our Christian tradition is whatever happened to healing? You know, this was such a central part of his ministry and his work.

Richard Rohr: Central.

Brie Stoner: Central. And it was like an act of—

Richard Rohr: Page after page after page.

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Brie Stoner: And such an active part of what he was doing in resistance to a system, both religious and in the empire, that had discarded individuals as not being worthy, and bodies as not being worthy. And so, I wonder what does it mean to be a rejoinder, a healer, a bringer together of what has been divided by the empire or by the systems of our time that seek to divide?

Richard Rohr: I've been saying the last year, try putting—at least it works for me—try putting the word “healing” in contradistinction to “punishing.” We were so raised inside of the framing of rewarding and punishing, rewarding and punishing, all based on a transactional notion of religion and upon a notion of retributive justice. Until those two notions are dislodged, which is the experience of grace, we talk about the gospel really being transformational, not transactional. But, certainly, when I was growing up, we saw the meaning of the miracles at the literal level, the least helpful level, as simply miracles to prove that Jesus was God. He could turn water into wine. He could walk on the water.

As you said earlier, that's transactional religion. It denies the symbolic. It denies the relational. It denies the archetypal to get that literal. And there's really no message beyond “Our God is the true God because he can do this.” So, every Sunday we all cheered “Our Jesus worked miracles.” It left us with a religion whose only frame was reward/punishment for not believing in those miracles maybe, or something like that.

So, distinguish it from punishing—healing—and you've got a great lens. Because once it's not about believing so we can punish those who don't believe, but here we have Jesus work working with people who are wounded. And maybe part of it is we don't usually have the bias anymore that sickness is a punishment from God. But almost all cultures historically did: sickness as a punishment from God.

Richard Rohr: You'll still find that in much of Africa and much of Asia, and if we tell the truth, in much of America, many people still believe this.

So, we have Jesus not punishing anybody but letting them out of the trap of that belief system. Naturally, they fell in love with him, and they saw him as a miracle worker, but the medical cure is never the meaning of the text, never the medical cure. It's the rearranging of relationships and the rearranging of self-image that takes place when I can't play the victim anymore. That's real clear in the man who never gets into the pool in time. He's been playing the victim for thirty-eight years. He really goes rather slowly. He doesn't want to get healed. He's probably a “nine,” Paul. [Note: Fr. Richard is referring to an Enneagram type. There are nine Enneagram types.] [laughter]

Brie Stoner: Just passively.

Paul Swanson: My people. We take our time.

Richard Rohr: You just give people that clue and ask them, “How were the relationships rearranged?” They'll go back into the village. People are afraid of them, because they liked him out in the cemetery. The roles were clear. He's the damned stupid person. We're the wonderful, healed person. Now the healed person comes back as healed, and we like him damned. Oh, it's wonderful, helpful, fruitful communication. So, I'm going to keep saying that, that punishment is what emerges, and reward, reward and punishment emerge when you don't have the primacy of healing. And, sure enough, we did not in any of our churches have the

primacy of healing.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. And to name that Jesus would often heal on the Sabbath, right?

Richard Rohr: Yes, even doing it wrong, yeah, and touching lepers, breaking the rules, touching dead bodies. Healing is his job. And then using the healing to communicate a lesson, and healing unbelievers just as much as believers and healing people who didn't ask for it as much as those who asked for it. It's just all logic is thrown into the heavens, you see.

Brie Stoner: That's such a helpful frame though that what he's doing is flipping the order, and the power, and the structure of relationships. That's so helpful.

Richard Rohr: It really is and leads to, dare I say it, a liberation theology. Jesus is a liberator, not a miracle worker. It does no good to just define him as a miracle worker. It's fine if you believe he is, but it's not going to help you with anything. And, in fact, it created more problems, because "Why doesn't Jesus now in 2019, heal my epileptic son?" And that's been true for half of the Christians who've ever lived. "Why did you work miracles then and not now?" It's because we don't understand the nature of miracle. I think.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. The phrase that jumped into my mind was how Jesus just doesn't pick a team, right? He's for everybody. And thinking about that—

Richard Rohr: He picked some workers.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: You used the right word. He doesn't pick a team that can be against the other team.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: That's a good word.

Paul Swanson: And then to look at our Christian history today and to see how the Church has colluded with empire over time, Richard, can you talk to us, help us understand how the original spirit of the Jesus movement kind of lost its momentum as it got institutionalized? How do we lose that ability to speak truth to power and to empire in such a way?

Richard Rohr: Do you want me to give you the historical dates? Did I say it here, or was that in Santa Fe last weekend? How in Israel, he offered an experience; it moved to Greece, and it became a philosophy. Did I say that?

Paul Swanson: Oh, no.

Brie Stoner: No, that sounds good. That sounds good keep going.

Richard Rohr: And then it moved to Rome and it became organized religion, Rome and Constantinople. Then it moved to Europe, and it became a culture. You're going to love the last step: It moved to America and became a business.

Paul Swanson: Ooh.

Brie Stoner: Ooh.

Richard Rohr: This isn't much of an exaggeration if it's an exaggeration of it all. The original experience being lost is even necessary, or possible for most people; so, experience, philosophy, organized religion, culture, business. I know. I'm glad I put that here.

Paul Swanson: Yeah, you're going to let that land for a minute.

Richard Rohr: What did you ask me though?

Brie Stoner: Hang on. We just need to sit with the grief of that.

Paul Swanson: I mean, you took a brush and just kind of painted a answer to that question. That's what I was asking, "How do we get from that original Jesus movement to losing that that kind of energetic zeal lifestyle as it got institutionalized? And I feel like in a very short order, you kind of help paint that picture about how as it got institutionalized, it was just kind of losing some of the incarnational mysticism of it. It was being codified in ways of thinking or ways of doing business.

Richard Rohr: And in each of those permutations and iterations, it became above criticism. It was the religion, the philosophy, the culture. Like you just came back from Spain, you see it there everywhere, unquestionable Roman Catholicism. The wonderful thing is how grace flows. That even inside of each of those iterations, there emerged humble, loving people, every one of them. The Gospel never stopped converting pure hearts. But if you didn't bring a pure heart to it, not much good could happen.

Brie Stoner: I'm reflecting on something you shared, or we were talking about when we were talking about a conversation about the Scriptures. I can feel inside myself as you did that historical drive-by that is so depressing—

Richard Rohr: Drive-by. [laughter]

Brie Stoner: --so depressing. I can feel myself wanting to say, "Well, then what's the point of sticking to this Christian tradition, when we know that this tradition has gone so far away from the intent of the founder?" I can feel the ways in which I want to peel out the complexity of being human, the complexity of this plane of existence, like you said, the fact that it is absurd. And there's some part of me that wants to just push against it and pull away from it, and say, "Well, what's the point then?" And yet I feel like there's an invitation through your teaching of the Universal Christ in which I can somehow embrace this great journey that we've been on in Christianity, even though it has moved so far away from the kind of original example. But it's hard to do that.

Richard Rohr: It is.

Brie Stoner: I don't feel like I'm making a lot of sense.

Richard Rohr: No, you are. You are.

Brie Stoner: How do you stay on the edge of the inside, Richard? I know you've got your vows and you're

a Franciscan but besides that, how do you keep your heart on the edge of the inside? How do you not get frustrated?

Richard Rohr: I think largely what helps me at this point is my age. I'm just on cruise control. I can't start over again at this point. No, I mean this is partially true. But I think it's much harder for young people like you to say, "How do I raise my kids? How do I use my Sundays? How do I use my studies?"

Brie Stoner: How do I make sure that the Christianity that they are taught by, or that they can be infused by, or they can be shaped by isn't the business Christianity?

Richard Rohr: Yeah, yeah. You do the best you can. But to completely absent yourself from the tension or the dilemma would be true spiritual laziness. And I think that's what Scott Peck also said in his first one, *People of the Lie*, he said, "I just find that most spiritual people are lazy. They want all their answers given. They refuse to--" He starts with life is hard. Life is hard. And the acceptance of that hardness is to stay inside the dilemma and let it itch you. Let it itch you. That doesn't mean you have to be a bona fide card-carrying whatever each Sunday, but to completely upset yourself from anything that itches you is to normally, and I say this now observing a lot of people grow up, to become very egocentric. You are the only frame of reference. I'm not going to allow history, institutions-- Institution is another word for incarnation, damn it. I wish it wasn't.

Brie Stoner: Whoa. Whoa.

Richard Rohr: Yeah, yeah, I know. The other piece I didn't give you is the dates. Don't you think that would be valuable here of 313 and 1054?

Paul Swanson: I think you may have done it before in a previous episode.

Richard Rohr: Oh, did I? Oh, I did. Okay. Great, great, great. Let's not go back there. But those are the big historical reasons that we look to different places for our authority. And we gave it to emperors and kings instead of really the gospel while pretending Jesus was Lord but didn't really mean it.

Paul Swanson: Richard, there's a story that comes to mind, for me, that energetic, radical roots movement of the Jesus movement that involves you when we were in South Africa, and it was the fragrance of those early days where someone, I don't know if you remember this at all, but we were at that men's retreat.

Richard Rohr: Tell me. Tell me.

Paul Swanson: There is a man there who was working with the homeless on the shipyards. He desperately wanted to become a Franciscan. He had a little dog, he brought with him to the retreat. And he was very much living a life of poverty.

Richard Rohr: Was he a black man or a white guy?

Paul Swanson: Nope. He was a white Afrikaner who was living amongst the poor, I think in Cape Town, but he desperately wanted to feel like he was a part of this Franciscan lineage. And so, he

wanted to be kind of institutionalized in that way. But you offered a blessing in the spirit of Francis, and he received it in such a way that he began to call himself a Franciscan.

Richard Rohr: Just my little old blessing.

Paul Swanson: And it felt like it was that early movement of human to human. You don't need the drapery of being an official member of this community but to have hands laid on, prayed over, blessed in this way.

Brie Stoner: Like a transmission.

Richard Rohr: That's real Apostolic succession.

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: Yeah, and carried on in that way. And he completely transformed after that reception.

Richard Rohr: No kidding? Thanks for reminding me of that.

Paul Swanson: And that's why I feel like that the fragrance of that early movement continues on is through the person to person, community to community, it's not necessarily going through the—

Richard Rohr: Yep. Yep. Yep, the formal, because we see now that the formalization of it, the laying hands on by a bishop has, just at this point, not fit the deal. It doesn't. The fruit of it is not that evident, that people who have had hands laid on them, really, more often than not, represent Jesus, or Jesus's values. More often than not, they represent "churchianity," how to hold together this institution.

Brie Stoner: That's really good. Have you said that before, "churchianity"?

Richard Rohr: You never heard me use that?

Brie Stoner: No, dang.

Richard Rohr: I think I used that more in Cincinnati in my early years.

Brie Stoner: That's good.

Richard Rohr: I'm glad I could introduce it.

Brie Stoner: It's good.

Richard Rohr: And it's probably a problem more for Catholics.

Brie Stoner: I don't know, I feel like the Evangelical culture or Protestant culture, it equates Christianity with this Sunday culture.

Richard Rohr: Yes, that's good. That's good.

Brie Stoner: And this is what this very conversation is pointing to is that the Jesus movement was a social

movement. It was a reordering and restructuring of relationships. It was, “There is this other way. This is the way that this empire does it, but this is the kingdom of God. Here’s another reality that you can fall back into, and be freed from the limitations, and constructs, and wounding, and oppression of this small empire.”

Paul Swanson: Yeah, I love how the kingdom of God in that way is everywhere, right?

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: It’s not localized to one specific place, or time and point and gathering, but it’s always at hand. [NOTE: Let’s edit this piece out, but how are we doing on time? How long have we been going? I’m kind of lost because I know the lesson was so long.]

Brie Stoner: We’re about an hour so you can ask your last question.

Paul Swanson: So, Richard, as a way to close here, where do you see the living, the embodied Universal Christ revolution now? Where do you see it alive and well?

Richard Rohr: When I would travel, I said this—and I’m sure I have no statistical proof for this—I said, “With all the philosophies on the world stage and all the worldviews, the only people who smile a lot tend to be sincere believers in whatever.” When you smile a lot, a sincere happiness if we could just gather together. And what I mean by that is the third-stage happiness, not the naivety of first stage. I saw a lot of that in the charismatic movement. But then I saw people who still got very offended when they didn’t get their way. But I mean, third-stage smiling, third-stage reordering where I’m genuinely happy in this world. I don’t meet many people who really can genuinely smile, who haven’t accepted the inevitability of the paschal mystery, and that they’re a part of it, that they’re in on the deal, and they’re a part of something good.

I don’t even know they need to use the word God, but they find divine purpose. They don’t even need to use the word divine purpose, but that’s what they found, divine purpose. Someone like Wendell Berry, who we mentioned before. People who don’t need to use the word God anymore, but they’re at home in this world. They’re connected in this world.

So, that tells me the “virus of the gospel,” as René Girard called it, has been released effectively into the history, because every country you go to there are people who get it, who are just caring, forgiving, loving, big hearted, big mind, big, big, big people. They’re everywhere. They might be old lumberjacks in Alaska, and they never go to church, but someone—maybe through their grandma, through their dad—someone communicated a big love to them. And they’re living that big love.

Richard Rohr: How is that going to pass to the next generation and the next? That’s why I’d say we still are going to need—I know people will hate me for saying it—the little street corner church. We’re still going to need a little gathering of two or three who keep renewing the proclamation, keep renewing the good news in every generation, because otherwise the yeast will be lost. How do you get it “burning again,” as Jesus says, if the tinder is lost?

So, what’s happening is that the effective message is dissociating in our time from the structures because the structures had become an end in themselves. And were about their

own self-preservation, self-magnification, instead of the proclamation of the mystery of faith, hope, and love. And once we catch faith, hope and love, our addiction to the group that's talking about faith, hope and love, is lessened. You won't hate it, but you won't need it either.

Brie Stoner: It strikes me that the historical arc that you described from the Jesus movement to this progressive institutionalized form of Christianity, all the way to business Christianity, is this desire to contain and control. And yet, the spirit of the Universal Christ seems to subversively-- I love that René Girard line, it's like a virus. It's a contagion—

Richard Rohr: "A virus of the gospel," a contagion.

Brie Stoner: --despite the poured concrete of our institutional attempts, there is this weed- like nature of Christ that grows through the cracks. And I think that gives me a lot of hope for our future as well to think that maybe what's breaking apart right now is the concrete of the structure so that more of that Jesus movement, more of that Christ energy, can break through.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: You got it. I think that has to be what God is doing. And that's our job is to --recognize what God is doing and to trust it even though it will feel like death. And I'm finding the older I get, it's equally hard to trust resurrection and that's what the liberal cannot do. They cannot trust resurrection. It's as hard as trusting death, is trusting, boy, there are a lot of good things happening, because we like being cynical.

Paul Swanson: It's an easier way out. Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. Yeah.

Paul Swanson: Wow. Well, thank you, Richard. What a way to end.

Richard Rohr: You're welcome.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. Thank you, Richard.

Richard Rohr: Thank you.

Paul Swanson: And that resurrection piece is so true.