

**ANOTHER
NAME
FOR EVERY
THING**

with

RICHARD ROHR

Season 3, Episode 5
The Personal is Political

Paul Swanson: So, Brie, we've covered "Jesus and Empire" as a starting place for how we think about ourselves as political animals in the world today and what Jesus taught and emulated in that way. Now we're shifting gears here to "The Personal is Political." What is it about this theme that strikes you as an important aspect of how we're relating to the Universal Christ in our day-to-day lived realities?

Brie Stoner: Paul, when you said, "political animals," are you referring to the donkey and the elephant, or--?

Paul Swanson: Oh, I'm more of a dolphin when it comes to political animals.

Brie Stoner: Okay, got it. In all seriousness though, this is a really important conversation. It was hard to have, heavy at times, but very critical for us to explore. One of the reasons why we wanted to talk about this is because if we're not paying attention to how our spirituality or how these huge ideas are lived out into our world at the social level, then really what are we doing?

Paul Swanson: Yeah. Yeah. If our spirituality, our faith, our ways of living these traditions isn't having any impact on how we're relating to one another, to bodies, to others, all these terminologies that can get us into sticky situations where we become too—as politics—not only as something that can divide us, but also bring us together.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. That's right. Somebody told me, and I forget where I got this from, but that one of the problems is that, we have a tendency to think about politics as what's happening at the governmental level, as opposed to seeing that, no, politics is the art of relationship and how we structure those relationships. So, if that's true, if politics is how we structure relationships, then everything we do and all the ways that we relate or choose to relate, is making a political statement.

Paul Swanson: That's a much more refreshing and believable way to approach politics. We think about this interpersonal relational level, and that it just builds and complexifies. When you think of large groups of people, of course, that's still politics, but it also has to deal with, "How's my school doing in my local neighborhood? How are these things going in my own district when it comes to the health of my waterways and my systems?"

Brie Stoner: Talking about politics is a total faux pas right now, right?

Paul Swanson: Right.

Brie Stoner: This is a super-heated topic; and so, we just want to offer to our listeners that our approach to this is not about claiming that one side is right, and the other side is wrong at all. In fact, what we're trying to do in this conversation is to say, "How do the values that we've been discussing and exploring together, these values that Richard is teaching us from The Universal Christ, how does that invite us into a different way to relate to each other, especially right now, for instance, in the United States, where this political milieu is nasty?"

Paul Swanson: Yeah. How can we engage in conversations from different political sides and recognize we're each coming from different viewpoints, and that's okay, but hold each other's viewpoint with love and tenderness as we each hope to create a better way of being in the world, not only for ourselves but for those who are in different positions.

Brie Stoner: That's right.

Paul Swanson: One thing that Richard does so well with *The Universal Christ*, is the way he talks about different distinctions and just having to name them before we can speak of the union between the two. I think that's the same in a political climate like this where the things are so partisan. How can we not live out of those identified partisan politics, but to see each other as humans in relationship with politics, and that first we ground ourselves in that humanity before we begin to cast off others by their own affiliations to different political parties?

Brie Stoner: I think that we have gotten so divided and especially around politics. I think this is the perfect time for us to explore how the *Universal Christ* can really invite us to see from the heart instead of from the polarized ideas and weaponized values that we use against one another, and how we can really begin to see from oneness, as Richard is describing, so that we can connect with one another and, yeah, invite a different energy into our world right now, that our world so desperately needs.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. It's like one of those phrases that keeps coming up in our conversation is, "We're all in this together," and how can we start from that place?

Brie Stoner: And so, with that, let's dive right into this conversation on how the personal is political.

Richard, in *The Universal Christ*, you talk about the relationship between the personal and the universal. Oftentimes, especially recently and right now in the United States, I hear people saying, "Well, I'm not really a political person," or, "I just hate politics." That feels like such an oxymoron, because if we understand politics to be the art of how we structure our relationships in the way that you were describing about Jesus in his healing ministry of restructuring relationships, then isn't it true that everything is spiritual; therefore, the political is both spiritual and a personal concern?

Richard Rohr: Forgive my coughing. I'm listening though. Did you finish there?

Brie Stoner: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Richard Rohr: Okay. You know we do much better if we talk about partisan politics as the problem. Precisely, what we're saying when we say, "dualistic thinking," the taking of sides, but in every act is a standing with one group of power or another. To absolutely say nothing, your power position is the status quo: "I am defending and legitimating by saying nothing that how things are right now here in River City are wonderful." That's your political statement but have no doubt that is a political statement. This false innocence, a lot of Christians want to claim, "I'm above that fray. I'm not political."

The standing for the status quo is precisely what's made most people think falsely, I think, that Christianity is inherently a conservative religion. In the true meaning of the term, *conservare* in Latin means to preserve, a museum, a monument, a past-oriented religion.

So, we're dealing with this all over the world. People who love the past, or the way we did it here in River City, these are the true Christians. That balloon has to be punctured because it is not true to Jesus at all. Look at the way he moves through Israel, critiquing, changing, healing, not in an angry way. So, we need to make a distinction in partisan politics that

every act is political. To not act at all is to be falsely conservative, but it tends to give conservative positions what they think—I don't think so—is the moral high ground. This is what it means to be Christian, to preserve the status quo, or at least to preserve the status quo among my elite group, my partisan group. Does that make sense? Does it?

Paul Swanson: It does make sense.

Richard Rohr: Does it?

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: I hope so.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. I think one of the things that shifted for me, is understanding the political as how we structure our relationships. Therefore, like you said, every choice we make is political. Our non-action is political. Our non-choice making is political because basically anything that we do is communicating how we structure our relationships, or what we believe about the way that things should be structured in our relationships to each other, to the planet.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. Go ahead, Richard.

Richard Rohr: I was just going to say, especially anyone's inability to critique their own power relationship. That's the biggie. That you cannot see how much power you have as a white man, as an ordained person, as a straight person, as an American person. Until that ability emerges, you are totally political naively. At this point it's becoming a scary naivety that this group thinks it is above criticism.

I got an angry letter from a recent graduate of the Living School saying, "We are dualistic because we're talking about white privilege." Of course, she's a white, privileged woman, but she was angry. I don't think she's going to say much good about the school. It's amazing that she stayed with it until the end, accepted her graduation, but doesn't want to hear her call to critique, her power position as an educated white woman. Yeah.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. It's so hard to see yourself in that, right, in that structure of relationships and where you are falling short in your own areas of growth and privilege that you're born with that you just can't name.

Richard Rohr: Can't name it.

Paul Swanson: It's funny. We were talking about the structure to relationships, which I recently heard this poet talk about. He's also a faculty member at a university. After our current president was elected, the students said, "What do we do? How are we supposed to relate? What's our response?" He said, "Well, I don't know what you should do immediately, but I do know that over the next few years that you should get to know twenty-five local songbirds by their song, and twenty-five local trees by their leaves." He said, "Because culture is based upon humanity's relationship to nature, which

builds culture with built politics.”

Richard Rohr: Isn't that beautiful?

Brie Stoner: Isn't that stunning?

Paul Swanson: It's a way to like, "How do we relate differently? We have to go back to how we're relating to nature." There's something about that. How does that strike you, Richard, when you hear that?

Richard Rohr: Even as a Franciscan, I remember when I first heard that kind of talk, I thought, "That's sentimental schlock," because I was trained in the classic, rational way of thinking. What it does is rebase—I'm going to use some big words—reality in facticity. I'll look, especially at animals. I was looking at a mother rhinoceros, seemingly smiling, there was a lovely picture yesterday, and her cute little baby rhinoceros. Normally, a baby rhinoceros is not very cute, but she was just so dear, how she was nuzzling it. I said the facticity of that fat, old rhinoceros. Why did God create that? That's a fact. I'm looking at it. I can touch it although it was a picture.

Deceitful words from a deceitful government are not facts. That's why I went out of the way in writing *The Universal Christ* to say it's another name for every thing. Words are not things. The word became flesh, and concepts, and opinions and philosophies—I'm not saying we don't find them helpful or need them once in a while—but they're not really the Christ. The Christ is facticity. To know twenty-five birdsongs, you have to encounter the facticity—I really doubt if that's a word, but I remember it being used in philosophy classes—of twenty-five different birds. What is it that's so grounding about that? It really grounds you in nature instead of words—

Brie Stoner: In the this-ness.

Richard Rohr: --in books, in this-ness, of course. Not just this-ness, but this thing, this bird. I was out in the yard again yesterday. Did I tell you I saw an owl?

Paul Swanson: No.

Brie Stoner: No.

Richard Rohr: A great big owl. My goodness, it must have been two-feet tall up in that same tree. It flew out on a fence post and just stood there looking at me with those big owl eyes. I said, "If I wouldn't have come back here to walk Opie, I wouldn't have seen this, almost epiphany. I can see why owls are used as common symbols. It was just the way it stared at me, of course, with those big eyes. When it flew, the first movement was sound, but then absolutely quiet. You don't hear a thing. Why is that? I think it's because it's facticity as opposed to opinion. That owl exists, and you cannot deny it. Therefore, you have to ask the question, "Why does an owl exist?" It's such a big one in my own backyard. How does an owl persist in the desert like we live in? Were you here when we found five little baby owls?

Paul Swanson: I don't think so.

Brie Stoner: What?

Richard Rohr: Yeah. Oh, they were the cutest little things. The mother hid them there behind our vineyard at the other building. I don't know who was on the staff who said, "Come, come, come, we pull these five little things." They were just looking at us. They didn't leave. You could tell they were obeying their mother's instructions, "Don't move." We all came out and were taking pictures. Someone must still have pictures of that. Again, the facticity of that, there's something that touches the level of the miraculous, the meaningful, the mysterious, the good, the necessary. Those are the categories that change you.

Brie Stoner: It reminds me of your value of devotion because it puts you in the heart, instead of being in our heads and our minds, that tend to attack and split the field dualistically. In the heart, it seems like from that place of grounding, maybe our

Brie Stoner: political personal perspectives can be expanded, and it can include a more grounded, heart-centered way of engaging.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. Engaging in a particular place, not just—

Richard Rohr: Yes. Yes.

Brie Stoner: Abstractly.

Paul Swanson: --abstract politics, but like "I care about this place, I care about that owl." Also, that might just change the way I relate to who I support running for a local office because they can also care about that owl.

Richard Rohr: Yeah, care about an owl. Yeah. It's that real. It's got to be concrete somewhere or it's just theory. You can disbelieve it as easily as you believe it, but I can't disbelieve that owl was sitting on the branch much less the five little cute versions of mother. It's two inches tall. Picture an owl just that tall, just looking at it.

Brie Stoner: I can't stand it. That's too much.

Richard Rohr: Never blinking. Oh, adorable.

Paul Swanson: I'm thinking back to what you were saying earlier in that previous episode about healing being the opposite of, was it judgment or punishment that you were saying?

Richard Rohr: Punishment.

Paul Swanson: Punishment. And how healing also plays a role of healing place, land, is also very political and how Jesus, his ministry of healing was a political act. How was it a political act? What was he doing in the act of healing individuals as the gateway, the personal to the universal? What was that speaking to, say, empire or politics in general?

Richard Rohr: You know, back in the 70's when I was involved in the healing ministry, there were so many study groups studying who God healed, what were the patterns? You go through the four Gospels and honestly there's no pattern. In other words, it's not the believers, it's not the people who prove their goodness, it's not the people who asked Jesus for a healing.

It's completely random. Some who don't ask at all get healed. Some clearly unworthy ones get healed. You can see there's a miracle of communion, grace, transformation that human beings are not fully in control of. That's a political act, because we want to limit healing—let's just call it salvation, and they come from the same root word, Spanish, is what?

Brie Stoner: Salvar. No, that would be to save.

Richard Rohr: Health. Health.

Brie Stoner: La sanidad.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. That's probably it. Yeah. It's the same word as health. If it's up to us, this is the fight in America today. It's the wealthy, well-heeled people who deserve health care. So, when Jesus—this is what he's doing—providing free healthcare everywhere he goes—free healthcare, free healthcare—he's ignoring and critiquing the system of health. Where that's made clear is the story where it says this old woman, for thirty-eight years, she'd wasted all of her money on doctors and then Jesus comes in one moment and gives her what she wants. We just weren't trained to know how to read these politically and to recognize that we live in systems that have clear, social categories of worthiness and unworthiness. For housing, look at our homeless problem, the richest country in the world; in fact, the richest empire the world has ever known.

They said in at least Los Angeles and in San Francisco, maybe the most comfortable, beautiful state, it's now an epidemic. People don't know how to bring tourists to San Francisco and Los Angeles because you cannot avoid them. They're everywhere.

Paul Swanson: Wow.

Richard Rohr: Wow. So, when you see what a community is excluding, that's the easiest way to track down what that society is worshipping. All right? When there's not enough housing and people are building thirty-five-room houses and these are couples who have no children, it blows your mind. Why? Just the use of resources to build all these houses. So, houses and classy houses, and that's our idolatry among many others too. Can you see just by those few, flimsy examples, how it is a social statement?

Brie Stoner: Yeah. It really is.

Richard Rohr: The offering of free healthcare, the rearranging of relationships, and the exposing of power relationships: who has all the power; who has no power? Invariably, when he leads people back into the village, back into the city, he's saying, "You do belong and they told you don't belong." And in some of them it says, "And he could not even re-enter the city. We're not going to change our notion of who the good guys are and the bad guys are." He has to stay on the fringe of town. We like things the way they are, where we're the good people and you're the bad person." Oh, it's just filled with that. If we had had preaching that for years had used those examples that are all there, I think we would have seen the social implications of the gospel.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. What a great line you said about what we exclude tells us about what we worship.

Richard Rohr: What we worship. That's right. It is.

Paul Swanson: What a great tool to unveil what we can't see.

Richard Rohr: It took me a long time to learn all these things too. Largely, or at least partly, maybe largely, I learned that by having to preach every Sunday, and I would look at a text and say, "What is this saying now? What's this saying now?" Not just, "Let's love Jesus more because he worked miracles." It doesn't work.

Brie Stoner: We were talking about the example of Jesus and how he creatively resisted the empire and his nonviolence, non-engagement in some ways, choosing not to participate in the oppression, his simplicity, and his healing. I feel with this upcoming, what we're facing in our country and in the United States right now, there's this tendency to fall into either complete cynicism that makes us not want to participate or this zealotry of reactivity in how we participate. How can we learn from Jesus's example on how we engage politically in an active, but contemplative way?

Richard Rohr: In the practical order, it comes down to not othering any others. I know I'm as angry as anybody at the political system in this country, so I certainly have a level in which I'm othering. Remember what I said before, you have to distinguish before you can reunite, so we don't go into some naivety, "Oh, there's no difference between this. All politics is evil, all the time, everywhere." We've reached a point of such total disgust for human values that there's no moral equivalence between it's always been this way or it always needs to be this way. This need needs to be called out.

But then, after you've called it out, your response—and here you better go to prayer, and you better go to love—has to be a nondual response. Okay. I think you're full of it. Let's just be crude about it. Okay. After I've made that harsh judgment, how do I relate to people who are full of it? I don't refuse to say, in the right places, in the right context, in venues that can handle it and hold it and know what I'm saying and laugh with me, "This is all bullshit." It has to be named in all its harshness.

Now, their word for bullshit was sin, but maybe the only way we're going to catch it is to use this—I can't call it a four-letter word anymore, it's an eight-letter word. This is what Christians who want to live in a false innocence. You know that, "Well, I'm not going to say that it's bullshit. We have to love everybody."

Brie Stoner: Right, and then they never call anyone out.

Richard Rohr: I know. How come you're not willing to love your liberal, democratic friends as generously as you love your political party, or forgive your political party? People cannot see their own contradictions because they've done no shadow work.

Brie Stoner: This scapegoating thing feels so huge—

Richard Rohr: Huge, today.

Brie Stoner: --especially for us and how we think about how we engage. I love that you said, you use this term othering, that the ways in which we can engage contemplatively is not to be passive

and just say, “Oh, well, I’m going to be non-dual, therefore I have no opinion,” but to speak prophetically to what is not true, while not demonizing people who hold different opinions than us.

Richard Rohr: Or let it suffocate your own heart that you’re losing sleep over your anger or you’re holding of this loathing for this other person, then this other person is in control. You can’t give them that kind of power.

Brie Stoner: It reminds me of that value. I keep bringing it up. Your values are so good, Richard, but the value of devotion to see the Sacred Heart in everything. That requires us to speak powerfully, but then again, remember, this person who I disagree with still has the Sacred Heart of Christ and I have to relate to that more than the opinions in which we don’t agree or see eye-to-eye.

Paul Swanson: It helps us see that the other is us, that inter-dependability. That’s not a word.

Brie Stoner: Interdependence?

Paul Swanson: Interdependence of one another.

Brie Stoner: Interdependence dependability.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Brie Stoner: Can we just make one up?

Paul Swanson: Yeah. Let’s make it more words. This speaks to me, too, just like the individualistic nature of the Western world, and in particular America, where we hold up the lone hero, the self-created person—

Richard Rohr: The lone hero.

Paul Swanson: --way over community building.

Richard Rohr: The Western movie.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. Exactly. John Wayne is the icon of America. There’s part of this as we enter into what does it mean to be a follower of Jesus in a political climate we feel that individualism is held up on one hand, and yet we feel like we have very little personal agency in politics. How do we hold both that gift of showing up in our full personhood as political people—

Brie Stoner: Agency.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. --and not get lost in the, “I’m just one person. What does it matter what I do?” Maybe it speaks to the othering piece, but I’m still grappling with something to hang on to in there.

Richard Rohr: I have to admit it must be my nine wing. I give into that a lot. It’s not going to make any difference, almost to total cynicism about my political agency. Now, part of it is, if I can say so, because I’ve had a lot of power in my life to influence and to change people’s minds, so I let myself off the hook because I’ve written books and all that, because I try to understand

why often I don't feel the urgency to be at this action or to sign this statement. I do sign most statements that people invite me to send, but my hermit role gives me an out, that I don't feel I'm helping my journey by going to every crowd that invites me into it.

The reason I'm saying that, is I do think we all have to really know what our vocation is. When in the Living School, I give those different levels of activism. That's what I'm trying to liberate. It's not just what is the need, but what is the call. Now, when call and need come together, thank God some people are down there today protesting or carrying placards, I will bless them, but more and more that isn't my call, but it's somebody call, and I will encourage them to follow it. Try to balance that out, or you'll live in paralysis, or guilt, or obsession about your use of your own power. I've got to do it, or to hell with it, I've given up on that.

Brie Stoner: Well, it's how we think that activism is just the protest, the picketing, and the signs, and the rallies. And yet, as you were describing earlier, our every choice is making a political statement. So, I think what you're helping us recognize is that, we make political choices with our whole lives, that can reflect a view of the Universal Christ—

Richard Rohr: Very nice. Yes.

Brie Stoner: --from where we buy our food and what kinds of food we eat to, how we choose to spend our time, what we engage with and what we don't. That's helpful for me at this stage of my life because I, too, am like, "Oh, man. I'm not at every rally. Sometimes I'm taking my kids to soccer practice," just to have that frame of locating where in my set of choices I can choose differently.

Paul Swanson: Right. Right. Yeah, the complexity of it is you have to show up where you can in your full self and your full power and not get lost in what you can't do. Right?

Brie Stoner: Right.

Paul Swanson: This is something, and we've mentioned white privilege, and this brings to mind for me of just like, how our human body speak to politics with race, gender, ability, and health. What might it look like for the followers of Jesus to approach the healing of bodies and relationship to bodies of all types as a political act?

Richard Rohr: Our own body?

Paul Swanson: Our own body but also the diversity of bodies and the way they've been classified in such ways as race, gender, ability.

Richard Rohr: You know what strikes me, there's facticity again. "I can't explain it away. Dang it. This is a disabled person trying to talk to me, and I don't know what they're saying," do you understand? Just the pure facticity of it makes me feel very uncomfortable and very powerless. I have to admit, that's often my weakest point is with disabled people when I don't know what they're saying. Maybe it reveals how much I've relied on verbal skills all my life, and knowing what people are saying, and knowing what I'm saying back and forth. when half of that is cut out, and I really can't understand another person.

I admit this as a sin, as a fault, as a weakness: I want to get away, because I can't negotiate

this encounter. I'm afraid I'm going to say the totally wrong thing, which I've done more than once with people who I can't understand. Anybody with a speech impediment, I just want to move away from it. The total facticity of that and absurdity of that really humiliates me and scares me. I'm sure it has do with my verbal ability, and I'm so used to being able to talk and then people who can't play my game, the facticity of there are people in this earth who can't play my game.

Then just understanding, I remember saying this to some bishops years ago, all our concerns about dogma and doctrine, well, what about all the people on this earth who are mentally ill, who can't understand, who will never understand the dogma of the Immaculate Conception or the Incarnation and all this? It can't depend on that. All we need is one fact—this woman, this man's mind is incapable of understanding the doctrines of the church. The argument is over. It can't depend upon believing doctrines or God would not have created this fact; this fact.

So, facticity, in all of its scariness, has a great ability to humble you, to broaden you, to make you redefine the question, "What is the question?" We usually went to all kinds of extremes. We'd create things like limbo and purgatory. Little intermediate zones, or just the answer, "Well, my little boy will never know the doctrines of the church. His mind doesn't work." That's one way of saying it. "Well, God will take care of it." That was probably the perfect answer. He will not believe the way we do. He will not understand; therefore, believing and understanding the way we do, is not an absolute norm. Mothers will invariably

Richard Rohr: say, "God will take care of it. I know that." Her love overrides verbal truth and mental understanding. Oh, I've encountered that again and again. Mainly for mothers and fathers because they will not deny salvation to their children even though they know they don't fit the bill.

Brie Stoner: Well, that's just it. It's just, when I think about bodyli-ness and its political statement, I think about the fact that bodyli-ness in creation itself, right, it makes me think of the fiat of God's saying, "Let it be, and it is good." That it shames our systems. Any system whatsoever that would declare that any created body, be it human, animal, or planetary, would not be good, or not worthy, or somehow less than other bodies, to place those in a hierarchy of worth, the human arrogance to do that in light of what we know about the Universal Christ and also the fiat of, "It is good. It is good. It is very good."

So, I don't know. That helps me recognize that, as you were saying, Richard, it's humbling to see how twisted we've gotten to think that we can place an order on creation that separates these bodies from being worthy, these bodies from being better, or more righteous, or more privileged, these bodies as being more worth listening to than others.

Richard Rohr: Opinions and theories of worthiness are an escape from facticity. Facticity is just sitting there, right in front of you: "My little boy with Down syndrome," or whatever, there it is, staring you in the face. So, what we will do is move to the side and create who's capable, and who's handi-capable, [30'45"] and incapable. You have to watch theories and concepts. We need them, but we don't need them when it comes to understanding the human soul. There'll never be enough categories. There won't.

- Brie Stoner: I think it's one of the reasons why I love your teaching on the Universal Christ so much, Richard, and just your general posture of Franciscan incarnationism, because I do think that all of our theology that has separated spirit from matter and spirit from bodyli-ness has perpetuated and enabled these oppressive structures that separate. Our very theology has made room for it. And so, I think there's something just radically holistic in healing about the Universal Christ that can re-plug us into our bodies so that we can plug back into each other in a new system of order and a new way of structuring our relationship.
- Richard Rohr: Stop calling embodiment "sin. flesh." We have a lot of unlearning to do. I've got to point out, Opie, my dog has in the last few minutes, scooted closer to me so he's lying on my toes. Now, what made him want to connect with my—There, he's turning again. Opie, what do you like about my feet? Huh? There he's safe for some reason. Just like your babies at your breast or yours. Facticity gives them comfort, and that we called such facticity "temptation," especially female facticity.
- Brie Stoner: Yeah, no kidding.
- Richard Rohr: All it was was temptation, sin, which ended up then becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy. You know, that we let women be nothing more than a temptation to our male purity. What a bunch of garbage.
- Brie Stoner: Or a maternal saint. Those were our options.
- Paul Swanson: Right.
- Richard Rohr: Yes. Yes. Yes. The Madonna complex.
- Paul Swanson: Right.
- Brie Stoner: Speaking of dualism, one of my growing observations with some of this us-versus-them, dualistic dichotomy in our country right now and the conflict that we're facing in a lot of other Western countries, as well, seems to be between a conservative or nationalist concern that is seeking to honor tradition and values, to the point of resisting all and any change. There's the liberal penchant for change often at the price of dismissing the values, and throwing them out, and throwing tradition out. How does understanding the Universal Christ help us to transcend and include both perspectives of this polarized divide?
- Richard Rohr: That is so important in my mind because it's tearing us apart. We call them culture wars. The person who is called conservative, as you know, tends to over identify with some or the other cultural symbols. The person who calls himself or herself "liberal," tends to identify with none of them, they say. They really do, but they're not being totally honest. They're so eager to be a flat-earth society, so eager to be egalitarian, that they've never committed themselves to anything. There's no devotion. You don't find devotion in most liberals. In most conservatives, you don't find self-criticism, an ability to recognize that my culture is just that, my culture. I can't raise mine up by putting others down or denying others. That white supremacy would re-emerge in the United States in our lifetime after the French Revolution and the American Revolution centuries ago, is really sad and really cause for hopelessness. You couldn't have written it much clearer than we did in the Declaration of Independence and the American Constitution. That was our thing. That was what the Statue of Liberty

stood for and now people want to re-divide into groups, because that group is not worthy, that group is not right. You'll notice that it almost always comes down to some notion of earning. We earned it. They didn't. That's the non-kingdom; the non-kingdom.

Any notion of counting, weighing, measuring, earning, and listen to the language of the typical right-wing person in the first few sentences, will be some word about, "I deserve; they don't deserve." So, there's not a radical gratitude that none of us deserve anything. You don't deserve the next breath out of your mouth. I don't find my conservative friends today live in that radical gratitude for the undeserved-ness of all of it. There's a feeling that my hard work, my

Richard Rohr: loyalty to the army, or whatever else, which is lovely, has earned me all these benefits.

Boy, that demon does not die easily once you think are entitled and your behavior has earned you privilege. If we really could follow the journey. I watched three hours of TV last night. I set them apart to watch the history of the Latino-Americans starting at the very first to enter and it was Santa Fe. They came right into this area. They showed the map and how it emerged and how again and again the Latino-Americans were disenfranchised as the Anglo took over and told them they were not worthy; they did not own. It never got the billing that the black people got because slavery certainly seemed, rightly so, much worse. There's the weighing and measuring, "Okay. This is worse. This deserves more attention. You, Latinos, don't deserve any attention because you never had it so bad." Some of the stories last night wanted to made me cry.

When was it? In the 20s or 30s, we deported thousands of Mexicans, right before and after the Great Depression. You'd see these women walking with sacks on their back, just following the railroad tracks back to Mexico. No provision for them, left everything they'd worked for here just because they were Mexican.

So, it's always creating of a new index of worthiness and deservedness. Do you see how radical grace, which was the name of our first magazine here, undercuts any notion of earning, weighing, measuring, deserving, that has to go before you can know God. I'm going to repeat it: That has to go before you can know God. No, you cannot, nor can you know the fruitfulness of your own soul until you plug into that source of infinite love.

Paul Swanson: Part of what you're speaking about is going to be experiential, right of that radical grace and not just the, "Here's what it means from the dogmatic love or how this is." You have to have that felt sensation almost of that unearned gift to be able to even speak like that.

Richard Rohr: You do. You do.

Brie Stoner: There's just so much anxiety in our culture, and I think at large in the world right now, because I think in any times of great upheaval and change, there's just a tremendous amount of toxic anxiety.

Richard Rohr: What I my going to end up with?

Brie Stoner: Yeah. I think one of the things that I appreciate about having the framework of the Universal Christ is one, to see that we're all in this together and that if we don't begin to re-orient

ourselves to recognizing that it's just us. It's not us and them. It's just, this is it—

Richard Rohr: This is it.

Brie Stoner: and to stop giving into that diablo, that dividing energy, that wants to separate and pit us against one another, but also to recognize that we can trust that, that we're not in this alone. That we're in this together also contains the spiritual movement of Christ and evolution.

In other words, we are all participating in this. I think there's something about that that gives me an ability to relax my own anxiety, so that my anxiety doesn't drive me to clinging, to attacking, to identifying with certain political outcomes. I feel like that's so important for us right now to orient toward how we can together relax into the change that's happening, and relax into changing together and having the hope for something better than where we are. It makes me think of those healing moments with Jesus where, what he was essentially saying is, "You are not what you have been told is wrong with you."

Richard Rohr: That's a nice way to put it.

Brie Stoner: The faith of the person who's being healed is saying, "I believe in what I cannot yet see, and I believe that there's something more that could be possible." So, I don't know. That gives me a lot of hope. I don't know if that makes sense, but that the energy of Christ alive in the example of Jesus, seems to indicate that there is more, there's an imagination of something beyond this, that we can live into together, but that we can also trust we're unfolding into. It just makes it so difficult when our political system is structured the way that it is, where it's like, you're either in this camp or you're in that one, you know?

Paul Swanson: Yeah. We need each other now more than ever with the climate crisis to be able to look at where our world is at and how we can actually support our own continued existence on this planet. So, maybe that comes to this question, Richard, as a way to round out the end. We have to just acknowledge that this is a heated political landscape right now.

Richard Rohr: Very. Very.

Paul Swanson: So, how do we live into the Universal Christ? Is there a practice that you can recommend as a way to reframe that radical gratitude or grace? Is there a practice you could recommend to stand and hold and be Christ in such moments of a heated political milieu that we just find ourselves in right now?

Richard Rohr: I think I said this yesterday, didn't I, but let me repeat it in this context. We need to create rituals of not knowing and not needing to know. People who live in such certitude, could you practice not being certain? Not being right? Would there be a way of listing a whole bunch of things and we could say as a littany response, "I don't know, and I don't need to know." Who's right? "I don't know, and I don't need to know," something to imprint this on the modern brain. Now I know people will really resist that because you see your knowing is your control tower. I told you that, didn't I? In Norwich, Julian's own cathedral, a man

Richard Rohr: said, "You're not going to take away my well-trained, English mind from me coming from America." I don't know what I said, but I was lost for words.

That's what it sounds like to a lot of people: "You're asking me to stand helpless before reality." If you've been trained ever since high school that knowing makes you better, knowing gives you A's, knowing makes you admired, there has to be some comparable arena in which we value, deliberately value, not knowing and not even needing to know. So, maybe you create it for yourself? I don't know that it has to be a social-- But it wouldn't be a bad thing for the center to do it in some of our retreats. I've been saying we need liturgies of lamentation, but we need liturgies of not knowing.

Paul Swanson: Wow.

Brie Stoner: What's so powerful for that is that, it's that radical simplicity—

Richard Rohr: It is!

Brie Stoner: --that you're talking about and it seems like if I can't be humble, if I can't live in humility, I can't connect, because I'm so busy being right about my own views of how I think things should go—

Richard Rohr: Of how right I am.

Brie Stoner: --and how wrong you are. I really appreciate that, Richard. That's an invitation for us to live into humility as a practice of connection.

Richard Rohr: Oh, good. Thank you.

Paul Swanson: Mm-hmm (affirmatively), and vulnerability too.

Richard Rohr: Very good—connection and vulnerability. You stand naked: "I don't know. I don't have an answer for that." Maybe we could create three or four different responses. Yeah. You'll do that after I'm gone. [laughter]

Brie Stoner: Way to delegate.

Richard Rohr: "Is Richard any good?" "Well, I don't know. I have serious doubts." Yeah. It would be worth creating though.

Brie Stoner: It strikes me that what we were talking about, how Jesus, his example of non-engagement, of not participating in certain aspects of the culture and the empire in this world of social media, and arguing, and debate, especially around this political topic, to choose to say, "I don't know. I'm not going to go there. I'm going to stay in this posture of open vulnerability and humility." That is so beautiful, Richard. Thank you for that invitation.

Richard Rohr: You're welcome. Yeah. Okay. Hallelujah.

Paul Swanson: Good stuff. Thank you, Richard.

Richard Rohr: We've talked enough today.

Brie Stoner: A lot of political jargon.