

**ANOTHER  
NAME  
FOR EVERY  
THING**

with

**RICHARD ROHR**

Season 3, Episode 7  
Environmental Awareness Rooted in  
Franciscan Spirituality

Brie Stoner: [music playing] Paul, one of my favorite things is when Richard wears his Franciscan habit.

Paul Swanson: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Brie Stoner: It's like the neatest [confirm @ 00:00:09] thing ever.

Paul Swanson: But you don't see him wear it very often, so when you do, it's kind of a treat.

Brie Stoner: Yeah, and it just reminds you again, oh, yeah, Franciscanism is the ground from which Richard has drawn so many of his insights and teachings and even evident in his whole orientation in his life and his ministry.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. That lineage, that Franciscan tradition, really helps you understand who Richard is and how he's able to speak with such a prophetic and poetic voice as clearly as he does because he is in the footsteps of Francis in that way.

Brie Stoner: Mm-hmm (affirmative). In this episode, we dive into Environmental Awareness Rooted in Franciscan Spirituality. It's a helpful lens through which we can begin to address the issues that we're facing environmentally, but from a contemplative stance that maybe tries to move us forward in making positive choices that are aware and connected to the impact that we have, but in a way that doesn't feel dogmatic, or heavy-handed, or judgmental toward people who maybe aren't ready to make those choices. [music ends]

Paul Swanson: Yeah, and I know this is so close to our heart as parents as we're thinking about what does healthy spirituality look like in a time of climate crisis?

Brie Stoner: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Paul Swanson: So, I think for all those reasons and more, this is one of the most relevant and one of the most resonant conversations we had with Richard, because it's so needed now in a time of crisis just like this. [music playing]

Brie Stoner: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Paul Swanson: So, with that, enjoy our conversation with Richard here on environmentalism and the Franciscan tradition. [music ends]

Paul Swanson: So, Richard, we've all read Eager to Love, and we—

Richard Rohr: Oh.

Paul Swanson: --we love the—

Brie Stoner: Why do you sound so surprised?

Richard Rohr: I do. [inaudible 00:02:21] Thank you.

Paul Swanson: I think part of the reason why it's made such an impact on me personally is just that it helps explain the tradition that birthed you in this way.

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Paul Swanson: It gives a deep time to your own formation, which I find personally helpful as I try to participate in the wider Alternative Orthodoxy that you have so well taught.

Richard Rohr: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Paul Swanson: In that, you name that the early Franciscans--Bonaventure, Scotus, and, obviously, Francis himself. They're known for their celebrated connection to being a part of nature and this world as a mirror to which we pass over to God. There's such a naturalness to this perspective, and yet the bulk of Christianity has seemed to pay no mind to this at all with the theology of domination over planet.

Richard Rohr: That's right.

Paul Swanson: So, for me, what comes to mind is the difference in the perspectives of the shape of God, that the Franciscans are more into practice of the wild God rather than the domesticated God who needs the A/C to be set to 68 degrees. So, can you add your take on the relational difference of Franciscans with God versus the dominant viewpoint that I think is the waters that we swim in right now?

Richard Rohr: Yeah. Because Franciscanism has always been and easily is sentimentalized, we call it "birdbath Franciscanism," and that's what Scotus and Bonaventure were trying to do, to give weight to this so it's not just sweet love of animals. Let's try what you brought up already this morning, or did you? I don't know if you did. It doesn't matter.

Paul Swanson: Let's say I did. It makes me sound good.

Richard Rohr: Martin Buber made it clear. He said, "Basically, there are two ways of relating to reality, I-it, and I-thou."

Brie Stoner: Right.

Richard Rohr: Now, the worldview of people before transformation, before reorder, is almost always I-it. That demands a conversion, to learn how to give dignity, credibility, equality, authority, use all of those words, to the other. The natural desire of the ego is to dominate it. That's the I-it relationship. The I-thou is to grant it, I know these are big words, but subjectivity. What we mean by subjectivity, it is not objectified. Huh? Once it's made into an object for my consumption, for my explanation, for my money-making, for my smart making: "I understand that." How many people don't you know that as soon as you start talking about something, they have to show off their intelligence. They knew that. They know all about those kinds of trees.

That's fine, but actually knowledge is a form of the subject-object split. How many people don't love to show off their knowledge about everything? Not that it's wrong to have knowledge of things. It's the way you do it. So, the Franciscan worldview personified in something that's sweet and sentimental, I guess, but was in Francis's first-recorded use of the terms "brother and sister" for everything: brother sun, sister moon, sister fox, brother air—even elements, even animals. I keep saying "I just got an email this morning," but I

did, again just this morning, there's someone who's calling a Franciscan who writes a column in a national paper "pagan" for saying what I'm saying right now—

Brie Stoner: Wow.

Richard Rohr: --for granting subjectivity, subject-to-subject, I-thou, letting the other speak to you. Let's put it this way, letting the other have voice. We've done this on retreats over the years, to find one object in nature, to sit before it for a while, and then journalize what that old log would want to say to you.

Paul Swanson: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brie Stoner: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Richard Rohr: It has led many men also on the Men's Rites of Passage to tears. "Well, I stood here for 110 years, and then I got blown down," or whatever. "No one notices me, but I'm sure glad you noticed me. Thank you." It's amazing how easily the words come, but first you have to grant it voice, which is to grant it some level of equality, or dignity, or soul, if you'll allow me to use that word.

Paul Swanson: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Richard Rohr: I certainly know there's a lot of people who when you say, "Animals have soul," they just, "No, only human beings have soul." Why do you say that? What evidence do you have for that? You haven't observed very long. You haven't been present very long, or you'd see everything has, maybe rudimentary in rocks, but what is life itself? A growing tree, a growing bush that keeps returning

Richard Rohr: every spring. The seed is the soul of the thing. It keeps showing itself, showing itself, until it finally accepts this is my time to die and usually does not fight its death.

The higher you are in levels of consciousness—humans, we're the ones who fight the death; animals, it certainly doesn't feel good, and I'm told most animals die a painful death in one way or another. But they seem to also accept it. They say they go into the woods and sit down. Where do all these herds of reindeer, every one of them die sooner or later. They go into the woods and sit down and die probably in a lot of pain. They let then other animals come and eat them, and they're back in the life cycle.

Paul Swanson: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Richard Rohr: I have to say that's soul. Maybe not the way you talked about a soul going to heaven, but a soul who's already in the cycles of life and death and, therefore, heaven. So, what Francis discovered was a spirituality for this world that allowed you to delight in this world and not just to seek to escape it, to get away from it, but to find God in it and through it. I'm glad you used the word "mirror," because that's the contribution Clare made, her feminine contribution. Because she didn't get to wander the fields. That's all that a woman could do in the 13th century after she was an adult. The women had to live in a cloister, maybe you've been there, San Damiano in Assisi.

But it's interesting that she uses the word "mirror" more than anything else. Everything is a mirror. Now, she had a little garden, so maybe in a much- diminished world watching her little flowers and plants grow. San Damiano's built like a little courtyard. It's still there exactly as it would've been when Clare was alive. She also seemed to be nature-based, and you see it in the metaphors she uses, that everything is a mirror, and mirrors the Creator. So, it was our contribution but because we allowed it to be sentimentalized and because, especially after the Council of Trent, when you dang Protestants divided from us, and we—

Brie Stoner: You jerks.

Richard Rohr: --and we had to circle the wagons and prove that we were right, what happened to most Franciscans is we became priests more than friars, priests in brown robes. You understand?

Paul Swanson: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Richard Rohr: That's what dualistic thinking does. Once we had to prove that the Protestants were wrong and we were right, we became more company men. Let me put it that way. That lasted until, really, my early years in the seminary. That's when it began to fall apart.

Brie Stoner: What's interesting to me is that this worldview, this Franciscan worldview that held relationality as the basis of the cosmos is now being proven as absolutely correct—

Richard Rohr: I know. I know. It's wonderful, yeah.

Brie Stoner: --from a scientific point of view. I think about the absolute arrogance of human beings to say such things like, "Oh, well, animals don't feel," or, "Plants don't feel," or, "There's no soul." We're finding now, the most cutting-edge science around consciousness is that human brains aren't producing consciousness. Consciousness is the matrix.

Richard Rohr: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brie Stoner: So, who are we to say and believe—

Richard Rohr: Is the mater, matrix [ @ 12'40" ]. That's right.

Brie Stoner: --that we are the only ones who have this capacity? As a point of just observation that kind of full circle, this Franciscan worldview, which is also so Trinitarian, right, because it allows us to offer that subjectivity just as the Trinity does to move into a communion paradigm with all reality. That's actually what science is telling us is real and true.

Richard Rohr: So true. So true, yeah. It took us eight centuries after Francis to say, "My God, he wasn't just a poet or a sentimentalist." Everything is relational. And the more that relationality can become conscious, which is appreciative, which is really contemplation, appreciative consciousness, not critical consciousness. That was the

trouble with the Enlightenment, which we call “analysis,” always critiquing, critiquing everything. Well, what about appreciating, appreciating in your observing something? That’s only strongly been re-appreciated itself in the last fifty years. [Can you turn that all off? Yeah. Just the fan or something, yeah. Thank you.]

In all fairness, so we don’t try to take all the credit, the other strand which held onto both the Trinitarian element and the nature element, we now call Celtic spirituality.

Paul Swanson: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brie Stoner: That’s right.

Richard Rohr: They had it way before we did, but isn’t it interesting? They were considered a subtext, and there’s a historical reason for it. You know what that is, of course, that the Roman Empire, which became Roman Catholicism stopped at Hadrian’s Wall and didn’t get into Scotland, and it didn’t get into Ireland across the

Richard Rohr: channel. Those monks, and nuns, and Christians had an appreciably different spirituality. You’ll see it in their art. You’ll see it in their--

Now, they don’t get everything right because they’re still, in my opinion, overly ascetic. There’s still a lot of body punishment. Yet, they loved the earth, and they loved the animals, and they loved the seasons. But they still felt the body had to be punished. When you read the lives of the Celtic monks, they’re pretty ascetical, and yet you read their-- I mean, Saint Patrick’s breastplate, who is the transitional figure, he learns from the Irish, even though he’s not Irish, but he was a Patrician. That’s his name, Patrick, from Rome, and he Romanizes the Irish church.

Now it’s all the councils of the church, the dogmas, the doctrines, but he still holds onto what he learned from the Irish, and you see this in his Trinitarian music and poetry. We have to believe he learned it from them, the people he was evangelizing, because that would not have been the norm in Rome at that time, we don’t think.

Paul Swanson: Yeah, and it helps me to think of those who did not immediately cut up and divide reality, but tried to appreciate that wholeness before trying to understand some of the distinctions. I’m thinking in particular about the ways that right now in our world today, for me, some of those who are like the Wendell Berry’s, the Gary Snyder’s who kind of live in this rhythm of “I’m going to help tend to nature, and nature is actually going to respond in a reciprocal manner where I’m going to grow this tree, and this tree’s going to respond by shading my house,” and how it is with Gary Snyder being kind of the epitome of the practice of the wild, the what does it live to mean in relationship to the wild with Wendell Berry in more of the agricultural sense.

And how, through their correspondence and friendship, they’re seeing that the wild and agriculture actually need one another to thrive. That you can’t have control, but you can’t have complete wildness for humanity to kind of be on its own evolutionary path. But it’s in that communion between the wildness and the cultivation of land as well. And that when you remove one too much from the other, like right now as we’ve just removed so many wild species, that is actually just damaging the way that we grow food, that we need to re-

introduce the ways that were just naturally a part of the evolutionary edge into our landscape so that we can try to rebuild that right relationship in that communal paradigm.

Brie Stoner: I think the word “relationship” seems so central to this need for us to shift into this new orientation of a Universal Christ, Franciscan approach to life. Right? Because without relationship, it does just turn into domination. It turns into—

Richard Rohr: It always does, yeah.

Brie Stoner: It reminds me of the conversation we’ve had about the World, the Flesh, and the Devil. It’s like without relationship, then we fall back into the system that is the waters we swim in, which perpetuate and teach us to just consume, use, abuse.

Richard Rohr: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, and the scary thing, of course, is that-- I mean, I guess the Vikings were pretty abusive. I think—[laughter]

Paul Swanson: They were, yeah.

Brie Stoner: I think you could say that, yeah.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Brie Stoner: I think that’s accurate.

Richard Rohr: And yet, the White men from Europe who colonized America were pretty abusive.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: They didn’t see the sacrality of the earth or animals.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Brie Stoner: Right.

Richard Rohr: It’s just that now our ability to be abusive is 100 times more.

Brie Stoner: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: And if we don’t name it and recognize it, I don’t know where we’re going to be forty years from now. The objective signs are not good that your children are going to grow up in a world that has the beauty that we’ve taken for granted.

Brie Stoner: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Richard Rohr: It’s sad.

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: It’s frightening.

Richard Rohr: God must weep.

Brie Stoner: So, zooming into some of the practical ways where we can maybe live into our values a little bit better, I was just in Spain a couple weeks ago, and I was stunned by how cheap it is to buy really high-quality, fresh, local produce.

Richard Rohr: Same in Mexico. Oh.

Brie Stoner: It's stunning, and it got me thinking about the relationship of food and our planet and, also, systemic oppression in our country where only the wealthy can afford organic, fresh, local produce. It just is so messed up. How does our relationship to food communicate our relationship to the body of Christ? How can we begin to pay attention to that?

Richard Rohr: If you'll allow me, this is why I consider *The Universal Christ* book my most important book, if I can say that, because what I've wanted to do all my life is extend the meaning of incarnation to all of creation, not just the body of Jesus, but the body of the earth, which has to be the body of God on some level. It came forth from God. It was God becoming visible and material, which is why I think John's Gospel uses the generic word "flesh," but we so limited and idealized the incarnation in the body of Jesus who ascended into heaven, so sacrality was not here anymore.

Now, we Catholics thought we were maintaining it, and symbolically, we were in the bread and the wine—okay, the sacred body is still here—but then we even sent Mary's body to heaven, and so we were always lacking an embodiment to sacrality. But I do think it explains the Catholic obsession with the Mass—bring the body into this world. Get it here because it isn't here. What we're saying is it isn't just the body of Jesus, it's the body of every animal, every bush, every tree, every water are all the body of God.

It was meant to be a different politics. It was meant to be a different ecosystem when you grant sacrality to the whole thing. You're going to walk on it differently. You're going to use it differently. You're going to respect it differently. You're going to pray differently. God isn't up there anymore. When you kneel, you're kneeling on God. You don't need to call God into the situation. It radically changes your prayer, which was the meaning of most official Christian prayers where we pray through Christ our Lord because we're swimming in Christ. We're swimming in the Christ mystery.

So, if people get what I—certainly others have said better—but what I'm trying to say in *The Universal Christ*, it is a game changer, because now there's dignity to everything, and it's not our place to decide who has the presence and who doesn't have the presence; who has the dignity and who doesn't have the dignity. Oh, this is such good stuff, you know, if I can say so myself. [laughter] But it's not my stuff. It's Ephesians, Colossians, the prologue to John's Gospel. It's the gospel, which was meant to save the world.

Paul Swanson: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Richard Rohr: Just hear that phrase. We've all heard it so often. It was meant to save the world, and all we had to do was save a few people, fewer and fewer as history went on. So, it didn't look like there was much joy, and the angels of Bethlehem said, "It will be a joy for all the people." I make a lot of that all, huh? So, it still has to be, I have to believe. I'm sorry. I'm just repeating

myself probably.

Brie Stoner: No, I think this is so revolutionary. This teaching is—

Richard Rohr: It's revolutionary.

Brie Stoner: --so revolutionary because it impacts how we think about everything. At a systemic level, if Christ is in all things, and you're calling us to be the kind of conscious actors in this kind of Christ movement to pay attention, then we do have to look at things even as simple as food. We have to look at, okay, how does this choice impact the whole?

Richard Rohr: There you go.

Brie Stoner: And again, without succumbing to, as you were talking about in *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil*, without succumbing to some game of guilt, like, "Oh, you're not doing this," or "I'm doing this," and without weaponizing our values against each other. The call to simplicity and to really pay attention to that devotion to the whole, I mean, we have to look at food as maybe one of those systems too big to fail, right, that we need to pay attention to.

Richard Rohr: Well put.

Paul Swanson: Yeah, it's funny. Food has become one of those things in our little family that's really centralized in issues of food justice, because we know we are paying more for locally produced food, but we're trying to support farmers who are tending to the earth in a way that's sustainable, that's going to regenerate the soil and not just take away. A lot of it has to do with an understanding of the Universal Christ. It has to reframe how I engage in my day-to-day life, and not just interactions with people, but also with the planet as the body of Christ.

I mean, this is where I feel like the endless implications of trying to live into what your book is teaching us, and I think this is at the cutting edge because we are living in a time of planetary crisis, that we—

Richard Rohr: Crisis.

Paul Swanson: --we have to reframe, otherwise, business as usual is going to end us up with just fire, and tsunamis, and catastrophe.

Richard Rohr: And only the rich will be able to buy their way out of it.

Paul Swanson: Yes. Right.

Brie Stoner: Right.

Richard Rohr: The poor will die first and suffer the most.

Brie Stoner: As you were saying in the previous episode about not being afraid to look at what needs to be criticized, to notice within ourselves as a community, like, why do we get so edgy around when somebody says, "Well, what about a plant-based diet?" What is it that gets so defended in us that needs to be like, "How dare you critique the way that I eat and what I choose to

consume?” But to really, to call us as a community to pay attention to what we’re afraid of being criticized, to see that as an opportunity to grow even further into these values that you’re describing of devotion, and simplicity, and public virtue.

Richard Rohr: Universal respect.

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Universal.

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Again, we’re all sinning. Jesus ate fish. Once you recognize it’s all an ecosystem of Christ feeding Christ until the end that’s all there is, is Christ feeding Himself. You’d have to say in fairness, “Well, if we extended it to the edge, then the plants are Christ, too.”

Brie Stoner: Right.

Richard Rohr: So, it isn’t just meat that makes you impure, which has always been my opinion why Jesus doesn’t make anything of dietary rules.

Brie Stoner: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Paul Swanson: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Richard Rohr: I’m not encouraging the wide consumption of red meat, in particular, although it’s helping my anemia to have a little right now.

Brie Stoner: This was really just a staged intervention to just give you a lot of—[laughter]

Richard Rohr: “Richard, stop that.”

Brie Stoner: Just kidding. No, I’m kidding. No, it’s true. I think you hold it in a way that allows for, okay, let’s not be dogmatic here, but let’s also look at the system. Let’s pay attention, and let’s make choices together. That seems to be the invitation of Franciscanism, too, for me anyway. Franciscan spirituality invites these little shifts for us, sometimes big shifts, to live more fully into the Universal Christ.

Brie Stoner: When I was recently reading *Eager to Love*, you talk about Franciscan spirituality as having a home base of nature and on the road. I wonder if you could describe these two principles and why they might actually be helpful for us today and right now as a guide for how we can live a more environmentally attuned life with less of a heavy footprint, with less of an attachment to place.

Richard Rohr: When this really hit me, I was in England visiting the Anglican Franciscans. They have a charming little house somewhere out in the countryside of England, their mother house. They use a lovely term for people on the road in England. They call them “wayfarers.” It’s much more common there. All over Europe, there’s walking paths. We don’t have them because we’ve idealized our notion of private property.

Paul Swanson: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brie Stoner: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Richard Rohr: That would never be tolerated in Austria, “This is my property, and you can’t walk on it. “There’s always a path through it. So, that’s the world Francis grew up in and the early friars walked in.

I should mention that today’s Jonathan’s birthday. He’s walking from Assisi to Rome with his partner today. They found the path, the Via Francesco, it’s called, that Francis walked several times from Assisi to Rome. It was a walking culture, which they fit easily into, and it was a critique of monasticism. This was my BA thesis, so it’s a big point of mine. Why did Francis say, and this is in his first life, “Do not speak to me of Benedict. Do not speak to me of Augustine.” Was he trying to be anti-Benedictine? No, he just had to demarcate that they had gotten into, understandably considering their period in history, the collecting of land, the fencing of land. That’s one reason the Reformation, at least in England, was so immediately successful. Some go so far to say that three-fifths of England was owned by the Church and by monasteries.

Paul Swanson: Wow.

Brie Stoner: Wow.

Richard Rohr: I mean, well go there and see the ruins. You just don’t have to go far on the road, and it must be somewhat the same in Spain.

Brie Stoner: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Richard Rohr: The Church became giant landowners, and Francis wanted us to be—in fact, his rule, we were told when we learned it, was tips for the road, how to live in relationship with nature as you observed it while you were on the road. But then Shakespeare-- Did I say that in the book? --Shakespeare uses a phrase that most non-Franciscans don’t know what it meant. He uses it in two of his plays:

Richard Rohr: “They walked like friars.” Now, to walk like friars is to walk not chattering next to one another, but in a row about four feet apart.

Brie Stoner: Huh.

Richard Rohr: It was walking meditation. So, you didn’t feel the air with your noise, and you observed the plants and the flowers. I’m sure they stopped for drink, and for eating, and for talk. I’m not saying it was a vow of silence. But to walk like a friar, that that phrase existed or persisted until the time of Shakespeare is really telling to me, that we had a different way of spiritual practice, and nature and itinerancy were at the heart of it.

Now, it wasn’t long. I don’t want to over-romanticize it, because I would say by the end of the 13th century, we had built little friaries. They weren’t nearly as big as monasteries, but we never surrounded them with farms, so we had to be mendicants. Mendico means “I beg.” Would the Spanish word be the same in the—

Brie Stoner: I'm not sure what the word would be.

Richard Rohr: Yeah, doesn't matter. We were like Buddhist monks in the early period, as were the Poor Clares. So, we have to believe that Clare herself went out begging, which introduced them to the world, but the world in a one-down position. I don't come as a teacher, I come as someone in need. I come as someone who's ready to have the door slammed in my face and watches my reaction to that. There are still countries in Latin America, I know, where the Poor Clares are still mendicants. It was outlawed in the United States eventually, so we friars were quite happy to stop doing it. But can you see how it's a different social structure?

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Brie Stoner: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Richard Rohr: A very different social structure, which creates a different kind of religious life. But in all fairness, it didn't last long. It just couldn't be sustained. When you're even up to ten friars in one house, how do you feed that many breakfast, lunch, and supper from the beggars who go out and the people who live close to the friary got tired of their door being knocked on, do you understand? It's just we don't like vagrancy, and it was holy vagrancy. Now, what the Buddhist countries did was they made it a privilege to be able to put food in the bowl of the monk. I don't think we ever succeeded at that. We were more a bother—

Paul Swanson: Too rascally.

Richard Rohr: --in my understanding. But the structure itself was magnificent, even though unsustainable.

Paul Swanson: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Richard Rohr: The brother who tried to organize us into sustainability, whose name is now a bad name—Michael just read the book. Did he tell you about it?—Elias.

Brie Stoner: Oh, yeah.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. Brother Elias was the three on the Enneagram who tried to make this thing work and built the great Convento in Assisi which held, like, 200 friars. This is right after Francis dies, and so he's not even buried in Assisi. You have to go to Cortona some miles away, and you go in a little corner, "Hic jacet Elias. Here lies Elias."

Paul Swanson: Huh.

Richard Rohr: Nothing else is said about him. He became the villain who, at least from my order's observation. But also, he loved Francis, and he loved the ideal, but he was an utterly practical man, and Francis wasn't. Francis was a zealot and an idealist, but none of us could live up to him.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. As you mentioned Francis and just thinking about these turbulent times where our planet is heading-- We are in the midst of crisis, and I know—

Richard Rohr: Oh, the pre-Doom era.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: That's what we're living, consciously or unconsciously; mostly unconscious.

Paul Swanson: Mostly unconscious.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. Yeah.

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: As I have two little ones at home, and Brie has two little ones, and as we're trying to imagine raising them in this time where our government is not addressing the issues of the climate crisis and—

Richard Rohr: Denying it.

Paul Swanson: --the Church is not being very helpful as a whole. What does healthy spirituality look like in a time of climate crisis? Where do you see those of us in this Christian tradition? This is where I feel like Francis has so much to speak to us right now.

Richard Rohr: He does.

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: What does that look like? What do we need to pay attention to? How do we cultivate a sense of depth and grounded-ness in this time of such-- The ground is shifting and shaking in ways that—

Brie Stoner: Well, yeah, and maybe some of his zealotry is needed. I mean, to a certain extent, it's like how can we be challenged by his example and by the radical nature of what he lived and called others to live?

Paul Swanson: [inaudible 00:38:01] That was a nice little ... We're getting too heavy with climate crisis.

Brie Stoner: [inaudible 00:38:10] come in. No, but in all seriousness, I recently decided to get the paper on Sundays as a way to get my news—

Richard Rohr: Oh, yeah.

Brie Stoner: Which maybe might sound really heretical to people because you're like, "Well, isn't that the Sabbath? Shouldn't you be not paying attention to news that day?" But my choice was so that I wouldn't be inundated the rest of the days. There's something about sitting with the paper that I find is actually helpful in reading the news in that way. I'm a tactile person anyway. Recently, there were a lot of headlines about the environment. I now have a nine-year-old who can obviously read and picked up the paper and started reading. He started crying, and he said, "What is happening?" He was reading about all the animals that are

extinct and on the verge of extinction—

Richard Rohr: On the verge.

Brie Stoner: --and our current administration's choices around that. He said, "Mama, what are we going to do? We have to do something. We have to do something." I felt lost. Opie agrees with me.

Richard Rohr: Opie agrees.

Brie Stoner: I felt at a loss in that moment, because I also feel that, and I do feel like the choices we have ahead of us, if we're not radical about this now, we are living out of alignment with the values of the Universal Christ, and so—

Richard Rohr: Very much so.

Brie Stoner: I think back to your question, Paul, how do we do this? What can we take from Francis's example and then take seriously?

Richard Rohr: How? How do you convict people of what is obvious? Our capacity for denial is immense, and I don't know how many hurricanes, and floods, and droughts it's going to take. Just like with the gun crisis, it took three in three days for the panic to begin, "My God, this is becoming a way of life." And we now have some movement. Whether it'll last, we don't know.

Paul Swanson: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Richard Rohr: But I think it's going to have to be one hurricane after another. But the voices of money and business are so dominant in a capitalist culture. What matters is the making of money. I'm not trying to be moralistic. I'm trying to be realistic. But any critique of capitalism, we saw it in our customer service department. We thought we would get a lot of nasty responses when I talked about gender and when I talked about-- What was the other thing I thought?

Paul Swanson: Was it race?

Richard Rohr: Race, yes. Race and gender. They told me the angriest calls from people who think they're my fans, oh, was when I dared to critique capitalism.

Brie Stoner: Right.

Richard Rohr: Why would you feel this need to run to the defense of capitalism? Only because it's working for you.

Paul Swanson: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brie Stoner: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Richard Rohr: Have you taken the time to read a few books? Who is it not working for, you know?

Brie Stoner: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Richard Rohr: How many is it not working for? Oh, the whole gospel hinges on some degree of detachment from your ego and your ego-centricity and your self-referential reading of reality. You put the gospel in the hands of self-referential people, they will distort it on every count; on every count. The sacraments will be distorted. The Bible will be distorted. The priesthood will be distorted. Ministry will be distorted. Church buildings will be corrupted. It isn't worship of God or reality anymore. You know, so many have said in poetry over the years that nature, and we've all had those moments, nature is the natural cathedral.

Paul Swanson: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brie Stoner: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Richard Rohr: Gosh, that's true. You know?

Brie Stoner: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Richard Rohr: So, why do we need to cover that up and block it out, actually? Block it out so we could pray inside? Now, I know you were at Gaudí's monument—

Brie Stoner: I feel like we need to make an exception for him, because at least he was trying to make it look like a forest.

Richard Rohr: Yes, I knew you were going to jump in.

Brie Stoner: No, no. No, it's true, though.

Richard Rohr: No, no. It's true. Brie was just in Barcelona recently where Antoni Gaudí-- Wasn't that his first name, Antoni?

Brie Stoner: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Richard Rohr: Yeah. He tried to make a cathedral that looked like a forest, bringing in as many natural lights as he possibly could.

Brie Stoner: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Richard Rohr: How many hours did you spend there?

Brie Stoner: Oh.

Richard Rohr: You just keep looking and looking.

Brie Stoner: Oh, yeah, it's stunning. It is stunning, and you do marvel at the human capacity for ingenuity and accomplishment.

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Brie Stoner: But to also recognize, you know, if we were to go and look at a giant sequoia, if a human being—

Richard Rohr: There you go.

Brie Stoner: --had carved that, we would be saying, "What a marvel of human capacity," you know?

Richard Rohr: Yes, yes. Yeah.

Brie Stoner: And yet we're cutting them down. Right? So, somewhere between complete despair, which I feel like I tilt into sometimes, and denial, is hope. I think examples like Greta—am I saying her name right--Thunberg?

Paul Swanson: Right.

Brie Stoner: Greta Thunberg? This young-- Do you know about her, Richard?

Richard Rohr: No.

Brie Stoner: This young woman who is leading an environmental movement. She's in high school. She started this protest that has now taken on, and so many are following her example. I think she's called an international work strike tomorrow. Is that right?

Paul Swanson: What is today? On Friday.

Brie Stoner: On Friday.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Brie Stoner: Okay. But all that to say, in the midst of this, just as we've been discussing with every conversation, it's like in the midst of the reality that is absurd and is to be grieved, there is yet this something-ness is trying to emerge and break through. How can we move into that animated action and not fall into despair or live in denial? That feels like the question I'm trying to live into with my sons.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: That's the challenge. It probably was of every time on a different level. Earlier people had higher rates of violence. I know that's hard to believe. But we just have higher rates of absurdity at every level; at every level. So, I can recognize why a lot of people have blocked it, have checked out: "I cannot absorb that much absurdity, that much negativity, that much despair." And so, for survival, they pretend it isn't happening.

Brie Stoner: They just deny it.

Paul Swanson: Right.

Richard Rohr: That this little circle of five people around this table is all we need to preserve. But that isn't going to work much longer.

Paul Swanson: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah, and just being so aware of the ways that we are rolling back some of these protections that we had—

Richard Rohr: Oh, horrible.

Paul Swanson: --with our waters, and our mountains, and when I feel that despair, it's almost like it just gets stuck in me.

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: I know, Richard, you said if you had another lifetime, you'd want to devote it to ways of lamenting, ways of—

Brie Stoner: Oh, the Liturgy of Lament.

Paul Swanson: The liturgy of lament.

Richard Rohr: Liturgy of Lament.

Paul Swanson: It seems like there needs to be in this era of crisis, we need to have these Liturgies of Lament to be able to even process and accept reality and the absurdity of what's going on right now and not let it just get blocked in our bodies.

Brie Stoner: And not get stuck in it. Yeah. That's good, Paul.

Paul Swanson: Because when we live in that despair, we kind of hide under the covers of what reality's actually trying to show us. Or, we have some of the most wealthy in the world trying to figure out ways to get out of this planet and go live on another one, which seems like a whole other way of channeling despair instead of living that communal paradigm where we're acknowledging what's going on.

So, if you were to offer a word or a way of inviting us into a grief ritual, or lamenting, a Liturgy of Lament for where we're at right now as a planet, where would you help guide us, whether it's in a personal way or in a communal way?

Richard Rohr: It's really the only remaining alternative from exploding from your anger. I, as a one, am so tired of being resentful of reality, and politics, and the church. [Note: Fr. Richard is referring to his Enneagram type. There are nine Enneagram types.] I just can't live that way, so I myself have to deny. The only way out is to—I mean it in the classic sense, I wish I cried easier—but is to somehow legitimate weeping. It's a way of disagreeing with it but while fully recognizing it. We created such a liturgy in the Men's Rites of Passage as you would remember, Paul.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: And then the one I mentioned yesterday, Liturgies of Not Knowing. Yeah. If I had another lifetime, I'd love to give time to both of those, because they're so contrary to typical church services. Remember when I used to talk-- Did I? I hope I used to talk about the difference between ceremony and ritual? That

Richard Rohr: ceremony affirms the status quo. Most Catholic and Protestant Church ceremonies are ceremonies.

Paul Swanson: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brie Stoner: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Richard Rohr: And they have to be. They have to hold the psyche together: “Life is good. God is good. You’re good.” That’s all we can do in a deconstructed culture like we have now. But rituals—and this is from the professionals who give PhDs in ritual and ceremony—rituals rightly named always reveal the shadow problem. They don’t concentrate on it, but they expose it. They reveal it, like the Wizard of Oz, pulling back the veil. I use the Fourth of July parade and speech and call that a ceremony, almost always. I use a loving but real protest march, or what you’re calling a Liturgy of Lamentation, as a real ritual, where you do ritualize the moment we’re in and the reality. You’re not a hateful person, but you name the garbage that’s going on.

Now, people who aren’t used to ritual will be very afraid of that because they’re not used to the shadow being named. They’re not used to the shadow being exposed, and they’ll say almost always, “You’re anti-American. You’re communist. You’re violent.” They’ll pull out any word they can. No, this is the classic meaning.

Now, let me bring that home to one ritual that persisted was Ash Wednesday as a clear example of that where the ashes were revealed, blessed, and put publicly on the forehead: “I’m owning death and my participation in death.” It’s one of the few rites of passage that persisted into the Modern era, and it always astounds me how many people come to church on Ash Wednesday. Do they know that, that somehow, I’ve got to name the shadow instead of just happy little Jesus songs, which aren’t truthful after a while?

Now, we have the phrase, “We proclaim the death of the Lord until He comes.” But that’s become an antiphon at the middle of Mass, but we really don’t proclaim the death. What we’ve got to do is proclaim equally the death and the resurrection, the dying and the rising, as equally to be trusted and equally a part of religion.

Paul Swanson: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Richard Rohr: The only time I wish I were a pope is if I— [laughter]

Brie Stoner: Can we just pause at for a second? Hang on.

Paul Swanson: Let that sink in.

Brie Stoner: Hang on.

Richard Rohr: --is I wish I could rewrite the official prayers of the Mass to let that be known, “This is what we’re doing here. We’re saying loss and renewal is the pattern of everything—

Brie Stoner: Everything. Everything.

Richard Rohr: --not just of Jesus. And we keep worshiping it in Jesus and offering this sacrifice to God the Father of Jesus’s death and resurrection; whereas, what we’re doing, and that is said, too, we’re offering our deaths and our resurrections, too, which means we have to trust both of

them.

Brie Stoner: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Paul Swanson: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: And part of that resurrection piece to me that just came to mind was also being able to delight in just the beauty of this world too. Even as we know everything is in change, everything's in motion, everything is dying, and everything is being reborn, I just had this flash of an image of-- I had a beer with a dear friend a week ago, and we were almost just giddy with delight at the sunset and that we were together experiencing that. It was just allowing the beauty of the moment to also have its say, too, and not get only caught up in the death that we're witnessing.

Brie Stoner: That's right.

Richard Rohr: That's lovely. Yes.

Brie Stoner: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Brie Stoner: That seems to also be a part of our—I said “our.”

Richard Rohr: That's all right.

Brie Stoner: Do you appreciate that?

Richard Rohr: I'm happy to have you say it.

Brie Stoner: The Franciscan that I am, but the heritage of Franciscanism is that this-ness, the haecceity-- Am I saying that right?

Richard Rohr: Haecceity.

Brie Stoner: Haecceity.

Richard Rohr: Haecceity; this-ness.

Brie Stoner: --of being able to appreciate beauty and particularity. I'm thinking of your gardening, Richard. The fact that for how many years now you've kept this—

Richard Rohr: Twenty-one years now, yeah.

Brie Stoner: --sweet, little garden. It's an image that's so burned in my mind when I think about you. Because as we consider how we can live in the tension of our times and how we're being called to live into the Universal Christ in the midst of an environmental crisis, I really appreciate that orientation, Paul, that you've offered us to say, and turning toward beauty,

and cultivating presence that can have awe and wonder, learning the names of twenty-five birdsongs and tree species, having that kind of intentionality is doing something, and it does put us in relationship in the world in a new way.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. Yeah. It allows for the complexity, right, of the beauty and the despair to just be. It's like that Celtic or that Franciscan image of the wholeness. Let's not divide it. Let's just hold it.

Brie Stoner: Hold it, both the dying and the rising.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Brie Stoner: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Paul Swanson: Like even now, the later days of September, I'm letting my garden go to seed. It's really hard to do. "Oh, here we go again. How many times have we done this?" I didn't have a big garden this year at all, but there's something sad about the dying, that I can't sustain these flowers. I can't sustain this plant. Yeah.

Brie Stoner: Well, Richard, as we close this episode, I wonder if you could share with us an experience that you've had this week of sort of turning toward that delight and awe and wonder of creation as a source of recognizing the Christ-soaked world and the hope of what may yet be.

Richard Rohr: I've been having it a lot. A lot. It's just been so easy to pray the last few days. Part of it is because I'm slowing down and not traveling. I'm more a hermit at home than I ever was in my life where I had to go off, leave the city to live in a hermitage. But by saying "no" to more and more speaking engagements, and having this cute little dog who's biting Corey's fingers right now—

Brie Stoner: Little Opie.

Richard Rohr: He leads me into it. I have to take him out, and I just noticed in this little yard behind me all the different clovers, and grasses, and little seeded plants that make up the lawn. From a distance, it looks like one uniform green. You get close, and you look at it, and, of course, he has to pee on any plant that's at all tall, it just makes me observe both the time element that I have more time than I used to have, and the space element, the space of my own yard. I said that to someone who was walking with me while we walked Opie. I don't need to go to the Grand Tetons. I really don't, if this makes me delightful. I've been to the Grand Tetons, and they're grand. But if I can get excited, which I do, about this little seedling, this little— There are some that is almost mat-like, creating a little bed.

I don't know. Those little things make me happy now, really happy. I'm not saying that because you asked the question. I started being that way, but I got too busy all the way from thirty to seventy. Now I'm free to go back to that, to not need to be in special places or cathedrals. In fact, churches really bore me anymore because they're always blocking this out and saying, "This space is holy in here." That's a lethal statement because if this place is holy, then that place outside is not holy. I know we have to do it. I don't want to be unrealistic. But the church where I have Mass, this big barn of a church on this corner isn't very pretty at all, and I don't think there are any clear windows. It's all covered with stained glass, not

even very nice stained glass at that. But we tried. We tried. That's what we thought it was supposed to be.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. It's such an invitation for us though also to slow down, to live the kind of intentional lives that don't give into stress and busyness and the world's notions of success in order to be in relationship with this blade of grass in this particular yard and this tree.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. This morning, I was taking out my recycling, and that knowing sound of the wheels against rock and gravel. I was holding my son who's almost a year old now, and I'm trying to balance both. I put it up on the curb for the recycling truck. I look up, and there's the moon.

Richard Rohr: Oh, yeah.

Paul Swanson: I was able to just have a pause in the midst of that busyness to delight in the fact that I'm holding my baby boy, and we're just together looking at the moon.

Richard Rohr: Oh, oh, oh.

Paul Swanson: That's what I feel like part of the gift of having that awareness, Richard, to those little things is then you can pause in the midst of the chaos.

Richard Rohr: And almost the littler, the better.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Brie Stoner: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Richard Rohr: Oh, the moon isn't little, but it's a little thing to notice it—

Brie Stoner: That's it.

Richard Rohr: --because we take it for granted. Now, did you point it out to him?

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Yes. "The moon," you said.

Paul Swanson: The moon, there it is watching over us.

Richard Rohr: He's going to get a different religious education, and I know Brie does this with her boys too.

Paul Swanson: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brie Stoner: Well, thank you, Richard.

Paul Swanson: Yes. Thank you, Richard.

Richard Rohr: Thank you, thank you, thank you. While you were saying that, Opie was licking my hand. Weren't you?

Paul Swanson: Aw.

Brie Stoner: Aw.

Paul Swanson: Weren't you licking my hand?

Brie Stoner: Aw.

Paul Swanson: Blessing it with holy water.

Brie Stoner: Little Opie.