

Podcast Transcript

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- [Isaiah 64:1-9](#) •
- [Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19](#) •
- [1 Corinthians 1:3-9](#) •
- [Mark 13:24-37](#)

<<Music: "Building Up a New World," 1st verse, fade out under opening sentence.>>

<<"We are building up a new world, builders must be strong.">>

>> MARGARET ERNST: Beloveds, welcome back to The Word Is Resistance. My name is Reverend Margaret Ernst, and I'm a minister in Berks County, Pennsylvania on land traditionally sewered by the Lennie Lenape people.

This is The Word Is Resistance, the podcast where we explore what our Christian sacred texts have to teach us about living, surviving, even thriving in the context of empire, tyranny, violence, and repression, times in which we're living today.

What do our sacred stories have to teach white folks specifically about our role in resistance and showing up for collective liberation and for racial justice? What wisdom is there for us as white Christians in these troubled, violent times? And what beauty can we find there in our resistance as we fight for justice?

Reverend Anne Dunlap asked me to contribute to The Word Is Resistance back in 2017, and I was hesitant at first. I didn't think I had anything to contribute, but I said yes. And then she asked more people. Since then, over six to seven years ago, 21 people have contributed episodes to The Word Is Resistance.

There have been meetups with listeners, live and virtually. We put our transcripts online. And through all of these, looking at this text, and bringing this text up as a lens on our lives. We have learned so much for our organizing, for our ministry, for our antiracist work. And here, there is a collective body of

theology and practical in these podcasts that we hope will have an impact for a long time.

I'm so honored to be with you today to host a conversation with our beloved colleagues and friends Reverend Anne, SURJ Faith's coordinator who founded the podcast, and Nichola Torbett, another longtime contributor.

I will share more with you about what we're doing today and why, but first let me tell you, as always, that this live recording of Dr. Vincent Harding's song for the Freedom Movement is of a multiracial movement choir practice in Denver, Colorado recorded in December 2014. And it's led by Minister Daryl J. Walker. We are deeply grateful to the Freeney Harding family for letting us use the song for this podcast.

We've done over 300 episodes of The Word Is Resistance together since January 2017. Some of you have been with us along the way. Some of us - some of you may have found us only recently. And we are grateful for each one of you.

And the time has come to complete this particular piece of work. We feel tender about saying goodbye to this incredible project that has meant so much to us, and also feels so celebratory for the world we have built here together for white Christians over the years who want to show up for racial justice and for liberation.

And to - to celebrate the completion of the podcast, we're wrapping up with three episodes of group conversations with our current contributor crew. And then we'll have the final episode from Reverend Anne with a - with a special request for you. Think of these final episodes as a kind of advent calendar. The parting gifts.

I'm hosting today's conversation which will be myself, Nichola, and Anne. And somehow in the scheduling, it worked out that we are three of the original contributors from way back in the day.

>> NICHOLA TORBETT: Hey, everyone. This is Nichola Torbett. I use she and them pronouns.

And just to tell you a little about myself, I was critically formed in the movement town of Oakland, California by the Ohlone people, who are indigenous to that place and who are still very active there through the Sogorea Te Land Trust. And

also, by a whole bunch of BIPOC-led, poor people-led, queer and trans-led organizations that make Oakland that movement town that it is.

It always feels important to name First Congregational Church of Oakland and the liturgical direct-action affinity group Second Acts as places who have held me accountable and shaped my theology, along with this podcast.

And then, as life does, life changed about four months ago. I moved from Oakland to Lenape land near Bangor, Pennsylvania, where I'm helping to shape programming at Kirkridge Retreat and Study Center.

It started to feel important to take all that had been poured into me and shaped me and utterly changed my life, and bring it out from the Bay Area to a place nearer to where I grew up, which was in Ohio. It feels a little like coming home, but coming home totally different. Coming home a different way, maybe, though I am hardly a Magi, and we're not in epiphany yet.

So, with that, I will turn it over to Anne.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: Hi, everyone. Reverend Anne Dunlap, pronouns she/her/hers, faith organizing coordinator for SURJ through the end of this year, at which time I'll be leaving, actually, to do some whole new work, which we'll be happy to share with you some other time. But - yeah.

I'm coming to you from what's currently called Buffalo, New York, which are the homelands of the Haudenosaunee peoples which stretch vastly across what we know or call New York, all the way into the Midwest. And Haudenosaunee peoples continue to lay down prayers of thanksgiving for this land and for the ancestors of this land, the peoples of this land. And I give gratitude for that.

And I give gratitude for all of you. And I give gratitude to you both, Nichola and Margaret, for this conversation today and all that you've brought to this podcast and the world, in general, over all these years.

>> MARGARET ERNST: Well, welcome to you, both. And welcome to all of you who are listening in today. You are part of our family this morning. We'll take a quick musical break, and then jump into the conversation.

<<Music interlude, verse 2 of "Building Up a New World.">>
<<"Courage, sisters, brothers, people: don't get weary, though the way be long.">>

>> MARGARET ERNST: Courage, people. Don't get weary. In order to look forward and to wrap up this project well, we want to start with looking back. So, we'll start with Reverend Anne, and then we'll fold Nichola into the conversation.

So, dear Anne, tell us about your hopes when you started The Word Is Resistance.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: Yeah. I think I hoped that people would listen. I mean, that's, like, baseline. Will anybody actually listen to this? It was a - seemed like a big experiment, even in that moment.

The very first episode was - went live the week that Trump was inaugurated in January of 2017. And I hoped that it could be a word for what we - what was clearly going to be some really scary time that we were entering into. And continuing through. Right? Is, like, that recognition that things have been bad for many people, and scary for a long time. Just, perhaps, more uncovered in that way.

So, I just hoped people would listen. Prior to - to launching, I did a lot of research, trying to see if something like this existed. A blog, a lectionary set of commentary. Like, you know, that - that would bring what I wanted to bring to this work.

And perhaps, like, the word that I needed to hear in that moment, which was, you know, biblical interpretation that actually had a power analysis about empire that was also committed to fighting antisemitism and anti-Judaism that was also feminist, also queer, also antiracist. All of that at the same time. And also, speaking to white Christians.

And nothing like that existed. Like, you could find pieces of those. Like, one interpretation. But not, like, bringing all of those together and really trying to allow the text to illuminate and speak to the moment that we're in, in all those ways. And I wanted white Christians to have that kind of resource. I wanted that kind of resource for myself. That kind of word.

And so, I hoped that - that people listening, white Christians, would realize that the Bible is actually such a helpful and sacred text of people fighting the same shit that we are, wrestling with the same questions we are. You know? Having the same troubles, having the same, you know, celebrations and joys and breakthroughs and hope and possibility that we are.

And I hoped that people would be moved to action because of that in ways that were, like, perhaps even knew, deeply accountable. And that they would share that. Not just, like, share the podcast on their social media, or whatever. But, like, share that good news that, like, oh, we have a resource here in our tradition that can help us in this moment.

So, I think those are some of those - those early hopes.

>> MARGARET ERNST: So, you saw a need for something that didn't exist, and created it, and invited us all into that project. And here we are, seven years later.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: Yeah. I'm just basically trying not to try. So, go ahead.

>> MARGARET ERNST: Well, I'll ask you a hard question so that you don't cry.

I - so, why - and our listeners might know this if, you know, might - could have - get it if they've been with us longer. But share, from your reasoning, why was the podcast with all of these intersectional analyses so important to be directed to an audience of white Christians, specifically? Why not just direct folks to other resources?

>> ANNE DUNLAP: That's such a great question. I - I really believe that because of the ways that white western Christianity provided and continued to provide for the, like, moral and theological backbones of the things that we're actually fighting - racism, capitalism, anti-trans and anti-queer stuff. Some of which are obvious, perhaps. Some of which, less so.

That it was so important to - to be in conversation with white Christians to undo the - those kinds of knottings of - of theology within these systems that we're - that we're actually all suffering from. To help us all find our mutual shared interest and uncoupling ourselves from this death machinery.

And offering a new understanding of what it could mean to be Christian that's not about dominating, that's not about some kind of, like, us against them, the good against the - the - the savage, the saved against the unsaved. But all of us in this together.

And we certainly did not the answers to all of that in the beginning, but I think, collectively, found our way to some really beautiful new ways of understanding what - what it can mean to be Christian as white people in this - in this time.

>> MARGARET ERNST: I know, for me, this has been a very particularly, like, specific piece of work that needed to be done. This theology we've done through The Word Is Resistance.

And it also lies within this larger corpus of folks. Of - of work that we hope people are accessing. That - for instance, when we put up - when we initially put up the podcast, we said, you know, we really also need to direct people to listen to podcasts by black folks, by - by - BIPOC folks, by indigenous folks.

Because you don't only need The Word Is - you don't just need The Word Is Resistance. You also need black liberation theology, you also need [inaudible 0:13:40] theology, you also need native theology and thought. You need perspectives from all these places in order to get the whole.

And we are just doing our particular part to speak to our people in the ways that we know we need to be spoken to.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: That's right. That's right.

>> MARGARET ERNST: And we hope that we've done that justice.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: I hope so.

>> MARGARET ERNST: So much has changed since January 2017. What has changed in the world and in the landscape that we're looking upon, Anne, since the podcast began?

>> ANNE DUNLAP: Yeah. I mean, sometimes I feel like so much has changed. And also, like, it's just the - the same machinery doing what it does. The same death machinery doing what it does. And it's just more visible to more people now, what's happening.

But I also - I - I - you know, when you - you know, I read that prompt question. And the first thing that actually came to mind was the pandemic. You know, we're - we're, at this point, probably now four years into when we first started hearing about COVID. When it was first starting to trickle in the news, perhaps. In - in China, and then into Europe, and then, eventually, you know, to here by January, February, March. That feels like a long time.

When I think about the span of the podcast, in general, January 2017, it just feels like eons ago. I feel like, sometimes, that we've lived through so many layers of time that we are not used to living through. In - in all that has been, like, been being, you know, as - as Adrienne Maree Brown says, you know, unveiled and uncovered in these years.

And, you know, the pandemic, in particular, I think, did that for a lot of people in ways that they may not have recognized, or maybe still don't recognize. In the ways that those with power and wealth just - mostly just abandoned us to death and to the risk of death.

The possibilities that were present, you know, in those first weeks of shutdown of actually providing for people and providing care for people. And, you know, quickly went the way of, well, we can't do X, Y, Z because profit margins. We can't do X, Y, Z because the economy. We can't do blah, blah, blah.

And - and now we're out of COVID money. So, you know, all of the places, you know, shutting down all the places where people could get free testing or - or vaccinated in multiple, multiple places. You know, like, all of that just disappearing and just being abandoned to a disease that is unpredictable. And if it does not kill you, could potentially leave you with disability.

And I think we still have not reckoned with that abandonment. And - and the grief of the - the - the loss of millions of people. And the - the grief of, like, a mass disabling event and what that - that implies for us as a people.

So, I think a lot about, like, the changing of the landscape. Like, that is a huge, to me, a huge piece that - that often doesn't get talked about. We talk about Trump. And we talk about, you know, the - the insurrection. And we - and, you know, now we're into wars and climate and all this stuff.

But, like, the pandemic, I think, really is - has to be part of that story of what's happened to us since - since January of 2017.

>> MARGARET ERNST: And through all that time, the podcast continued.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: Yeah. Yes, it did.

>> MARGARET ERNST: So, we encourage you, if you're listening, to look back on these episodes. Like, look back at these moments of importance, historically. These movement moments. And how our contributors responded. And how we looked at these different scripture texts, the lectionary for each week.

And then, we have changed, too. And Octavia Butler says, "All that you touch you change. And all that you change - " Wait. "All that you touch you change. And all that you change changes you." Is that right?

>> ANNE DUNLAP: I think that's right.

>> MARGARET ERNST: Thank you. And we have been touched and moved by this podcast.

I'm curious, for you, Anne. How has the podcast changed you in your organizing, in your ministry, or in your faith?

>> ANNE DUNLAP: I mean, I - I am very clear I'm not the same person I was when we started working on this. And, you know, some of that is attributable to other things, of course.

But there is a lot, I think, that's attributable to the discipline of working on this podcast. Not only the episodes that I worked on myself, but each week. Like, what is Nichola saying this week to this moment? What is Margaret saying this week to this moment? What is, you know, Allen or Seth or Will or, you know, like, Brigitta. Like, what are - what are - what are my people saying in this moment? And learning from all of you.

Like, one of the, like, key things - and I think both of you, early on, had episodes about this. Of this kind of - like, the - the good Christian versus the bad Christians. And how

posturing ourselves as the good ones was actually not going to serve us in the movement.

And that just blew my mind. Like, oh. Oh, that's actually creating more division. When what we actually need to be doing is, like - you know, Margaret, your - your brilliant title for your episode of Fishing for Our People. You know? It's creating that community. And we can't do that if we somehow think that we're better. Like, we're saved.

Like, and how that began to, like, work at the, you know, the underpinnings of my own theologies and reading these texts. Like, if that's not it, then what is it?

And so, that - that would be a key, like, theological and faith shift for me. Because that was definitely me. Like, I've got it all figured out. And I think in the beginning of the podcast, those first several episodes was, like, I've got it all figured out and I'm here to teach you all so that you all get it all figured out, too.

And it shifted over time to actually, like, implicating myself in it and opening myself up more vulnerably. I've - I've talked about this before, I think. That even if you look at the transcripts, those early ones that are, like, bullet points and black paragraphs and, you know, lists of - of things. Like, they're very, like, linear, structured.

And at some point, you know, even that year, I think, it shifted into this much more poetic form on the page. Shorter phrases, wandering around. Sometimes just being like, I don't actually know. Here's an idea. What do you think? And just - and leaving it with that. And so, that, like, willingness to be vulnerable and now have all the answers. To actually wrestle with people in it and to be open about that is a shift for me.

And I love Jesus more, actually, from working on a podcast. Like, really seeing Jesus as a comrade in movement. And trying to struggle through the kinds of stuff that we do in movement and in organizing and trying to build community. And trying to survive desperate conditions. And the way, sometimes, he seems to really struggle with that. Like, oh. You - you - you are actually somebody I can understand.

Because this is also me. That sometimes, you know, I have to get away. Sometimes, I snap at people that I should not snap at. Because I'm traumatized. Like, there's actual trauma

happening in the text. And seeing that, you know, in - in him, like, made me love him a lot more.

Yeah. Those are - those are some things.

>> MARGARET ERNST: Wow. So, those are some pretty significant shifts. The sense of kind of - I think I hear you talking about, like, the humility and trying to draw this binary of good Christians and bad Christians. And a deeper love for Jesus.

So, if anyone thought we were throwing Jesus out, then you've just heard it from Anne -

>> ANNE DUNLAP: Yeah. You were quite mistaken.

>> MARGARET ERNST: - Loves Jesus more. Nichola -

>> ANNE DUNLAP: A queer liberationist feminist saying she loves Jesus more.

>> MARGARET ERNST: There you go.

>> NICHOLA TORBETT: I love it.

>> MARGARET ERNST: He loves us, this we know.

So, Nichola, let's invite you in. How has the podcast changed you?

>> NICHOLA TORBETT: Yeah. It's really - just sitting here sort of in awe of thinking who I was in 2017 when we started this. And I remember, you know, working on that first episode and being so terrified about putting something out into the world that was going to live beyond my saying it. You know? That was going to be recorded. And how scary that is. You know? And the fear of making a mistake.

And, you know, that's - that's different now. Not that I don't still take it seriously, and not that I'm not afraid sometimes. But I think that so much of what we've put out in the podcast is about how we're going to make mistakes, we're going to miss the mark.

There's - we're immersed in this history that has completely shrouded our ability to perceive the world. And we're going to get it wrong. And so, I feel a sense of both liberation

and, like, community and solidarity in that. Of, like, oh, we - we're going to need to call each other in and support each other and try to help each other learn.

And, you know, there have been - there have been times on these podcasts where we've disagreed with each other. And - and it's so cool that we're able to do that and learn in that process. And I feel like that has really changed how I organize, because it's so easy to fall into that. I mean, you named it, Anne, as the - the good Christian bad Christian dynamic. But it's also the good white person, bad white person dynamic. Right?

And that binary, like, it just doesn't even make sense to me anymore. You know? Like, that doesn't exist. The good - the good white person doesn't exist. And nor - and nor does the bad white person. It's like a bunch of us trying to figure things out over here. You know? So, that's a big part.

And then, I remember, too, some early conversations we had. I think it was - it was the three of us having the conversation around, how do we not center whiteness in a podcast that is addressed to white Christians? Remember that conversation? And I think where I've landed on that -

>> ANNE DUNLAP: I do, yeah.

>> NICHOLA TORBETT: Yeah. Like, I realized, oh, we can't not center whiteness, because we're white.

And also, I really love what the two of you were saying about, you know, all we have is our little part to contribute to this larger movement. And it's really important that folks also be hearing other voices that are not coming from white people.

And at the same time, my understanding of what the work is for us as white people has just, like, expanded so much. And my sense of the importance of working with and organizing white folks. That's been a real movement for me. Like, I didn't really want to do that, I don't think, in 2017. I was still like, it's way more fun to hang out with the BIPOC movement organizations than it is to work with white folks.

And - yeah. I'm just - I'm seeing the importance of that work. And really being nourished by organizing white folks, at this point. That feels like a shift that - that came about

through our wrestling with questions like, how do we not center whiteness?

And Margaret, I think your - I don't remember which episode it was, but your asking us to think about where - where are you in this text? Who are you in this text? And, spoiler alert, you're probably not Jesus. You know? And you're probably not even one of his closest disciples. You might be a Roman, in fact.

That was really, really helpful for me in sort of thinking about, well, what is - what is my place in what we're doing here in movements? In the world. You know? That sort of decentering that happened with that question.

Yeah. So, those are some things. There - there are probably other things, too.

>> MARGARET ERNST: Great. So, we - like, in many caucus spaces, we - in this caucus, we center whiteness for the sake of liberation. For the sake of a larger project - project of decentering whiteness in the - in the world. Right?

>> NICHOLA TORBETT: Exactly.

>> MARGARET ERNST: And I remember Ruby Sales, in an episode of On Being, an interview with Krista Tippett, she says that we need people doing white liberation theology. Right? That speaks to people everywhere. In Appalachia, in places that are hurting, and in places that are being organized into fascism through a strategy of white supremacy. So, that's one of the commissions we've tried to take on here.

Well, to answer this question myself, I - podcast has changed me a lot. And I - as I'm hearing you both reflect on it, I'm recognizing that I think I've made, like, specific life decisions based on the kind of impact of doing this podcast on me over time.

I first started contributing to the podcast when - like Anne mentioned to me, it was in the month after Trump was elected first. And those were times when I was living in Tennessee and I was organizing - I felt really called to organize white religious folks to show up more effectively in different black-led movements in Nashville.

I was in Divinity School at the time, so, I was also, like, intaking a lot of theology. And I - a lot of my insights from the episodes, that came from that work of trying to organize white people.

And then, when I came back north, I first was an associate minister at a very self-consciously progressive white church with mostly, like, white liberals. And then, I really recognized that I felt led out of that particular culture into trying to bring what I could to a more politically purple area, a more conservative space. And also, more working-class community.

So, I really felt, I think, inspired and motivated by The Word Is Resistance to practice what I preached in terms of not demonizing people in conservative areas. I will say that that doesn't mean I'm not - doesn't mean I'm stupid. Like, I am - like, my neighbors here in Berks County, like, have a collection of AR-15s. I'm not stupid.

But what I have learned is that the way neoliberals works is that it - it tells us to be distracted by thinking that, like, the racists, so to speak, are over there, when - when we're all actually functioning in this racist system. And then, that kind of demonization stops us from doing effective movement building. And we need to find another way.

So, I made the choice to take up a call at a small church in Pennsylvania in a pretty - in a more conservative part of the UCC. And it's been challenging, in many ways, especially as a queer person, as a female. I'm the only - basically, the only female minister in that part of the - in the county - part of the county. It's isolating, at times.

But I've also been so hopeful because of it. Because I see how all these folks who are not being organized by the left are deeply down for mutual aid for hospitality, for immigrants and refugees, for queer folks and trans liberations.

Like, when the right conditions are created for people to be able to, like, reflect about their values and who they are and who they want to be and their faith, like, there's so many more people who are with us than against us. And that gives me so much hope.

And I think that The Word Is Resistance and our - our real conviction that we created it with, this podcast, over time

helped me to have the fortitude and the courage to take up this call. And then to try to spread that good news wherever I go.

>> NICHOLA TORBETT: Amen.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: Amen to that.

>> NICHOLA TORBETT: You just kind of blew my mind in that way that you do in episodes. When you were talking about neoliberalism and distraction. You know? And - and - yeah. Yeah. Assuming that the racists are over there rather than in here, inside me and us, on the left. Wow. Thank you.

>> MARGARET ERNST: Yeah. I mean, I'm not going to lie. There - there are actual white nationalists. You know? Right? We should not -

>> ANNE DUNLAP: Right, right, right.

>> MARGARET ERNST: We cannot undermine - like, we can't conflate. Right? And flatten things. Like, we should be - we should be very scared of the far right.

But it's a - we need to look at it in the context of the broader system of capitalism and how that far right is both creating the conditions for its base to build, white nationalism to build. And what - yeah. And it's doing a good job of organizing folks.

So, that's why we're here. To do something different.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: Right. That's right.

I mean, what a gift it's been for me, like, to as - as, like, the - the coordinator of the podcast, to watch, like, you, Margaret. In the beginning, you were literally telling me, "I don't think I have anything to say. Why do you keep asking me?" And consistently trying to, if I may say, like, get out of it over time. And me bringing you back in. Let's be real.

Like, and watching your growth from that moment, you know, back in, you know, early 2017 to, like, where you're at now, like, has been - and - and, like, so many folks over the podcast, I think, especially if they've been doing it for a while, just getting to watch people's transformation from when they first began.

And then, like, "no, actually I have something to say. And I have something to speak into this moment." And - and I have learned and - and I've got, you know. And, like, making those choices because of the transformation that you've lived through. Like, that's been, like, such a gift of being part of this project, for me, as the one who's, you know, on that kind of week-in-week-out, working with folks on it. So, thank you.

>> MARGARET ERNST: Thank you, Rev.

>> NICHOLA TORBETT: I just wanted to bring one other voice into this conversation, because I - you have me thinking about something that Tur-ha Ak, who is a leader in the black power movement in Oakland, said in a teach-in one time. He said that white nationalists are the shock troops of the owning class. You know? And they're basically being used -

>> MARGARET ERNST: Oh! Say that again. All right.

>> NICHOLA TORBETT: So, yes. There are white nationalists, and they're - they're also being used. You know? These white working-class white nationalists are being used by us.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: That's right. That's right.

>> MARGARET ERNST: Boom. Yeah. So -

>> ANNE DUNLAP: And we see that in our sacred text. We've talked about this over the years. We see that happened with these layers of, you know, how do we survive under the Roman empire? And see those fracturings happen even in the text once we begin to know how to look for them?

And to understand that kind of power and what that does to communities and the choices they feel like they have to make to survive. Just to bring it back to our beloved Bible and our believed comrade, Jesus.

>> MARGARET ERNST: So, we've already been talking about what we're taking with us from the podcast. What do you both hope that people will take with them when engaging in scripture?

>> NICHOLA TORBETT: Well, I think this piece around knowing that we're going to get it wrong and make mistakes. And just that the whole point of the gospel is grace. You know? So long as we keep coming back to the work, keep coming back to the work. I really hope people take that with them. That we be

emboldened to, as Bayo Akomolafe says, "Stale generatively." I think that's really important, as one thing.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: I love that. And the - that idea of - or - or that practice of grace and - and coming back to the work, and coming back to the work. I mean, Margaret, that was your powerful episode for our Roman series about grace. And that it, you know - that - that coming back, the opportunity always to come back to the work.

And so, one thing I hope that people will take is, you know, go back and listen to that series again. That Wrestling with Romans series. And realize that Paul is not our enemy. He is our ally. And that these texts that are continuing to be used for so much harm are actually meant for our liberation. Even if we didn't have all the answers in that series. Because we didn't always. Because it's a lot to unpack.

But there - there is that work there. The - the signpost, the - the clues, the hints, the illuminations. That Paul is not our enemy in this work. And I literally heard somebody, a Methodist pastor, say that recently. You know? About Christian Zionism. That it's all Paul's fault because Paul is a Roman citizen and he is very proud of his privilege on what - no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no.

That's not - that's not - you know, we have been told a lie about Paul and what he's up to. And so, being able to recover Paul as an ally for us, a comrade for us, a leader for us in figuring out how we unhook ourselves from this machinery of death. Paul's got some good answers. Not always, but he definitely has some. And we throw him out at our peril, I think.

So, take that - let's take that with us, too. And I hope folks take that with them, too.

>> MARGARET ERNST: I think building on that, what you say about Paul, Anne, I think for me, what I hope people take with them when engaging in scripture is just the commitment to keep wrestling, keep going, and to trust that there are something there. There is something there for you. There is a good word. There are a few that can truly be life-giving and liberating and make a difference in your life.

Because I - taking Paul as an example, I signed up for that - for - to do a podcast for the Roman series. And I just struggled with the text that I received. Because it was a really

hard text. It had all this shit - sorry, pardon me. All of this - all of these -

>> ANNE DUNLAP: No, speak the truth. Speak the truth.

>> MARGARET ERNST: Yeah. He says a bunch of shit about slavery, honestly. Like, using this metaphor of slavery. Being enslaved, righteousness. And I was like, I just can't get with this. And it's true.

And ultimately, I decided, kind of based on the framing of that - of that series where we said, you know, we - we're holding multiple things to be true. That we can reclaim Paul from the way he's been utilized by - by the right - by empire. And there's some times that we can't go with Paul all the way.

And that's why I was able to work with that text for - I was able to look at, okay, here I am seeing this really helpful perspective about grace. And I will not go with you Paul, like, on this metaphor.

And so, to reject the - to reject parts of it with a clear, like, ethic - with clear hermeneutic about why I'm rejecting it, while also reclaiming what could be liberating was really helpful. And so, it's just this wrestling.

I mean, I think about how the word Israel, which an anti-Zionist rabbi recently reminded me of. Rabbi Ari Lev reminded us of an action. That the word Israel means to wrestle with God. It's not necessarily just a place, definitely not a geopolitical entity. It means to wrestle with God.

And we, too, now, are wrestling with God. And we wrestle with these - with God through these texts. Through these super challenging texts, at times. And we have to do it. We can't just take the kind of progressive Christian bait of not talking about or not taking seriously the texts that we don't want to look at. Because then we yield those texts to people who will use them against us and will use them against other people.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: That's right. That's right. Well said.

>> MARGARET ERNST: So, we are now recording this in the time of Advent. And something that our podcast crew reflected on as we were preparing for this wrap-up series of conversations is how the story of Advent - King Herod finds out about the baby

Jesus and is threatened by this one who it's prophesied, you know, will somehow undermine Herod's power and his throne.

And so, Mary and Joseph go home by another way. And we want to ask ourselves, how are we going home by another way? Mary and Joseph take baby Jesus home by another way in order to protect him from the violence with empire, and the threat on his life.

How are we going home by another way as a result of our work on The Word Is Resistance? We are different after going through this journey together. How are we going home by another way?

>> NICHOLA TORBETT: I'm just thinking about - one of the things I had to come back to so much, working on episodes of The Word Is Resistance, is that old saw that every "you" in the Bible is plural. You know? And that, actually, this text is addressed to communities, not to individuals. And, you know, it - I ran up against it.

I think, talking about that scripture about "don't worry about what you're going to wear or what you're going to eat." You know? And so many people over the years have to me, well, how is that working out for poor people? You know?

And what I realized is that the question is, are we practicing it? Those of us who are not in desperate straits right now. And if we really were, would there be poor people? You know?

So, it's addressed to a community. It's meant to be a communal project. And I think part of what white supremacy - one of the lies that white supremacy has sold us is the lie of individualism. And that we're supposed to make it on our own. And, like, there's so much vulnerability in letting go of the fantasy of making it on our own. You know? But that - I feel like that's one of the ways that I've been changed by this work.

And I actually have felt it in your episodes as well. That there's a softening. There's a vulnerability. There's an acknowledgement that we can't do this by ourselves. And for me, that - that has totally changed my life. You know? I'm living now in intentional community. And that was not something I saw coming. But - yeah. Very powerful.

>> MARGARET ERNST: I love that language, Nichola. The fantasy that we can do things on our own. Yeah.

What about you, Anne?

>> ANNE DUNLAP: Well, it's so funny, Nichola, that you - you - you use the language of - of softening. Because when I think of this question, like, going home by another way, you know, how have I been changed? And we talked about that a little earlier. But the word that keeps coming to me is softness. And softness as the - as the counter to the harshness of the death machinery.

And I love what you said, Margaret, about - because I usually think of the epiphany stories, like the Magi are going home by another way. But also, Mary and Joseph and Jesus are going to whatever home is by another way. By doing what it takes to keep their family safe. Finding that protection, which they would not have done alone. Right? Somebody must have received them, made sure they had shelter, made sure they had food. And then, when they were able to - to come back, you know, to be able to do that.

I think of the Magi going home by another way meaning we are not going to look to Herod for wisdom anymore. That is - that is not the way of safety. That's not the way of - of - of goodness. To look to power. To - to - to define for us what mystery and love and whatever we think it means to be a king when, you know, we know who Jesus was in the grand scheme of things. You know? In terms of the oppression under the Roman empire.

But that, you know, that - the harshness, the cruelty of this machinery that we live in and - and the - not the complete response but my transformation across these years to much more softness. That place of vulnerability. Shifting out of the, you know, I don't know, posturing of early 2017 and that kind of hard, fiery edge. To wanting so much more softness for myself, for our people, for the land.

I know that my herbal practice has contributed to this somewhat, too. But, like, I also see the - my herbal practice in forming how I read scripture. And, like, you know, just wanting so much more softness for all of us. And that practice of softness and vulnerability and gentleness. And in that collective place is one of the ways we dismantle this - this machinery that just wants to chew us up and spit us out, really.

>> MARGARET ERNST: I'm thinking of a quote. And I think it's often - it's one of these quotes that's like - everyone said, apparently, when I look it up. One of the - it's attributed to St. Francis de Sales. That nothing is so strong as gentleness, and nothing so gentle as real strength.

And that - what you're speaking, Anne, gives me a different perspective on this image of Jesus as meek and mild. That meek, like, in a biblical sense, is not meek as in passive. But, like, a choice to be fiercely gentle, because of one's awareness of the true brutality of evil. That it's a gentleness that has a fierceness inside of it. A deep conviction inside of it, to the end.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: Yeah, I love that. I love that. A fierce tenderness.

>> NICHOLA TORBETT: Yeah. I love that, too. And it's making me realize how deep in me the rhetoric, even though I reject it politically of, you know, we're going to be tough on crime, has gotten into me. It's like - like I keep wanting to be like, but we're not going to be soft on racists. You know? Or racism. We're going to be tough on that. And it's - the whole framing is wrong.

It's like it's a punitive framing. It's a graceless framing. And it's very hard to articulate the alternative, because it is strong. It is strong, it is fierce. It is uncompromising around allowing harm to human beings or any living thing. And at the same time, it's very gentle.

>> MARGARET ERNST: Yeah. I mean, I'm going to be real. Like, if people are getting in the way of people that I love, like, I'm still going to punch a Nazi. You know? But as an overall organizing strategy, yeah. There is a softness required.

I was struck, Anne, when you said that, you know, we're going home by another way by kind of imagining a new version of safety. And what came to me was this experience I had recently at the church where I pastor. We've been doing this community listening process of, like, one-one-one conversations in the community, in the town. Like, about what breaks people's hearts about living there, and what brings them joy.

And we were convening the themes from these - these one-on-ones, and - in a meeting. And we were doing a visionary exercise, where we asked people to say and describe, what would

it be like if this town - in - in this town, everyone's needs were cared for? What would it - would it be like if there was not so much isolation and, you know, not so much struggle and strain? And - or hate and fear.

And one person said - raised their hand and said, "It would be like Mayberry." And everyone kind of, like, looked at them and, like, smiled awkwardly, but with some uncertainty. And then, like, a black person who was sitting next to that person said, "Yeah, well, Mayberry, but with black people in it, and with more diversity."

And so, we started talking about that. We're like, what if - I asked the person who said Mayberry, and I asked other people, too. Like, what - tell me more about what that means to you. What does that represent? Like, if we were to imagine a Mayberry in 2023 that is inclusive.

And people said, well, it would be like trust. You know? You - you really know your neighbors; you can trust your neighbors. People look out for each other. People aren't isolated. Elders are not alone. You know? Young people are not alone.

And someone said they'll - they said, "Well, in Mayberry, they always said that there was no lock on the jail." And I -

>> ANNE DUNLAP: I was just thinking about that. I was just thinking about that. And there's this one character who's, like, an alcoholic. And when he knows that, like, he needs a safe place to sleep it off, he goes and lays down in the jail cell. And then, in the morning, lets himself out again.

Like, how brilliant is that? Like, here's a safe space for you until you're ready to - yeah.

>> MARGARET ERNST: Yeah. And I got goosebumps in that moment, when that person said it. Said - they said there's no lock on the jail.

I said, oh, my gosh. I cannot - and - because - and it helped me to really believe what I was saying earlier about, like, that we have such a wide, huge base of people in this country who are with us on abolition. Right? Who are with us on defunding the police and dismantling mass incarceration. But I think who haven't been organized in a way that reaches them.

And that's our job to figure out. Like, it's not black folks' job to go figure out how to get white people in small towns to get abolition. It's our job. And it's possible. Right? This vision of a world that doesn't need jails or incarceration or police with guns.

They also said that. Like, they - a lot of people said, the police wouldn't have any guns. I was like, great. Like, let's - now let's go shut some things down so we can make that possible.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: Margaret!

>> NICHOLA TORBETT: Looks like our work here is done.

>> MARGARET ERNST: We're just beginning. You know?

So, we're almost coming to the close of this conversation, which is so bittersweet. But there will be more conversations to come this Advent.

Anne and Nichola, do you have tips for people who are reading scripture as *The Word Is Resistance*? Now that this podcast will be no longer, we see it as - you all, as our listeners, and in our own journey going forward, to keep up this work. This exegetical work, this preaching work, this reading work in - in Bible study. So, what tips do you want people to have?

>> NICHOLA TORBETT: I think there's this piece, I mentioned it earlier, around, where are you in the text? How are you positioned? Can we get honest about that? And then, from there, what is the word? To you and to other white folks. That would be the first thing I would lift up.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: Yeah. I - I think we've named a lot of things, actually, that people can take with them and - and - and use themselves. And I - I want to name one of those which has been really important for me, which is really recognizing the role of trauma in living under systems of oppression. What that does to people, how it can impact imagination, impact what we think our choices are.

And then, how we can see that living out in the text in ways that we think are - are, like, some sort of, like, theological fights over Christianity versus Judaism, for example. That what we actually see are, like, the - you know, the - the fracturings around, you know, oppressive trauma. And

ways that, you know, similar ways that we can see that happening now that it's not that different.

And so, bringing a lot more compassion for people as they're trying to navigate that in the text. And as a way of helping us also figuring out how to navigate that here. And seeing the ways that many, including Jesus, including Paul, are trying to, like, weave community back together, you know, in the face of that kind of fracturing.

Building that bigger weave. Building - you know, rebuilding community, strengthening community, collectivity. And giving us ideas for how to do that now.

>> MARGARET ERNST: I think, for me, I've learned a lot as I've also preached more and more to congregations over these past few years. When I started doing the podcast, I wasn't really preaching regularly. And now that I am, like, my [inaudible 0:58:38] Jesus and podcasts and preaching have changed to be more pastoral.

I think I used to be extremely academic. I think I used to feel like, okay, if I can get you to understand the text right, you know, and have the right analysis of it, what it means, and context, and everything, then all will be well.

But what I've learned is that, like, we don't - you know, when someone's coming in to church, like, from, you know, their jobs or from, like, caring for elders or a sick child or parent or husband, like, people are really not looking for a deep academic analysis. They are looking for words of encouragement. And they should get that.

And that's, I think, a challenge to figure out, how do we do that? How do we encourage people and also challenge people? And help people to come along in this new consciousness.

So, I think my - my advice is if you're - especially if you're preaching or sharing - even not preaching, but, like, sharing with others about these texts, to look for the very human feelings and experiences inside of them. Like grief, fear, shame, loneliness, isolation, love. And to connect those with the experiences of who you're speaking to, even if the people that you're speaking to might not be located where the folks in the texts are located.

We can find a shared location in our experiences of those feelings. So, people in my congregation, for instance, might not know what it's like to be an immigrant in detention. But some of them do know what it's like to have kids or family members in jail because of drugs. Or, like, because of addiction.

People in my family - or, sorry - in my congregation might not know what it's like to have fear for their family, like, being killed by the police, but they might know what it's like to, you know, not have control over how someone perceives you.

And so, I think I've tried to always link those together to build the bigger "we." To say that God, the divine, you know, in - makes - makes it possible for all of us to transform these experiences and systems to a more soft world. To a more radically loving world that we all want to be a part of.

>> NICHOLA TORBETT: Love that.

There's also this piece around - and I think this has been, you know, the podcast and also my work with ancestors recently. I think there's a way that we can read the text while questioning how the lies of white supremacy and capitalism have shaped our ability to understand it.

So, for example, linear time. You know? Like, linear time seems so obvious to me. But really, we didn't have synchronized linear time until industrialization. And people had to show up at work at a certain time.

And I feel like scripture is much more about cyclical time. And every - it's like every time bread is mentioned in the text, it's manna. And we're back there in the wilderness. You know? And also, it's Passover. And every time a lamb is mentioned, it's Passover.

And so, to me, there's something really powerful about breaking our assumptions around linear time. It makes so much more possible. It - it subverts that neoliberal fantasy of an uninterrupted march toward progress and improvement, which we all know is a lie. Yeah. So, there's something about time that I - I would encourage people to question.

>> MARGARET ERNST: Well, question away, folks. And we hope that as you look at these texts, you will continue to wrestle and question. You will continue to connect with the feelings and human experiences inside of these texts.

That you will continue to meet the person of Jesus that Reverend Anne mentioned who was, you know, a man wrestling with building movement under empire. And the fears of that, the challenges of it, the contradictions of it. And - and the conflicts of it, as well.

And we have - we hope that you will come home by another way with us. That even though this project will be ending soon, that you will take up the work in your communities. Whether you're leading a Bible study, whether you're a pastor, whether you're a layperson leading a church. Whether you're a person who's not affiliated with a particular congregation or faith community and is just finding your way in the world. You can live this good news in everything you do.

<<*Music interlude, verse 2 of "Building Up a New World."*>>

<<*"Courage, sisters, brothers, people: don't get weary, though the way be long."*>>

[Call to Action and outro]

>> MARGARET ERNST: Beloveds, your call to action is to continue to read scriptures as The Word Is Resistance. You can do this in whatever space you find yourself. Whether you're telling our sacred story, you can bring these lenses to offer resistance words for what we are facing.

Also, we want you to know that the podcast will continue to be available wherever you listen. It's not going anywhere. The database for finding episodes and transcripts will also be available.

So, for now, you can go to the home of The Word Is Resistance on SoundCloud, and you'll find the link there. We also want to commend you to some of our favorite resources for liberatory work for Christians, including enfleshed, our Bible app, Justice Unbound, and Geez Magazine. These are some places that are - that are also doing commentaries and analyses of scripture.

Justice Unbound, at present, has an awesome Advent devotional series with a daily devotional ran by womanist thinkers and scholars and ministers. So, I want you to check out those resources.

- [Enfleshed](#)
- [Our Bible App](#)
- [Justice Unbound](#), and
- [Geez Magazine](#)

And, finally, we have a request for you. We would love to hear from you what this podcast has meant to you. So, if you would like to record a one- to two-minute reflection on what The Word Is Resistance has meant to you, you can send the recording, along with a transcript, to Reverend Anne at her Email address. So, that's faith@SURJaction.org. And we'll feature you in the final episode. We would love to hear from you. So, please get those to us between now and December 15th. You have some time.

Beloveds, thank you, as always, for joining us from wherever you are on this good Earth. We will be back next week with another Advent parting gift. This will be a group conversation with M Jade Kasier and Sharon Fennema, hosted by Anne Dunlap. Of course, a huge thanks to our sound editor this week, Claire Hitchins.

So, we leave you with some words of encouragement and - and blessing. Wherever you find yourself in this moment, and in this week, we hope that you will have the spirit of resistance with you. And that you - with that spirit, it will be a longing for a better world. And the belief that you can organize and bring your people into that world, whoever those people are. Even the ones that you have discounted.

And we ask you to remember that you, too, are able to experience a deep freedom beyond your own understanding. We are building up a new world. Builders must be soft and strong. Amen, and thank you for being with this.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: Amen. Love you both, so much.

<<Verse 3 of *"Building Up A New World, Verse 1 repeated."*>>

<<*"Rise, Shine, Give God glory, Children of the Light"*

We are building up a new world, builders must be strong.">>

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RESOURCES:

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REFERENCES:

**The Jewish Annotated New Testament, NRSV.* 2nd Ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, editors. Oxford University Press, 2017. Check all the amazing essays in the back!

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