

Podcast Transcript

DATE and LECTIONARY WEEK (i.e. 4.17.22 Easter C)

- Acts 10:34-43 or Isaiah 65:17-25 • Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24 • 1 Corinthians 15:19-26 or Acts 10:34-43 • John 20:1-18 or Luke 24:1-12

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

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

[Intro and Transition:]

>> BLYTH BARNOW:

Welcome back to The Word is Resistance, the podcast where we explore what Christian sacred texts have to teach us about living, surviving, even thriving in the context of empire, tyranny, violence, and repression, the times in which we are living today. What do our sacred stories have to teach us as white folks about our role in resistance and showing up in liberation?

This podcast is a project of SURJ Faith and is particularly designed for white Christians. We believe white Christians, like me, have a responsibility to commit ourselves to resisting white supremacy, to speaking up, and showing up and disrupting white supremacy where we find it, including in our own Christian traditions. And we do this work, remembering that we are building up a new world.

This live recording of Dr. Vincent Harding's song for the Freedom Movement is of a multiracial movement choir practice in Denver, Colorado in December 2014 which is being led by Minister Daryl J. Walker. We're deeply grateful to the Freeney-Harding family for letting us use this song for the podcast.

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

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

For folks who don't know me, my name is Minister Blyth Barnow. My pronouns are she/her. And today I am talking to you from a chilly but almost spring central Ohio.

I work at the intersection of harm reduction and faith-based organizing with faith and public life, but really I went to seminary to learn how to hold spiritual space for the communities I come from, communities that the quote, unquote

"church" has deemed crude, dirty, expendable, sinful, and profane.

But those are the people that taught me about the sacred and I know that we're holy.

I'm also really lucky to get to serve on SURJ's National Leadership team with my incredible co-host today, so I am going to pass it over to her. Take it away, Chanelle.

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: Hey. Thank you, Minister Blyth.

I am so happy to be here. My name is Chanelle Gallant. I use she/her pronouns as well and I am happy to be here repping the dirty and the profane.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yeah.

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: Yeah. Yeah, super excited to have a conversation with you that we have had kind of off and on for many years. So, I am also an activist and a writer mostly. I have worked on issues related to the criminalization and policing of sex work and racial justice for about twenty years. I am on the Board for Showing Up for Racial Justice. And I helped to cofound the first SURJ chapter outside of the US in Toronto.

I mostly write about things like policing sex work, racial justice, most recently in pleasure activism, the Adrienne Maree Brown collection, and I am currently working on two books, including one on migration and sex work with my long-time comrade and co-conspirator Elene Lam. And here we are, years and years after having this first conversation, probably these first conversations about, you know, profanity and the sacred and Christianity and white supremacy back in 2009.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Mhm. Yeah. I think - let's see. 2009 might have - was it even maybe 2008? I can't even remember. But the [00:03:51] program in the Bay Area.

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: Yeah.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yeah. And that, ladies and gentlemen and siblings is where Chanelle blew my mind by helping me to understand that the culture that we were talking about in terms of white culture was actually white middle-class culture and that's why I didn't know what the hell we were talking about,

because that is not the culture I was raised in. Whiteness looks different in working class communities. And so, that is - has been a game changer for me, and you brought that to me in 2009. Very grateful.

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: Yeah. Well, and you also blew my mind because you know, you were writing about stuff that just made so much sense to me, just like on your Femminary blog about the sacredness that we can find in queer sexuality.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Mhm. Yep.

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: And I remember - I don't know if this is too spicy for this podcast.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Bring the spice.

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: Okay. Well, I remember you writing about ejaculation as baptismal fluid and I was like, who the hell is this? Hello. Woo. We've got a live one here. Okay. Right on. She is doing the - she is doing God's work.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: That's right.

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: And I was - I was - I mean, basically I was just like fuck yeah. Hi. We need to be friends immediately.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yeah. And we have been. Yeah.

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: So, yeah. And I love that because that was my experience with sexuality too. My experience of sexuality was that you know, it was - it ranged from very mundane, very ordinary, very powerful, very loving, and also sacred, and sacred in the ways that it was seen as I mean, just so filthy and wrong. And I was like, this isn't. This is actually beautiful and transformative. And we really never - I felt like - I felt like as a queer person, my community never really got to be taken - it's like we never really got to seriously consider the spirituality of our sexuality. And you were the first person I met who was really doing, like, taking that seriously and really doing that, so thank you for that.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yeah. I just - this conversation, today we get to talk about Mary Magdalene who I know is close to both of our hearts. And I remember even texting you a picture of when I got to go to Palestine and sending you a picture of where she was supposedly born and all of that. And she kind of epitomizes

this conversation about sacred and solidarity and sexuality and all of these spaces of intersection.

And I can sometimes - you know, I work in the church world. I do faith-based organizing. And just like queer people listen for cues about whether or not somebody is about to be rude to them, I listened to how people talk about Mary Magdalene to see where our theology has alignment and where it - where it may not. So, I'm excited to dig into that with you today.

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: Yeah. Yeah. I'm excited to dig into that. I mean, I feel like both around - around any kind of sexuality, I think it really brings up the question of what we mean by sinful and what redemption is, because I also felt like I've never, never really gotten to have a conversation about redemption because as soon as it comes up related to Mary Magdalene, I know what the sin is considered, and it's considered to be her sex work.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yeah.

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: And I'm like, no, I opt out of that. I opt out. I recuse myself from any conversation that starts with the premise that she was a sinner because of her sex work. And that means then that like I said, I felt like I never really got to have conversations about the sacredness of queer sexuality. It also means I have often felt like I never really get to have a conversation about redemption because of the way it's so - the bigotry and bias that's been built into it. And that's a shame. You know, we should - all of us, with many different types of sexualities, should be able to enter into these really profound reflections.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yep.

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: On spirit and sex, but we don't get to do that. So, here we are.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yeah.

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: Doing it ourselves.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Here we are. That's right. And this is - we're going to here in a second read the scripture that is used in the lectionary this year for the Easter service and Easter is my most precious holiday and a lot of the roots of my faith are rooted in Easter. And a lot of it is about how we resurrect our

own communities, how we resurrect our sense of self, how we resurrect our dignity. And I think the scripture will give us some do's and don'ts.

So, I'm going to dig in here and we can read the scripture together because whenever somebody is like, you know, John 20:1-18, I'm like, I do not know. Thank you. I went to seminary and I do not know. So, I'd like to read it for everyone.

So, this is John 20:1-18 and it goes this way.

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So, she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we do not know where they have laid him."

Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went to the tomb. The two were running together but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.

He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw - did I just read this?

He saw the linen lyings wrapping there and the cloth that had been on Jesus's head - I did not read it - not laying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself.

Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in and he saw and believed, for as yet, they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and she saw two angels in white, sitting there, the body of Jesus - sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head, the other at the feet.

They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?"

She said to them, "They have taken my Lord away and I do not know where they have laid him."

When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus.

Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?"

Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him and I will take him away."

Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned to him and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabboni," which means teacher.

Jesus said to her, "Do not hold onto me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord." And she told them that he had said these things to her.

So, that is the scripture from John today.

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

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

So, lots to dig into. There's - there's a lot there. I wonder what strikes you first about this story.

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: I mean, some of the things that I notice about it are I think one of the things I really notice about this is what's not there, and that this story isn't - she isn't seen more as sort of the apostle of the apostles and that she isn't really - that Mary Magdalene, the role she hasn't played in the church given this, you know.

And I think - I know that on a previous episode of this podcast, Reverend Anne talked about her grief and about the transformative power for grief which I really see in this too, you know. I listened to that podcast and - episode and I heard the message about how it's not that she sees Jesus's death by state violence, right, he's killed by the state, as being a source of his salvation, right. It's not that she - it's not that she's saying that state violence was necessary to save someone's soul. It's actually what we're seeing is her survivorship, her rage and her grief about this injustice, and

that out of this, you know, comes her vision of a new world. That's what I see in it. What about you?

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yeah. I love that. I think one of the things - oh, I just went on a trip so it's not there but I usually have a little icon of Mary Magdalene above my desk. I don't have it today. But one of the things that I see here and I see so consistently with her is presence. She didn't leave. She doesn't look away. And she's feisty, you know. It's not just like, "What? I'm confused." Like, she stays. Everybody is gone again already. They left him on the cross. They left the empty tomb. They don't understand. And Jesus appears to her and she is like, I can empathize with this feeling I get in the scripture of like, her - how worked up maybe she might be, where she was like, um, excuse me? Where have you taken him?

Like, you can see what a fierce advocate she is even in those small lines. You can see her determination to see things through to the end and to understand and to learn from what has just happened. And you know, in Easter, there's the whole Easter egg thing and Mary Magdalene is pictured with a red egg and it's not in our lectionary, like many things aren't in our lectionary, and it's not in the canon, but it's the story of Mary Magdalene even after Jesus has been resurrected, marching to the seat of power with her traveling food, which were eggs, and being like, guess what? He's risen. You didn't - you thought you could kill this. You thought you could kill this movement and you were wrong. And here is what we are learning from this. Here is the impact of this violence and what we're going to do with it.

And the person, the emperor, was like, nope. He's no more risen than that egg in your hand is red.

And I just always picture it just like, this defiant look on her face just lifting the egg up and the egg turns red in his presence. And I don't know if that's really where Easter eggs come from but that's what I like to tell myself and that's why I dye Easter eggs around Easter.

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: I think it is very clear that Mary Magdalene is a bad bitch.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yes.

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: Like, she is - she is the fucking original bad bitch. I think it's very clear. Like you said, she

is present, she is present in her anguish, she is present in her grief, she is present in her anger too though.

And I think it's interesting, all these representations of Christ's death, actually murder. You know, the Pietà, right, the classic image of Mary grieving her only son, et cetera, and she is just - she is in her sadness and it's only Mary. And I'm like, where is furious Mary Magdalene? Where is like, pissed off, visionary Mary Magdalene? And I think it's just the sexism of the church.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yeah.

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: You know? Because she's a defender as well, you know. She confronts power. And instead, what we get is like sad mom. Okay? I mean, that's also part of the story and that grief and that anguish is part of Mary Magdalene's story as well. But so is the power and the confrontation and that's just been completely ripped out of this story.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yeah. And I - I'm searching for the right word. I don't know exactly what it is but I relate to it, this feeling of like, you know, I've seen women in my family do this. I feel like I've done this. I've seen women around me do this where they just like, you can see their jaw set and there's this piercing gaze where it's like, I will not look away from what is happening right now. I will not look away from you. I am clear about who is responsible for what is going on right now and you will not move me. And that is the - the like energy and spirit that I get from Mary Magdalene quite a bit.

But lots of sexism in -

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: Yes.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Having conversations about Mary Magdalene. Lots of whorephobia.

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: Yes. Let's introduce the term whorephobia.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yeah. Go for it.

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: Yeah. Just like, that's a term that is used to describe a specific type of bigotry and institutional/structural bias against people who sell sex or who

are profiled as sex workers and associated as sex workers, so that can be pretty broad, actually.

So, in fact, like what you see is that whole communities get profiled as sex workers. It's just why we end up with like a lot of really intense stigma, discrimination, and policing aimed at transwomen of color because the entire community are profiled as sex workers, so.

It's basically - it's the oppression. It's all the different forms of oppression against people who are in the sex industry, who used to be in the sex industry, or who are suspected of being associated with the sex industry. And you could call that anti-sex work bigotry or whorephobia, but really the important thing is that it's not just an attitude, like racism is not just an attitude or sexism is not just looking down on women. It's all the structures that actually keep people down.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Mhm. Yep. And when we were having a conversation preparing for this today, you know, there's lots of different - there's a couple different gospels, a couple different gospel renditions of this scene that we read today. And together, we had read the one from Luke. And I wonder if you'll read that for us just for a second because I think -

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: The Luke one?

>> BLYTH BARNOW: I think it'll - yeah.

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: Sure. Sure.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Because we were just like, this is textbook.

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: Yeah. I feel like, yes. So, speaking of sexism, I have definitely never read scripture allowed, certainly not while recorded, so this is a fun new experiment for me.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: You got this.

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: Thanks, Blyth.

Okay. So, this is - it starts with, on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb but when they entered, they did not find the

body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them.

In their fright, the women bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He's not here. He's risen. Remember how He told you while He was still with you in Galilee. The son of man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified, and on the third day, be raised again."

Then they remembered His words.

When they came back to the tomb, they told all these things to the eleven and to all the others. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary, the mother of James, and others with them who told this to the apostles. But they did not believe the women because their words seemed to them like nonsense.

Peter, however - one dude with a brain, apparently - got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

Well, you could have asked the women. Anyways.

So, that is the other scripture referring to Mary's role in the resurrection.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yeah. And even Peter, he only gets half credit for that because he still walks away being like, huh, what happened. And then Mary and the other women were like, is this thing on? Hello? Guess what just happened?

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: I know. And Peter - well, there are so many funny stories. I feel like there's a lot of kind of funny questions asked about this. Like the first one, right in the text, is like, geez, I wonder what could have happened? And they're like, well, you could have just listened to the women who just told you.

But when you read about other roles that Mary played, for example, Mary was known to have financially supported Jesus's ministry, right. Somebody had - somebody had to pay for the food and the lodging and all that stuff. And you literally read people write about someone who is known - who is legendarily

perhaps the most famous sex worker in all of history and they're like, I wonder where she got the money?

And I'm like, um, it's funny you should ask because the question is right in front of you. But we get into all of these kind of dead end, silly questions about Mary because of all of the whorephobia, just all of the like panic and fear and - and contempt for the fact that she's associated with sex work. And I don't - I have tried. Like, I've tried doing my own research and I've tried reading between the lines and I can't actually tell conclusively that she was a sex worker. I think that she, and also because the concept of sex work is actually kind of a cultural construction and what we mean by sex work actually changes to time and place. So, it just wouldn't mean the same thing then that it did now. Like, a century ago, dating was considered sex work. Like, any sex outside of marriage has been considered sex work. It's - there's nothing kind of like universal about it, so you can't look back and be like, oh, she was or wasn't, because the meaning just was so different.

But she definitely - she definitely seems to have been someone who broke rules around sex. She definitely broke some kind of rule around sex. And was she what we would call now a sex worker? I don't know but I'm just saying, some of the - some of the signs do add up, like I mean, that she had financial independence, that she had mobility as a woman, she could go where she wanted, she had money, she - you know, those were things that would have been associated with women who had an independent source of income through sex work.

She seems to have been her own type of medium, healer, or seer in some way, which would make sense to me in terms of, you know, there being sort of a - not - there is a thread of overlap there between women who are healers and sex workers. So, a bunch of that adds up to me being like, yes, she certainly was some kind of sexual renegade. She may have been a sex worker. And a lot of people have tried to either invisible-ize it, like when those questions come up around the source of her money, or have tried to do what they consider to be a feminist reclaiming by denying that she was a sex worker. And this is their way of - this is - this is the mainstream way of feminist reclaiming is to erase her sex work and I actually think that that is sexism and is not - not actually a feminist form of respect for Mary Magdalene.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yeah. There's been lots of bunny rabbit ears over here, lots of air quotes around feminist and things like that.

I wonder if you can share a little about the church's history in terms of their thinking on sex work and you know, now there's a lot of anti-trafficking - more bunny rabbit ears - work that goes through congregations. There's kind of this puritanical focus on - around sex. I wonder if you can share if it's always been that way.

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: Yeah. I mean, I'm not a historian so I feel like there's going to be other folks listening to this who might actually have a more comprehensive understanding of it, but I'll give you my layperson's understanding. And I have a perspective that is really shaped from reading the history through the lens of someone who can see and understand and respect sex work, which a lot of people cannot do. They don't know how to read between the lines. They don't know how to interpret the historical data through that lens, right, because they are viewing it - they only know how to see history in a way that sex work is considered immoral, sinful, and to - to make someone disposable and worthless. And when you look through the historical record without that view, it really changes how you see things, right?

So, the church, I mean, the Christian church in the US right now is extremely implicated in supremacy politics, right? The white Christian church is very, very connected to pretty rightwing forces for the last few decades, right, which was an intent - I'm sure you guys have discussed this a lot - it's an intentional strategy of the right to organize white Christians behind rightwing political agendas.

And the church's relationship to sex work has definitely been part of that. Obviously, it goes back much further than that. The church actually has a very long, complex relationship to sex work that is not as straightforward as everyone thinks it is. Everyone thinks that, you know, that Christians would always take this kind of approach that - I mean, I think the Christian church has long - as far as I know, for the most part, viewed sex workers as sinful and immoral and - but the church has also been involved in managing and running brothels in different parts of the world and in England.

So, it's more complicated than people think, right? It wasn't - and it was certainly not from a place of respect, as I understand. It was a place of control and profit.

But it is not as straightforward as people think. There is actually a pretty wild history there of the relationship between churches and sex workers, but the church is like any other institution that tries to profit off sex workers and use sex workers to - in a way that's kind of similar to how they have with LGBTQ people to sort of promote their own agendas and create division.

And currently, a way that the church, in particular, the white Christian church in the US does this, is that that strongly back the anti-trafficking industry. And you know, many think that the anti-trafficking industry is this benevolent movement that helps women who have been forced into sex work but it's not that at all. What it actually is, is just the modern face of policing of sex workers.

And so, you know, anti-trafficking laws, a bit part of this is because anti-trafficking laws do not distinguish between sex work and violence. Though the police can use anti-trafficking laws to racially profile working class neighborhoods. They can arrest sex workers, they can deport sex workers, they can steal sex workers' money, their phones, everything because all these anti-trafficking laws define sex work as human trafficking.

And so, when, you know, the church and in particular evangelical churches are the leading moral and political backer of the anti-trafficking industry, what they are actually backing is the policing of sex work.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yeah.

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: And then women who actually do really need help do not get it.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yeah. Well, and is there also areas of overlap in terms of policing, you know, how does race and migration play into that?

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: Oh, does it. So, you know, the police are - you know, enforcement is never even, right? Policing is always directed at communities of color, working class communities of color, and working-class migrant communities.

So, when people say that, you know, and the police say, oh, we broke up a trafficking ring, what they actually did was just go investigate a bunch of working-class sex work businesses, terrorize everyone, you know, seize all of their money, and lock them all up and deport them. And then they will do a press release, you know, and saying that we have broken up a sex trafficking ring and because the law doesn't distinguish, right, between sex work and trafficking, but those laws are really pretty much exclusively aimed at people of color because that's who is going to be profiled, right. When I talked about what are the communities that get profiled and associated with sex work? It's going to be communities of color, right? And so, those who are most targeted, most surveilled, most investigated, most deported, most robbed and abused by the police are migrant sex workers and sex workers of color and trans sex workers. You know, it's the most marginalized sex workers who are going to get it. Yeah.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yeah. And I think this is also a space where we really see the church, you know, that dichotomy. I can't remember if we said it earlier in this conversation or another but the difference between pity or mercy and justice, or charity and justice. And you know, there are many congregations that do anti-trafficking work, many denominations that have named it as a priority for themselves, and I live in a state, I live in Ohio, where similarly, trafficking is - all sex work is deemed to be trafficking. It's exclusively talked about as trafficking. That same thing you just said about breaking up a ring, you know, that was in the news three days ago here.

And I do some policy work in my day job and largely around harm reduction and drug policy, and I hear how people talk about the workers and it is always with pity. It is always with this - this savior complex. It is always as if they are helping them and these poor people, now - I'll say that their faux-mercy has expanded to say that now addiction or substance use is also looped into that of like oh, these poor people, you know, drugs play a part in this and all of this.

But it's always pity. It's always a sense of charity. And growing up working class, seeing how the church interacted with my own family, I always have felt that that form of charity to be rooted in deep disrespect. And so, it concerns me that so many congregations have taken this on when it's like, well, what - what does this faith, what does Christianity call us to? Does it call us to charity? No, it calls us to justice. It calls us to understanding the systems that people are up against, to

being able to look at them directly with that Mary Magdalene gaze, and seek to reduce the harm of those systems on peoples' lives and build power with those people who are impacted in order to build a new world. That is what Christianity is for me.

And I'm so grateful to get to have this conversation with you today because there's people I deeply love who do incredible justice work and this is one lane that they just really have a hard time understanding. And I think it's rooted in - in deep stigma and I think that stigma is connected to white supremacy and respectability and all kinds of things. So, this is an Easter topic for sure because Easter is all about, you know, giving - giving up ourselves in order to build a new world and that a new world is possible, that resurrection is possible, that people may condemn us, people may target us with violence for various aspects of identity or community. They may seal the tomb and pronounce us dead to them and we can still rise. Like, we can still push that tomb, that stone back, and show up to our people.

And for me, Mary Magdalene, one of the reasons I love her so much, I think of her as kind of the - what's - the saint of harm reduction in some ways, is she doesn't - she doesn't leave. She stays on the journey. And I think that's why Jesus appears to her. She has earned his trust. Like, she didn't walk away. She didn't leave when it was hard. She had boundaries. She had clarity about yes this, no this. But she continued with him to the end and that's somebody that you trust. That's a ride or die, you know?

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: Yeah.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: And she is that for him. So.

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: I think - yeah, gosh, that is so beautiful. I have so many thoughts and feelings about that. Thank you.

I think something that I find really - first of all, I just want to follow-up on what you said about pity and charity. And I think something, you know, for folks who are listening to this and want to transform that way of thinking, something that - a way of thinking that I feel is really helpful in changing the kind of disrespect and contempt that can come through that way of looking at people who are being really oppressed is to think of them not as victims but as targets.

And that's what Jesus was, right? Jesus was a target. He wasn't someone to be pitied because he was like a sad, pathetic person. But he was - he was a target. He was a target of violence. And it's the same with drug users and sex workers. People look down on them and feel so sad about their lives but they're targets. And then it changes the cause of the problem because it shifts the question to, well, who is targeting them? It shifts the problem from is the problem that you're a sex worker or a drug user or you're a poor person or you're a criminalized person? Or is the problem that someone is targeting you? That's the problem. And to me, that is a complete shift from where we lay the responsibility for the problems in someone's life.

And the problem for someone who is criminalized isn't what they are doing. It's that the state is criminalizing them and the state - you know, Jesus's problem was that he was targeted and criminalized by the state.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yeah. And that's one of the things I love about Mary Magdalene is she's not confused about that, you know. Like, she sat at the foot of the cross and she was clear about who put Jesus there. And you can tell that she's clear because she marches to his fucking house and is like, hey, you. You did this and I want to let you know that you did not win.

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: Yeah.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: And yeah. She's - she's feisty. Love it.

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: And I think for me, that raises one of the real mysteries of the Mary Magdalene story which is, look, why did Christianity choose a sex worker to be one of the most important players in this - in the pantheon? Why was Jesus's partner a sex worker? Or a sexual rebel of some sort, even if we want to just say we can't say for sure if she was a sex worker.

We know that Jesus's partner, his ride or die, his life partner was some type of independent, sexually disobedient rule breaker, badass in some way. And Christianity has had a really rough time, you know, trying to avoid that or make sense of that or minimize it or change the story. But that's what's there. And I don't know why.

I mean, I thought - I've questioned. I've - I've wondered, why does - why was such an incredibly important role played by a woman who is apparently a sex worker? And I don't really know. I

don't really know but there - to me, there is something mysterious there about that. And I think it might be about the role of sex in life and in creation. I think it might be about the importance of sexuality.

I - I think, you know, going back to that kind of traditional and historic relationship between sex workers and healers, you know, that - but I don't really know, you know? I don't really know.

I think in a much more pragmatic, kind of less mysterious way, I think the regulation of sexuality plays a really important role in systems of power and domination and oppression and I do think that's, you know, that is part of why the church has so many - is so - has such strict and biased relationship to sexuality.

But in the real big picture, in the place of mystery and spirit, I don't actually know why Mary Magdalene has this role in Christianity.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Mhm. Yeah. It makes me - my brain is going a million miles a minute because I'm like, why, yeah. That's such a great question. And I think that one of the things that came to mind is there's something about having somebody who, you know, when we look at Jesus's ministry, we see him aligning himself with people who are perceived to be the other, the outcasts.

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: Right. Right. That's true.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: The disrespected. And Mary Magdalene is that. And - and Mary Magdalene is the voice of the resurrection. Jesus didn't go floating around to everybody being like, guess what? I'm here. He appeared to Mary Magdalene. Mary Magdalene is the voice of the resurrection.

And so, what does that tell us about where we think God offers power and offers vision and offers a voice for a new world?

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: Damn.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: That's what comes to mind for me.

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: One hundred percent. That makes so much sense. Yeah. Thank you for that. Yeah. Like, can you say that again, like where does God -

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Oh, I don't know.

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: It was something like where does God offer us that vision? And I feel like what you're saying is like, among the outsiders.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yeah.

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: Yeah.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Among the targets.

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: Among the targets. Yeah. Yeah.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: And I've heard you talk in the past about you know, part of the reason that Mary Magdalene has such a clear ministry, has such a clear vision for a new world, has such clarity about who is responsible for the world that she's living in is because of the way she has lived her life as a target, is because of the grief that she has experienced. And we can see visionaries in our world today -

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: Yes.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: That share that narrative.

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: One hundred percent. That's the thing. We don't - you know, that's the thing. There are - for me, I think about you know, I'm an abolitionist. I believe in the abolition of prisons and police and all systems of cursorial control. And I came to abolition through the vision of, you know, the vision of working-class Black women, abolitionists, who saw that a world without police and prisons is possible. And I didn't. I really didn't. I was just like, oh, I guess, you know, I had grown up being critical of police but I still thought that police and prisons were a necessary evil. I thought that they were bad at what they did and you know, needed to be improved upon, and needed to do better at protecting our safety and our security. But there was a vision beyond the horizon that I couldn't see.

And you know, that came through Black women who were the targets of state violence, living in communities that were

essentially under occupation by the state through the presence of police and having their families disappeared into prisons. And that experience, you know, being targets, again, being targets of power, of being - experiencing grief and loss through the fire of that survivorship and the brilliance and wisdom to see a whole different world is possible. Because that is what abolition requires of us. You can't just, you know, go put a padlock on a prison. You actually - I mean, you can, but you know, and you have to actually create a world where prisons and police become obsolete.

And on the one hand, this is very visionary. On the other hand, it's so incredibly actually unbelievably achievable. And not even that far away. It's like, literally just stop giving billions of dollars to police and put it into the things that prevent violence, that create safer communities.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yep.

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: It's really not rocket science actually. On the one hand - and that's what I think is so - one of the things that's so incredible about visionaries is that they see something that is actually quite obvious. You know, and the obvious thing about prisons and police are they don't work and they're not designed to work. That is apparently very hard for a lot of people to see.

One, it's not working. Two, it's never going to work because it wasn't - it's actually doing what it was designed to do.

And literally billions of us have been convinced of this. And it's like the emperor has no clothes, you know. It was like these abolitionist women came along and said, guess what? You know how this just keeps failing? There's something else we could be doing to keep our communities safe that actually works. And we have the evidence of this. And we were doing this for thousands of years. And many communities are still doing this. And for me, it really made sense because sex work communities already, I watched create their own safety outside of prison and police - systems of prisons and police because they had to.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yeah.

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: So, it's actually just in some ways, an incredibly big vision, and in some ways, incredibly simple.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yeah. I mean, it's, in its own way, it is profane because profane, like - profanity also speaks to some sort of ordinariness, of like, yeah, and so, there is - there is this way of absolutely not and it's like, no, but of course. It's - it's that simplicity that people make very complicated.

And I'll say, you know, for myself, that abolition has been a growing edge for me for a long time and I have considered myself an abolitionist for a long time and - and it was in 2020 that I really realized the limitations of my moral imagination. Because I was like, yeah, I can like, sit with all of the like, radical queers and at the Critical Resistance Conference and talk about abolition and oh yeah and this vision that we have for a new world and learn from folks who have been building that world, but I didn't, like you said, I didn't really believe it was possible until I was having conversations with moderate to conservative clergy in Central Ohio who all of a sudden were talking about defunding the police and abolition work. And I was like, well, look at that. That is something to repent for. I really didn't believe it was possible.

And when I hear the voices of those visionaries, it is really without pedestalizing or removing the humanity and the hardship that has contributed to that vision, I really hear - that is where I see most clearly the call to the world that I think God wants for us. It's like, no, God doesn't just want body cameras so that we can watch people being murdered. God wants people not to be murdered.

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: Yes.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: God wants us to have communities that are safe, where we have enough, where there is a sense of abundance and connection. That's what God wants. God wants so much bigger for us than we ever speak for ourselves. And that is what I hear in those demands from those visionaries. Yeah. And I'm grateful to continue to learn at their feet.

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: Me too. God does not want body cameras, Blyth.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: God doesn't want body cameras.

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: God's vision for us is definitely not body cameras.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Definitely not body cameras.

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: So that state violence can be recorded? No. No. That it does not happen.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yeah. Imagine if it was like in Jesus's time, people just sat there and watched the livestream of Jesus's crucifixion over and over again.

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: Oh my God.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Who wants that? And I think there's something - this is a whole different podcast and I'm going to wrap us up, but I'm just going to say, the preciousness of language that the Christian church can use sometimes where we talk about crucifixion, crucifixion has come to mean something mystical is happening there, when that's the feeling that it brings up in me when I hear crucifixion, it was murder.

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: Thank you.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Using the words that are appropriate and not masking it I think is part of one very, very small part of how we offer respect to the visionaries that have been lost.

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: Thank you.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yeah. So, let's just take a collective breath as we wrap up this spot and maybe a collective hell yeah.

And I wonder, Chanelle, if you can offer us a call to action. Yeah.

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: Yeah. Well, for folks listening to this, I mean, this has been a lot. We - this is - this is some - this is some edgy Christianity, I'm just going to say.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: I want that tattoo. I want a tattoo that just says, "Edgy Christianity."

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: This is edgy Christianity. So, if you are still with us and if this sounds like the world you want to build too, if you too want - believe that God wants more for us than police reform but actually wants a world that respects the sacredness of life, and I always - I feel like I need to say -

>> BLYTH BARNOW: I heard the disclaimer already in your voice.

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: You heard the asterisk. And that means protecting reproductive choice. Then I think, you know, a call to action that I would love to see more churches do, and I know this is edgy Christianity but I just want us to think big here, which is if you personally support sex workers, that is lovely. Thank you.

I would like you to add some power to that opinion by organizing your church to actually back the full decriminalization of sex work. I want your personal view to have some political power to it. And the way to do that is to organize your church to support the full decriminalization of sex work.

I know that's a lot. I know that's a big ask. But why am I on here if not for that? Because let me tell you, God does not want sex workers criminalized either. God wants decriminalization of sex work.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: And you know what He doesn't want?

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: What?

>> BLYTH BARNOW: I said He. I never say He for God. That's so interesting. But you know what God doesn't want?

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: What doesn't God -

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Anti-trafficking campaigns.

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: God does not want an anti-trafficking campaign. God wants sex workers to have self-determination, power, freedom. The ability to determine their own lives free from state violence, free from Christian supremacy and contempt.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yeah.

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: Autonomy. Autonomy over their bodies. And that starts with ending the power of the state to criminalize sex workers.

So, that is my call. If you - and if you - obviously, people are going to need to understand how to do this. I know that people can't do this alone. So, if you're looking for more understanding on what this means or what this could look like, then I highly recommend you look into the work of a couple of

organizations that are made up of migrants in the sex industry, which is what Mary Magdalene was. She was a migrant woman, a Palestinian woman who moved from one place to another and was, as far as we understand, a former sex worker.

So, if you want to support migrant sex workers, check out the work of Red Canary Song. That's Red Canary Song. And Butterfly: Asian and Migrant Sex Workers Support Network. That's an organization that I work with.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Great. Amazing. And we'll put those links in the show notes too so folks can - can find them easily.

Wow. You all are welcome. That's a lot to chew on.

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: Thank you.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: That's a lot to chew on. So, why don't we end with this blessing that Minister Chanelle gave to us earlier, which is may we all work to put some power into our opinions.

>> CHANELLE GALLANT: Organize.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: And may we hear a call to the world that God wants for us and the voices of the visionaries that live among us. And may we act accordingly.

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

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

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Well, thanks as always for joining us. We'd love to hear from you all. Wondering what you're thinking after all of this. So, feel free to comment on our Soundcloud, our Twitter, or our Facebook pages, or by filling out the survey on our podcast page at SURJ.org. You can also give us a like or rate us on iTunes, Spotify, or wherever you check out your podcasts. You all know all about that.

You can find out more about SURJ, which is Showing Up for Racial Justice, at SURJ.org, and you can also sign up for SURJ Faith updates and find transcripts for every episode of this podcast, which includes references, resources, and action links.

So, tune in next week and many thanks to our sound editors and everybody who helps to make this podcast happen.

Until next time, everyone. Thanks.

<<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.>>

~ ~ ~

RESOURCES:

[Red Canary Song](#)

[Butterfly: Asian and Migrant Sex Workers Support Network](#)

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REFERENCES:

[Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good](#)

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