

SURJ
"The Word Is Resistance"
Episode 2

Speakers: Reverend Anne Dunlap and Blyth Barnow, Hosts

3.14.21 Lent 4B

- [Numbers 21:4-9 •](#)
- [Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22 •](#)
- [Ephesians 2:1-10 •](#)
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<<Music: "Building Up a New World," 1st verse, fade out under opening sentence.>>
<<"We are building up a new world, builders must be strong.">

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Beloveds, welcome back to "The Word Is Resistance," the podcast where we're exploring what our 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, in showing up, and in liberation? What wisdom is there for us as white Christians in these pandemic times, the pandemic of COVID19 and the centurieslong pandemic of white supremacy?

This podcast is a project of Showing Up for Racial Justice Faith program, SURJ Faith, and is particularly designed for white Christians, white Christians talking to other white Christians about race and white supremacy.

We believe white Christians like us, 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 tradition. And we do this work remembering 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, being led by Minister Daryl J. Walker. And we are deeply grateful to the Freeney Harding family for letting us use the song for this podcast, "The Word Is Resistance."

I'm Reverend Anne Dunlap, pronouns she/her/hers. I'm a United Church of Christ minister, and I'm the faith coordinator for Showing Up for Racial Justice, SURJ. I live in the place currently called Buffalo, New York, here in the homelands of the Haudenosaunee and Erie peoples.

For Lent we've been offering some special conversations with our contributors, and I'm so excited today to have Blyth Barnow back with us. Blyth has been one of our contributors for a long time, and she's just so brilliant and full of heart and love and joy, and I'm just so glad you're here today, Blyth, and that we get to talk together.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Thank you so much. So good to be with you all again, and I get to chat with you this morning. How lucky am I? Even though it's early.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Even though it's early.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yeah. For folks at home, my name is Blyth Barnow. My pronouns are she/her, and today I'm talking to you from Hopewell land, what is now called Newark, Ohio, in Central Ohio. I spend my days working with Faith in Public Life as their harm reduction faith manager, where I work to bring people who use drugs and faith leaders together to end the racist war on drugs. I also serve on SURJ national's leadership team and am pursuing ordination in the United Church of Christ. So that is a little about me.

In these Lenten conversations, we're practicing self-reflection in community with each other. What can we learn from each other, from our mistakes and misperceptions, from our own places of pain, and also our places of joy, healing, and hope, which might guide us in this time as white Christians working for racial justice?

What ways of being and belonging, meaningmaking and ministry, spiritual practices, and movement practices can help us move towards God and towards community? Towards God in community maybe.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Mmm, mmm.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: The late Dr. Vincent Harding, elder and leader in the black freedom movement, often spoke of live human signposts, people in our lives who can help us find the way towards greater wholeness and multiracial democracy. This Lent we look towards each other, to the scripture, and to the live human signposts in each of our lives to guide our path forward.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Our text today is from John, Chapter 3, the Gospel of John, Chapter 3, and includes one of the most famous - "famouses" verses

>> BLYTH BARNOW: What?

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: (Inaudible) [04:48] which, yeah might have to grit our teeth a little bit, but hopefully will give us some good stuff to talk about. So, Blyth and I are going to read the selection, John, Chapter 3, 14 through 21.

And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned, but those who do not believe are condemned already because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.

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

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

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: So for those of you -- who you may not know this, but it's, like, not even 9:00 in the morning yet. Blyth and I are going to have a conversation about a text that has caused a lot of trouble over the course of Christian history, this particular verse from John, but also these kind of stark polemical feeling binaries. And if you've listened to

this podcast at all over the years and you've heard me take on John, you always hear me say that John gives me fits, this gospel gives me fits. It's the hardest one for me to deal with because of these the starkness of this of these binaries.

And so, Blyth, I'm just going to hand it to you. Like what do you think is going on in this passage? What stands out to you?

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yeah. Well, first things first is I'm just so impressed at John 3:16's ability to sell embroidered throw pillows. That's the first thing that comes to mind is I'm just, like, oh, I get to sit with this passage today. But really what struck me when I was preparing for today is I realized as much as -- you know, I grew up in the Midwest, and I've definitely seen those throw pillows and, you know, reclaimed wood with the passage on it, you know, everywhere, the Cracker Barrel kind of decor real in my world.

And so I'm familiar with this passage, but when I was preparing, I realized that I'd never really sat down and on purpose read John 3:17, the next passage. And I was really struck by the first part of that, which just says God did not send the Son, did not send Jesus, into the world to condemn the world. And so often John 3:16 is used to condemn others. That there's some guilt associated with it or has been in my life, where it's, like, listen, Jesus died for you, so you really got to get it together.

And so I just found it very validating, and I felt it in my chest of, like, oh, yeah, that's not that's not what this is about. God didn't send us Jesus to live -- you know, to learn through Jesus' example to condemn us, but and, you know, I think everybody has their different practice of reading scripture and understanding scripture. And I wasn't brought up in a very religious household, and so I feel a lot of freedom to take what I like and leave the rest. I feel a lot of freedom to see what God is saying to me through the text and reinterpret.

And so, you know, even the rest of that 3:17, you know, it says God did not send Jesus into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him. And I think traditionally that's understood as being saved in an atonement theology way of being saved through his crucifixion, but I think I find that I'm saved, and I think that there's ways in which our community together can build collective salvation and learning through his example, his crucifixion. So that's what stuck out for me when I first was sitting with it.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Mmm, yeah, I like where you ended there with the salvation, like, through doing what Jesus did.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Mhmm.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: And it reminds me that the origins of this word of, you know, might be saved. So being saved or salvation is really about wholeness and healing.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Mhmm.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: And so that, you know, Jesus came so that we could find wholeness and healing, and then, you know, I would want to add like in the context of, like, Imperial domination, like, you know, that there is a way for the collective, the community to find to find healing and to be whole --

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yeah.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: -- given the context of terrible things happening.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: And I think that's part of what these conversations in this podcast seeks to do is, you know, part of one of the biggest barriers to wholeness is white supremacy. White supremacy fractures. White supremacy divides. White supremacy flattens. It doesn't allow that wholeness. It doesn't allow that flourishing. Yeah.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Yeah. Well, and that makes me think of what I was sitting with this morning as I was reading the text, which are these binaries that feel very stark and fractured, even in just this little piece of text that we have, you know, the believers and nonbelievers and the ones who love. It says in John that the people who love darkness rather than light, and we want to name like -- the use of darkness to signify evil is not something that Blyth and I choose to use because of the way that darkness as evil has been mapped onto bodies and used, you know, to commit all kinds of atrocities, so we want to take care with our language around that.

So when, like, people who, I don't know, something else, chose something else rather than love, really, but the splitting apart it seems and that of, well, there's this kind of people and this kind of people. So then, like, how do we how do we, like, make sense of God loves the whole world. Jesus came for us to have, like, wholeness and healing from the things that

fracture us, but using this language that seems to anyway just create more division.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yeah.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: And certainly that's what this text in particular, especially 3:16, but also the text around it and in this whole chapter, Chapter 3 up through Verse 21 that we read today, which is this whole conversation that Jesus is having with Nicodemus, who is a Pharisee, who's supposed to be supposed to be in, like, traditional Christian understanding -- nobody can see me making the air quotes on the Zoom.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: I can see.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: You know, it was supposed to be the enemy, the one that Jesus was against, and yet here they are having this conversation that we're kind of taught is, you know, some kind of loaded, like, angry polemical -- I keep using that word. I don't know that that's the best word. But, you know, us versus them, Jesus versus Pharisees kind of conversation. And, really, it's just a kind of conversation a rabbi would have had with another Jewish person about how to make sense of what was happening and make sense of text and make sense of practice, especially like just a very it doesn't have to be this kind of charged conversation.

So, you know, so I was left thinking about, like, what are these binaries for? Like what purpose are they serving? And in this both in this text but also more broadly in John because John, it's rife with these kinds of setups that feel very much like us versus them.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Mhmm.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: I have thoughts about that, but I don't know you look like you have a thought, so I'll let you...

>> BLYTH BARNOW: I guess the two quick thoughts, one is as you were speaking, I was, like, oh, this seems like such a clear case of -- you know, there's been so many times where I've learned something, and I'm, like, oh, I've really got it. And then I go to communicate it, and when I communicate it, it's so clear I don't have it.

So, you know, I had a moment of compassion for the, you know, for John, the composite of this text, of, like, you missed it. You tried so hard, but you missed it. And then also had

thinking about what could the binary offer us? Like what could what could be useful?

And in some ways there's this way in organizing communities that I see this tool happen to different levels of effectiveness, of naming the stark reality of where we are and then naming the vision of where we want to go. And I wonder if there's some way -- in my deconstructionist practice, you know, I wonder if there's some way that that could be useful for us, that frame here of because when I you know, evil is not a word that works for me, and for me usually the words that fall into place better are something like shame or violence. And so if this text is saying, like, here's what happens when you live in shame, here's what happens if you were free of it, those were just the things that came to mind.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: That gave me a little chill to hear it like that.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Mhmm.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Here's what happens when we live in shame. Here's what happens when we're free of it.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Mhmm.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Ah.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Is there some way you know, part of the series in this Lenten time is thinking about, you know, being real about our desire to address white supremacy as white people. We learn things, and then when we try to communicate them, often we miss them. We miss the (Inaudible) {17:31}. Or we think, you know, even as -- I spend my day as an organizer. So even as organizers, we're trying to do the, quote/unquote, work, but we can be pretty condemning in it.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Mhmm.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: And that condemnation pushes people into shadow, into shame.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Uhhuh.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: And when I read this scripture, you know, 3:19 says and this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people love darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. And I heard so much of our electoral

framing in that, of aggressive and leftist folks and, you know, in my experience, folks who have a lot of class privilege or academic privilege or live in coastal spaces, which I say as somebody who lived for 12 years in the Bay Area, and love all my Bay Area people. And I read that first part, "and this is the judgment," not as this is the condemnation. The scripture just told us that Jesus

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Yeah.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: didn't come to condemn. And so I read it more as like

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: This is the assessment.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: -- the assessment that we make. Yeah. And the assessment that we make is that those people in the Midwest and the South, which usually we're talking about working class and poor white people, our assessment is that those folks love the darkness because there's something in them so corrupt or so evil or so ignorant that they would rather live in darkness than work towards the light of transformation that we're offering them, you know. And, really, it's just we haven't listened fully. And we've come into this work with this judgment, with this assessment where, of course, we're missing what they're offering us. So -- Oh Anne, your face.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Yeah. Gosh, that I'm, like, all emotional just hearing it put that way. You know, being from the South -- and I've been thinking a lot, wrestling a lot for several months several months now, you know, what do I carry around as a Southerner? What kind of shame do I carry around as a Southerner, who, you know, left as a kid, had to change a lot about myself to not, like -- even the way I talked -- to try to avoid being a target of things? And to hear, you know, just all throughout my life, you know, it's the South's fault that we're this way. You know, Southerners you know, I'm from Arkansas. The jokes about Arkansas are just, you know, people say to my face.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Mhmm.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: And, like, that shit doesn't help.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yeah.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: And to just hear you put it that way just now just really like just -- you know, maybe it's because

I'm not entirely awake and, like, extra vulnerable. I haven't put on my whole armor of the day yet, but it caught me. It got me. And -- but it and it makes me think about what I was thinking about also this morning with these you know, these binaries in John, you know, I was sitting with the question of: What are they serving for the story that John is trying to tell?

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Mhmm.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: And, like, reminding myself that the strongest words that John has in this story are for the Jewish religious leaders that sold out to Rome. You know, it's not for the common people. It's not a condemnation of Judaism. It is -- it's, you know, those of you who sold us out to Rome. And we remember this gospel is, like, written after the destruction of the temple, so in the aftermath of all this trouble. And what we have done with it is turned our attention away from Rome and made it about the people who are trying to make sense of what has happened to them and made it seem like the people are blaming each other, which may also be a little bit of what's going on; but, also, Jesus is talking to a Pharisee, Nicodemus, who turns out to be his ally, who advocates for him in front of some of these, you know, collaborators.

And he's this community that gets built up in this gospel in particular is, like, this blend of, you know a class blend, an ethnic blend with gentiles and Samaritans and Jewish people and all different kinds of people. So there's there's something different going on than just a blanket condemnation of humanity.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Mhmm.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: And if we can figure out if we're the good ones over here because we believe in Jesus and everybody else is, you know, of the darkness or which I don't even like. Why am I saying that? Of the paleness, as Adrienne Maree Brown, that's her language, of the paleness and condemning. So we end up doing that same division, reenforcing that same division that white supremacy asks of us. We're the good ones. It must be workingclass people. It must be all the white evangelicals. It must be the Southerners. They're just, you know, they're just you know, can't be saved.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yeah. We're trying to bring them into the light, and they just won't come.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: You just won't come.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yeah. Yeah. When I was

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: And I feel that resentment of being told that. You know, ignorant, backwards, you know, and why -- you know, why some folks would be, like, you know -- I mean it was ingrained to me when I was little to, you know, watch out for those Yankee carpetbaggers who are going to come down and tell us how to live and take all our resources back up north to the MasonDixon line. Like that's a real dynamic that happens.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Mhmm.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: And as we're talking, I'm, like, and that is not what this text is about.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: No.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: It's not trying to set us up to figure out who is us and who is them, who are the good ones and who are not.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yeah. And in some ways there's something I feel like there's something about listening here, and it's never said in the text, but it's something that's standing out to me of what I'm learning from it. And, you know, my I was raised in Northeast Ohio. My partner was raised in Southern Indiana. And I was, like, oh, I get to be with a fellow Midwesterner, but the reality is Southern Indiana is a mix of Southern and Midwestern. So I love Southerners and I love Midwesterners, so I got the best of both worlds. I got lucky. But, you know, I hear how my partner talks, and then I go home to their family, and I hear how their family talks. And their family has a drawl and they don't. And it's (Inaudible) [25:58] that they talk themselves out of it for some of the same reasons I heard you say

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Yeah.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: of wanting to be free of judgment, and I think particular I wonder, I guess I don't know, but I wonder if that is particularly true in leftleaning progressive spaces and queer spaces, where folks pin their hurt on folks that they came from. So that's something I'm thinking about.

But, also, when I was preparing for today, when I read scripture, especially when I'm reading a specific passage, I try to read a little before and a little after to give myself some context.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Me too.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yeah. I think it's an awesome practice. Thank you, seminary, for teaching me that. But in general

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: And let's face it, the lectionary editors like to drop us down into the middle of conversations where we have no idea why in the world Jesus is talking about Moses raising serpents up on a stick. Like why? What (Inaudible) [27:07]?

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yeah. It's like when you're at a party and you turn into the kitchen, and you're, like, whoa, what'd I miss? Yeah. Well, in John 3:11, you know, Jesus says: Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know and we testify to what we've seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. I've spoken to you of earthly things, and you do not believe. How, then, will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?

And for me reading it in this kind of question of, you know, who's the enemy is something that you had said earlier to me. And this assumption that a lot of white wellmeaning, I guess, maybe -- maybe they're wellmeaning. A lot of white folks, progressive white folks land on that it's other white people, that it's poor and workingclass white people are the enemy. We get so confused. We miss empire, like you said, altogether.

And so when I heard Jesus in this passage, you know, I live in where my home is isn't rural, but I live in a rural county, and I get to work with rural organizers a lot, many of whom are working class, not all of them. And I heard their voices in this of when we're organizing and building base and when we're trying to build broad coalition, I see who those folks are willing to work with and who they're not. And who they're willing to work with are folks, who when they share what they know, when they share what they've seen, when they share about the earthly realities, they're believed. That's who they work with, and that's who they share their sacred gifts with.

And I think as -- you know, I'm painting in very broad strokes, which we know is not always the most helpful. But, you know, I think as the left, we have a lot to learn in that passage of -- people in the South and the Midwest are telling us what they need. They're telling us what the reality is on the ground. And we don't accept their testimony. You decide it's about something else. So then they go and they turn Georgia blue without us is what happens. They still have those gifts.

They still have those heavenly things.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Yes.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: So then we get to sit back and be, like, oh, my gosh, who knew? Well, they knew. They knew all along.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Yeah.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: But we didn't listen. So we missed it. We didn't

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: More chills. Went and turned Georgia blue without them.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yeah.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Oh.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: So when we think about, you know, where are we falling short in organizing with other white folks or bringing white folks into the work to undo white supremacy, part of where we're falling short is forgetting that white supremacy is what we're organizing against, not other white people.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Mhmm.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: And I'm reminded of this conversation. There was a poem I meant to bring it that -- you know, a conversation that we had in SURJ in a meeting where both you and write at, and this refrain came up. We crafted a poem together. And the question was posed: What if we organized out of love of our people and not fear of our people?

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Yes.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: I think that that is where a lot of folks land is they land in fear. They want to and my gracious pastoral heart, you know, I think understands that that's a desire to be free of hurt. Be free of pain. Distance themselves from harm that was -- real harm that was done. And I get that. And I've been there. And, also, it is I don't want to make it sound too simple because it's not. But I found it to be very transformative to orient towards love of the people that I come from even though I have to have boundaries in my relationships to them.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Yeah.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: What did I wish that they had in order to love me better or in order to love the world better? So I wish for them as opposed to wanting to be so opposite of them. So that's an important journey I'm still walking that road.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Definitely not there, but...

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Yeah. Yeah. Rather than being opposite of them. That line of that poem, what if we organized, you know, out of love for our people instead of fear of our people? I remember when y'all read that poem, and I was, like, messaging you in private, like, oh, my goodness. Like --

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yeah.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: We need to bring that into our podcast because -- I don't even know if I remember that it was on this particular text, but it fits so well with the theme

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yeah.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: that we're wrestling with, you know. And

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Would you like me to find it? I can try to find it?

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Yeah, sure.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Okay. Let me --

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: And while you do that, I'm going to remind folks who are listening that, you know, we're talking we've talked a lot about, like, in organizing spaces and on the progressive spaces and left spaces, but this is also true in the church, in the white Christian church, like, we can't let ourselves off the hook, which is, you know, really part of the point of these conversations, that the white church has done the same thing.

It has you know, how many meetings was I at when I was Presbyterian where, you know, they were fighting over LGBTQ ordination, and everybody blamed the South for the Presbyterian church not being able to pass, you know, whatever amendment it was at the time and to be able to ordain LGBTQ people. And, like, I'm sitting right there, like, hello, queer Southerner, like, it's not this simple.

And the way in which we, you know, as white Christian churches have not invested in poor workingclass white communities. We have not invested in the South. I did research on this a couple years ago for our seminary organizing project and, like, there is no unless it's, like, a mission, we're going to go help those poor people, but there is no investment in white poor workingclass leadership, in white rural, you know, churches and congregations. You know, they're lucky if they get a student pastor who will stick around more than a year. Like, where is the investment in the leadership and the thriving? You know, the UCC doesn't have that. There was not a denomination that I could find, easily anyway, that actually invested

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yeah.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: in people. And I think that that reflects this kind of -- this broken place, where it's easy to feel like we are the good ones, those of us who, you know, are not from those communities. We're middle class. We're not from the South. Like we're from, you know, Midwest workingclass communities. And then, you know, then we're the ones who have made it, and the rest of y'all backwards people, you know, good luck. Like

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yeah. Well, and I'm struck by the fact, like, invest there's very little investment, but there is a lot of extraction.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Ah.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: There is a lot of, like, you know, what would what would our churches be -- our progressive churches be without Martin Luther King? You know, if we took the ability to quote Southerners out from backward places of worship, how would we communicate our values? We'd probably struggle. So we're okay extracting that from the South.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Oh, wow.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: But we're not going to invest in what made that organizing that was done, those spiritual gifts, possible.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: I'd never thought about that. And that's like white supremacists.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yeah.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Right? The extraction, just an

extraction. We'll exploit your words. We'll extract your words.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: But we'll never pay you for them.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: We'll never pay you for them. Oh.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: You know, and there's so many ways to invest in a community. There is, of course, financial investment and there's people investment, but there's also you know, it's an investment to believe people when they tell you what's happening.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Yeah.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: It's an investment to say, "You're probably right. We'll do it your way."

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Yeah. You would know better than we would.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yeah. You know, all of that is an investment.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Relational investment.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Exactly. So we're we're happy to extract the parts that spark our inspiration or tickle our funny bone or whatever, but then but there's no relationship there. And when you just take, you know, there's a word for that.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: There's a word for that.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: There's a couple words for that.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Yeah.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: So...

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Hmm. Hmm.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: What do you think about the poem? I can read the I found it.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Do you have any other thoughts about -- like what are you going to take with you from the conversation? And maybe we can finish this section with that poem and then offer the closing.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: I think the things that I'm really going to take with me is, you know, for me Jesus was a spiritual teacher. Jesus is also an organizer. And that's how I relate to him. So really what's going to stay with me is that spiritual teachers and organizers were not brought into this world to condemn. That is not why we're here. That is not our purpose, and that's not what God is asking of us. You know, I think what God is asking of us is that -- you know, and love becomes this such a trite word, and it really irritates me because it's

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Yes.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: it's a useful word in its true meaning, but I think when we love each other, when we invest in each other, when we build those relationships, we pull people out of shame through the light. And that is you know, that last part, but those who do what is true come to the light. Well, we build the kingdom the kindom together.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Yeah.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: And so when we build that together, then we're brought into this transformation, into this space of abundance and possibility, which is what I think that light is speaking to. And when we do that together, we get to see a little more clearly. We get to perceive a little more clearly. That's what I'm taking.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Hmm. Yeah. I think just, you know, being in conversation with you has helped me so much with this text. I'm going to take all of that and and, like, maybe even when we're able to live into this in this way, like, we're pulling ourselves out of our own shame.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Mhmm.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Because that deflection, that holding people at a distance, is also, like, about our own shame. Right?

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Mhmm.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: So maybe part of it is, like, pulling our own selves out of the places of shadow, out of the places of shame, out of the places of fear, you know, the line from the poem. And, yeah, we have to do that together. And so the reminder to me of, you know, be clear about who the enemy is and it's not us.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Mhmm.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: You know, it's not our siblings. It's not who we're taught that it is.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yeah.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: And we were taught about this text that the enemy was a certain group of people, and that was actually a lie

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yeah.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: actually.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Mhmm.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Once the Roman Empire was in charge of Christianity, why in the world would you want this text to be about, you know, condemning the Roman Empire?

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yeah. That doesn't really work for us.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: That doesn't work. So we're going to make it about, you know, infighting, and, you know, which is not to say there weren't tensions or disagreements, but that's just, like, human. There's tensions and disagreements in movement work, in churches, like, all the time.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yeah.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: But we together -- you know, what you said, like, we're not here to condemn. That's not our job. That's not our work. That's not even God's work.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yeah. Yeah. I'm reminded, actually -- it's literally staring at me in my face, so this little story of, you know, I work with faith leaders, and I work with denominations and all around people who use drugs and the drug war, and there's a lot of judgment there.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Mhmm.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: A lot of shame there. There's a lot of condemnation there. You know, and condemnation in terms of, you know, distorted morality but also literal condemnation of imprisonment and incarceration and removing people's children. And, you know, those judgments have real very real consequences.

And so I was speaking to a group of folks the other day. I was invited I'm, like, how much to share? I was invited to speak at this group, and I was invited to speak in a section they were doing a pastoral ethics training around substance use and addiction, and I was invited to speak on the section titled "How to Avoid Enabling Drug Addicts."

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Oh.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: And I was, like, you chose me. You chose me to come --

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Oh, interesting.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: -- to this conversation.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: There is so much judgment just in that title.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yeah. I was, like, how to say that the title of your pastoral ethics training is unethical? How do I do that?

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: It's not pastoral either.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Not pastoral. And so I had this moment and right now I get to be part of the Anne Braden program with the Catalyst project as a facilitator, and we just reviewed the teachings of Anne Braden. And if folks aren't familiar with her, I encourage you to look her up. And one of the lessons that we learned from Anne's life is not to stand on the sidelines, just to step in and sit in the mess a little bit.

And so, you know, I got this invitation, and I was, like, I'm not doing that. You're kidding. I'm not talking in there. And then I thought about that teaching from Anne, and I was, like, what does it serve for me to step out of that conversation? And I had this moment of being, like, my "no" to that conversation would actually just be rooted in my not wanting to be tainted by their misunderstandings.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Oh.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: That I didn't want to be associated with those people. So if I don't want to be associated with those people, those white people, those folks who don't get it, those whatever, who am I left to talk to? It's a pretty small pool, and it's a pool that doesn't move things forward in the way that

I say I'm committed to do.

So I said yes to the conversation, knowing that there may be some folks who might be upset by what I would bring, but they asked me. And I remembered God sent them to me. God asked me. So I said yes. And before I got on, I was so nervous and was, like, I don't know, because people were sharing personal testimony. And when you're talking about substance use, shame is just everywhere. And to refute things that were shared in the person's personal testimony just exacerbates shame, so how do you do that?

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Yeah.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: So I was really nervous, and I remembered this prayer and mantra from Brené Brown that she shared, and she was talking about talking to, like, big, fancy Fortune 500 people. And she said that before she gets on stage, she says to herself, "People, people, people. They're just people."

And for her it's equalizing in terms of, like, pushing back on imposter syndrome and all of that. But I literally why I stay it was staring me in the face, folks at home can't see, I wrote it on a Postit note that morning because when I my desire to say no, my desire to not connect was, yeah, rooted in not wanting to be tainted by other people's misunderstandings, but it was also because I was afraid of them.

And so when I sat down, I was, like, they are just people, meaning, they can't hurt me. I mean, of course, we know that's not true, but in the prep selftalk

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Right. Right.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: you know, they can't affect my daytoday realities. But, also, they're just people, and they're learning just like I am. And so what if I have something to learn through that conversation, and what if I have something to offer in that conversation?

So I wrote "People, people, people" on the Postit, and I set it on my computer screen so that when I started to get overwhelmed I could remember we're all just people talking to each other trying to build relationship and understanding, and it's really easy to make it more complicated than that, but that's actually what's happening. That's the root of it. People talking to people trying to get God's will a little more right than we did yesterday.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Yeah. In conditions that are really terrifying.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yeah.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: And which circles us back to John's gospel. People talking to people, you know, trying to figure out the next best faithful thing to do in conditions that were really terrifying.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Mhmm. Mhmm.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Yeah. People, people, people.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: People, people, people. Just people.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Why don't we take a break, a little music break, and come back for the closing.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Sounds good.

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

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

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: All right. So to close, we're going to Blyth is going to offer us this poem that she mentioned just a few moments ago, so go ahead, Blyth.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Thanks. So this poem was created by some members of the SURJLT and leadership team, and I'll share it, and I know that I will not read it as well as Pam did, but I know God gives me grace.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Amen.

>> BLYTH BARNOW:

What is possible
when we organize out of love for our people
instead of fear of them....
and not just fear, hate
can't organize people you don't like, hate even
We are not here by accident
11 years of cumulative work
Grinding, chipping, thinking, planning, trying, growing
We do not go to grandma's house empty handed
We show up with something

Accountability, not just a lofty idea
is real... has substance matters
Is this harsh, no it's reality
base and power
are possible now
What is possible when we organize out of love for our people
instead of fear of them
These new priorities
fit in the simple bold statement of who we are
who we have always been
Love,
rigor
and righteous rage
This political moment is ripe
everything has brought us to this moment
naming these national political priorities
working off so much ground
gained by the abolitionist movement
“It's harder to live under white supremacy unexamined,
it costs you more
living inside white supremacy is lonely,
We live inside the transformation

We ARE NOT asking
if not now when
We are the now
the dishes are done
We were made for time such as this
a time such as this made us
organizing
organizing
organizing
IS the only way
We had to grow to this priority and everyone helped get us here
building a base and developing leadership
rooted and ready to grow power
We move in service of the joy of transformation
and reject the suffering of supremacy.
momentum
alignment

alignment

alignment

We honor those before us

by moving through the portals to change they created.

And we know movement is made through organizing.

growing grassroots to alter the whole landscape

a generative time

our love for each other

What is possible when we organize out of love for our people

instead of fear of them

(Alia, Anice, Blyth, Carla, Cacye, Hilary, and Pam

SURJ LT and c3 subgroup, Feb 24, 2021)

And that was written about Alia, Anice, me, Carla, Cacye, Hilary, and Pam. So grateful for all of them.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Yes. So grateful for all of them and for you. And for you. Grateful for you.

So what we're asking folks to do as a call to action for this week's episode is to reflect, like, with your people. That's part of the point of this. Like get your people together.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Safely.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Safely. On Zoom, double masked, six feet apart, whatever. But get your people together somehow and ask each other: What if we organized out of love for our people instead of fear of them? What would be different? What would be possible?

And also ask yourselves, like, when do you seek condemnation? When are those times that you feel that coming on, that desire to condemn rather than to understand or to go deeper with someone? What's going on for you then? What's something different that you could do, a different move that you could make rather than condemnation?

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Can I add one thing?

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Yes.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Always having markers for things is helpful for me to remember things, so I invite folks every time they see a cross-stitch pillow with John 3:16, think about John 3:17.

You'll have a lot of chances to remember depending on where you live.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Every time you see the sign pop up behind home plate, now that it's about to be baseball season

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Yeah.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: you can say, "But John 3:17."

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Mhmm.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Thank you so much, Blyth, for being in conversation today. I just appreciate you so much.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Thank you. Same thing.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: So grateful for you. And thanks to all of you who are joining us from wherever you are on this good Earth. We would love to hear from you by commenting on our SoundCloud or Twitter or Facebook pages. And we'd love to hear from you about how we're doing, you know, especially from folks of color and nonChristian folks who may be checking us out.

So next week we'll have a resistance word, which will be the last of these Lenten conversations. And this will be with Seth Wispelwey and Allyn Steele, which should be very exciting as well.

You can find out more about SURJ at showingupforracialjustice.org. And our podcast lives on SoundCloud. Search on "The Word Is Resistance." We also just got on Spotify, which makes me feel like, I don't know, we're all grown up now or something. I don't know. So give us a "like" or rate us or whatever you do on these platforms to show some love.

The transcripts are available on our website, which include references, resources, action links. The poem will be part of this transcript, so you have access to that.

And, finally, a big thanks to Matt Reno, who's our sound editor for this week.

So send us off with a blessing, Blyth.

>> BLYTH BARNOW: Okay. Join with me in prayer. Dear God, help us move through this week as people of encouragement, truth, and kindness. May we welcome one another instead of

passing judgment. May our love be bold enough to pull us all from the sidelines and into the center of God's love and justice for us and for the world for this is how we build the kingdom. Amen.

>> REVEREND ANNE DUNLAP: Amen.

<<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.>>

REFERENCES:

The Jewish Annotated New Testament, NRSV. Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, editors. Oxford University Press, 2011. (Check all the amazing essays in the back!)

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