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Podcast Transcript

6.6.21 Pentecost 2B

- [1 Samuel 8:4-11, \(12-15\), 16-20, \(11:14-15\)](#) and [Psalm 138](#) •
- [Genesis 3:8-15](#) and [Psalm 130](#) •
- [2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1](#) •
- [Mark 3:20-35](#)

<<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:

[Anne]:

- 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, in liberation?
- What wisdom is there for us as white Christians in these troubled, violent times of pandemics and racial capitalism, and the beauty of resistance?
- I’m Rev. Anne Dunlap, pronouns she/her/hers. I’m a United Church of Christ minister and I’m the faith organizing coordinator for Showing Up Racial Justice (SURJ). I live in the place currently called* Buffalo, NY, here in the homelands of the Haudenosaunee and Erie peoples.
- This podcast is a project of 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 multi-racial “movement choir practice” in Denver, CO in December 2014, being led by Minister Daryl J. Walker. We are deeply grateful to the Freeney-Harding family for letting us use the song for this podcast.
- The Word is Resistance.

I am thrilled today to welcome to the podcast, Reverend Jennifer Butler, the founding Executive Director of Faith in Public Life. In addition to the great organizing work that she leads at Faith in Public Life, Reverend Jen has also recently published, "Who Stole My Bible? Reclaiming the Scripture as a Handbook for Resisting Tyranny," which I think is very much right up our alley here at The Word is Resistance. So, welcome, Reverend Jen. Please introduce yourself.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: Hi, everybody. I am so excited to be here. I'm a big fan of SURJ's work and you all have taught me so much, so I just feel really excited about this opportunity.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: Beautiful. So, today we're going to be talking together about one of the lectionary selections for today that also happens to be one of the texts that you take on in your book, Reverend Jen.

1 Samuel 8:4-11, (12-15), 16-20, (11:14-15)

8:4 Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah,

8:5 and said to him, "You are old and your sons do not follow in your ways; appoint for us, then, a king to govern us, like other nations."

[Jennifer]:

8:6 But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to govern us." Samuel prayed to the LORD,

8:7 and the LORD said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them.

8:8 Just as they have done to me, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so also they are doing to you.

8:9 Now then, listen to their voice; only--you shall solemnly warn them, and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them."

[Anne]:

8:10 So Samuel reported all the words of the LORD to the people who were asking him for a king.

8:11 He said, "These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots;

8:12 and he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots.

8:13 He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers.

8:14 He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers.

[Jennifer]:

8:15 He will take one-tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and his courtiers.

8:16 He will take your male and female slaves, and the best of your cattle and donkeys, and put them to his work.

8:17 He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves.

8:18 And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the LORD will not answer you in that day."

8:19 But the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel; they said "No! but we are determined to have a king over us,

8:20 so that we also may be like other nations, and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles."

[Anne]:

11:14 Samuel said to the people, "Come, let us go to Gilgal and there renew the kingship."

11:15 So all the people went to Gilgal, and there they made Saul king before the LORD in Gilgal. There they sacrificed offerings of well-being before the LORD, and there Saul and all the Israelites rejoiced greatly.

[pause here for music break]

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

>> ANNE DUNLAP: So, Jen, I really like the flow of your chapters in your book where you move from like understanding the text to lessons for us in our own time and then to how we resist and what the lessons are for us in our resistance.

And I actually think that's a great flow for our conversation today, to move from the text to the lessons to resistance. So, let's start with the text. What are some important things for us to know about this story?

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: So, I see this as a pivotal story and scripture and what I try to do in the book is walk through these pivotal stories from the creation story all of the way through to Revelation to show how the Bible truly is the story of a social movement led by God, a series of social movements to resist tyranny in all of its forms, to resist domination systems and systems of empire.

And those systems are sometimes imposed from the outside, you know, the Hebrew slaves in Egypt or Babylon invading. They are sometimes imposed from the inside by choices that we make to go against God's plan for equality and shared power.

And so, in this text, there are a couple of things to notice. One is this is a dramatic pivot. God had told people at Sinai, told the Israelites, that they would be a nation of priests. And the way I see that, that's kind of a call to a type of democracy where everybody has a relationship with God and everybody is living out God's commandments.

This is a move away from being a nation of priests guided by prophets and by judges to being like the other nations. Notice that emphasis. Like, we want to be like everybody else. Can you just let us be like everybody else?

And so, it's not unlike what we see happen even at Sinai where the people go down and make a golden calf, you know. I remember as a child, seeing that and being like what? God just did all this stuff in the desert and let them out of Egypt and then they go and make a god that looks like the Egyptian god, you know? They go back to Egypt, basically.

Now, here we see another turn. So, they've been trying to live out this - this Sinai covenant but now they're afraid.

They're afraid because of the Philistine threat and so - a couple of other things. And so, they're turning back again to be like everybody else. They just cannot live up to this vision that God has set before them.

So, there's - there's that. We just want to be like the other nations.

The other thing that I noticed in reading this passage, sort of doing Lectio Divina meditation when I was writing the book, is the number of times the word take is used in this warning. He will take, he will take, he will take. And when you really look at each one of those warnings, we can see that so present in our world today of how a domination system works. It can be, as I said, you know, imposed from the outside and quite brutal, or it can be a gradual channeling of resources and making your children serve in a highly militarized society and you know, taking your sons and taking your daughters.

And then eventually it's kind of like a slow progression, kind of like the frog in the boiling pot, progression, you know? To where in the end, you end up with this dramatic, you know, if this were on stage or like in a movie, it would be like, dun-dun-dah and you will be his slaves, you know?

>> ANNE DUNLAP: Yeah.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: And so, it's quite dramatic. But what also struck me and like going back to this text, as I wrote the book, I really didn't know which texts were going to be my - you know, it's hard to pick for a while and then they really fell into place.

As a child, I never heard this preached on. You know, this is so pivotal, this warning and what happens, but I don't think I have heard anybody speak to this text. So, I really went digging around to find some good exegesis to see if my instinct was kind of right on about it. But those are some of the main things I see in this text.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: Yeah, yeah. That - when I was rereading this, I don't think I've heard anybody ever preach on this text before either, actually, now that you mention that. But while I was rereading to prepare for our conversation today, I was struck also by the repetition of take. He will take, he will take, he will take. And I went through and I, like, circled them all.

And you know, it's not he's going to ask you and you might be able to share. But he will take. And gosh. And then as you said, you end up at the end of this - these warnings with and then you'll be his slaves. So, we return right back to Egypt, you know.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: Yeah.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: Gosh. What I love in your chapter is how you take those "takes," if you will, and really map them onto our own political and economic structure here in the United States of the taking and the exploitation and the development of this - this militarized culture.

I actually have written in - it must be from when I was in seminary, this part of like, I'll take your sons to work on the chariots and the horsemen and the commanders. I wrote in, the military industrial complex. It's right here.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: Yes. Oh, yes.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: And the exploitation of the labor and the exploitation of the land, taking the grain and vineyards and all of that is to solidify - in this text it's a king. In our context, it's you know, a metaphorical king that is wealth and power solidified in the hands of a very few.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: That's right.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: And so, we're actually not very far from this warning. And so, you know, I just - I find it to be also like a very human text of the struggle that we have as humans because this isn't a story that is really particularly unique to the people of Israel. You know, we all have this struggle of do we want to live in a way that's, you know, allows for the thriving and flourishing for all? Or when we feel threatened and unsafe, do we actually, you know, then choose some kind of system of power and domination that ends up concentrating that power in the hands of a few people to the detriment of literally everybody else?

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: It's worth thinking about that, right? Like, as we're getting into this text, like, this is an ancient wisdom like you're saying, you know. This is an ancient wisdom being revealed here and for those who are experts on studying democracies and autocrats and different systems like that, they

will point this out that it tends to happen - like, autocrats rise to power in times of immense instability, slow growing, intensifying inequality, racial fears, you know, ethnic fears. And when you delve into - for Samuel, you find that that's exactly what's going on.

You know, so other pieces I didn't point out in terms of the text is like, biblical historians can kind of go back and see that this was a time of intensifying wealth disparity. They can tell that from archaeological digs. There's the Philistine threat. And there's a failure of leadership internally. You know, they haven't been living up to their ethical system. You know, so it's a point of vulnerability and instability.

And then as you were talking, you were reminding me of just how ironic it is that when you know, there's - when we're operating out of fear, either personally or communally, we choose to do things that ultimately drive us to that fear, to what we actually fear.

So, they fear getting dominated and conquered by another nation and being subjugated. Because they are living and making decisions out of their fear rather than out of trust in God and compassion and empathy, they end up creating that which they fear.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: Yes.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: That's what we all do all the time in our lives, you know. Even in my personal life. You know, I'm afraid. My fear takes hold of my brain. That anxiety takes over. That loop in my brain takes over and then I end up making bad decisions based on sort of like that anxiety. That's always a place of weakness.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: Yeah. Just the simplest example, you know, when you're going to like, travel and leave a loved one at home, how so often we pick a fight because we don't want to deal with our feelings of - you know, I'm going to miss you. So, instead, we just pick a fight as if somehow that would be easier.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: Oh my God. I'm like clapping symbolically and laughing here. That's such a great example.

Or even on the very basic level, if you do sports or you're running down the stairs or whatever, if you're like, I'm going to fall, you probably will fall, right? Like - there's like,

when I used to play basketball, somebody told me free throws were 80% confidence. You know, if you sit there thinking, I don't know if I'm going to make this, but you say, I'm going to make this and then you remember your form and do it, you're much more likely to make that shot, you know. That's a very simplistic example. There are much deeper ones but probably they're too personal for us to convey.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: Yeah.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: These are all great examples.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: Yeah. So, yeah. I love that - that - this is one of the reasons I love scripture because when we dig into it like this, these aren't like, you know, high fancy stories about - they're human stories about trying to figure out how actually do we survive when we're being trampled over by Assyria, Egypt, Babylon, you know, who's next? Like, how do we actually keep ourselves safe?

Because I think part of what is, you know, happening in this story is you know, and kind of surrounding this story, is God actually going to keep us safe or not? Because we kept getting squashed on and if we think about the - the arc of first and second Samuel and what the scholars call the Deuteronomistic history which is this whole kind of tale starting in Judges through Babylon's destruction of Israel and Judah, they're writing this, they're telling these stories and trying to make meaning out of their experience of having been conquered by a giant empire, you know. It's like, wow.

There's just layers upon layers of you know, how do we stay safe? What does it mean to be faithful to God's way when we're still under threat? And how hard it is. Like, I have some really deep compassion for you know, like living now and trying to live as an abolitionist, right? And like, what do we do when, you know, my neighbor won't turn his music down? Like, what do I actually do? Very simplistic but real example.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: That's right.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: You know, what do we do about - I was talking with a congregation last night about the community safety for all work that we do around congregations, you know, divesting from relying on police and you know, what happens when our Black Lives Matter banners get vandalized by the Proud Boys? Do we call the cops and have them dealt with? Because they're

violent and scary. Like, oh yeah. What do we do? How do we actually create safety for ourselves that doesn't end up replicating the same unsafe systems that we're actually trying to get free from?

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: And this is where the rubber hits the road, right? Like, so this is really getting deeper into what's happening in this passage because this is real. Like, I went back. I was like, okay, wait, wait, wait. Why are they so afraid?

So, you look at the chapters before this and they have really good frickin reason to be afraid, right?

>> ANNE DUNLAP: Right.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: The Philistines are coming, you know. The Philistines are big and they're like better armed and all of that.

And I love that you bring up, you know, abolitionists and defund. We have been working a lot with Defund Police and I actually love like you know, teaching that to people because so often what happens is God lifts up this vision but then the world around us says, you know, that's a nice vision but it's not going to work. You've got to be real. You've got to be practical, right? Our politicians tell us that all the time.

But as people of faith, I think it is our job to stay in the vision and then your question is so well put, so what do we do? What do we do? We live in the tension between that vision and the reality and what I appreciate so much, like Black Lives Matter website, their materials on defunding police to me are so helpful because they're like, you know, this is what we're headed toward. It's going to be a gradual process. It is really hard in the meaning. We're figuring this out and we've got to be willing to live in the tension.

And I think that so often, we just want to be like the other nations, you know. Like, we want to go to like the really secure, just be like everybody else. Can't we just like - you know?

So, that ability to live in the tension is a very spiritual place to live with those ambiguities. That's some of what trusting God is also about. So, it's staying with the vision. It's being able to live with ambiguities, to ask the questions,

to not fear the smaller failures, you know, to realize, okay, we're going to get this wrong sometimes or we're going to have to adjust, you know, like be compassionate with ourselves.

But to stay with that rather than go to the sure thing, rather than to revert back to the way things have always been. God didn't tell us it was going to be easy and really crystal clear, but God set us on a journey and through the wilderness, right? It's always through some rough terrain.

But I love that vision because that, you know, I used to do archery too at camp and they always taught us that like, if you wanted to hit the bullseye, you actually had to aim higher than the bullseye, right? That's what vision is. If you don't aim higher than the bullseye, you're going to go down underneath. You're not even going to hit the target because the arrow is going to go up and then curve and gravity is going to pull it down.

You know, but that's the way I think of vision. We always have to aim high and we'll eventually get there. If we aim low, we're never going to -

>> ANNE DUNLAP: We'll never get there if we aim low.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: Yeah. We'll be off target.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: We'll be very off target.

I think that kind of - that tension or the - we just want to be a nation like everybody else, we see that in the founding of our own country of the United States. There's like these ideals around religious freedom and democracy and yet part of what we enshrine into those originating documents are enslavement and genocide and the three fifth dehumanization of an entire group of people so that we can be like other nations. Like - and we have yet to reckon with that history.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: That's so deep.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: We're still reckoning with that history.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: We are still reckoning. So, that is so deep. So, you know, you go back to like the people who - the White people who came and took Native American lands and then eventually created slavery and the categories and the white supremacy system. They too were fleeing oppression, right? When

you think about the Scotts and the Irish and all the successive ways and what they did, instead of - we're told this triumphal story of like, and we created the land of opportunity and freedom. No, we did not.

We replicated the systems of Europe, you know.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: We created a king and called it the United States.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: We did and we see this even more. Like, a lot of us saw, okay, well at least, you know, we're not perfect as a democracy and we're still evolving but you know, at least we have this balance of power. But we saw how weak we were under Trump when he basically kind of functioned as a king. You know? And we saw that so many of the ways in which our democracy - so-called democracy, our fragile democracy, however you want to call it, the way in which it functions relies on a lot of norms.

Like, who knew a president can't be convicted of a crime and go to jail. That was of course the way the Justice Department decided to interpret things but clearly it's also like a thing that's never - not very clear in our constitutional law. So, a lot of the reforms -

>> ANNE DUNLAP: How convenient.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: How convenient, right? So - so much of this we realized and some of us were like well, you know, okay. Congress will - and the judiciary will balance out like a maniac president who is off the rails. No. As it turns out, like, a president really committed to this, you know, white supremacist reimplementing autocratic style actually can go quite a long way, you know, who has no regard for any sort of norms whatsoever.

So, you know, for those early on, I just remember the first weeks of the Trump administration. People were like, okay, one, maybe he won't be like he says he's going to be. Two, you know, there are balances of power. It turns out presidents do have a lot. So, get out there and vote because presidents do have a lot of power.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: Right, right. Yeah. And I think too, you know, I remember having a sort of heated conversation with my parents who were very much on the checks and balances, the

system will hold him accountable. I was like, I'm not actually so sure that that's going to happen. Like, why would that happen, you know? You know.

George Bush has yet to be held accountable for his war crimes so why would we think that - why would we think that presidents would be held accountable for any of them for what they do?

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: That's right.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: And so, you know, it's really on you know, the credit goes to the organizing that happened on the ground in really key places that made it possible for us to get him out and we're still dealing with the fallout of his, you know, we're still not going to hold him accountable for what he did and what he incited.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: Yeah.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: And all of that is important and I think too, you know, what's something we can learn from how old this story is of how we - you know, we continually as humans choose that which, you know, ends us up back in Egypt over and over and over again.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: That's right.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: Is that - that was not an aberration. But again, kind of going back to, you know, those key things that you know, violated the vision of quote, unquote, "democracy." Democracy for whom? Certainly not democracy for the indigenous peoples of this continent. Certainly not democracy for women. Certainly not democracy for enslaved people. So, therefore we're not actually in a democracy. We live in a system that does its hardest to consolidate wealth and power in the hands of you know, a very few White people. That's it's job.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: That's right. That's right.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: That's what it was born to do. And so, you know, yes, we want there to be accountability for the previous presidency and also it was not an aberration.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: It was not an aberration and what we see in this passage about choosing to have a king is like, there are these turning points in history, right, where you have a chance to like, do it right or do it wrong, and they choose the wrong

path and it takes them a long time to dig out from that. It slowly degenerates until you end up with Solomon who is a classic autocrat. He's the apex.

A lot of times, people will - you know, I remember my children's bible, you know, like, Solomon in all his splendor. That's not the story.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: He's so wise. Yeah.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: He's so wise.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: It's just like, no.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: No. So, you can get the book and read that chapter on Solomon and be like, no.

What's so refreshing, I find like one of my hermeneutics is like go back to what I first thought as a child when I read this text. I remember being like, this doesn't really - one of these things does not look like the other, you know, the Sesame Street song. Like, just, this text does not match with everything else.

Solomon uses slaves to build the temple to God. So, here's a god who says, remember, I brought you out of slavery in Egypt and I am the god who frees slaves. That's what all the commandments are based on, all the law that is repeated all throughout the books of the law in the Bible. And then Solomon builds - and if you look at that scene in the Bible too, God kind of looks at Solomon - I mean at - yeah, Solomon, and actually God does appear twice I think to Solomon. So, this is like really the conversation. And God is like kind of - I picture God rolling God's eyes, you know. Like, this is what you do? You know. And then God says, you know what I really want is for you to live up to the commandments and to Sinai. I mean, literally, that's that scene. You can kind of see it in the scripture.

But back to your point about like this is what we've always been. We have these moments of reckoning and this is what I appreciate about Reverend Dr. William Barber's preaching is he talks about we need a third reconstruction.

I remember when I first heard that years ago, I was like, wait a minute. Let me go back to my history and - I remember this but let me look.

So, after the Civil War, we have like you know, just barely even twenty years. Almost immediately, Lincoln is assassinated, right, by Confederates. And then they start to dismantle reconstruction so that basically you have slavery by another name. So, we never really end slavery. It becomes Jim Crow. And then we have the Civil Rights Movement and here's where I really bought into things.

We're getting better. We still have racism but we're getting better. We've had the Civil Rights Movement. We had the Voting Rights Act. Oh, wait a minute. Voting Rights Act was gutted in 2013. But you know, schools are getting better. No. Schools are more segregated now than ever before, you know.

So, like all of these you know, economic equality starting to happen, though Black communities lost like 40% of their wealth during the pop of the housing bubble because they were really targeted by predatory lending.

So, you start to like learn all of these facts and you realize wait, that system is still in place and it intensifies at certain periods of time but - and we make a little headway but then it gets rolled back again. So, it's like a constant journey.

And now we have a moment for another reckoning. You know, we've had like an apocalypse, an unveiling. That's what an apocalypse is. It's not the end of times. It's the unveiling of the powers and principalities that are behind the systems that we've been numbed to. We've kind of fallen asleep and we're like, you know, oh, I'll go shopping. I'll watch some TV. But we're kind of getting numb to what's actually happening in our society.

Now we're like, oh, wow. There's all this stuff I didn't realize, I didn't see the whole - they have an uprising. People are waking up. And so, this is another moment. Are we going to choose a king - and we're in that right now very intensely. Are we going to choose a king or are we going to confront our history? I think of critical race theory and the attack that is happening on critical race theory. I think of the 1619 Project and the way conservatives are going after that. We're either going to confront our history, we're going to reckon with race, are we going to - are we going to do reparations? Are we going to set things right? Or are we going to try to paper it over again and are we going to choose a king? Are we going to choose an autocrat, an oligarch? Are we going to continue to pretend

like we're a democracy but just go on with channeling resources up? Inequality, economic equality is at an all-time high and that's been gradually happening since the 1970's.

Phew. We're in a moment, you know, so we have a choice. We're in a choice point right here. Are we going to choose a king again?

>> ANNE DUNLAP: It makes me wonder about this text, of thinking about it with that layer of like, they're telling the story as a way to make meaning out of being conquered by Babylon and destroyed by Babylon. Like, how is this story and for Samuel, like, the reckoning for, you know, we told you this was not going to work. Oh yeah, this doesn't work. And they don't try it again, I don't think.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: No. And here's the thing. I forgot to say, if you look at my chapter on Solomon too, this warning that's given in 1 Samuel, by the time you get to the story on Solomon, Solomon dies and that warning is reviewed almost point by point. And they say, look what has happened here. He has taken your sons and daughters. He has taken the best of your land. He has made you his slaves. It's like a book end, you know, because -

>> ANNE DUNLAP: It only gets worse after that.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: And it only gets worse after that and then they're carried off into captivity.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: Yeah. Yeah. Reckonings.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: Really have to breathe into that, huh, because I'm feeling it, man. Oh boy.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: We are in that - we are in one of those moments. Like, are we clear that this does not work?

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: Yeah and we're finding that out because it works for some, right? And those some for whom it works are trying to convince all of these other White people that it works for them too when it doesn't.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: And it doesn't. It works for a very few people in honest truth.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: That's right. And so -

>> ANNE DUNLAP: It works for the king and his courtiers and that's actually it.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: That's right.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: That's actually it and you know, the more clear that we can be about that I think as White people, you know, in SURJ, maybe you have heard us talk about this, the idea of mutual - not the idea but the value and the practice of identifying our mutual interests as White people and dismantling this system is being clear that actually it does not work for us.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: Yes.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: You know, it's kind of getting away from the - the White privilege framing of things, although it certainly does try to - offers bribes to keep us faithful to not God, if you will, in our kind of Christian thinking about it, but it doesn't actually work for us. And gosh, if the pandemic didn't make that clear of the complete and utter lack of care for you know, the vast majority of everyone on the planet, including in this country, you know, then gosh. Like, you know.

I always try to remember like, that - that you know, Black organizers, indigenous organizers, you know, immigrants, you know, organizers have been telling us all along, this doesn't work. This doesn't work.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: Yeah. We told you all.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: We told you. And I was definitely, you know, I have been one of those people who was like, well at least we're not like - and I talked about this on the podcast. I cannot remember when, but maybe - maybe it was around the time of the attack on the capitol or some time during the election. I can't remember actually now. But it's there somewhere of, you know, spending time in Central America and definitely like fascist, violent, upheld by the United States governments in El Salvador and Guatemala.

And - and being, you know, like deeply sympathetic to that cause and wanting liberation for the people and also like, at least that doesn't happen in my country. At least we have free and fair elections. Like. And what the people had been trying to tell me in Central America was like, no you don't.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: That's right.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: You don't actually.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: I've been thinking about confessing this same experience because I spent time in Latin America too and I used to say the same thing. I remember one time at a parade, I saw somebody running around with a Ronald Reagan mask and he was standing behind a guy in a devil costume. And they were like, together, the devil and Ronald Reagan at this parade in Guatemala, right? And I sort of got it. But I didn't get that internally we're not too far off from Guatemala in terms of the concentration of power. And especially now, you know, where they have like ten families that still control all of the wealth and an indigenous population that is really suppressed.

We have similar things here but there are ways that we kind of obfuscate it with our culture and our amenities and different things that we have. We can kind of soften it enough and it's what Walter Brueggemann, the theologian, calls like the numbing of the empire.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: The numbing. Yeah. The numbing that's necessary. And the stories that we tell about the American dream and the land of opportunity and -

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: Yes.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: And freedom. And like, actually, no.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: Yes. We've been brainwashed with our history and I grew up in the south, you know, but I think this happens everywhere.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: Yeah, me too.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: Daughters of the Confederacy, like, spent a lot of time revising our history. And the Southern Baptist Church was really you know, separated because of slavery. In post-Civil War, they created a theology that would rival and take down the social gospel that was individually centered, personal piety that saw that you know, that taught that Jesus would come back only after the world unraveled and got worse. It wasn't like our duty to try to implement and live out the Kingdom of God here and now. You know, in fact, we want the world to fall apart because that means Jesus will come back

and set it straight. Set it straight for who? For White Christians, right?

>> ANNE DUNLAP: Right.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: So, like, there was a Civil War history, a Civil War theology that - theology of the lost cause, history of the lost cause. It basically - we were all taught, especially we White people. I should be really clear because it was - we were indoctrinated as White folks. So, even - even -

>> ANNE DUNLAP: As White Christians.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: As White Christians. And we - and some of us, like, you know, I've been at this a while. I think okay, I got this. I don't. I'm just constantly finding I have to keep reconstructing - deconstructing, reconstructing because I'm in it. Which gets to your point about like really understanding how these systems don't benefit White people.

I've been talking to folks about this. I've had some people say to me, well, that sounds nice but it sounds a little naïve. Somebody is trying to make an argument to convince White people to come into this because really you know, I don't know if we're going to be able to convince these people, you know, to give up their power.

But I think this is so key to really understand how it impacts White people that you know, like, the majority of this country wants to raise the minimum wage. The majority of this country wants government healthcare, wants like a healthcare that is not dependent on whether you have a job or not. We want those things by overwhelming numbers. Why aren't we voting for them? It's because the other side is mobilizing our racial fears against us.

A great book on this, by the way, is "The Sum of Us" by Heather McGhee who is an African American policy -

>> ANNE DUNLAP: Yeah.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: - must read. A must read. Beautifully written. So, there's not only like the wellbeing, economic cost, but there's a spiritual cost. I'm getting deeper into this. I'm starting to read a book called "My Grandmother's Hands."

>> ANNE DUNLAP: We talked about that.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: Did you talk about it? I was like, you all probably already talked about this. That was going to be my next words. Resmaa Menakem.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: We talked about that book.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: Oh my God. So, I'm getting into that.

We've got to understand that and it goes back to the thing I said about Solomon that like we portray him as like - some, and certainly my Southern upbringing in church, Solomon was the height, the quote, "height" of the Israelites, you know, and was living in God's favor and all of that.

No. If you look at that text, there is - there are two competing traditions within that account of Solomon and so you'll read that account of Solomon and you'll be like, wow, they keep repeating themselves. But if you look at it, it's like story A. Same story again, viewpoint B. So, viewpoint A, viewpoint B. So, they're repeating the stories but that's because it's like you have a tradition that really liked the monarchy and sort of benefitted from that and then you have the tradition that is like the Moses tradition that is like, no, this did not work.

And so, that gets to the Whiteness. Like, so like, Solomon became like the other nations. Did that work for the people? No. There is a civil war right after that. People come to the next ruler and they're like, you need to set this right because your dad really messed things up and they refused to do so. Civil War, eventually they're invaded because they get weaker and weaker, everything falls apart until Isaiah comes and helps show them that God is going to do a new thing.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: Yeah, yeah. I was going to mention that. Like, reading these stories alongside the prophets who are also - you've got these competing narratives within this arch of story and Samuel and in Kings and then you also have the prophets who are like, you know, you all rulers are not doing your job. You're pressing your - you know, all of this stuff in like Isaiah 58 who are holding both like this structure doesn't work and also the empires that are conquering you are also terrible and God is going to love you through the whole thing and we're going to figure out a new way through this.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: Yes.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: And I think that's where we find ourselves. Like, we're having to figure out a new way out of this disaster that has been the United States of America if we want to really be as blunt about it as that, you know.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: Yeah. So, there's a huge opportunity here and there's a huge threat, right? We don't know which way things are going to go. We're really at the climax of the story, like that turning point that you can't get up and go get some ice cream for if you're watching the movie of it, you know.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: What happens next?

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: Right now we're in a two-year hiatus where we have a Biden presidency - now I'll say hiatus - Biden is also a king, you know. So, we have to hold him accountable. We have to hold his feet to the fire. We have to get him to be more visionary, more aggressive.

We saw this during the refugee caps. Biden didn't come in right away and raise those refugee caps and the faith community and others really threw down on that and they got him to right away raise those caps, you know. So, we've got to hold him accountable.

And right now, Congress is going to take up the For the People Act to reform our democracy and the John Lewis Voting Rights Act. We need to be - we need to do everything we can to get those through. We cannot, like, hang back.

Also, the infrastructure bill that Biden is trying to get through, we need to make sure there is as much money in that as possible. We need to be - we need to push hard. So, we've got to hold him accountable.

But here's the other thing. We have a mid-term election coming up in two years and we all mobilized really well and got Trump out. Thank God, right? So, this - most of us don't pay attention to these mid-term elections. 2022 is going to - it's Raphael Warnock in Georgia, you know, Martin Luther King's church. Is he going to be reelected again?

If we lose - and usually, historically, the other party that's out of the presidency usually wins a mid-term election, always does. So, and we barely - we don't even have enough of a majority right now in Congress to pass the things we want to do.

So, if we don't do well this election cycle, it's going to wreak havoc and things - opportunities will really change. Things will end up back sort of in the Trump era of politics and that kind of feeling again and we'll have a longer haul, basically.

So, the next two years, we're still just pulling out of this.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: So, we want to encourage folks to you know - maybe hiatus is not entirely the right word even. It's like -

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: That was a bad word for me to use.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: We want to catch our breath but the organizing to build a world that we want can't stop.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: Cannot stop.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: It cannot stop.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: No.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: We have to continue and to go as hard as we did at the end of 2020 and during 2020 with responding to the pandemic, the organizing we collectively did around that, the organizing we did in the summer of the uprisings to defend Black lives, the organizing we did to get a tyrant out of office. You know, we have to rest and also we can't stop.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: Exactly.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: We can't sit back and be like, oh, you know, now a democrat is in - no. It's - we still have a king. It's still a king. This structure is still doing what it was intended to do.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: That's exactly it.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: And so, you know, let's continue to throw down, continue to organize for abolition, for economic justice, to get better people in positions to make better decisions in the structure that we do have in the meantime while we are building a whole new world.

And I'm so grateful for really the abolitionist visionaries who are holding us to like - there actually could be something

beyond this moment, you know, and let's all do what we can to move in that direction.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: That's right. That's right. Yeah. Yeah. Hiatus is a really bad word so thanks for scratching that. It's really like, alright, we just came through like a wild storm and so now we've got to like, you know, like repair the ship a little bit, take a breath. At the same time, get the ship ready again because we've got to sail out again.

And it's important, I think, in our organizing, to think about local elections, how to build power. I know a lot of times people get frustrated and cynical about politics but politics is us, right? If we're upset with our political system and our democracy, we're upset with ourselves, right. Don't try to hold that at bay like I don't want to deal with this politician. No, that's how you build power. These people should represent us. They work for us. And if they're not representing us, then we need to change that so we can get people - you know, we've been working for - against police brutality in Columbus, Ohio which has like one of the highest per capita rate of police shootings in the country. And we're just realizing, you know, we've got to get involved in like, bringing up better candidates because we have a democratic mayor and he's still not making the changes and we have a big, broad coalition.

We're still - I was like, okay. In two years or so, we'll have all of these reforms. I'm embarrassed to say, no, man, no. It's going to - it's so entrenched in the power of the police unions and all of that.

So, we've got to build a movement. And our faith voice is really critical, you know. As we see here, our theology and moral critique and vision are really important. We're working with 50,000 religious leaders around the country and we're building deeper networks in states like Georgia and Florida. But we all need to kind of throw down and create a different world vision for people in this country, to give people courage to go through these times that are coming.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: Yeah, yeah. We need each other and we need that vision and we need that courage because it's hard. It is hard.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: It is hard.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: Yeah.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: It is and we think, you know, so this cool thing about the Bible is just like, these people were up against a lot. Like, none of it made sense, you know. Like, Shiprah, Puah, and Miriam, they all throw down in Exodus Chapter 1, you know.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: Yeah.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: They were - I mean, this is a genocidal pharaoh and they're like, you know, just this little tribe, you know, in Egypt, like, and God brings them out. So, all throughout the Bible, that's what the Bible is. It's a story of people who went up against impossible odds and prevailed.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: And prevailed. And prevailed.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: And more recently even outside the Bible, when we look back at our ancestors and the unsung heroes especially that I'm trying to discover now, how long - you know, the Civil Rights Movement. God. It's rooted all of the way back to the founding of the country, you know. And then you have theologians like Howard Thurman like, creating the theology for the movement in the 40's and 50's and 60's and James Baldwin. So, you've got to realize, you know, all of us are - everything we do is building that movement toward God's vision and plan. And it may not feel like it.

Sometimes it just, you know, you're like, I don't know if this is going to make a difference. You know, I'm sure Rosa Parks, you know, the women who were behind that strategy for a long time before she even set foot on the - I don't know if this is going to make a difference. She didn't know. They didn't know.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: I don't know. We're going to try this and see. And you know. And then you know, we end up winning Georgia. So, yeah.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: Yeah. Who would have thought that? We decided to build a program there in 2014 and I was like really shocked we chose that state. It's my home state so I was ecstatic but I was like, I don't know. Should I really even say this to the board? I don't know. Are we going to - you know, so.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: It's believing in the people. It's believing in the people on the ground, kind of like the people in these

stories who were telling these stories and trying to make sense of their experience. And you know, believe in the prophets and like, you know, believe in the people. Invest in us. And that's what, you know, you all have done at Faith in Public Life and what we did in SURJ. And we invested in door knocking, you know, poor and rural White folks in Georgia and increasing voter turnout there. Believing in the people.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: Oh, I love that.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: [Indiscernible]. And - and then amazing things can happen. So.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: I love that. And to invest in poor, rural. Did you say White folks? You know, we write off people. And this is the thing I always, you know, want to say is never write off people no matter who they are. Like, God can do a new thing. That's my mantra right now. That's that text from Isaiah. So - it's so beautiful.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: It is beautiful. It's beautiful.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: Solidarity. That's why that principle is so important.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: It is, it is, it is. We need all of us. We need all of us. We all go together or we don't get there at all.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: Yeah.

>> ANNE DUNLAP: A preacher I knew said in a sermon once.

Well, let's take a pause for a music break and come back with our closing.

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

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

[Call to Action and outro]

So, a couple of calls to action for everyone coming out of our conversation together with Reverend Jen, and one is for all of us as White folks to get really clear about our history, like, the importance of really understanding our history and where we come from and as Reverend Jen mentioned, the attacks that are

happening right now on critical race theory and the 1619 Project which we've talked about on the podcast before.

So, you know, let's all do our homework on these things and support those efforts to make sure that - that you know, these projects are taught and that we have a clear understanding of what's happening and clear about our history, like where we come from, how we were founded, and remembering that.

A second call to action is to join the campaign that is being led by Faith in Public Life, the Holy Recovery Campaign, particularly the emphasis on the For the People Act and the John Lewis Voting Rights Act which are really to protect voting rights and to fight voter suppression that is happening right now in our country. And we'll make sure that there is a link to how to connect to that campaign in the transcript and when we share the episode out on social media.

<https://www.fplaction.com/holyrecovery>

And thank you again, Reverend Jen, for joining us today. This is such a delight to be in conversation with you about such important things. I'm so grateful for your work. And so, thank you again.

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: It was so fun. I mean, yeah. This was so great just to throw down on this text and really vision together. It's very exciting.

[Anne]:

Thank you. And thanks as always for joining us from wherever you are on this good earth. We'd love to hear from you all by commenting on our Soundcloud or Twitter or Facebook pages, or filling out the listener survey on our podcast page at showing up for racial justice dot org. And we'd love to hear from you about how we're doing, especially from folks of color and non-Christian folks who may be checking us out. Next week we'll have a resistance Word from Seth Wispelwey.

You can find out more about SURJ at showingupforracialjustice.org, and our podcast lives on Soundcloud; search on "The Word Is Resistance." Give us a "like" or rate us on iTunes, Stitcher, or wherever you listen to our podcast. Transcripts are available as well on our website, which include references, resources, and action links. Finally, a huge thanks as always to our sound editor, Maxwell Pearl!

Rev. Jen, would you offer us a blessing to close us out?

Jen: [blessing]

>> JENNIFER BUTLER: Yeah. Let's pray.

Gracious God, we give You thanks for this vision that You have given to us that there is another way to live together. It doesn't have to be a domination system.

Oh, what music, what music in a world that is full of tyrants, that we together, we the people can rise up in solidarity and resist and no matter what the odds are, You are with us and You will lead us out as You have for your people time and time again throughout history.

We take hope in that vision. We place our faith in it. We pray You give us courage and remind us that You are the God who leads slaves out of Egypt and into liberation. You are that God. And You will lead us out. And what is ours to do is to remain faithful to that which You place in our heart.

So, go with us now. May we take You with us as we face the powers and principalities of our day, the ones that impact us individually, the ones that impact us communally.

It's freedom for us as White people to dismantle the white supremacy that we ourselves have grown up with. What freedom to get that out of our souls and to understand the plans that You have for us, not to exploit others and not to be exploited through our racial fears and resentments, but to move into freedom with You.

We thank You for that promise and we take joy in that whatever the conditions we face, we take joy. It is joy to be in the struggle together and with You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

>> 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.>>

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RESOURCES:

Rev. Jennifer Butler: **Who Stole My Bible? Reclaiming Scripture as a Handbook for Resisting Tyranny.** <https://www.revjenbutler.com/books>

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#### REFERENCES:

\*Why do I say “currently called” Buffalo, NY? Indigenous scholar Damien Lee: “When I write, I avoid the phrase ‘...in what is now Canada.’ I use ‘...in what is currently Canada’ to open possibilities for imagining futurities beyond the settler state.” Check out this post for more: <http://nativeappropriations.com/2018/02/wakanda-forever-using-indigenous-futurisms-to-survive-the-present.html>

*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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