

## Podcast Transcript

July 3, 2022

Proper 9C (Disability Justice Series)

Scripture: Luke 10: 1-11, 16-20

### Disability Justice: Interdependence Day

<<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:

Welcome, friends, to *The Word Is Resistance*, a podcast of Showing Up for Racial Justice, or SURJ. This is the podcast where we explore the weekly Christian scripture readings with an eye toward racial justice and collective liberation.

My name is Nichola Torbett. I use she/her pronouns, and I’m recording this at my home, which is on the ancestral and unceded homelands of the Ohlone people in what is now known as Oakland, California.

As many of you know, this podcast is aimed at white Christians like me who want to respond to the call to dismantle white supremacy. We recognize that as white Christians, we have our own particular work to do - that it is our responsibility to learn how to resist the forces of white Christian supremacy from which we’ve benefitted and with which we are otherwise complicit. We are seeking to find and uproot white supremacy wherever it shows up, including in our own Christian tradition.

And, as you may have heard, we’re doing a special series this summer, looking at the Luke passages through a disability justice frame. DJ is a framework developed primarily by disabled queer and trans people of color to challenge the fundamental ableism of our culture *and* the way that ableism is all interconnected with white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, and capitalism. I’m super excited about this focus because disability justice is so *thoroughly* paradigm shifting. When we stop focusing on what is supposedly “wrong” with individual bodies and minds, those that we have labeled as “disabled,” and instead focus on how existing systems and structures *are disabling* of certain bodies and minds, and specifically those that do not adequately serve systems of power and profit, or that threaten to disrupt the amassing of profit and power—that cost something to include—well, that shift in focus really changes what we notice, what we long

for, and what becomes possible—namely fundamental transformative change from the bottom up.

For me, immediately, what I notice is how exhausting life is right now—the demands that are put on our bodies, minds, and spirits from day to day just to survive within this social order. We face what feels like constant assaults to any sense of being okay as our rights and the rights of people we love are threatened—people who can get pregnant; queer and trans people; people with disabilities, Black, indigenous and people of color, all under attack, with the Supreme Court’s reversal of Roe a couple days ago being just the latest assault. And yet, no matter how much harm we see happening, no matter how much direct and vicarious trauma we absorb from these events, we are supposed to keep going, keep showing up at work, keep hustling to survive. In the face of all this, I think a lot of us are just deeply tired. I know I am.

This world is disabling. And it is more disabling to people with bodies and minds that do not easily fit into the streamlined profit-generating structures that govern our lives, making a few people very very wealthy and offering enough of the rest of us—those who can make our bodies and minds fit—offering us just enough ease and comfort that we don’t rise up and burn it all down.

So long as we don’t look too closely. But this summer? We look. We commit to noticing that the way things are is not the way things have to be. We could have ramps where there are stairs. We could have a quiet, low sensory space at every conference. We could stop using fossil fuels to generate chemicals that are slowly poisoning the environment such that many of us are developing Multiple Chemical Sensitivities. We could do the life-sustaining work that contributes to the thriving of all beings, AND do it at a pace that doesn’t exhaust us. We could normalize taking breaks, resting, and saying no when our bodies and spirits say no. We could build up a new world.

We are building up a new world.

That’s also the song you are hearing throughout this podcast. 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.

This week I’m making notes for this episode as rockets and cherry bombs and M5000s explode throughout the neighborhood. The Fourth of July is BIG in Oakland, and around here we don’t even wait for it to get fully dark, much less wait until the actual day, before bombs start bursting in air; by July 5, the streets will be dusty with ash from exploded fireworks. Independence Day is not my favorite holiday, for all the reasons you might expect, but living here, I’ve long since

given up fighting it, and on the big day, I'll go out and congregate on street corners with my neighbors and spin in circles to watch the 360 degree show.

It's so-called Independence Day on colonized Turtle Island. But here, on this podcast, I'm hoping we can celebrate Interdependence Day, instead. We'll be looking at Luke 10, verses 1-11 and then 16-20, which in some ways is about concrete practices of interdependence, and I'll be putting that passage into conversation with two blog pieces by Mia Mingus, a disability justice organizer and trainer who describes herself as a queer, physically disabled, transracial and transnational adoptee. Let's move in.

<<timestamp 6:51>>

<<Music interlude, verse 1 of "Building Up a New World.">>

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

Here's the gospel selection from this week's lectionary. Again, this is Luke 10: verses 1-11 and then 16-20:

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.

Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road.

"When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.' If someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them; if not, it will return to you. Stay there, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house.

"When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is offered to you. Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town we wipe from our feet as a warning to you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God has come near.'

"Whoever listens to you listens to me; whoever rejects you rejects me; but whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me."

The seventy-two returned with joy and said, “Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.”

He replied, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

That’s from Luke, chapter 10.

I think I want to start with my very favorite line, which is “I saw Satan fall like lightning.” It’s so dramatic and vivid, like that moment in a blockbuster movie when the evil villain is shot down out of the sky. And honestly, I crave something like that right about now. Whatever force it is that has this country in its grip, whatever has taken over the Supreme Court, not to mention the rest of the government, and the police forces, and just...all of it? I want to see that force taken down with all the bombast of a Marvel summer movie.

I think the original disciples would probably be with me. These are the folks who wanted to rain down fire on a Samaritan village in the last chapter because that village didn’t welcome them. Jesus said no, though—bursting their vindictive bubble—and he kept it moving toward Jerusalem.

Here, too, Jesus cautions the disciples not to get too excited about dominating demons, whether in the form of snakes or scorpions or Satanic personifications of evil. Instead, he says, “rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

There is...some kind of *alternative* victory being teased out here, in this talk about heaven and the kingdom of God. Let’s put a pin in this, and we’ll come back to it.

For now, let’s turn to what Jesus has asked the disciples to do. He’s sent them out, without purse or bag or even sandals. (In chapter 9, he’s already asked them not to take any money or food or even an extra shirt.) They’re supposed to go out completely vulnerable, without any ability to meet their own needs, and they’re told to extend God’s peace in exchange for the hope of hospitality.

I have to admit that this makes me extremely uncomfortable. I like to have what I need to meet my own needs. It’s kind of a joke around my community, in fact, that I rarely go anywhere without a big backpack full of...you know...books, paper, pen, cash, debit card, checkbook, stamps, postcards, loyalty cards to every coffee place in Oakland (of course), tape, markers, water, and a high-protein snack for me and one for you. My housemates have nicknamed the

backpack Precious, so careful am I not to be separated from her. I really don't like to have to ask for anything. I once walked three miles dragging a huge suitcase rather than ask for a ride to the train.

Asking for help feels so vulnerable. And it IS vulnerable. Our first experience of vulnerability is as tiny babies, right, and although most of our parents probably did the best they could, it didn't always go perfectly, and sometimes things were, have been, and are demanded of us in return for the generosity we were offered. Acknowledging a need for help sometimes feels like inviting exploitation. I first started thinking about this consciously a few years ago when I took a fall out in public—one of those spills where you're just racing along and suddenly, irrecoverably, you are airborne, and then you're on your face on the ground. And then, almost as quickly, you're on your feet, or at least I am. It just feels so urgent that no one see me fall. Instinctively, I sense how dangerous it is to show weakness in this world that despises it. I hate that this world is like this, and I know that it is. I know it deep in my body.

But a lot of people who are more disabled by this world know it better than I do. Mia Mingus has written about what she calls “forced intimacy” as a result of her physical disabilities. For example, she has described having to be pushed in a wheelchair through an airport by an employee who is saying racist, xenophobic, and sexist things to her, or having to lean for support on the arm of someone she does not trust or want to touch. Forced intimacy can also take the form of having to be likable and ingratiating just to get the help that one needs.

Our vulnerable, needy bodies render us like sheep among wolves.

This culture has made an idol out of self-reliance and independence. We talk about the importance of being able to “pull our own weight,” of “not being a burden” on other people. But the truth is, we all have needs. We just do. We need to eat and drink. We need safe places to rest—and more of that, probably, than most of us get. And we can't actually do all this for ourselves all the time.

I have been so grateful, these past few years, for the way that people with disabilities have been normalizing “access check-ins.” I don't know if this is happening where you live, but at the beginning of most meetings here in the Bay area, it has become common to invite people to name anything they need in order to participate fully in the activities of the day—for example, someone might say that they need everyone to speak up so that they can hear, or that the fluorescent lights give them a headache, or that they might need to get up and move around to manage their pain. The first few times I participated in this kind of check-in, I think I probably said I didn't have any access needs, until someone reminded me that that was not true, and that what MIGHT be true is that all my access needs were met by the space and structure of the gathering. Now, I will sometimes response that “my access needs are met”—a reminder that

existing systems and structures have largely been designed to accommodate bodies and minds like mine. More often, though, I realize that actually these systems and structures DON'T really work for me, but that I have the privilege of being able to deny that. So now, often, I do ask for accommodations, like breaks every hour or so, or written materials or a transcript because my anxiety sometimes makes it hard for me to take in detailed information aurally. Everyone has access needs; it's just that some of those needs are more often met than others. And we can work together to try to design gatherings in a way that meet as many of our needs as possible. We can normalize needing things from one another. This doesn't have to be a source of shame, and when we're in it together, it doesn't have to put anyone at risk to acknowledge having needs.

If we are sent out as sheep among wolves, at least we are in it together.

<<Timestamp 16:47>>

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

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

Jesus sends his disciples out to practice interdependence with strangers, sheep among wolves, and for protection, Jesus commissions his disciples with something he calls *God's peace*. "When you enter a house," Jesus instructs, "first say, 'Peace to this house.' If someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them; if not, it will return to you."

I love how peace is presented here as this tangible thing—I imagine it kind of like a carrier pigeon—that can go out from you and rest on someone else, building a relationship between you, or can go out from you, check out the other person, and if there is no place for it to land, return to you intact.

There is a way that this peace protects the disciples from rejection. They go in with peace, which I imagine as this sense of *who and whose* they are—with the knowledge, maybe, that their names are written in heaven—and with an eagerness to invite others into that. This is what it means, right, to "heal" people? In her book *MY BODY IS NOT A PRAYER REQUEST*, Amy Kenny differentiates between "cure," which is an individual physical process focused on eliminating disease, and "healing," which is a sociocultural process that happens in community, as relationships and belonging are restored. Cure is sometimes possible and desirable, but healing of interdependence is always possible. So the disciples go, with God's peace, to offer this healing, and if it is not welcome or desired, their peace comes back to them. They don't need to spend a lot of time feeling rejected or plotting revenge or patching up their own sense of self-worth—all of which tempt us toward domination and even sometimes violence, which also, by the way, takes us out of the kingdom. Instead, they just shake the dust off and move on, tossing behind them one last reminder that the kingdom of God is near and (still) available.

I don't know EXACTLY what this peace of God is, but I do know when I've encountered people who have it. They have this calm assurance about them. It's not that they don't have needs—not at all—but that they have a kind of comfort and acceptance around their own needs. It feels like they know and accept themselves as the limited and vulnerable creatures they are, and when I get near that, I can relax. I can acknowledge my own limitations and needs for help. We can be vulnerable and human together. We can give and receive freely without domination.

Mia Mingus has named this feeling of ease “access intimacy.” She defines access intimacy as

“that elusive, hard to describe feeling when someone else ‘gets’ your access needs. The kind of eerie comfort that your disabled self feels with someone on a purely access level. Sometimes it can happen with complete strangers, disabled or not, or sometimes it can be built over years.... It is a freeing, light, loving feeling. It brings the people who are a part of it closer; it builds and deepens connection.”

Access intimacy is interdependence in action. It also seems a whole lot like what we call the kingdom of God. And the only thing we need to access it is a willingness to acknowledge our own and everyone else's needs.

We don't need to be invincible. We don't have to be self-reliant. We don't have to “pull our own weight,” whatever that means. We certainly don't have to rain down fire on anyone. Our names are *already* written in heaven. We already belong—right now, as we are, with all our vulnerabilities and met and unmet needs, our unwieldy minds and bodies and spirits, and we can be part of creating communities of belonging where everyone's needs matter, and everyone gets to consent to how they are met.

Interdependence Day. Every day we celebrate it, we get to see Satan fall like lightning.

Amen.

<<Timestamp: 22:02>>

<<Music interlude, verse 3 of “Building Up a New World.”>>

<<“Courage, people,: don't get weary, though the way be long.”>>

**(Call to Action and Outro)**

Over the past few weeks, we've been inviting you to read up on disability justice. I want to continue in that trend this week by asking you to read two pieces by Mia Mingus: her blog piece on [forced intimacy](#), and her 2017 Paul K. Longmore Lecture on Disability Studies called “[Access Intimacy, Interdependence, and Disability Justice](#).” I'll link to both in the transcript.

And then I want to invite you to start thinking about access needs at gatherings you organize or participate in. What are your access needs, and how are they being met, or not? Whose access needs get met, and whose don't, and why? What information is provided about the accessibility of the event? Is there a place for people to name their access needs in advance of the event? Who are the folks who are organizing around access in your community, and how can you support them, consensually?

And finally, we'd love to ask for your support. If you're committed to getting white folks on board for dismantling white supremacy, please make a donation to SURJ; we split every donation with a movement partner doing amazing work. This month, we'll be sharing it with Jews for Racial and Economic Justice. You can donate online at <https://bit.ly/JFREJSURJ>, or find our podcast page at surj dot org. We'll share the link on social media too. Thanks for helping support this podcast and organizing white people to show up for racial justice and the new world we're building together.

That's what I've got for you this week, folks.

We'd love to hear what you think of this episode and of the work we're doing here generally. What are you making of it? How are your own movement struggles unfolding, and what are you learning from those? You can comment on our Soundcloud or Twitter or Facebook pages, or you can fill out the survey on our podcast page at surj dot org. Give us a "like" or rate us on iTunes, Spotify, or wherever you check out our podcast.

You can find out more about SURJ at surj dot org. That's also where you can sign up for SURJ-Faith updates and find transcripts for every episode, which include references, resources, and action links.

We appreciate your feedback very much and are especially eager to hear from BIPOC folks, people with disabilities, and people who are not Christian: How are we doing? What's working, and what's not? We'd love you input.

Finally, we want to thank our sound editor for this week, Jordan Perry. Thank you so much, Jordan!

That's it for now, friends. So many blessings to you for grounded accountability, deep transformation, and loving connection as we build up a new world. Until next time, I'm Nichola Torbett.

<<Timestamp 25:22 >>

<<Music: “Building Up a New World,” verse 1>>  
<<“We are building up a new world, builders must be strong.”>>

## RESOURCES

“Forced Intimacy: An Ableist Norm” by Mia Mingus:

<https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2017/08/06/forced-intimacy-an-ableist-norm/>

“Access Intimacy, Interdependence, and Disability Justice” keynote by Mia Mingus:

<https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2017/04/12/access-intimacy-interdependence-and-disability-justice/>

## REFERENCES

Kenny, Amy. *My Body Is Not a Prayer Request: Disability Justice in the Church*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2022.

Mingus, Mia. “Access Intimacy: The Missing Link” on Leaving Evidence. 5 May 2011. Accessed 28 June 2022.

<https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2011/05/05/access-intimacy-the-missing-link/>

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