

Podcast Transcript

10.10.21 Pentecost 20 B

- [Job 23:1-9, 16-17](#) and [Psalm 22:1-15](#) •
- [Amos 5:6-7, 10-15](#) and [Psalm 90:12-17](#) •
- [Hebrews 4:12-16](#) •
- [Mark 10:17-31](#)

<<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:

- 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.

We are definitely into autumn here where I live. The light is gentler, the breezes cooler, the goldenrod is indeed golden, and of course the trees. The trees! All the glorious riot of colors before the maples and oaks and lindens and locusts release what they no longer need to hold.

One thing I am loving about living here,
farther north, between the shores of two great lakes,
Is that there are 4, definite, long seasons.
Autumn is no exception.

Our first autumn here, 3 years ago,
I noticed it. The changes started small --
A few leaves edging red or gold,
Goldenrod flowering out,
Berries ripening on hawthorns --
Until everywhere felt like it was
Glowing with color,
And then the leaves started falling,
Little by little, until everything
Was bare, and ready for winter.

That's all true except for 1 tree in our front yard,
A "Royal Pauwlonia" which has giant heart-shaped leaves
That don't really change in autumn.
Instead, they all fall off at once when we have the first freeze.
I don't really think they're supposed to live here,
So far north,
But here this lovely tree is.
I just laughed out loud the first time
I opened our curtains in the morning and
Discovered our front yard was carpeted in these giant leaves.
It was a LOT to rake up, let me tell you,
And we *had* to rake them,
the leaves were really too big
To break down into the soil easily.

The Royal Pauwlonia notwithstanding,
I love that autumn here is long,
That there's all this beauty before the release,
Before the letting go that's necessary for winter,
For the fallow time.

I think there is something
About these four long, distinct seasons
That my bones recognize as familiar,
In a deep ancestral way, as being similar
To the rhythms from where my people come from.
Rhythms of the seasons
That hold wisdom for us
About what is necessary
To generate life.

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

Our reading for today is from Mark's gospel,
And it includes one of those
Very famous lines that so many of us like to explain away.
I think you'll know the line when it comes.

Here's the reading:

Mark 10:17-31 (NRSV, alt.)

10:17 As Jesus was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

10:18 Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone.

10:19 You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.'"

10:20 He said to him, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth."

10:21 Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."

10:22 When the man heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

10:23 Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!"

10:24 And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!

10:25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."

10:26 They were greatly astounded and said to one another, "Then who can be saved?"

10:27 Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible."

10:28 Peter began to say to him, "Look, we have left everything and followed you."

10:29 Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or siblings or parents or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news,

10:30 who will not receive a hundredfold --houses, siblings, parents, and children, and fields with persecutions--now in this age, and in the age to come eternal life.

10:31 But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first."

Actually there's probably a couple of lines in there
That are well known.
Of course, the camel through the eye of the needle.
And "many who are first will be last, and the last will be first."

My mom liked to repeat that one
When my brothers and I got to arguing
About sharing and dividing chores and stuff.

She wasn't wrong, even if,
As the oldest, the first, you know, I always felt like
It was not fair that I'd end up last on this list.

What my mom was getting at was,
Here's how we live in this family together.
We share things. We all do our part.
And actually, I'm just realizing,
What she did was pretty revolutionary,
Because what she was saying was that
The 3 of us all had to share responsibilities.
That my brothers had to wash the dishes sometimes,
And clean the house --
That we all had to know how to cook and wash our clothes
And sew on a button.
-- not just me, and my mom,
As the two women, but all of us.
She actually upended the social structure of patriarchy,
In our home at least,
By insisting that me and my brothers shared responsibilities.

Wow, well done mom.

I think most of us encounter this story
About Jesus and the rich man
And the camel and the needle
And react kind of like I did with my mom.
We think only about the perceived loss
That comes with upending social structures.

We say, surely Jesus didn't **really** mean
For the man to sell everything.

Except, he did. He did mean that.

Because Jesus understood that to be wealthy
In the context of the Roman Empire's oppression,
Meant that in some way, you were collaborating with Rome.
You were complicit in Rome's colonization.
You were making your wealth off Rome's exploitation
Of your own people.
It didn't matter how many of the commandments
you were practicing, faithfully.
If you were wealthy,
If you possessed more than your fair share,
Then you were not participating in the divine economy,
An economy of life, called here the "kingdom of God,"
But participating in Rome's economy,
An economy of death.
Your wealth actually relied on murder, adultery,
Theft, lies, and fraud -- those commandments
You thought you were following so well.

And so, if you want to re-orient yourself
To the economy of life,
If you want eternal life --
Which I have said before is really
The life that generates more life --
You have to first let go of, release,
All that ties you to the economy of death,
All the ill-gotten possessions
That stole food from someone's table
That stole medicine from someone's body
That stole breath from someone's life.

Sell what you own, and give the money to the poor folks.
Sell what you own, and give it back.

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A lot of progressive folks like to think
We get this story. We get a little bit on our high horse,
Like, YEAH, SELL ALL YOU HAVE,
You rich Christians!
We love to throw this verse
At folks who read the bible quoteunquote literally about other things:
"But what about where Jesus says sell all your possessions,
We say, "Why don't you take *that* literally?"
I have totally done this.

But mostly, if we're honest, we don't take it literally either.

Our churches sit on endowments we won't release to feed and house people,
Our churches sit on stolen land we won't give back,
Our churches sit on bank accounts of financial institutions that fund pipelines.
And so do we.

How hard it is, to enter the kingdom of God!

Do you notice what Jesus does here?
Jesus implicates everyone.

First he says,
*How hard it will be **for those who have wealth** to enter the kingdom of God!"*

But then, when the disciples are confused,
As we often are, he says:
"Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!"

There's no modifier there,
no group named the second time.
It's just...Jesus says, it's just *hard*.
For everyone.

And I even think he includes himself in this.
He implicates himself.
Because when the man calls him a good teacher,
Jesus responds, "Why do you call me good?"
As if to say, being good isn't the point.
He does not differentiate himself
From anyone else involved in these scene.

And I'm reminded of what Nichola Torbett
Has said a few times on this podcast,
That this posturing quoteunquote "woke" white folks do
About being the good ones
Actually perpetuates the division that white supremacy relies on.
That being antiracist isn't about being good.

I think that's what Jesus is saying here.
Being part of the kingdom of God
Isn't about being good.
It's about making choices,
Often very hard choices, over and over
Because that's the nature of living
In oppressive systems, in violent structures.
That's the nature of living in the economy of death.
We're all complicit in it,

Even when we think we're following the commandments,
Even when we're doing our best,
Or at least our best we know how to do
In that moment.
How hard it is, to enter the kingdom of God.
I don't think Jesus means this as a judgement.
I think it's just recognition.
It's hard, to make these choices,
Hard to release what does not serve
The economy of life.

It's just hard.

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

It's just hard.

I'm struck by how it says that Jesus
Loved the man. The man says,
Basically, "I've done the best I know how,"
And Jesus hears that, and loves him.
I wonder if that love is like
A compassion, a tenderness,
For someone who is trying, maybe,
And is still yet so entangled,
Perhaps doesn't realize they are so entangled
In an economy of death.
Like Jesus knows that what he's about to say
Is going to shake this man all the way up and down.
And he feels for him.

I wonder what would happen if all of us,
When we're talking to each other
About how we're entangled in white supremacy,
Held each other with that kind of compassion,
That kind of tenderness.

Nevertheless, the man walks away grieving.

Maybe the rich man,
And the disciples too, thought
Selling all you had was like the royal paulownia in our yard,
Dropping all its leaves at once.
A startling, sudden event.
Today everything; tomorrow, nothing.

Today fullness; tomorrow bare and empty.

That's such a common response
When we talk about abolition, for example.
Like today there's cops, and tomorrow there's nothing.
Today there's cops, tomorrow there's chaos.

Or to talk about the pipelines again,
Today there's fossil fuels, tomorrow there's darkness.

But that's what Jesus is getting at.
Upending the social structure,
Releasing what does not serve life,
It's hard, yeah, but it's how we find our way
Back to life that generates life.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs writes,
*"What if abolition isn't a shattering thing,
not a crashing thing,
not a wrecking ball event?
What if abolition is something that sprouts out of the wet places in our eyes,
the broken places in our skin,
the waiting places in our palms,
the tremble holding in my mouth when I turn to you?
What if abolition is something that grows?"*

And here I come back to
The wisdom of autumn: release is beautiful.
Release nourishes the soil,
All those leaves composting into the soil,
Nourishing the seeds germinating in the winter dark and
The networks of microbes and worms and beings
That help make rich soil and strong plants.
Release makes new life possible come spring.
Life that generates life.

In the cycle of seasons,
At least in this part of the world,
That process of release comes again and again.
Likewise for us,
The choice to release or hold onto
The gains of the economy of death
Come again and again.
It's not a one-and-done,
But a journey. A hard one, often.
Because, as Jesus says,

Sometimes what we have to let go of hurts.
Family. Friends. Beloveds. Possessions.
We have to be willing to lose them.

The thing is though,
We gain more. A hundred-fold, he says.
Life that generates life.
This has been my experience
As I have deepened my anti-racism work.
I have definitely lost relationships, lost opportunities.
But I have gained so much more.
People I know who will always have my back,
People who know I will always have theirs.

White supremacy teaches us
That transformative change is a binary:
Cops today, tomorrow chaos.
Pipelines today, tomorrow darkness.

It serves the power structure well,
To keep us believing that,
That if we try to shed, to release,
To defund, to dismantle,
That the only thing waiting for us
Is nothingness, chaos, violence.
Always the threat of violence.

But Jesus teaches something different.
The cycle of the seasons teaches us something different.
There is beauty as we build.
There is beauty as we release.
There is beauty waiting for us.
There is beauty right here and now.

I wonder, today, what the rich man
Ended up doing. We don't know.
We assume he grieves because
He doesn't want to give up his possessions.
But I'd like to think his grief,
His heartache, was at least in part
About recognizing his role, his complicity
In the economy of death.
I think we do grieve, when we recognize
As white folks, our complicity in white supremacy.
I know I do.
Maybe he did too.

Maybe he went home, and looked around,
And picked things up in his hands,
And started putting things in piles to sell.
Maybe eventually he came back to Jesus,
With a purse full of money,
To contribute to the movement.
Maybe they had a long talk
As they walked the road together.
Maybe the man realized he'd found new family.

Life generating life.
Life generating life.

<<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]

For our call to action, I'm inviting you again to support the indigenous-led resistance to the Line 3 pipeline. Releasing our reliance on fossil fuels is one way we can generate new life for all of us, all of creation. Follow [Honor the Earth](#), established by Winona LaDuke, and [Giniw Collective](#) for updates and action alerts from the water protectors. We'll have more links in the transcript as well as on our social media for actions you can take to defund the economy of death.

Actions:

- [Minnesota Interfaith Power & Light](#)'s website with action alerts for faith folks + indigenous-led groups to follow
- [Stop the Money Pipeline](#) (divesting from pipeline-funding banks etc.)
 - Check out their [Defund Climate Chaos](#) campaign, actions you can take for the upcoming Glasgow Climate Talks.
- [Get connected to the frontlines and support resistance camps.](#)
- Donate to bail funds and frontline camps: <https://linktr.ee/stopline3>
- [Line 3 Resistance Dashboard](#)

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 surj 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. We'll be back next week with a resistance Word from Seth Wispelwey.

You can find out more about SURJ at [surj dot org](http://surj.org), and our podcast lives on Soundcloud; search on “The Word Is Resistance.” Give us a “like” or rate us on iTunes, Spotify, 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 to our sound editor, Claire Hitchens! Glad to have you joining the team, Claire!

(Words of blessing/encouragement)

- Blessings to you in all that you do to resist injustice, and in all that you do to build up a new world.
- Love and liberation, beloveds. Love and liberation.
- Until next time. I’m Rev. Anne Dunlap.

<<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:

Alexis Pauline Gumbs, “[Freedom Seeds: Growing Abolition in Durham, NC](#)”

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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. 2nd Ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, editors. Oxford University Press, 2017. Check all the amazing essays in the back!

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