Episode 12 transcript

Ian Lasch – Part 2

I = Ian Lasch
R = Robyn King
S = Stephanie Shockley

[Opening theme music]

R: Welcome to The Accessible Altar, a podcast of conversations at the intersection of faith and disability. I'm Robyn King

S: And I'm Stephanie Shockley

R: And today we are back with the rest of our conversation with the Reverend Ian Lasch.

Ian is an autistic priest in the Episcopal Church who takes great joy in living out the priestly vocation to serve as pastor, priest, and teacher. His primary areas of interest in ministry include Christian formation and discipleship, virtue ethics, disability theology, and the liturgy or worship of the Church. He is married to Loren, also an Episcopal priest and they have two young boys.

[music interlude]

R: So you are one of the few people I think I've encountered who had discovered and spent time thinking about and it sounds like to some extent at least internalizing and incorporating any sort of disability theology pre-diagnosis. And a diagnosis can be a life-changing event for good and bad reasons, like, it is usually a bit of a mix…

I: Sure

R: Are you willing to share a little bit about how any of that knowledge was helpful, if it gave you a framework, or if it was a

little bit like rediscovering it all again knowing more about yourself?

I: Uh, that's a really good question. I think there are some ways in which it was probably very helpful, right? I think, particularly… So for me, my diagnosis was, if anything, a relief. And a lot of autistic adults will say something similar to me. The way I always describe it is it was like a bunch of really weird stars, you know, there were a lot of stars in my life that were really kind of bizarre, or outside the norm, that sort of thing. But realizing I'm autistic made me realize that they make up a constellation, that there's some pattern to that. So for me in a lot of ways it was really helpful, and I think part of that was because I had already managed to get out from under the bad theological anthropology that I went to seminary with, right? If my sense of self had been totally tied up in cognition still, and I'm not saying I'm completely away from that or completely over that, but if that's solely how I define what it means for me to bear the image of God that would have been much more difficult for me, that moment of diagnosis. It was particularly helpful though when talking about my son's diagnosis. Because I had maybe gotten out from under that for myself but hadn't… but there's something different about coming to grips with the fact that all the ways in which my life was difficult will be all the ways in which my son's life will be difficult, and possibly maybe even more so, right? And so I think for me, having encountered disability theology already, and grappled with disability theology already, and really, I'll be honest, and say I've really poured myself into it exponentially more so since my son was diagnosed, but having that background meant, made it so this was a practical issue and not an existential one, if that makes sense. That I already had the underlying theology that this didn't feel like the ground completely shifting under my feet. So all that really remained was, well there are some ways in which his life is going to be more difficult than I wish it would, and what are the ways in which we can tackle that head on and give him the supports that he needs, rather than "what does this mean?" You know, what does this mean for him as an individual, for him as a

child of God. I didn't have those questions to ask when he was diagnosed.

R: And this, my follow up question to that might be one you don't want to answer, for any sort of reason – because you and your wife are both clergy, so this means you have a large church community that sometimes overly invested in your children, I assume

I: Sure

R: How is navigating that, especially given that you had some of the theological framework to know that some of the responses you would receive were rooted in, you know, a theological anthropology that is not beneficial.

I: Yeah, this is, I mean, this is sort of an ongoing question. Because there are ways in which I'm already tackling this question, or I'm already engaging the topic of disability theology and theological anthropology from the pulpit, in the congregation, administratively even. Like, looking at the fact that we don't have an accessible campus, and how do we remedy that and what are the things that we can do that can help mitigate that. But, but at the same time, I mean, I've been here, it's coming up on two years, it'll two years, it'll be two years next month that I've been at St. Francis.

R: Oh, so you've been there really for the pandemic.

I: Yeah, basically.

R: Which is a very different pastoral relationship

I: It is, and it's just, there are ways in which… I mean, I've only been here two years. My son was diagnosed actually after moving to Savannah. So his diagnosis is a little over a year and half old and mine is right at a year and a half old, or maybe a little less. So there are ways in which we are still learning. But I'll say, it's

been relatively recently even that I let the parish know that I was autistic. And that's been interesting, and actually kind of encouraging. Didn't get any really bizarre comments or anything like that.

R: That's impressive.

I: Heard from some people, one parishioner who has a high number of autistic individuals in their family, and was really grateful that I said something. And somebody else who had a child diagnosed with ADHD when they were an adult and as a result they also got a diagnoses of ADHD. So I think for me at least, and this, the book is still out, it's only been a matter of weeks since I sort of publicly identified to my congregation as autistic, and it's not something that I tend to drop, right, but it I'm also not going to preach on it every single Sunday. So there are ways in which we are still learning together, and I'm still learning what it means, and I have no doubt that there are ways in which I'm going to be falling short of what expectations might be, because they've had a lot of neurotypical clergy before me. And there are ways in which I think that they'll appreciate and even already do appreciate some of the gifts that I bring that are sort of directly attributable to autism.

R: As someone who is also in the category of disability where it's not immediately apparent so I often don't have to disclose until I want to or choose to, I'll say that's usually my experience. By and large when I talk about migraine or other things, people are like "oh yeah, no…" and it invites other disclosure and sharing.

I: Right

R: So I hope that is most of your experience too.

I: It has been to this point. And I think only good things will come of that. Well, I shouldn't say that, because there's always the chance of ableism rearing its ugly head and people saying well, you wouldn't do this if you were X. But for me, I mean to this

point it has all been positive, and I think it's helped people realize… I mean, I think one of the biggest problems, one of the biggest issues in the Church is that we think there are a few select subjects that God cares about, and everything else is part of secular society, part of the "rest of the world" right? If all me saying I'm autistic does is make people realize "wait, God cares about that too" then I think that's absolutely a good thing.

R: Hannah Gadsby is a late diagnosed autistic and a very famous comedian. I was listening to her on a podcast and she talked about diagnosis as a shame eraser. Which, it sounds like it's similar to what you're describing. But I wanted to use her term because I don't think the neurotypical abled world sees that aspect of it.

I: Right! And this is, I mean this is the wildest thing about autism diagnosis, right? In order to get diagnosed as autistic, a) it's significantly easier for me because I'm a cis white man, so my presentation is more of the stereotypical, historical presentation, meaning the way that it's been observed by looking autistic, cis white males, right? So it was much easier for me than it would be for anyone who is not any one of those things. But on top of that, one of the things that I realized in the course of this, and I've always been drawn to sort of psychology, and did a little bit of work on that in my undergrad. And one of the things that's fascinating is the only mechanism for diagnosing this is the DSM, is the Diagnostics and Statistics Manual, which is a categorization of mental illness, right? It's pathology, it's saying this is deviation from normal. And what's more, for autism in particular, and really for most mental illness in the DSM, in order to be diagnosed you have to prove, it has to be clinical, meaning it has to rise to the level of interfering with your quality of life. So we have no way of identifying what autism actually is except be measuring how bad it is, right? That's the only mechanism we have, is we've designed something that says "as long as it's this bad or worse" "as long as you're suffering this much or worse then we'll diagnose it. And so the hardest part for me was basically proving that this interferes with my quality of life. Because I have a full time job, I don't have

a ton of support needs, in some ways this is because I've adapted, and have all these sort of built in masking behaviors and self support behaviors and good community support. So the hardest part for me was proving that I had suffered enough, or that this was bad enough to actually rise to the level of diagnosis. And we have, and what's more… I'm sorry, this is bordering on a diatribe right now, but

R: No…

I: But the other thing about autism is, and what most neurodivergents have, what most neurodivergent advocates will say these days is that most of the mechanisms, most of the traits we use to diagnose autism are not characteristics of autism per se, but they are autistic trauma responses to being wired a certain way, to being a certain way in the world, and having a world that is not prepared to adapt to that, right?

R: That is what I was about to say, this is what I have seen as a critique of how we diagnose and understand autism. That's really the result of that trauma.

I: And that's the thing, that's a lot of what it is, basically we're, we have a really hard time because we haven't designed a really reliable mechanism for identifying autism outside of saying "they were traumatized and shamed (autistics were) in these particular ways and developed these patterns of behavior." So it's just really, I mean, it's kind of messed up, right, to live in a world where that's the only way to tell who's autistic is if they're damaged enough by the world that we can identify these behaviors. And so, what would it look like if we were able to erase that shame? In some ways diagnosis is that, because you've been taught, and me less than most, there are, I think part of the reason diagnosis was difficult for me even as a cis white straight male is that I wasn't shamed as deeply about some of this stuff as a lot of people are. But that doesn't mean I wasn't shamed at all, and there are ways in which I really, like I say I thought I was deeply weird in a lot of unconnected ways. And then come to find

out, no, I'm just wired in a different way than the word expects, so I don't act or behave in a way that the world anticipates.

R: I think this goes back to some of what we were talking about earlier, and it's such a paradox, because we have such a poor understanding of the image of God, as a society, because we are post-Christendom, but we are still a society deeply informed by white Western Christendom, we tend to cause all this trauma to people who carry and bear and share with us an image of God that we have decided is unacceptable.

I: Right.

S: Yeah.

R: Which is also how we know they're there in an institutional, medical sense, yeah, it's not okay.

S: I'm so fascinated, I'm just really being very quiet because I'm listening and sort of trying to process this, because, again, my experience, my experience and my area of knowledge is more physical disability. And I'm thinking about the level of shame around the things you have to do when you have a physical disability to cope with the world not being set up for you, and then I'm sort of translating that… but that's even, like, there's all this weird shame and stigma around stuff that you have to do about something that's obvious, that's very obvious to other people, and there's still a whole bunch of stuff around it right, and, this doesn't happen to everybody, but it is possible to grow up feeling extremely weird about all that. So now I'm sort of translating that over to, what if people don't know what the situation is. Or what if you don't have a diagnosis. Or what if it doesn't make sense, or you haven't put that constellation together of all those different stars that don't seem to fit together. That's a whole… I'm just kind of thinking about how traumatic that would be, what an impact that would have, you know.

I: And this is, there are a lot of autistic kids who are genuinely traumatized by the world. And by the authority figures in their life. I think that's true of just about any disability, I think you're right. We live in a society in which even though we are all different, even though everybody is very very different, there are acceptable bounds of deviation from some ideal being, which never existed. Like, it's a fantasy.

R: We made it all up!

S: Yeah [laughs]

I: We absolutely did. But we're so beholden to that idea, and to the idea that we align with that ideal, that's it's almost an affront, and almost an insult when we're brought face to face with someone who doesn't align with it, like "how dare you?" And I think that's true with disability in general. So it's physical and mental and cognitive and all of that. We just have a society that says it is on you to adapt. And in some ways, this is the beauty of autistic research as it stands. One of the things we're realizing is what is known as the double empathy problem, right? One of the things that's considered a characteristic of autism is a difficulty in communication, particularly social communication. So, when it comes to carrying on a conversation, autistics sometimes struggle, right, that's the way that it's defined. What they're finding is, if you get two autistics together, they don't have any trouble conversing. They carry on a conversation just fine. And same when you get neurotypicals together. The difficulty is when you get an autistic individual and a neurotypical individual, there's a breakdown in communication. And in some ways, it's you know, and this is an imperfect analogy, but in some ways it's like two different computer operating systems trying to communicate. It's that they're speaking different languages. They're approaching conversation with different ends in mind, right? And this is the beauty of it, of autism is, that we're gaining this insight about it, that autistics are often viewed as rigid or uninterested in communicating with neurotypicals, or uninterested in communicating. And it turns out most autistics are just not

interested in playing the social games that neurotypicals find meaning in in some ways, or view as essential parts of social communication. So what, essentially, the reason I'm bringing this up is, what we're realizing from this research is, the problem isn't that autistics are a problem, the problem really is that neurotypicals expect autistics to related to them the way that other neurotypicals do, and it just doesn't work that way. And I think that's an insight that we can apply, the double empathy problem is something that we can apply to virtually all disability. That it's not, this is not a problem that people with disabilities have, or that disabled people have, this is a problem in between disabled and able bodied people, and having different expectations and different ways of being. Does that makes sense at all?

R: It does. And I'm going to pull us back towards church stuff because as you're talking about that double empathy and the question of like, what is the point of the things we do, I'm thinking about how many different church divisions can be summarized, "well, the problem is you think we're doing this and I think we're doing this."

I: Right.

R: Or the problem is that your goal here is so that you have your ideal experience of church and I have to look at all of the other people in the congregation and meet some of everyone's needs, most of the time.

I: Yep.

S: Yeah.

I: Yeah, and so, exactly. Like, one of the biggest fights that you will ever see, that you see in most congregations, especially if they happen to be growing, or changing, even, is children in worship, right?

R: Yes

I: Like, to what extent are kids supposed to sit down and shut up, right? And this is, like, one of my favorite images, or ideas, of worship, is in fact medieval cathedrals, right? Because they were everything. Like they were livestock markets at times, and everybody was in there doing whatever they darn well pleased, even as the liturgy is happening in some ways. Our liturgy is not private prayer time. It's not my opportunity to come to church and be spiritually filled personally, to the extent that anything that distracts me from that goal needs to be cast out. That's not what we're doing when we gather together. But I think that's often the way in which we in an individualistic Western society approach spiritual worship, as though it's not a communal endeavor, as though it's not about the community coming together with as much mess and chaos as that inevitably entails, but that it's in fact my moment to come and get strengthened and recharged for the rest of the week.

S: It, this almost sounds like a combination of, you know, American or North American consumerism combined with a little bit of "the building always wins."

R: Yeah

S: Right? Like our buildings are set up where this a performance and you shut up and watch what's happening on the stage, and also we think that this is supposed to be done our way, the way we want it, for me. It's a little bit of both, of both things. Western Christians get really confused when they walk into a worship space that has no pews.

I: Right

S: When they walk into, when you walk into an Eastern Orthodox worship space. What's happening here, what do I do here?

I: [laughs] right. And they really get confused when the liturgy stretches into that third hour, right?

S: Right [laughs]

R: You mention John Swinton, who, if you are in disability theology spaces, is one of the current big names. Actually, I just think he got appointed chaplain to the Queen

I: Did he really?

R: Yeah

I: That's awesome

R: And he's at the University of Aberdeen, and there's a whole program in disability theology you can take there, which looks amazing and the people who have taken it are writing and doing some really amazing things. It is a practical theology program though, and you have made the connection between that, and the liturgical theology where the Anglican Church tends to like, park our tent, for good reasons, and occasionally complex results.

I: Sure.

R: And this has been one of my, like, unresolved challenges, as someone who really loves our liturgy, it's also really problematic. And asking questions that challenge that and that change that are really hard because we don't see it, because we have been praying these prayers for so long. Have you found other resources that address some the liturgical ableism? How did you make that connection?

I: I'll be honest, I, uh, I haven't come across a ton of those, to be perfectly honest with you

R: Neither have I, but maybe you found the ones I haven't

[all laugh]

I: I think, I mean, I think it's potentially a growing area of interest. I mean I think that because I see more people concerned with it and addressing it sort of piecemeal. I haven't identified, or come across, any more, we'll say systematic reviews of our liturgy and our liturgical life and our ritual in order to say what are the ways in which this is problematic or an issue. In part, I mean, I'm hopefully going to pursue a PhD at some point. I'm in the midst of that application process because I want to do systematic theology around the topic of theological anthropology, specifically autism. And I want to do that because so much of our theology around disability currently is practical theology, right? It's about how does this operate on the ground. And to me, and this is, that's a very good approach, and a very important approach, and probably, without a doubt, the best place to start. But I'm interested in wildly impractical things that, the questions that are existential in some ways. Like "how do we redefine what it means to be a bearer of the image of God in a way that doesn't exclude anyone?" Because I think that until we do that, that any prayer that we pray that tries to explore the concept of the imago dei is going to be broken and incomplete. There are some conceptions out there that I think are less of an issue than others, but I haven't seen a lot like systematic theology, liturgical theology, that's done from a disability theology perspective. It tends mostly to be pastoral theology and more recently biblical theology. And both of those are really really important and probably more central than what I'm interested in, but they don't trickle down quite as readily to our liturgical life, for example.

S: So, you mention in your bio that you're really interested in formation and discipleship, actually. You talk a little bit about teaching, and that's part of that, but I don't think it's all of it. I mean there's, there are other pieces to formation and discipleship. So, from a practical standpoint, when you try to put this all together, your interest in theology of disability, in our understanding of anthropology, systematics, all that, what is it

that you would like to see happening regarding formation, regarding discipleship, in the Church that's not happening now.

I: Um, wow, that's, uh…

R: [laughing]

S: I will offer you other easy questions if you'd like….

[all laughing]

I: No, that's a great question. Uh…

S: I feel like I need to ask – chocolate or vanilla ice cream to give you an easy question, because that was a pretty hard question.

I: So, one of the things, this is an imperfect analogy, one of the books I'm also reading right now is "Punished by Rewards" by Alfie Kohn which is about how rewards in the workplace and in school actually, functionally, don't do what we want them to and in fact are often counterproductive. They take away intrinsic motivation and replace it with extrinsic motivation, so they'll work as long as the rewards are there and then they don't work. And in fact you're left enjoying that thing less and being less competent at that particular skill than you were beforehand or that you would be if someone hadn't offered those sorts of rewards. I bring that up because in the course of the book, one of the things he mentions is that for 3rd and 4th grade students, the accessibility of a text was much less important than students' actual interest in the text. That in fact it was, I think he said something like 30-40 times more effective if they were interested in it than if the text was accessible, right? That's the… if I could do one single thing, especially for the Episcopal Church and the mainline, is get us to LOVE scripture again. Because I don't think that we always do that. And there is an upper limit to how much we can actually be formed by our engagement with scripture, and our encounter with God in scripture, if we don't actually love scripture. So to me that's one of the most dire problems we have, and we often frame

this in terms of biblical literacy, right, like how well do we know scripture? And I think the reason we don't know scripture is because we don't love scripture. Because we think that there are portions of scripture that don't have good news for us. And so we don't read the minor prophets, for example, and don't read a lot of the Old Testament, and we don't read anything outside of "love your neighbor as yourself." Those sorts of, you know, few passages that we really tend to focus on. So, if nothing else, if I could do nothing else I would try my hardest to get people to really help the Holy Spirit set people on fire with excitement and love for holy scripture. Because it is so deeply life giving and we've used it to such, I mean we've used it in such horrific ways that we've done damage and we've led people astray and we've caused people to disengage from scripture and from the Church and from engagement with God. And it's not meant to be that. And so I'm so grateful to all the biblical scholars out there who are really grappling with that, and leading people to realize that hey, the way we've used this is pretty wrong, and in fact maybe the opposite of how should have been using this. But if I had to start somewhere, that's where I would start. And I don't know exactly how to do this, but it's sort of a running joke around St. Francis, almost every sermon I end up saying "this is one of my favorite passages of scripture." [laughs]

S: [laughs]

R: I do that a lot too.

S: I really like that, because I feel like I'm always the earnest one, who's going "okay, so, guys I love this story!"

I: [laughs] yeah!

R: But this one is fascinating!

S: Right, I love this story! Or my other one is, is usually something like "sometimes I open the lectionary, I open the book and I look to see what it is this week and I go 'oh my gosh' but

then, once I figure, once I look at it and read it, it's so fascinating, I can't wait to tell you!" and they I'm, they just, I don't know, they shake their heads at me sometimes. But my husband and I say, especially coming out of experience as activists, if you let it inform your life and vice versa, it will be like everything's dancing, like, it sparkles, it's really exciting.

So, thinking about disability theology and scripture, where do you, can you give an example of something you get really excited about that is good news regarding disability in scripture? We just did this five part series on Bible and disability and had some really interesting conversations, but I'd love to hear what other people have to say.

I: I have a few different ones and I'm trying to think of which one would be easiest or best to convey. I think one of the ones that I always come back to, or the one that I always come back to, is Jacob wrestling with the angel, or wrestling with the Lord, depending on how you're reading that particular passage. But, this idea that the moment at which, not just Jacob, but all of Jacob's people, the chosen people of God, are given the name by which they will be known in the world, that's a moment of disability, right? So to my mind, there is a sense in which disability, I'll say we, meaning the wider Church, we often treat disability as though it's a fringe issue, as though it's a niche concern. But it is central, central to the Gospel witness. Disability is not, it's not just tragedy, it's not just a problem, it's not just a sticking point in our theology, but it's the moment at which Jacob comes to be known as Israel and God's chosen people were given their name, you know?

S: That would be one of those where I step into the pulpit and I go "ooh, I love this story!"

I: Exactly, exactly.

S: So I love, I love that story, and that was not one I would have thought of off the top of my head. I love that you brought that up.

Before we go, and before we get too much further along, I wanted to give you a chance to talk about your podcast.

I: Oh sure! So I host, along with David Sinden, who is an organist, he was a co-worker of mine initially at St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Ladue, Missouri, which is just outside of St. Louis. It is mostly his work, I'll say. I talk with him, he is the brains behind it in just about every possible way. But we talk about Episcopal liturgy, Episcopal and Anglican liturgy and music. It's called All Things Rite and Musical – R I T E and musical. And we talk about liturgy and music, particularly through and Episcopal and Anglican lens. We try and mix it up and do some discussion of why things are the way they are and some, you know if there's breaking liturgical news, or particular holidays or feast days coming up or that have just occurred. There are often trends in the Church, right, so if they're anything like that, we'll try and at least talk about them. He's, David's a lot of fun, he's a musical genius in a lot of ways. He does all of the music for our podcast, which is all sort of 8 bit style hymns, basically, and it's phenomenal [laughs]

S: I have to tell you how much I appreciate the beginning… first of all, every time I hear the name it makes me laugh… every time I hear it, because of course it's a play on the old hymn All Things Bright and Beautiful, right? But, I was so excited when I went to listen to it and there was an 8 bit version of the hymn. It was like "yes, they did it! Oh that's fantastic…" anyway, I was overly excited about it.

I: [laughs] I don't blame you, I get excited every time I hear the final cut and he's got the music in there, I'm like, oh, that's where he went with it, that's great!

S: It's very cool, yeah.

So, yeah, All Things Rite and Musical. It is very, some good stuff in there. It's nice… I was listening to your Ash Wednesday podcast and I was like, wow, wait a minute, there are some things in there I haven't thought of before. You know, we get into our routines and we get overwhelmed by parish ministry and sometimes, you know, maybe, I don't know, speaking for myself, I miss some opportunities to hear some new information or other ways of thinking about things, so…

I: You know, the awesome thing about that podcast is I've had a couple of friends or listeners who have said "I've thought about this or used this in a sermon" or talked about this or done something differently for this feast day because of listening to your podcast. And like, I try to be very intentional about the fact that if there is a right way to do it, I don't know what it is. I don't think there's a right way, I think there's you know, occasionally best practices around certain things, or things that might do more harm than good. For the most part I think… I think most of us are that way, that we get locked into a certain way of doing things, and there's nothing wrong with that, but sometimes you really need, in order to see it anew, to see that feast day afresh, or that holiday afresh, you have to do something a little bit differently, just to appreciate what's actually happening. Because otherwise it just becomes the same sort of thing.

S: Robyn, do you have any other questions?

R: I think that's, all of the questions I have for today. You should definitely come back and we should talk about more liturgical disability stuff though.

I: Right on, right on. I would love to. This is, I think it's an important conversation, I think that we're really just scratching the surface on it, I think there are more and more people thinking about it, which I think is an absolutely good thing, but I still think we have a long way to go.

S: Thank you so very much for your time, and for being here.

I: Thank you all so much for having me.

[music interlude]

R: Thank you for joining us for this conversation on faith and disability. We encourage you to find local conversation partners to talk about faith and disability with. Special thanks again to Ian for his time talking with us. Stephanie, you said you had a couple thoughts about this chunk of our conversation.

S: Absolutely. This conversation was so interesting that we wound up splitting it of course into two episodes. So, a couple of different things. One thing I was thinking as I was reviewing our audio. I was thinking that all of guests, including Ian, and this is our 12th episode, which is

R: Mind boggling

S: Exciting! Yeah. Really mind boggling, really exciting. All of our guests have offered a perspective and faith, disability and theology, but they have also offered just a plain, really interesting perspective, lots of good wisdom, just on faith in general. I have been reminded over and over again that when we make an effort to include voices that have historically been left out, we gain so much. It's so much broader than whatever specific issue they might be here to talk with us about. And I was reminded again as I was listening to this episode and as Ian was talking about, for example, Jacob wrestling and what we learn from that. And also about teaching our congregations just the love of scripture. It's partially related to disability, but not entirely, and yet really interesting and helpful.

R: I agree. I think this is one of the common misconceptions about disability theology or even just disabled people, that our area of interest sort of shrinks down to the things that directly touch disability, when it's really sort of the flip, and disability is

everywhere and all of the things touch it. I know I was explaining this to a colleague recently. Because I care about disabled people, I am also, to do that well I have to care about racism, and LGBTQ issues, and environment, and climate change, and immigration issues, I can't actually care about people who are everywhere if I don't care about all of the things. And in the Church that means I care about how we teach and tell and love our Bible stories. If we love them well, they're all the richer for knowing about disability and being able to see things through that.

The other thing that I really value in Ian's willingness to share with us is how helpful it was to have an awareness and a familiarity with disability theology and some of the key things about that prior to his own diagnosis, or even to his child's diagnosis. And that that helped make that worldview shift, that can be but is not always part of a diagnosis, less jarring. So I'd really like everyone to understand that we care about this for people because it will make people's less hard at moments that are not always easy.

S: Right, yes, and I think it does come back also to what you were saying about caring about all of these intersecting issues, and I think Ian does a good job of modeling this thing of caring about something before it was 100% related to what was going on in his own life. He cared about it because it was something that affected a lot of people and he thought he should know about it. And I think that's good thing to model for all of us, because for all of us there are issues that maybe we feel are not exactly directly related to us but they're related to the world that we serve, and that's good enough.

R: yep.

S: So I think that all of those pieces really fit together.

There's one other thing that I was thinking about, and that is the idea, and we hear it all the time, but it's really meaningful when it's embodied, and that is that representation matters. Our guests

have all modeled this in different ways, but Ian has thought, it seemed like he has thought a lot about what it means that representation matters, and he's thought a lot about what it means to be publicly autistic, and a clergyperson, and I thought that he brought a really interesting view and I learned a lot.

R: Yeah, and the other thing that I would add from that is that I enjoyed the fact that he shared that he wants to be publicly a clergy person and an autistic person and he also took time before rushing out to make sure he understood that. Maybe he would describe that, but he gave himself time to think about that and internalize that before, not that you have to, but that you can. You can disclose at the time you are ready to, it doesn't have to be immediately.

S: I think I do want to mention again All Things Rite and Musical because that's an opportunity to hear some thoughtful and interesting discussions about liturgy and as I said in this episode, sometimes we just kind of get in a rut with what we're doing and we haven't had a chance to give a particular liturgy or the way we do something thought in a while, because parish ministry gets overwhelming. And they have some fascinating conversations on the podcast. So, I just want to plug that podcast again. All Things Rite (R I T E) and Musical.

R: And I'm still very happy that even after the second half of this conversation we're still looking forward to having Ian back to talk about more disability theology liturgy things again at a later to be determined date. But I'm already looking forward to that conversation.

[music interlude]

S: You have been listening to The Accessible Altar: a podcast at the intersection of faith and disability hosted by Robyn King and Stephanie Shockley. We record on the tradition land of the Leni Lenape and Treaty 6 territory.

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[closing music]