

**ANOTHER
NAME
FOR EVERY
THING**

with

RICHARD ROHR

Season 1, Episode 8

Practice Resurrection

Brie Stoner: Welcome to season one of Another Name for Every Thing with Richard Rohr exploring the core themes of his new book, *The Universal Christ*.

Paul Swanson: As mentioned previously, this podcast is recorded on the grounds of the Center for Action and Contemplation and may contain the quirky sounds of our neighborhood and setting. We are your hosts. I'm Paul Swanson.

Brie Stoner: And I'm Brie Stoner.

Paul Swanson: We're staff members of the Center for Action and Contemplation, and students of this contemplative path. We're trying our best to live the wisdom of this tradition amidst making school lunches, cheeky podcast co-hosts, and the shifting state of our world.

Brie Stoner: This is the eighth of twelve weekly episodes. Today, we will be discussing chapter 14, "The Resurrection Journey," which Richard describes as a pivotal chapter in understanding the collective good news of *The Universal Christ*.

Paul Swanson: One more thing before we get started, Brie and I are having a blast being in conversation with Richard, and we would love to hear what questions are arising for you as you listen to this podcast or read the book. So, if you have a burning question related to the themes of *The Universal Christ* that just won't leave you alone, head over to cac.org/podcast and follow the instructions there to submit your question. After this season is over, we'll sift through the submissions, pour a glass of something tasty, ask Richard your questions, and then share his responses with all of you.

So, Richard, today we are talking about chapter 14, "The Resurrection Journey," and I want to begin with a story that I was told in the church that I was growing up in where Jesus rose from the dead. And the purpose of this is to prove his divinity. And then, also, to give hope to those of us who accept Jesus into our heart as our Lord and Savior, that his death will not be the end of the show for us too. So, resurrection is possible for us if we believe in Jesus as the tradition that I came from. That was where I started, and I think it was a pretty common place for evangelicals to begin. Could you tell us about the limitations of that perspective and the invitation to a larger view of resurrection?

Richard Rohr: Yeah. I probably overuse this term, "transactional instead of transformational." But this will be another clear example of that. There's a metaphysical transaction that took place in Jesus' life, or Mary's life, or the saints, but you've also heard me say too much that human beings are so self-centered that they don't get interested in anything unless they're part of the deal. So, it became this objectification of Jesus as the exclusive symbol of what God wanted to do, and we were supposed to believe it. And we all made the leap of faith and said, "Yes, we believe it." But there was a reason, at least in my analysis, of looking at most Western Christian denominations, we didn't really get excited about it, because it didn't include us. It was all about Jesus and the transaction between

Richard Rohr: Him and His father, again, that we were supposed to trust really happened; and, as you said, prove that He was God. So, it left the whole meta-narrative up in the sky, if I can put it that way, distant, metaphysical, mere belief, nothing that was participatory, nothing that was grace really, that included us.

So, you just had the somewhat typical narrative that we Catholics handed on. But this is why I so often say you didn't really reform us. Now you know the reason I emphasize that so much is because I think individualism did, more than anything else, to undercut the whole gospel message. And so, again, we were supposed to believe individually that this happened and that was supposed to make us saved. There's nothing transformational about that for your own soul. There is no grace in it for you. And until things tug at our heart, at our soul, at our experience, we don't tend to get excited about them. People say—I'm sorry to say I've never been to an Orthodox Easter celebration—but you have to go to an Orthodox Church on Easter to see genuine excitement in the church as they shout, "Christ is risen. Christ is risen indeed," and light their candles and hold them up. Because, as you know I say in the book, of course, the Eastern Church seems to have gotten the collective notion of resurrection.

Now, I'm not saying all Orthodox people got it, but in general it was taught there more than in the Western Church. For us, it was a lone miracle, an anomaly, that no one ever has risen from the dead, but our Jesus did. And it left us sort of helpless, because, well, we couldn't prove it. And other people said, "Well, I don't believe it." And so, we got into fights with them for not believing it. Why would that make you a more transformed, loving person if you believed with your head that Jesus rose from the dead? Or the effect it often had, was make you more smug, righteous, exclusionary from those who didn't believe what you believed.

Paul Swanson: Why did you look at me when you said "smug?"

Richard Rohr: Say it again.

Paul Swanson: Why did you look at me when you said "smug?"

Richard Rohr: Yes, you are so smug, Paul.

Paul Swanson: I was lucky enough to be at a Eastern Orthodox Holy Week.

Richard Rohr: Oh, were you?

Paul Swanson: And it was amazing.

Richard Rohr: Tell me, was it true?

Paul Swanson: I was able to bring some students with when I was working at a Bible college, and—

Richard Rohr: I'm glad you can bring that up as an example.

Paul Swanson: --it was just the full-body experience of—It felt like it was my first Easter in a lot of ways.

Richard Rohr: Really?

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: So, you're not the first one who's told me that. Isn't that neat? Where there was genuine participatory excitement?

Paul Swanson: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Richard Rohr: See, we sing it in our songs, “death is destroyed.” But no one believes it. Do you understand?

Brie Stoner: Do you think that has something to do with how profoundly we’ve adhered to this idea of being separate from each other? In other words, I’m struck by how we philosophically have just gotten into this worldview. I mean, and in many ways, maybe a necessary correction because we needed to feel our agency as human beings.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. And that’s good enough.

Brie Stoner: But we kind of collapsed into it to the point where we no longer see ourselves as an interdependent, interconnected whole. And so then salvation becomes individual. We lost that collective, participatory—

Richard Rohr: We were content to preach the gospel to people who had not yet woke up. If waking up is overcoming your separateness, that wasn’t deemed essential it seems. And so, to very separate, autonomous selves, we preached the gospel, and it didn’t have much historical effect, cultural effect, neighborhood effect, even church effect. So, you’re right. And, of course, I make a lot in the book of that 1 Corinthians 15:13, which no one quotes: “If there is no resurrection from death, Christ himself cannot have been raised.” Why does no preacher quote that? We just quote the next line. “If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and your faith is useless.” We love to preach with a threat. But that the previous line says Christ was an example of the universal principle of resurrection from death. It’s right there. 1 Corinthians 15:13, but we didn’t hear it. Of course, to be kind to our ancestors, we didn’t have the science we have now, the biology we have now, which is aiding us to see, “Oh my gosh, nothing really dies in the universe.”

Brie Stoner: And nothing’s separate.

Richard Rohr: And nothing’s separate; both of those. Exactly. So, that’ll help us, I think, be more sympathetic to those who went ahead of us. Now the science that we’ve been given in quantum physics and molecular biology is saying, “Oh, this is the shape of the whole universe.” It’s good stuff.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. And I love the way that you help us redefine resurrection as another word for change.

Richard Rohr: Thank you, yes.

Paul Swanson: In the book you talk about how it’s a-- Well, this is a quote from you: “Resurrection is another word for change, but particularly positive change, which we tend to see only in the long run. In the short run, it often just looks like death.” And from there you go on to say even the intuition of the Catholic rites of, ‘Life has not ended it has merely changed.’ And this speaks to some of the intuitions of a religious or a spiritual lens that science is in partnership with it now. Right?

Richard Rohr: It is.

Paul Swanson: But, there's something about the human experience where we have a really difficult time with change, whether it's a TV show getting canceled, people getting upset, or the rearrangement of pews in the church.

Richard Rohr: Mm-hmm (affirmative). [laughing]

Paul Swanson: How do we learn to trust resurrection as change at the cellular level? And kind of another question to tag onto that for me is do we have to at first not trust it to learn to trust that this change is indeed positive?

Richard Rohr: Boy, that's a real foundational question. Why do human beings so fear, dislike, and oppose change? We prefer homeostasis; business as usual. Now the psychologists say that it's the nature of the ego. The self-sufficient self likes its self-sufficiency. And when you rearrange things, you have to rearrange your self-sufficiency. You have to recognize, "Well, it's not really all about me." So I think it comes back to that, that the ego hates change. The self-sufficient self likes being self-sufficient. Now when you rearrange the room, which means I have to adjust to other people and include them in my self-definition, that's why you who have children are so lucky. I mean that sincerely, because you have to learn this every day to raise a child, and to be married, or to sustain a marriage. That's good stuff. And yet we both have to admit, we know a lot of parents and a lot of married people who are still grandly self-sufficient. Do you understand?

Paul Swanson: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Richard Rohr: You're amazing that the marriage can last. I guess they found some detente whereby they can maintain their independence and still say, "I love you." Not really, maybe, recognizing the meaning of that phrase. So, psychology explains it as good as anything, the human fear of change, that it's the human fear of vulnerability, loss of boundaries, loss of control. The ego wants control, period. So, if you don't practice already on the playground, really, a little kid is practicing, if you can't play with other kids, you've probably got very strong control needs. It's why sports is important for so many boys, maybe playing house. Forgive me for giving stereotypical roles, but yeah, it starts with playing, and a truly narcissistic child doesn't even know how to play because it's giving away to the other every so often.

Brie Stoner: What's interesting to me about what you're saying is that it seems as though we need to have a certain basis of security in order to have imagination, which I would say—

Richard Rohr: That's a positive way to put it. Thank you. Yes.

Brie Stoner: --is part of what we need in order to accept change, is to have the imagination that can move out of existing structures. And you talk about this idea that we're going somewhere good. You say, ultimately, this whole direction can be trusted. I tend to think of that as the big E, Evolution. So, the collective experience is going somewhere good. But what I appreciate about the nuance of how you're phrasing it is that, you're not glossing over personal loss or changes that aren't good, because those are there

too. But you're trying to ground us in a bigger reality that can see the relationship between evolution and resurrection. Is that kind of how you—

Richard Rohr: That's wonderful. Thank you—

Brie Stoner: Okay.

Richard Rohr: --for seeing it. One statistic that's really helped all of us, was that two years ago or three years ago, when these statisticians said it can be proven there is less violence on the planet than ever before in history. Wow, that felt good. I'm just, "Really?" Of course, it makes you think, what was history like?

Paul Swanson: Right.

Richard Rohr: Were we that savage? So, there we have a statistical evidence that human beings are growing up even though in the momentary, segmented, "You know, I'm living in Venezuela today, it doesn't appear to be true."

Brie Stoner: So there's a perspective, because if we're thinking of deep time maybe it can be trusted.

Richard Rohr: That's a good word, "deep time." Yes.

Brie Stoner: But in our own lives often it just feels like chaos.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. It usually feels like chaos.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. I was on a hike this last weekend with a couple of friends. And one of my friends was telling me that he went on this beautiful walk with his sister, and it was a beautiful day, and the sun was shining, and the birds were chirping. And he describes his sister as a bit of a nature mystic. And they were having this experience, and they got home and he said, "Oh, it's just a perfect day outside. And it's so beautiful, and it's so peaceful." And she said, "Well, that's an interesting perspective. If you were a bug trying to survive, you may have a different perspective on the day." And I thought, "Oh my gosh, that's exactly—

Richard Rohr: The changing of perspective.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. --what we face. I think it feels like chaos to us. I think we feel our personal losses so deeply. And I don't think that should be glossed over, right? Because that is—

Richard Rohr: That's it.

Brie Stoner: --there's grief there, and loss, and there's violence. But I appreciate the way you frame that, that we're going somewhere good. That there's a deeper, bigger, trusting place to go to.

Richard Rohr: And, of course, I look at everything theologically, forgive me. But that's why we need Jesus front and center to dramatically present the two steps backward. Failure is part of the deal. And if God Himself, if I can use Christian language, suffers failure and loss and death, then that must be the pattern of the whole. So, I think that's why the crucified Jesus became our logo. It just has to be experienced like a divine zinger. Oh my god, it isn't just butterflies and rainbows, but hanging in the middle of this is a dramatic statement about, trust the two

steps backward. Trust the human tragedy, even that will be part of the movement toward resurrection. That's really good stuff. That I always say authentic Christianity is utter realism. It's not idealism. And I think an awful lot of Christians, especially liberal, progressive types, still confuse the gospel with idealism; Kumbaya. We don't have the luxury of Kumbaya. Now we try to create that in first-world Christianity, but it isn't true.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. I'm thinking of Teilhard de Chardin, how he described the cross as the symbol of the sweat, and toil, and cost of evolution.

Paul Swanson: Wow.

Richard Rohr: Perfect. That's all I'm saying. He always says it better. Yeah, that's true. That's so true.

Brie Stoner: I don't know, Richard, you've got some good ones in there.

Richard Rohr: Well, I'm trying.

Paul Swanson: He just got that first. Richard, one thing I love with this chapter is you bring in Jesus's wedding banquet metaphors.

Richard Rohr: Good.

Paul Swanson: And something that He uses a lot in His teachings.

Richard Rohr: A lot, and it isn't noticed.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. And you really help us kind of see the import of that. And how is Jesus talking about the resurrection journey within the banquet stories?

Richard Rohr: Well, if Jesus's primary metaphor and image for eternity is consistently, and it is, a wedding banquet in which all are invited, and even in the text are included, those several wedding banquet stories where we try to make it exclusionary, "You don't have a wedding garment on." That's a perfect example of how the problem is included in the Bible: the resistance to the inclusive message, the nonviolent message. It's always there. And then there is one gospel, which I think we all love, Matthew 25, which isn't a banquet but a courtroom scene. And I find it almost nefarious, if that word works, that we chose to emphasize the courtroom scene over the ten metaphors of the banquet. Because a courtroom scene, as it is described in Matthew, is rather dualistic and clear. The sheep and the goats, we like that. And, of course as you know, I love Matthew 25 because it emphasizes justice and care for the poor. And it's almost as if Jesus has to make that into a dualistic message, because we'll do everything we can to avoid it, to deny it, as we have.

Just look at Christian history. Despite the threat that Matthew 25 ends with, and Matthew loves to end with a threat. I always say he had unhealthy parenting patterns. [laughter] His parents, his mother, probably always threatened him, because he has to end everything with a dang threat, and that's all you remember.

I remember last year when I was preaching on this here at the big parish church, and they're all following me, you know, "Whatever you do to the least of the brothers and sisters,"

and I almost was tempted, “Don’t read the final line, because that’s all they’re going to remember.” And you could just see that shocked look, “And those of you who do not will be thrust into the lake of fire for all eternity.” “Ohhhh.” That’s all they remember. It gives you theological PTSD when you threaten people with eternal fire. Well, it’s simply the language in mythology of ultimacy, of importance. Forgive me for taking so much time on this, but we clearly chose Matthew 25 and threat for all the good that that—I

Richard Rohr: love Matthew 25 instead of the many passages that are talking about a wedding feast, including the very first story in John’s gospel, the wedding feast at Cana, which is clearly a message about abundance and excess, replacing the six jars—is it six or five? I can’t remember—of waters of purification. He changes the waters of cleaning up into the wine of waking up. God, that’s good stuff. But there it is again, the wedding banquet. And, of course, we developed the whole theology of marriage out of that. “Well, that shows Jesus is for marriage,”—

Brie Stoner: No, of course.

Richard Rohr: which wasn’t really the message. Of course, Jesus was for marriage. But, anyway.

Paul Swanson: And I love, even the invitation that you were saying right now, to view it for the generosity of the banquet itself, because I know just focusing on the miracle at Cana—

Richard Rohr: The miracle.

Paul Swanson: --you lose that whole—

Richard Rohr: That’s right.

Paul Swanson: --abundance.

Richard Rohr: There was the transaction instead of the transformation.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. You focus on the magical—

Richard Rohr: The magical element.

Brie Stoner: --thing, yeah, and you’re not paying attention to the symbolism—

Richard Rohr: “Look at Jesus. He can turn water into wine.”

Brie Stoner: --of what He’s doing. Yeah.

Richard Rohr: “Hooray for our Jesus.” [clapping] “Our God is better than your god,”—

Brie Stoner: Right.

Richard Rohr: --and that’s not the message at all. That’s the message the ego wants it to be, to elevate my tribe above your tribe: “My God can change water into wine.” Great.

Paul Swanson: Yeah, invite me to your next party.

Richard Rohr: If that's God, of course.

Brie Stoner: Well, I'm glad you're bringing up the ego, because you have this line speaking to the wedding banquet metaphor. You say that "The fragile ego always wants to set a price and entrance requirement of some sort. The ungenerous mind does not like the wedding banquet." And I guess that's the first time that I've really been able to absorb it.

Richard Rohr: Thank you.

Brie Stoner: Is that why a universal wedding invite, or universal resurrection, universal salvation is so threatening to us?

Richard Rohr: I think it is. You see, payment and quid pro quo thinking gives you a sense of control. "I can win. I know how to play the game." Do I say in the book, quoting my lovely Thérèse of Lisieux, how the only science God does not know is mathematics? It's only found in one of her letters. If I didn't put it in the book, I should have. Yeah, it's in one of her letters. "God knows all sciences, but He knows nothing about math," and you get her point. The mathematical world is all fully controlled of adding, subtracting, paying, being paid equal to what you gave. The thought that God ignores mathematics, just for me, brings the message home. But until you've experienced unconditionality, un-deservedness, un-meritedness, you almost don't have the filaments, if that's a word, in your brain to take that in. There are no cells that are formed to access any notion of unearned love. And I'm sure you first experienced it from your partners or your children. It does make you tear up, just, "Where did this come from?"

In my first set of tapes back in '73, I had just seen the movie that had won the best movie of the year, *The Sound of Music*. I was even in the gazebo in Austria where it was sung. Remember that Julie Andrews says, "Nothing comes from nothing, and nothing ever could. But somewhere in my childhood, I must have done something good, or I could not have deserved you loving me this way." It's a beautiful—as she and Christopher Plummer are looking into one another's eyes, "What did I do to deserve it?" And then he sings it back to her. Watch it again. It'll make you tear up. How did Rodgers and Hammerstein figure this out? This is why we can't dismiss—

Brie Stoner: The arts.

Richard Rohr: --popular culture, movies, drama, novels, because again, and again, without all the theological overlay, they get the foundational message. Yes, nothing comes from nothing, nothing ever could, but it seems to have happened. Something came from nothing, undeserved love. There's really major resistance because "I'm not in control now. I'm really not. You mean I didn't earn it? My good behavior didn't achieve this?" It's un-processable. So, we move it back into some equation of quid pro quo, tit for tat. "Somewhere in my youth or childhood, I must have done something good."

Paul Swanson: That's so lovely.

Richard Rohr: It is. It's not mine, it's the gospel.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. I love in this chapter how, for me, it connected back to the first chapter, too, of that

phrase of the Christ-soaked world when you say that “Neither Christ nor Jesus is outside of our natural reality in the first place.”

Richard Rohr: Yes. Yes.

Paul Swanson: And what that connected for me was then—

Richard Rohr: Thank you.

Paul Swanson: --could I say, could we all say, we are born out of a Christ-soaked world? And that then, we're a part of this embodied conversation with the Divine?

Richard Rohr: You're naming it, Paul. There are so many things I'm, probably naively but still, hoping for from this book, and one will be that people will begin to see that authentic Christianity is based in the natural and even destroys the distinction between natural and supernatural. Karl Rahner, as you know, is one of my heroes. He's the first frontispiece at the beginning of the book. He had a very fancy word for this. God, I remember my professor taking a whole morning to describe this to us. I just walked out of the room dazed. And Karl Rahner's phrase was, “the supernatural existential.” It took him a whole morning to describe it that in existence grace is already planted. It doesn't need to wait for behavioral change. This is so good. I don't know what else would make the good news good, inherently good? If it's contingent on me understanding it or on the perfection of my response, I'm going to just say it, it is not good news. It leaves you inherently unstable, fragile, insecure, and trying to create artificial criteria by which you can be worthy: “I went to Mass on Sunday. I obeyed the Ten Commandments. I didn't have sex with my neighbor's wife.” Okay, I hope you did all those things but none of them prove that you've experienced unitive love.

Brie Stoner: That line, this may surprise you, is actually one of my favorite lines from your book. You say, “that neither Christ nor Jesus is outside of our natural reality in the first place.” I think the reason—

Richard Rohr: Thank you.

Brie Stoner: --why I love it so much is because I think we've all had experiences of the Christ or Jesus, that level of miraculous, that level of the veil parting and seeing God in a diaphanous quality through our material lives. I think of when my son Rowan was born, and I'm telling you, the room filled with light. And I'm sure many other women could describe—

Richard Rohr: Women, yes.

Brie Stoner: --birth moments like that. But I'm even thinking of stories of resilience, of beauty in the midst of horrific violence, in the middle of wars, and the things that you see. So, that line reframes for us, gives us an opportunity to look at our own lives with the same kind of miraculous gaze that we tend to look at Jesus or the Christ.

Richard Rohr: Yeah, well said; very well said.

Brie Stoner: So, the veil parts, and you say this in your book, it provides the language and the framework from which we can see the veil is always parting. So, I'm curious—

Richard Rohr: In fact, we create the veil.

Brie Stoner: That's it! Right. So, I was wondering if you have any experiences of the veil partying that you would feel comfortable sharing with us?

Richard Rohr: Oh, my. Well, it's funny. As you were talking, one did come to mind that I don't think I've ever talked about. I did two of my hermitages in Lent at the New Camaldoli in Big Sur. I don't know if you've been there.

Brie Stoner: Yes.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: It's a Camaldolese monastery. And because I was there for forty days, I would have—and I was much younger and in better shape—I could walk in these deep glens behind the monastery. Where it's just like, I mean, you think you're in—what's the movie that was filmed in New Zealand?

Paul Swanson: Lord of the Rings.

Brie Stoner: Lord of the Rings.

Richard Rohr: Yes. I thought I was in Lord of the Rings. It was just all kind of leaves, and fallen redwood trees, and little frogs, and no sound could be heard. But I said, "Why would I ever want to leave? This is it. It's heaven. It's just beautiful." And probably no one ever comes down in this glen, because it was pretty steep to get down in it. And then at the bottom, of course, there's a beautiful stream. But that made the whole retreat. All I could do was go back to journalize about the deep experience of connection I had through nature. I don't know that I was even, forgive me, I don't know that I was thinking of Jesus. Jesus was in the leaves, the frogs, the redwood trees, even the fallen redwood trees, which I had to climb over. God, it was heavenly. And I thought, "How many people ever come to a place like this?" It was just beautiful.

Richard Rohr: So, yeah, I have to say the veil parted. And I went back there any number of times, and always would experience what I guess I'd call the residue of that original moment where it was never as strong, but still just as confirming, and just as enlightening, and just as solidifying of my selfhood and my goodness. Wow. And no religious language was necessary even though now I can understand what religious language is trying to say. But I have to be honest, it often gets in the way, because it becomes too pious, too churchy, too pretty, too circumscribed: "Well, Jesus didn't appear in the glen." "No, but Christ appeared in the glen." Yeah. I didn't say it that way then, but I'd say it that way now. Because Jesus is circumscribed. Christ is uncircumscribed. When you could let go that need to put boundaries around God, or Jesus, you're getting toward where we're talking about. Yeah.

Paul Swanson: I think stories like that is part of why I connected so much to that phrase, "the Christ-soaked world," because it just—

Richard Rohr: You've liked that from the beginning.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. It just gets me giddy.

Richard Rohr: Thank you.

Paul Swanson: I think because it just elucidates experience in the world as something that has the holy participation.

Richard Rohr: Already soaked—

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: --before we came on the scene.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. And soaked for 13.6 billion years with no human being there to say, “Oh, isn’t that wonderful?” Who is this God so humble, so patient? It was already giving glory to God before we brought consciousness to it. And I do believe that’s our role, to bring consciousness, and glory, and praise to what has always been true. But it was always true before we started praising for it.

Brie Stoner: My son, Rowan, said to me the other day—I don’t know if this will be relevant or not—he said, “Mama, I love you so much. I love you the most-est. I love you so hard.”

Richard Rohr: “Most-est.” [chuckling]

Brie Stoner: He goes, “It’ll be so hard, but I love you the third.” And I was like, “Okay.”

Richard Rohr: The third?

Brie Stoner: The third. And I was like, “Interesting. I’m going to see where this is going.” He goes, “Yeah, because I have to love God and Jesus first and second.” And I said to him— Exactly, right?

Richard Rohr: How dear.

Brie Stoner: But then I said this phrase of the Chris- soaked world. I was like, “Well, actually Rowan, this whole world is full of Christ. So, if you can love me the most-est and you’re loving God, and you can love God the most-est, then you’re loving me.”

Richard Rohr: Oh, isn’t that lovely?

Brie Stoner: It was really funny. I love that phrase, too, Paul. I use it all the time now.

Paul Swanson: It’s such a beautiful expression, that exchange with your son. I mean, that’s a theological lesson that is happening out of the day-to-day conversation.

Brie Stoner: And out of this book!

Paul Swanson: Yeah, that’s right.

Brie Stoner: And this is why it’s so helpful.

Richard Rohr: And, also, I want to say, that it wasn't wrong, your early Christian teaching to him that he should love God and love Jesus. And clearly that's planted in there. So that's good. You've got to have an anchor by which to understand infinite love. Now that he's put you in the chain is all we need. That's all we need.

Brie Stoner: "I love you the most-est, but"—

Richard Rohr: "Most-est."

Brie Stoner: --"I love you third."

Paul Swanson: That keeps you humble, right?

Richard Rohr: Beautiful.

Paul Swanson: And to bring it back to Jesus and his particular resurrection moment, what do you see as a shift for Jesus and his followers after his resurrection, and what do we have to learn from that 2,000 years later in our own resurrection moments? How do we learn to trust our moments of resurrections when they shift for us, similar to what happened with Jesus and those who were following Him?

Richard Rohr: Obviously, I can't prove this—and good people might well disagree with me—but I don't believe the human mind of Jesus fully comprehended that He was the personification of this universal mystery until after the resurrection. I believe he had to go through all the stages of life, and death, passion, rejection, betrayal like we all do. That's why I call Him "the map" in the book. So it's a growing awareness in Jesus, just as it normally will be a growing awareness in us. I don't know if I've told you, but I said it in years past how when I was a young priest and those young boys were all baptized in the Spirit and all excited about Jesus, and I was just sure they would all produce tremendous fruit. And then I saw after a while that just that knowing we're loved, didn't bear a lot of fruit in a whole bunch because they had lived no life in between to long for love, to need love, to need mercy, to need forgiveness.

In other words, if you give the good news too glibly, too quickly, too easily, and it just becomes a formula: "Jesus loves me, this I know because the Bible told me so," I'm glad, but you got to create capacity for that. And that's life. You've got to hate yourself a few days. You've got to be rejected and say, "What did I do wrong?" Whatever it might be. And so, I'm just trying to show the parallels between our lives and Jesus. I think Jesus Himself, it wasn't earning His Christhood, but it was readying Himself to hold such a big truth. So, again, I can't prove that. You know, when He asked, "Who do people say that I am?" That's the giveaway that He doesn't have perfect knowledge, it seems to me. And He's really saying to the apostles, "How am I coming across? What are the crowds saying? Could it be true you are the Christ, the son of the living God?" But He doesn't say it like, "Yes, sir. I sure am." He just lets Peter say it. "Okay. Maybe I am." Isn't it the same way with us?

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. Or even the way he was so anguished in the garden when they fell asleep. I mean, these are real human moments.

Richard Rohr: The perfect example.

Brie Stoner: Or the loss of His friend when Lazarus dies, you know, there's real grief. But we don't like to look at Jesus like that—

Richard Rohr: No. That's to make Him too human.

Brie Stoner: That's right. Because we'd rather ignore the fact that He had a whole life before His ministry began. We don't like to picture Him as having the same kinds of questions.

Richard Rohr: Needs. He has no needs.

Brie Stoner: Exactly, yeah.

Richard Rohr: I'm glad you used the example of the garden, because that He clearly needed these guys. "Stay with me. This is hell." So, was Jesus a codependent? Was Jesus needy? Yeah, because He was a human. And we haven't reflected enough on the humanity of Jesus. You know what I'm going to say now as a Franciscan. Those who study the history of spirituality say, "Until Francis, there is no one who emphasizes the humanity of Jesus." It's all the iconographic, if that's a word, Divine Jesus; Divine Jesus. And even art changes after Francis as we see in Giotto where there are little plants, and little birds. This world, this human world that we experience, begins to become holy, but it took us 1,200 years to dare to think of Jesus as fully human. You know what I realized, in fact just recently, is, really, I thought of Jesus as half human and half divine, and you put them together and they make a whole.

And I'd be willing to bet a lot of people—okay—no, fully human and fully divine the creed of the Church says. See, without a nondual mind, you cannot process that. You can't. You'll make him half human and half divine. But fully human. So that means His human mind—I don't know how He accessed that with His Divine mind, but I don't think His human mind knew. He grew, as Luke's gospel says, in wisdom, age, and grace just like you do. That's why He's "the map." He's a good map for faith and love.

Paul Swanson: It kind of makes sense of why we wouldn't want to look at that fullness of humanity, because then it gives us permission to also experience the fullness and depth of our humanity.

Brie Stoner: That's right.

Paul Swanson: And that kind of freedom is frightening to—

Richard Rohr: Frightening.

Paul Swanson: --to be able to risk and fail and get up again. I mean, this is exactly what you're pointing at in this chapter.

Brie Stoner: Yeah, that instead of constantly projecting onto Jesus, "No, no, no, that's what Jesus did." Now we have to look ourselves—

Richard Rohr: Yeah, you got it.

Brie Stoner: --and realize, okay, this is actually the path of my entire life, and how can I begin to see myself this way? That's uncomfortable.

Richard Rohr: That's why we use the language of Ken Wilber on descending religions and ascending. When it was all about pretending we were divine and jumping over our humanity, we created a lot of delusional Christianity. I don't know what other word to use. But once we know the descend has to proceed the ascend, you have to go into your humanity before you can even desire or appreciate your divinity, I think that's the only trustworthy path. And again, that's the path Jesus took, coming into the world as a little baby. And when I was a little Catholic boy, I believed when He was laying in the manger He knew everything. And He just, "I'm going to pretend for thirty years."

Brie Stoner: I'm going to pretend that I can't talk. I'm just going to make these—

Richard Rohr: "I'm going to pretend that I can't talk"—

Brie Stoner: "I'm just going to make these gurgling sounds."

Richard Rohr: --"even though I know all the languages of the world. And these stupid people—[laughter] We just undid the message; undid the message.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. My first inkling of that was hearing a story or an interview with Wendell Berry where he was talking about his early times with Thomas Merton, when he would visit Merton at the hermitage.

Richard Rohr: I guess I never knew they met.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. There are some photos.

Richard Rohr: In Kentucky. I should have assumed that.

Paul Swanson: And Wendell Berry said, "Thomas Merton was the most human person I've ever met." And that right there seemed like a giveaway. Like, well, there's a depth to that word when it's said in that phrasing knowing what we all know about Thomas Merton as the great prophetic and contemplative voice of the 20th century. That just unlocked the door of humanity for me in a way that I needed that example.

Brie Stoner: In all his messiness too. Everything that we know, I mean, we love to just project—

Richard Rohr: And now we know more and more.

Brie Stoner: --perfection. Yeah. That is liberating. That doesn't make him less of a saint for me at all.

Richard Rohr: More.

Brie Stoner: It makes him more so.

Richard Rohr: More. Exactly. Yeah.

Richard Rohr: You know that's why he didn't become a Franciscan. Do you know this story? He was at St.

Bonaventure's in New York, and he went to Fr. Aranayes, who was a holy man, and went to confession and confessed that he fathered an illegitimate child. And holy Fr. Aranayes said, "Well, I'm afraid you can't become a Franciscan. You're not worthy to." So, we use this all the time: "Thomas Merton was not worthy of us. We kicked him out and then he went to the Cistercians." What a mistake.

Brie Stoner: Fr. Aranayes living up to his namesake there.

Richard Rohr: That's right.

Paul Swanson: I want to read a quote from the book that's loaded with a lot of theological heft that I would love for you to unpack for us. I'm going to read it first here.

Jesus was always objectively the Universal Christ, but now His significance for humanity and for us was made ubiquitous, personal, and attractive for those willing to meet reality through Him.

Can you unpack that through an example in light of those who have some sort of experience with Jesus as the Universal Christ, but Christ still seems too big to understand?

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: Does that make sense what I'm asking?

Richard Rohr: Well, I'm trying to make the point five times in the book. That we have, if we understand it well, such a holistic religion, that we have to be spoken to at several levels to meet the whole person. And Jesus for me meets the personal, intimate, heart, relational level; Christ meets the universal, philosophical, scientific, global, cosmic level. And my judgment is, you get both of those, you've got a very good lens into your own reality first of all, and maybe into the reality of the whole.

If it's just the conceptual universal, it becomes theory, becomes theoretical. You've heard me say, I'm worried sometimes that some of our own contemplative people can never pray from their heart and even admit they don't pray from their heart anymore. Then I tell them, if I were their spiritual director, "I think you've gone too far down the Christ road, and you've lost the Jesus."

Richard Rohr: Now, there's other people in a lot of pious Catholicism, cozy evangelicalism, where it's so sentimental. It's so sweet. It's so individualistic. It's so personal; Jesus is my personal boyfriend, that it's just, you just want to say, "Gag me with a spoon. Just stop it." [laughter] This is not a religion that's big enough to include all of humanity. Your little Jesus looks a lot like your Mississippi culture. And you can't see that, but— So, I don't know if that was the import of your beautiful question but thank you for letting me say it.

Paul Swanson: Yeah, you nailed it, because I think I was just trying to name for folks where Christ is still too big of a concept—

Richard Rohr: Too big.

Paul Swanson: --to understand, and you're naming that Jesus is the gateway. And sometimes people can go too far down one road where they—

Richard Rohr: One road or the other.

Paul Swanson: --don't have the personal, but they have the cosmic, and vice versa.

Richard Rohr: There you go. And until the cosmic becomes God for you, now, here, it doesn't engage the soul or the heart or even the full mind. Yeah.

Brie Stoner: That's interesting though coming from the evangelical background where the personal was the only emphasis. This quote where you're quoting Michael Dowd when he describes God "as reality with a personality."

Richard Rohr: Yeah, I love that.

Brie Stoner: Which I love that too. It's so helpful. But what that's helping me realize is that, when it's so highly personal, our personalities overly influence—

Richard Rohr: Very good, yes.

Brie Stoner: --how we view God. And I guess I never realized that before that without the cosmic, we're sort of living by the tyranny of a God made in our own image.

Richard Rohr: Of our set of blinders, our filter, just falls in love with a beautiful God.

Brie Stoner: A God of perfect beauty and symmetry.

Richard Rohr: Asymmetry.

Brie Stoner: Right, slight asymmetry, monochromatic.

Richard Rohr: Yeah, I think that's exactly right. And my "one" type, we wanted a God who created order, and was the judge, and the law keeper, and all of that. [Note: Fr. Richard is referring to his Enneagram type. There are nine Enneagram types.] And of course, my type became clergy. And so, we saw ourselves as the policemen of the church; of the world. Word police, and doctrinal police, and ritual police. That's the church I was raised with. A priest was pretty much a church policeman to keep everything in order. And to the ego trying to form itself into a structure, that's rather appealing in the early stages. "Oh, okay. Stay inside this boundary and I'll be a good boy, and God will love me." But when you're still emphasizing that at thirty-five and fifty-five, you're not growing up.

Brie Stoner: Speaking of projecting our human personalities onto God, can you give us a brief overview of where the concept of hell came from?

Richard Rohr: Wow. Well, I'm going to speak philosophically, first of all. That I do believe we have to preserve the option of a human, "No," or we are not free. So, there's some sense to that. If you're not free to say, "No," if we're all robots and just absolutely programmed 100 percent to love God and love our neighbor, then your choice to love your neighbor really doesn't mean that much, because you were programmed to do it.

So, to preserve human freedom, we had to preserve the possibility of a sacred “No.” Well, I don’t know if it’s sacred anymore, but, yeah, it was ultimate. So, to reveal the ultimacy and the danger of that no, most religions, even Buddhism have some notion of a place of death, eternal death, totally missing the mark. It descended into the language of punishment and torture, especially after Dante in the West. But the seeds of it are found a lot, especially in Matthew’s gospel, although it’s other places, too, but it’s all based on metaphors from the Old Testament; the sea of fire. You need metaphors that communicate ultimacy and urgency.

And I bet you’ve descended to it in rare moments with your children, “You better not ever do that again, or I’m going to never let you eat any candy.” It has to be real strong or the kids don’t get it. But eventually you have to grow out of being the kid and notice that it was just a metaphor.

You know, the various words that were used, not just in the Old Testament, but in the whole Mediterranean world, were Hades, She’ol. The Jews use Gehenna, the garbage dump outside of Jerusalem. Hades is not the same as our Western notion of Dante’s hell. Hades is simply, and She’ol too, the place of the dead. If you read Greek mythology, the place of the shades. And they actually had the honesty to withhold judgment. It was more like our Catholic notion of limbo, where they’re neither happy nor unhappy. They’re just sort of waiting. That was much more honest to leave a place where we withhold judgment. But our judgmentalism finally won out, and we made it into a place of torture, eternal torture, and God being the torturer. I just can’t say strong enough, and I’m not trying to be some iconoclast, or liberal, that just undoes the whole good news, because God is less loving suddenly than the worst person you’ve ever met in your life. This won’t work. It won’t work. To have this always sitting in the background that Jesus told us to love our enemies, Jesus told us to forgive

Richard Rohr: seventy times seven, but you know what? God doesn’t. That will not work, and we’ve got to admit that was in our unconscious. We always have that little doubt, “Well, I know He’s supposed to be love, but it doesn’t look like love as I’ve experienced it. My mommy loves me better than that.” I mean, most of us would say that. “Mommy forgave me, but God doesn’t. God not only doesn’t but doesn’t forever.” Oh, It’s just horrible. It’s just horrible.

Brie Stoner: Don’t you tell this story-- I think I’ve heard you tell this before—

Richard Rohr: What?

Brie Stoner: --about Teresa of Ávila what she says about hell?

Richard Rohr: Oh, yeah. Well, and in fact, both the Teresa’s said that; Thérèse of Lisieux too. She had to keep on the good side of the Inquisition, which in Spain was at its height, of course. So, you see this very often in her writings. She places her bet on the side of what the priests and cardinals want her to say. And so she’ll, “Oh yes, I believe in hell.” And then the sisters say, she said out of the corner of her mouth, “It’s just that nobody’s there.” [laughter]

But in a way, she was right to assert the possibility of an eternal “No.” I think we do have to say that. I mean, some of the people in history have been ogres until the last moment of life. Now, we still have to say that it might be a place of eternal death, not a place of eternal

torture. I can even go that far, that it is possible for some people to choose death. But I think that's what Teresa was saying. No one's in a place of eternal torture, but we have to leave the theoretical possibility that you could say "no" to love.

Now, I hope I quote this in the book. I know I have in other places. The line that we find several times in the first centuries, I think, from the Desert Fathers and Mothers is, "No one will be able to resist the allure of infinite love." Now, that's what the doctrine of purgatory moved out of, do you see? I know we made it too literal and too silly, but no one can resist the allure of infinite love. That there was wiggle room even for these horrible ogres who tortured other human being-- We condemned El Chapo yesterday to life in prison, and that man has lived an evil life. But if God is infinite love, and God is going to show infinite love one day to El Chapo, maybe El Chapo will not be able to resist it. Why would we begrudge him that? Why would we want him to burn for all eternity? Wouldn't it rather be a statement about the graciousness, the magnificence, the munificence of God, but we want to see bad people suffer. I don't think God needs it, we need it. We want it.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. And that brings to mind what we've talked about in previous conversations, the scapegoat mechanism. Can you speak to that about the connection to the scapegoat mechanism and how you kind of just open that door as far as almost like the wish to see others suffer so that we can feel good

Paul Swanson: about our own standing and what we see in ourselves in the light of our own goodness?

Richard Rohr: The Germans have a word for it, schadenfreude. They always have a word for everything. They put two words together—and freude is joy, and schaden is the shadow side of things: To take delight in the shadow side of things. Brilliant concept. And you just described it in a certain way, that there is some devious part of the human person. We think it's the maintaining of order. This much evil in the great ledger book of eternity must deserve this much punishment. Now, if you were raised that way, in your mind, that really does make sense. That concept doesn't go away easily. So, the scapegoat mechanism was when, through the help of scholars like René Girard and rituals like Leviticus 16, it was revealed to us that human beings preferred to create a symbolic thing they could righteously hate, because they had to hate something. There had to be somewhere for that internal negativity to go.

And as long as it's even symbolic. If you read the whole passage in Leviticus 16, it goes out of its way to show that the goat is chosen completely arbitrarily. Two goats are presented, and choose one for no reason, and make that the one on which you project your dark side. So it reveals that you're the problem. It's accidental what you choose. When you can see that— And, of course, René Girard's genius is that he insists it's an unconscious mechanism. You really don't know you're doing it. You really think, "No, those Mexican people at the border are the problem. Just get rid of them and America will be happy again." How do you unconvince people of what their ego needs to feel secure and superior? And, remember, that's what the ego always wants—to feel, well, separate, and superior, and secure.

Yeah, I think one day René Girard will be a household name in Western Christianity. Because for many of us, that explanation alone pulled back the veil to understand the sin of the world and why Jesus became the scapegoat: to reveal the illusion, the deception, the lie of the scapegoat mechanism. We hate what we should love.

Brie Stoner: It also seems like that's deeply connected to the capacity to live out what Jesus was modeling of loving our enemies. In other words, loving those who are maybe even oppressing or who have hurt us. I think of situations in my own life where I've experienced trauma, or violence, and I think, yeah, you want to scapegoat that person for doing that—

Richard Rohr: You do.

Brie Stoner: --thing to you. There is nothing in you that naturally would want to forgive them unless, unless we had this deep immersion in this cosmic view of things, in

Brie Stoner: which that person isn't actually separate from me. And am I not guilty of manipulation, or—

Richard Rohr: That's right.

Brie Stoner: --of taking power, or of lording over any being? Of course, I am. But then it seems like this view of the Universal Christ is actually what helps us begin to even live a little bit of what—

Richard Rohr: A little bit.

Brie Stoner: --Jesus was able to live.

Richard Rohr: Well said. I can't improve on that. Yeah.

I want to ask God one day, if I'm allowed to, why did God allow us to live with such capacity for deception, and even prefer deception seemingly? Do we need self-validation that much that we just need to project our darkness elsewhere? It seems to be the case. But if God in God's infinite mercy knows that, the one who knows all can forgive all. We know a part. And once we all know, we're complicit. This is why this Pauline notion of evil, we're all complicit in the evil of the world. We live in a country that is profiting upon the oppression of the rest of the world. Now, we're not supposed to say that. We're not supposed to know that. Anybody who knows history knows it's true. How many bases does America have—is it 360, or something like that—all over the world. We're the empire of the world. And so, you and I are sitting here in this luxury and feeling so Christian. There is no human being who's not complicit and enjoying the fruits of injustice, deceit, lust, greed, gluttony, all the capital sins.

Pray that, if I'm supposed to, that I can say that more clearly. Once we stop giving people a pure pedestal on which to stand, which is I think especially what evangelical Christianity try to do, "You are above the black people. You're above the rapists, and all the rest." Now, "Their sin is my sin, and my sin is their sin." You see how we get back to the collective in that—one lump. Did we talk about "One Lump"?

Brie Stoner: Yes.

Paul Swanson: We did, yeah.

Richard Rohr: Good. Good. Good.

Brie Stoner: I'm going to borrow your copy real quick, because when I read your work, Richard, I just imagine you saying all the things in your cadence.

Richard Rohr: In my terrible-- Yes.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. Well, no, I actually really love it.

Paul Swanson: It's lovely, yeah.

Brie Stoner: So, I figured—

Richard Rohr: I hope so. Thank you.

Brie Stoner: --maybe you could do that for us right now and just read a little section of your own book.

Richard Rohr: Oh, really?

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: From my own book?

Brie Stoner: It's this paragraph.

Richard Rohr: Which paragraph?

Brie Stoner: Right there.

Richard Rohr: All right, I will. What chapter is this from? Oh, "Resurrection." You know, I have told people, if you only read one chapter, read the one on resurrection. That'll, I hope, intrigue you to read what led up to that. Okay. Page 186:

But now you have been told about the eternal Christ who never dies, and who never dies in you. Resurrection is about the whole of creation. It is about history. It is about every human who has ever been conceived, sinned, suffered, and died. Every animal that has lived and died a tortured death, which is most of them. Every element that has changed from solid to liquid to ether over great expanses of time. It is about you and it is about me. It is about everything. The Christ journey is indeed another name for every thing.

Thank you for letting me read that. Sometimes my own words convert me. I do! I read and I say, "Oh, God, that's good." Forgive the arrogance.

Paul Swanson: No, thank you, Richard, for reading that. As a way to close out this conversation, if resurrection is about the whole of creation, and we have this abundance of examples around us, where have you seen resurrection in your life in this past week?

Richard Rohr: I can honestly say that an honest notion of resurrection becomes clearer every year older I get, and I think that's the benefit of having lived many years. You see, "Look, that passed. That was forgiven. That was let go of. That doesn't matter anymore. That changed. I changed." The people that really hurt me or

Richard Rohr: betrayed me, when I really look into my heart and I have no reason to hurt them or to even let them know, this is the one characteristic. We have a great problem not letting you know that you hurt us. We have to say it. I can almost tell when a "one" is going to do it. "Well,

you did do that.” I even have that need almost none now. And I know I, by willpower, I’m sure I still do it, but it does not dominate my psyche at all, even in my dreams. So, yeah. But I know it was given to me. I fell into it. I guess there was some allowing on my part, but now the allowing has become an enjoying, where I really can enjoy my own soul. Do you understand? Because it isn’t so filled—I’m not saying there isn’t plenty there yet—but isn’t so filled with junk, with negativity, with memories of who hurt me, and how they hurt me, and how much they hurt me. And you just want to say, “Oh God, I bet I hurt them.” You’re just more aware of that.

So, yeah, it has to be experienced in your own soul, or it’s just a theory. It really is. And that is the joy of my later years now that I most days can genuinely enjoy that. And it’s not really an enjoying of the Richard self, except in so far as the Richard self is a part of the whole self, the God self. In that world, I don’t have any offenses that I can’t overlook, or any hurts that I’ve got to remind you of. It just feels like, “What an utter waste of time.” I don’t want to bother with that. I don’t need to bother with that. So, if something in there makes sense—

[music playing]

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Thank you.

Paul Swanson: It sounds like a practice of resurrection.

Richard Rohr: Yeah, a practice of resurrection.

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