

ANOTHER NAME FOR EVERY THING

with

RICHARD ROHR

Season 2, Episode 8

Miracles, Signs and Wonders

Brie Stoner: Welcome to Season 2 of Another Name for Everything: casual conversations with Richard Rohr responding to listener questions about his new book, The Universal Christ and Season 1 of this podcast.

Paul Swanson: As mentioned previously, this podcast was 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 trying our best to live the wisdom of this tradition amidst feeling judged by other parents, locating Band-aids for scraped knees, and the shifting state of our world.

Brie Stoner: This is the eighth of twelve weekly episodes. Today we're tackling your questions on the theme of what we don't know, nerding out on science and theology, and having a conversation about miracles, signs, and wonders.

Paul Swanson: So, today we are combining a few different things, but one of them is the relationship science and theology and, also, the way miracles, signs, and wonders have been a part of the Christian Tradition for so long. So, part of what we're hoping to do is to bridge the gap in this conversation and to see it from a wholistic point of view, and we want to kick that off by going way out to the billions of galaxies. So, Richard, this question comes from Jennifer from Brookville, Indiana:

Richard, with there being six-hundred billion galaxies, and the publication this week of the first image of a black hole, what might Christ be out there? It was Jesus here in human form, fully human and fully divine. Seriously, six-hundred billion galaxies, how can we possibly think, let alone believe, that we are the sole deposit of God's Christ? Thoughts, please. Don't covet your insights.

Richard Rohr: That is well stated. It's the absolute immensity of the universe that, you know, even the Psalms talked about but had no ability to actually quantify the way we do now that is forcing us to a re-imaging of God. because we now realize that we had pulled God into this one planet based on this one storyline—and you're used to me saying, but it makes the point—dependent upon one sin committed between two rivers in the Middle East, that the presence of the Divine in this universe and the Christ could not be co-dependent upon one little mistake human beings made. We needed God at least as big as this universe and, frankly, much bigger. So, this is working out well to give us a little humility. I don't know if she was emphasizing "out there," is that the problem or the concern?

Brie Stoner: Maybe like expanding our notions beyond Christ beyond just our planet and creation understood as our world to include these six-hundred billion galaxies. I mean, I can't even understand that.

Richard Rohr: Okay, well. Yes. We can't formulate thoughts of infinity or eternity.

Paul Swanson: We're not just a special galaxy

Richard Rohr: But, in fact, that is one of the reasons I chose the title The Universal Christ, that she got it. This is not talking about a savior of the planet Earth, but one who names and liberates the meaning, the direction, the purpose, of the whole universe. And it is mind blowing. It doesn't lend itself to the little Sunday worship ceremonies that we've all become accustomed to. It really doesn't, and this is scary for clergy with people who are now talking about the forest being their cathedral, and the stars being their spiritual world.

They're not wrong in saying that, they're really aren't, you know, but again, remember we've always got to keep the microcosm connected with the macrocosm, because we're back to The Scandal of the Particular. So, it is scandalous if Jesus is the image of the invisible God, that he became incarnate on this, this planet: why? Why? And, of course, that doesn't preclude that there could have been incarnations on other planets, and we probably presume that. Maybe that is at the heart of her question. Jesus was here in human form, but who knows what form Presence took on other planets.

You know, I often wonder if that's going to be the only thing that will humble our politics, our geo-political fights on this planet, if we would discover, "Oh, my God, there's another one, and they're doing it maybe a lot better than we are." Who knows? So, she's making a good reflection.

Brie Stoner: I think that's one of the things I love about science and all the things that science is bringing us now both from pictures of black holes to quantum physics and quantum mechanics is it's opening us up back to what little--oh, there's a bug on me. Christ in all things but maybe not just that bug. [laughter] Sorry, bug—but does the sense of wonder what little we know how much it puts us back to humility, and--

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Brie Stoner: --we operate in our day-to-day like, "Oh, yeah, this table is solid." And we still have such an anthropocentric view of, like a human-centric view of reality that every now and again when science corrects us with statements like these "six-hundred billion galaxies," how can we not allow that to shift our orientation to a posture of deep humility?

Richard Rohr: How can we not?

Paul Swanson: I think I see that in the ways that there's a wilderness church network that is happening where it's--

Richard Rohr: Oh, really?

Paul Swanson: --it's churches where its sanctuary is outside but they're doing the traditional mass or their service is in a pilgrimage of a hike, but doing it with the altar being like a stump and the homily being given in front of that altar, and people collect things to bring to the altar. And there's something about that humility of this is another sanctuary; this is another space where that microcosm is connected to that macrocosm in very concrete ways by bridging their religion with that.

Richard Rohr: Wow!

Brie Stoner: I also really like what you said, [Fr. Richard], which is what you just brought up, Paul, the microcosm is an image of the macrocosm, which allows us a different way to interpret even our own spiritual tradition. It's a microcosm of a macrocosm story--

Richard Rohr: Perfect.

Brie Stoner: --and that creates a greater sense of I can trust it at all levels of truth, in a way, or at multiple levels of truth, while still accepting the larger view that there could be other planets, there could be other stories, there are other stories on this planet, there's other traditions. I don't know, it just expands. It feels like it's in an expansive way.

Richard Rohr: And as the first question says, in a certain sense, how could there not be?

Brie Stoner: Right. Right.

Richard Rohr: What is the egocentricity that, you know, compresses all of Divine Presence in our little world, it seems, yeah. So, this is good humility for us, and good not knowing, which is probably symbolized in the macrocosm by black holes and dark space, or dark matter.

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Yeah, which is most of the universe; most is unknowability--

Brie Stoner: Yeah, unknowability--

Paul Swanson: Right.

Richard Rohr: --by our criteria.

Brie Stoner: Unknowability and potentiality--

Richard Rohr: Like potentiality

Brie Stoner: --like something that I think when I link those two things together, not knowing isn't just about emptiness for the sake of emptiness, or unknowing for the sake of emptiness, it's also for the sake of the potential of what can happen in that space.

Richard Rohr: That's good. That's good.

Brie Stoner: So, John from Los Angeles, California, has a question. He says:

In your book you talk about Christ being materiality itself beginning with the Big Bang. This begs the question: What is the difference in the universe and Christ? Are they synonyms? If so, is the universe the second person of the Trinity?

Richard Rohr: I think John got the point that the universe is the body of God, and as I love to say, what else could it be? Did it come from some other source? It's the external reflection

of the internal mystery and glory and beauty of God, and even taking it to “Yes,” it’s the second person of the Trinity in visible form. And that’s why, you know, at least in medieval theology where I was mostly educated, you know, we were not allowed to, as I remember, make any decision about is the universe eternal? We couldn’t say “Yes,” and we couldn’t say, “No,” which again left us in holy unknowability. Maybe was there one nanosecond, but then we’re back in our notion of time. How do you have an eternal God without an eternal manifestation unless there was one second which God thought about it and said, “Let’s do it.” [laughter] “Let there be light.” Oh, it’s so fun to, you know, tease out the implications, the implications, the implications, yeah, and John, I think you did it well.

Paul Swanson: I have so many memories of you, [Fr. Richard], saying “What kind of God is this”? What I love about that is it invites you into that wonder without having to jump to that conclusion.

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Brie Stoner: Uh-huh.

Paul Swanson: So, here’s a question that I think is a “What kind of God is this?” type of question.

Richard Rohr: Okay.

Paul Swanson: This is from Sebastian from Ipoh Perak, Malaysia.

Richard Rohr: Wow!

Paul Swanson: He asks:

This question might sound naïve but, please, I am serious as it is a stumbling block for me: If all creation is connected in the love of God—and I do want to believe so—then what about the harmful bacteria in rodents, cockroaches, mosquitoes, flies, rats, etc. [and maybe the bug on Brie’s arm a minute ago] Should we just leave them as they are and let them play havoc in our lives, and if we try to get rid of them, are we compromising on the way of the Christ?

Richard Rohr: I’m eager to try to talk about this. I don’t know that my answer will be adequate. I’m sure it won’t, but let’s start with an underlying foundational misperception, which I share in. Our understanding of perfection, holiness, goodness, reality is the exclusion of imperfection: Get rid of it. Somehow from the very beginning it seems God puts in the equation the problem, the pushback, the difficulty what we usually call “evil.” It’s in every case. I mean the Bible, and this has been one of our major problems in interpreting the Bible, that it’s, quite frankly, filled with absolutely horrible passages about killing, and rape, and gang rape, and I mean they’re all in there. Unless you know the negative is allowed to create the true positive. Now, again, I’m not a scientist, but at my superficial level, I do know that there are particles smaller than the electron, the proton, and the neutron. But if the proton--Am I correct, is the positive charge—

Paul Swanson: Yes.

Brie Stoner: Uh-huh.

Richard Rohr: —and the electron is the negative. Is that right?

Brie Stoner: I think so, yeah.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. Well then why did God create electrons? Damn it! Get out of the atom! We can't resolve this. If you look at all of our moral problems, social problems, community problems, it's always about how can we eliminate what we perceive as the negative—the cockroach, which survived the planetary extinctions.

Now, I guess he's asking a further question: Are we doing the wrong thing when we eliminate harmful bacteria? I just had bronchitis. Is that a virus or bacteria? I don't know. But at any rate, I certainly went and got my medicine to kill that bacteria. Now I'm very grateful I have most of my voice back, and I suppose most of us in this room would kill cockroaches, mosquitoes, flies, and rats. He listed them very well. There are absolutely consistent religions, like the Jains—you've seen them in India wearing this mask—that they're even afraid of killing a bug with their mouth by inhalation. They are being consistent, but maybe we're the great compromisers who say that some evil, which we call evil and is not really evil maybe just inconvenience, we can eliminate for the sake of a greater good not out of malice.

I have learned, I hope this doesn't sound silly, but when I swat a fly, say "Sorry I had to do that." All I can believe in the great scheme of things that if I did it maliciously, I don't think that would be so good, because this fly is not evil, it's just doing its fly thing. But for the sake of what we perceive as a greater good, I am writing a book here and I can't let you keep distracting me, "Sorry, you've got to go."

You know, this is what I'm trying to address in this small monograph I am writing now. I think Paul's idea of sin is not individual fault but, in fact, he's saying we all must carry our universal complicity in evil. And when I swat a fly, I am owning my—at a very low level perhaps—my complicity in evil. I am not a perfect, pure person. If we would have named sin that way as a recognition of how we are trapped in a situation—Paul says this in Romans—where you cannot, not sin. You cannot not. We all do. Not only can we not avoid it, we're enjoying the fruits of it. I mean, much of our American system, and the rest of the world knows this, is based on deceit, oppression, lies, keeping other countries at bay in various cruel ways, I just had a visitor this morning who just came back from the border. When she came two days ago, there are five hundred people coming across. They had taken away all their backpacks, all their shoes, so they literally must come into this country, this "land of the free; home of the brave," must humiliate poor Hondurans in this way. Oh, and most of us, we don't know what to do about it, what we can do about it, so we are complicit right now. You and I are sitting here enjoying the fruits of these quasi-boundaries that allow us to live with a very high economy while poor people from Honduras who are carrying all their possessions in their backpack and even that is taken away from them. Forgive me, I had to get that in. If I think about it too much, I can't think.

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: It's just too absurd. That's the tragic situation; the tragic state of life. And, all I think the gospel is asking us to do is can you at least know that, and recognize that, and stop seeking some moral worthiness or superiority. You are all complicit in evil [thumping sound] period. I don't care what church you go to you're enjoying the fruits of evil. This damns us all, not in the usual way we use the word damn, but this search for "I'm not guilty," we're all guilty. Again, Paul says all this. Just go back and read Romans. I think it's a genius insight. And, of course, he's circling around it the way I do, too, and that's why it's so hard to read Romans. It's just, "Where is he going with this"? Well, I think it's in this direction. Let me at least say it that way: that evil is everywhere, and what goodness is, is the ability to incorporate the negative, at least in your knowledge, hopefully in your heart, and the religion I was raised in was eliminate the negative as if we could, you know.

Paul Swanson: Uh-huh.

Richard Rohr: It sent us on a road that was so self-serving. And then we Catholics added this little thing of private confession so I could go and confess my dirty thoughts and think I had eliminated the negative. You just made the problem even more easily deniable.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Brie Stoner: It seems like so much of the message of The Universal Christ is about placing us back in deep connectively to everything.

Richard Rohr: Everything.

Brie Stoner: So, even the complicity of the sin on one side and the interconnected belonging on the other side--

Richard Rohr: Very good.

Brie Stoner: --that could allow us to see ourselves as related to the viruses, the cockroaches, the in relationship with, which doesn't mean that we allow a rat infestation to take over our house, but it does change how we view ourselves in a great web of being, a great web of life.

Richard Rohr: Very well said.

Paul Swanson: Uh-huh.

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Brie Stoner: I really appreciate how science is continuing to educate us on that, and one of the things that came to mind as you were speaking with this question about bacteria is the insights that we've gained in the last twenty years on the microbiome of our intestinal tract, about--

Richard Rohr: Oh, yeah, very good.

Brie Stoner: --how many species of bacteria are in there?

Richard Rohr: Are living in our intestinal tract.

Brie Stoner: This is amazing. I think somebody needs to write a book called God in My Gut, because--

Richard Rohr: That's good.

Brie Stoner: --when I discovered that, I mean, I was just living in this state of shock I think for weeks. And I read a book called Gut, which was amazing and all of a sudden, I was just thinking about all these little teeny tiny species living inside of me and thinking, "I'm a community."

Paul Swanson: Uh-huh.

Richard Rohr: That's lovely.

Brie Stoner: "I'm a community. I'm a we, like, there's no I," and realizing that the foods I was eating was impacting them, and that they were impacting my cravings, and that that impacts your brain function, your hormones, it's just all interconnected.

Richard Rohr: Wow. Yes, yes, yes.

Paul Swanson: Yes.

Brie Stoner: It is all a system.

Paul Swanson: Uh-huh.

Richard Rohr: That's one of the best statements of it I've ever heard. Thank you. That's good, because it's true, and it's true everywhere and the gut of a Hindu is the same way, and the gut of a Jew is the same way. Yeah.

Brie Stoner: I think this next question you're already starting to tease out about our relationship to nature and how we think about what ultimate victory could look like, or ultimate fulfillment. Paul from Portland says:

In nature we do see a pattern where strong creatures are consuming weaker ones. black holes sucking in energy and living matter into permanent frozen stillness. In the current scientific prediction that the universe's endless expansion will end in a heat death and permanent separation.

I think that's one of the many theories going around.

Richard Rohr: Wow. I've never heard that one.

Brie Stoner: Well, I think, as always, there are multiple theories, right?

Richard Rohr: That's one. Yeah.

Brie Stoner: He says,

One of the pillars of the Evangelical worldview, [which is his own worldview of origin] is that something fundamental needs to change in nature in order for good to have final victory. They hope for a second coming, an end of history after which the rules of the

game—the nature of nature—will have changed. [His question is] What are we to do with this? Does something need to fundamentally change in nature for the way of God, love, relationship, goodness to have final reality?

Richard Rohr: The only way I can understand the end of time, the second coming, the day of Yahweh, the Second Coming of Christ, is as a triumph of love. In other words, I think still at the very end, there will be evil, there will be cockroaches. You know, the first community I started in Cincinnati, the Scripture I chose was based on that last chapter in the Bible where the New Jerusalem, the new city, the new aeon, descends from the heavens as a pure gift. We've been working for it here, but in the end it's the final great act of grace. It is given as a gift. I think that's what the microcosmic moment of the Resurrection is saying.

Paul Swanson: Uh-huh.

Richard Rohr: Just know that all these crucifixions are going to lead up to a grand Resurrection given by God. But, does something fundamental change in nature? No, I think human nature will still be egocentric and probably will still have violence. I don't think that's going to go away. That doesn't mean we shouldn't work for it or in ourselves seek to overcome it. But both Jesus and Paul use the metaphor of leaven, which is a very humble metaphor. They seem to say what was happening was God planting a yeast inside of creation, which is not—yes, it doesn't influence the whole dough—but it isn't really the whole dough. It just causes it to rise.

So, I think people of love—what we thought was co-terminus with the church and now we know it isn't, which isn't the point I'm really trying to make—we Christians must be a little humbler. Now we know it's the mosque, and the synagogue, and the hospice care people, that these are the leaven, and they're not co-terminus with the world. God is loving and transforming the whole world in spite of themselves just as God has loved me in spite of myself and brought me to this moment where I can see it a little bit and thank someone for it and appreciate it.

I said to a friend just yesterday, no, it was early this morning, when I was waking up somewhat groggy, and I just said, "How do people get up and get the courage to start another day if there's not some belief in a loving God, or that this is all going somewhere, going somewhere going good"? If they don't, the only purpose is to get rich, is to get drunk, is to have as much sex as possible, and it might even work for a number of years, but finally they have to wake up on a day like even I woke up this morning, "Why am I doing all this?: Forgive me after you've had to spend so many hours with me yesterday, [laughter] and it was a wonderful day, but you still have to start another day and say, "Well, here it is again," or "Is making these recordings really going to make a bit of difference"? And, I finally was able to get to yes in my prayer; but I'll tell you, I had to fight some small no's, of cynicism, of doubt, of self-doubt. And I guess I just want to say that because I know I'm talking for all of you. We all feel that--

Brie Stoner: Uh-huh.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: --and it feels like a black hole; it feels like a loss of faith, and it is, in a way, but it's okay.

Black holes were apparently part of the deal.

Paul Swanson: That reminds me that this past week, my daughter had said, "Why do you go to work"? She's trying to understand that, and I try to explain, you know, "Well, I'm going to help people and for my own growth, and hopefully I'll be supporting others in their growth, and she's just kind of like--

Richard Rohr: I just want daddy home.

Paul Swanson: --why are you doing that? It's like this constant battle for her just to conceptualize work. But even the way that you named it as, like, we all need those charges of having a bigger story to be a part of, because--

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: --when she actually asked me that question, it helps reinforce my own understanding about why I am going to the Center for Action and Contemplation every day, and it helps reawaken me, because she does ask that question so often. It's nice when someone can ask you, "How are you being leaven today? How are you going to participate in a way that is going to help unfold the way of God"?

Richard Rohr: Yes. Yes.

Brie Stoner: The leaven imagery is so helpful as is the salt, the salt, because it's that which brings forth something. That which brings forth the flavor. I also think about how Teilhard de Chardin said, "Christ is inoculated into matter," this idea that we are also being inoculated, that we have the opportunity to influence where things go in that way. And I think lately, interestingly enough—speaking of relationality and connecting to the great web of life—in my prayer recently, prayer practice, I've been infused with the sensation of praying with a community,--

Richard Rohr: Good.

Brie Stoner: --you know and addressing that devotional heart not to an individual god, person, or Jesus person, but almost like feeling my devotion move into a connection to a community. It's been really interesting, because I think there's something about that that helps me in those moments that you're describing, Richard, of the drudgery of--

Richard Rohr: Drudgery, that's a good word.

Brie Stoner: --how do I do another day of this thing called living that I am just sucking at?

Paul Swanson: Of email.

Brie Swanson: Of email!

Richard Rohr: Take another shower and put on clean clothes. Again?

Brie Stoner: Oh, my gosh. Yeah, but there is something that I think when we are able to connect with our place in the greater fabric of things that both allows us to relax knowing that it's not just

all on us, but also allows us to feel the movement and purpose of being a part of something bigger that you're describing, Paul.

Richard Rohr: Being a part. It's the only way out of our radical egocentricity knowing I am a part of my putting one foot in front of the other might be in union with a lady in Cambodia who just lost her baby yesterday. That gives it meaning.

Brie Stoner: So beautiful.

Paul Swanson: Uh-huh.

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: Well said, and as we've been talking about the mundane aspects of life, we're going to kind of dip into the Christian stories of miracles and how do those play into our current situations in today's world. So, this question comes from Jared from Maryland:

I believe that signs and wonders are absolutely not limited only to the Christian faith, or any faith for that matter, but my experiences with these miraculous moments personally—and I say this knowing full well that many have performed signs and wonders from place of ego-driven chauvinism, but, he's saying, I've always been from a part and intention of love for my fellow sisters and brothers. Where do the prophetic signs and wonders fit in with The Universal Christ?

Richard Rohr: I'm going to come at it in a little different way, but I hope a helpful way—it's just what comes to me this morning—what the miracles of Jesus—the signs and wonders, the prophetic signs and wonders in the Hebrew Scriptures, too—are saying is give God grace (let's just use the word grace instead of God) that grace can create room for exception. It is not an inexorable wheel of certitude, of causality, leave wiggle room around everything for something more, something better, something good. Now, when you first hear them as we all must, we like magic. You see this in our love of-- What are the novels everybody's reading?

Paul Swanson: The Game of Thrones?

Brie Stoner: Oh, you mean Harry Potter.

Richard Rohr: Harry Potter, yeah. Yeah. I haven't read one, I'm sorry. They must be wonderful, but they do reflect this love of magical thinking, which is okay, I think it's sort of red level.

Brie Stoner: Also, our superheroes, you know.

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Brie Stoner: There are so many superhero movies and Star Wars that Paul Thompson is representing with his t-shirt today. [laughter]

Richard Rohr: Look at him.

Brie Stoner: I think you're right. You're intuiting that there's a craving for--

Fr. Richard: Craving for magic, yeah.

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: --just an awe before magic because it's breaking the laws of causality, what I call the inexorable wheel of certitude and definitiveness. It gives space; it gives freedom for otherness, for surprise, for difference, and that's what I believe God is planting in history. Don't feel that your future is definite, certain, entrapped, which is hopelessness. So, this is saying it a little differently than just the "magic wand" that makes the hand return, or something like that. I know that would be the first level understanding of most miracle stories, but why does Jesus say, "You are going to do greater things"? I think he's talking about the kind of things you and I are lucky enough to be involved in, that we, we get letters and cards every day from people saying, "It changed my life." You know, "It saved my life." I think I got two like that yesterday. I didn't change your life. I didn't save her life, but somehow maybe words I said, or words I wrote, the two charges met, us placing the word out there and her readiness for it, and she is changed. That's just true. You don't have to have a supernatural explanation. That's also the way things work; also.

So, the miracle stories are making room for also, for something more. Without it, to live in a world of absolute certitude is very deadening. It's very hopeless, and to hope that there could be a difference, a change, makes you work for it, ironically, and that's your wanting of it. And why would God give a gift to someone who didn't want it? So, we first must be the wanting and that's symbolized by Mary's "Let it be." We always have to state our "Let it be," or I don't think it happens.

Brie Stoner: One of the things that is so interesting about a lot of the quantum physics stuff that's coming our way, is this idea that reality is impacted by the observer, for instance.

Richard Rohr: Yes!

Brie Stoner: I'm going to butcher this, if you're a scientist just forgive me this. I don't know what I am talking about. But also, the idea of emergence that in the natural world, things can emerge out that have not previously been in. In other words, that they're not an ingredient that was pre-existent, but that new things can emerge in this universe. These are things that show us that what is possible is so much greater than our minds have rationalized away, you know. And I think about how much the Enlightenment has made us obsessed with rationality, and

Richard Rohr: That's right.

Brie Stoner: --that which we can see, and that which we can touch, and that which makes sense to our minds based on the philosophical frames that we've been given and that we're comfortable with, you know. It's no wonder that we're not participating in or being witnesses of more signs and miracles. I think in some ways we're the ones limiting what's possible with our own views and paradigms.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. That reminds me of the metaphor you were talking about yesterday, Richard, of the closed system, and--

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: --not much can happen of new emergences or potential emergences in a closed system.

Richard Rohr: Yes, that does build nicely “in a closed system,” what I was calling the inexorable wheel of certitude, that’s a closed system.

Paul Swanson: Uh-huh.

Brie Stoner: I don’t know if I’ve said this on the podcast before, forgive me, but that story when Jesus is out walking out on the water, and Peter climbs out of the boat and he starts to sink, and a friend of mine gave me kind of a Jewish midrash perspective on that where he said, “Notice that when Peter starts to sink, Jesus says, ‘Oh, ye of little faith, why did you doubt?’ notice that Peter would not have been doubting Jesus because Jesus is just fine on the water, standing on the water, what Peter is doubting is himself.”

Richard Rohr: Oh, yes. Oh, yes!

Brie Stoner: His capacity to be as Jesus was, or to live out a reality that didn’t make sense, that was beyond the laws of nature. And so, in some ways I think, so many of the healing stories of Jesus he’s saying your faith is healing you. Your capacity to believe in something that is not yet or that is not of this world, and your capacity to believe that you’re not limited by the stories, the narratives, the wounds you’ve been given is what heals you.

Paul Swanson: Uh-huh.

Richard Rohr: There you go. There you go.

Paul Swanson: You think about all these folks who come from hardship and trauma where if they stay in that storyline then they stay closed in some ways. We all know stories of folks who have almost bought into an alternative way of being that has allowed them to heal from those past depressions and trauma to be an incredible contribution to a new way of being. It’s more of an open system versus the closed family storyline they were in.

Brie Stoner: So, to close out this exciting conversation on what little we know both in science and in the miraculous, Rebecca from Alabama asks us this question:

I struggle because if God does not manipulate humanity by causing tragedies in order to teach lessons, then why would God manipulate in a positive way? [She’s referring to miracles.] However, there have been times and situations in my life that certainly seemed far more coincidental or convenient.

Richard Rohr: It is.

Brie Stoner: In other words—I think this is very subtle and nuanced—what she is saying is, “If God isn’t manipulating things in a negative way, why would God manipulate things in a positive way in the miraculous”?

Richard Rohr: The first thing that comes to mind is manipulate the wrong word in both cases? If grace is inherent to reality from the beginning, the seed planted inside of everything, then everything

is programmed to move toward greater fecundity, greater expansion, greater goodness, and life, and truth, and love. So, when it doesn't move in that direction, but it moves toward tragedy, we're saying this is not grace at work now. This is, however, the life and death cycle at work, which we can accept, I hope. It's still hard to accept.

So, the life and death cycle is at work and planted in the middle of that, is the seed of grace in everything that gives us the way out, but it's not manipulation in either case. We used to call it the God of the gaps; that is, the only purpose of God to step in and cause tragedies and cause miracles. No, God is permanently engaged always moving everything toward greater life—but here's the rub—through the pushback of death. That's why the Christ had to become crucified in Jesus to say this is a part of the mystery of Trinity itself. There is self-emptying, there is, as Carl Jung isn't afraid to say, there's even a kind of darkness in God, or at least the acceptance of non-fecundity, non-success, non-fullness that was always hard for us to accept because we say God is totally good. Yes, God is totally good, but God's goodness includes the ability to work with badness.

Paul Swanson: Uh-huh.

Brie Stoner: Right.

Richard Rohr: That's the step we don't make, and it is a difficult one.

Brie Stoner: I like that you've said, as well, the humility and vulnerability of God that would choose to empty Godself and to participate in this realm, in materiality, which means submitting to the laws of nature. And, I guess in some ways one of the ways I'm thinking about it is if God is operating within the laws of nature that includes everything, then maybe the miraculous is God showing us what little we know about the laws of nature.

Richard Rohr: That's good!

Paul Swanson: Right.

Brie Stoner: You know, that it's not outside of our reality. It's just more perhaps more deeply within it, more fully within it than we know how to be.

Paul Swanson: I always love when I go to feed my chickens every day. We have a compost pile, you know, where we're throwing our refuse, the things that have died, the plants, and all of a sudden, sometimes things start to grow out of it, or it will become soil that we will use to bring things to life, and--

Brie Stoner: That's a miracle.

Paul Swanson: --it feels like a miracle to me in some ways these natural rhythms of death and resurrection.

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: It is life to the chickens. They're all excited about that when [unintelligible speech].

Paul Swanson: That's right.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. I think in closing, there are so many miracles that we're witnessing.

Richard Rohr: And that's not just poetry.

Brie Stoner: No, it's not.

Richard Rohr: It's not just poetry.

Brie Stoner: It literally is miraculous. We have a good friend of ours on staff who's about to become a dad, and his wife Brenna—they just went to the doctor yesterday—and she had been working and doing all these yoga positions, and the baby's perfectly positioned, and you just think the miracle of birth. You think of everything that needs to happen in a woman's body and everything that needs to happen with that baby and all the different steps and movements that need to take place--

Fr. Richard: Yes.

Brie Stoner: --for a child to be born. I mean, it's just miraculous.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: There's an hour show on that. It's something like one hundred and thirty-nine things—I'm just pulling that number out—that have to go right and in proper sequence for a baby to be born--

Brie Stoner: Right. Yeah.

Richard Rohr: --and we didn't have anything to do with it.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: We're just waiting for it.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. So, maybe--

Richard Rohr: If that's not a miracle, my goodness.

Brie Stoner: Right. The poet Rilke says something like if you can't find something to write about, don't blame your world, blame the poet. I'm butchering it, but it's something along the lines that we're the ones--

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Brie Stoner: --who need to foster the kind of presence that can see these miracles and be witnesses to them. So, in that vein, Richard, where have you experienced, or when have you experienced in the past week one of those moments of, "Oh, my God, this is miraculous!"?

Richard Rohr: I'm back to my nature shows again. [laughter]

Paul Swanson: You're going to have your own nature show pretty soon.

Brie Stoner: We're going to make it the "Rohr Channel with Nature Shows."

Richard Rohr: They had these herds of wildebeest in Kenya, it seemed like hundreds of thousands as far as the eye could see, you know. And then one little wildebeest stops and gives birth, and all those steps that I was saying in the human—one hundred and thirty-nine is the number I picked—apparently would be the same in this little baby wildebeest, that God would care enough, program the world well enough. that that little thing would be born. It's not very pretty, but mama is all excited about it, and she's licking it, it just is mind blowing; mind blowing. And Jesus seems to be saying the same thing when he talked about, you know, the robin that falls and God knows about it--

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: --that every creature is somehow contained within this Divine Bounty, this Divine Mystery, and the loss of it is never, apparently, a tragedy to God, because He's going to reshape it in new form; because they have to continue the nature story. After I was sitting there in awe, a lioness comes and grabs the baby wildebeest. It lived not even two minutes. Oh, I just want to turn off the television, and I had to accept both the beauty of the first minute and the inevitably of the second. And I wondered what a mother wildebeest thinks. What did she go through? I don't know. We'll never know until eternity somehow. What is this mystery of loss and renewal, loss and renewal? And, by the way, I'm finding that for many people, those two words—loss and renewal—are more helpful than death and resurrection, because death and resurrection have been so spiritualized. We just think they apply to Jesus, but loss and renewal applies to a wildebeest too.

[music playing]

Paul Swanson: Thank you, Richard.

Richard Rohr: You're welcome.

Paul Swanson: And that's it for today's episode of Another Name for Every Thing with Richard Rohr. This podcast is produced by the Center for Action and Contemplation thanks to the generosity of our donors.

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Brie Stoner: From the High Desert of New Mexico, we wish you peace and every good.