

**ANOTHER
NAME
FOR EVERY
THING**

with

RICHARD ROHR

Season 3, Episode 1
Universal Christ Values (Part 1)

Brie Stoner: [music playing] Welcome to season three of Another Name for Every Thing with Richard Rohr. We thought we would do something a little bit different for this season. Instead of kicking off with our usual hilarious introduction, we're actually just going to have a brief conversation about our process as we prepped for each of these episodes.

Paul and I both found ourselves wanting to make the Universal Christ more practical and more relatable. And as we considered what would help us in that process, how can we hone in on the and between action and contemplation, we realized we wanted to have a conversation about values.

Paul Swanson: Yeah, and one thing that we thought would be helpful for all of you is coming into our process a little bit because this is very personal for us. As we know that personal gateway often connects at the most universal level. And so, in our preparation for these conversations with Richard, they are so delightful, sometimes soulful, sometimes there's tears, usually a ton of laughter, because we're talking about things that matter most to us.

Brie Stoner: Right. As we were preparing for this conversation on values, we realized that both of us, without even knowing it, were going through a journey this summer of taking stock of where we were at in our lives and wanting to really concretely land on what are three principles or four principles, or vows, or values that I can really orient toward to make this more concrete in my life. And I'm talking about something that would be so concrete that it can inform how I make my choices as a mom, but how I make my choices even in work, in life, how I spend my time.

And it was amazing to me, Paul, because we didn't even talk about this. We were both going through this, this summer and when we sat down to get ready for this season, we realized both of us had been trying to articulate, "Okay, what are the principles I want to live by?"

Paul Swanson: Yeah, and I think I was sharing with you a practice that my wife, Laura, and I did before we were married, where we each took a separate piece of paper and I named what do I want to see every day of my life, every week of my life, every month, every season, every quarter, every year as a way to see how am I attuning myself? Then asking her to do the same thing, and then we can see where it overlapped. And we would try to pull our values from that as a sense of where are we finding life in the day to day and the seasons of our life together. And for you it looks a little bit different because you were, well, I'll let you talk. What am I doing?

Brie Stoner: Yeah, thanks Paul. Hey, why don't you mansplain it for me? But, no, seriously, I was out on vacation with my kids, slowing down in nature, and you'll hear me talk about this on this episode, but I had one of those experiences where I realized that to live from this spiritual frequency, to live from this place that can actually recognize the Universal Christ in all things, it takes a certain level of intentionality. And being intentional means we have to stop, ask ourselves these questions, focus in on the small choices, incremental ways that we can live into this further. And I think that's what you're going to hear in this episode is us having a conversation with Richard about how he would describe the core values of the Universal Christ and then how we can together as a community seek to live into that more.

Paul Swanson: Yeah, and Richard makes connections with values that we didn't actually think of coming

into it. And the way that he was able to connect that to the greater tradition, the greater perennial tradition in our own Christian lineage, was pretty enlightening for us as we orientated ourselves around values as vows, ultimately.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. Spoiler alert, I think we started in order during this episode. I think that happened. [laughter] We're so confused.

Paul Swanson: And with that, here's our conversation with Richard on values.

Brie Stoner: Richard, I recently went through a bit of a reset. I was out with my kids on a farm that we like to vacation at, and I was in nature. And as so often happens in nature, there was this slowing down to another frequency so much more than just being on vacation. It felt like there was a slowness, and silence, and rhythm that allowed me to touch on a spiritual frequency. And so, when I came back from that time, I realized I need to live my life from that frequency more—

Richard Rohr: Yes. Good.

Brie Stoner: --and that I need to take steps to do that. And so, I started working on creating some values, some three simple values that I could live from to help me make choices, and decisions, and guide me as a parent, but also in my work-life rhythm to live from that place more.

And so, the first question, as we're talking about values in this episode is, as we've journeyed through the themes of The Universal Christ, I wonder if you could share with us what you think three or more, any values that might be based on these teachings of The Universal Christ that can help us actually embody it, to learn how to recognize Christ in all things, in our everyday ordinary lives?

Richard Rohr: Well, it's funny you'd come up with three, because it just so happens a few weeks ago, I came up with three too. I mean it, this was not set up as you know.

Richard Rohr: And I don't know that they'll produce, but I think it's almost so simple it's hard to teach. They're not highfalutin, heroic values.

And the first one is that we have to somehow live a life that's connected to the heart, or we get into head ideology, righteousness, opinionated-ness, and my word for that is "devotion." And I have to say I've learned that from old time Catholics and old-time evangelicals, the healthy ones. They're invariably heart-based people who look out at reality with soft eyes, you can almost see it in their eyes before they start talking, or the natural smile on their lips. So, I'm going to encourage the uncovering of what we mean by the word devotion, because I don't want our teaching on The Universal Christ, or the CAC in general, to be another heady righteousness, a heady explanation.

The second I came up with is simplicity. Now this is a very Franciscan value, and it overlaps with humility, and overlaps with simple living that if there isn't some movement toward downward mobility, now there's many levels on which to understand that, but if your spirituality is in any sense making you climb, achieve, prove, perform, I think you have good reason to mistrust it, because that's the way your ego is operating, and you're going to use even the Sermon on the Mount, even the eight beatitudes, even nondual thinking and our

contemplative thinking, as a way to be superior, as a way to be a better, so some form of radical simplicity. It should get simpler and simpler.

The third one, I haven't found the right word for it yet, so I'm going to give you the word I have as of now, I'm calling it a sense of "public" virtue. Now, let me explain. Please, if anybody hears this and can come up with the right word, send it in. I think the virtue I was trained in, I'm sorry to say, in the seminarian, even novitiate was "private" virtue. How could I interiorly be virtuous? So, I, Richard, was good; so, I, Richard, was worthy of God and in those days could go to heaven. I don't think that comes close to the mystery of the body of Christ. The mystery of the body of Christ has the face turned outward: How can I be good for the sake of my neighborhood? How can I be good for the sake of my city, my church, my community? How does my goodness affect goodness in my children?

It really is a different starting point. It's not seeking your own ego enhancement, but the spiritual growth of others. Wasn't it Scott Peck, I think, who had that as his definition of love to really seek the spiritual good of others. I see that frankly in both of you as parents, and I see that in any good parent. I bet it's hard not to lose as the kids get a little older, a little more troublesome, but at least when they're little, an innocent and cute, you just want them to spiritually understand and to spiritually grow, so don't lose that. It's a face outward. You're not trying to be privately perfect, "I want to be good for the sake of Billy and Ebba," or whoever it is. And that's very real in young parents. It's, unfortunately, often lost as the kids get older. I don't know why.

Brie Stoner: Maybe because identities start to get wrapped up—I can see this in a lot of parenting, right—in the ways in which our identity becomes attached to how children are performing—

Richard Rohr: Performing, yeah.

Brie Stoner: --which then becomes another form of that private virtue that you're talking about.

Richard Rohr: Yeah, that's right. Very good.

Paul Swanson: I really like, bringing my kids with me wherever I go because of that reason so they can see that—

Richard Rohr: How you interact?

Paul Swanson: --am I the same person at home as I am in public? Then when they call me out, I mean not in a kid way where they ask a question like, "Why did you do that," or "You sound different when you talk to that person."

Richard Rohr: Isn't that interesting how they're watching you?

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: We used to attack, I'm sorry to say, our "eight" mother for that very thing: "Yeah, you're terrible with us, but as soon as the relatives come, you're all polite." [Note:

Fr. Richard is referring to his mother's Enneagram type. There are nine Enneagram types.]

Brie Stoner: An angel. Well, Richard, if it's okay—

Richard Rohr: Oh, God, today's her birthday. Forgive me, mother. It is. [laughter]

Brie Stoner: She's haunting you now. If it's all right with you, I'd love to spend a little time with each of those values that you described.

Richard Rohr: Oh, okay.

Brie Stoner: And starting with devotion, as a good child Baptist, growing up as a Baptist and as a good evangelical, I really appreciate that you're making a distinction about the ways in which that devotion moves into something bigger, right? It's not just devotion to my personal view of things. It's not my devotion to our particular tribe's camp view of God or reality. So, we're not saying we have devotion to the contemplative view of reality. Right? What you're describing sounds like a posture of the heart, like you said, "soft eyes." Could you describe this more? So, it's almost like not devotion to a specific point, but almost to the all, can you help us understand that?

Richard Rohr: I wonder, as you say that, if I'm not talking about, maybe, what Jesus was talking about when he talked about "Blessed are the pure of heart." It's having achieved a purity of intention, and desire, and motivation that isn't about me—how I look and whether people are going to like me, or pay me—and I think we have to purify our intention several times a day, really: "Why am I doing what I'm doing?" And if you don't localize that in the compassionate space that we call the heart, it all becomes making an impression that will ultimately benefit me; whereas, a heart-centered person, first of all, I'm not saying it's wrong, first of all, is concerned about how will this benefit me? [NOTE: SHOULD THIS BE "isn't concerned about"?] You've all met it in loving people who seem to really care about, "Is this helpful, Richard, or is this going to make any difference?" They really appear to be concerned about you. It's quite beautiful. You feel softened, you feel held, you feel tenderized around people like that. And on the public level, whatever the CAC has been communicating and today seems to be receiving such a broad response.

If it's not heartfelt and creating heartfelt people, I predict it will not last, and it doesn't deserve to last. It'll be another head trip that we can argue about. But heartfelt people, you can't dismiss them. I think it was the image of the early Quakers, still today, the Amish, the early Franciscans. I don't know that we kept it. It was a heartfelt-ness that made them dear to people even if they didn't agree with him on other points, like not going to war. They still couldn't dismiss him.

Paul Swanson: I'm thinking, Richard, of someone who could be hearing you talk about devotion and saying, "Well, I feel cold in my relationship to God or to Jesus." What would you say to that person as a way to help cultivate that? How do you help them see that this is something that is not an innate gift, but something that someone can also grow into and fan that small little spark so that can grow into a flame?

Richard Rohr: Well, we all know you can't fake it. It won't be an out-flowing energy, but sometimes you do have to "fake it till you make it," as they say. You have to practice compassion or practice being kind, but your heart, as Wesley said, has to have been "strangely warmed." A beautiful phrase.

This is one of the hardest things in the teaching of spirituality because you cannot manufacture the warming of the heart. You can't say, "You should have a warm heart." It is the work of grace. So, I know that's a non-answer, but it really is an answer. And if it helps you to be less willful, less pushy, less judgmental toward yourself, the face you turn toward yourself is the face you will turn toward the world, and I deeply believe that. Once you learn to stop hacking away at your own mistakes, you'll stop hacking away at everybody else's.

Brie Stoner: I wonder, just that phrase you used of where does your heart warm or what warms your heart, I wonder if that could be a practice of devotion, of cultivating devotion to inwardly pay attention to what is warming your heart.

Richard Rohr: Yes, pay attention to it.

Brie Stoner: What is it that actively in your life warms your heart to turn toward those places because that seems to be the work of Christ or the Spirit moving in your life, right? I mean, I remember there are periods of my life where I felt really conflicted about the idea of praying to Jesus. So, if I was listening to this now, the idea of having devotion to Jesus or God would've been really hard because I was still working through unlearning some of the unhelpful things I had learned. But during those times, nature became this portal for me, for that soft warming, the heart softening, and something deeper being the embers of faith were still very much alive.

Richard Rohr: As a Catholic, I can't help but wonder or ask, "Why do these often saccharin images of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Holy Heart of Mary"-- If you've been to a Catholic country, they're everywhere, and they're holding their heart out in front of their body. No image emerges that broadly unless it's doing its work. And I see the sweet people in front of them and it's we heady people who refuse to kneel there, or weep there, or pray there, because we don't understand the changing of the heart. We want to figure it out all up here.

Brie Stoner: It's bodily, it sounds so bodily to put your heart-- It also makes me think of a certain stance of radical vulnerability.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Of course, it is, because the heart is always naked even with the crown of thorns around it. I know its terrible art, but as you know, Teilhard even made a great deal of this. This sophisticated theologian has profound commentaries on the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Isn't that amazing? And you did it with your Sunday school images of Jesus with blue eyes and—

Brie Stoner: Blowing hair in the wind.

Paul Swanson: He looks like a Swede.

Brie Stoner: It's like a picture of Paul in his youth. You know what though, I love the Sacred Heart

image, and I wonder, just as we're talking about devotion as a value, with this framework of the Universal Christ, is that value not devotion to the Sacred Heart in all things, a turning toward that?

Richard Rohr: Yeah, of course, which is the compassionate soul at the heart of everything.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. So, whatever your entry point to that connection, that's it.

Richard Rohr: Yes. If we really had the faith to believe this is the nature of God, can you imagine how much healing would take place? This is the nature of God, not the judgmental, lightning-bolt throwing God that most of us de facto live with.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. I resonate so much what you were saying about nature being something that can hold you and guide you in that state of devotion. And I also think, too, of folks who are devotional themselves who have that devotional heart where being around them, I think it does shape your own journey in known and unknown ways. And there's something about a community devotion that also helps springboard you I think on a path where it lessons, if it's just an individualistic route. And this is why I think evangelicals have done it so well, speaking from my own heritage, that community was so hear-centered that I was able to grow into that and not get lost in why I disagree with this or get in a head trap.

Brie Stoner: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Again, it allowed us at an experiential level to trust our heart. And that seems to be—

Richard Rohr: I'm so glad you can say that.

Brie Stoner: --the gift [crosstalk @ 00:22:44].

Richard Rohr: I think it's true. I see it in these groups of ministers who often come here. There is a heartfelt love of Jesus in many Protestants that we Catholics had before Vatican II. And after, we became correct, liturgically correct, scripturally correct and less heartfelt.

Paul Swanson: So, we've walked around devotion. I'm curious, with simplicity, Richard, you were formed in a community that really valued simplicity—

Richard Rohr: Yeah, we did.

Paul Swanson: --interiorly and exteriorly. When you look at those of us who are living outside of that kind of intentional community, religious community, where do you see simplicity alive and well in the world that you can point to and people can begin to have models of how they could follow in this lifestyle—simplicity that Jesus emulated, Francis emulated, and others?

Richard Rohr: I think on this, when you have to say even more, does it demand a deliberate, conscious choice for downward mobility, that everything doesn't have to be upped, upped, for me to be happy. I just see our culture straining for excess, almost every advertisement, think of it, as people are dancing because of their Tide box cleans their clothes [laughter], and it's just always, "Isn't this wonderful?" It's all so stupid. No one believes it. No one believes it, but it's elegant people, beautiful people.

Brie Stoner: You're not enough unless you consume this, or—

Richard Rohr: It's not a real world, and yet we allowed that world to be normalized and each set of commercials has to be more clever than the last ones. What is going to be the end point? They tell me the end point is violence or porn, that when the

Richard Rohr: nerve ends need more stimulation, more stimulation, you move toward the violent or the pornographic.

Paul Swanson: Wow.

Brie Stoner: Wow, that's profound.

Richard Rohr: The ordinary just the gentle touch on the hand, or whatever, isn't stimulating anymore. Isn't that sad?

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: I think we've all faced it. I certainly have. I mean I've been taken all over the world to four-star restaurants and four-star hotels, and I'm not saying they're wrong, but you just better watch it. So, after a while you feel, "Well, I'm not showing him proper respect if I don't take him to a four-star restaurant." He has to get that practical. So, I tell friends, "It doesn't have to be fancy." We will all go in that direction. I'm not saying there isn't a place for vacation, for excess, for the wedding anniversary, but when every weekend is the wedding anniversary, as it were, it doesn't mean anything anymore.

So, the more we can be home-based, close to our own little world, our own little plot of earth, our own little lower middle-class world—I know these are Franciscan values and I'm not saying I've lived them. I've tried to live them, but I also got pulled into the world of nice things just because of this. Everybody felt, "Well, he's the speaker. He's got to be taken to--" and I end up staying in places that I say Francis would turn over in his grave, but I don't want to hurt my hosts. How do we get the courage that Mother Teresa had to just tell people, "No, I won't stay there." Now, she'd tell them before she went, "I want to stay in a Motel 6, or something like that."

Brie Stoner: So, I have a question then. As we look at radical simplicity and you just mentioned Franciscanism, what would you say is the right relationship to beauty then in simplicity? And here's what I mean: I think our culture has taken beauty and commodified it into consumption, right?

Richard Rohr: Yes. Well put.

Brie Stoner: So that we think we have to serve the slave of more-ness. But also, I mean to play into the absolute stereotype of being a "four," my own deep appreciation of beauty. And I just was in Spain for the first time in ten years, it's like even just the way they set a humble table is beautiful. The orientation toward a rhythm of life that's slow, is beautiful. And to me, there's a certain simplicity in that, that's not about more-ness, it's just about beauty.

Richard Rohr: Yes. Yes.

Brie Stoner: So, can you help me just navigate that in a way that doesn't-- How do we not turn the desire to orient toward and cultivate beauty in this life? How do we not become idolatrous in that desire to where we lose simplicity?

Richard Rohr: Or associate beauty with expenses.

Brie Stoner: Yes. Well, yeah. That feels-- Yeah.

Richard Rohr: That's what you meant by consumerism, I know. "I have to get her a beautiful gift" really means an expensive gift where the first observation is how much did it cost. We have some transference, some conversion to do in that direction, because we keep upping the ante, and after a while it isn't beautiful, it's garish. It's really overdone. I see this, and some necklaces that people, how much more can you dangle around your neck? [laughter] Let's just stop it. Now, forgive me, I'm being a "one," but do you really think that makes you more beautiful or that makes you more valued?

Dun Scotus considered beauty the harmony of the true and the good. And when it isn't true anymore, like fifteen circles of jewelry around your neck, there's something untrue about that. Do you understand? It's like, this is not the way the world can live if we all had to have gold and silver, fifteen rings of it around our neck, the world can't live that way. It's unsustainable. It's untrue. Or, that you're worth that much. You'd be worth so much more if you didn't need that. And we could just look at the beauty of your own form and see the inherent goodness.

I hate to be picky, and I don't want to undo the business of jewelry makers [laughter], but the inherent goodness is different than decorative goodness, you see. And when you decorate yourself too much, you don't pay attention to the inherent goodness, nor do you admire it, nor do you love it.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. You can't even see it. You can't see it.

Richard Rohr: You can't even see it, that's right. Yeah.

Brie Stoner: I'm reflecting—you're thinking in jewelry terms—but as I visited Our Lady of Montserrat, the Black Madonna in Montserrat, and it took two hours to get to her. I mean, the place had been turned into a zoo, the monastery. There's no trace of it. It just feels like it's like a Disneyland. And then you finally get up to her, and this is the Madonna, and Ignatius of Loyola lay down his arms in front of this Madonna, and this little statue of this Black Madonna. And then you finally get up to her, and you have one minute there before you're ushered out, because the lines are so long, and there was so much gilding everywhere, everywhere, all around that you could hardly pay attention to the profound shape and what she represented as this beautiful Black Madonna holding the world in one hand and Christ in the other.

Brie Stoner: And I kept saying, I was like, "I wish I could just take her out of that and just put her in a white, simple"—you know—so that you could actually see it. But I think what you're saying is profound Richard, that the movement towards simplicity doesn't sacrifice beauty, but rather it puts beauty in service to the good and the true.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. Very good. Zen Buddhism and early Franciscanism have that same instinct, that less is more, less is beautiful because it doesn't make you emphasize the externals or the decorative.

Paul Swanson: There's a true grace and beauty to the simple life where you see someone who is embodying that and that it's almost that, that radical vulnerability fits in with that. And it just sprung to mind a memory, Richard, when I was an intern, you took me out for a meal, and I tried to pay and you said, "No, no, I'll take care of it. I've a vow of poverty, you have to help me keep it."

Richard Rohr: Did I? I'm glad.

Paul Swanson: Even that relational simplicity, too, where it's trying to expand the limits of your generosity too. It wasn't a showy act. I think of me, I was trying to take you out. I was trying to be showy in that way, "Well, let me take care of this humble friar."

Richard Rohr: No, you weren't. Humble friar, I wish.

Paul Swanson: I think there's something to that, that simplicity that is grounded in beauty, and vice versa, that they play off each other so well when they truly sit between-- How did you say it? --the good and the true.

Brie Stoner: The good and the true.

Richard Rohr: The good and the true, the harmonizing of the good and the true is beauty. Yeah. You see a piece of architecture that you know is beautiful, and you see one that is just overstated, trying too hard, big pillars, and marquis, and so forth, statues in front as are many churches, I must say. I go to Europe to see magnificent 13th century cathedrals, and then I see garish, ugly, ugly Catholic churches that are just, "You're trying too hard. You're not in love with goodness or truth anymore because truth wouldn't allow you to cover statues of the poor St Francis with gold. Don't you see the inconsistency of that?" That they don't, tells me they don't understand St Francis or any other saint for that matter.

Paul Swanson: But they lost that intentional, somewhere along the line, they made one concession and just kept building.

Richard Rohr: I'd like to melt down some of those churches and give the money to the poor.

Brie Stoner: Richard's fantasy is just melting the gold down.

Richard Rohr: Melting down churches.

Brie Stoner: This value though of radical simplicity, and you talked about downward, just the focus on poverty, and then also as we talk about beauty, there's something so important for our time right now with the ecological crisis that we're in to center this value of radical simplicity. And it's so difficult to find a way to do that as families out in the world, right? I wonder if you have a word of advice for ways where we cannot be dogmatic but actually have integrity to this value of simplicity?

Richard Rohr: I bet you two could answer this better than I, because when they see you delighting in sitting

on the ground and making daisy chains, or something like that, instead of needing to go to Disneyland one more time, they're going to learn. I don't know any other way to teach it except to model that you take delight in simple things, you take delight in ordinary things. How you started today, you went into nature. You know, behind my little hermitage over here, there's a rather big backyard that most people don't even know is there, and so it's normally quiet. Now since I have Opi, I take him for a walk four or five times a day. And I've just discovered the magnificence of those trees. There are four huge cottonwoods, and I admire them every day. And I experience just what you said, a spiritual frequency. I walk back to my house slower than I came out just because of gazing at those trees. I don't know how long they'd been there.

I've always loved trees. You said it well, it is a different frequency. Now, when they see you as their parents admiring a tree, getting gaga over the beauty of a tree and not needing an America's Got Talent stage with shooting fireworks. How are we going to turn this around? How do you make contemplatives? I mean the stage sets are just getting more elaborate, and I'm in awe of them too. How did they do that and how do they change it in ten minutes? So, I'm not saying I don't admire it, but it's not true. This is not true reality. It sometimes out does the singer, it sometimes out does the dancer, and this is not true anymore.

I thought it was about your talent or even in my generation, you'd have the primary singer and then four lightly-clad girls behind dancing, making moves, and you have to think all the eyes were on these—at least the male eyes—were on these four girls because singing their singing isn't really that good. [laughter] I don't know. I don't want to be harsh but pare it down; pare it down. A really good singer can stand alone on a stage with a microphone and a voice and enchant you.

Paul Swanson: Wow. I feel like you've been reading my journal, Richard.

Richard Rohr: Really?

Paul Swanson: Brie and I were just talking about this not long ago about, I think I said, "I want my spirituality to be folk-singer spirituality," where things are just cut back to the true essence where it's vulnerability, but it's the beauty of the poetics of the words that are the natural outflow from a place of integrity. So, you don't need any—like, I love hip hop as well—but you don't need the layers of all those beats and hooks, you just have that voice speaking truth. And that's where I hope to go on my own sense of a journey of downward mobility. You have to be intentional because there's like, "Oh, it would be nice to add that background, vocalist," or whatever it may be because it's going to add a little pizzazz to your song and dance.

Richard Rohr: Yes, it does.

Brie Stoner: It does. But Paul and I were also talking about how a commitment to simplicity to this kind of living from that frequency also requires us to make hard choices about what demands our time, and there is something about this culture, again, having just experienced the contrast, I am so present to it. There's something about our American culture that thrives on stress, and work is stressful, and it invades the thought, and it's almost like we're addicted to stress and addicted to being at this level of intensity that I do think keeps us from that frequency as

well.

That's something I'm working on, is like what is the right relationship to creative projects so that I remain in that place of stillness and don't fall out of myself when I take on more work or consider what's the right rhythm of my life. It's like we're absent of that core cultural rhythm of life that values slowness, and meals at the table, and the kind of presence that could allow for walks to admire trees, you know.

Richard Rohr: If contemplation isn't leading us to some form of under stimulation and a sense of enoughness-- Just this weekend, I went to the backyard with Opi ten times probably. I just said, "What more do I need than this backyard?" It's just so beautiful. It's a kind of contentment with less and less. And there's no show I could go to, there's no rock concert I could go to. Well, that would be miserable for me. Bono, don't listen to this.

Brie Stoner: I knew you were going to say that.

Paul Swanson: I have a friend in town who lives a very radically, simple life. He's in his sixties, he dumpster dives for food. His house is always open in case someone needs a place to stay, and I asked him one time, I said, "Chuck, how did you become this way?" And he said that he read an interview with Dorothy Day where that same question was asked of her—

Richard Rohr: Oh, wow. Really?

Paul Swanson: --and she said, "One day at a time." So, he said, "I try to make these 1 percent changes in my life in the right direction."

Richard Rohr: One percent?

Paul Swanson: "Changes in my life."

Richard Rohr: Changes.

Paul Swanson: So, it's just like altering things just one percent. And so, that's been a challenge that my wife, Laura, and I have taken on where it's like every month we try to say, "What's the change we can make by 1 percent?"

Richard Rohr: What's the 1 percent?

Paul Swanson: So, look, we're going the right way and we keep course correcting, and then hopefully we end up in a place that has that radical simplicity interiorly and exteriorly, but I have found that it is so hard to not when culture is—

Brie Stoner: So loud.

Paul Swanson: --so loud, "Keep yourself busy. Be stressed." These are actually signs of what we think of achievement—

Brie Stoner: Success.

Paul Swanson: --or success, and we have to be countercultural on this, I would say.

Richard Rohr: Do you limit the amount of stimulation TV your kids can watch?

Paul Swanson: Yes.

Richard Rohr: Good.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. And that's been a part of it even for ourselves, how can we lessen that as well—

Richard Rohr: Yes, you have to do that too.

Paul Swanson: --so that we don't get caught up in that same messaging.

Brie Stoner: Yeah, that's a practical, helpful way I feel for families to engage with these values is what you just said. Like, "All right, how do we take monthly stock of where we are and try to make these little, incremental changes that can allow us to practice it?" It's so helpful.

Richard Rohr: And notice that we're saying "limit, less." We're not dualistically saying, "Throw out the TV, or "The TV is evil." no. It's okay. There's a place for it. That's much harder virtue to put limits or boundaries to things. Yeah.

Brie Stoner: Well, speaking of virtue, Richard, shall we transition to this idea of this value that you were describing as public virtue or this commitment to orienting ourselves in a radical generosity of giftedness to the "all"?

Richard Rohr: A few months ago, in fact, I think I sent it to you, Paul, representing the Living School. I said, "We've tried in the first five years of the Living School to teach our students service." And many of them are doing amazing service. But there was a way in which it didn't land true. It felt like something you have to do or must do to show that you're a Living School student. And, frankly, there were a good number who didn't seem to rise to the occasion—didn't seem to—who knows? Who knows?

But I suggested to you, if you remember, that we change the word from "service" to "solidarity with." And I was so happy when, without exception, every one of you in the school and out that I shared it with came back with a strong "yes" for that. "Solidarity with" is what I mean by public virtue, that your eyes are turned outward toward the world, toward reality, obedience to reality and to standing in union with it instead of just serving it where the subject/object split is preserved: I enter into their subjectivity and share their subjectivity. Then, if an act of service emerges, hallelujah, because it now comes out of compassion and love for my friends and not just me heroically serving someone else.

So, when I talk about public virtue, I mean that needs to be our bias, I think, always: "How can I be in solidarity?" And, that's got to be different for everybody. What group? Is it the immigrants? Is it the battered women? Is it those imprisoned? Is it the homeless? But somewhere you've got to make a move to know at least one of such people by name, by face, by experience, and doing that little bit of a walk with them leads you to make some changes in your life. It's actually much harder than acts of service.

I used to do it much more regularly when I was a jail chaplain. Now Elias helps me because he's working with the homeless and the immigrants. It keeps me in touch with both of those

groups. But I have to say, in these years of writing books, I don't think I did that enough. There were always, "Well, you're serving by writing." And maybe I was. I hope I was. But it becomes clinical, your writing does unless you have solidarity with some concrete homeless people, some concrete immigrants. It's so wonderful because of my public role, even though I live in this little hermitage behind the parish, I don't know how many people came to my door this weekend and on the grounds there was a little fundraiser to pay for the bonds for immigrants who are in prison or in jail, so it comes to me and says, "Be in solidarity with me." So, I have to take advantage of those opportunities.

Brie Stoner: This feels like it ties in so well with how you started the value of devotion of a heart, that imagery of a heart-centered approach to life that is wounded and again, to bring the image of the Sacred Heart, that is wounded by, and okay

Brie Stoner: being wounded by, the suffering in our midst and the suffering of the body of Christ in the world, which is—

Richard Rohr: Excellent.

Brie Stoner: It's a totally different way of living. We typically like to be protected from that or move away, or look away, not openly soft to hurting with.

Richard Rohr: And that you really need to assess. I mean, I have to be honest. I've met some very smelly homeless people and some very disagreeable people on the streets that everything in me wants to turn away or to get away. It's just so unpleasant, and God must understand that, but then I at least have to have the honesty to admit like little Thérèse of Lisieux did, "I don't know how to love at this moment." And that's my inability to be Christ, or to look out with the eyes of Christ. I don't need to hate myself for it, but I do need to recognize I'm not there yet. Okay. I'm not there yet. "Lord lead me, teach me, soften me." It leads you to prayer, really.

Brie Stoner: It's so interesting, too, I'm just realizing it's almost like you're good at this, Richard, that you have experience weaving profound insights into actionable ways of practicing them. Because the second point of radical simplicity, if that wasn't there, there's something about our consumeristic culture that keeps us distracted, and keeps us busy, and keeps us obsessed with accumulating that we can't-- In that approach to life, there is no room to look outward, to be wounded, to listen to the cries of the earth, or the cries of our neighbors. There's no orientation toward the spaciousness of encounter. So, I really appreciate the way that they weave together. Without radical simplicity, can we even expect to have the encounters that can wound our heart?

Richard Rohr: Right on. You said it well. When I presented these to the faculty, just to the call last week, I said, "It's just striking me right now," and I'm being honest in saying this, "These are the same as the three vows of religious life." And Cynthia just shouted, she says, "You got it." Devotion would be chastity. What are the others?

Brie Stoner: Simplicity.

Richard Rohr: Simplicity would be poverty, and obedience to reality would be public virtue.

Brie Stoner: Oh, it's so good.

Richard Rohr: It really works. And so she wants--in fact at Conspire next year—she wants us to really develop, and the whole team did, so we've got to develop these three virtues and recognize these aren't new. Why did every religious order come back to poverty, chastity, and obedience? They were probably poorly named. Our obedience was to our superior. Our poverty was for the sake of our private virtue, you know. And our chastity meant celibacy. Now all three of those would be significantly different. I mean, a lay person has the virtue of chastity. You don't look at every beautiful woman that walks by because you're committed to one, and you've given your heart. That's just as much chastity. Yeah.

Paul Swanson: It flings open the doors for the laity to be in communion, in solidarity, with those in religious life. And I can just feel the way you were translating them into the parlance of today, how it feels like we can all hold hands in these [crosstalk 00:52:25] versus secluded behind a wall, or behind a closed community door. There's a oneness to it that I don't think I had connected to before.

Brie Stoner: And it reminds me of a conversation you and I just had, Paul, about desiring to-- It's like looking for an orientation of commitment. We want to live these values. I like that you're calling them, they're also "vows" because in a way that's what creates a container within which we can focus the energy of our lives and our love, and put it in the use and in service of this vision of the Universal Christ and animating that reality into our world. But it's like we need that guide of what are the things I live by. So, I love the idea of them as vows. It's like a new order, it's a new Universal Christ—

Paul Swanson: Oh, good. This might be the main point of this whole session. Yeah. The vowed life was a focused life. It didn't matter that you didn't always live them perfectly, but they became the North Star that said, "This is the container that's going to hold my life together." Good. If we can do nothing more than transfer that at the CAC, we've created a lay form of spirituality that's believable.

Brie Stoner: It's like the "Rule of Life of the Universal Christ."

Richard Rohr: Yeah. Very good. Very good. Yeah.

Paul Swanson: I love that phrase you just said, too, "believable." We all want to live a believable life. Something that's in deep relationship to reality not something that's so idealistic, or the spiritual bypass, but really believable and grounded in not only ourselves but also in relationship to others and God.

Brie Stoner: Good stuff. So, in closing, Richard, I wonder if we can ask you, where have you experienced one of these values in your week, this past week?

Richard Rohr: This past week?

Brie Stoner: Where has your heart sparked with devotion or you felt a turn, a desire to move into even greater simplicity, or felt that animated desire for solidarity and public virtue?

Richard Rohr: Well, you know, I keep coming back to those three trees in my backyard that I've spent so

much time with by taking Opi out to poop and to pee. [laughter] It's so mundane, but I've named one, the "elegant tree," one, the "mysterious tree," and the other, the "stately tree." And they all have spoken of this beauty

Richard Rohr: to me, but three different kinds of beauty. The one is a little farther over behind a fence. I don't know what it means beyond that, but it was minutes of observation, just standing there realizing these are hidden in the back of the parish lot. Most people at Holy Family Parish have probably never seen these trees, and they're just works of art even filled with a lot of dead limbs, but yeah, beauty, beauty. And I've said that, "Here you've been standing here." I've lived in this little house now twenty years. They've been standing there the whole twenty years, and I don't think I ever learned to appreciate them like I did these last couple of weeks, and it was because I had to take Opi out to poop. And he sometimes takes a while. I still say "she," because I think of Venus. It takes him a while to decide to do it. I don't know. Do you parents go through this?

Brie Stoner: Oh, yeah. [laughter]

Paul Swanson: Yes. It's got to be in the right place at the right time.

Brie Stoner: Right time. Sometimes the right place and time don't show up, so it's just the wrong place and the wrong time.

Paul Swanson: Right.

Brie Stoner: Right. Well, thank you, Richard. I can feel how these values are going to be such a helpful frame for us to begin living into these teachings.

Richard Rohr: I didn't expect it to go this direction, but I'm glad it did. If we can somehow renew the historic three vows, we're going to give a gift to the world and dissociate it from habits and cloisters. Did you ever go to a monastery in Spain with the grill where you don't even see the Carmelite sister?

Brie Stoner: Oh yeah. Yeah.

Richard Rohr: It's like, "What does this have to do with the following of Jesus?" I know they did it for the highest of motives, so I'm not putting them down, but I don't think it made them holier. Our old idea of cloister, that this kept the heart pure, that "I'll never see a man." Well, it may be better if you do see a man and say, "I don't desire him more than God." Okay, now I'm preaching.

Paul Swanson: Thank you, Richard.

Richard Rohr: Thank you.

Paul Swanson: Speaking of bathrooms—