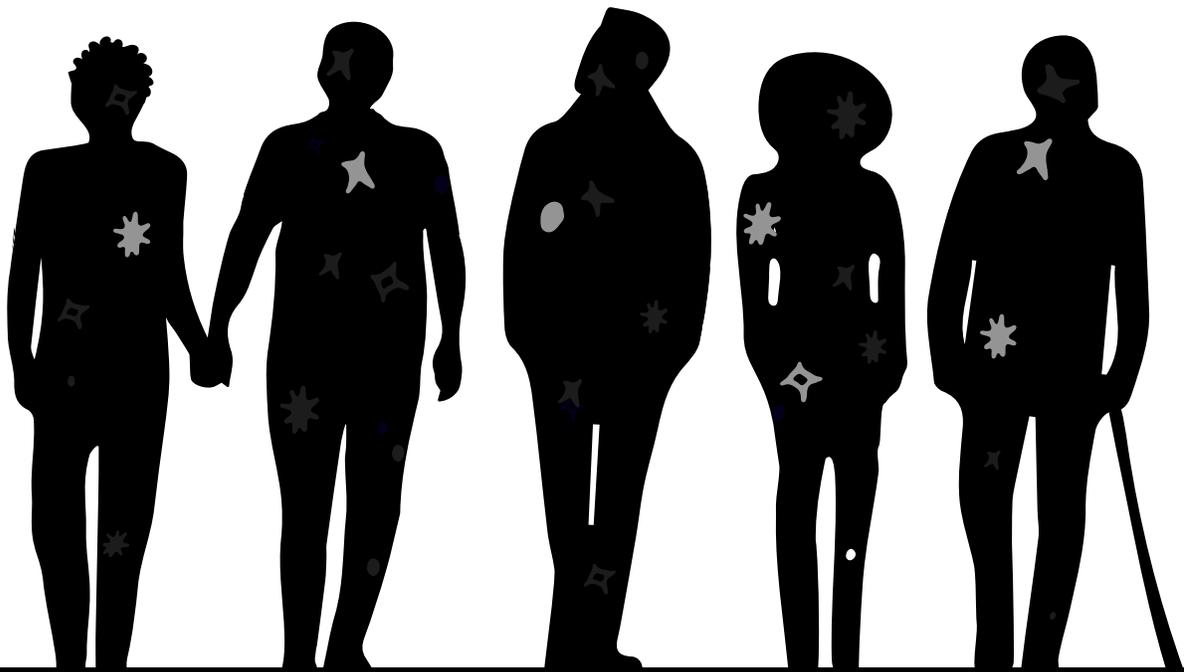


THE COSMIC WE

Episode 2:
When Only a Poem Will Do
with Rev. Sonia Walker



from the CENTER FOR ACTION AND CONTEMPLATION

- Sonia Walker : I really believe, for me, that there is a divine adoption that that can take place if you're open to it. So, I think I've been assigned to people and people have been assigned to me. And so, I work within the venue I find myself. And my friends who have spending time bopping around with me, and for sure my children, and now my grandchildren, they just go, "Oh, you go to the store with her. She just going to be talking to everybody like she's got to talk to them right now." And so, I do live life with an intensity and an urgency. And I pour what I have into the vessel before me.
- Barbara Holmes : This podcast explores the mystery of relatedness as an organizing principle of the universe and of our lives.
- Donny Bryant: We are trying to catch a glimpse of connections beyond color, continent, country, or kinship through science, mysticism, spirituality, and the creative arts. I am Donny Bryant.
- Barbara Holmes : I'm Barbara Holmes. And this is The Cosmic We. We're delighted today to have with us the Reverend Sonia Walker. Pastor Sonia is Associate Pastor of the First Congregational Church. She's ordained, Disciples of Christ, and UCC, has served at WHBQ-TV. While there, she brought a dimension of advocacy to the job, using her platform to address social issues such as hunger, race, school reform, and literacy.
- Barbara Holmes : Pastor Sonia, your life spans careers in television, counseling, education, and ministry. Welcome. We're delighted to talk with you about your ministry and about your prayers and about your stand for justice.
- Sonia Walker : Thank you so much, my dear friend and Sister Barbara. When I heard that, I thought, "Maybe I should burst out into song singing, 'Good, nice sweetheart. It's time to go.'"
- Barbara Holmes : No, this is not a requiem. This is a celebration of a woman who uses prayer as a language of the heart, prayer as an opportunity to commune with the divine, and prayer as a liturgical unmasking of all of our falsities. So, I just want to ask you about your spiritual background. Where do you get all this from, all this moxie and all this spiritual strength?
- Sonia Walker : Well, the longer I live, the longer my list of gratitude becomes, Barbara, because I really was blessed be reared in a family that affirmed me beyond race and gender at a time when all those things were stumbling blocks, more than stumbling blocks, they were barriers and detours, and class and socioeconomic. I came from a family that just really kept telling me I was wonderful. And when I found out it was just... well, when I knew that wasn't all that there was, it didn't matter. I was off and running.
- Sonia Walker : And then the depth of family, I knew great-grandparents. And it wasn't that my folks reproduced early in life, but I knew great-grandparents. I knew both sets of my paternal and maternal grandparents into my adulthood.
- Barbara Holmes : Wow.
- Sonia Walker : They were all still alive and alert when I married. And I married later than a lot of my peers. So, I had that sense of who and what and where and when for generations now.

Barbara Holmes : Yeah. They had a way of doing that, didn't they? I remember my dad calling me princess. There were no crowns around and I certainly didn't have real money, but I actually believed that it was true.

Sonia Walker : Well, and, I mean, my father was the only surviving son in his family. And so, my aunts introduced me to adults with such pomp and circumstance. They'd say, "This is Sonia. This is Ike's daughter. This is our niece."

Barbara Holmes : Wow.

Sonia Walker : And I thought that meant, "Well, hey, I belong in the big people's circle." And I always functioned in adult situations and I actually... it got me in trouble with some of the adults in my life because they'd say, "You don't know a child's place." And I'd say, "What is that?"

Sonia Walker : I mean, I went to visit my grandmothers, both my grandmothers with their friends and with their sisters and brothers. So, I mean, I thought I had a seat at the table early on.

Barbara Holmes : Was your dad a minister?

Sonia Walker : Was my father?

Barbara Holmes : Yeah.

Sonia Walker : Yes, he was. But he actually did not go into ministry until I was 12. And it was a very difficult time in our family because all this discussing and when and... he just came in and announced to my mother he was going into the ministry and there was a possibility that he could get relocated. And she's going like, "What?" and some more things that I won't repeat on the show, but it wasn't a family decision. We just kind of got our stuff packed up and moved to a little town that had one traffic light in it.

Sonia Walker : But that wasn't the core of my spiritual life. I think it was watching my grandparents and hearing their stories. And it was from seeing the best and the worst of my family, but I think my grandmother allowed really, the prayer piece. I would go downstairs in the morning sometimes and find her on her knees in front of her window, after she'd swept the porch and aired out the house. She was a South Carolinian, a Charleston woman. And she had rituals and discipline for her life. And I mean, I remember standing there one time in particular, and tears were streaming, and she was crying out to the Lord, and the air was blowing in through the window. It was a wonderful spring morning. And the curtains, the lace curtains, were flying. And when she was through with her conversation, she turned around and embraced me and acknowledged my presence. But I knew I had stood at a holy place with her.

Donny Bryant: Wow. Reverend Sonia, Pastor Sonia, I do have a very quick question. I now have transitioned into the second half of life, they say. I'm 46. And you just mentioned being in a particular season of your life, where you see things differently. The question I really have for you is what has been some truths over the years that you have found to be very consistent throughout life's changes, throughout the seasons that have

changed, and even through the tears and through the blessings of life? But what are some truths that now in your octogenarian years, that you can still say, “These are still true today”?

Sonia Walker : Well, I know that love trumps everything. And I know that the thing that balances love is forgiveness. I saw this in examples. And I saw unforgiveness. And I saw how it wounded people.

Sonia Walker : I’ve had people come and talk to me about affairs in a marriage and they’re wounded deeply, you know, “You broke this promise.” And I said, and God gave me these words first. I didn’t think it up out of my own, “It’s okay not to want to forgive. It’s natural. It’s human. But because we are both human and divine, God gives us an opportunity to acknowledge our human pain and disappointment, and then to pray for the strength and the will... “ and I said, “You may have to pray for a year or longer just for the will to forgive, but it is essential to be willing, willing to forgive. And God will help you do it.”

Sonia Walker : And that love, that love relationship, I mean, if you can keep remembering, if we can keep remembering how much more we love people and situations than anything else and ask God to strengthen and deepen the love, we can get through a whole lot of stuff.

Donny Bryant: Amen. Great.

Sonia Walker : I’m leading a group at First Congo called Walking the Talk. We came up, in this pandemic of race and the reckoning and whatever else we want to call it, and came up with a statement, an anti-racism statement for the church. It’s one of our covenants. And I felt called to create a space to talk about race. I said, “Ideally, it wouldn’t be I, but that’s okay because this is a predominantly white congregation. And I can walk into fire and not be consumed. I still believe that.” So, I said, “If you can’t talk about race in sacred spaces, we need to shut down these churches and make them recreation centers or something like that because I feel strongly about it.” My husband used to say, “The problem with you is you really believe people ought to do the right thing, and that they’re going to do it.” Yeah.

Sonia Walker : So, we do this once a week. And there’s a smaller group than some of the other offerings in our classes right now, but we just plod on. And sometimes, as it’s getting near that time, I go, “Oh my God. Is anyone going to show up?” But I just go and I’m exhilarated and I’m elevated and I’m excited. And I’ve said to them, “This is spiritual warfare. And you are doing mighty work to even try to be talking about this stuff, however small or large we are.” And they just keep coming. And so, that’s the lane in which I’m driving that issue.

Barbara Holmes : You mentioned the pandemic and what was happening for a little piece in your life during that. How do you pray during a pandemic? And after it’s over, how do you pray after?

Sonia Walker : Oh, well, I did pull a few prayers. You asked me to do that. And right now, we

are birthing a center that is being named after me. And I have to say to people, “Look, you stole my intellectual property. And you are stuck with me for a long time to come.”

Barbara Holmes : We’re going to get to that. That’s an exciting new center. We’re going to talk about that.

Sonia Walker : Well, we’ll talk about that a little later, but I’m just saying I really wanted to go back and read prayers from when I first started doing them. I realize I have many, but I just stayed in this zone. This was the 21st of March.

Barbara Holmes : Okay.

Sonia Walker : God of every season of life, the earth has heard your summons. Snow storms are taking their last bows. Rain storms are beginning to be warm, not freezing, cold and icy. Sunflowers are saucily modeling their annual wardrobes with enthusiasm and excitement. Birds are rehearsing their songs like music masters preparing for large hall concerts. We see, feel, hear, or even become the changes we call spring in this hemisphere. Others of us call it the season of Lent.

Sonia Walker : Almighty God, after all the unpredictable things we endured under so many difficult circumstances, we say, “Thank you. Thank you for inviting us to abide in you, even if we didn’t know you or want to.” We, when at our best have been compared to less than filthy rags, humbly say, “Thank you for abiding in us in our greatest hour of need.”

Sonia Walker : We continue struggling to accept Jesus as the way. Like Thomas, Philip, and waves of others, then and now, we doubt you. You promised to clear a way for us to be in your presence beyond this life, and yet we doubt you. Does the place you make for us have reserved spaces for people divided by region and race, color and class, height and hearing, gender assigned and gender defined, health and stealth? Despite our foolish ways, you remain our advocate as thy kingdom comes and thy will becomes our truth, our way of life. Amen.

Donny Bryant: Amen.

Barbara Holmes : Amen. Goodness. Thank you.

Donny Bryant: It’s interesting, Pastor Sonia, that, as I hear your prayers, I’m reminded of an article that I read, I don’t know, I think maybe it was 2018 about you. And they called you the mother of reinvention. Do you [cross talk]. It was an article, I believe...

Sonia Walker : Old soldiers never die; they just fade away.

Donny Bryant: Well, it said something to the effect, how... I mean, and I hear that in your prayers and how you reimagine the isolation and the pain of the pandemic, the physical separation from one another, but there was this reimagining of what reality could be like in your prayers and in relationship and what life is

like, even in exile. And so, I can see that title, the mother of reinvention, even being applicable in how your prayers are written.

Sonia Walker : Well, let me say this. I'm not one of these people who does a spreadsheet of where I'm going to be in three years or five years or tomorrow or even this evening. But what I do know, what I really learned about myself in seminary, the most outstanding part of me, my discernment, is that I have been who I am all my life. And I've always had hope. I've always seen the glass full. And over time, I've had experiences to teach me what that meant and how to articulate that, how to verbalize that. And that's really true of all of us. There's a denominator that goes through everything. And we bounce up and down off of it, but who we are is who we are. It's your spiritual DNA. And we usually run from it most of our lives, or all of it.

Sonia Walker : And it's not so much that I am reinventing myself, but I move who I am into new settings. And somebody said some, oh, probably 30 years ago, "Sonia Walker, some of us are..." and this was a woman about 15 years younger than I. She said, "We're thinking about our retirement plan. You keep starting up new stuff." I said, "But I'm doing the same stuff. It's just new settings."

Donny Bryant: That's great.

Sonia Walker : And so, people greeted me after my husband died. And I didn't have to be concerned about practical shoes in case you have a fall. And I had a little more time to put some more paint on myself. And I got a few long dresses shortened. And people said, "I thought you'd left Memphis. Where have you been?" I said, "I took my gifts and my talents to another venue. I've been running on a different track, swimming in a different lane, but it's still me. I just came back with some new stuff."

Barbara Holmes : You said this. And I just want to share your words with you because they're so inspiring. You said, "Ministry, this forum, gives me one more opportunity to encourage people to live into their own truths." How do you help someone in a culture that can't discern, or says they can't discern truth, to live into that inner truth, that spiritual truth that they came here with?

Sonia Walker : Well, in the first place, it takes a lot of energy. And Walter, my partner for life, would say to me, "Your problem is you think you can case work the whole world." And I said, "You know the story of the boy and the starfish, don't you? You just help the ones that you encounter."

Sonia Walker : I really believe, for me, that there is a divine adoption that can take place if you're open to it. So, I think I've been assigned to people and people have been assigned to me. And so, I work within the venue I find myself. And my friends who have spent any time bopping around with me, and for sure my children, and now my grandchildren, they just go, "Oh, you go to the store with her. She just going to be talking to everybody, like she's got to talk to them right now." And so, I do live life with an intensity and an urgency. And I pour what I have into the vessel before me. I also think I have a long straw and I take out of that vessel what's there for me. And because I hold myself to that, that there's still more, there's still more, God will give

you what you need, if we really can live in the fact that we're the vessels and God has the contents for the vessel. And we often think, we're the vessel, the contents, and the creator of the contents.

Sonia Walker : And I want to go back to this statement I made a little earlier, that I said I'd learned how to verbalize some of this feeling and discernment. Sometimes you just run in a meeting or an event and you think, "I'm just going in and going out." Just see and be seen. And one day, I was really on my way to my office. This was about two careers ago. And an artist, an African-American male artist, and this is what just knocks me out because some of the most powerful, spiritual things I've experienced, it's been an African-American person in an obscure role. And so, we have to look for where is the divine showing up. But he was a guest for teachers, then Memphis City School Teachers, at a workshop that the Arts Council was putting on, now called ArtsMemphis, okay? I've lived through everybody's evolution. And so, I walked in there just long enough to hear him say, "People keep talking about the glass is half full or half empty. The glass is always full because where the water ends, the air begins."

Barbara Holmes : My.

Sonia Walker : That's how I tell people, that pandemic or nay, that has stood for me in many conversations. And it's just true. It's a simple truth. Wherever the water ends, the air begins. So, the glass is never empty.

Donny Bryant: Yeah.

Barbara Holmes : Correct. And also, you follow... you said, you listen, you have time to listen. I remember when I was living in Memphis, I was taking my mother to the hospital. She wasn't feeling very well. And before I could turn the key, Sonia had pulled up behind me. Pastor Sonia jumped out of the car, took my mother's hands and said, "Can I pray with you?" Right there by the side of the road, she calmed my mother's nerves, prayed with her, and we took off. And my mother said to me, "Did you tell Pastor Sonia to come?" And I said, "No, but she's got her own messaging system."

Donny Bryant: Oh wow.

Barbara Holmes : So, it's really instinctive. It really is. Another thing you've said to people is, don't be afraid of the darkness in your life and your uncertainties, and don't be compelled to fill your life with busy-ness that has no purpose or no pleasure in it. Step into the calling that God puts you in. That works.

Sonia Walker : Are you sure you found those words attached to me?

Barbara Holmes : Yes, I did.

Sonia Walker : I'm pretty good, man.

Donny Bryant: Pastor Sonia, I want you to speak a little bit more. Just a minute ago, you mentioned being able to see the divine in obscure places, being able to see God in places that you may not necessarily... you talked about it in the, yeah, the artist, but...

- Sonia Walker : Because I do not remember his name. I just remember he was from New York. I wasn't there long enough. I think he was a painter, but I don't even know what his medium was. But that day, it was spiritual lessons for me.
- Sonia Walker : And we go whizzing around thinking... I mean, brushing past people. And one of the things that just makes my hair turn blonde and straight is like, "And what do you do?" I hate that question. And I mean, you know there's a way to find out what people's life work is with that, "And what do you do?" Like, you're going down a checklist. Do I want to keep talking to you or not at this important event? "And how do you know so-and-so." Like, oh please.
- Donny Bryant: Yeah. I mean, but Pastor Sonia, I think you're right because I think in some respect, in our culture, we tend to define a person's identity based upon what they do or their work. But what I hear from you, it's not so much about the work; it's who you are. It's that character. And so, so much about how you've described your journey over the years has been so much influenced by the formation of your identity in the early years of your life and how that identity has inspired you and given you passion and allowed you to continue to keep going on throughout these years. So, I think there seems to be that there's a connection with understanding our sense of self-worth and our identity and who we are, not based upon our performance, but based upon a declaration of who we are, how the divine sees us and how we see ourselves in that.
- Sonia Walker : One friend of mine, long ago on the other side, and I quoted her many, many, many, many times, said it this way. She had taught gifted children. And she said to me one day, "Walker, don't you think childhood is everything, and all the rest is trying to figure out what it was?"
- Donny Bryant: Yeah. That takes it down to the basics.
- Sonia Walker : Yes. And that is why children sit right in the middle of my heart. Children have a space in my heart. Or even the child in a person that they bring and allow themselves to be vulnerable. That sits right in the center of my heart because I do know that the childhood I had anchored and grounded me and fed me and gave me more than enough to share, more than enough.
- Sonia Walker : And so, somebody said, one of my aunts said to me, "Oh, you just go in a room. You just start hugging people and moving all around. Didn't you get enough loving when you were growing up? What is that?" I said, "No, I have enough to share. That's what it is. I'm not walking around deprived. Don't feel badly about the way you loved me or didn't. I'm fine."
- Sonia Walker : And so, that's who we're working with all the time, that little child within. People have written about it and made a lot of money. And it's still, we don't put things in place to take care of children any better, but beginnings are everything.
- Donny Bryant: But for those who start off and don't have that rich, solid, anchored beginning, how do you help them to find a center that they can keep returning to as a safety?
- Sonia Walker : I remind them that their beginning has nothing to do with Mary and John getting

their hot water together and making them, that their creation really began long before the human touch got in the picture. And if you can't get the love you think you want or you didn't get... go back to the story. And if you don't know it, let me remind you that the word says, "Thank you. You knew me when I was being knitted in my mother's womb. You knew me before the beginnings of the earth."

Sonia Walker : Now, don't try to hold me to exact quotations because I have to put it in language I know. My children say, "Mom, how do you find this in the Bible?" I said, "Honey, wait a minute. I have to look it up." I'm not a scripture-quoter. I just use the scripture I have to give people hope and to help them undergird their lives, but I do know how to use the word and how to find what I need.

Barbara Holmes : Pastor Sonia, First Congo in Memphis, where you serve as an associate, is a multi-racial, multi-generational, peace and justice-oriented, open and affirming church. What does that mean to you, particularly during Pride Month with regard to it's being open and affirming?

Sonia Walker : Oh, I had something in a prayer about all that just on Sunday because there was so much to acknowledge in the week, that June is the month of Juneteenth and the Pride month and so on. I've embraced it. I have completely embraced it because there are people in my life that I love who are maybe not open or not out and they're not publicly out as LGBTQ or anything else, but that has not been a problem for me. And what I liked about the church, they didn't say, "Well, they can come in, but..." it is really literally opening and affirming. People are officers. There are people on staff. If you want to be closeted, if you need to be closeted, fine. If you want to be open, if you want to redefine your orientation. I mean, I've seen times when people came to church and explained who they were, introduced themselves, a couple weeks, months later, dressed in different clothing. We actually have walked through people going through their transition, with surgery and medication.

Sonia Walker : And you know what? It's just given me another rich toolkit because it just keeps affirming that the embrace of that congregation and the members who are LGBTQ, known and unknown, their embrace of me and mine of them has really helped me in many other arenas of my life. People said to me, "Are you doing marriages?" Yes. And we were very excited when the Supreme Court made marriages legal, but still people hold their breaths, whether it's going to be reversed by the courts or the...

Sonia Walker : My grandchildren, one set of my grandchildren were here when I did two different weddings. And they were just going like, "Well, we've only been to gay and lesbian marriages at grandma's church." And the first time they went to a heterosexual wedding, they went, "Oh, is this the way this works?" I mean, these children have grown up that way. In their school, because they've been here, they were ready for a child to make a transition from male to female in their school. And the school had to address it. And they were going like, "Okay. We know how to do that. So, it's prepared me for a bigger ministry than just what I knew.

Barbara Holmes : There is a verse in Exodus, I think it's chapter 14, 15, where the people run up to the Red Sea and have nowhere to go. And they start praying to God. And God says to

Moses, “Tell the people to stop praying to me, and move on. Do something.”

Barbara Holmes : And in your ministry, I see the depth of prayer, the acknowledgement of our pain and our suffering as human beings, but also, move on. Let’s do something: justice, peace, action. And because of that combination, someone saw fit to endow \$6 million in your name to start The Justice Center. Wow. What is it like when money actually matches up with purpose?

Sonia Walker : I scarce can take it in. Well, we are still in the process of actualizing that gift because with it, came a lot of needs for the church to have it be a welcoming center. You’ve seen our parking lot. As somebody said, we have 22 doors around this campus and people never know how they get in the building. So, we are sharing the money. We’re going to put in an elevator so that we can use the second floor for our residential conference center. It is so amazing.

Sonia Walker : We had one board and it dissolved itself because, in the face of COVID, nobody could figure out where they were going next. And so, we’ve had to do a lot of work to try to move past that, what looked like a false beginning. I called it a miscarriage. And someone shared with me that babies born after miscarriage are called rainbow babies. And so, we are now trying to birth a rainbow baby, with gratitude for those who opened the pathway because everybody can’t get fertilized. Everybody cannot conceive. You know that.

Barbara Holmes : I have no comment, Pastor Sonia.

Sonia Walker : So, even the fact that they were a constituted board is a gift to us.

Barbara Holmes : Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yes, yes.

Sonia Walker : That’s what I’m saying. And I wasn’t on it. So, I was a neutral party to say, “You didn’t do anything bad. It just wasn’t the mixture.” Some things we put in those full glasses make the glass go pang and the glass shatters everywhere.

Barbara Holmes : Timing is everything. And for the context of the audience, First Congo sits in a neighborhood that is very, very eclectic, a lot of needs in the area for feeding and clothing and housing. And this is a large and rambling church that serves many, many needs to the community. And Sonia-

Sonia Walker : Excuse me, Barbara. It’s kind of sandwiched in between Central Gardens and Orange Mound.

Barbara Holmes : Yes. But people don’t know what Orange Mound is-

Sonia Walker : Well, I know. I know.

Barbara Holmes : [crosstalk 00:34:19] in Memphis.

Sonia Walker : You can tell them what that means.

Barbara Holmes : It’s a historical black community, which also has a lot of needs. So, this gift is going

to change not just the church, but also the neighborhood and the lives of a very, very diverse community.

Sonia Walker : Well, people talk about it a lot and its name is kind of long and all that, but I said, “It’s not to honor... “ it’s humbling and embarrassing really because, I mean, I just did like Walter said, I kept treating every relationship like it was one starfish. And people strung these things together and went, “Oh, wow,” but it’s not that.

Sonia Walker : I think the most important thing about it, for me, is that it’s a teaching tool to remind everyone who hears about it, knows about it, is trained there, exposed there, is gifted there, brings a gift, takes a gift, that the power of one is what propels me. The power of one. I wasn’t trying to major in something that would get me in headlines. I wasn’t trying to do... I’ve never been focused on that. I just believed that whatever I was assigned to do and whoever was assigned to me, I have poured it in like I was the only watering can around.

Sonia Walker : And so, the real piece of this is I hope that the way this center is made invitational to people, wherever they are on the justice ladder, to really believe they have power, both divine and human, to be a justice worker. And it’s not about a label or a title or who knows or who doesn’t know or a salary or not. There are opportunities to do justice work for all of us in our everyday lives.

Barbara Holmes : Reverend Sonia, I’ve had so many conversations recently, particularly as we are still in a pandemic, but maybe on the tail end of it, many conversations about the future of the church. What is the church going to look like in the future? I wanted to see if you had any insights or any ideas, any thoughts about what the evolution and what the next generation of the church is going to look like, based upon your history, your experience and the wisdom that you bring?

Sonia Walker : Oh my. I’ll be giving the next \$6 million if I could answer that. Well, let me say this. I remember in seminary, the concept of the emerging church. I thought, “That’s pretty interesting,” in as much as I was born into a deeply entrenched AME family. And I was very proud of being an African Methodist Episcopal child because I knew in my bones it was a protest movement. It had been born out of protest. And that made me very proud. It was very difficult. The first time I ever stepped into a congregation that was predominantly white and then joined, even if there were black churches or predominantly black churches. I just couldn’t figure that out, what God was wanting me to do and be, when I had belonged in the protest with movement, but anyhow, that’s a whole other story.

Sonia Walker : And now, people are talking about the evolving church. It’s complex, but it’s not. We don’t want to do the work. We just want to hold onto these institutions as they were. It’s a form of escapism for many of us. We understand there are different threads in the black church historically. And I honor these differences, but in the black church, we want to have dress up and a place to go. And even if we couldn’t read real words, we were smart as hell. And we got to be somebody important and were recognized with status. I get that. And that’s still true for many of us, that we have place and purpose in our congregational communities.

- Sonia Walker : And I don't think we ought to stop that, but I think we've got to create multi layers of... I mean, Barbara has two sons. I have three, and all the ones that my children brought to my door, but you don't try to give the same ones, the same thing, everybody the same menu. So, some churches have adapted and have a Saturday night five o'clock service or a seven o'clock service. They call them traditionals and this and that. We've got to find out what really feeds the people. Their needs are so great.
- Sonia Walker : I mean, I called that priceless Corey Pigg on here, the engineer. I called early, got ahead of the crowd and finally learned to go ahead of the crowd, and said, "Would you walk me through how to get on this particular platform?" Because I want to be focused on what I'm going to be. I want to be so open that I don't want to be all mismatched and anxious about how to use this technology. I didn't want to use my energy that way and just be a deflated balloon here sitting here with you for however long we're going to visit. So, I put my energy... I reserved it for what matters.
- Sonia Walker : And that's what the church is going to have. I mean, maybe we have to have a part of our luscious buildings open for people to be a walk-through. I mean, when you're in crisis, can you wait until Sunday to go get a hallelujah moment? One of my visions for the seminary was why don't we put some signs up on that gorgeous access property and have people from the community invited to those midweek services. Noonday, you're driving along, tears flying out your face, you just heard more news than you can handle. You need to run up in there, see a big sign say, "Come pray with us. Come let us be with you." We didn't get there yet, but you know what I'm saying?
- Sonia Walker : I mean, I think one of the things that magnetizes me to people and people to me is I make myself available. I have friends who call me all kinds of names that aren't really profane, but they're worse because I'm not the girl, or old lady, who's going to pick up the phone and say, "Well, they have a sale on toilet paper over at Ike's. Shall I come? I don't live life like that probably because there was a time I couldn't go to the store every time they had a sale. So, I said, "But if you call me... " and people say, "Oh, I wanted to call you, but you were just so busy." Call me. Leave me a message. Make it clear. Write the message. Write it on tablet. But if you make it clear that I need you now or soon, I can part the waters, but I'm not going to... and I can be there a couple of days, over a week, a month to help you get through that crisis. But I got to move on.
- Sonia Walker : I'm not, "Now, Angel, what kind of paint you think I ought to paint my bathroom?" It's not that I don't respect that or that I don't have rooms that need to be painted. It's a short time to be here on this earth. And I want to do the things that give me energy and hope and allow me to do the main thing, keep the main thing the main thing.
- Barbara Holmes : Well, that is a good stopping point. I just want to thank you for being willing to talk with us this afternoon. Our community is blessed. I am blessed. All the people who know you are blessed because you're doing the work that your soul must have.
- Donny Bryant: Yeah.
- Barbara Holmes : Thank you, Pastor Sonia.

- Sonia Walker : Oh, thank you for the opportunity. Thank you so very much. Be well and be blessed in your work as well.
- Barbara Holmes : We'd like to leave you with a few reflections on the segment with Reverend Sonia Walker. One of the things that she focused on was inner truth, and helping those who are assigned to you. When I lived in Memphis, I watched her do this over and over again. Simple encounters with storekeepers or someone passing on the sidewalk led to in-depth conversations, pouring into vessels, drawing the sustenance needed. It's an amazing thing to be able to know where you're needed, to do what you're called to do, to pour into the lives of others.
- Donny Bryant: One of the ideas she mentioned in our conversation about inner truth, she spoke of this concept of divine adoption. And maybe one of the things we can take away and reflect on is how maybe we're assigned to people and how those people have been assigned to us.
- Barbara Holmes : Who are you assigned to? What's your call? What are you needed for? And where can you draw sustenance for your ongoing work?