

LEARNING

HOW  
TO

SEE

with

Brian

McLaren

Season 3, Episode 2  
Christianity, Race, and Politics

Brian: Welcome, everyone. In this episode, we'll be talking about Christianity, race, and politics. This discussion will take us into the subject of slavery and the violence, including sexual violence, that is part of that history. We believe this episode is really important, but we're also aware it may not be appropriate for some listeners.

Brian: There's no way to talk about Christianity today, especially in the US, but also around the world, without talking about race and politics. Many people have tried to define Christianity as spiritual, as if it were above politics. That's how I grew up in the 1960s. But I came to realize that to claim religion was too spiritual for politics always empowered the oppressors. Passages in the New Testament, like II Corinthians chapter five or Acts chapter 10, showed that Jesus and Paul had a vision of Christianity that was radically, scandalously inclusive, that upset social pyramids, that upset prejudices, biases, and bigotry.

And what happened when this message was proclaimed was that old divisions, dividing walls just dropped away. I think a lot of us wonder if that legacy can be rediscovered because in the intervening centuries, Christianity has been used as a weapon, not a medicine. It's been used to further divide people based on race, gender, class, national origin, and other kinds of status.

There's no way to talk about Christianity today, especially in the US, but also around the world, without talking about race and politics. Listen as I read this passage from, Do I Stay Christian. I'll read it slowly, thoughtfully, so that you can let it echo and resound in your own heart.

Purity and innocence might sound like good things if you have never read the story of Cornelius and Peter in Acts chapter 10. Peter was raised in a strict purity culture. So he felt it would pollute him to go into the home of an unclean Gentile like Cornelius, but Peter had a powerful dream or vision in which God repeatedly commanded him to break one of the purity commandments and thus violate his own innocence. The vision shattered his preconceptions. And so he consented to enter the home of Cornelius, the unclean, the Gentile, the other.

Then Peter made this disruptive statement. "God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean." He wasn't just changing his definition of what was clean or unclean. He was leaving that binary behind forever. Peter continued to struggle with this insight. The cult of innocence dies hard. And later, Paul confronted him about his inconsistency. Paul understood the struggle because he had a disruptive spiritual experience that was remarkably similar to Peter's.

He was what we would call a religious extremist, a violent fundamentalist terrorist, going from town to town, to arrest, imprison, and kill members of his purity culture who didn't uphold the high standards of the cult of innocence. He was so convinced of his innocence that he felt justified in committing violence.

Paul had his relapses into clean/unclean thinking, like the rest of us, but he had the audacity to say that the primary marker of belonging to the community of innocence, which was circumcision, didn't mean anything. To another group he wrote, "From now on, we regard no one from a human point of view. From this new point of view, instead of dividing the

world into us and them, clean and unclean, we participate in a new creation in which we seek to reconcile all people to God and one another.”

To another community, he said that he had become all things to all people, leaving his supremacist identity behind. And to yet another community, he described his mission as breaking down dividing walls of hostility and preaching peace to everyone, everywhere, no exceptions.

Of course, both Peter and Paul were simply building upon the example set by Jesus himself. He touched lepers, those considered unclean. He protected a woman caught in adultery and challenged her accusers by saying, “Let the one without sin cast the first stone.” Which means if you read between the lines that if you consider yourself innocent and pure, you just might become a killer.

Brian: Welcome to this episode of Learning How to See. In this episode, I’m joined by my friend, Lisa Sharon Harper, a gifted author and speaker and activist, and we’ll be exploring some themes from her powerful new book, *Fortune*. And I’m also joined by my esteemed colleague in the Living School at the Center for Action and Contemplation, Gigi Ross, who you may remember from our last season.

Brian: Lisa Sharon, I am so happy to have this conversation with you. I am a raving fan of your book, *Fortune*. I thought it would be great, but it just went beyond what I could have even imagined. So impactful and a heartbreaking story, a beautiful story, a resilient story. A story of brings together 10 generations of your history with the larger history of America with theology. And I wonder if you could tell everyone a little bit about the process of writing the book. Amazing, an amazing unfolding story to me.

Lisa: It was. I have to say, there were several times in the middle of it at different junctures that I thought, “What am I doing? What have I said I would do? Am I crazy to try to do this?” But I didn’t start out to write a book. I started out 30 years ago to figure out who I am as an African-American. We have a brick wall, at least we used to have a brick wall, when it came back to the Civil War. Past the Civil War, it was nearly impossible for any of us to find anything about who we are and who our people were. And most of us don’t even know our great-grandmother’s names, our great-grandpoppy’s names. Or we might know one, but not all of them.

Lisa: And so I didn’t. I knew I had Grandmom Gillison, who was my great-grandmother, and that was my only great-grandparent that I knew. And other than that, I had Kissy and Chicken George, and that was it. We saw roots about 21 times and they became my family. But around 1991, I decided, no, I want to know more. I want to know who I am and who we are.

Lisa: So my mom and I jumped on the phone, and we got to talking. And I still to this day have my very first family tree, 1991. We didn’t even have names. I think my mom might have obviously knew names, but she didn’t tell me in that day or I wasn’t interested. I just wanted to know, okay, when did grandpop live? And when did great-grandpop live? And all of that, so I have that tree.

Lisa: But now we have 1600 names on our family tree. Been working with a genealogist over the

last year who's really filled it out through DNA, DNA detective work. It's been an incredible, eye-opening journey. And when I realized that this was a book was when we discovered Fortune, when we discovered Fortune Game McGee and Sambo Game and Maudlin McGee, her father and mother, and realized that they were intertwined with and impacted by the very first set of race laws that ever existed on this land in the second colony.

Lisa: So the first set was 1662 in Virginia, and then two years, following two years after that was Maryland. And they were a mixed race couple, white woman, black man. And because of that, that was exactly the issue that caused the creation of those first race laws in Maryland. Their daughter, who they named Fortune, ended up absorbing the wrath of them.

Lisa: And then I realized in every generation after that, because we've been here so long, we have been impacted and our lives changed, our fortunes changed by laws that... The laws that created race in America. So then I said, okay, this is not just my family's story. This is America's story of race in America and this needs to be written down. So that's why I wrote Fortune.

Brian: Before we come back to that, Gigi, I'm wondering... I know a little bit about your family history, and I'd love to just hear your reflections on Lisa discovering her story.

Gigi: Lisa, I have to say I have two families. I have an adopted family and a birth family. When you talk about your family true, I actually met my birth family for the first time in Virginia. I used to live in the DC area. I met them in Virginia when I was 33 years old. I met my grandmother there, my birth grandmother, and she wouldn't let me call her anything but grandma, but they had someone who traced that part of their family tree up to about right after the Civil War. So you got the last slave and then going on through. And so I actually had those names from just that maternal birth part of my family.

Lisa: Isn't that powerful?

Gigi: It is, very much so. Very much so.

Lisa: It's grounding.

Gigi: Yeah.

Lisa: Right?

Gigi: Yeah.

Lisa: Yeah. It's grounding.

Brian: When people ask me to recommend a book about America's racial history, I've always recommended a book called The Half Has Never Been Told. And now I have to recommend two books, Fortune and The Half Has Never Been Told.

Brian: It was interesting. For all the reading I've done, those laws that you mentioned in Virginia and Maryland, I'd never heard about. And as soon as I read them, it just felt like a new level of horror, and the interplay of racism and money and greed and economics fell into place. And I wonder if you could just explain to everybody what those laws were and how this young woman, as I recall from Ireland, and a young man who had been kidnapped and brought over from Africa, they became part of your story. But also connect this connection to how law creates an economy and a racial legacy and all the rest.

Lisa: So you have to go back to the beginning of Virginia, the first colony in Virginia, to understand the context before we get into Fortune's experience, so Fortune, my ancestor. In 1630, a young one young girl was born. Her name was Elizabeth Key. Elizabeth Key was born to Thomas Key. Thomas Key, around that time actually, was a member of the House of Burgesses, the legislature of the colony of Virginia. Thomas Key was her father. Thomas Key was a British citizen. Thomas Key was actually forced by the colony to recognize her as his daughter, and he had her baptized. And the thing is, according to English law, you cannot enslave another British citizen. And citizenship came through the line of the father.

Lisa: So around 1650, Elizabeth Key is about 20 years old now. She says, "You know what? I shouldn't be able to be enslaved. My dad is a British citizen. That means I'm a British citizen, which means I cannot be enslaved according to the law. Oh, and by the way, I'm baptized. My father had me baptized, and you can't enslave another Christian according to British law." And so she won her case. She walked off the plantation. She was like, "I'm done. Bye, y'all. I am free. And I should be, according to the law."

Lisa: So guess what, a bunch of other people got the same idea. Realized, wait a minute, my dad is a British citizen too. I've been baptized. I shouldn't be able to be enslaved. And so, they also walked off their plantations, and they won their cases according to the law.

Lisa: So the House of Burgesses, which were the law makers and also the planter class, they started realizing about 12 years later that they were losing their people. They were losing their free labor, and their profit line was shrinking. And you had all these mixed race people walking around in Virginia that were confusing the racial caste system, which was in development at the time.

Lisa: So what did they do? Instead of abiding by the law, in order to love the law, they changed the law. And instead of having citizenship go through the line of the father, now they would have citizenship go through the line of the mother, the women they were raping, the African women who were not seen as citizens. So if citizenship goes through the line of the mother, then their children would not be citizens, and therefore they would be enslavable.

Lisa: And then they added two words that created racial caste in America, in perpetuity. Legal racialized slavery in perpetuity. So under the thousandth generation and beyond, if your ancestor then traced back to a black woman, you would be enslaved,

period. That's the end of the discussion.

Lisa: So that's how the first race law came to be in 1662 on this soil. Up to that point, everything was social morays and also judgements in the courts. But that was the first legislative law.

Lisa: And notice that law has intersectionality woven into it. Not only is it the first race law, but it's also the first citizenship law. And it's the first gender based law. So you can't pull, extract one from the other in American law, the legal construct.

Lisa: Now two years later, Maryland, the second colony, has a very similar but the opposite issue. They have another issue with mixed race children, but it's the opposite issue. It's not white men raping enslaved black women. That's an issue, but they're not perceiving it that way. And law is never created just in a bottle. Law is created out of a perceived need on the ground.

Lisa: So their perceived need on the ground was to deal with all of these Ulster Scot and Irish women who were indentured servants coming over, working on their plantations, falling in love, and marrying the enslaved black men who were right there on the same plantations, and then having children with them. What do you do with these kids? Are they going to be free? Are they going to be indentured? Are they going to be enslaved? And what do we do with these betraying white women who are bruising our white male egos?

Lisa: Think about that. There were a lot of these unions that happened, marriages. You don't hear about this, you don't hear about this. So you know what they decided to do? They decided that they were going to deal with this issue by making this declaration. If any white woman marries an enslaved black man and has children by that black man, then her children will be enslaved in perpetuity, and she will be enslaved until her husband's death, by her husband's master.

Lisa: So white women, think about that for one second. This is the first race law in Maryland in the second colony, the second race law ever. And it tells you immediately what the value of your whiteness really is. You are only white in so much as you protect the white male ego. That is how white you are. Because if you don't, you may as well be a slave, and you were. They did enslave white women.

Lisa: And this is the thing. Brian, this is what gets to your point. It didn't take long before the Maryland, some people call it the House of Burgesses and other people call it the General Assembly. So the General Assembly didn't take long before they realized that the planters were now forcing their indentured, Irish, and Ulster Scot women to marry and have children with enslaved black men, so that they would increase the profit line of their ventures, their capitalist ventures. This Catholic colony pledges its pearls and says, "Oh, we didn't mean to do that." That's arguable because they actually are the planter class. Hello. So the legislators are the ones who are the...

Lisa: So what do they do? They take the keys of indenture and the management of who gets indentured and who gets enslaved out of the hands of the planters. And in that moment, they place the keys in the hands of the church, and the church then becomes the managers of the crushing of the image of God, the exploitation of the image of God on earth. They have the most accurate records. When the courts sentence people to be indentured or to

be enslaved for whatever reason, they are the ones who keep the most accurate records, according to expert genealogist that I spoke to, Paul Heinegg.

Lisa: And so you see very early on the roots of the hierarchy of human belonging, and it's most explicitly shown when you ask the question, who does this benefit and to what end? It always, always benefits white men. And in every single case, actually in every generation, the white man is the only one who bears no accountability for his actions and is protected from consequences by the law.

Brian: My gosh, I just have to say, as I read this, having spent most of my life in Maryland, I felt like I was seeing things I'd never seen. But that detail that the church becomes the custodian of enforcing racial hierarchy, of course, brings to this wild combination of factors. Sex, rape, money. You suddenly realize, and Maryland became... A huge part of its profit came from white men raping women to produce babies that could be sold. Just suddenly, you see that this is this whole underbelly. It's not just the production of cotton. It's the production of what were called hands. They weren't even full human beings. That were just hands that would pick cotton. Oh my gosh. It's incredible.

Lisa: Now Brian, there's also something else here. When you look at the law and you ask who is penalized for having sex across races, the only other person who is not penalized is black women. Black women are not penalized by the law because our bodies are understood to be farms for free labor. Our bodies produce the free labor. So, white men can have sex with us or rape us with impunity, and we will not be called into court because white men use us to produce that free labor.

Lisa: Now here's the thing. This is debatable. People who are scholars actually argue on both sides of whether or not white men... Believe it or not, whether or not white men raped black women or even mixed race women in order to get free labor. But here's the thing.

Lisa: First of all, I read a book that was amazing by Brock, Rita Brock, I believe is her name, rape sexuality, and colonial slavery and colonial times. And what she says explicitly is that rape was used as a mechanism to entrench profit lines, and also as a method of terror on colonial plantations and the colonial life.

Lisa: But secondly, I did a little DNA search of my own. Because of the work of genealogists that have actually documented this, particularly Paul Heinegg, I know the names of the indenturing families of fortune who stood there in a courtroom in 1705 and was sentenced to be indentured until she was 31 because her family, her father was Senegalese and her mother was Ulster Scot, because they were black and white. So, she was indentured to Mary Day. And then her daughter was indentured to Anne Fooks. So I went into my ancestry DNA and said, are these surnames in me? And it turned out they were.

Lisa: So I wondered why in the records, there was never any mention of a father. I asked, are they in a brothel? What's going on? They weren't in a brothel. They were simply indentured to these families, but it turns out that their bodies were being used, because now by that time, they had begged off of the white women being enslaved thing. And what it came down to was if your mother is white, you cannot be enslaved. But if your father is black, you will be indentured. And if they were married, indentured for 21 years, if they were not married,

indentured for 31 years, hence Fortune is indentured for 31 years or until she's 31.

Lisa: And then the laws develop even from there, to the point where when Fortune's daughter is in service now as an indentured servant, the incentive, the financial incentive for that rape was that as indenturing men raped their indentured servants and had babies by these servants, their children would then be indentured to their family by law for 21 years. 21. So that's 21 years of more free labor. 21 years. There was financial incentive.

Brian: There's so much more we could talk about relating to your book because Native Americans, First Nations people are also part of your story, and they fold into all of this. And I just can't recommend the book highly enough.

Brian: Gigi, I want to ask you a question. There's a well known quote from Howard Thurman. He said, "By some amazing but vastly creative spiritual insight, the slave undertook the redemption of a religion that the master had profaned in his midst." And thinking about this deep entrenchment of the Christian Church in America and in Britain and around the world, Christianity was profaned by the enslaver, the colonizer, the conquistador, the oppressor, yet through this vastly creative spiritual insight, the oppressed undertook its redemption.

Brian: I wonder, Gigi, what your thoughts are when you hear those words from Thurman, and you think about your own experience.

Gigi: The first thing that comes to my mind is it is redemption because originally, Christianity was religion for and by the marginalized. And just thinking of history, one of the problems that actually the Romans had with Christianity was that only were the slaves becoming Christian, but also the women were becoming Christian. And both of these are people who aren't really "citizens," they're property. Although Roman women had it better than some other women, but still.

Gigi: And so, it's reminding me of just what Lisa Sharon was talking about, that Christianity actually started in a way as a refuge for those who were marginalized. And a way that they can find to salvation through something that Howard Thurman talks about in Jesus of the Disinherited, of really coming to see themselves as children of God. And if they're children of God, you can slay their bodies, but they're free.

Gigi: I also remember, there's... I don't know the exact quote, but Jean Shinoda Bolen in her book, *Gods in Everyman*, says something that other people say, is that when you're growing up and you don't get a sense of love, you often settle for power. What I feel in Christianity, and I can't prove it, is when you are being oppressed and you actually get the chance to have power, there's a real temptation to take it. And so you have the emperor saying, "I like this religion. I had this vision, and so I'm going to take it over." But the people could have said, "This isn't what this religion's about." It would've cost them a lot, but they were used to having it cost them a lot. But they didn't. They took... I'm not blaming it on them, but because it isn't just individual saying yes, but the way the system worked, all of a sudden Christianity got turned 180 degrees around and became this religion of power instead of this religion of love.

Gigi: But still throughout Christianity, even though there was the powerful church, there were still

people who were trying to bring Christianity back to its roots. And in the first movement of the desert fathers and mothers was how it started. And so, I think that relationship with Christianity goes on through time. You have the powerful institutional part is really in bed with the governmental power and making sure that the status quo, those who are rich, what we now call the 1%, they just keep going. But you also have this other current of people just trying to bring Christianity back to its roots, to its place of solidarity with those who are on the margins.

Brian: Let me speak as somebody raised in a white Christian setting. The church I grew up in, we lived up in New York, then we moved to Maryland. And when we moved to Maryland, we were shocked to find out that the church of our denomination that we attended was a segregationist church in the 1960s. And my parents were appalled by that, and in fact, I think were the first people to break the color line in that church.

Brian: But the thing I was only told is that Christianity is a religion of love, and we just kept a secret or we were kept in the dark about the power dimensions to our faith. In fact, one of the ways we were distracted is we were Protestant, and our big thing was how different we were from Catholics. But then you realize that's a weapon of mass distraction, that we think our big difference is with Catholics, when really the big difference was... Well, the truth was Catholics and Protestants had both been part of this history of racism and white supremacy.

Brian: And Lisa Sharon, this is something you wrote about in your book, that legacy that Catholics and Protestant share. I wonder if you could just say a little bit about that.

Lisa: I think that the thing that strikes me about the legacy of racial caste and the way that our faith has entrenched it has protected it, and at the same time has fought against it. It has to do with exactly what Gigi was talking about, the corruption of our faith from the very beginning. I honestly think it has to do with the fact that we've been worshipping, not just a European Jesus, but white Jesus. And I think it has to do with the fact that... and when I say white, I mean white in the political sense. I mean white, as in the Jesus who was shown to us in purple robes and a crown, and we even say crown of thorns, but that was no crown. That was a torture mechanism. White Jesus does come to us from the social location of empire.

Lisa: And yet, the actual Jesus came to us in a social location of the enslaved, of the serially colonized. His people were serially enslaved. And really, there's not even one writer in the entirety of the entire Bible that was white. Not one. Not one. Just think about that. There's only one person in the entire Bible that has a speaking role, who is European, as in born, bred, white, European. Pilate. The only one. The only one. Some people would say, "Oh, but Paul." No, no, no. No, no, no, no, no. Saying that Paul was white as like saying that I'm white because I used to live in New York City. No, no, no. Rome was the center of the colonizing world at that point. It was incredibly diverse. And Paul was a brown man from a serially enslaved, colonized people.

Lisa: So when you look at that, this is the thing that made me go, "Aha," Brian, was when I realized that in writing my last book, *The Very Good Gospel*, that the very first page of the Bible is written in the context of colonization. It's written in the context of enslavement. And they are writing actually critique of their enslavers' their captors' worldview. And they are declaring against the tide of what the culture tells them, I am somebody. We are

somebody. We too are made in the image of God. We too are called to exercise dominion in the world.

Lisa: Oh my gosh, how did I not hear this before? How did nobody ever teach this to me before? But no, the people in my life at that time were actually arguing over whether it was really about seven days of creation or not. Was the world really made in seven days or the... Oh my goodness, people. This is the kind of argument you have if the Bible is written by white men. But it's not.

Brian: Another weapon of mass distraction. Yes.

Lisa: Yes, yes, yes, yes, exactly.

Brian: So much more we could talk about. I want to touch a subject, Lisa, that I have been so impressed by your courage to address. White Catholics and conservative Protestants have been united in their opposition to abortion and LGBTQ equality. It's like that's brought them together. But that shared opposition and that alliance looks different when we bring race into the picture. And I wonder if you could say a few words about that.

Lisa: Yeah. It's really interesting. Well, actually let me just say, first of all, that according to every poll and not just political polls, but also sociology, sociologist studies, particularly one that's coming out pretty soon by Michael Emerson, same author of *Divided by Faith*, which came out in the year 2000. All the polls say the same thing, that the majority of white people in America, regardless of their religion, are voting Republican.

Lisa: Now I don't have anything necessarily against Republican party, Democratic party, because wherever you pin the tail on the year, the party has a different ideology. So it's not really about the party. It's about where the party stands right now. So what is it, what's going on right now? What are they voting for right now? That's the question.

Lisa: And what they're voting for right now, the majority of white people in America, which increases... The ratio of white people that are voting for the Republican party increases the more Christian they get, the more they ascribe to Christian thought, the more they're going to church. Literally, if you're going to church at least once a week, you're what Michael Emerson calls a practicing white Christian. And you believe in the Bible, and you call yourself a Christian.

Lisa: Well, Michael Emerson right now, according to his sociological study, it's actually shown that the majority of practicing white Christians in America actually are not worshipping Jesus at all. They're worshipping white Jesus, they're worshipping whiteness. And so white Jesus is one of their totems, he would say. So it makes sense then, that the majority of white Christians in America are voting Republican because the Republican party right now is actually diametrically opposed to its founding fathers, to the Republicans of the 19th century, who established the justice department, who established the 14th amendment, which entrenched birthright citizenship, which they are trying to dismantle, which established voting rights for all men who were citizens in America. It took another, what, 60 years for us to get it for women, but we got it. And yet now, it's that party that is not only suppressing the vote, but trying, actively plotting to subvert the vote in this election and in 2024.

- Lisa: So why would most practicing white Christians be voting for the Republican party that is doing this work right now? It is because they worship whiteness. And that goes for both Catholics and evangelicals. And they have both been manipulated by the politics of sexual politics, in particular around abortion. And it started back in the '60s with the Catholics, but it very quickly in the '80s took root. But in especially the evangelical case, that whole thing started not around abortion or even sexual politics. It started around race, and maybe race and sexual politics there. So it started with wanting to keep pure white space. It started not actually even with Roe v. Wade, it started with Brown v. The Board of Education in 1954, the passage of Brown v. The Board of Education, issuing of that judgment. That was when we began to see war declared again in the South. The year after that was Emmett Till.
- Lisa: When we finally got the Voting Rights Act in 1965, that was actually the point when the Dixiecrats walked out of the Democratic party. And about a decade later, they found themselves gravitating like a magnet to the Republican party, where they still sit today.
- Lisa: So Catholics and evangelicals have been used really by the Republican party in order to build its power. And the question of abortion has been leveraged in order to sway that vote, but they have been manipulated and lied to.
- Lisa: The way that I had an aha moment was when I realized, wait a minute, the evangelicals lost their Supreme Court fight in 1983. 1983, their Supreme Court fight, Bob Jones University v. The USA. In that fight, they were fighting to maintain pure white space on Bob Jones University's campus. Bob Jones University said, "Okay, okay. Okay. We don't want to lose our tax exempt status." Their first concession was to say, "Okay, we'll admit one black person." So they admitted their janitor, and their janitor made it for less than a year before he said, "I'm out. I'm not doing this anymore."
- Lisa: And so then they said, "Okay, okay, okay. We will admit married black people onto our campus." And then, US government said not good enough, because of a title in the law that came down as a result of the Civil Rights Act, which rests on the judgment of Brown v. The Board of Education. So they said, "Okay, okay, okay, okay. We will admit single black people, as long as they sign an agreement that they will not... A contract saying they will not date while they're on our campus. And any white person who dates a black person or even is a sympathizer with the miscegenation of the races will be expelled." And they all had to sign an agreement. This is in the 1980s.
- Lisa: So they lost their tax exempt status. They lost it. And the Supreme Court came behind them and said, "That's right. They should lose their tax exempt status because they're not complying with the Civil Rights Act."
- Lisa: So that same year within really weeks, the religious right was born. The moral majority was born. And their number one directive, their number one strategy, was to overturn the calculus, the weight of the court, the Supreme Court, where they had just lost. But they looked around and they said, we can't do this by naming race as the issue anymore because it's not gauche. It's not the thing people are going to respond to. So what did they do? They named abortion. And they made abortion their way to overturn the court.
- Lisa: And what do we see happening right now? Abortion will likely be outlawed by this court,

by the court. They won. They won the war in the last year, in last couple of years with Amy Coney Barrett being appointed to the court. And also with Brett Kavanaugh. Brett Kavanaugh was the tipping point, but Amy Coney Barrett just tipped it over. And so now they have a super majority in the court, and it's lifetime appointments.

Lisa: And what do we see? Within two years of her appointment, we do see the demise of the right for women to make decisions about their bodies. We see the impact that's going to have on black women in particular, whose history of white men telling us what we can do with our bodies. Hello. Either resulted in us having 19 children in order to people their plantations and with free labor or having our tubes tied without our consent. And we also see that coming right behind that is the end of affirmative action. Isn't that interesting? A race law that is actually going to be most likely shot down by this Supreme Court.

Lisa: I warned about this. I warned about this when Brett Kavanaugh was up for his hearing, I said, this is not really about abortion. This is actually about *Brown v. The Board of Education*.

Brian: Yes.

Lisa: That is the law. That is the ruling that's in their cross hairs, and it is.

Brian: So we see this history that goes back 10 generations in your family being in the headlines today. I wish we could keep this conversation going on for hours, because it's just important and fascinating. But I want to offer this closing comment and invite each of you to give a couple final words about it.

Brian: You both know I left my career as a teacher. I became a church planter and pastor. And in many ways, I knew that the Christianity I inherited and that had brought me so much blessing and benefit was in decline. And in some ways... We use words like renewal. We're trying to bring renewal to Christianity. We're trying to save Christianity from its decline. And I could feel that my generation, it was losing their hearts and minds.

Brian: But I remember, I was probably in my 30s or early 40s when it hit me that if we saved Christianity without addressing its deeply embedded white supremacy and male supremacy, we would not be doing something good. In other words, a racist and sexist Christianity is not worth saving. That's what I came to feel increasingly. And that many people are leaving Christian faith for many different reasons, but one of those key reasons is they don't want to be part of a community that's unwilling to address its history and theology of racial harm.

Brian: Lisa, through your book and other work, and Gigi, through your work in the Living School at the CAC, you are both helping us address this reality in Christianity, both past and present. And I'm grateful to you for that. And just wondered if you had any final comment.

Gigi: The first thing that comes to me is the difference between Christianity and the difference between following Jesus. And sometimes I think labels can become idols. So I have two things. There's one, on the one thing, I really would not want to give Christianity to those who are entrenched in white supremacy. I would not want to do that, because there's also the other side of Christianity, which has done a lot of good.

- Gigi: But at the same time, I think it's more important to follow Jesus than what you call me. And so for me, if it's Christianity has come and its time is gone, as it is right now, then that's... Everything is born, everything dies. That's not going to stop God. Something else will come up in its place. So I personally have to say, I don't actually go to church right now because I haven't really found a church community that speaks to me and that I can feel supported by, but I still follow Jesus. And for me, that's way more important than that label.
- Gigi: That being said, that's individual. Systemically, it's very, very important that Christianity be called out on its shadow side, and for some people not so shadow side, because it is not really true to what it's supposed to be. And I think that should be held up as much as possible.
- Brian: Thank you. Beautifully said. Thank you.
- Lisa: I think that when we ask the question, what is the call of the church for the next 500 years, if the first 500 years was about the reformation, the reformation of the church... Not the first five, but the last 500, what's the next 500 about? I think the next 500 will be about the decolonization of the church.
- Lisa: I know there's a huge deconstruction movement right now, but I have to say, Brian, you were probably one of the first people to ignite that deconstruction movement, at least that caught fire from it. And that was decades ago. That's not new. But I do think that there is a decolonizing work that's happening, and that's a little bit different because... And you can correct me if I'm wrong on this, Brian, but when you're talking about deconstruction, the center point becomes you. The center point becomes your own sensibilities. I deconstruct this because it doesn't make sense to me. But it's not really about building. It's not even about honestly finding truth, necessarily. It's about taking apart what you've been told and showing how this is a lie. And I get that and it's true.
- Lisa: But when you decolonize, that's different. The center point then is the truth. The center point then is the authentic thing itself and the center that has been colonized. That the goal is not to deconstruct or to come back with nothing. The goal then is actually to find what is the true thing? What is the actual essence of the actual thing? So in the work of decolonizing our colonized read of the scripture and decolonizing our faith, then the goal then becomes to find brown Jesus, to figure out who is this politically black, physically brown person who walked the earth and changed the course of time, who came from a serially enslaved, colonized people.
- Lisa: The entirety of the New Testament is written in the context of colonization. What does that mean? What does that say? What does that imply about the reading and how we've been reading it from the social location of Caesar? Not of Jesus.
- Lisa: So, I think that the way for us to... No, I don't even know. I don't know really the language. Is it redeem Christian faith? Is it save Christian... Maybe not. And I think I only use the word Christian insofar as it was used in Acts. And when it was used in Acts, it was used in the exact opposite way of what we are experiencing it of now. It has become a religion of empire. And yet in Acts, it is a religion that is challenging empire through the actualization and the freeing of people to speak their own languages and to be who they really are without having the overlay of empire on top of them, meaning diversity. Diversity is embraced.

- Lisa: So brown Jesus, when people come to me and they ask me, “How do I move forward in my Christian faith?” What I say is, “Discover and embrace brown Jesus.”
- Brian: Listen to these words from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, using an unfamiliar, but I think deeply legitimate paraphrase of words that you may already be familiar with. And imagine how saying these words, feeling these words would instill in you an identity very different from the identity that religion often instills in people.
- Gigi: Rise up, poor and vulnerable and those in solidarity with the poor and vulnerable, for yours is the new way of life.
- Lisa: Rise up, all you bereaved who mourn for loved ones you have lost to illness and violence, for you will be comforted.
- Brian: Rise up, all of you brave enough to be nonviolent, for you will inherit the earth.
- Gigi: Rise up, you who are insatiably hungry and thirsty for justice, for you will be filled.
- Lisa: Rise up, all who choose to be merciful rather than vengeful, for you will receive mercy.
- Brian: Rise up, all who choose to be pure in heart rather than deceitful and hypocritical, for you will see God.
- Gigi: Rise up, all you who choose to be spreaders of peace rather than spreaders of hate, for you will be called children of God.
- Lisa: Rise up, all who are persecuted, harassed, heckled, rejected, and mocked for standing for justice, for yours is the sacred ecosystem.
- Brian: I want to thank our guests for this episode, Lisa Sharon Harper and Gigi Ross. I want to thank the Center for Action and Contemplation for all the great work that you do. And I want to thank each of you who are listeners. Thanks for devoting this time to this important question of how we hold our Christian identity in a world so desperately in need of racial healing. And a special thanks to Corey Pigg, the producer of this program, who is such a joy to work with.