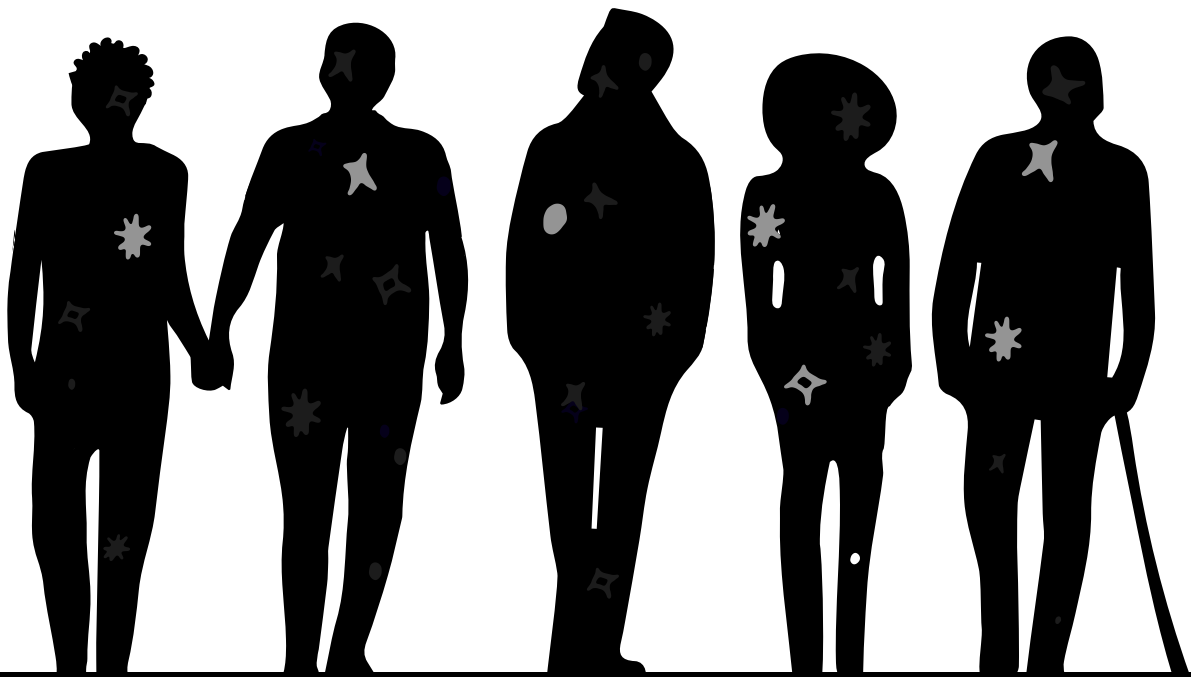


THE COSMIC WE

Episode 2: Contemplation

with Dr. Barbara Holmes and Dr. Donald Bryant



from the CENTER FOR ACTION AND CONTEMPLATION

Barbara Holmes: This podcast considers a type of contemplation that arises out of crisis. I'm referring to a state of devastation brought along by ecological and natural causes, as well as injustice in the oppression of a group of people. These are not circumstances that invite or induce contemplation in its ordinary practice. Contemplation is a soft word in a hard world. Most of us considered the practice to be a voluntary entry into deep and often sacred reflection while in safe and comfortable spaces. Sitting in stillness allows a settling of the mind and the spirit. Through breath, our bodies are revived and attuned to divine presence and cosmic connections. However, in its historically understood context, contemplation requires the privilege and time to retreat from the front lines of everyday life, if only for a little while. For most people of color or culture and communities under siege, such comforts are inconceivable.

We dare not shift our gaze for even a moment to consider an alternative reality. Survival requires an alert, spiritual, and embodied stance. To contemplate in the ordinary sense of the word during a crisis might increase the possibility that we miss or misread signs of danger in the immediate environment. We have to be present or woke, or we might miss the rumbling of a dam that's about to break, a volcano that's about to erupt, or the seething resentment just below the surface of a police officer's polite and routine request for driver's license and registration. We might let our guard down at the wrong moment with lethal consequences. To be woke is to be spiritually alert and willing to be a witness to injustice or catastrophe.

Donny Bryant: From the Center for Action and Contemplation, I'm Donny Bryant.

Barbara Holmes: I'm Barbara Holmes.

Donny Bryant: And this is The Cosmic We.

Barbara Holmes: Welcome to The Cosmic We. In the first session on the book, Crisis Contemplation: Healing the Wounded Village, we talked about the definitions of crises, how they occur, the communal aspects, and how we're all supposed to respond to all of this. So today we're going to be talking about the second chapter, which is on contemplation and the ways in which it occurs during a crisis. So Donny, when you hear the word "contemplation," what do you think of?

Donny Bryant: This is a word that I think has depth, there are layers to the word, but to me, I typically apply the word and interpret the word for me as a way of describing the process of listening, the process of hearing, the process of becoming in tune, if you will, the process of processing. I remember writing down my thoughts around this, and I remember writing, "processing." Sometimes when you're going through something and sometimes I'm like, "Hey, how are you handling it?" "Hey," my response sometimes, "I'm processing." And the processing is a way for me to describe the contemplative approach that I may be handling in that moment. I actually like, there's another thing coming from chapter two in your book, "Slowing Down."

Barbara Holmes: Yeah, we're going to get to that.

Donny Bryant: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah. In a nutshell, that's my way of describing my way of interpreting contemplation.

Barbara Holmes: Yeah, I mean, I call it “a soft word in a hard world.” I mean, most of us think about it as something that we do voluntarily, and it’s an entry into deep and sometimes sacred places, even if they’re in our homes. But we’re usually safe, we’re usually comfortable, and it’s something personal. But when we’re talking about crisis contemplation that has communal impact, we’re talking about completely different type of contemplation. And so for me, it’s a breaking, it’s a shattering of expectations. You know what they used to say in Seinfeld, “It’s the experience of your worlds colliding.” Everything’s happening that shouldn’t be happening. So the question becomes how do you contemplate when you’re devastated. When you’re under siege, when you’re beleaguered by ecological natural stuff, injustice, oppression, how do you do it then? When we’re so used to sitting on our mats in a zen position, relaxing and contemplating, but what is this crisis contemplation? How does it occur? And what do we do when it does?

Donny Bryant: It leads me to an experience that I had this past week, the concept of communal crisis. As you’re describing, I’m in preparation for this. I didn’t realize what was going to happen this past week, but in East Lansing where I went to college, I went to school, my alma mater, Michigan State University, just experienced what I considered a communal crisis. This past week, for those who may not know, there was a shooter on campus who had killed, unfortunately murdered three individuals and five others were critically injured. This happened the day before Valentine’s Day. So February 13th. Coincidentally, I was actually, Dr. B, on my way up to Michigan State to deliver flowers to my daughter.

And while I was en route about 15 minutes from the campus, I get a text from my daughter saying, “Dad, shots were just fired on campus.” A few minutes later, she’s texting me a quote from the university saying, “Run, hide, fight.” Something to that effect. And so at this point I’m like, really, I didn’t realize what was happening and got on the phone. I talked to her and she shared with me that this was coming real time. Apparently it was 15 minutes after the first shots were happening, had rang that the community university reached out to the students. So I immediately, I get on campus. Now, at this point, the university was not locked down. Michigan State is a very sprawling, a very large campus, and it wasn’t yet locked down. I can see the sirens. I can see police vehicles rushing to the part of the campus.

So I got on campus and I was able to get in contact with my daughter. She was on her way to the dorm and I was going to meet her there. Subsequently, she made a decision to go to a friend’s house who was in town, my friend who was in town in Okemos. And we decided to meet over there. And so she was safe. Her friend who was with her was safe. They were off campus. But while this was happening at 9:00, it started at 8:00, 8:15, that shooter was actively on campus from 8:00 to midnight. So for four hours there was this anxiety, this unexpected, unprepared, and there’s nothing you can do about it. And I started to realize that we’re part of, there’s a communal connection here. There is a communal crisis that is being experienced, right? There is a togetherness.

And what I recognized in that moment was that, “Wow, I am a part of this now.” Even though my daughter was safe, there were a lot of other parents who did not know

if their children were safe. It was difficult. I mean, the cell phone lines were being stretched. People couldn't reach me because my phone was not working during this, at least for a couple of hours. I wasn't able to receive or send calls. And so it was just amazing situation. The situation ended at around midnight, but it was the next day and the days after where the processing began to take place, where there was this communal, in my opinion, contemplation. We're searching for answers, we're listening, we're trying to understand, we're trying to make sense. My daughter knew one of the people who was murdered.

And so you begin to realize that you're not so far from what happened. You are right there. You're connected. And so the grief that she experienced, I experienced. The pain that she experienced, I experienced. And so I began to have a different understanding. One of my business colleagues, she's from the Ukraine, and we had a meeting this week. So again, she has family in Ukraine. And so I began to understand that the war in Ukraine, that is another example of communal crisis, like the people they're experiencing there is a symbiotic experiencing of pain and suffering and grief within the individuals in that community. But it just doesn't stop via geographically. It transcends geography. And oftentimes it also affects us who may not necessarily have a direct connection to people who are there, but now we're part of that. We grieve with them, we sit with them. So I want you to invite you to really help us to be able to understand that a little bit better. How do you process and what are some lessons and how is contemplation played out real time in these examples of communal crisis?

Barbara Holmes: What a horrific event. And unfortunately they keep happening, so we can't call them... The crisis is that we're not doing anything about the protection of our children in elementary schools and colleges. The tragedy, the crisis, is that guns are rampant all over the country. Not so much with responsible gun owners, but with folks who probably should not have them. And so then the question becomes, when you're in that kind of a situation, what's the answer? And how does contemplation help if it can? And no one's going to like the response because there isn't a response in the ordinary ways. Everybody, in my generation and yours and all of us, we want a clear process to resolve something. What do we do? How do we do it? What's going to make us all feel better? There aren't any answers like that. And basically what I'm offering in this chapter is the understanding that when there is nothing to do, some of the things that can be done are things we don't want to do.

I mean, Bayo Akomolafe says it most clearly. He says, "The first thing you do is slow down." You stop doing things in the ordinary way and you slow down. And he says this precisely, "Slowing down seems like the wrong thing to do when there's fire on the mountain. But in hurrying up all the time, we often lose sight of the abundance of resources that might help us to meet today's most challenging crises." See, because we're rushing through the same patterns we're used to. And of course, there's not a single way to respond to a crisis, particularly one where people's lives are at stake. However, you can slow down. And what Bayo says is, "By slowing down, you bring face to face, you come

face to face with the invisible, the hidden, the unremarkable, and the yet to be resolved.” But it gets even more haunting. I mean, that’s the thing I like about that philosopher, because he’s talking about, yeah, there’s fire in the mountain, there’s a shooter on campus, but he says, “It’s not just about slowing down, it’s about staying in places you don’t want to be.”

He says it’s talking about, it’s taking care of ghosts and hugging monsters and embracing the weird. It’s about staying in places that are haunted. And I don’t know about you. I don’t want to stay in a haunted house, but sometimes my life feels haunted. So if the only power we have is love, when you’re in the midst of a shooting on a college campus, what does that mean? And I’m not talking about suddenly humming songs and loving the shooter. What does love mean when it becomes the only interaction that you have in during a crisis? What do you think, Donny?

Donny Bryant: This idea, when you talk about love, it comes to mind. You mentioned in the book this concept of letting go and the challenges is that we have oftentimes, and when we use that word love, there’s so many different interpretations of what love looks like and what love means. And so love is one of those words that has become watered down. But I think when I hear you use the word love, there’s this, it’s from the Greek, it’s really the agape. It’s the unconditional, the sacrificial, the “if it doesn’t go my way, if you don’t say, I’m sorry, I’m still here.” It’s the kind of love that does not require a condition to be met. That is a difficult love for us to fully live out oftentimes. The referencing of that type of love is, I think it is the ideal. It is the ultimate. But the concept you write in the book, and you talk about letting go, and you say, “When you truly authentically, really let go, what you have left is God. What you have left is this divine source, the Spirit.”

Barbara Holmes: It just occurred to me is that, in order to love, you have to slow down.

Donny Bryant: Yeah, yeah, it’s connected.

Barbara Holmes: There’s no such thing as drive-by loving. You can’t do it drive-by loving. You got to slow down. You’ve got to give attention to the object of the person of your love. There’s got to be reciprocity. There’s got to be mutuality. Something has to happen that is the intervention of something we don’t really control. It is giving ourselves over to something, letting go so that something else can do the loving through us and for us, because we’re not capable of it.

Donny Bryant: That’s it. The letting go and letting go of our idea of what is right, our idea of what is wrong, our idea of what’s true and what’s not true, our idea of who’s good and who’s bad, who’s up, who’s down, who’s rich, who’s... All of these labels that we use to define how we engage and how we relate and who we accept and who we reject. Letting go means letting go of those definitions, letting go of the socialization or the missocialization, if you will, and getting down, slowing down long enough for you to be able to experience that which is truly real, truly authentic, truly whole.

Barbara Holmes: Yeah. One of the things that you have to let go of is your own ego. I give, yeah. And you are a contemplative, you're a pastor. I'm a spiritual teacher. I don't think I have much ego, but that's just not true. We all have massive egos that get in the way of our loving one another. I just give you an example. I was meeting this person for a business lunch the other day. And the meeting was being held because the denomination that I belong to had lost all my records. Okay, well, this isn't the first time that's happened. And because of this George Santos stuff, what they were implying was that I didn't have any. They were questioning my credentials and my ordination. Well, now that's easy to put to rest. I keep records of absolutely everything. But because my denomination is historically white, and I'm not, there was some uncomfortability and undercurrent at the table.

She was tense, and I was too, and I wasn't as friendly as I can be. And she was trying to explain, and suddenly she burst into tears. Now I know I can be a pill, but tears really. And then she's suddenly, and we're talking about, she's looking at my credentials and saying, "Oh, we're so sorry. We didn't understand." And then she suddenly starts crying and says, "I'm sorry, but my son just died." And all the rest of what we were talking about disappeared. There was nothing to say. A silence descended on us. Were we a community, just the two of us, at that moment? I don't know. We didn't have anything further to say. I expressed my condolences, I softened my tone, and we sat in silence. Was that a contemplative moment in the midst of the crisis of ineffable grief? I mean, something happened between the two of us.

Donny Bryant: Yes. To answer your question, I believe, and this is what I really want our listeners and readers of the book to get, that this is part of the contribution. I think the invitation for us all to be able to experience moments like that which you described was when you began to recognize that there was certain beliefs that you were holding onto about the other person and you were engaged and she had certain beliefs about you, that there was an eclipse, there was something that took place. And you were willing in that moment to let go. You were willing to let go your pride or your need to be right right now. And you were willing to be vulnerable, if you will, as she was willing to be vulnerable.

And that there was some context, there was something else. There was some crisis that had happened that unbeknownst to you that you actually were invited to be a part of. And you accepted that invitation. And you sat with her silently. In some shape or form, you administered this contemplative opportunity and moment to slow down, to hear, and to grieve together. And I think that's where the healing, I mean something that's being engineered in the spirit that cannot be architected intentionally, it happens in the moment. And you are willing to just go with the flow. And I just feel that there are lessons to be learned from that. You speak of things that are just too extreme. In your book, you talk about the eclipse, the moan, and the stillness, that there are three components to this understanding crisis contemplation. And you describe the eclipse as something that comes in between one object and another object.

And you describe that when that happens, when that eclipse happens, oftentimes there's an invitation, there's an opportunity, and sometimes there's just a manifestation of an unutterable moan, an indescribable, an expression and articulation of pain or

sorrow or grief that words cannot describe. And oftentimes it is that kind of force that intellect cannot really interpret, that sometimes opinions can interpret it, but only in that moment, only in the spirit, that sometimes there is a way of understanding and participating collectively. There's a level of compassion that can be experienced and received, and that's where the stillness happens. You book in that, that the trilogy there with eclipse, moaning, and stillness. It's often after that expression of grief, that expression of yearning, and it can happen at the collective level.

Barbara Holmes: Yes, yes.

Donny Bryant: I think in your book, *Joy Unspeakable*, which was my first introduction to your work, you described the transatlantic slave experience, and you describe the pain and the moaning and the grief that happened at the collective level as a communal contemplative experience. And from a conventional historical standpoint, we did not see that as a communal, contemplative experience, but it is, and this is what you're describing. And I would love for you to just maybe elaborate a little bit more on that, because I think that's critically important because that's what I was experiencing with my daughter at Michigan State. That's what I began to realize, that in these chat rooms that was happening, there was a moaning, there was a communal contemplative experience online, and kids were sharing their opinion and they were expressing their grief and they were supporting one another at that level.

Barbara Holmes: Yeah. I mean, it's in the darkness. It's in the moment of crisis when you have fallen through all of your own expectations, that there is the opportunity for rebirthing. And that's why I was talking about the holes of slave ships, because although folks don't seem to know that, the people who were taken were taken from different tribes and nations with different languages and different gods and different approaches to religion and different spiritualities. And so often they couldn't even speak to each other because they didn't have the same language, but yet they were all shattered. And so in the whole of that ship, there is a rebirthing because these people will never set foot on the continent of Africa again. And what happens when you're giving birth to something? Inevitably there is moaning because it isn't an easy process giving birth. And so the groaning and the moaning and the singing is, I describe it as stitching together a completely new community.

It will never be the same as it was, but something new is being born in the whole of that ship. They have called out to the gods that they believed in the continent and have not been released from their pain or their suffering or their grief. And so now they're wide open to the God who they think they have fallen into the hands of. And what happens is they come to the Americas and the African diaspora is they fall into the hands of a loving God. Now, it isn't that they come to Christianity as slaves and learn about it, because Africans were there at Jesus' time and helped Jesus carry the cross. They were there from the very, very beginning. And many of our church fathers were Africans, we just don't know it. So it's not that they became Christians and got a new God in America, but they become open to the manifestations of a God who will knit them together as a whole new community.

So the breaking is hard, but something new comes out of it usually. Donny, have you

ever had to let go of something because we don't like to let go because it's like giving up. We don't like quitting. If you tell me to do something, I'm going to do it until it gets done and I won't give up. But sometimes you have to take your hands off of something that you can't control anyway. Have you ever had to let go of something you didn't want to let go of, but it was beyond your control? Donny, if you've had had to let go of something because we don't like to let go because it's like giving up. We don't like quitting. If you tell me to do something, I'm going to do it until it gets done and I won't give up. But sometimes you have to take your hands off of something that you can't control anyway. Have you ever had to let go of something you didn't want to let go of, but it was beyond your control?

Donny Bryant:

Absolutely. I think we all have. And I think we all have experienced moments in our life that were just overwhelmingly difficult to process, to understand, to accept. Yeah. I have had an experience, and one person said to me, "Donny, you're so used to being able to fix everything. You've been so successful at fixing broken things. You're an engineer. You love to solve problems. You've been able to do this in business, you're able to do this in this situation, you're able to do this in the church, but this one situation you will not be able to fix." And just hearing that and considering that that might be true was devastating.

And I have learned that the key to healing and the key to survival is surrender i.e., letting go, i.e. "kenosis," which is a Greek term for gently releasing the thing that you hold onto so closely to your heart. It might be your ego, it might be your identity, it might be your status in community, your title, your position, it might be a marriage, it may be your finances, whatever the idol is to use a theological term that you're holding onto. You have to let go. And honestly, the critical key that I recognize, the genius in letting go is what you just described, it's a breaking four new beginning. It's a dawning of a new day. The opportunity to experience the beauty of resurrection and renewal, "new creation" as some writers call it.

And so that is the promise, and that promise is for everyone, every human being. But we typically don't see it that way when the breaking is happening, when the pain is upon us, when the darkness is upon us. I have, and we have. And to your point that it's not oftentimes, what I'm starting to recognize in chapter two is that although we may see it as personal individual, oftentimes it is very much communal, that there are other people sitting with you. There are other people who are experiencing it with you. Sometimes you feel like I'm all alone, I'm by myself, and no one understands and no one is feeling this, but the reality is you are not alone.

Barbara Holmes:

No. I mean, often you've had signals all along that you were on the wrong path, and you won't turn around. When I was practicing law in Miami, I had every signal that that was not what I was supposed to be doing with my life. But after you take two bar exams and pass them and after you're sitting by the white sands and blue beaches of Miami, do you really want to wander down a path where you don't know where it's going? No. So I just kept trudging along, doing complex civil litigation that I hated. And it took a breaking, it took a crisis. The firm collapsed. A perfectly normal firm, one day it's there, the next day the partners are fighting, it's gone. I'm my grandmother's dying. I have to go home. I have nothing. I have to leave my practice.

And I don't know, I mean, all of this is crisis

And my relationship breaks up. Everything happens at the same time to force me to stop. Now, is that God throwing bricks and throwing up walls to make me crash into them? Of course not. It is the hints that you do have a path in life. And when you veer off, the most loving thing that can happen is that you get stopped. And I remember going to my mom's house and trying to decide, "What do I do?" I have a license to practice law in Georgia. Shall I go practice law again? I hate it. Should I go back to Florida and practice again? What should I do? So I did nothing. What I did was I went to bed. I just relaxed all summer, did nothing. There was nothing to do because I could not control that situation. And one day my sister came by and said, let's go take a look down the street. Maybe we could both volunteer at a children's home. And when we walked in, it wasn't a children's home. We thought it was. It was a seminary.

As it turned out, Columbia Theological Seminary was around the corner from my mom's house. And I walked in and said, "Oh, we thought this was a place we could volunteer." And they said, "Who are you? And what is your name? And what is your education? And would you like to come to seminary?" And I said, "Yeah." And they said, "Okay, good. Just come this summer. Pay for your courses. And take Hebrew and all that. And then come in the fall and we'll scholarship you." And I didn't go. And in September, they called me up and said, "Why didn't you come?" I said, "Because I told you I wasn't working. I had no money. I couldn't pay for the courses, so I didn't come." And they said, "Oh, please stop it. Come in now." And they scholarshiped me. And I graduated from Columbia and went on to Vanderbilt. And my life began. But without the breaking in Miami, I'd still be trudging along practicing law when I did not enjoy it. And that's not a gift to anyone when you're doing something that isn't your gift.

Donny Bryant: So the crisis experience was not a rejection, it was redirection.

Barbara Holmes: Yeah, it was redirection. And the redirection had been coming all along, but I wouldn't pay any attention.

Donny Bryant: Wow. And I think with what I'm hearing as you articulate the story of your journey, is that there are signals that are often blinking. There are warning signals, or there are signals that are saying, "Hey, over here." But because we're so busy and oftentimes so distracted or worried or we're anxious or we're afraid or stressed, whatever that emotion is, that stops us from slowing down, it's almost in the slowing down that gives you the ability, it's the sitting still. It's the stillness that allows you to see the universal oneness of what's happening, to see the signals, to be able to at least perceive them, I should say, or to become more in tune with the signals, to sense the signals. And that's the power of contemplative practices. That is the power of prayer, the power of meditation, the power of silence. There's a gift there.

Barbara Holmes: I think the reason it's so difficult is that everyone is afraid of, a lot of people anyway, are afraid of the dark. And I don't know why that is, because there is a palpable darkness in the midst of crisis. But unless you are familiar with things like St. John of the Cross and the Blessing of Darkness, it is a womb that is a place of rebirth. It is a place of healing. It is a place where God wraps us up and envelops us in a way that we

can't rely on our ordinary sight.

And so we have to see with the heart, because there is no way out of many of these crises other than through letting go, relinquishing, and waiting, we try to our religious systems to avoid all darkness. And you know how church is. We glorify the light and we make sacrifices to its heat. But often all of the talk about love in church doesn't get manifested in any real way. And you were telling us a story about the ways in which love is manifesting in your multiethnic, multi-religious congregation. That was just amazing, so tell us a little bit about that story.

Donny Bryant:

I guess it was actually the Sunday before this crisis happened at Michigan State University, so this would've probably been, what, February 12th. We were in service and I had already considered a message. I prepared a message. And just before it went up, I just felt the tug and the leading to change it. So I had stepped out and it went into the chapel and had my phone, which was my digital bible. And I just started thinking about what is it that needs to be communicated today? And settled on this concept of love. And I had forgot Valentine's Day. It wasn't even intentional. I didn't even realize it was coming up on Tuesday. I had realized that there's something that we need to talk about in love in my congregation. There was a gentleman who is, he had been coming on and off.

He's part of the LGBTQ community. We have a great relationship. We always have great conversations about different things that we share. And this Sunday, he had brought his partner. Prior to that, had never brought his partner to service. Got a chance to connect with his partner. And we had a wonderful, actually, I saw them at an event that was on Saturday. I saw them both at an event that we had both attended with another member of our church. And so, it didn't even really dawn on me until after service. I said, "Wait a minute. This is the first time that he brought his partner." And I started asking myself questions, "What made him feel comfortable?" And what I got from just in the conversations and even after service, it was like, there was kind of a bright light. There was like a relief.

And I was trying to figure out in my mind like, "What's so different?" And the message that I got was, "This is not typical. We don't always feel comfortable being able to worship in a church." That was a manifestation and expression of the message of love. And I think I shared earlier in our conversation to you about when I came up with the title, I was trying to figure out my title because I just came up with the sermon on the fly. And I remember having the congregation go around and hug three to five people. And as they're doing that, I said, "Tell them I love you." And that's when Spirit just said, "That's it. That's the message. 'I love you.'" In 1 Corinthians 13 became the foundation for that message. And this becomes a message for me. It is a message of love.

And even understanding the darkness and understanding the pain, understanding the crisis, understanding the wilderness, there is a way of framing it. There is a way of trying to interpret it, to see the love, the unconditional, the sacrificial, universal oneness of love that is within that darkness that it's producing something. There is a seed that's been multiplied in that. I'm always a little bit shocked as I am in my

journey trying to practice this. Darkness has a way of helping you to, as you said, let go of all these different ego trips that we have, the brands, the way we identify people, the labels we place on situations and people. And when you go through your darkness, when you go through that season, when you go through the crisis, oftentimes there is an appealing away. There is a relinquishing, there is a letting go.

And then what you have left is universal love. It is the essence, the source. It is God. It is the divine. And it's from that place that you begin to see the universal connectedness, the cosmic communal connectedness that we have, the connection, the oneness. Again, I love how Father Richard Roarke, he calls it, he says, "What it means to be Christian is to be able to see the Christ in everything, to be able to see the Christ image in everyone." And there's an appreciation. There is a value there. You see the wholeness there, the oneness there. And I think that comes out of contemplation, that comes out of stillness, that comes out of letting go and slowing down. And it's from that place that we live, it is from that place that we relate, and it's from that place that we engage with community. And I believe it is from that place that there is a communal healing, a global healing that could happen, a corporate healing, a cosmic healing that could take place.

Barbara Holmes: Yeah. When a crisis has you in its grip, what contemplation offers is the ability to stop striving. What contemplation does is it allows you the space to grieve your losses and then let go. It lets you know that it's all right to withdraw from ordinary pursuits for a little while. It's all right to get out of the driver's seat and sit in the back for a while. It's okay to let the Spirit lead you.

Donny Bryant: Dr. B, at the end of the chapter, you have some practices. Chapter two, you have given us some things to consider spiritual practices. There are people, Dr. B, who this is new to, what we're discussing and the practice of contemplation is new. You give some very detailed and I think very excellent steps and things that we can actually consider. And I wanted to see if you were willing to share from some of the spiritual practices, how would you go about engaging or initiating a spiritual practice of contemplation as a result of the context of this chapter of your book?

Barbara Holmes: Yeah. I've often come to the conclusion that we talk too much. And with all of the crises that are going on currently with the violence in the streets and the political confusion and the opposition of one part of the country against another, that some of the practices that would help would be to stop talking and come together. There's a way in which, I imagine even in my own mind, a beautiful space where people who disagree on absolutely everything could come and be still together. And to allow at least one hour of time together with perhaps some music, perhaps some drumming or just quiet meditative sounds to just do nothing. And then slowly after that hour was up, to allow the conversation to begin coming directly from the silence.

I think even community meetings that begin with the ordinary, they say the prayers, sometimes they do the pledge of allegiance, they do something, and then they start talking. What happens if you speak to one another after you've allowed your hearts to commingle and conjoin in silence? Can you get a deeper expression of feeling? Can you listen to others in a better way? And so to think about contemplation in a

communal context means it's not always just sitting together. Sometimes it's deciding to do something together to help the wider world. I was sitting in my car at the beach the other day just watching the sunset. And they were all of these people, elderly and young, all ages, and they had trash cans in their hands, and they had sticks, and they were picking up trash on the beach. Nobody was talking. They weren't giggling, laughing, and playing or doing any of the things that the other beach goers were doing.

They were silently cleaning the beaches. And there were so many of them. I wouldn't have noticed if it'd just been one or two or 10 or 15. It seemed like a hundred or more. And they were all wearing the same T-shirts that indicated some ecological group. And when they passed one another. They didn't speak. They smiled at one another. They lifted their pales to show how much they'd picked up, but it was all silent. And so they were doing something and it was a very contemplative action, but it didn't require a whole lot of language. Now, I'm a writer, so I love language, but there are some things language can't touch. And the mysticism of this world is one of them. And the only way you can tap into that power and that energy is through contemplation. Wonderful conversation. Thanks, Donny.

Donny Bryant:

Thank you, Dr. B. Thanks for listening to this episode on contemplation. Dr. B gave us a definition on contemplation as "a soft word in a hard world." Contemplation within a crisis is a catastrophic, unexpected event. When this event is experienced, it leads to a shattering, a breaking. And in the process of that shattering, what's in you will come out of you. And that wound brings about an inseparable communal bond, an inseparable connection within the people you do life with. And that's what we'll discuss in the next episode on wounds. Thanks for listening.