



EVERYTHING BELONGS

Catching Up with Richard Rohr

Mike Petrow: There was a kid from Kansas that had a mystical experience under a Christmas tree, and through over 50 years of teaching and 50 books to his name, he would spend the rest of his life trying to show us that everyone and every thing belongs. Now in the sunset of his life, in his 80th year with the world rapidly changing, Richard is fond of quoting St. Francis in saying, “I have done what was mine to do. Now you must do what is yours to do.”

So here we are as our beloved teacher, Father Richard Rohr, is stepping back, and we’re sitting with these massive questions. If everything belongs, why does it have to hurt so bad? If everything belongs, why does the world seem so unjust sometimes? And what is our responsibility to help create a more just and loving reality where everyone really does belong? How do we live these teachings forward and apply them in an ever-evolving and increasingly messy world?

In the coming seasons, we’ll be moving through Richard’s major books and teachings, but in this introductory season, we’ll be setting the stage by focusing on guideposts for living the teachings forward. We’ll introduce you to our expanding community and explore how together we are all striving to co-create a world where everyone and everything might actually belong. But first, today, we’ll begin by paying Richard a visit.

Paul Swanson: In planning this first season of the Everything Belongs podcast, we went through quite a few iterations. Each shift was a move in the right direction. Even as we suspected, we hadn’t quite discovered the right destination. That is when it clicked in, how can this podcast reflect and inform what Richard reflects in his teachings? It is not about right destination, but right direction. It’s not about perfect articulation, but authentic, humble, and purposeful seeking. We decide the best way to begin Everything Belongs was to open the front door of the Center for Action and Contemplation and invite all of you in on the direction that the CAC is headed.

We begin with Father Richard Rohr. Like the rest of the world, the global pandemic changed how Richard taught and moved about his days. And like many organizations, all of us at the CAC began to work remotely. Once it became safe during the pandemic to do so, Mike and I began meeting with Richard weekly at his hermitage. We would first be greeted by his dog, Opie, and then by Richard’s laughter at Opie’s relentless pursuit of getting yet another treat from Mike.

Mike and I would settle in on the couch and Richard in his recliner, soon to be joined by Opie on his lap. Seeing Richard, this internationally recognized spiritual teacher and author at 80 years old, contently reclining with his dog, snuggling tight, it would be an understatement to say that he looks more relaxed. Of course, he says he’s just leaning into his Enneagram nine wing. But being around Richard these past few years, we have seen him ease into a transition of being. He has been releasing many of his active duties at the Center for Action and Contemplation at the local parish and in the living school. As he has released these duties, a new spaciousness has opened up. He still wistfully engages with interest on our personal lives, raises doubts on spiritual matters worth ruminating on, and is clear-eyed about injustices and woundings in our world.

But his laugh is quicker and his ears are more perked to listen a little more acutely to the subtle winds of the spirit. If Richard hears these words, he’ll say, “Oh, stop it,” and I will,

because Richard's gift is teaching and he knows the best way to honor any teaching is not to put a teacher on a pedestal. They'll just fall off anyway. But to embody the truth of the teachings and live them forward as only you can in the unique context of your own daily life.

We are inviting you to take a seat with us on Richard's couch in his hermitage to hear the echoing church bells nearby, to listen to Opie's chortles as his eyes flutter towards sleep. To catch up with Richard on what the past few years have been like for him in this season of transition, the gifts and trials, the directions unfolding before him. As you can imagine, before any of us can spit out a word, Richard's eyes will get big with excitement and he'll ask us, "Well, what should we talk about today?"

Mike Petrow: From the Center for Action and Contemplation, I'm Mike Petro.

Paul Swanson: I'm Paul Swanson.

Mike Petrow: And this is everything Belongs.

So Richard, we're very excited that not too long ago you turned 80. How does it feel to be a newly minted octogenarian?

Richard Rohr: 80 is an age you never think you'll live to, so I'm still in the surprise days. I'm 80, and with the recent health scares, I doubly didn't think I would make it to this, so it feels good. Unearned gift, a mysterious gift, and I don't even know why that's true because I never prayed for a long life. I never expected a long life, but it seems like... What does the Psalm say? 70 years? "We live 70 years or 80 if we are strong." Well, I'm not strong, but I'm 80.

Paul Swanson: How did you celebrate your 80th birthday? What does one do to celebrate?

Richard Rohr: Two men on the staff or helpers at the Center took me for a road trip through Southern California. It initially started that we were going to make a contemplative retreat at the Big Sur Monastery. Then the storm closed it down, so we couldn't go there, and we found out how many friends we had in Southern California. It was just a delight, and my birthday hardly mattered. Every day was more fun than the next. So it was traveling in a car with good mileage, so it didn't cost too much. It was a Prius.

Paul Swanson: You guys got to throw that in there.

Richard Rohr: Right? I had to let you know.

Mike Petrow: So Richard, I think a lot of the folks who are listening would love to know. In your 80th year, what does a typical day in the life of Richard Rohr look like when you're not out having adventures on road trips?

Richard Rohr: Well, I wake up around 6:00 naturally. Opie has learned my schedule now. If I don't start stirring to get up, he taps me. "It's time to get up." I make coffee, and then I sit here and drape my coffee and gaze out the window. Usually I'm opening the blinds around then. After about 45 minutes, Eli drops by and he makes breakfast for both of us, so that's always delightful. Nothing fancy, just little fruit and protein. And then I lead the Center at prayer at 8:30. I don't lead, I mean, I attend. I lead one day. But every day is different. That's one

thing I like about my life. There's nothing boring. It's always different each day. Like you guys coming here today, it's different.

Mike Petrow: Well, this is probably the highlight of your week.

Richard Rohr: Of the year.

Mike Petrow: Yeah, that's true. That's true. Well, that's great. What really brings you joy? What brings fun and happiness into your day?

Richard Rohr: What brings fun and happiness? When I'm not urgent, when I'm not under a deadline, which most of my life was, and now I'm enjoying so-called retirement where I don't have many deadlines. And when I take advantage of that... See, what the ego could do is create deadlines that aren't even needed. Like today I said, "Those three guys are going to come today and I better clean up the house because I know they'll criticize it."

Mike Petrow: Are you still waiting to clean it up?

Richard Rohr: So I create little deadlines, but when there isn't, and I can really gaze... And gazing and praying and thinking are all the same thing now.

Mike Petrow: Yeah, I think that's been the most interesting thing probably for us getting to be in conversation with you in, the last few years, is listening to you talk about your spiritual practice and how important gazing has become. Would you say a little bit more about that?

Richard Rohr: Oh, sure. I realized that when my best prayer happened, and that's the best way to say it, I didn't do it. It happened. I was usually in the midst of a gaze, a sustained gaze, and I learned, you probably heard me, to distinguish the gaze from glaring, which is when I look at something judgmentally-

Mike Petrow: Like us.

Richard Rohr: Like you two, yes. You're getting a big glare, or, what was the other G I used?

Mike Petrow: Glancing.

Richard Rohr: Glancing. Just a non-caring, looking at everything like you do from the window of a car as you're driving along. Much for life is glaring and glancing, but not gazing. And that just, in a moment, it became clear in my backyard here underneath the cottonwood tree. Just sitting there gazing. No one to glare at, nothing passing by to glance at, I could enjoy a sustained gaze. And I just want to teach that to as many people as I can before I pass so they'll know that prayer is something... Well, no, it is essentially religious, but it is what we think of as religious.

God always gets into such moments, but you don't always call it God. You just call it contentment, happiness, freedom, joy. And I think that's how God shows God's self, and that's so different than the way I was raised. It was all through moralism, really,

that God showed himself through what he was demanding of you each minute. It was a moral matter, not a mystical matter. And now why did it take my whole life to fully understand that it's all about how you see and how you enjoy, how you take it in, not what moral commandment are you following, where you always fall short by the way, because you'll think of a commandment that you're not fulfilled. Excuse me.

Mike Petrow: I appreciate that so much for me because my practice, I'm closing my eyes, and so often I've thought of practices trying to shut the world out, and teaching on gazing has been really, really insightful.

Richard Rohr: Oh, good. Eyes wide open.

Mike Petrow: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Not eyes closed shut.

Mike Petrow: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: That's a different kind of prayer.

Paul Swanson: You were saying it's an evolution at this part of your life.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. Just the simplicity and the clarity of that realization. I'm sure I was growing in it, but now it's so simple. It's so clear and so true that I know I don't have to prove this to people. I can't prove it. I just invite them, "Do it and you'll see. You'll know whatever it is you need to know."

Paul Swanson: Is it the kind of thing where for those of us who are not yet 80, but might have that sense that this is a part of the path down the road or to try to practice it now to incorporate in our current position in life? Or is that something to look forward to? How do you imagine teaching that to others who are still forming their own unpacking, unfolding spiritual journey?

Richard Rohr: I mean, you're too young, man. The fact that you've already responded to that tells me you're on the path already or it wouldn't have spoken to you. You've seen that it's true. But great things can only be understood gradually in gradation. You don't get anything great all at once. You can't absorb it. And so this wonderful gift of time allows you to, "Oh, I thought I knew that, but I didn't until just now." It feels like that.

Mike Petrow: So I appreciate that so much.

Richard Rohr: Good.

Mike Petrow: And we've talked about this. You're really, literally, talking about gazing, opening my eyes to see that contemplation is deep listening and not deep ignoring. It literally is the long loving living-

Richard Rohr: Good phraseology, Michael. Good.

Mike Petrow: I want to ask, you talked about the gift of time and for years, I imagine your whole life you've been involved in the rhythm of the church, saying mass, doing the hours. What has it been like to now not be offering homilies, not be going to the church to do the liturgy every day?

Richard Rohr: Well, because of my Enneagram one, I'm sorry to say, I first of all feel guilt. You're not a real priest anymore. You don't say mass, you don't wear the garb very much. So it's first a feeling of, "Am I kidding myself?" And I've just created a nice little life for myself in this beautiful little hut, which is much more than a hut. So it's first of all, fear that I'm fooling myself and making life too easy for myself. After that, it's wonderful. If I could get through the guilt... But one always has to get through the guilt. You used to think you were a one, didn't you? Oh, that's right. You're not supposed to be in the room.

Mike Petrow: Corey's not here. Pay no attention to him.

Richard Rohr: He's not here.

Corey Wayne: Sorry about it.

Richard Rohr: This happens on talk shows where they talk to the camera man and no one knows who they're talking to. Did I answer your question, Michael?

Mike Petrow: Yeah. I love that notion and I love your honesty. For you to talk about the gift of time and then also say, "And still I have guilt." How do you wrestle with the guilt and let it go?

Richard Rohr: Well, that has become easier and easier. That phrase struck me recently in Merton, "The brutalities of our own will." He used words so well, and I realized as a young man, I think my will was brutal. It just, "You may not do that." It was harsh. It was stern. It wasn't the voice of God. It was the voice of my German culture and seminary training and temperament.

Too much will makes you brutal. We see this in, I won't mention names, but some of the reformers, and some of the saints were just so brutal in their judgments of everything and you say, "God, I wouldn't like to live with him," because it would be living with my old self, and I had enough of that. It didn't make me kind. It didn't make me happy. I wonder if I smiled much. They said I did. They said I was always happy. I'm glad to hear that because I wasn't feeling that always inside, but now I feel it. Yeah.

Paul Swanson: And that pause in your priestly duties was during the pandemic, is that correct? That's when-

Richard Rohr: Well, you're right. It coincided because the bishop here said men over 75 should not function as priests anymore because the sacraments are too tactile. You're always touching the people. And that was a great insight, so I was out immediately. It wasn't a matter of choice. It's one of the good things about Catholic hierarchy. When they give a good order, it takes away... "Oh, okay, I'll just obey the order."

Paul Swanson: You got the senior discount.

Richard Rohr: It's like a senior discount. That's excellent. Yeah. When you're ordered to do something, then

you sort of like it.

Paul Swanson: Everything Belongs will continue in a moment.

The pandemic holds a unique spot in all of our lives as it is a rare shared global experience. The losses and silver linings are as diverse as they're real. From here, a through line of gratitude, appreciation, and reflection of the essentials of life carry us forward. In this tone and tenor, we continue with our conversation at Richard hermitage.

Who are your peers these days? Who are you hanging out with? What friends bring you life and lights you up right now?

Richard Rohr: Tu'r just came from Cincinnati, New Jerusalem last week. We went on a little road trip to Acoma, where I first was assigned. John Quigley is coming out next month. My old friends are all in other cities or Cincinnati. You're my new friends, you young ones here at CAC, but I don't have a lot of peers in Albuquerque. I don't know why. It's probably my own fault, but I wasn't building friendships. I was trying to avoid one more relationship, one more relationship.

And there was some selfishness in that too that I kept a lot of people... In those 40 some years that I was on the road, including my first years out here, I tried to limit friendships just for survival. I didn't know how I could be intimate, honest, truly friendly with that many people. And I go to a new city, back to Cleveland or Oakland, and you'd meet friends that you met years ago, and that was always enough. You just have to have some intimate friendships in your life, but they don't have to be on a daily basis. They really don't.

Mike Petrow: Speaking of friends in other cities, and speaking of the gift of time, it sounds like you've been traveling a bunch or at least a bit, right?

Richard Rohr: No, lately you

Mike Petrow: You've been able to take a road trip to Acoma.

Richard Rohr: These little road trips are wonderful. Now that I don't go on planes hardly at all, I enjoy a road trip with someone that I can talk to. They do the driving and I do the talking with them. I hope I don't monologue, but yeah.

Mike Petrow: It's that Road Tripping with Roar podcast coming soon.

Richard Rohr: I enjoy it very much.

Mike Petrow: Yeah, that's fantastic.

Paul Swanson: What is it about traveling that continues to spark you, animate you as you step away from more public duties?

Richard Rohr: I suppose it's a need to keep my world big and not get too tiny in the world of Albuquerque, CAC, New Mexico, this little house. I love it. I love it, but if I let this become the parameters of my mind or the issues that CAC, the issues, I'll just become cranky. I think maybe I already am. I hope not. Yeah, I was lucky to live most of my life in a much larger

world, and now I hesitate to make it small again.

Mike Petrow: It seems like it's a good center, but maybe not a great circumference so you can get out and about.

Richard Rohr: Oh, very nice.

Mike Petrow: That's cool.

Richard Rohr: Thank you. Thank you.

Mike Petrow: That's delightful. I think probably the things people really want to know, Richard-

Richard Rohr: What?

Mike Petrow: Two things I think people really want to know. First and foremost, are you writing anything?

Richard Rohr: Well, that's funny you'd ask. Just this morning I wrote a chapter on Amos the Prophet, and it just flowed out. I was so grateful. Just came like it used to. Now, I had spent a few days in the last week reading Amos, so getting a sense of his message-

Mike Petrow: One of the more-

Richard Rohr: ... And he proves the point I want to make. He doesn't become loving and compassionate till the last chapter. It's like again and again. They start off angry old men yelling at everybody. Now, here's the thing I've got to reconcile to write the book well, their anger is deserved, but it's ruining them, and that's why I think most people close the book on the prophets. Who wants to be yelled at all the time? But what they're yelling about, especially Amos, boy, is it deserved. He does have nice things to say about rich old ladies who are demanding of other people and rich old priests who are not really obeying the law themselves.

He's an outsider. He's a poor herdsman who sees how the inside of the church, the synagogue in his case, and the government that was really operating. So he's a classic prophet. He has this bias from the bottom, an outsider who isn't an establishment person who has the freedom to see it. First, like most of us, you just get mad at it. Those hypocrites. And he unrolls that through most of the book, even though the issues he raises are very true. But finally, he's moved from anger to love, and that's when he's a full prophet. So that's the point I want to try to make from as many prophets as I can, but you got to wait until the end of the book usually.

Mike Petrow: So the movement is from anger to love. That's fascinating. You just said they start out as angry old men. It's almost like they're aging backwards.

Richard Rohr: Oh, wow.

Mike Petrow: That's anger to love is the movement?

Richard Rohr: Well, the way I'm saying it in the book is a little more subtle than that, which you as a four will understand.

Mike Petrow: Sure.

Richard Rohr: It's anger to tears.

Mike Petrow: Oh, wow.

Richard Rohr: I start with a Latin phrase, [foreign language 00:27:25]. Have you ever heard that phrase?

Mike Petrow: No.

Richard Rohr: It's quoted in history and literature and Shakespeare. I think in Shakespeare. [foreign language 00:27:36]. Our professor went on and on about... Of course, he was a four, Father Lucian, and [foreign language 00:27:43] means the tears of everything.

Mike Petrow: Wow.

Richard Rohr: Things have tears and things call forth tears.

Mike Petrow: Wow.

Richard Rohr: Oh, it's a rich concept and that's why it's been quoted and re-quoted throughout history. It was just quoted by, not surprisingly, Pope Francis. He was quoted [foreign language 00:28:13]. "The world today demands tears." Yeah.

Paul Swanson: Wow. So part of what you're saying is that a prophet does not come into their fullness until they've recognized the tears within and speak out to the injustice that's causing those tears, but also the tears of the world are having an impact on those prophets.

Richard Rohr: And finally soften them.

Paul Swanson: Yes.

Richard Rohr: Now what I got to do and pray that I could do it is hold on to the truth of the anger. Well, it's my daily meditation today too, in fact. The truth of the anger, but the danger of the anger or what isn't true about the anger. It's your apatheia. When you let it control you, you're not a help anymore. And that's why we have so many false prophets in America today, in the world today, are angry, angry. And you want to sit there and say, "I agree with you. I agree with you. That deserves anger, but you're not a good messenger of it because you're just making me more angry. You're feeding it by letting it become your ego." Yeah. I'm sorry.

Paul Swanson: No, no, no. I don't want to cut you off. I was going to ask about this pattern of the prophet that you are noticing, this kind of Benjamin Button of going in reverse-

Richard Rohr: That's good.

Paul Swanson: ... Have you seen that pattern in your own life? This sense of-

Richard Rohr: Oh, of course.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: That's me. I mean, my early social justice sermons at New Jerusalem, some of them just edged out of the room. "I don't think we want to hear Richard today. He's on one of his tirades," but then they saw me come back from Latin America and Africa angry. And I do. I think it's autobiographical what I'm seeing in the prophets, but I think I can make it evident from the text that it's not just autobiographical.

Anger just distorts everything. It makes you egocentric because it's my anger, my deserved anger, my right to this anger. In fact, I'm on higher moral ground than you are because I feel it and you don't you slobby bourgeois middle class Catholic.

Paul Swanson: And this connects to what you were saying this morning about anger and a right relationship with anger.

Mike Petrow: Right.

Paul Swanson: Do you want to just... Because Richard has mentioned apatheia and the teaching you gave this morning.

Mike Petrow: Sure.

Paul Swanson: How does that integrate into this?

Mike Petrow: Sure, so apatheia, it's a concept that comes out of early Christian contemplative teaching and it sounds like the word apathy, but it's not.

Richard Rohr: It's not.

Mike Petrow: It's not caring about what doesn't matter so that you can care about what does.

Richard Rohr: That's such a good definition.

Mike Petrow: Thank you.

Paul Swanson: Yeah, so good.

Richard Rohr: We just got to make you a teacher. I'll just wave out and you can wave in.

Mike Petrow: I'm just content to point people to your stuff, Richard. It's such a gift in that when we think about strong emotions too, apatheia is not not feeling things. It's not freedom from emotions, it's emotional freedom. It's letting our emotions be our teachers and our instructors without letting them utterly consume us.

And the last thing we talked about was how one of our other teachers at the Center, Jim Finley, talks about anger and he says so often we're trained to think that anger is violence or anger is revenge or anger is bad, when in reality anger is a message. It's wisdom that a boundary has been violated and then it's fuel to restore the boundary, which lines up with what you're saying about the path of the prophet. That's really, really profound.

Richard Rohr: Here's where we really conflicted, most Jews and Christians. We largely presented God as an angry person.

Mike Petrow: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: This is a major conflict. Well, if God could be angry... In fact, we were, I heard a woman yesterday on TV. She says, "I'm a God-fearing person," and I just thought, "No." What made her use that phrase? She's afraid of God and this is a virtue? God-fearing is a phrase people do use to mean a good person. You got to be afraid of God before you can be good? This distorts our entire moral system, and that's not an overstatement.

Mike Petrow: Well, it's interesting. There was a point, where especially when I would read the Hebrew Bible, the emotions of God scared me and bothered me a lot, and I've come to a point, and this is a very Enneagram four thing, where I love reading about a divinity that expresses itself through emotions. That's very liberating to me, but being stuck in anger, that's a particular thing. Do you think it's because we are in that first part of the path of the prophet where because we're angry, all we can see is anger in the divine? Or it was written from that place?

Richard Rohr: That's part of the truth right there. But the other thing I'd want to say is... Now I had it and I just lost it.

Mike Petrow: This is what's been liberating for me about your teaching on the path of the prophet, is because it starts with the acknowledgement that there should be anger at injustice.

Richard Rohr: That was the point. The moral problem is that so many people don't feel anger at the homelessness in San Francisco and every rich city. The richer the city, the more homeless people it has, at least if it has a nice climate. So how can we validate necessary anger and yet not use that as an excuse for it to become narcissistic anger? I'll pray that I can find some clarifying phrases because we've got to get that clear.

Mike Petrow: When you talk about in some of your writing and when you talk about the path of the prophet, the movement from anger to sadness, you said something one time where you said, "Anger is often disguised sadness."

Richard Rohr: Oh, that was my big line on Grief Day.

Mike Petrow: Oh, blew my mind.

Richard Rohr: Do they still use it all in the rites of passage?

Mike Petrow: Oh, I haven't done the rites of passage yet.

Richard Rohr: Well, that's why you're not initiated.

Mike Petrow: No.

Richard Rohr: That's why you're so boyish.

Mike Petrow: It's true. Someday I'll become a man. The MROP. Anger is disguised sadness?

Richard Rohr: I thought I gave a fairly good talk on Grief Day, but the high point was when it would build up to that. "Do you know most of you think you're angry men, but you're not really angry, you're just sad?" And I'd just stop and they'd just be glaring with open eyes because they

knew that was true, but no one ever told him that. And a lot of men are very sad. A lot of men.

Mike Petrow: I think about even the work we do for activism or even to speak out against injustice or even to help people heal, requires us to feel so much sadness. And I sometimes think as a society we're not taught how to do that, so it is easier to stay in anger at this particular moment in time.

Richard Rohr: Very good.

Paul Swanson: The joyful activist is a rare breed.

Richard Rohr: Say it?

Paul Swanson: The joyful activist is a rare breed.

Richard Rohr: Is rare.

Paul Swanson: Those who engage in playful, joyful, direct action or systemic action, but does it with a sense of even that apatheia, that stability from a place of inner stillness.

I do want to ask you about something that I would imagine brings you joy and no sadness, is your new friend Opie, and there's a lot of folks who haven't met Opie.

Richard Rohr: Here he is, laying in his anxiety bed. Opie, we're going to talk about you. Open your little eyes, there.

Mike Petrow: He looks pretty at peace to me.

Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Go ahead, Paul.

Paul Swanson: What can you tell us about Opie? Who is Opie?

Richard Rohr: Opie is a dog I got at the rescue. I assume he's about four or five now. He's a Jack Russell Terrier mix. He isn't pure breed. Sorry, I hope that doesn't insult you, Opie, but you're not pure breed. You're a mutt, but we love you. Yeah. Well, he opened his eye and look at me. He gives me so much joy. When I'm really just taking myself too seriously, I look at any animal, not just him, but he's the concrete one. An animal takes me out of my human exaggerations and human everything to legitimate my basic animal nature, which used to be a put down.

I remember in minor seminary before Vatican II, "They're just animals. Those people are just animals." And I remember when I learned that anima means soul, so to call someone an animal is to mean they're insouled. This is not an insult. And they carry their soul much purer than we do because we're all complicated with image and success and our looks and our health, but he just takes every day as it comes. He would change everything in the middle of the night if I wanted to get up at 3:00. "Let's go. Wherever you are, I want to be." Isn't that how we should relate to God? Wherever you are, I want to be. Well, Opie is that

way with me.

Paul Swanson: That's delightful.

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: That is delightful. The last 10 years of your life have been a pretty incredible journey. Just thinking about Living School started 10 years ago. Falling Upward came about 10 years ago to Universal Christ, which came out not that long ago. You've hung out with the Pope.

Richard Rohr: Who was elected 10 years ago.

Paul Swanson: Who was elected 10 years ago.

Mike Petrow: Wow.

Paul Swanson: And then you've gradually released some of your active duties at the CAC. Are there any words or images that come to mind as a way to describe this arc in your life from 70 to 80 through all these transitions and growth opportunities?

Richard Rohr: The more I like people, the more I tease them. And I think it reflects just... I realize so much that I worried about in my younger years, is it worth all that worry? I'm much more lighthearted. Just see the humor in everything, the silliness of everything. It's all so silly. Why do we get upset about it when it's going to change next month? And it's my only outlet from our terrible politics, our terrible treatment of the earth. If I concentrate on it, I'm in trouble. Here's the same issue again. I've got to know it. I watched two wonderful shows yesterday on people trying to save the earth and it was so beautiful. These smart people.

It's really making me appreciate science. Scientists are searching for truth to save this planet, to catch carbon, for example, and I used to look to clergymen for great truth. These two shows I saw yesterday, right now I think I'm going to look to scientists for great truth because they are intent on finding how to catch carbon. And the creative ways... It was a whole hour on catching carbon. How can we bury it? And most of all of them that I can remember were happy people because they were doing something that was going to make a difference for humanity.

In my opinion, they were loving God by loving reality as it is and loving humanity. We want to help the next generation. They kept saying, "I don't want my kids to grow up knowing what I know about what we've done to this planet."

Mike Petrow: I appreciate that. That's really beautiful.

Richard Rohr: It's real for me right now. I'll take scientific truth, forgive me, over most clergy truth.

Mike Petrow: Well, and I appreciate too that looking at reality comes with responsibility-

Richard Rohr: Ah, very good.

Mike Petrow: ... If we see what's really there. I appreciate that, Richard. That's beautiful. That's beautiful.

Richard Rohr: These people, they were mostly middle-aged, but taking responsibility. Not just complaining about the rich or oil, but, “Here’s the situation. Here are the numbers. What are we going to do about it?” And they’re finding things to do about it. I’m not smart enough to repeat the science to you, but it was very impressive that you can capture carbon and shoot it down into the earth. And they showed pictures of it being shot down.

We’ve only begun to undo the damage of the last 100 years, but everybody’s starting at a different place and learning to save the earth. Well, what do we call Jesus? The savior of the world? Okay. The savior of the world is taking on a different character right now, because it really needs saving. I remember young people saying to me when I was first ordained, “Well, I don’t know why I need saving,” and I sort of had to agree with them. They seemed like, “Okay, what am I being saved from?” We just weren’t sure we needed saving. But the earth, if you’re looking, you can’t deny it.

Paul Swanson: What a metaphor too, of just the sins of the fathers and of the present that have gone out into the carbon, and now we have to deal with that regardless of how you contributed to it or not. It’s now our problem, and also future generations. How do we be responsible and for the goodness of the earth, for the goodness of one another and not be like, “Well, I’m out of here before this is going to really hit us.”

Richard Rohr: Yeah. It’s sincerely care about your children, grandchildren. This phrase has probably being overused now, but I hear it on a new level. We’re tired of thoughts and prayers. Thoughts and prayers. “We’re sending you our thoughts and prayers.” There’s a whole bunch of scientists now who have moved beyond thoughts and prayers, and I’m not against thinking, and I’m not against prayer, but to write it off as that, and I’m afraid people of faith do that way too easily. Let’s tell God about it and forget about it ourself.

Mike Petrow: That’s so profound, and I love what you just said there about thinking about, use that biblical phrase, the sins of the previous generation, and we think about the inherited responsibility to carry on the work that’s handed to us. I can’t help but wonder, as we sit at this moment and you’re leaving, handing some responsibility to the CAC, and also as we’re talking about ecology and science, one of the things I love about the new dean of the Center for Action Contemplation, Brian McLaren, is that he does bring a lot of ecology and science into his teaching.

Richard Rohr: Yes, he does. He’s much better educated than I am. I have to quote other people because I got little education in science. I had biology and chemistry. That’s about all. They’re good.

Mike Petrow: Well Richard, what are you most excited about and how does it feel to see this transition to Brian stepping into the role of Dean and to see Dr. Barbara Holmes and James Finley and the team here at the Center carrying that work forward?

Richard Rohr: Great excitement. My job now is, how can I back them up, encourage them, but I don’t have to take the lead in saying it because I know they’ll say it better, and for now. I mean, 10 years ago news is already old news. We’ve got to talk to right now, which is what I was learning from Amos this morning. He dealt with his probably just 10 to 20 year period of what he saw happening, and he addressed his prophecy to that. We’ve got to do the same thing with our lifetime.

Mike Petrow: I appreciate, Richard, there's so much bad news. There's so much challenge facing people alive on the world right now, and I appreciate hearing you seeing all that and acknowledging it and somehow holding it with joy and hope, it seems. It really does seem like you've made that transition to the path of the prophet.

Richard Rohr: I like your continued use of the word appreciate. An appreciator is a contemplative. In fact, you become an all-day appreciator.

Mike Petrow: Nice.

Richard Rohr: Yeah, of little things. Of everything. So keep using it.

Mike Petrow: Right on.

Richard Rohr: Keep appreciating.

Mike Petrow: It's such a gift for us to get to spend time with you. It's such a gift for us to let people get a sneak peek of what it's like to spend time with you and where you're at at this point in your life. I think the last thing we would want to ask you is would you offer a prayer for us and the listeners and everyone who wants to live your teachings forward?

Richard Rohr: Right here? Right now?

Mike Petrow: Yeah, let's do it.

Richard Rohr: All right. God of everything, everything, everything. No exception. Everything we've ever looked at has come forth from you. You've thrown us into this jumble and we're slowly learning that you love it all. You forgive it all. You heal it all. You accept it all. You allow it all. May we be your sons and daughters, and do the same. Amen.

Mike Petrow: Our conversation with Richard will continue in the next episode, where we shift to his thoughts on the future of the work he's passing on to us here at the Center and in the lives of everyone listening to try and co-create a world where everything and everyone might actually belong. Thanks for joining us.

Corey Wayne: Thanks for listening to this podcast by the Center for Action and Contemplation, an educational nonprofit that introduces seekers to the contemplative Christian path of transformation. To learn more about our work, visit us at cac.org.

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Corey Wayne: And me, Corey Wayne. The music you hear is composed and provided by our friends Hammock, and we'd also like to thank Sound On Studios for all of their work in post-production. From the high desert of New Mexico, we wish you peace and every good.