

LEARNING

HOW

TO

SEE

with

Brian

McLaren

Season 7, Episode 5

Seeing Nature as a Franciscan

feat. Sr. Joan Brown and Michele Dunne

Brian McLaren: He was naked in broad daylight in front of the church. He had taken off all his clothing in front of the local bishop, in front of his neighbors and peers, and in front of his angry father. He now stood before them all, "I shall go naked to meet my naked Lord," He said. We know him as Saint Francis, but at that moment, he was just Giovanni Francesco di Bernadone, a young man on trial at the portico of the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Assisi, Italy. Standing there self-exposed, he must have seemed more a candidate for involuntary hospitalization than elevation to sainthood. His father was a prosperous merchant of fine fabrics and appreciating commodity at the beginning of the 13th century when dressing up was becoming more and more essential for those wishing to ascend the socioeconomic ladder. He had accused Francis of selling some of his merchandise to raise money for a church renovation project.

Since the fabric had indeed been sold and the proceeds invested in Francis' passion, Francis had nothing to offer in restitution, so he gave his father everything he had, his money, the shirt off his back, along with the rest of his garments saying, "I return not only my money, but also my clothes." In so doing, Francis stripped off the identity he had acquired from his earthly father and clothed himself in a more primal and primary identity as God's unclothed creature, God's naked and vulnerable child. That wasn't Francis' only experience of nakedness. Once the story goes, Francis commanded his colleague, Friar Ruffino, to go preach in the Assisi church naked save only for thy britches. When Father Ruffino complied, Francis felt ashamed for issuing such an extreme command, so he went and joined him in naked preaching. We're not sure whether the breeches were included or not.

Years later, he stripped naked again and went out in the snow to make snowmen, this time in an attempt to deal with his sensual desires, one would imagine that the technique worked well enough, at least for the time he was outdoors in the freezing gold. Francis joined a long tradition of nakedness in the service of spirituality, stretching from the days of Samuel and Saul, through Isaiah's three-year stint preaching nude to Jesus himself. In the Sermon on the Mount, when Jesus talks about turning the other cheek and walking the second mile, he says that if someone takes you to court suing you for your overcoat, you might as well give them your other clothes as well. Implying, I think, that in so doing, your self-exposure will serve to expose the heartless greed of your opponent. Jesus lived out his teaching three years later when by his exposure on the cross, he exposed the brutality of the occupying Romans and the hypocrisy of the local religious establishment.

Saint Francis is known for many things, but probably not for nakedness. He's probably best known for the Song of Praise he wrote in 1225. That's considered the first poem in vernacular Italian. It's called the Canticle of the Sun. And in this beautiful poem, I encourage you to read the whole poem yourself, he begins, "Most high, all-powerful, good Lord." And then he says, "Praised be you, my Lord, with all your creatures, especially brother, son who is the day and through whom you give us light. And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor and bears a likeness to you most high one. Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Moon and all the stars." And then it goes on. "Praised be You my Lord through brother wind and through the air, cloudy and serene in every kind of weather. Be praised you my Lord, through sister water."

What strikes me in this poem is Francis doesn't say be praised for these things, but be praised with them and through them. It's as if Francis is saying, I'm praising you, God, because I'm

praising the sun, and through my of the wind and the weather and the stars and the clouds. It seems to me that Francis, in his nakedness, was trying to return to a more primal identity as part of nature, as a child of soil and wind and rain, as a member of this earth community with fellow creatures. In this episode of Learning How To See, we're going to listen to some contemporary Franciscans who are going to help us bring the wisdom of Saint Francis and the tradition of Franciscanism to strip away all of the pretenses of our contemporary society of clothing and the cars we drive and the money we spend, ways of showing our social and economic status, to try to return to the humility of simply being creatures with our fellow creatures in this beautiful earth.

In this episode of Learning How To See, we want to learn to see like Franciscans so we can show up in our time maybe fully clothed, but with that naked awareness of our connection to the earth. Welcome everyone to this episode of Learning How To See. I am once again thrilled to have some amazing guests. We have Sister Joan Brown and we have Michelle Dunne, two examples of what we mean when we say living in this world with Franciscan values and vision. And Sister Joan, I wonder if you could just introduce yourself. What do you want people to know about you?

Sr. Joan Brown: Well, I am a Franciscan sister, follower of Francis and Clare, Franciscan hearted, living in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and I've been here for many years. I am passionate about all of life and working with climate change in particular.

Brian McLaren: And you work with a wonderful organization called Interfaith Power and Light. Could you just tell folks a bit about that? And we'll put links in the show notes.

Sr. Joan Brown: Excellent. Yes. So I'm the executive director of New Mexico and El Paso Interfaith Power and Light, and that is a national organization begun over 20 years ago by an Episcopal minister. And we have about 40 state affiliates. We work on what I call three prongs, inspiration, education, direct, active kind of hands-on engagement like solar energy efficiency, food, et cetera, and then public policy advocacy. And in our state, a lot of the area really involves community health, climate, a lot of oil and gas, a lot of legacy issues from extractivism. And so we're doing positive forward things, but we're also addressing these very systemic challenges that we are all affected by.

Brian McLaren: Thanks, Joan. And I should just say, when I first started getting activated about climate, Interfaith Power and Light was one of the first organizations I consulted and started learning. So it was really played a key role in my own learning curve in this, and I highly recommend them to others. And Michelle, if you could introduce yourself and tell us both about you and about the Franciscan Action Network.

Michele Dunne: Hi Brian, I'm so happy to be here with you and Sister Joan. I'm Michelle Dunne. I am executive director of Franciscan Action Network. I'll say a little bit more about that in a moment, but I'm a secular Franciscan. That means I'm a member of a lay religious order. The Franciscan path is something that started in my life about 10, 11 years ago, and it led to big changes in my life, including a complete change of career. I was in foreign affairs for many years and then three years ago left that and came to FAN. And what FAN is a network of Franciscans who want to take action in the world based on gospel values and Franciscan spirituality.

We've got about 50 Franciscan religious communities, Sister Joan's community is one of them, who are members of FAN as well as... Right now we've got about 14,000 individual members and we have grassroots groups all over the United States called Franciscan Justice Circles. And we're a multi-issue organization. We work on a lot of issues that Franciscans care about, but certainly climate and environment is one of them, it's probably right at the top of the list.

Brian McLaren: Thank you so much Michelle and Joan for being here. There are so many things I would love to talk about with both of you. I'm recalling a TEDx talk I saw recently from a friend of mine named David Lamott, and his talk is titled something like this, *Why Heroes Will Not Save the World*. And he tells the story of how people we think of as heroes who made a big change were actually part of big organizations and big movements, and it took the whole organization and movement to bring about the change. And of course, this is true of Saint Francis. He began a movement, really, and in some ways, both of you are part of this and all of us who have a connection to the CAC, we may not even realize it, but Father Richard is a Franciscan. And so in many ways there are a whole lot of us who have already been shaped and formed by Franciscan values and we don't know it.

And I wondered if maybe I could start with you Joan. I wonder if you could just, off the cuff, or you may have a way, you talk about this all the time, but what does it mean for a person to be a Franciscan and to feel themselves part of a Franciscan movement?

Sr. Joan Brown: Well, I think it goes to the heart and it's being Franciscan-hearted, and that means Saint Clare Assisi too is part of that.

Brian McLaren: Yes.

Sr. Joan Brown: The masculine and the feminine are both. And more than that, it's a gigantic community. And knowing oneself, feeling oneself as part of everything that is from the smallest molecule, to the tree, to the sun that was this morning and this vast soul connection, I think, that then interweaves me and us all together in a community. And your note about heroes, and I think we're living in this time when it's not the heroes that are influencing, it's the communal and it's all of us, is this vast community and recognizing love as core to that. And that's what inspires and moves towards justice, towards engagement in the world for that which is suffering, but only to, I believe, transform, be a part of the evolution of beauty in the world, which is what we're being pulled toward and into. And that's really what this Franciscan-heartedness is about, is seeing of beauty within everything

Brian McLaren: When we talk about *Learning How To See*, that is one of the gifts of Francis and Clare. They embodied a spirituality that was... Wherever they saw beauty, they saw God and they saw the beauty of God in all of creation, including all of their fellow humans, including humans that other people rejected and saw as unclean or nothing but ugly and enemy. So Michelle, the Franciscan Action Network, the name suggests, well, okay, once we have this vision, we need to turn it into action. I'd love to hear a little bit more about how you see faith and that Franciscan vision being

translated into action in these times.

Michele Dunne: Okay. I mean, and if you'll permit me, Brian, just a quick comment on the vision a little bit. Saint Clare said something that I love. She said, "Jesus is the way, Francis showed it to me." So to me, to be a Franciscan means that you're living the gospel, you're following Jesus in a certain way that Francis and Clare showed us. And one way that relates to action at the core level is that one of Francis's great gifts to the world, I believe, was to show a way of being in kinship. Kinship is always a key word for me when I think about Franciscanism, right? Kinship with all of humanity and with all of creation, it's radical. It really is really very radical once you start to penetrate what it really means. It's not stewardship, it's not care, it's kinship. For me, how am I being a sister? Am I being a sister to my fellow human beings and to all of creation? And it's so... Anyway, I'm sure we'll get into this, but it requires huge adjustments in the way I think that most of us approach the world and our role in it.

It's very much against our cultural programming or what we were raised with. Now, so what does this mean for action? I mean, we as a staff at Franciscan Action Network, we see ourselves as serving this network and helping to inform, inspire and mobilize people in our network to take action. And action, so let's say we're talking about climate, environment, creation, action. We help to mobilize people in campaigns. This is a vast, vast area, but we've chosen a particular lane of action that we think fits in very much with Franciscan kinship, which is environmental justice. And this means being in solidarity with communities that have been disproportionately affected by environmental degradation and climate change. I can give you specific examples if you're interested, but being in solidarity with them and doing action with them, and this can mean congressional visits and letter writing campaigns.

I was speaking to Sister Joan earlier about being out in front of the Supreme Court with Apache Stronghold just a couple of days ago who are asking for their religious freedom, their ability to practice their religion on their sacred lands that are being degraded by copper mining. So we take lots of different kinds of actions with our network, with our justice circles that are based on this relationship of kinship and solidarity.

Brian McLaren: As you say that, I think of Bill McKibben, a great environmental leader. And when people ask him, "What can I do as an individual?" He says, "Well, how about stop seeing yourself as an individual and start seeing yourself as connected, feeling that kinship and being connected in movements for collective action?" And that to me is very Franciscan. Michelle, as you were saying that I couldn't help but think, in the Gospels for Christians when they hear Jesus speak of the kingdom of God, unfortunately, I think when we hear kingdom, the word king dominates, male and dominating, a dominating male patriarchal figure. I dare to think, in fact, I'm quite certain, that's not what Jesus was talking about. And that word kinship, I imagine what would happen if we translated that phrase from the original languages to the kinship of God, which is kinship through God with every bird and stone and whale out in the sea and ecosystem and acre of beautiful forest and all the rest.

And that's so much what Francis and Clare, I think, represented. It was a spirituality that was so different from what they were typically associated with. I have a question that I can't get away from. A lot of people are not asking this question anymore because a lot of people look at our institutional Christianity, whether it's Catholic or Protestant, and they just think this is religion organized for its own self-interest, and they find it very hard to see, even though we all know it's there, evidence of Christianity organizing for the common good, Christianity organizing for this kinship with everyone and all of creation. And I wonder if you could each share places where you see sincere Christians, and if they're sincere Christians, I'm sure they welcome in people of all faiths, but where do you see Christians actually organizing for the good? Could you tell maybe some stories of what you see? Joan, could you go first?

Sr. Joan Brown: Sure, I'd be happy to. And I just wanted to add a note about what you were saying earlier about Kingdom, and rather kindom, and that, I think, we're in this very huge transformational, transformative moment right now, and within Christian traditions especially, of addressing the doctrine of discovery, which is part of what is historically, I think, a misreading misunderstanding of who we are called to be with one another, and that is still in our psyche, in our worldviews and is affecting policy and all kinds of areas. And so we need to undo that, not just undo it, it needs to be transformed into this deeper spirituality that we're talking about here today. So I just wanted to show that out because here in New Mexico... I mean, it's on the surface because we work with so many indigenous people, and Michelle mentioned the Apache Stronghold and they came through here. We had a very sacred water ceremony with them and blessing, and they spoke about that and how they were surprised they were in a church, that they would've rejected that before, but this was a healing time because of the embrace that they had.

And I think that's what you're talking about in this living out of what the Christian message is. That would be an example of it. Another one... There's so many. We work heavily in the Permian Basin in Southeast New Mexico, west Texas, and that is probably the second largest oil and gas producing area in the entire world, and certainly in the United States. And in order to do this work down there, which is very, very difficult and even dangerous for local people to speak up. The way that we have been able to do this is through the leadership, a quiet leadership and engagement signed behind the scenes, so to speak, with faith leaders down there because they have seen, they know, they've been listening to their people. They know of the health implications, they know of climate change. They're very concerned. It's kind of confronting these large, immense corporate oil and gas interests. But the only way this tiny little voice is making a ripple and making a difference, at least on the surface, but I believe we make big ripples on the spiritual plane, is because of these people who are...

They're basically Christian in that region, some Catholics and some Christians of different denominations. What we're talking about is not always seen. It's being in solidarity, as Michelle mentioned, with some of the work that we do with the legacy issues of uranium mining among the Navajo in the Grants area. We have emergent retreat experiences where we go into the field of these places that are desecrated and we pray for transformation. We had a very powerful one just a year ago that was also addressing the doctrine of discovery, meeting with some of our indigenous friends, communities to undo that and the long walk of the Navajo for the Trail of Tears here in this region. So I think people aren't aware of these more hidden kind of stories that are actual actions. And as Francis said, "Preach the gospel.

If you must, use words.” Well, this is not using a lot of words. This is people’s actions, their bodies, their spirits engaging in compassionate ways for the earth and people.

Brian McLaren: Joan, before we move to Michelle there, I just want to sort of pause on that because when we think what really is at stake in the Permian Basin, for example, here is our reserves of fossil fuels that if they are all mined and sold as a business wants to do and shareholders wanted to do, that reserve of fossil fuels alone, it pushes us so far beyond what the environment can sustain that the game is over. And so when we realize the size of this struggle, we’re actually having to stare capitalism in the face and say, “If you make a profit, you destroy us.” And this requires courageous work, as you said, people get killed. In fact, I just read the other day that the number of environmental activists killed around the world in this last year has really been high and the number is growing. So yeah, these are deep struggles and to have people of deep faith engaged, it’s a beautiful thing. And some of them can’t be talked about.

Sr. Joan Brown: Right, exactly. Because of the... And Brian, you mentioned this and what could happen, it’s already happening because of the methane releases that are happening even now as there are methane rules, and that’s a larger influence on climate than other efforts or other pollutants from CO₂ emissions. So it’s happening now. And so we have to be so creative, and I think this is a very Franciscan quality as well, being very creative in what are the strategies, what are the ways that we can intervene in this in new ways and new possibilities to influence.

Brian McLaren: Learning How To See will be back in a moment. Michelle, where do you see this Franciscan vision being translated into action? This is your work. I know it’s impossible to single out one or two things that cover it all, but give folks a couple additional pictures.

Michele Dunne: First, I want to thank Sister Joan Brown because Sister Joan, you were at our Franciscan Justice Leadership conference last year and you spoke about the doctrine of discovery. And it’s so important, I think, for all of us to learn and to know how this has shaped our own thinking, our own way of seeing the world, our place in it, our relationship with indigenous peoples all over the world, our relationship with all of creation. And there’s a tremendous amount of, as you said, unlearning and transformation that needs to take place inside ourselves, and you really helped. We had all these college students, Brian, at this Franciscan Justice Leadership conference who were feeling very overwhelmed about the climate situation, and that’s something you’ve all done us a great service, Brian, by writing your book, *Life After Doom*, and addressing that feeling of being overwhelmed. I want to say here briefly, I think this is another one of St. Francis’s gifts to the world. Something he said just before he died was, “I have done what was mine to do. May God help you find what is yours.”

And he’s telling us there that none of us can do it all, but we also all do have things to do, and this is what it’s about. This is something we ask ourselves at Franciscan Action Network every time we face an issue. What is ours to do here? Let’s pray about that. Let’s hear from our network about it because we can’t do it all, but there definitely are some things we can do. I want to mention one initiative that I find very promising. Pope Francis wrote this wonderful encyclical, *Laudato Si*, in 2015 that hasn’t gotten nearly the attention it should have in the world, or certainly not in the Catholic church, in the Catholic community, but

there are people who are doing things. So for example, Michael Perry, who's a Franciscan Friar now, has started something called the Laudato Si Center for Integral Ecology at Siena College, and he's really seriously trying to get the 22 Franciscan colleges together on not only educating, raising a whole generation of leaders, training them to be active in doing what needs to be done on climate environment and taking the real actions on their campuses for sustainability and so forth.

So that's to say, okay, yes, it's nine years later and it's discouraging that more hasn't been done about Laudato Si, but we're not giving up. We're still taking actions. So there are so many initiatives, but I just wanted to mention that one. And I think it's very important for all of us, Brother Michael's doing it, Sister Joan's doing it, we are trying to do it at FAN through our justice circles and our annual conference to help young people find what is theirs to do and to go out there and do it, and not to be too overwhelmed by this very, very overwhelming problem.

Brian McLaren: What both of you have shared reminds me something that I think I forget, you wouldn't think I would forget this since a lot of my life is as a teacher, but teaching people, educating people as we're doing right now is a form of activism because whether we're working with college students or listeners to a podcast or people in a critical environmental area like the Permian Basin, if we are educating people, we're helping them change in their vision, in the way they see the world, and that leads to all kinds of other important action. Sister Joan, when I was looking at the website for Interfaith Power and Light in New Mexico, I was intrigued to see that you have some liturgies and rituals there, and I have this strange belief that liturgies can help change the world.

They can change the world for the worst. And I am sad to say it, but an awful lot of our churches bring people together and they just, in a sense, have them say words that the people don't even think about, they're sort of on autopilot, and it just feels to me like such a wasted opportunity and I dream of what liturgies would look like that took the situation in our human-Earth relationship as seriously as they should be taken and what those liturgies would look like. I'd love to hear you just share a little bit about what you've seen and experienced and what you wish would happen more of.

Sr. Joan Brown: Well, I think for some of this to happen, people that are leading liturgy ritual really need to know their immersion in where they are and their place. And that's with the people, with the creatures, with the trees, with the water, with the land, with the earth, and to know that they're part of that. But even in a Sunday worship, I mean, if people and those leading worships really understood what the water is in baptism, that that water is ancient, that it keeps circulating around, and that it's the water that, well, Francis and Clare probably drank, it's the water that I drank this morning. It's, not only is water life, water is alive. From it springs forth everything that is. So even taking what, in Catholic terms, Catholics understand, they don't really understand. They don't really know. And many of those worship leaders don't really know and don't really understand.

But then also to be engaged, all of life is a ritual. So my drinking the tea in the morning is a ritual, and our Asian friends certainly help us understand that, or being in the Permian Basin, and I don't know if anybody else goes out there and has water and prayers and an oil rig, but we do when we have immersion retreat experiences. We just had an experience, and

this is a long story, I'll try to make it very, very short. The first oil rig in the Permian Basin is called Santa Rita well number one, and it was at a time a hundred years ago when churches were contributing, investing in oil and gas. A Catholic community in New York invested in some wildcatters thinking there has to be oil there. So this community gave some money, they weren't getting any, they came back and the sister said, here, take some rose petals, this prayer and pray to Santa Rita, the saint of impossible cases. They went back, they did that. A couple days later, they hit oil.

So we feel, or felt, we made a pilgrimage there this last summer because we felt we need to change that cycle. Maybe that was good at that time, but it is not now. We need to pray to Saint Rita, the saint of impossible cases, and with our rose petals, with our prayers, with our water, we prayed for this transformation to happen. I think we forget or don't realize the power, the real power, of prayer, of ritual, of liturgy, and it's integrated into our lives every day in everything, and that most of what reality is is not what we feel or see or this desk that I'm at, but it's what I don't see and the mystery and the soul within everything. And I think that is a gift of Franciscanism, I really do, of deep Franciscan spirituality, if we dig into this in a new way.

Brian McLaren: Oh my. That picture will stay with me. And this has remarkable similarity to the Doctrine of Discovery, and we'll put links for this in the show notes. For people who haven't heard of the Doctrine of discovery, here is something that the church launched that was in some ways the credit card, the moral credit card that funded colonialism. And this is part of the church's history that most Christians never heard of. I've written about this in a few of my books, and the language of it, it just sends chills up your spine. And now to think that Christians are now having to say let's face this in our past and let's repudiate it and let's move beyond it, and let's reverse it, to picture that in harm done to human beings, and then through this repetition of a ritual, a repudiation or a turning the page on an attitude toward fossil fuels. Oh my goodness, that's powerful. Thank you so much for that.

Sr. Joan Brown: And Brian, even to say, and don't be afraid, once you know what this doctrine is, to see it around you and call it out. I've called it out even in public regulatory hearings where somebody has said, "Well, we should just dump this waste here. Nobody lives there," Which is the basic premise of the Doctrine of Discovery. I said, "Yes, people live there. No, this is the Doctrine of Discovery. And no, this is not right, and we should not do this."

Brian McLaren: Yeah, yeah. Thank God for you doing that.

Sr. Joan Brown: Well, no, others are doing it too, so we're educating them here. This is great.

Brian McLaren: That's right. Exactly. And we have the chance now to recruit a whole bunch of people. Yeah, I think in a real sense, folks like us, we never just show up for a talk or a podcast. We're always recruiting and... Yeah, that's right. Well, I wonder, we are at a very dangerous moment, and we're having this conversation in an election season, and we don't know how this election is going to go. A few months from now, we could be in very, very different situations depending on how people choose to vote because when it comes to understanding the value of the earth, I don't think either of our political parties are anywhere close to the vision that we share. But I think we know that some candidates and parties are less harmful than others, and it feels to me like this is part of the work that a movement like

the Franciscan movement and the movements and organizations both of you represent, that we realize that we're in a long-term arc of change for helping people see in a new way and especially see our kinship, as you said, Michelle, with the earth and with one another in a new way.

I wonder if I could just offer each of you a few parting words for what you are feeling at this point in our conversation and what you want to say to someone who's driving along in their car listening to this podcast or taking a walk around a lake or doing housework, and they've got their earbuds in and they're listening. What do you want to whisper into their ear? Go ahead, Michelle.

Michele Dunne: Well, one of the things I've been thinking about is that one of the things that appealed to me about the Franciscan life when I first heard about it is it's a life of prayer and action, prayer and action, action and prayer, back and forth, one feeding the other. And I think that relates to your conversation with Sister Joan about meaningful liturgy. So I started down the path of becoming a secular Franciscan, and I'm like, okay, I'm going to do this prayer and then I'm going to take action, etc. And then I realized there was a missing piece. There was something far more basic, which was my simply being in the present moment and seeing the humanity of every person in front of me and the living earth, the living creation. I realized I'd gone my whole life sort of objectifying and categorizing. I was hardly seeing living things.

I was seeing them as things. I was seeing people in categories, and there was a whole new awareness I had to develop, an ability to respond and live in the present moment so that I could be open to what is mine to do. I couldn't even get to that point of what is mine to do and taking action. And so it's really related to engaged contemplation and everything the Center for Action and Contemplation is doing. I guess if I'd like to say something to people, it is to be patient with yourself, be gentle with yourself, try through prayer, meditation, contemplation, to be moved to that awareness, and then to be open to what it is that you'll be asked to do. I have found that whatever it is I will be asked to do will involve sacrifice, but that the sacrifice becomes a sacrifice of love once I'm in that feeling of awareness of the present and kinship with others. I hope that makes sense.

Brian McLaren: Oh, thank you. That's so beautiful. No, thank you so much. Thank you. And Sister Joan.

Sr. Joan Brown: Yes, thanks so much, Michelle. And yeah, I think you're talking about objectifying things. I think everybody, not everybody, but many of us get caught in that every day or have not moved out of it, so what a gift, a grace that you are in that place. And what it reminds me of is a quote, I've been working with, sitting with, appreciating Pierre Thiers or Chardin a lot, and in his Book of Hours, which are daily prayers, there's one comment that goes something like, "We're living in a moment when we either deny the value of everything around us or we recognize it and we see within it the potential and the possibility of universal love. And so that every element, everything is this expression of love. And am I accepting that invitation? Am I opening my eyes, my heart, my soul to see in very deep and new ways every instant and the magnificence of so much around me?"

So at the moment you asked how we're feeling, I'm feeling a little emotionally overwhelmed

because I just feel so passionate about all of this and living in this time and with everyone and everything, and of just unveiling and allowing love to guide and to call deeper into real advocacy and action. And love is only love, I believe, if there's action and newness, new relationships, and ever evolving forward.

Brian McLaren: I'm so glad to be in this good work together with both of you.

Michele Dunne: Thank you so much, Brian. Thank you.

Sr. Joan Brown: Oh, thank you, Brian and Michelle. This is just a huge gift of my week. Thank you so much.

Brian McLaren: To have Michelle Dunne and Sister Joan Brown together, it just makes me think of St. Francis, and it makes me also think of Pope Francis who, when he became Pope, chose the name Francis to connect to all of the things that we've been talking about several times in this season. We've mentioned Laudato Si, this beautiful and important document written by Pope Francis and a team of people as a letter to the world to encourage us to hear the cries of the earth and the cries of the poor. And at the end of Laudato Si, there is a prayer, and after our conversation today, it just felt that this would be the best way to end this episode. So I invite you to join me in a spirit of prayer. This is a prayer from Pope Francis inviting all of us to join him in this prayer.

All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures. You embrace with your tenderness all that exists. Pour out upon us the power of your love, that we may protect life and beauty. Fill us with peace that we may live as brothers and sisters harming no one. Oh God of the poor, help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth so precious in your eyes. Bring healing to our lives that we may protect the world and not prey upon it, that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction. Touch the hearts of those who look only for gain at the expense of the poor and the earth. Teach us to discover the worth of each thing, to be filled with awe and contemplation, to recognize that we are profoundly united with every creature as we journey towards your infinite light. We thank you for being with us each day. Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle for justice, love and peace. Amen.

