



EVERYTHING BELONGS

Francis

with Jon Sweeney

Paul Swanson: Hey everyone. Welcome back to Everything Belongs. Today we are thrilled to wrap up our season by talking about chapter 13, Francis: A Natural Spiritual Genius. I'm joined here by Drew Jackson. Drew, good to see you. How are you doing today?

Drew Jackson: Doing well, Paul, doing really well. It's good to be with you.

Paul Swanson: It is always good to be together. And here we are wrapping up this season of Everything Belongs with this final chapter. And something that I was ruminating on as we were beginning to wrap this season was we know that our next season's going to be focused on Richard's new book, the *The Tears of Things: Prophetic Wisdom for an Age of Outrage*, which feels like a nice next step coming from Francis. Because with *Eager to Love*, we knew we wanted to prioritize this conversation, this series because it is the lineage that Richard draws from. Francis is Richard's spiritual father, and we at the CAC are swimming in those same waters of lineage and seek to exemplify and live this out and teach from this lineage in our own particular way. And so we can see ourselves in the work of the CAC being connected to Richard, being connected to Jesus, being connected to Francis.

Paul Swanson: The radicality of this work does not begin with Richard, does not begin with Francis, but we can see it as the core tenet of who Jesus is and how Jesus lived from this place of unitive connection. And we have these nuggets in the gospels, these nuggets in Francis, these nuggets in Richard, and others, of course, about how we might live in this way that is steeped in the love of Christ for the love of neighbor with the love of the world. And Francis is just such a great lightning rod for how we talk about this. And so as we wrap up this season, I can't help but think of what a journey we've been in, in conversation not only with Richard, but this multitude of guests and how it overlaps with the circles of our own lives. What's on your mind this morning, Drew, as we think about wrapping up the season on *Eager to Love*?

Drew Jackson: Oh, there's been so much in these conversations that we've had, but I really think that as we come to this last episode of *Eager to Love*, I really think that this chapter on the natural spiritual genius of Francis, there's a reason that Richard ended it here. And it feels like a natural landing place that everything that Richard has been saying has been pointing to this chapter that really, in so many words, distills down that spiritual genius of Francis to his laser focus on embodying love in the world. And really even to your point, Paul, about how this didn't start with Richard, didn't start with Francis, that this was Jesus's focus all along.

Drew Jackson: If you could sum up all the law and the prophets, it comes down to love God, love your neighbor as yourself, that the core, the center is love and Francis' real focus on that, and to actually put flesh to that. In our conversation that we had with author Jon Sweeney, he really continues this for us. He unpacks this in his own life and his reflections on Francis, his reflections on marriage, right? And he talks about it as this Francis' sensitivity, but it's this sensitivity toward the movements of love that move you toward action, that move you toward the other, toward solidarity with the poor, the oppressed.

Drew Jackson: And so it's not this kind of sentimental sanitized love, but it's this love that gets in the dirt and that is in so many words, what Richard has been saying, this is the direction of it all. This is the point. This is the genius and the witness of Francis' life. So as we get into these conversations where Richard really pulls on these threads and as we talk with Jon Sweeney,

he unpacks this more. It really is an invitation to hear about what it means to put flesh to this love in the world and how we're not just invited to study that in the life of Francis, but to continue that legacy of an eagerness to love in our world, in our time and in our place.

Paul Swanson: That's it. That's so well said. So I hope everyone enjoys this and steps into it and learns to see how they might be called to live these teachings forward in their own life.

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

Paul Swanson: I'm Paul Swanson.

Drew Jackson: And I'm Drew Jackson.

Paul Swanson: And this is Everything Belongs.

Mike Petrow: Richard and Paul, always great to be here with you again. Richard, thanks for welcoming us into your living room and thanks Opie for hanging out with us. This has been such a rich journey. I'm curious, Richard, as we've had these conversations, what's it feel like to step back and once again revisit your great spiritual father in Francis and his genius?

Richard Rohr: The very fact that Francis is always a rediscovery, it's like, "Oh, there's more. I forgot that. That's really good." Those kind of reactions reveal his universality. At the first vespers of his feast, which is sunset on October 3rd, the first antiphon is, "Franciscus vir catholicus." Francis, the truly Catholic man, and universal man. I always thought that was very courageous of someone that they recognized he was the universal man. Sort of like that painting you've seen of Leonardo da Vinci.

Paul Swanson: Yes, with his arms outstretched.

Richard Rohr: With the arms out stretched.

Paul Swanson: The legs out stretched.

Richard Rohr: The pattern of all things. Francis got so much right and he was able to get it right by beating his way, not in an angry way, out of the paper sack that Italian Catholicism had created for him. It had given Jesus to him, but it put so many limits and boundaries on Jesus. He for me is just the constant example of order plus disorder already exemplifying, reorder. Because he holds on to his traditional Italian Roman Catholic faith, but does it in such a different way it's hardly recognizable, which is what Rome was afraid of, that he was going to lead a reform movement, and why some call him still the first Protestant.

Paul Swanson: I can see that.

Richard Rohr: That was the danger from the Catholic side that, "Hey, the way he's talking, is a whole new ball game."

Mike Petrow: He really walked his own way.

Richard Rohr: He did. He did.

Mike Petrow: And like you said, it was dangerous to do so he could have gotten in a lot of trouble.

Richard Rohr: He says in his testament, “No one told me what I was supposed to do.” It isn’t the exact word, I followed the spirit, but I did what I had to do is the effect. No one told me.

Mike Petrow: Are you 81 now? I can’t believe I’m forgetting this.

Richard Rohr: Yeah, about to turn 82.

Mike Petrow: So 81, about to turn 82. In 2025, at this moment, if every time you encounter Francis, it’s a rediscovery. If you could sum up the genius of Francis for us right now, in the moment that we’re in in time, what do you think it is?

Richard Rohr: He kept his eyes on the goodness of God and stopped trying to prove his own goodness, his own worthiness. And that for me is the real meaning of his poverty, this obsession with poverty because it is an obsession. Just rejoice in your littleness, rejoice in your nothingness, then you can’t lose because you’re not trying to gain anything that you don’t already have. He got the upside down nature of the kingdom of God. He really did. It wasn’t an achievement, it wasn’t an accomplishment, it wasn’t a performance, and he just would have to go apart with great regularity into the forests and the caves and just weep when he’d see the general state of 13th century warfare between all these city states.

Richard Rohr: He came back from the war himself and the class struggle that the church did nothing to diminish but actually added to by its idealization of popes and bishops and priests. So he deliberately did not become a priest himself to undo the status associated with clergy. He had real doubts about even accepting priests in the order. It took him a while and then it took the form of intellectuals. He just didn’t trust these people who had big degrees because they fell in love with that.

Mike Petrow: Yeah, I appreciate you sharing too about him just going and weeping. I’m hoping our listeners stick with us for the next season of this podcast where we’re going to be going through your book, the Tears of Things, and this will be something we explore is how when we look at the brokenness of the world and sometimes even the brokenness of the religions that are called to make it better, we are first so angry and then you’ve taught that if we stay with that anger, it leads us to tears.

Richard Rohr: It morphs spiritually into tears of compassion, sorrow for the thing, not hatred of the thing, genuine sympathy for how do we miss such good news and make it such bad news?

Paul Swanson: To me, that’s the Franciscan connection in that book, right? The tears, the compassion of hearing you re-describe of Francis basically in the parlance of our time saying it’s not about me, and then as he goes to weep in the forest, it’s about the state of the world and how the Kingdom of God is not being lived out in the way that it’s being called to and prophets speaking to the trouble of the times weeping over it and landing eventually in a place of compassion. It seems to be a connective thread there between Francis and that spirit of that prophetic path.

Richard Rohr: It looks like we're going to get to talk about that next year.

Paul Swanson: That's right.

Richard Rohr: In a major way.

Paul Swanson: You begin this chapter with a quote from Christian Wiman, which is so nutritiously packed with the essence of this book I want to read right now.

Richard Rohr: He was the editor of Poetry magazine.

Paul Swanson: That's right.

Richard Rohr: And his book, *My Bright Abyss*, is still one of my favorite books on faith.

Paul Swanson: That's an incredible book. And this quote comes from that book and he says, "I did not know what love was until I encountered one that kept opening and opening and opening."

Richard Rohr: "And opening."

Paul Swanson: How is that quote indicative of the spiritual genius of Francis to you, Richard?

Richard Rohr: I guess because what I was first given, and what I've seen so many people were given, explaining the almost hatred of Christianity today, is many were given a supposed love that kept closing and closing and closing. This one isn't worthy, that one isn't worthy, this one doesn't belong, that one isn't ready. It was just how could we be so stingy with what is infinite? Talk about wanting to cry. There's so many sincere people who really started going to church and lost God. And I say that now after over 50 years as a priest meeting a lot of church people who were utterly bored with any notion of a spiritual journey, a spiritual itinerary, to use Bonaventure's term. It isn't real, it isn't good, it isn't healing, it's confining. It's who does not belong, who is not good, who is not worthy, who am I allowed to hate reaching the point rather commonly in every century, who am I allowed to kill?

Paul Swanson: That's such the Franciscan spirit of that who is God, who am I, keeps opening and deepening, in love over and over again.

Richard Rohr: Keeps opening. Bigger, bigger. When you to Assisi someday you'll see out in front of the basilica where he is buried, there's a beautiful green lawn tending down toward the door and they put a new statue there of Francis re-entering Assisi on a horse after coming back from war, and it's no heroism in the statue at all. He's just sitting there with his head sunk onto his chest. It's so untypical of the way we painted saints, disillusioned with war.

Mike Petrow: I think about his early desire to be a knight and to be this heroic.

Richard Rohr: That's it. He went, like many men, seeking the military duty to be patriotic, to be nationalistic, to be heroic. God understands that. But, go ahead.

Mike Petrow: Well, he set out to be a hero and he was so defeated by life and his own ambition. It totally inverted the script for him. He became a completely different kind of a hero. I think my favorite little passage in the entire book is in this chapter and you talk about the moment in time that he showed up. So let me read this and then I have a question or two for you. You say, “Exactly when we began to centralize and organize everything at high levels of control and fashion, Francis, like a divine trickster said, ‘Who cares?’” So good. Right when Roman Catholicism reached the absolute height of papal and worldly power-

Richard Rohr: Innocent III.

Mike Petrow: Yeah. He said, in effect, there’s another way that’s much better. “Exactly when the style of production and consumption that would eventually ravage the planet earth came along, he decided to love the earth and live simply and walk barefoot upon it.”

Richard Rohr: I wrote that?

Mike Petrow: You did. It’s pretty good.

Richard Rohr: That’s good.

Mike Petrow: That’s really good. How about you?

Richard Rohr: I can hardly remember anything I wrote. Go ahead, though.

Mike Petrow: Well, first of all, okay, I love that you refer to Francis as a trickster. I love the archetype of the trickster. For our listeners who might be less familiar, what is a trickster?

Richard Rohr: One who colors outside the lines, but not in an angry or rebellious way, but in a creative, whimsical, often humorous way that surprises even the elect, even the pious, even the insider is a bit scandalized. He tricks you into the truth by revealing it from a completely different angle, by undoing the pretense of almost everything.

Mike Petrow: The trickster tricks you into the truth. It reminds me of the old days where the court jester was actually the king’s most trusted advisor because they could mock and flip the script. This idea that a trickster is a teacher and a transformer. So how is Francis very specifically a trickster?

Richard Rohr: There’s one story, in one of the lives where the Holy Roman Emperor came on his parade through central Italy and the friars went out to tell him, “Get out of your prison.” I don’t know if it’s a myth or a truth, but later, “Take off all those silly clothes. You don’t need it. Take off your crown.” Whether he joined them, or he sent them out in his name, but the words they used were, “Don’t you realize you’re living in a prison?” They redraw the lines of what’s acceptable, what’s important. It’s very close to the prophets. I’m going to be a different kind of believer, but not taking pride in that, either. That’s the secret.

Mike Petrow: I’ve read Eastern Orthodox texts where they talk about, because the holy fool is such a thing in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, and they say, “If you want to be a holy fool, you’re probably doing it for the wrong reason.” Because there’s just as much pride. I mean I feel this from the Enneagram 4. There’s just as much pride in going, “Look at me, I’m different. I’m

going to challenge the status quo.”

Richard Rohr: That’s right, that’s right, that’s right.

Mike Petrow: As there is in surrendering to it.

Richard Rohr: You’ve got to watch it.

Paul Swanson: And how neat, I mean I just think about too, in modern day politics, how needed the trickster is for leadership to be kept in check, to laugh at what we all see, but maybe it’s not a conversation that’s being had. I can think about the correspondence dinner that the White House used to do where it was making fun of the president in front of the president and there’s maturity that it takes to take those shots in your presence because it’s humility and humor next to power. And I think when we don’t see that, that’s when my hackles go up. I get a little bit nervous about the leadership if they can’t laugh at their own folly or have their blind spots revealed in such a way. As I reread *Eager to Love* along with Mike and so many of the listeners, and holding the alternative way of Francis in my hands in our lives today, I see Francis, his sharper edges, being filed down by culture, the garden statue, the pious friar, and you even have a quote, I think it’s from, is it Sir Alfred North? No, Whitehead, I think, about-

Richard Rohr: Alfred Whitehead.

Paul Swanson: Yeah, the denigration of religion into just a comfortable life and I feel like that’s been done with Francis in some ways.

Richard Rohr: Oh, yeah.

Paul Swanson: And to your point about always rediscovering Francis, so thinking back for everyone journeying through this process, what does it take to maintain or to use that sense of rediscovery of the sharper edges of Francis so we don’t lose the radicality?

Richard Rohr: You know, and I hope this is a bit of an answer. When Franciscanism lost its real appeal, in my opinion, was after the Council of Trent where we all united as Roman Catholics in one huge conformity against Protestantism because you were overtaking the church and we weren’t Franciscans anymore. We were diocesan priests in brown robes and we lost the trickster almost entirely. You see this book here, I just got, the *Franciscan Intellectual Tradition*, and it really dies after the Reformation. There is no intellectual tradition. We just have pious saints, devotional saints, who I’m sure were good and humble even, but they’re not tricksters anymore. They’re not anti-imperial. Well, they’re not anti anything, really. They’re just pro the Holy Roman Catholic Church and those were most of the men, good men, who taught me. They were good, but not exciting.

Paul Swanson: They didn’t have that electricity that you talked about Francis having, that contagious electricity.

Richard Rohr: Yeah, that’s right. And some of that was good because the trickster appeals to the young man for the wrong reasons, to be a bit of a rebel. It’s a dangerous path because how do you know you’re not enjoying your contrarian role?

Mike Petrow: Oh, yeah.

Richard Rohr: We'll pursue this in this new book that the prophet is the contrarian, but for love, not for fame.

Mike Petrow: For love. Oh, I like that, contrarian for love. I like that.

Richard Rohr: I never said it before.

Mike Petrow: No, that's good. Thank you.

Richard Rohr: I say my best things without thinking about it.

Mike Petrow: And one of the things I appreciate about our conversations about the trickster saying who cares is it is a reminder to get back in touch with what actually matters. I've been thinking about this teaching from the desert fathers and mothers that I love so much. We've talked about it before. Apatheia. Sounds like apathy, which is not caring about anything, couldn't be more different.

Richard Rohr: That's right.

Mike Petrow: Apatheia is not caring about what doesn't matter, so you have more energy to care about what does matter. I think about you and you've quoted Francis from time to time saying, "I've done what is mine to do. Now you do what is yours to do."

Richard Rohr: You must do yours.

Mike Petrow: Knowing what to care about is connected to knowing what is ours to do. How in the world do we know what to care about and know what is ours to do when there's so much to care about and so much to do?

Richard Rohr: It struck me in a recurring way over my lifetime that Francis', and Jesus, who he's building about, of course. Universal social justice agenda is to live a simple life. Otherwise, you're always a part of the system, pleasing somebody to get some advantage, to make more money, to have more notoriety. Simplicity of lifestyle is the most universal social justice ideal I can think of. And people like Mennonites discovered that, didn't they?

Mike Petrow: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. The Quakers, those who get the gospel, they always find a way to move outside the reward system.

Mike Petrow: It's hard.

Richard Rohr: And it's hard. Very good, yeah.

Mike Petrow: It's hard. It's really, really hard. Even, bring the listeners into this, it's great to have these conversations. It's hard not to be driven by the amount of downloads or the reviews because we're always looking for ways to feel like we're making a difference, and yet that can be such a trap to look for those reward systems, or at least externally.

Richard Rohr: Now in my retirement, almost every day I hear voices of, “What good are you now? You’re just sitting here, who are you helping? Who are you changing? Who are you fixing?” Because I got so used to that my whole middle years, every day I had a new spiritual conquest. Now you come and ask me questions that might be a little job to do, but mostly I don’t have any jobs that seem significant.

Mike Petrow: How do you reconcile that? How do you carry that?

Richard Rohr: You know that quote that I’ve quoted often from Little Therese, emphasizing the little, Therese of Lisieux, “Whoever is willing to serenely bear the trial of being displeasing to herself.” I said that in my sleep a few nights ago. I was displeasing to myself. Who are you, the supposed spiritual teacher? And I was just tearing myself up in my dreams and I said, “Now if I can serenely bear this trial, that will be a pleasant place of shelter for Jesus.” I don’t have to fix it. I don’t have to be pleasing. I don’t have to think well of myself. Boy, that’s freedom.

Mike Petrow: Wow. How would you translate that to those listening? How do we each walk our own walk and not be crushed by those voices that tell us that we’re not doing enough?

Paul Swanson: Thinking about the different seasons that listeners are in, whether they’re a young adult in their first leg of their careers, searching something out, midlife, or maybe winding down career, or in retirement. I just think to add those layers are kind of helpful lenses, as before you respond, Richard.

Richard Rohr: Somehow you need to break the measuring stick. You need to ignore the measuring stick. What is the criteria, if we’re all seeking to love as God loves? Well my God, there’s nothing to measure. We’re all just, as I used to say more commonly, we’re all playing in a sandbox. We love as God loves. So what’s this point of evaluating even the examination of conscience that the Jesuits were so good at? There was a place for it, but I don’t think it applies in the last third of life.

Mike Petrow: I really appreciate that invitation to break the measuring stick and to take it back to love.

Paul Swanson: Is the invitation throughout just constant surrender?

Richard Rohr: Of course.

Paul Swanson: That seems to be like the standing-

Richard Rohr: To the great mystery.

Paul Swanson: The great mystery, your self-improvement project is over. Now the surrendering looks different from another standpoint.

Mike Petrow: But when we talked to Kate Bowler, she was so great and she talked about our culture driving and this idea, your best life now is just around the corner, if you just do this next thing. Or, we can fix the world if we just do this and we should work on ourselves and dear God, we need to work for justice in the world. But also-

Richard Rohr: No, that's the paradox. Otherwise it's an exercise in slovenliness to just be as sloppy as you want to.

Mike Petrow: Wow, that's a good word.

Richard Rohr: Evaluate and yet recognize your evaluation is still self-referential and self-serving. That's probably what we mean when the mystics say, "Only God is judge." And then once I stopped taking my judgments too seriously, I stopped taking yours too, what do you think of me here?

Mike Petrow: Well, that's good because I try to bring as much judgment as I can, so I appreciate it. I mean, the book is called literally Eager to Love. What a beautiful reminder to just bring it back to love and to love ourselves as fiercely as we love the things and the people and the world around us and let that be our motivation to do what we can.

Richard Rohr: Keeps opening and opening and opening. Yeah. There you go.

Mike Petrow: This has been good, Richard.

Richard Rohr: You've been good.

Mike Petrow: Thanks for walking through this with us.

Richard Rohr: Thank you. Thank you.

Paul Swanson: Thanks for walking through it with us again.

Richard Rohr: A delight.

Paul Swanson: Thank you, Richard. Thanks, Mike.

Mike Petrow: Thanks, Paul.

Paul Swanson: Thank you.

Mike Petrow: Thanks, Opie.

Paul Swanson: Bye, Opie.

Mike Petrow: Everything Belongs will continue in a moment.

Paul Swanson: Today our guest is Jon M. Sweeney. Jon is an award-winning author and independent scholar. His books on Franciscan Spirituality, which I've read a few of, have sold a quarter million copies. He's also the author of 40 books on spirituality, mysticism, biography and memoir, including Meister Eckhart's Book of the Heart, which I wholeheartedly recommend, which was co-authored with Mark S. Burrows, as well as Thomas Merton: An Introduction to His Life and Practices. To learn more about Jon, visit the show notes for this episode of Everything Belongs.

Mike Petrow: Listeners, welcome back to the Everything Belongs podcast. This is the final episode of

our season. We're so excited. It's so great to be here with Drew and Paul together. We very rarely get to have conversations with all three of us, and we are especially excited to have Jon Sweeney with us this morning. Jon, I can't wait to talk to you about St. Francis, I have a stack of your books on my desk here. I didn't realize how much I'd hung out with you and St. Francis till I went back and looked at the shelf. Do you have a favorite of the works on Francis that you've gotten to hang out with over the years?

Jon Sweeney: It was maybe seven or eight years ago. I don't remember what year it was specifically, but I wanted to write a book about Francis and his best friend, Brother Elias, who then took the order into the wrong direction immediately.

Mike Petrow: Richard mentioned this book yesterday.

Jon Sweeney: Oh, really?

Mike Petrow: He didn't know the title. Okay, so you were saying yes he did. He said he wrote a book about Brother Elias. Yes, Richard was very excited about it.

Jon Sweeney: I think Richard probably blurbed it if I remember, but it only helped sell it to 10 people.

Paul Swanson: Richard was one of the 10. It sounds like.

Jon Sweeney: He probably was. Yeah, no, it's a book that actually blends fiction and nonfiction. I mean, the way that I tell the story, there will be moments when you'll read a paragraph and you'll think, "Okay, well he was making up the scene there because he can't possibly know some of the details that he's putting in the scene there." So it's a little bit of a blending in that sense, but it's a faithful telling of how Brother Elias screwed up the early Franciscan movement, and it began when he secretly buried Francis's body the night before the procession when it was supposed to take place. So it's written like a mystery. I think it's such an important story to tell, too, but it's probably a little bit too thick of a book, maybe too much and too detailed for the reader who does a Google search on Francis of Assisi or Franciscan spirituality. It's probably a niche of a niche of a niche, kind of a book.

Mike Petrow: That's amazing. You've written all these books about Francis, you've compiled Francis' works. What has it taught you, just as a lead in, to spend so much time with Francis over the years?

Jon Sweeney: It has taught me more and more what it was that attracted me to Francis in the first place. I mean, what attracted me to Francis in the first place as a high school kid, really, was his privilege that he then stripped away bit by bit, piece by piece. The way that he embraced his fear, the vulnerability that took place when he encountered his father, when he was beat up by his father, when he was embarrassed as a young knight and soldier and the way that he was a kid who had everything but yet had nothing that he really needed or desired. I saw myself in a lot of that. So that's part of what attracted me from the beginning. And it was biographies of Francis that attracted me, like Julien Green's wonderful little book called *God's Fool*, or the book by Paul Sabatier, the *Life of Francis*, the big one that really began the whole life of Francis renaissance in the late 19th century, which I brought back into print as the *Road to Assisi*.

Jon Sweeney: So I mean, that was how I got started in it all, about 25 years ago. And then it has just

deepened for me more and more because I've tried to live out, as I'm sure you do too, I've tried to live out those principles of embracing my fear, going towards what frightens me, being willing to be vulnerable, sometimes in silly little simple dumb ways and sometimes in important ways. Where in town am I going to live and that kind of thing. So it's just become the set of principles that guides my life, or at least I hope it is.

Paul Swanson: That's fantastic, Jon, and I love hearing about the writing and how it's gotten integrated into your way of life. And you may not remember this, but a few years ago you spoke to my new monastic community, the Community of the Incarnation, and one of the things that you brought up in that conversation was ways that you were applying Franciscan spirituality in the day-to-day about where you live. And you told the story about your house and how you have made that a place of hospitality. I wonder if you could just share a little bit of that because I feel like it's such a great example of the expression of Franciscan values and spirituality in the day-to-day of life.

Jon Sweeney: Yeah, well, there's a few stories I could tell, but I mean the one that pops into my mind when you say that, Paul, is I have worked remotely for 20 years as an editor and as a writer. So we have generally lived wherever my wife needs to live. My wife's a rabbi. So we moved to Milwaukee about eight years ago because she had a congregation here, which she actually just very recently left, but we're still in Milwaukee. And when we moved here, we did what a lot of people of relative privilege do, which is we got to choose where we were going to live. And at the time, we had just adopted a teenage girl. So we adopted Anna and then we moved to Milwaukee, and so we moved to the first suburb immediately north of Milwaukee because it had the best high school and we knew it was going to be an incredible challenge to get this kid through high school.

Jon Sweeney: So we moved there and we got her through high school. Ironically, she totally bombed out of that best high school in the state because she was a kid who didn't come from any privilege at all, and she was suddenly surrounded by kids with privilege, and she rebelled against it. She hated it. So we actually ended up having to hustle and scramble and get her into another situation. We got her through high school, thank God, and it was great, and Anna is doing wonderfully now, by the way.

Jon Sweeney: But after that high school experience, we were able to sit back and say, "Now if we had it to do over again with different circumstances, we wouldn't have moved to where we moved. We don't want to be in the nice suburb immediately north of the city. We want to be where actually there needs to be some light. We need to be involved in what's going on in the community. We need to be right next door to problems that take place instead of separating ourselves from that stuff." Not that we had consciously done that, but I think there was a little bit of guilt. I mean, I'm a Catholic, she's a Jew. We're both really good at guilt.

Jon Sweeney: I think there was a little bit of guilt, but there also was just a taking stock of what was going on and what are we going to do now? We wanted to be very deliberate about what we were doing. So we moved to a place, Milwaukee is a terribly racially divided city. So we moved to the part of the city called Riverwest, which is a very in-between zone, and we immediately had homeless people on our front step, people knocking on the back door asking for stuff.

Jon Sweeney: So anyway, this is too long of a story, but I always remember the first weekend we were

there, we immediately had these kinds of experiences that I was just mentioning, but one of them was I came home from running a couple of errands and came in the back door, which is where the kitchen was, and there's a guy who I had just seen out front as a homeless guy sitting at my kitchen table having a cup of coffee, and my wife was standing there, giving him a cup of coffee. And I had been part of, of course, part of the conversation about moving there and why we wanted to be there, but all of a sudden this guy was right there in the kitchen and something just seized up a little bit in my heart, not that I wanted it to, I mean, we don't sometimes control how we react to things, and I just all of a sudden thought like, "Oh, my God," I was suddenly afraid.

Jon Sweeney: I was suddenly scared. He's in the house. When I met him out on the sidewalk, that was one thing, but now he's in the house. And it was so instructive for me because I often joke, although it's not really a joke, that my Jewish wife is a better follower of Jesus than I am. So she had him right at the table with a cup of coffee, and it probably took me, I don't know, three or four minutes to stand there and say a couple of things and let myself calm down and realize what was going on before I was then sitting down at the table and getting to know this guy. I was embarrassed about that. I was embarrassed that that was my first reaction, but it was a learning process and life is a learning process.

Paul Swanson: Thanks for taking the time to tell that story. I feel like those details are important about how it's never just a one momentous leap forward and how we live these things, but it's a circling, it's a step forward, four steps back, you jump up and down. I feel like it shows up in so many different ways in our bodies and in our experiences.

Jon Sweeney: I agree, and that's why I sometimes go out of my way to tell those kinds of stories because I know that groups that I talk with often are full of people like me of all the right intentions of good heart, but of fear and not quite knowing how to take the first couple of steps and then not knowing what to do when you get to the third or fourth step and all of a sudden you're terrified. It's not simple, it's never easy, and it's good to remind people that it's okay that it's complicated because it means that you're in the thick of it, and that's what we're supposed to be.

Drew Jackson: Hey, Jon, I really appreciate you sharing that story and just it turns me toward this last chapter in Richard's book, *Eager to Love*, and so I've been intrigued by when the title of Francis as a natural spiritual genius for this chapter, and I wanted to just open up the question for you. With all of your study on Francis, what would you consider Francis' spiritual genius, or his brilliance?

Jon Sweeney: Yeah, thank you, and I love this chapter, and then I would use the same language that Richard uses that he was a spiritual genius, a natural spiritual genius. I think a lot of it in Francis comes from his sensitivity. I'm not a naturally sensitive person. I'm married to one, and I have no doubt that I was attracted to her because of that. That sensitivity is so powerful in some people's lives, and I wish it was powerful in mine. I'm trying to find ways to live into a greater sensitivity to have things affect me more, but I think that's part of Francis spiritual genius, and I think that's part of what Richard is tapping into is that Francis was deeply sensitive and he didn't run from it. I mean, he did. I mean, of course that's part of the story that attracts us to Francis is that he did walk away from it.

Jon Sweeney: I mean, those early scenes with the leper on the road when Francis is on his horse and passing by the leper, because he wants nothing to do with him, which isn't what I did with the homeless guy on the street. It's just that I was happy to give the homeless guy in the street five bucks, but then all of a sudden he was inside my house and that was a whole other thing. But then Francis jumps off the horse, runs back to the leper and grabs him and hugs him.

Jon Sweeney: So he was able to react with sensitivity to things. He was able to realize when he needed to strip away the armor that he had put up there so that things wouldn't affect him, and he wanted things to affect him. That's what I want. It's what I think that people want. I mean, especially post pandemic. People want to feel things. They want things to affect them. I think that's one of the keys to Francis's spiritual genius is that he was sensitive in every way and he understood it and he understood how to remove the barriers that we naturally put up so that we become less sensitive so that he could experience and feel the world and then respond to it.

Drew Jackson: Jon, I resonate with that so much, and as someone who lives in a place like New York City where I'm constantly having to negotiate what does it mean to feel when I walk around and this systemic poverty is just in my face every day when I walk out of my door. It's like, how do I not numb myself to it and realize that it's like I do that as part of a survival mechanism, as a way to make it through the day, and yet there's something that is compelling me to keep asking the question, how do I not keep numbing myself to what I'm seeing in front of me? But then that also prompts the question, what then do I do with what I'm feeling?

Jon Sweeney: Yep. Yep. Drew, I think that is the number one challenge that people have today because at the other end of the spectrum, we do have examples of people for whom it's almost like they're an open wound to the wounded world, and I'm not so sure that's good either because it destroys you, it destroys certain people. I mean, when you look at Simone Weil, for instance, I think she was destroyed. She was wide open. I mean, you can't live that way. I mean, I guess you can become a martyr and a saint, but I don't know how you can have a life beyond brief martyrdom and sainthood that is inspiring for people who then can't follow that path. But then you also can't just put up all these barriers.

Jon Sweeney: You have to find that middle ground, and I feel like we have real difficulty finding what that middle ground is, or maybe it's not even a middle ground. That makes it sound too staid or something. It's something other, but this is not at all a commercial, but I mean, I'm working on one other little Francis project that will come out at some point, and my whole purpose is to talk about the things that are replicable. I always want people to feel and realize that Francis isn't this saint on a pedestal somewhere or this saint who did what no one else can possibly do. That actually there's ways in which he experienced God. There's ways in which he reached out to others that are absolutely replicable.

Mike Petrow: Oh my gosh, I love that so much, Jon, thinking about responding to the need around us, or the hunger around us, without being devoured by it. I can't help but think of... There's so many great images of Francis. Francis hugging the leper, Francis with the birds, but it's always been Francis and the wolf that has spoken the most deeply to me, and I'm really enjoying your book literally right here on my desk, Feed the Wolf is fantastic. Would you mind, for our listeners who maybe don't know that story, would you mind recapping for us

the quick story of Francis and the Wolf of Gubbio, is it?

Jon Sweeney: Yeah, Gubbio.

Mike Petrow: Yeah. And then the wisdom in that of Francis in facing the things that are terrifying, feeding the wolf, and not being devoured by it.

Jon Sweeney: Yeah. Yeah. Well, so Gubbio's not too far from Assisi. And Francis at this point, he'd been 5, 6, 7 years into his work as a healer of relationships, as a preacher, which is not the right word when people think about preaching today, but for Francis preaching meant singing and dancing and accompanying people where they were, and then saying a word of gospel here and there. That's what preaching was. But he was about six or seven years into this, and he had a reputation for sanctity. He had a reputation for countercultural sanctity, and so he would get calls every now and then from folks in other towns. And this one was a weird one. This one was, can you come to Gubbio because we have this wolf. It's terrorizing our children and our families, and a couple of men have even gone out to meet it and try to fight it and it killed one of them, and we're terrified.

Jon Sweeney: And so Francis travels to this town, and I think the way I tell the story in *Feed the Wolf* is that the most amazing thing to me is his first response when he gets there, is that he goes out to meet the wolf. And that is amazing to me, given the conversation we've been having, I guess there's a context for what I'm suggesting, which is this fear that he had, obviously he had the same fear that other people had. He doesn't want to get torn limb from limb by this animal, but the first thing he does is he goes out to meet the wolf because what are you going to do with your fear other than facing it? So he goes out to meet the wolf, and he basically brokers a deal between the wolf and the people of the town. And then, at that point, it's a good way to segue and say that Francis had an extraordinary relationship with non-human animals and the created world in a way that most of us can't possibly understand.

Jon Sweeney: There are, believe me, there are ways in which I am a skeptic, and if you've read stuff that I've written about Francis, I have many occasions when I am skeptical about Francis and his miracles. For instance, whenever the stigmata comes up, I always go out of my way to explain why I'm really not going to spend time talking about the stigmata, mostly because Francis didn't talk about the stigmata. So I don't think it's our job to talk about it. At the end of the story, I think it's important to know that after he brokers the deal between the wolf and the town, the deal is that the wolf will stop hurting people and scaring people, and the people of the town will feed the wolf.

Jon Sweeney: And so that's where the title of my book comes from is that we're all wolves. We all are wolf-like, and we all need to be fed. We all have basic needs, and this wolf was starving, so why are we surprised that the wolf was attacking people he needed to be cared for? We all have basic needs to be cared for. I also suggest in one of the chapters of that book that there's been all these theories over the centuries that the wolf of Gubbio actually was a man because there's an Italian word for wolf, which is a name of a criminal who we know from some of the early chronicles was converted by Francis and became a Franciscan friar.

Mike Petrow: Goodness gracious. The genius in that simple moment, in that simple story. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Jon Sweeney: I tell the story that way because I'm trying to be faithful to what I think it means in Francis life. If Francis were a real complicated thinker, if he were a theologian, if he were going around the world trying to be a deep mystic or something, I would tell the story differently, but he wasn't. He was a very simple guy responding in simple ways, and I think that's why people were so drawn to him. There was such an authenticity. We usually can smell when something is inauthentic, and I don't think that's because we're brilliant in the 21st century, or we're so savvy because of the media saturated world we're in or something. In fact, we're probably less sensitive than we could have been centuries earlier. I think people flocked to be around Francis because it was the real deal instead of smoke and mirrors. So anyway, I think that was part of his genius too, was responding in simple, really clear ways.

Mike Petrow: That's so profound, I think of the day and age that we live in, there's a real radicality in authentic simplicity.

Jon Sweeney: Yeah, yeah, there is.

Mike Petrow: Thinking about the work that you're doing now, I think you have done your previous work on Francis too, but that you're zeroing in on what is replicable of Francis and how does that get translated in a way that invites folks to take that up? What do you think the life and teachings of Francis have to teach us about following the radical way of Jesus in our lives today?

Jon Sweeney: To use language from Meister Eckhart, who's another figure who I love, we're either pregnant with God or we're not. There is no other, and I think Francis highlights for us, in really challenging ways, that every decision we make, every place we go, every relationship we forge or don't forge, we spend more time not forging relationships than we do forging them, is a decision of whether or not we're going to follow Christ. If we are Christ followers, if it's a decision to be faithful to our faith or our tradition or our practice or to not, and that's a way in which he challenges us so much. I mean, some people run away from Francis at a certain point because they find it impossible because they don't see him letting up. They don't see him streaming Netflix all afternoon to have a break every now and then, and I don't think he really did have a break every now and then.

Jon Sweeney: I think for him, his break was to go up to a cave in Mount Subasio and spend three or four hours downloading and in contemplative experience, but it wasn't the way in which we escape for periods of time. And that can feel overwhelming. So if you're willing to take that on without a big ladle of guilt, if you're willing to just take that on and decide that your practice is going to be more deliberate, it's going to be about paying closer attention. It's going to be about listening to your feelings and paying attention to your reactions so that you can respond more consistently and be willing to be challenged by people who are close to you and around you.

Jon Sweeney: My wife and I challenge each other all the time on just some of the stupidest things. If you could hear some of the things that we argue about, you would think it is just crazy, but it'll be, she bought something at the store and I'll question, "Well, why'd you get it there instead of getting it there?" Or, "Why'd you get this one instead of getting that one?" And maybe there's a way in which some of those conversations are ridiculous, but yet it's about us trying to be faithful. What do I consume? Where do I consume it? Who do I know? Who do I

support? And I think that's what Francis, that's part of his genius, that he's challenging us to live that way.

Drew Jackson: Just to pick up on that, I am really intrigued by what you just said there in terms of Francis' focus on the faithful, like being faithful. And one of the conversations that I feel like we have a lot, even as we've been talking about Richard's book, is the way that Francis in his way of life, his way of life became a critique of the social order. And so I'm curious if you think that that was something that was intentional for Francis?

Jon Sweeney: It's a both, and. I hesitate to answer it because I don't want to inject myself too much. It's impossible not to inject yourself when you're interpreting someone like Francis of Assisi. And so I'm sure that when I write about Francis, there's too much of me in whatever I'm suggesting was true about him, and there's no way I can avoid that. I try to avoid that, but there's no way I can avoid that. I do believe that he was deliberately challenging the social order. His radical attention to poverty, for instance, was yes, a response to what Jesus taught the disciples in the Gospels, and the fact that Francis took it literally, to the letter, and insisted that Jesus would never have had coins in his pocket, for instance, and never would've had a place to sleep, that he knew he could sleep in the same place a week later.

Jon Sweeney: That was radical. I mean, that was so radical that in a generation or two after Francis' death, there was a pope who had to side with the Franciscans, who had disagreed with Francis and say that that was absolutely not true, that Jesus was not radically poor. It became this dividing wedge between what was the early Franciscan movement and what became the Franciscans after that, which was radically different from Francis. So there's no question in my mind that that was about challenging the social structures, and I'm going to throw in another one, which is that, and I say this in my books from time to time, there's no question in my mind that he was in his very subtle, clever, genius way challenging the hierarchy of the church too. One of the ways that I express this sometimes is that all you have to do is look at Francis and Dominic, the Franciscan movement and the Dominican movement began at exactly the same time.

Jon Sweeney: Francis and Dominic were exact contemporaries, and if you look at the life of Dominic, he's constantly going to Rome. He has to go ask a bishop about this. He has to go get approval from the cardinals about this. He has to go meet with the pope about this. And if you look at Francis, he's trying as desperately as he can to not go to Rome. He does not want to go ask anyone for permission about anything. He's just going to live his life as my eighth grader would say, and do his practice as he knows he's supposed to, and as God has asked him to do, and sometimes it's better just not to ask and to not ask for permission. So it's funny to me that very quickly, immediately after Francis's death, the cardinal in charge, who then later became the pope, embraced Francis as this great champion of the church and this great supporter of Mother Church, and he didn't not support Mother Church, but he went out of his way to not be involved in those politics. And I have no doubt that that was intentional.

Drew Jackson: Yeah, that's so good. And one of the things that I keep getting drawn back to is Francis' voluntary choice to be in solidarity with the pain of the world. But I'm wondering, do we ever really get a good glimpse into his struggle to stay in solidarity with the suffering of the world? To keep choosing to stay there? Was there ever a sense of him wanting to retreat to the comforts of wealth, power, and ease? If so, what do you think kept him from doing so?

Jon Sweeney: I don't think there was. There was, again and again in Francis, a tension between him wanting to spend time alone. He was a contemplative. He was a contemplative in action, but he was a true contemplative in the sense that he, I think, connected with the beloved in a way that was intense and personal and powerful, and he didn't want to leave those times, but then he knew he had to. I think there was this tension in him where he felt like he had to wrest himself out of what he loved in order to go back and do what he needed to do, what he was supposed to do.

Mike Petrow: This is our last episode, exploring Richard's book, *Eager to Love*. And then what's going to happen is next season we're going to come back to explore Richard's book, *Tears of Things*, which is Richard's next and possibly last book. He's had four books in a row, that are his last books, so we're just rolling with it at this point. In this book, Richard looks at the lineage of the Hebrew prophets, and he describes what he calls the path of the prophet. And what he says is he spots a pattern in which we encounter injustice in the world, and very often our first response is a very deep, very appropriate, very righteous anger, which can also potentially be immature and destructive if it's not managed well. And he says if we look at our anger deeply, what we see behind it is actually a very, very deep sadness. I am curious, I don't want to force something that's not there, but when you look at the life of Francis, do you see any of that anger or that sadness and any way that he moved towards the love in the midst of that?

Jon Sweeney: Well, I love the question because I love what you're telling me is in this next book. I resonate with that. Yeah, I see that in Francis of Assisi for sure. One of the ironies about him being such a popular saint, one of the world's most popular saints, is that he sometimes wasn't a very nice guy, and there's times when he would respond like a prophet. Richard was saying that initial response of anger, there's one incident where we have Francis visiting friars in another town nearby, and as he arrives, he sees that they've started to build a house. Well, you're not supposed to build a house. That's not what a Franciscan does, because that's not Franciscan vulnerability, at least not according to the early days of the movement, which then changed.

Jon Sweeney: But the scene has him climbing up onto the roof of the house, surely while the other friars were trying to rationalize with him like, "Oh, this is the way things need to be. You need to accept we can't live by those strict ideals," or whatever. And Francis is ripping the tiles off of the roof, just tearing the house apart. So it is that prophetic anger, which I resonate with as accurate and as true, but maybe not the best approach and maybe not the approach that he then would've taken the following day. I think he does return again and again, in the last couple of years of his life, if you read the accounts of what he was doing in those last couple of years, like writing the *Canticle of the Creatures*, for instance, using the phrase *Mother Earth*, coming to a place of deep love, of non-dualistic, deep love. He was leaving those prophetic moments often, I think, and going back to a place of wound and love at the same time.

Mike Petrow: Oh, that's really good. I'm going to think on that one for a couple of weeks, wound and love. Would you give us another few seconds on how those two go together?

Jon Sweeney: Well, when he is writing the *Canticle of the Creatures*, he's the first one to write about *Mother Earth*. I mean, we still have leaders in the church today who think we're new age

freaks if we talk about Mother Earth, and you just have to say that Francis of Assisi did it 800 years ago. Then all of a sudden he writes a verse about death, about Sister Death. So the wound was always there. I mean, there was no hint of triumphalism. There was no hint of certainty in Francis, theological or otherwise. There was just the hope and the love and the wound never really went away.

Jon Sweeney: The older I get, I'm getting closer to 60 now, and the older I get, the more I feel like there are great ways that you could put together Francis with a lot of Zen Buddhist teaching and practice. There are ways in which they're together. I've been doing a lot of reading of Dōgen, the 13th century zen master lately, and I'm sure it's because of what I bring to the reading that I keep reading, thinking, oh my God, this is Francis. This is Francis. This is Francis. But it's ironic and it's interesting to me because they were contemporaries and there's a non-dualistic love and attention to the wound of the world at the same time that is in both of them. And practice. Practice, practice, practice daily.

Paul Swanson: I'm curious, Jon, if you have any last parting words for the listeners as they seek to hold this place of the wound and the love as they carry it into this next season of their life?

Jon Sweeney: Well, what pops into my mind when you ask that is what I would say is probably not something that your audience needs as much as most of us need because you guys pay close attention to daily practice. I mean, I know that's what everyone is about and you challenge each other to do that, but I think that is what we need more than ever is we need a daily practice and for each of us it's different, but it needs to be daily and it needs to be true practice. It can involve a whole bunch of things and you have to have someone who challenges you to stay on it because if we're not in a daily practice, I don't think we are going to be able to maintain the attention and the sensitivity that we need in order to respond to these things in the right way. It's too easy to lose our way. If you're going to live by the principles that Francis sets out, I don't think it takes a lot of you, other than the most obvious things, paying attention and being faithful to a daily practice and listening.

Paul Swanson: And deep gratitude for your time today, Jon.

Jon Sweeney: My pleasure.

Paul Swanson: Thank you so much for being in conversation.

Jon Sweeney: My pleasure. Nice to spend time with you guys.

Mike Petrow: Friends, what an amazing conversation with Jon Sweeney. The radical simplicity of Francis' message and lifestyle, and I don't often think of radicality and simplicity as going together, but I think that's something that became really, really clear to me there. I know Drew, simplicity is a big deal here at the Center for Action and Contemplation.

Drew Jackson: Yeah, we've been talking about simplicity internally as a staff team all year because it's one of our four core values, and I mean Jon shared so much wisdom in reflecting on the simplicity of Francis. It's not complicated when we think about someone like Francis or when we think about the saints that these high ideals that we could never get to, but really it's less about the high ideals and more about the ways that they just lived what was right in front of them. That is so radical.

- Mike Petrow: I love that. There's a great quote from Carl Jung where he says, "The imitation of Christ is not actually trying to imitate the exact events of Jesus' life, but to live our lives as authentically and originally by the same values that Christ did." Which is pretty cool. We're not just reflecting here at this moment on this episode, this is the last episode of the season. This is the last chance that we get together and talk about *Eager to Love*, which I know Drew is your favorite of Richard's books, or the one that introduced you to Richard, if I remember correctly. What's it been like for both of you this season to hang out with this teaching from Richard and with Francis?
- Drew Jackson: It's been so, so rich to revisit this book. It's been a while having the opportunity to come back to it and to read it while being in these conversations that we've been in. It's like it opens up new dimensions of it and what I'm recognizing more and more is what's been compelling to me about Francis so much of his voluntary solidarity with the pain of the world, this movement toward that and the way that his life in all these different aspects became a critique of the social order, became a critique of the church as Jon spoke about, and that's something that I've been, for a long time, just sitting with that and what does it mean to live prophetically in the world? I think that Richard and his writing on the life of Francis captures that so much, and I am always drawn back to that.
- Paul Swanson: That resonates so deeply with me, Drew, I'm thinking about something that Jon said today and just how it's one of those seeds that I think has been there throughout the conversations that we've all been involved in and through this book of beginning from a place of experience of God and a faithfulness to deepening that experience and where does that call you? How do I love my family better? How do I serve my neighborhood better, in the concrete practicalities. And it does start to make you a little odd when you're following this alternative way of Francis, of Jesus, it puts you at odds with systems and places and communities that seek to elevate power and prestige over the common good and the love of God and neighbor. And bringing that all back home, I can feel that thread throughout so many of the conversations that we've had this year.
- Mike Petrow: That's so good. One of my favorite conversations ever was just driving down the road with a buddy of mine and we were listening to music and he just turned and looked at me and he goes, "You know, listening to Led Zeppelin is like reading the Bible. Sometimes it's that same old thing you've heard a hundred times and another time it hits you like you're hearing it for the very first time all over again." I remember just hearing the deep love of Led Zeppelin and scripture in this statement and it reminds me why we do this podcast. This has been an opportunity for me to revisit a book of Richard's that I've already read, to revisit the life of Francis again, and really in these conversations it's been like encountering it for the first time again.
- Mike Petrow: It reminds me what a gift it is to go back over and over to some of these teachings and these lives of our great spiritual heroes and let them hit us anew as we are different people than we were when we first started. Like Drew, you are a different person than when you were the very first time that you read *Eager to Love*, and I'll bet all of that comes together, which also reminds me, Drew, it's been so great to have you join our Everything Belongs team here and be such a great voice and fellow host on the podcast this season. I'd love to know how it's been for you and invite you, as our newest host, to have the final word on *Eager to Love*

with us and our listeners.

Drew Jackson: Well, thank you, Mike. Thanks, Paul for welcoming me into this space, into these conversations. It's been a real gift. I think about ending this season. I wanted to leave our listeners with a poem because of course, of course.

Mike Petrow: I love it.

Drew Jackson: I wanted to share this poem as I think about a lot of the themes from this book and where I am sitting at right now, coming out of that conversation with Jon, thinking about the simplicity of loving what is right in front of us and confronting our fears. Jon talked about that and confronting our fear of being able to love what is right in front of us, the person that's right in front of us, or confronting those biases that come up in us that prevent us from love. And so this poem is a poem that I wrote reflecting on the story that Jesus tells in the Gospel of Luke about the rich man and Lazarus, and I think there's so much in that story that I mean we can draw out and parallel to the life of St. Francis and the story where this rich man is Lazarus lying at his gate and the rich man every day is stepping over his body as he goes in and out and about his day and after the rich man dies, he has this confrontation where he sees Lazarus in what is called Abraham's bosom.

Drew Jackson: He's in paradise and the rich man is in hell, whatever that means. He's in this place of torment and he's looking at Lazarus and he's confronted with the fact that he's had the opportunity his entire life to be present to and to love what was right in front of him, and he kept stepping over, for whatever reason. I write this poem out of this place of deep grappling with that and asking myself the question, how do I stay present enough to what is in front of me, to love with simplicity, even in the midst of the fear, the anxiety, the biases that rise up?

Drew Jackson: And so this poem is simply called Wishes.

Drew Jackson: I see him when I walk across 14th street.

Drew Jackson: Feet sticking out from under another's throwaway blanket, crusted over, gangrene.

Drew Jackson: Sneaker store in my peripheral vision that, to him, likely seems a lifetime away, a great gulf fixed.

Drew Jackson: I slip my hand into my pocket to assuage my guilt.

Drew Jackson: I wish I could fill his hands with cash.

Drew Jackson: I wish I could fill my heart with compassion.

Drew Jackson: I wish I could fill my mouth with courage to ask his name.

Drew Jackson: I wish I could see him as more than a barrier on my way to the L train, MTA card in my hand.

Drew Jackson: I push the gate open.

Drew Jackson: So as we end, I invite you to sit with the words of that poem, then the invitation to even connect with the deep desire that I believe each one of us has to live with simple love and compassion in this world, and ask ourselves what is keeping me from love and how might I face my fear and step in to that place with courage, and with hope, that there is something beautiful on the other side of my fear?

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Vanessa Yee: Vanessa Yee.

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.