

Mike Petrow: Hey friends. Welcome back to another episode of Everything Belongs, the podcast where we live the teachings of Father Richard Rohr forward. This season, we've been looking at Father Richard's book, The Tears of Things, his most recent and he claims last book. It's been a beautiful exploration the last few months and we've now come to chapter six, Unfinished Prophets, Elijah, Jonah, and John the Baptizer. We're about halfway through this season, and it's right here in this chapter where Father Richard takes a look at prophets who he think went on the path of the prophet that he's been describing with us and didn't quite get there. They didn't quite make the full journey from anger to sadness to love, and, hey, this is a great opportunity for us to look at all the ways that we're on the journey and to check in with where we are in our own development and in our own prophetic path. And also to ask ourselves, can we learn from prophets and scriptures and spiritual teachers who themselves are maybe a little bit unfinished and incomplete? And in doing that, can we let ourselves be incomplete and imperfect?

I can't help but think of my favorite saying of Richard's, which is that the only perfection available to us is to completely love our imperfection. This time we're going to do something a little bit different. You know, normally what we do is we go to Richard's hermitage and we talk to him for just about 20 to 30 minutes, and then we bring in an external guest and we unpack the themes of the chapter and the wisdom for about an hour. This episode, we're going to do a little bit different. We're going to hang out with Richard longer. We're going to take some extra time in the hermitage and tell and unpack these four stories that Richard points out as being so useful. And at the end of that, I'm going to get to sit down with one of my favorite co-hosts, Carmen Acevedo Butcher. And she and I are going to talk about how this conversation and this chapter invites all of us into loving our own imperfection and learning from imperfect teachers.

Friends, as always, you don't need to read the book to listen along and glean some really good wisdom out of these great conversations, if you want to. It's great to have you reading along with us. Either way, we hope that you hear an invitation in all of this to be a part of the conversation, to bring your own questions and your own life into dialogue with all of us as we ask what does it mean to live in a state where we're always a little bit incomplete, unfinished, and imperfect, and maybe learning to love that is the whole point. Without further ado, let's head over to Richard's hermitage and jump into this great conversation on the Tears of Things, chapter six. From the Center for Action and Contemplation, I'm Mike Petrow.

Paul Swanson: I'm Paul Swanson.

Carmen Acevedo ...: I'm Carmen Acevedo Butcher.

Drew Jackson: And I'm Drew Jackson.

Mike Petrow: And this is Everything Belongs.

Paul Swanson: Richard, thank you so much for inviting us back into your hermitage to have a conversation on chapter six of Tears of Things, Unfinished Prophets, Elijah, Jonah, and John, the Baptizer. And Richard, before we ask you a few questions, I want to kind of set the table 'cause this is a feast.

Richard Rohr: Okay.

Paul Swanson: There's a lot in this chapter.

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: So all three, Elijah, Jonah, and John the Baptizer are unfinished prophets.

Richard Rohr: In my judgment.

Paul Swanson: In your judgment.

Richard Rohr: Yeah, that's all it is.

Paul Swanson: But because they're incomplete, we can relate to them very easily and they invite us into their own incompleteness, not to imitate them...

Richard Rohr: Wow. Well said.

Paul Swanson: ... but to learn from them.

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Paul Swanson: And you write that mature prophets make us conscious of both the patterns of grace and the endless disguises of ego. Thank God that he uses our mistakes to bring us to himself. So don't stop noticing your flaws and blind spots. So in this way we can be shoulder to shoulder with these incomplete prophets and also looking towards the maturing of prophets as ways to emulate. And what's shocking, Richard, is that you encourage us to notice the flaws and blind spots and our scriptural heroes because you also write, "We do scripture and ourselves a disservice if we take such unfinished prophets as examples to blindly follow instead of recognizing their complexities and what they about the much deeper role of God's love in human history."

And you tell us that this pointing out the flaws in blind spots is a lot of our immature religion. I think we all have stories if you can tell about that. And you write, "The prophets are indeed an early warning system against an angry picture of God, struggling with this entrapment themselves and overcoming it in many of their texts. The violence of God and religion must be directly and firmly undone inside the Bible itself, or it will only continue to undo all of us." And I think beginning just say thank you for writing these words. It helps us know how to relate to these texts and how to...

Richard Rohr: Thank you for hearing it.

Paul Swanson: ... to take them and to wrestle with them and to really work with them. But let's begin by defining our terms. You call Elijah, Jonah, and John the Baptizer unfinished prophets. What do you mean by that term, unfinished prophets?

Richard Rohr: I only realized this after the fact that as I look at the books I've written, I realize I'm obsessed with character developments, with growth because we had so much magical Christianity. We Catholics made canonized saints perfect from their birth. You know? You good Protestants made born againness an instantaneous moment, which was not fair, not good. So it wasn't hard to find it even in those called prophets, there was development in the text in the Bible, and sometimes the most known aspect of the prophet is the undeveloped part, like Elijah killing how many, 450 people, murdering.

Paul Swanson: So many.

Richard Rohr: I mean, there's no way you could say that's a high level of moral development. There's no way you can get around it. We did though. We just ignored it. Well, he's a prophet, therefore it's okay. That makes us dishonest with the text. So the ones I call unfinished is they mostly go on two higher stages. Well, in Jonah's case, who is my favorite in many ways, he remains whining 'til the end...

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: ... that God is merciful to the Ninevites. So it's real genius on the part of the Bible that it shows us the undeveloped state, so know what not to do. They are negative teachers in a way. They get halfway there. Elijah, in reference to violence. Jonah, in reference to inclusivity. John the Baptist in terms of individual sin rather than collective sin.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. I so appreciate the way you point them out. But doesn't mean they were bad.

Richard Rohr: No. No.

Paul Swanson: They were just incomplete, which makes them highly relatable for us.

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Paul Swanson: Helps us know the differences, as you said, between the incomplete and the more mature prophet from your framework and how we can hold both as ways of seeing ourselves in some and also aspiring to modes of behavior and relationship with the divine love affair. But I also want to say, Mike, I know this chapter contains at least two of your major heroes...

Mike Petrow: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: ... and three that you've done immense study on.

Mike Petrow: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: Really.

Mike Petrow: Yeah. I've written hundreds and hundreds of pages on Elijah, Jonah, and Job. I...

Paul Swanson: Well, and how many sermons?

Mike Petrow: ... love these stories. Oh. Yeah. Dozens.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Mike Petrow: They're such good stories.

Richard Rohr: They are.

Mike Petrow: Because this chapter references such rich stories, how would you feel, Richard, if we tell our listeners a little bit about the stories and then just...

Richard Rohr: Please. You'll make it easy for me.

Mike Petrow: Okay. I would love to unpack them a little bit one at a time because they're so...

Richard Rohr: Oh. Do. Do.

Mike Petrow: ... rich. All right. Great. Starting with Elijah, what a character. Right?

Richard Rohr: What a character.

Mike Petrow: Elijah is so central to scripture, super central to Jewish mythology and spirituality as well. We're not going to get into it, but because in the end of the story, Elijah doesn't die. He's taken off in a chariot to heaven. So he's kind of a Highlander figure. In Jewish Jewish myth and fable, he shows up to this day. You know? Elijah's around. But one of the things I love is the way that Elijah is allowed to be incomplete and invites us into that, especially in the story you mentioned, Richard, one of my all-time favorite stories, if our listeners want to check it out, it's found in 1 Kings chapter 18 and 19.

Richard Rohr: 19. Yeah.

Mike Petrow: So good. Elijah famously has a contest with the prophets of a false God who's sort of taken over and he proposes that they each build an altar and they attempt to call down fire from the heavens to see whose God is real. And Elijah lets the other team go first, so to speak, and they dance and they chant and they're going for a while. And after they're unsuccessfully trying to call down fire

from heaven, he starts taunting them. He really, really starts giving him a hard time. In one translation, he's saying, keep praying, keep calling. Maybe your God is away on a trip. Maybe he's in the bathroom and he just keeps taunting them to keep going. And then after they're unsuccessful, Elijah offers a short prayer and miraculously calls down fire from the sky, probably lightning. And it burns up both altars. And he has won the contest beyond any possible doubt.

He has embarrassed the other false prophets, but in his zeal, he doesn't stop there. And as you mentioned, he then slaughters the prophets of the now defeated and embarrassed false god and, Richard, I would say you probably shock a lot of our readers when you say, on page 84, "I recognize this is a new perspective for most of us, but there is no way we can sanitize these murders." And you remind me a lot, this is not going to surprise you, of Origin who says that when we read scripture, we can never be satisfied with a meaning that is not worthy of God.

Richard Rohr: Wow.

Mike Petrow: Yeah. Can't be satisfied with a meaning that is not worthy of the god of love.

Richard Rohr: Always rely on Origin.

Mike Petrow: But it's interesting that you're inviting us into a prophetic reading of the prophet when you say to us this violence is not okay and it's not of God. That's pretty bold, Richard.

Richard Rohr: It didn't feel bold to me. It felt obvious. But what saves it makes it easy, is the wonderful scene outside the cave.

Mike Petrow: Oh. We're going to get there. Don't worry.

Richard Rohr: Okay.

Mike Petrow: We're going to get there.

Richard Rohr: So proceed to that because the story of development that I would highlight in yellow.

Mike Petrow: A hundred percent. Well, before we get there, it's interesting to notice what happens here. His response at the end of this victory.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. Yeah.

Paul Swanson: It's such a dualistic paradigm, right? Stuck in this win-lose, good guy, bad guy thinking.

Richard Rohr: Bad guy. Yeah.

Paul Swanson: And does it make it too easy to support violence and even commit violence when you're stuck in that framework? Richard, how does this win-lose paradigm, which you've talked about so much limit development and lead to violence?

Richard Rohr: It allows us to live with an immature notion of reality that things are 100% good or 100% bad, and we ourselves are included in the mix. That, well, I just happen to be 100% good because I'm a Jew, or I'm a Catholic, or I'm the group I belong to. But that's why he has to get him to go to listen to the still small voice.

Mike Petrow: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: To listen at a deeper level. It's a perfect teaching on contemplation.

Mike Petrow: It's one of the best I've ever seen.

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Mike Petrow: So Elijah calls down fire from heaven, wins the contest, does not give the prophets the opportunity to learn from it, right? Because they just saw Elijah's god bring fire down from heaven.

Richard Rohr: Oh. I wish I had...

Mike Petrow: This could converted them.

Richard Rohr: ... said that.

Mike Petrow: Well, we could have converted them, but instead he puts them all to the sword because he's stuck in this win-lose paradigm. But then what's interesting is what happens next. And this is one of my favorite stories of all time.

Paul Swanson: And it's like a bad movie script up until this point.

Mike Petrow: Exactly.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Mike Petrow: And then it all turns. Here's the big twist because right after this, right, one of the greatest moments of victory a prophet has ever had in scripture, he has a spectacular breakdown and a moment of total burnout. Right? He's basically invincible. He's just called down lightning and murdered all his enemies, but he gets a death threat from Jezebel, who's the wife of the king, and was the patron of all these prophets that he just defeated. She sends him a death threat and he falls apart and he runs for his life. It's like if you are at the pinnacle of your career, things are going the best they've ever gone for you. And you get one bad

email or one negative comment on social media, one bad book review, and you just throw your arms up and go, it's hopeless. I give up. And he falls apart.

And this is a lot like what we talk today when we talk about burnout. Right? When we talk about burnout psychologically, we're talking about something that is usually associated with emotional overwhelm, a sense of cynicism where we just don't feel like anything matters, and a feeling of helplessness, feeling like we can't make a difference, so we give up. And I think this story is so important for anyone who's ever experienced that. Before I jump into the story, Richard, I have to ask you, how can our anger and our zeal lead us to burnout? You've talked about this the whole time that it's unsustainable to stay angry.

Richard Rohr: The first thing that comes to mind is the situation you're forced into is to up the ante to increase your violence or your hatred or your angry explanations to remain in charge. It doesn't just stay the same. You have to have more hatred, more accusation, more killing. Negative energy feeds on itself and builds. And so it's inherently self-destructive.

Mike Petrow: Wow. And we're going to see that in other stories too.

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Mike Petrow: That is powerful. Well, what's wild is how he gets pulled out of that self-destruction.

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Mike Petrow: God draws him out into the desert. So he leaves. He gets out in a quiet place. And I love, we've seen the icon, you've heard the story Elijah's laying down by a brook, and birds come and bring him food. And the miraculous and beautiful nature of that can take away from the fact that what God first has him do is take a nap and eat some food. And I often reflect on how many of our problems could be solved if we would just occasionally pause, rest, eat.

Richard Rohr: You're developing much better than I did.

Mike Petrow: And in one of the most beautiful moments of scripture...

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Mike Petrow: ... he's in the cave and God comes to speak to him, and there's an earthquake and it shakes the mountain, but the scripture tells us, but the Lord was not.

Richard Rohr: And he has just been an earthquake.

Mike Petrow: He's been an earthquake.

Richard Rohr: Yes. Yes.

Mike Petrow: And there's I think a firestorm, right? So you have lightning and storm and he's just called down.

Richard Rohr: He's been the firestorm.

Mike Petrow: He just called down fire from heaven, but the Lord is not in the fire. And so it goes. And then it tells us that there's a still small voice.

Richard Rohr: Genius.

Mike Petrow: And when he hears the still small voice, he recognizes that it's the divine speaking him, and he goes out to have a conversation. So, Richard, you define this chapter, this section on Elijah as being stuck in spectacle. What does it mean to get out of spectacle and listen to the still small voice and how does that save us?

Richard Rohr: What we're doing in a contemplative practice or sit is paying attention. And so you lower the threshold of beauty, little tiny things, little quiet things teach you, impress you, draw your attention. It doesn't take big showy things anymore. That's almost the heart of the matter.

Mike Petrow: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: I experience it here on my front porch where on a Sunday afternoon, no one's around here and just watching nothing. It takes less and less to make me happy, completely happy. It's the still small voice, whereas early and when you're young, you're looking for miracles and apparitions, at least if you're a Catholic. You're looking for something showy. I don't expect that. I don't think I even need or want that because it's true illusory, the meanings I attached to a spectacle.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. I'm thinking too right now of the Carmelites, because they claim Elijah as their spiritual father.

Richard Rohr: They, our holy father, Elijah.

Paul Swanson: And it is for the still small voice, not the fire from heaven, the murderous encounters. But I think about that juxtaposition because of what the Carmelites have given the Christian contemplative stream in this modeling of atuning to the still small voice and faithfulness to that in big and small things.

Richard Rohr: Their connection goes back to ancient hermits who lived in the caves on Mount Carmel. Evolved into the Carmelite order. And so that's how Elijah became their holy father.

Paul Swanson: And just also, I can't help but think of Jesus too being drawn out to the desert as well in this story.

Richard Rohr: There you go.

Paul Swanson: These connections and the way that these stories overlap and...

Mike Petrow: Oh my God.

Paul Swanson: ...bleed...

Richard Rohr: Where there's less to pay attention to. And ironically, it ends up being more where small significance is big significance.

Paul Swanson: Yes.

Mike Petrow: To sort of turn that upside down...

Richard Rohr: Turn the page.

Mike Petrow: ... and look at it another way in talking about wanting to just be alone. I love that you included Jonah in here.

Richard Rohr: Oh. Okay.

Mike Petrow: Jonah's one of my favorite stories of all time...

Richard Rohr: Mine too.

Mike Petrow: ... maybe my favorite story of all time. You collect Jonah images.

Richard Rohr: There he is on my hearth.

Mike Petrow: It's such a good story. Jonah is a prophet, and the word of the Lord comes to him and tells him to go prophesy against the city of Nineveh, the capital of the scariest empire of the day. They had destroyed the northern Kingdom of Israel. And I love this. Jonah just goes, nope. And he packs up and he heads in the opposite direction. His answer is absolutely not. He goes down to a port in the opposite direction. He rents a ship going in the opposite direction as far away as humanly possible to the other side of the Mediterranean Sea. And then in the English translation, he goes down into the ship and he takes a nap. So the ship sets out. God sends a storm to shake him up and wake him up and to redirect the ship and stop Jonah. But he sleeps through the storm 'til the captain comes and wakes him up.

And to his credit, Jonah says, this is my fault. Throw me into the ocean and the storm will stop, which is a bit dramatic and he has to talk to them into it too

because the sailors don't want to throw him overboard, but they eventually do. And then God sends a whale famously to gobble Jonah up and swim him back on track. And I love on page 86, you say that you also love the story and you have had similar experiences where you feel like God is redirecting you. There's a scholar named T.A. Perry who I really, really like. And he says that if you look at the original Hebrew, Jonah wasn't asleep in the cargo hold of the ship. He was in a prophetic trance...

Richard Rohr: Oh.

Mike Petrow: ... or we might say he was engaged in contemplative practice. So one way to read this might be that he was a contemplative who did not want to take action.

Richard Rohr: How interesting.

Mike Petrow: He's just like, leave me alone. I just want to sit and meditate. I don't want to get out in the world and prophesy.

Richard Rohr: That's very fascinating. Wow.

Mike Petrow: So here's my question for you, Richard. First off, what would you say to our listeners who maybe aren't burnt out like Elijah as much as blissed out? And they just want us to be happy. They all want us all to work on our personal practice, work on ourselves, be non-dual, say everything belongs and not rock the boat. What advice would you give for those who'd rather be lost in contemplation and our pursuit of the divine and ignore the plight of those suffering in the world and not take action?

Richard Rohr: Forgive me. I fear that's a good percentage of my listeners. They don't know they're doing it, but they think to keep reading books or listening to tapes is an end in itself, and it isn't, but you give me a new text. Jonah down in the hold of the ship is in false contemplation. That's the term Merton used, I think.

Mike Petrow: Well, and so is false contemplation, just dissociating and spiritual bypassing, some would say?

Richard Rohr: That'd be maybe a better, he gives you consolation, but it's false consolation. And it's preferred by the introverted personality. And we've got to recognize that the introvert can't have a natural head start over the extrovert. God reveals God's self to both of us equally.

Mike Petrow: That's wild. Well, you can see it in everything Jonah does. And if our listeners want, the book of Jonah is only four chapters long, and it is a great read, and I cannot recommend it enough. God rocks the boat to shake Jonah into action, sends a whale, swims Jonah back. After getting devoured by a whale and spit up on shore, he decides, he decides that maybe he'll do what he's supposed to do and answer his calling. He goes to Nineveh. He preaches the shortest and the

worst sermon of all time and just basically says in 40 days Nineveh is going to be destroyed. The shortest and worst sermon of all time is also the most effective sermon in the entire Bible.

Richard Rohr: There's a the lesson, right?

Mike Petrow: It's true.

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Mike Petrow: The people immediately repent. Immediately. They're like, okay, let's repent the animals, they have the animals cover themselves.

Richard Rohr: Fast. Poor things.

Mike Petrow: It's wild. They go on a fast and God decides to spare them. And Jonah is pissed. He's so mad.

Richard Rohr: Furious.

Mike Petrow: And he basically says to God, you dragged me all the way here to do this, and now you're not even going to punish these folks. And then the funniest part is, and he's like, and I knew you would do this. I knew you would be merciful 'cause that's who you are. So he's so stuck in, he finally gets out of his contemplation and takes action, but he wants justice. And to be fair, this city has terrorized the world and the Hebrew people. This would be like if Jonah marched into Berlin at the height of the Nazis power and said, God's going to destroy you. And then everybody starting with Hitler was like, you know what? You're right. We're going to repent.

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Mike Petrow: And Jonah's like, no, I'm sorry. Too little too late. And how is that not too little too late? That's my first question for you. Should God have punished the Ninevites?

Richard Rohr: Well, my guess would be that he misunderstood the first lesson from Yahweh that God wasn't really into punishing the Ninevites. He wanted that.

Mike Petrow: He did want it. You're right.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. Yeah. He wanted that. He still, as I say, I think I do into the reward punishment worldview and he won't let go of it. He wants them punished. And as you know, by the end of this book, it's one of my major points, that as long as we remain in the reward, punishment version of God, I don't see how Christianity or Judaism can be significantly reformed because you have violence,

hatred, validated scapegoating all the way down, all the way down. If God can do it, we should do it.

Mike Petrow: The other day, someone sent me a story about a kayaker that got swallowed by a whale and spit out. People wonder, is it historically possible that it happened? Is it literal? And I think what's more important is that the story happens over and over again in our hearts, minds, and imaginations when we engage it deeply and act it out that way.

Paul Swanson: The only sign you'll be given is the sign of Jonas, right?

Richard Rohr: Is the sign. Thanks for quoting that. Clearly Jesus had studied this text that going into the darkness and being spit up by God's control is the path for all of us. What loss of control and handing over control to God.

Paul Swanson: Well, we're going to turn the page again and turn our attention to John the Baptizer and John the Baptizer of course was Jesus' cousin, was teaching and preaching outside of the city center, going to the wilderness, going to the river, and calling for a change in life, a change of being. But he was also throwing stones from the outside from this almost like self-righteous standpoint towards Herod. Help me if I get this wrong. Herod married his brother's wife.

Richard Rohr: I was getting confused too. Yes.

Paul Swanson: And so one of the things that you point out in the way that this story gets told is that instead of where a more mature prophet would critique the culture or the system, John the Baptizer narrows in a one individual.

Richard Rohr: He just focuses on this one bad egg as we used to say.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: That's what not to do. Keep going. Keep going.

Paul Swanson: And we heard this, I mean in our recent times, there was one bad apple on this police force, there was one bad apple in Congress, you know, instead of the culture that creates some of these things. And I feel like, at least this is what I feel like I've learned from you, Richard, is like anytime you individualize it, you're scapegoating them in a way where you lose the argument for the whole, the prophetic voice, the critique of the system or the culture. And yet as Jesus says, you know, you even quoted at the beginning of this chapter where you say, "No man born a woman is greater than John the Baptizer, yet the least in the kingdom of God is greater..."

Richard Rohr: Least.

Paul Swanson: ... than he." Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Greater than he is. What a statement.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. How do you relate to that statement when we think of John the Baptizer as an unfinished prophet and yet somebody who Jesus Christ was kind of paving the way for his own work in the world?

Richard Rohr: Well, it's that line that I often use to show how Jesus teaches paradoxical thinking. He makes two seemingly superlative statements total, total, and they're one following the other. He gives us permission to recognize both can be true at the same time. No man born a woman is greater than John the Baptist. That's a great praise. And then immediately, but the least who gets what I'm talking about has surpassed John the Baptist. That is meant to be struggled with, meant to be struggled with.

Mike Petrow: Yeah. And I'm going to be real. I've never gotten this one. It's always bothered me, and maybe I'm getting it right now for the first time. So John is right and he's righteous. He might be the most right and the most righteous person who's ever lived, but with Jesus, it's always the least of these who are still closer to God. It's always the bias to the body.

Richard Rohr: That's an excellent way of saying it.

Mike Petrow: So it's not the most righteous.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. It's John's righteousness that undoes him as a prophet, makes him a less unattractive figure really.

Paul Swanson: Correct me if I'm wrong here, but it's a little bit of CAC history where John the Baptist at the origins of the CAC was celebrated, like the feast day was kind of the celebration.

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Paul Swanson: He was a bit of the patron saint of the CAC. How do you relate to that connection as you've worked with it now?

Richard Rohr: We did that in the late eighties. Then I moved out here from green Cincinnati to the desert, and I came from St. John the Baptist Franciscan province, and we needed a desert patron. We even took our vow of nonviolence on the feast of John the Baptist as a staff not recognizing that he wasn't a very good patron of nonviolence. He was, in his verbal accusatory way, very violent. I think it's what he thought he had to do. He didn't get time to grow up. His journey was cut short symbolized by the beheading of John the Baptist, which became its own feast day in the liturgical calendar in the end of August. We all felt sorry for him, but it was a man whose prophetic journey, this is my interpretation, was unfortunately cut short that he never was able to become compassionate, forgiven at all.

Paul Swanson: And I love how your understanding of John the Baptizer has also matured and grown these last 40 years where you offer these critiques while also honoring the post he held in his own unfinished work that needed to be done.

Richard Rohr: Yes. Yes.

Paul Swanson: 'Cause I think we need more of these kind of relationships to scripture, these characters, these prophets, that they don't get lionized in a way where we can't critique, we can't wrestle, we can't call them unfinished. Because it doesn't negate their own presence in the biblical stories or the necessity of it, but the inclusion of them actually helps us grow into our own maturity, that development you were talking about.

Richard Rohr: When we recognize the phrase, word, hyphenated word non-violence, I'm told I can't prove it was not used in the English language or the German language 'til the 1950s. You can tell if the word didn't exist, the consciousness didn't exist. We didn't see non-violence as an operable virtue. We really didn't, the whole civilization. So again, you get back to how unless you critique culture, civilization, you don't really nip in its greenhouse growth.

Paul Swanson: Yes. Yes. Well, I'm going to quote you now from your book that relates to this. You say, "I have seen so many Christians on the one hand and justice activists on the other who are morally correct in their actions, but spiritually quite immature, doing the right thing for the wrong reasons. This is one of the major reasons I founded the Center for Action and Contemplation nearly 40 years ago, and it is still true. Some live a counter cultural lifestyle, not really to help the poor, but to be seen as counter culturally chic. Progressives must get out of their heads and move beyond the political correctness that passes for enlightenment. The divine love affair that characterizes the prophets is still mostly unknown to liberals or conservatives." And what I so appreciate about this quote, Richard, is it's not just about looking the part.

Richard Rohr: Feeling morally on higher ground.

Paul Swanson: Yes.

Richard Rohr: That's not a goal to be sought.

Paul Swanson: Yes. And to point out that they haven't moved beyond their heads. They haven't surrendered the head to drop into the heart, to show up in the fullness of what the prophets are pointing us to. And you named John the Baptist as being all head and stuck in these strategies of righteousness. Been using a phrase a lot, it'd be fun for you to speak to right now, is what does it mean that culture eats ideology for breakfast and how does that relate to this character?

Richard Rohr: I don't know why it's even true, and I wouldn't have thought up the wonderful phrase myself. Who said it?

Paul Swanson: Peter Drucker.

Richard Rohr: Peter Drucker.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: That was it. Yeah. Much of religion, he wasn't addressing religion the way I do, but much of religion is an ideology. It's not an encounter. The way the mystic teaches religion, it's an encounter with universal mystery and universal grace. But an ideology is just a sort of fruitless belief system that I believe this to be true. Elijah killed 350 prophets and don't you dare deny it, and therefore it's good. That kind of religion as a belief system is so entrenched that it's hard to get people out of it. It feels like old time religion. It feels like the way true believers believed. You know, my old paradigm of order, disorder, reorder, remaining trapped in a so-called order as if it were reorder and it isn't reorder. It's order.

Mike Petrow: Well, this is the one you had to sell me the hardest on, but I get it. And you won. I see it now. When you say this for me, "John remains an unfinished prophet operating not by lamentation, not by tears or praise, but primarily by accusation." When we see that John the Baptist is stuck in accusation, you then take us to the book of the Bible that literally accuses accusation itself as not being good enough.

Richard Rohr: That's right.

Mike Petrow: And I love it. You take us to the Book of Job, which reveals the limits of accusation and invites us to imagine something different. It's weird to say that I love the book of Job, but I love the book of Job.

Richard Rohr: Oh my God.

Mike Petrow: I reread it every few years.

Richard Rohr: It's a masterpiece.

Mike Petrow: It is-

Richard Rohr: It's the summit of the Hebrew scriptures.

Mike Petrow: Oh. I think it was Harold Bloom. Someone said that all the books of Western literature orbit around the book of Job like planets orbiting around the sun.

Richard Rohr: Really?

Mike Petrow: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: That's good.

Richard Rohr: Wow.

Mike Petrow: It's just I love it so much and most of us know Job, one, we talk about the patience of job. Job wasn't that patient.

Richard Rohr: Wasn't patient at all.

Mike Petrow: Wasn't patient at all. Two, Job is a story of a man who loses literally everything and oh my gosh, he does. But most of the book is actually a fierce argument that takes place after that loss. And a lot of people know the beginning and the ending of the book. They don't know the story. So in the story, Satan, which literally means the accuser pays God a visit. And from there the entire story is about accusation. Right? God when talking to the accuser points out his servant job, which invites the accuser to do what the accuser does, which is to accuse Job and to accuse God of being too kind to Job and to ask to test Job. And then God says, go for it. So then terrible things happen to Job, no contest, horrible things. He loses almost everything he owns. He loses all his money. He loses his children, and then he has friends that come and visit him after he loses everything and they have the good sense to sit with him silent for several days and then Job opens his mouth.

And the literal translation that I read at one point is he says, God damn the day that I was born. Job accuses his fate and he accuses God. Then Job's friends accuse Job because they say, if bad things happen to you, either, A, it's your fault or even if it wasn't your fault, it's your fault now because you're not suffering in the right way. How dare you suffer in the wrong way. Job accuses his friends. God shows up. God accuses Job's friends and Job, which is wild because Job complains about God and Job's friends defend God and then God shows up and says, Job's the only one who told the truth, which is crazy because God's saying that Job was right to complain and protest and then Job has a divine revelation of God in nature and he is satisfied.

I'm going to say one nerdy theological thing that 97% of our audience can skip, but this is a theodicy. If God is good, why do bad things happen? And the only answer to theodicy is theophany. God shows up in suffering. That's the only answer. But the question, Richard, is when I read this, landing on Job's supposed comforters telling him, if you're suffering it's your fault or it's your fault for suffering the right way. They blame the victim. The whole story is about accusation and the accusation doesn't get us anywhere. Why is the energy of accusation so insufficient?

Richard Rohr: What you see in the friends of Job is the modern world, but really every generation in a different way. Do not make me let go of my reward, punishment version of God. I am going to hold onto it at all costs and Job is disagreeing with them. He says, I know I didn't do nothing wrong to deserve this. There is no logic

here. This evil came into my life. Well, you called it theodicy. Why does evil enter our life? There's no reason except where were you when I created the stars? Your little mind is incapable of understanding the mystery of suffering. Didn't our wonderful Jung...

Mike Petrow:

Yes.

Richard Rohr:

... write a book the answer to Job?

Mike Petrow:

Jung wrote a lot about Job, and then he eventually just wrote a book about Job, but it was his wrestling with the unanswerable question.

Richard Rohr:

Yeah.

Mike Petrow:

If you're suffering and I can make it your fault, then it gives me a sense of control. It gives me a sense of control, and it makes me feel safe.

Richard Rohr:

That's right.

Mike Petrow:

Then you're doing the wrong thing, but I'll do the right thing and then I won't have to suffer.

Richard Rohr:

I won't have to suffer.

Mike Petrow:

And I can be protected of the fear of what happened to you happening to me.

Richard Rohr:

Yeah. Brilliant.

Mike Petrow:

Subjugated people deserve to be subjugated.

Richard Rohr:

Yeah.

Mike Petrow:

Then I'm not threatened by this situation.

Richard Rohr:

We've seen that in our lifetime. You'll blame the victim. Blame the victim, which is what the friends of Job want job to do, and God to do blame the victim, but to say, you know what? There's no one to blame. It's a universe of divine forgiveness. Where were you when I created this universe that you don't happen to like very much?

Mike Petrow:

Well, isn't it crazy that we would rather believe in an angry punishing God...

Richard Rohr:

Go ahead.

Mike Petrow:

... than a loving God who lives in a universe where suffering just happens and we have a responsibility to help make it better?

Paul Swanson: What I'm thinking about with this too is the way that Job refuses to limit God's freedom.

Richard Rohr: God's freedom. Go ahead, Paul. Yeah.

Paul Swanson: And this reminded me of Eager to Love too. You talk about the different freedoms that the Franciscans seek, and one of them is to keep God free to do as God will, because that is mystery. You can't box God into you do X, you get Y. And so many of these, I mean the friends show up with like just admit this, just do, acknowledge that this is what's happening. What have you done? And Job refuses in the face of that to let God be anything but mystery.

Mike Petrow: Well, I mean, I've lived some of this. I remember when my brother died, people would say to me, do you think that God took your brother early to keep him from sinning later in life? And I was like, what? But the lengths that we go to...

Paul Swanson: Yes.

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Mike Petrow: ... make sense of things instead of living in a free cosmos with a free god.

Richard Rohr: It comes from our dominance of sin as the core concept that sin management became the job of a clergyman. Whereas the real message should have been the dominance of grace, the outlook, that even in suffering, God is working.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: We can't live in this world if that isn't somehow true.

Mike Petrow: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: Yes. And I think too, as we think about the Job story, like in his rage and in his tears, Job actually gets to see God.

Richard Rohr: Yes, I know. Go ahead.

Paul Swanson: And this reminds me of the scripture "Blessed are the pure in heart. They shall see God." Why does Job get to see God, Richard?

Richard Rohr: Because he doesn't approach the divine epiphany with a preconceived set notion, job description of God. He lets the mystery remain total mystery bigger than his little mind. Where were you when I created the stars? You said before we speak of the patience of Job. Actually, it's the humility of Job to bow before mystery and to say, I don't get it either, but it's okay.

Mike Petrow: What's interesting is how that's liberating. Right? So I've read this book over and over. When I was younger, I would read that, where were you when I created the universe?

Richard Rohr: Oh, as a threat.

Mike Petrow: You worm. And then what honestly happened was I started falling in love with nature, and then it was God going, where were you when I created the stars? And look how vast the cosmos is. Look where the eagle gives birth. And I remembered, for me, you know, I was grieving the loss of my mom and my brother just sitting in California on the beach watching the ocean and listening to the tide roll in under a full moon and the healing power of experiencing something that was so much bigger than I was.

Richard Rohr: Yes. The nature chapters in Job are some of the most beautiful in the whole Bible...

Mike Petrow: Gorgeous.

Richard Rohr: ... on the praising of nature as the only healing out of this overly rational notion of religion.

Paul Swanson: The poet, Christian Wiman...

Richard Rohr: Oh. Yes.

Paul Swanson: ... who's also done a lot of work on Job, and he says, when job needs to scream his being to God, it's poetry he turns to.

Richard Rohr: Oh yes.

Paul Swanson: The only language that can try to speak to mystery without trying to contain it. I think it's the poetry of going to the beach...

Mike Petrow: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: ... watching the ocean roll in.

Drew Jackson: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: It's that same poetic impulse and poetry I feel like has that it's not romantic or flowery or unnecessary. This is the necessity of the arts. I think trying to connect to mystery in the heart of heartbreak and the rage.

Richard Rohr: Poetry is always searching for metaphors, reveling in metaphors. Whereas rational religion, thinks there are no metaphors. Everything is literal and they think that's a higher consciousness. It clearly isn't.

Mike Petrow: Job's journey through silence to anger, to sort of, dare I say it, bargaining in wrestling for a meaning...

Richard Rohr: Oh, that's good.

Mike Petrow: ... to sadness, which might sound familiar to some folks.

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Mike Petrow: And then the acceptance that comes when he has this revelation of beauty in the divine. I love what you're saying, the poetry of it, like sitting on your front porch, looking at the cottonwood and looking at the dumpster, Richard, when you talk to us about gazing, and then he says, "I spoke about things I didn't know about, but now I put my hand over my mouth." And I remember folks for years taught that as look at Job, God corrected him. But then when I learned about...

Richard Rohr: Hand over my mouth.

Mike Petrow: .. contemplation, hand over the mouth is the sign of enlightenment. Right? It's the silence that follows divine visitation.

Richard Rohr: The Indo-European route, I'm told, for don't try to talk about it is MU. Our word, my mystery, mystic both covering the lips saying, shh. It's untalkable, Heinrich Zimmer's line, which I quote somewhere in the book, "The best things cannot be talked about." So what we do is spend our life talking about the third best things, sports and the weather.

Mike Petrow: The dialogue ends. The action doesn't. Job is restored because everyone in the community comes together. They have a dinner for him. They all bring him a piece of gold. And it's the people who help get him back on his feet. And then Job's never the same again. And we see later in the story, in a patriarchal culture, he inherits all his daughters equally with his sons because something has changed in him and he knows what it is to be without.

Richard Rohr: I never noticed that. Thank you.

Mike Petrow: It's pretty cool. But that-

Richard Rohr: Right at the end.

Mike Petrow: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Mike Petrow: It results in action. Right? The people save Job and then Job becomes a different presence to his children even.

Richard Rohr: He shares his inheritance with his daughters and his sons.

Mike Petrow: Yeah. Yeah. And the story names the daughters, but doesn't name the sons, which is pretty cool.

Richard Rohr: Oh. This has been so fruitful.

Mike Petrow: It's so good.

Richard Rohr: Thank you, both of you.

Mike Petrow: As we leave these unfinished prophets behind, what should our listeners keep in mind as they continue to grow up in the book and grow up in the stories and grow up with the prophets?

Richard Rohr: They're meant to undo us. That's why I call it holy disorder, that the first order we've almost all created has to do with reason and logic and story, fairy tales of self-created happy endings, but not the transformative endings that the Bible gives us, if we read the Bible honestly. And that's why you, as evangelicals, me, as a Catholic, can't give up on the Bible. It's still unique, unique piece of literature, but unfortunately up to now, it's largely been used to create order not to validate any kind of holy disorder. And that's what I hope this book does.

Mike Petrow: Well, and what a gift to be invited to follow examples, not who are perfect, but who show us their incompleteness and help us see our own.

Richard Rohr: Yes. Yes. Because if we're honest, we can all identify with immaturity in ourselves, an incompleteness in ourselves.

Mike Petrow: Well, this has been the faced Paul that you told us it would be. So thank you, Richard.

Richard Rohr: Thank you too.

Paul Swanson: It's been more than enough. So good.

Richard Rohr: My goodness. This makes me wish I could rewrite this chapter and include many of your points. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Paul Swanson: Well, now Mike has his homework to write a book on the themes of this chapter.

Mike Petrow: I'm going to write Richard Rohr's incomplete book on the prophets.

Richard Rohr: Now that Rohr is gone, let's improve on his many mistakes.

Paul Swanson: The Unfinished Franciscan.

Mike Petrow: Oh my gosh, too good.

Richard Rohr: Thank you.

Mike Petrow: Too good. This is great.

Paul Swanson: Thank you both.

Mike Petrow: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Richard Rohr: Rich stuff. Rich stuff.

Mike Petrow: Carmen, always such a joy to get to sit down with you in conversation.

Carmen Acevedo ...: Same Mike.

Mike Petrow: Hey, I'm so glad that we get to chat, not just about this great chapter, Unfinished Prophets, but also about the conversation that Paul and I just got to have with Richard. What a rich opportunity to go a little deeper and talk a little longer and explore these four fascinating characters that he shows us as three unfinished prophets and then one very unexpected, complete prophet in job. What'd you think about that conversation?

Carmen Acevedo ...: Well, I found the whole episode very helpful in trying to figure out how I can deepen my own experience of accepting myself as an incomplete person and prophet.

Mike Petrow: What do you think it shows us and our listeners? How can we let ourselves be incomplete prophets? Like Richard's encouraging us to take the full journey, and yet, I bet if we're honest, most of us feel like incomplete prophets.

Carmen Acevedo ...: Or there's the risk that we don't feel like incomplete, and instead we're striving perfectionists.

Mike Petrow: Yes.

Carmen Acevedo ...: So for me, the first step is that we can actually stop the presses and ask God to help us with this. So one of the things I've prayed before and I think we can all pray is to help us, God, to learn not to push the river, as Richard says, that beautiful image of how we all try to create our own rivers and we can more and more ask God to help us learn to trust and experience the big river of God's love. But I think what makes that so hard is that how so many of us grew up learning perfectionism. So I'm a recovering perfectionist, and Anne Lamott says that it's a tool of the oppressor. And I would add, I think perfectionism is employee of the month every month for the empire really, because it's a constant pushing of the river. So much so that we cannot even know that we could be imperfect. Right?

It's like trying to build dams on this river and we just can't. And that's what I love about this episode is that, and also this chapter of The Tears of Things, is that Richard is inviting us to dwell in and live from Therese of Lisieux's Theology of Imperfection. So I don't know why we have this absolute obsession with perfectionism, but I prefer to think of perfect, not as in I need to be flawless because obviously that's not possible, but to perfect, so as a verb and to do over and again this prayer of please God, help me become a wise lover of you, as Brother Lawrence says. So for me, I think, we are always talking about calls to action. What can we do to actually bring this into the world in our lives? Something as simple as self-compassion and being more mindful of that.

So in my phone, every day I see this alert that says, not go to this meeting, not send this email, but it says, I am safe. I am loved. I am part of the human family. So it reminds me, as a recovering perfectionist, that the whole point really is about love and to focus on that. And I also have on my desk, so we can make reminders for ourselves, right, this quote from Mirabai Starr, she says, "The greatest gift you can offer anyone now is unconditional mercy for your own sweet self." So I think we've made God into this taskmaster instead of this loving friend who's made ducks and egrets and the dirt we walk on and the trees. And if I can remember that, then I can be gentler with myself and with others.

Mike Petrow:

Oh. I love that so much, Carmen. It reminds me of, I often say my favorite thing Richard has ever said is that the only perfection available to us is to love our imperfection. And I always say that my favorite piece of mail that I've ever received, you sent me a little note and you had handwritten a quote on it, and I love it. And this is what it says, Abba Macarius was asked, how should we pray? The old man said, "You don't need long windedness. Just reach out to love and say, 'love as you wish, and as you know me. Grant me self compassion' or just love help." I think of those words often. You know, if we can accept our own imperfection, it makes more room for us to accept the imperfection of others. What do you think, Carmen? Can we still learn from the incomplete prophets and all these great traditions?

Carmen Acevedo:

Well, yes, and I love the fact that you have that note in your phone, by the way. I remember it. So I think of these incomplete prophets, and I remember them. I think they're like, they're family, so them all or not, they are family, our family, and I find them useful for helping us see our blind spots. And I kind of check in with them and think over time how has my relationship with my understanding of them changed over time, so like a barometer for growth. So when I first read Elijah years ago and learned he'd murdered hundreds, I was like, why are we studying a mass murderer? And then later on I was like, and if Elijah had had this same bio and been a woman, how would his path have been treated right in the Bible? And then I got to, why are murderers in the Bible accepted and allowed to change, but those in real life are pretty much treated as not human?

And finally, I got also into including what parts of Elijah's righteous rage speak to me in my experience past and present, and I mean both my own righteous rage and also the righteous rage directed against me at times. So I think they're super

good reminders of don't judge or will be judged, and they're kind of like cautionary tales. And you and I have talked about this before, Mike. They're kind of like an anti-hey (phonetic) geography. So the church has been super good at creating these perfect stories of saints, but not as good, you know, that control the narrative, but not as much as inviting us into the imperfect really.

Mike Petrow: I'm curious, how do you think we can let our living teachers be imperfect? Just like we can look at Elijah on the page and see his imperfection, how can we let our living teachers, like even Richard, be imperfect?

Carmen Acevedo ...: Well, I always think of my mother's simple wisdom where, Mike, she used to say, if you have one finger pointing at somebody, you have several pointing back at you. And so what is it about that person's incompleteness or that annoys me? And so I think it's very similar with our teachers. I think they remind us of our own shortcomings, as you said, and they can help remind us to shift our focus to God's love instead, that big river. And I think Connie Zweig speaks to this super well. She says, don't over identify with the human teacher, but instead see that person as human. You know, and then we keep our own agency. We can know sometimes when we need to walk away, you and I've talked about this before, when we need to walk away from a teacher who's no longer healthy for us, and it can help us avoid unhealthy attachments.

Because for me as a teacher at the university and college level, one of the things I most want my students to do is not, I want to work myself out of a job, and I want my students to become so convinced of the amazingness of their selfhood that they're motivated to have agency and go do the things that I know they can do. So I think the other thing is we can remember the communal aspect of this endeavor we're going about, and that it's more about conversation and dialogue. And it's not about me as an individual as much as it is the body of Christ or the community or the common good.

And so I just think it's a shift of perspective that can help deliver us from this. And I also think of D.W. Winnicott, one of my favorite psychoanalysts. So he has this phrase about the good enough mother, which in my mind, I translate to the good enough parent and the good enough teacher. I mean, why do we have this expectation that teachers should be perfect? That's another question. But we could expect our teachers to be supportive. Right? Not put them on a pedestal, but we can expect them to be supportive and to challenge us in good ways because they hopefully know some things we don't. And also they know that we know some things that they don't. So I think it's just a shift of our perspectives can help us.

Mike Petrow: Yeah. I can't help but think of a quote from Carl Jung that I love. He says in his book, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. "I feel very strongly that I'm under the influence of things or questions that were left incomplete or unanswered by my parents, grandparents, and ancestors." And I wonder sometimes if that which is incomplete or imperfect in our teachers invites us into the work that is ours to do. When we look at what's unfinished in our teachers, is that an invitation?

Carmen Acevedo ...: Oh my gosh. Because I had this one teacher in college who was life-changing. I mean, literally he taught me about Hildegard, not really taught me because I didn't have a class on it, but he shared his love for Hildegard, and that was so inspiring. And he taught me about writing. He was a kind person, down to earth. And one day he said, well, you know, this is one fly in the ointment, the imperfection. One day he said, you know, Carmen, that's the reason women aren't philosophers because well, they just don't have the mindset for it. And I was only like 20, but something in me went, whoa. And what I realized was that was something for me to sit with and learn from. He was a very kind person. He was very supportive of me. He was a better than good enough teacher. And I still have conversations with him in my heart, and I'm grateful for him. So, yeah, I do think that they're kind of trailheads of where we can go further.

Mike Petrow: One of the things that's also imperfect or incomplete about this conversation is there are no women prophets who show up in this dialogue and few that show up in what Richard's working with in *The Tears of Things*, possibly second Isaiah. But there's a real absence of women here. What counsel would you give for wrestling with that in completion?

Carmen Acevedo ...: That question truly speaks to my heart and also to one of my wounds from childhood on. Once at a retreat I was leading, someone asked very pointedly towards the end, what does Christianity offer women really? And this was decades ago. And what she meant by that was, where do I fit in? Where do I see myself represented in the tradition? How does this work for me, as a woman? And, you know, we can talk about Jesus as this man who has this amazing feminine energy, yes, and he treated women with respect and all. But the truth of the reality is, growing up, I heard so many sermons preached and they could only be preached by men, that women are the weaker vessel, quoting scripture. So imagine my disappointment when I zoomed out. And I learned it wasn't just evangelical churches of my childhood that taught that. The ancient world does.

Christianity at large is kind of set to that default. So what are women supposed to do with lines from Aristotle who called woman a deformed male and Aquinas who said, woman is a failed male and is "naturally subservient." And what I do with all of this is I ask myself, what has this done to our world? And it's pretty easy to see that everyone is deformed by that. Our children are. It's not just the women. Our children are, our men are, our creatures are, our earth is by leaving out the humanity, the full humanity. And it reminds me, Mike, I had this student once do research on airbags and how when they were first being made for various "reasons," only male crash test dummies were used, and then the women were injured by these early prototypes of airbags. It's not true anymore, but I think when we don't bring in the voice of women, then we have difficulties.

I was thinking when I read that Richard mentions in the chapter, he mentions seven women as prophets. And I was thinking, if you put me on the spot, Mike, and you asked me to name those seven women, and I wasn't on the podcast and I didn't have notes, could I do it? I could name a few. So here they are Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Abigail, Huldah, and Esther. So where we go

to learn about this? Because to my mind this question is not just the elephant in the room. It is the blue whale in the room to me. You know, it's a sea creature and it's the largest sea creature. I think we can read. So for example, Wilda Gafney has helped me to fill in some of the gaps, Dr. Gafney. She's got this great book from 2008, *The Daughters of Miriam: Women Prophets in Ancient Israel*, and she gives us this wonderful image of Miriam who was perhaps an octogenarian or even a nonagenarian.

And she and her dancing disciples are leading the Israelites dancing and drumming and singing a song of Thanksgiving across the Sea of Reeds or the Red Sea. I wasn't taught that growing up at all. And then she helps us to see that Huldah and some of the other prophets, they had all these oracles, but they're not really preserved. And she also helps us see that there were more prophets than we know of and that they're hidden often, so to speak, by the grammatical masculine gender of the text, that if they're like say 30 women in a group and one man, then the gender for the group is male, you know, when it's written about. She also reminds us, Dr. Gafney, that the biblical text presents female prophets leading the people of God and proclaiming God's word as part of the natural order of things, and Jesus did the same.

So we can take hope in things like that and I can think, well, this is part of the work. Ann Ulanov, one of our favorite Jungian psychoanalysts, says that pride has been defined historically from the perspective of men. And so I would say the more we can go upside down and hang off, as I did as a child, off a tree limb, and look at the world upside down and kind of challenge our perspective, here's how she turns the world upside down. Ulanov writes, "For a woman, sin is not pride or the exaltation of the self, but a refusal to claim the self God has given. Women refuses self by hiding behind self-doubt and feelings of inadequacy, always assuming some greater authority knows better." So for me, it's not just women are left out, but do I leave my own voice out in my own psyche? So I think it's a challenge and it takes all of us to do this. Right? So I think your question is more important even than any response to it because it's a question we're all being asked to live out really.

Mike Petrow:

I hear you saying perhaps that these don't have easy answers, and the first step is honestly recognizing what's unfinished, what's incomplete, what's imperfect. Bonus question before we wrap up. Do you think if there were more women prophets and mystics in this conversation, Richard describes this pattern of often we start in anger, we move to sadness, we finish in love, do you think that pattern would be experienced any differently?

Carmen Acevedo:

Wow. That is such a wise question because I have thought about this. You read my mind. So, for me, my path, and I'm only speaking for myself, but I do have some friends who I think this would be similar. My path started in tears and empathy for others and self-compassion for others. For me, an unfinished prophet would be someone who had not yet been able to articulate or express their anger. So would start in tears, then go to anger at abuse towards me and my own family, and also in my experiences of sort of being demoted in the

society. And so then because of that, I would say, wow, and I learned this in therapy, my anger is justified and healthy and normal. I can own it and embrace it, and my selfhood grew and then my self-compassion began and it deepened, bonus, my compassion for others.

Mike Petrow: As we send our listeners out for another few weeks to reflect before we're back with our next episode, what invitation would you give them for, one, sitting with their own imperfection, but, two, also sitting with the imperfection of the traditions and the teachings that are often offered to us?

Carmen Acevedo ...: One thing that I try to do is write down or mentally go over a list of two things, things I'm grateful for in my life, people, experiences at the end of every day, and also occasionally stop and thank God for parts of myself that I appreciate, which is not something that I do naturally. So I would say stop. And when we do these things of being grateful, also include what you're grateful for about who you are because God made you. So that's the first thing. I think asking that question like how do we accept, engage, and struggle with the fact that the tradition itself is incomplete?

And I'll be honest with you, I don't have an answer to that. If I'm struggling with something about the tradition that I just flat out don't like, I think it's not representative enough or not, doesn't go with my experience, read, study, find books, and just read, inform ourselves, and then take notes, take classes. So I just think ongoing education, I know it sounds like a generalized answer, but I really think look up a book, put out there and ask friends or even go to the internet and look up books. Wilda Gafney is a great place to start.

Mike Petrow: Thanks, Carmen. That's so great and, everyone listening, thanks so much for continuing to take this journey with us. We're at about the halfway mark and it's a good moment to recognize in our own growth, we have a long way to go. We are incomplete. We are unfinished. We are imperfect. That's our gift because it calls us forward into growth. We recognize the incompleteness in our teachers and in our traditions and recognize that that's an opportunity for us to lean into that and take the work further and to hear the invitation for our own explorations. Thanks everyone so much for listening. As always, we'll see you again in a few weeks on Everything Belongs.

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Cassidy Hall: Cassidy Hall.

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.