

Mike: Welcome back folks to another episode of Everything Belongs. This is our final episode on The Tears of Things, and in just a few minutes, we're going to be discussing some of your questions. But first, I have to tell you, it has been a bomb for me to have these sanity making conversations. So thank you again to our guests, thank you to Richard, and big, big thank-yous to our podcast team. From the Center for Action and Contemplation, I'm Mike Petrow.

Paul: I'm Paul Swanson.

Carmen: I'm Carmen Acevedo Butcher.

Cassidy: I'm Cassidy Hall.

Drew: And I'm Drew Jackson.

Mike: And this is Everything Belongs. It has been so good to be in these conversations. And one of my favorite conversation partners this year has been Cassidy Hall, who was a guest with us this season in our episode on The Three Isaiahs. And you might not know this, who has worked with us behind the scenes on each and every single episode. I am thrilled to announce to folks that you will be joining us next season as one of our regular hosts on Everything Belongs. I could not be happier. I have to ask you, what has been your favorite part of this journey with The Tears of Things looking back on the last year?

Cassidy: Yeah. Thanks, Mike. I'm so excited to be joining the conversation, but I have to admit, Mike. I love that you're welcoming me by asking me an almost impossible question.

Mike: Indeed.

Cassidy: What a great season it was, hearing from Walter Fluker, Jacqui Lewis, Randy Woodley, and so many other wise, wise teachers. I also think back to that first episode titled Good Trouble. I vividly remember being on a walk when Drew's blessing at the very end of that episode washed over me. And in that blessing, I keep thinking back to this. In that blessing at the very beginning of this season, he asked us, "Would you go from wherever you are in the prophetic spirit and find yourself in good and necessary trouble, stirring up chaotic love for the sake of the flourishing of our world?" And in that blessing, in a form of a question, that has just followed me throughout this entire season as we've journeyed through this book and in this time in history.

Mike: That's just amazing. And I feel like that question has gotten more and more potent for me with each episode and with each month that has passed since Drew asked us. So many folks listened along and they had their own conversations about the book in reading groups with friends, on the internet, in-person. Thank you to everyone who listened along and thanks especially to

those of you who wrote in and shared your experience with us of reading *The Tears of Things*.

Cassidy, you know what's coming. One listener especially sent us something that touched us so deeply it had all of us in tears and we just wanted to share it. Kathy wrote, "Dear CAC friends, this season of *Everything Belongs* and the book, *The Tears of Things* accompanied me as I cared for my beloved husband of 49 years, Tom. Tom died of ALS on November 24th, 18 months after the diagnosis. In the spring, a woman who writes a blog called *A Joyful Sorrow*, about her reflections and caring for her husband who was diagnosed with ALS 15 years ago, posted the Rosemary Trommer poem, *For When People Asked*. It spoke to everything I was feeling and reeling from.

Then to find out the poem opened *The Tears of Things*. Well, a cosmic entanglement, for sure. I would listen to the podcast episodes or slowly read the book at night after Tom went to sleep. It's become a way of connecting my ongoing movement from anger to sadness to tears, witnessing the devastation wrought on Tom's body and trying my best to care for him, to connect all that to the deep story. Thank you for helping me place Tom's and my story in the bigger, deeper story. It does indeed all come down to love, harsh and dreadful and miraculous. As the winding down from exhaustion and the living into a new reality happens, one step forward, two steps back. I thank you for the ways you have accompanied me this year." Peace, Kathy. Wow, Cassidy.

Cassidy:

Yeah, deep breath. Mike, you and I have read that a couple times and our move to tears every time. What a gift to be in community with the listeners in such a way and to be along on each other's journeys. And that message reminds me not just of the actual tears of things in this life, but also the reality of things. One thing I love about these episodes is it's a time where we get to be more in dialogue with each other and more in conversation. So when we invited listeners to send in questions for this episode, we could learn more about things we all might still be wrestling with, thinking through, and the many ways that we engaged in deep conversation this season.

Questions were sent in from all over the world. We heard from some of you in Belgium, Ohio, Florida, Texas, New York, Canada. And as Mike just said, some were reading in groups along with us. Others were joining on their solitary journey and some were amid a journey of grief, like Kathy.

Mike:

So many good questions. Thank you to every one of you who sent questions in. We did our best to select questions that felt like they were in the spirit of what other folks were asking. And please know if we don't ask your question, it doesn't mean that it's not important and precious to us. As we let it inform our process in building future seasons of *Everything Belongs*.

But before we get to those questions. Cassidy, I so appreciated your episode. It was one of my favorites. And one of the things that came up all season and became really, really clear in the conversation you and I had with Carmen is to

look and listen for who's missing in the conversation. Whether we're looking at The Tears of Things and it lets us ask, "Hey, where are the women prophets? Where are the queer prophets? Where are the prophets that are outside of the mainstream?"

Richard tells us to notice who's missing. When we pay attention to who's been suppressed, that often shows us the shadow of the dominant culture and it shows us what our culture truly worships. It often also points us to the folks who have the medicine that we need, the wisdom we need for our shared wounds. So Cassidy, my first question for you is, why is it so crucial to listen to who or what seems to be missing? And honestly, how do we do that?

Cassidy: I love this question because it's one I have to continue to ask myself and remind myself to think about. And in this season, we thought about the prophetic and we learned that we often see and hear the prophetic on the margins. I was reading James Cone the other day, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. And in this book, James Cone writes, "The real scandal of the gospel is this. Humanity's salvation is revealed in the cross of the condemned criminal Jesus and humanity's salvation is available only through our solidarity with the crucified people in our midst." Meaning to me, those suffering in our midst, those navigating hurt, loss, pain, those in need.

So I hear this as the real scandal of the gospel, which I love that phrase, will stir up love for those hurting in my life, my community, my world. The real scandal of the gospel is a call to solidarity, which is something Mike, you and I have been talking about a lot. How do we do that? Because I think that's the hardest question you asked. How?

Mike: Yeah, for sure.

Cassidy: And that begins with, I think, our own vulnerability and humility because solidarity is not hierarchy. Solidarity is about equality and equity. Solidarity is about the recognition that the human experience in all of its extremes and all of its forms could be upon us at any time and in any way. Solidarity is truly loving our neighbors as ourselves, our neighbors next door, our neighbors in other states, our neighbors in other countries. So I think when we really look and listen for who and what is missing, as so many of us have learned to do from womanist scholars and theologians, we get to understand more of God's image in our midst and I think we have to be open to the discomfort of that because we don't get to see more of our image that we've created of the divine, but more of the reality of God's image.

All I can say for me is that a lot of the work is in paying attention. Putting aside what I think I know and putting into questions some of the narratives I find comfort in because voices and truths on the margins, as we've learned this season from the prophets. Our voices that will always point us to more discomfort because they are always concerned with the greater good, the liberation of all people and not the comfort of a few. As the season has taught

us, the prophetic is coming from those spaces of where we see voices missing and where we need to listen.

Mike: So good. So much wisdom there, Cassidy. I doubt I've ever told you this story, but I love that you referenced James Cone. I once had a conversation with him waiting for a bus and it was when I was an undergrad. It was one of the most impactful conversations in my life. I still think about it all the time, 30 years later. And what we were talking about was ... I had watched him get in an argument with a room of all white theology professors. And what they were saying, and this was a long time ago. This was 30 years ago, was our students don't believe that racism is a thing anymore. They think it's something that got solved in the '60s and it's a thing of the past.

And what Dr. Cone was telling them was, when you are in a room of all white people talking to all white people, that's a very easy belief to have. The secret is to listen to who's missing, pay attention to who's not in the room, so that we're not in an echo chamber. And I watched Dr. Cone have to literally raise his voice and yell at someone to get them to hear what they did not want to hear. Back then we used to call that educating in the presence of an absence. But this idea of noticing who's not there and then listening to the stories of others to expand our own experience seems to be such a pivotal and important aspect of us living as prophetic people in times that call for that. And I think *The Tears of Things* is guiding us into that.

Cassidy: We have a question about something, Mike, that you jokingly refer to as the missing chapter in *The Tears of Things*. So here, Richard encourages us that we cannot understand Jesus if we do not understand the prophets. And he talks about Jesus as prophet, but not to be confused with the Jesus we make in our image. Here he talks about the fierce and wild Jesus, the prophet Jesus.

Mike: How does it deepen our understanding of Jesus now on the other side of *Tears of Things* to think of him as a prophet?

Richard: I think it's needed to counterbalance the Sunday school image that most of us grew up with of Jesus a sweet, good shepherd, which all fits in. He was, but you separate that from the prophet and you don't get the full Jesus. And that's what we pretty much did. And certainly American Christianity was the Sunday school version, which was a version appropriate for kids. I don't think they're ready for sacred criticism. So first you have to have the capacity for the affirmative, which Jesus exemplifies. But when it's used to eliminate Jesus the critic, you haven't got Jesus anymore, which is what we're stuck with.

Mike: Yeah. I can see where the nice Jesus doesn't jive well with the prophetic Jesus. And I've heard you for the decade that I've been a student of your teachings, Richard, I've heard you say over and over again, that a weak Christology is captured by culture.

Richard: Yes.

Mike: We interpret Jesus through the cultural lens that we have. What do you think the danger is for American culture to interpret Jesus through its own lens? And how's that showing up right now?

Richard: He becomes harmless, innocuous, safe, not worth engaging with, and that's what's happened. He's been too easy to throw out of the public conversation because all he would say is, "Peace be with you." Which I don't want to make fun of. It sounded like it. Peace I give is not the peace that the world gives. It's not this sweet peace. It's a suffered through to peace. I don't know how we're going to reestablish that in the Christian conversation, but the educated person doesn't take Jesus seriously. How did we get to that? They're embarrassed by him being brought up as part of the conversation.

Mike: It seems it's easy to make Jesus be what we want him to be. I think about, we can cut this part but I think about-

Richard: Yeah. He's malleable to the ego, to the culture.

Mike: Jesus is like soft clay that we can just sculpt into whatever we need him to be to justify us.

Richard: And it's always nice.

Paul: It's almost like we've professionalized Jesus. It's like you work for this church, you clock in, you clock out, you show up on time, you say the nice things, you don't trouble the waters. Or the examples in the gospel takes that evolving understanding of the image you first get when you're a child to understand that Jesus does love you, but that love is much grittier and more fierce.

Richard: Love is a harsh and dreadful thing.

Paul: Yes.

Richard: Dorothy Day. Yeah.

Paul: We've taken the wildness out of Jesus.

Richard: That's a good word. Yeah.

Mike: Yeah. The Jesus who would flip tables or call Herod a fox or tell people they need to repent.

Richard: Right.

Mike: Well, Richard. For those of us who can still call ourselves Christians or for those of us ... Whatever we call ourselves, we are committed to the Christ paths and the imitation of Christ. What does it mean for us to recognize that what we're imitating is a prophet? What does it mean to live a prophetic Christianity right now?

Richard: It gives you the freedom and the ability to speak the shadow side of everything, which it always has. To expose it, not for the sake of meanness, but for the sake of truth. It gives you the voice. Well, there's another side to that. It gives you the freedom to speak that way to the president, to the government, to the legal system, and prophets point out things like that.

Mike: It feels like a moment in time where we need some good prophetic Christianity right now.

Richard: Right. It's so needed. It's not allowed. When the voices that be immediately step in and whitewashed a killing without any time to have studied the evidence, and that's got to be visible to the whole country. Lord, how did we get to this? That's what imperial Christianity is used to. There's our version and it over speaks everything else immediately after the killing or after the catastrophe. Here's the version. Don't bother me with an investigation. It basically oversteps all critical thinking and the prophet insists on critical thinking.

Mike: Gosh, that guy. I love him so much. Cassidy, I know that Richard's book on the Sermon on the Mount is probably his best answer to what it looks like when we listen to Jesus as a prophet. And what's really exciting is that there will eventually be a season of Everything Belongs on that book, and that'll be so great when we get to it.

Cassidy: I can't wait for that season, and I know it's going to challenge me just like this one did. I think it's one thing for us to say that we need this fierce and wild Jesus, but a whole different thing to say we're willing to follow him because we know that path is never easy or simple. I mean, we learned that this season in the way of the prophets. Speaking of being challenged, The Tears of Things brought up for me a lot of challenges with these violent God images of the Hebrew scriptures. And I know that came up for a lot of us because some of these texts are just really, really challenging. All of the war and violence and why is God like that? And we received another great question specifically about this topic from a listener that Richard also responds to.

Mike: I'm going to ask you a question from our listener, Sharon. She writes this, "Good morning from St. Croix in the US Virgin Islands, where the roosters are praising God to greet the day. Father Richard, what do you think about all the references to war in the Bible? As a patriot and a pacifist, I cringe when I read about thousands of lives being trashed seemingly at God's hands. Are these lost lives collateral damage like the pigs in whom Jesus sent the legion of demons? As a veterinarian, a vegetarian and a humane sympathizer, this one also troubles me. I've always just written these things off as instances where I have to just trust

God. But when my husband said he didn't think much of scripture because of all the violent images, all the times God says, "I will crush your enemies." I fumbled for an answer. All I could say was, "What if the enemy is cancer or hunger or addiction or war itself?" From Sharon. Richard, what do we do with all these images of war and all these seeming commands to violence coming from God in the Bible?

Richard: We were given the impression that the whole Bible ... And I know what we're trying to say when we say it, is inspired. Everything in there is high level. In fact, it's an evolutionary document that charts the growth of Israel, the growth facilitators are called prophets, but left to themselves, the Jewish people are as violent as anybody to this day, just as the Christians are.

Mike: As our Christians, yeah.

Richard: If you don't have that self-correcting element inserted clearly in the text, in the whole anthology of books that the Bible is, and that's what it is. It's a whole bunch of books from different periods, from people at different levels of consciousness. If you don't insert that, the Bible is dangerous, which is exactly what it's been up to now in most of history. Why empires could misuse it, kings could misuse it, angry people could misuse it, and they did.

It feels like it's only in the last 50 years that we've had the freedom to see that. We call it liberation theology, seeing the Bible as a liberating text, not a confirming of my already existing prejudices and a text basically telling us to be nice, which is just harmless. You'll end up being not very nice at all if that's how you read the text. A lesson in being nice. It's ironic, you end up being hateful because there's no self-observation, there's no self-criticism, but very few denominations were trained to read the Bible that way. The Mennonites, the Amish, but even they were selective in what they saw as healthy capacity for criticism. It's not their fault. The culture didn't allow them to go all the way.

Mike: It's interesting. Early, Origen called out these passages very specifically. He would point to passages where supposedly God was commanding people to murder women and children and calling for violence. And he said that our job was to grow past those passages and never to be satisfied with an interpretation of scripture that was not worthy of God and the God of love. But it seems we always lose the ability to be critical of our own religion and pardon the free association.

I think of a conversation I had with a friend one time and he said to me, "I don't believe in religion. I only believe in science because every war that's ever been fought in human history was fought in the name of religion." And I shot back and said, "Well, I don't believe in science," which is not true. Of course, I believe in science. But I said, "I don't believe in science because every war that's ever been fought in human history has been fought with the tools of science." And he laughed and we acknowledged that there's so much in science and religion

for the healing of humanity, and yet it seems like we can take the very best things and still use them to inflict our hurt on others.

Richard: Yeah. And we're given so much leeway to do that, so much permission by seeming leaders and clergy who are not healed people themselves yet. And so they thirst at the violent texts. Thirst isn't the word I wanted. Savor, something that gives them permission to be violent or hateful. I mean, your friend was right. It's amazing how much of religion has produced hateful people. And Jesus points it out, your religion says to you love your neighbor, but hate your enemy. He knows that's the way we think. Hate your enemy. So all you got to do is find a justification to name him an enemy.

Paul: What it brings up for me is our inability to work with limitations. How do we look at a scripture text with our own limited way of viewing through it, acknowledging that we can't just take everything as it is? There's some things we need to outgrow.

Richard: Yes.

Mike: Yeah.

Paul: And then if you take the other side, the tools of science that have been used for violence, we don't have a good track record of self-limiting tools of destruction. We don't respect the limits of what's possible and also the limits of what's possible in our own destruction.

Richard: Yes. Voracious appetite to expand itself, to increase itself. And if there isn't a limiting factor that it's inserted into the equation, religion is used for nefarious purposes, and that's true in Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, and Hinduism too. It seems to have become most dangerous in the three monotheistic religions that we insist on. An agreed image of God. He's always our God, always representing our team, which allows us to eliminate everybody else's, unimportant, not good, bad, dangerous, heathen.

Mike: It seems like all of these religions, always the prophet lives in tension with the king or the prophet is intention with empire, always with the preferential option for the poor and the downtrodden and the outsider.

Richard: Always. That just only started getting developed 50 years ago, the recognition of God always being on the side of the poor.

Paul: And that's certainly a crucible for the prophet to be in.

Richard: Yes, it is because they always know the powers that be will be immediately offended by that very thought. Those who are eliminated always reveal what the culture idolizes. That's why you want to look for, who is the poor person, the person we have no time for? It reveals what we worship, what we really

worship. That's why Jesus had to get rid of the animal worship in the temple because this is what you're really worshiping, Yahweh by animal sacrifice. It's a smoke screen to show what you really worship is the whole temple system itself, that makes you the saved and everybody outside of Jerusalem the enemy.

Cassidy: I love what was said there. Let's look at the biblical texts as an evolutionary document that charts the growth of Israel and the growth facilitators are called prophets. I just love thinking about the prophets in our midst and the prophetic as these guides, almost these chaplains, these midwives of growth. And that critical need for self-observation and self-criticism. And if we don't use and read the text with the lens of liberation for all people, we're missing the point. That was just such a powerful response for me.

Mike: The way I would say it is that love is the greatest lens. It's the holy hermeneutic. It's wild to think about the Bible is ever asking us to grow up in our reading of it, and it's giving us these prompts. This is a statement that sometimes is confusing for people, but it's why I try to remember to read the Bible mythically, instead of literally or historically. And I don't mean mythically in the sense of a myth that is untrue, but I think of myths as stories that help us make meaning. Myths are messy and they're mystical and they're mysterious and they have multiple meanings. Myths motivate us. They move us deeper and deeper and deeper and they're alive and they don't like to be stuck in a simple, rigid meaning.

I said it there, and I'll say it again, like Origen says, "I never want to be satisfied with a meaning that is not worthy of the God of love."

Cassidy: Amen to that. I love that you use the word messy because messy is not bad.

Mike: Yeah.

Cassidy: Messy is real. Messy is real. And I love that you brought to the conversation the topic of myth because I'm so excited now to hear from co-host Carmen Acevedo Butcher, who responds to a question somewhat about this, a question from Elda who was in a study group in Canada and Elda writes, "Much as Mike Petrow said on each podcast, each chapter has become our new favorite. We spent two weeks on chapter seven and had much discussion on the meaning of quote, "If we do not mythologize our pain, all we can do is pathologize it." And she writes, "Any insights on what that means would be helpful." Sincerely Elda and others from the study group. Let's hear from Carmen on that.

Carmen: Thank you, Cassidy and Michael. If we don't mythologize our pain, we just pathologize it. And thank you, Elda. That's such a good question and everybody in the study group. So for me being dyslexic, whenever I get a question like that, I have to go to the essential words of it. So mythologize and pathologize, because until I understand what those mean really, I really can't get to the question itself.

So mythologize actually means to make a story of. I mean, mythologize sounds like a \$10 word, and I suppose it is, but at its heart, it means to use the mouth to share. In other words, to tell a story. And what I like about that, especially as a trauma survivor, is to remember. To remember myself, to tell my own narrative, to re-story and restore my history. To mythologize, because I think sometimes what we think when we hear mythology is to make it like Zeus thunder-bolty. But actually what it means to me is ... I find in my story, where my story opens up into everyone's story. Others and the story. So the story of the universe in Richard's egg, the story of love.

And then if I don't do that, which is really a joyful thing to do, full of self-compassion. Yes, heartbreak, but at the same time to love is to have one's heartbroken. If I don't do that, then I pathologize it and the heart of the word pathologize is to suffer. And for me, what that means in my experience is, if I don't embrace my story with that Rogerian, unconditional positive regard that Jim Finley often talks about. I love Carl Rogers, myself. If I don't do that, then what I end up thinking is that I am where I am broken.

I spent a lot of years thinking I was depression, when I was depressed and having a lot of self-loathing. That is pathologizing it. Thinking I am my self-loathing, thinking I am myself hate. Instead of seeing, "How did this happen? Who am I really?" And opening my story up to seeing where it fits in with other people who have suffered childhood abuse and difficulties in evangelical churches and church wounds. And as Michael Petrow often says, "Finding the wisdom in my wounds." That to me is mythologizing it.

So becoming the heroine of my own story in a way that takes the wisdom that comes from that and brings it to the community, and then we all share it together. I think because we are all taught to be passive takers, we take in other stories on the TV or on the internet or wherever we get our media. I think we can forget the fact that people used to sit around campfires and tell stories, that mythology. This is a very human, very deep ... Just part of being human is to tell these stories and to tell our own story and to have that agency.

So that's what it means to me. And what I love about it is that it really does bring me face-to-face with love and with the fact that Julianne of Norwich says, "God is nearer to us than our own sole." That God is closer to us than our own soul, that God loves me and is right here.

Mike:

Everything Belongs will continue in a moment. Carmen is so wise, and she nailed this. When Richard says, if we don't mythologize our pain, we'll pathologize it. Unless I'm mistaken, he's quoting the late, great archetypal psychologist, James Hillman, from his appropriately titled Re-visioning Psychology, which is a profoundly visionary book. And I think it's important to remember this because we live in a moment in time where very often our pathology is our mythology. So many of us go through this moment in time utterly and completely defined by our wounds. Instead of letting our wounds be invitations to healing.

Carmen and I talk about this all the time, and I love that she referenced that. It's our wounds that very often set us out on our wandering and shape our life path, but they also give us our wondering, the questions that we wrestle with, and they lead us to our wisdom. And I think that's the essence of mythologizing, letting it be an invitation. What we said earlier, myths are invitations to make meaning. And in that process, myths are messy, myths are multiple. They invite us to tell the story over and over and over again in different ways. Myths are mutual. They connect us to each other, and myths are medicinal. They are stories told with the intention of healing. And that doesn't mean we put a bow on something before it's ready, but it is an invitation to lean into meaning. I could go on and on about this for hours and I won't, but I get super excited about it. What do you think, Cassidy?

Cassidy:

I love what you said. We so need story. With what you said and what Carmen shared, we also need each other. She talked about using the mouth to share and it makes me think of the fact that we need a witness. We need to be seen and heard by each other and to pathologize is to suffer. So how critical to think about it as being seen and increasing our wisdom, rather than internalizing it and suffering through it. But also this ever present question of balancing solitude and community, which makes me think of this pathologizing and mythologizing in the sense of ... In community, witnessing is possible, so telling our stories is possible.

In solitude, it's not that it's not possible, but I think it reminds us of the need for the balance between those two. So this next question is one I love reflecting on, but it's a layered question as it comes from someone who has experienced that unchosen solitude forced upon them by illness. So let's hear the question and then what Richard, Paul, and Mike have to share.

Paul:

This comes from one of our listeners in Belgium, from Nelly. Nelly writes, "The question that lives in my heart is not coincidentally about community. There is great value in aloneness. I know this better than most. I've spent months and years in solitary confinement due to ill health and I gathered so much wisdom there. Not just through reading or listening, but through going through the being alone and also just the being instead of the doing. But I have sorely missed community over my 25 years of soul-searching and shadow-boxing. It seems here in secularized Western Europe, we walk inverted paths. Solitude first, community after. Since secularization, people in search of spirituality had to figure out alone. Some like me, wandering through all the stories, some clinging to one story they found along the way, some losing themselves entirely due to the lack of grounding or community.

I feel like we're ready for a new form of community. I would love for you to speak to this inverted path of solitude and community, and secondly, would love to know if there are Bible stories that speak to this. It is a daunting path and I am humbled before it." With much love and gratefulness, Nelly.

Richard: Wow. I do think we probably need community first to be a corrective to our natural egocentricity. We need to be a part of a group. The trouble is that it creates group think, addiction to belonging, belonging as a substitute for being converted. If you look at the tradition already starting in the early centuries. In the second half of life, there emerged the monk and the hermit and the pilgrim who wandered apart from the community. So what I think she's probably exemplifying is both, which is exactly right.

If I hadn't had my first half of life based in relationships, interactions with others, meetings, communal, prayer service. I don't think I'd be prepared. But to be honest, a lot of that now is ... This is going to sound so arrogant. It feels so boring. Just worrying about what others think and what others want me to do and the fostering of a deep co-dependence among other people, instead of the radical clarity of what does the soul know and what does the soul have to do?

Mike: I'm curious, Paul, being your friend the last few years. I feel like you've had a really interesting journey with the importance of being solitary and also being in community, being in family. I'm curious how you'd answer this question.

Paul: Yeah. For a long time, I never thought I was going to get married just because of how-

Richard: Is that right?

Paul: Yeah.

Richard: I didn't know that.

Paul: I just thought the single life is probably for me. I'll probably end up as a fire lookout in the Gila National Forest or something. And I think it is a recognition of the love awakened in both solitude and in community, particularly first in my marriage and family. My wife just got back from five days in Colorado. That creating space for one another, to be in solitude in other ways, because then the return is even better. She comes back fulfilled, revived, and me too, and the things that I'm a part of. And I've also found there's no community that has all the goods.

Richard: That's right.

Paul: I'm a part of a New Monastic community, the Community of the Incarnation, which I love. It's a backbone of part of my community, but that's a dispersed community. So I'm also part of the local Mennonite church here, and that's a localized community. Having these rippling effects is really helpful for my own interiority, but it also to become overly self-referential about, it's about me and my soul without interdependence. And I look at Jesus. Jesus was always palling around with the disciples and those followers, but would always go into the wilderness alone.

Richard: There you go. It's so clear.

Paul: And there's that going out in return, I feel like of solitude and community. How about you, Mike? How does that ring for you in your life?

Mike: Oh, I just appreciate so much what you both shared. It helps me think about it. First, I want to say one of my favorite running gags, is they say the greatest miracle Jesus ever performed was having 12 close friends in his 30s.

Richard: Twelve close friends?

Mike: In his 30s. As life gets busier and busier, it's harder and harder to maintain.

Richard: I've never heard that.

Paul: That's hilarious.

Mike: Yeah, community and friendship. I grew up in a church as a teenager that my family founded. So my family was in church. My spiritual teaching was in church. I volunteered and did community service in church. I socialized with people in church and I deconstructed that things happen. But I think one of the things I realized is there's always been this longing in me since then. It's very unconscious, for a one-stop-shop, that I will find a community that will give me everything. So I really appreciate what you said there.

No one community can give you everything. No one partner can give you everything. No one practice can give you everything. So being liberated in that and recognizing that community is beautiful, connection is beautiful. And also, I'm glad that nothing can give me everything because it reminds me of the importance of being connected multiple places, but also of the call to interiority, to find that solitary place, to get out on the mountain and be alone. To sit down with my journal and be alone, to sit down and practice and be alone.

And last I'll say ... Something that I've really become aware of in the last two years is in some ways I'm never alone because when I'm in quiet or I'm out in the mountain by myself. I feel like my deceased loved ones are there with me and I know that animals show up and I feel like ... As crazy as it sounds, I feel like Carl Jung and Julian of Norwich and Origen are with me in some ways. There's that other component too of never less alone than when alone.

Richard: The communion of saints.

Paul: Yes.

Richard: You now have access to all generations and all periods.

Mike: Cassidy, so rich. I know that this has been a really intense thing to wrestle with and balance in your own life. I'm curious, what does the dance between solitude and community look like for you?

Cassidy: I first just have to repeat that line, that opening line from Richard when he answered. He said, "I do think we probably need community first to be corrective to our natural egocentricity." Just amen to that. And Mike, you and I have been talking a lot about Howard Thurman's The Sound of the Genuine speech, which he gave in 1980, and I can't help but think of Thurman again here when he says in that speech, "I hear the sound of the genuine in myself, and having learned to listen to that, I can become quiet enough, still enough to hear the sound of the genuine in you."

Now, if I hear the sound of the genuine in me and if you hear the sound of the genuine in you, so that when I look at myself through your eyes. Having made that pilgrimage, I see in me what you see in me, and the wall that separates and divides will disappear, and we will become one because the sound of the genuine makes the same music. Now, this is solidarity, this is witnessing, this is community. This is the path of what we talked about earlier, don't you think?

Mike: Oh, my gosh. So much so. When I think about the sound of the genuine making the same music, I can't help but think about Dr. B, who is such a good friend and mentor and who used to say to me, "You know, Mike. Life has a rhythm, and every now and then you lose it. And when you lose the rhythm, you just got to go back and find it again." I think that's true for all of us.

Cassidy: Oh, absolutely. And I think to your point, really listening to the sound of the genuine and really being true and honoring that sacred, true self. All these different maybe words for it. It's not simple, it's not easy. It's not always the answer we want about who we are. It's something that does make us recognize that interconnection with all other people. When we see parts of ourselves maybe that are dark or hard to look at. For me, it creates almost this sense of solidarity with all other people who have experienced that thought, that feeling, that emotion.

We got a really great question from another listener that relates to this in some way. Listener Lee writes, "One thing I'd love to hear the group dive into more is how to hold the, "Tears for one thing are tears for all things." How to hold that intention with not allowing that generalization to dilute our resolve to work on very specific, concrete, discrete injustices now. I fear that some people will be satisfied with a vague mystical grief that ends up taking no actual action in the material world." I can't wait to hear Drew respond to this.

Drew: Cassidy, it's a great question. Thanks so much for that question, Lee. I mean, you're exactly right. Anytime we stay at the universal level, whether we're talking about something like grief or love, there's a real danger of falling into a vague mysticism that doesn't move us to any real action in the world.

Everything can just remain up in the head and abstractions and the real world remains untouched.

And like Richard ... He gets at this in his chapter on Amos a little bit when he says, "Theoretical truths that touch no one deeply are hardly truth at all. Yes, truth is universal and absolute, but it must show itself in a specific context." I love that. I think that's so helpful. Universal abstractions without concrete particulars easily become ideologies that the ego feels it must defend. And one of the things that Richard has always taught and comes a lot from his Franciscan tradition and teachers like the Franciscan philosopher, John Duns Scotus, is the importance of what is often called the scandal of particularity. Duns Scotus is called this haecceity or thisness.

And this is just a way of saying that we can't love or grieve universals. It's really hard and I would say impossible for us as human beings to wrap our hearts around ideas or concepts. This is the brilliance of what Christian theology calls the incarnation. It's why incarnation matters. Richard says, "Love our God incarnate, always begins with particulars. This woman, this dog, this beetle this Moses, this Virgin Mary, this Jesus of Nazareth. It is the individual and concrete that opens the heart space to an I thou encounter." It's so beautiful.

I think the point that Richard is trying to make with this idea of tears for one thing or tears for all things is actually quite the opposite of vague mysticism, but it's really asking us the question, what is the one thing, the one person, the one experience of suffering, the one injustice that breaks your heart and breaks it open? And how is that specific concrete solidarity and those specific concrete tears pushing out the boundary lines of your heart to be in solidarity with all the suffering of the world?

So the only way to get at any true, genuine, universal grief is through the particular and concrete, and we must stay with the particular and the concrete. Or if your starting place is the universal, it has to move to the concrete and the specific. Is your heart breaking over the injustices being done toward immigrants in our country? That's beautiful. That's a beautiful place to be. And the question is out of that, how might those tears move you to stand alongside your immigrant neighbors in your neighborhood, in your city, in the place where you are?

And so I think the invitation is to pay attention to what is breaking our hearts, because that might be where the spirit is leading us to show up, to stand in solidarity, to push back against injustices in concrete ways with real people who have names.

And so I'll end with this quote from Richard who says, "You can only know anything by meeting it in its precise and irreplaceable thisness and honoring it there." I love that question. It's so important. Thanks so much for the question, Lee.

Gosh, there's nothing like hearing from a poet and a theologian all in one take and what a gift it is to hear from Drew on that question in particular. I think when we're really engaged ... When we really engage in the present moment, we can learn how to love one thing really, really well, whether it's the human before us or the bird in the sky, and the present moment can also bring that sense of awe. Don't you think, Mike?

Mike:

Yeah. Gosh, so thought-provoking. Richard often says how you do anything is how you do everything. And I think the same thing is true. How you love anything is how you love everything. So the irony here is that universal love really, I think, often starts with loving one thing well. Origen said to love God and to love good things are one and the same. So I do think it's a real spiritual practice to start committing to love one thing well.

So we talk about listen to what breaks your heart. And I also think it's true to listen to what warms your heart. I know for a lot of us who've experienced a lot of trauma or suffering in our life, it's really terrifying to love. This is something I don't think we talk enough about is how genuinely scary it is to love. For me, I will admit that one of the most profound spiritual practices I have had in my life, don't laugh, is owning a cat. I had come through a season in life where my heart had been so completely broken. It had been shattered. I had lost a spiritual community and a friend circle. I had been betrayed by family members that I never thought would betray me. I'd been let down and I'd let other people down.

And looking back, I know that my heart was very, very closed off. And right around this time, I adopted my cat. And I brought him home two days before the pandemic kicked off and we all went into lockdown and then I was in this place of having this tremendously broken heart and being cut off from the world. Stuck at home, interacting with my neighbors from a distance and strangers through masks. And I had this cat in my house. And every morning when I woke up, he would jump and sit on my chest and he would headbutt me and he would purr. And I realized that my natural instinct was that I wanted to push him away. And I thought, no, I am actually going to force myself to sit here and be with this cat and be vulnerable with him and give him all the snuggles that he desires until he gets to that moment that inevitably comes where he's like, "No, I'm done with you." And he just dashes off into the other room.

But this idea of forcing myself to be fully present to this one creature and accept the love that it was giving me and give some in return slowly started to thaw my heart. And then things started to happen. And I think also coming out of lockdown was a part of this. I started to get to know my neighbors. I started to get to know the folks that worked in the Walgreens on the corner and in my favorite coffee shop. And I started to listen for tiny little soundbites about their lives. And I started to catch when they were having a hard day or when I could tell they were carrying a little bit heavier of a burden. And that to me was an unexpected place of reconnection and thawing of my heart.

So I would say, yes, 100% pay attention to what breaks your heart and let it start with one thing and one person, but also pay attention to what warms your heart and find those little places that you can start to take risks to step into a place of loving. Loving one thing as a gateway to loving everything. What do you think, Cassidy? Does that make any sense?

Cassidy: Oh, that resonates so deeply. Yeah. I got my cat, Pax in a somewhat similar state and just the way that changed my heart space was such a gift for my life. And I think that we can learn a lot from those seemingly small moments, be it with animals, our pets, our nieces or nephews, our friends, our friends kids. I think there's so many ways that we can be open to what warms our hearts. And I think that's so crucial, Mike, that you also brought into the conversation trauma because it's one thing to say, go after what breaks your heart, but we need to do that in a way that is safe and to be able to do that in a way that is holding with it what warms our hearts because we need to be okay. We need to be okay in order to do that loving action towards the things that break our heart.

Mike: It's so true. I feel like so much of our spiritual practice and so much of walking the path of the prophet that Richard shares with us in The Tears of Things is a perpetual practice of bringing our heart back online when the world is doing everything it can, every moment of every day to shock or scare or exhaust or bore us into being numb. And it's this constant invitation, as Howard Thurman says, to listen to the sound of the genuine, to bring our heart back online.

Cassidy: Yeah. In thinking about these things we've mentioned, these animals we've mentioned and these little reminders of truth and God's presence, it brings us to another question because we also got to talk with Richard about this being the year of St. Francis as declared by Pope Leo. And so we got to hear from Richard, a Franciscan, of course, of what that might mean. What does it mean, the year of St. Francis or what could that encourage us towards?

Paul: Richard, we know that Pope Leo has declared this year, the year of St. Francis.

Richard: I just heard that. Yeah.

Paul: What do you think about it?

Richard: An Augustinian. Yeah.

Paul: Pollen from the wider collective. Why do you think that this is important right now with everything going on in the world?

Richard: Francis exemplifies a joyful, non-reactive response to the empire, to the system, to the church itself by going on the side and doing it more happily, more freely, more joyfully. I don't know Leo's reason exactly, but there's something in Francis that's the universal man that keeps appealing to people because he did it positively, not reactively. You could say he's reactive, but not really. He loves

the world. He loves the animals. He loves the brotherhood, even though he has to get away from them.

Paul: Well, it reminds me of Nelly's question about the inverted culture. And I think about how often we ... In current culture, it feels inverted of defining yourself by what you're not and what you're against.

Richard: Oh, that's so true.

Paul: Rather than what you're for. And St. Francis feels like somebody who knew what they were for and just went about it.

Richard: For the great lover and therefore all else could be included, the lesser loves can be included in the great love.

Mike: When I think about what you were saying earlier too, Richard, about how Jesus has become so malleable in some circles, and we can either make Jesus what we want Jesus to be to justify all manner of bad behavior. Or Jesus is so easily dismissible and Christ have mercy. That should not be the case. The real Jesus demands to be taken very seriously. But there's something about Francis.

I have friends in so many different places on the spectrum of reactivity to Christianity. From folks who love it, to folks who are skeptical, to folks that hate it. But Francis just seems to walk through that like Jesus passing through the crowd. He seems so universally well received. What do you think it is that he carries that people almost universally, or to very large numbers, respect Francis as being the real thing?

Richard: It sounds so glib to say his positivity. We're tired of sin management, which is the version of Christianity so many of us were given. And Francis moves beyond sin management to delight in animals, nature, brother, son, sister, moon, creation itself. We want to reposition ourselves in a non-sin-based religion. It's based in nature, creation, the universe. I love to watch these nature shows and these whole scientific shows on the micelle and the heart of the root. You wouldn't think you could spend a whole hour learning about micelle, our roots and how they control everything. They feed everything. Our photosynthesis, there's so much to be in awe of. Maybe that's the word. Francis was an awe-based religious leader, not a sin-based. He didn't have modern science, but he was already in awe of the universe.

Mike: There's some thinking out there that awe might be the one thing that's big enough to counteract the severity of trauma. We experience trauma and then we're conflicted and relive the patterns, but awe is even bigger than that. It drops us into something that's just so gigantic. I'm going to think on that for a long time. Thank you for that, Richard.

Richard's answer on Francis surprised me. I expected him to talk about Francis challenging dominant culture. I expected him to talk about Francis going against capitalism and empire. I'm going to be honest, I was blindsided when he talked about Francis' joy. And yet I think about our conversation with Dr. Fluker, which was such a high point for me in this last year of exploring the Tears of Things. And wow, as Dr. Fluker reminds us, as Dr. B reminded us. Wow, do we need joy right now? And not a joy that is naive, not a joy that is a numbing, but a joy that is a resistance and a joy that, as we were saying earlier, helps keep our heart coming back online.

And once again, it reminds me of this amazing quote from Howard Thurman, "Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive because what the world needs is people who have come alive." And while that can seem very hallmark when you first hear it, the fact that it was Howard Thurman that said it gives it so much gravitas. And this gets me thinking about a long series of conversations that we've been having with Richard behind the scenes that haven't made their way into the podcast broadcast where Richard at the end of his life has been telling us about the importance of building a life founded on making what he calls erotic decisions.

And this is a term that he borrowed from a Substack author named only Tamara, but this is something that Richard's really been keyed into. Decisions not based on logic, not based on probability or collective worldly wisdom, but decisions driven by Eros and driven by a deep inner knowing and compulsion. I know he shared a lot about this at our revision conference last fall. When I asked him about the courage that we need to follow, Jesus as prophet in walking out our own prophetic path.

As the man Richard Rohr, in your eight decades on this planet. Personally, in your personal prayer life, in your interior life, what has Jesus meant to you in your journey?

Richard:

Well, he's the one that makes my love life possible, this strange thing of celibacy that I committed myself to before I knew what I was doing. It's more or less worked for me. I've had a wonderful life and the glue that holds that together is a relationship with God, whom as a Christian I picture as Jesus. Not Only, you know my book on the Trinity. So Jesus grounds, solidifies, enlivens the whole faith journey. It isn't an abstraction. It isn't a boring commitment. It's what I call an erotic decision. Isn't that a great term? It's not your practical decisions. It's not your functional decisions. It's your erotic decisions that change your life. Nothing else changes you. Nothing else changes you.

Now let me define erotic decision. I don't just mean ... In fact, I do not mean sex. That's far too limited. I mean anything you do with what we called in philosophy, the good and the true and the beautiful. When you make a decision based on the good, the true and the beautiful. Planting flowers, working with orphan children, that's an erotic decision. It changes you. It transforms you. It's not a transaction. We poor Catholics, we were given so much good mysticism,

but we had all kind of transactions. This many prayers, this many days in purgatory. I mean, out of purgatory. It was such a waste of time. It was such a loss of grace, such a loss of ability to read the soul and to see what was happening in the soul.

Mike: This has just been burning in Richard's imagination for the last few months. And he said to me in one of our conversations about it. "That the great tragedy of most folks' lives is that they've been waiting until they die to enjoy the divine banquet. And when they die, they will realize that they had been surrounded by it all along." And he said, actually, for most people, that would be their hell, was to realize that they could have been enjoying it all the time.

Cassidy, when we wrestle always with this question of looking at all the suffering and the hurt in the world and asking, "What is mine to do? How can I contribute to putting my healing in the service of healing the world when the world is so broken?" That is such a heavy question to wrestle with and such a heavy burden to carry. Does it seem counterintuitive to you that in point of fact, finding our own work to do might somehow be connected to what makes us come alive?

Cassidy: I love that question and it's so important. I know so many of us are finding ourselves just weary and worn down by the news feeds, but yet we're also determined to stay informed. And Mike, I've found myself more and more drawn to people who don't take themselves too seriously. And the creativity I've seen in my own community or other states or other cities have really deeply inspired me. And it's not because the work isn't serious. I think it's actually because the work is so serious, sometimes we have to engage this almost like trickster image to subvert the norms or the expectations. We need to stay sane and alive.

And I think we keep asking ourselves, "What is mine to do? What is ours to do? What is mine to do? I don't know what to do today. There's too much going on. I can't do something about everything." And I'm just more and more convinced that what is ours to do begins with letting go of what it looks like because we can get so distracted by our ego. And so I'm naming that because I think about that too. But I think what is ours to do, again, begins with letting go of what it looks like. And I think when we get distracted by our ego in that way, we detach ourselves from action and we get further from the action that is the action that makes us come alive.

Mike: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. First, I want to resonate with what you said about ... Well, the way I would put it is self-seriousness. I've found that the spiritual teachers and the heroes of mine, the folks that I gravitate to the most are utterly devoid of self-seriousness. They do not take themselves too seriously, and because they don't take themselves too seriously, they demand to be taken seriously.

And I don't think we realize what a heavy burden it is to take yourself too seriously. I think constantly about this teaching from the Desert Fathers and Mothers, and I talk about it all the time. It's this concept they taught called apatheia. That's A P-A-T-H-E-A. It sounds like apathy, which is to not care about anything, but it's not, no caring about anything. It's not caring about what doesn't matter, so you have more energy to care about what does. And to say it another way, coming from mystics who had to travel through the desert in the sand and the sun and survive. It's about not carrying what's not yours to carry, so you have more strength to carry what is yours.

One of the things we need to let go of is self-seriousness and feeling like we need to do everything. Because I think in the moment that we're in, there's so much suffering and there's so much injustice that we can trick ourselves into feeling like the only appropriate response is performative misery and performative urgency. I'm only in solidarity with other folks if I make sure that I never let myself feel any shred of joy and I never let myself be at peace for a moment. I have to be rushing all the time because the world is on fire. And we need to take that very, very seriously, but we need to take it seriously in leaning into what is ours to do and what is ours to be, and what is ours to feel.

And I think that's what Howard Thurman is getting at when he says, "Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive because what the world needs is people who have come alive and because work that is driven by what makes you come alive is very often sustainable. Because it's work driven by the deep tap root of the spirit that's sinking into the ground of who we are and the ground of what is and giving us the ability to show up in the face of so much hatred and fear and injustice in the world right now."

What is mine to carry? What is mine to let go of? What is mine to give someone else to carry? What is mine to carry with others? And recognizing that I genuinely cannot save the world on my own and I'm not being asked to.

Cassidy:

Yeah. Yeah. Something else that Thurman says in that speech, he reminds us, "You are the only you that has ever lived. Your idiom is the only idiom of its kind in all of existence. And if you cannot hear the sound of the genuine in you, you will all of your life spend your days on ends of strings that somebody else pulls." And so Mike, I think along with those questions, I think in staying true to the sound of the genuine, part of that work is knowing ourselves and knowing ourselves and learning to know each other, so that we can truly be in solidarity. So I can honestly see you, so I can see you with a lens of truth and therefore the lens of love. If I don't fully see you, how can I really love you? I just wonder if that's also a part of the equation, is knowing ourselves more deeply and again, holding that lightly.

One thing I always get frustrated with is always never statements because they don't leave room for me to grow or change. I think there's something to the importance of knowing ourselves and moving with that, learning through that,

growing through that. And this makes me so excited about this upcoming season.

Mike: It is a shock and a surprise to all of us that we are so excited to share with the rest of you that in wrestling with the question, what is each one of ours to do in the world to make love more real? We've decided that the next season of Everything Belongs, we're going to sit down with Richard and go back to his teachings on The Enneagram, which I know for a lot of folks-

Cassidy: I feel like I should have had a drum roll there.

Mike: A drum roll would have been great. I think The Enneagram is a way that a lot of folks first got to get to know Richard. Cassidy, we've been talking about this for months and we're ... I'm not embarrassed to say we started out skeptical and then became super excited about it. Why do you think The Enneagram is such an interesting follow-up to The Tears of Things?

Cassidy: Yeah. I mean, I think reflecting on the Tears of Things, I'm seeing more and more that The Enneagram is a tool for solidarity. It's a tool for engaging the vastness of the human experience and to understand the vastness of the human experience in such a way that we can see each other and that we can understand each other and therefore truly love each other.

Mike: I think that's so well said. When I hear so many people asking, "How do I know what is mine to do?" There's so much hurt in the world, we can often feel like our best efforts are throwing water balloons at a wildfire. But in reality, we genuinely believe that when we figure out what is ours to do, what we're actually doing is we're just carrying our bucket in the bucket brigade. And it might be small, but it's one link in the chain. It's one step in the process. It's one massive contribution to healing.

And I think The Enneagram is actually a tool, especially the way that we're going to look at it in this upcoming season that helps each of us look at our unique wounds and our unique wisdom and ask, "What is my work to do in the world?" Gosh, that's so exciting to me. I can't wait to learn from Richard. I've listened to his old teachings on The Enneagram and they're so good, but now on the other side of him writing everything from Falling Upward, to The Universal Christ, to The Tears of Things. It's so rich to get to hear him at this moment in his life integrate all of that in how he uses The Enneagram as a tool for spiritual discernment and charting our course.

Cassidy: What I've learned so far and in my coming to learn about The Enneagram, it has been such a gift of understanding my inner world more and understanding what's going on inside me more clearly, so that I can better understand, again, what is mine to do. Why some things don't feel comfortable for me to do or to not do. And that being said, I think I also don't want that to limit us because I think that it is important to be uncomfortable in some of the things that we do

in life and the ways in which we take action because we're not living in a comfortable time.

And so I think understanding ourselves more doesn't mean creating an easy path or creating a way forward that simplifies something. I think this is really going to challenge us. I think it's really going to challenge me, to be honest.

Mike: My prayer for us going into this season is that it helps us to listen deeply to the wounds and the wisdom of everyone around us and to our own heart and helps us, as Richard taught us in *The Tears of Things*, to be with our anger, to be with our sadness, and to let those things lead us to how love wants to be made real in our own lives uniquely, and we can be put in service of making it real in the world around us.

Cassidy: It's going to be great. I can't wait.

Mike: Folks, you have spent months and months and months wandering with us through all the wisdom contained in *The Tears of Things*. We hope that you don't leave this season and leave this book feeling like you have all the answers. We hope that instead you've been equipped with good, good questions because the quest really is in the questions. We hope that when you feel anger, you are reminded that you are angry because something you love is at stake and that anger can be fueled to make change in the world.

We hope that you soften your heart to feel the sadness of loving deeply in a world so broken, and we hope that you increasingly wrestle with how to grieve that and bring your heart back online day after day after day. Thank you for the opportunities you've given us to learn this season.

Cassidy: I just want to end with maybe the same thing I said at the beginning, which is from Drew's blessing and just add a couple things to it. So my question and my blessing is, can we go from wherever we are into the loving prophetic spirit to find ourselves in good and necessary trouble, stirring up chaotic love for the sake of the flourishing of ourselves, our neighbors and our world?

Mike: Amen. Thank you, Cassidy. Thank you listening family. Thanks, Richard. It is such a gift to get to be with all of you in conversation. We'll see you again soon for the next season of *Everything Belongs* as we explore *The Enneagram*.

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Sara Palmer: Sara Palmer.

Dorothy Abraham...: Dorothy Abrahams.

Brandon Strange: Brandon Strange.

Vanessa Yee: Vanessa Yee.

Cassidy: 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.