

Backstory Preaching

A Conversation with Clergy Coach, Laura Jackson

11/2/2020

Transcript (unedited): "Caught in the Middle? How to Move Out."

00:00:14 <inaudible> welcome everybody. I am Lisa Cressman and Episcopal priest and the founding steward of backstory preaching. And I am here with another conversation with Laura Jackson and Laura, welcome back. Laura is a, is an episodic seminary grad. She is a clergy spouse and a lay person with deep background in chaplaincy trauma therapy and counseling. She has a coaching, a coaching practice where she focuses on clergy and clergy,

00:00:43 families, church leaders, and lay leaders in faith communities. And you can find her coaching practice holygroundcoaching.com. Here's what I'm hearing from the preachers. I serve Laura back. Holy week, Easter time clergy were the heroes. They were suddenly thrust into an online world and had to

figure out how to run online worship at the holiest time of the year. And they,

00:01:20 the, the efforts were Herculean and people were so grateful. They were so appreciative and clergy from many I heard from rarely felt that level of appreciation. But now we're several months in, were kind of used to online world and worship and people are generally getting kind of crabbiest. The pandemic is wearing on. Of course we have the election we've got black lives matter.

00:01:53 And the, the Goodwill of so many wanting, wanting to see change in this country. But clergy are working with folks who are all over the map and are not feeling necessarily that they need to hold back their own opinions about online worship or wearing a mask or getting together in person or not. We've got Christmas coming up around the corner and all of these feelings are looking for a place to go.

00:02:28 And clergy are the recipients of a lot of the stuff. So when clergy are feeling caught in the middle

between competing interests and angst, what, what, what can be helpful for what can be helpful for clergy in this situation that intensity of emotion especially Built up over time or fueled by our collective weariness with this whole situation is a lot to hold it is.

00:03:12 And my first recommendation is don't hold it right. You said than done, right? But it's, it's not possible before the pandemic before this year. It wasn't possible to please everybody in the church about everything and it sure isn't now. And that is, that is disappointing because a non-zero percentage of people who go to seminary are really hoping that it will make everybody loved them.

00:04:01 Okay. And it, it turns out that it doesn't exactly, but there's a, there's a process to be navigated there around what, what percentage of people are going to have, what amount of negative feelings and then some denominations, are they going to fire me before next Sunday? Right? I mean,

there's, the stakes are, are, are hot right now.

00:04:35 And emotions are high and it's, it's other people are not keeping perspective probably. And even just trying to be sort of empathetic to people. They may be, it may not be that everyone is angry at the clergy person, but that they're so angry with each other. And they're coming to the clergy about, you know, you and I are okay,

00:05:00 you've got to get rid of bill. Well, Right. And it's not fun, Not fun. And I think Just naming that as you have is a start to say, this is not because isolation is so common for single clergy congregations. The pastor may be feeling like I am the one that the whole universe is jumping on, right. Speak with peers as they can affect three preachings regular group and say,

00:05:48 Oh, this is a cultural moment. This is a historical moment that we're caught up in. These energies are not actually because I'm the most terrible person that anybody in my congregation has ever met. Like this, this energy

belongs to sort of fear of change and anxiety about the nation's future and things that are really things that, that are to which this,

00:06:19 this level of emotional response is proportional. Right? Thinking problems that are generating this big response, when that big response get, gets pointed at one human, it feels pretty fire hosing. Yeah. Right. So that sort of reassignment of not internalizing the size of it, the intensity of it don't carry it. Right. Like March is this furious about,

00:06:50 COVID-19 not about me. Okay. Right. I'm not bad. Okay. You know, I didn't stop the economy. Okay. All right. Because it can, it's because we're trained to sort of empathically take in what people are bringing to us and when it's rage and terror, that's, there's gotta be some emotional hygiene there. Right. And partly,

00:07:22 that means some other things we've talked about of having practices of physical and neurological reset to be like, I took all that in. I heard it and now I'm going to go dump it out in

the garden before I compose my clever email response telling you why you're completely wrong or, you know. Okay. And there's so that's, I mean, Self care is a word that I don't like because one it's been commodified.

00:08:05 So that it means sort of your feelings are making you a less productive worker, please go and buy a \$7 coffee so that you can come back and do an abusive job some more. Right. That's and too, it's, it's another job that you have to do. Right. You have to self care yourself into not being so annoyingly human. Right.

00:08:31 And so I don't, I don't like to talk about that, but I think about self compassion, kindness to the body, just, and, and that question of respite that we talked about of understanding there's gotta be a rhythm. And if it sounds like I'm off on a tangent from what do I about church conflict, I'm really not because I'm resourcing because we respond so differently to situations when we're resourced,

00:09:11 when we have claimed space for ourselves to, to get that reset and to feel what we feel when nothing is happening, that of just the feeling of whatever is coming at us next. Right. Right. Sometime in neutral is essential. Protecting that time, scheduling that time, figuring out in what context it's possible is, is job one of leadership in a time of intense conflict.

00:09:51 I really like, like the word resourced is I'm thinking that There's essentially as, as, as leaders in family or ministry, wherever we rely on having the adequate resources of a budget, for example, and time and the appropriate skills, or we've got the people around us so that we're resourced in order to be able to do the job that has been entrusted to us.

00:10:28 Yeah. And so I really like the, what, what are the resources I have to have internally to be able to do, to be able to do this job and do it well, and it's easy. It's easy to think that I'm running on fumes is appropriate or what's expected at a time like this when we would, we

wouldn't do that with sort of any other of our jobs to say,

00:10:57 it's, it's okay. If it sort of runs on fumes, like we're running on pennies. When we're trying to put a roof on the house, it doesn't work that way. And so it's, it's not, it's not enough to say I can run on fumes awhile longer. So to think of it in terms to reset that con inner conversation of what are the resources I need,

00:11:16 how do I need to be resourced to, to serve well, in this context is a really helpful way for me to think about, And there's not one answer you're right. Yeah. It's very personal, predictable questions. Like how much sleep do you need to function at your most compassionate and thoughtful, and least reactive? The difference between me on nine hours and me on six is probably three meltdowns over the course of the day.

00:11:58 Not all of them, mine, but some, no, it's you, you can feel when you're crispy. Right. And maybe it's, I need to eat something for breakfast that

has protein in it. Maybe it's I need to go for a 30 minute walk without my phone. And if my family member says, Oh, I'll come with you. I say,

00:12:24 no, thank you. Or maybe a walk with someone is what fills my tank. Right. But in with yourself, it's even locating your tank and acknowledging that it's not a virtue, as you say, to, to run it on fumes. Right. And what I mean, you say, Oh, we act like it's acceptable. No, we act like it's heroic.

00:12:48 That's the word? Right? Like I'm so I'm the tireddest one. I'm the best, little brave little toaster. That's still plugging along in defiance of physics on nothing. That's so good. And that's not so good because you don't, you will re you are not, infinite will rest. You will run out and you don't get to choose when and where and how right.

00:13:24 That's Right. Why not? Right. That's why the cowboy act is not ultimately helpful. And so let me ask about those are things in terms of resourcing ourselves for sort of larger picture day to day. What about when

we're in the heat of a moment? So we're in a church council meeting and we've got people who were getting upset, or we get the,

00:13:56 the angry email or the phone call, what are some things that we can do when, when the heat has suddenly Rhythm? So I think noticing as quickly as you can, that things have shifted to have even a code word to say to yourself, like, okay, what did you say the fire's on? Or he, yep. We were like,

00:14:31 you know, I mean, it could be Barcelona. It doesn't matter. But you say something to yourself. That's like, Oh, we're, this is happening. Now. I need to shift how I'm operating. I need, because you're, there's a what's happened is the level of conflict has gone up little bitty book from Alban press. I don't even know if it's still available anymore by speed Lees,

00:14:56 L E a S called levels of conflict. And he basically lays out that if there are two living people in a room, there is conflict is not bad. Conflict is not inherently bad. We want different things.

We're not the same person, but the level at which we're engaging it and negotiating, it can play out a number of different ways. So there's,

00:15:19 and we tend to start at the collaborative sort of, Oh, here's a problem. How can we solve it together? How can we bring our diverse thought and experience to get a better solution? Elsie, you'll see, you'll see things I won't see. That's great. And it ratchets up to, I don't like your solution too. I don't like you to,

00:15:39 I don't like you in anybody who looks like you to not only do I want to win this, I want you off the face of the earth. And that's absolutely he's writing about conflict and congregations. I mean, because people are bringing all of their hopes and fears and dreams and imaginings about their relationship with the Holy, into this little box, you know,

00:16:05 it ratchets up pretty fast. And now the weather outside is also pretty intense. And so it's not just about what color is the carpet in the sanctuary that gets us to level seven. It's, you know,

how is America going to look next year? Right? And so to, to say to yourself and the, and the, the way to in the appropriate way to engage is different for each level to say to yourself,

00:16:33 like I just heard a click and I should probably stop collaborating and start disidentifying myself from this person and trying to see if they're okay. Oh, it's gone up again. I need to make sure I'm okay. You know, there's, there are, there are shifts in those levels and you don't, if you're still functioning at the previous level, you're blindsided.

00:16:59 When the thing turns, I once described this as having brought a casserole to a gunfight. It's not a good feeling when you're, Oh, let's see how we can work together. What's your position and your position is that I should be dead. Oh, let me think about that. No, don't think about that. So just to say to yourself,

00:17:25 Oh, this is happening and I need to, how do I need to shift my response? What's but the sort of hardwired reaction is to match the

intensity that the other person is bringing. If I'm defending and that's, I don't know if there's any level where that's the response that makes it and well, maybe when they lawyer up, you should lawyer up.

00:17:55 Right. But it's a parishioner comes swinging at you. You should probably not swing back. So the, the, the instinctive response doesn't serve. Right. But there's a, there's a space in there to say, okay, what I need to stop what I'm doing and do something else. And the, Oh, the impulse to, to mirror it back.

00:18:20 I don't give a lot of tips, but I heard this one when I use it. And I really like it. This is like a policy to put in place. If you receive a communication that jacks up your heart rate, that, that upsets you, you know, at a physical level, the response should be by a different medium, right?

00:18:45 If you get a mean email, pick up the phone and call them, if you get an angry answering machine message, write them a letter. If that, right. If you are talking on the phone and

you're upset, why don't we get coffee and talk about this just shifted over one up or down, doesn't matter. But to say, let's,

00:19:06 let's not have the escalating email war where it all ends up in writing what I said when I was amped up. Right. You know, or let's not shout at each other on the phone. I'm going to go sit down when I'm not talking to you and compose my email. Right, right, right. That's really helpful. That's my hack of the week.

00:19:32 We Brown shift the medium. Oh, we take those. We take those hacks anywhere. We can get them move the conversation. Right. This has been so helpful. Again, Laura, thank you very much. Thank you for your ministry to clergy and clergy, families, and lay leaders. And because we really, we, we need coaches when we're too caught up in this situation to be able to come up with creative solutions when our imagination has been quieted down or stifled because of anxiety.

00:20:11 Coaching is one of the great things that can help us imagine new possibilities. And so thank you for your ministry to all of us. I'm very grateful. Thank you all for watching this series. And again, Laura's coaching is at Holy ground. Holy Holy. Say it again for me, Laura, please. Holy ground coaching was right. Okay. Holy Ground CR coaching.

00:20:34 And we can find Laura and get more information about her programs. So thank you Laura. Very much. And I look forward to another conversation another time. Bye everybody.