

Backstory Preaching

A Conversation with Founding Steward

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Jackson

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Transcript (unedited): "How to Find Respite During Relentless Change"

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 Episcopal 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,

00:00:44 families, church leaders, and lay leaders in faith communities. And you can find her coaching practice at holygroundcoaching.com. And how do we find respite when the external realities and that, And our under our roof never let up. If you think back to CPE, it's

like being a cancer survivor who is going to work on the cancer ward every day. Right? It's a problem.

00:01:19 That's totally different from mine. No, you're not right, right. Go to see people or we're either seeing them remotely or we're seeing them with masks and distancing and precautions. And so it's, it's never absent. Yeah, no, you can't get a break from this situation. And that the question you're asking is what does respite look like in that,

00:01:49 inside of that context? Yeah, because if this thing, this has not turned out to be a three month problem or, or one problem or a simple problem, you know, it's everything. And so you can't sort of hold your breath for 18 months and just, just wait. Right, right. Got to be relief. There's got places of an Oasis in the desert.

00:02:20 And I, I was hearing somebody recently in a coaching demo, actually talking about all the reasons that that respite couldn't exist. And it was a list of all the things that had been good. And it was all long trips with the whole

family. And we can't do that. We can't do that. And so it's not possible. And, and the,

00:02:56 the corner that was finally turned, the question that came up was how does it have to be that big? What would a smaller respite look like? And if that doesn't seem possible, go smaller, smaller, smaller, what is one breath of relief? What is, you know, where, where do you feel good? Well, if the answer is outside,

00:03:22 how long does it take to be outside? Maybe not three days, maybe a two week road trip. Maybe, maybe not 30 seconds. I mean, you've got to give your system time to settle. Right, right. Maybe 10 minutes, maybe can walk outside and stand there until you feel different, then it's all right. To cut, to dip back in,

00:03:52 even between two meetings to go and do that. And just to give your nervous system a chance to come out of the total engagement, total battle mode, right. Neutral for a time to have any deep thoughts or pray. I don't, I

don't name that prayer necessarily. I think for clergy in particular, explicit verbal prayer is bound up with work in a way that is a sacrifice that people make in becoming professional religious people.

00:04:46 It's very hard to find words to pray with that. Don't kick on the sort of, I have to pretend that everything is, I have to act like everything is basically going to be okay. Right. Very hard to reach sincere lament in, you know, complete sentences because it, it activates that, that it's not fake, but that armor of a vocation.

00:05:15 Right. That's it of being on. Yeah. Right. And so I, my suspicion is that for people who, whose paying job and, and vocational identity is as a religious leader, that, to that silence with no input can, can, and coming back into that state where if God were speaking, you might hear something, but there's no pressure to hear something great.

00:05:53 All right. If it's just you and your body, and eventually you start hearing the birds singing in the, you know, it's actually worth 10 Psalms and

liturgies. Nice. We'll have that bodily experience of sort of being held up. Yeah. This past weekend, thinking of, you know, what are we missing and where do you find respite? And I've,

00:06:24 I've noticed sort of pandemic fatigue is also getting to me and I'm having more sort of daydreams about visiting family going on a trip, things like that. That is not realistic right now. And so what's, so what, what respite is available. And I spent having something to look forward to is a form of respite without having sort of the trips to go on.

00:06:56 I was thinking about, so what, w what could I look forward to? Well, I love to have to eat well and eat, eat healthfully, but I don't really like to cook that much. I don't enjoy it, but I spent last weekend cooking because it was something that was manageable. It didn't require a whole lot of thinking. It's something I do well.

00:07:24 So I didn't have to sort of deal with a learning curve. And I knew once I did this, I would have meals to

look forward to for the entire week. Right. It serves the dividend. Exactly, Exactly. And so it is, it was a deliberate, but I hadn't put it in the terms that you have in terms of respite,

00:07:44 but it was a deliberate shrinking of what, something that I can have to look forward to. And it was, it was one of the, the, it was more restful than I expected it to be. It's strategic, actually. It's, it's I call that doing a favor, taking care of future me. Good one. Yeah. And up the freezer and past you hooked you all these nice meals.

00:08:11 Exactly. You have to go, thanks past me, right? Yeah. Good. You know, because the, you could cook one meal every day and eat it, but that feeling of eating something, you didn't just cook. Yeah. So you trick yourself, but it's a little it's care, right. It's enough to be able to give and receive care with yourself.

00:08:35 I think that's right. And it's, it's hope too, that when you say having something to look forward to, it's two things. It's hope, which is crucial right

now. And it's orienting, it's, you know, we at my house, somebody will walk into the kitchen and say, are you making scrambled eggs at two o'clock in the afternoon?

00:09:00 And the other person will just say, what is time? And that's like, but we need to know what is time as humans. We really, we like to know where we are in space and time. And to be able to say, you know, later this week I will, Oh, it's, it's a tomato soup day. Cool. You know,

00:09:24 it's, Oh, that's happening. There's a thing that happened today is not yesterday. Right? It's soothing, it's orienting. Right. I think all of these, right. It doesn't have to be outside. You can do this trick in the shower. As you say, you can do this trick in the kitchen. There are places you can notice where the places that sort of put you into this other mode,

00:09:48 but it's receptive, intuitive. It's maybe slower and less verbal. And I want to say for extroverts, there's also respite from alone, no respite from isolation. And the question of how to solve that without, in a way that is safe

right now, and doable and practical and, and loving to the other people that you want to connect with is a challenge of this time.

00:10:25 Right? So that is a challenge. Isolation is a challenge for clergy and 4g families and good times because it's sort of water, water everywhere and not a drop to drink. We're surrounded by people, but they're not the people we're supposed to rely on for every social comfort. Right. But in this time, everyone is now sort of in that boat of,

00:10:53 it's just hard to know who to are, are past routine ways of getting our social needs met probably don't work right now. Right. Especially, and for those who live alone. Yeah. It's, that's a, it's a huge, huge problem. And I will say, even if you don't live alone, being crammed into a house with everybody at once,

00:11:20 all trying to do your own things, probably on different internet attachments is not necessarily an experience of connectedness and

relationship building solutely it goes every direction. Yep. The friction or isolation, like the relief from friction is the isolation, but then you get the isolation you wanted and you're like, wait, but I'm not connected. Yeah. There there's some paradoxes as,

00:11:51 as a strong introvert. I have, I don't know when it happened, but I have finally reached my marker of this is enough alone time. I don't get a lot of alone time because of what I just said, but this is enough time. Like I, there are people I miss and there are kinds of conversation that I missed and I'm starting to reach out for it.

00:12:14 Like the summer. I started writing to one friend at a time and saying, when can we have a zoom chat that we're not all zoomed out, but having it's better than phone calls with old friends, with people that really get you scheduling. And they don't have to be long. You can have a 10 minute FaceTime or zoom or phone chat with somebody.

00:12:38 Right. And if it's somebody that you have a connection with is nourishing, and then you can sort of dip and go like being outside for 10 minutes, you can text someone or call them in between things. But it takes up, it takes energy to initiate that, but think of it and plan it and reach out. And I'm starting to think that scheduling those little dips,

00:13:06 not just, not just one at a time retail, but to say like on Tuesday afternoons, I call somebody from my contact list, you know? Right, right. To say, scheduling this time to meet my social need. Yeah. Recognition that the other things I do have value, but they're not meeting this need. Right. Right. Right.

00:13:30 So **finding respite in those, those pockets** of being able to get outdoors and at least long enough to help you feel like you can breathe, finding respite in what are some of the familiar things that can be carried over that are nourishing comforting and may not be the grand respite we are accustomed to, but, but shrinking it

down nonetheless into some of those manageable ways,

00:14:01 including from long showers to cooking, to baking bread and being intentional about talking with, talking with friends and keeping up those relationships to make sure that some of the social needs are also being met. Yeah. I think it's, I think it's complicated for clergy and other helping professionals. It's not really complicated, but it feels complicated to say what kinds of connection with other people actually serve my needs.

00:14:40 Right. There's professional formation around making sure that your relationship with other people is not designed to serve your needs. Right. Right. I'm here for you. And I enjoy that, but I'm here. It's not about me. I'm here for you. Right. So easy to slip into that mode and to have people I like to say, who's your bad friend who can fall.

00:15:04 And in 10 minutes they can make you snort, laugh, something completely inappropriate. And then like you're done for the day. You've had your

little, but just something that is definitely not you working. Right. Yes. **So respite is possible even with, even alongside of, even between all of the other things happening It has. Yeah. But it's the size,**

00:15:33 The size. Good. All right, Laura, thank you very much. This has been so helpful and I look forward to having another conversation soon. Thank you. Okay.