

Backstory Preaching

A Conversation with Clergy Coach, Laura Jackson

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Transcript (unedited): "Effective Leadership During Rapid 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,

00:00:43 families, church leaders, and lay leaders in faith communities. And you can find her coaching practice holygroundcoaching.com. And we're going to be talking a bit about how clergy are managing right now. There have been so many changes. The pace at

which life is happening is beyond breathtaking. We've got the pandemic, there's been George Floyd, wildfire wildfires. I wish they were wild flowers.

00:01:22 That would be so much nicer wildfires. We've got obviously the election, which may not be decided for a good while. Everybody's got strong opinions. And so one question I have that I thought Laura might be able to help with is how are we supposed to be effective under when there is this, the sands are shifting so rapidly. How can clergy be effective when we can't count on what the next week is going to bring?

00:01:57 Thanks, Lisa, that I, that is a really widespread question. I know. And I know it's hitting clergy particularly hard in some ways, because of what you said about the strong opinions that there's, there's the need to pastor, to a community that is intense feeling intensely and intensely also feeling intensely divided. And so the pressure may feel like it's on to please everyone at a time when nothing will,

00:02:33 when there's nothing that everyone agrees on. That's for sure the emotional drain of that sort of constant calculation and awareness is a real energy cost of, of moving in this environment at this time. And I think the good news there is actually part of the bad news you just talked about, which is whatever it is, it's changing really fast. And so even if people are,

00:03:09 are very intensely sure today that they really want you to do X, Y, and Z once something else. And so being driven by sort of the latest and loudest is, is Mo it's more obvious than usual that that's not even a strategy that is possible to enact much less, isn't going to be successful. No. Right. And so I think sanity at this point lies in pulling in from the circle of awareness and the circle of influence into the circle of agency of the really getting really tight about what is it that I do control,

00:03:57 right? I don't control what's on the news. I don't control other people's thoughts and feelings. Even people that I'm in relationship with. I can

control my actions. I can control my choices about how I, how I allocate my time. And that's, I can hear already people saying I don't control how I allocate my time, but I think there is room for negotiations.

00:04:27 And for, you know, I, I have a friend who said about being in business for himself, that the bad news is you worked 24 hours a day. And the good news is you get to pick which 24. I think the third year life is, you know, you're constantly, there's a lot to do, and you've got to do all of it,

00:04:48 but you have some agency in shaping how that schedule gets structured and how it, how it gets done. I think that's a real problem because I hear that a lot from the preachers I serve, not only are they in demand from their congregations, but for those of course who are at home with families than their children who may be being homeschooled, their spouse,

00:05:18 it can feel with all due respect to all spouses out there, like they're under foot sometimes as I'm sure

we are for them at other times, it goes, it goes all around. And so that feeling of being torn in so many directions and people demanding a piece of us is, yeah, it's a real problem. Absolutely. And I think there's a,

00:05:42 I read an article recently that, that named as one of the surprising losses for people in this time, the loss of the commute, right? You felt that in your body. Yeah. There's that, that minute where that 10 minutes or 20 minutes or an hour or whatever it is, where you're not at work anymore and you're not home yet, not at home anymore,

00:06:11 and you're not at work yet. And then this world where so many people with so many knowledge workers, people who can work remotely are at work in, you know, two square feet next to family life, as it goes on your commute is, is I turned my head, right? There's no gap in the middle where, where I'm no transition thoughts.

00:06:37 Right. That's whatever happened in the one sphere before the other spheres coming at me. Right. Or I

think no, that naming that loss because people complain right about their commute in the old days where like, Oh, you know, I want a job closer to my house. I have a shorter commute now we're like, could I please commute somewhere?

00:07:00 Not so naming that shift, that, that, that was performing a function for us. It was forcing that transitional space reveals that there's a need to construct that transition somehow in terms of some kind of ritual or routine that signals to your, to your hind brain, to your body, I'm shifting contexts, I'm putting down whatever that was or I'm, you know,

00:07:31 I'm sure I'm bringing out the part of my self, that functions in this way. And so it's, it's that time. And for that matter, having a time, just having a time when that happens, just having a time, when you say, all right, I'm not answering, unless someone, unless I am being called to a deathbed, I'm not answering work texts after X o'clock on X days.

00:08:03 I'm not even gonna guess what that time is, but I'm going to say it probably should be earlier than you think. You know, this time is the time when, instead of that space, what we use to express with space, we're now expressing with time Hmm. Sensory cues. So you might have a piece of jewelry that you put on when you go to work.

00:08:31 If people are still wearing collars, you might choose to wear your collar while you're doing. Even if you're not on zoom, while you're at your desk, writing your sermon or doing whatever, and then take it off when you go into the kitchen or to the dinner taper to say that I'm, I'm creating a door so that I can walk through the door and then be on the other side of it.

00:08:54 Yeah. Yeah. I think that's, that's really helpful to have to have those, some of those normal cues, because if we were commuting, we would put on work clothes. And when we get home, we change and sort of, that's a great cue that can carry over from the

old days to the current ones. I just had this flash of that gesture.

00:09:18 I just pictured of a bunch of the folks I know, sort of settling into the driver's seat of the car and pulling the collar out. Right, right. Exactly. Yeah, yeah, yeah. No, to choose when that happens like that to yourself in a, in a way that's sensory, that's physical. Right, Right, right. Is there a way that you would suggest how we can elicit the support and help of our families so that there's also creating that cue for,

00:09:56 I was at work and I was not so available. Now I am available. How do we, how do we work with our families to have everybody work together on that and for their cues as well, because they're doing the same thing we are. Yeah. That is a wonderful, I love that question. And I think because it's so contextual, so personal,

00:10:22 I think sitting down with the family to have that conversation might be really relationship building and really welcome to say to one dinner or one hour and sit and get the kids and get the

kids ideas and say, what would, what would say to you, mom is not available now, but I know when she will be, and I know what to do until she is right.

00:10:51 What's the, what's the signal that says it to you because I can make up all this stuff I want. But if the people I'm living with, aren't reading that signal, then it's another conflict. Yeah. And to say, you know, even to say, when is it important for me to be available? If I have some choice, I have some flexibility.

00:11:16 Is it better? If, if all the zoom school and around three, I dunno if it does, but say it does. Maybe that transition minute. That's like the kids coming home from school only, they, they also don't have a commute anymore. They're also coming home is turning your head. But the part where all your children shift from being glued to the zoom screen and trying to concentrate,

00:11:45 to being able to move around might be a great time for another adult in the mix, or a great time to say, what was today like for you? What

happened? What did you, and then go back to work, right. Maybe that doesn't have to be like knock off at two 30, but maybe from two 30 to three 30, I don't schedule meetings because I want to be with my kid during that transition.

00:12:06 Yeah. But no, unless you ask them. Right, right. Yeah. And it's to do the thing that's high leverage for your family, instead of guessing what they want or feeling guilty about what you think you should do. Right. Right. You're like if their bucket is getting filled, they're not going to be in your pocket every 30 seconds about where do we keep the ice,

00:12:27 you know, where are the cookies they're in the entry? You know? But I just want to just talk to you. Yeah. Right. Right. At the time. And to have that be routine for them too is grounding. Right. Right. So This has been a really good example of, with all of the innumerable grains of sand that are shifting under our feet,

00:12:58 where are the places that we do have agency places that we can

make choices, create micro routines when the larger routine has been so dramatically disrupted when we don't know what's coming up for today or for this situation for the moment, these are the things that I'm, I'm able to choose. And constructure in a way that's beneficial. Yeah, I think so.

00:13:28 **And I think there's a, there's a temptation to feel the pressure then of thinking I have to sit down and make a brilliant list of coming up with all of these things. That would be so great. And I want to relieve that pressure by saying, maybe set an intention for a week to notice things that are working nice.** One to notice things that are less stressful than the other things and say,

00:13:55 Oh, I feel less like running, screaming from the building. When I get up in the morning and take my shower first, or, you know what, or playing my kid's dumb video game with him four or five minutes, or I don't know. I don't know what your thing is, but to say, Oh

wait, that's nice. How do we get more of that?

00:14:17 What's nice about that. How do we get more of that? Nice. I love that. Setting an intention, noticing already what's already working attention to, how could that be replicated? Yeah. We're not starting from zero. Something is already okay. Which is also reassuring because it reminds us that God is already in our midst. God's already showing up in ways and taking care of us perhaps in ways we haven't noticed.

00:14:46 And that's the only reason I can think of why something is already. Okay. These days. Yes. Goddess is sneaky for sure. For sure. This is great. Thank you for this, that very helpful way to be reframing, how to consider, what do I have agency about? And, and also I'm feeling a sense of lightness and gratitude over the things that you've helped me see already.

00:15:21 Oh, that's right. That actually already works and God's showing up in some really great places. So thank you. Great conversation. And I

look forward to the next one. Yeah. See
you then. Okay.