

## Where Do You Find Hope? With Corina Newsome

**Nicole Diroff** 00:01

You are listening to Climate Changed, a podcast about pursuing faith, life and love in a climate-changed world hosted by me, Nicole Diroff

**Ben Yosua-Davis** 00:10

and me, Ben Yosua-Davis. Climate Changed features guests who deepen the conversation, while also stirring the waters. The Climate Changed podcast is a project of The BTS Center.

**Nicole Diroff** 00:23

It's really nice to be with you today, Ben.

**Ben Yosua-Davis** 00:26

Likewise, likewise,

**Nicole Diroff** 00:28

I have been thinking a lot these days about what I'm paying attention to, what I'm noticing, and our guest today unpacks that in some ways that I really love. I'm wondering, what are you trying to pay attention to these days?

**Ben Yosua-Davis** 00:49

I was thinking about the work that I do as a home renovator. This is like my other hat that I put on weekends. And this property that we have was really just incredibly rundown and we're bringing back to life and it's about two cleared acres on the island where we live. And one of my new practices is when I pull up to the house in my 1978 GMC Sierra, which is basically an axle, four tires, an engine, and a lot of rust, I turn off the truck. And before I rushed in to begin my day, I try to walk kind of circumnavigate the property while praying, circling prayers from the Celtic Christian tradition. And this has given me a wonderful opportunity to notice what's happening on the land in ways that I haven't before – begin to notice the trees that are circling the fields. Noticing where the bittersweet, which is the bane of every islander's existence, needs to be trimmed back really significantly, and begin to watch the land kind of start to come alive as the seasons come alive as well. So that's been one of my big noticing practices, right now. What about for you?

**Nicole Diroff** 01:54

I love that. And I, I really would like to visit the island and see you driving that car someday, that I that would bring me great joy.

**Ben Yosua-Davis** 02:04

I would be thrilled to give you a ride. You just have to make sure when you step into the cab that you don't step through the floor when you're getting in.

**Nicole Diroff 02:13**

All right, I'll try and be nimble. So I have been wanting to connect with this maple tree that's right outside of a room in our house that has a lot of windows in it. And this tree in many ways is the artwork on the walls of that room. I've been wanting to treat this tree as a friend, I have been trying to figure out how to remember to do that. I like you're the way in which when you drive up and stop at the house, that's your trigger to kind of do this noticing. But because I'm walking through the house all the time, I didn't have a trigger. So I have decided that when I take my first sip of coffee in the morning, I'm going to go over and greet my friend the maple. And it has worked for the past maybe month. And I love sort of tracking the seasons through the lens of this tree, whether it's buds emerging or leaves changing color, I think I'm gonna notice so much more. And I hope it builds a relationship.

**Ben Yosua-Davis 03:31**

I'm really excited to actually hear maybe we can track throughout some of our conversations what the maple tree is telling you

**Nicole Diroff 03:40**

And your property too.

**Ben Yosua-Davis 03:42**

All right. I am excited to jump into today's episode. Nicole, you had such a powerful conversation with Corina Newsome.

**Nicole Diroff 03:48**

I totally did. It was the kind of conversation where I couldn't help myself from saying yes and amen. Corina and I connected in an honest way that does not always happen, especially the first time you meet someone. Let me tell you a little about Corina Newsome, who is known as Hood Naturalist on Twitter, and is the Associate Conservation Scientist at the National Wildlife Federation. She recently graduated from Georgia Southern University with a Master of Science in Biology. Corina began in the field of Wildlife Science as an animal care professional. She specializes in avian conservation and passionately connects people with the natural world through birds. She did this at previous jobs at the Nashville Zoo and Georgia's Audubon Society. In our conversation Corina shares how she has experienced the hurdles faced by marginalized communities in wildlife conservation. And as a result Corina's mission is to center the perspectives and the leadership of black, indigenous, and people of color in wildlife conservation, environmental education, and simply through exploration of the natural world. And in our conversation, we talked about a poem by Emily Dickinson. In each episode of Climate Changed we'll take a moment to center and ground ourselves in our bodies. And we thought this poem would be just perfect.

**Ben Yosua-Davis 05:30**

We invited poet Maya Williams to read the poem for us. Maya Williams, along with fellow poet Padraig O Tuama, were featured in our 2021 summer arts series program Poetry as an Art of Survival. Maya Williams is from right here in Portland, Maine. They are a religious queer, black mixed race suicide survivor constantly writing poems, you will hear Maya read Dickinson's "Hope," followed by one of Maya's original poems.

**Maya Williams 06:00**

Hope by Emily Dickinson. Hope is the Thing with Feathers/ that perches in the soul/ and sings the tune without the words/ and never stops at all./ And sweetest in the gale is heard/ and soar must be the storm/ that could abash the little bird/ that kept so many more./ I've heard it in the chilliest land/ and on the strangest sea/ yet never in extremity/ It asked a crumb of me. "Religious Imposters" after Anis Mojgani's "Shake the Dust." This is for the evangelist through actions rather than words. I see you. Don't let this be another poem you leave to hang dry on the clothing line and forget later. To the monotheistic Hindus and Buddhists. To the non-Kosher jews. Let this be a poem that covers you the way you need it to. A lot of disagreements can come out of various perspectives, but let this be a poem where a part of you can be seen. If only for a moment. This is for the evangelical who is unsure about heaven and hell. This is for the hijabi. This is for the non-hijabi waiting for the right time to cover. To the non-hijabi not requiring herself to wait for anything. This is for the religious and non-religious agnostics. To the Sikhs without long hair and turbans. To the Jains who swat at flies. I know you may feel like a religious imposter in your own spaces, but I see you. To the proselytizers and non-proselytizers. To the LGBTQIA+ affirming theologians trying to love their siblings well. To the feminist theologians trying to follow Scripture the best way they know how to, not knowing how to fit in the faith among them. I see you. And I hear you. To the religious and nonreligious scientists. The pantheists. The seeking Pagans. The irreligious and unaffiliated. To the ones with and without rest on Fridays, Saturdays, or Sundays. To the identifiers of more than one worldview. To the more I wish I could list, forgive us for accusing you of cherry picking. You're only trying to find the best fruit for your labor to put back into the world.

**Ben Yosua-Davis 09:27**

Thank you, Maya. You can learn more about Maya Williams at their website [MayaWilliamsPoet.com](http://MayaWilliamsPoet.com). On the site, you will find readings of more original poems. "Religious Imposters" was published in Frost Meadow Review and then shared on Interfaith Youth Core. So Nicole, you have a conversation to share with us.

**Nicole Diroff 09:46**

I sure do. Corina and I chatted for a little while – well over an hour – and we'll be sure to put a link to the entire conversation if you're interested. But I want to say just a little more about Corina Newsome. A Christian originally from Philadelphia, Corina has been an active member of Young Evangelicals for Climate Action. She is one of the co-organizers of the inaugural Black Birders Week. I first encountered Corina, when I read her essay in the 2019 anthology "Rooted and Rising: Voices of Courage in a Time of Climate Crisis." There was so much more I could say about Corina, I deeply respect her and really enjoyed talking to her. So I'm excited to share this conversation with all of you.

**Corina Newsome 10:40**

I'm a wildlife conservationist whose work is centered around environmental justice for people, for communities of human beings. I'm in a state where my faith in Christ is part of my hope, but in many ways has been

deconstructed and is being reformed. And it's helping me to understand the complexity, as well as the capacity for manifesting the vision that we want to see for our communities in ways that I really, up until recently didn't even have the capacity to imagine and having to think about the interesting thing if it's okay, the interesting thing that has emerged for me now is that, and this is I was just talking about this yesterday, so I'm fired up, is that over the past three years, approximately, when activism has been a real central part of my work around social justice. So I've worked in like, climate activism, I've been a part of an organization called Young Evangelicals for Climate Action for several years, but it was never it was it never like, was in, like, in the center of my life, so much. Activism, generally speaking, is now and where I'm really coming up against the tangible, like, hostility around inequity, right, from the general public. And so over the past three years, I've been really in the mix of that and, and talking a lot about environmental justice, and a lot about the ways that racism and white supremacy manifests in every possible dimension of a non white person, but in my case, a black person's experience in the sciences and recreation, in healthcare and all these and it just became, I was infuriated all the time, which is not wrong to be angry, right? It's not wrong to get angry. But I was living in anger. I was like, rooted in anger. And I was becoming unhealthy, physically unhealthy. I was becoming separated, I could feel it from my faith from God, like it was like an anger that was like made me not want, I was averse to like, love. It was like, I don't want I don't want that right now. I don't need that. Like, it almost feels like, that's not what the world needs. Like, we need to address these issues and that requires. And so again, and I'm like, how do you hold both of these? I never knew I'm like, how do you hold the urgency and the need to, like, hold systems accountable, and like shake them to pieces and destroy them and build new things? Right? How do you have that ability to do that? And also, like walk in love. And when I say that, that doesn't mean lack of accountability, or lack of lack of any of that. But it's like, like, how do you not carry the burden of anger? Right? Like, that's like a double whammy like you're kind of subjected to the injustice and then you're carrying a burden of just the emotional response. And it was a lot and it separated me from God. Literally, within the past month, I have been rethinking everything. I realize the way that I come to think about my faith as a child. Like, again, nothing was interrogated. It was just incorporated into what I you know, how I believe the world to be in history and all this all these things. I was like, I have to start over. I ship and start over who was Jesus? Who is the great community organizer, as one of my pastors who I look up to Reverend Dr. Heber Brown says, A womanist, a community organizer, right. And I was like, let me start over because I've been trying to reconcile how I came to have a faith as a child, and how I came to believe with what I know to be true about injustice right now. And it's not matching up and I can't, it's not working for me. So literally the past month, I've been rereading the Gospels like all of that, you know, from top to bottom with a new perspective of who is Jesus? Yeah, the person, right. Yeah, I mean, like, and it's like changing everything. Like, I feel like a new person I felt so out of touch with like, the joy that I feel like God has naturally given me and I and I feel like I'm becoming aware I'm becoming back in touch with him back in relationship with God and like in touch with who it is he's called me to be and it's just, there's not as much weight there and I can move freely. There's freedom there. That will be my answer. My long answer.

**Nicole Diroff** 14:41

That wow, you know, faith journeys are not sound bites. They're not so I appreciate the way in which that was long and circular, and in process and in process and you will be in my prayers, you will be in my prayers because what you're wrestling with is huge. As you started talking about being, you know, the possibility of just being consumed by anger, actually, an image of Jesus really came to my mind of this person who was going through

the world and being threatened and have very much had that possibility of being consumed by anger, and at the same time wanted to challenge structures. So I will be thinking of you as you reread, and maybe I'll do some rereading with you in spirit. Yeah, I have been looking forward to having a conversation with you around the theme of paying attention. You are a contributor to a book that we have been engaging with a whole bunch at The BTS Center called "Rooted and Rising: Voices of Courage in a Time of Climate Crisis," edited by Leah Schade and Margaret Bullitt-Jonas, both of whom are friends of this organization at this point, and you in I think it's your opening paragraph has have this quote, where you say, I decided I would make a career out of my desire to look closely. And I highlighted that right away. I just love it. And I wonder if you want to just speak to that, at all, I know that essay in a way is a few years old at this point. So yeah, how you would talk about that concept right now?

**Corina Newsome 16:32**

Yeah, you know, I think that and I, in a conversation I had recently on Instagram Live. One of the things that I realized coming from a low-wealth background that has a lot of madness and chaos associated with it, because of the low income, low resource context in which I lived, and with my family lives one of the things that I realized is that when it comes to the this, the busyness of staying afloat, we, it kind of eliminates our ability to kind of be in touch with our life source, which is Wow, the natural world around us, right, which causes which is another essentially layer of harm done to people living in poverty, people getting in resource deprivation, yes. And it creates just like this cycle that feeds on itself, it just depletes you, you know, and one of the things that I've realized recently and like I've known but it really kind of crystallized for me recently was that, and depending on where you are, you have different amounts of access to this. I currently live in Atlanta, Georgia, which is called the City in the Forest, because even in your most low income areas, we have like old growth forests. And it just, it's unlike anything I've ever seen. That's not the case for every city and right, you know, low wealth community, by any means, especially some of your biggest cities. But there are even in those scenarios, there are ways to watch live to look closely at the life that's happening. And there is an actual, like you can feel, you can feel the difference that makes in your body as far as the stress levels and just the constant like tension that just exists from not knowing and having to ration constantly, like that is such a taxing way to live. Yeah. And the moment you stop for 30 seconds and watch a living thing, something lifts inside of you something just like a burden just feels it just like feels lighter somehow. And so I've realized that looking closely is like very much a necessary opportunity that everyone needs to be able to do. But you don't necessarily know that it's there if you're not taught so yeah, as much as I even loved while I was already a wildlife nerd. And I didn't even know that I could have looked closely at the world around me where I was and have seen so much life I didn't know there was life to see. Of course now that I've since I've gone back to Philadelphia and have like it, which is just very recent. Even since that book chapter I'd had the chance to just bird and look at birds. Oh, wait, there are birds here, right? I just didn't know. I had no teacher. I had no one showing me right. And I'm like, had I known to look at these things. I just imagined like how much stress I could have felt lifted off of me in those moments where I was sitting, panicked about like, oh my gosh, like, I don't have lunch for tomorrow, what am I going to eat like, oh my gosh, like our electricity got cut off like and I have to do all my homework before my battery runs out. I'm like, like all these moments where I had these just like gripping bouts of stress. And I could have looked outside and there was probably something I could have stared at, that would have lifted a burden even a little bit. And so it's, you know, kind of going back to the origin. Not only is that like a stress reliever that I'm really tapping into now and encouraging people to engage in now, but it's like, it's fun, like, oh my gosh, especially if

you're a person of faith, it's like, wow, you are able to see a reflection of the Creator who spoke this into existence, like and watch his word continue to create life, right? Like, we're continuing to see how life is bursting at the seams from everything from like, the diversity of birds and the planet, all the way down to like the, the morphology of a caterpillar, it's like there's so and you can never see it all. So it's just a constant, bottomless like, jar of a goal, like you could just like you. So if you there is no end of the supply of wonder there's no end of the supply of healing, that looking closely outside provides you and I'm just so grateful to our creator for giving us that bounty. And I'm very committed to addressing the ways in which that bounty is not accessible equally. kind of part of part of the work that I tried to do. One of the really incredible example of a framework through which I've seen faith communities, in specifically black faith communities engage with this, and it's not even so much in the realm of, or from the perspective of exploration for exploration's sake, or hmm, but in the context of, of actually addressing resource inequity and resource depletion, and from the, from the framework of food sovereignty. And so I've seen churches, there's a, there's a faith community that does have created the black church, black church, for oh, gosh, I have to look at that. I'm sorry, I can't think of it right now. But it's like a black church food sovereignty network that actually connects churches together across kind of the East Coast. And they part of their ministry is being outside and learning about food systems, and like having people grow food, and having people share food, and they're, you know, like that in itself. So right, like thinking about, in addition to the, the, just the joy of wow, like, look at these pits, like look at these, right? Because it's biodiversity, it's like, look at how food grows, and like, look at how much bounty there is, when we do it ourselves. And, you know, like, there are so many benefits that come from that, that addresses the issues and equity, but also connects people to our source of life. Yeah. And then and then of course, with that is this growing wonder and you get you are then positioned to look closely, oh my gosh, like, look at what just came up out of the earth, and I pulled up this carrot, Look what just came out, you know, like, look at the wildlife that's using this space that we have cultivated for our food, and using it for their own resources to you know, and it's, like they're seeing it be addressed in that kind of an intersectional way, is such a beautiful, beautiful thing. And it's tied very closely to activism is tied closely to community organizing, but it creates the space and the framework for people to be able to be connected, especially those, you know, communities who have been the private resources to be connected to the source of life of joy, of wonder. And so I tried to find ways to model that where I, you know, I try to prop up those kinds of examples, like, look at how multi-dimensional the benefits are when we do this.

**Nicole Diroff** 23:16

For me, this really relates to the question of hope, which I think people of faith kind of get this question thrown at them. Okay. You're a person of faith. So, where's your hope? You know, like, I need hope. Can you give me some hope? I don't know if you've had that experience or not. But I when I opened up your essay in "Rooted and Rising" another time, I loved that you started with this with this reference to Emily Dickinson, who says, hope is the Thing with Feathers that perches in the soul. Yeah, so I just I'd love to hear your thoughts on hope and what moved you so much about that quote to you know, have it be the what brings people into that essay?

**Corina Newsome** 24:08

Yeah, so I think for me, it was, it was the so the reason why that that essay, or that that poem was so meaningful to me was that as I began to learn about birds and study them very specifically, and very closely, I realized, and I referenced the Scripture in the essay about you know, about where God is right? If I go to the I might misquote this Lord have mercy, but essentially, no matter where I go, you are there if the depths of hell you're there, if it's

you know, on the mountaintop, you're there and it reminded me of birth so much because there's nowhere just about that you can go where there aren't birds. Hey man in the you can be in the, you know, filthiest like most urban like polluted environment, you're gonna see these extremely like hardy sparrows they may not be they may be an invasive species, but they're still they're still in their own right inherently beautiful birds incredible species, right you see life, you see life finding a way to exist and thrive in many ways. And then of course, if you go to these very what many people would consider to be pristine kind of ecosystems, of course, you see a brilliant diversity of birds, you also see, in places where birds are kind of given the resources they need to thrive, you see a greater diversity, you see, you know, so there's this parent, standing there with, with kind of releasing the releasing the bondage of injustice that creates resource scarcity and creates an overall scarcity and in the lives of people like me and my family who have kind of been in the middle of situations like this, like, when people are free to, to live in their, the fullness of their creativity, they're like that imagination, and that hope it just comes alive, it just bursts. And I've realized recently what I as I've been working more with young people, and particularly young people who are from backgrounds like mine, yeah, communities of color, black communities, low wealth communities, right. Like seeing them, kind of it has, you know, there are a lot of threads here, right, like, whether it's like our identity that we've kind of felt the need to or felt, you know, hostility towards because, you know, because of white supremacy, and because of, you know, anti-blackness and things like that, there's the, you know, seeing just the cultivation of love of self and all of who you are, has created a situation in which people are able to be so much more creative and be so much more imaginative. And that has really been the thing on which I own which my hope has, in which my hope has dwelled on it, yeah, like, wow, like, we actually, there's a whole lot more capacity here than I ever thought was possible, because people are able to exist in their, in their fullness in the fullness of their humanity. And when people experience marginalization of who they are, whether it's because of their sexual orientation, or because of their socio economic status, or because of their ethnic identity like that cramps us, like we're not even able to, like, we are not able to contribute like it's yeah, we can contribute so much more when we are able to exist in the fullness of our humanity. And so the reason that poem to me was so important is because

### **Corina 27:19**

a single bird, right, a single bird, in my act of studying it, studying them closely. If you were to look at it, you'd be like, Oh, this thing is fragile. Like, if you pick up a bird, right? You're like, this thing is lightweight. I could literally crush it if I try not very hard in my hand, right? It's full of hollow bones. It's full of air sacs. Right? Like, yes, it's mostly feathers. It's it feels like nothing like it was crumble under the pressure, right. And I feel like that is an assumption that a lot of people make about people who are pushed to the margins of society, who are like, in these vulnerable positions. It's like, like, one thing goes wrong and it could tear you apart like you not I mean, it just even from being someone in that position. It feels Yeah, all right. But at the same time, so say, like a little ruby throated hummingbird, that you can't even feel it, if you're holding it, it's like, am I holding anything? This same bird is flying over the Gulf of Mexico. And it takes a lot more work. That's because bird to fly than any other. So hummingbirds aren't like hawks, they can just like have their wings on soar, right, or a vulture. Like it's constant movement. It is constant work. Constant powered flight the whole time. They're flying over open, open ocean, open water, nonstop 18, 22 hours without ever stopping all the way down to South America. Right? It's like, if I was just to say to somebody, what do you think this can do? Yeah, I presented them a hummingbird. What do you think this can accomplish? They would never say what they actually can do, they would never imagine that they could, right. And so the combination of birds existing in every place, you can imagine the



combination of that with, you know, the fact that birds don't seem like they should be able to do very much, but they do just about the hardest physical feats of any living thing on this planet with their incredible migrations and their breeding seasons and the way that they live and survive, it's just like you would never think. And to me that that reminds me of the plight of my people that reminds me of like the way that people interpret me interpret us, right, and our ability and our capacity, and it's like, oh, no, like, you might think that we are fragile. You might think that we you know what I mean, but look how much we actually. Yeah, I mean, like, it's so yes, there are so many layers to why birds embody hope for me. And studying them has really crystallized and helped me to see wow, like the things that seem absolutely impossible, are very much possible and are happening in magnitudes and on scales that we can't even picture. I am really brimming. I am overwhelmed with gratitude. I'm overwhelmed with hope for the people that I've been able to build relationship with. The only thing that has drawn me out of hopelessness, the only thing that has drawn me out, I should say things that have drawn me out of what has, has, has at times felt like bottomless rage and anger around the issues that we're facing, is being able to be in relationships with people and relationship with, with creation of which we are, of course a part. And I think that separation from creation is what has led to the, the entirety, in many ways, yes, of the of the injustice of the exploitation of the scarcity that we now have that we're subjected to. Lack of relationship with creation and creator has created this situation. I'm encouraged to meet people and to engage with people who see the interconnectedness of these elements and who thrive and root their working relationship. And I think that that is one of the huge keys to our success as a as a unit as it as a human community as we move forward in realizing justice for the creation that God has spoken into this incident. I'm excited about the work and I'm grateful.

**Ben Yosua-Davis 31:16**

That last image that she shares of the birds, was one that just hit me right in the gut, this point where she says, you may think that we are fragile, but dot dot dot, and I've been thinking about this idea of empowerment and disempowerment and fragility, because I think it's really easy in moments like this, with climate, with racial justice, with all the incredible challenges that are facing us as a society, to move to places of apathetic disempowerment, there's this whole like, well, the world is gonna burn no matter what we do. So might as well order another package from Amazon sort of attitude. But one of the things I noticed in your conversation is how she framed what she was sharing with you by talking about imagination, and then linking it to the practice of hope, and how that can bring us into this place of empowerment. So I was really curious, that was one thing that really struck me, how did that land with you as you were talking with her?

**Nicole Diroff 32:14**

I appreciate this question, Ben. And what I'm holding in my mind is, the moment in the conversation when Corina spoke about actually sitting with the tension of not knowing where lunch is going to come from the next day. She speaks that line kind of quickly. But that came into my body in a way that I was able to picture her younger self. I spent 15 years in Philadelphia, so imagining her in in Philadelphia with those concerns. Then this next image, it's like it leaps to this other image for me of Corina, holding a small bird in her hands. And having this description of birds that have very fragile bones. I don't think I have ever had the opportunity to hold a bird in my hand. But I can picture what she's saying. What do you think this thing could accomplish? What do you think this being can accomplish? That line then comes to both of those images, holding this little bird and holding the depleted nests of feeling like there were so few options, literally even to know where lunch was



coming from. The two things I heard her say were people and not people and sort of the more than human, the connections. Paying attention to the connections is what creates possibility is what brings her to the more which we may call God or the divine. I don't know if any of that resonated for you, Ben in terms of connection, and that being a place of possible imagination, and maybe even hope,

**Ben Yosua-Davis 34:20**

As you share about that I was thinking about how connection is a source of imagination and new metaphor and how important it actually is to renew our relationship with the more than human community in order to renew our imaginations. As I think about some of the work that I've done with The BTS Center around organizational leadership, one of the most renewing things for the organizational leaders who we've been working with is just bringing ecological imagination or ecological metaphors in into the room, inviting people to go to their natural environment and let it be their teacher. What does a tree or a dog have to say about productivity? As it turns out a lot, and some things that are actually really important, and really timely for the moment that we're in. And the other thing I often think about is how our relationship with the more than human community indeed, I find this is true of my relationship with my children as well. Kind of helps me relativize or put into correct perspective, all these big things that we're holding. I noticed this with my children all the time. It's like, yes, the world is on fire. But right now the most urgent thing in my life is that my daughter needs Cheerios. And doing so brings me out of this kind of heady place of anxious disempowerment and back into my body back into the concrete back into the relational back into the real. And I find the same thing happens for me when I'm working on the when I'm working on this property it's very easy to sit and you know, doom scroll. But in the end, like the sheetrock in a house, that's mouldy needs to be torn out, the lawn has to be mowed. Flower bulbs have to be planted, I find doing so is not actually it's not a distraction from the important work. But it's a way to ground the work back in something that is concrete and physical and relational and real in ways that actually gives my imagination power that enables my imagination and the ideas that I have when I build my castles in the air to actually be able to touch the earth in a way that can grow something new.

**Nicole Diroff 36:23**

One of the things Corina says is that she really didn't have anyone to teach her to look closely. You and I both have young children and are into this more than human world exploration stuff. But I was thinking about beyond parents, who does do that teaching these days, and how do we support those opportunities to actually teach a young person or just another person and adult also, this ability to look closely and find the healing and the possibility that Corina speaks of in actually paying deep attention.

**Ben Yosua-Davis 37:05**

As you share that I immediately think back to the contemplative practices that are a part of my tradition, because that is actually what took me into a place where I began to notice the more than human world around me. My teachers, when it came to that were people like Teresa of Avila, and Julian of Norwich, and Meister Eckhart and some of the people who have been my spiritual teachers who are still living today. And I note that we live in a culture more than ever of perpetual distraction. One of the reasons why it's hard for nature to teach us now is because it speaks in cadences that are far slower than our smartphones. And so we're sitting in a place and something doesn't happen within five seconds of a desire true, doesn't happen right in five seconds, you know, the bird's just sitting there, it's not doing anything entertaining, like in the YouTube video we just watched

before that bird or that moss, so that tree has a chance to teach us we take out our smartphone, and we check social media, or we look at our email or whatever it is that we've been trained attentionally to do. But of course, the contemplative life, and this is true in every spiritual tradition, is all about noticing. It's all about paying attention to what's showing up so you can show up to the world. And so you can show up to your own life. And to me, this is such a key part of what it means to be engaged in the work that we're that we're doing nowadays, there's this tendency to get consumed by whatever like the crisis of the minute is, and Heaven knows there are always 40 billion bad things happening in the world that feel like they demand our emotional and spiritual attention. Sometimes the thing we have to do is stop and notice that we're getting pulled in, and then bring ourselves back into our bodies and into the place that we're supposed to be so that we can engage the work from a position of stillness, a position of non-anxiety or peace or love, rather than a position of, oh my goodness, what's going to happen next? I think as well about how that awareness that we have of the natural world and of these relations. Also, we then carry back into our own understanding of relations within the human world and issues like white supremacy, and racial terror and structural injustice, which have been surfaced so powerfully and so painfully, especially over the last few years.

**Nicole Diroff** 39:34

I know you and I been and those of us connected to The BTS Center are really committed to diversifying the perspectives that we're seeing through. Living in Philadelphia, I know that my neighborhood it was considered a downtown neighborhood it was an urban neighborhood, but the neighborhood I was living in had trees and Corina's didn't I constantly need to be in conversation with Corina to know what even this same geography is experienced like by someone who's in a neighborhood without the trees that I am completely taking for granted.

**Ben Yosua-Davis** 40:17

Nicole, one of the things I appreciate about this is this notion of how access to nature as teacher is tied up in racism, how even when it comes to these very foundational sources of wisdom that we need to be human how even their access has been tied into and limited by the white supremacist structures that are a part of who we are as a nation.

**Nicole Diroff** 40:43

This commitment to see through other experiences, other human experiences, other experiences from the natural world, it builds what's true. For me that requires getting as you said out of the distraction entertainment cycle, and realizing there is there is so much more. There is so much more. As I mentioned earlier, you heard just a piece of our longer conversation. If you want to hear the full thing, please check it out. Visit [thebtscenter.org/climate-changed](http://thebtscenter.org/climate-changed). At this point in our podcast, we love to shift into talking a little about what could be next. So let me share a couple of things that come from Corina is work first if you want to make your home more bird friendly. Corina links to an article from American Bird Conservancy. Glass collisions kill up to 1 billion birds in the US each year and almost half happen at home windows. I just saw on the most recent Audubon newsletter, the image at the top were these children painting with glass markers – "I love birds!" – all over their glass doors, and – "don't run in here!" So this is something you can do today. Just visit [ABCbirds.org](http://ABCbirds.org) and look under the solutions tab. Ben what are you thinking about in terms of next steps from this conversation?

**Ben Yosua-Davis** 42:34

So if you're looking for an organization to help out, I'd actually suggest the one that Corina mentioned which is the Black Church Food Security Network. Their national organizer Reverend Heber Brown III actually co-lead a presentation for us on imagination back in 2021. Another great place at the Boston Food Forest Coalition which starts intense urban food forests throughout Boston. We'll post links to both places in the show notes along with a link to our conversation with Heber back in 2021.

**Nicole Diroff** 43:03

You can also make a difference by making a donation to Freedom Birders. Freedom Birders is a racial justice education project built on inspiration from the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Lives Matter movement and #blackbirdersweek. Visit [freedombirders.org](https://freedombirders.org) to make that donation.

**Ben Yosua-Davis** 43:23

And one last one, if any of you are interested in starting to engage with nature as we've been talking about from a place of noticing and how nature can be a teacher, our colleague, Aram Mitchell has put together an amazing set of trail side practices. These are all short videos, three or four minutes that you can engage with. It'll give you some different exercises you can do in your encounter with wild nature which may be out on the trail somewhere or in your backyard, and we'll put a link to those as well. There are about five different ones you can choose.

**Nicole Diroff** 43:57

Thank you so much for joining us for this episode of Climate Changed podcast.

**Ben Yosua-Davis** 44:07

We would love to hear your thoughts and responses to our conversation. We also welcome any suggestions you have for this new show.

**Nicole Diroff** 44:14

Feel free to email us anytime at [podcast@thebtscenter.org](mailto:podcast@thebtscenter.org).

**Ben Yosua-Davis** 44:19

Our podcast is produced by the amazing Peterson Toscano and as a project of The BTS Center in beautiful Portland, Maine

**Nicole Diroff** 44:31

Learn more about the many resources we share and our regular online programming by visiting the [theBTScenter.org](https://thebtscenter.org). We wish you well as you notice maples and pigeons and our human brothers and sisters living right beside us.