

Daddy, Did We Hurt Them?

Tue, Oct 25, 2022 6:28AM • 54:35

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

grief, people, world, ben, conversation, book, child, michael, ways, son, hope, hannah, climate, stories, loss, community, feel, essay, church, moment

SPEAKERS

Nicole Diroff, Ben Yosua-Davis, Michael DiMonte, Hannah Malcolm

Ben Yosua-Davis 00:03

You are listening to Climate Changed, a podcast about pursuing faith, life, and love in a climate-changed world.

Nicole Diroff 00:11

Hosted by me, Nicole Diroff

Ben Yosua-Davis 00:14

and me, Ben Yosua-Davis, Climate Changed features guests who deepen the conversation while also stirring the waters.

Nicole Diroff 00:23

The Climate Changed podcast is a project of The BTS Center. So Ben, this final episode of season one of Climate Changed goes pretty deep. It's a little emotional. And there's some conversation about grief and hard things. All of which is true. But I also feel like in this time, we need joy. We need wonder and we need connection. Okay, how about wonder. Where have you been finding wonder?

Ben Yosua-Davis 00:58

So I was remembering this moment this last summer, I was out really, really late on a weekend finishing installing these windows that are about three stories up. There had been a piece of equipment it was supposed to come in the afternoon, it didn't come until seven o'clock at night. So like I'm up 25 feet in the air with my dad like handing me saws and equipment like through the opening where our window is supposed to be. And we finally get done with this work at 11 o'clock at night. I am grumpy, I am exhausted. I get down from the cherry picker I walk out, and our side field looks like it's on fire. There are more fireflies in it than I've ever seen before. It was it was one of the most extraordinary things I've ever seen. And so I remember I just sat on kind of the remains of what used to be the porch steps and looked out at the field and thought even in a moment like this where I am tired, exhausted, and dirty, life is still irreducibly wonderful and miraculous. What about you?

Nicole Diroff 02:06

That's a beautiful image. We have been harvesting green beans from our garden. And I have to say, the way the green beans grow on the stalk has been bringing me so much wonder. They kind of always come in twos. And they have this certain way of growing a little bit and then sending out a new shoot for more growth. And it's drawing close to these green beans that has been opening up wonder for me.

Ben Yosua-Davis 02:41

Fresh green beans were always one of the highlights of my summer when I was growing up. There is nothing quite as delicious as when you pick straight off the vine.

Nicole Diroff 02:50

Now as we move into our episode, what can you tell us about what's headed our way?

Ben Yosua-Davis 02:56

Today I'm sharing the story of this beautiful and heartbreaking moment I had with my son around the dinner table. I get a little raw with this one. The topic is so deeply personal for me.

Nicole Diroff 03:11

As a fellow parent, I have been both looking forward to and feeling a little nervous about hearing what you have to say. Living in a climate-changed world is challenging. And helping to navigate my own child through it all can feel overwhelming.

Ben Yosua-Davis 03:29

And I'm hoping that my reflections along with the discussions that you had with your dad and Hannah Malcolm will help all of us even those of us who aren't parents enter into this moment in a way that is honest and grounded, and hopeful.

Nicole Diroff 03:44

Before we listen to the audio essay you prepared for us, let's take a moment to center. In every episode of Climate Changed, we bring you a grounding. Today, I'm inviting Hannah Malcolm, the editor of an amazing book that we have been engaging with at The BTS Center called Words for a Dying World: Stories of Grief and Courage from the Global Church. I invited her to share one of the many poems in this book with all of us as our grounding. Hannah.

Hannah Malcolm 04:24

Thank you, Nicole. I want to share with you a poem written by David Benjamin Blower who is a musician, writer, and podcaster. And this poem comes from an album that he released in 2019 called We Really Existed and We Really Did This, which is a record of reflections on ecological breakdown. This poem is called The Wall. We all walk into the future backwards, because the past is our only reference. And only rarely does the present demand that we turn and refer to what stood there ahead of us and when the future demands that we turn and behold, we will confound it and say no, and any who turn and say what they see, we will no longer break bread with these. For if we must hit the wall, it is our wish to do so unknowingly. Can we hope for any better ending than this? If only it was so but we do know, we can smell it and we can feel it in our bones. And to suspend our knowing unknowing, we go

and hang what we know on the tired bones of those, scapegoat the wretched of the earth for the judgement that we piled against ourselves. And all before creation gives birth to the new things we cannot imagine. Nor should we have any right to taste them. And then she will take back from us all her stolen Sabbath's rest. We will say on that holy day. "Amen, and yes."

Nicole Diroff 06:01

Thank you. You will hear more from Hannah Malcolm later in the program. But first we will share with you Ben's audio essay. It is called "Daddy, Did We Hurt Them?"

Ben Yosua-Davis 06:14

Meet my son, Michael, "hello." What are you doing today? "I might be sewing seaglass today." Seaglass? What sort of seaglass? "Seaglass wrapped in wire." Seaglass wrapped in wire. What is your favorite thing in the whole wide world? "My family and God." I swear we did not cue him to say that. Michael's six. He's in kindergarten at the little two room schoolhouse on the island where we live. Pre K through five. Nine students. Michael spends a lot of time outdoors. The school on forest Fridays, shooting baskets in our half overgrown backyard, at the farmstead of his BFF Hayden where he runs around gleefully among the chickens, playing all the games with swords that mom and dad won't let him play at home. My love for him could reignite the sun. That's also true for my two and a half year old ball of adorable ferociousness Genevieve. But let's just talk about Michael for a moment. We're in that peaceful season where parenting is a mutual love affair. We play baseball and he changes the rules every time he's about to lose. We read long chapter books together about toads and toll booths and dragons. And I hope soon about hobbits. We have family dance parties where I've almost convinced him to like songs written more than five years ago. We pray together every night saying the words that my grandmother taught my mom and my mom taught me. And he thanks God for coming home and seeing daddy and prays for his friend Ari, who moved away a few weeks ago and asks for God to help him be a good listener. And to be okay when he makes mistakes. We have this game that we play. It's almost become a litany. Michael, guess what? "What? You love me?" Why do I love you? "Because I'm their son." Why are you my son? "Because God wanted me to be your son." My children are pure gift. Yes, sometimes crying, tantruming, utterly exasperating gifts who break things and poop in inconvenient places, but still pure gift. My children are the ones who keep me grounded and teach me joy. That's important for me. I work in climate, and I love my job. But sometimes, I have to stare into the abyss that is the consequences of our flagrant abuse of the world. And some days, that's fine. But other days, the Abyss stares back in ways that break my heart. One night at dinner, I was explaining to Michael that I would not be able to put him to bed that night. I would be working in my office on a gathering about helping people grieve for all the places in the world that have been hurt. He asked "Did we hurt them?" We've had a lot of difficult conversations with my son since the Pandemic began. His remaining great grandparents died in the last two years. And we couldn't go to their funerals. We've talked about George Floyd, and why all his favourite basketball players are kneeling during the national anthem. We've talked about wars in Ukraine, and why Russian soldiers are killing people. And I've learned, my son can hear hard things. How do you describe planetary devastation to a six year old? In a way that's not either straight out terrifying or straight out lying? How do you explain that the We is a horrible knot of definitions and guilt is that all humans, just Americans, just certain privileged ones of which we are a part who have had our lifestyles sponsored by the hurt? Just those of us in this farmhouse kitchen, on this particular island, right now? And how do you do all of this in a word, born

from a mere silent moment? My wife and I looked at each other for a frozen second, across the dinner table. I took a deep breath. Yes, we hurt them. Not you personally. It's just really hard to live in the country that we do. And not hurt the planet. I'm taken back to when Michael was born. That was maybe the holiest moment of my life. No one could describe what it would be like to watch my child take his first breath. No one could describe what it would be like to lie, nose to nose with my son minutes after he was born as he lay on his mother's chest and have our eyes locked for one eternal moment. I remember, I sat and rocked him back and forth in my arms. I told him over and over. You are my son. You are my son. And felt within myself something change at such a subterranean level that I knew it would take a lifetime to understand what it was. We want to give our children the world when they're born. But what does that mean when the world we give them has been broken? By us. It's not just that the world will be a harder place for my son than it was for me. It's not just that he has weathered one pandemic and will likely have to weather more. It's not just that someday, he will go to a funeral for an island beach that families have gone to for generations to play in the waves and harvest clams at low tide. It's not just that as bad as it will be for him, it will be far worse for most of his kin, the human ones and the not human ones, most of whom have far less responsibility for this moment than I do. Or he does. It's that we did it. It's that I did it. I hurt them. We hurt them. The We doesn't mean all of us. But it definitely means me. And people like me in our white bodies, whose privilege was built on generations of exploitation and abuse. We who are taught that the world exists for the purpose of our convenience. In other words, the we around this table right now, and my son, especially the we of me and you. But yes, we did it. I did it. I did it, in part because sometimes I don't know any better or didn't have any other choices. I did it because abuse is baked into our way of life, confirmed in policy by our government, monetized by our corporations, enforced by our culture in ways that we simply can't control or just don't notice. But sometimes, I did notice. And I still did it. For the dumbest reasons. I did it. So we could have snacks and convenient plastic pouches and flat screen televisions that could swallow a wall. I did it to numb myself on instant entertainment and to your door retail therapy. I did it because I didn't want to have hard conversations didn't want to fight for what's right. And more than anything else I didn't want to compromise my precious lifestyle, which is based on burning the future generations of our children to the ground. We became the bane of flying and swimming creatures so our sandwiches would only cost 99 cents. Exterminated species for sport or because they happen to be in our way or because we just didn't give a shit. Chop down trees older than any of our remembered ancestors so we could build cheap furniture. And now because it's always a cycle that consequences rest on all of us. But more than that will rest on our children who will have to struggle with the birth rights we broke, while our bodies lie in privileged preservation in the ground. Yes, we hurt them, I hurt them. And that, my son, is our birthright to you, along with all the love I could possibly give. Back at that kitchen table, my son paused again. "I want to stop people from hurting them," he said. "Even if they hurt me when I do it." In this moment is all my rage and grief and hope. Rage at my son's birth right broken through no fault of his own. Grief at the undeniable reality that there's nothing I can do about it, and hope because of the determination of a single young soul who wants to stop people from hurting his kin, even if people hurt him when he does it. People like me are taught that hope rests on dominance. It's the unspoken assumption that lies under all our make a differences and change the worlds. We were told that we were the self styled gods of the universe, that there was nothing that we couldn't do, nothing we couldn't be, no challenge that couldn't be overcome with hard work and innovation. We don't know how to deal with problems that simply cannot be fixed. We have no way of hoping in the face of problems that cannot be fixed. Because hope for us must always be an expression of power. Against all of this,

there is "I want to stop people from hurting them. Even if they hurt me when I do it." And there is power there that goes beyond the mere utility of saving the world. It is its own precious gift, one that doesn't need to save anything in order to be of incalculable worth.

Nicole Diroff 20:18

After listening to Ben share so deeply a story about his own son, I decided to sit down with my own dad. Hi, dad.

Michael DiMonte 20:29

Hi, Nicole.

Nicole Diroff 20:30

Ben's audio essay, both opened my heart and got me thinking, yeah, we're a little older than Ben and his son in sort of a different phase of life. In fact, I have a child, you have a grandchild about the age of Michael. Introduce yourself, in whatever way feels right to you.

Michael DiMonte 20:54

Well, curiously, I'm a Michael, as well. So I'm an engineer by training, and education. I'm now retired, but spend a lot of time working in the church. Now, I'm not really a big church person. I think I'm a pretty faithful person. Not hugely engaged in the institution of the church. But family's sure important.

Nicole Diroff 21:24

Thank you. I wonder if there's anything you remember from me at five, what I was like at five, or what it felt like to be a dad of a five year old, young girl.

Michael DiMonte 21:38

As Ben commented that his son can ask important questions or can hear important things. That's one of the standouts, for me relative to you, and also your brother Jonathan, that, you know, we had pretty clear conversations. And you asked pretty pointed questions. Just the way, you know, Michael, six year old five year old Michael, makes very pertinent comments. Children can see through the clutter. There's a lot of clutter in our environment. And sometimes their view is more direct.

Nicole Diroff 22:33

Yeah, I think it's really easy as parents and grandparents to feel like, kids are not ready to hear more. This is a real opportunity for families, for families across generations to notice some things, to talk about the ways we're choosing to live in the world. And to name that there are some choices in that. There are some values that we bring to those choices.

Michael DiMonte 23:02

When we articulate things, when we try to answer your questions, there's always a feedback loop that helps clarify things for us. If you just contemplate it in your mind, there's something powerful about speaking the answer out loud that is both clarifying for you, because you've had to articulate it. And it'll also take you to next steps.

Nicole Diroff 23:34

Yeah, I feel like Ben wrestles so actively in his piece around his own and his family's own level of, of guilt, in relationship to what's happening. As I talk with people of different generations, about the climate crisis, there is a sense from young people that there's a real sense of anger and frustration, not being in decision making roles yet and feeling like they will bear out the consequences of lifestyles that both you and I have grown very comfortable with.

Michael DiMonte 24:14

Yeah, it's true. Very true. Yeah.

Nicole Diroff 24:16

And I wonder how and if you're talking about that at all with your peers, and how for you, you hold those emotions.

Michael DiMonte 24:28

Lord knows there's plenty of things in the world today that we can regret, which are things of our making one way or another, whether it's climate change, or something else, you know, can take you down and they can bring it to a pretty low spot. The way I cope with that is really kind of the Okay, acknowledge it, own it. Make a plan and do something about, get off your bum and do something about it. Because there are things we can do, we can steer the boat in one direction or another, it's long term, it's not, it's not a sharp U turn. It's a slow arc.

Nicole Diroff 25:23

Makes me think about where Ben went in his audio essay. The ending point is really him taking in Michael's sense that he's willing to sacrifice. He's a five year old, willing to sacrifice. Ben's reflection on our hope, not lying in dominance, which is often where we put our hope in a sense that we'll be able to fix it, we'll be able to figure it out and win whatever fight we're in. Ben points to his hope, coming from Michael's willingness to be selfless.

26:11

Wow. Right. So of course, we have the Christian value of service, which parallels some of the things that you were alluding to. It's so important to be of service to others. I personally probably can't shed, at this point, that orientation towards power. When I say get off your bum and take action, right, that's kind of a reflection again, of looking to some form of personal influence, personal power, contribution, however minuscule that component may be, I still am turning back to that.

Nicole Diroff 26:55

Thank you, dad for this conversation, and for being my dad, and for the family that I was raised in and continue to be a part of now as an adult, and, and with my own with my own children.

Michael DiMonte 27:13

Thank you, I love love, love you.

Nicole Diroff 27:17

I love you too Dad. Hannah Malcolm, thank you so much for agreeing to have a conversation with me.

Hannah Malcolm 27:31

It's really lovely to have this conversation with you. And I found Ben's audio essay really moving incredibly thoughtful in the way that it was put together.

Nicole Diroff 27:40

When people ask you what you do. How do you respond to that question?

Hannah Malcolm 27:46

I usually start by saying that I'm training to be ordained as a priest in the Church of England. And then I say that I'm also writing a PhD about how we can think theologically about loss because of climate breakdown and ecological collapse. Usually, that's sufficient to create an awkward energy between me and the other person. Either they would rather not talk about religion, or they'd rather not talk about climate change. And sometimes it's both. If the conversation goes further, we might talk about how those two things also interact in other parts of my life, in some of the kind of organising and campaigning work that I do. That's plenty.

Nicole Diroff 28:28

I wonder if there are identities that are important to you that you might want to share as we start this conversation.

Hannah Malcolm 28:37

I'm British, white British. I've lived most of my life in the UK, although I also lived in the States for a couple of years, where I met my husband, who is from Alaska, originally. I suppose for this broader conversation, one of the pieces that has been very interesting for me to explore has been around some of maybe like the meritocracy type ideas or ideals about yourself that you can grow up with, if you grew up in a middle class environment. I was raised by parents who were very passionate that we would kind of take our faith really seriously and what it means in the world. And for them, that meant, you know, some quite sacrificial things. But also, if you grew up in the kind of middle class world where education is really important and where you believe that problems can be solved if people try hard enough, right? Like that's the kind of belief that can be really easily absorbed. That was one of the bits of disentangling that I think I had to do as an adult as I came to terms with climate change as something that it didn't matter quite what I did. There was real failure repeatedly in that story. So that's another bit of I think, my identity that's been interesting for me to engage with, as I've explored particularly my responses to climate change.

Nicole Diroff 29:56

I love that you went there right from the beginning because this is piece of your writing and thinking that I just want to name I don't see anyone else doing it quite in the same way that you are reflecting on privilege in the context of ecological grief. And I think Ben does that also in his own way, including really at the end, where he starts probing into what hope looks like, when it's not about dominance. And it's not about figuring out the fix. When he shared that, I'm wondering if you'll let me read back a few of your own words? I thought of you almost immediately. Here's a sentence or two that you wrote, in your

introduction to Words for a Dying World. "In the West, we have imagined ourselves as the great problem solvers and architects of the earth. Perhaps we are now pricked by guilt, at the cost of our position. But we still assume that our position is the one from which improvement, or even salvation will emerge. That is, if it is to emerge at all." Ben talks about hope in the face of problems, that cannot be fixed.

Hannah Malcolm 31:25

Yeah, it's really interesting to go straight to this question of how we talk about hope, in meaningful ways. Part of the encounter with grief over climate change was, in some ways, a kind of recognising a generational thing. So my granddad was a climate scientist. When you are a child, you really do believe on some level that your parents and your grandparents have a lot more power in the world than they do. He spoke with so much urgency about climate change, but actually, his work, in some ways had the opposite effect on me, it didn't create anxiety, it created a sense of confidence that people like him, you know, we're working so hard on this problem, and had dedicated their lives to trying to tackle this at a global level. So of course, by the time I was a grown up, this would be something that had been solved. Realising as an adult, you know, looking at his the work he had done, and all of the good things he had been involved in, and yet, you know, accepting that carbon emissions have only risen over his lifetime, you know, as a real material measure of where we've got to. And lots of us that are involved in activism, we have to do this process where we begin really very earnestly thinking, you know, if I, if I attend enough marches, or I sign enough petitions, or I write to enough people, then we'll see real transformation, and those projects tend to fail, at least in the short term. We also then discover just how tangled up we are, you know, complicity in whatever the thing is that we're angry about. That kind of feeling of trying to peel back layers of an onion, right? And just never getting to the heart of what's really going on. That thing that Ben says about this hope of wedded to power in our minds, right? That kind of challenge to us that how do we sustain hope when we feel powerless? Or when we discover our powerlessness or, you know, even just our failure, even when we have done things sometimes we do things in ways which are destructive when we intend for the good? Yeah, that's one of the themes that comes up quite strongly in this podcast series, actually, that I found really interesting, the different ways people have talked about hope. Yeah, and how that comes up again, in Ben's piece. I really loved the way that Veronice Miles kind of shaped her description of hope, as embodied hope. That really comes out in this description that you get from Ben's son, of embodied hope, very, sort of viscerally right, that he's willing to accept hurts in order to behave in hopeful ways. That for me, is what we talk about when we talk about hope. It's, are we able to commit ourselves to behaving in hopeful ways even when that is from a place of weakness and vulnerability. And in my own kind of Christian thinking about this and my theological thinking about it, I found it very helpful to remember that in the Christian tradition, hope is a virtue, as much as it is, you know, a feeling that we can have that hope, like love is a virtue that, you know, you can't just have the virtue of hope by sort of wanting to be hopeful. You have to have the virtue of hope by practising hopefulness; virtues come through the action of developing a habit. So we become inhabited by hopefulness when we continue to kind of pursue living in that way, even when the consequences don't seem like what we'd hoped they might be. So yeah, I found that a really like a really interesting bit of connection between these different conversations over the series.

Nicole Diroff 35:05

Thank you so much for adding that description of hope to this thread that we absolutely have been following in the podcast this season. As Ben wrestles so actively with the use of the word "We" in his audio essay, I wonder your take on that, especially as you were the editor of a book of stories from all over the globe, people sharing grief and courage. I wonder how, as an editor, you responded to the different times when people used I, or We, in terms of the corporate and or personal responsibility for the crisis we're facing.

Hannah Malcolm 35:51

That was a couple of different ways that this manifested itself in the way the book came together. I really did notice a sort of geographical divide in how people situated themselves. Someone actually it was David Benjamin Blower, who pointed out to me that when he read the other essays in the book, he said that a lot of the accounts from the west came across as really lonely. They felt lonely, because the people writing them seemed lonely in their experience of this loss, the sense of, you know, living in a culture that is not acknowledging the problem and feeling a sense of detachment, right in isolation as a result. And also, you know, that's a highly individualistic culture. And so the personal came to dominate. And also, to be honest, I think, as well, even for those who tried to talk about their corporate response in the West, there was a real, you know, there's a real sense of like, extractive capitalism is a very lonely place to live like it, it creates loneliness. It alienates us from each other, as well as from the land. And so there was a real, there was a real "I" focus, not only in terms of talking about responsibility, but also in terms of sense of loss. Yeah, and a lot of the accounts that were based in the minority world. A sense of corporate identity was much stronger in the accounts that came from majority world writers, both in the sense of what they had to lose, and also the response that they were making.

Nicole Diroff 37:23

Wow.

Hannah Malcolm 37:24

That was true, both in kind of the present level, like how they described where they were situated, but also in terms of the histories that they drew on. So one of the things about editing it that was just a learning thing for me, yeah, was this historical, intergenerational dimension to putting the collection together. When I started the process of thinking about it, I thought, I'll probably divide this book geographically. Yeah, so I'll probably have people from different parts of the world and group those contributions together. And then we'll, they'll kind of interact with each other in interesting ways. And you will see different perspectives, but from similar locations, but one of the things, the themes that really emerged from people's contributions that just hadn't occurred to me at the sort of to the extent that it came out was this, that, you know, we're creatures of history, that climate and ecological grief takes place in relation to the past, present, and future. And that was also really obvious in the ways people talked about "We" in terms of the history of their people, and in terms of the kind of future that they saw for their family, and how they related to those two kinds of collective groups. And so in the end, that's how I divided up the book. Yeah, into past, present and future. Obviously, those locations in time, also confront each other and overlap, and they fall apart. And also they hold us in place. Yeah, that was, I think, a really interesting element of this I versus we dynamic.

Nicole Diroff 38:54

I wonder for you, what it meant to turn to the globe. Why listen to stories from all across the globe, as you make meaning of understanding the grief we're facing as a species?

Hannah Malcolm 39:10

That was quite a basic reason, which was that we do grieve something that feels like the loss of the whole, but also that grief is manifest in particular places. So our grief kind of belongs to places, right. It's an expression of love and love over the loss of particular things, particular peoples, in order to create some kind of meaningful framework for talking about global loss, we need to see what is the particular that we're losing? Yeah. And I'm sorry, I really wanted to do justice to that. Another reason that's a fairly basic one was that our conversations about climate and ecological grief can very easily be dominated by Western voices. Yes, just because this is where a lot of the conversation has been held anyway. I didn't want to just give another minority world perspective, I wanted to bring into conversation, voices that would in some ways contradict with each other and clash with each other. Because we're not talking about a homogenous experience, right. Like one of the things that makes climate change so difficult to engage with is that it doesn't create a shared future, it creates disparate futures, the future kind of splinters before us. And we will anticipate very different kinds of realities. As we move forward. Even though we're faced with the same global problem. It creates very disparate futures. So I wanted to do justice to that problem, as well. And I think the last thing I would say is that I really do think that grief, and the way that we experience it is very much a learned behaviour. So one of the dangers I think we face with talking about grief, is that we can treat it in, at least in the minority world, because we've had a highly kind of pathologized and medicalized approach to dealing with grief, particularly in the last century, is that we can treat it as quite a private and personal experience. And also one that's not really open to criticism or questions from other people, right, like my feelings are inevitable, and so I can't change them and so you can't criticise them. In some ways that there is an element of truth to that for, you know, very highly personal losses. But we're not dealing with a personal loss, we're dealing with a loss, which affects everybody, it's a shared context of loss. There's quite a lot of danger in our grief becoming highly personalised. This kind of grief can make us nihilistic, it can make us selfish, it can make us behave in destructive ways, as well as compassionate ways. I wanted to push against the idea that the way you feel about climate change, however you feel is it's fine. And it's an open question. Yes, actually, you know, that leads to like, the United States currently spends more on border control than on climate solutions, like we have, you know, we can, our feelings about this, these problems can become political, they can become material in the way we respond. I wanted to create a dialogue about grief, that will be challenging, as well. And in the process of being confronted with other people's grief experiences. There's a learning that goes on. So we're learning again, what's worthy of grief and what isn't. And if we only hear stories like our own, then we will believe our grief is the one that's most worthy of attention. And that takes an attentiveness to the losses that others I think encountered to learn again, what kind of grief really matters, what kind of grief we need to pay attention to.

Nicole Diroff 42:38

Yes, well said Hannah. Amen. Amen to that. As we wrestle with our emotions and grief in response to the climate crisis, when we are invited to bring those emotions into community, and direct that grief towards the divine, there's increased understanding in that expression. I wonder if this might be a

moment for you to share either a story of something you saw or experienced, or a vision for what you could imagine the church doing to help with this sorting of emotions.

Hannah Malcolm 43:25

One of the real key passions of mine is how we transition from expressions of grief into corporate laments.

Nicole Diroff 43:34

Yes.

Hannah Malcolm 43:35

In the Jewish and Christian traditions, lament is always prayer, and it's corporate expression, of anger, of loss. Yeah, of suffering, of pain of desire for change to God, that is distinct to grief, because it's turned outwards is always turned outwards towards God and towards the community. The church has a real place to play in being somewhere where we turn our grief outwards. And that's a quite conscious thing that we participate in, both in terms of participating in lament and also in how we respond to this kind of loss. The churches as a place of safety, as a place of refuge and a community. We have to ask what that might mean spiritually in terms of helping people to practice lament, and the transformative power of corporate lament of corporate prayer. And also how we respond to that feeling of grief practically what resourcing churches can give people. And this comes right down to the really like the basic stuff like making cool church buildings available to people and heat waves being places of refuge in in increasing extreme weather events and storms. This winter in the UK, we are facing an energy price crisis. Churches who are able to do so many of them will be offering warm banks, when people can come and be warm in a building.

Nicole Diroff 45:04

Yep

Hannah Malcolm 45:04

There is that like spiritual practice that I think is vital. And in many ways the church is already resourced to do it. Because we already have the lament Psalms, we already have these practices of confession. Yeah, of turning to God, collectively, acknowledging where we've gone wrong, asking for help, sort of acknowledging pain, and then looking to a kind of conviction that that death cannot win. And then we're sent out into the world, we have this pattern of gathering and sending, which already facilitates that work. And how we incorporate into that really practical expressions of response to climate change is, I think vital. So churches already are good at doing a lot of this stuff with things like food poverty, with responding to other kinds of immediate material need lots of churches do that work, but how we think about these other kinds of crises coming around the corner, and what it means to be a refuge, physically, as well as spiritually for people and the relationship between those two things. That's something I'm really passionate about.

Nicole Diroff 46:03

Thank you. Earlier, we talked about the thread of understanding hope in this podcast series. Another thread that I think weaves through this podcast series is the practice of paying attention. I wonder how that theme has emerged in the stories you've been collecting?

Hannah Malcolm 46:27

Yeah, I loved how Robin Wall Kimmerer puts it in terms of the, you know, grief that emerges from intimacy. Yeah. And the cost of attention that comes with that. And you see that in Ben's son's response as well, right, a willingness to learn, and then a willingness to let it hurt. And in some ways, the whole book was a kind of exercise in the softening, that we go through that, like, it's painful to let yourself be softened by these stories, because it's easier to hide behind the statistics. Yeah, to let statistics make the numbers of losses almost meaningless to us. It's much more painful to confront the stories of communities. I loved as well, this theme of children teaching adults, and vice versa. That, you know, we see in that episode, that episode with Corina Newsome, that's something that goes on in that conversation between Ben and his son as well. That paying attention kind of like grief is a learned behaviour, right? We're learning what to pay attention to in the world, we're learning what matters based on what we choose to speak about. Right? Yeah, there's two kinds of learning that you hear in that conversation between Ben and his son, there's a moment of teaching, and I'm teaching you that this is a kind of grief in the world that you can attend to, in your own way, as a child, that you can be aware of this, and then a teaching in response of like, what's the kind of immediate pouring out of love that his son offers? In the collection, you see that too, in the ways that many of the people that particularly those who are involved in some kind of immediate activist or, or scientific work, they give these really loving descriptions of the place that they're from, of what they do not want to lose? Yeah, whether that's a scientist who's working in the Barrier Reef, or a theologian who's from a fishing community in Indonesia, or an activist who is kind of blocking pipelines in Canada. These really quite visceral descriptions of people's attention to the world around them as something that they love, and are afraid of losing. It's really costly. All of them talk about the pain that comes with that. I think particularly you see it in like a sort of a generational attention, right, where you have a community who for generations have attended to a piece of land. And then the significance of losing that land is even more profound, because of forced migration, because of rising sea levels. And that's a theme that comes up as well on the book.

Nicole Diroff 48:57

For those of you listening, one of your next steps might be getting a copy of *Words for a Dying World*, edited by Hannah Malcolm. It's an incredibly powerful book filled with so many different insightful essays, all of which are relatively short. It's just really packed full of beautiful stories. Hannah, in addition to getting a copy of the book, are there things on your heart today that you might want to invite people into as a next step?

Hannah Malcolm 49:31

If you are a member of a of a religious community, whether Christian or otherwise, I think there's a couple of questions we can ask ourselves as we face up to what we're losing and what's coming ahead of us. And the first one is about this, you know, how can my church community locally be a refuge for people in practical and spiritual ways? So how can we provide or facilitate support pastorally and spiritually for perhaps local climate activists, for young people, for those who are involved in in local

organising, and then how can our building or our lands be a place of refuge, as people face increasingly precarious environments? That leads to a kind of second thing, which is the bigger picture. So you've got your local church community, I think it's just a helpful thing to begin that conversation, right? Like, that's a really big thing to make a five year 10 year plan. But it's a smaller thing to say, as a church, have we started having this conversation? What would the first step be to begin thinking really seriously about how we're serving our local community? And then there's the bigger picture one, which is that if you're a member of a religious community, and that has some kind of national network, so it might be a denomination, or a kind of religious council? What kinds of assets does that denomination or religious council have in terms of land in terms of investments? Are those things aligned with what we say we believe in terms of the goodness of the earth in terms of our duty to care for and tend for what God has made? One of the things I'm really passionate about is what the Church of England does with its finances, and with the land that it owns. Of course, there are churches all over the world that own land, and have financial assets. Those are two quite specific things. One is what's the local church doing? And how can I ask those maybe awkward questions of what we're planning to do as a local church? And then this big question of, can I find out what my denomination what my community does nationally, in terms of its kind of resourcing that it has available to it?

Nicole Diroff 51:45

Perfect. Thank you so much, Hannah, for this conversation. It's been delightful to wrap it back and talk to you again, after about a year from when we last did a program with you and to do it in this podcast format. It's been really wonderful. I wish you every good thing in the really good and important work that you are doing in the world.

Hannah Malcolm 52:09

Thank you. Thank you for having me. It's been great to be with you.

Nicole Diroff 52:11

You can follow Hannah Malcolm on Twitter. @hannahmalcolm. She is the editor of the anthology Words for a Dying World: Stories of Grief and Courage from the Global Church. It is published by SCM Press, and available wherever you get books. We will have links in the show notes.

Ben Yosua-Davis 52:41

First, I want to say a word of thanks to you, Nicole, and to your dad, Michael DeMonte, and to Hannah Malcolm, for coming in and offering us their reflections on this story that I shared.

Nicole Diroff 52:54

Ben, it was really my pleasure.

Ben Yosua-Davis 52:59

In each episode of Climate Changed, we share meaningful and achievable next steps you can take.

Nicole Diroff 53:05

In speaking with my dad, he had a timely thought about an essential next step.

Michael DiMonte 53:13

Vote, we need personal change. We need family, we need community change. We need systemic change too you know, I guess the thing that comes to mind next is don't be afraid to talk about it. Don't be afraid to talk to people who may see things very differently. We need to garner the courage to stick our necks out and engage people who see things differently. It's not going to be an easy conversation and it won't produce immediate results. But it's another drop. Yeah, another little drop and who knows where it'll go.

Ben Yosua-Davis 54:11

If you have a child in your life, you can find a way to talk to them about climate and our more than human community with them. Remembering that kids are capable of having much harder conversations than we adults give them credit for. Here are a couple places you could start: the next time you both see a bird for instance that catches your attention, invite your child to imagine with you.

Nicole Diroff 54:13

We see how disasters are becoming more frequent in our world. As a way of connecting with all who are impacted, you could create a 72 hour emergency kit with a child in your life. In addition to the basics, you can customize it with suggestions from your child. These may include favorite snacks, games, books, and gifts to give to others. To learn more about 72 hour kits, visit ready.gov/kit. that website again is ready.gov/kit

Ben Yosua-Davis 54:21

If there's a natural disaster, talk with your child. Share that one of the reasons this happened is because of the ways that we as humans have changed our planet's weather. Don't shy away from the conversation that comes afterward. Thank you so much for joining us today for this episode of Climate Changed podcast. This is the last episode of Season One.

Nicole Diroff 54:23

We would love to hear your thoughts and responses to our conversation and to this podcast. Would you like us to continue for Season Two? What suggestions and recommendations do you have for the show?

Ben Yosua-Davis 54:23

What guests and topics would you like us to cover? We welcome any suggestions you have for this show. Feel free to email us: podcast@thebtscenter.org, that's podcast@thebtscenter.org

Nicole Diroff 54:23

Our podcast is produced by Peterson Toscano and is a project of The BTS Center in beautiful Portland, Maine. Learn about the many resources we share and our regular on-line programs by visiting TheBTSCenter.org