

Climate Changed What Does Coll...g Look Like with Rob Shetterly

📅 Thu, Sep 07, 2023 11:19AM ⌚ 45:42

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

work, rob, portrait, truth, painted, world, word, forests, bts, telling, conversation, country, feel, lament, collective, life, engaged, wrote, climate, truth tellers

SPEAKERS

Ben Yosua-Davis, Nicole Diroff, Lilace Mellin-Guignard, Rob Shetterly



Ben Yosua-Davis 00:02

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



Nicole Diroff 00:09

Hosted by me, Nicole Diroff.



Ben Yosua-Davis 00:12

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



Nicole Diroff 00:19

The Climate Changed podcast is a project of The BTS Center.



Ben Yosua-Davis 00:30

I don't know about you Nicole, but it feels good to be back behind the mic.



Nicole Diroff 00:34

Well, I can say I'm feeling at least a little more comfortable than I was when we were producing Season One which, as you know, was my very first attempt at podcast co-hosting.



Ben Yosua-Davis 00:46

And I have to say you learn so much so quickly. If you are joining us for the first time, we will tell you what to expect from this episode and all the episodes in Season Two. In a moment we will share an exercise to help ground and center us today. It will be a poem by Lilace Mellin Guignard.



Nicole Diroff 01:04

Then you will hear the conversation I had with visual artist Rob Shetterly, a friend of The BTS Center, and an inspiration to me personally, he has painted over 250 portraits of Americans Who Tell the Truth.



Ben Yosua-Davis 01:21

I have already heard the conversation. So I am excited to chat with you about the questions, thoughts, and wonderings it brought up for me.



Nicole Diroff 01:29

After Ben and I reflect on my conversation with Rob, we will end our show by offering you tangible, meaningful, and achievable next steps you might want to take after listening to this episode.



Ben Yosua-Davis 01:42

Now to be clear, you don't have to do them all. These are just suggestions to have you on your own path to living and serving in a climate-changed world.



Nicole Diroff 01:51

As we launch into Season Two of Climate Changed, I feel like we should reintroduce who we are at least a little bit, considering it's been a year since Season One premiered.



Ben Yosua-Davis 02:03

All right, Nicole, what are five words that describe you?



Nicole Diroff 02:07

Okay, five words: Minister, mother, naturalist, relatively new Mainer. That might have been six

Okay, five words. Minister, mother, naturalist, relatively new father. That might have been six. How about you Ben?



Ben Yosua-Davis 02:22

Father, Islander, researcher, home renovator. I'm actually curious about who is listening to us.



Nicole Diroff 02:30

Oh, me too. Okay, for those of you listening, what are five words that describe you? Feel free to send us an email and introduce yourself. Our address is podcast@thebtscenter.org. That's podcast@thebtscenter.org. And we would love to hear from you.



Ben Yosua-Davis 02:53

Before we hear Nicole's conversation with Rob, we will take a moment to center and ground ourselves. Lilace Mellin Guignard reading of the poem she wrote, *The Great Reimagining*. She first shared it publicly at The BTS Center's 2022 Convocation.



Lilace Mellin-Guignard 03:10

The Great Reimagining with thanks to Toni Morrison and Cole Arthur Riley. I want to know how it felt, to be the first knitter to imagine the loops yarn could make to cut the heel without a seam. Each time I work the sock pattern, I cast a spell that transforms a long spun strand into three dimensions of warmth. And who was the brave stone whisperer wedging the Keystone above their head in the first dry laid arch Crazy, right? I mean, there were arched stone vaults hefted hundreds of years before power tools or Vermont. To what risky craftsmen Can I apprentice myself, to learn to see in my mind what has never been seen, never achieved and worked backwards, so that somehow the missing pieces fill themselves in without mortar without falling on my head. To learn the physics of imagination, the equation that reduces fear to less than constructive curiosity. We know an object in terror stays immobile. We know horror films get made every day because it's so easy to imagine bad things happening to good planets. After all, the ice sheets come, the ice sheets go. But now we have our finger on the remote, pushing fast forward, as if the ending has already been written as if pushing these buttons wasn't actually writing that ending. Stop, Breathe, make believe. Teach our children, this was not ordained. We must remember we are better than this. Back when the great dreamer imagined us, there was nothing to go by. Then there we were, in all our swimming, crawling, flying, slithering, climbing, walking glory, each a piece of creation, each a fragment of the Almighty day's fantasy, roaming, the hills swinging and trees willed into free will. Yet now we act like prisoners of creation, forgetting the gift, the risk forgetting we're each a piece of the greatest imagination could we do you think spin back into pure possibility? Could we dream a little before we think make a leap forward trusting physics to fill the steps in behind us. Maybe if we believe that even we are worth saving, we can stop unravelling, and hook our loop to the loops around us. It's time to turn the heel to hold with our hands in the air above us the rock we lift from our neighbor's chest. Even as hands we don't know, lift the rock from our own.

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Nicole Diroff 07:13

Thank you for that poem, Lilace. We now turn to my conversation with Rob Shetterly. Rob is the artist behind the portrait series Americans Who Tell the Truth, which includes people like William Sloane Coffin, Maulian Dana, Reggie Harris, Robin Wall Kimmerer, Bryan Stevenson, Henry David Thoreau, and many, many more, both well known and rather unknown truth tellers. Rob speaks with children and adults all over America about how democracy cannot function if people don't demand the truth. Rob is a fellow Mainer and beloved friend of The BTS Center. I really enjoyed having this Climate Changed conversation with him. You are the artist behind Americans Who Tell the Truth, this incredible portrait project. What is this project? And why do you do it?

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Rob Shetterly 08:18

Americans Who Tell the Truth is something that was born out of kind of a reluctance and rage, guilt, grief, you know, all these things that are not necessarily good reasons to start doing anything. But I was so distraught at the run up to the Iraq war, that our country was committed another set of war crimes and that I as a citizen of the country was being made complicit in. And I found that very hard to live with. I felt incredibly alienated during this time, as I felt during a lot of my adult life from various policies of the United States. But I kept thinking, What can I do at this moment to feel less alienated and also maybe have some kind of voice and I knew that it had to be through the thing that I do best, which is paint. And it also needed to be positive rather than negative because I was being held captive by an awful lot of negative energy. My own, what it boiled down to was that I needed to exorcise literally the spirits of the administration, the George W. Bush, Cheney, Powell, Condoleezza Rice, etc, etc. You know, who were promoting this illegal war, and get them out of my body out of my heart out of my head, and replace them with people who have actually made me feel good about this country. Yeah. People that spend their lives often sometimes only one done one thing, sometimes an entire life of trying to insist that this country live up to its own ideals that began with one portrait of Walt Whitman that kind of re connected me to the fundamental democratic impulse. I had never painted a realistic portrait In my life, I mean, I was an artist, I was a self taught artist. So I knew how to teach myself how to do something. This portrait of Walt Whitman, I put it up in the foyer to our house, as soon as I finished it, because I wanted to be looking at it myself. Within a couple of days, two or three people had come in, stood in front of the portrait and burst into tears. And it wasn't, it wasn't because it was a terrible portrait. And it wasn't because it was really a great portrait. It was because with the portrait and then the quote that I'd written on it which were Whitman's words about how to live in the world. I think people suddenly felt reconnected to this country in a way that they felt so upset about being in. It was that kind of healing, I noticed was not just my own. Other people could use these to help heal themselves to. At the beginning, it was an art therapy project. Yeah, I was just trying to figure out some way to live in this country. And feel comfortable. Yeah, it was by surrounding myself with these portraits that I thought I was gonna do it. And then it just it mushroomed, and then people started to respond to it. And now it is something I never expected.

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Nicole Diroff 11:10

How many portraits are you up to at this point, Rob?

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Rob Shetterly 11:13

I'm not absolutely sure. But I think it's close to 207.

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Nicole Diroff 11:18

Amazing. There are several themes and threads in your portraits, but environmental justice is one that of course stands out to The BTS Center, as we have been working to cultivate spiritual leadership for a climate-changed world, who is someone who you have painted, that you would consider to be a spiritual leader. And let's define that, really broadly, a really broadly defined spiritual leader in the climate-changed world?

R

Rob Shetterly 11:48

The project began about militarism. But very quickly as I began to add other voices, it became kind of a chaotic cacophony of voices, which is another word for intersectionality. I would like to define the problem first, the ones doing, there's a man named Erik Reece, who's a professor of English, and he's a poet, writer himself at the University of Kentucky in Lexington, who a number of years ago when I was travelling around West Virginia and Kentucky painting people who were resisting mountaintop removal coal mine, I met Erik Reece because of a book he'd written he wrote a book called Lost Mountain. And that was the literal name of a mountain that he went and studied. It was being taken down over the process of a whole year by a coal company. What they did in case people listening don't understand what mountaintop removal coal mining is, these big companies realised that they could save a lot of money by automating their process in such a way that they didn't have to hire coal miners to go dig tunnels underground and scrape out the coal from the seams under the mountain, instead begin to blow off the upper layers of the mountain, down to the various seams of coal, scrape them out, blow it up some more, scrape them out all the time dumping the forest, the animals what they call the Overberg. Yeah, down in the valleys, polluting the rivers and streams. So Erik Reece studied what happened on that mountain. First, what happened to the life above it because Appalachian forests are the richest most diverse forests in North America. So they bulldoze those forests, with no regard for anything right over the side of the mountain, they didn't even harvest the wood. And of course, just by doing that, they destroyed the lives of so many Appalachian people who lived in those forests, who found herbs in those forests, who knew who they were because of those forests. So they did that, and then they will start blowing up a mountain. So Lost Mountain became literally lost after this, and he wrote this wonderful book about that process. But I want to get to about that was it he said, our most modern sin is that we have not loved the world enough. We have exiled the holy from this realm, so that we might turn its mountains into money. For me, that statement is so apt for a economic system, a culture, a society, a country that decides that the exploitation of nature of people of other species, and the profit that could be taken from that is superior to any other needs.

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Nicole Diroff 14:36

I'm interested in the methods of truth telling that you have encountered as you've engaged with these more than 250 Americans Who Tell the Truth.

R

Rob Shetterly 14:48

That's interesting to call there's so many ways, and often they are so particular to a particular time, or a particular moment, what a person can do, being able to strategize What is the right thing to do in a moment is as important as, as what you say itself. When is this method, the way that's going to be most effective. I'm thinking right now, if someone like Tim DeChristopher, who by the way, now lives in Maine. Tim DeChristopher was a student at the University of Utah back in 2008, at the end of the Bush administration. This is George W. Bush, when he wanted to give a gift to the oil and gas and coal companies as he left office by opening up all this public land in Arches National Reserve, and as part of this beautiful, fragile, gorgeous red rock parks in southern Utah. He wants to open this land up to fossil fuel exploration, and Tim DeChristopher, who was a penniless student studying economics at the University of Utah, heard about this, and then he found out where the meeting was going to be where the various companies were going to bid on the land that they were going to get to do their explorations, and then possibly their exploitation of these fossil fuels. He was planning to go there to interrupt the meeting, at some point just to show that somebody knew what was happening that this public land that belongs to all of us was being given to these coal and oil companies that he found out where the meeting was, he went to the door in the hotel, they assumed, because nobody's supposed to know that he was a bidder, and they gave him a paddle to go into start bidding. He ended up using that paddle, and bidding \$22 million by 1000s of acres of land. And before he was discovered, that didn't have any money. And he was doing this only to interrupt the process. He eventually was put in jail for two years for doing this and while he was in jail, he was given a full scholarship to Harvard Divinity School. Because of the publicity about this, once it became known to people and the embarrassment of it to the government, the land was taken off the mark, it was saved. And as far as I know, is still saved. There's a strategy that's very different. Yes, from stealing the Federal microphone is committing a kind of civil disobedience, and being willing to take responsibility for what you've done, not run away from it, but instead, embrace it, and then pay the consequence, which also helps to complete your mission. Right here in Maine, you know, someone like Russell Levy, who started the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association. Again, this isn't so much about speaking. But it's building an organisation which brings together organic farmers and people who want to be organic farmers or people who want to support organic farming because they know how environmentally and politically important it is. And building a very powerful organization that can not only support all those farmers, but also becomes a strong political voice that is advising political candidates about what bills and policies they should be supporting. That kind of thing, that building of an organization is another particularly powerful way to become a voice in these issues. I was just thinking of Robin Wall Kimmerer, the great Potawatomi indigenous writer, who I'm sure you've talked to. Her writing, because it's so powerful, and that the intersection between indigenous knowledge, botany, scientific lore, her own personal story, and by combining all those things, in a very beautiful and humble and gentle way, is able to help an awful lot of people understand how we need to be living, if we're going to survive on this planet, not just us, but all the other species that are on the planet too. That isn't really the same as a voice in front of a microphone. It's taking the time to craft a message that almost anybody can understand.

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Nicole Diroff 18:37

Beautiful. Robin Wall Kimmerer's Braiding Sweetgrass is something of sacred text to me for sure. And her method of writing really is a beautiful way of truth telling. I have heard you say that truth telling that points at hypocrisy is especially dangerous. I often view your work as

that truth telling that points at hypocrisy is especially dangerous. I often view your work as really looking to those places where there's hypocrisy and those who are trying to unveil that. We have been at The BTS Center thinking quite a bit about shifting from sort of individual truth telling and potentially individual experiences of hypocrisy to collective truth telling. One of the people you've painted Reverend Dr. William Barber II who is a Disciples of Christ pastor, formerly president of the North Carolina NAACP, Reverend Dr. William Barber II said the role of the church is to engage in the dangerous Ministry of telling the truth. So the danger is highlighted there, but also the collective putting actually an institution in a responsible place for telling the truth.

R

Rob Shetterly 20:02

A lot of great labor unions and I paint a lot of labor people. Yeah, you know, we think of the International Workers of the World and Mother Jones, Gail Hayward people like that they were dangerous, because they were doing these radical strikes at a time when there was no appetite for these strikes at all. And the government could easily call in quasi military forces, put them down and beat them up, shoot them, drag them off to jail. And you'd never hear them again, practically, that kind of danger. You know, often this is a kind of radical solidarity, where you know that you're standing in solidarity to the victims. And there are many victims. In this case, it would say with the labor unions, victims of people being victimized and exploited in mills, or coal mines, or on the railroads or wherever was if it was being victimized people like code paint, they're thinking of Iraqi citizens, or Syrians, or Yemenis, or the US is selling all these weapons to Saudi Arabia to destroy that country and kill so many civilians. Somebody has to stand with the victim, somebody has to take that on. Being willing to have that kind of solidarity is a very dangerous thing.

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Nicole Diroff 21:11

I think you're gonna keep painting portraits for a little while. But if you were to imagine painting, just that interconnectedness, that solidarity, that communal sense, do you have a vision of what that painting would look like?

R

Rob Shetterly 21:27

Protests at Standing Rock. All these people come in not just Native people, but a huge Veterans for Peace contingent and other people from all over the country, in solidarity with the native people as they stood against that pipeline and being put across their land under the Missouri River, the possibility of almost the assuredness of it, eventually breaking and poisoning so much. That kind of vision is not about a hero. It's about a collective of people who understand that sometimes the common good can only be protected by the common people, they have to do it themselves. And the more they are that are willing to take that risk of being part of that, the stronger they are, as we talk about these issues, we know we're talking about power. There's no way a group of indigenous people from some tribes in the Dakotas can have the financial power of enormous oil and pipeline companies. And they don't have the access to the law the same way those companies do, or to the control of the law, or to politics or anything else. However, what they do have is they have the courage of not giving up when they can do that as a collective. That is extraordinary power, that ability can make all the difference.

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Nicole Diroff 22:52

Rob, I'm really grateful for this conversation this morning. And for your very good and important work in the world. I encourage you as you find people who are living and telling the truth, and able to find ways to share their messages with others through your art. It's a beautiful project. We're so glad to be related to you at The BTS Center through the ways that we've worked together, and I offer you blessings on this day.

R

Rob Shetterly 23:22

Thanks, Nicole, and thanks for this opportunity. And thank you so much for what you do.



Ben Yosua-Davis 24:03

What a powerful conversation you had with Rob Nicole, I was really struck by all the people that he named. It gave me hope, just a reminder of the incredible courage and graciousness and generosity that is also a part of what it means to be human. And I was also particularly struck by this phrase he used near the end of your conversation of how the truth telling is actually about a collective of people. It got me reflecting on the number of different modes that Rob Shetterly introduced for what it means to tell the truth from disruption to storytelling to organization building all both within individual but most frequently, collective contexts. It seems to me that our culture actually has a really monolithic view of truth telling, what does it mean to stand up and tell the truth and generally, we have this image of like the one courageous individual engaged in protest, in some ways, like that's the best conception and the worst is this understanding of like telling the truth is putting an obnoxious, self righteous post on social media and walking away.

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Nicole Diroff 25:08

I've been thinking a lot about what truth telling looks like for faith communities. The two descriptions you just gave, aren't really the right modality for faith communities to take. I've been probing people talking about lament, which is something that runs so deep in our faith traditions, and is expressed in Christian scripture. The lament is this way of being together in saying that something is not right, saying that as an expression to the Divine, expressing to the Divine, that something is terribly wrong. And we need to move in a different direction. One example of this comes from a colleague of ours, who has been watching trees be removed from the downtown area in her town. She decided to bring together some people to have a funeral for those trees. And to share publicly that this is worth mourning, and worth being upset about. I loved how Rob talked about the courage of not giving up. And that colleague has actually facilitated more than one tree funeral, because the trees keep being cut down, they keep having red string tied around them, marking that they're coming down. And so she has gathered several people together who are not giving up and we'll keep continuing to lament the loss of those trees.



Ben Yosua-Davis 26:55

I was thinking about our colleague as well, when I was thinking about this and how every time she comes back to us in conversation and talks about the trees that she is holding funerals for it brings tears to my eyes, I'm in a small community, 400 year round residents, these are the people who you're with. So you're always negotiating truth telling within the context of ongoing relationship, you can't just blow someone off the face of the earth and then walk away because you're going to see them on the boat, you're gonna see them on the road, you're gonna see them at community gatherings. So truth telling always has to be done within the context of relationship. And that is often tender, messy, vulnerable work that you have to come back to again, and again. And again. Sometimes as well with lament, knowing the truth that you want to share, they may never be able to hear. And so you still have to find ways to be in relationship together and to mourn the ways that your relationship will never be what you hoped it will be. I also find that truth telling sometimes is also about reframing, we often think about truth telling within the context of political binaries. So is this progressive, or is this conservative and certainly, we live in a culture that is not just more polarized culturally, but it's actually kind of polarised in its frameworks for understanding the world. And oftentimes, I find what truth telling also is about finding ways to break down those binaries, and offer people new frameworks for understanding the world around them. That's where I'm actually really, really grateful for the resources that come from my faith as a Christian, because it gives me some ways to enter into this conversation that don't have to be defined by our dominant cultural and political discourse, and can speak a word that everyone can come around. On the island, that's the beach that we're going to have to hold a funeral for. And we have common ground because we all know this place. And we and we love this place. I recently gave a talk at a scientific conference on water, about what faith leaders can teach us about coping with existential fear and dread speaking to a group of scientists and climate engaged folks, especially some young students, and I found that that the Christian understanding of hope, which is that hope is not optimism, but rather that it's a virtue, it's something you practice on a regular basis, was an incredibly good word to all the people in that room coming from all sorts of different contexts. It gave a new language and vocabulary that spoke to a world where one of the things that does unite us conservative or liberal is our understanding of power and that we're responsible for going out and changing the world. And if we can't change the world, then there's something wrong with us. So being able to go in and offer a frame that says you are not responsible for changing the world. And incidentally, I just want to pause and say to any of you who are listening here, if no one's ever told you this before, you are not responsible for changing the world. That is not in our pay grade. All we're responsible for doing is what we can in the context that we can and found that there were multiple people in the room who said, I've never heard anyone say that to me before. That's also truth telling, because then it gives us new frameworks and a new perspective to engage with the work that we're doing in a new way that is hopefully more sustainable and more life giving as well. That to me is also a big part of what it means to tell the truth.

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Nicole Diroff 30:20

Thanks, Ben, as you were sharing, I also was thinking about the ways in which our great teacher in the Christian faith, Jesus, told the truth, which in those stories, it's so often through metaphor, or through a question asked back to whoever is speaking with him, or through storytelling through imaginative storytelling. And I'm now left thinking about how we can do more truth telling through metaphor and question and story.



Ben Yosua-Davis 30:55

I also think part of that is there's a truth telling, that we can do by inviting people simply to notice what's around them. Jesus did this all the time, and saying, Pay attention, consider the lilies of the field, consider the sparrows that you see all around you. There's something important here about truth telling, also being about noticing what's going on around us. One of the things I really appreciated in Rob's conversation is actually the way he invited us to notice what was going on in new ways. He used this quote, that really stuck with me, "we have exiled the sacred from this realm, so that we might harvest a mountain for money" when he was talking about the story of of mountaintop removal. And that kind of reframes our work in a different way. It's not just about the tragedy of this mountain being brought down. It's not just about kind of the ecological side effects. It's not just about capitalism. It's not just about fossil fuels, but there are actually some spiritual root causes to what's going on that we can notice if we kind of sit up and pay attention.



Nicole Diroff 32:04

This is something we've been exploring really deeply at The BTS Center, root causes, like colonialism, domination, extraction, consumption, as root causes of what we are talking about in terms of carbon at this point, connecting back with the ways in which we exist in an economic system that rewards individualistic, short term, and rather placeless decisions. I so appreciated the way in which Rob's stories pointed towards that if part of the challenge is having exiled the sacred in order to make money, how do we bring the sacred back in?



Ben Yosua-Davis 32:52

I think part of what we're doing is trying to teach our children to ask questions by asking them questions. And our son Michael is now getting old enough that when he sees us doing something that doesn't line up with our values, like he's beginning to ask questions of us. So you know, we go on the rare occasions where we can find takeout, which is not very often on the island, and you bring home everything in these plastic or Styrofoam containers. And he's saying, Wait, why are you doing that? Doesn't that hurt the earth? And then we have this wonderful moment of like, mutual truth telling together. I also think increasingly for me, it's about teaching my children to notice practices, like I'm walking with my children through the forest with Merlin the birding app from Cornell being like, Oh, do you hear those birds? Let's figure out what those birds are and what those calls are. And I find that's also a process of truth telling and helping them wake up to the world.



Nicole Diroff 33:43

I'm thinking about the ways in which Robin Wall Kimmerer, one of the people who Rob painted, and was referenced in my conversation with him, asks us really to interrogate that which we are seeing around us. She wrote an essay called "Corn Tastes Better on the Honor System." It has totally reshaped the way I see a row of corn. She's inviting us to think about the beingness of the world around us, and says, "conceiving of plants and land, as objects, not subjects, as things instead of beings provides the moral distance that enables exploitation, valuing the productive potential of the physical body but denying the personhood of the being (And she's talking about corn here) reduces a person, corn, to a thing for sale. This too is a manifestation

of colonialism." And she goes on to say "there is another word tugging at my sleeve asking for recognition. That word is slavery, standing alone in straight lines, in poisoned fields, forced to carry genes not their own. Today, sacred maize is enslaved to an industrial purpose, feeding cars and factories." For me that connects so closely to what Rob shared about, we have exiled the sacred from this realm so that we might harvest a mountain of money, whether that's a mountain top, or the way we relate to corn.



Ben Yosua-Davis 35:33

That is such powerful truth telling. And I'm reminded in this again, how truth telling calls us back into relationship. I think that's part of what Rob was getting at when he shared that. And I'm reminded that those relationships, like all relationships take time and tending and are filled with joy, but also anxiety and beauty and complexity. I've had some opportunities to spend extended periods of time on working farms. And I'm struck by the profound reciprocity that those working these farms have with the land with the creatures the way they know them. And the way the sheep and the goats know them. I've watched someone walk down the road and all of a sudden, there's this whole flock of sheep and goats just headed right for the fence. One of the things I also appreciate about Rob's vision is the way that reminds me that we are not alone in this work. I think I mentioned this right at the beginning how it feels like we're embedded in this group of people who will never know who are also carrying this work with us. It reminds me of the Christian theological concept of the communion of the saints. As we do this work, we are united across space, but also across time with other people who are joining us and what we're doing, whose lineages and understandings we can build on.



Nicole Dieroff 36:57

Saints also feels at times like this huge word that is beyond any of our capacities. Rob plays with that in terms of the people he's painting, he's really not trying to present as heroes that the rest of us can never come close to, to being like. Rob actually has this quote that says "Americans who tell the truth are selected as real complex human beings, whose acts for the common good can be emulated by all of us by any of us. The saving grace of a healthy democracy is not a handful of heroes, but a culture of engaged citizenship inspired by the courage of truth tellers." So yes, that speaks to the communion of the saints with the idea that any of us and all of us might be those saints. It makes me think of a book that we have engaged with through the past couple years at The BTS Center, called Rooted and Rising, it's filled with essays by what I would consider to be a communion of saints doing the work. I just want to shout out some of the names of people in that book who have become really good friends of this organization in this work, Leah Schade, Margaret Bullitt-Jonas, Fred Small, Natasha DeJarnett, Corina Newsome, the producer of this very podcast, Peterson Toscano, Jim Antal, and so many more voices. That book works to bring diversity of perspective forward so that we can know that we are not alone in this work.



Ben Yosua-Davis 38:38

I'm gonna go back quite a bit farther to an 11th century Saint named Brother Isidore who is the patron saint of farmers in day labourers. And the thing I love about Brother Isidore is we know almost nothing about him and he did nothing we would consider significant with his life. He was

a married mediaeval peasant who ploughed the fields, there are legends of him sharing his food generously with others of a mysterious white oxen and the angels that would assist him as he ploughed who just led this quiet, humble life. And it's a reminder to me to stay grounded in the concrete, the local and the real and to remember that I don't have to save the world. I just have to do my part.

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Nicole Diroff 39:19

I imagine all of these people we just named and so many more coming into that vision Rob shared of collective courage, standing together with diversity at Standing Rock or some other location that needs community to tell the truth as a way of moving towards healing.



Ben Yosua-Davis 39:50

We end each episode of our show by providing you with possible next steps you can take. We recognize that knowing about climate change and being moved by the plight of our world is Not enough. But what is enough?

N

Nicole Diroff 40:02

None of us can solve the world's problems alone. But we can take the next meaningful, significant step. When I spoke with Rob, I asked him to share some next steps with us.

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Rob Shetterly 40:17

There are so many next steps, there is no one next step. Totally everywhere in this country, there are people, organizations, committees, school groups, who are trying to do the right thing. Put it this way, none of us is going to make the big change, which is going to change the world. I mean, there are changes that need to be made at policy levels, at the highest levels. But until those are made, it's incumbent on all of us to be working locally, you know, to do what we can, partly because of what we can accomplish in terms of green energies, and transportation, various things that can happen at a local level, the way we build the way we do all these things. And the way we get involved in politics locally, that's really important. The thing that happens at that level, and we did our educational work, we do our Samantha Smith challenge, it's gonna be other educational programs we have is that you notice with kids. Because when you ask them directly, how do they feel about these issues? We go into schools, we get the kids to talk about what they know about the problem. A lot of them do know about most serious effects of what's going on in the climate, the symptoms. But if you push it further and say, What do you how do you feel about it, feel the kids might say, well, we're terrified. And you say, Well, isn't your school doing this or that, you know, to help you with this? Often not. By getting people, kids, but all of us get involved in working on some project that works at some level, to alleviate, mitigate some of these issues. It changes our emotional relationship with them. Instead of being so fearful, we feel much more positive. We feel like, Yes, I can do some. And while we're in the process of doing those local things, we can also continue to put pressure on the governments who are not taking care of us in the way that governments should, and to make the most serious choices.

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Nicole Diroff 42:22

I would also encourage people to check out a really amazing documentary that has been done on your work. That's called Truth Tellers, and people can access at truthtellersfilm.com To learn more about some of the people that Rob has lovingly painstakingly painted portraits of and identified quotes for. And rather than watching it alone, I would encourage you to consider offering a screening of that film in a community that you are connected with your faith community, a neighbourhood school in your area, or even trying to pull together your extended family. I watched that film with my third grader and it sparked some really meaningful conversation about democracy and a call to tell the truth. I have no doubt it would do the same for your friends and neighbors. Now what about you, Ben?



Ben Yosua-Davis 43:23

My suggestion is to write a note of thanks to someone who is doing courageous work whose work is perhaps going unrecognized, and the more local the better perhaps someone in your neighborhood, your workplace or your faith community. Many thanks to Robert Shetterly for spending time with us you can learn more about Rob and see for yourself the portraits of courageous truth tellers he has painted visit americanswhotellthetruth.org that's americanswhotellthetruth.org

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Nicole Diroff 43:54

And thank you for joining Ben, Rob, and me for this episode of the Climate Changed podcast.



Ben Yosua-Davis 44:02

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

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Nicole Diroff 44:08

Feel free to email us at podcast@thebtscenter.org.



Ben Yosua-Davis 44:17

Our podcast is produced by Peterson Toscano is a project of The BTS Center in beautiful Portland Maine.

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Nicole Diroff 44:24

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