

CC S3E2 Joelle Novey

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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SPEAKERS

Nicole Diroff, Jessica Jacobs, Anna Barron, Dr. Keisha McKenzie, Joelle Novey

- N** Nicole Diroff 00:02
You are listening to Climate Changed, a podcast about pursuing faith, life, and love in a climate-changed world, hosted by me, Nicole Diroff
- D** Dr. Keisha McKenzie 00:13
and me, Keisha McKenzie. Climate Changed features guests who deepen the conversation while also stirring the waters.
- N** Nicole Diroff 00:20
The Climate Changed podcast is a project of The BTS Center. Keisha, welcome back as a guest co host of the Climate Changed podcast. I am psyched to catch up today.
- D** Dr. Keisha McKenzie 00:35
I'm excited to and really glad to see you and hear you, but first for you listening to this episode, we're thrilled to share a conversation Nicole had with Joelle Novey. For fifteen years, Joelle has served as the director of Interfaith Power and Light for Washington, DC, Maryland and Northern Virginia. She'll tell us about the successful community organizing they've done, and share some best practices for working collectively to address climate related issues.
- N** Nicole Diroff 01:02
You will also hear Joelle speak about her own Jewish faith and how it grounds her in climate work. She also brings up some powerful interpretations of stories from the Hebrew Scriptures.

D

Dr. Keisha McKenzie 01:16

Before the conversation, we'll offer you a moment for grounding, and at the end of the show, we'll invite you to consider some possible next steps you might take after hearing our conversation today.

N

Nicole Diroff 01:30

I can't wait to hear what you're up to these days. How are you spending time?

D

Dr. Keisha McKenzie 01:37

Well, it's been a year of reordering which work projects I get into, how much mischief, whether, whether I'm an artist again. So I've, I've really loved being able to learn about gouache paints. They're kind of like a mash up between acrylics and watercolors, and so, like I've started to do, to do some painting on the weekends, and it's just been really lovely to fall into something that doesn't have a productivity outcome attached to it, and to use that art to help me see the world around me in a different way. So this is be a more of a human being season for me. I love it. Yeah. And then second to that, we're in the second season of Moral Repair: A Black Exploration of Tech is a podcast I'm a co host of with Reverend Ananda Barclay, and we're supported by PRX, a production company. And we get to think about emerging technologies and their moral impacts on us, how they're shaping the world around us, and whether there are resources from our cultures that can help us mitigate the damage they cause.

N

Nicole Diroff 02:48

We'll put a link in our show notes so that everyone listening can enjoy that really good podcast also. Now I don't know this about you. Are you a novel reader, are you a fiction reader?

D

Dr. Keisha McKenzie 03:03

I am, but I've been kind of stuck in non fiction land for a little season. So if there's something that's caught your eye, please put it on my radar.

N

Nicole Diroff 03:13

Yeah, I have been thinking a lot about what stories we're telling these days and the ways in which they tap into the themes that I'm in conversation around with climate change conversations, and it just opens up this whole concept around the arts and the way artists are needed as leaders right now. So even what you shared about doing art that invites you, I heard it as like invites you to pay attention to the world in a different way. It feels really, really needed. So I'm going to tell you a little about the book I just finished for my book group that meets here in Maine. It's a book called North Woods, written by a person named Daniel Mason, and it follows a particular place, a particular plot of land in Western Massachusetts, through time, through a long amount of time, many generations of time, and it includes all sorts of fun.

You know, there's murders and eroticism and interesting storylines. But what's amazing about the book, in terms of the conversations I've been having, is the author has clearly made an effort to shift the natural world from a setting for their story to an active protagonist character in their story, which I love, and does this thing of inviting us to reflect on the purpose of our life, which is, frankly, rather fleeting, like there may be a thing down the line that another inhabitant of the home that we live in might find and be like, Oh, what's this? And what did that mean? But it also it makes us think about, oh, these things that are so important to us right now likely do not have the longevity we might imagine them to, and at the same time, these places have ongoing power to shift and change and define so anyway, that's a piece of fiction I've been engaging with.

D

Dr. Keisha McKenzie 05:27

Yeah, I've written it down because I love stories that take that turn of as you said, moving from Earth or land as object to Earth land as character. And I love also the humility of remembering that our life spans are relatively short in the context of Earth and land. And so there's something about needing to be in conversation with the unfolding story that's happening around you that you're part of, without making your own chapter in that story, the entire story. Yeah, and for that purpose, that's why we need each other, and that's why we need to be able to tell stories and pass them down. So after our individual lifespan, somebody else can learn, somebody else can be surprised, somebody else can argue with us, you know. And I think that's the story of community across time that's captivating to me.

N

Nicole Diroff 06:21

Beautiful. Our grounding today, before we get the conversation I had with Joelle Novey, picks up on this theme of needing artists today. In each episode of Climate Changed, we provide a space to clear our heads from the busyness of the day and center ourselves. For today's grounding, Jessica Jacobs will share from her new collection of poetry, *Unalone*. These are poems created in conversation with the book of Genesis.

J

Jessica Jacobs 06:57

This poem begins with an epigraph from Reuters, which is talking about the United Nations Human Rights Council Report on climate change and poverty. And it says simply, in climate apartheid, rich will save themselves while poor suffer. And the only other thing that you should know which is really powerful is the fact that the Hebrew word *tevah*, which is almost all the time translated as the word ark, can also mean word. Collective nouns: When Noah was still just a man, not yet sailor and Savior. God said, make yourself a word for I have decided to silence all flesh. Scraping muscle from a hide, his wife crouched nearby, listening. Without argument or question without a single signal of warning to neighbors or friends, her husband, that little wind up toy, God's docile errand boy, complied. He built the word to spec, big enough to hold two of every creature, but too small for her mother, too small for her brother, no matter how she wept. From planks of gopher wood smeared with pitch, Noah built the word and God shut them up in it. Water crushed down from the sky, fountained from the seas, dissolving living dust and breath to reefs of hushed mud. And Noah, a silent man in a silenced world, drifting in a wooden word. With an otter, placid as a stole across his shoulders, instead of

talking, he lived in his hands, picking nits, troughing food and water, always more water, tending, tending to every walking, creeping winged thing, to all beings but her, never lying beside her, never tasting the taste of sleep, his tongue withered to a husk. The dark hold was mobbed with chitter roar and screech without restraint and from outside the ceaseless babble of wood and rain. She was drowning in languages she couldn't speak, and he never offered her a word of comfort. When the rains finally ended, Noah bound a rope to the rafters before the raven before the doves, he lowered himself from the word's one window. A splash, and he leashed the rope to his ankle, leaned back and let his hands fall empty, let the flood embrace him. Grime sloughed from him into the waves until the only animal he smelled was himself. Noah bobbed there, a beaming buoy tethered to the word in which the future floated, where his wife unseen, the new Eve, humanity's unnamed mother looked out from the window and watched as he gave himself to the killing waters. Looked past him, trying not to think of the death and rot that brothed him. Is a man good? She wondered, who can construct a word large enough for only a chosen few, and now, no matter what promise once rainbowed the sky before the world is again silenced. The water and weather already rising, already tearing the roofs from the poorest among us, instead of floating unnoticed past those taken by the tides, can't we build a peaceful fleet lashed by syntax and spring lines into a sentence of survival? Words that recognize, that welcome, not just some, but all.

N

Nicole Diroff 11:51

Thank you, Jessica. That was poet Jessica Jacobs reading her poem Collective Nouns. It appears in her book of poetry entitled Unalone. Learn more about Jessica at her website, Jessicalgjacobs.com that's Jessicalgjacobs.com we will have this link in our show notes at climatechangedpodcast.org

D

Dr. Keisha McKenzie 12:23

Nicole, I think we're almost ready to hear your conversation with Joelle Novey. Joelle has been serving as the Director of Interfaith Power and Light for DC, Maryland and Northern Virginia since 2009. She strongly believes in the potential of faith communities in the climate movement.

N

Nicole Diroff 12:39

Joelle grew up in Baltimore and is actively involved in various Jewish communities in DC. She loves to engage with people from all walks of life and all ages in conversations around the climate crisis and ways we can each contribute to protecting our world.

D

Dr. Keisha McKenzie 12:58

Prior to joining Interfaith Power and Light. Joelle worked at Green America and served as a hospital chaplain. She holds a BA in social studies from Harvard with a minor in the study of religion. Joelle's cohousing building is LEED silver certified, and will soon be powered by solar energy. After Nicole's conversation with Joelle, Nicole and I will carry on the discussion. Enjoy.

N

Nicole Diroff 13:29

How would you describe the path that led you to a place of leadership in the climate movement?

J

Joelle Novey 13:35

It always seemed to me from being a kid listening in Hebrew school at Chizuk Amuno congregation, that religious ideas were really radical, and that if we took them seriously, we would be really we would be totally different, like even just the basic idea that every person is made in the divine image is would have to transform the way we are and the way our society is. That's very, very serious kid.

N

Nicole Diroff 14:03

Yeah!

J

Joelle Novey 14:04

I was really listening the question of, what would it really look like to take these ideas seriously and live them out in the world we encounter and find ourselves in has been the driving question of my life. Yeah, I had a lot of experiences in college, and shortly afterwards, experimenting with creating Jewish community that expressed our values and put the work for social justice at the center of the community. I at one point with a community I helped found invented the term Davar Tikkun. So a Davar Torah is a word of, like a little sermon, a little thing of Torah and Tikkun is this idea of repair that is associated with social justice work. So a Davar Tikkun is like putting, you know, in place of the sermon, an organization doing good work coming to the congregation.

N

Nicole Diroff 14:58

For you engaging with your own community and making meaning from your own tradition in these times, where do you where do you turn within Jewish tradition to make meaning?

J

Joelle Novey 15:13

The series of texts that I keep returning to to talk about why I'm called from Jewish tradition to do this work are were assembled this way by Rabbi Fred Scherlinder Dobb, one of my teachers, and it has to do with a discourse about when we can violate the Sabbath, the Shabbat rules in order to save the life of someone who's sick. So the rabbis took Shabbat prohibitions, things you can't do on the day of rest, very seriously. And so the the question of when you when we are required to violate those rules and prioritize instead saving life, you know, really says something about how highly they value saving life. This is a dialectical tradition that's in conversation over generations through multiple commentaries. So I'm going to just recount a

little bit of the back and forth. Maimonides says, a sick person in danger, we attend to all their needs on Shabbat at the advice of a skilled local healer. In other words, if a doctor says it's necessary, but subsequently sort of makes it a you know, maybe there's not scientific consensus. What if one doctor says to but another doctor says there's no need, and they say, Well, we still violate Shabbat for them, since even doubtful danger to human life pushes aside Shabbat. And then subsequent commentary, the tour expands it further and says, we don't need an expert to tell us it's necessary, even with nobody there to assure us that it's necessary to violate Shabbat to save the person's life. Even doubtful danger to human life makes the law lenient. It's forbidden to delay the treatment of the person who is sick. And Josef Karo, Middle Ages adds one more. He says, The one who rushes to do this, the one who rushes to take action in a case of an uncertain case of danger to human life, is praiseworthy, but the person who stops to futz around and ask more questions and delay is a murderer. So what I get from this, this conversation, in my tradition, is a is what I try to embody in my own work, which is a fierce spirit of intervention when life may be at stake. And it's not that we have every question answered already. It's not that there is not great uncertainty about the outcome of many questions in the climate crisis, but it is our we are called to be fiercely, you know, warriors for life and protectors of life, you know, like mama bear energy where we, you know, protect life ferociously. That, to me, is the that is, that the the intention or orientation of spirit of Jewish tradition that I try to bring to this world. Yeah, bring to this world

N

Nicole Diroff 18:03

Beautiful. And thank you so much for introducing our listeners to the way Jewish theology works, which is layer upon layer of different interpretations. It is different than Christian bible study as I've engaged with it and something that I so deeply appreciate about Jewish brothers and sisters.

J

Joelle Novey 18:26

Our ancestors, who wrote stories like the Noah story, or say, you know, there's a prayer in our tradition from, I think it's Deuteronomy that says, you know, if you listen, God will make the rain fall and the crops rise. And if you if you don't listen, then, then God will not and all of these texts convey a world in which our ancestors could not imagine, a world in which anyone but God could mess with the weather amazing, right? And we've inherited the that worldview, but, but we know that we are now for the first time, you know, in a world in which human beings are driving the climate system, right? Likewise, all of our traditions have a cycle of seasons and an agricultural cycle of, you know, rainfall and and crop growth and and rejuvenation that that is basically unmoored now by climate crisis. And I would suggest that that feeling of separateness that we now experience is a lie and it's and it's the lie we have to fix and address and correct in order to repair our climate. One text from Pope Francis, encyclical Laudato Si, that I have shared with many faith communities. He's actually quoting the previous pope, Pope Benedict. He says, our external deserts are expanding because our internal deserts have become so vast. In other words, diagnosing the climate crisis and the impacts that we see outside of ourselves, in the natural world, in the errors of our own spirituality, our own hearts, our own mistakes as human beings. And I have tried to challenge faith communities, particularly because I think we all have a tendency to try to look for the we have to look for the blame for climate change, at someone else, at another country, at our neighbors. But when I try to say, could you diagnose the spiritual errors that are making the climate crisis possible in the spiritual life of this

community? You know, that's an that's an intense question, but it's one that points our attention in the right place, I think. That this sense of separateness that we can just burn up fuels and pour the, you know, heat trapping pollution into the atmosphere indefinitely, without consequence, that we can frack like, you know, squirt chemicals directly into the groundwater and like expect that not to affect us ever. This is false, and it's a false belief that is causing the climate crisis, but it's also causing suffering for us because we are disconnected from, you know, from the reality of our interdependence with each other. There's a teaching around waste that says there is no away like we we say, hmm, let's throw that away. We, if we understand the earth to be finite and all of the all people's home places to have sacred value, then, like, wherever that trash is getting taken is not away to whoever is having to live around it. And so we need to get away from the get, so to speak, get away from the idea of of there being away. And this this summer, we had a new experience for me living on the East Coast, which was wildfire smoke affecting us for several days in a row. I've been deeply affected by the teachings of Rabbi Julia Watts Belzer at Georgetown, who invites us to look again at the story of Noah and the ark, which which she believes has become sort of our dominant mental frame for surviving climate catastrophe, ecological crisis, and invites us to think about all of the assumptions built into that boat, that little boat that that are really problematic, you know, the idea that there's only a few spots out, the idea that that we were going to, you know, it's, she's also a disability activist, and like, the idea that we're going to choose two perfect specimens, you know, is sort of eugenicist, and that there's that we're gonna basically accept the destruction of the world and just satisfy ourselves with a little remnant making it out. Also all of our child you know, whimsical, childlike art about Noah's Ark, right? Kind of focuses on the boat and not this like context of massive loss and suffering and destruction and the implicit framing is that we made it on that we we're on the boat with them, and the idea that there's a, it's a zero sum game, like there's only a certain number of seats on the boat, and you will get on at someone else's expense, and you should elbow people out of the way to get there. All of that, I think, is misaligned with what is we're called to do in this time.

N

Nicole Diroff 23:24

Yeah and I vote, just to say, I have always really struggled to teach that story to kids. And it's one that's like, expected to be teach, to be taught, because the image of two elephants followed by two giraffes followed by two lions going on to some ark is like, you know, meant to inspire children to love God. But the bigger context is really problematic. And it is on the scale that we indeed are facing on some levels that that there, there is massive, planetary wide kind of chaos going on.

J

Joelle Novey 24:01

The invitation is to think about why we asked this such a small question. I call it like a small boat. It's like a small boat theology, it's like, it's like, once you build this tiny vessel that's inadequate to the task, asking who gets to go on is the wrong question. Like, let's start at the beginning and ask, let's save everyone. Let's save everything we can. Let's save all that is sacred. Let's appreciate and protect all of us. Like, what if we saved everything we can? There's a book, a book of essays that I love called All We Can Save. Like, let's save all that we can save. Really thinking about getting through the climate crisis to something better requires

contradicting the thinking that got us here, and the way to do that, and the way to do that is to ask a question that starts from the sanctity of all that is and saying, how do we all work together to save all that is sacred?

N

Nicole Diroff 24:56

Amen, I feel like where you started. In terms of taking religious tradition and thought seriously, and the way in which that implies divinity wrapped into everything, sacredness wrapped into everything, and having that as a starting place for understanding the common good is, is beautiful. I love it. What does Do you have a story for us? What does solidarity look like? What does thinking about, not just our own, getting on some boat to save ourselves? What does solidarity? Have you seen it? What are we aspiring to?

J

Joelle Novey 25:43

The work we've been doing with congregations in the District of Columbia around gas really has illustrated, for me, the potential of movement building because so we are working together with Washington Interfaith Network and DC Sierra Club in a group called Beyond Gas DC. And the first thing we did was we had different congregations go around their communities with handheld methane detectors and just measure the leaks anywhere that gas in the pipes, in the ground, underneath an aging city, it's leaking. It's not just one or two. It's like everywhere. And it was not just in the nice parts of town or the poor parts of town. We demonstrated there were hundreds of gas leaks under every part of DC, and it was powerful. Muslim boy scouts did it. My rabbi did it. Lots of different folks in different neighborhoods measured this themselves and then combined the data together to make a case to the DC council that we have a problem. The groups that are brought together by this work, Washington Interfaith Network is worried about black homeownership in the district and preserving healthy homes for DC's longtime residents. IPL, historically is, you know, focused on climate justice and addressing methane as a climate super polluter. Right now, we've been fighting for something called the Healthy Homes Act that would allow low and moderate income DC households to electrify and we're going to have hearings in the coming month, and hopefully it will be come law inshallah and the other, the other sort of hand, hands on thing we've been doing around gas is measuring the pollution in our kitchens when we're burning gas burning stoves. So again, this is something that is, is true of anyone in the in the city, you know, in very different kinds of homes, very different kinds of neighborhoods. We are all measuring dangerous pollution, I should say, unhealthy levels of nitrogen dioxide when we're cooking over gas burning flame. Being able to connect what we're seeing in our own neighborhoods and communities with what other people in other faith traditions and other kinds of neighborhoods are experiencing in their own homes, has really built this amazing movement for stronger electrification policy in the district.

N

Nicole Diroff 28:12

Thank you for sharing that example of solidarity that went to researching and studying and being curious and doing citizen science together as solidarity. I feel like that's rarely the story that I hear when I ask that question. We're in solidarity because we're being citizen scientists together, and we're coming to better understand what we're up against, and then it makes it that much easier to stand together in asking for something. I love that as the beginning place.

J

Joelle Novey 28:46

The gas fight has really been transformative to our ability to imagine working in much bigger coalitions for change.

N

Nicole Diroff 28:54

I mean, we use this language of movements, and you reference movement building. Sometimes we talk about grassroots movements, and I wonder for you, as you play with that idea of what does that mean? What do we mean when we talk about a grassroots movement? What inspires that?

J

Joelle Novey 29:21

Too many folks, when we talk about taking action on climate change, their attention turns to whether they recycle everything they could, changing out their light bulbs, composting more or composting at all. So many of these folks, I just want to say we are not in a climate crisis because you didn't recycle that thing. We are in a climate crisis because industrial polluters have been allowed to, like despoil and damage our one planet without consequence or accountability for 150 years. The only way to challenge a global problem and that kind of adversary at scale is to build a movement larger than they are. I really have been pushing over and over again, asking every faith community we work with to think about what they can do to be part of a larger movement for systemic change and to hold polluters accountable and to change laws. I say that for a few reasons. One, it's it's of a piece with the other values that bring them to this work. The same reason you would put up solar panels on your own building, because you don't want coal fired, or, you know, fossil fuel fired energy to like light the sanctuary where you pray to the Creator. That's the exact same values that would bring you to testify for a strong clean energy law in Maryland or for an all electric building code in the District of Columbia. So first of all, it's just, I really try to invite folks to say you're already the person you need to be to get involved on these policy questions, because it's the same values. It's not like advocacy is not a special other thing. It's the same thing. Yeah, yeah. The other the other thing that I invite folks to notice is that climate crisis can feel so overwhelming because the scale feels so much beyond what we can do as one person. Joining a huge movement, and it's getting bigger every day, is the way to feel like you're part of something big enough that it could really matter, and that's how you find hope. It in the scale of the climate crisis, is by joining a large movement.

N

Nicole Diroff 31:29

I do think the blessings are so for me, they're so relational, which is, which is the counter to the loneliness that you talked about the desert-like way of being.

J

Joelle Novey 31:41

And I think it's also a call to do the work in ways that are inclusive and kind, right, like that it

matters what we're fighting for, but it also matters how we how we conduct that fight, and if we fight in a way that affirms everyone's humanity, honors our need for rest and joy. I also think people want to join a movement that is fun. We've been dancing the Electric Slide outside of council chambers in support of all electric building codes, and getting people excited about electrification. A couple weeks ago, we were speaking out for a bill that would help Marylanders get off their gas burning appliances. And we were trying to drive home the idea that burning a fire inside your house is kind of old fashioned. And so we all dressed up as the Flintstones, and I got my whole team to join me with this concept and we said, you know, burning fuel indoors is like Stone Age technology, but we can all do better in 2024.

N

Nicole Diroff 32:46

I love it. This piece about joy. It matters to me that I am a parent right now, and you and I share mama identities and have had a chance to talk a little about why being a parent makes this work so so poignant for you. I wonder what your children teach you, remind you, keep you centered around as you do this work.

J

Joelle Novey 33:19

I thought you might ask me about this, and I will try not to cry. In thinking through how I would answer, I kept getting teary. Yeah, so the I once heard a podcast in the last year or two by one of the women fighting the mountain valley pipeline that's going to go cause a lot of damage and is very foolish through Appalachia, and it's been a long, long fight. At one point, Senator Manchin personally intervened to have Congress, you know, override local decisions. So that so that the pipeline could go back on, get the pipeline back on track once it had been canceled. The quote of hers, that was the headline of the podcast, was, at least mom tried. I have a nine year old right now and a five year old, and I've taken them to so many rallies and protests, tree plantings, solar dedications at every kind of faith community. Just recently, we did a trash pickup with the Sikh community, and they got eco-Sikh T shirts. You know, it breaks my heart when I think about the future they face, no matter what we do or what I do, will be a stormier future, but I think they will know in their bones that mom tried and that they were loved and worth fighting for. That's the gift that's mine to give them. Yeah, let's fight with all we have as a testimony to our love. I've been very influenced by the indigenous pipeline fighters in the Midwest who have used the term protectors, that they're water protectors, they're not protesters, they're protectors. Yes, those of us who are trying to repair our damaged climate, stop causing all this harm to our ecosystems, like put our weapons down, we are protectors, I feel very energized at home and focused by that identity. One of my mantras, especially now that I'm in my mid 40s, is just to tell the truth. Like, just tell the truth. Sometimes there's good reasons not to tell the truth, but like, Plan A is tell the truth. Yeah. Always tell. I invite everyone listening to think about what is the one community you're a part of, where people care what you think, where you're known and loved, where you have the power to open a climate conversation and ask, What would our communities responding to climate change with integrity and compassion look like? Certainly, many, many places around the country have Interfaith Power and Light affiliates. I welcome folks to go to go to the national website and find the map and see if there's an IPL in your the place you live. But there's many, many grassroots groups. People always ask climate activist Bill McKibben, what's the one thing I can do as just one person to and he doesn't like that question, so he started saying, Don't be just one person. Join

a group. Join a group. Get on a listserv, whether it's the local Sierra Club, you know, a grassroots organization or a faith based group that is going to call you to action over and over again, that's going to be your companions on the journey, not not just a one time thing.

N

Nicole Diroff 36:34

Beautiful. Joelle, may you be blessed. May your organization be blessed in this really good and important work in in these times.

J

Joelle Novey 36:49

Thank you so much.

D

Dr. Keisha McKenzie 37:06

I love that the theme of Noah's ark came up in your conversation with Joelle. I recently rewatched Darren Aronofsky's film version of the story. I've always loved it as different as it is from the version of the story that I grew up with, maybe because it's different and also because it's rooted in Jewish tradition and not just Christian tradition. I think I was struck immediately by the theme of, what do we do when the world ends, and how do we endure the cataclysm and the trauma of losing almost everybody and everything? And that's certainly not the story that you get with the little felt figures of the two giraffes and the two lions, you know, when you're a kid. But I love it for when it came to me, I was also learning about the role of religious people in the Rwandan genocide, and I was learning about pending climate catastrophe for people in small islands and my family were Islanders, and my family's Jamaican. To see the story not only as a story about covenant, which is one of the ways I learned it even only about climate or ecological responsibility, which is another way I've heard it, but to think about it as a trauma story and a story that challenges us to think about how we navigate trauma, not just as isolated individuals, but as a collective like I think that's a really helpful way to re engage that narrative as complicated as you're right, it's a it's a tough story to sell.

N

Nicole Diroff 38:45

Looking at it that way is where the critique of, as Joelle calls it kind of small boat theology, where it's about the selecting of who gets on and who's saved, which feels like a limited number. I think my favorite part of what Joelle shared was this quick line she said about imagining who is going to lead the chants that keep us together as we face to use your language as we face the end of the world, as we face really significant trauma. It brings me back to the role of artists in community organizing that actually what we need is is chant leaders and musicians and so much more than what I think we typically think about in terms of who's engaged in climate work.

D

Dr. Keisha McKenzie 39:47

That resonates with me, because I think there's two sides to the cataclysm. There's going through it, and there's living afterwards and building something new. For both of these

through it, and there's living afterwards and building something new. For both of those experiences, you need people to lead some chants. You need the people who will lead the grief chants, and you need the people who will lead the we made it chants, and we're gonna make this chant. I think I resonate with the frame of we get to save all that is sacred. She she said that. I resonate with it only if the answer to who's sacred is all of us right, because that's part of the problem of the old story as told, the only ones worth saving were the eight on the boat and the animals. Yeah, like we're not the rich billionaires who are trying to craft the capsule that takes only a favorite few to Mars like we're not. We're not doing that. That's not where we're putting our moral imagination. And so if the answer to all who are sacred is all of us, then let the poets and the song writers and the visual artists and the graphic designers and the policy makers who are making art of their own, even if not conventional, be captured by that sacredness as well. Like that's my deepest hope, yeah, that that our politics and our theology and the way that we structure our community groups is shaped by a sense of the sacredness of all life, not just all human life, but like all life. Because we know what the world looks like when we don't have that mentality, when when it is just about the small group, the small boat, yeah, the outcome of those policies, we're already living in that reality, and it's a nightmare for many of us. It's like, how can we craft a different dream? Is what I wonder.

N

Nicole Diroff 41:47

Yeah, beautiful. It makes me think about a way of community organizing that is maybe different than what I've experienced in some settings, that has felt very driven by outcome, sort of, you know, we're getting together because of this thing we need to change. And that's very clear. And here we go, which can be cool, but it makes me think of being together in a particular place and asking, what is it like to be you in this place and imagining, not only asking that question of the humans, but if we can attune ourselves to pay attention to also, what might this be like for some of our more than human kin?

D

Dr. Keisha McKenzie 42:37

That's a beautiful question, and I I have written it down, because I'll be taking it with me this week for sure. But as you say, like to listen to that question from not just other people, but also other species. I think of Barbara Kingsolver's writing, and I read one of her books last year sometime that was one of the features that just captivated me about it, not just the texture of description, and she puts you in place, but she also helps us to see from the perspective of the wolf or the coyote or the, you know, the tree or the bird or the snake, and to be able to drop out of our particular vantage point being one of the dominant species on these planets, on this planet. I think we sometimes forget there are other eyes that are seeing this world and maybe other wisdoms that we can draw from.

N

Nicole Diroff 43:30

Yeah, and others who are concerned about the state of the planet and perhaps enacting their own response to that.

D

Dr. Keisha McKenzie 43:41

Which, for me, reminds me of how Noah responded to his distress, which was actually to withdraw from conventional culture and fall into wine. I don't recommend that as a solution, but a lot of people, when they're going through grief, do pull away. And so I think it's not just to be able to notice when people are in distress and be with them in that so that they can move through it, but it's also to imagine we have to feel all of our feelings, and we can't just legislate our way out of those feelings. Yeah, so like the activity and the organizing for concrete policy outcome is critical. And I'm so so glad that Joelle is engaged in that work. And as people do that, we also have to supplement with some trauma informed conversation practice. Otherwise you don't last in that sort of work because it is, it can be so intense. We're in an era when a lot of the collectives that have been formed are kind of like those small boats and not enough, not up to the task as you put it. The nationalism is not up to the task. The ideological small group things not up to the task. The polarized corners on social media not up to the task. What could change everything that I came to through religion and that other people, I think have come through through perhaps philosophy and spiritual practice, is to constantly push out the boundary around my people, not just that it includes others, but that I recognize they were already included, and it was my smallness of heart that kept them out.

N

Nicole Diroff 45:32

As part of each of these conversations, we like to close with a way for people to take next steps after hearing us chat.

D

Dr. Keisha McKenzie 45:45

I was thinking about Joelle's mention of community. Very often at the end of conversations like this, it's like, go join Sierra Club or another existing climate group. And perfectly valid option. I also wonder about the communities that we're already part of, like the congregation or the reading group or the knitting club or the walking club or whatever it is, have a conversation there. Open a discussion there, about this wider circle, this larger story, this ecosystem and what next steps that group could possibly take to demonstrate its own commitment to a future that we can all live in. What about you, Nicole?

N

Nicole Diroff 46:36

I think I'd invite listeners to take this question of, what's it like to be you in the place that you are in, and ask that of someone, or perhaps a more than human being that you're truly interested in the answer. Begin to form those sorts of connections that will make us want to face the end of the world together. Anna Barron, our assistant producer of this podcast, also has invitations for our listeners, Anna.

A

Anna Barron 47:55

Thanks. Nicole, you and Keisha have great chemistry together, and it was such a treat to get to hear your reflections on the conversation you had with Joelle. I've put together a few more invitations for you our listeners. First, I want to direct you to the Interfaith Power and Light website, at interfaithpowerandlight.org There you will find multiple ways to get easily involved.

I suggest clicking on the "Find your state" button to link you to your local chapter of IPL. This will give you options for events to attend, as well as a community to connect with. And if you have the means, we encourage you to use your financial privilege and donate to IPL. You can find the link to donate on their website as well. Secondly, in the theme of collective action, I invite you to participate in the Eight Front Doors challenge, which is run by the organization called The Neighboring Movement. They encourage you to connect with people in your neighborhood and give you action steps to do so. Visit neighboringmovement.org to learn more and participate in the Eight Front Doors challenge. We will also put the link to this in our show notes. If you would like to expand on the above invitation, I would also invite you to organize a food and clothing drive with a few of your neighbors, maybe after you've connected with them by doing the Eight Front Doors challenge, put up signs around your neighborhood and spread the word, then bring the donations you've collected to your local homeless shelter or an organization helping neighbors in need. As always, if you do any of these next steps, please feel free to share them along with this episode on your social media, so that some of your friends might be able to get involved as well. There is no pressure to do all or any of these next steps. We just want these to be a resource for you as you figure out ways to engage in this huge and overwhelming topic. Thanks Nicole, Keisha, and Joelle for inspiring me to get out and get more involved in my own community.

N

Nicole Diroff 50:12

Thank you Anna, and thank you Keisha for co-hosting with me yet again, and for this particular conversation.

D

Dr. Keisha McKenzie 50:22

You're so welcome. It's a pleasure to be back with you on the show, and I'll be taking your question with me this week.

N

Nicole Diroff 50:34

Keisha, please let listeners know how they can follow you and your podcast.

D

Dr. Keisha McKenzie 50:41

Well, I'm still an occasional user of the formerly Twitter so X, I'm at McKenzie and M, A, C, K, e, n, C, I, A, M, and it's probably easiest to find me by my full name, Keisha E McKenzie on LinkedIn. Our show Moral Repair: A Black Exploration of Tech is on LinkedIn, Instagram, X and all major audio platforms. So just plug it in wherever you listen to shows like this one, and you'll find us. We recently won two ambys nominations from the Podcast Academy, which was really encouraging. Thank you. Thank you. So thank you listeners for joining us today for this episode of the Climate Changed Podcast. I'm taking away that call from Joelle to get and stay connected.

N

Nicole Diroff 51:31

Next month, you will hear a conversation with an evangelical Christian pastor who seeks to engage other evangelicals in climate change work. Kyle Meyaard Schaap is the author of *Following Jesus in a Warming World: A Christian Call to Climate Action*. It is published by InterVarsity press.

D Dr. Keisha McKenzie 51:51

He joins Peterson Toscano for a conversation about the Bible and climate change. You'll also hear from our other host, Ben Yosua Davis, in conversation with Derek Weston. Derek is theological training and education coordinator at Creation Justice Ministries. The episode asks the question, What on earth does the Bible say about climate change?

N Nicole Diroff 52:13

We would love to hear your thoughts and responses to our conversation, and welcome any suggestions you have for this show. In this episode, we discuss the common good and community organizers. Do you have a story to share from your community, or maybe you want to share lessons you have learned from your own experiences?

D Dr. Keisha McKenzie 52:35

Feel free to email Nicole, send your emails to podcast@theBTScenter.org. That's podcast@theBTScenter.org you can also call and leave a message or text us at the following number, 207-200-6986. Plus one, if you're calling from outside the US, that number again, is 207-200-6986.

N Nicole Diroff 53:04

The Climate Changed podcast is produced by Peterson Toscano and Anna Barron. Our podcast is a project of The BTS Center in beautiful Portland, Maine. Learn about our many online and in person programs, as well as the many resources we share by visiting theBTScenter.org That's theBTScenter.org

D Dr. Keisha McKenzie 53:29

And may we be renewed in our awe of all creation, walk gently on our planet home, treasure our chance every day to care for one another and all life, and never lose sight of the possibilities of tomorrow. Thank you.