

Climate Change, American Catholics, and Laudato Si with Jose Aguto

***Climate Changed* features guests who deepen the conversation while also stirring the waters.**

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

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

Nicole Diroff: Hello listeners, thank you for joining Ben and me. In this episode, Ben is going to share a conversation he had with Jose Aguto. He is a dedicated advocate for climate action who is deeply rooted in his Catholic faith.

Ben Yosua-Davis: Jose and I had a rich conversation about his faith, the Catholic Church in the United States, and Pope Francis' global impact in providing spiritual and moral leadership in a climate-changed world. Nicole will then join me to share our thoughts and responses to what Jose shared with us.

Nicole Diroff: As always, in a moment we will provide you with a time to center and prepare for the conversation. At the end of the show, one of our producers will join us to share meaningful next steps you can take to address climate change in your community.

Did you have any childhood experiences encountering a different faith tradition

Ben Yosua-Davis: But first, before we get there, Nicole, I have to ask, did you have any childhood experiences encountering a different faith tradition or visiting someone else's place of worship?

Nicole Diroff: Great question. As a child I was being raised in a congregational church and had the chance to visit my father's extended family's Catholic church. And it felt very different to me. I remember thinking I don't know when to stand or sit or move my hands and sometimes I didn't understand the language that was being spoken. So while I love the sense that we are part of one body of Christ, at this point in my life, visiting a Catholic church actually felt like an interfaith encounter when I was young. How about you, Ben?

Ben Yosua-Davis: My high school girlfriend went to a Mennonite church and invited me to go and visit this Mennonite congregation. Afterwards we were talking on the phone, she asked me what I thought about it and being as I was a 15 year old male jerk, I proceeded to tell her all the ways that her church was worse than my church. Um, as you might imagine, that did not go over very well and was actually this wonderful moment of challenge where I began to realize you can't act like jerks to other people when there are causes for religious difference.

Nicole Diroff: Well, I can say that at this point in my life I find being in spaces where other people are doing their meaning making thing is like maybe my favorite place to be. I got to hang out with some Quakers recently and silence is not totally my thing, but it was amazing to be present with people making meaning in that way. A lot of this season has been that for us. It's been a chance to hear how people are making meaning in this climate-changed world. Jose is going to bring us another version of that today.

Laudato Si addresses the urgent need to tackle climate change and environmental degradation.

So before we hear Ben's conversation with Jose Aguto, we will pause here for a moment of centering. To help us center, we will hear words from Laudato Si on care for our common home.

Ben Yosua-Davis: This encyclical by Pope Francis was released about 10 years ago. It addresses the urgent need to tackle climate change and environmental degradation. It emphasizes the moral responsibility to protect the planet and highlights the interconnectedness of social, economic, and environmental issues.

Nicole Diroff: Now let's hear some members of The BTS Center staff team reading excerpts from Laudato Si.

Peterson Toscano: The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development. For we know that things can change. The Creator does not abandon us. The Creator never forsakes his loving plan or repents of having created us. Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home. Here I want to recognize, encourage and thank all those striving in countless ways to guarantee the protection of the home which we share. Particular appreciation is owed to those who tirelessly seek to resolve the tragic effects of environmental degradation on the lives of the world's poorest young. People demand change. They wonder how anyone can claim to be building a better future without thinking of the environmental crisis and the sufferings of the excluded.

Madeline Bugeau-Heartt: What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us? To children who are now growing up? This question not only concerns the environment in isolation, the issue cannot be approached piecemeal. When we ask ourselves what kind of world we want to leave behind, we think in the first place of its general direction, its meaning, and its values. Unless we struggle with these deeper issues, I do not believe that our concern for ecology will produce significant results. But if these issues are courageously faced. We are led inexorably to ask other pointed questions. What is the purpose of our life in this world? Why are we here? What is the goal of our work and all our efforts? What need does the Earth have of us? It is no longer enough then simply to state that we should be concerned for future generations. We need to see what is. At stake is our own dignity. Leaving an inhabitable planet to future generations is first and foremost up to us. The issue is one which dramatically affects us, for it has to do with the ultimate meaning of our earthly sojourn.

Peterson Toscano: I urgently appeal, then, for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. We need a conversation which includes everyone. Since the environmental challenge we are undergoing and its human roots concern and affect all of us. The worldwide ecological movement has already made considerable progress and led to the establishment of numerous organizations committed to raising awareness of these challenges. Regrettably, many efforts to seek concrete solutions to the environmental crisis have proved ineffective, not only because of powerful opposition, but also because of a more general lack of interest. Obstructionist attitudes, even on the part of believers, can range from denial of the problem to indifference, nonchalant resignation, or blind confidence in technical solutions. We require a new and universal solidarity. As the bishops of Southern Africa have stated, everyone's talents and involvement are needed to redress the damage caused by human abuse of God's creation. All of us can cooperate as instruments of God for the care of creation, each according to his, her or their own culture, experience, involvements, and talents.

Ben Yosua-Davis: I recently met Jose Aguto and I was struck by his depth of knowledge and breadth of experience. With a career spanning over two decades, he has worked tirelessly to address climate change through a lens of social justice and moral responsibility.

Nicole Diroff: Until recently, Jose Aguto served as the Associate Director of the Catholic Climate Covenant, where he played a key role in promoting climate action within the Catholic community. He focused on education, advocacy, and mobilizing Catholics to address climate change through the lens of faith and social justice.

Ben Yosua-Davis: Jose has also served as Senior Legislative Secretary at the Friends Committee on National Legislation and Senior Policy Advisor at the National Congress of American Indians. His career spans various legal and policy positions reflecting a deep commitment to environmental protection, sustainability and social justice through a faith based lens.

Jose Aguto shares the story of what led him to address climate change through faith.

Our conversation begins with Jose sharing the story of what led him to address climate change and social justice through the lens of his Catholic faith. I'm curious if you might be willing to share your story of what called you to the work that you do right now around environment and climate, where it comes from in your own life.

Jose Aguto: When I was in law school, several decades ago, I asked myself the question, who are the peoples most abused by the rule of law or the lack of application of the rule of law? My answer was Native Americans, Indigenous peoples. Before coming to the faith community, I worked for 12 years for Tribal nations at EPA and then also the National Congress of American Indians and was really blessed to go to Indian country and spend time seeing how the natural environment naturally infused into the beings of indigenous peoples their ceremony, their culture, their society, their ways of life, their survival. It was that natural interconnectivity that had no, if you will, boundaries to it between these various categories that I mentioned, which really struck me. I learned to grow into that. And then, while I was working for NCAI and lobbying Congress, their issues were not being taken up sincerely by Congress. And after four years of frustration, as well as seeing the collapse of climate legislation, I wasn't hearing a particularly strong moral call from the faith community. So then moved to the Quakers, the Friends Committee on National Legislation to lift up a moral call. We were able to persuade some House Republicans to introduce a resolution called the Gibson Resolution a week prior to Pope Francis' visit to Capitol Hill in September 2015 to break Republican silence on climate change. And that was a faith filled call. We were coming not as partisans but in the interest of our common home and our common future. I decided to move to the Catholic Church as a cradle Catholic because though Pope Francis issued Laudato Si, I wasn't seeing a lot of action from that and enthusiasm for the U.S. Catholic Church at that time, even though the Quakers and the Protestants and the Jews and the Muslims were just absolutely thrilled by this as well as Bill McKibben, he was absolutely thrilled by Laudato Si. So I moved to the Catholic Climate Covenant to help the Church lift into this call to care for creation. One of the reasons why I came also into the faith space, it wasn't just some sort of strategic move. It was also a spiritual discernment, a need for me in the challenge, the true psychological and spiritual

challenge of trying to work on an issue where the science and the impacts are screaming at us. I needed to return to my faith and strength in the Creator in order to carry forth with this work.

There is a significant moral dimension to this crisis that can get wiped away.

Ben Yosua-Davis: It's really interesting to me how you describe the trajectory of your journey from working in secular spaces to working in faith oriented spaces. Part of that was about the ability to add some moral language and some moral urgency to the current situation that we're in.

Jose Aguto: The moral call was necessary to lift up. And if you look at for example Laudato Si, paragraph 4, Pope Paul VI in 1971 said we need a radical change in the conduct of humanity and no economic, political, technological fix will be sufficient unless there is an accompanying moral and cultural strength to that. And arguably we as a human civilization have never really stepped deeply into the moral dimensions of what we're doing, what we allege to be progress. Now more so than ever with the climate crisis, we have to be much bolder about lifting up that moral call.

Ben Yosua-Davis: I think you're pointing out something really important here, which is that there is a significant moral dimension to this crisis that I think sometimes can get wiped away in all the conversations about technology and policy. Not to say that technology and policy are not important, but there is a moral dimension. There is something here about how we human together that's really important for our listeners who might not be familiar with Laudato Si or I know, its sequel as well, Laudate Deum. And both of them are really startlingly frank, straightforward documents about the moral implications of the climate crisis.

Pope Francis released a series of documents addressing climate change.

I'm curious if you could just give us a really quick summary of what Pope Francis is sharing in those documents, and then the impact that you've seen it make among those who are in your Catholic spaces.

Jose Aguto: Pope Francis starts with an explanation of the Church's awareness of our interrelationship with creation, grounded in theology, as well as the statements of previous popes, and lays out in scientific, moral, political and economic analyses in various chapters how we as humanity have strayed from our care for creation. He does ground it in the sacredness that the Catholic Church holds for the life and dignity of the human person, then calls for us to radically change our behaviors in order to prevent the climate crisis moving into Laudate Deum. That is the document where he does call it a climate crisis and exhibits an exasperation and a concern that eight years after the

publication of *Laudato Si*, we still not have seen transformation of our industrial and our political systems that are embracing the climate crisis to the scales that it needs to be addressed. So, as you mentioned, there's an increasing urgency in his own language about us needing to step into this based on our need to nourish ourselves internally, and we touch each other spiritually first as the grounding that results in this ecological conversion in the systems in which we live. So it has been a particular inspiration for me to work with our constituents, many of whom are parishioners, working assiduously to convince their pastors and bishops to step into this, recognizing that many of them are unfamiliar with the topic. But now to see very tangible progress across the board in the Catholic Church. And it's a really exciting time for us.

You don't hear love creation in the theological traditions.

Ben Yosua-Davis: So I'm curious then, how does that work out in the context of the Catholic parishes that you're working with? What has been your experience, attempting to connect them with the roots of their faith, tradition and practice, to this moral vision that the Catholic tradition is offering up?

Jose Aguto: The greatest commandment calls us to love God with all of our heart, all of our soul, and all of our strength, and to Love our neighbors as ourselves. And this is the foundation. You don't hear love creation in the theological traditions. And what is being taught in the seminaries is not centered on creation or in many places, it's not even mentioned or just in passing. Read *Laudato Si* and we'll talk about it for a class and move on. So the theology in and of itself isn't well formed around this. So that's an inherent challenge. But there is now consideration of recognizing creation as something integral. And Pope Francis says this in *Laudato Si*, integral to our faith, not an addition. And the U.S. conference of Catholic Bishops also has statements in this way. And so how do we live into this? How do we bring in this ethic that hasn't been emphasized over 2000 years of tradition? So you take, for example, the training of our consecrated, who have been more anthropocentric in their orientation and their formation, and bring in care for creation as integral to that. And Pope Francis says it's all connected. So caring for creation means caring for our vulnerable neighbors, means caring for the Creator, because that's the first sentence in the Bible, and that's the first sentence in the Nicene Creed that God is the creator of heaven and earth, all things visible and invisible. Going back to the very basics of, if you love God, then you love his creation. We want to take that grounding into the space of prayer, word and action. And so our story is with the Catholic Climate Covenant is helping the Catholic Church step into those three parts which are sequential to pray, to understand the word, and to discern and to act. So it has been a particular inspiration for me to work with our constituents, many of whom are parishioners, working assiduously to convince their pastors and bishops to step into this, recognizing that many of them are unfamiliar with the topic. But

now to see very tangible progress across the board in the Catholic Church, and it's a really exciting time for us.

One diocese is committing to being net zero on climate change.

Ben Yosua-Davis: What stories might you be able to offer us about the opportunities that open up?

Jose Aguto: There is a diocese, they are going to commit to being net zero, not just saying it, and creating what we would call a Laudato Si action plan, which is what the Vatican requests of all dioceses. And it's easy to, well, relatively easy to say, I will commit to a plan implementing that, as you may know, is another ball of wax. So for a diocese which has perhaps hundreds of churches, tens of schools, hospitals, hospices, all kinds of facilities to care for their flock, how do you get them to net zero in one diocese? The CFO reached out to the business community, the Catholic business community. And now we have commitments from Catholic business leaders in energy efficiency, energy audits, accounting, renewable energy buildings, retrofits willing to offer their services to the archdiocese to live into this and to practice it. This is one of the most critical developments in our efforts, and we've had long standing efforts with diocese to help them step into actual implementation of Laudato Si through Net zero. This is the most comprehensive, and it brings in so much of the Catholic community in this archdiocese, which is in a conservative state, to have profound implications and resonance with this archbishop and his fellow bishops. And so that is the pivot, the tipping point, which can then convince other bishops that this indeed can be done when you access the fullness of the Catholic community in your diocese. There are conservatives who are deeply concerned about climate change. And we heard that in 2015 they would say so privately. They wouldn't commit publicly. There is a group of conservative business leaders from conservative parties who are deeply concerned about climate change. And, they are actually providing funding for some of these efforts, but they don't want to be known because in the partisan politics of today, that would get them ousted from the party. We want to, and we continue to talk quietly with these courageous conservatives to figure out ways to lift them up and bring them in quietly. So this is part of that quiet dimension to then lift up these folks into this space in a good and constructive way. And my focus has been, since I was working with the Quakers and with the Catholics, is grounded in your faith. So having these conservatives say, what would your faith tradition tell you about your decision making processes? Ought that not influence your decision making processes? You know, think about your children, think about your legacy. And if you understand the gravity of the climate crisis, ought this now be the time for you to exhibit that moral courage? And we will help you with that. We will

provide you with that spiritual grounding and also, if necessary, you know that, that political support in order for you to do that.

Ben Yosua-Davis: That is amazing.

This is in a conservative Catholic diocese where climate change is taboo.

And before you get to your next story, I wanted to ask. You mentioned that this is in a conservative Catholic diocese. I think the experience of many religious leaders is that it's really hard to start conversations about climate when in many conservative settings, just saying the words climate change are kind of verboten. So I'm curious in that setting what was it that enabled that diocese to engage really significantly with this issue without perhaps tripping over some of these political cultural landmines that are a part of the American landscape right now?

Jose Aguto: Well, as we know, it first starts with relationship. And one of the phrases, one of the words that Pope Francis and in the Catholic terminology is encounter. So encountering that person, regardless of where he or her is on with regard to their resonance with your opinions. And going back to the adage, love your neighbor and in the Gospel also love your enemy. So, and coming to this space, as the Quakers would say, seeking that of God in everyone. So though there are, there may have been differences or a lack of understanding, we had one person who has a very strong theological foundation who encountered his archbishop and provided him the moral and theological basis for him to step into Laudato Si. And that archbishop's response is, I can't argue with you. This makes perfect sense. I need to do it. And then he then convinced the people in the office in the archdiocese to go forth and implement it. So it was that kind of conversion, one to one.

Ben Yosua-Davis: That is amazing in part because I know that's really hard work. One of the things that I have noted within the American Protestant context, which is the context in which I grew up, is oftentimes congregations are very disconnected from the roots of their tradition. Oftentimes when there are conversations about discerning, for instance, how should we engage with climate or care of the earth, those happen through fundamentally secular lenses that can be useful but actually aren't who they are at their identity.

Jose Aguto: Katharine Hayhoe is a great communicator across divides and differences, both with her faith and her scientific expertise. One of the talks she gave was explaining that in order to reach, for example, the Knights of Columbus or the Rotary Club, who are pretty much identified as conservative, very, very well intentioned and doing great work in the world, but having a sort of a conservative orientation. So she said, going to a

Rotary Club meeting, as she was walking through the door, she saw the values that they were upholding, which are common to our faiths and wove climate change as being completely related to the values that she read from the Rotary Club charter. I was on a call with some of our constituents, and one of whom is a Rotary Club member, and I mentioned Katharine Hayhoe. And he smiled and he said, well, you know, the Rotary Club, for, say, time immemorial, we have been seeking to eradicate polio across the world. That's their mission. And they've been able to do it almost everywhere, except for perhaps two places, one of which is Somalia. An incredible achievement. And he said, the Rotary Club has decided that climate change is going to be our next mission. He cited Katharine Hayhoe as one of the influences for their pivot. Bam.

Ben Yosua-Davis: That's amazing.

How is the American Catholic Church's response to climate change different from other countries?

I know we've been talking a lot about kind of the American context, but of course Roman Catholicism is a global religion. So I'm curious. How is the American Catholic Church's response to climate change different from other parts of the world? And why is that so as context?

Jose Aguto: Pope Francis lifted up *Laudato Si* and, and we've seen, in my estimation, most of the bishops conferences in the other nations embrace it to varying degrees and certainly not resist it in the context of the American Catholic community. In some ways we have to be grounded in the culture of our nation. The Catholic vote in the United States is almost mirroring the American vote. American views on climate change are almost mirrored by the Catholic attitudes. We understand that Americans identify foremost as their top affiliation with their political affiliation and not their faith affiliation. I think any faith tradition in America has this challenge of the overarching American culture having undue influence on our faith traditions. There are also, if you will, political and economic considerations that bishops, uh, and pastors have to consider when they are looking at the financial health of their diocese, which may cause them to not be affirmative about climate change and ecological conversion. Many of them have not been raised to or been trained or formed to consider creation care as fundamental to their ministry. There are an array of challenges in the U.S. Catholic Church that they have to manage. I would note, for example, that though the Biden administration has been the most affirmative with regard to climate action, we, the United States, are the number one fossil fuel producing nation in the world right now and are opening up public lands for drilling and trying to get liquid natural gas out to the rest of the world as fast as possible. We are still going full bore with fossil fuel. Our nation is in many ways a fossil

fuel nation. You take all of these overarching contexts together and make it very challenging for our U.S. catholic Church to embrace fully an ecological conversion.

Ben Yosua-Davis: I hear in your voice as you share that some of the frustration that comes from trying to call people back to their roots in a context like this that is so politically charged, where political identities so deeply shape our own sense of human and religious identity as well.

Jose Aguto: Yes, and I don't want to blame anyone who is placed in this uncomfortable position. For example, I used to work for the National Congress of American Indians, who at that time had over 300 of the 570 plus federally recognized tribes as members. They come from a diversity and in many ways they are the Tribal version of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, which is 193 dioceses. I thought that working for NCAI, we would have a very, very powerful stance on climate. Actually, it was quite muted because there are some tribes who have natural gas, coal and oil underneath their lands, which they want to extract. And I was walking through the halls of Congress with one of these tribal leaders. I was lifting up the need for renewable energy development where possible, as appropriate on tribal lands, for example, in the Great Plains, which are considered the Saudi Arabia of wind. And this tribal chairman was trying to remove the bureaucratic barriers to tapping the coal and natural gas on his lands. And it's not for me to make a moral decision because he had 50 to 75% unemployment on his reservation for his nation. Where is he going to find jobs? So there are economic, social, political implications, especially economic ones that he had to consider that bishops have to consider. It is very difficult for us to judge. And then when I was advocating for climate legislation, you can see this on the national level. The politicians in Alaska and Texas and Wyoming and West Virginia, pick your state where there is significant fossil fuel production, you're not likely going to get an enthusiastic response to climate action. You take that to the international level. The Saudi Arabias, the Dubais, the Petro states. One of the Petro states, by the way, is Norway. You will not find from them affirmative positions on the Paris Agreement. Just look at where the oil is, where the coal and the natural gas is, and then you can see where the levels of commitment to climate action are. It's a massive, massive challenge on so many levels.

Ben Yosua-Davis: Part of what you point out is that, at least in some of these cases, those concerns are quite legitimate. If you have, for instance, as you were sharing, your community has a 50 to 75% unemployment rate, then where are people getting jobs? Is a really important question. When we, as The BTS Center, were doing research on congregations and care of the earth, one of the things that came up really, really vividly was this understanding of how important community context was for how you would engage. We asked congregants, what are the greatest barriers for your congregation engaging in issues around climate justice and care of the earth? Pastors said, our

greatest fear is conflict. What the congregation said is we are old and we are tired and we are worried about the institutional pressures of our congregation closing, and we don't have energy for this. Those concerns are very legitimate. Part of what I've learned is the role of religious leaders is you have to engage people within the context of those concerns. Acknowledging them as real and then saying, in what ways can we work through this context to bring about transformation on this really pressing issue? Acknowledging that while I believe that climate is the most urgent issue facing us as a species right now, we always have to engage with it within the context of people's day to day lived context and experiences.

Jose Aguto: But to the point of how are we as faith traditions going to sustain ourselves into the future, knowing that there's a lot of disaffiliation and there's aging in our congregations? We know that young people view climate change as one of their top priorities. There is going to be, if it's not already out, a study by the Cara Institute at Georgetown, which is going to bear this out, that I believe the figure is 65% of Catholic youth and young adults rate climate change as one of their two top priorities into the future. The way to vivify or revivify the church is to help Catholic youth and young adults, or those who are stepping away from the faith, live into their call for climate action through the lens of their faith. We know that our faith traditions provide extraordinary spiritual strength during the most difficult of times. That's why we've endured for millennia. And so when you combine the two, you have the spiritual strength and then you also have the benefit of action, because one of the best antidotes to despair is action. And then one of the best antidotes to despair is really living into your faith. We are seeing a rise, a growth, an explosion, through our youth and young adult programming, that is having Catholic high school students and young adults step into this action to issue their call from their faith within the Catholic Church. And we who have been working in this Catholic climate space have been telling our pastors and bishops, if you want to revivify the church, if you want a wonderful tool of evangelization, if you want to see these young folks back into the church, inspired by the church, then you live into what it means to live into *Laudato Si* and climate action. And I would also say, as another contextual story, that John Lewis, before he died, was expressing both admiration for the passion that the young people are carrying into movement building across these many sectors. He was also noting some concern about the activism that he didn't feel was grounded in, if you will, the greatest commandment. And one of the things that he said was when he and his colleagues and his friends were in the civil rights movement, during the day they would carry the picket signs or sit at the lunch counters, and at night they would talk about the gospel, they would have the Bible in their hand. And the civil rights movement, as you know, has a very, very strong theological, religious, faith foundation. And he found some of what's going on with the youth and young adults today as lacking, you know, perhaps because they haven't been formed or they left the churches, they left the institutions for reasons that are justifiable.

But what I'm trying to call people to is that these institutions have a legitimacy. Everything has a good and bad in them. If you look at the good and strive to improve the good within this institution, then we can lift up, because the atomization of our society, the bowling alone, the just say it as I want to say it, is not going to manifest the institutional changes that we need. And I believe that our faith traditions have that moral authority that if sourced by youth and young adults returning to the church and working intergenerationally with the rest of the church, grounded in 2,000 years of Catholic tradition, which have the answers if we look for them and we apply them, we can move the needle of the moral compass of this nation.

Ben Yosua-Davis: That is so powerful. I don't know if you saw me, but I was nodding along with you, your silent amen corner to all of that.

Jose Aguto: Thank you.

Ben Yosua-Davis: Thank you for our listeners. Perhaps we have listeners here who are pastors or congregations or maybe lay members of congregations. What is one concrete next step that you might offer them? To encourage engagement in those settings.

Jose Aguto: To be grounded in humility, to have conversations outdoors, to start first with a prayer and then a minimum of five minutes of silence outdoors, to listen and feel the glory of God's creation through all of your senses, then coming into your soul and then stepping into a conversation where you're seeking that of God and everyone.

Ben Yosua-Davis: Thank you. And thank you for this conversation that we've had together. I deeply appreciate the ways that you have worked and reflected so deeply upon what it means for your tradition, for the Roman Catholic tradition to engage transformationally with this, especially honoring the context that we're in, and that there is other ground for us to do this work besides just political frameworks that we actually do have, moral, theological frameworks grounding from which we could do this work as well, that can help transcend some of these, what often feel like impassable binaries that are so much a part of our culture. And that has been a gift to me and I know it will be a gift to a lot of our listeners.

Jose Aguto: Well, thank you, Ben. It's been a pleasure having this conversation with you.

Nicole Diroff: Ben, thanks so much for that conversation you had with Jose and for sharing it with me and our listeners. One of the things that stood out to me was the way in which context matters so much when we're talking with people about climate change. And it stood out to me the way in which Jose was sharing about the political divisions

that are present in our American context and how very challenging those divisions can make it to have the conversation. I think the courage that Jose spoke about, I just felt that really deeply in terms of when we're not sure how people are going to respond. That is real climate courage, a topic that we've been exploring quite a bit this season, really how to step into that courage and perhaps risk something even when you don't know what the response is going to be.

Ben Yosua-Davis: Yeah. And, you know, as you say that, I'm reminded that perhaps this is the reason why I, and I think probably so many of us, fall back on the scripts that we're given. It's a way to avoid real reciprocal encounter. I think about this work a lot where leaders in faith communities often really struggle with how to talk about climate. And I think part of it is oftentimes they inherit scripts and framings that they feel like would be a good thing to say, but they're not actually sure whether they'll honor the people who they're working and sharing life with. And I think the thing when we get off those scripts and have person to person encounters, um, it's not only a matter of, well, I don't know whether this is gonna convince someone else, but someone else might convince us of something as well. And this is something I really appreciated in Jose's conversation with me is he talked about, what am I supposed to say to the tribal leader who has 85, 90% unemployment about not developing these resources, their land? There's a moment that knocks us off our scripts and forces us into encounter in a way that is both very difficult but is ultimately really, really productive.

Nicole Diroff: Yeah. I've been engaging with Katharine Hayhoe's book, *Saving Us* recently, and we were privileged to do an event with her in the spring. She has a focus of talking about climate change. It's a super popular TED talk that Katharine has led, and in many ways it is a first step. But what she's pointing out is that so many of us are not taking that first step of talking about climate change with the people who we care the most about, the people who we spend our lives with. And her huge advice is to talk about the things that we love. Not to share data or some policy concern, but to attend to people's identities and to tap into the things that they love because of those identities and start to explore the ways in which climate change, could impact those and envision solutions that we want for our world, solutions that aren't about denying those factors of identity. And of course, the story Jose shared about Katharine walking into a Rotary Club and seeing, oh, here's the identity, it's on the wall in five points or whatever it was, and then finding the way to make those five points all about climate change. I wonder how to do that with my aunts and uncles and with my neighbors, it still feels like a huge challenge to me, even though it sometimes sounds like just, just talk about it, you know, just part of that. The very first step.

Ben Yosua-Davis: Yeah, yeah. As you were sharing, I was immediately thinking back to the island where I lived that I've talked about a lot on this podcast in conversation with you. In the winter, 2022 to 2023, we had three huge storms that just did horrible damage to a lot of the beloved beaches on the island. The stone pier where we catch the ferry was underwater. Like boats were canceled for the first time ever that people can remember because of flooding. And I remember after, I forget if it was the second or the third storm, I went outside to walk my dog. And uh, the first three conversations I had with people I met on the streets were all about climate and all about these beaches. And have you seen the erosion? And what about the house that was on one of the beaches? Like on it? It was grandfathered there. They could only build it there. That's been washed off its pilings for the second year. And, are they going to be able to continue to rebuild that? And it's conversations like that that remind me that actually there are a lot of ends to the climate conversation. You don't have to lead with climate to get there. And I think this is so important because I know I internalized this narrative for a long time that part of what it meant to be a good person, especially when it came to issues of social concern, was I had to go in and say the hard thing and fight it out. You know, it's almost like the in person version of the social media flame war. You know, when the comment sections on someone's post explodes, like that's what it meant to be really doing the work. But there are a lot of ways to get into this conversation. And I also think there are a lot of ways to talk about climate without talking about climate. So if the word climate change makes the people in your life run to the exit, start by talking about place.

Nicole Diroff: Mhm.

Ben Yosua-Davis: Especially if there's a history and roots there. Talk about why do you love this place? Why do you want to continue to see it thrive? What changes have you seen? And that's a way to get into conversations about care of place and land and people that we've been talking about during this season without ever having to say the words climate change. And there are so many different ways we can do this. It's about people's encounter with the natural world. Some of the greatest climate change deniers in my life love to fish, love to hunt, love to camp, love to garden. There's a place that we can find common ground, even if the things they post on Facebook just make my hair stand at end. Theological context, which Jose talks about so well in this piece, is another way to bypass some of these places where our conversations get stuck. And I increasingly find myself just less interested in having the "have you heard about climate change and the bad impact it's going to have on the world Conversation," and more interested in meeting people where they're at and forming relationships and saying, how can I help encourage and raise up in them the virtues that we will need in a climate changed world? Regardless at this moment, whether they believe in climate change or not, there are going to be very few places that don't have specific examples of the ways in which climate change is challenging their innocence. And so I think, yes, sometimes

avoiding those words is perhaps the way to go. And other days, I think, you know what, maybe now is the time to start making some of these connections. And then how do I hold that person in the grief over the loss of innocence? That's a question that I wonder about. And I imagine many of our preachers and spiritual leaders that The BTS Center does programming with, as you say, they want to honor the people that they're working with. We're trained to do that as spiritual leaders. And one of the things we're going to grapple with is people's loss of innocence.

Ben Yosua-Davis: Yeah, I mean, I've been joking, like, I don't have to convince anyone that climate change is real. The weather will do that for us. I wonder if in some ways the shift or the place of the loss of innocence as you speak of is people who thought that climate change was a bad thing. That was going to happen to other people in another time.

Nicole Diroff: Right.

Ben Yosua-Davis: What can we offer our community that can help them in a way that is deep, like it goes down deep to where the grief and pain is. Begin to memorialize and celebrate and say goodbye to that which was, which won't be coming back.

Nicole Diroff: The quote that Jose shared in your conversation about civil rights activists engaging with Bibles in their hands was so powerful and made me start imagining what climate actions with Bibles in hands could look like. We're engaging in a book study right now on a book called *Singing the Psalms With My Son: Praying and Parenting for a Healed Planet* that was written by Wilson Dickinson. Wilson says we need to turn back to the Psalms to know how to hold the broad expanse of emotion that is present as we encounter these realities. As there's great joy, as there's significant loss, as there is guilt and rage. We're actually not alone. We actually have resources from within our scriptures. Wilson points specifically to the Psalms. There's a reason these scriptures have been passed down to us, and it is because they respond to the drama of real transformation and maybe the time that those Bibles in the hands of people engaging in climate action, that is what's grounding them. That is the vision, that is the emotional container that they can turn to as they engage.

What does it mean to offer gifts and resources in ways that are gracious?

Ben Yosua-Davis: As someone who's worked in interfaith understanding work, I actually feel like you're really well positioned to answer this question, which is it's great to have these resources, but we do live in a context where there's still this history of Christian supremacy and the ways that the Christian tradition was used coercively as a tool of imperialization and colonization. So what does it mean to offer gifts and resources out of your context in ways that are gracious but not coercive?

Nicole Diroff: I've been in so many interfaith conversations where I feel like the first thing I want to do is tell them that sort of Christian I'm not.

Ben Yosua-Davis: Yeah.

Nicole Diroff: I'm like, okay, well, let me school you on the ways. I'm not all the things you think I am. But I've realized that is really not what people are interested in. They're actually really not interested in what I'm not. They're actually really interested in what motivates me and what moves me. It's just that good skill of like, I language, just using I language around, around making meaning. It doesn't have to be true for someone else. If you're authentic about what's moving to you it might produce some intrigue and of course to then turn the conversation to someone else and ask what's motivating to them? Where do they find inspiration to live in the ways they do? Mhm. So finding out what's motivating them is the other way to make sure you're being gracious that it's not sharing something because I think it's good for you. I'm sharing it because it's good for me and I want to know what's good for you.

Ben Yosua-Davis: Thank you for making those connections. I really appreciate that.

Nicole Diroff: Thank you for what you shared with Jose, Ben, and then the conversation that we've had just now. After hearing Jose's rich insights and the conversation he inspired, our listeners may be wondering what they can do to address climate change or enhance the work they're already doing.

One suggestion is to contribute regularly to a climate change organization that aligns with your passion.

Ben Yosua-Davis: One suggestion I have for all of you who are listening is to contribute regularly to a climate change organization that aligns with your values and passion. While large one time contributions benefit nonprofit organizations, monthly donations from contributors are crucial for building organizational stability and I bet many of you have climate organizations working in your community, in your watershed that definitely need your help right now.

Nicole Diroff: Now if you're looking for inspiration of where to give, Bentley University has compiled a list of international, national and regional climate justice organizations. We'll share that in our show notes. Two organizations I support through membership and regular donations are, the Audubon Society and my local land Trust in Scarborough, Maine. My 10 year old has watched me make those philanthropic decisions, so he recently decided to donate his lemonade stand profits to the Center for Wildlife in Cape Nedick, Maine. A local business heard about my kids giving and

decided to match his gift. I tell this story because in my experience, philanthropy leads to more philanthropy. The very best kind of slippery slope I could imagine.

Ben Yosua-Davis: That's amazing. I'll also add Blessed Tomorrow offers a directory of faith based organizations involved in climate change initiatives categorized by state and you can find a link to those in our show notes as well.

Nicole Diroff: We include links to these lists in our show notes on Climate Changed podcast to share other potential steps you can take. One of our producers, Anna Barron, is here.

Anna Barron: Thank you Nicole.

This episode inspired me to put together a couple more invitations for you. First, I invite you to take part in Lectio Terra, which is a spiritual practice of reading scripture and engaging with the natural world and the non human community. You can choose to do this practice individually or you could facilitate a small group. For helpful guidance, visit The BTS Center's website thebtscenter.org Go to the Resources tab and click on the Leadership Commons button. If you scroll down you will see a link to a page called Guides to Lectio Terra. There you will find documents which are created by our very own Ben Yosua-Davis. They direct you to engage in Lectio Terra. Afterward, take a moment and reflect on how this process went and consider writing a journal entry with your thoughts on the experience. I also encourage you to visit the Catholic Climate Covenants website, which is the organization that Jose was a part of. You can find it at catholicclimatecovenant.org As a first step, consider clicking the Join Us button on the homepage to stay up to date with news, resources and ways to take action. Once again, that's catholicclimatecovenant.org we will also put the link to this website in our show notes as always, if you do any of these action steps, please feel free to share them with this episode on your social media so that some of your friends might be inspired to do the same. 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 Ben, Nicole, and Jose for this reflective and insightful episode.

Ben Yosua-Davis: Thank you.

Next month you will hear a lively conversation with writer Elizabeth Rush about climate change.

Anna thank you so much for joining us today for this episode of the Climate Changed Podcast. This is the penultimate episode of Season Three.

Nicole Diroff: Next month you will hear a lively conversation I had with writer Elizabeth Rush. Liz is acclaimed for her book *Rising: Dispatches from the American Shore and the Quickening*. Her writing combines meticulous research with personal reflection, offering readers a compelling narrative on the front lines of climate change. She's been published in *Orion Magazine*, the *New York Times*, the *Atlantic*, and *National Geographic*. I spoke with Liz about her newest book, which I really enjoyed, *The Quickening: Creation and Community at the Ends of the Earth*. The book documents her voyage to Antarctica, capturing the awe inspiring and everyday moments of this groundbreaking expedition. She also explores the profound question of what it means to bring a child into a world undergoing radical environmental change. As parents, ourselves, Ben and I will consider the questions, conundrums and perspectives Liz raises. We will then open up the conversation to include a new first time mother, Sophia Cheng from withmanyroots.com in the UK.

The Climate Change Podcast is nearly time to begin producing Season Four.

Ben Yosua-Davis: Nicole it is hard to believe this season is almost over and it is nearly time to begin producing Season Four. So friends, we would love to hear your thoughts about themes, topics and guests you would like us to consider for Season Four.

Nicole Diroff: You can text us or leave a voice message at 207-200-6986, plus 1 if you're calling from outside the USA, that number again is 207-200-6986. You can also email us at podcast@thebtscenter.org.

Ben Yosua-Davis: We invite you to follow The BTS Center on Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn. Visit our website climatechangedpodcast.org to see our full show notes and a full transcript of this episode.

Nicole Diroff: Oh, and we have a discussion guide for this episode. In fact, we have a discussion guide for all of our episodes starting with Season One. Thank you for sharing our show with your friends, family and colleagues in conversation. It is through word of mouth that our podcast is growing.

Ben Yosua-Davis: The Climate Changed Podcast is produced by Peterson Toscano and Anna Barron and is a project of The BTS Center in beautiful Portland, Maine.

Nicole Diroff: At The BTS Center we have regular online and in person programs. We include book studies, speaker events and online lament rituals. We have a growing collection of resources including the Leadership Commons and Earthbound Practices.

We collaborate on different initiatives including Climate Conscious Chaplaincy, Eco Preacher and the Research Collaborative. Learn more at thebtscenter.org Bye everyone. Thanks for listening today. Grace and Peace.