



Center for Congregations
PODCAST

Whosoever

A discussion with Rev. Dr. Alton B. Pollard III of Louisville Presbyterian Seminary about leading in contentious and divided times without abandoning our convictions.

Reverend Dr. Alton Pollard:

Underneath all of our self-identifications is this larger grounding that says that we all belong to God, we are all the children of the universe, and as a result we are all siblings one to another.

Kara Faris:

Welcome to the Center for Congregations podcast. This is a conversation for anyone invested in sustaining and strengthening their faith communities. The Center for Congregations is an Indiana nonprofit that exists because we believe the work of your congregation is essential. Our mission is to strengthen your congregation, helping you find the right information or expertise for your congregations needs. We're able to do this work because of the generosity of the Lilly Endowment.

Ben Tapper:

Welcome back everyone. I am Ben Tapper. I'm an associate for resource consulting with the Center for Congregations in our Indianapolis office.

Tim Shapiro:

And I'm Tim Shapiro who serves as the president of the Center for Congregations, and I work with Ben out of the Indianapolis office.

Ben Tapper:

And Tim we just had a wonderful conversation with a board member for the Center for Congregations and the president of the Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary which is a mouthful. Revered Dr. Alton Pollard. I was amazed. I haven't had much interaction with him before the interview. I'd seen a couple of his speeches, seen some of the things he's written. I left the conversation feeling pretty inspired about the work that we're doing as it pertains to congregations and the message that he delivered for congregational leadership. And I'm just wondering what pieces of that resonated with you as you think about the work that we do here.

Tim Shapiro:

Ben, I agree with you. It was very inspiring to hear. We were calling him Dr. Pollard and he very graciously said, "Hey, call me Alton." One of the things that I'm aware of whether it's because of the pandemic or just any time, any season, a lot of our congregational leaders are just like any leader finds that the demands that they have are just beyond their reach of talent and gifts. I mean, it's true for all of us. And I think it's really helpful sometimes to hear from someone who is a leader, like Dr. Pollard, who

has a pastor's heart and has worked out a framework of not only how he leads but it's woven inside of his personhood.

Ben Tapper:

Yeah. I mean, his vision is definitely clear and concise. I mean, you spend a couple of minutes with him and you walk away without a shadow of a doubt about his vision for leadership, his vision for congregational life, for how faith can be infused into leadership, and I think that's wonderful. One of the things that I was intrigued by was how he talked about the overlaps between administrative leadership and congregational leadership and how he's bringing a lot of the same skill sets into his role as the president. And we work with congregational leaders all of the time that have to wear many hats, but I haven't heard as many of them talk about the administrative skills it takes to do their job effectively, and so I'm wondering you've been here longer than I have Tim, what that sparked in you as you think about the pastors and the congregational leaders that you've worked with.

Tim Shapiro:

Well, first of all Ben, I was really glad the way ... and learned a lot in the way that Alton described the sense that administration leadership has a pastoral component and pastoral component has a relationship to administration and leadership. Each really has a holistic view of all of that. Our pastors in Indiana are on one day of the week, they're having to present the sermon and the next day there's a leaky roof and they're having to deal with that. Or they're preparing a book study and they realized the furnace isn't working. So I think the pastors that we work with, the other congregational leaders we work with are always having to balance what it means to have a pastoral sense of self and leadership sense of self and administrative sense of self and putting those all together is like a life-long vocation.

Ben Tapper:

Absolutely. Absolutely. And as we think about putting it all together and communicating a vision for leadership, the vision for our community that was probably my biggest is that it's still possible to be a congregational leader, to be a faith-based leader and to have a poignant vision for your community that is embedded with your understanding of truth, it is embedded with your passion, embedded with your understanding of your sacred text. And he kind of brought that, and I imagine brings that into his work each and every day. And so given the context of the work that we live in, given how faith leaders are struggling to not only make sense of the world but to communicate a vision to their congregations, I thought it was awesome that he just kind of holds that so deeply within himself, he can just kind of pour it out throughout the podcast.

Tim Shapiro:

I mean, he was lighting up. You can hear it in his voice. He loves to talk about this. He loves to embody it. As part of our conversation, Alton said, "I'm really an introvert. I'm really a quiet soul." And he was so-

Ben Tapper :

Which I found questionable.

Tim Shapiro:

Yeah. Right. Right. And so inspirational for a quiet guy. He's just totally inspirational. But it tells me that there is an element of pastoral leadership, congregational leadership, whether you're a clergy or laity where you need time to think, to pray, to wonder and you can't be on as you might say all of the time. The other thing I want to say Ben is both of us would be really careful about not describing Alton's personal vision and his leadership vision because he does it so well and it's like we want our listeners to

be on the edge of their seat waiting for what Alton has to say rather than us telling you ahead of time what Alton is going to say.

Ben Tapper:

Right. I will give you the listeners a hint in that he unpacks a word that I am certain most of you, most of us haven't given a day of thought in our lives. So just know that.

Tim Shapiro:

Yeah. Right. And I'll give my little hint that totally redeems ... I haven't watched football this year. I don't even know if football is taking place right now.

Ben Tapper:

It is.

Tim Shapiro:

Okay. Thank you. But he redeems something that while I watch football games I sometimes see as a sign coming from one of the spectators in the end zone. So he redeems whatever that activity is in a really nice way.

Ben Tapper:

Yeah. So I mean having said that, we were inspired obviously by listening to Alton. We believe that you will be too, and we hope that you walk away feeling empowered to more firmly understand and name your vision for your community.

Tim Shapiro:

The Center tries to connect. I mean, it's really our mission to connect congregations with preachers, teachers, videos. All kinds of different resources. There are two resources that come to my mind in listening to Alton. One is himself. He's a resource. And so any time you can connect with him, he's a very busy man as you can expect. There's videos of him preaching on YouTube, on the Louisville website. So he himself is a resource. The other one I want to point to and he does mention the mystic theologian pastor Howard Thurman. I believe that's who Alton studied during his PhD program. So one specific resource is, hey, have your congregation think that maybe or discern whether a book study around Howard Thurman's work would be good. Plus, there's a fairly new documentary out about Howard Thurman.

Ben Tapper:

Thank you for naming that, Tim. What I want to say is that I hope the listeners are inspired by Dr. Pollard in the same way that we were and are and that as you listen, you are able to take away some element of encouragement as you bring your vision for leadership into your communities. So without further ado, here is Reverend Dr. Alton Pollard.

Ben Tapper:

Hello everyone and welcome. I'm here this week with my co-host, president, Tim Shapiro. And our very honored guest, Reverend Dr. Alton B. Pollard III who is the president of Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. Welcome Dr. Pollard. It's so good to have you here this morning.

Reverend Dr. Alton Pollard:

Thank you, Ben.

Ben Tapper:

So as we start this interview, we wanted to have you on because you can uniquely speak to kind of overlapping fields of our faith lives and faith communities as the president of a seminary in the Midwest. You have that institutional knowledge and experience in academia and as a congregational community leader, you bring that pastoral spirit with you everywhere you go. And so I'm wondering if you can speak to how you move through both spheres of influence and what they can learn from each other in your experience.

Reverend Dr. Alton Pollard:

Well, Ben, before I was an administrator in higher education I was a pastor before I was even a faculty member. So I have been down both and several roads together. And for me, the transition from the pulpit sanctuary and everyday congregational life was simply a change of venue but not a change of purpose when I came to the academy. And now as administrator ... and for me, administration is very much about leadership and that's where I think the consistency of understanding pastoral ministry comes in. That it is about being caring and compassionate and it is about providing vision. And it is not only about providing vision, it is about acting on vision. So it wasn't until before I came to Louisville Seminary, you may not, may or may not know that I was dean of the Divinity School at Howard University for a decade.

And it was in that experience in particular that I began to have this nascent understanding that administration at its best is also pastoral. Before then, I thought administration was simply administration, Tim. But as people kept bringing all of their cares or concerns whether they were scholarly or research or publication focused or whether it was about their more personal family lives and existences or whether it was our students and staff with a myriad of questions and concerns, I really came to understand the importance of having that kind of sensitivity in this office and in this work and I am so deeply gratified to then come to Louisville Seminary and be able to continue that same trajectory of bearing witness to a god who is loving and just.

You mentioned that Louisville Seminary is in the Midwest. I would beg to differ. Louisville Seminary is in the South. The last time I checked, Kentucky is still below the Mason–Dixon line and so I just wanted to note that because it is often stated even by people who are right here in Louisville that this is the Midwest. I am from Minnesota, Tim, and no, this is not the Midwest. So I'll just-

Ben Tapper:

Forgive my error. I will defer to your expertise.

Reverend Dr. Alton Pollard:

No, no. It's quite all right. It really is the case of a lot of people who are from here say that this is Midwestern, and I think it's because Kentucky straddles two regions. It's the northern most part of the South. And it is just south of the Midwest. And so it stands to reason given that Louisville is also a very progressive minded city in many ways relative to the minds of many and certainly distinctive in the State of Kentucky. It has to some a Midwestern patina. But for those of us who have spent decades living in the South like me and who grew up in the Midwest, again like me, I can tell you the difference. So it's quite patent. And that we can no more escape our past than in our personal DNA. And so Louisville and Kentucky and Louisville Seminary is, I think, a sterling example of that.

And it is because, as Tim well knows as an alum, it is because this institution was noted for having bridged North and South as the only Presbyterian seminary to do that over the course of its history from the onset that really distinguishes it and we continue to try to live into those kind of justice concerns.

Tim Shapiro:

So Dr. Pollard, Tim Shapiro here, one thing I do want to note not only have I graduated from Louisville Seminary but currently the Center for Congregations has a relationship with the Louisville Seminary in terms of we are a supporting organization which means we serve to support the mission and vision of Louisville Seminary. And I'm interested, Dr. Pollard, in two things that you said. You talked about leadership not only as pastoral care, administration not only as pastor care, but also having a vision. And I'm wondering, I think the Center ... we try to connect congregations with the resource and I'm wondering if there's a connection between your vision and perhaps a one-word resource and that word is whosoever. And I love it, but I want to learn more about it from you.

Reverend Dr. Alton Pollard:

Tim, you have just found your way to my heart. Thank you so much. Whosoever is for me one of the most important words on the face of the earth and certainly in my understanding of ministerial life and personal witness. It is a singular word that is found in John 3:16, and of course John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that God gave God's only begotten son." Et cetera, et cetera. It's a quotation that many people know, even people who are not in the Christian tradition. For me, it is a singular word, whosoever in that passes that is the most meaningful.

Because it speaks to me in a way that says while we may continue to struggle with the meaning of God in the world and in our lives, God is saying unequivocally without a doubt any hesitation that there is no person that stands beyond the pale of what God desires for our lives and in relationship with God. That whosoever means that our requirement, our commitment is to be the same. That we are to engage each other, to relate to one another, to a wrestle, to struggle with each other in ways that says unambiguously that we affirm the inherent dignity and worth of every person that we meet without respect of gender, race, social class, ethnicity, sexual preference, love or affection.

And to say that it is without respect of person is to mean that it is absolutely respectful of each person without in any way diminishing the capacity, the skill set, the attributes of everyone that we meet. And so whether we're talking about male or female, nonbinary, fluid, it doesn't matter how a person self-identify. What matters is that we invite them to self-identification because grounding underneath all of our self-identifications is this larger grounding that says, "We all belong to God. We are all the children of the universe and as a result, we are all siblings one to another." And for me, that is just an absolutely beautiful and wonderful declaration and it gives me hallelujah joy every day.

And I come to Louisville Seminary with that understanding [inaudible 00:16:45] in fact, hanging over my desk which has been there for over 20 years now, is the painting, poster, that says, "Whosoever with", the Nazarenes arms outstretched in his technicolor coat which reflects the rainbow children of God, that persons of every condition and stripe are and I desire to be invited the same into yours. And so if we are able to inchoate this understanding of what it is to bear witness, to be faithful, to minister to our learning population as they come through theological education and go into congregations and pulpits and clinical context and community engagements, if we can share the excitement of just absolutely affirming that all people that we meet are stamped with the insignia of the divine, then my God, what a world we can build.

It brings hope to a world that I think is often forlorned because of our identity politics that have consigned many of us to the side of the narrative of not only the Christian faith in the United States of America and around the world, but in our own nation has also consigned people to the side of the democratic process. And so we not only seek to have beloved community in faith terms, we seek in the United States to also create a democracy that is inclusive, that is engaging, that is embracive, and that is just. And for me, these are two very different sides of the coin that yet it still are one coin. And I think LPTS, Louisville Seminary, was already understanding much of this before I arrived. We're just taking it to a new level and I brought of course the singular word of whosoever. And I bring it out of the embodiment of my own experience.

I think there is none of us who at some point in our life, Tim, have not felt what it is to be marginalized, to be made less than, to be understood as somehow being lower on the ranks of hierarchy. What we want to do in the celebration of the spirit of the living god is to eradicate hierarchy, to demolish divisions, to tear down walls and not build them, and to continue to affirm that each and every person in her or his or theirs in their inherent worth is able to speak articulately about what their gift is to our world. And let us go then and celebrate with them. That's, for me, that's [inaudible 00:19:47] just having conversations yesterday with some of our faculty and staff about the same and I have regular conversations with our students [inaudible 00:19:57].

For some reason it's a word that I'm not aware of has ever really been lifted up out of the Biblical text in profound ways. And perhaps that's because we specialize so much in our xenophobia and tribalism that we are afraid to go there. We need not be afraid. And so I am anxious to continue to carry on this grand experiment here at LPTS and see how far we can go in preparing persons for ministry. Whatever their denominational background, taking it to the streets, to the churches and inviting our parishioners, our believers, the faithful, to courageously embrace the notion that everyone is absolutely to be affirmed. And stop using just the rhetorical language of welcome to the church. Because we know that if there's one institution that has truly been divided more so than others, unfortunately it's been our houses of worship.

And this is so contrary to my understanding of what God wants for us, what God desires for us and what God says we deserve, that it's just hard to fathom why we continue to posture in this way.

Tim Shapiro:

Thank you. That's a beautiful answer. I wonder since that one word has not been lifted up, I just wonder how congregations, congregational leaders could find either that word or the image or the word that covers the heart of the faith, because a lot of times congregations may have a vision or mission statement that says, "We are hospitable. We live the Gospel." Those kind of statements don't claim one soul or stance or heart like the one, like whosoever does. And I've never heard it lifted up in any way close to what you say, Dr. Pollard.

Reverend Dr. Alton Pollard:

Well, I am so appreciative of the fact that my life experiences ... Tim, just so you know, I'm not comfortable being called Dr. Pollard. Okay.

Tim Shapiro:

You use the ... I've heard you on a number of occasions say that. And when you send notes to people, you say, "Your friend." I've noticed that a lot.

Reverend Dr. Alton Pollard:

Yes. Because I think that's pretty much what the biblical text says. This is what we will be called. And I do agree with the Society of Friends on that one. And so I do love that language. But I also am very much aware that we live in a day and age where for so many hopeless fading around this notion that we can find our ways to each other. I don't live in that world. I live in a world of conviction and of courage that tells me that there is no progress without a struggle. The language. The words of Frederick Douglass. I live in a world that tells me that freedom is constant struggle in the language of Angela Davis. I live in the world that says that with every generation the struggle must be continued anew. That's the language of Coretta Scott King. That's the world I live in, which means that while I may not get to see the end result of or the product of what I so ardently desire for human community, I still must work at it. I must give my all to it.

Believing that the increase comes from God, God's self. And this is my hope and it is my faith. It has driven everything. And has brought me to a place like LPTS which quite candidly, you've probably heard me say Tim, was three years ago was beyond my wildest imagination. I never would have thought that I would be in an environment like this at a place like this. And yet the God of the impossible continues to act again and again, over and over. And that's why what we see in the social or around us, and that's why what we see in our ecclesial context may provide us with material evidence of a different direction, but the immaterial, the spiritual that undergirds and grounds and forward grounds us I find to be even more compelling a reality. And just because we cannot see it, doesn't mean it is not there.

And with every step forward that we make, I see increasing evidence of the divine everywhere in people that I meet, including people like the good reverend Dr. Tim Shapiro.

Ben Tapper:

Yes. Indeed. Indeed.

Tim Shapiro:

Thank you.

Reverend Dr. Alton Pollard:

Yes. I can tell you, let me just say, that there was a time not so long ago when I was a younger man. The biblical text that meant the most to me was found in 139 Psalm. It's kind of like whosoever. It's not a part of the Psalm that anyone ever quotes. But it was the Psalm passage that spoke directly to me. I hate them with perfect hatred. My own life had been so bullied and sullied by white people as a teenager in high school in particular, but throughout all my years before that, I grew up in an all white neighborhood. And white people hated the presence of my black family there. Our family had managed to get around the restrictive covenants as far north as Minnesota. Yes, they were there too. And we moved into that very bucolic community of Caucasians. And it was a Norman Rockwell type environment. Very suburban. Upwardly mobile middle class people.

And they did everything possible over the course of my life there to make everything miserable. And the violence and the more that I remembered from day to day there really took me to a place of understanding that passage in Psalm. And it was even in the midst of my moment of hatred there, having decided that there could not possibly be such a thing as a good white person in the world. Because I didn't know any. Everyone seemed to be oppositional. Seeking my social death and the social death of others who were also of African descent around me. I had to really dig deep, Tim. I had to learn

all the more about what the good book of the record had to say. I had to remind and be reminded that God is bigger even than hate itself.

And as I moved away from high school and became older, gradually began to meet people. Those angels we entertained unawares as the good book says, I was able to come to a place of peace, even as my anger never left. And to this day, I think that sits a righteous indignation is what drives. And it is that righteous indignation that compels me to, that fierce urgency of now has so famously been said, for our congregations that we cannot afford to continue to do business as usual with respect to allowing our cultural mores to have more sway than our spiritual depth and integrity. And unless we are willing to wrestle with [inaudible 00:27:50] forms of principalities and powers, we are not going to bear witness to the living God on the face of the Earth as we want, or at least as we espouse. Perhaps as we espouse and want are two different things. I don't presume to know.

As for me, I must live at one peace with my internal and external self. And the preparation of our learning community here at LPTS and my engagement as a pastor and working with churches and my love for the household of faith is that we want to see God's movement on the face of the deep. And that movement begins with each of us. Moving away from bigotries and moving away from the prejudices and the discriminations and deciding that I am my sibling's keeper. Okay. Let me shut up.

Ben Tapper:

What you're saying is so profound and powerful. It's definitely hitting home. And there's so much that I think we can take the time to unpack and zero in on but we're bound by time constrains. And so as we think about nearing the end of our conversation, and we think about the depth that you [inaudible 00:29:10] you articulated this concept of whosoever and when you said that, I hear in my mind beloved community and fighting for that community, fighting for that inclusivity and that affirmation of all people, I imagine there are those that would hear that and would also hear you speak about righteous indignation and feel like, "Whoa. There's a tension there. How can both be true?" And so can you take a few minutes and just speak into that tension for those that might be holding that in their own leadership?

Reverend Dr. Alton Pollard:

Ben, for me, God lives best in the creative tension. It is at the intersections of the disparate parts of my life and at the disparate components of our existence as human community where we are sometimes torn asunder with all of the fragments that comprise our individual and collective identities. It is at that meeting place is where the mystery of God works best, most profoundly, most incredibly, most phenomenally. And so I seek to just let God be God and I try to get out of God's way. I don't seem to succeed very well, but I try to get out of God's way and just let God have all of the pieces that make up the brokenness of my existence and make me whole.

And the encouragement then is for others to be able to find their own way to the eternal one in the same way, to know that it is absolutely all right to be filled with tension, to have a life that sometimes seems to be about juxtapositions and contradictions, but in the words of someone that Tim knows well, Howard Thurman, in the words of Howard Thurman, "The contradictions of life are not final. They are never final." And it is with this assurance then I can pick up all the broken pieces that comprise me. I can take up of my DNA and I can look at them comprehensively and understand that in the same way that my composition consists of so many different parts, so too do my siblings.

And if I recognize all of the strands of myself, I should be able to recognize the complex stands that comprise all of the other selves around me. And I should be able to see them for what they are. Not as dissimilar to me, but as part of me, as in community with me, as grounding for me. In the language of the African proverb, "I am because we are." And this is a very different notion than the usual Western formulation, "I think therefore I am." And it is that sense of being absolutely and utterly discreet person's devoid of the relational component that has often made our lives so difficult. But when we understand that the fullness of who we are exists in the context of the fullness of each and every person that we meet, and that God would desire nothing more for us than to live ever more fully into that, also means then, Ben, that justice which is love and action, that's how I define justice, justice must reign.

And what does justice mean besides love and action? It means that if there's anything in the life of persons that prevents them from coming to the fullness of themselves in relation to God and the world around them, then our responsibility, our accountability to our siblings is to work, to eliminate, to remove, all of the barriers that prevent persons from being most wholly, that's wholly with a W, and holy, with an H, themselves. And this has been my witness and understanding for, well, for a long time now. And I am just so encouraged that no matter what the movement of our days may be, no matter what the social injustices, we have the resources. We have the spiritual strength to not only persevere but to invite others into the spiritual fray with us.

And I think unless we understand that courage is a cardinal virtue in this world, we will not go there.

Ben Tapper:

Courage as a cardinal virtue. Yes. Yes. So we have about two minutes left on this interview, and so I'm wondering Dr. Pollard, two things. If you can just name a resource, or that could be a book, a video, a speaker, someone that you think can really speak to these concepts that you've articulated for those that want to do a deeper dive, whom or where would you point them if they want to learn more to unpack some of these concepts? And the second thing is, if people want to connect more deeply with you, how do they do that? Where do they find you? You on TikTok, Instagram? Where can they look?

Reverend Dr. Alton Pollard:

So Ben, the last question is the easiest one. So the only social media platform I am on regularly is Twitter. But I am there. So I'm easily found. And of course you can easily locate me at Louisville Seminary's website and the like as well. I'm as close as e-mail. If anybody would like to e-mail or whatever. I'm happy to share that. And because I move around ... I'm by nature a very quiet individual, so I'm never looking for a spotlight. I just want to help to make the world better than we have found it. And that's pretty much all that matters to me. The first thing in terms of reading, Tim, you know what I'm going to say. For me it's always Howard Thurman. It's always going to be Jesus and the Disinherited. There are many other places that one could begin with Thurman, but for me that's always a great starting point.

Luke chapter four. 16 through 18 in the Biblical text. "The spirit of the Lord is upon me." It's great encouragement for my soul. What it tells me is that in the midst of the world's greatest difficulties, strife, temptation, I know that I can walk through that as Maya Angelou would say, "Like I have oil pumping in my living room because I carry with me this spirit of God."

Ben Tapper:

I want to thank you so much for joining us today and sharing your wisdom. It has been great to have you on this podcast. Thank you.

Reverend Dr. Alton Pollard:

Thank you, Ben. It's good to be with you and Tim today.

Matt Burke:

That was Dr. Alton B. Pollard III. Next up, resources. All right. Welcome back. We're going to talk about resources. And Ben, what resources do you have or did you take away from our conversation with Dr. Pollard?

Ben Tapper:

Yeah. A few different resources came to mind for me. The first is a video conversation that was hosted by Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis. It was called The Witness of the Church and a Critical Presidential Election. And the dialogue centers around Dr. Bill Kincaid, who was former interim president for the seminary and a long-term professor there, and he has a new book that's out and his book is called Letters to the Church: Encouragement and Engagement for the 2020 Election. And so the book itself is a resource, a good resource for congregations wanting to understand how to have healthy dialogue around decisive issues that pertain to this election. The conversation is a dial up between Dr. Kincaid, Reverend Nicole Barnes, Dr. Leah Gunning Francis, Lorie Tapia and Bishop Jennifer Baskerville-Burrows.

And so it's Dr. Kincaid and four faith leaders and women of color that are dialoguing not only about what is needed to be discussed at this time in congregational life, but loosely what it means to speak truth to power, what it means to engage our faith in this critical junction in our nation's history as well as the content of the book. And so I think it's just really helpful conversation for any faith leader that is struggling to understand how to speak truth and love, for any faith leader trying to understand what it means to lead as themselves but to also hold the issues of the day with honesty and integrity. I just think it's really informative. And so I'd bring both Dr. Kincaid's book and this virtual conversation as resources.

Matt Burke:

Nice. And what about the conversation with Dr. Pollard kind of led you to that resource?

Ben Tapper:

One of my takeaways from Dr. Pollard's conversation was just his own personal conviction. A lot of times when we're doing these resource sections, we are thinking about specific moments or specific things that were tangential to what was discussed. But I think listeners might just take away the power of Dr. Pollard's conviction. And so I wanted to bring resources that might help our listeners connect with their own power, more deeply with their own convictions, and to allow them to bring that into their leadership. And I think both the book and this conversation might help facilitate that for people that are listening.

Matt Burke:

So I got another one from the Louisville Center for Church Leadership. It's an article by Carey Nieuwhof who is a preacher. He's also ... I believe he also has a podcast and a website. But it's a very short article. It's called 4 Opportunities for the Church in the Current Political Tension. and just briefly I'll share the four topics that he covers, and I think these are intriguing enough that hopefully it'll get you to check out the article. The first one is be a confessor in a culture of blame. The second is foster conversation in a culture that shouts. Number three is broker meaning in the age of information. And four is be the counter culture. And so I just think it's some different ways of framing how the dialogue is working, what

our place is in the dialogue, and how can we as leaders live into this tension of this time of tension. And be an antidote to the way things are moving and the way dialogue is happening in our culture.

Ben Tapper:

Thanks for bringing that as well. I keep noticing a lot of focus on what it means to have healthy dialogue in congregations during this season as I was researching resources myself. I'm just fascinated by how central dialogue seems to be to what it means to lead effectively during this hour.

Matt Burke:

Yeah. I agree. And I think that's one of the things and hopefully this podcast will be launching a couple weeks before the election, and it just breaks my heart to see the conversation in the media and the conversation even with people who I'm friends with just devolve into if you're this, then you must believe this and you must think this. And rather than listening to the other side, rather than listening to explanations, I think it's just a cultural fault that we have right now that we want to boil everything down into such binary ideas. It's not that easy to just give a label to one side or the other. We have to create dialogue to where we listen to the people around us and understand how they've arrived at their beliefs. How they've arrived at their thinking rather than painting them with a brush and assuming all of these things about them.

And we just have to have meaningful dialogue and especially within our congregations, one of the things that I've been hearing from pastors is that the cultural divides are creeping into their congregations in very unhelpful ways. And if we can't dialogue about them we'll continue to live in these binaries and continue to believe the worst in our opponents. And we can't believe the worst in our opponents. And that's one of the things about the interview that I love so much is Dr. Pollard talking about whosoever and just the reminder that all are created in God's image, regardless of their past, their current beliefs or what have you, they are a person who, as he put it, has the stamp of the divine on them.

And we need to lean into every conversation that we have with that in the back of our minds. It needs to become a mantra and a way of seeing the world. And I think if we as congregational communities, if we can begin to embrace that, we can be at the forefront of changing the dialogue and even changing the world around us.

Ben Tapper:

In that spirit, the final resource that I brought today was actually Dr. Pollard's inauguration address from May 2019. You'll find some of it familiar, because the title is Whosoever. And so a lot of the same things that he brought up in the podcast interview are also part of the sermon. That's where that came from. But I think he unpacks it a little bit more deeply in ways that you can in a sermon, that you can't in a podcast interview. And so if you want to hear kind of the original Whosoever message, we also have a link to that resource in the show notes.

Matt Burke:

Yeah. And just Google his name on YouTube. There's a lot of good stuff. He's a wonderful speaker. Very engaging and just really a lot of wisdom there.

Ben Tapper:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Absolutely.

Matt Burke:

Just a reminder that the Center for Congregations is here to serve you no matter where you are on the political spectrum, theological spectrum. We are here to serve your congregation because we believe that all congregations benefit the communities that they're involved in. So please don't hesitate to reach out to us. We've got an e-mail address podcast@centerforcongregations.org. We've got The CRG, T-H-E-C-R-G-.org, where you can find resources on all kinds of aspects of congregational life and again, we are here to serve you because we believe in you. We believe your work matters and we want to support and serve you in that way.

Ben Tapper:

You can also connect with us on social media. Facebook and Instagram is where we're active. You can find us at the Center for Congregations. We post resources, information about upcoming education events as well as congregational stories and highlights. And so if you just want to see more snapshots of the great work that congregations are doing, you can find some of those stories on our social media pages. You can also find it on our website, www.centerforcongregations.org.

Matt Burke:

Do they really need the www?

Ben Tapper:

They do not. But I figured why not. Just throwback. I mean, if you put it in, it'll take you there. So ...

Matt Burke:

Oh.

Ben Tapper:

No harm. No foul.

Matt Burke:

Yeah. And we would love for you to reach out to us at the podcast e-mail address. Let us know how we're doing. Let us know any resources that you have as you listen to these conversations and as you think about articles that you've read, books that you've read, videos that you've seen. We would love to kind of crowdsource some of that information because we're always on the lookout for good resources that we can share on the podcast and in our work with congregations around the country.

Ben Tapper:

And if you appreciate the work that we're doing, specifically the work of this podcast, please take a moment and go to Apple Podcast and leave us a five-star rating and a review if you like. The truth is, five-star ratings are the fastest way for new listeners to this discover this content and so if you appreciate the content and think other congregational or lay leaders might benefit, the fastest way to ensure they can get their hands on it is to leave a five-star rating on Apple Podcast. So we appreciate you doing that.

Matt Burke:

All right. That's all from us for this episode. We'll talk to you again in two weeks. Thanks so much for listening.

Ben Tapper:

Take care.