The Leader's Way Podcast
Episode 17: The Church and Prayer with Rowan Williams

Rowan Williams: You sit down. You straighten your spine. You find your balance as you sit. Perhaps take your shoes off. Sometimes it helps. You observe your breathing: tense? constrained? rapid? slow? Give it a few minutes. Let it settle. Let it find a rhythm. Don't think of anything in particular. Keep your spine straight. Keep the flow from the crown of the head down to the stomach, coming and going. In and out, up and down. And think of it rather like your heart beating. It clenches, it opens, it clenches, it opens. Click, click, click, click. You are breathing in, you are breathing out. And you arrive where you are.

If at that point you find it in your heart to bring to mind a couple of very simple words. "Jesus, into your hands I commit my spirit." "Lord, have mercy." "God, come to my aid." "Jesus, lover of my soul." It can be a line of a hymn.

And as you breathe out, let those words just keep coming. It's the beginning, I think. Sometimes of course it's the end, too. Most of us never get much further than that.

Brandon: Hi, I'm Brandon Nappi.

H: Hi, I'm Hannah Black.

B: And we're your hosts on The Leader's Way, an audio pilgrimage from Berkeley Divinity School, the Episcopal Seminary at Yale University.

H: On this journey, we reflect on what matters most in life, as we talk about all things spirituality, innovation, leadership, and transformation.

(Both) Hey, Hannah. Hey, Brandon.

H: So in sync, ready to roll.

B: So in sync. We did a thing.

H: We did a thing. We have a special visitor here, in the flesh. It's Rowan Williams.

B: It is. You know, a friend of mine asked me what it was like hanging out with Rowan Williams. And I would say we were sitting with someone who had the equivalent of 75 brains in his skull, but also simultaneously with someone who's profoundly humble and never pedantic. And even when he's drawing from, you know, his wide canon of literature, that's beyond anything I can comprehend. So he's referencing things I don't understand by the moment. He does so in a way that is not obnoxious, that is always pastoral. And I learned so much just being with him. So it was sweet. How was it for you, Hannah?

H: Oh, it was lovely. I had gotten to spend a little bit of time with him in the past at Clare College, Cambridge, because I was at Clare while he was the master of Magdalen College,

Cambridge. So it almost was like the crown jewel of Cambridge, here at Yale. So that was very, very fun. We got to reminisce a little bit about how 30 years ago when he was a visiting lecturer here, his two-year-old daughter saw snow for the first time in New Haven. And there's snow on the ground still now from a storm we had last week. So it was all very, it's just wonderful. It's hard to put into words how like, exciting and life-giving and inspiring it is to have Rowan Williams here with us.

B: Yeah, he spoke so beautifully and poetically about prayer. So I'm still sort of thinking about that part of the conversation. It will nourish me for a while. Yeah, he has a gift for being able to speak from 30,000 feet, and then to zoom right into the weeds and speak to the real practicality of human experience. So, yeah.

H: So Brandon, I'm sure many of our listeners are familiar with Rowan Williams and his life and work, but could you give us a little bit of a bio?

B: I'll give a little bit of a bio, which will be a long bio by most standards. But what I'd love you to keep in mind is this long bio that I share is about one-seventeenth of the actual bio, right?

H: Yep.

B: Rowan Williams studied for his doctorate at Oxford. He returned to Cambridge as tutor and Director of Studies at Westcott House after his university experience at Cambridge. He became fellow and Dean of Clare College, our favorite college at Cambridge. At some point we'll do a Clare College episode, Hannah.

H: Oh my gosh.

B: That'd be a great thing.

H: Yes.

B: He went back to Oxford as the Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity for six years before becoming Bishop in Wales and then Archbishop of Wales. And then in 2002, he became the 104th Archbishop of Canterbury, which must be amazing to have a role in which you're the 104th version of that role.

H: You know, Brandon, you're probably the very first Executive Director of Leadership Initiatives for the Divinity School at Yale. Just think of the 104th.

B: Oh my gosh. Well, I hope I die at this desk, because I love the work that we do. I never want to not do it. Rowan Williams was also the 35th Master of Magdalen College. He was awarded the Oxford Higher Degree of Doctor of Divinity in 1989. He's a noted poet and translator of poetry. And apart from Welsh, he speaks or reads nine other languages. Just sort of ponder that alone. He speaks or reads nine other languages. Though retired, he is still an honorary

Professor of Contemporary Christian Thought at the University of Cambridge. He's author of many, many books, including *The Wound of Knowledge*. Most recently, a volume on Augustine.

H: A little glimpse of the man, the myth, the legend. The only thing I have to add is that he's the most recent recipient of an honorary degree from Berkeley Divinity School at Yale.

B: Ah, great point. And as I as I now understand it, he is the only human to have ever received an honorary degree from Yale University *and* from Berkeley Divinity School at Yale. So, I mean, we gave him something yesterday that he didn't have, which was stunning. When I started the day, I didn't think that I'd be giving Rowan Williams something he didn't even have. But collectively, of course, we gave him an honorary degree. And I hope after this conversation, you see why.

H: Enjoy, listeners.

H: Well, welcome to the Leaders Way podcast. We are so delighted that you've accepted this invitation.

Rowan: Thank you.

H: Well, gosh, you're the kind of person it's hard to choose questions to ask because your expertise is so wide ranging.

R: Well, that's very, very flattering. It's one of those no pressure moments, isn't it?

H: No pressure, no pressure, no pressure. I mean, on this podcast, we've talked about a variety of things. And one thing that I think is dear to our hearts and the hearts of a lot of our listeners is the health of the church and the Anglican communion worldwide. I mean, I don't know if we're ever not in a difficult time, but we're in a little bit of a difficult time when it comes to matters of gender and sexuality and church unity, I think. And this is kind of a giant question to launch this off. I imagine it'll get lighter as we go. But I wonder if we could dive right in and hear your thoughts from your experience of the value of both church unity and inclusivity, and kind of what wisdom you have to share on that front.

H: Well, thank you. It's a bit of a Nobel Peace Prize exercise, isn't it?

H: Totally.

R: The two things which really … were most often in my mind were probably these: First of all, the fact which I think is a bit of a no-brainer from the New Testament point of view, that we're not in the church because we've decided to have a church. God decided to have a church–or, rather, God decided to summon a community. And already in the pages of Christian Scripture, you can see that there's an issue about some people not being very happy that God has invited others into that community. And we can so readily forget that the New Testament church is not

a peaceful little group of Middle Eastern herbivores sitting around in Quakerish harmony. It's a lot of really quite impassioned and angry and pained people. And every page of St Paul's letters tells us something about that anger and pain. So as you suggest, Hannah, that's something to do with the fact that this isn't entirely new.

But what St Paul is always appealing to when he writes in the New Testament is, we are here because we are already part of something which we don't have to earn and we don't have to work for. And that's the unity that some are given, the organic unity of Christ's body, in which there is now a human community in which everybody's job is the life of everybody else. And that's really quite a revolutionary view. It's a kind of blossoming of what the historic Hebrew community is all about in terms of the community that keeps the law because the law is about life, as the Psalms remind us. But in Christian Scripture it kind of flowers into something more than just local in that way. So that's the first thing, because God wants us there. And unfortunately, it seems God wants my neighbour there as well, even if I didn't think of inviting them. So a real theology of the Church ought to be pushing us back towards thinking about God and our unity, really resting not on our achievement, our agreement, but on the one welcoming offer that God makes to God's creation.

And the second thing is a bit more pragmatic, and it follows from that, really: What if the person I disagree with is not going to go away? What if when I wake up tomorrow morning they're still there and they still haven't changed their minds? And we've probably got a few decades together left. Do we simply seek a safe place that is a place where we're safe from each other? Or do we take seriously the notion that there might be still, even across that deep and bitter otherness, there might be some exchange of life? I suppose when I was Archbishop I tried to keep people at the table for that reason. There were those on both sides of the debate who said, "Well, why don't you just do a bit of surgery?" And I suppose like any responsible physician, my line is, "Surgery is quite a drastic response." And in this organism that is the body of Christ, what if the other doesn't go away? And it seems to me that's something which we need to learn in politics as much as in the Church. Politics increasingly becomes a zero-sum game these days. So that whoever wins an election, the losers have no stake in it. And I want to ask, so how do we get from the zero-sum thing, “If I win, you lose,” to some kind of … at least some kind of hope that there's the possibility of mutual service or mutual life-giving or nourishment beyond that, even if we go on disagreeing?

H: Yeah. Well, in your image of the body, even if one were to go to the drastic measure of surgery, the goal of surgery is never to cut the body in two.

R: Generally, no.

H: That's often what we're looking at in the realm of Church politics.

R: That's right. That's to me why the sacramental life matters so much in the Church, because that is a place where we haven't earned our right to be, where always all of us together, are guests. And I'll be lecturing this week on the subject of solidarity. And it seems to me that for a Christian, the most fundamental solidarity is that fact of invitation, as I was saying a moment ago.

B: I wonder if you can take us back to the earliest moments of when your call was discernible. One of the things we'd love to do on the Leaders Way podcast is to hear vocation stories, both because I think they bring us a lot of delight, and because our listeners are seminarians. Our listeners are other humans in a lot of fields who are trying to discern where God is leading them. So I presume all of your leadership was not inevitable in your life and probably seemed quite fantastical to a young person. Can you share the story of priesthood and your call to ministry and how that unfolded for you?

R: Well, I grew up initially as a Welsh Presbyterian, not as an Anglican, until I was about 12, I think, 11 or 12. And the local Presbyterian Church was an amazingly lively and literate and engaging place with a wonderful minister who was a first-rate preacher in the best Welsh scholarly tradition. And I remember thinking as quite a little boy, “Well, I wouldn't mind doing that.” I enjoyed Sunday school. I enjoyed the scripture examinations every year. My goodness, that's a long time ago. We had a Sunday school of 500.

B: Wow.

R: And in those days in Wales, you were put in every year for a scripture examination. You were tested on what you'd learned in the year, formatively professional in some ways. But I loved all that. I got really engaged with the study of scripture. And the inspiration of Geraint Nantlice Williams, the minister, was a big thing. So I think that was there from very early on. And we moved house and we moved town. And the church most like where we'd been in our new setting was actually the Anglican parish church. So we slipped away in that direction. And once again, incredibly fortunate in having a pastor of outstanding intellectual spiritual quality, with a real humility, pastoral warmth, immediacy, accessibility. I've said again and again when I've been asked about my own calling, Eddie Hughes in Swansea, Canon Eddie Hughes. He was the one who gave me a model to work at. He was somebody who, although he hadn't very much in the way of university education, he read voraciously. He was a great enthusiast for poetry and drama. He steered me towards the kind of theology he thought would help me come to terms with things. He steered me away from some kinds of dead end. So I think by the time I was in my mid-teens, I was fairly sure I wanted to offer for ordination. And then I guess two things complicated that; one was I started worrying about whether I might have a vocation to be a monk, which certainly makes your adolescence a little bit more complex than it might otherwise be.

B: Have you had an encounter with a monastery or with a Benedictine tradition?

R: Not really. We'd had a Franciscan friar visiting us, I remember, who made a huge impression on many of us. And I'd read a bit about it. And I'd just been gripped by the idea that there's a possibility of a life lived with that kind of single-mindedness where God was concerned. So yes, there was that. And then I guess when I got to Cambridge to study theology, I wondered, well, is it the academic life? Is it research and teaching? But I couldn't quite let go of something a little bit more uncomfortable in the background. So it took me until I was 27, 28 really to sort it all out.

I didn't go straight into seminary training. And back then in the Middle Ages, of course, a lot of people were ordained in their early 20s.

B: Right.

R: So when I went for my selection interviews, clearly people on the panel who thought that at the advanced age of 27, I was leaving it a bit late, distant days. But yes, I think what really finally tipped it for me was a mixture of things. I finished my doctorate and then went to teach at Mirfield at the College of the Resurrection with the monastic community there. So I lived with the monastic community and shared a lot of their life and I taught theology. And after a couple of years of that, I think it was fairly clear, no, I wasn't actually going to join the community. And here were all these people I was teaching who were offering themselves for ordination. And I was constantly overwhelmed by thei quality, by the depth and the integrity of these students. And I thought, well, if they're willing to trust themselves in the ministry of the Church of England, I should be willing to take that risk as well.

H: Wow.

R: So eventually, with a bit of deep breathing, I went to a bishop and said, “Well, I think I might like to have my vocation tested.” And it was, and the results were positive, as they say. And the rest is history. But what is curious, I think, over the decades is that the things which I've cared most about, including the monastic tradition, but also including academic theology, in all sorts of ways, these have gone on weaving together for me. After I'd been teaching in Cambridge for three years, and I'd been ordained deacon and priest, I decided I would offer my services unpaid as a curate in one of the parishes, one of the less obvious parishes in Cambridge, out in the councilor state in Arbury. So I lived out there for the next few years and ministered in the parish, visited, did the Sunday school, preached, all the rest of it while teaching in the university at the same time. And then when I moved to Oxford later on, again, I had a position in the cathedral in Oxford, as well as the academic chairs. So something that, in Oxford too, I was delighted to be asked to help in one of the parishes in East Oxford, as well as in the cathedral. And then a little bit out of the blue, the invitation to be a bishop in Wales, and again, still a possibility of teaching and writing.

So yes, all those things have gone on mingling in my calling. But I can remember in that period of discernment in my 20s, thinking quite a bit about vocation being connected with what you understood about yourself and where your own deepest instincts and attractions lay, which is why I've written from time to time about how vocation is not a kind of random casting session for some play. God's saying, "You look quite plausible. Why don't you play second spear carrier in Harry V?"

No, the calling is God's word creatively drawing out of you what is there in the middle of you. And the sense of calling is therefore a kind of slotting together of something which you might not realize was very deep in you. But God has slowly brought it to the surface, and you think, "Yeah, okay, yes, got it. Click." This is sort of awkward to say in a way, but I recognized again in my 20s that people were asking me for advice or looking at me for care in ways which seemed to me not insignificant. And I thought, "Well, maybe that's what I'm supposed to be

opening the door to." And maybe, and this was really important for me, maybe if you have that kind of pastoral, whatever it is, etre or atene, it's quite a good thing to exercise it within a boundary situation so that you don't just become a sort of self-appointed guru.

B: So when I imagine you in this little parish church on the outskirts of Cambridge getting a different kind of education than the one you had received.

R: Not so little either. It was an enormous concrete monstrosity from the 1930s, freezing cold.

B: I wonder what the lessons were that you could only gain in that church, that maybe the university and your seminary experience didn't provide you. What was that learning like?

R: One of the learnings I think was there are things that are not solved by talking, but are solved by slow accompaniment. So the words you use, and I've always been reasonably good with words, the words you use aren't always going to come. Be aware of that. That was one thing. Second, of course, rather obviously, is the sheer untidiness of human lives. And the fact that churches, when they're doing their job, will attract people with untidy lives. It's a paradox. We sometimes talk and act as if there was on the door something rather that could just sort your problems out and then come back.

Which I have heard of a very, very experienced and brilliant Buddhist teacher say. He's not wrong either, but that's another story. But to give the impression that you're not really allowed in unless you've got everything tied up. I could look around on a Sunday morning and think, well, here are quite a lot of very confused and conflicted lives, as well as others. Here are extraordinary instances of generosity and vision and energy, which don't fit into any of the categories that the textbooks will tell you about. And a bit connected with that, there's what I think of as the slow burn of pastoral work. The results don't immediately come in.

And the story I've often told, I used to walk from my house to morning prayer in the church pretty well every day. And sometimes, especially in the summer months, I would stop to chat to somebody in their front garden. And after about nine months of this, this person stopped me and said, "I think you would go and visit so and so in a neighboring street because her husband's just died and she's in a bad way. And I think she needs a call."

That's the slow burn, the casual contact, which when a crisis comes may just come up. And I don't know how much we teach in seminaries about that particular sort of patience, that particular readiness to think it doesn't all have to be visible, spectacular, and overnight.

H: As we're talking a little bit about vocation and seminary, and we've heard some stories like this on the podcast of vocation, who feel weakly or strongly a sense of calling, but then whether it be the Church of England or the Episcopal Church in America, the bureaucracy of the Anglican Communion can sometimes seem like a casting director who doesn't see the spark. What kind of words do you have for people in that situation?

R: If there's something in you which is real, God implanted and God activated, there will be a way of that making a difference in the body. It may not be quite the way you like or prefer or can make sense of. Ideally, it would be wonderful if people were able to feel they were recognized

and used in the right way. But we've all known those who without any sort of a huge malice or incompetence on the part of the wider Church just don't find that and can sometimes live with a quite deep sense of privation or unfairness because of it. And I think, once again, if you think the body of Christ is more than just the organization, you have to believe that something goes into the water supply. It's a difficult one, though, and the Church often sends out very contradictory messages. These days, for all sorts of appointments and positions, you have to fill in enormously complicated forms about what are the things you're brilliant at. I'm not completely sure that it results in any fairer or more obviously constructive results, but that's me being a grumpy old man.

B: I wonder if we could talk a little bit about prayer, maybe precisely because the body of Christ can be such a difficult place in which to find a home. We all have many friends and relatives who come to us and say, "How can you live inside of this institution?" I also think just the way our world is today, where we're facing an election here in the United States, it's not as utopian as it is across the pond. And so, I've been thinking a lot about prayer these days, of course, it's Lent. What has your prayer life meant to you in all of the leadership that you've held and the challenging moments that you've found yourself in, just more generally in the Christian life?

R: When I was a teenager, somebody gave me a publication of the Fellowship of St. Albans and St. Surgis, the Anglican and Eastern Orthodox Association. It was a book of Orthodox prayers, including the wonderful prayer of Metropolitan Philodets of Moscow in the 19th century, which ends with the words, "Teach me to pray, pray thou thyself in me, pray in me." That stuck with me all the way through with the sense that St. Paul writes about in Romans 8. Prayer is, well, another great image from George Herbert, God's breath in man returning to his birth. And that sense that prayer, at its most natural, is simply what there is in us, breathing out back to God. That's always been very, very important because that's what stops prayer being another duty, another thing you've got to do, another thing or another box you've got to tick. And that seems to be quite important in making sense, again, of what the Church is. “How can you live in such an institution?” Well, I don't simply live in an institution. I live in an organism, in a network, a living network in which God's breath is returning to its birth. So to pray is to try to remove the obstacles in you to that breath, moving out Godwards. To come back to that every day for a reasonable amount of time is not only to be praying, as one activity among others, it's also to be reminding yourself of where you stand, who you are and what you are.

And that's why, certainly in my years as Archbishop, it just wasn't possible to get through the day without making sure that there was a period when all that was brought back into focus. And I've always loved Desmond Tutu's alleged remark. I think it's him. Sounds like him. “I'm too busy to pray for less than two hours a day.”

B: Right. It's beautiful. Correct me if I'm mistaken, but do I hear some Laurence Freeman in your words as well? And maybe you could share your connection to the World Community for Christian meditation.

R: Yes. Yes, Laurence has become a good friend in the last decade or so. But I think most of my inspirations have come from two sources. One is the Eastern Orthodox world and the

tradition of the prayer of Jesus, the prayer of the heart, the sort of measured recitation on the outer breath of the prayer of Jesus, and also other bits of the Benedictine world where I had a lot of contact for a long time. So when I discovered John Main's work about prayer with a mantra and so forth, it seemed to me, yes, there's the Benedictine context, there's the version of the prayer of the heart. So it felt very familiar. I never met John Main or heard him, but I liked what I read. And then I'm getting to know Laurence a bit and doing a few bits and pieces with him. I'm doing retreats and panels and discussions with him. Not least two or three events where we talked about meditation and children and how to help.

H: Oh, wow.

R: Especially primary age, elementary age children getting into the habit of stillness. So yes, it's a long connection, one that I'm very grateful for. And I had the real pleasure of spending a week last November in Bonnevaux in France, where the World Community of Christian Meditation now has a residential center with a huge converted barn, which acts as a meditation space and chapel. And a week with a most interesting group of people, including a lot of parishioners from the Roman Catholic Church in Dublin who were trying to rethink their parish life on the basis of shared meditation.

B: That's really exciting to me. I had many conversations with my Buddhist friends who were raised within the Christian tradition and never bumped into the contemplative tradition and felt that they needed to turn to Buddhism, which– I'm a great lover of Buddhism and some of my dearest friends practice in Zen and Asana and Thervada Buddhism–And I'm curious about the kind of work we can do within our Christian tradition to lift up historical Christian practices that can nourish the heart and the body and the mind in ways that they're finding in other places.

R: Yes, just so. It is exactly that frustration people experience that nobody wants to talk about this or nobody knows about it.

B: Yeah, well, Jamie was just on the podcast recently and said, essentially, "Why are we hiding this contemplative tradition under a bushel if this is what people actually want? This is what will motivate people toward the tradition."

R: That's right. There it is. There it is to be used and drawn on. And what's gone wrong is not easy to see. There are some I've heard Cynthia Bushe, for example, say that nobody talked about contemplative prayer when she was growing up. Well, happily, I can say that wasn't true. And I was, as I've already indicated, extremely fortunate to be in an environment where the vicar would quote the cloud of unknowing and assume that was something we would want to know about. But I think we were probably in a bit of a minority. Yet there's always been that element.
I guess one of the things which has made it a bit harder for people is the impression sometimes given that contemplation is a really very rare and rather...

H: Exactly. … Like how do you access it?

R: Yeah. And it's not for the poor plebs like us. You just get on with saying the rosary or whatever while we have some mystical excesses. And that's the other side of it. People think sometimes, oh, all of this meditation stuff, it's all about mysticism. Not a word I much like. It's about strange experiences and intense things. And those things happen. Of course, they do. But that's not actually where the heart of the contemplative reality lies. And of course, that's where St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa are so helpful. I think when I first read the whole of St. John of the Cross when I was about 23, 22, 23. It's sort of, I think I was thinking, yes, yes; now I see. And I read that alongside the wonderful work of Ruth Burrows, the Carmelite sister who died recently, the age of 100.

H: Wow.

R: And the *Guidelines for Mystical Prayer* was given to me by a Benedictine friend, in my early 20s. And again, I thought, yes, this is it. And around the same time reading Abbot John Chapman's spiritual letters, they all kind of circle around the same thing. Contemplation is available for people. Contemplation is not as difficult as you think it is. And contemplation is a great deal more difficult than you think it is. And fundamentally, it's about growing into your identity as a baptized member of the body of Christ, becoming what God wants you to be, aligning yourself, orienting yourself, or as I like to say, attuning yourself to the reality flowing towards you so that you are maximally what you can be in relation to God and to others. Because the disciplines of contemplation get rid of some of your fantasizing, your paranoia, your defensiveness … you unclench heart and spirit.

H: So if I'm a listener, and I don't feel like I've ever done this before, and I think, Okay, this afternoon, I'm going to practice contemplative prayer. What do I do? Do I walk into a room? Do I take off my shoes? Do I go outside? Do I sit down? What do I think?

R: Well, if I were to pitch a very rough bit of advice here, you sit down. You straighten your spine. You find your balance as you sit. Perhaps take your shoes off. Sometimes it helps. You observe your breathing: tense? constrained? rapid? slow? Give it a few minutes. Let it settle. Let it find a rhythm. Don't think of anything in particular. Keep your spine straight. Keep the flow from the crown of the head down to the stomach, coming and going. In and out, up and down. And think of it rather like your heart beating. It clenches, it opens, it clenches, it opens. Click, click, click, click. You are breathing in, you are breathing out. And you arrive where you are.

If at that point you find it in your heart to bring to mind a couple of very simple words. “Jesus, into your hands I commit my spirit.” “Lord, have mercy.” “God, come to my aid.” “Jesus, lover of my soul.” It can be a line of hymn.

And as you breathe out, those words just keep coming. It's the beginning, I think. Sometimes of course it's the end, too. Most of us never get much further than that.

H: You're saying so many good things that I want to ask a lot of follow-up questions, but could you tell us a little bit about the Jesus Prayer and maybe a little bit about how to teach a child or children meditative prayer?

R: Just a word about the Jesus Prayer. In its present form, it's a version of the Prayer of the Tax Collector in Jesus' parable. You simply say, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner," or some combination. That's something that crystallizes in the High Middle Ages in the Byzantine Empire, but it goes back a lot further because seventh, eighth century you already find great spiritual writers saying, "You repeat the name of Jesus," or "You repeat, 'Lord have mercy' or 'Lord, come to my assistance.'" So there's clearly a long tradition passed down in practical teaching from those early days of this … technique is not a very helpful word, but this *discipline's* practice of breathing out as you speak to what is most real and most unconditioned in words that somehow attach to the person and reality of Jesus.

I think even when you say, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit," you're quoting the Psalms, but you're also quoting Jesus on the cross, which I suppose is why that, if I'm honest, that is the formula which increasingly I tend to go back to. So that's the Prayer of Jesus. But as for children, we often think that children just want to be entertained. We've all been in churches and we've all probably done family services in which there's a kind of desperation to keep children entertained.

H: Fight chaos with chaos.

R: Well, what if you fight chaos with something else? This is a slightly frivolous story, but not entirely. I used to do quite a lot of school assemblies for young children between six and eleven and like to tell them stories. And one story I often used to tell, which came from Russia originally, I won't tell you the story now, but it involves a snowstorm. And because it's nice to involve the children, as I said, "It's a stormy night and the wind was very–oh, what noise does the wind make, and they'd all go, "Whooooo, whoooo." "And the snow was falling heavily," I'd say, "What noise does the snow make?" And I'd say, "Right. Now, when it comes to this in the story … " So wehn I'd tell the story; "And it was a windy night," they'd all go, "Whoooooo!" "And it was a snowy night." –And there was dead silence.

That told me something. And when with Laurence and with others, I've been trying to encourage children, usually sort of nine or tenish about this, it's with that in mind. They're not terrified of silence as we think they are. And if you help them to do something with it, if you tell them, "Breathe, breathe in, breathe out, settle your body," they know what it's about and they can do it. And I remember looking at a little list of, well, sort of a report from a dozen or so children who'd been doing meditation, and they explained why it meant something to them, how it worked for them. And they said, oh, you know, they said all the right things. They said this was a moment when … they wouldn't have put it quite like this, but they reoriented themselves, anchored themselves, stole themselves, and felt at home. So it can be done.

H: I used to teach Godly Play, which I don't know …

R: Oh, yeah.

H: And before I went for the lesson, I would have all of them kneeling. And I can't remember if it was before or after we said the Lord's Prayer together, I would invite them into a moment of

centered silence. It felt like a real accomplishment if we got to about 10 seconds, but at the same time, it felt really profound.

R: Oh, yes.

H: And one or two of them would say the time went faster than they had ever had it. Even to go five minutes without too much pain.

H: It really is a gift in a very noisy world.

R: It is.

B: Likewise, I was a youth minister once upon a time and would lead retreats for teenagers. And we would bring together sometimes 150 teens. And we would practice centering prayer together. And they would repeatedly report that this was their favorite aspect of the retreat.

R: Yes, yes. I was with a mixed group of guitarists and youth pilgrims from the UK in Taize about … It must be about 18 years ago now for a weekend. I remember reporting back on it to somebody else saying, you don't forget the sound of several hundred teenagers being silent.

H: Yeah. Well, I also … you're reminding me used to lead my high schoolers in centering prayer. And this was a pretty evangelical school. The only language people had for it was to compare it to other religions, back to our earlier point.

B: Oh, I got kicked out of an evangelical group for teaching centering prayer. Yeah, I was heartbroken..

H: But it's a gift that belongs to the evangelical church, it belongs to the Anglican communion, It belongs to us all as the body of Christ.

B: Yeah, absolutely. The Spirit is moving. And I wonder, these days, what's bringing you hope as you look out on the horizon and see certainly conflict and fragmentation, but I suspect also much beauty as well. What are you seeing these days as you talk so beautifully about keeping your eyes open? What are you noticing that's hopeful?

R: Much beauty, certainly. And for all the conflict it brings, I think as a culture, although we're in a mess in any number of ways, it's just become a bit harder to hide suffering and injustice than it used to be. And people will get terribly exercised about woke culture and the extremity of all that. And I think, well, all right, maybe the pendulum swings too far, but we are just more awake, and I use the word deliberately, more *awake* to the cost of some of our comforts and some of our successes to others than we might have been the years when I was growing up. And I do not regret that. And on top of that, of course, it's just the matter of those people in our congregations who are still discovering Christ and those unexpected people come knocking on the door. And that's all deeply, deeply hopeful. And because God. We know that that kind of

hopeful behavior and response opens a shaft down into the well of something that keeps rising in our world. Can’t be destroyed.

B: Bishop Rowan Williams, we're so thankful for your presence here at Berkeley Divinity School at Yale. We'll keep you and your ministry in our prayer. And we're just so thankful for all you do for the church and for the world. Bless you.

R: Thank you very much indeed. I've enjoyed talking with you.

B: Thank you for listening to The Leader's Way. We hope you were encouraged and inspired. To learn more about this episode, visit our website at berkeleydivinity.yale.edu\podcast.

H: Rate and review us and follow the podcast to make sure you never miss an episode. Follow Berkeley at Yale on Instagram for quotes from the podcast and more.

B: Until next time.

H: The Lord be with you.