

## **The Leader's Way Podcast**

### **30: A Space of Grace at the Church of the Presidents with Rob Fisher**

Rob Fisher: At its best, you are a vessel for something bigger. And when I was first ordained, I remember feeling uncomfortable putting the collar on the very first few times, you know, and then I remembered ... when the bread is blessed, is it worried that it's good enough bread or not? You know? You're missing the point if you're thinking of it in that other way.

B: Hi. I'm Brandon Nappi.

H: Hi. I'm Hannah Black.

B: And we're your hosts on The Leaders 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 innovation, leadership and transformation.

B: Hey, Hannah.

H: Hey, Brandon. How's it going?

B: It's going really well. I feel like it's been a while. I've been away on vacation.

H: Yeah. You've been gone. You know those memes about when your work bestie is out, you're just kind of like moping around.

B: Yeah. This reunion is sweet, and I am so curious about how you were doing in all your scholarly endeavors.

H: Oh, yes. Yes. I don't know if we've said this on the podcast. I am currently a Dean's Scholar at Virginia Theological Seminary. So I'm up in Northern Virginia near DC, kinda near where our guest for today is from. And we just bought a Subaru. I feel very excited about it. We went from a 2005 car to a 2021 car. So, Brandon, it's like driving a spaceship. Like, there's music possibilities that weren't there before. We've been pumping up the jams. This is why I was asking about Chapell Roan earlier, stuck in my head along with the rest of the country. Wow. And one of the things that happened at CarMax-- CarMax, if you're out there, you could be our next sponsor. Fight it out with Subaru.

B: We are in the midst of some serious negotiation.

H: With Subaru? Yes. Subaru USA.

B: Look. I'm not gonna disclose anything in violation of our contract, but there are hundreds of thousands of dollars on the line here. And I'm not feeling the love even though it makes a Subaru a Subaru.

H: That's the problem. We already know their tagline. They can't change it now. Anyway, we're filling out the paperwork, and the lady's like, "What do you do? What do you do?"

And I'm like, "I work at Berkeley Divinity School at Yale."

She's, "Oh my goodness." And this ... those who know me well, this is almost like a running joke that I can't get through one conversation with a stranger without them telling me their whole spiritual journey story, and that's what happened. Like, buying a car already takes a long time, and I was both thankful that this lady was taking the time to tell me about her faith journey, and I also was like, "I would like to leave CarMax now with my new car."

But okay. Fast forward, Griffin and I are really excited about our new car, and so we got with the times and purchased this little Instax Mini. And this has inspired us to be true Subaru people and take this thing on the road on little adventures. So yesterday, we took the dog canoeing. The thing is we took her kayaking when she was, like, 14 weeks old, which was a poor choice, a very poor choice. We were in Long Island Sound. She's a Labrador. She's a water dog. And so she was just, like, shooting herself out of the canoe at every possible moment because she was, like, "This is awesome. This is water. I like to swim in water. I must swim in the water now."

So we couldn't keep her in the kayak, and we lasted, like, 10 minutes. It was wild. So we were like, okay. New car, new us, two-year-old dog. Let's go. So we went canoeing under Key Bridge in Washington, DC yesterday, and she stayed in the canoe. She did kind of sit on the edge and let her tail, like, sweep through the water. She's kinda cooling herself off, and then I could see, like, a paw here and there trying to, like, get out of the canoe. So it was on the mind, but she did stay in.

B: So I have in my mind not the George Washington in the canoe crossing the river, but I have Nellie with George Washington's hat on, the paintings, muskets in the back.

H: Very distinguished. Yeah. She will lead us ...

B: A Book of Common Prayer. Wow. Well, that was well deserved!

H: I also found out here in Alexandria, there's an Episcopal church that is where George Washington went to church. How cool is that?

B: I believe that a Berkeley graduate is the rector there. Indeed. If I'm not mistaken.

H: Yeah. Mhmm. Very cool.

B: Well, that was a well-deserved bit of fun with Neli after all the ministry and faith sharing at the Subaru dealer.

H: Out on the water, nobody could get to me with their faith stories.

B: Well, any walking on water? Did Nellie ... have any ... miraculous?

H: She really did want to swim, but we kept her on board. Because the problem is if she goes in, everybody's going in.

B: Ahhhh. Well, that reminds me that this week, I also had an unexpected faith-sharing moment.

H: Did you?

B: Yes. I was walking down the streets of Manhattan, and I am now a street preacher. Because early Sunday morning, I was walking to go get a cup of coffee. I was in Manhattan, for an overnight with my kids, and some friends were visiting from the Netherlands. Shout out to my Netherlands listeners, Cleo and Clara. And ...

H: For a second, I was like, there's only one?

B: Yeah. And this gentleman was walking down the street and he was listening to a podcast. And I heard what I instantly knew to be the voice of my mentor and teacher, Richard Rohr. And so I said to him, "Oh, you're enjoying some Richard Rohr." And the guy's brain almost totally exploded. (Sorry. I almost knocked over my lamp.) Because, I think he thought he was being fairly discreet, and so we had a lovely faith-sharing moment for, you know, about 3 minutes on the street corners of the tough streets of Manhattan. So I thought we had some lovely fellowship. We talked about our faith, and it was really fun.

H: Wow. It's kind of Thomas Merton of you, except instead of Louisville, it's Manhattan. Very cool.

B: Yeah. It was a fun moment of connection. You know, sometimes you go to New York and you feel ... Yeah. Just overwhelmed by the clouds and the anonymity, and it feels just ...

H: The anonymity. That's the word.

B: Yep.

H: Yeah. So ... Wow. Well, I can just about see Washington, DC from where I'm at right now, and it feels like every five seconds, there's a new political curveball. So who knows what the state of the country is gonna be by the time this even gets published? But I'm really excited to get kind of a view from the inside with our guest today.

So, Brandon, I've met our guest for today at EPN once, but then you traveled down to DC and actually got to spend some time with him. So why don't you introduce our listeners to our guest for the day?

B: Sure. I had the great privilege of spending a couple of hours with the Reverend Rob Fisher, one of our Berkeley Divinity School at Yale graduates, who is the rector at St. John's Lafayette Square, right across from the White House. His leadership during a really tumultuous time in the life of our country is something I'm so excited to be talking about today. He has some incredible stories. He's originally from Southern California.

H: Whoop whoop.

B: So excited about that, Hannah.

H: The best people are.

B: I will try and be as cool as both of you. Wow.

H: You should have brought some shades.

B: ... Though likely fail miserably. He has an undergraduate degree from Yale College. He studied Japanese and sang with Yale Russian Chorus. Isn't that cool? Before seminary, he was an organizer on environmental issues in California. As I said, he graduated from Berkeley Divinity School at Yale. He's been a chaplain. Chaplaincy was at New York Methodist Hospital in Brooklyn. He served in parishes such as Saint Bartholomew's in New York City and churches in San Marino and Santa Barbara. He's been involved in interfaith work, working closely with Jewish and Islamic communities while he was there in the Carmel Valley. He and his wife, Sarah, who is a journalist, they co-founded and published a magazine called Edible Monterey Bay. You see, he really is cool. It's a quarterly publication focused on food and wine in California.

H: That's very cool. It's actually hard to think of something cooler. Californian food and wine? I mean, come on.

B: Yeah. I mean, I like Legos. It makes me the opposite of cool.

H: I don't know. Legos are secretly cool.

B: Well, here's why I'm so excited. As our country is experiencing so much political turmoil ... you know, he's someone who has lived this intensity, lived this kind of division, but has really leveraged the church and the gospel and the church's mission for reconciliation and healing and really creative ministry right in, as some people would say, the swamp of Washington DC. But he has created a real oasis. I'm just so excited for this conversation.

H: Yeah. It's kind of interesting because I think a lot of rectors, priests, spiritual guides, what have you, are wondering how to lead people through this time. And he sort of has that in a mega way. Like, he can't get away from the political landscape. So I'm curious to know what wisdom he has for the rest of us who are sort of, like, living more toned-down political lives that actually feel like they're dialed up to a hundred. So here we go.

B: Yeah. Yeah. Enjoy this.

Father Rob Fisher, we're so thankful to have you here on the Leader's Way podcast.

R: Thank you. I'm glad to be here.

B: You're a Berkeley grad. You're rector at St. John's Lafayette Square in, Washington, DC. You have a really sort of unique vantage point to look at our country and our church. But before we get into any of those really layered and rich topics for conversation, I wonder if you can just share a little bit of your vocation story. And, you know, I was just with a teenager who came to me and said, "I think I'm called to priesthood. How do I know?" And so I'm thinking, you know, we probably have seminarians listening. We have potential seminarians listening. And this age-old question of, how do you know that God is calling you to a particular vocation, whether it be to be a lawyer, a teacher, or a priest? Can you share that story and maybe share how you knew?

R: Yeah. Sure. So, both my parents are educators. My dad was an elementary school principal, and my mom taught elementary school, and we were churchgoers. We grew up in the Episcopal church, I'm a cradle Episcopalian, and I saw them model a life of service. They didn't use the word *vocation* or *calling* about what they did, but that was absolutely what they were doing right before my eyes and my sister's eyes. Both of us kinda got it. We thought, Well, that's what you're supposed to do. You know, you're given opportunities. You're given gifts. You get the chance to, like, learn and develop yourself. And what you need to always do is then use those gifts to serve. And I knew from an early age that I wanted to do something of service; do something that would serve something bigger than me, but I didn't know what.

I actually was interested in foreign service. I thought state department work was super exciting. I got to study Japanese as a high school student and also Chinese. And I was fortunate to get to attend Yale as an undergrad, and I did many things. It was a mind-opening experience on a lot of levels, but I ended up majoring in Japanese. And I thought, you know, I would move in that direction of foreign service. But I actually got to know people whose dads were in that line of work and their families moved all around, and I realized what a commitment that is. You know, and you also, by the way, when you do that, you have to support whatever the administration may be, whether you like them or not. And I thought ... that's a huge thing.

So I was a little lost as I was getting close to graduating for that question of, like, what will I do with my life? I also was involved with a group at Yale called the Yale Russian Chorus. And it was started in '53 to keep some musical traditions alive that couldn't be sung back in the homeland. A large part of our repertoire was actually Russian Orthodox sacred music. And we were keeping that music sung. It wasn't explicitly a religious organization, but to sing that music ... you cannot help but be moved if you're part of that sound. And we would have people who were Buddhist, atheist, agnostic, or all kinds of flavors of Christian, including Orthodox, and Jews in the group, including some who wore their yarmulkes as we sang these hymns about Christ. We were one in the sound. And so that that was a really formative part in in many ways. That was my big church experience during the four years of college when I wasn't attending as regularly on Sundays at regular church.

That and a few other big experiences as an undergrad showed me about something called organizing. And that if you get a bunch of people behind something and they're aligned and there's organization around it, incredible things can happen. Our Russian chorus group, we weren't the best singers, but what we were doing was pretty special. And we ended up singing in the White House for Boris Yeltsin. We sang in Carnegie Hall twice. We recorded a professional label classical music record. It was because of the organization. And I realized, you know, organizing is a thing to do. So I took a job out of Yale doing grassroots organizing for the

environment. They sent me to the Bay Area of San Francisco, and I had some formative and, you know, challenging and awesome experiences.

Then I was attending Grace Cathedral, and I realized that the church at its best is about organizing. It wasn't like I was hearing a sermon and that was changing my mind, something I hadn't thought of or been oriented toward. It was taking something that was already lit inside me and then taking that flame and fanning it. And I realized that's what we're meant to be about. Of course, at that point, I was totally against the idea of going into the ministry because, obviously, I'm a normal person. And that, you know, is not something that normal people would do. And so, fortunately, for me, I did have some people ask me, people who knew me really well from different parts of my life, people who I could trust to be super honest; three different people within the course of a month said, "Have you ever thought about seminary?" And, of course, my answer was "No way. That's not me."

And so I had to face one of two possibilities. Either God calls normal people or maybe I'm not a normal person. Either way, I was glad that God kinda hit me over the head, and I had to break down some of my own stereotypes and biases. And when I switched gears and actually started praying on it and moving in the direction of this path, all these green lines started appearing. My life started ... all the things that didn't fit started fitting, you know.

So I'm very grateful for all of that. And there were a lot of things that I experienced that I had no idea would eventually help prepare me for some of the things that we get to do as priests, including the grassroots organizing experiences in the trenches that I got to do back then.

B: I wonder, Rob, is there a particular piece of music from those Yale Russian Chorus days that was particularly moving for you that you can call upon and maybe we can even share with listeners?

R: Oh, I will tell you my kinda standout favorite among favorites was a setting that S called Otche Nash it's Our Father. It's the Lord's prayer. So ... set by Kedrov. It's the most simple like ... the melody is almost nothing, and you it's just so meditative. You just kinda float as you sing it.

(music plays)

... And that was one where, you know, in the Orthodox tradition, traditionally, instead of having a pipe organ, the choir is the organ, and so we were the organ. We were the instrument. Our bodies were that.

(music continues)

And when you sing, and I love to sing. I'm not, like, Whiffenpoof level or anywhere near, but I love to be in harmony with other people. And when you don't know where your voice ends and your best friend's voices begin ...

(music continues)

And in some of the music we sang, because we also sang Georgian music and Ukrainian music, you get these incredible tight harmonies and things that you don't hear in western music that really wake you up musically.

(music continues)

The Yale Russian Chorus, by the way, is alive and well, and I have been fortunate to be part of the alumni. When I was an undergrad, we called the alumni Scare Bears, so I guess I'm now one of them.

H: You have arrived.

R: It's a magical experience to be a part of it.

B: So with your story in mind, and maybe you've experienced sort of on the other side of the collar, wearing the collar, conversations with people who are thinking about ministry, do you have advice for people who are considering seminary or ministry? And did you ever find out whether you can be normal and in ministry?

R: I think the answer to that question really is, what is normal? You know? One thing that that I'll never forget; the night before I was ordained, we actually had fourteen people ordained all together in one class in the diocese of LA. One class of ordinance. It was pretty powerful, and we got to do an overnight retreat the night before that ordination. And the bishop, who was a very memorable personality, looked around the room, and he looked at us, and he said, "When you become ordained, don't become a professional."

H: Woah.

R: He said, "I know some priests who are professionals. They're assholes." And, it's an important point. You know? Another priest who gave me good advice before I was ordained, as I was entering the process, actually, she said, "Remember, it's a downwardly mobile journey that you're gonna be entering on." And I will say, I think that some priests forget that. And I think, sadly, even I've met some people who are relatively newly ordained that think that wearing the collar is about the privilege and the specialness and a lot of those kinds of things. And that is not what it is to be. Another thing that that was shared with me that night that the bishop said-- those words by a different person who was speaking to us all, he said, "Remember, we are sacramental in our church, in in the Episcopal tradition. We are sacramental people. When you are ordained, you become a sacrament. So, yeah, a priest is empowered, has the privilege, is consecrated to consecrate. You know? But just walking down the street, you are a vessel for something that is beyond you."

I was actually thinking about this, this morning, knowing that we were gonna have this conversation. I just hopped into a coffee shop, and the guy on the other side of the counter was looking at me a certain way. And it was one of those times where sometimes I forget if I'm wearing a collar or not. But that ... it was a reminder of, you don't know what you're bringing in a room wearing a collar, and it can be an incredibly humbling and also a beautiful thing. And

sometimes it's a very complicated thing, by the way, too. But at its best, you are a vessel for something bigger.

And when I was first ordained, I remember feeling uncomfortable putting the collar on the very first few times, you know. And then I remembered, Well, like, when the bread is blessed, is it worried that it's good enough bread or not? You know? That's ... you're missing the point if you're thinking of it in that other way. And so I find it liberating to remember that when you're ordained, it's not--it shouldn't be--about you, but about what you might be able to carry and what window you might be able to offer. I love what Bill Countryman wrote in his book, *Living on the Border of the Holy*. He was a priest at CDSP. I believe he was a New Testament scholar as well. But he had this wonderful perspective on ... to be a priest is to bring people to the borderlands, which are dangerous and exciting places where the holy and the rest of everything else come together. And you're like a trail guide. You know, take people there.

(commercial Living Church)

H: And now a word from the Living Church: What does it mean to be human? How do we live fully as creatures loved, limited, and liberated by God? If you're a leader, teacher, or preacher in the Episcopal or Anglican tradition, we'd love to invite you to The Human Pilgrimage, a Living Church conference in Oklahoma City, September 26-28, 2024. This conference will focus on how to be human faithfully from birth to death, how we live well and take care of one another, and how we can answer the Great Commission in light of these realities. Speakers include Amy Peeler, Katherine Sonderegger, and other top pastoral thinkers. The conference will also, we hope, equip theology students, clergy, and lay leaders to address contemporary ethical and pastoral concerns related to living, loving, and dying well. Come and join new friendships, good food, and ministry-forming conversations. Go to [livingchurch.org/events](http://livingchurch.org/events) or click on the link in the show notes on the podcast website for more information and to register now. Apply discount code YALE for 10% off all tickets. Back to the show!

B: So I mean, this is striking me as so, so countercultural, so counter to the kind of focus on branding that once used to just be the domain of companies. Right? And now people are thinking about branding themselves. And you're articulating, what I think of as kind of the charisma of John the Baptist. Right? Pointing to Christ, pointing to something else, and your life having a kind of, of course, inherent dignity and purpose and meaning, but it's a meaning relative to a larger purpose. And that has a kind of resonance in today's world. It has a contrast to most of culture.

R: It sure does.

H: So I do wanna ask about what that's like at St. John's Lafayette Square in Washington, DC. Brandon and I were talking earlier about how I think for a lot of spiritual leaders, there are conversations that are gonna be happening between now November that not all spiritual leaders are used to thinking very much about. But you're, like, at the epicenter of American politics, leading people into the borderlands. What's that like? What's your church like? What's your ministry like?



R: Yeah. There's so much to say. But just to start with what you were talking about, the marketing. And we do need to think about marketing in the sense that we need to think about how do we convey to people who are uninterested, why they should be interested in what is offered in a Christian life, a life of faith, a life in Christian community, what a church can do and be, and what it can provide. And I think that the market is there. We have had a hard time meeting the market and actually communicating what it is, why it matters. And we get in-house. This is something I never wanted to be, but I find that in my life, I'm around churchy people way more than I was before I went through the process. And we can we can speak just to ourselves too easily and forget how it all sounds.

What I noticed when I first got to St. John's, a couple things. I looked around and I observed what makes this place tick. What is this place at its best? What is this particular church, its charism? And I realized a couple of things. One is, this is a place of grace. And it's important to be a place of grace here on this particular corner of H Street and 16th. Because we are not only literally across from the White House, but we're in the middle of a city that is often very grace-challenged. And when I see people coming through the doors, I see a response people have, whether they're visiting from far away or whether they're DC people. People know they need grace. And when they step into a place and they experience this as a place where grace can be lived into, they realize the goodness of that and how much we need it. And the people who are attracted to become members of St. John's, the reason I came here was not because of the really amazing history and the beautiful architecture and all these other exciting things, but I came because I fell in love with the people. When I got to know some of them, I was drawn to the community that's here because it is a thriving, living, breathing community of people who seek to follow Christ. And part of what makes the community here the community that it is, and this is something that I think is about a holy currency that exists in Washington DC, where a Christian holy currency and an actual reality of who's drawn with people who come here from far away to work and live and serve, it's *service*. So many of the people at St. John's are here to serve. A lot of them are active military or retired. A lot of them are our friends in the state department who answered that call, you know, and it's kind of interesting having people that are part of the community, and you fall in love with them, and then all of a sudden, "Well, I'm off to (name a country.)" And fortunately, now we live stream, and so they can still be part of the community when they're away. And then they come back. I've already seen a little of that. And of course, people in politics, and people in government, and all kinds of ways. And, you know, from outside DC, people look upon the city, and they see all the qualities that are not great. And those exist.

You know, one word that we didn't use when we were talking before, but it is an important word, is the word *ego* and the guardedness that we have to have against the temptation for all that. Well, there's a lot of ego all around here, and we have to be guarded against the temptations of it every day. But the thing that saves us in a lot of ways is to, you know, lean into that service part. And I know it's with myself, but I also see it with others, people inspiring each other every day. People look at each other and see what a person can do when they take great gifts, and then they use them to do something for a bigger cause.

B: One of the things that my friends who might identify as non-churchy, what I find them doing with me often is asking me to define my terms. Because sometimes I'm guilty of throwing around some of my favorite theological language and just assuming that everyone knows what

they mean. And sometimes I even assume that I know what I mean when actually I might not. And you used one of my favorite words, and it's you know, dear to most Christians, and that's *grace*. And so when you describe St. John's as a place of grace, can you share what's behind that? What you mean? And grace is one of those little words that actually has quite a big history behind it. So for you, what is that word grace, and and how does St. John's live into that charism of grace? Yeah.

R: Didn't Philip Yancey say something like it's the last unspoiled word? You know?

H: Yeah. Oh, gosh. I won't go down the rabbit trail.

R: Yeah. One thing that I find very particular to us, to our context, is people in this town are constantly being measured up. And when you meet a person, it's this little dance, and it's a faux pas to ask what do you do, or who do you work for. But everybody so badly wants to know. I was walking the dog a few days ago, and I met a woman. And turned out she was from Texas. I said, "Well, I'm from the west too. I'm from California."

And she said, "Oh, I work for a Californian."

And then I'm like, "Oh, who is it? Who is it?" Of course, I got her to share.

She's like, "Oh, the vice president."

I'm like, "Really?" Because we have a lot to talk about. But the thing is people are being measured. And the achievements they've had, the schools they've gone to, the credentials, all those kinds of things. To be able to step into a place where that is not where your value is, that that's not how you're valued at all, is, like, such a relief here and such a liberation of your soul.

The other thing too, and this is just getting more of the case every day or every minute. We are one of the rare places where people in DC who may do battle against each other on the political fronts every day can come and sit with each other and kneel side by side, receive communion from each other. And even more important, maybe, in some ways even more rare in some ways is to really actually become close to each other, you know, to form real friendships, to care about each other. And that changes everything. If we were just tolerating that there are people of different political parties who are not just, like, token, but they're, like, in it. Like, they're working for right. It's their livelihood. You know what I mean? But that they can really be worthy of love, You know? And also, that people can see the servant in each other, even if the person is serving some ideas that one person is totally against. Yet, you see that that person does believe it. They do believe it. And by the way, people in DC, many of them do believe in what they're doing. I think people outside of DC have become so cynical about it, and I don't blame them. But I can just share with you what I've seen, and that is people do still earnestly come at their work from different perspectives, different parties, and all those things.

I don't think the old days were as good as they talk about, where people used to drink scotch together at night after working hard in, you know, the houses of Congress and play golf and all that. I think it was better than it is today, but it's not 100% lost, but it does get worse, the separation and the animosity and the demonizing. And that that's another word. I think that's an important word. I have my own political perspectives. I will sometimes sit in the pews when I'm visiting another church, and I'll hear a sermon. And I will know that I have the same views basically in terms of, like, policy of the preacher, but I feel uncomfortable when I hear the preacher speaking a way that I know is demonizing those who don't agree with me and that

person. You know? And I don't think that moves us forward in a helpful way, really. It's a humbling thing at St. John's to preach because we are expected to, and I'm glad this is the case, we're expected to deal with important political issues of today. But when you do, you have to remember that you will have world experts on those topics sitting in the pews. You know? You'll have, like, 3-star admirals, you know, and people who work in the highest levels of whatever. And so you need to know your place in terms of your issue expertise. You know?

And also, I say this with my staff and make sure that people understand the importance of not even accidentally demonizing those who will have different views. You can say things in a strong way, in a powerful and a clearly spoken way, in ways that also will bear grace. It is possible to do that, and it takes a lot more work.

H: So how do you do it? How do you preach and include politics in the preaching, but not just preach politics? If I'm a listener and I'm a preacher and I'm thinking, Gosh, I don't usually preach anything to do with politics, or I've never touched politics in my preaching, but I have to now because the world's ... what, how do you do it? How do you do it?

R: Yeah. Yeah. There's a lot a lot I could say about that. One quick first response. I think it was Jim Wallace who said this, that if the temptation is to go left or to go right, consider going deep. I think that came up, Brandon, when you and I were talking before. I think that's great.

B: It did. It's such a good line.

R: It's true. It is an option. I also think of some words that I heard when I was a student at Berkeley. We had the retired bishop of New York, the legendary figure Paul Moore, you know, a complicated figure, but back then, you know ... Interestingly, he was dying of cancer, but it wasn't public. And I think he was on his sort of like final tour around visiting important places. And so they brought him in. It was kind of a surprise to us all. "Okay. Now you're all gonna literally, like, sit on the floor and listen to this guy as he shares things he learned over his career as a priest and a bishop." And he said "Always remember this when you preach. No matter what size congregation you're preaching to -- it could be 7 people. It could be 700 people. There will be one person who's just had their heart broken. Have a word for that person. And there will be at least one person who's just had the most wonderful thing in their lives just happen. Have a word for that person." So that is a great bit of advice in a challenge. It's hard to really do it. But when I prepare sermons, I try to recall that and ask myself about ... if I was in one of those categories and I was hearing the sermon, you know, what would it possibly do? You can do the same thing in terms of other life perspectives.

And when I do my study on an issue, you know, if I'm gonna go into a topic and I'm gonna go into the issue, I don't just read the like-minded views to me. You know, I think we have to do that. Because even though there are a lot of ... it's easy to say when you're on one side of an issue. It's easy to say, "Oh, the people on the other side are just idiots." It's like, actually there are probably some people that are actually pretty smart, and they may be really wrong, really wrong-headed. But we should read them and hear what they're saying, and why they're saying it.

One other thing, and this is the thing that we were told, when I was at Berkeley at YDS. I think it was David Bartlett who said this, and many people who went to YDS will remember him fondly. He was one of the few greats. And he talked about William Sloan Coffin back in the day, and what a force of nature that guy was, you know, and they called him Bill because they

could call him Bill. Like, “Bill Coffin would do this and that.” So when he was chaplain at Yale for those years, difficult years in the sixties, he would be able to say things and keep people with him in spite of the way he challenged students, including conservative students. And the reason they stayed with him is they knew that he had their back in the end. They knew that the chaplain Bill Coffin would be there for them if they needed him. That he actually really cared. He cared about them as people. He was a pastor. There is something that happens when you get to be the pastor of a place, not just a visiting preacher. You can do more and say more, and it doesn't happen in your first few months, either. That is an important dynamic, and that helps.

H: Thanks so much for listening to this episode of The Leaders Way. We had such a rich conversation with Rob Fisher, especially surrounding events that occurred on the national stage, which happened to be his parish's doorstep in 2020, that we wanted to break it up into two parts for you. So this episode focused a lot about Rob Fisher's ministry, what it's like to be a priest in DC. And our next episode is gonna go into events that we all kind of saw happen surrounding the pandemic, the murder of George Floyd, and a presidential visit to St. John's Lafayette. So stay tuned for part two.