

Speaker 1: 0:16

[inaudible] welcome to hyphenated life. We invite you to join us on this journey to explore the connection of the sacred and the secular that inspires us to become more fully alive. [inaudible] don't have all the answers to them by they were great questions. I was like, wow, this is going to be a fun conversation. No, you can't trust someone who has all the answers. Anyway ,

Speaker 2: 0:54

Welcome to another episode of hyphenated life. We are joined today by Reverend Dr. Serene Jones, who is a minister ordained and the disciples of Christ and the United church of Christ. She describes theology as the place and story you think of when you ask yourself about the meaning of your life, the world, and the possibility of God for her, that place is a dusty piece of land on the Plains of Oklahoma, where she grew up. She writes, I go there to find my story, my theology. I go there to be born again, to be made whole to unite with what I was, what I am and what I will become in her work as a public theologian, Serena explores theology as clarifying lens on the present from grace to repentance, to the importance of moving from grieving to mourning . Dr. Serene Jones currently serves as the 16th president and the first female president of union theological seminary in New York city. Her books include trauma and grace theology and a ruptured world. Feminist theory and Christian theology cartography is of grace. And most recently call it grace finding meaning in a fractured world. Welcome Reverend Dr. Serene Jones to hyphen ended life. What an honor to have you on today. Thank you for joining us.

Speaker 1: 2:22

I will thank you for the invitation and I'm very excited to be in conversation today with such a great program.

Speaker 2: 2:28

Thank you so much. Well , uh, let's start here. Uh , a primary premise of this is still a quite new podcast. We're in season two here with hyphenated life, but it's inspired by the words of Madeline Lingle , where she says there is nothing so secular that it cannot be sacred. This is one of the deepest messages of the incarnation. Uh , and of course we're in Boulder, Colorado. So there's , uh, you know, we feel it even more of the talk of spiritual, but not religious these days. I wonder if you might begin serene by talking a little bit about how grace comes into this picture for you with regard to what we see as in David and I have talked about this a lot, sort of a false binary between sacred and secular, because what I'm struck about with your book among many things, the book call it, grace is just so full of story and narrative that helps , uh, I think give color and , uh, this deep humanity to how you talk about theology as a public theologian. So if you could just kind of start there of grace as theologically oriented to what it means to be a real or fully alive human that you lay out in your book, but this whole sacred secular thing you seem to really , uh, step into in a very narrative way. But what might you say about those words from Madeleine L'Engle and the whole premise of , uh , what helped us create this podcast even ,

Speaker 3: 4:04

Ah, that's such a great quote and it's so true, and it really does get to the core of, of what is most sacred. And, and for me as a, as a, as a Christian, you know, that God became fully fleshed. Um, is there anything more secular than just the reality of

humanity , um, made Holy by the fact that, you know, God, wasn't just a little bit there, but fully there. Um, and coming out of the season that we're in right now on , uh , just having the ended Easter, you know, they're all the way, all the way to a horrible political death and, and yet , um , stronger than the most oppressive forces in the world around us. And so I think about that a lot right now in terms of everything that , um, as a nation and globally , um, that we are suffering collectively. Um, and there is , uh , you think about just as one part of that suffering, COVID-19, COVID-19 doesn't know if you're a Christian or a Buddhist or a Muslim. Um, and I think we're at one of those points in our nation where , um, the , the, the, the sense of a common humanity has the power. It , it is creating an inflection point. It has the power , um, to bring us together , uh, as we , uh , as we struggle with life and death, it also, of course, in our humanity , um, has the power to tear us apart. Um, and that's one of the powerful things I think about , uh , when you talk about the relationship of the sacred and the secular and the theme that runs through sort of my view of life is that as human beings, and this is a universal truth, I think is the most vexing thing about us is that we are capable of enormous, good, and beauty and glory and brilliance, and all entangled with that is the fact that we are capable of horrendous evil. We are capable of big mess ups, and we are capable of getting it very wrong and that pertains to all of us. Um, and that's sort of the , the tangled mess. That is what it means to be human. Um, and so you, you're in Boulder where the spiritual, but not religious are no doubt, very strong. I am in New York city where it is the dominant religion.

Speaker 4: 6:55

Yes, yes.

Speaker 3: 6:59

And , uh, and if you're not spiritual, but not religious, you're actually something that is hyphenated. I heard a new term the other day , um, from someone who is a Pisco paleon , but has a Buddhist practice and she called herself a Buddha. Paleon

Speaker 4: 7:16

No , there it is. Well , yeah .

Speaker 2: 7:23

You know, a deep part of your own story and , um, you, you described theology and I love this. I love just how you , uh, humanize this whole conversation through these powerful narratives in your book, call it grace, but you describe theology as the place and story you think of when you ask yourself about the meaning of your life , uh , the world and the possibility of God. Um, and I , I love, I love what you wrote . You said I once was a happy but confused Christian child. And , and I grew up a Southern Baptist in Tennessee, by the way. Uh, so I'm not sure how happy I was, but I was definitely confused.

Speaker 4: 8:05

But

Speaker 2: 8:06

You say, now I am a wiser, still fundamentally happy yet humbled Christian leader, humbled by life. And by my own understanding of the complexities, horrors and the gifts of the Christian faith. I just love that. I wonder if you would, how would you , uh, we, we know that your story begins , uh, you know, on the, in that dusty patch of ground in Oklahoma, but how would you begin to describe , uh, your own sort of spiritual and

religious background , uh, your childhood and how you describe how it was a mix of complexities and horrors and gifts, how at this agent's stage of your life and being a public theologian for 40 years, how do you , uh, you know, w what's your stump speech about that these

Speaker 3: 8:56

Days? Oh, well, the stump speech I already gave it is that we're , we're really great and we're really horrible, and that is the nature of the life we'll live together. But for me in that book, I began it's my childhood, because I think all of us are so profoundly marked by the places that we grow up and the communities that form us. And for me, that was , uh, you know, small town, Oklahoma, where my family goes back generations. Um, and I grew up in the disciples of Christ, which , uh, for people who aren't familiar with it, I know there's more in Colorado who are then in New York city. Um, but it's about as low church as you can get in terms of , uh, doctrines. And I did not grow up with a very , um, indoctrinated sense of what it meant to be a Christian, much more of a , a community since you know, that we became Christians when we were around the table together. And , um, and remembering the story of Jesus, it was very anti hierarchical. Um, but it was also the disciples of Christ really came out of a movement , um, of a combination of Baptist and Presbyterians moving West. And they were a pretty rugged group of people. Um, my family in Oklahoma , um, one part of them were , uh, originally , um, homesteaders Sooners who settled in that , uh, hard concrete Prairie and , um, took up the task of trying to make a life for themselves with extremely poor. Another part of my family got there at the turn of the century running from the law because they were , uh, one of them was a horse thief and , um, uh , turn of the century to steal a horse was actually worse than murdering someone because a horse was a way a whole family, you know , got around and coped with life. So just even in the story of my own family, coming to be in Oklahoma has in it, these stories of amazing fortitude and resilience, and yet also, you know, these stories of, of criminals. And , um, in the book, I, I try to honestly reckon with the racist , uh , history of Oklahoma, all the way from the relocation and genocide of native Americans to horrible Jim Crow laws, to the Tulsa massacre. And then I tell the story of discovering, you know , uh, my family's most likely own involvement in a lynching of a woman, Laura Nelson in Oklahoma, Oklahoma in 1911 , um, place. I had grown up loving in a story I had never heard. Um, so it's the combination of, of stories of resilience and love and , uh , tremendous evil. And so much of that is, is still with us. It's still with me. Um, and it's still with us in this nation. Um, and throughout the book, I'm sort of grappling with many of the issues that we struggle with as a nation, as not just abstracted political issues, but issues that I experienced inside my own self and my own body. Um, and I wrestle with them as I've wrestled throughout my life with theologians. So they're theological in their very secular nature. I mean, there's, you know, for a person formed by faith, everything, it's the illogical, because it's a story about the nature of who we are and how we live together.

Speaker 5: 12:53

Yeah. I recently read an article in the times was talking about one of the reasons we're so fractured socially by politics is because politics is no longer separable from the rest of our lives. It really does embody us that division has gone away. And so , uh, whether it's social, economic, racial, whatever, whatever conflict exists , uh, the , the politics becomes a part of that entrenched duality and entrenched separatism between the , the

two sides. And, and we're , we're experiencing it obviously massively on it on a cultural and social scale in our country, but individually within our families, in our friends and, you know, every one of us, you know, has, has someone that we've so to speak lost , um, because of these differences that now you really can't divide all of them. Um, you know, you , uh, a couple times, at least in your bio, I see reference the term public theologian. Um, and I was wondering if, for me, and for maybe some of our listeners, if you could expound on exactly sort of what that means. And , um, I don't know if it relates to exactly what I was saying before, but I feel like in some kind of way it does that the , these things , uh, do relate to one another.

Speaker 3: 14:15

Well, when I use the term public theologian, you know, I think basically any good theologian should be a public theologian because when you're talking about the scope and breadth of faith, you're talking about our public lives together, how we live together and all of the issues that are there in front of us are a part of that. Um, but I think at this present moment, you're right. I mean, the political divides are just excruciating and they're deep. Um, it's like the grand Canyon is opened up between, you know, the sides of our nation. And I find it helpful , um, to remind people that this particular divide hasn't always been there the way it's manifesting itself now. Um, for instance, in the 1920s in Oklahoma, I write about the fact that you couldn't find a Southern Baptist, who wasn't also a socialist and proud of it, and they elected governor and something like 149 state reps were socialists and a socialist ticket. Um, and that really what we're seeing now in terms of the, the red and the blue and the religious right, and the religious left , um, is, is a fairly new phenomenon , um, that you can even find in the, you know, in the seventies, the Southern Baptist convention and , um, passing resolutions, supporting a woman's right , uh, in , in the first trimester to, to , uh, to have choice , uh, with respect to your pregnancy, that would be unheard of now. Um, but the , the sort of embattled nature of where we find ourselves is a result. Um, as I read it historically, have a very concerted effort , um, on the part of , uh , a lot of money on the right , um, that, that reached a point really in the late fifties and came to fruition in the seventies that saw , um, sort of liberal Christianity , um , even in its evangelical forms as a real threat to the growth of capitalism, because across the board, in the groups of people that now don't talk to each other was a shared sense that poverty , um, and that oppression in any form of hunger , um , lack of education and healthcare, these were basic issues that Christians should unite around and address, and that you couldn't be a Christian if you didn't care about them. Um, and what we're living with now is the result of that concerted effort to fracture that bond. Um, and , and, and in a sense fracture , um, the capacity of that Christian vision of , of addressing social evils , um, to have the kind of power that it needed to take on the growth of capitalism. There's so much more to be said about that, but we see that Fisher right through us right now, and it's around our tables. Um, and then growing up in Oklahoma, it's definitely runs through , uh , my larger extended family as well in some rural urban divide is I think , um, and growing up in rural America , um, which wasn't always considered the conservative part of the United States is now , uh , become that. So , uh, it's, it's a, it's a complex web of things, but something's has to give and some, and it needs to shift, or we're going to , um, sort of sink into that grand Canyon in a tumble that is a real threat to our democracy. And ,

and for me as a person of faith, a real, a real threat to the capacity for us to thrive as human beings together,

Speaker 5: 18:29

Sort of realm of public theologian. Do you see any, uh, responsibility of what you might on a cursory level label as a progressive Christian? Is there a messaging problem that we have, uh, to, to kind of, uh, redirect, uh, the identity of Christianity in America back to where it originally was with these agreed upon points that, you know, suffering is bad. And, uh, one of our roles as Christians is to do our best to help people not suffer, which isn't too far off from. Was it a Pisca booted, Pisca Buddhism or Buddha paleon, um, you know, that they're very similar concepts that the core tenants of these religious traditions, and it does feel, I feel, and I I've talked to him, had many conversations with people who feel like, wow, it feels like our religion has been, um, kidnapped from us and in the identity is misconstrued, um, in such a massive way. W what can we do? What could a regular person do that, you know, isn't, uh, maybe have a public theologian on their business card or something like that. Um, how can we take that back, so to speak?

Speaker 3: 19:47

Yeah. Yeah. Um, so I, I, I don't know if it's a messaging problem. I think that, um, to a large extent, the sort of spectacle of the religious right has so attracted the, the media's attention, um, and a lot of money behind it to attract the media's attention. Um, you know, I often get asked this question, you know, do we see progressive Christianity on the rise again, and as if it's somehow died and wasn't there and now it's coming back and it never died. And it's been here all along doing its work. Um, of course, um, you know, I use that word humility in my description of myself as a older now confused but happy, basically Christian. Um, but doing it with a sense of humility, uh, you know, not, you don't help, or you don't commit yourself to building a better world because you want to have a good stump speech, or because you want, you know, to get on television, you do it because people are suffering and you want the suffering to stop, and you want to be in solidarity and work together. Um, but I do think that, uh, you know, at this inflection point, um, we either start seeing a shift, um, or we're in for really very difficult times. And I feel that shift happening. Um, I feel it, I, you know, I feel like many people for whom the big questions of life who would be quote never, you know, never entered the doors of a sacred space are now asking those big questions and seeking deep answers. Um, and that, um, communities that do share a common concern about poverty and immigration and healthcare and housing education, or, you know, are starting to find each other and come together in a spirit of hope. And, um, I also have such as the leader of a seminary where we have many, uh, religiously unaffiliated students, also many students from different religious traditions, still the predominantly Christian, but, you know, people keep coming to seminary, um, to ask these questions and to, uh, read ancient texts and to look for wisdom and to be confounded, um, and humbled and empowered, uh, that gives me enormous hope.

Speaker 2: 22:34

Uh, what's, what's the, what's the him David truth that confounds us, but love that has found us. Thanks. Be to God. Um, yeah. Yeah. Um, well, you know, to that point, serene, in some ways we, um, we are national partners with a group called Baptist joint committee for religious Liberty in Washington, DC, which is, um, one of the few, uh,

maybe only agencies that , uh , deals exclusively in first amendment issues related to religious Liberty. And what we've talked through here at pine street church in Boulder and through , um, it's now called BJC. Uh, we major in acronyms apparently in Baptist life. Uh, but one of the, one of the things that, that really has come front and center in the last few years, certainly of the under the Trump administration is this merging of , uh, American identity and Christian identity. And almost to a point where it becomes cover for, for white supremacy, this whole idea of Christian nationalism , uh, from your, from your seat as a public theologian, if you , uh, you've got the open mic here, what might you say about white Christian nationalism today as it's manifesting? And certainly we're , uh, we've, we've come still coming through. Uh, we've not come through , uh, this pandemic upon the pandemic that we've talked about a lot on this podcast, the racial , uh , pandemic that's been raging for 400 years, certainly the global health pandemic for the past year, but it , it, it seems, and I love to hear you say that you , uh, are, are feeling like the shift is happening, but I'm just curious about your kind of observation around this whole white Christian nationalism phenomenon and how it's been really manifest in the last 12 months.

Speaker 3: 24:26

Yeah, well, it's, it's been , uh, manifest on the national stage and so many ways that are deeply disturbing. Um, and I think it's been a wake up call , um, for many , um, white churches that aren't Christian nationalists. Um, you know, the there's a lot of , uh, predominantly white churches in the United States that are , uh , would describe themselves as mainstream. Um, wouldn't necessarily think of themselves as they'd have a mixture of Republicans and Democrats and maybe a few , um, you know, libertarians mixed in there. Um, but who really have never , uh, thought of themselves as white supremacists. And because of that, I have never dealt with the past of their own church and the past of their own families. And so with this sort of public rise of, of white supremacist nationalism, it's sort of in your face , um, to such a degree that I'm finding churches actually , um , having serious conversations and going through processes of introspection about history of their own churches and also their own lives, their individual lives, how they got to be where they are and the, and the legacy of chattel slavery, and Jim Crow and native American genocide that that was built on. So th th in, in some ways, the fact that it's risen so blatantly to the surface, as, you know, kind of knocked some sense in , in terms of courage , um, to communities to deal with white supremacy , um, that wouldn't normally think of themselves as in any way, white supremacists . Oh, I, of course they would say, I'm not, we're not racist. We just happened to have a completely white church. Um , and it's always been a completely white church. Uh, I wonder why it was always a completely white church. What was the social dynamics that led to that who built your building? Where did the money come from , um, and how did it get passed on? Um, so I'm, I'm hearing more conversations about that now than I have in my , uh, in my lifetime. And I hope that continues to build and for those conversations to continue, I think what happens when people start actually facing the reality of white supremacy in their own lives and the history of the nation, their biggest fear that stops them from doing it is that somehow they're going to die. If they do it, you know, like they're either going to be so humiliated and ashamed, or that they're going to be so overwhelmed that somehow life will stop. You know, some horrible thing is going to happen. If you say, you know, I, I stand in a long line of white

supremacists, and then you say it and you realize the roof is not falling in. And, you know, the African-American people that you deal with every day are going to say, yeah, like tell us something we don't know. Um, you know, so it it's, it it's, it's not, it's, it's life shaking in that it frees you and it opens you to change. It's not life shaking in the sense that you die. And I think that that's part of the power of white supremacy is you think if you're good , if you, that's what you're taught as a white person, that somehow if you breach the boundaries around whiteness and start asking questions, then you're, you know, something terrible will happen. Nothing terrible happens, but increase sense of freedom and connection, which is terrible.

Speaker 2: 28:15

Uh , I don't, I'm not quite sure this is connected, but in the book , uh , call it grace. You, you talk about this formative moment. You had singing a Woody Guthrie song around the campfire at church camp and , uh, David over here , um, you wrote , uh , another verse to that song, I think , uh , a few months ago that really helped us all hear that, hear that song in a more prophetic , um, kind of inclusive way that maybe if we stop at the first two or three verses, it's just a raw , um , America Anthem, but serene, you talk about hearing this song and how that moment was sort of a full circle. One for you in which you had not heard all the verses to that this land is your land. This land is my land. Uh, could you share with our listeners , uh, how that moment kind of shaped you and changed you and what was going on in your own station of life, in that experience?

Speaker 3: 29:14

Well, that's a great question and I want to hear them , I want to hear the verse that you wrote. Um, so yeah,

Speaker 5: 29:19

I'll have to look that up. I did, I changed the , uh , time signature, the mode. I changed it to a minor mode. I changed it from a song of protest to a song of lament really. And this was over the summer during the George Floyd , uh, protest . And when that happened and , um, uh, because yeah, it , it, the profound of that song in the verses that aren't often sung around the campfire , um, felt like they had lost their juice , uh, when they're put up against American culture in society in 2020, and especially in the summer of 2020, but even today. And so I had been inspired to, to rework it, make it feel more accurate to today's world, and also added a few verses , uh , look those up because it was a while ago that I wrote them and I have a poor memory. I've , I've memorized more music than my brains hard drive can , uh, maintain in my life anymore. So it just bumps stuff off without asking

Speaker 3: 30:22

As you're looking it up, I'll tell this story real quick. Part of the backstory is , is that in the town of Oak chemo , which I mentioned earlier where the , um, in 1911, Laura Nelson and her son were lynched by the town. Um, there was a postcard of the town on the bridge celebrating, like support the July , um, as, as her body and her son's body , um, hang down towards the river. Um, in, in that same town , um, the Lynch mob was led by Woody Guthrie's father , um, and Woody Guthrie , um, wrote several songs about this lynching that never became popular. Um, you can, you can find them if you go online, but it tells the story of Laura Nelson and , and the lynching. And it was something that would he go through himself wrestled with his whole life , um, you know, the racism of his own father, the white supremacy, the violence of it , uh, under Jim Crow. Um, now I

didn't know this at age 14 when I was at church camp and we're out in the town of Guthrie, Oklahoma, um, no relationship to the Guthries about cleanup, but, um, the, you know, the, the, the youth minister is playing his guitar and we're all singing along to the verses. We all know, and then he keeps going and he sings this verse about, you know, and I was standing, um, in the shadow of the people. And I saw my people, uh, standing in the, something like the food line, and I saw them hungry. And I found myself asking, is this land made for you and me? And then the next one is I was walking down the highway and I saw before me a sign that said, no trespassing. And on the other sign on, on the other side, it didn't say nothing that sign was made for you and me. And I heard these boys, these, and I was like, what? And I was like, I, you know, I was at church, I learned about racism and poverty and all these things. They still had never taught me those verses. And it became for me a metaphor of America, you know, it's like, we want the good Shiri verses, even as liberals, we want the good cheery verses, and we don't want the hard versus the limitations, the confession of sin, um, and the reality of suffering and that in the book becomes, you know, the, are we going to lop off the hard parts, um, and only seeing the cheery parts. So, um, and that was, uh, you know, story of Woody Guthrie's own life is a very tragic story of someone who, you know, wrestled with that, that grace and brokenness and, uh, his own mental illness. Um, so he also becomes a very major figure in my own life in terms of just thinking about America. So what, so did you find your verses?

Speaker 5: 33:55

I did. Yes. And, and I had, I had also, in my version included the one about the no trespassing that the first time I heard that it blew my mind. Um, it was the first time I heard it was Gillian Welch and Dave Rawlings performing this song. And all of a sudden I heard them do that verse. And I was like, what, what? And so I went home and looked it up right away, and there are a bunch of other ones as well. But, um, yeah, so this summer I wrote a couple extra verses

Speaker 6: 34:33

In the cages on the border and the fires and the flooding of the rivers and the homeless deaths, uh, all the shootings in the school yards and the never ending battles. It's this land truly made for you and me [inaudible] 400 years ago. They shaved their boats here. They sail boats, never looked back to see the trail of fears there. How can it possibly be the ceiling won't shatter, ran together? Why don't we pray it together? [inaudible], you know, updating a modernization of something that is still pertinent, you know, the big game versus goodness. I can't wait to hear people singing them. Very powerful.

Speaker 2: 37:15

Thanks, David. Yeah, I think there, there's a video of that we can kind of put on perhaps should folks to hear, but, um, yeah, really profound. And thank you serene for being such a, such a storyteller in this book, call it grace. I mean, just extraordinary. And you take grace out of the realm of some theological abstraction or, or cliché to make that live and breathe in, in real human lives. And certainly in your own. I want to shift quickly in the few minutes we have remaining. We're actually starting a, a series a, this weekend on Celtic spirituality and, and one of the big themes. Uh, and I know one of your favorite theologians and been hugely influential in your life as John Calvin. So perhaps this bumps up a little bit, uh, with, with Calvin, I don't know, maybe you can help us with

this, but , uh, one of the things I'm drawn to from the Celtic stream , uh, of Christianity is this, this notion of original blessing , uh, beyond original sin. And one of the things you say is so profound to me, just a , a one line , you know , spiritual gut punch is grace is more original than sin. It, grace is more original than sin. And I often think about Pelagius who , uh, provided a sort of theological underpinning for original blessing that , uh, goes something like this. And John Philip Newell in his book, Christ of the Celts writes about this, but it's something like the birth of a baby is the birth of the freshly born God among us. And that's maybe I'm missing something, but that feels to me quite different than a theology that needs to rush a baby to the baptismal font, you know, to ensure they won't go to hell if they die , uh, which is my, you know, shorthand of the , uh, Augustinian tradition. But that grace is what is, what is deepest in us. And that it doesn't oppose who we truly are. It opposes what is false , uh , in us. And so could you help us with this, this, with all of that big said , uh, this notion of original blessing and original sin, especially being someone so deeply influenced by, by Calvin. Oh , w what could you say about that?

Speaker 3: 39:44

Well, so for me, grace is, you know, most simply understood it's the reality of the, of the ultimate victory of love in a cosmic sense, as well as our individual lives, that the last word about everything in existence that comes into existence that ever has been or ever will be, is finally , uh , the word of , of , for me, God's love that's grace, and you don't have to do anything to earn it. It's not something you have to fight for. It's not something you have to get baptized again. You don't have to say the right words to get it or sing a good song or follow some strange set of rules. It just is. Um, and that is the most original thing about the mere reality of existence. That is a blessing that it, that that existence is in , in, in God's marvelous work, that there is something not nothing. Um, and when it comes to sin, you know, the best way I've found to talk about it is that I don't have a , you know, a kind of origin story. Of course we have, you know, the story of the garden in scripture, but that the best term I've heard to talk about is it, is that center originates in the mystery of our freedom. It's , it's mysterious where it comes from, but it's there. And it, and it's , uh , it's a , it's a product of the fact that we are, we have freedom. We have as human beings, the, to make our lives and to make our lives collectively. And , um, and because of that, you look around and you see it very much living, not just in bunches of people, but in the very systems we create , um , our fractures live in our language and our, our social structures and our past our memories , um, the way we carry ourselves, how we feel in our bodies. Um, so it's not as original as grace by any means. Grace still wins, but it's not as if, because sin is so, you know , um, big in terms of its, of its tentacles in our freedom, that it's not something anyone can claim to have escaped. And it gets away from, this is the part that I do like about Calvin , um, that it, when you invoke this notion of original sin, you're not saying that we're sinful because we're born because our parents had sex. That's ridiculous, you know, and from Augusta, and it's just bizarre, how would you ever think that it's bizarre? Um, the whole that that's had on Christian consciousness is like ridiculous. Um, but it , it rigid original sin more has to do with the fact that when you recognize that it lives in the systems that hold us , um, you, you can't use sin as a sort of defining rod to say, well, here's a pure person and here is not pure person. Um, making it original know means it's something we all bear together. It's a , it's a radically equalizing, equal opportunity employer. It it's

there. And none of us can claim purity. Um, which doesn't mean that in the lives that we live, we're not called to struggle, to be more faithful , um, and more loving. Um, but we never get there. Um, so it gets us away from this notion that we're, somehow, if we live a perfect life, going to somehow ascend a ladder to heaven and arrive in a saintly condition , um, that's just not how life works.

Speaker 2: 43:57

My final question, because it is the season of Easter. And we just came through resurrection Sunday. Um, serene. I remember , uh, an interview that you did with Nick Kristoff for the New York times a couple of years ago, when he point blank asked you , um, do you think of Easter as a literal flesh and blood resurrection? He said, I have problems with that. And so I'd like to ask today, how does serene Jones understand and articulate what resurrection means in our world today?

Speaker 3: 44:33

Well, yeah, you'll also remember that he asked me if I believed in the Virgin birth, which is more important to people than the resurrection , uh , which is a funny thing about I'll ask Christians are such strange people. So more controversial for me to say that in, no, I didn't think that the Virgin birth, you know, was important theologically and I, it goes all the way back in Christian history to the beginning of theologian saying, why would Jesus be completely human? And why would we need to make Jesus's mother a Virgin in order for him to be completely human ? It's like ridiculous. So anyway, the Virgin birth,

Speaker 2: 45:13

I think your next book should be titled ridiculous,

Speaker 3: 45:15

Serene , ridiculous to say that it's not miraculous, that Jesus was born, but Mary just didn't have to be a Virgin in order for the, for the miracle to happen. And , um, the meaning of resurrection for me as a Christian , um, you know, the way these stories live in us for me, I experienced the resurrection when I hear that story as literal as, as it's not being a metaphor for something else is that Jesus literally Rose and , and in our lives we can literally rise. Um, but I also think that in that rising, the story is, is even bigger. And that's what Jesus has himself, you know, says on when he talks to the disciples on the road to MAs who they don't even recognize him. Um, and he teaches them and tries to explain what has happened. They still don't get it. We, we all don't get it. Um, because the reality of the victory of love, the victory of love over the most forceful and deadly powers in the universe. Um , that's what happens on the cross and then in the resurrection , um, that is like, talk about a story that blows your mind , um, and to get the truth of that , um, you don't have to necessarily be like me, you know , uh , cradle Christian for whom I think of it as a flesh and blood event , um, that it's even, it's , uh , it's a phenomenal truth. Um, that love is that powerful

Speaker 2: 47:04

Well here's to a God raising the dead and all of us and serene , I think about Irenaeus, a early church father, who said the glory of God is a human being fully alive. And in 20 or 30 seconds, what's making you come alive these days in your own life and work,

Speaker 3: 47:22

Oh , well, I said it earlier, but I just come alive. When , uh, each year a new of students walks in the doors of union theological seminary, and they come here to study and to learn and to become pastors and religious leaders or spiritual leaders and activists. And

they keep believing with all their hearts and minds and souls that the work , uh, of justice making is still possible. And that we're called to it together. I just gives me so much hope. They keep showing up and walking through those doors.

Speaker 7: 47:59

Reverend Dr. Serene Jones, thank you for showing up and walking through the doors of hyphenated life today. What an honor to have you and to see you again. And , uh, we are just deeply grateful and we wish you and , uh, union theological seminary in New York city, all the best going forward in these heady days as we've we look to , uh, get to a post pandemic reality. But thank you for joining us today. Her book is call it grace , uh, serene Jones. Thank you so much.

Speaker 3: 48:29

Thank you. Thank you for your song and thank you for this wonderful conversations and blessings to pine street church.

Speaker 7: 48:37

Thank you. Thank you so much. Hyphenated life. It's a production of pine street church in Boulder, Colorado hosted by David [inaudible] and Andrew Doherty produced by Phil Norman executive producer. Alexey Molden special. Thanks to today's guest, the Leo Hill trust of Boulder, Colorado, and pine street church. If today's episode has inspired, you reach out to us at hyphenated life on our Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter pages. You can also find us@hyphenatedlife.org. If you were looking for a spiritual community, we'd love to join you on that journey. Go to pine street, church.net to find out more.