

Speaker 1: 0:16

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. Welcome to this , uh,

Speaker 2: 0:41

Special edition advent podcast. My name is Andrew Dardy. I'm the senior pastor at pine street church here in Boulder. And I'm joined today by David [inaudible] , who is our spirituality and the arts director, and also our executive administrator. Good morning, David. Good morning, Andrew. This is fun already. Isn't it. I'm having a blast having a great time. Very good. And we have the distinct honor and privilege of talking to a very special guest today. Elizabeth Meyer Bolton of the salt project. I've known Liz for several years. I think we met through the Lilly endowment network through pastoral residency work many years ago. And Liz is a storyteller. She is a creative director Xtrordinair. She's the founder and president of the salt project. The salt project is an amazing and fun and creative and boutique production company. And they do social media content commercials, book trailers, visual mission statements, and they have worked with an amazing array of corporate clients, including PBS target, the travel channel O magazine and the Oprah Winfrey network. What so we welcome today. Liz Meyer Bolton, Liz. Welcome. And thank you so much.

Speaker 1: 2:01

Thank you so much. I think it is my honor. And my,

Speaker 2: 2:05

Well, I thought we could start today by having you Liz share a little bit about the salt project. I'm sure you've never been asked the question before of what is salt all about and what it's, what is its mission and purpose. But one of the core aspects here at pine street church in terms of our, what I call a six word sermon is inspire life. And there's something about that, which makes me think of one of the more famous wisdom quotes from African-American scholar and author. He was a key civil rights leader, Howard Thurman, who once wrote, don't ask yourself what the world needs, ask yourself, what makes you come alive and go do that because what the world, what the world needs is people who have come alive. And so I'd love to just ask what is lighting your creative fire the most right now in your work at salt and that is making you come alive?

Speaker 1: 2:55

Yeah, well , um, so we started the salt project maybe

Speaker 3: 3:00

10 years ago when I was pastoring in Boston and we started making film based , uh , resources for congregations for adult it or small group learning or house churches. And then our family made a big move from Boston out to Indianapolis and I , um, stopped congregational ministry and really went into film and we started to branch out a little it's PBS and O magazine. And we worked , um , with the Obama foundation and Maria Shriver's a , not-for-profit the women's Alzheimer's movement. And , um , we've always maintained our church resource side cause my

husband and I are both church nerds, but we always have this corporate side too , or this , um, visual mission statement side and what I feel keeps coming alive for me or , um, what I come alive is just the storytelling in traditional congregational ministry, the preaching. But now it's more of a visual storytelling with film and just trying to make kind of abstract ideas , um, concrete for people. So I'm just thinking of talking with Maria Shriver's , uh, people at the women's Alzheimer's movement. They wanted to , um, visually describe that Alzheimer's, isn't just losing a thought or not remembering something they wanted to have it evoke kind of chaos in the mind. And so through animation, we had a young woman whose hair Rose up into , um, funder cloud and it started to rain and thunder and lightning , and then the room filled up and things started to float and it's, that's what makes me come alive is trying to make abstract ideas , uh , concrete or a little moment that someone can, can feel , um, or be moved by something that's abstract. So , uh, what brings me alive again and again and again, is that the, the beauty and the craft of storytelling, making something visual that remains invisible.

Speaker 2: 5:35

Wow. That's beautifully said what's coming up for me as you're describing that is, you know, when you talk about having, you know, one foot in the church, you are an amazing preacher. Liz folks is an amazing preacher. I've had the privilege of , um, but I'm sorta curious too . One of the things we've talked a lot about and with one foot of in the church world, and certainly you're still working with churches and obviously the , the corporate clients you've worked with. One thing that we've thought a lot about is this sort of sacred, secular almost this false dichotomy or duality. Uh, and we, we quote a lot , um , uh, Meryl , is it Marilyn lingo , Madeline Madeline Lingle . Thank you. Um, you know, it says there is nothing so secular that it cannot be sacred and we've been really playing with those boundaries. I'm just kind of curious in your work, how, how that works itself out, especially with such deep history that you have theologically and spiritually in the church, and also now , uh , with really expanding your vocational life with, with all of this amazing visual storytelling and what you've just described. Would you mind maybe saying a little bit about that sacred secular distinction and how it kind of works itself out in your own mind and heart and work?

Speaker 3: 6:56

Well, I mean, for me, it's where Christianity sings, its most beautiful melody. Um, and it, you know, it , it pertains to Christmas and Easter both it's it's that there is no secular, it's just that that God is under the skin of everything. Even, even, even where you think God is absent there , God is the most present to me. That's that's the Christian, you know, hope and mystery. It is that this dichotomy or what we feel is a dichotomy between sacred and secular. Um, but then, you know, the deeper we get into our scripture and the deeper we get into faith and our, our experience in the world, those lines begin to blur, you know, so, so there's good Friday, which you could think would be the most secular, this sort of violence and this place that feels abandoned. And then, and then we have Easter Sunday, which transforms good Friday. It's like, and , and the fact that God is, is there at the, at the heart of the violence , um, at the heart of the secular the most abandoned place even there God is. So for me, it's this beautiful , um, terrific collapse of those categories , um, that, that I love about Christianity and about my faith and about , um, just storytelling, you know, everyone, everyone in their has good Friday

moments. They have the weeping that lasts , uh, during the night. Um, you know, the, the Madonna and child is the same Pia TA you know, it's, it's the same movement. It's, it's God in both and all the time, the sacred is the secular I'm going to stop now because I could go forever.

Speaker 4: 9:23

That's a great David. I know that , uh , we do a good Friday. I know we're talking about advent, but we do actually a good Friday musical meditation here at pine street church. And , uh, I'll let David talk a little bit just briefly about that and how this kind of connects to with the sacred and secular, right. I , my , my ears absolutely perked when you mentioned good Friday is perhaps the most secular , uh, Christian, you know , story event in the Bible. And , uh, we've, we've chosen good Friday , uh , to be our annual sort of , uh, biggest , uh, presentation of music in our church. And we call it a good Friday musical meditation. And what we do is we select a secular album , um, some sort of iconic album that in particular might tell a story might , um, have some sort of deep spiritual undertones and themes. And we perform it in its entirety with a stage of professional musicians, and we weave meditations throughout that guided by Andrew. Um, and so that absolutely is exactly what our goal is, is to sort of try and shatter that false dichotomy of that. There is a difference that there's one world and another world and something separates them because through those three days, good Friday through Easter, like you said, all of a sudden, all of that is just flipped upside down. And , uh , that's , that's, that's one of our biggest goals with that , uh , project that we do annually. And this year will be our sixth year. I believe our seventh year, many years we've been doing it. And , uh, so yeah, that was great to hear you jump into that.

Speaker 3: 11:07

I got in trouble once for not in trouble, but it had mixed reviews singing silent night on good Friday, which I thought was , um, a lovely tribute to Mary and the baby and the [inaudible] and, you know, Christ the savior is born through this, you know, a triumph over humiliation and, and it bumped up against , um, some people's feelings about , uh, disconnecting the two holidays. Um, but I kind of stand by it a little bit, you know, I think it's interesting , um, you know, shepherds quake at the site, you know, like I feel like it's, you know, to, to, to have the whole story in the Christmas story or the Christmas story in the, the , um, crucifixion story and it works well poetically with me , um, and it, and it, it brings out those sacred secular parts of, of the tradition. So I wouldn't, I don't know if you should do it on your big, on your big, good Friday night.

Speaker 2: 12:38

Uh , I need to figure out a way to get that in there. Somehow. I love that. I mean, it, in a way that makes people cry for an unexpected reason.

Speaker 3: 12:46

I know, I know we did candles, we did candle light and everything held up in the hall , held them up like you would do on on-site on a Eve . Wow. No, yeah , that's profound. I know, I didn't know. It's edgy maybe, maybe two .

Speaker 2: 13:02

I think you got in trouble for good, for very good reason. Liz, she get in trouble more. So this is advent and a Holy season of four weeks leading up to Christmas , uh, for those of you who need a quick refresher, a time of preparation, introspection focusing on our souls. Um, and I love what the salt project , uh, when they talk about advent, add that means coming at it's a time of longing and watching, praying for God's healing and transformative presence to be ever more vibrantly present in the world. I love that. Um, and as Christians, the good news we strive to live by and declare is this love is stronger than hate peace, more enduring than war hope, more powerful than despair. And the light of God's love will extinguish forever. The shadows of shame cast by violence, suffering, sorrow, and hate, Oh my gosh, that gets said, that gets at the heart of this advent season. And those big themes that show up in our lives, the hope, the peace, the joy, the love, and that you say Liz, that the season is also for simple things and keeping things simple. And I'm just curious, what does that look like in your own life right now?

Speaker 3: 14:23

Ah , it is a spiritual trial to keep things simple. Um, I think advent is, is a good training. Um, I think about just the, just the simple act of, of lighting a candle. He, you know, we sort of in church interchange that I belong to or pastored, you know, we get up there and we light an advent candle and there's of words and, you know, you sort of do it because you're supposed to do it. And I like to think of the shadows in the world that will, will, that are designed to take away your hope or take away your peace or take away your joy. And then as a community, we come together and it's just the simplest thing. We light just this one candle of protest that, that stays lit and can light a million candles. But this one candle that stays lit against , um, the despair, you know, and it's so simple. That's what I just love about the Christian Jewish is like these basic elemental things, this one candle that, that chases away the shadow, and then it gets brighter and brighter and brighter until Christmas Eve.

Speaker 2: 15:47

Um, again, my name is Andrew Dardy , senior pastor at pine street, church of Boulder here with David. [inaudible] , our director of spirituality and arts. And we're talking to the founder and president of the salt project, Elizabeth Meyer Bolton. And , uh , we're headed to the finish here, Liz. Um, but we totally ripped off James Lipton from inside the actors studio sort of, and want to ask you, what's your favorite word right now and why?

Speaker 3: 16:15

Um, there's so many good ones. There's so many good ones. Um, or maybe you guys could answer it and then I could come in behind you.

Speaker 2: 16:22

Yeah, yeah, for sure. I'm not sure I have a great answer either . I was just flushing anyone's ever asked me, I think right now my favorite word is grace. Um, and I think it's not a theological concept , uh, to believe in for me right now, as much as it is something I'm feeling in my gut in my body. Um, and just how radical grace is just how I'm just scratching the surface of what that really means. Um, so it's, it's my favorite word right now. I think because it invites some extra

curiosity and intrigued to really kind of wrap my, my whole life around what that, what that is. I think I've done a really great job at preaching grace in my short life, my vocational life, but I'm not sure that's always translated to me. It sort of goes back to what you said earlier, Liz, about how, you know, preaching in some sense really is self persuasion. And I think I got into this path in some ways, because I thought I could be , uh , you know, a more, I don't know, faithful follower of Jesus or something. If I were a pastor rather than doing something else in life, it would, it would move me along and inspire me in a different way. And , uh, I've reminded by a Benedictine monk that sometimes the reasons we get into faith are not the same reasons that we stay. So that's definitely not the same reason why I've stayed on this path, but I , I do think , uh, we live in a time, as you said, David earlier, some of the worry of bringing a child into such a divisive world right now, in some ways, a very dangerous kind of world. Um, w what is , where is grace , uh, in all of that, it , where how do, how do we, you know, get us get a step up on the path toward what that really means? And I think sometimes it's just too , almost , uh , it's so good. It must be true kind of idea. But , um, I think I'm really , um, yeah, just really intrigued and curious about , uh, the depths of what grace really is right now. So I'd say grace is my favorite word right now. I have mine. Yeah,

Speaker 3: 18:41

My favorite word. And I know it's kind of a buzz word , but I will , uh, complicate it a little bit for you is vulnerability, which brand a Brown talks a lot about , um, being vulnerable, but with eyes towards Christmas and thinking about the deaths we've had in our family , um, and just the suffering in the world , um, here's what Brenae Brown doesn't do that our faith does so beautifully and wondrously is that we can and should be vulnerable. And we have the courage to be vulnerable because of Christmas, because God came with a soft spot on his head because God came with Mary's milk on his breath because God, you know, walked the via Dolorosa. And because God , um, was vulnerable and breakable and, and triumphed over , uh, that. So we can be vulnerable in our relationships in community. We can be vulnerable because Christ is with us because Christ has walked the way before us, because every time we are vulnerable, God is present. Um, so I think, I think vulnerability , um, individually and communally , um, is such a beautiful concept and a word I keep, I keep coming back to and try and strive towards .

Speaker 2: 20:40

Yeah. I , I find myself thinking of this , uh, almost in terms of what is my favorite word or idea

Speaker 4: 20:48

Ever, because I'm not sure that, you know, if I think of the most , uh, frequently occurring word in any of our lives right now, it might be like impeachment or something like that. But that's far from the most important word to me. Um, and I certainly wouldn't want to pick a negative word, but I think , um, you know, and Liz, you opened up here earlier talking about one of the things that you love about the sort of media work that you do is the challenge of bringing to life and evoking some emotional experience through your work with, you know, in , in , uh, making a video for example, and having people feel an emotion from that video. Um, to me , uh, I think the most important thing to try and keep at the forefront of my life and passion and goals. And in my existence here on this planet is the idea of transcendence. Um, and how, how do we

experience that as often as we can and, you know, it can be a semantical word. Absolutely. But , um, I think it's a pursuit that leads you inevitably towards experiencing life in the best way possible. So, you know, the birth of a child is certainly a transcendent experience. I haven't experienced it yet. Um, but I would imagine a transcendent experience as we're here coming into advent. Um, you know, th the miracle not, not referring to the Virgin birth miracle, but the miracle of birth of Jesus, you know, that is a transcendent experience. Something that communally we can, we can share. Um, for me, one of the biggest things that it comes round to is experiencing humans , creativity in the creative potential that we have to impact and, and tell stories and, and, and communicate with one another in ways that words don't allow , um, my background being in music, that's, that's where it is for me. That would also be my answer to the other question of when was the last time you cried, it was at a concert in it wasn't for anything in particular, other than just, I, I was brought in Rose to a plane that you don't normally exist on. And , uh, so that's something that's important to me. And , um, I try to keep that, you know, on my radar at all times, because the longer I go without those types of experiences, the sort of more difficult things can become. And the more you lose focus on the important things, the transcendence,

Speaker 3: 23:33

Transcendence, vulnerability, and grace, exactly. Come on. I don't think I need any more podcasts after the Donald . The only, the only thing though, that might be a nice little

Speaker 2: 23:46

Gateway into that. I was thinking of Denise lever, Tufts , uh , enunciation poem, and Liz, when you said , uh, the soft spot , uh, on a baby's head, I was thinking about a part of her annunciation , where it says to bear in her womb, infinite weight and lightness to carry in hidden finite inwardness, nine months of eternity to contain and slender vase of being the sum of power in narrow flesh, the sum of light, then bring to birth, push out into air a man-child needing like any other milk and love, but who was God that's Denise lever toss annunciation. I think grace ability and transcendence is all captured in that beautiful little verse from Levertov. So let that be our maybe advent benediction for this conversation right today. And we are so, so lucky that goes deeper than the word, lucky to have you Liz , uh , be part of this conversation, the salt project, they say, we believe in amazing stories, bright colors, glitter, kindness, ukuleles. I thought unicorns were in there too, and good and good conversations. And this has been a really, really good conversation. Liz Meyer Bolton. Thank you. You are a gift to us and to many, and on behalf of our church here at pine street in Boulder, we thank you for the gift of your time today. Thank you so much. Have a deep

Speaker 1: 25:25

And light and lovely advent

Speaker 2: 25:27

With much 10 sentiments and grace and vulnerability, as much as you can handle exactly as much as we can put in a Mason jar and more thanks so much.

Speaker 1: 25:46

[inaudible] life is a production pine street church in Boulder, Colorado hosted by Andrew Doherty and David podcast is produced by Phil Norman and executive producer, Alexi molding the special thanks to our guests today. Leo Hill trust.