

Hi to all of God's beloved children, and thank you for spending time with me and my voice today <3

A little bit about me before I start:

My name is Logan Rozos, I am an actor, filmmaker, poet, and student at NYU Tisch School of Arts. I'm a gay trans Black man living in the Bronx. I'm a Catholic who believes I have a lot to learn from many faith traditions, and who feels a strong impulse toward mystic understandings of faith. And my pronouns are he/him/his.

I want to begin by reading parts of a poem by Mary Szybist called "Entrances and Exits"

"In the late afternoon, my friend's daughter walks into my office looking for snacks. She opens the bottom file drawer to take out a bag of rice cakes and a blue carton of rice milk that comes with its own straw. I have been looking at a book of paintings by Duccio. Olivia eats. Bits of puffed rice fall to the carpet.

A few hours ago, the 76-year-old woman, missing for two weeks in the wilderness, was found alive at the bottom of a canyon. The men who found her credit ravens. They noticed raven circling--

Duccio's Annunciation sits open on my desk. The slender angel (dark, green-tipped wings folded behind him) reaches his right hand towards the girl; a vase of lilies sits behind them. But the white dots above the vase don't look like lilies. They look like the bits of puffed rice scattered under my desk. They look like the white fleck at the top of the painting that means both spirit and bird.

Olivia, who is six, picks up the wooden kaleidoscope from my desk and, holding it to her eye, turns it to watch the patterns honeycomb, the colors tumble and change—

[...]

Duccio's subject is God's entrance into time: time meaning history, meaning a body.

No one knows how the woman survived in her light clothes, what she ate and drank, or what she thought when she looked up into the unkindness of ravens, their loops, their green and purple iridescence flashing--

I think of honeybees. For months, whole colonies have been disappearing from their hives. Where are the bodies? Some blame droughts. Too few flowers, they say: too little nectar.

Consider the ravens. They neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. (Luke 12:24)

The men never saw the ravens-- just heard their deep *caw, caw* circling.

Olivia and I look down on Duccio's scene. I point to the angel's closed lips; she points to the dark wings.

The blue container of rice milk fits perfectly into Olivia's hand the same way the book fits in the hand of Duccio's Mary. She punches a hole in the top and, until it is empty, Olivia drinks."

So, to move on to the Biblical passage I'll be reflecting on today: this is Ephesians 1:15-23, and I am reading from the New International Version

For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

I want to focus in on two parts of this prayer, which is attributed to Paul. First, in Verse 18, where Paul says "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you."

The world we live in right now sometimes seems especially designed to drain all hope from us. The tragic coronavirus pandemic has of course taken so many loved ones and community members from us. Furthermore, the response to the pandemic often lacked the love and cherish for human life that our faith teaches us to have, especially when it came to our disabled and

immunocompromised neighbors, and those of our neighbors who work in low-income essential jobs in the service and retail industries. Inequality in our material conditions and systemic oppression continue to take so much from our communities and from our spirits. And the land and Earth that our Creator gave us for food, water, shelter, companionship, and beauty has been deeply wounded and disrespected by the processes and the continued legacy of colonialism. I can say that as a trans person, the introduction of hateful and discriminatory bills designed to target and subjugate my community— especially trans youth— has been greatly dispiriting.

Of course, our faith can be a great comfort to us in the face of so much adversity. My belief in God's works in this world and in the world to come certainly gives me hope. But Paul does not say to the Ephesians that the Lord merely *gives* us hope. He says that the Lord *calls us* to hope. It is our *responsibility* to find the hope within us and within those around us, and to nurture it and enable it to strengthen us as we build stronger communities, and a safer, more loving, more equitable world.

This feels like a daunting task! But Paul also reminds us that the power God gives to believers is the same awesome power that raised Christ. It can be difficult to believe that we have that kind of power, especially when we are confronted with systems that disempower us and subjugate us. But, when we allow ourselves to feel the spirit of hope and the spirit of the resurrection within us, there is little else that feels as thrilling or as comforting.

In looking for the poem I read at the start of this episode, I found an article from Sarah Sentilles at Harvard's Divinity School. The article is called "Artists Make Good Theologians"

In it, Sentilles says "painters, photographers, animators, performance artists, illustrators, sculptors—seem to understand instinctively what it took me years to learn: the world is made and can be unmade and remade."

Sentilles continues "the late theologian Gordon Kaufman, taught me that theologians are artists. Their creations are not works of art to be hung on the wall, he said; rather, they are worlds to be lived in. Kaufman often pointed to Genesis, to the God who speaks words to bring the world into being, who uses clay and breath to make human beings. *You see*, he'd say. *In this story God is a poet and a potter, and even though that doesn't tell us much about God, it tells us a lot about what the authors thought about artists: They knew their work was world making.*"

I bring this up not just because I'm an artist— though I have felt the awesome power of the Lord when I create art, and I think art-making can be tremendous practice for the great tasks God calls us to— but because I think hope goes hand in hand with a desire to remake the world.

The Reverend Chaim Rodriguez, who spoke on the first volume of this podcast, said something I found rather beautiful. He said that the queer community is “in the resurrecting business”, because we resurrect our communities every time we stand up for justice or help each other to stand after we’ve fallen. Having seen and been awed by the way that, for example, my trans sisters have always supported one another through community protection and mutual aid, it feels clear to me that the power God gives us is at its strongest when realized through community and through the ties of love.

I would also like to turn to Verses 22 and 23 of this section in Ephesians: “And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.”

I know all this talk of hope and of God’s power may feel unmoored, or abstracted, or disembodied. But Paul provides this idea of the church as a body, receiving the fullness of Christ, which feels wonderfully anchored in my lived experiences of having a body. The Church is a body, and Christ is the head. Like in our bodies, the head is not just at the top and in a position to direct the body, it is also intimately and inseparably connected. Our living bodies can be no more alienated from Christ than they could from their own heads! Which maybe sounds a little bit silly, but it’s an image that’s helpful to me.

And, like the body, the Church is always changing, always being renewed. This reminder is greatly heartening to me, because, as queer people, we know that the Church is an institution that is far from perfect, that it has not received the fullness of Christ’s love, and in fact is sometimes a barrier between us and His love. But as we draw upon the strength God gives us to reshape the world, and to reshape the Church, let us pray that it be strengthened, fed, purified, and perfected by His love, which excludes no one.

If you’ve borne with me this whole time, God bless you. I hope these short and rather jumbled thoughts led you to think about how you’d like to see the world made and remade with the strength and the hope that God calls us to.

And I’d like to close with some song lyrics. This is from Vito’s Ordination Song by Sufjan Stevens, it’s a song about a friend of the songwriter, the reverend Thomas Vito Aiuto, who preaches at the Resurrection Williamsburg Parish here in NY. And it’s about this pastor receiving a message from God before his ordination.

I always knew you
In your mother's arms
I have called your name
I've an idea

Placed in your mind

To be a better man
I've made a crown for you
Put it in your room

And when the bridegroom comes
There will be noise
There will be glad

And a perfect bed

[...]

Rest in my arms
Sleep in my bed
There's a design
To what I did and said

Amen.