

Our Holy Habits: Rooted Improvisation

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- [0 : 0 0] So we are doing a co-preaching thing, and we forgot to bring up chairs. So Taneta's doing that. Okay, sorry. We're discombobulated, but we're going to make it.
- So we're in the series about our church's values. We're calling it Holy Habits. So far, we've talked about radical friendship and revolutionary justice and relentless curiosity. And if you go on our website, you'll see the last value listed is something called rooted improvisation.
- Rooted Improvisation. And in the spirit of rooted improvisation, we moved it up two weeks because that makes sense. It's a metaphor.
- So what we're going to do is instead of having just like a fully prepped sermon, we have a little bit prepped. But then we've invited a journalist to come up and interview us.
- So I'm going to go ahead and invite Natalie Ferdig up to the platform. I don't know. It's so improv.
- [1 : 0 9] Are you doing a mic? Do I get a microphone? Yeah. No, you get a mic. That way our online folks can hear. That's right. An hour.
- My voice is coming out of this speaker very loudly at me. Would you like that to be turned off?
- No, it was just slightly shocking. Oh, okay. Okay. It's fine. Good. So. Hello. Hello. Hello to everybody. Did you want to introduce Natalie a bit? How should we do this?
- Do you want to introduce yourself a little bit? Yeah, I think I forgot to send you any information about me that you didn't use to introduce me. This is improv. Go for it. So it's not improv. I'm a journalist, as I stated. I work for Politico.
- I interview senators. It's my job. I will not treat you like a senator. But I also have been a member of the table for like I think seven or eight years.
- [2 : 0 3] Like back in the old building that we had to leave because it was going to fall on our heads. But yeah, so I am very like, I've seen a lot of iterations of this church.
- And I'm very excited like to still be here. And I'm excited to do this that we're doing right now. So yeah, so Tanetta, I think I'm supposed to ask you to tell us.
- The only non-improv part of this thing today is could you tell us what is rooted improvisation? Yeah, I can do that. So yeah, part of what we wanted to do is, it's so funny.
- I always have these moments where right before we do these kinds of things, they're often, I say, look, you know what? We should really like be a bit more spontaneous, you know, like take questions on the spot.
- And then it's right before I'm like, why did I come up with this idea? Like, I like having formed ideas, especially in front of people. So yeah, so here's the one part of that that'll be a little bit more fully formed.
- [3 : 0 7] So we've been in this series, Our Holy Habits. You know, we've talked some about radical friendship. And we've talked about revolutionary justice and relentless curiosity.

And this Sunday, we wanted to move to this value, this holy habit of rooted improvisation. So first of all, when you think about this holy habit, this value, I think it's important to think a little bit about how it emerged.

So you kind of have to picture in your mind's eye, Anthony and I meeting together for our Tuesday staff meeting, just random Tuesday morning in his basement.

His dog, Willow, is not happy because I'm no longer on the sofa and he's, well, she is, she is confused. And like, why is everybody standing up near this board you have up?

What is going on? So we're about to go into this moment where we're, we've, you know, we've spent months and months and months with the elders talking about, you know, what, what does a table church want to be?

[4 : 11] And, and, and what, what, you know, what is it? What does it want to be? And what did Resurrection City, what was it? What did it want to be? And now it's time to kind of flesh out these values, these, these holy habits.

And we're playing with wording and we're asking lots of questions of each other and we're adding thoughts to what the other person has said. And a lot of the phrases didn't come that hard.

You know, things like radical friendship, like revolutionary justice, those were not actually that hard to come by. But when we got to this last value, rooted improvisation, you know, we knew we wanted to say something about experience, you know, experimentation and creativity.

And the word improvisation had come up in our meetings with the elders a number of times, but it's kind of this long, clunky word. It's probably the word, if you see it on our website that you're, you know, you least understand what we're talking about.

So we felt pretty unsure about how to include it in our values. And we also, I'll be honest, we had shoehorned ourselves because we had all these R's. And we were like, how do we put an R in front of improvise?

[5 : 21] What are we doing? And so we left that meeting only knowing like, okay, this is an important word, but we're not exactly sure still how it'll be shaped and formed out. And then we met with our elders and they helped us finish out this idea of rooted improvisation.

But I, and I mentioned that Tuesday morning, and I think it's important for you to picture it in your head, actually, because of something that Anthony said that day.

You know, we're starting to put things on the board. We're going back and forth about these values. And it, I don't know, the room felt kind of like heavy and weighty, like for, you know, at least a few years, these are going to shape who we become and what we embody.

And as usual, I was going into my over explaining every word mode. I was like explaining everything. English teacher. That's right.

That's right. And Anthony just turned and he's like, no caveats, no explanations, no qualifications. Let's just go. And that's what we did.

[6 : 27] And we had this time of just going. And for me, I realized after, as I was reflecting, preparing for this, that was a moment of improv in and of itself.

Years ago, one of the first audio books I ever listened to on CD in my old car that we called the Doom Buggy was Tina Fey's book, Bossy Pants. And she gives a couple of rules for improv.

Number one, she says, agree and say yes. Respect what your partner has created. Start with that. Number two, don't just say yes.

Say yes and add something. Contribute. Trust that your initiation is worthwhile. Number three, make statements. So don't just ask questions and put everything on everybody else to figure out.

Steak, put your stake in the ground somewhere, even if the process is unfinished. And then four, she says, there are no mistakes, only opportunities. So that's this idea of being open to discovery.

[7 : 32] And that's what was going on with Anthony and I in that basement, Anthony and me in that basement. The second thing I'll say, and then I'm going to be quiet, is, well, there's a third thing. The second thing I'll say, and the second thing I'll say is that I actually don't really love, like, I kind of am afraid of doing improv.

So for me, when I think about improv, I think about jazz. And I am just really struck by this idea that, you know, improvisation at the heart of jazz. And jazz emerged in Creole, Louisiana, in this moment of cultural and racial mixing, this kind of, this zone of, you know, experimentation and transgression, really.

That's how you got this improvisational form of music. Jazz is fundamentally decolonial. It's not about control. And that's something we want to embody here in this community.

And then my final thing actually is just this piece of scripture, which is Matthew 13, 52. Jesus says, therefore, every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.

And I love that. This idea, every scribe, every person who is literally disciplined for the kingdom is grabbing from the past and pulling it forward into the future.

[8 : 55] And it's really interesting that in that order, Jesus starts with the new and essentially says the new actually is the key to understanding the old and pulling it forward.

And I think that's part of what we're about in this community. Do I get to ask questions now? I think so. Fantastic. Because I've been taking notes.

Awesome. So I heard you say a lot of really fun, exciting things. I actually have a background in improv. Former musical theater kid. Anyone has spent like 10 minutes with me.

It's obvious. The yes and is like just the core of improv. But how do we take that, that idea, and what does that look like in someone's life, like on a day-to-day basis?

Do you want to? I think people have a lot of experiences with religion and churches that are very top-down, hierarchical, control-oriented.

[10 : 00] And I mean, that flies in the face of improvisation. Improvisation, there is no script. You are collaborating. You're working together. And in high-control environments, you don't get that opportunity.

Even the way that we talk about like God's will. What's God's will for my life? As if there is this one thing, like a tiny little railroad track sliver that's God's will, and everything else is off-ground, you know, off-limits.

As opposed to an environment where there's a wide-open field that's all good possibilities. And you get to discover that alongside a community, alongside friends and family and a neighborhood.

You get to discover that together. So to me, the yes and is recognizing that no man is an island, no human is on their own. You get to discover that your decisions have implications in other people's lives.

Other people's decisions have implications in your life. And we all get to kind of help make those decisions together. And yes and each other. As opposed to a system that is so hierarchical, so top-down.

[11 : 11] I'll tell one little story. I have a person in my life who they ended up going down a religious path that was basically a cult that forced them to follow to the letter the Torah, a weird interpretation of Jewish law.

And I mean, the sort of thing where like the wife is sleeping outside the house during her period and like handing over physical discipline of their children to other people. Like bizarre things, okay?

And so like we're all questioning this person. And what he said to us was, I finally know what God wants for me. And so he enters into this high control, in the end abusive environment because it was certain.

And certainty, as we talked about last week, is intoxicating and can seem comforting. It's limiting and it stifles growth and it limits possibilities.

Whereas a yes and in someone's life opens up possibilities of things that have never been before. Can you guys think of an example from Jesus' life where he showed yes and action?

[12 : 22] I mean, what comes up for me is just the structure of the Sermon on the Mount, that particularly in Matthew 5, that you have heard it said, but I say to you.

And I think what's really profound about that, you know, other rabbis had used that structure with one another. But Jesus is dialoguing with, you know, the words that were understood as the words of God and saying, but you have heard it said, but I say.

So there's this radical relocation of authority. And I think what's fascinating is to think about what does it mean as a church to consider that, yeah, that we have to accept a certain amount of, wow, like we have a Holy Spirit authority in community with one another to figure out how to think about the new and the old together.

And I think that that's the one thing that really comes to mind from Jesus' life for me. I think, I mean, so much of Jesus' life is reacting to things. As Jesus is walking along the Lake of Galilee, this thing happens.

What does Jesus do? And so there's so much reaction going on. There's a story of Jesus and the Syrophenician woman where she comes up and says, please heal my child.

[13 : 38] And Jesus is like, I'm not going to do that. I'm only focused on Israel. And she's like, yes, but don't the crumbs off the table fall to the dogs that you just, you know, insulted me. And Jesus is like, good point.

I will do this after all. Improvisation. He reacts. He responds. One of the stories I had written down in my notes is John chapter 7. Jesus' brothers, so like his half-brothers through Mary, are saying like, hey, you need to leave Galilee, go to Judea so that the world can know that you're the Messiah.

And Jesus is like, no, I'm not going to do that. It's not my time. So his brothers go up to Jerusalem for a festival. Jesus has just told them, I'm not going to go to the festival. And then Jesus secretly goes to the festival, which like hopefully nobody has like a theological crisis about Jesus like telling a fib.

That's a different story for a different time. But like you have Jesus reacting in moments, saying one thing to one person, then secretly going and doing another for strategy's sake of like pivoting and like, you know, what's the Muhammad Ali phrase?

Float like a butterfly. Sting like a bee. And Jesus is doing that with his life. And like even to the point of like subterfuge, like not being completely transparent with people. So anyway, I see it in lots of places.

[14 : 48] So we're supposed to go subterfuge is my takeaway. I mean, but like Jesus says, like be as gentle as doves and as wise as serpents, right? Like Jesus is being sneaky on purpose.

He does not want to die yet. It's not part of his strategy or his time. And so the brothers are like, oh, Jesus told us he's not coming. That goes into Jesus's strategy. Like he doesn't want anybody to know he's there.

So the follow-up question, which I think in some ways they're connected, but what does it look like for the church as a whole in the city that we're in to be an improvisational church?

Yeah. So I think, and this also gets at yes and, I think one of the simplest practical things as I was reflecting on this that came out was just depth of listening to one another.

Because to participate in improv where there's acting or music or something else, you've really got to understand what other people are bringing. Yeah. To be able to riff and create music with them or create a scene with them.

[15 : 57] So I think learning how to deeply listen to the people in this room and the people that consider themselves part of this community to figure out what are we building together? How do we need to show up and care for each other?

And I also think that is about listening to the city and just being deeply in touch with our neighborhoods and our neighbors and to understand the currents, you know, in terms of, yeah, that's just kind of what's happening in the city.

And to be able to, again, to riff off of that. So I think one of the most practical things is listening. I recently, me and Tanetta were praying together.

And in my prayer, out came this sort of confession, like sort of disappointment about lots of things, my own career. And like things that are not the way I pictured them as a 22-year-old or a 28-year-old or a 34-year-old.

Things that have changed. And so we got done praying and Tanetta's like, tell me more. And what I was sort of processing was like, you know, I'd worked at a church for 10 years that like had a building.

[17 : 05] We had staff with large staff meetings, a budget that was larger than the tables, all those sort of things. And I had kind of agreed to, without really thinking about it, a career trajectory that said I would go from a larger church to a larger church to a larger church.

That did not happen. Right? I ended up here March 2020, shut down, purely online church for a while. We're not massive. We have a budget that's, you know, quarter of a million.

Like it's not large. It's two of us plus me half time. These were not the things that I planned for. We're searching for a building. We've been searching for years for a place to have a morning service.

And like none of that has panned out in the way that I expected. But that means that we're lightweight. We can pivot.

We can change. We can pay attention to what's happening in the city, in the life of our congregation. We're not weighed down by like a multi-million dollar building mortgage. We're able to be like lightweight.

[18 : 11] And again, we'll probably all be. Flow like a butterfly and sing like a bee. Like we can do new things and it's not like breaking 100-year-old systems. And I feel like God is slowly forming me as a pastor to let go of this sort of mega church 22-year-old dreams that I had.

And instead like have a church that looks maybe, you know, we're still pretty institutionalized. We've got a board and bylaws and a budget and all those sorts of things. And also like we look nothing like the 200-year-old Presbyterian church down the street.

Or, you know, for that matter, the 125-year-old building that we're meeting in now, the congregation that meets here. And I'm okay with that. I think that gives us some strengths that we wouldn't otherwise have. I actually just recently thought I saw the table do some cool improvisation in our community.

If I can offer up this anecdote that I saw, which was in the, like, as we're staring down a possible government shutdown. Like I posted on my Instagram story, hey, does anyone know of like anybody who's organizing money or anything?

Like to help people who might be laid off by this. Because I know a lot of federal workers and, you know, I work on Capitol Hill. There's people who are cleaning halls that get completely furloughed and have absolutely no money, no back pay coming.

[19 : 28] And within like three hours, like three different people from the table were like, oh, Ali Miguel's got that. Ali Miguel's on it. Email Ali Miguel. And it was like, we're not the biggest church in the world.

But I emailed Ali. Ali emailed me. Like I got it in like a couple Politico newsletters. Like a hell of a little staffers were emailing me being like, wait, who's that person that we can email? And Ali did the same thing during the pandemic.

And it was like, I saw this church improv around the needs of the city to like fill a hole that frankly some of the larger churches may actually have more like resources to help with.

But actually we, you know, like there was something happening here that people really wanted to participate in. So just to like, I don't know if that's something that you guys see as a strength of being an improvisational church or if that's kind of something that is in your vision when you're using that word.

Yeah. I mean, I think the idea of being leaderful is an idea that's really important to both of us that there are people who can. Yeah.

[20 : 37] So I knew Ali was organizing some things. I didn't know from your angle, though. And I think that that's actually really, really beautiful, that there are things that crop up organically and folks feel like they have, you know, the ability to push those things forward.

Yeah. I also think multiplicity is really important to name in improvisation. And that goes with like, you know, a multiplicity of leadership. It goes to a multiplicity of theology as well.

So, yeah, I think also a lot about that outside of the binary, there are going to be multiple options, multiple expressions, multiple ways things are happening. And, yeah, things cropping up beyond kind of what is considered the center.

So we kind of have a picture of what improvisation looks like. But how do we get there? Like, what are – so you said yes and, and I smiled, but it was like partially from PTSD.

Because when I was on the high school improv team – It's okay. You can tell us. I'm apologetic about this. But we had these, like, hour-long – we had practices.

[21 : 44] And, like, if we were doing this skit and we didn't yes and, like, the coach would literally whistle at us. And we had to, like, get out of the skit. And it was like doing some sort of athletics.

And it taught our brains to go yes and instead of contradict or pivot. Or the thing that was hardest was when someone would present a totally new out-of-left-field idea, we would be so stuck in the scene that we'd already been creating in our heads.

That, like, popping our brains out of that was something that we had to unlearn. Like, and learn how to pop out and then do that. So as people trying to be improvisational in our lives, in our relationship with Jesus, in our relationships with each other and with the city, like, how do we – what's the whistle?

Like, how do we learn how to pop ourselves out of, like, like, Jesus? You know, I'm on my way to Capernaum, but then someone stops me. How do I learn to stop and say yes and?

Jeez, that's a sermon. Good well done, Natalie. That's a sermon itself. Yeah. One of the things that comes up for me actually goes back to radical friendship and some reading I was doing around that.

[23 : 01] And just the idea of friendship is not keeping secrets. And what this writer meant by secrets was just learning and knowing who you are and being okay saying that.

So that's that kind of yes and, and the and is a statement. I know that a lot of us in this room or watching online are kind of in process thinking about what – how do I think about faith?

How do I think about theology? All of that stuff. Relationship with God. God's, you know, apparent side. All these different things. And yet, I think in the midst of that, being able to say, here is where I am without fear is the only way that other people can improvise off of what you've brought.

Like, if no one ever is able to say, here is where I am. It is unfinished. I don't know. I might be wrong. Then I think you can't ever move to the creative place.

So that's one thing that I think a lot about. And, you know, with that, being willing to make mistakes. And I mean, when we were up here, I was ready to take a selfie with you.

[24 : 05] I was ready, right? That was like awkward and everything. But that's okay. I think being willing to be imperfect, to make imperfect, you know, say, I believe this. And then I was wrong about that.

Or I feel differently now. I think it's really important to creating something together. Yeah. I'll bring another scripture. Acts chapter 16.

You have Paul and they're traveling around. And you just get a couple interesting verses right next to each other. Acts 16, verse 7. They approached the province of Mysia.

And they tried to enter the province of Bithynia. But the Spirit of Jesus wouldn't let them. They tried to enter Galatia. But the Holy Spirit kept them from speaking the word there. Then finally, Paul has a vision of the Macedonian, urging Paul, come over to Macedonia and help us.

After he saw the vision, they prepared to leave for that province. So you have Paul and his companions on these journeys. And they're making moves. They're making action. And then they get blocked.

[25 : 06] And then they try something else. And then it doesn't work out. And so they sort of are on their back feet. And then they get a word from God. This is the direction that you're supposed to go. And I think there's some freedom in that.

And again, thinking about God's will. You're not stuck just like, I will do nothing until I have a literal vision from heaven. Tell me what to do. I think there's some freedom to experiment.

And to fail. And to mess up. And sometimes that will lead to like, something amazing. And sometimes it will lead to just a kaplunk nothing. But it's instead of this idea of like, you must not move whatsoever until you have a literal vision from heaven.

I just, I don't see that in scripture. So I think, you know, that's the big sort of church-wide sort of thing of like, let's experiment. Let's try new things. Let's see what happens. And then I think there's just the interpersonal life of being, granting yourself the grace to not get it right the first time.

And I'll just add to that. Becoming the kind of people who can watch somebody not get it right the first time. Like, as I was, again. And not point and laugh. Yeah, exactly. Like, you know, I was, I love the idea that in improv you have to trust the group.

[26 : 23] And I know a lot of, or whoever's on stage with you, you've got to trust them. And I know that a lot of us maybe feel skittish about trusting the group. Trusting who's in this room.

Trusting. But again, like, developing that capacity to hold each other. Again, when we make mistakes, when we mess up. We were, actually, Anthony and I were recording this podcast.

The Revenue and Sherry Justice podcast. And I said something. It was about class. And it was about race. And I thought it was so good. And then Anthony said something else. And it kind of clarified what I was saying.

And I realized he kind of, like, what I had said could have been misinterpreted. And he kind of cleaned it up. Like, he had me. Like, that kind of, like, I will not let you look bad.

I will not let you fall. Like, we can trust each other in the group. I think it's something that I deeply hope we're developing as a community. Yeah. I mean, we talk about that as a worship team, too. We are all up here in a slightly vulnerable place.

[27 : 22] Yeah. Like, we could be laughed off the stage at any moment, you know? And so we all have to, like, be willing to practice and rehearse and improv so that we don't make each other look stupid. And that takes some work and effort and also a decent amount of trust.

I don't know why, but I feel like that somehow leads into the kind of last question that I really had about improv, which is where do we have to be careful?

Like, where do things not – you keep, like, smiling as if you didn't ask a journalist to sit up here and ask questions. That's a great question. You think I was going to be like, so what's next?

Like, sorry. But, like, where can we stumble in, like, being too focused on improv or where can being too improvisational trip us up?

I mean, that's the rooted piece, right? So when we first brought the word improvisation to the elders, there was a little bit of, like – it sounds like you're not taking this seriously?

[28 : 34] Sort of like – like, is improv what's supposed to happen in a church? Like, you're theologians and you're thinking about faith in God. And so that's why we were talking about this – well, okay, music theory, jazz.

Jazz is not just, like, throwing a bunch of notes against the wall and seeing what sticks. Like, jazz is based off of music theory, which is sort of the science of music, and then playing and bending with it to do interesting things.

It's not that it's based in nothing. It's rooted in something. And that's how we ended up with that – another R word. And improvisation begins with a center point of some sort, and then it can pivot and bend and change and groove from that center point.

And I think there's importance of listening to our past and our history and our ancestors and our traditions, because a lot of the things that we face today – theologically, socially, economically, all of that – has been thought about and considered before.

Maybe not in this moment and this neighborhood, but has been thought about and considered before. So looking back to that to have some roots so that then you're able to pivot and improv from there.

[29 : 49] Sorry, I have a follow-up on that specifically. When we're talking – this is what journalists do. So the idea of being rooted I think is something that is complex for a lot of people in this church.

Like we all come from very different backgrounds and have different roots. What – is there some sort of like – I mean, we could be like, Jesus in the Bible, right?

But like what – how do we find a common root when a lot of us are coming from a lot of very different backgrounds in Christianity or in other religions and are looking at some things that one might person – one person might consider a root of their relationship with Christ was actually maybe something that in a different world hurt another person that they're sitting right next to in church?

So like how do we get rooted in the same place so that we can then improvise? Yeah, Tanetta, how do we do that? The answer is Jesus.

Jesus. No, I mean, that is actually what came up for me. That's actually what came up for me. And, you know, I am often asked by folks, especially leaders, like essentially like am I Christian enough or something?

[31 : 05] And I think what holds us together – I mean, it's actually pretty broad. It's essentially that probably everybody in this room in some way is fascinated by Jesus.

Some way. You may not be able to name that. You may not know what to do with it. But in some way you're revolving around this, maybe because of your past. I mean, I don't know. But you're – and so I think about that really as the essential root without adding a lot more to it.

And I do also think it's important to name that good improv, you know, allows for autonomy. And I was reading one writer who said it's a balance between constraint and possibility.

And constraint means there are boundaries, right? And so when you ask about how it can go wrong, I think it's not having any boundaries about what I bring and who I am and kind of not having that rootedness and kind of blending in, overblending into what everybody else is bringing.

Like, not knowing who you are in the midst of it. So I do think saying – like, leaving that broad, like, the root is Jesus. That's what we're about here. And, like, there's autonomy in that.

[32 : 14] There's self-expression that's always going to differ from one person to another in that – in this community. Yeah. Yeah, I think, at least in my mind, it always immediately wants to go towards, like, beliefs.

Like, let's make these sort of cognitive statements that therefore set those boundaries. And I think that impulse, I'll admit, is a mistake as opposed to, like, what is it that we're all seeking?

And I think, going back to my old sort of gospel preacher roots, we're all sort of the person that goes up to Jesus and says, what must I do to be saved?

And as a reminder, the word for salvation in the New Testament can also be translated liberation, liberated. What must I do to be set free? And I think we're all seeking, essentially, a version of that.

What do I have to do to be set free, to be liberated, to no longer be oppressed? And we can all name a dozen and dozen different ways that we need to be set free from something.

[33 : 18] So we're all seeking the same thing, that we have that fascination with Jesus. And I think that also does set that boundary of you can't act in such a way that you're working towards somebody else's oppression.

You're working to make sure that somebody else is not set free. So I was given leave to also ask you guys some questions about the church at large.

But I would like to pivot from improv into your guys' relationship. Because you've talked a couple times here about, like, you know, when we were talking or when we were having our meeting.

And so what does improv look like in two co-pastors? You're good. Why they pay me a medium amount of money.

That's a great question. I mean, I feel like the dynamic of siblings has come up a couple times. Yes. Yes. I'm the annoying younger sibling who just pulls pranks on you a lot.

[34 : 18] Yes. There have been pranks. That's right. There may have been whipped cream in a communion cup at one point. Yes. That's right. When I came back from- They didn't think that was funny. When I came back from parental leave, there was whipped cream in the communion cup while I was serving.

And I was like, I guess, you know, Anthony's from the Midwest. I don't know. I was just like, I don't know what they do in communion out there. So I just served. I was like, all right. That's actually what I thought.

Yeah. I think, like, it has been- Yeah, it is a lot of yes and-ing. It is a lot of, you know, trying to be clear about what's important to us. And then leaving room for the other person to add to that.

There is, you know, just a lot of- Like, in any relationship, any friendship, you know, whatever. You've got to know, like, what is the dynamic? Like, Anthony is much more freewheeling, you know. He'll get up here and preach with, like- I'm like, is there just one word on that iPad?

Like, what is on that iPad? And that scares me to death. So, like, knowing who he is, like, we have to, like, really listen to each other and know, like, how we show up and what we bring.

[35 : 22] And I think we- You know, we've talked about this before. Like, we definitely have very different backgrounds in ways that are interesting. And so, we always have to be, like, thinking about how to really support each other in that way as well.

Do you feel like- I mean, I think for all of us- I did not have two pastors of a church growing up. I think it's a very fun idea. But it's something that is universally sure, like, who to approach.

Like, who's, you know, who's doing what? What's each- Like, whose role is this and that? Or, you know, like, should I ask mom if I can go to the dance on Friday? Or, like, you know, so, like, can you guys kind of give us a better idea of, like, where you guys' sort of strengths have separated and who takes a lead on what things?

Have we ever said this from the stage? I feel like we've never said this. I don't think we ever have it from the stage. We do have a document that actually lays some of this out. Yeah. Believe it or not. We don't wing everything. Yeah. Do I have to submit a FOIA to get the document?

You might. You might. But let's see. Yeah. Pretty early on, we set some, like, purview things. And I don't know if this is exactly what you're getting at.

[36 : 33] But, like, yeah. You, pretty early on, like, sort of took over the preaching ministry, the organization of who's preaching, preaching what, the series, all of that. I focused more on, like, the worship side, like the music and the team and all those things.

We've got a bunch of wonderful volunteer directors that we try to do one-on-ones with, at least on a monthly basis. And so it didn't seem like the best use of everybody's time for us to be at all of those.

So you meet with? First impressions, prayer, justice and compassion, and also communications. Yes. And then I take care of administration, community formation, worship, and table kids.

And, yeah, some of that is, like, I think we were at a whiteboard one day of just, like, what are the things that you feel best and most passionate about? Some of the things are just, like, who do you already have relationships with?

There's, like, there's, don't worry, there's nothing on the list. They're like, man, I really hate that I have to meet with that person. That's not what it is at all. It just, yeah, sort of naturally fell out that way. Yeah. So when you're looking at the future of the table, sorry, I'm getting a little ahead of myself.

[37 : 42] First, I want to talk about, I want you guys to really quick us a rundown of, like, how you guys came together. Like, our churches came together. Because, like, I mean, I've been here for eight years, and I was talking to Anthony in the back, and I was like, when did we all come together?

Like, when did this all happen, and how did it come about? So, like, really quick, elevator pitch. How did this happen, and why? Yeah. So essentially, what was it, 2020?

2021. 2021. So I started in 2019-ish, a church called Resurrection City, D.C. I was frustrated at not seeing churches that were intercultural, affirming, justice-seeking, and which had, you know, somewhat more modern, whatever that means, worship.

And so started that community, and just deeply wanted to be, like, very decolonial, very team-oriented. But it was also 2020 when we planned to launch, and so that was pretty brutal.

You know, great things happened. And I still talk to people who miss Resurrection City. And, you know, I felt like, pandemic, I'm burning people out by asking them to try to, like, get this thing off the ground.

[39 : 02] So we started with the leadership, and one of the options was, like, is there some kind of church partnership? And Becky, Becky, yes, welcome back, by the way, had come to some Res City things.

I was like, you should talk to Anthony. And so we had a conversation. I was like, all right, I guess there's this process. Let me see where I fall in the application process.

Simultaneously, we were trying to hire an associate pastor after our executive pastor, Jessica Breslin, had left and was in the process of getting married and moving away. So we had a very sort of broad associate pastor description, job description of, like, we didn't know if we were going to get, like, a 22-year-old out of college or, you know, somebody with some years of experience, years and years of experience.

And we were just sort of open to whatever God had in mind. So, yeah, you saw that, and you're like, I'm applying for the job. And what about a merger of these two congregations?

Yeah, and I have to say, I know some of y'all have done this. We had explored other partnerships, looked at, you know, been interviewed in other communities. And literally, I saw the announcement one night because I was just frustrated.

[40 : 14] I was like, there must be something better than what I'm seeing. I know some of y'all have ended up in jobs, too, because of doing that, right? And I saw the description. I was like, yes, anti-racism is a part of the gospel.

Yes! I was all over. I just was like, this is amazing. And I had known about the table church, but hadn't kind of known kind of that part of the church.

So that was, it was so refreshing to me. And I was aware of who you were through, again, Becky Farah, let me know. And I knew you'd written stuff for Q Christian. And you had been speaking at some other churches that I had, like, admired from afar.

And so Becky had said, you really need to reach out to Netta. And I was like, I'm too intimidated. She's too cool. And then you applied for the job. Yeah. Yes. Yeah.

So, yeah, that became then a conversation to merge the two congregations. I, like, actually have so many more things I want to know, but I'm also looking at my watch and we need to wrap up.

[41 : 09] Thanks, everybody, for your patience. But I hear, in closing, final question, that there might be, like, a fun announcement about our church. What is she talking about?

I don't know. There's a fun announcement. You guys are so much worse at improv. Do not apply for any acting jobs.

So, for, like, a year and a half now, we've been looking for a place to host a morning service. Yes. There's a gasp. That is the response I want.

That's the response I had when I was told to ask this. We have finally found a place for a morning service. That's right. You can go. You take this. Yes.

So, just go on. So, okay, we have to caveat. Yes. There are some caveats. The document has yet to be signed. The document looks fine, but we got it yesterday, so we need to still sign it, okay?

[42 : 10] Yes. Everything will be fine. So, yeah. That said. Yes. So, it looks like we will be at DC Bilingual, which is in Fort Todden. It's a public charter school.

So big. And, yeah, it's a public charter school. It's, you know, it's got a playground outside. It's got parking. It's got classrooms where we can do adult formation.

It's near a metro. It's got a lot. And it's in kind of a multilingual, multiracial community, which makes it really, really exciting. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

So, very quickly, the plan moving forward is that we're starting gradually. So, we're going to have one service in October, one morning service in October, one in November, two in December, including Christmas Eve.

And then we'll be able to start weekly in the first Sunday of January. That's right. We'll get you all the dates soon. It's like October 22nd for the first one. Yeah, October 22nd. Yep. And then the plan is to continue the evening service.

[43 : 10] Yes. So, we still have a relationship. The first congregational. We also have a five o'clock service and our live stream. The goal is, you know, multiplication, not just a complete migration.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. That's it. Hooray. And my final plug, too, in all of this is just to name that in light of the morning service, in light of who we want to be as a community in this kind of rooted improvisation and kind of leaning into being leaderful, we are starting what we're calling Second Sunday Serve.

So, you see in your seats that there are cards there. I am so grateful for that so many of you that do serve in this community. If you don't, I encourage you to consider serving.

We are becoming more clear that, you know, part of belonging and part of discipleship is radical participation. And so, we invite you to explore the team.

So, you can fill out the card, give it to somebody at First Impressions, and or you can come up, stay for a bit after service, get some pizza, and hear from the ministry directors about what we're up to.

[44 : 20] We definitely want to make sure that as we go forward, with the morning and evening, that we are thinking about what it means to have both sites, both places, and folks serving throughout the week, that we're thinking about what it means.

That it's not, these services don't just look like us. They don't just look like a handful of leaders. They look like y'all. They bury y'all's fingerprints. So, I just encourage you, if you are not yet serving, to consider it. Yeah.

Thanks, guys. Thank you. And thank them for, like, undergoing this, because being interviewed by a journalist is... Yep.