



## Episode 04: Jay O'Hara

- Callid: Welcome to On Carrying A Concern.
- Kristina: Where we share stories of friends in service.
- Callid: Also, some reflections and lessons from the road. I'm Callid Keefe-Perry.
- Kristina: I'm Kristina Keefe-Perry. This week we have Jay O'Hara, who is a member of West Falmouth Preparative Meeting, which is one of the member constituent meetings of Sandwich Monthly Meeting, one of the oldest meetings on the North American continent. He's going to talk to us about his experience of living into ever increasing faithfulness in a way that reordered everything in his life.
- Callid: This interview was done during New England Yearly Meeting Annual Sessions, the day after Jay was invited and did deliver a plenary address about the work that he did as a climate action and a witness. Where he and some colleagues took a lobster boat and anchored it in the way of commercial vessels carrying coal as a protest against the realities of the way that fossil fuel and ending the world. You'll hear him mention several times in the show this reference to this action around that piece of climate disobedience.
- Kristina: People can look in the show notes and see some links to information about the lobster boat trial?
- Callid: Yeah, and you can learn about Jay. As we've said before, part of what we're trying to do on this show is not just capture the outward stuff that you can maybe Google about a person, but explore what it was like for them. What was the experience, inwardly, that got them to the place that you can see what happens outwardly.
- Kristina: Right.

Callid: Before we jump into that, just a little bit of podcasting housekeeping. Several people have pointed out the episodes are very long and that's because we didn't make them shorter.

Kristina: Well, there's so much goodness in them, how could we make them shorter?

Callid: By editing better. However, the point of how to use it is, we have put in musical interludes, so that if you want to take breaks. When you hear the music starting, you know that you're coming to the end of a thematic segment, and you can take a break there. If you're thinking about using this in adult religious ed, you don't have to listen to the whole show. It's chunked into thematic units based on content in the show, and they're always bookend-ed by music. The users manual for episodes of On Carrying A Concern, tell you that the music is a digestible chunk.

Jay: I came among friends at Earlham College. For some odd reason there were a number of Quakers in my freshman dorm, who I was immediately friends with. I went to worship my first week at Earlham as an undergrad, and I never left.

Callid: Why did you go to Earlham, do you know?

Jay: I didn't get into Oberlin.

Callid: Is that a common response?

Jay: I don't know, but it's just ... I am grateful that I really did terribly in calculus in high school, so I tribute that, in part, to Oberlin's rejection. I had a vague sense, a very vague sense, of who Quakers were. Mostly from reading James Michener's 'Chesapeake' in middle school. Quakers are good, peaceful people doing good things, or whatever. Abolitionists, sort of, history stuff, but really knew very little. I had grown up in a congregational church, PCC. As we get more into the story that'll probably service again.

Kristina: When did you consider yourself a Quaker?

Jay: I don't actually know when that happened. I remember distinctly a walk between whatever administration building, towards the Meeting House in the library with Tracy Peterson. In which Tracy said, "Jay, why aren't you a Quaker yet?", this is my senior year, or something. I said, "Tracy, I measure myself up against what I consider a Quaker to be, and I'm just really figuring out what that yard stick looks like. I'm just figuring out what it would mean to be a Quaker." She's like, "That means you are one." I'm like, "Dammit." I think probably from that encounter on I started being a little more, like, "Maybe I am a Quaker, not just showing up every week."

Jay: I didn't apply for a membership until I was settled back on Cape Cod to Sandwich, so that probably was eight years ago now, or something.

Callid: It's interesting to me, I mean, there are in various quarters conversations about the capacity, or inclination, of young adults to be grounded in a monthly meeting, or grounded in a religious society in general. Do you remember being part of any of those conversations, or thinking, "Oh, there isn't a place for me." Or, how does that work?

Jay: No. I mean, I felt very much included. After Earlham, I was back in the Cape for a year, year and a half, and I went to worship in the summer, to start developing a little bit of a relationship with friends in West Falmouth. Then I was in D.C. for a couple of years with Friends Meeting in Washington. I was accepted as a Friend. It was very clear I wasn't going to apply for membership there, but I think I also, more than most people my age, have an extreme sense of place. I had already felt very attached and grounded to place on Cape Cod, in my hometown, which was where I moved back and lived for another eight years after my time at FCNL.

Jay: Just knowing that that was the place where I wanted to seek membership. Knowing that that's where my home is, and having read way too much Wendell Berry in my life, knew that all those things fit together as a piece with who I am in my life. Which I don't think is the typical experience of people in their 20's and 30's.

Callid: Interesting.

Jay: I knew I wanted that geographical grounding in place and with an intention that I wasn't going to be moving for a while.

Callid: Then the follow-up question, which is one we love to ask, why have you bothered to stick around? You became a member-

Jay: In Quakerism? Yeah, well that's the thousand dollar question. I mean, I ... I don't know, maybe I should just backup and just tell how I ended up, really ended up as a Quaker.

Callid: Talk about what's the difference between "really", and whatever you told us so far?

Jay: Well, I mean ... Yeah, so I trace my first ... Now, looking back on it, I see my first ... Maybe this is the Woolman sparrow experience, but the first inclinations of the tendency in me to obey the truth in my heart, rather than what was expected of me, to, whatever it was, 8th or 9th grade in Congregational Church. You go through Confirmation class, and you expect to be confirmed at the end of the year. I had not been baptized as a child, as my parents hadn't realized that they needed to get their

kid back into church until I was a little older. They're like, "Oh crap, we better go to church because we have kids now."

Jay: This moment, standing next to the kitchen stove in my parents kitchen, where my mother said, "Well Jay, it's springtime. We're coming up on the end of the Confirmation process and before you get confirmed, do you know we'll schedule a time for your baptism. Let's pick a date." Having the absolute clarity in my heart to say, "I can't do that. I cannot in good conscience stand and say the words that would be expected of me." To move in that direction of accepting the creed that would be expected of me to be on that path towards membership in that church.

Jay: That was, I think, the beginning. Then that elicited quite the first round of parental consternation, particularly from my mother about my life choices, where she broke down in tears. Saying that she felt that she had failed as a mother, worried that I was going to hell and all that sort of stuff. In some ways I can trace back my first inclinations as a Quaker to that. That's the stuff.

Callid: Not that that stuff was Quaker stuff, but that there was something at work in you there?

Jay: Right, absolutely. Absolutely, something at work in me there that I didn't know where it fit in the world. I didn't know that ... I think it took me a long time in the beginning of attending weekly worship at Clear Creek Meeting to get into whatever level where the faith really started to make sense. I took Quakerism 101 with Steve Angel and so for years could ... I mean, this is classic, classic profession with possession. I could speak the Quaker lingo. I knew more about Quakerism than most of the people, and most of my younger colleagues at FCNL that I was working with. All of a sudden I was the Quaker expert guy, but it was a profession without a possession in a lot of ways, and a repetition of dogmas.

Jay: Until only a few years ago, I would say only ... I'd have to actually look back chronologically, but four or five years ago.

Callid: What about those dogmas being repeated ... What were those dogmas that you were repeating and what about them was appealing to you, enough to keep you around?

Jay: I'm not sure.

Callid: Because we say we don't have dogma, right? I mean, that's the-

Jay: I think there's a difference of what kept me around and those dogmas. What kept me around was the experience I had of worship, and I think I learned worship from the closed eyes and gentle smile on Michael Birkel's face, sitting on the facing bench at Clear Creek Meeting. That experience of a peace, a joy, that was clearly animating

him and his life, and his occasional ministry. It made a very strong impression on me, as well as his lived example of working part-time to have a full spiritual life.

Jay: The things that I think I repeated, or that I grabbed onto when people asked, "What are Quakers? What's that?", was often around ... I think the dogma of experiential rather than belief centered. Definitely what really first got me going was at the beginning of my sophomore year in college was 9/11. I came in on the political trajectory of activist Quakerism. That's what kept me for a number of years before the spiritual stuff started really clicking. What else were those dogmas? I'm not entirely sure. I'd have to spend a bit more time. I can remember explaining Quakerism in various ways, but I can't remember what it was that I was using.

Kristina: Would you ... This is interesting because you've described the experience of worship. Would you say that before ... You also talked about how it was maybe, just four or five years ago that something shifted.

Jay: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Kristina: Would you say that before that four or five year mark, whatever that mark is, that you had experienced a Covered Meeting?

Jay: Yes.

Kristina: Okay.

Jay: Yes, but I hadn't experienced the radial reorientation of my life, which happened, I would say, four or five years ago. In a way that then opened up, which is with the story I was telling yesterday, which then opened up a possibility of the faithfulness that lead me to the lobster boat and all that sort of stuff. I struggled around the question of, like, "What is God? Who is God?", for a long time. It was only, maybe in the last ... Maybe a little further ago than five years, but really in that time span that I started to be able to see my experience mirrored in Scripture and other writings about what people are calling God.

Callid: In the Judeo-Christian Scriptures?

Jay: Yeah.

Callid: Yeah. Mm-hmm (affirmative) Do you ... Is there a moment, or a series of moments in that four or five years ago that made you feel like you really clicked with it? That 'clicking', is there a clicking-

Jay: Is there a day?

Callid: Yeah, or a clicking six months? I'm always just curious about when that happens and why that happens. I think it's fascinating.

Jay: I think it was a bit longer. It was just piece by piece, very slowly. Then I looked back and said, "Oh, this is really different from where I was." The ... I think the real crucible for it was around I had come back to Cape Cod, I'd gotten involved with the secular climate movement and the student climate movement and I was really trying to do good work, but found myself repeating ... Found myself back in the secular activist trap and treadmill that I wanted to avoid, maybe. I found that the fruits of where I was were becoming poisonous. Lots of self loathing and going back into depression that I had some of in high school. A harsh judgemental-ism about people who weren't doing enough. Really harsh on friends who I felt like, got it on climate change, but then just go on living their life. Like, "How could you?" Take them by the neck.

Jay: Not knowing how to interact with the world, that wasn't waking up, despite my energy and everyone else's energy in trying to "fix it", in quotation marks. Then the watershed was realizing that I had to stop. I had to quit. I had to step away because I knew that not only was I suffering, the work was suffering.

Callid: Step away from activism?

Jay: Yeah, yeah. I just quit it all.

Callid: How was that for you?

Jay: It just was like, lighter. I already had some sense that I was just going to open and trusting wherever I was led next, but I wasn't going to go out crusading for the next thing. I wasn't going to make a plan. I was going to wait.

Kristina: Yeah.

Jay: I was going to wait, just wait. That really turned me back. I turned back very consciously. Not that I had stopped attending Meeting, or anything. I'd been consistent in worship and in business, and all that sort of stuff. That turn redoubled my focus, I guess. With intent to say, "No, I'm going to ground this in my faith somehow."

Jay: It actually didn't take that long before a bunch of others of us who had been feeling this same hunger, put together the Young Adult and Friends Climate Working Group and starting chewing on it from that perspective.

Callid: I just want to test out with you, is that like, you had this activism. You had this spirituality. You knew that if you asked the question, the spirituality would support

the activism, but they were running on parallel tracks. They weren't actually the same thing up until-

Jay: Yeah, yeah. Yes. Yes, exactly.

Callid: You could legitimate cognitively.

Jay: Well, it's all good work, you know?

Callid: Right.

Jay: "I'm called to be an activist", or whatever, which is really different from the call be faithful.

Kristina: Right.

Jay: I think.

Callid: I resonate with Jay's story a little bit, in that I, certainly came to the Religious Society of Friends for political purposes. I think a lot of people do. One of the things that I thought was interesting in his story, not just in his personal narrative, but in the ways that this shakes out for Friends in general, has to do with the fact that that's really a lot of the story of the Religious Society of Friends. Certainly in the liberal tradition. I don't know about others, but I think Liberal Yearly Meetings and Monthly Meetings that identify with Liberal Yearly Meetings. For much of the 20th and 21st century is that our influx was around Vietnam. I know I heard lots of stories around people coming to Friends during the late '60's and early '70's. Then also reconnecting to the Religious Society of Friends, or plugging in for the first time, around the wars in the Middle East from the United States.

Callid: Even just recently, here at Fresh Pond, we saw a number of folks start coming to Meeting again, or come to Meeting for the first time after the election of Donald Trump to the Presidency. I think there's ways in which there are some political machinations behind what get people in the door the first time, which has to with the history. Whether it's an imagined history or real history, or somewhere in the middle, is irrelevant, but there's some idea that the Quakers are some kind of people who I can be among to do this kind of political resistance work with and it gets people in the door.

Kristina: Yes, and I also think the history is deeper than that. I think there's a significant group of folks who came to the Religious Society of Friends as contentious objectors to war. It was part of their pursuit of conscience and alternative service for the second World War.

Callid: Do you think that they came to Friends because they were CO's, or because they were Friends they were CO's?

Kristina: No, I think that a lot of people were exposed to Friends because they were CO's. At least my experience in Pacific Yearly Meeting, there are a number of folks who came to Friends through their 'CO-ness', and then they were exposed to other in the camps while doing alternative service. They met this group of people who were compelling to them. Then they themselves became Quaker.

Callid: Gotcha.

Kristina: Or Brethren, or Mennonite. I also think there's some component of people who are coming for political reasons. I also think that they're coming to make sense of what's going on.

Callid: Yeah. Religious is meaning making.

Kristina: Right, of course.

Callid: Yeah.

Kristina: It's not just to find a group of like-minded social activists. It's also a group of people who are asking questions. They're trying to dig deep.

Callid: Well, and that's one of the things that I think was really interesting that Jay says. Is that he came in, really learned about Quakerism. He knew all the Quaker dogma, that's what he says, right?

Kristina: Right.

Callid: He knew all the right things, he knew how to talk about, "Woolman did this. Woolman did that. George Fox did this. This is the testimony of this." You know, he knew all of the nuts and bolts of it, but they weren't actually merged or integrated in his life. He knew all of the Quaker facts. He knew all of the Quaker cred stuff.

Kristina: Right.

Callid: He was doing activism, and he could justify the one through the other, but they weren't really united and it wasn't really until they were united that he really felt like he really started to cook on all cylinders. That's a mixed metaphor.

Kristina: I like it though. Have you ever tried to fry an egg on an engine block?



Callid: No. I mean, I think that the merging of those two things is really interesting, right? You asked him, "Had you been in a Covered Meeting?" It was like, "Yep." It wasn't like that Covered Meeting was like, "Oh, now I get it. Now I've understood the Holy Spirit's presence." Like, "Yeah, I had done that, that's why I was sticking around", but it hadn't actually clicked that they were one and the same in an experiential way and it wasn't until that happened.

Kristina: I hear, as he distinguishes that notion of occupation as the thing that defines him, that he was an activist and he was defined by this occupation and the trappings in the community of practice, which he now sees as toxic. That's what he was. It was being. The alternative to that, laying it all down and then really listening was a process of becoming. I think that that, for me, is a really nice nugget, an encapsulation of what is powerful about the process of the Religious Society of Friends, a constant becoming.

Callid: It's really interesting, right, because he says, for him, "The call to something", and I think here we're thinking about the call to be an activist as an occupation, is how I heard that.

Kristina: Right.

Callid: Is different than a call to faithfulness, out of which whatever happens will happen.

Kristina: Right.

Callid: For him, he really separates them. I'm not sure they're always so clear. I don't think there's a bold line in the ground where it's clearly one or the other. I mean, his experience is his experience. That's for sure, but I don't know if that tracks. The call to something is very different than a call to faithfulness. I think sometimes the call to faithfulness might look like a call to something. Thoughts?

Kristina: Yes, the call to faithfulness might be a call to something, but beyond the call to something, for something's sake. The call to something for faithfulness' sake, may not have the outcome as well defined. "I'm going to do this action because it will get me something." It will have a desired outcome. We'll hear Jay talk about this later, about outcomes and what we can control and what we're in charge of, and the power of realizing that we're not in charge of those.

Callid: Yeah. I think the last piece that I have, that I wanted to take note of, is that the reason why he felt like he had to step away from activism isn't because he didn't think the work was good. It isn't because he couldn't justify it. It's because he felt like he was losing himself into, he says, "Judgemental-ism", which I think as an 'ism' is a pretty interesting one. Judgemental-ism, "Why aren't people getting it? Why aren't

people getting it?" That kind of, internalized sense of critique, maybe a biting critique, that he needed to turn away from.

Callid: I think that's interesting. It's not, "Oh, I was an assassin or a banker funding assassins", or whatever. Something that people would say, "Oh, I realized my life was horrible." He was an ecological activist and he felt like it wasn't tenable. It wasn't like the outward work was the problem, it was what it was doing to him internally.

Kristina: Which, he did say affected the outward work.

Callid: Mm-hmm (affirmative) Yeah.

Kristina: But, yes, I heard that and that is interesting. One last thing, so he tells his story of conscience. He makes a comparison to John Woolman and the sparrow. It's a robin in John Woolman's life.

Callid: Bird fact.

Kristina: For folks who don't know, young John Woolman is out and sees a robin, a mother robin in its nest and throws stones and kills the mother robin. Then all of a sudden feels great contrition because he realizes that these baby robins are not going to be able to survive without their mother. So, he kills all the babies too, figuring that that's the most compassionate thing to do. From that point forward, says his journal, or they say, he had a compassionate orientation towards all life. We know that in his later life he was a vegetarian when that was not popular. He didn't use animal products. Anyway, that's the story.

Kristina: Jay talks about the experience of knowing in his being that he couldn't be baptized. It's an interesting comparison, right? It was a formative experience of him as a young person, and it deepened and continued to work in him. It was a time that he listened to the truth that was in his heart. It's way before he went to college and even more before he reoriented his life and laid down his activism, but he still points to that as the moment that he looks on as evidence.

Callid: Yeah, I mean, I think one of the things that Carrying A Concern, that comes along with Carrying A Concern, it seems to me, is a necessitated regular practice of self reflection.

Kristina: Right.

Callid: Part of that ... That's partly because you weren't trying to say, "Am I out running the guide? Am I under running the guide?" To look at yourself in the moment, I think is helped out by looking at yourself throughout the trajectory that brought you to this moment. I think we hear, in a lot of these stories, people pointing out key moments. Most of whom were not 'The Moment', for all time, but were pieces of the story that

when they look back on, they go, "Boom. Boom. Boom. Boom. Now I'm here." It seems like that's, kind of, part of the practice, is to look back on your life and say, "How did I get here?"

Kristina: I am noticing, as you lifted up the importance of self reflection, that Jay mentioned that his schooling in what it means to be a Quaker was observing Michael Birkel. His countenance in worship, but also the fact of his lived life as a professor at Earlham, working only half time so that he could have time for a fully developed spiritual life.

Callid: Is that true about Michael Birkel?

Kristina: I don't think Jay's lying to us. I don't know the intricacies of Michael Birkel's working life. I think he's retired now. Is he?

Callid: I don't know. Let's leave all this in, this is really great. Our expertise everybody. We know everything about Quakerism. We know Michael Birkel's employment status. That's not true.

Kristina: I know.

Callid: No, we don't know that. Sorry Michael.

Kristina: He does smile in worship though, it's true.

Jay: The instigator for my start in that process of clearness and support, or the oversight, started with a clear lead to go to Pendle Hill with Noah and Kathleen. Noah and ... What's her name, from Multnomah?

Kristina: Marge Abbott.

Jay: Marge, we're leading a week of prophetic ministry.

Callid: Noah Baker Merrill?

Jay: Yeah, yeah. Kathleen and I, and I don't remember, there were a couple of other Friends from New England who were there. I felt really called to that, and I asked my Meeting to send me. That started the process.

Callid: Talk about that. Why not just go?

Jay: Why not just go? Well, yeah, good. Exactly. This is where I do wish I actually kept an actual journal, even just personally, because I don't really know. I had read enough and knew enough that ... I had experienced enough in my own activist life that I didn't want to do this as an individual. I was done with the individualist thing.

Then if I was to go, I wanted to go on behalf of my Meeting, as well. The very concrete stuff was that I was poor.

Callid: So you were looking for financial support, that was part of it?

Jay: Partially, part of it, yeah. Yeah, absolutely that was part of it. I wrote a letter with this request, which was ... Actually, I don't have ... Yeah, it's somewhere.

Callid: Yeah.

Jay: It was really clear. I was really at the time that my going was not just for me, it was for us, and maybe even for the life of our Religious Society. Yeah, it wasn't just mine.

Callid: Now? We're jumping back and forth here, but ... That was a group of people helping you. You asked for something, and they said yes.

Jay: Yeah.

Callid: That was a point in time, right? "Send me to this thing at Pendle Hill." Do you now, or have you ever had a group of people who has more consistent oversight over you, or anchoring? What's the language you use? What do those people do, and-

Jay: I use oversight, and I talk about oversight with them, and they keep saying "support", and I keep saying "oversight". It goes back and forth.

Callid: What's that, for you?

Jay: For me, oversight is like, I desire my Meeting, in some way, to make sure that I'm being faithful. To hold me accountable to, really, what I'm led to, and make sure that I'm not overstepping. Making sure that I'm not under stepping. My Meeting at this point, despite my trying to encourage that, is still deeply uncomfortable with that idea in some ways.

Callid: Uncomfortable that you that?

Jay: Uncomfortable exercising that sort of authority power.

Callid: Even though you're asking for it?

Jay: Yeah. At this point I have not had an experience where my committee has heard a, "No" or a, "Stop", that I hadn't heard. Or a, "Go", that I haven't heard. I hunger for that day.

Callid: Why do you think that is?

Jay: I think part of it is I don't want to feel so damn lonely. That it's just me. I hunger for the ... I hunger for the Meeting, and our Society, to feel really engaged and responsible for the nurturing of Ministry. Yeah.

Jay: I feel like I come back to this metaphor, my ego is like a Therm-a-Rest mattress, it's self inflating. I want help in staying low. Yeah.

Kristina: Have you had an experience with, if not with them, with someone doing that pruning, and what was it like? If you ...

Jay: Yeah, I feel like I have had some good experiences where I've been like, eldered. There was a good one for me at a YAF retreat a couple years ago. Just great, because we're real with each other.

Kristina: Right.

Jay: That's what I'm tired of and why I think I hunger for that oversight. It's like, "I just want to be real." Like, "Let's be real. What's really going on? Where are we, and how did we get there? How am I either being faithful, or not?"

Callid: Do you think that because reticence to exercise, that isn't real? I'm pushing you a little bit on this, but ... People are afraid to hold you to a standard of discipline.

Jay: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Callid: Is that not real?

Jay: The reticence? No, I think it is real. Absolutely. Yeah, absolutely, and I think we need to ... You know, that's ... There's a process-

Callid: The problem is not talking about it, is that the issue? It's not addressing the reticence, or something like that? I'm asking this question for myself too, right, because we can be a hair's breath away from another judgemental-ism. "You're not taking this real enough. I want real crew."

Jay: Right. Right, right, right.

Callid: Right, and so we want to avoid that, right?

Jay: Yep.

Callid: Because we love lots of people that we're in community with.

Jay: Oh my God, yeah.

Callid: I mean, so what's that balance?

Jay: My committee is effing awesome.

Callid: Yeah.

Jay: I love them, they love me, and it's phenomenal.

Callid: That's not the issue?

Jay: Yeah.

Callid: But you still feel alone? I mean, that's the thing I think is interesting, right? You love them, they love you, and I asked with the question, you said, "I don't want to feel so alone."

Jay: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Callid: Right, there's something there, yeah?

Jay: Mm-hmm (affirmative) Yeah. Yeah. Yep.

Callid: What's it like to be Elder? What do you mean by eldering? You have been eldered, so maybe you didn't have ... What did you say, "oversight", but you have been eldered. What does that mean for you, because that means different things for different people in different places?

Jay: I don't ... Actually, I'm going to back up, and we'll get that in a second. I don't mean to say that my committee hasn't told me to slow down at points. It almost never happens in the in-person stuff. I wrote a piece for 'Friends Journal' on my lobster boat experience, and I was away when I sent it to them, and they were very declarative. Like, "This is not acceptable for you to send." You know, I didn't submit it. I guess, truthfully, there has been some good oversight. They have exercised that.

Jay: What they are really good at, and in particular what I love about the committee, is that there are two members in particular for whom the Biblically based gospel stuff is not their experience of Quakerism. For whom mushy goo ... Both of whom are scientists, both of whom, I think they're both Ph.D's. One is a physicist and one is an engineer who builds robots for [inaudible 00:42:23]. They're like, awesome and have been long, long time Friends. That language doesn't resonate, and they're testy. Not testy, but they're nervous around Christian language in particular. Spiritual language in general, and the Christian language in particular.

Jay: They're consistent loving questions for explanation and hold me to dig underneath the meaning and try and be really clear in a way that's awesome, and I love it. Making sure that I really am speaking the experience, not the words. There is oversight there, in that way as well. They ... Yeah, "Don't just say something Jay, like, get down to it." They make me drill down into it in a way that's really loving and really good.

Jay: Your question was about the experience of being elderd?

Callid: Is that eldering? I was, kind of-

Jay: I think it is, yeah.

Callid: Yeah.

Jay: Yeah, I think it is.

Callid: The questioning?

Jay: Although it can feel like ... It can also feel like ... Well, I don't know. I don't actually know. The experience of it is an experience of someone asking questions who are being like, really like, "Really?" Like, "Come on. Jesus? Really? You think God is going to give you the answers to those questions?" Like, very skeptical. It's not a ... I think it's different than being the sense of being, like, called out for out running. I guess that's how I ...

Kristina: It sounds like it forces you to clarify, but it's different than someone saying, like, "I don't hear ..."

Jay: The life moving in what you're saying?

Kristina: Yeah.

Jay: Or ... Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

Callid: It's not either/or, right? It's not like you would want the one and not the other?

Jay: No, no, no.

Callid: It's not like that?

Jay: No.

Callid: No. So, what it is about those other eldering experiences where someones speaking your language in a way that holds you to a different kind of standard or commitment, or something that's appealing? I mean, what is it that's appealing about that? Maybe it's not appealing, what about it is something-

Jay: Well, no it is appealing. I think what's appealing about it is that there's a being in ascension. I use stupid educator's language. We're like, "It's a community of practice, that's practicing together and being real with each other. Using our varied experience to nurture the prospering of truth."

Callid: Is that what an elder is, someone who can do that?

Jay: Yeah. For me, I think, yeah. Yeah.

Kristina: I really resonate with Jay's story about appealing to his Meeting, to go to the workshop at Pendle Hill with Noah Merrill and Marge Abbott. He says it practically, he did it because he didn't have the money, but he also knew that he didn't want to do things alone. When I was first ... When I was young in my Quakerism, I was a member of Strawberry Creek Monthly Meeting, and I was really drawn going to a permaculture design training. I could have just gone, but something in me knew that it was connected in my life in the Meeting and somehow to the Meeting. I didn't have a support committee at the time. I don't think I knew, really, about eldering and oversight, in the same way that we're talking about it, but I made a request to the Meeting for financial support. They gave me support in more ways than just that.

Kristina: I made a request to the Meeting for support to do this travel because I felt like it was an extension of myself in the Meeting. The support that they gave me was two-fold. First, they did give me financial support. Some directly and also an invitation to do some creative fundraising, so I mixed together dry ingredients and packaged them up and sold them as Permaculture Pancake Mix, which just cracks me up now to think about.

Kristina: Then when I returned from the training they scheduled an adult RE session, where I was invited to talk about my experience at the design training. How it related to my own faith journey as a Friend, and what I thought the implications were for us as a Meeting. They wanted me to bring the fruits of my training back into the life of the Meeting. That was an incredible experience. I think even more than the funds that they gave me to go to this training, was to be invited to share it with the community and then to ponder how we might live into it.

Callid: Yeah, and I think that question around living into it, looks different for different people. What people want out of it, like living into what, is, I think, different for different people. I mean, Jay talks about loneliness and it has nothing really to do with whether or not people see him. I think he's a fairly public Friend and somewhat



well known, within New England Yearly Meeting at least. Certainly among the ecologically minded Friends of New England Yearly Meeting. What he's looking for is people to show up and demand a responsibility from him.

Callid: I think this is the kind of scenario where we don't have a one size fits all scenario when people are looking to, kind of, come into relationship. What they're looking to get out of that relationship is really different depending on who the person is.

Kristina: I think that's right. That's how people work.

Callid: Yeah, yeah. I mean, the danger of that though is, everyone wants whatever they want out of Quakerism, so anyone can do whatever they want, right? That's the slippery slope of that side. Whatever anyone wants to get out of this relationship is fine and figuring out what are the boundaries of our community? Are there things that we do have in common? Are there shared practices? Are there shared hopes and shared desires? Those ... Maybe not nailing that stuff down, but talking about that stuff seems important. I don't know if we always talk about it as much as, maybe Jay would like, or I would like.

Kristina: Or I would like.

Callid: Or you would like.

Kristina: I think there's a lot that we could be talking about in terms of our interior life, and desires, and our longings.

Callid: Yeah. Yeah, he uses the phrase, "I want to get low." That made me really think about ... One of the things that spun me off thinking about it is the fact that it's one thing for Jay to say, "I really want to have that committee help me stay low, or get low", but that's probably not the best prescription for everyone.

Callid: You know, I'm thinking about, it was a very famous book and interaction. Where a guy named Niebuhr wrote this book about the nature of human sin and it more or less boils down to a pride or action, or thinking that you're the center of something instead of God. This woman named Valerie Saiving, who was an early feminist theologian wrote, "Yeah man, you get that right for you. Like, for dudes", and this is largely white people we're talking about here, right? The human condition around sin being based in pride, and doing too much, and thinking you're too powerful, "Yeah, you're totally right, for you." That the issue for many women wasn't pride, but not living up to what flourishing would look like, not living fully into what, maybe God would have them do. Not because of their own failings, or own sinfulness, but because of the societal structures that make it more challenging for women to live into the fullness of their power.

Callid: I think it's really important for me when I hear Jay say, "I need to make sure I have a committee to make sure I get low." I say to myself, "That might track for me", but some other people might need committees, and responsible communities, and accountability to say, "You're beating yourself up too much. You can live more fully into this. You can be freer. You can be out there more. Your voice can be heard more." I think that that plays a lot along the issues of power and privilege, around race, ability, class probably also.

Callid: I just am aware that this is, yet again, another reason why we need to be talking to one another about these things. Lest we assume that everyone's needs in the ministry are the same, we need to figure out for our ourselves and then allow other people to help us figure out for us. Then also help other people figure out what they most need to live into the fullness, not the too-much-ness, or the not-enough-ness, but the fullness of what it looks like to steward and exercise those gifts.

Kristina: Totally, and to frame it another way, to use a different framework than Niebuhr and theologians, in 12 step programs, especially originating from AA the work in 'The Big Book', the work of the 12 steps is essentially about getting low. It's about having too much pride. Jay talks about how his ego is self inflating, and the men who wrote 'The Big Book' and came up with the 12 step program all talked about their egos as being too much.

Kristina: Charlotte Castle, who is a feminist, also a Quaker, in her book 'One Journey, Many Roads' talks about, "That's great for you guys, but women, people of color, people without power, may be caught up in the throes of addiction, not because they're ego is over inflated, but because they have self loathing." They need to build up self confidence and belief in themselves. It's really a very similar thing.

Kristina: That makes me think that when we talk about accountability, and I talk about this as "holding the feet to the fire". Even I, when I use that phrase, I think of it as a burning off the chaff image, but it could also be live fully into who you are and what you are given. Kind of a, Howard Thurman call to the sound of the genuine.

Callid: Yeah, I mean, it seems to me that at the heart of this conversation, however you slice it or dice it, the invitation that Jay wants, that I think is resonate with you and me, at least, and I think we've heard it from a number of other people, is for a deepening kind of relationship. A kind of relationship that is intimate enough that people are willing to say to one another, "Hey Friend, it seems like you've over stepped, or you're under stepping." People who are in each other's business enough to know how it is that they're experiencing the movement of God in the world, and their attempts to live faithfully into that, however that looks.

Callid: Lacking that kind of intimacy, eldership doesn't really look like much of anything, other than finger-wagging. For someone to really have accountability over my work

they need to know me. They don't need to like me, or be like me, but they do need to know what I'm doing and how I am in the world. So that they have some measure of ability to understand what it is I'm doing when I'm trying to be of service in the world. I think that that's part of what he ... I think, when he says he's lonely, it might be that. Not that people aren't being faithful to their oversight over him, but feeling like, maybe, there aren't people who know him that way.

Callid: What do you think ministry is in the Religious Society of Friends? Either historically, or in the present, how do you understand that?

Jay: This is like, my basic experience. I hunger for the presence of ministers among us to enliven and embolden our worship in our Meetings.

Callid: Whose 'us'?

Jay: 'Us', Friends in New England. Even just West Falmouth Friends Meeting would be a richer place if once a month someone was showing up.

Callid: The traveling ministry is what you're talking about?

Jay: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. A traveling ministry that pollinates, and a traveling ministry that's a gospel ministry.

Callid: What does that mean?

Jay: For me, it's not that one can't have ministries and labor under concerns that are a ministry, but that the life blood of our Religious Society is a gospel ministry that points towards the way, the Friends way, or Jesus' way, or whatever that way, however we want to think of that way. That invites those of us who worship as Friends to be faithful.

Callid: Mm-hmm (affirmative) As opposed to a ministry of concern for birth care, or a ministry for fair trade economic practices. A ministry, a gospel ministry, which is about faithfulness?

Jay: Yeah, yeah.

Callid: Then the follow-up question is, are you a minister?

Jay: That's, I don't think, a label that one can don oneself.

Callid: Now you just said you yearn for ministers among us, if we can't don those for ourselves who does that?

Jay: Our Meetings.

Callid: Okay, so if a Meeting is unwilling to call someone a minister, ministers cannot emerge from that Meeting?

Jay: No, that's not true, but-

Callid: Well, what's funny about that? I mean, let's play with that, what's funny about it?

Jay: I think what's funny there, for me, is that there has to ... I think for it to be, like, good ministry, there has to be relation there and someone just spinning off into oblivion as a minister, isn't ministering to the body. I think there are examples, contemporary examples of named ministers for whom that that happens. I think an authentic ministry is seen as a ministry from both ends, not just the subjective, like, "I am a minister", but is recognized, "Oh, that is ministry." Like, "I see that." Like, "We see that." Otherwise, it's too easy to get caught up in ego.

Jay: That's not to say that Friends, because we are Friends, cannot minister. It's not to say we can't minister unto one another. Absolutely. Yeah.

Callid: Do you feel like sometimes you've ministered to folks/

Jay: I think so. It feels, I mean just to my sense today and yesterday, was that what I was given spoke to the condition of people. Challenged people, and felt faithful, and faithfully delivered. Yeah. I don't know that ... I mean, that doesn't necessarily mean we have ministered, but ... Yeah.

Callid: I mean, that's always interesting to me too, right, because if someone baby-sits, they're just a baby-sitter. That's just what they are. If someone ministers, "Well, I don't know if they're a minister." That category has a special, cultural sheen on it.

Jay: I agree. So for me, the thing is that it's about naming, it's not about crowning. It's about seeing the thing, and naming the thing, "The thing". One can't just put on the jacket or the hat, and be like, "Poof. Minister", without it being, I think, a relationship.

Callid: With that meaning?

Jay: Yeah. I mean, you can't just decide that you're a baby-sitter.

Callid: Right, someone has to hire you.

Kristina: Hire you.

Jay: I think it'd deem you worthy of baby-sitting.

Callid: Yeah.

Jay: Great example.

Callid: Yeah, interesting. I hear in you, kind of, a desire and a longing for not only ... Or, I'm wondering if I hear this in you? Not only accompaniment, but then there underneath the accompaniment therefore you want something for yourself, which is a kind of discipline and a kind of service. We heard in the plenary a desire, a Thomas Kelly says, "Go the other way. Go the other half."

Jay: The half, yeah.

Callid: That suggests that there's, at least, been some kind of tasting of first fruits of what it's like to go the other half, sometimes.

Jay: Hells yeah.

Callid: What was that like? What's it like to have that on your heart, or however you would say that? What's it like to be called into wanting that? What was that like for you? Not abstractly, but for Jay O'Hara.

Jay: Well, I mean, I don't know that I've been ... I don't know that I'm ready to claim that I've been to heaven, but I do feel like all of Paul's Fruits of the Spirits, like I feel like I've experienced that. That it's the hunger and the longing that I have is for others to experience it too. Less to have a ... To build a community of people for whom that is why we're here. I don't know how else to describe the utter joy and clarity of potentially going to prison and being ready. Being ready. I don't know that I'm ready to be Mary Dyer who spent whatever days in prison, as like, in paradise. I think I've experienced some of what she's talking about. I would just love to share that with people.

Kristina: What can you imagine that might be like? I mean, I don't want to give you the answer to the question.

Jay: For me, it's like, for step one, pattern and example. I just have to do it myself, and maybe someone will see that and see that experience in themselves or recognize that within themselves. That that might minister to them. As I'm led to testify to it, I don't know where that leads. Yeah. I don't have any big vision plan.

Callid: You just recently gave the plenary here at New England Yearly Meeting sessions and one of the things you said in there is, you heard a story or you were participating in an event, where a comment or an aside was made to you. Like, "We're doing a great job, but it's not like anyone's going to sell their house." Right? Saying, "Look, there's

limits to what we can do in terms of activism, or service, or commitment, or self sacrifice maybe."

Jay: Yep.

Callid: Where are you in terms of understanding limits, or not, in terms of what's possible for you, for other people, and how to do engage with other folks who have different limits than you?

Jay: I think that was my big frustration, dealing with other people was my big frustration thing and judgment.

Callid: People are hard-

Jay: I'm much more ... I'm even at peace with that individual who still is a challenge for me. For me, I'm pretty convinced that with God everything is possible. That's not like, "If we believe in God, anything might happen." That's like, "If we actually give ourselves over, I can't predict what we can do." I am absolutely not interested in telling others, or have any idea that I would know what others place in that is. My experience has been that as I try to walk Thomas Kelly's path of holy obedience that the more I give over, the more I'm given. That I think people would be surprised if they found themselves able to let go of some of the things that we think of as security, and place our hearts rather, our treasure rather, in heaven, or whatever.

Jay: For me, the lobster boat thing is like, that's what happened. Odds were we were going to get handcuffed within an hour and spend a bunch of time in jail. That's what we thought was going to happen. We thought we were going to get like, Patriot Act terrorism charges. That that was possible in the legal realm of ramifications for what we were doing. We were ready to give up.

Callid: Is that yours? Is that what that means?

Jay: Yeah, yeah.

Callid: Yeah.

Jay: Yeah. We were ready to give that up. We had already decided that our lives, that that was a fine way to spend our lives. Having come at it from that perspective of having given over that much of your life, or what could be your life, not hoping. Not being like, "Yeah, hopefully we get away with just some misdemeanor charges and get a good bail out deal", or whatever. Going in, ready to take the full whatever comes. Somehow, living that outlook, more was given than we ever could have imagined.

Kristina: Right.

Jay: I can play two sides of this. I can ascribe it all to luck, "Well, you got lucky and the DA just was a good guy." Or, "The Coasties were particularly nice", or whatever, but I don't think that that's the whole story. There's something of giving and the willingness to have given it up, that allows one to go out into the world with a different sort of energy that invites something transforming.

Callid: It seems also that it's not, like, you didn't want to go to jail for three years.

Jay: No.

Callid: Like, that wasn't the ...

Jay: That was not the point.

Callid: Right, it wouldn't have been better if you'd got that instead of getting off easy.

Jay: Well, it might have been, but I sure don't get to make the decision of whether that's better or not. That's definitely not-

Callid: Say more about that.

Jay: Oh, like, I was particularly conscious of this going into the trial thing. Like, I did not know, and I think it's human hubris to think we know what the right outcome is. There is, in some ways, you play all sorts of mental games, like, "Oh, it would have been better if you had served six months in jail and you would have been a hero or something."

Callid: The story would have been better?

Jay: Yeah, or whatever. Or, it would have been better if you would have been able to put Dr. James Hansen in Bill McKibben and whoever else on the stand and have a big show trial. Maybe that would have been better, but that's not my job. I don't know. I don't get to decide.

Kristina: It seems like there's a lot of-

Jay: That's the same, I think, with the action itself. Like, I don't know what the best outcome was. There were all sorts of moments where I was like, deciding what we were going to do at that moment. If we had thought all the way through of like, "No, we want it to look exactly like this. Through this part, do this. Be an asshole in this direction", or whatever, that we wouldn't have been under immediate guidance, which, I think, we were as we did it. Particularly around, like, I had the key to the lock that locked the giant anchor to the bottom of the boat in my pocket the whole

time. There were a couple of times where we were like, "Should we throw this overboard?" "I don't think so."

Jay: In responding that way, being curious, being open to continual guidance and trusting that the right thing is going to happen, whatever it is, just dispenses with the fears, dispenses with the anxiety. Allows one to, in being in the hands of God, to be the hands of God. We're able to then approach everything with love, because we're not worried about how it's going to turn out. We can be fully present and not anxious, not worried.

Jay: My suspicion is that the gospel words are true, that if we are in a place where we're not worried about how we're going to feed ourselves and not worried about how we're going to clothe ourselves. Then we're going to be held and miraculous things that we never would have expected are going to happen. I don't know, try to live into that.

Callid: The thing that is totally wild to me about this last piece, it's been two years, I think, since we recorded this, or maybe like a year and a half. Just this morning I was reading Barclay's Apology in Modern English, as one does.

Kristina: I was going to say, "Like you do."

Callid: Like you do. That text, right, is one of the first and only Quaker theology, systematic texts, that answering all the things in the second generation of Friends.

Kristina: Right.

Callid: Anyway, there's this part in there where he's trying to figure out what ministry is and how you know what ministry is. If it's not learning Greek and Hebrew and Latin and doing all these school things, but how do you know? One of the things that Jay says is that ministry needs to be seen from both ends. Or he says, he doesn't want people to just, kind of, decide they're ministers and spin off into oblivion, right?

Callid: Both from the perspective of the individual they should see their own life as a response to God's call, or Spirit's call, or that deepening, transcendent power, that peaceable force. It's also the case that your community would often want to see that, and there's this passage that's in the tenth proposition about ministry, which is almost identical to that. I think it's pretty fascinating because I don't think Jay's purposefully quoting from Barclay's Apology, but there is this sense within Quakerism, that has gone back a long time, that there's a resonance there.

Callid: "The God who gathers Christians also provides ministers and teachers among all of those Christians, with the inward, unmediated operation of his own spirit to watch over, and instruct them, and maintain them, in an animated, refreshed and powerful condition. Their call to ministry is verified in the hearts of their brethren, and the



seals of their apostleship are the awareness of the life and power passing through them, which daily and inwardly reinforces them in the most holy faith."

Callid: Right? "Their call is verified in the hearts of their brethren." Their call is not verified in their own self sense, but in the hearts of their brethren. I think ... I mean, I hear ... How does Jay say it? "Ministry has to be seen from both ends."

Kristina: Right. You want just a baby-sitter, without having someone to baby-sit.

Callid: Someone who wants you to baby-sit.

Kristina: Right.

Callid: Yeah. We are now excited to say that we've gotten our first listener email, and it's from Will Tabor. It's really awesome that you're sending this in, and so we wanted to share this with you all because Will has a perspective on the Melody Brazo episode, which is really, I think, pretty great. Thanks Will, and Kristina, if you would.

Kristina: Sure. Will writes, "Hi. Your final segment about the hireling ministry got me thinking about how, or whether the stand against hireling ministers was part of a larger challenge to the existing social order and part of the Quaker stand against tithes, and an established church. As I understand it many of the postings of ministers, especially to rural parishes, were political appointments and in some cases the appointed ministers did not bother to show up at their parishes for long periods of time. This was part of a larger critique of the social order. I heard enough hints of this to get me thinking about it in new ways, but that kind of connection might be missed by someone who's not so familiar with 17th century British history. Anyway, it's a great start. Will."

Callid: I am also not super familiar with 17th century British history, although perhaps more than many people. I'm certainly not a British historian, but I thought, there is some truth to this understanding of the way that the church of England would appoint people to these rural parishes. It, kind of, functioned as a status symbol, almost. Or, a leverage, a political leverage maneuver for the family of that person. While I can't make any convincing historical argumentation there, it's certainly worth considering. I think, Will, that the stance against the hireling ministry may have, in the very least, been an attempt to challenge or resist against these kinds of structures of the use of power for the gain of political capital. As opposed to the entering more fully into that peaceable reign of God.

Kristina: Thanks Will for writing this email, and also for modeling for other people the ways in which we hope that this series will be increasingly a dialogue. That you will write in with your observations, your historical facts, and your comments and questions about episodes.

Callid: Concerns also. A lot of this is just Kristina and I reflecting on the powerful testimony of Friends. Any of it is something you can have issue with.

Kristina: Indeed.

Callid: We want to thank Fresh Pond Monthly Meeting for the oversight of our ministry, for my committee, and for Kristina's committee.

Kristina: We also want to thank the Legacy Gift Fund of New England Yearly Meeting for financial support of this podcast.

Callid: As well as the Obadiah Brown Benevolent Fund.

Kristina: And Salem Quarter.

Callid: Once again we want to thank Blue Dot Sessions for making such incredible music available. This week we heard from the tracks Coronea, Promesa, Our Quiet Company, and we just want to say thanks so much for hosting such a great place for improvisation and making that music free to the world. You folks are awesome.

Callid: We couldn't do it without all of them and all of you listening. We hope that as you move forward you find creative and novel ways to use this content. If you do, you let us know how you're using it. You can check everything out on [OCACshow.org](http://OCACshow.org).

Kristina: Or you could find the podcast on iTunes or Google Play.

Callid: Or Facebook. You can play it from lots of those different places and we hope to hear from you, and see you again in the audio space next week.

Kristina: Thanks for listening.