

(MUSIC)

MIKKI METTEBA: I was fined for trespassing along with the other student last semester, back in December. I sat in at the investment's office alongside everybody else. It was a very special moment, in all honesty. I hold that day very close to my heart.

NATHAN EMPSALL: Mary's song. The Magnificat, when she learns she's gonna have Jesus and she talks about how God is going to cast down the mighty and lift up the poor. Well if we're going to be Christlike shouldn't we at least name who the mighty are? And name who the poor are that they're abusing? Even if we can't cast them down we can still call out those systems the way God and Christ and all the Old Testament prophets do.

PAUL RINK: There's literally no reason why a 16 year old should be doing this work. It should be the older generation who have positions of power and have put, made this situation happen in the first place. And literally the only reason that these students and young people are stepping up is because nobody else is and it's their future.

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MICHAELA MAST, HOST: This episode is our very last, and we'd like to spend it by talking about what comes next – about what happens when we come home ready to make change in our own communities.

(THEME MUSIC)

HARRISON HORST, HOST: Welcome to Shifting Climates, where we attempt to rehumanize the conversation on climate change. I'm Harrison Horst.

MICHAELA: And I'm Michaela Mast

HARRISON: Thanks for joining us.

(THEME MUSIC)

HARRISON: This season, we've waded through a lot of heavy topics, hearing highly personal stories of how environmental degradation and climate change are affecting the health of communities. But now that we're home, what do we do with those stories? That's what we want to talk about today – how people like us are engaging, and why it's not always easy.

(END THEME MUSIC)

MICHAELA: It all kind of comes down to a dilemma we've come up against – what do we do as individuals with new ideas when we operate in a society run by institutions built on old ones? And for these conversations, we find ourselves at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, making some unexpected connections.

MIKKI: Well, I'm Mikki. My name is Mikki Metteba.

MICHAELA: This is Mikki.

MIKKI: I'm a first year here at Yale. And I plan on studying Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies and Political Science.

MICHAELA: Mikki is matter-of-fact in an unassuming kind of way. She has this bold and spirited side that came through the longer we talked. We've heard from Mikki once before this season, in Episode 3. She grew up in Deer Springs, AZ, on Navajo Nation, and is Navajo herself.

MIKKI: The indigenous people, since time and memorial, have shared a deep connection with the land and have based their humanity in that connection to the land.

MICHAELA: But we originally connected with Mikki because we had heard about Fossil Free Yale, an active student group organizing for climate justice on campus that Mikki's involved with.

MICHAELA: Um, so this fight has been going on for how long?

MIKKI: Um, I think 2013? I always hear 2013 from people in Fossil Free Yale.

HARRISON: Fossil Free Yale is part of a broader national movement calling for the divestment of fossil fuels that has taken off at universities across the country. In fact, Michaela and I were involved with a divestment campaign ourselves at our own school, Eastern Mennonite University.

MIKKI: I can't give a very detailed history of Fossil Free Yale but students have been fighting for divestment from fossil fuel companies for a long time.

HARRISON: The gist of divestment is this: Most universities, including EMU and Yale, have an endowment, a pool of money that they invest in the stock market. The returns are then often used as a source of funding for scholarships and development projects. Essentially, Mikki and the others at Fossil Free Yale are asking the university to withdraw their endowment money, or divest it, from any fossil fuel companies they own stock in and reinvest it elsewhere.

MICHAELA: Historically, divestment has been a way of aligning an institution's monetary decisions with its values. The goal is usually to make a moral statement, but if the movement becomes big enough, it can also make a tangible difference, not necessarily because the industries suffer financially, but because it's a way of garnering energy for a social movement. Back in the 1960s, for instance, divestment and the subsequent boycotting of South African companies pushed the South African government into negotiations that ultimately dismantled apartheid.

MIKKI: I first joined Fossil Free Yale last semester. Well, I was involved with the Native American Cultural center right off the bat. And a couple of people from the NACC were involved in Fossil Free Yale. And just seeing indigenous people living by the responsibility to the land inspired me to also take part in that responsibility.

HARRISON: Mikki sees her involvement in Fossil Free Yale as one avenue for living responsibly with the land, while also resisting the actions of Yale that don't align with her roots as a Navajo.

HARRISON: Could you explain to us the specifics of the endowments in question that are called for removal and what specifically is being asked for in return?

MIKKI: Well, Yale's, invested in a number of evil things. But the endowment justice coalition's 2 main demands are that they cancel Puerto Rican debt and that they divest and withhold all closings in fossil fuel companies. And making divestment public and being very open and verbal about it is just a large part of like the moral, the morality of divesting from these evil things.

MICHAELA: Last year, Fossil Free Yale formed a coalition with another student organization calling for Yale to release their holdings in Puerto Rican debt. We won't go into detail here, but it makes for a wise collaboration – one group is concerned about the perpetuation of climate change and the other is concerned about the burden of debt on a part of our nation that's most vulnerable to climate change. Though the university has been relatively unresponsive to either request, they have made a few quiet changes. But of course, if their decisions are going to contribute to the momentum of the movement, or make a statement of any kind, they need to be announced loud and clear.

MIKKI: Yale has sold like 99% of its holdings within Ntero, a fracking company. But they did that very low key. They didn't say anything about it. It wasn't until investment papers were released or reports were released that people were like, "oh, they actually did this." Yet they did not make a public statement. And Yale making a public statement about it definitely would have set some sort of example to other institutions. Yeah, and it's frustrating.

HARRISON: Why do you think Yale is holding back on something like that?

MIKKI: Well, David Swensen is an accomplished, I say that in quotes, investor and just...he's an incredibly large voice in the world of college endowments. And I think that maybe divestment would just really antithesize everything that he believes in. And he's not going to give that up anytime soon.

HARRISON: As Yale's chief investment officer, David Swensen understandably feels pressure to perform. In 2018, Yale's endowment was \$29.4 billion, the second largest of any university in the states, behind Harvard. And in his 30+ years in the position, Swensen has managed to secure an annual return of 13%. Let me just repeat that – Yale's endowment is almost \$30 billion and, over 30 years, has an annual return of up to 13%. Last year, Yale made \$3.3 billion – that's over \$350,000 an *hour* and over \$9 million every day. These are enormous sums of money we're talking about. And for this reason, investors all over the country look at Yale's portfolio strategies as a model; if David Swensen spoke, others would follow. And so Mikki's right, in a way – if Swensen's job description simply dictates him to make as much money for Yale as possible, then he has been wildly successful.

MIKKI: And Yale released position papers about divestment last semester. And they were like well, climate change really isn't the fault of the people producing it, but the people relying on fossil fuels. And as long as people rely on these forms, or on fossil fuels then it's just going to be a part of our investments.

HARRISON: This sounded kind of fishy to us, so we looked up Yale's official position on fossil fuel divestment. Here's the very first sentence: "Yale's guiding principles are predicated on the idea that consumption of fossil fuels, not production, is the root of the climate change problem." The statement goes on to make some good points – that modern society couldn't exist or function without the consumption of fossil fuels, and that without the demand of consumers, fossil fuels suppliers wouldn't have a market. But I think it's just as misleading to lay the blame – and the onus for making change – entirely at the feet of consumers. As a consumer myself, it's obvious that there are a ton of different factors that influence my purchasing decisions, many of which are out of my control. Tangent aside, though, let's go back to Mikki.

MIKKI: Peter Saladay, our president of Yale, and Marvin Chun, Dean of the College, are constantly like, "oh, well we'd like to sit down and talk to you about it." But those talks are ultimately unproductive and not really conducive to anything.

MICHAELA: At EMU, the situation was a little different, but we also felt that it was crucial to try and collaborate with administration first, before assuming the need to take a more aggressive or adversarial approach. Why create unnecessary tension? But at Yale, they've tried to go through the proper channels, with little success.

MIKKI: Students have, well since 2013, have taken the administrative route of all of this. So that meant um creating some sort of presentation to present to the ACIR, the Advisory Committee on Investor's Responsibility, and that's the only sphere that students can interact with, and then the ACIR responds to the CCIR and...it's a very long process. I think the CCIR only meets like once a year. The ACIR only like 3 times a year, and in the end it didn't really come to anything.

HARRISON: In other words, the bureaucratic structure of the investor's office doesn't allow for prolonged, constructive conversation, and neither is the administration making room for that. It feels like every time they reach out to talk, they're dismissed without much thought.

MIKKI: That whole administrative route I feel is designed to just exclude students from really any say in this. And so I think students definitely felt like they wasted a lot of time taking this administrative route, but I also think it's just worth saying to people who would be ready to criticize the organization that they at least took the administrative route and that's their reason for escalating now.

MICHAELA: This year, Fossil Free Yale's main strategy has involved events called sit-ins, where they literally sit in the lobby of the investments building either until they receive a satisfactory response or are forced to leave. They spend their time singing, meditating, giving presentations, and chanting, sometimes for up to 6 hours. And last time, Mikki, along with 47 other students and 1 faculty member, were fined for trespassing when they refused to leave.

MICHAELA: And do you hear from anyone? Like were you received by anyone in the building? Did they come listen to you? How did that work?

MIKKI: Um, 2 students went up to the investments office themselves this time, the most recent action before spring break. And it had snowed the night before, so they went up to the investments office. And they said that as they were speaking to the receptionist, she was just like very maniacally laughing. It was very strange and was just like "oh, no one came in because of the snow." But they could clearly see people at their desks. And they refused to speak to them. Yeah, I guess that just kind of sums up our interaction with administration in general.

MICHAELA: As a prestigious academic institution, Yale produces some cutting-edge research, some of which directly supports climate response. Their programs in religion and ecology, climate change communication, and environmental studies are among the best in the nation. But, when push comes to shove at the administrative level, the institution isn't willing to be nearly as outspoken as its students and its research. And it starts getting even more questionable, or at least inconsistent, when you think about how Yale harnesses the innovation of its students to advertise itself as a progressive institution. This starts to get at some of the broader concerns Mikki has about Yale, concerns that make her question her choice to attend at all.

MIKKI: And I think initially I was definitely pretty excited. I was proud about getting into Yale. And then, I think the excitement eventually wore off when I just considered the history of New England in general, and the erasure of indigenous people, and Yale really being at the heart of all that, alongside like Harvard and other institutions that, for a long time I had my eyes on.

MICHAELA: Mikki is especially aware of a lot of historical harms that we tend to gloss over – like, for one, the fact that the people who founded Yale University were some of the same people who pushed out Native Americans in New England.

MIKKI: And I got here. I was immediately bummed out. I was like, Oh, this wealth, prestige, image of Yale is right here, right now. But I really just don't feel like it was ever made for me. Or it was just made on the backs of people like me.

HARRISON: The longer she's been here, the more disheartened she's become by learning about the institution's founding. Even the man whom Yale is named after – Elihu Yale – was a slave trader and merchant with the British East India company, which itself one of the most notoriously atrocious contributors of harms in history. In 1718, Yale donated 400 books and a large stack of goods to the college, and in return maintains his legacy as the namesake of one of the most prestigious academic institutions in the world. This was news to me, but it makes me understand a little better where Mikki's coming from with this.

MIKKI: As the school year rolled around, I could see a lot of other first years excited beyond their mind to be at Yale, and incredibly proud to be here. And I really just couldn't be proud of it. I still find it hard to really relate to other people who may not be entirely aware of the real impact of Yale's investments or Yale's history in general. But people who are also aware of it yet continue to be proud of it, and choose to bask in whatever prestige is present here. Yeah, it's definitely frustrating.

HARRISON: Nevertheless, Mikki says she's found a home among her fellow students in the divestment campaign.

MIKKI: The students in these groups have definitely made me feel like I could call New Haven home. I have to have some sense of belonging. Otherwise I just feel miserable all the time, I suppose. But the students in Fossil Free Yale and the Endowment Justice Coalition have definitely made me feel like I have a home here somewhat.

(MUSIC)

HARRISON: Mikki's struggle with identity at Yale raises questions that are being wrestled with by institutions all over the US right now. What parts of our history should we be proud of? Or should we be proud of any of it? What do we lose when we hold so tightly to our history that we aren't willing to change? Back at Yale, Mikki isn't the only one asking such questions.

PAUL: Yale in particular is really resistant to talking about things that make it seem bad in the past because it has so much wrapped up in its tradition. And it's bureaucratically and institutionally and philosophically resistant to changing the things that have made it great.

MICHAELA: This is Paul Rink.

PAUL: I'm Paul Rink. And I am pursuing a juris doctorate and a masters' of environmental management degree.

MICHAELA: We were also joined by Paul's good friend Zander Pellegrino, who I had happened to go to high school with and is now a graduate student at the forestry school.

ZANDER PELLEGRINO: I'm Zander Pellegrino and I'm pursuing a masters in environmental science.

MICHAELA: Paul and Zander ran into us at an event our first evening at Yale and enthusiastically agreed to interview with us on the spot. Zander has one semester of school left, and Paul just completed his degrees in May. So both have a good feel for the general attitude toward climate change and environmental justice on campus.

PAUL: I've actually been pleasantly surprised. I came to Yale Law School before I came to Yale Forestry. And one of the reasons I came was because I knew there was the forestry environmental school here and so I was already doing a joint degree and I knew that there was some focus on environmental issues. But I didn't realize how big climate change in particular was going to be on campus, and I think it's increased since I arrived.

MICHAELA: Even environmental justice is a common part of conversation, at least at the forestry school, where Paul and Zander attend.

PAUL: I think at the forestry school there is a lot of talk about it. I think there could be more, but it's definitely something that people know about and recognize the term and it's definitely part of the conversation, for sure. What are your thoughts?

ZANDER: I agree that it's, I mean, it's a term that people use and recognize. I don't know that people agree on a way forward, or a recognition of Yale's historical complicity in getting us to this point, where we have environmental injustices. I don't think there's consensus about that. Not that there should be consensus, but I think there's people who really do resist the idea that Yale historically as an institution is involved in creating climate injustices when I think that's part of the conversation they should have.

HARRISON: Zander mentioned an orientation program that students at the FES school go through, which has historically included a community engagement section – but it hasn't always been led in a way that promotes understanding and justice between Yale students and New Haven's diverse community. So last year, a group of students created a petition to adjust the program to reflect the school's stated values of equity and collaboration.

ZANDER: So we can talk about the petition and white supremacy in the environmental movement more broadly, but there was a, there was a group of students who held up a banner in the class photo last year saying that we need to dismantle white supremacy in the environmental movement, which started a conversation at Yale.

HARRISON: The reason Zander is talking about class pictures is because the stairwell in Sage Hall, the symbolic home of the Forestry Environmental school, has a picture of every FES class dating back to 1904. The class of 1904 features a group of white men in suit jackets, while classes in recent years are much larger and more diverse – and then last year, the class decided to hold a banner that called for the “dismantling of white supremacy within the environmental movement.” But that's not all. On the ground floor, just by the doorway, hangs a portrait of FES founder Gifford Pinchot, who was not exactly progressive in his views on diversity and race, to put it mildly. It hangs right next to a bulletin board celebrating environmental champions who are people of color. Walking into the building, the tension is almost palpable.

PAUL: And actually to build off of that. I don't think this is uniquely Yale. I think it's something that's really traditional institutions. And the divestment program has been really resisted by the administration. I'm part of a coalition trying to get Yale to sign onto the We are Still In Coalition. And it's been amazing to me how resistant they've been to just signing this petition in solidarity with a bunch of other colleges around the country. And it's just, I've really come to realize that these historical institutions are not going to be at the forefront of progressive movements or change.

MICHAELA: I find that Paul & Zander's questions about Yale's historical legacy relate to a tension I've experienced in my upbringing. It's a tension between tradition and change – a dance between convention and progress that exists in the classrooms of my highschool, in the pews of my church, and in the boardroom of my university. How do you hold tightly to a legacy that has shaped the identity of the institution – with pride – while remaining open to change, which often necessitates a pointed rejection of parts of that legacy?

(MUSIC)

ASHIA AJANI: Isn't it so sad we are just now learning the correct ways to love each other now that the world is ending. I mean, maybe this is divine intervention or we're just horrible with our timing but, the think pieces about radical love are swallowing up my news feed just as surely as the landslides are gobbling up uneven earth. So I guess I've gotta be grateful that we are learning something. As the tsunamis beat their skulls against the coast, I will respect the fact that we have different needs and ask for consent before I hug you. And as the earthquakes crumble the soil as you tell me about the grief flowing throughout your blood, I will not draw away from you. Instead, I will bring you coffee and chocolates in hopes that my love will make you feel a little less small. As the nuclear blasts tear into the planet and render all vegetation inedible, we will not make unsolicited comments about each others weight. Instead, I will marvel at how you still have your smile. The stars will fall out of the sky when I don't force my children to display affection at family gatherings and believe them when they say certain relatives make them uncomfortable. I will teach them how "no" is the most powerful word they have in their vocabulary. The snow storms, now wild and unexpected and more frequent, will gawk at how freely I apologize and do not blame my babies for my own shortcomings. I'm sorry I was wrong will be but a whisper among the bombs and the gunpowder. As bullets talk their bloody backtalk into fragile borders we will ask, what is a border? What is a red line? What is the meaning of all the separations now that we've been forced to reckon with our greatest truth. What is it about ego death that forces us to look into ourselves and bear witness to that unspeakable terror that we might not outlast our mistakes. Who will answer the big questions when history runs out of steam? Climate change makes everything so much more immediate. In this day and age I don't have time for ambiguity. Let's get married and have a bunch of hybrid babies raised on a mixture of survival and love. And we'll all live in a bunker in the mountains far from all the things that made us hurt each other. As we feast on tree bark and earthworms, I will smile at you, teeth filled with dirt, and tell you that I love you. I love you. I love you just as surely as the moon has bled out of the sky. Many years from now, if the ocean hasn't swallowed the last of our cities, and the sun has not scorched the earth into oblivion, my children's children's grandchildren will know nothing of the sadness that swept across the Atlantic, took root in unfamiliar soil, and buried its head there. I have often questioned what survival at the end of the world looks like. Once everything goes silent, do you think love pours out of the body when the light goes out? Or does it remain stagnant, waiting to be exhumed once more.

(MUSIC)

HARRISON: Many thanks to Yale student, and now recent graduate, Ashia Ajani for sharing her poem with us. It's called, "How We Love Each Other." One of the reasons I love this poem is because I think Ashia taps into some emotions that a lot of people my age feel very deeply. And that's part of what we're talking about here too – differences in generational perspective, something that comes up naturally in our conversations about institutional engagement. For me, the emotions that come through in Ashia's poem are highly relatable. It's an anxiety felt by members of our generation who are born into a world that society tells us is dying, and that it's up to us to save it because those who came before us are too depressed, too tired, or too bitter to make the necessary changes. It's a confined frustration over centuries of wrongdoing that leaks out of us in the form of impulsivity and nihilism. It's the ever-present, nagging question that none of us ever really want to totally face up to: What will our world look like in 50 years, when I grow old? I'm generalizing a bit here, but I know it's not just Ashia and I who feel this way. We aren't alone. We're going to go back to Paul now. He has a few more thoughts about young people and engaging with institutions about climate change – but this time, the institution in question isn't academic.

PAUL: So the crux of the case isn't that the federal government failed to do anything to stop climate change, it's that they actively did things to keep climate change happening when they knew it was going to have these negative impacts on the future generations.

HARRISON: When we talked to him, Paul was finishing up his law degree, and for his summer internship, he worked on a case with a group called Our Children's Trust, a nonprofit organization that filed a lawsuit against the United States on behalf of 21 kids and teens. The case is called Juliana v. the United States.

PAUL: 21 youth plaintiffs from around the country are suing the federal government for actively disseminating and perpetuating a fossil fuel based energy system that they knew, based on historical documents, to be causing climate change that would have impacts on future generations' constitutional rights to life, liberty, and property.

HARRISON: When the case began in 2015, all 21 of the plaintiffs were younger than 18. In fact, their age is the basis of their claim. They're arguing that, by continually promoting the fossil fuel industry, the U.S. federal government has taken an active role in obstructing the rights of young people – through climate change.

PAUL: There's a number of legal theories in play, two of which are based in the constitution under equal protection doctrine and then due process protections. And then the 3rd one is called the public trust doctrine.

HARRISON: We're getting into the weeds a little bit here, but essentially, Our Children's Trust is appealing to parts of the constitution that protect the well being of American citizens – first off, the government's promise to protect natural resources for the sake of public use, and second, a guarantee that all citizens will be granted equal protection under the law. The plaintiffs are arguing that the threat of climate change compromises those promises for people of their generation and generations to come.

PAUL: Currently it's being held in appeal, at the 9th circuit, in a motion to dismiss the case. And if that motion to dismiss is denied at the 9th circuit it will probably go to the supreme court. And if the supreme court denies the motion to dismiss, then the case will go to trial finally.

MICHAELA: Long process.

HARRISON: So the decision to have the trial is going to the supreme court potentially.

PAUL: Yeah. And if the supreme court or the 9th circuit says that the motion to dismiss the case is granted then the case will never go to trial. It will just die right there.

MICHAELA: By the time this all ends up ironed out the young people might be so young anymore.

PAUL: Well to be honest, they've all grown 3 years since then, or 4 years. So some of the plaintiffs who filed the case when they were 18 are now 21, and yeah, it's, it's troublesome because there is a timeframe here that's important.

MICHAELA: So in other words, since being filed 4 years ago, the case has still not been granted a hearing at all. But if the case is heard and the young people win, the US government would have to fulfill 3 things: First is declaratory relief, which just means that the government would admit that they've done something wrong. Second is injunctive relief, which would prohibit the government from granting leases or permits for fossil fuel extraction on federal land. And third is a mandate to the court that would require the executive branch to develop a climate recovery plan that would transition our economy into renewable energy. The process is long and arduous, but even if it doesn't go to trial, Paul is confident that it's been a worthwhile pursuit.

PAUL: Although I really believe in this case and it's not just because of the court case itself and what the outcome will be, I think it's raised a profile of climate change in a way that is somewhat revolutionary. There's literally no reason why a 16 year old should be doing this work. It should be the older generation who have positions of power and have put, made this situation happen in the first place. And literally the only reason that these students and young people are stepping up is because nobody else is and it's their future. And it's not gratifying to hear people say we're so proud of you, go get 'em, when it's not your responsibility as a young person to do that.

(MUSIC)

MICHAELA: Paul brings up a familiar frustration. The fight against climate change *must* be intergenerational – we need the wisdom of a long view that comes from our elders, the loyalty and practicality of my parents' age group, and the clarity and vision of my own. But too often, it feels a little like we've been left high and dry. We're applauded for our efforts as a generation, yes, but rarely are we offered the true support or authority we need to get anything done. It feels as if we're being asked to take the steering wheel of a moving car. We know how to operate the car, and we know who to ask for directions to get to our destination, but we're still in the back seat, an old white guy still has his foot on the gas pedal, and we're headed straight for a cliff. Our next interview took us to one place we have felt this frustration most strongly, to another institution that has held a very important place in our own lives as Mennonites – the church. It can be a frustrating place at times, and it's a complicated place for many, but it's also a place where we might find just the vision we need.

NATHAN EMPSELL: Noah was the first conservationist. If it was all about people he would have only had to bring a few animals onto the boat for humans to hunt and fish after they repopulated there. But scripture tells us he took all the animals.

HARRISON: This is Nathan Empsell.

NATHAN: Nathan Empsell. E, M as in Mary. P as in Peter. S-A-L-L. Probably say the Reverend Nathan Empsell at this point.

HARRISON: Nathan is a forward, to the point kind of guy. He speaks with conviction and expertise that will serve him well as a reverend in the Episcopal Church.

NATHAN: I'm in my fourth and final year of the dual degree program at Yale's divinity school and Yale school of forestry and environmental studies.

HARRISON: For some, this may sound like a bit of an unusual combination, but it's actually a popular dual degree option at Yale. And aside from his academic pursuits, Nathan is highly engaged with both the religious and the scientific community. At Yale, he works for the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication as a Digital Advisor, and he's a former digital strategist for the Sierra Club – while at the same time, managing a Facebook page called Episcopal Climate News. From Nathan's perspective, the combination makes a lot of sense.

NATHAN: I didn't connect it to religion until I learned, probably in college, that people always separate harming the environment and harming the human. We can't focus on the environment, it's too expensive, we've gotta care about people first.

HARRISON: But, as we've learned, if you hurt the environment, you also often hurt the people.

NATHAN: We are so interconnected and intertwined because that is the way God designed creation. Why would God tell us a story that mentions 2 of every single animal? Instead of just the ones we need. Well, it's because every animal, including humans, needs every other animal. God designed the world to be interconnected and intercentric. And the more we learn about earth system sciences over the last 30 years, really, we're learning more and more about all the scientific connections. Well, they're right there in Genesis 9 in the flood story! And American Indian tribes and other indigenous tribes and really every world religion have been telling us about interconnection forever.

HARRISON: And again, this is something we've heard a lot of too. But in the context of this conversation, Nathan also points to Jesus as a model for understanding that connection.

NATHAN: Some people look at the Bible, their perspective of dominion over the land, some look at it, if not dominion at least land as a gift. This is for you, go, take it. Kill all the Canaanites and commit genocide to get the land that is yours. And others will look and see Jesus never praying in the temple, but always praying in the garden, in the wilderness, on a boat out on the water. Jesus would go to the temple to teach and flip tables. We should go to the temple or to church too, I'm not saying otherwise, but Jesus always prayed outdoors. So there's that connection to land and water and air as well. Not just land, but the earth as a whole.

HARRISON: As Christians, we've tended to move away from that truth – that Jesus often found himself closest to God outside. We choose to worship in comfortable, air-conditioned churches that have enough space in the pews that we don't have to, God forbid, sit directly next to someone. But – why have we moved in that direction?

NATHAN: I think unfortunately all too often, both the academy and religion follow culture rather than the other way around. Certainly they influence one another in a cycle. And you see that in almost any religion, in almost any continent, in almost any century. That's not just Christianity. There are times when Christianity could stand against the culture and reform it and call us to live in the city of God rather than the city of humans.

MICHAELA: That's Christianity at its finest – when it unashamedly embraces the traits Jesus modeled. And sometimes that means acting independently of its parent culture.

NATHAN: But there are other times when culture defines religion and co-opts it. And I think that's very much happened in the US and in Europe with capitalism. Runaway, unregulated capitalism. You know, I'm not speaking against profit. But the way in which we see profit above all else. And that's facilitated by schools and universities. It's facilitated by business schools that teach that, but it's also facilitated by religion and religious schools. Because who funds the pastors, who funds the professors? It's the businesses. It's the people in the pews who work for those businesses. Here's my donation but pastor, this is what I want to hear. We're all intertwined and interlocked in all of this. We're one humanity.

MICHAELA: That interplay between society and the church is a phenomenon that underlies a lot of what we're talking about here. It gets at a question that's been disputed in the church ever since its beginning: to what extent are we supposed to engage with the broader world? Is it our place to participate in politics? To go to public schools or to run private ones? And once we realize that it's impossible to totally extract ourselves from mainstream culture, it also lies at the root of the question we're asking this episode: *How* are we meant to engage? According to Nathan, understanding our interconnection to everything in and of the world is critical in understanding God's vision for creation. And further, he thinks that climate change is actually helping us realize that interconnection as a church once again.

NATHAN: As climate change and other ecological devastation grows worse and the science grows more and more clear and as the effects grow more immediate, we're waking up to that, all across society. And religion and the academy are no different. We wandered away but how can we wander back?

HARRISON: To illustrate his point, that we are and always have been a part of this community of creation, and that it takes a great amount of hubris on our part to pretend that we're not – Nathan gave us the synopsis of a sermon he's been working on. It has to do with rocks.

NATHAN: I learned a year or two ago that glaciers suppress volcanoes. As glaciers melt, volcanoes are erupting more often. Or at least they will begin to soon. Likewise, fracking in the midwest has caused some earthquakes. Fracking contributes to climate change because of methane leaks. It also creates other environmental problems, especially through the enormous amount of water it uses. So here's some ecological devastation causing earthquakes. Causing rocks to shake. Like the Psalmist says, the stones will cry out. And now they literally are. And this is all scriptural. We were told this was going to happen. The stones really are crying out, and creation really is groaning like Paul says.

HARRISON: So even as we're given a vision for creation, we're also warned of the ways that it can go wrong, that the stones will cry out and creation will groan when we wander away from that understanding. And this takes us back to the question Nathan mentioned earlier: "How can we wander back?"

NATHAN: The thing that I love the absolute most about God and Jesus and the Bible is that we get to try again every single day. The prodigal son and the widow's lost coin and the lost sheep...this concept of loving what we find. Of finding what is lost and of giving it another chance. They're powerful parables on their own, but you sit there and read that full chapter in Luke and it's an amazing internal spiritual experience, every time I re-read those stories together. We get to try again with the earth too. There's still hope, we're not done yet. The IPCC scientists say we only have 12 years left to act to avoid the worst of the destruction. I say we still have 12 years left to act. And the church can lead the way on the moral side of that.

(MUSIC)

MICHAELA: For Nathan, at this point in his life, engaging with the church is hardly even a question. But for me, and many others in my generation, the answer isn't quite as straight forward. I do believe, like we've said before, that there is great potential here, which Nathan describes – for the church to be a guidepost for justice and peace building and joy in a world facing widespread devastation and conflict. But the church is also fraught with division and indecision. For many, it's a place of hurt, where, ironically, considering the messages of interconnectedness and selfless love it is founded on, a sense of belonging can be hard to come by. I have seen many friends of mine walk away, despondent and cynical, fed up with the church's apparent inability to face the current and historical harms it's created, or to engage in messy, complex, and sometimes incriminating dialogue, the topics that occupy our thoughts and govern our lives outside of church. It's too easy to sit in the pews in our Sunday best, questions and doubts piling up as the service goes on, and then smile our way through fellowship hour as if it all makes sense. I have felt all of these things myself, to a much lesser degree than some – the hurt, the cynicism, and mostly, the confusion. And I've been on the other end as well, as one who, despite having good intentions, doesn't invite others in. So the question remains – have we wandered too far from God's vision? Is it even worth sticking around?

(MUSIC)

HARRISON: Let's go back to Paul, one last time – to hear his story on engaging with the church.

PAUL: I actually am Catholic. And I grew up in a small town in Michigan called Gaylord, ironically. And I was really involved in my Catholic church. And 2 winters ago, winter of 2017, I came back from Yale, home for Christmas. And I was really driven to go talk to the priest in the Catholic church about, you know, just even going up and talking about climate change as a social justice and an ethical issue to the congregation.

HARRISON: So when Paul got home, he sent his priest an email. But his priest didn't respond for weeks.

PAUL: And then when he finally did he basically said no I can't do that. I hope you understand because the pulpit is this really important position and if you have somebody saying something that could be seen as political you run into problems with the bureaucracy of the Catholic church. And you just can't do that kind of thing.

HARRISON: This was surprising to me, because the Catholic pope, Pope Francis, has been very vocal about climate change – so much so that it's a primary topic of his 2015 encyclical, entitled "Laudato Si'." Since its publication, Laudato Si has been immensely popular, and it's also really important because it provides a precedent for discussing climate change within a Catholic context, so I asked Paul if he brought it up with the priest.

PAUL: Well so he asked me when I emailed him, have you read the encyclical Laudato Si? And I said of course!
laughter

HARRISON: So Paul remains saddened that, despite the pope's emphasis on the topic of climate change, his priest feels as if his hands are tied.

PAUL: It's been frustrating to me because these big organizations that have so much power and really, there's no reason why they shouldn't be taking a bigger step considering that the ethical implications of these concerns align with their mission statements. It's been really frustrating for me.

MICHAELA: We resonate with this, too. The church is meant to be a moral compass, a strong driving force for change. And yet the politics always seem to get in the way.

PAUL: And I am actually going to try again when I go home again to reach out to him but I'm not holding out much hope because he seemed hesitant. And based on my home town I'm not that surprised because it's a little bit like if people talk about climate change it's usually as the butt of a joke, more than anything else. It's snowing outside, yeah right, climate change, right, kinda thing.

MICHAELA: And now that Paul is studying climate change, he thinks he may have lost a bit of credibility in his home town – after all, he's studying climate policy at Yale, both a topic and an institution that would be considered liberal where he comes from.

PAUL: I think a lot of people at home think I've been indoctrinated which may or may not be true. If learning about science counts as indoctrination. But honestly a lot of people don't believe in climate change where I'm from because they just really haven't done the research themselves and they fall in line with what they hear on the news.

HARRISON: So if he gave you the opportunity to do your sermon, what would you say?

PAUL: Oh! I actually have this little pithy, 3 minute, written out document. Now hang on, I need to think about what it said though. Well basically, I made the moral argument for why Catholics should take action on climate change in particular because they have a mandate to live as Jesus lived and to care for the poorest and the weakest in society. And climate change in my mind and, honestly truly, is the biggest social justice issue of our generation, if

not ever. In terms of the people who are the least responsible for causing it are those who are feeling the brunt of its impacts. In terms of generations, the young people versus older generations. And also the global south versus the global north. And even within the United States itself, lower income communities, migrant communities, diverse communities of color, etc. are feeling it when they often didn't have as much of an impact on causing it. And for that reason I think there's a moral imperative to do things on climate change. And that's actually the driving force for me in terms of my desire to have a career in climate change law and policy.

MICHAELA: Sounds familiar.

PAUL: We might be on the same page? *laughter*

HARRISON: Yes, we were and are very much on the same page. Which then prompted us to return to our question. We wondered, as someone whose track record with the church isn't perfectly smooth – is it still worth engaging? Even as the frustrations pile up?

HARRISON: I think there's a lot of potential to ground our response to climate change in the moral ethics of our church background. But maybe that's impractical for our generation write large, to ground themselves in a church body, just because it's not practical for them, or they don't find hope in that, or they've been oppressed, you know, in any sorts of ways. And so I'm wondering, is there another way, or another place where we center our climate change response ethics. Do you think churches are the best place for people our age to do that? Or is there somewhere else that we should be looking to, to like convene?

PAUL: I personally think churches are a really important place. And one of the reasons for that is because, while I think you're right that generally our generation doesn't find as much in the church, I think that that's a generalization. I have a lot of friends back home that are very, very much my age and very involved with the church. And I think that those, that's the demographic that could really benefit from learning more about climate change, understanding it better from an ethical standpoint. And in addition, I think the generation above us and the generation above that are still heavily persuaded by religious institutions in general. And I think that's an important thing to tap into. The problem is, I don't, I don't know the best way to go about advocacy as people in our situation. I think often times the authority comes from the religious figures themselves. But I don't think that's a reason to sign them off, and I think it actually is a really important avenue.

(MUSIC)

HARRISON: We, like Paul, think there is a tremendous amount to be gained from cross-generational partnerships. And we'd be super excited to start working on that, together – because there's no time to lose. So we'd like to extend an invitation, because our engagement comes with a few caveats. Right now, we don't feel legitimized in our hopes or in our fears. We have yet to hear widespread commitment from older adults that they are willing to work with us and for change, and we have yet to see our institutions demonstrate that they care about our future as much as their own. Yes, we do have to change; yes, our lives will look different; yes, it will be hard. But if it was easy, everyone would be doing it already. I recently heard a speaker who talked about the hope of the resurrection, and how we often take its message to heart as individuals, but not as institutions. As Christians, we believe that Jesus has overcome death. This is the very thing that allows us to be creative and generous and joyful in life, and yet, our institutions still fear it – and I think, right now, that fear is paralyzing. Honestly, it's one of the reasons I don't go to church often, because it feels like that fear has choked the life out of a community that could and should be vibrant. What if our religious institutions lived into the resurrection story? To realize that there are worse things than death – and that failing to act true to our calling is one of those things?

(END MUSIC)

NATHAN: I am often moved to act when I see things that are wrong. But I know that many other people, understandably, feel despair, instead. And when we feel despair we can be paralyzed. And instead of getting a sense of urgency when we see things going bad, we feel overwhelmed and back off. There is still hope. As Christians, we know there's hope through the resurrection. The apostles didn't get it. He kept saying, Jesus kept saying this temple will be rebuilt in 3 days. They didn't understand what he meant. They couldn't see that the resurrection was coming. And so they gathered in the upper room to mourn and decide what comes next. They'd already been told what comes next. They couldn't see it. I don't know what's next. I don't know if we're going to solve the climate crisis or any ecological crises. But I know that like the apostles in the upper room, we're called to gather and talk and keep trying. Because maybe there's a resurrection coming, of the earth this time that we can't see right now, just as the apostles couldn't see. Our inability to see, our feelings of despair, are no reason to give up. That's what hope and faith are all about.

(MUSIC)

MICHAELA: Here we are, at an end that, as always, is also a beginning.

HARRISON: We've come a long way together, me and you and everyone we've met on this journey. And now we part ways, knowing that the enormity of the situation at hand is indisputable.

MARY EVELYN TUCKER: The challenges are enormous. People are realizing, something is amiss. Something is deeply out of sync.

POLLY PESHAKAI-ATKINSON: Sometime I lay at night just quietly thinking about what the heck is going on.

MICHAELA: We've seen that both the roots and the impacts of climate change reach deeper and further than we could have imagined.

JOAN BROWN: I think ultimately, this is a soul crisis, and a spiritual crisis.

STACEY JENSEN: Food, as, like language, is fast disappearing.

SAULO PADILLA: Right now, millions of people, are seeking refuge due to climate.

ROBB REDSTEER: And I wake up every day, thinking, these kids, what are we going to do for them?

MICHAELA: And that the situation we're in is not at all simple.

SAYRAH NAMASTE: So I think a lot of our lifestyle is built on the exploitation of people, either in their own country, or once they arrive here too.

ELLA ROSE: They're doing to the blacks the same thing they're doing to the Native Americans. Figure you're not going to say anything or speak up.

MICHAELA: So we leave you with some challenges.

JOAN: With climate change, the biggest change that needs to happen, is not in the climate itself, but the climate change of the human heart.

ANTONIO MAESTAS: What communities are affected first? Low income communities of color. So we need to be at the decision-making table and at the forefront.

MICHAELA: And we leave you with some assurances.

SWAMI DAYANANDA: That's what it is, the joy, the joy in the faith and of God, is what is the common ground between us. There's no difference between Baptists and Yogis.

ANTONIO: And pretty much what it boils down to is, your liberation is our liberation, and our liberation is your liberation.

MICHAELA: That we exist among a community of unlimited creativity and extraordinary resilience.

MARY EVELYN: As we regather and reclaim and re-situate ourselves as beings in the earth, we will realize we're not alone. There's no need to be lonely. But we are amidst the earth community, the very vibrant community of life.

(END MUSIC)

HARRISON: In the words of the Talmud, "Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief. Do justly, now. Love mercy, now. Walk humbly, now. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it."

(CREDITS MUSIC)

MICHAELA: Shifting Climates is produced in collaboration with Sarah Longenecker, who is also our photographer and web designer.

HARRISON: Special thanks to the Center for Sustainable Climate Solutions, who is sponsoring this project.

MICHAELA: And one last time, a huge thanks to all of our musicians – it didn't take us long to realize that music changes everything. Theme music is by Jesse Reist and Madeline Miller. Credits music is by Luke Mullet. Transition music is by Maria Yoder, Maia Garber, Perry Blosser, and Jonny boy Bishop.

HARRISON: This week's shoutout goes to James Souder, who helped connect us to a ton of folks at the Yale Forestry and Environmental School, even from across the pond in Amsterdam.

MICHAELA: And a big shout out to Doug Graber Neufeld and Daniel Bellerose at CSCS for all the food and the money and equipment and advice and for dealing with us all year long.

HARRISON: You can find us at www.shiftingclimates.com. We've got episode transcripts, a map of where we've been, some extra resources, and our Episode 5 photo essay – so make sure you check it out. And although this is our last episode, we'll be releasing some bonus material next week, so stay tuned for that.

MICHAELA: If you ever want to talk with us about our episodes, please feel free to reach out! You can email us at shiftingclimates@gmail.com or look for more contact information on our website. We'd love to meet you and hear your thoughts.

HARRISON: Thanks again for following along with our journey this year. It's been a wild ride, and we hope you enjoyed it as much as we have. I'm Harrison Horst.

MICHAELA: And I'm Michaela Mast.

HARRISON: See you around.

(END CREDITS MUSIC)