

TableTalk_Ep10_060424

Tue, Jun 04, 2024 5:05PM • 53:45

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, institutions, church, leaders, bishop, sense, ministry, talking, greg, good, tradition, work, learned, life, future, imagination, living, years, pastor, tennessee

SPEAKERS

Sam, Bishop, Greg

Sam 00:04

Welcome to The Table Talk podcast, a place where United Methodists across Tennessee and Western Kentucky can connect with one another in deeper conversation around life and faith. My name is Sam McLaughlin, and I'm the senior pastor at Bellemeade United Methodist Church in West Nashville, and I will be your host for today's episode. Today, we are honored to be in conversation with our own Bishop Bill Makelele and Dr. Greg Jones. Since 2012, Bill Makalali has served as the resident Episcopal Bishop over the Tennessee and Western Kentucky area of The United Methodist Church. Under his tenure, Bishop Makelele led a multi-year effort to peacefully and effectively create a new conference while merging the former Memphis and Tennessee conferences of The United Methodist Church to create the Tennessee Western Kentucky conference. While doing so he facilitated the creation of one of the strongest most adaptive leadership structures this Episcopal Area has ever seen. Dr. Greg Jones serves as president of Belmont University in Nashville, Tennessee. He is known for his entrepreneurial leadership. Prior to his appointment at Belmont, Dr. Jones served as the longtime dean of Duke Divinity School. Today's conversation is partly inspired by his book called Navigating the Future: Tradition, Innovation, and Wilder sees together with Bishop Makelele, we are talking about what it means to lead and think differently in times of great disorientation.

Bishop 02:19

Greg, you have presented this idea of tradition and innovation. So help us to understand what this term means. Define it for us and like really dig into it? Well, the term came to me back in the 90s, when there were the worship wars going on. And it was either fights about traditional worship or contemporary. And it seemed to me that, that the people were divided unnecessarily. And I just thought that the notion of making stuff up and doing everything new lead to chaos, but I didn't think that you should just get stuck in the past. And so I started playing around with this term. And I asked a friend of mine, who's a New Testament scholar, what came to mind when he heard the phrase tradition to innovation, he said, Well, actually, the book of Luke which he'd done his dissertation on, I thought that was good sign. And he said, The gospels and then he said, Actually, you could see the whole Bible as a process of tradition, innovation, because only God creates out of nothing. We're always creating out of something from the past. And so the phrase, for me became a holding the past and the future and a creative tension that gives life to the present. It's about drawing on the best of the past, to set the context for vibrancy in the

future. If you think of it theologically, it's about bearing witness to the Holy Spirit, who's making all things new, by conforming us to Christ, who was the one in whom creation came to be.

Sam 05:56

You talk about four drivers of traditionalism, nostalgia, unexamined habits and assumptions, perceived lack of imagination, and outright obstinance resistance to change because it's changed. Can you talk a little bit about this? Yeah,

Greg 06:20

well, the phrase traditionalism comes from Yaroslav Pelican, the great historian of Christianity at Yale, who said tradition is living faith of the dead traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. And we get stuck in these traditionalist mindsets that become resistant to change, for no apparent reason, often other than its change, and we lose sight of that long standing biblical habit of being open to the, to the work of the of the Spirit. And so when you realize that the the choice isn't whether you change or not, the question is whether the change is faithful or not. And we have to overcome those tendencies for nostalgia. My grandfather, who was a Methodist minister in Iowa, used to say that there's nothing that accounts for a longing for the good old days quite so much as a bad memory. And you know, you want to you want to always be examining, making sure we're bringing the best of the past forward and not lapsing into nostalgia or resistance, we've, that's become more of a problem when we started thinking of institutions in mechanistic terms rather than organic ones, organic ones, like Jesus talks a lot about the vine and trees. If you have an organic metaphors for your organization, everything's changing all the time. The question is, are you enabling it to be fruitful, sometimes that requires pruning, and those sorts of things to enable more things to flourish? But we've got to get out of a mindset that it's either change or no change. That's no change is actually a fantasy. So the question is, is our change going to be faithful or not?

Bishop 08:01

You made me think of something Fred Craddock used to say about pruning. He said, when you're being pruned, you don't know whether you've been cut off or cut back and hurts the same.

Greg 08:11

That's right. And yet, you know, when I'm not a good gardener, but when I took some rose bush lessons to learn how to do it, this woman wanted me to cut this, this rose branch, and I said, but it's doing fine. And she said, you don't just cut away the dead stuff. You have to cut away good stuff in order to get better stuff. And that's when I went, Oh, that's my problem, which

Sam 08:37

is very hard to do in ministry, it is very hard to do. Okay, you are both leaders of long established organizations or institutions, which of course, are made up of people who hold values and traditions along with shared hopes and goals. And so you both know, well, the love hate relationship we as human beings have with institutions. Greg, you, right. We love to hate the institutions, we need. People increasingly mistrust institutions because they have failed to live up to what we hope and expect of them. So that leads me to ask what kind of institutions do we need today, Bishop,

Bishop 09:16

I have had the opportunity to serve on a couple of college boards Millsaps College and I'm on the board at Emory University, currently, and I continue to believe that our educational institutions are primary to the thriving of humanity, the flourishing Greg likes to say, but also am increasingly convinced that the church is an institution that we must preserve, and we must continue to adapt to what's coming in the world. In this particular cultural environment, not think the church has a role to play, to strengthen communities, and not to do damage and harm in our, in our world. You know, studies are beginning to emerge now that are saying, teaching us that even people who don't particularly care for the Christian way of life are joining faith communities because of the contribution those faith communities make to the world so and then, I would also add our health care institutions have been, I've been really important, particularly from the beginning of Methodism in this country, health care was a primary tool that we use to transform people's lives. And so I would say, at least those three right off the top of my head,

Sam 10:53

yeah, it sounds like a holistic approach to a human being, Greg,

Greg 10:57

institutions are crucial to any well functioning society we sometimes live with, with the fantasy that we don't need them. And we do need them because they are a bedrock for us. You've all Levine several years ago wrote that institutions are at their best are molds of character. And so they are worthy of trust, they help to form us in the ways of our imagination, and nurture those opportunities. But the institutions we need now, are ones that are vibrant, and dynamic, and forward looking, and are worthy of trust. So that means that leaders of institutions have to be trustworthy people. And when those institutions are worthy of trust, then character begins to get shaped in important ways. institutions that their best are kind of like offensive linemen, and football, you don't pay attention to them. But you notice when they mess up, and we need really healthy ones, there's a reason why left tackles are the second most highly paid players in football because they protect the quarterback. And we need those kinds of bedrock institutions healthcare as Bill said, education, but we need them to be healthy, and trustworthy, so that people can invest in them, because they're going to help shape us. What Levine describes as the, as what we've tended to have in our culture is platforms for celebrity, not molds of character. And that's when it becomes really problematic. And you see that whether it's in politics, or economics, or the church or any environment, we lose what we really need.

Sam 12:39

So how do we nurture institutions, as leaders and participants, I hear part of what you're saying is like, you've got to have people a part of the institution that are a worthy character, and, and you know, are people you can trust, right? So But how, how do we nurture that as those leaders,

Greg 12:56

it's a big challenge, because trust can be broken in a second and it takes them. I don't know what the I used to say 10 times as long. I think that's an understatement to rebuild trust. But it's just a patient process of being able to discern to listen well, to love well, to engage. And that means you've got to listen to the wide diversity of people who make up any institution, whether it's a local congregation, or a university or healthcare institution, you're going to have people with a wide variety of backgrounds,

perspectives, and you've got to be a holding environment that embraces that diversity of perspectives, and honors everybody who contributes to the institution, there'll be some people who want to preserve more of the past or there'll be some people who want to be out on the edge of change. And you need both groups, and you've got to find ways to hold that together so that they don't become oppositional.

Bishop 13:55

Would you call that the tension of the opposites? Yes. And that's where the creativity comes. Right. It is,

14:02

it is when when creativity comes and it's hard to hold all that together.

Sam 14:07

Bishop, what would you say about when we think about leaders of the church extension ministries, you know, we have a lot of pastors that do different things outside the local church, you know, what kind of leaders do we need for viable and healthy institution?

Bishop 14:26

We need leaders that are authentic, transparent, and leaders who can be imaginative and are willing to take some risks. Really leaders that are in some cases fearless and can also build consensus and bring people with them. I think one of the reasons we were successful and merging these two conferences is that we built To relationships across the area, and we went slow enough, but not too slow to get the buy in that we needed. I think sometimes pastors go into congregations and think that they can they have all the answers. And they're just going to deliver the the answer that the church needs without getting buy in and building those relationships, and it's in and that ultimately leads to trust. What I like to say is people forgive you for being a lousy preacher, if you're an excellent pastor. And if you are an excellent pastor, your preaching will start sounding like a B plus. But if you are not an effective pastor, your preaching will not carry you through the day. And so building those relationships is key to being an effective leader. I tell people, I have one gift, it's relationship. I'm gonna try to go with it

Sam 16:18

more than one.

16:22

No, I think that's a really important point. And I would emphasize that sense of listening. in whatever context you find yourself. When I got to Belmont, the first thing I wanted to do was learn the history of the institution, and be able to tell that story because there were a lot of people who've lived that story, and I needed to learn it. And learning that history is often what enables the greatest creativity and vitality. You know, when I talked about how Belmont needs to change going forward, I have two women who founded the word Belmont, in 1890, school teachers from Philadelphia, and then about how Belmont reinvented itself in 1951. So there's this history that we can draw on of really important people. And the fact that I learned that history and can talk about Dr. Gabbe heart and then followed by Dr. Trout, those kinds of stories inspire trust, that I'm not just coming in to try to recreate the institution or the context, in my image, I'm actually seeing the tradition and the life that has carried us here. And then

that inspires greater sense of Oh, yeah. And we can continue to change because we've done it in lots of ways in the past.

Sam 18:27

You are both the top people in your institution, you know, whether we want to like, really have hierarchy or not, it exists, right. And so what are things you can do, as the top leader as the bishop as the president, you know, that that nurture these kinds of institutions that we need, Bishop, we'll start with you.

Bishop 18:53

Well, thank you for the question. I believe, as a bishop, you have a couple of key opportunities. One is you have the opportunity to convene people, and you can bring people together for important conversations. And I think out of those conversations, you can begin to discern a path forward. The other the other opportunity I have in this role is to the the opportunities to appoint leaders to congregations. And I think you can look back over the last 11 years of my time here, where we've made some really excellent appointments with leaders in congregations, yourself included. But we've also missed it a time or two. You know, as Ken Callahan, you say we had made some excellent mismatches.

Sam 19:51

Sometimes you can't know till they're there,

Bishop 19:53

and that is the truth. But and so I look back and I can see Ah, how getting the right personnel, you know, it's the Jim Collins thing, get the person in the right seat on the bus. And we've been able to do that. Well. And I think that's the to me, those are the two things that a bishop can do in an annual conference is bring people together, discern the future, build consensus and move forward and then put people in the right places to serve. Yeah.

Greg 20:24

Right. I think the first task is to help an institution understand itself, where it's been and where it's going. And then includes articulating a vision that draws people together and inspires people to that future orientation by drawing on the best of the past. And then secondly, is to recruit, develop and retain talent, getting the best people continuing to develop them, and then finding out what will keep them happy and feeling like they're growing in their work that includes that convening role, and bringing people together. I think that often, it's about cultivating unlikely friendships. And so I say, at Belmont, you know, that involves getting our musicians that are scientists, to interact with each other, and to have our athletes talking to artists. And it's it's about cultivating a sense of community and a sense of belonging. But that that focus on people relationships, and talent is really, really crucial. I was at a, we just had a big announcement about a gift that's going to help us expand our work on Music Row in the entertainment music industry, and Mike Curb who was giving the gift. In one sense, it was a backhanded compliment. But I took it as a really high honor, he said, you know, you're a really great leader, because I really liked the people you've hired. So it's kind of like him saying, you don't do much, but you hire great people. But I thought, well, actually, that's what I say about leadership is I hire great

people, and then empower them and get out of their way. And that's when I think things are really vibrant.

Bishop 22:04

I call that the definition of wisdom. No one has asked,

Sam 22:09

equipping roll. Okay, how do we discern when we're talking about tradition, and tradition and innovation? And, you know, leaving some things in the past, bringing some things forward? How do we discern the traditions that are important and can guide us versus the traditions that do hold us back to living into what God is doing right here and right now through the movement of the Holy Spirit Bishop?

Bishop 22:35

Very carefully? Well, I think I think you have to, like it does take a sense of intuition, in some ways, to sense where the Spirit is moving. You know, I lived through the worship wars in the local church, and served the church that chose not to go down the contemporary worship, because they believe that their gift in that kind of that particular setting was to be that traditional worship congregation. And we had, we had the best music anywhere. And we, you know, we it was a vibrant place. And we had, our music team had over 350 people involved in music ministry, from the children all the way up to the mills. And so we we chose to hang on to who we were in terms of who our identity was. And I think part of part of your question is how to, you know, what your identity is, in your context for that particular time and space. But it also is, you know, ask the question, do we have all the right pieces of the puzzle in place, to move into the future faithfully, and sometimes you have to say, you know, what, we've been trying this for 50 years, and it's really not getting us anywhere, and it's time to sunset, a particular ministry, and not create, you know, and there's always somebody for whom that is a sacred cow. And so we have to, you have to, you know, carefully work with the stakeholders in that ministry and help them see a new future. You know, the local churches have opportunities with space, their buildings. And, you know, for many people, if you change the color of carpet, or they'll color paint on the wall, it's like a crisis. And so how do you move a church to say, oh, maybe this isn't the way it ought to be? We need to go in a different way so that and I think we have to remember what the soul that is. Muscle and Chris played on a soccer team. He had a South African soccer coach, and his law his favorite saying was so what now what and he If you do something really great, so what now? What if you make a bonehead play? So now what? And so I think sometimes we have to ask the question in the church, what is our, you know, what is our purpose? What is our mission. And, as we've tried to say, in Tennessee, Western Kentucky over the last 10 or 12 years, nothing is sacred, but the mission. And I think if you had to have, and that's where you create, you got to get the buy in. So I call it 1000 cups of coffee. So that you get the people on board to move into a new future. It's good.

Greg 25:35

It's an ongoing task that never ends. And I love the image I first learned from Bishop Tim Politiker, now of blessed memory. But he talked about a term that comes from Simone Vai, and Seamus Heaney called redress, the best way to think of it is like you're a ship's captain. And that you've always got to keep a sense of balance, and sometimes you'll lean more to one side or to the other. And there are times when you want to lean into change. And if you lean into that for too long, then people are going to

yearn for tradition, and they're going to learn for something that's familiar. But if you lean into all that's familiar, too much, people are going to yearn for something new. And so it's that sense of redress of always finding the the right sense of balance by going back to the worship horse, I preached to the church one time and, you know, it was one of those Sunday mornings where I think they had four services. And they started out in a black robe. And then I went to just a suit. And then I went to an open collar. And the last time I think it was shorts and T shirt, that ultra contemporary worship service. But at the ultra contemporary worship service, this woman came up to me and she said, I loved your sermon, I love this, this worship service. It's so great. I just wish we could sing some of the old traditional songs like Lord, I lift your name on high. And I thought, okay, even when you get to the ultra contemporary and doing something new every week, people begin to yearn for something familiar. And so there's that it's a paradox. And if you are always doing something new people are going to yearn for what's familiar. But if you lean into what's familiar for too long, people want something new. And part of that process is also talking with people because often, when you know, you've got something that's a traditionalism that needs to be cast aside, is when the people can't explain why it matters. My wife was serving a local congregation when we lived in Baltimore, and we got there and they had a tradition around their Thanksgiving worship service. That was weird. And it was sacred to everybody. And she just said, in 1000 coffees, she said, so why do you still do it this way? And no one could explain, except that they always done it that way. Right. And then she pointed out that the pattern, which was a very US centric service, we were across the street from a large public university, University of Maryland, Baltimore County that had a lot of international students. And then a number of them were coming to the churches, how do they perceive it? And then it were like, oh, never thought of that. So the people couldn't explain why it still mattered other than grandma did it. Mama did it. So we're doing it. That's good word.

Sam 28:21

Okay, there is no doubt that we are living in complex times, this time of human creation is messy and unpredictable changes everywhere. It happens at alarming speed. It can feel unsettling to people making us long for the days of the past, maybe that nostalgia we were talking about. And while we may not be able to see into the future, there is a high likelihood that it's going to continue to be messy and unpredictable, because maybe that's just human life. So what does this mean for leaders and for communities of faith today? How can we see this as an asset and not a fear? Bishop?

Bishop 28:58

That's a great question.

Sam 28:59

You know anything about maths?

Bishop 29:02

Well, you know, I adhere to the chaos theory, that out of chaos comes order. And I think we're living through a messy time right now and in this country, maybe and really in the whole world. And will we be able to begin to see some order out of the chaos that has been emerging over the last several years? I think in the church, you know, I call our experience with schism is a great adventure and missing the point. And what we've identified as the reason for schism is our our challenges with LGBT Q A

community, but what is really the underlying driver, I think, is the fact that in this country out Christianity has taken it on the chin. And we've identified the losses on that LGBT issue. But really, what we're seeing is that Christianity is lost, it's in this country. And we need to reclaim our voice and our place and what it means to be a faithful community in the world in this time. And it's not to ignore the presenting issue. But it is to say, there's a lot more going on here than just that as the cause for the decline in Christianity in this country. Greg, what would you add?

Greg 30:41

I think your description of messiness is more than norm in the history of the world than the exception. And we sometimes again, going back to my grandfather talking about a faulty memory, is we we don't pay attention when we say that, you know, politics is in our country, which is terrible right now the the fragmentation, the polarization. But if you look at some of the history in the 19th century, when people in Congress were literally fighting and caning each other, you know, you begin to realize it, this isn't new. It's it may be lamentable, but it's not new. And that sense of messiness goes all the way back to Easter. If you look at the the disciples after Easter, they're not going oh, now we got everything figured out. It was a lot of chaos. And there was a lot of discernment, it took four centuries to figure out the doctrine of the Trinity. And there were plenty of arguments along the way. So that messiness is more than norm, and I think it actually ought to keep us humble, and focused on God. And you know, I think the big question of for our time is, do we believe that God is active in the world? I talked about his Easter hope and Pentecostal power, do you believe God raised Jesus from the dead, and got did God pour out the Holy Spirit at Easter, and if God's active, then that ought to put us on the margins, and Christ at the center, Dorothy Day, said she wanted to live her life in a way that wouldn't make sense if God doesn't exist. And the sad reality for me is, my life makes way too much sense on a daily basis, regardless of whether there's a God, and I ought to be living in a way that I'm not at the center of God's at the center. And then messiness is just another adventure. Something to add to that bishop,

Bishop 32:32

I couldn't say it any better.

Sam 32:34

The Holy Spirit started in here. Okay, we're also living in this time of hyper individualism, where the rights conveniences, beliefs, experiences of the individual are often placed above the collective. Even in the church where we know God has created us to live as one body, we often find ourselves valuing our individual voices over the larger body of Christ. So can you speak to this and specifically, for those who deeply desire to navigate the future collaboratively and in relationship with other people? How do we do that?

33:12

I begin by quoting Paul it's no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me that if if we see ourselves not at the center, but trying to discern what Christ is calling us to be, and to do, it'll lead to a lot more humility, and a lot more listening. You know, the the letter of James has a wonderful set of phrases, be quick to listen slow to speak slow to anger. And we're in a time when we're quick to anger, slow to listen and quick to speak. And so I, I've wanted to put those phrases over every pastor parish committee meeting door, or faculty senate meetings at a university that just says, Hey, be quick to listen, slow to

speak. And that's a way of saying, I'm not the Senator, you know, or pulsing. I see through a glass dimly. I do see it's not like I don't have a perspective and I do matter. But I see through a glass dimly, so I ought to have a much deeper sense of humility, than confidence, or self centeredness.

Bishop 34:22

I, one of the things that I learned after my accident, was that everybody leaves out of their own self interest, including me. And I was having people texting me in the hospital when I was in the hospital. Worried about one thing or another related to the church, when I'm about to have surgery the next day, right? And I'm sitting there thinking, don't you know, yeah, my body's in a million pieces, and I'm fixing to have major surgery tomorrow. And, and I think that that really gets to the human condition. tion, which is we all continue to struggle with the power sin that lives in us. It's not he lives with Sandy lives. And I think about Romans seven, when Paul says very good, I would do I do not do. It's like we have great intentions. And yet, and yet, we don't live in our best selves. And so it takes the community of faith, I think, to hold me in those spaces, when I tend to veer toward my own self centeredness. And to bring us back and so the power of the coin in the eyes of the church, to help individuals get over themselves, so to speak, and see a greater vision for the sake of the kingdom. I think that's to me. You know, that's why you got a job, Sam, because you got to keep preaching that to help people get to the, through those times when self centeredness wants to be the reigning theme. And you know, we, even in the church, we struggle with me wanting it my way. You know,

36:22

you talked about self interest favor, I sometimes will do a quick overview of the whole Bible and say, you could read the whole Bible after the fall as God trying to overcome us acting like two year olds, that God creates and says, We ours and yes, and then after sin enters the world, we say me mine. No. And God's continually trying to say we ours and yes, and we keep saying, No, me mine. And, you know, I love the phrase in Second Corinthians one one. Paul says that, in Jesus, Jesus is God's definitive. Yes. But Good Friday is about us saying no. Thank goodness for Easter. Listen,

Sam 37:05

I have a two year olds, she says, I do it myself. Totally resonate with what you're saying? Yeah,

37:11

it's cute. When it's a two year old. It's not so cute when it's someone like me saying I do it myself. That's

Bishop 37:17

right, when the 14 year old says You're not the boss of me,

Sam 37:22

can hear it in multiple ways? So Dr. Jones, you write about the role of curiosity, and I would love to talk about that a little bit with both of you. Can you tell us a little bit about how you see the role of curiosity, being important for leaders and innovation?

37:37

Well, it's, you just were talking about a young child. You know, Jesus says, except as you become like, a little child, and children are intensely curious. You know, I'm now reliving it with granddaughters where they can get really focused on an ant on the ground, or my current two year old granddaughter, who just loves what she calls gain, Pinkles, green sprinkles, sprinkles, she wants them on cake, she wants them on ice cream. And it's like, they have to be green. And they're very particular. And it's just incredible to see that delight. Because I've gotten cynical and it's just, you know, focused on the daily and that curiosity, or what sometimes is on wonder and enacts to, there's this sense of and all came upon them. And Greg Boyle talking about humbly industries out in LA. He said, You know, it's very different if you look at another human being from a perspective of judgment or perspective of law. And I realized that I judge people a lot more than I look at them with awe. And I think that curiosity is very much like a child. And you know, they they look at the world, they look at ants, they look at green sprinkles, they look at other people with a sense of awe. And that's what we're called to, to rediscover. Good

Bishop 39:07

So one of the one of the things our cabinet has been exposed to is this, this word called the three practices, and one of the fundamental ideas and three practices is remain curious. And then I go to ted Letho says, Be curious, not judgmental, you know, and, and I think how do we stir up the curiosity of the faithful when we're in a Bible study, and we invite people to ask deeper questions. And I think leading with questions, sometimes helps people remain curious.

39:57

One other emotion about it because you Curiosity is related to an imagination. And I've been saying, since the pandemic, we've been suffering from an imagination Deficit Disorder. And it's getting harder to be hopeful for the future. And there's a there was a story in the in numbers, which I like to tell a lot about numbers 13 and 14 on the back to Egypt committee that wants to go back to Egypt. And I came across a comment from a Jewish writer talking about that story. And she said, when the Israelites decide they want to go back to Egypt, she said, they suffered a death worse than physical death. It was the death of their imagination. And I just, I had to put the book down and just kind of absorb that, that the death of the imagination is worse than physical death. And that's that sense of curiosity, and that kind of sense of ability to continue to learn and grow. Yeah,

Sam 40:54

I felt like we find ourselves so stuck and stifled. Sometimes there was a great Potter up near Bershka springs in Tennessee, I used to work up there. His name was Phil Mayhew, and some Tennessee, Western Kentucky people know who he is, he passed away recently, but he had a shirt, as an artist that said, Don't get mad, get creative, you know. And so there's these moments where you can just you've got to shift your mind, you've got to think creatively and be imaginative. And you'll find something, you know, fish, if anything else you would add about imagination.

Bishop 41:28

When I was old Greg story of the numbers 13 and 14, I've got a sermon I do on the men of a different spirit, Joshua and Caleb are men of persons of a different spirit. And so they saw what was possible,

as, as opposed to the other who are concerned about the future. They can I like to say Canada, yes. Suppose not the no votes, and they saw a way through? How can how might we foster people to be people of a different spirit, see the possibilities. Now, sometimes, that's really difficult. And so you need to hang out with people like Greg Jones, every now and then to stir your imagination are Sam McLaughlin, so that in and of myself, I might struggle to see what's possible. But one of the beautiful things about the work that I do with our team is that we put an idea in the middle of the room, and all of a sudden you have 14 other people that spark their imagination. And what happens on the other side is this great new thing that you could not have perceived otherwise. So that's elaborative work. And I think that's where the Holy Spirit shows up most

42:49

great learnings for me in Nashville, and it's partly because of our community at Belmont, but we have a lot of songwriters. And songwriting is a is a creative work, but it's a team sport. I always thought just somebody sat down, wrote a song and then performed it. And going to songwriter rounds in Nashville is just phenomenal. Because you hear, you know, one of my favorite songs by Garth Brooks, as if tomorrow never comes. And they you hear Kent Blasi, and Garth talked about that song. And it started out very different than it ended up. And Garth actually is credited as a co writer and he, he said, Here's what I contributed. And he played like two chords, because Kent convinced him that he was going to kill the song we got by by leading with the death. It was like, We got no second verse if we start to, but you just see how through that creative process, new life comes. And you know, it's kind of like the the the folks out at the Pixar, Ed Catmull said, you know, every story stinks. And he actually writes about the first version of Toy Story, which is an iconic movie, but you read the first draft of that, and it's terrible. And they work together in a room. And all of a sudden, what was terrible, becomes amazing. And it requires that collaborative spirit. And the diversity of gifts that you read about in First Corinthians.

Bishop 44:20

Yeah, that you make me think about. I know there are teams of clergy who get together to work on sermons together. And the what happens in that is that a better sermon is emerges. And each person takes what's been created and goes back to their place and preaches their, their style or their version of it. But when I'm sitting in a room by myself with a blank piece of paper and a text, I'm thinking what am I going to say about this text? So I think I think more of that could be a benefit to the kingdom. It's

Sam 44:54

a more sustainable institution to where it's not all on me. Right, right. Yeah. Okay, well, I do want to ask another question before we get to our lightning round. Again, because you're both leaders, and you've been leaders for a long time, you know, what are one to two lessons that you have learned over the years they can be about innovation or imagination or institutions, or they can be about something else, what are one or two lessons that you have learned as a leader that you would share with those who are listening today?

Bishop 45:34

Personally, what pops in my mind is that I can't do it alone. That I need others in my life I need, I need a team. And I learned here in this work, that I don't have to be the smartest person in the room. But I do need to be around smart people. And, and what I've learned is that if you make space for conversation,

the best ideas will emerge. But it's you got to make the space for it. I've learned a bunch of other stuff. But that,

Sam 46:20

like,

46:24

I'd say the first thing is to ask questions, that it's more important to frame good questions than it is to think you need to be the expert or have the right answer. And I think the other thing that I learned, I written a book called embodying forgiveness right before I went to interview to become Dean of Duke Divinity School. And I thought about all the leadership and organizational questions they might ask. And then one of my former teachers around the tables on the search committee said, how having written embodying forgiveness affect you being dean? I thought, no, no, that was my scholarship that didn't have anything to do with leadership. And it really set me thinking, and I realized that actually being willing to admit you're wrong, particularly when you're in a position of power is really important, both for everyone else, but it also decreases the differences in the room, and that there's a sense of trust that emerges if you aren't just going to say, because I've got the title. I'm right, that when I've been able to say in a room or publicly, I blew that people were like, Well, what was that? You know, and I think that's been really important. It's also helped me recognize that I'm never as good as my successes and never as bad as my failures.

Sam 47:39

Yeah. And we need those institutions where people say, that was wrong, right. All right, we're gonna move to our lightning round questions. So we're gonna start with you, Bishop, what most excites you about ministry right now.

Bishop 47:57

Well, you know, my candles burning out as a full time leader in the church. What most excites me is seeing young clergy, young leaders rise up and do really great work. And we had a we had this wonderful experience at annual conference last year, when we were introducing our ordinance to the annual conference. And they came up high fiving each other and excited because they were had reached this time in their life. And it was just this joyous occasion in the annual conference, to see these these young leaders who are just enthusiastic and ready to have the opportunity to serve. So that's one of the things I would say the the other thing excites me is when we have a team now we call it faith and innovation. And we've kind of stopped using the language of new church development. But we're looking for places where innovative work can take place in a variety of different pockets. And we're trying to empower those places. And so one of those right now is was in our church and Columbia, who in they have, they've joined with a group called Fresh Start, which is a recovery ministry, mostly of women who have been in recovery. And they, they this group of women outgrew the space they were worshipping in and now they've come to be a part of the Columbia church and we're going to appoint their leader to be on the staff at Columbia first going forward and the Columbia first congregation has embraced this, this group of people in a way that maybe five years ago they would not have, and that's all because of the creative work of the body through, you know, empowering leaders to do. Take the next the next what I call the next phase We'll step that's it's extraordinarily

exciting to see where, you know, God is still raising up these pockets of leaders and people who are being faithful in spite of all the crazy things that are happening in the church.

Sam 50:50

Last one, finish this sentence. Church is

Bishop 51:01

church is people, church is the body. In its best sense, it is caught in the not Ecclesia.

Sam 51:40

Greg, what most excites you about ministry right now.

51:44

I have the privilege of working with a lot of young people who are going into vocations other than professional ministry. So moving from a divinity school to a university setting, I just love seeing young people are going into nursing and into music and entertainment and art and architecture and medicine, and getting to see their entrepreneurial ventures. And they want to do it from their perspective of faith. And so I'm seeing how it's bearing fruit in new ways. I've never really know much about architecture or pharmacy and seeing how people are living out their faith through these different vocations has been really enlivening and exciting.

Sam 53:00

Church is

53:04

called to bear witness to the good news of the gospel.

Sam 53:08

Amen. All right, guys. Thank you, Greg, and Bishop makelele. If you'd like to learn more about anything that we've discussed today, visit our table talk website at [TW que umc.org/table talk](https://www.umc.org/table-talk). And if you'd like to add to our conversation, we would love to hear from you. Email us at [table dot talk at T w k umc.org](mailto:table-dot-talk@twkumc.org).