

Transcript

Kate Bowler: Well, my dears, this has been such a beautiful season of podcast conversations and oh my goodness, do I have a treat for you for our last episode of Season eight! But don't worry, we will be back in the fall. And while our team is taking a little break in the summer from new episodes, we thought you might still need maybe something sustaining during these summer months. So many of us are spread too thin and frankly, just kind of exhausted by all we have to continue to bear up. We need rest, but we might not know where to find it. So this summer, I'm going to be sending out a blessing every Wednesday to your inbox, if that's your kind of thing. It's a few blessed words that might offer you space to just speak honestly about how beautiful and terrible and fun and tiring our regular days can be. Maybe we might find just a minute to be people together in our hopes for a summer that doesn't stress us out more and in the real days that ask a little too much from us anyway. Life is hard, but we don't have to do it alone. So if you want to do this together, then sign up for free at KateBowler.com/newsletter and I'll just send you some blessed kinds of stuff.

Well, friends. Okay. So I have a really special episode for you today, and I've been so excited about sharing it with you. I have the privilege, the ridiculous privilege, of getting to go to London for a real in-person sitting across the table taping of today's conversation. I got to go to a palace, an actual palace with none other than the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby. He oversees all of Anglicanism, which, if you're not familiar with Anglicanism, it's a massive denomination that spans the globe. Justin has been the archbishop since 2013, and I felt so lucky to get to do this, but also unbelievably nervous. Oh my gosh. He is kind and hilarious. And he was so generous with his time and the way he thought really carefully about his own experience of grief and what is bringing him hope. Also, at one point, he pretends to be a prosperity church preacher. So, yeah, day made. I think you're going to love my conversation with the most reverend and right honorable Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury. And honestly, that's only part of his full title. Oh, and if you can find me on Instagram or Facebook or whatever, you can see the pictures of where I absolutely had no idea if I was allowed to hug him. So instead I suddenly just decided to do it. But really slowly. It's so awkward. You're going to love it. Alright. Here we go.

Today is wonderful and strange. I'm in Lambeth Palace, and I've got this adorable little teacup here, and I'm going to meet the archbishop. And it's like a beautiful day. Uncharacteristically sunny. I don't know what English people are complaining about. Feels like they need a new marketing department because it is beautiful here.

Kate Bowler: Yes. Amazing. Okay. Thanks for having me. We. We set up here, if that's all right. Yeah. So I'm really grateful for this.

Justin Welby: It's a pleasure.

Kate Bowler: Thanks. You have a wonderful job and calling. And I am really enjoying getting to know your people and your digs. I wondered if we could start with you. With the young. With the young Justin, and what your young life was like. What was it like growing up?

Justin Welby: It was pretty confused. My parents divorced before I can remember. I was separated immediately after getting married pretty well. And so I don't remember them being together. And at the time, they both were drinking very heavily through to when I was 12, when my mother spent three months, perhaps longer in a state hospital, mental hospital, and stopped drinking. And that was just over 50 years ago. And my father kept on drinking and using drugs and all kinds of things. So it really was a pretty dysfunctional on the happy, sort of messy childhood.

Kate Bowler: Yeah. Yeah. You had a a powerful spiritual turning point in college. I, I wondered what your faith had been like before that and what changed?

Justin Welby: Before that, I certainly wasn't an atheist or an agnostic for that matter. I think it was the kind of faith that meant it wasn't worth the trouble. Not believing, because believing didn't make any difference. Really.

Kate Bowler: Yeah.

Justin Welby: So I sort of respected the clergy and we had compulsory chapel at schools, boarding schools from when I was 8 to 18. And we had compulsory chapel there twice a day, every day, seven days a week. And you in morning prayer, typically you caught up with the last bits of learning, whatever you hadn't learned behind the hymn book during the service. And on Sunday you turned up at chapel, and once you confirmed you turned up Saturday, which means you got out earlier. So it was quite a good thing to get confirmed. And then you that was about it. In the holidays we didn't go to church except at Christmas, and then that stopped once I was about seven or eight, I think. So it was part of life's little duties, but not worth rebelling against. Didn't have a enough cutting edge to to be worth saying no to. And so after I left school, I went to between leaving school and going to university to Cambridge. I had about nine months and I spent about seven of them working in Kenya, about 70 miles north of Nairobi in a what was called a Harambee school. And Harambee is a word that means self-help. So it's self-help school supported by the local community. So very basic. Really, really, really basic. No electricity, no running water. There I met for the first time Christians for whom God was a reality and not a concept. So in terms I'd use nowadays, I'd say where God was, who you followed, rather than God was what you believed in. And that's a hugely different way of looking at it. And I was very struck by that. And my first year at university, I thought that following God who was personal would really ruin my life. And nobody liked the God squad anyway, so I didn't pay much attention. I went to chapel once, twice in my second year. There was a moment where it all sort of fell into place. Right then someone explained to me about who Jesus is and what He did on the cross and the resurrection and, and in a sort of classic way, I prayed a prayer of commitment and found that the question I should have been asked, asking myself was "Who?" not "What?" And so the who became a reality and that was where it all changed, really.

Kate Bowler: I don't have a strong conversionary before and after because I, I remember thinking what a wonderful story to live inside.

Justin Welby: I remember thinking that as as when I was very young. But then it just was a fairy story. Oh, so your parents, were they practicing Christians?

Kate Bowler: They became Christians kind of later in life, which I was pretty grateful for, because I felt like I got to skip a lot of the precious kitchy-ness of a subculture that I think are Christian subculture. Yeah. I mean, we did have a...

Justin Welby: Precious kitchens.

Kate Bowler: There's only quite so many records you can listen to that where the choruses don't lie or

Justin Welby: Oh I never heard one at all. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Kate Bowler: It was nice to feel like they, I mean, I think both my parents religious experiences helped inform a little something of I mean, my dad read very highbrow. He read Augustine in college and thought, all right. And that was it for him. And then my mom was handed one of those terrible, bless them for spiritual loss tracts where she opened a pamphlet and said, "You are a sinner", and she was like, I mean, I guess I suppose. I mean, yeah, it worked. And people are always hoping those pamphlets work. And my mom just pick one up in a college, you know, rec center and thought, I suppose I am falling short of the glory of God. And then that was it for her. But something about the the emotion is...

Justin Welby: That is mesmerizing. I Just we're a lot more gosh, that would make my life easier. We just go around. We just use our country to go around and.

Kate Bowler: Spreading pamphlets.

Justin Welby: Spreading pamphlets on, you know, pub bars and nightclubs, disco floors, whatever. I mean, it would just save so much time.

Kate Bowler: Really would, the feeling, I mean, I think people do sometimes stumble into some kind of lightning bolt.

Justin Welby: Oh, yes, they do.

Kate Bowler: But I.

Justin Welby: ...but you drifted in.

Kate Bowler: I felt I grew up mostly was, you know, Mennonites, the cheese eaters of the prairies. And so I was mostly around that type. And yes.

Justin Welby: Our chief of staff is very influenced by Mennonites, but he's sort of Northern Irish. I wouldn't describe him as cheese eater of the prairies. No, definitely. No.

Kate Bowler: I think what I liked about the Mennonites early on was I learned a lot about faithfulness, like the kind of, that's like, oh, I'll build your coffin for you. That's a real that's a real kind of person. I'll bring the casserole and.

Justin Welby: I'll build your coffin.

Kate Bowler: Oh, yeah, they will. And it's a it's kind of an intense and many small acts that will add up to a life of being carried is.

Justin Welby: And a real community.

Kate Bowler: I learned about the church growing up from Mennonites, but I didn't know quite enough about a God I couldn't live without it until I was diagnosed very suddenly with cancer. And I thought that was my last year. And then the...

Justin Welby: How long ago was that?

Kate Bowler: Was six years ago.

Justin Welby: So for a last year that's lasted a bit.

Kate Bowler: Yeah, it's been sort of a, I wasn't supposed to live beyond that first year and then I just kept living.

Justin Welby: Don't answer if you don't want to. But what kind of cancer?

Kate Bowler: Was colon cancer. And there was no cancer in my family, so I didn't have any expectation that I would sort of be that story that they tell at a party. Oh, did you hear about. It's terrible. Oh, wait, that's stories about me. So yeah, that was the that to me was the most powerful experience of being carried not just by a community. And I had a great community because I was at a divinity school where everybody flagrantly abused clergy, visiting hours, protocols and just constantly. I'd like 12 personal clergy at any time telling this to hospital staff. Oh, don't know, I have a personal pastor, just popping a collar on and getting on in there. And I so I had a I felt carried by the love of others, but I felt blown away.

Justin Welby: It's really interesting. So there was for you, it was both the love of others, but there was also the love of God.

Kate Bowler: Yeah. An undeniable, ridiculous kind of, why am I not more upset about this?

Justin Welby: Yes, that, you see when our eldest daughter died in a car crash when she was seven months old. So she'd now be um, 40 this autumn. So it's very long time ago, 39 years ago, more or less. At that point, I think I mean, we were absolutely full of grief. Paralyzed? No, not part of the wrong word. We were grief stricken and it was the most enormously painful time. But we were very definitely carried by the love of God. So what you say makes a lot of sense. When a year later, our son had to have neurosurgery, which was when he was very, very tiny, two or three months, there was a sense of the complete absence of God. And in that case for me anyway and in that time, it was the support of the community. So it's fascinated me to hear you. You

have both at the same time, as it were. And and did that continue? Has that continued that sense of the presence of God?

Kate Bowler: Oh, no, it went away.

Justin Welby: When did it go away?

Kate Bowler: I was terrified that it would. And so I went around. I honestly wandered the halls of the divinity school, having theological problems, asking sort of Aquinas scholars, have you heard about this? There's a there's a some kind of sweetness there. I feel like I know that I am propelled toward the concrete, and yet I feel lifted and weirdly bubble wrapped. And this is going to go away, right? Please tell me it's not going to go away. And they're like, oh, yeah, it's definitely, it's definitely going to go. It lasted about 3 to 6 months and it got me through the, I think, the horror of it, but but not the enduring this of it, that I felt like I would need a different kind of I don't know, I. I would need to understand that that some pain endures and that that I would need different maybe spiritual muscles for that.

Justin Welby: It's really interesting that it is a very I like that phrase, different spiritual muscles. I remember reading through not that long ago stuff about Dark Night of the Soul and all that. I'm thinking that that's not it. Don't quite fit that one. But John Stott used to talk about the go go principle.

Kate Bowler: I don't know this. Tell me.

Justin Welby: It's very simple. It stands for Go on going on. And I think and you think, oh, well, that's sort of public school Christianity, you know, private school Christianity in in American terms, you know, sort of stiff upper lip. Winning the Battle of Waterloo on the playing fields of Eden stuff, you know but it's not it it seems to me that some of that that we sometimes have to develop muscles for is just saying, well, it's another morning so I'm going to go through today. Yeah. And just see what happens. Some days you get to the end of the day and you just can't imagine how you got through it. And some days you think, well, it wasn't as bad as I thought it was going to be. And then there are the moments of of sort of relief and faith and the presence of God. I suppose, if I'm being really honest, particularly since an experience in recent years, an experience with depression, I am now, you know, C.S. Lewis wrote a book Surprised by Joy. I think if I was, there have been times when it might even be one where I might write a book called Suspicious of Joy.

Justin Welby: So it's you know. You just sort of think I'm feeling well and happy. Okay. What did I eat this morning? Have I been... Did I take more drugs than I should have done? You know what's wrong?

Justin Welby: Rowan Williams, my fabulous, fabulous predecessor, who is a great one of the world's great philosophers and theologians, he when I was a new bishop ten years ago and I was newly the bishop of Durham, and there was a big kerfuffle going on and in to do with various bits of property in Durham and who owned them and who was selling them and who was buying them. It's too complicated to explain. But anyway, it sort of got sorted out. So we ran,

organized a dinner for everyone to sort of all be together and very formal dinner in this place in Lambeth Palace. And I was a very new Bishop. So I came down from Durham in the train and I came along here and I was really frightened. I was going to meet the Archbishop of Canterbury. Terrifying. And in the course of the journey and coming here, the whole solution to the problem fell apart. So I had to come and say to run, you know, we're having a dinner to celebrate solving this problem. It's not solved. And typical. And he said, What's wrong? And I was thinking of a way to try and explain it. And I said about one of the people involved, Rowan, I said, Archbishop, have you ever read Winnie the Pooh? And he said, I have two children, of course I've read Winnie the Pooh, rather grumpily, I thought. So I said, Well, so and so is Tigger. And he's just bounced off. Oh, he said, there is almost no human situation that cannot be explained with the hermeneutics of Winnie the Pooh.

Kate Bowler: That's right.

Justin Welby: And I am Eeyore. I am genuinely Eeyore. So, you know, if you know, you're Winnie the Pooh, you do one of the stories where he's given a balloon and he's happiest when it's burst because nothing more can happen. So I don't know if that makes you suspicious of joy.

Kate Bowler: But then says, Pooh, it's so much better with two.

Justin Welby: Oh, my goodness, you are. You've got a good memory. I'd forgotten that. But but then I'm evil. But I said, I think has has the carrying come back? Has the sense...

Kate Bowler: Weirdly, the theology of Winnie the Pooh is exactly the next the carrying kind of went on is. At least with me, there was a there is a certain, um, there's a certain narcissism in fear, right?

Justin Welby: Where the oh, gosh.

Kate Bowler: That little asterix that says it will always be this bad. I was on a loop where every week the same terrible thing would happen. Every Wednesday, it was chemo all day. And then for the rest of the week it was... feeling like death

Kate Bowler: Yes, chemo pills. And then I had two days off and I had a 18 month old son. And so I spent the whole time toggling very abruptly between I will be an indestructible mom and there is an encroachment of death and I am...

Justin Welby: Absolutely this is a clean one.

Kate Bowler: To see what happens.

Kate Bowler: And the worry the worry and pain for me is always will it always be this way? And then what could possibly make any of this all right if I if I can't bear up the weight of my life, if I can't be the one that bears up the weight of my life?

Justin Welby: And what was the answer?

Kate Bowler: Um, it, it was we had a I met a lovely person, she said. She called it the the fellowship of the Afflicted. That the the knowledge of the precarity of the world can be a terrible gift.

Justin Welby: That's exactly right. That's beautiful. In the various places one of the things we discover very frequently is other people who whose children have died as children. When it happens to you, you think you're the only people in the world. Then you realize, actually, even in the global north, in the rich world, it's happening the whole time. It's everywhere. But one of the things it does. One of the many things in which it changed us was that sense of the precariousness of life. Yeah. And you just don't take things for granted in the same way.

Kate Bowler: And it can be the breaking, and in the breaking the knowledge you get right at first where you know, the world is inside out and undone and you know it. And why didn't you know it before? And you know you can't live. My friend Luke Brotherton, he gave me a lovely said, Oh, it's that kind of bright clarity. He called it tragic time, I thought. And he said, I thought that was a lovely.

Justin Welby: That's a very luke way.

Kate Bowler: Yes.

Kate Bowler: But he loves naming two kinds of time. And I love thinking about kinds of time. And it did give it the feeling that I might not live like this in this crisis forever. But there is a way of seeing that that might make me more useful. It might make me a little more compassionate, a little more prone towards service, maybe.

Justin Welby: I think it does. Well, certainly for us. Yeah, absolutely. And and that was that was one of them, one of the impacts on us and also more honest.

Kate Bowler: Yes.

Kate Bowler: Less likely to small talk beyond the two minute mark, for me? I might give you 2 minutes and then we're getting into it and then we'll get into it.

Justin Welby: Oh, yes, yes. I don't know. Yeah, there's probably an element of that. But probably. Yeah. Part of the knack of Archbishop thing is to just witter on for quite a long time when you're working out what you want to say. Archbishops talk while they're thinking about what they need to say. It's a way of filling space. I mean, you know, if necessary, I'll talk about that mantelpiece for quite a long time.

Kate Bowler: I'd be very interested to hear about it.

Justin Welby: I know nothing about it, but it wouldn't stop me lying consistently for several minutes. I mean, that mantelpiece looking at it, I would guess it's Chinese. From this hand in marble. You can tell by the way the veins run on it.

Kate Bowler: I can see it now.

Justin Welby: And that would mean it's more likely to be 18th and 17th century.

Kate Bowler: Oh you forget, I am schooled in the ways of academia, which it's completely like. Yeah, just clearing their throat takes 20 minutes. Yes, that's true.

Kate Bowler: I did kind of wonder if this sort of knowledge you have when the world is undone is if that clarity is something that then sort of pops up or becomes more useful that in times of crisis, like during the pandemic, I know you spent a lot of time praying for people, seeing people in their most vulnerable. I wondered if that your membership in the Fellowship of the Afflicted sort of gave you a citizenship with them, maybe?

Justin Welby: I think it does to some degree. I think not necessarily. I think lots of things have that impact. Just for the sake of you said that I spent a lot of time during.

Kate Bowler: The pandemic.

Justin Welby: Pandemic praying for people. You did? I do quite often pray for people.

Kate Bowler: Even I've heard.

Justin Welby: It in times of the pandemic. I just thought it's best to have that on the record. Archbishop, any praise during Pandemic Sunday.

Kate Bowler: Needs are really pickle of a problem to get this man praying.

Justin Welby: The last time was 100 years ago during the Spanish flu epidemic. But hey, no it it was. But I think there are other things. For me, one of the ways that our experience got working is through bringing bring me into contact with loads of different spiritual traditions and approaches to life. For instance, Catholic social teaching, which has had a huge impact on my thinking about the world and justice and truth and peace and war and that kind of thing amongst Catholic friends coming, finding the extraordinary gift of silent prayer in front of the sacrament. And that thing where these two thoughts are connected. It may just take me quite a long time to get there.

Kate Bowler: I figure it's going somewhere.

Justin Welby: I've forgotten where I started by the time I get to the end. But for me, one of the extraordinary moments when praying silently with this in front of the sacrament with the other people in the community here in the chapel after evening practice for half an hour of silence is I'm always struck by the intense fragility of the host of the consecrated bread, which and that links in to this sense of the precariousness of life that Jesus both in his incarnate life and in his and in however you understand the real presence, but without getting into that right down that rabbit hole, but in his presence with us through the host is utterly fragile and yet infinitely powerful. And so when you go into the hospital and you're kneeling or standing next to the bed

of someone who's right at the end of their life and is unconscious and dying, and in one particular case, not from a muslim family, not a Christian family, you don't start thinking about what? This is going to sound very bad, but I'll say it anyway. You don't think about what the right thing to do is. You think about being alongside someone where everything is not right and praying because everything's not right. And to put it at its most basic, it can't do any harm and it might do some good. It's not very profound, but it's a lot better than walking away. Yeah. And so you spend time with them.

Kate Bowler: That speaks to the one on people's biggest fears when they encounter an unsolvable tragedy is, well, I wouldn't want to do the wrong thing. I wouldn't want to. And sometimes that barrier then continues to stand between us. So I like the I'm willing to be a bit embarrassed.

Justin Welby: I'm willing to be a bit embarrassed. And then at the other extreme and this is something I've talked about, but traveling in South Sudan and being at the site of a mass grave in a town where there were 3000 unburied bodies and the opposing forces in the Civil War had swept through that town four times in a month and in the most horrendous way with torture and rape. And I'm just extraordinary. And with the body bags, with the clergy in them, at my feet, you know, we were in the grounds of the cathedral and a group standing around and they said, will you pray for the grave before we fill it in? It was a grave for 60 people, 80 people, something on that. And that is a sort of depth of tragedy that we're now seeing in Ukraine, places like Mariupol, but makes almost no sense to most of us who haven't lived through wars which outside, you know, the very elderly and people in various parts of the world in Europe, most Europeans have no concept of that. And you you look at that. And again, the archbishop of what was then Sudan and South Sudan says, would you pray for this grave and you thought, uh, not sure how to do this. Yeah. Not taught at seminary, you know, and the best thing is you just start praying and express what's in your heart and draw on the sounds and the absolute outrage that this should be done by anyone, to anyone, and the horror of the people that for whom these were those they knew and loved and the darkness that seem on a bright, sunny day to in South Sudan to sweep out from the fringes towards us. To face, that seems to me, is with protest and lament, which I think in most of our Western liturgical traditions, Anglicanism in the West, we have completely forgotten about. We don't know how to do lament. We don't know how liturgically to call out our intense anger at injustice and wrong or even of God. We don't have a service that says May those who did this have their children's heads smashed against rocks, because we think it's a bit not quite the done thing to pray that, but we might feel it inside. Yeah, we might hate as viscerally as that but we don't say it. And I think one of the one of the most important things about suffering is to enable us to be transparent and honest with God and say exactly what we think, because he knows anyway, there's not much point in.

Kate Bowler: Hey, we can't do a...

Justin Welby: There's no point you being. There's no point in being polite with God it doesn't fool him.

Kate Bowler: Yeah. American culture has a solution for that.

Justin Welby: Oh yes.

Kate Bowler: It's so I in my before life I, my historical expertise was in the history of the prosperity gospel.

Justin Welby: Oh yes. I think I knew that. Yeah.

Kate Bowler: The solution then is of course, to re channel our spiritual thoughts toward positive outcomes. So the solution then is not honesty. It's in fact prescriptive positivity.

Justin Welby: So, Disneyfied religion?

Kate Bowler: It feels like faithfulness because you know what the at the edges of your mind, the owners of the world are, are, are sort of percolating there. And it feels like bravery to say no weapon against me shall prosper. I am more than a conqueror. It feels like kind of spiritually bucking up. Honesty then, though. I mean, the first casualty is the kind of honesty you're describing.

Justin Welby: And that needn't deny God. Psalm 44, Welby translation. You know you've sold your people for a pittance that is the NRSV, I think. In other words, God, you're an absolute rubbish businessman. You just don't get how to buy and sell things. You've sold us out, but you didn't even make a buck on it. Yeah, that is just pathetic. And then you go on a few verses and you know, Are you asleep? Wake up. That is real proud. Psalm 56, verse eight. It's the one after, in our deepest grief, that that Caroline came back to our lives. You store up our tears in a bottle. Nothing is lost, nothing's forgotten. Nothing is wasted. I think for people who go through really bad times knowing that God doesn't waste it, doesn't lose it, loves us, understand it, knows what we're feeling. It's very interesting in exile. The exiles don't as far as I can remember, and you'll probably correct me, but as far as I can remember, The exiles, when they confessing their sin, they didn't confess that they were angry with God, they confess they were unfaithful with God constantly. Yeah, we didn't do this. We didn't do that. We didn't. We followed the balls. We sacrificed our children to Moloch and all the rest of it. But I can't, offhand or even on hand, think of places where they said we got ready to cross with you because we felt you'd let us down. And yet that's very much part of what we expect nowadays.

Kate Bowler: That's right. Yeah, but that kind of rage doesn't need confession. It does not sound very polite the way you're describing it.

Justin Welby: No, it's not very polite. Plenty of my colleagues would tell you I'm not always very polite.

Kate Bowler: I think that was maybe my best, hardest thought. Harvest the hard heart. Harvest. That would be wonderful... Harvest thought would be a real prosperity gospel theology. Just seeds of faith.

Justin Welby: Seeds of faith that come from fields of corn. And out of those fields of corn. I want you to take a tithe and just put it in the basket as you leave the church.

Kate Bowler: Hey, I think you do. Yes.

Justin Welby: And now we're going to sing.

Kate Bowler: There's always a lot of singing. That was the first sermon. Then it goes to song.

Kate Bowler: I think the thing that preserved my faith most for that first year of being very sick was being unbelievably angry at things that felt like they were like God's hype man, just right there trying to explain away a tragedy. And and that the most precious moments were the ones in which someone said, you know, this is this is unbearable. And even even there is no there is there is no heaven that that solves the problem of pain. But that reaches into the present.

Justin Welby: Is the interesting. You can't again I'm being I will get into all kinds of trouble get a load of letters for this. But it seems to me that the pastoral answers to suffering tend to be theologically inadequate, and the theological answers tend to be pastorally inadequate.

Kate Bowler: Yes.

Justin Welby: And yet that seems to be something to do with the shape of the cross and the shape of Jesus's experience that nobody tries to, well, the Pharisees to know if he was the Son of God come down sort of stuff is a sort of theological approach to it. But all the women do is stand at the foot of the cross.

Kate Bowler: Yeah.

Justin Welby: And presumably weep. And that's the right thing to do.

Kate Bowler: Yeah, that's beautiful. Yeah. Yeah. Those were always all the people I liked best. I liked the. I liked the ugly tears. I liked the, especially from my very proper friends.

Justin Welby: you have proper friends...

Kate Bowler: Well, you know, it's all smoking jackets and port at the divinity school. Yeah. You know, they love a good. Just the faint sounds of Masterpiece Theater in the background. We have a lot of people who are caregiving in some way their children or aging parents, or they're in a profession that's very emotionally strenuous. I wondered what words of encouragement he might be able to offer them now, especially when it feels. I mean, the truth of it is that also the world is on fire and sometimes these layers kind of compound in a way that makes it feel impossible then to do the small acts of love.

Justin Welby: Probably makes them think they can't do the small acts of love. There was a friend of mine who died almost two years ago called Desirae Mokonawa. And I first met him in 2005 in Geneva, where he is from eastern Congo. And he was doing a course on development studies and I bumped into him at breakfast. We were in the same building and we just started chatting and I went to see him in Goma where he was a parish priest, and once a couple of times,

two or three times, and then he became a bishop and we kept in touch. So I went to see him. And during the Ebola crisis was the last time. And I remember one of the occasions in his area, we went to a refugee camp and for various reasons, food wasn't getting through to it, I think. Or I mean, this the last figure I knew there were 137 militias in the area. You know, so and they're all fighting. Different people. And the UN and the Congolese army. And attacking the refugees at the refugee camps and attacking the Ebola things. Anyway, we went to this refugee camp and it was built. It's very volcanic area. It was built mainly on volcanic rock. And the opening place we went to was a huge tent run by amazing medical charity. And it had children all around it, very young children with severe disabilities who as the refugees had fled, they had been forced to leave their disabled children behind. And these were the ones that had been rescued. And I remember just sitting with my little little boy a few months with his sister, who was about three, who was caring for him and the place he was very severely disabled. Um, and the tent was full of these children dying. And the doctors were doing everything they could. There were very few doctors, one or something. And then we went round the camp at the other extreme, and it was a woman who lost touch with her family as they fled. Very elderly woman, stone blind and she just I sat with her and held her hand. And she didn't know who I was. I couldn't speak to her because of language. But we just sat in hold hands and she was just crying for help. And then we went round and went round. And at the end of it, it was just one camp. It wasn't big 12,000 people. We at the end of it, as we were going back to into Goma, I said to Desirae, What do you do? How did you cope with this? How do you deal with the weight of this? Well, he said, I do what I can with the resources God gives me and the rest I leave it to him, to God. He died of COVID after a trip. He was a very good friend and he died of COVID after a trip up north. He is in his forties at the time, so young man and his wife was equally it is equally extraordinary. Just which reminds me, I must get in touch with that bit again. But they are extraordinary, extraordinary, extraordinary people. And I would say to people in the kind of professions you're talking about. It actually doesn't matter what percentage of the problem you've dealt with. Your job is not to solve the problem in most cases. Your job is to do what you can with the resources God has given you. And if that's very, very little indeed, it's very little indeed.

Kate Bowler: Yeah.

Justin Welby: I have to keep telling myself this because I'm not very good at that. I do guilt in really large scale and feelings of failure or imposter syndrome and huge scale. But it's the truth. And I would. And whether it's in time, energy, emotional energy, money, don't beat yourself up. You do what you can. And this is where the psalms of lament and protest come in again. Because all you can do when you run out of resources, lament and protest, you can't solve the problem. We've got this huge war, a terrible war in Ukraine. Lots of people are saying to religious leaders, especially Pope Francis. But when they get really desperate, they say to me, you know, you ought to be mediating. Well, it would be lovely to have the opportunity. But if that's not possible, it's not possible. And as long as we know, each of us knows that we've done what we can with the resources that God has given us used in the sensible way the New Testament talks about. So we aren't leaving our children to starve while we do something. We aren't neglecting our aged parents in order to help put the food bank. Which is the sort of classic thing. Yeah, I would say you just turn to God and say, I've done what I can. The rest are in your hands. And by the way, I'm really deep within me I'm sad that you didn't give me more resources to deal with this. I'd love to do.

Kate Bowler: Yeah.

Justin Welby: And, you know, I feel just desperate about this. Yeah. But be honest. Yeah. But serious thing. Do what you can. Leave the rest to God, I think. I mean, I'm. I'm the most useless one at applying this. But, hey, it's good advice.

Kate Bowler: The image in my mind when you're describing this is not working backwards from the problem down to my resources, but working forwards towards resources.

Justin Welby: That's really interesting. I'd never thought of that. I think that is helpful, actually. Yeah.

Kate Bowler: This way it gets me back to math and I love formulas. Just give me a formula for how I'm going to run my faith.

Kate Bowler: According to A. But now I've been on the tragedy of my life...

Justin Welby: Are you a mathematician?

Kate Bowler: What's that? Lovely quote?

Justin Welby: If it's about math, it's not nothing, but it may be a quote

Kate Bowler: Gosh, it was. It was. There's one if there's if there's one discipline like science that God never knows, it's math. And I

Justin Welby: But God is a terrible mathematician.

Kate Bowler: Yes. Yes, that's exactly the. I've had to abandon all my young ideas for being a good person. And then.

Justin Welby: Yeah, I mean, you know, which is big at one or 100, God says one. It's just it doesn't work.

Kate Bowler: Thank you so much for spending this time with me. And it's been such a joy.

Justin Welby: Well, it's been a joy for me. Thank you very much, indeed.

Kate Bowler: There is something so lovely that the Archbishop said that I just want to think about for a minute longer, about when his daughter died and he felt God's love. But then when his son got sick, he felt nothing but his community carried him through. He said something like, Sometimes you feel the love of God and sometimes you feel the love of a community. And if you are very fortunate, you get both. But so often we are deeply lonely and scared that either God or people won't show up. So I thought this might be a nice way to close us into the summer, to bless us when we're scared about having to face the hard things alone. Alright. A blessing for you. God, what if. What if I walk out on this ledge and feel only the taste of my fear? What if I

discover that what I carry cannot be shouldered? What if I live too long without that feeling? That I can set this, this, this down. God, fill me with a love that staves off all the darkness. Comfort me when I can't think another reasonable thought. And if I can't, I mean, I just can't feel your nearness, hear you telling me that I loved, send your armies of do gooders, tuck my name inside their hearts. Give me people who love to hold more than this day can manage. And if you can't send more than one because more than one would be nice, just send the nearest person to take things out of my hands and into theirs until I know again today that I should never be expected to walk this road alone. Friends, it has been such a joy to be with you this season. Thank you so much for continuing to listen faithfully and to share your stories with us. Our team reads every single comment and piece of mail and review you send. We just feel so lucky to be part of your days. I also just wanted to say thanks for how much you've been a source of strength and support. Thanks to you, my book, *Good Enough*, was an instant New York Times best seller and stayed on that list for like a ridiculous amount of time. And that's just you. I can't imagine a kinder and more loving community to be a part of. So thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. And while this is our last episode of Season eight, don't worry, we will absolutely be back in the fall. In the meantime, I'm going to send out those blessings every Wednesday this summer to your inbox. So visit katebowler.com/newsletter. And I cannot sign off for the season without thanking my absolutely wonderful crew who makes this possible. First to the Lilly Endowment, the Duke Endowment, Duke Divinity School and Leadership Education for their unwavering support of our medium sad work. To Harriet Putman, Gwen Hegginbotham, Jessie Broome, JJ Dickinson, Keith Weston, Dave Odom, Katherine Smith, Edgardo Colon Emeric, Jeb and Sammi, thank you. And a special thank you to Ruth and Julianne from the archbishop's office for making this possible and to our extra special onsite producer, Sasha Seinfeld. And really, truly very deepest most of all, thank you to Jessica Richie. She is the coauthor of *Good Enough* and the *Champion of My Life* and the unbelievable producer who makes these conversations absolutely a gift and not just a conversation. So, Jess, you make everything better. And thank you so much to our community. Man, we love you. We're going to talk to you again soon. And in the meantime, come find me online. I'm @KateCBowler. This has been Everything Happens with me, Kate Bowler.