



Resipiscence:
More with Antonia Coleman

May 30, 2024

Transcript



Sara Hayden: This Center for Repair of Historic Harms, which is a center within the Presbyterian Mission Agency-

Antonia Coleman: Mm-hmm.

Sara: ... that the director Jermaine Ross-Allam, who is a social ethicist and reverend, is the director of, you are collaborating together and you have been at the work of the intersections for public discourse on reparations, reparatory justice-

Antonia: Mm-hmm.

Sara: ... models of remedy.

Antonia: Mm-hmm.

Sara: Jermaine said something that struck me the way that he said it, speaking in the context as a Presbyterian minister-

Antonia: Mm-hmm.

Sara: ... his tradition, that Protestant theology cannot be complete if we do not have a theological component that helps us understand that Christianity has entered into this hemisphere in a racist and genocidal way, through racism and genocide.

Antonia: Mm-hmm. I agree with Jermaine in that, and I have to give a particular upshot to Corey Schlosser-Hall -

Sara: Mm-hmm.

Antonia: ... who is my immediate supervisor in the Office of Innovation-

Sara: Yeah.

Antonia: ... because I am the administrator project manager for both missions. And you can't have repair without innovation.

Sara: Mm-hmm.

Antonia: You have to be able to understand and innovate this repair and not just the repair of the theology, but the repair of the heart-

Sara: Yeah.

Antonia: ... mind, and spirit of the individuals who make up the theology. My favorite word in the whole wide world right now is resipiscence.

Sara: Yes. I've heard you say that.

Antonia: (laughs)

Sara: And you're the only person I've heard say that ever in my life. Resipiscence.

Antonia: Resipiscence.

Sara: Yes.

Antonia: It's an SAT word, and it means the change of heart, mind, and soul from a particular way of doing things to the new way of doing things, and with the mindset to not go back and repeat the old way which brought harm.

Sara: Hm.

Antonia: This speaks to repentance.

Sara: Mm-hmm.

Antonia: True repentance, and you cannot have that kind of repair without the commitment to not to go back to the way things were.

Sara: Would you use resipiscence... Would you be kind to use it in a sentence for us?

Antonia: I'm asking Auntie Google to use it in a sentence. When I realized how I had offended my colleague, I immediately expressed my resipiscence.

Sara: Hm.

Antonia: And that was Uncle Al.

Sara: Okay. (laughs) It's now everywhere.

Antonia: It's now everywhere.

Sara: Because you just asked that question.

Antonia: It sure is. (laughs)

Sara: (laughs) It's in every device now. Is that how AI works?

Antonia: So, resipiscence is a noun, which means a change of heart, mind, a reformation, return to a same sound or correct view or position.

Sara: Okay.

Antonia: Thank you Vahisha Hasan for teaching me that word.

Sara: Hm. It goes back to what you're saying though about this desire to invite and see and live in a different way-

Antonia: Mm-hmm.

Sara: ... based on knowing what we do know-

Antonia: Mm-hmm.

Sara: ... that we didn't know.

Antonia: But now we do, and since we know-

Sara: Yeah. Now we do, so what do we do?

Antonia: ... we gotta get to work.

Sara: Mm-hmm.

Antonia: We have to do it.

Sara: Mm-hmm.

Antonia: Don't just sit up and talk to me. Everybody can talk. Not many will do the work.

Sara: Yeah.

Antonia: Something that I read a long time ago out of an old book called *My Testimony*, and it talked about how people attended this funeral, and when the people left the funeral, they decided, "We gotta do something. We gotta do something." And it ends up to all these people doing the talk, all these people doing wishing, all these people imagining and dreaming or forgot about it, and it's one person to do the work. And if I have to be that one person, I come with the power of my ancestors, that number, a number that no one can number, a number that is my cloud of witnesses on a daily basis.

Sara: Hm.

Antonia: You have a cloud of witnesses too.

Sara: Mm-hmm.

Antonia: We each have ancestors who have done well and who have not. It is up to us to call the ancestors to task. "Okay, y'all didn't do this right." We have to make it right and be okay with making it right, not holding any guilt of yourselves if you've not done any of the atrocities or committed any of the harms that were done, because we have to understand... And I was just reading in a book, a new book that's coming out. Thank you, Amy, for allowing me to be a reviewer of the *Creating a Culture of Repair: Taking Action on the Road to Reparations* by Robert Turner.

I advise everyone to get the book, but I also advise everyone when reading the book to take your time and drink water while you're reading the book, for the simple fact that there are some hard truths.

Sara: Yes.

Antonia: The book mentions John Rankin. There were things that John Rankin had done that were not well, but in the end, he had a resipiscent moment-

Sara: Hm.

Antonia: ... and changed. There's another Presbyterian, Gabriel Tickner, who had a resipiscent moment, who manumitted all of the slaves that he owned. So there is history, yes, that you would want to put your head in the sand about.

Sara: Yeah.

Antonia: There's the history of the Liberians, the Presbyterians that sent black folks back to Africa, and those black people became the colonizers. Yes, there's history friends-

Sara: Yeah. Yeah.

Antonia: ... that we all have to face where we sit in our privilege, where we sit in our marginalization of other people.

Sara: Hm. And the names that you invoke in particular in those instances are ones who we may have in the past, not so distant past, and present in many cases, we thought Presbyterian minister John Rankin, abolitionist-

Antonia: Right.

Sara: ... conductor of the Underground Railroad.

Antonia: Right.

Sara: I want to look back as a white person-

Antonia: Mm-hmm.

Sara: ... and say, "This one ancestor got it right. They got it right here. I can look back and be absolved." It's much more complex, the work required, the invitation being issued, is much deeper-

Antonia: Mm-hmm.

Sara: ... than going down the line of our ancestry and saying, "I'm okay. I got out of this okay."

Antonia: Right.

Sara: "I can disassociate from the past and present evils."

Antonia: No. Right. You can't disassociate yourself from it because it's in your DNA.

Sara: Yes.

Antonia: And it carries forward in the work that you do. It could be passive-aggressive microaggressions. It could be little implicit biases, is something we're learning in prep for the General Assembly that's about to happen.

Sara: Yeah. As you think about convening the General Assembly, as you think about convening among a group of people who have convened every two years, every four years, looking back into history in a certain way with certain rules of order, which allowed us, I would say, to disassociate from the resipiscence (laughs) required of us-

Antonia: Mm-hmm.

Sara: ... to do the work of repair.

Antonia: Mm-hmm.

Sara: For those who are familiar with General Assembly, this every two year meeting of Presbyterians who are sent by their presbyteries - teaching and ruling elders - to come together and discern what initiatives, what changes are made, to our governing documents, our commitments going forward: What's the invitation for us in this particular year, knowing what we do and having folks at the helm that we do have right now at the Presbyterian Mission Agency, folks such as yourself?

Antonia: That is a good question. The theme this year is live into hope. What can we expect at the GA this year, is we expect to live and to hope. And all that that means, what does hope mean? What is Esperanza? What is that? We'll get to find out. You get to define it for yourselves, create an action plan.

Sara: Hm.

Antonia: And to make sure that it is one that speaks to the honesty. Be honest about where you are as an org, where the GA is, and how it looks. And then, begin to innovate and reimagine the possibilities of what can be birthed from this moment, you know?

Sara: Mm-hmm.

Antonia: There's a whole expectancy for denominations to be in non-existence in a few years or so, and when I say few, probably fifty a few.

Sara: Yeah.

Antonia: Because there are people who are not going to church anywhere. Thanks, COVID-19.

Sara: (laughs)

Antonia: And you can't put that all on COVID-19.

Sara: No.

Antonia: Parents, church members, how have you made the people feel? How have you lived into and embodied the text-

Sara: Yeah.

Antonia: ... of Matthew 25?

Sara: Mm-hmm.

Antonia: When you saw the hungry, did you feed them? When you saw the hurting, did you heal them? When you saw the oppressed, did you put yourself on the line some kind of way? Did you ally? Did you advocate, understanding that allyship and advocacy are two different things and require two different types of mindsets?

That is what you should be expecting from the GA this year, to go home and to live and to hope in a way that would benefit the future and not yourself.

Sara: Hm. Wow. We'd like to invite our guests to think about, those listening to this conversation, you know, wherever they are, they're at work and walking around their neighborhoods who are struck by the invitations that you have given us, the things you've invited us into in these moments of conversation-

Antonia: Mm-hmm.

Sara: ... and I want to ask you, when you think about maybe someone who's hearing this and saying, (laughs) "The Spirit has not led me at this point." You know, maybe you're listening and thinking, "That's one of many things to be done," and you know, "I've got other things to focus on at this moment." What advice, what posture or practice would you recommend someone take as they consider your invitation?

Antonia: Hm. That is a beautiful question. I like that question. So my dear listener, it is my heart's desire that you make time, for you have the fiduciary responsibility as a steward in this Earth realm to care for not just the needs and the desires of what you want, but my dear listener, you are tasked to care for the needs of others, especially if you sit on the throne called white privilege.

As you sit on your throne of white privilege or where you are adjacent to, let's be clear 'cause there are some of you who are adjacent to that throne that lives off the breadcrumbs that fly off the table of systemic oppression, make time. I implore your heart, and I compel your heart, and I prick your heart to

make time to care for the needs of those who don't have access, because the theology of sufficiency as I have learned tells me that there is abundance for everyone-

Sara: Yes.

Antonia: ... and n- not just a lack for these people, and I squander it all. Make the time.

Sara: Yeah. This is the kind of medicine that is now available, that has been available, but that we are implored to be aware of its availability-

Antonia: Mm-hmm.

Sara: ... and to take it. And our lives will not be the same when we swallow that pill.

Antonia: Right.

Sara: And we will see differently.

Antonia: Right.

Sara: Our relationships will change. That's that hope you talk about, the General Assembly. When we begin to see that solidarity is an invitation and an expression of being people of hope and abundance together-

Antonia: Mm-hmm.

Sara: ... collectively.

Antonia: Mm-hmm.

Sara: I thank God that you bring your traditions and experience into this place as Antonia. We're not asking one another to arrive as similar versions of one's self, but coming with an acknowledgment of our own lived experience and meeting together and hearing one another, and I thank God for your witness and the witness of your grandmothers-

Antonia: Mm-hmm.

Sara: ... and your grandfather that you spoke of, your mother's heartbeat.

Antonia: Mm-hmm.

Sara: Which is in you even as we speak.

Antonia: Mm-hmm.

Sara: And I thank God for the way the Spirit compels you to live an open-hearted life, not only to receive, but that heartbeat that beats off of you that is a gift to me when we sit at table together.

Antonia: Thank you. Thank you. If I could say this part also for you and the listeners, in addition to making time, it is also my desire that the cloud by day and the fire by night goes before you all to make your way safe, easy, successful, peaceful, prosperous, and abundant your way with the rear guard of goodness and mercy following you all the days of your life. So make time.

Sara: Amen.

Antonia: Amen.