

Reverend Gonzalez, GreenThumb Harvest Fair, New York  
September 18, 2021

Rachel (00:01):

Okay, so Gregory, will you tell me, please, your name, where you grew up, where you live now and about how old you are?

Reverend Gonzales (00:10):

Yeah. I'm Reverend Jose Gonzales. I was born in Bayamon, Puerto Rico, and I came to this country in 1953 when I was about 18 years old.

Rachel (00:29):

Now this is the question I ask everybody, which is when you think about climate change, what do you think about and how do you feel?

Reverend Gonzales (00:37):

Well, when you tell me about climate change, I think about the oil companies, how they, they are disturbing the whole planet. I think about how ignorant we are about what's going on and ignorant about what we can do personally about this. And we don't have anyone telling us what we can do. Sometimes they talk to us because they have a little project going on. They want to know how to enhance that project or how our opinion would help them.

Rachel (01:23):

Who's "our", is it an organization or...

Reverend Gonzales (01:27):

No, no. I'm not talking about you. No, I'm not talking about you. I don't know you, I don't know your organization. I'm telling you when people have come to me, they have an agenda to fulfill, you see? And so, whatever I say is used or discarded according to their agenda, you see? And, and this is how I feel about the... And then I say, I feel hopeless, because I feel hopeless even though I know that there are many possibilities for progress. If we get our public officials and the people who are in power to do something about it, because they tell us that we can do things about... What do you call the composture?

Rachel (02:18):

Compost?

Reverend Gonzales (02:19):

Yeah. About compost about things like that, which is true. All right. I agree with it, but that's only a very, very small part of what has to be done.

Rachel (02:35):

So you feel hopeless.

Reverend Gonzales (02:37):

Yeah.

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Rachel (02:39):

You said you're a Reverend?

Reverend Gonzales (02:40):

I am.

Rachel (02:40):

Well, then I ask you this question. Do you have a set of spiritual or religious or ethical beliefs that help you navigate this moment of change? Help you understand it?

Reverend Gonzales (02:55):

Well, let me say this. When I need something, I pray. I pray. I also, I know that that God will answer prayer. I know that this give me comfort and give me enough... Being into the animals to do something. But then again, it's not up to me. I try to do something, but I can't. You see, the only thing I can do is that I recycle. What can I do? Recycle. Because that's all I can do.

Rachel (03:41):

So you feel like there's nothing you can do that really enacts, meaningful change around the issue?

Reverend Gonzales (03:49):

That's right. There's nothing meaningful that I can do.

Rachel (03:51):

What is meaningful change?

Reverend Gonzales (03:53):

Well, listen, everything begins with making the powers that be, people in power, aware of that and that we want them to do something. You see? They have to know that we demand that they do something, but they are able to navigate through all that every election time and get it reelected. And like somebody said that she delivers for the community. But I don't see anything. [inaudible 00:04:30], they keep on telling you "We do something for the community." But they don't say what. And you see, for example, I see the president is trying to do something, you see. And I see, and I believe him. He's believable for me. He's believable. He's a Catholic, and you could see that he is a man of good will and that he takes his religious views seriously. And then I appreciate it. I'm Protestant, but I appreciate that of him.

You know what I'm saying? I don't care the other guy's religion. I do care that they practice it honestly. You see? And I think he's doing that. And he's trying to do something for the small people here, you see? And people don't understand that by giving money to the rich ones, they get richer and nothing is done. And we need people that will speak for us. Let's say, for example, you, you see. I need you to speak for me, to speak for the... Because you are a little above me when it comes to this problem too. You're in a situation that you can, maybe I can shout, a soft note and you can shout a higher note. You know what I'm saying? And that if each one does a share, then we are going to move the people. We are going to move them. Many things that could be done, but I don't know. I wish I could give you a better answer because...

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Rachel (06:15):

Well, it's a tough answer. It's a tough question to answer. Since you've been here since the 1950s, are there changes that you've noticed in your local landscapes or seasons or weather over the past 70 years?

Reverend Gonzales (06:32):

Oh yeah. Let me say, in 1957, I was assistant to the pastor on this church here on 121st Street. And, and I was a student, college student, at that time. They were finishing this project and we came and we visited them at that time, offering them a Bible or something. But I haven't seen changes when it comes to housing. You see? I see changes in the community, but the changes do not reach the original people that were here.

You see, initially all this here was German. Then the Italians came... I'm sorry, the Italians came, and the Germans move out. Then the Puerto Ricans came in, and the Italians start moving out. You see? But that was what they called upward mobility. Then, but the Puerto Ricans have been here are now... Other Hispanics are coming in and listen, I'm not saying that I want people out. I'm saying everybody's welcome. But what I'm saying is that the Puerto Ricans came in, they tried to do something and they co-opted our leadership. That's what they did. They co-opted our leadership and we were left with nothing. Now, they're moving them out and you have the middle class element coming in. And I hear that the money that the United States give to Israel, all right, Israel lends it. I mean, put it in bank and the bank lends it to developers who come in here, you see, and develop these houses.

But the Hispanics are not getting anything out of it. There are middle class groups that come into it. So you look at it from different angles and you'll see, it's not a conspiracy. They're not saying... But there is a neglect. You see, there's neglect. People that don't care. But what they don't know is that if I don't care for you and for my neighbor, whatever happens to you eventually is coming to me. And you see all these people that are moving here, you can see that eventually, okay, the Hispanic might move out, maybe move out the city, whatever. But what are going to have left over? They will try to recondition this, and before you know it, they will be fighting each other. I know that when we treat us, we disrespect or neglect, that disrespect and neglect are coming back to us. You know what I'm saying?

Rachel (09:55):

Have you noticed any changes in addition to the population changes, have you noticed changes in weather or seasons?

Reverend Gonzales (10:07):

Well, listen. For example, yesterday, I was surprised because I saw something. It was cloudy all day long here. Cloudy. You see the clouds? But no rain. All day from morning to evening. And you see the clouds. I never seen that before in New York City. And I've been here quite a while.

Rachel (10:35):

Wow. What do you fear for the future? What do you fear fearful for, for the future?

Reverend Gonzales (10:41):

My fear is that we keep on listening to the powerful ones, because they have the means to come to us, but they really don't care for us. And we keep on listening to them instead of doing what we doing now, listening to each other and see what we can do together. You know what I'm saying? And force those

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people to pay their taxes, pay whatever they have to pay and give back to the community while they're stealing from the community. Because they're stealing everything. You might say, no, it's legal business. I don't say no. But somewhere they [inaudible 00:11:37] legality, because they can force the ones that make the laws to make laws according to their wishes. So something is wrong here.

But what I'm saying is I am telling my people, if we stay together through thick and thin, we stay together, I think that we can overcome because nobody is going to do anything for us. But if we honest, we do it for ourselves. So we have to present on any help, and try to do things ourself. Now, that's difficult. That's difficult, because I'm trying, for example, here, I'm trying to see we can start a program, a GED program, people would come in and we teach them so they can get their high school diploma. And after that, we contact, let's say the University of the state of New York and we start a program so they can get a Bachelor's degree. Things like that. But for that, we need some help. And where can I get that help? You know what I'm saying?

Rachel (13:01):

Yeah.

Reverend Gonzales (13:03):

And I'm not talking about you paying me. Because I don't need. Whatever I get every month, it's very small, but it's enough for my trust in it. But I'm talking about programs. Programs in terms of education, fair housing, economic development, employment, and education, that we can do things on those areas, but nobody's listening. Until you now.

Rachel (13:37):

What do you feel hopeful for? Even though you said you feel hopeless. What do you feel hopeful for?

Reverend Gonzales (13:42):

No. let me say this here. If you say hopeful, maybe I'm not hopeful, but I know one thing. I have to keep on fighting. I have to keep on trolling. I have to keep on pressuring my people to do what we have to do.

Rachel (14:01):

Reverend, thank you so much for talking with me. I really loved this conversation. I appreciate you sitting down and sharing with me.

Reverend Gonzales (14:07):

No, I really appreciate you. Your ear.

Rachel (14:11):

Thank you so much. It was really nice talking to you.

Reverend Gonzales (14:12):

All right. Okay. Thank you.