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Jesscia: Welcome to Tangible Theology Learned and Lived.

We're exploring the ways in which theology permeates all aspects of life.

Through conversations with various faculty of Concordia Seminary St. Louis,
we will challenge you to deepen your theology and live out your faith in Christ.

I'm your producer and host, Jessica Bordoleau.

I'll talk with a variety of professors on a variety of topics, something different every episode,
but all pointing to the intersection between faith and daily life, when it's Tangible:

Theology Learned and Lived.

Today we're talking about a very unique and specific way to live out your faith.

I'm talking with Pastor Bill Wilson.

He is the Director of Residential Field Education here at Concordia Seminary St. Louis.

Before that, he spent 15 years as a pastor in St. Louis City,
and before that, he spent 24 years in agricultural business.

He has an MS and BS in agricultural economics and earned his Masters of Divinity here at Concordia Seminary.

Pastor Bill, welcome to the show.

Bill: Thank you, Jessica. Great to be here.

Jesscia: Pastor Bill, you asked me to invite Dr. David Schmitt to the conversation.

He is a professor of homiletics here at Concordia Seminary and chair of the Department of Practical Theology.

He and Pastor Bill share a passion for a rather unique interest.

Dr. Schmitt, welcome to the show.

David: Thank you. It's great to be here.

Jesscia: So Pastor Bill, I invited you to the show because over the last few years, I've seen what started as a personal interest of yours become a passion and now really an effective ministry.

And I've gotten to see that happen because I've been in the same community with you, a member of the same church.

And it all started with your interest in bees.

You and Dr. Schmitt are both beekeepers.

Pastor Bill, how does that happen?

Bill: Well, I have a love for agriculture.

So I grew up farming, raising hogs, cattle, sheep.

So when I moved to St. Louis, beekeeping came along.

It became very popular in the city, urban beekeeping.

So it perked my interest.

And so I looked into it.

I started with the Missouri Beekeepers Association, my wife and I did, to learn more about beekeeping.

And after we got some education on beekeeping,

there were all kinds of clubs here in St. Louis that we were able to be part of.

And then in 2014, 13, somewhere in that area, we decided to put in bees.

Jesscia: And this was while you were working as a parish pastor.

This was just a hobby.

Bill: It was a hobby.

We'd started with a lot of the natives.

So we were working with the Botanical Garden, St. Louis University,
other places on what it means to have native plants for pollinators.

And so it was natural that we thought beekeeping.

And just by the way, you said you've been participating in this.

And so I supply honey to you and your family.

Jesscia: Yes, I buy honey from you every year.

And I give it to my family as Christmas gifts.

And we use it at home.

It is very good honey.

Yes.

Bill: So we started Timothy Urban Beekeepers,
since that was something I really loved to do.

And David became part of that.

David: How did you get involved, David?

Well, my next door neighbor was interested in keeping chickens.

And her husband said, no way.

I don't want you keeping chickens.

That's a lot of work.

And his dad kept bees up in Moline, Illinois.

And she's like, well, how about bees?

And I'm like, I'd love to do bees.

And so have you ever had that experience where maybe you're interested in buying a car,
and then all of a sudden you notice them everywhere?

That's what happened with this.

She wanted, Lisa wanted to do bees.

And so I think I told you, oh, my neighbor and I were thinking of doing bees.

And then all of a sudden, Bill opened the door.

And they're everywhere.

Everybody's doing this.

And it was great to see that community that's kind of hidden.

And then all of a sudden, you begin to see how many different people are doing it.

Bill: That's the unique thing about beekeeping.

It covers a wide range of people, both very skilled people, doctors at Barnes Jewish Hospital,
to people that are living in a trailer house out in Jefferson County.

But we all come together and unite together for one purpose, and that's beekeeping.

To learn from each other, to be better beekeepers.

So my mentor was Ron Danbeck.

He was a member of our congregation.

And he kept bees.

He was a beekeeper.

So he got me interested and Brenda.

And so we developed and he mentored us through the first couple of years.

And now the two of us together work together with Timothy Urban Beekeepers.

Jesscia: And what's Timothy Urban Beekeepers?

Bill: It's a group.

We received a seed grant from Concordia Seminary from Dr. Arand.

Because it's the first article, God's Creation.

How God has miraculously put together bees and what they do pollinators
and how they provide food on our table.

Jesscia: And that's a focus of Dr. Arand's.

Bill: Yes.

Jesscia: Is the care of creation.

Bill: So we received a \$2,000 seed grant.

And from that we were able to help people in our neighborhood.

We started advertising, put up a sign on our fence by the church.

And people were very interested.

Because urban beekeeping is really popular.

And like I said, it's very eclectic.

The group of people that will be beekeepers.

But it's people who are interested in creation.

They're interested in keeping our environment healthy.

Jesscia: And that's been more and more important lately in the environment.

Is the importance of bees and pollinators, right?

Bill: Exactly.

Yes.

Pollinators really.

It's not just honeybees either.

So there's lots of pollinators.

So that's why we worked with Saint Louis University.

Sustainable agriculture.

So how can we sustain the neighborhood?

How can we help?

And cities are really a great place for bees.

Because there's a lot of vacant properties.

People who are planting native plants.

And so bees do really well.

Jesscia: Dr. Schmitt, where are your beehives?

Is this something that you drive out to a farm for?

David: No, no.

We have them in our backyard.

Now we had to get approval from all of our neighbors.

Our city requires that you have approval from all of your neighbors.

So it kind of helped us get to know our neighbors.

Kind of in a bad way.

Because at first we didn't get the approval.

But then we started writing letters and talking and educating people more about bees.

And then the next year we got the approval.

So we put them in our backyard right between our properties.

Because it's the furthest distance from all our neighbors.

So trying to be kind and accommodate any fears they might have.

But nobody's been stung yet.

Which is great.

And you know, and it's really, it's beautiful.

I love it.

I love going out there.

I actually love in the morning having coffee and walking out and looking at the bees.

It's so bizarre.

I didn't know I'd enjoy that so much.

But I do.

You're nodding your head.

Bill: Oh yes.

I love, I take my chair out sometimes and just sit and watch them in the morning.

Fly out, fly back in.

My wife, Brenda, she goes crazy because she thinks, I think that the bees know who I am.

Jesscia: Oh no.

Bill: And they respond to my voice.

And she goes, for real?

You think that's true?

Oh yeah.

She says, Bill, they do not know you.

I said, yeah, yes they do.

They know me.

But then they sting me and I think, well no, they don't know me.

Jesscia: Maybe that's why they sting you.

Bill: Yeah, right, right.

But it's just amazing to watch them in the morning when they take their flight to go
out where they're going to go for the morning.

And bees will go up to about two miles.

So we have two hives in our backyard.

We can have four hives in the city.

That's what's allowed.

But we have two.

And then we have two training hives at Timothy Lutheran Church.

I'm no longer a pastor there or a member, but the club, the Timothy Urban Beekeepers,

I'm still part of that.

And we have two teaching hives there so people can come and learn.

We share equipment.

We have an extractor.

We help with smoking, you know, whatever you need to do, things to get people started.

And that's what that seed grant was for, just to really help them.

Jessica: And it sounds like an involved hobby.

It seems to me that beekeepers have a hidden camaraderie.

I've seen you when you start talking about bees.

d Oh, we do, yeah.

Bill: There's a network, really a great network in the city of St. Louis.

You can go to catalogs and purchase things, but if you can do things locally.

David: Well, the fun thing is, is there's, you know, so my neighbor, Lisa, she's in sciences at

SLU, and I'm more kind of in the arts realm, right?

PhD in English literature.

So, and there's different ways of doing beekeeping.

You've got scientific studies.

And so the Missouri Beekeepers Association, they bring in people who have degrees from

Duke or here or that, and they explain all of their science.

And Lisa loves that.

I like our urban beekeeper where it's more, I think it's more artful.

It's like, well, here's what I did.

And you know, oh really, you just dump sugar on top of it?

Yeah, that's all I do.

And it's kind of, at least it's like, well, where's the science behind that?

And I'm like, you know, so it's kind of different ways of knowing and working together.

Bill: So it's not just simply you put the hives out there and away you go, and then you harvest the honey.

There's a lot of things that go on.

And that's why we get together for these opportunities to share with each other, to actually hands-on get into a beehive.

And so it really brings community together.

You build relationships in your neighborhood, in your community.

And these are people you may never see in the pew, but you're building these relationships.

And so I believe Timothy Lutheran Church is important at the corner of Ivanhoe and Jamison for one reason, because it's a beekeeping spot where people go to learn about beekeeping.

And we harvest the honey in the kitchen.

We extract it.

So it's important that Timothy Lutheran Church is at that corner, providing that opportunity for people to learn about beekeeping.

Jessica: Because the people who are beekeeping in that community, that's their interest.

They're already interested in that.

They're not church members who are doing a new program or new fellowship activity.

Bill: No.

And I'm not Pastor Bill.

I'm Bill Wilson, the beekeeper.

So that's, I try to make certain that everyone knows that we don't do a devotion before we start our meeting.

We don't do prayers.

But I do have people come to me that are part of our beekeeping group when they have something happening and ask for our church to pray or ask for me to pray individually for them.

So that makes it unique in that sense.

Jesscia: People who I've never seen in church are part of Timothy's urban beekeepers.

Bill: But we can talk about God's creation, how God has provided these bees.

There's no way a big bang could ever have provided something this unique and this special as the honeybee.

And we get to witness that.

We get to see that.

David: They really do fill you with wonder just while you watch them.

I mean, you open the hive and the technique is to be quiet and to move slowly.

And if you do that, you just watch this entire world of bees doing their thing.

It's beautiful.

And you think about how many other creatures are just doing their thing and God has orchestrated all of this.

It's amazing.

Bill: During COVID, I was able to do some Zoom meetings with some schools.

And it was really amazing because students got to see close up in the hive without being there.

And one group, I believe it was down in Phoenix, some fifth graders down in Phoenix, they were able to see actually some little baby bees hatch.

David: I saw one.

That is so amazing.

Bill: It's amazing.

Bill: Yes.

And they got to see that.

And so there's interest now in younger people for beekeeping, but also for planting native.

I always tell them if they don't want to have beehives, plant native.

And so that's a way.

Jesscia: What do you mean plant native?

Native plants from Missouri.

You work locally here and plant native plants that the local pollinators can utilize for pollen, nectar, and just making a lot of connections.

That's the thing.

You're just meeting a lot of people and you're seeing people from all walks of life.

Jesscia: How unique that a whole community of people would be hanging out with a pastor to the extent that these beekeepers do, interacting with you just being yourself.

Bill: Yes.

Jesscia: They're just seeing Christ and who Bill Wilson is.

Bill: So this is the great story.

So Timmy Zell is with Fox News and he did a program called The Thread.

His producer went by our church one day and saw this big sign, Timothy Urban Beekeepers.

From that, he decided to do something on Timothy Urban Beekeepers on The Thread.

So I'd encourage people to go and Google The Thread beekeeping and you'll be able to watch.

So there was one gal who joined our beekeeping group, one woman, and she said, she was very adamant, she said, I will never call you pastor.

You're not my pastor.

I said, no, no, I'm Bill Wilson, the beekeeper, even though we meet at church.

And she was always hesitant to even talk to me hardly.

So when Tim did The Thread, she was interviewed.

And prior to our doing The Thread, her brother was sick and then he died.

And she asked me if I would pray for her and pray for her family and include that in our prayers at the church and include it in my devotion life.

And I said, sure I would.

So when Tim was visiting with her, said, how did you get involved with Timothy Urban Beekeepers?

And she said, well, pastor Bill invited me and I thought, wow, she was never going to call me pastor.

And then she did.

Jessica: Someone who was hostile to the idea of church.

Now look to you for support.

Bill: Exactly.

Yeah.

So I mean, that's probably my greatest story, but others I've been able to be involved in some pretty eclectic communities that were hesitant to have a pastor, but I'm just Bill the beekeeper.

And then once they understand that and I can participate and I can add to the conversation, then they become more relaxed and much more understanding.

And then I can just become a regular person within the group.

David: It's kind of like beekeeping, right?

Everybody has all these fears about the bees.

They have fears about the church.

Bill: They got fears.

Exactly.

David: And then when you get to know the bees, you're like, they're not a problem.

They're just working and produce something sweet and great.

Bill: I think people think it's a bait and switch.

So you're trying to bait them into coming to church.

And never was Timothy Urban beekeepers.

That wasn't even in our radar.

Jesscia: You just used the facilities.

Bill: We used the facility.

We used our passion, our love for beekeeping, our opportunity.

And it has, it's just really connected us with lots of people.

And we're just all beekeepers.

We do that when we harvest.

But I think there are things.

Children have been involved in our school.

Word of Life School, but also with our daycare because they see that we have some of those opportunities also.

So there are extensions of the beekeeping that happen.

And we may never know, you know, until we get to heaven, what connections have been made, maybe through the beekeeping.

David: Well, I mean, it's just shared love creates community.

Bill: There you go.

Jesscia: And it's authentic.

It's not a community that you created to draw people in, but an authentically one that you already love.

Bill: Yeah, it's relationships that just grow.

And it's kind of one of those things, you know, you don't see one, someone for maybe three months.

But then when you see them again, you have this passion for beekeeping.

So you immediately catch up on what's been going on in life and then what's been going on with your bees.

And then so it's just a natural way of, you know, flowing into a conversation.

You don't have to start all over again because you have that one common interest and that's beekeeping.

Jesscia: Living out your vocation.

Neighbor.

Bill: Faith is life.

Life is faith.

Jesscia: Now, you both are preachers who sometimes teach homiletic classes on campus.

How is your passion for beekeeping and everything that you've learned about that aspect of God's creation impacted your preaching?

Bill: This really brings in creation.

You know, God the Father.

I always think of that when I think of the bees, how God's creation is so unique and so special.

And we take, we don't see it every day like we should.

And so this is one of the amazing things that sparks me into saying, okay, creation needs to be part of my message.

The uniqueness of what God has given, not only in people, but in what we see each and every day.

The seasons, the four seasons.

So I'd say that's part of my preaching that's changed a little bit because of beekeeping.

Jesscia: First article connection.

Bill: And then also the engagement of community.

You know, how do I get people out?

It doesn't have to be beekeeping, but if someone's passionate about, you know, book reading, reading books.

They can have a book car.

David: Restoring cars.

Bill: Yeah, restoring cars.

You know, anything that someone's passionate about, you can build a community around you.

You can build a neighborhood around you, relationships.

And from that, all kinds of things can happen.

Jessica: I've spent most of my life living in urban settings.

So sometimes the agricultural examples in scripture are a little bit beyond me.

Sheeps, goats, wheat.

And I need someone to explain that to me so that I understand the parables and the Old Testament stories.

And so your connection, especially Pastor Bill with agriculture, influences the way that you understand scripture.

Tell me more about that.

Bill: Well, I think that's what I've been able to bring into the preaching at Timothy.

I know Dr. Kolb has said, you have all these agricultural examples.

You know, so I do really resonate when Jesus talks about, in fact, my devotion this morning was in Mark, where the four kinds of soil that the seed is cast into.

And you know, right immediately I'm thinking, oh yeah, I get that.

You know, that's, you know, so I understand that.

But also what I've noticed, you know, just in the way of relating to people when it comes to agriculture.

It's so natural for people to understand what the soil does.

And so children can learn early on when they're in a classroom, when they plant something in their little styrofoam cup.

You know, they watch the bean seed grow or tomatoes plant grow or whatever.

You know, they get it.

And so, you know, God supplies.

That's how we have food.

I mean, I don't like it when someone says, well, I know where milk comes from.

Comes from Schnucks.

Which is the grocery store.

Yeah, grocery store.

No, it doesn't.

Comes from the cow, you know.

So where does honey come from?

Not from the store.

Comes from the bees.

And so children get an opportunity to see that.

So I have a couple, I think this spring there's a couple homeschoolers.

They've been involved with learning about beekeeping.

We have another high schooler that just contacted me.

He's got a great lab at school where he can build things.

He's going to build a beehive and he's going to start this spring.

So there's just this interest in younger people too.

And providing, you know, care of the environment.

And so this is just one way of doing that.

Jesscia: Now the name of this show is Tangible:

Theology Learned and Lived.

In which ways has beekeeping made your faith more tangible?

David: Well, for me, I think I can remember a time when I was out there.

Remember when I lost the queen?

Bill: Oh yes.

David: Right.

So my hive lost the queen.

The queen bee.

The queen bee, right.

And so when that happens, if you don't do anything, they will die.

The hive will just die.

I mean, you know, if there's no queens that they can make that are present there in terms of the eggs and stuff, they'll just die.

And it was interesting that they keep working.

They keep working.

I mean, so they're without this queen and they're just working and they're going to work till their death.

And I don't know, it struck me.

I know it's kind of the hidden god thing.

You know, when there are times in your life when you're disillusioned.

You're disillusioned with the church.

You're disillusioned with your congregation.

And how do you respond?

And sometimes we just go all wacky, right?

Or else we just walk away.

We want nothing else to do with the church ever in our life.

And here are the bees when that happens, when that disillusionment happens.

They just keep doing what they're doing.

They just keep doing what they're doing.

And so there's something about the discipline of discipleship, particularly in times of disillusionment when you feel like, you know, when something major has happened.

The fact that you just keep doing what the Lord has given you to do.

And the Lord will work it out in his time.

I mean, that to me would be like one example of how it can shape how you contemplate and think about God and its connection to the daily life.

Bill: But I believe it's looking for God's creation every day.

So you see something miraculous when you see, you know, the trees that are not blooming.

Or you see the evergreen trees that continue to bloom or continue to have green throughout the entire winter.

And how they provide for the rabbits, the squirrels, the deer, all those sorts of things.

And so you get a really a handle on trying to be more aware of God's creation.

Jesscia: Our final question is always, what do you want our listeners to know?

Bill: I want them to know that there are ways to connect to your neighborhood, to engage your neighborhood, to build relationships.

That the church isn't for itself inside.

But how can you get outside?

And this is one way.

But if all of a sudden there's interest, not only in your church community, but in your neighborhood, you move forward and you see what happens.

Jesscia: And you're good at finding interest.

You've been bugging me for five years to put a beehive in my backyard.

Bill: Exactly.

So I mean, you know, yes, it's not for everyone.

But I do love that you plant native plants.

We do.

You and Adrienne are very good at that.

David: I guess I would say that if there's something you're interested in, reaching out to others causes you to suddenly discover communities that you never knew before existed.

And you become part of a group of people and you begin to find shared passions.

And it's just it's a wonderful thing.

I think our tendency can always be to turn to the Internet for more information.

But, you know, and that's good.

But sometimes if you just turn to your next door neighbor or somebody and talk to them,
you'll find connections you never knew existed.

And that can really be enjoyable.

Jesscia: Well, that's all for today.

I'd like to thank our guests, Bill Wilson and Dr. David Schmitt, for being on the show.

Thanks, guys.

Bill/David: Thank you.

Jesscia: And thank you for listening.

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