**107 WWIT**

[00:00:00] [00:00:00] **vo:** Welcome to the wheel with the podcast, with your host Devin weeders. We're a community that is committed to celebrating diversity and inclusion, providing and promoting disability, education and awareness, and having fun to remember, to rate and review the podcast and enjoy the show.

[00:00:32] **Devon:** Hey guys, welcome to our first episode as real with it. I am so excited if you didn't know, we rebranded, we have a website we're upping our social media game, all of the things to make this really very, a good experience for you guys. So it wasn't do and be a part of, please give us a few months because it's a lot to learn really.

[00:00:59] Two people [00:01:00] show. So it's a lots of fun, but, um, we will be steadily improving this and feel free to email us@helloatwheelwithit.com again, that's hello@wheelwithit.com. If you have. Any suggestions or questions, or like to be a guest, just put something in the subject line that was that's. We know where you're writing to me about.

[00:01:28] And I will, you know, get back to you as soon as I can. I will put that link in the show notes too. So today we have. Laura see Rob, she is dividable. I met her once at a Panera bread because my therapist got to know her from sewing, organic lettuce. Believe it or not. So we talk about that. We talk about going to seminary.

[00:01:55] We talk about disparity. We talk about a lot of things and it's a little [00:02:00] disjointed in parts. I'm sorry. I'm a little receipt. This is my first one back after a long, long break. Yeah. Other than that, it's a great interview and I hope you guys enjoy the show and don't forget to go to wheel with a.com, which I will put in the show notes and yeah.

[00:02:18] Enjoy the show. And I can't wait to make more of these.

[00:02:28] So tell us about yourself and then we'll go from there.

[00:02:33] **Laura:** Yeah, I'm Laura and I have a blog that Laura see rob.com. Um, I became a writer a number of years ago, as I realized people that were meeting me, didn't know a lot about my disability and the way my life. Outside of the few minutes that I was meeting people at church.

[00:02:55] Um, so over time I realized I needed [00:03:00] to create more space for conversations and I started blogging and then more conversations also started in person as a result of that.

[00:03:10] **Devon:** So what is your book about.

[00:03:14] **Laura:** Um, it's about my experiences of life with a disability. And it's also, um, past couple of years, I started seminary where I explored disability and theology.

[00:03:26] So I also write a bit about that so that people can learn about the disability. Experience and how it is a part of a lot of people's lives, but that doesn't take away from their identity and who God said they are as a person.

[00:03:47] **Devon:** So what it's for the people who don't know, I know, but for the people who don't know, what is your disability and what is it.

[00:03:56] It's

[00:03:56] **Laura:** called arthro gripe, posis, [00:04:00] multiplex, congenital. And that basically means I was born with a lack of muscle mass and a number of my joints have contractures. So my arms and my legs are affected. And how does

[00:04:16] **Devon:** that like, uh, affect you in your day-to-day life as a result of your disparity? If you don't mind me asking.

[00:04:24] **Laura:** Oh, no, that's fine. Mostly means I need a lot of physical assistance to do task, like getting up out of the bed and getting dressed somebody my to help feed me and give me a shower. Um, Either put me in my wheelchair or helped me walk. It was by holding onto my arm, but like once I'm in a corner, I can do my own tasks.

[00:04:49] So, um, if I'm set up with my books, I can read my own books and write, or if I'm at my desk with the two lower height, I can use my own computer. Um, [00:05:00] but the, in between tasks, I need a little bit of this system.

[00:05:04] **Devon:** So do you live on your

[00:05:06] own?

[00:05:07] **Laura:** No, I live with my parents at the moment.

[00:05:09] **Devon:** Okay. Cause I was going to ask you how assistance works.

[00:05:13] Cause, cause, um, I've navigated that or trying to well look into live on my own and it's almost impossible. So if you lived on your own, I was going to be like, oh, how does that work? But

[00:05:25] yeah, it is very tricky. I lived more independently when I went to college back then. Number of years ago now. Um, so I would have, um, coordinated caregivers and nurse aids during those years.

[00:05:43] But right now it is a bit difficult where I live to find consistent in order to leave on my own. And you live in Virginia,

[00:05:52] right? So. I actually met you once. I don't know if you remember this, but I actually met you once [00:06:00] because my former, uh, physical therapists brought organic lettuce

[00:06:05] from you. And she told me

[00:06:07] about you and we met at

[00:06:09] Panerea Bread

[00:06:10] **Laura:** Yeah, I remember meeting you. I remember

[00:06:14] **Devon:** that was crazy. And now we're here talking on a podcast. So you mentioned earlier that, um, you deal with disability in theology. Uh, tell us about what you've been learning through that. Cause that's just fascinating.

[00:06:28] **Laura:** Yeah, it's been a really cool opportunity for me to explore my own personal questions and just to bring theology more open to my blog readers and help people to understand that disability is a type of what I call like a human limitation.

[00:06:47] And every human has limits of some kind. But that doesn't mean I'm not an image bearer, like God called humans in Genesis. [00:07:00] Um, so I think it's important to talk about disability and theology together because in the churches as a whole, we don't commonly hear about disability and how. I as a person with a disability, still have gifts to bring to the church.

[00:07:22] And that goes back to the gifts of the spirit that we hear about in, I think it's first Corinthians, second Corinthians. Um, People with disabilities can often be overlooked inside the church and not really given the opportunity to use their gifts. So a few years ago I started teaching the preschool kids because that was something I could do for my wheelchair.

[00:07:49] And I taught kids for four years. And then that was something where I said, Hey, I can do. Will you give me the chance. And then a few years later, [00:08:00] I spoke to my church and shared my testimony and that helped more people to see me as a person and understand a little bit more about my experiences. Um, and I was.

[00:08:17] Invited to be a youth leader after that because the person in charge of our youth ministry thought, Hey, I can do this. So there was a contrast between me advocating for myself versus me being invited to participate. If that makes sense.

[00:08:35] **Devon:** Yes. And that's the reason why I want my local church because they have a, uh, Uh, kids, disability ministry and an audult disability ministry.

[00:08:48] So they really are better than most that, including people at disparity. So I will bet, but, um, has your church made any changes [00:09:00] since you've done that?

[00:09:04] **Laura:** More difficult for me to answer that question with the pandemic. I haven't been able to attend in person very well. Um, so I think in general, after I spoke and share my testimony, I did notice more openness and more people greeting me because I go to a larger. Congregation. So there is a big crowd and that means there's a lot of people who don't know me and they often don't take the time to say hello or talk to me.

[00:09:35] But once I spoke to the whole crowd, people were more open to reading me or giving me a hug during the greeting moment back before the pandemic. That is so

[00:09:46] what can the church in general. Do better to like include people with disparities.

[00:09:56] Ooh, it's hard to narrow it down. Short answer. [00:10:00] Um, I think mostly it means just getting to know the person.

[00:10:04] Like if you have someone with a disability in your congregation, you have to have a chance to talk to them outside of the church service. And I think it's also. If there are some leadership people involved with helping with the disability ministry or just, um, bridging the gaps, I think.

[00:10:31] **Devon:** Yeah. Are there any resources that you find helpful and like, Churches too.

[00:10:39] **Laura:** I read a book by Eric Carter about including people with disabilities. Um, I think that the name of it, he is a professor out of Vanderbilt and he writes a lot about what inclusion. Like from a standpoint of [00:11:00] researching that demographic. Um, so I read his book and there's a lot of practical guidelines in this book about like coordinating with the different services in your community that work with people with disabilities and talking with churches at the same time.

[00:11:23] **Devon:** Yeah. Can you get me the name of that and send it to me and then we'll put it in the show notes.

[00:11:29] **Laura:** Yes, I can do that once we're off.

[00:11:31] **Devon:** Okay. So we're jumping back a little bit. How, first of all, what did you major in, in college?

[00:11:40] **Laura:** I majored in communication studies.

[00:11:42] **Devon:** Oh my gosh. Um, and I have to ask

[00:11:47] **Laura:** you, how did

[00:11:48] **Devon:** you end up

[00:11:48] **Laura:** seling lettuce?

[00:11:50] Well, that was interesting. Uh, beginning story. Um, I had started to. Buy it [00:12:00] as a customer because I eat a lot of salads and I learned about the business, um, when they were first starting out and I saw that they were hiring part-time sales people that you could work from home. And I thought, I think I want to give this a try and.

[00:12:23] I applied and I did it for a couple of years and that turned into a really cool way for me to practice public speaking, because I had to present the letters product to the different businesses or people's homes.

[00:12:40] **Devon:** Yeah. That must have been interesting. Are there any good organic wellness stories that you could tell us?

[00:12:48] **Laura:** Um, I don't know. I think it's just the funny part for me is I was starting to become a writer and speaker along the same line, the time, like along the same time that I was [00:13:00] selling. But, and so for me, it's like, I started my public speaking by selling lettuce.

[00:13:05] **Devon:** Yeah. That's an interesting public speaking story.

[00:13:09] Um, so you're in seminary now, correct? Yeah. So when do you graduate from seminary?

[00:13:16] **Laura:** I'm not exactly sure. I'm taking it a little bit slowly just to take classes when my time and energy allow me to do that. Um, so I probably have a couple more years before I'm officially graduating.

[00:13:31] **Devon:** So what are you putting on doing after you get out of a seminary?

[00:13:37] **Laura:** Well, I hope to keep writing and speaking and maybe, um, once the pandemic improves, I can do more speaking, like I used to do.

[00:13:45] **Devon:** Yes. So like, what's your favorite class that you've taken in seminary?

[00:13:54] **Laura:** My first one was very detailed. It was a [00:14:00] theology class that also gave me a big history of what the church thinks and has said about disability. A whole lot of years. And I think that was a good beginning point for me to just jump right into both topics about the historical church leaders, along with the theology.

[00:14:23] And I think that one really was eyeopening for myself.

[00:14:27] **Devon:** So where are you going to seminary?

[00:14:30] **Laura:** It's called Western theological seminary. And it's looking at in Holland, Michigan.

[00:14:36] **Devon:** Oh, so you're doing this online then?

[00:14:43] Yes. I heard west hall in Michigan. I was like, well, dang, that's a long commute. Um, so, um, what do you enjoy doing? Like, what are your hobbies?

[00:14:57] **Laura:** Um, I love [00:15:00] to read books, but I also love to, to, so, um, and recently I started trying my hand at water coloring.

[00:15:12] **Devon:** With your disability

[00:15:16] **Laura:** oh, no, that's fine. I use my hands. The one hand I use to guide the fabric. In one hand, I used push the foot pedal

[00:15:27] and look up Laura C., Robb, I have a video it's called. This is how I, so

[00:15:33] **Devon:** I will put that in the show notes, because that is fascinating. Um, So, is there any research being done, like Bao your disability? Um, and is there any like for therapies? Cause I know it's pretty rare, isn't it?

[00:15:53] **Laura:** Yeah. The thing about one in 3000 are born with a form of arthrogryposis and the other interesting [00:16:00] fact is there are 400 plus types of it.

[00:16:04] So it really encompasses a whole lot of. Different conditions. And when I was growing up, I had a lot of physical therapy. That was the main treatment route that my family chose. And there are researchers studying different things nowadays. I don't know a lot about it at the moment, except they're just trying to keep up with people, especially adults.

[00:16:31] There's not a lot of research with adults with arthrogryposis. I think most of the research. When I was younger was about kids and how the best treat them. Um, it's about like maximizing your abilities with your, the muscles you do have and the joints that do work.

[00:16:55] Did that answer your question? Yeah.

[00:16:57] **Devon:** Um, so do you wish there was more [00:17:00] research for adults or, um, Are you kind of happy with it being kid focused?

[00:17:11] **Laura:** Um, I mean, I think I like more research as adults because sometimes I wonder if the experiences I had with my body now are, are related to arthrogryposis or something else, or is it just a normal part of life?

[00:17:29] **Devon:** Yeah. So yeah, if there could be more like how it affects your body,

[00:17:36] **Laura:** just like kind of what to expect.

[00:17:39] **Devon:** What is one thing that you wish people knew about your disparity?

[00:17:48] **Laura:** Well, when I always come down to is that I use a wheelchair when I'm in public. And so people can see my disability physically, but I all, I still wish that [00:18:00] there was less of an assumption that I am also mentally affected by.

[00:18:07] I can attest to that.

[00:18:09] **Devon:** Yes.

[00:18:09] **Laura:** Yay. Because there's still this problem in the world where people don't want to talk to me or they're talking to my companion. There's just this weird barrier. It's still very prevalent. Why do you think

[00:18:25] **Devon:** that is that they feel like your mentors Heron's too.

[00:18:33] **Laura:** What was your question again? Why do you

[00:18:34] **Devon:** think that they feel like you're meant to challenge too and not just physically?

[00:18:39] **Laura:** Oh, I think there's just an assumption that is in culture because I don't know exactly why I think. They just don't want to take the time to be uncomfortable and to get to know somebody who is very different than the way they look, maybe.

[00:18:58] **Devon:** Um, yeah, I guess, [00:19:00] uh, and like the representation that we see on TV up until recently has been largely people with mental health disparities. So maybe that's a reason.

[00:19:09] **Laura:** Yeah, you're right. Yeah. That does not help.

[00:19:13] **Devon:** But yeah, it's a stinky barrier that needs to go away. Okay. So our last few questions that we always ask are, number one, what inclusion is fill in the blank.

[00:19:29] **Laura:** It's really, to me, it's about the longing. It's not just me being physically present somewhere. It's about me having space. With my peers in a place where I also belong. Um,

[00:19:46] **Devon:** and what has got you hopeful right now?

[00:19:52] **Laura:** What's got me hopeful right now, the summer season, and just being able to connect [00:20:00] with friends again after this pandemic.

[00:20:04] **Devon:** That is a great answer. Um, thank you so much for coming on.

[00:20:10] **Laura:** You're welcome. Thanks for the invite.

[00:20:11] **Devon:** And we will see you guys next episode. Bye

[00:20:15] guys.

[00:20:19] **vo:** Thanks for listening to wheel with it. You can support the show by visiting our website wheel with a.com. Following us on social media and financially supporting us. You can find all those links in the show notes. See you next time.