



PROGRAM TRANSCRIPT

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WELCOME

Daniel Pawlus: Welcome to “30 Good Minutes!” We’re glad to have you with us for this half-hour reflection on faith. I’m Daniel Pawlus.

Lillian Daniel: And I’m Lillian Daniel. Our guest today is Christian philosopher and inspirational speaker, Terry Hershey. He’s going to talk to us about what it means to be a community.

Daniel Pawlus: We also welcome back Michael Siegel, Senior Rabbi of Anshe Emet Synagogue in Chicago, who will reflect on how the actions of one can affect an entire community.

Lillian Daniel: And we begin with the story of a woman who takes the Jewish concept of *Tikkun Olam*, “repairing the world,” to heart. Alison Lighthall works to re-build the lives of American soldiers returning with the psychological scars of war. This is her spiritual journey.

SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Alison Lighthall: In Judaism we have an integrated part of our belief system that’s called *tikkun olam*, which is “to repair the world.” The siren of *tikkun olam* has always been there for me and I have felt a need to participate in repairing the world. Nursing has been one of the ways that I’ve done that. As a Jew, I think that one of the things that we have is a relationship with God where we argue with God a lot. In having this argument with God, it deepened my relationship and my faith that strength is there because I felt pulled through some of these adversities in a way that couldn’t be explained in any other.

I feel very often that I am a conduit of God’s love and God’s words and God’s strength to other people who are in need and suffering. But really the work of psychiatric care is the work of spirit and soul. The soldiers that come out of Afghanistan and Iraq are finding that when they get home that there is a huge adjustment. We’re doing what we can to bring them back integrated into the community. It’s still not enough. Our presence in Iraq is more painful than we were prepared for. Everybody is a suspect in Iraq. The children are suspect, the women are suspect, the peasants are suspect, the elderly are suspect. And that is making it impossible for a moral person from the United States to participate in that war with their morality and their sense of dignity and integrity intact because they will not drive over a child. They will not hit an innocent bystander if they can possibly avoid it. So the insurgents have our soldiers in terrible moral danger and it has injured them at such deep level in some ways that it requires a special kind of care for them to recover

from that.

That photograph is out of “Newsweek,” I think. It was so stunning that I clipped it out and framed it. The soldier is either a doctor or a nurse. Whatever it is that has happened is over and he is left with this baby in his hands. You can see on his face a kind of deep compassion fatigue that doesn’t get talked about very often. It takes a tremendous amount of courage and strength to face these challenges that these men and women are facing and come home in one piece. What I want to do is carry on my own personal mission that I started in the military and I want to do in on the civilian side.

Hand to Hand Contact is my new organization. It is dedicated to trying to bring the soldier all the way home, to help civilians understand what the military experience has been like for these Iraq war veterans, and to create compassionate communities into which the veteran can return. As long as there is love, there is hope. And I don’t think that any of my soldiers would say that I talk about love a lot but I think that what they experience with me is a kind of love.

INTRODUCTION

Daniel Pawlus: Many thanks to Alison Lighthall for sharing her spiritual journey. For more information about Alison and “Hand 2 Hand Contact,” you can visit our web site at 30goodminutes.org. Now, let me tell you about today’s speaker.

Terry Hershey lives on an island in the Puget Sound, where most days you can find him in his garden. After graduating from seminary, he was a minister to youth and young adults. Today he writes and speaks about contemporary spirituality, especially our relationships with God and each other. It’s a great privilege to have Terry Hershey with us today on *30 Good Minutes*. Welcome, Terry.

MESSAGE

Terry Hershey: Thanks, Daniel. It’s good to be here.

This little boy was having nightmares. You know, the bad kind where you have to go to Mama. It’s really no use going to Dad because he just says, “Go to Mama.”

“Mama, Mama, I’m having nightmares!”

“It’s OK, honey. Here’s what I want you to do: I want you to go back to your room. I want you to kneel down by your bed. I want you to pray to Jesus and he’ll fix it.”

“OK, mom.”

He went back to his room, knelt down by his bed, prayed to Jesus, got back in bed and he had more nightmares. All mamas out there, you know this story. Back and forth to Mama all night long. Six times: “Mama, Mama, I’m having nightmares!”

“I know, honey...”

“I know, Mom. I’m going back to my room. I’m going to kneel down by my bed. I’m going to pray to Jesus and he’ll fix it, but before I do that can I just lay in bed with you and have you hold me?”

“Well sure, honey. Why?”

“Because sometimes, Mama, I need Jesus with skin on him!”

I understand where he’s coming from. And it reminds me of a story in the Gospel of Matthew. A very strange story actually. Jesus is talking to a large group of people and his mother and brothers come to visit him. And Jesus, who is the PR man’s nightmare, says the thing that you don’t expect him to say. He pretends he doesn’t know his family. He does an amnesia thing: “Who is my mother?” And the disciples are thinking, “Lord have mercy! He’s been in the sun too long.”

And then Jesus says something extraordinary. He points to the people in the crowd, just the people who are there and says, “This is my mother. This is my brother. This is my sister.” If Jesus meant that, it’s going to change the way we live, that we are literally linked. Now he’s not making some theology about the nuclear family. He’s not saying this is the way you treat your mother and brothers and sisters when you go home for Christmas or Thanksgiving. He’s saying something more profound and that is this: that if we really are brother and sister, then no one, *no one* is on a faith journey alone. No one.

If that’s true, if we really are brother and sister, then it literally changes the way we live. But if it’s true, then that means there is going to be some good news and bad news with, this which is at least better than the sermons I got when I was a kid. Those sermons were bad news and then more real bad news! But this at least has some good news. But we’ll start with the bad news first.

If Jesus meant that we are really brother and sister, Mother Teresa said it best. She said that one of the reasons we don’t have peace in our time is because we have forgotten that we belong to one another. So bad news number one: none of us can make it alone. Now this is bad news because we live in a culture that we pride ourselves in self-sufficiency, self-reliance, we pull ourselves up by our bootstraps. When we’re flat on our back we shake our fist at the world. We can handle it, thank you very much! I mean even as a country we do this whole “we can do it.” None of us can make it alone.

Bad news number two: if we really are brother and sister, then guess what? We’ve got to quit keeping score. Now that really is a problem because in this culture our value, our worth, our very identity is predicated on keeping score: what we do, what we produce, what we achieve, what we accomplish, and how busy we are, anything that’s newer and faster and more up to date. And then what happens is, if our paradigm for our value and worth is keeping score, then we’re no longer brother and sister and we see one another as competitor or adversary. And then I spend all of my energy because I’m keeping score. I spend all of my energy putting you down or trying to lift me up. And I use a lot of conversations talking about us and them. The problem is this: if our paradigm is keeping score, then we’re scared to death to be real with each other, to be ordinary.

There's a great story about a Sunday school class of first graders. The kids were acting up so the teacher tried to settle them down: "Kids, kids, kids, kids, kids!" she said. That's how you can tell you've taught Sunday school too long! "Kids, kids, kids, kids, kids!" She said, "Let's play a game. I'll describe something to you, you tell me what it is. It's a furry little animal with a big bushy tail and it climbs up trees and stores nuts in the winter." Nobody said anything. She said, "You are a good Sunday school class. You know the right answer to this question. Furry little animal, big bushy tail, climbs up trees and stores nuts in the winter." Finally one little girl raised her hand. The teacher said, "Emily?" Emily said, "Well teacher that sounds like a squirrel to me but I'll say Jesus!" If we're really brother and sister, a squirrel can just be a squirrel because we have nothing to prove and no one to impress.

Which leads to the third piece of bad news and that is this: if we are really connected, if we are really brother and sister, if we are on this faith journey together, then that means we're going to be connected to some people we don't like, people we didn't choose, and people who are different. Here's the extraordinary irony. Some day, because we are brother and sister, someday God's grace will touch you, will touch me through someone I did not choose and someone I least expected. And some day God's grace will touch someone else, some one different through me in a way I did not anticipate. You see, when I look at that person who is different, I need to recognize that God did not put them on this earth for me to change or for me to convict or me to save. God put them here for me to learn from, listen to, to challenge and be challenged by, and to enjoy together this dance called life.

OK. That's the bad news. Now the good news. Three pieces. One: if we really are brother and sister, then we don't need to pretend we've got our act together! We can literally do this: *Phew!* [wipes his brow] Why? Because if we're brother and sister there is nothing to prove and this is not a race or a contest or a beauty pageant. Which leads to good news number two and three and that is this: we can receive from one another without keeping score and we can give to one another without expecting a pay back.

Where I live in Seattle, there is a program, in a town called Bellevue, called Buddy Ball. Now, Buddy Ball is a program for baseball that mixes able-bodied children with children with disabilities. It was started by an extraordinary woman named Beth Campbell. She started it for her own son who is ten, who was not allowed to play—and I love the way we say it with kids—he was not allowed to play with "normal children" in Little League. So she started Buddy Ball. He had a variety of disabilities and it's called Buddy Ball because if you can't run, a buddy runs for you. If you can't hit, a buddy hits for you. If you can't throw, a buddy throws for you. You've got to go to a Buddy Ball game! It's an extraordinary thing to see a kid in a motorized wheelchair as he gets to go by himself, to see a kid in a motorized wheelchair trying to stretch a double into a triple. It's a hard thing because he raises his hands to cheer and when he does the wheelchair stops. You've never seen such joy! I'm quoting from the Seattle Times now and it said this. Oh, I have to say, you have to know the rules of Buddy Ball and one of the rules is it is against the rules to strike out! Once you get six strikes, you automatically get to go to first. I know a lot of you are saying, "Hey, I could have played baseball that way!"

I gave a talk once to some professional psychologists and ministers and I talked about getting six strikes and going to first. And this man was so angry because he got in my face and said, "How

dare you teach that kind of freedom to children!" I said, "Sir, you could use more roughage in your diet!" We're scared to death when we live by grace instead of keeping score. The Seattle Times says this: when that son gets to first, it says he doesn't stop there. It says, but he doesn't go to second either; it says he runs into the crowd and he hugs everybody. And then it goes on to say this: "It is what sports can be. People running and jumping and playing because nobody's keeping score because nobody cares."

And I say to you, it is what community can be. Some place where we can run and jump and play because at least for a minute or a day we quit keeping score. Why can we do that? Because we know that essentially we are brother and sister, we are connected and we are not ruled by fear and we are not ruled by score. And in the end because we are connected, we can literally be Jesus in skin.

CONVERSATION

Lillian Daniel: If you'd like a free printed or audio copy of the message you just heard from Terry Hershey, we'll tell you how to place an order at the end of the program. Or you can visit our website at 30goodminutes.org to watch the video or download the text anytime. Now, let's talk with Terry Hershey.

Terry Hershey: Hi guys. It's good to see you!

Lillian Daniel: Terry, when I think about what gets in the way of community for people, I know there are so many people who say I would love to have an authentic experience of community, even a faith community. But what gets in the way is this tyranny of business and much of the busyness in the community where I live in the suburbs of Chicago has to do with children being on sports teams and that prevents them from even getting to church on Sunday.

Daniel Pawlus: She got you there I guess!

Lillian Daniel: How do you speak to that?

Terry Hershey: Oh. At one level people recognize it. I mean we recognize that it's out of whack, you know. We're out of breath and out of time and we know that something is off. But here's where we get in trouble when we assume that we can take care of it by adding more to it, you know. So we say, OK, I can be more authentic and be real if I have more time with you but I need to balance my life so we tell them to go buy a book on balancing their life. In other words, we add more to their life by some new technology, too. So we exacerbate the problem with the problem. And the first step is someone willing to say, "I can't do this. I can't live this way anymore." Part of the problem is the permission to say this isn't working for me, which is a way of being real, which is where community starts. Because if I'm willing to say this isn't working for me, I need another way to this, then maybe you will say, "You know what? I understand." Just in that exchange we now have community because we have some place of vulnerability.

Daniel Pawlus: I'm so glad we're talking about this idea of community because I'm fascinated by it on a couple of levels. I think people are drawn to faith communities for one thing and then there's a separation sometimes about the personal relationship that they have with God. How do

those two things play off of each other? Because my experience has been when I'm part of a vital faith community, it feeds the other personal piece. But to have just one or the other, it seems less full in a way. Would you agree with that?

Terry Hershey: I absolutely do agree with that. Part of my own faith journey is spending time with my spiritual director, who is a Benedictine, and so I've spent a lot of time at a monastery with him. Of course, the Benedictines would say that whenever you greet someone, you greet Christ. And so what was ingrained in me, which is the assumption that I really cannot have that one on one with God unless I see God in the face of those people around me. So I can't really differentiate it. In our culture, what we've done—at least from the Christian church—what we've done is this “me and Jesus” mentality, you know. But it's impossible. There is no such thing. It's impossible.

Lillian Daniel: In some ways it's exasperated by the very thing we're doing here, which is a religious television show, but there is a phenomenon, of course, in America of people who are distanced from real-life faith communities and have this very personal relationship with God through only the media or the radio. What effect does that have on folks?

Terry Hershey: That's a great question. I mean because it's the same with technology, too, because all of the way we do email and FaceBook or all of those other things. I can have my community but it's a pseudo-community. And I know a lot of churches are even toying with that where they are actually doing worship services online, you know. They're all by video or whatever it's called. That stuff is way beyond me! I was born in the wrong century. But I think personally it takes a toll. I mean Phyllis Tickle and I have talked about this and Phyllis says, no, you need to let people find community where they can. Just because it's not the way I believe it should happen doesn't mean it's not at some level “real.” But at some place, some time, there still has to be Jesus in skin. There has to be something with skin to it.

Lillian Daniel: And even some skin to a person that you disagree with. I loved your point about in community you're forced to sit next to somebody in the pew who you might disagree with on every political issue there is.

Terry Hershey: Yes. And it think that's the whole extraordinary thing about, as an Episcopalian, when we pass the peace. I mean that's a whole extraordinary thing: when you pass the peace you're passing the peace to someone that may not be your kind of people. But the point is that skin means something then. What's what happened to me. I went through a divorce and as it so happens in the church, the church fired me because that's what the church does when you're down. They tell you how down you really are! You thought you were down before? Wait until we give you the good news. And I remembered I did the whole self-reliance thing, you know. I was angry at everybody. It doesn't matter. I mean nobody's going to mess with me. I would hold myself up and I had enough beer and ice cream to tide me over for a long time. And there were four people, people that I wouldn't have been friends with, people that I wouldn't have chosen and they were different from me, who came to my house one day and said, “We heard you're going down. We want to go down with you.” And they literally were Jesus in skin to me, to remind me I can't do this.

Daniel Pawlus: You've had a unique opportunity now in the traveling that you do to speak to a lot of different audiences. I'm sure you get many different view points on community, but maybe you could share a couple of them with us that really speak to you in a profound way. And then community can be so many different things to so many different people as we know. We can find it within a ministry, within a church, or within the church as a whole, or with a group of friends. Are there any in particular that really come to mind when you're on your travels and so forth?

Terry Hershey: Well, the biggest one is the story we all know about 9/11, because I work in New York and so I have many, many friends who were there at the time it happened, and what they say about it. It didn't matter to talk about what differences there were with us. We automatically were involved in rebuilding and healing. So that's the extraordinary thing about a catastrophe that allows us to put aside those differences. And the second thing I'm finding with groups now is—and these are not necessarily groups who are in churches but kind of spin offs from churches—is very much in the model of a 12 step group. I see a lot of these in places I go where people are saying I can't live this way anymore. I need to get with other people. And the first thing they've decided to do is: how can I quit labeling people? I think of the world we live in now and the fear, the whole thing about Iraq. Immediately we are suspicious of people because they're different. The trouble is, as soon as you label someone, you dismiss them. And these groups that I'm familiar with as I travel are talking about how can we take the labels down, get rid of the labels.

Lillian Daniel: What could we do to transform the church, if you will, into a place that could respond more authentically in that post-9/11 way to a more ordinary disaster like a divorce?

Terry Hershey: That's a great question!

Daniel Pawlus: That's a really good question.

Terry Hershey: Because my experience is, I wish they'd been there for me. And yet, you know, that's a cop out because the truth is there were four people there and, in fact, those four people were in the church. And maybe the powers that be didn't respond like I wanted them to, but the real church did, those four. They were Jesus in skin. So I can't hide behind that. But what I do know is this, as much as I am angry at the bureaucracy and powers that be that don't do that, I still have the opportunity—in fact, the responsibility—to make it happen in my life.

Daniel Pawlus: We're so glad you joined us, Terry. I wish we had much more time. Thank you for being here.

Terry Hershey: Thanks. It was great to be with you guys.

INTRODUCTION TO REFLECTION

Lillian Daniel: Thank you. And now, Michael Siegel, Senior Rabbi of Anshe Emet Synagogue in Chicago, brings us a final thought on community.

REFLECTION

Michael Siegel: There is a story told about two men on a wooden ship well out into the ocean.

Suddenly, one of the men began drilling under his seat. The man sitting next to him became alarmed and asked for an explanation. The other stopped drilling just long enough to say that this was his seat and there he will do what he wants, and demanded that the questioner just mind his own business.

Friends, this is a wonderful illustration of the effect of our actions on the larger community. We may think that what we do affects only us, but the fact of the matter is, is that there is always resonance to our actions. In an individualistic society where the sovereign self reigns supreme too many of us play the role of the man with the drill. We seem to be more interested in protecting individual rights than thinking about the responsibility we have to one another. Community begins when we show awareness of those around us and the power that our actions have over the larger whole.

CLOSING REMARKS

Lillian Daniel: Thank you, Michael, and our thanks again to Terry Hershey, Alison Lighthall, and you for joining us today on “30 Good Minutes.” I’m Lillian Daniel.

Daniel Pawlus: And I’m Daniel Pawlus. Before we go, I encourage you again to visit our website at 30GoodMinutes.org for more information about today’s program and a wonderful collection of messages, reflections, and stories to deepen your faith. Now, from all of us at “30 Good Minutes,” may your faith be strong in the week ahead and may your heart be open to God.