



## PROGRAM TRANSCRIPT

**Program #5206**

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### WELCOME

**Lillian Daniel:** Welcome to “30 Good Minutes!” We’re happy you’ve joined us for this half-hour of reflection on faith. I’m Lillian Daniel.

**Lydia Talbot:** And I’m Lydia Talbot. Our guest today is Grace Imathiu, a native of Kenya and now a United Methodist pastor in Wisconsin. She’s going to talk to us about “patience.”

**Lillian Daniel:** We also welcome back our good friend, Michael Siegel, Senior Rabbi of Anshe Emet Synagogue in Chicago. He’ll be reflecting on what it means to persevere in the face of hardship.

**Lydia Talbot:** And we begin with the profile of a man who left the hectic world of commodities trading to teach people to deal with conflict in a way that embodies compassion. Scott Seagren helps people resolve disputes by learning to see things in a different way. Some might call it a Godly way. Let’s watch.

### SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

**Scott Seagren:** I’m Scott Seagren and I am a conflict coach. Conflict coaching really was developed probably in the last ten years because people are finding that, in the midst of litigation and even in the midst of mediations where parties come together to work out their differences and then go off, sometimes there will be built in resentments. My passion is in letting people open up the possibility that conflict can actually be an opportunity in their life.

I was down at the Board of Trade for almost twenty years and a very intense environment. I thrived on the intensity of it. So I had a situation with my dad who was my business partner where we had differences of opinion about where the business was going. I chose to leave the business rather than deal with the conflict. It broke my heart and I’m sure it broke his heart, too. There was a lot of learning, a lot of prayer, a lot of soul searching. We tried to come together and talk about what the positions were. We could never come together and talk about how much our hearts were broken. You know, you can wear that victim role. We wear it like a backpack. We take it with us everywhere we go. And at some point I had to ask myself: Is this just the way that I’m going to be the rest of my life?

Well, you know, I spent the better part of two years searching for what was my faith, where had my sense of God gone to carry me through that difficult time. It ripped up my definition of what

God was; it ripped up my definition of what compassion was and threw it away. It had to be filled in by something that was very present. So my definition of God, my definition of faith became not something that I grew up with but something that had to be a verb, had to be something that was active that I was practicing at that moment or else it was meaningless.

I was asked to give a workshop on conflict resolution skills and I called him and I invited him to my workshop. Five minutes before the workshop he walked in with my brother and asked some good, hard questions. So since that time we've had a couple of conversations. It hasn't been resolved. There's still scars from it. I have to live it every moment. I can't fix and then walk away from it. You think heaven is always up above you. Heaven is this beautiful, lush place of peace and it is. I'm finding that it's not a place that's "over there." It's actually a place that also exists in the midst of all the chaos.

### SPEAKER INTRODUCTION

**Lillian Daniel:** Our thanks to Scott Seagren for sharing his story. For more information about Scott's work you can go to our web site at [30goodminutes.org](http://30goodminutes.org).

Now, let me tell you about our speaker. Grace Imathiu first appeared on "30 Good Minutes" in 2004, shortly after we heard her speak at the annual Festival of Homiletics. She's been one of our featured speakers and commentators ever since. Born in Kenya and raised in Nairobi, Grace is the daughter of a distinguished Kenyan clergyman. She followed in his footsteps when she herself was ordained an elder in the Methodist Church in Kenya. Grace has lived in the United States for several years and is pastor of Brown Deer United Methodist Church, north of Milwaukee. Grace speaks to gatherings around the world and is the author of "Words of Fire, Spirit of Grace." We're very happy to welcome Grace Imathiu back to "30 Good Minutes." Welcome, Grace.

### MESSAGE

**Grace Imathiu:** Thank you, Lillian.

A man named Lazarus is ill. You know what that's like: itchy throat, watery eyes, clammy skin, high fever, can't keep anything down. Lazarus is ill. And his illness is not just another bug going around. This illness plans to kill him. His two sisters, Mary and Martha, send a message to Jesus. It's a one liner: "Your friend is ill."

What a message! What a surprising message. I'll tell you why: the message does not request anything. It simply informs Jesus of the condition. But, whenever Jesus meets someone with a need, he often poses the question: What is it you want me to do for you? No presumptions from Jesus, no second guessing.

Take for instance, when he met blind Bartimeaus. Jesus asked the blind man, "What is it you want me to do for you?" It doesn't mean that just because he was blind he wanted sight. Bartimeaus might have asked for a new coat. And remember the man ill at the pool for thirty-eight years? Jesus asked him "What is it you want me to do for you?" Who knows? He could have requested winning the pool lottery! Jesus is constantly asking, "What is it you want me to do for you?"

So here is the question for you: What is it you want from Jesus? Mary and Martha: What is it you want Jesus to do for you?

You see, the Jesus question—“What do you want me to do for you?”—is in actuality not a question but an invitation. Jesus invites us into partnership in our healing. Jesus invites us to articulate our hope. Jesus invites us to dare speak out loud our yearning. Say it, risk it, saying what is it you want from Jesus.

But Martha and Mary do not request anything from Jesus. They do not say “Send Lazarus a healing word with just your speaking.” They do not say, “Come right away!” They only say, “Lord, your friend is ill.”

If Jesus reads between the single line of the message, we don’t know. He simply says, “Hmmm...no rush.” And he continues doing his ministry for three days. How unlike the friends I have, he who hears one of his best friends is sick and he stays put! And two days of staying put, Lazarus gets from bad to worse; and then from worse to dead.

Here’s what I’m thinking: perhaps the question that Lazarus’ illness poses is a question of power. In other words, “Who’s got the power in this text?” Who in this text says “jump” and we all ask how high? Who calls the shots in this text? Who sets the agenda? And know this: nobody, not even empires give up power that easily. No one gives up power on a silver platter. So there is a power struggle in this text between Jesus and death itself. Because you see, Jesus knows that if we live or if we die, we belong to God.

When word comes of Lazarus’ death, Jesus then begins his journey to Bethany to Lazarus’ grave. Some among us might say it’s too late now. Lazarus is dead there is nothing more to do. But Dead End signs do not deter Jesus. He keeps on walking, even when there is absolutely nothing in the horizon that smacks of hope.

At Bethany’s gate, Jesus is met by Martha who informs him that he not only missed Lazarus in the ICU, he missed Lazarus’ funeral. And I bet you if the phrase had been coined then, Martha would have said of Jesus’ arrival, “Too little, too late!”

Then Mary comes to meet Jesus. She goes to Jesus and falls on her knees before him. This time she is a woman whose alabaster jar is her very heart. And broken-hearted, she falls at Jesus’ feet and empties her heart’s tears. Tears more overpowering than costly nard drenching the Rabbi’s dusty, sandaled feet. Hoarse with weeping, she must have whispered it, “Lord, if you had been here, our little brother would not have died!”

And I don’t know whether it was her words, whether it was her posture, or whether it was her tears because something broke the Son of God’s own alabaster heart. And we are told Jesus wept. It amazes me that many of us no longer weep. Pictures of children dying of hunger, we change the channel. Stats of children left orphaned by HIV/AIDS bore us. Some say it is compassion fatigue. Some say our hearts have been hardened by our suspicions. Some say it is

our tears that are hidden. Some say we no longer know how to weep. We are shell shocked and drugged.

Jesus wept. This ain't no sign of weakness! Tears are a sign that one is alive. Tears are a sign that we have not given up yet. Jesus wept. And then after his weeping everything shifts. "Take me to the place where you have laid him," he says.

They take him there. "Move the stone!" he tells them. You gotta be kidding! Even the dead man's sister says there is love and then there are the practical things of life and death. Four days dead is not nice!

But Jesus still insists: "Move the stone!" I can see them working a sweat as they push on that stone, interrupting the order of things as we know them. But this is Bethany and anything and everything can change in Bethany.

And after a prayer, Jesus cries out calling Lazarus by name, "Lazarus! Come Out!" And there he walks, the resurrected man still wearing dead man's clothes. Jesus tells the community, "Unbind him and let him go!" And they do.

Jesus will not be rushed by death. Jesus will not allow death's threat to set his agenda. And it is only when death has done its dirty deed that Jesus gets ready to do battle. When it looks like game over, that's when Jesus says, "Let's roll!" Death, having exhausted its intimidating weapons of fear, anxiety, depression, all having been exhausted and that is when, wearing us down with sorrow and dead ends, death will have to reckon with Jesus.

And now, receive a benediction someone passed on to me: May God bless you with discomfort at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships so that you may live deep within your heart. May God bless you with anger at injustice, oppression and exploitation of people, so that you may work for justice, freedom and peace. May God bless you with tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation and war so that you may reach out my hand to comfort them and to turn their pain into joy. And may God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that, through your love, you can make a difference in this world so that you can do what others claim cannot be done. Amen.

### CONVERSATION

**Lydia Talbot:** If you'd like a printed transcript, audio copy or DVD of the message you just heard from Grace Imathiu, we'll tell you how to place an order at the end of the program. Or you can visit our website at [30goodminutes.org](http://30goodminutes.org) to watch the video or read the text anytime.

Now, let's talk with Grace. Grace, a masterful job of unpacking the Lazarus story. I recall when United Church of Christ minister, David Chevrier, collapsed of a heart attack during a speech he was giving to the Illinois Coalition on the Death Penalty and didn't breathe for fifteen minutes. After quadruple bypass and weeks in rehab, surrounded with hundreds of parishioners in the hospital—they broke all the rules—he was back in the pulpit and he preached on Lazarus. The transforming power of God's love. Isn't that what that's about?

**Grace Imathiu:** That is. I wanted to work with that passage because it has ideas of patience in there. Mary and Martha patiently waiting for Jesus. And Jesus patiently being in God's time, refusing to be rushed by death. The story told all of us patiently waiting for God's time. That story opened that for me, in the African tradition of story telling, where the story tells the definition of patience, waiting on God.

**Lydia Talbot:** Endurance in the midst of tough times.

**Lillian Daniel:** I think this is a fascinating story because it's one of the few stories where you realize that Jesus had deep friendships, that there was an inner circle of people—Mary, Martha, Lazarus—who really meant something to him in a different way from the people whom he was ministering to, the strangers. And in this one where he breaks down and cries, he realized that was a real friendship for him. Can you say more about what friendship means for Jesus and how that plays out in other places in Scripture?

**Grace Imathiu:** I love that you talk about friendship because this friendship Jesus and Lazarus have, this friendship that, whenever Jesus needs a friend, it seems like he goes to Bethany and he hangs out with Lazarus and Mary and Martha. On Palm Sunday, before he begins his parade that leads to the cross, that night he spends in Bethany. I always wonder and wish that I could have eavesdropped what he and Lazarus were talking about, friend to friend, when maybe he said I'm so afraid of what's going to happen on Friday. And maybe Lazarus said, "Don't worry about it! Been there, done that. I died, remember? You can do this." Something goes on there that is not recorded in our Scriptures, that we don't eavesdrop on. I'm so glad you mentioned friendship there.

**Lydia Talbot:** I must ask you, Grace, about the Bethany moments in your own life. When have you been at the gates of Bethany?

**Grace Imathiu:** Bethany. I love Bethany! Things happen in Bethany that I see that are not happening elsewhere. Bethany is the place of extravagance, where this woman came and broke the alabaster jar on Jesus' feet and just this costly nard. Bethany is the place where we find the last time Jesus was seen. It was in Bethany. It is the place of ascension. So I have experienced Bethany in experiencing generosity. In my congregation is one of the most incredible places I know of a Bethany moment, where I serve a congregation that is so generous, not just to me but to one another and to strangers. Where have you experienced Bethany moments?

**Lydia Talbot:** My goodness! Just being her with you and Lillian in this moment. I mean, you've been on the show several times before, Grace, and you are what your name implies.

**Grace Imathiu:** Thank you, Lydia.

**Lydia Talbot:** The grace in your authentic vision and discipleship. My Bethany moment I guess would be in terms of gratitude. Gratitude, I guess. Every day, every night before I go to bed, every morning when I awaken, gratitude for God's blessings in the midst of so many trials and tribulations. But take us back to Kenya because I know, Lillian, we want to ask Grace about Kenya.

**Lillian Daniel:** Yes. I was so interested that you've lived in the U.S. for a number of years and are pastoring in a mainline American denomination, and yet with your Kenyan background I imagine that the sermon is an amazing opportunity for cross-cultural dialogue whenever that happens. Tell how the spirit works through that. I know your book of sermons is selling very well and I suspect it's because of this very unique voice you bring to the table.

**Grace Imathiu:** You know, Lillian, the amazing thing is wherever you go in the world—and I've traveled the world quite a bit and lived in different parts of the world—it's amazing, people are still people. I've pastored churches in different parts. I've pastored a church in Kenya, I've pastored a church in England, and now I'm pastoring in Wisconsin. Once in a while...other than the language people speak, people are still the same, you know. I think my challenge is how to present the same message but in different vessels that we understand. The way of speaking sometimes in Wisconsin is quite different from the way people speak in Kenya. In Kenya the story is everything and any point is made in the vessel of a story. I know my book on a collection of sermons is popular in divinity schools these days and in Bible studies around the country because it offers a different vessel of bringing the same message, the vessel of a story, a good story.

**Lydia Talbot:** I'm sitting here thinking you are the wife of a gifted photographer, David, and the mother of your precious son, Eric Mugambi.

**Grace Imathiu:** Yes!

**Lydia Talbot:** And the story telling must be a huge part of your parenting, your mothering little Eric. What kind of stories do you share with him about our faith.

**Grace Imathiu:** What a challenge. Eric is seven years old and I tell him a story every evening, an African story. He is so American. He wants the story to be exactly the same day after day. But an African story changes because I'm not the same person I was yesterday. So sometimes I will go on a little bit longer in some parts and he'll say, "That's different. That wasn't there last week!" And I'll say, "Yeah, the story grew." And the story is as long as his bedtime is.

**Lillian Daniel:** What is it about Americans, then, that makes us want the story to be the same? I mean, what does that say about American culture?

**Grace Imathiu:** I don't know if I can make a statement about the culture itself, but I think for me the storytelling culture doesn't need to get to the point right away. I think that is helpful then because the issue of patience, the story does insist you patiently wait. I don't know if that's what you were going to get at, the patience of the story.

**Lillian Daniel:** And it doesn't have the expected ending either. It's full of twists and turns, it goes on longer. We expect the story is over with the death, but then it continues to twist.

**Grace Imathiu:** Yes. You might even know the end of the story and we know how it will turn out, but the story insists that you have to go through these phases and you have to be patiently waiting.

**Lydia Talbot:** Patience is a virtue, a Christian virtue. In many religions, a virtue and a core virtue of our faith. And yet aren't there times when it's appropriate not to be patient in matters of injustice? Jesus chasing the money lenders out of the temple.

**Grace Imathiu:** Yes. And I think there is a point of—and I haven't quite worked on this completely—but I think this impatience in the story when Jesus summons Lazarus to life, it's almost impatient with waiting for the resurrection moment and the future. It's all about bringing the future to now. Patience insists we wait until we are done with the in between time, between now and the future.

**Lydia Talbot:** Are you patiently awaiting the completion of your dissertation?

**Grace Imathiu:** I am doing that!

**Lydia Talbot:** In 30 seconds, when is that?

**Grace Imathiu:** Right now my dissertation is on being a mother, raising a seven-year-old, and I'll tell you, that's the most amazing school I've been to!

**Lydia Talbot:** "Words of Fire, Spirit of Grace" is your book. It's out now?

**Grace Imathiu:** It's out now through Cokesbury, through Amazon.com, through the publisher. So it's out and you can get that.

**Lillian Daniel:** Fantastic.

**Lydia Talbot:** Wonderful title. Thanks, Grace.

**Grace Imathiu:** Thank you.

#### REFLECTION INTRODUCTION

**Lydia Talbot:** And now we turn to another in our series of reflections on the "Fruits of the Spirit." Today, Michael Siegel, Senior Rabbi at Anshe Emet Synagogue in Chicago, reflects on "patience."

#### REFLECTION

**Michael Siegel:** Marcus Aurelius, the Roman emperor, learned a powerful lesson about patience and perseverance. He learned it from a man who steered his royal boat during a terrible storm. The old man lashed himself to the ship's tiller to prevent himself from being swept overboard. All the while the man prayed aloud: "O, seas, you may sink me if you will, but whether you sink me or save me, I will hold my tiller true." We can all learn a powerful lesson from this elderly pilot. The sea of life can be calm or it can stormy. The important thing is to hold the tiller of life

with a firm hand, to steer it according to what you know to be proper values, and have the faith that eventually you will come to calmer seas.

CLOSING

**Lydia Talbot:** Thank you, Michael, and our thanks again to Grace Imathiu, Scott Seagren, and you for being with us today on “30 Good Minutes.” I’m Lydia Talbot.

**Lillian Daniel:** And I’m Lillian Daniel. As we go, I encourage you to visit our website at [30GoodMinutes.org](http://30GoodMinutes.org) for more information about today’s program and an extensive collection of other messages, reflections, and stories to deepen your faith. Now, from all of us at “30 Good Minutes,” may peace be with you in the week ahead.