



## PROGRAM TRANSCRIPT

**Program #5214**

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### WELCOME

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

**Lillian Daniel:** And I’m Lillian Daniel. Our guest today is Martin Copenhaver, Senior Pastor of Wellesley Congregational Church in Wellesley, Massachusetts. He’s going to talk with us about living with the knowledge that we are loved, profoundly loved, by God.

**Daniel Pawlus:** We also welcome back Otis Moss III, Pastor of Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago. He’ll reflect on the subject of “patience” in our ongoing series on the “Fruits of the Spirit.”

**Lillian Daniel:** But let’s begin with the story of a woman whose artistic talent has been directed toward the creation of contemporary icons, those windows to the mystery of the Spirit. Let’s meet Meltem Aktas.

### SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

**Meltem Aktas:** I’m an artist. My life turns around creativity, spirituality, a love of nature, friends, animals, and food. My kindergarten teacher called my parents to school and she actually said to them, in front of me that I was quite talented and they should pay attention to my art and encourage that. There is something that took a turn in my life at that point that I realized I was unique in something. I grew up in Turkey, close to Syria and in a rural part, and I had a completely different culture. Then I ended up coming here right after college to pursue further my studies and then I got immersed into American culture.

You can call me a contemporary iconographer. Traditionally, only men—the monks—could paint icons. The word “icon” means image, a Greek word, and it originated with Byzantine icons. They are the symbolic image of holy. The subject is a window to a more spiritual world. What it is about icons is that it’s not just depicting the image, it’s immersing yourself to the theology and to the spirituality of the subject that you are trying to convey. As an iconographer, we believe that as human beings we’re limited; therefore, you have to ask for guidance and help from a higher power to take you to another place. The creative process is everything. There is a moment that comes that it becomes almost like an ecstasy and when it goes there something magical happens and you know that you’re meant to do it, that very moment you are meant to do what you are doing and it’s so powerful. You can’t too arrogant or you can’t be too confident about oneself. You have to be always in that humbling place, asking for guidance. Then you open your heart and soul and can be completely vulnerable, whatever that may bring to you, so

that in the end you can be inspired to a level that your hand and mind and soul can be guided to create this image.

I know deep down that I am doing what I'm meant to do and that's all that matters. For me, that is the ultimate appreciation of life. What could I ask more?

### SPEAKER INTRODUCTION

**Daniel Pawlus:** The ancient art of iconography plays an important role in the worship of many Christians worldwide. Our thanks to Meltem Aktas for sharing her spiritual journey. And for more information about her work you can visit our web site at [30goodminutes.org](http://30goodminutes.org). Now, let me tell you about today's speaker.

The Rev. Martin Copenhaver served churches in Arizona, Vermont and Connecticut before becoming Senior Pastor of Wellesley Congregational Church in Wellesley, Massachusetts in 1994. He's the author of four books, and has co-written a new book with our own Lillian Daniel called, "This Odd and Wondrous Calling" due to be released in the fall of 2009. Martin Copenhaver first appeared on "30 Good Minutes" in 1995 and it's a great pleasure to welcome him back. Welcome, Martin.

### MESSAGE

**Martin Copenhaver:** Thanks so much. It's good to be back!

Who whispered in your ear when you were very young? Whose whispering voice do you still hear even now, these many years later? Who whispered in your ear and told you who you are in a way that helped shape the person you would become? And what did that whispering voice say?

Jesus was an adult when he came to the waters of the Jordan to be baptized by John, but in Matthew's Gospel the story is told almost as if it is a second birth narrative. Before this story, Jesus does not speak. He does not act, either, at least not in any way that Matthew records. But when Jesus emerged from the baptismal waters, dripping like an infant fresh from the womb, a voice from heaven said, "You are my Son, the Beloved; my favor rests on you."

How different it would be if this declaration of God's favor had occurred later in Jesus' life. It would sound very different if it were said only after Jesus had healed the sick, embraced the outcast, and preached good news to the poor. It would be very different because then we might conclude that God's favor was upon him because of all he had done, that in some way Jesus had earned the blessing. Instead, Jesus was immersed in God's favor before he had an opportunity to say anything or do anything. The very first words that Jesus heard as he emerged from the womb of baptism were like words whispered in a baby's ear: "You are my Son, the Beloved; my favor rests on you."

In some ways, of course, it was a unique blessing. When God called Jesus, "my Son," it speaks of the unique relationship that Jesus has with the one he called his "Abba," his Papa. But scripture also affirms that, through Jesus, we are all drawn into an intimate relationship with God, so that now we are all children of God. So what was said to Jesus when he was baptized is the same that could be said to anyone when they are born or they are baptized: "You are my

child, my Beloved; my favor rests on you.”

It can be difficult to hear that voice. There are a lot of other voices out there, the voices of friends, strangers and family members, the voices of the culture at large that speak with an amplified voice that is impossible to escape. The voice that calls you beloved can be all but drowned out by those other voices that may say very different things, like, “You’re nothing special,” “You’re nobody,” “You don’t matter, not really.”

There are still other voices that also make it difficult for us to hear the voice that calls us beloved and, ironically, those are the voices of praise, saying things like, “You’re an excellent student,” “You’re going to go places,” “You’re really a special person,” “You’re a good father,” “Your children are so polite,” “You have a lot to be proud of.” Now, obviously, we all need praise on occasion. But words of praise can make it harder for us to hear the voice that calls us beloved. After all, to be praised and to be beloved are very different things.

Praise is something you earn. You have to do something to be praised. And if we seek praise often enough and receive it eagerly enough, it can come to seem as if everything—even love—must be earned.

So the person who is motivated by praise is quite different from the one who feels assured that he is beloved, or she is beloved. To be called beloved is not something that can be earned. It is a gift. There is nothing you have to do to be beloved, there is nothing you *can* do to be beloved. You are God’s beloved, not because of what you do, but simply because you are God’s beloved. Even before you had a chance to do anything that could be called special, God whispers in your ear, “This is my child, the beloved, in whom I am well pleased.”

But it’s hard to hear that voice sometimes. In fact, I believe that one of the reasons we are so determined to distinguish ourselves in some way is because we can’t hear the voice that calls us beloved. Being different, a cut above, is the only way we know to keep from being lost in the crowd. We’re afraid of feeling forgotten, of going unnoticed.

And we will do almost anything to distinguish ourselves as special. All the praise we seek. All the recognition: the trophy, the degree, the office, the job, the promotion, the address, the accomplishments of our children. All the ways we endeavor to stand out, to enlarge the scope of our lives. All the ways we use to assure ourselves that we matter, that we have a place in the world, that we are loved. All because we assume we have to do something to be valued.

I don’t remember the first time I walked, but I imagine it went something like this: I stood at one end of the room with my mother and my father was a full three steps away. Before that day I could probably do the kind of creative dangling that almost looks like walking, when somebody held me by the hands and shifted me from side to side as my feet barely touched the floor. But this is the day when I will try a real honest walk on my own—all holds barred—with just two eager parents, miles apart, there to cheer me on. So I set out, wobbling at first, stumbling at second, but unmistakably making it on my own from one set of arms to the other. And then I imagine that my father lifted me high in the air with an exultant shout as if no one in human history had ever walked before. Then, after numerous kisses and exclamations, I probably felt

like the most loved, most marvelous boy in all the world.

After a time I could walk with more assurance but, for some reason, I didn't receive so much praise. In fact, I can't remember the last time that anyone praised me for walking across a room. So I had to do other things. Simply walking just wasn't good enough anymore. I had to strive to make a splash in other ways, just to get back to that feeling, that feeling of being noticed, of being picked up with a shout of delight, of being valued.

For the most part, we don't have much experience with unconditional love, so we try to create conditions in which we will feel worthy of love. We do not entirely trust love without reasons, so we strive to create reasons for the love received.

And in all that striving, it's easy to lose sight of the fact that my parents did not praise me because of my accomplishments. Rather, they praised my accomplishments because they loved me, and would have loved me if there were no accomplishments to praise.

If parents sometimes have something like unconditional love, a love without reasons, for their children, how much more so does God love God's children? All of our striving to try to win something that is ours already. God values you, not because you have distinguished yourself in some way, but because you are God's beloved.

Many people may have whispered in your ear when you were very young. You may still hear some of their voices, these many years later, telling you who you are in a way that shaped the person you would become. Some of those voices are probably encouraging, while other voices you may have spent much of your life trying to silence. But before all of those voices, and above all of those voices, is the one voice that, before you could do anything or say anything to distinguish yourself in any way, said, "This is my child, the beloved; my favor rests on you."

To love others, as Jesus did, first we are reminded that we are loved, and have been since before the beginning, even as Jesus was.

### CONVERSATION

**Lillian Daniel:** If you'd like a printed transcript, audio copy or DVD of the message you just heard from Martin Copenhaver, 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 Martin Copenhaver. Martin, I wanted to applaud you as you walked across the room; that image of being applauded as a baby for doing something and then having to earn more and more praise! Most of us think of heaping praise on the people we love as a good thing. How is it that that gets in the way?

**Martin Copenhaver:** Well, I think we can get mixed up about that and think that we have to do something to be loved. I think that if we're praising the accomplishments of our children, always associating it with something that they have achieved and not heaping love on them, as you say, just for being who they are, I think that's one of the reasons why we need to tell our children everyday that we love them because they're not always heroes everyday.

**Daniel Pawlus:** You know what it reminded me of, Martin? Your message spoke very directly to the act of baptism, especially when we're in that pure moment of really being bestowed as beloved within the church, the community and by God and it's such a special moment. Why do we lose sense of that the older we get? We're looking for praise, as you've talked about, and we lose the distinction between being beloved and the praise. What do you think contributes to that?

**Martin Copenhaver:** Well, I love the fact that with baptism you don't have to do anything to be baptized. You don't know what kind of person this person is going to become and yet you have that expression of God's love bestowed upon you. How do we lose that along the way? There are a lot of other voices that we're hearing and those are not necessarily God's voices. You have to clear a lot out to be able to hear God's voice.

**Lillian Daniel:** I want to ask you a little bit more about this image of whose voice you hear whispering in your ear. And, of course, there are some people who are just tortured by memories of family members who've been cruel or friends who have said unkind things, and they can't get those voices out of their ear. Say more about that.

**Martin Copenhaver:** Yes. That may be why Martin Luther, who led a kind of tortured life, had a very problematic relationship with his father. He said, "There is no comfort greater than baptism because in baptism the God who cannot lie has bound God's own self to me." So he was silencing the voices in his own life by remembering the blessings of baptism.

**Daniel Pawlus:** On the flip side of that, though, is the positive, as you've said. I think of my grandmother as one of the most influential people in my life and hearing her voice of encouragement, based in a deep belief in her faith that she passed on to me. So there is an upside to that but it's a tricky balance, isn't it?

**Martin Copenhaver:** I think it is.

**Lillian Daniel:** What's the difference—to use a psychological term—between something like self-esteem and knowing that you are beloved by God?

**Martin Copenhaver:** I think those are related, aren't they? I mean, self-esteem is what comes from receiving that and recognizing that you are beloved. I think that is maybe a good definition of self-esteem.

**Daniel Pawlus:** Martin, you know we're blessed to have Lillian as a co-host, but she's also a wonderful writer in her own right for the "Christian Century." She's written her own book and the two of you are working on a book. I think it's a wonderful opportunity to talk about that a little bit. Why don't you share with us how this came about, how you decided to collaborate on this, and a little bit of what the book is about.

**Martin Copenhaver:** Yeah. You get to be interviewed, I guess! So the book came out of our experience of writing for pastors and for the church, wanting to give a picture of what the pastoral life is like. So these are vignettes, little cross-slices, of what pastoral ministry is. It might

be a book that would be for someone who is considering the ministry or someone who has forgotten why they got into the ministry in the first place, and for interested lay people who want a deeper understanding of what pastoral ministry is about.

**Lillian Daniel:** I think we were looking for a book that didn't exist on our bookshelves, that kind of book that you would give to someone on that occasion. And as we talked about it we realized that, between the two of us, we had already done a lot of writing and speaking on this topic of trying to really encourage people to consider the vocation of the ministry and to consider what's fun about it and joyful and exciting, but also to reflect on it with honesty and humor. An appreciative honesty was the tone that we're looking for here. It seemed interesting, too, that we had between us served in churches in all areas of the country, big and small, urban, suburban. Martin is male. I'm female. Those are slightly different experiences of being in the ministry. It seemed like a fun way to do a book. Remarkably, we're still friends!

**Martin Copenhaver:** That's right! Remarkably!

**Lillian Daniel:** Yes, he agreed to be on the show!

**Daniel Pawlus:** How do the two of you collaborate to do this? Obviously, you live in Massachusetts and Lillian lives here. How does this work in terms of putting this together?

**Martin Copenhaver:** Gratefully, we were able to receive a grant to write the book. We were able to convene some people in various parts of the country to share their experiences: seminarians, people new to ministry, people in theological education, and seasoned pastors, as well. So we benefited from some of their reflection.

**Lillian Daniel:** I have to say it's really fun to write a book with another person. I found it a lot easier because you encourage each other. When I had written my first book, it was pretty lonely and hard to produce something in a vacuum, but Martin would write a really good chapter and then I was inspired to write one. We kind of kept pace with one another.

**Martin Copenhaver:** So, Daniel, I'm of the conviction that the allure of the ministry—and I think it has great allure—is really only understood from the inside. It's not the kind of job that you would pick out of a jobs fair or a classified ad. When you talk about what the benefits are, it would be very hard to describe that unless you inhabit that life and it is more of a life than just a job. It is a vocation, a calling. And that's the title. So we're trying to give a little bit of a glimpse so that people might understand the allure of this work.

**Daniel Pawlus:** Are you wrestling with some of the challenges of that, as well?

**Martin Copenhaver:** Absolutely.

**Daniel Pawlus:** Why don't you speak to a couple of those for our audience. I'm sure there are many!

**Martin Copenhaver:** We wanted to be appreciative but honest about those things. What are some of the challenges?

**Lillian Daniel:** Raising money! Especially these days, dealing with issues of money. Personally where most ministers are at financially is often a pretty precarious place and yet we're out there talking about that.

**Martin Copenhaver:** The church is the place where we have an opportunity to live with and hopefully love those we did not choose. There are challenges in that!

**Daniel Pawlus:** Absolutely. Well that brings us back in an interesting way to this idea of being beloved. What can we do more in our active spiritual lives, in our daily lives, to plug into that more? I know my faith community has a retreat called the "Beloved Retreat for Couples" where they go together and try to spend a weekend to immerse themselves and really experience this feeling that you're talking about. Not of praise, not of appreciation necessarily, but this sense that God is a much larger power of love in our lives.

**Martin Copenhaver:** To get that reminder. I was in Israel this spring for the first time and there I learned about this beautiful Muslim practice that the first thing when a baby is born, whispered in that child's ear is the *adhan*, which is the call to prayer. "Allah is great, God is great," in the right ear and in the left ear the call to worship, which again begins, "Allah is great, God is great," so that God is the first word that the baby hears. And then in the call to prayer—five times a day it fills the streets of Muslim areas—you hear again what was once whispered in your ear because we all need a reminder, maybe at least five times a day!

**Lillian Daniel:** To me it's a wonderful reminder. This message that the words that we whisper in one another's ears really matter, that these are messages that you carry forever. It might make us think a little bit more about what we say to one another, how we treat each other.

**Martin Copenhaver:** Absolutely.

**Lillian Daniel:** In God's words to Jesus, the first words are so tender.

**Martin Copenhaver:** Words matter. Whoever said "sticks and stones can break my bones, but words cannot hurt me," lived among deaf mutes because, absolutely, words matter!

**Lillian Daniel:** What's the most damaging thing that somebody could whisper in another person's ear?

**Martin Copenhaver:** Wow! You are no account.

**Lillian Daniel:** You don't matter?

**Martin Copenhaver:** You don't matter.

**Daniel Pawlus:** We're so glad that you had time to spend with us today and I know we both appreciate this conversation.

Martin Copenhaver: It's great to be here. Thank you so much!

**Lillian Daniel:** Great to be with you!

#### REFLECTION INTRODUCTION

**Lillian Daniel:** We turn now to another in our series of closing reflections on the "Fruits of the Spirit." Today, Otis Moss III, Pastor of Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago, reflects on patience.

#### REFLECTION

**Otis Moss:** One of the most influential theologians in America but the least known is a gentleman by the name of Howard Thurman, a teacher of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Dr. King would take his book, "Jesus and the Disinherited," just about everywhere he would go. And it is Howard Thurman who tells a story when he was a small child that he witnessed a gentleman planting pecan (or pee-can) trees, depending upon what part of the country you are from. And as a child he indicated to this seasoned saint, "Why are you planting these trees? You will never be able to live long enough to actually take from the fruit that is coming from these trees." And so the seasoned saint says back to Howard Thurmond, "I'm not planting these trees for myself. I am planting them for another generation." That we are called to plant for another generation, we will never see the end of the race but we just pass it on. And so that is really what spiritual patience is all about: pass it on to someone else and there will be fruit.

#### CLOSING

**Lillian Daniel:** Thank you, Otis, and our thanks again to Martin Copenhaver, Meltem Aktas and you for being with us today on "30 Good Minutes." I'm Lillian Daniel.

**Daniel Pawlus:** And I'm Daniel Pawlus. 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.