



## PROGRAM TRANSCRIPT

**Program #5201**

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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 Otis Moss III, pastor of Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago. He's has been called one of the "20 to watch" ministers shaping the future of the African American Church.

**Daniel Pawlus:** We also have Christine Chakoian with us today. She's the Senior Pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Lake Forest, Illinois, and will be reflecting for us on making the choice to love.

**Lillian Daniel:** And we begin with the story of a man for whom making music is not only a gift to be cherished, but also a gift to be shared. That realization has been a spiritual journey for Bill Buchholtz. Let's watch.

### SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

**Bill Buchholtz:** Mamaazhi Makwa. That's my Indian name. My Christian name, or colonized name also it's called, is William Buchholtz. I'm an adoptee with native heritage. I play native flute. My adoptive mother played church organ and my birth mother, I found out, she played piano. I think that's where I got the abilities to play the piano and the organ. I don't consider myself special but I do consider special the gift the Creator brought me. I'm very honored to be able to play this instrument.

I'll play for anybody if it's for a good reason and a good way. The traditions that I've learned say that if you've been given a gift you should share that with others. What this means to me is roots, culture, history, tradition. I got a call one day from a native elder in Chicago. She said, "Bill, come over. I've got a gift for you." I took it and I looked and I go, "Oh! That's really nice. I don't know how to play this!" That's how I said it to her. She got this real serious look on her face and she said, "It's in your blood!" Like that. And I go, "OK." I picked it up one day and just put it to my lips and started playing, just like that. In the first year, I was gifted seven or eight more flutes by people who heard me. At the end of that time, I kind of looked up and I said, "OK. I hear you."

First of all, I play for the Creator, everybody else after that. When I'm playing, sometimes I'll

close my eyes because I'm not playing for myself. It's also a healing instrument, too. The sounds of the music are very relaxing and healing in that sense. You can't really play this if you're in a bad mood. I can't think of doing anything else but this. This is who I am. All adoptees tend to gravitate towards one of what they are and I gravitated towards, if that's the word you use, my native side which explains why I can just pick up a flute and play it at the drop of a hat. I guess I could keep on talking but maybe I should just shut up and play a song! [flute music]

### SPEAKER INTRODUCTION

**Daniel Pawlus:** Traditionally, in Native American cultures, the flute is used for sacred purposes, so its very sound is a form of prayer. Our thanks to Bill Buchholtz for sharing his story.

Now, let me tell you about today's speaker. Otis Moss III earned a degree in Religion and Philosophy at Morehouse College and went on to receive a Master of Divinity Degree at Yale University. For ten years he was pastor of the historic Tabernacle Baptist Church in Augusta, Georgia, where the congregation grew from 125 to over 2,000 under his leadership. In 2007, he accepted a call to be pastor of Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago. He's a frequent speaker on *30 Good Minutes* and will be returning throughout this season as one of the regular commentators at the end of each program. It's so good to have Otis Moss back with us today. Welcome, Otis.

### MESSAGE

**Otis Moss:** Thank you. It's a delight to be back.

Growing up in Cleveland, Ohio, there was a thing I loved to do and that was to go to the circus, the Barnum and Bailey three-ringed circus. I loved going to the circus, especially with my godfather, Alan Warren. And there was one thing I loved about the circus. I loved the lions, the tigers, and the bears, but I especially loved the elephants. But I always got nervous, especially sitting on the front row with these elephants, these large, massive animals.

I was always worried that there was going to be some type of elephant *coup d'etat* that would happen right there on the front row! I asked my godfather why is it that the elephants are able to do all of these things but they do not escape? They are much stronger than the trainers. And my godfather said something very interesting to me. He said that they have become comfortable with their captivity, that literally, their leash has been the limitation on their ability to grow because fear, the politics of fear, have been introduced into the spirit of the animals. And as a result of that, they will always stay in place, never moving outside of where they have been dictated that they should operate.

The politics of fear was operating within these particular animals and as a result of the politics of fear, they stayed in one particular place. And as I grew up I began to realize that the most dangerous type of domesticated animal is one that has nothing to lose. Fear, in the words of Howard Thurman, is the one thing that dogs the footsteps of the oppressed by pressing their backs against the wall. For when the spirit of fear operates within a human being, we are locked into a particular cycle or a pattern or a behavior.

When we look at a particular text, in the seventh chapter of Kings beginning with verse three, we

see that there are four lepers. These four lepers were operating under the spirit of fear. They believe that if they stay where they are, they will die. If they move into the city of Samaria where there was a famine, they will die. But one of them made the decision to say that, well, what do we have to lose if we go into the enemy's camp? We cannot be paralyzed by our fear.

That becomes the perennial question for us this day and age: are we going to be paralyzed by our predicament and paralyzed by our fear? Lepers, people who are second-class citizens, lepers who had a skin condition, they would not be paralyzed by their fear. They made the decision that they were going to determine their own destiny by making a decision not to be locked in by fear.

It is Rabbi Hillel who makes the statement that every morning we wake up, the scales are equally balanced between good and evil. What we do during the day will determine where the scales fall. And that is the question for us: what are you going to do this day? Will you be paralyzed by fear? Will you live in the comfort of your captivity? Or will you move from the level or place of your comfort and move into a unique area? We cannot be paralyzed by fear.

There is a story that I love to hear and a story that I want to share with you. A story that was passed on to me by my father. Growing up in La Grange, Georgia, he tells a story of a gentleman that has his first opportunity to preach at a small country church. I believe it was Mount Olive Baptist Church in La Grange, Georgia. And this young seminarian stood before the people, had all of his notes put together so beautifully, and was ready to preach. But, of course, back then they did not have any type of AC, so all of the windows were open. A nice, beautiful breeze came in and blew away all of his notes! He did not know where he was in his sermon. He did not know exactly what to say. I think that the only thing he could say was, "Ain't he all right? Ain't he all right? Ain't he all right?" And, of course, everybody was kind of bowing their heads just praying for this young man.

But there was an elder saint who kept on saying, "Go ahead! Preach it! That's right! Say it!" Everybody in the church knew that he was not saying much of anything. So immediately following the service, after everybody left, he decided to find this elder saint and go up to her and speak to her and says, "Now, you know that my notes went everywhere."

She said, "Yes, baby, I saw that!"

"You know that I wasn't making any sense."

She said, "That was absolutely true that you were not making any sense!"

So the young man said, "Then why were you encouraging? Why were you shouting the entire time as if I had an incredible sermon?"

And she smiled and looked back at him and simply said this, "Just because you didn't do your job, doesn't mean I'm not going to do mine!"

All of us have a job to do. We cannot be paralyzed by fear. And in this country and in this day and age, it is our duty to transform and change our condition and the condition of other people.

We have nothing to lose!

### CONVERSATION

**Lillian Daniel:** If you'd like a printed transcript, audio copy or DVD of the message you just heard from Otis Moss, 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 Otis.

Otis, that's every preacher's nightmare to have the pages go all over! We've all had that happen or happen in our dreams, right? But you are such a confident leader of an important congregation, well known, and I found myself wondering as you were speaking, has there ever been a time for you when you were paralyzed by fear and how did you push through it?

**Otis Moss:** Oh, many times, many times. Yes, absolutely! As a matter of fact, the same thing that happened in this story that I was sharing happened to me several times. One time when I was speaking, one of the first opportunities I had to speak when I was in college, I literally lost all of my notes. I prepared very well and they were all on the floor and everywhere. All I did was just pray at that moment and just let everybody know that I'd lost all my notes. If you don't mind right now, I'd like to pick them up and put them right back on the lectern. And everybody got a laugh out of it but at the same time I was terrified! There's always a level of tension anytime that you stand before the people of God, or just in general between any group of people, that operates in your spirit.

**Daniel Pawlus:** You called out an interesting time, Otis. In the country right now there is a lot of fear out there.

**Otis Moss:** Absolutely.

**Daniel Pawlus:** The economy is in a difficult place. What are you preaching about to your congregation and what are you hearing back from them in terms of their concerns? How is it being addressed in the faith community there? Because there is a lot going on out there right now.

**Otis Moss:** I've been focused on several pieces. One is, I've been preaching on love actually for the last several months and always including that theme. I mentioned Howard Thurman in the sermon and he's one of my favorite theologians. He says if you were to look at it in its totality, the love ethic of Jesus Christ is the central piece of the Gospel. So love drives out fear. And when we begin to operate as a people operating in love and learning how to love, we will not allow the politics of fear to determine our behavior.

**Lillian Daniel:** You quoted Howard Thurman, who is wonderful to quote. For our viewers who might not be familiar with him, say a little bit about who he is and why he's an important figure.

**Otis Moss:** Howard Thurman is one of the most brilliant theologians to have ever lived in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A graduate of Morehouse College, a great school he went to! He was a teacher of Martin Luther King, Jr. and also my father. The one book that Dr. King kept with him everywhere—he kept a Bible, a kept a copy of the Constitution, but he also kept the book “Jesus

and the Disinherited” by Howard Thurman, which is really the basis of Dr. King’s “liberation theology.” Every time you hear Dr. King’s speeches, you will hear echoes of Howard Thurman in his words.

**Lillian Daniel:** And a beautiful writer of prayers.

**Otis Moss:** Oh, absolutely!

**Lillian Daniel:** An incredible wordsmith.

**Otis Moss:** Yes, indeed.

**Daniel Pawlus:** One of the things that I think drives fear for us a lot in society is the media many times. What is your take on that today? I know that it’s been a challenge for you in some ways. I’ve been praying for you through all that. You don’t need to go into great detail about that if you don’t want to, but I’m sure there’s been lessons learned in that process for you along the way so I’d loved to hear what you thoughts on that are.

**Otis Moss:** One of the challenges I think that we have with the media is that the media in many ways, because it is corporately controlled, is kind of snatching democracy away from the people. And the reason I say that is because we no longer have conversations as we are doing right now, but we usually like to frame things as solely as conflict. What is going to produce ratings! The creation of something that is “either/or” is what produces ratings, versus let’s go into depth and talk about this issue. So we are caught up in a lot of things that are really not issues. We don’t talk about the economy, even though people are fearful about the economy. We’re just hearing today about what’s happened on Wall Street but we’re not getting into in depth issues in reference to how did this happen and how can we as a country rise above this and what does this mean for ordinary Americans.

**Lillian Daniel:** When Trinity Church found itself in the center of a controversy, and when Barack Obama distanced himself and resigned his membership from the church, was fear a factor in that for him?

**Otis Moss:** You know, I would not be able to speak specifically in terms of the reasoning in terms of his spirit, but I do understand and know that part of that was the creation of this idea of the exotic or the alien. And when I say that, talking specifically about Trinity Church, the has been in the media this creation that the African American church is so very different and so very alien in that it’s so very strange. But yet Trinity is just like any other particular church that comes out of a particular tradition. And because of the media, as you mentioned, Daniel, they created this idea that we were such a strange brand of Christianity, but in reality just very normal like every other person. In a political vacuum it becomes very difficult for any person to talk about the true issues and their kind of narrative and their faith without it being created as an “either/or.” It has to be one or the other. You either have to be Billy Graham or you have to Malcolm X. There is no in between! There is no way you can talk about being out of the Kingian tradition. There is no way of talking about that you can draw from a Graham and draw from a King and draw from a Paul Tillich. And that becomes the difficulty that we don’t like to dialogue. We’d

rather demonize.

**Daniel Pawlus:** So how do you keep a community, a faith community, focused in times of challenge? It's got to be quite difficult when a lot of things are swirling around, lots of activity going on, but you're still all gathering together on Sunday for worship and you're still there for the reason to come together. Do you have any thoughts on that?

**Otis Moss:** Refocusing on why we are here. What we did is, we started a period of prayer and fasting. The second thing was to continue to preach Christ, preach love. Do what we do best and that is serve the community and serve the immediate needs of the community and refocus on our mission and who we are. In the process, more people joined the church. In the process, the church began to expand and grow and people began to realize that, wait a minute, what we are hearing over here from this corporate entity does not match up with what we have experienced coming to the church. These two images do not match up. And you just have to really work through this. Like hitting that wall when you are running. You just have to keep on moving. As a result, the Lord has really blessed Trinity in so many amazing ways.

**Daniel Pawlus:** I wonder if you could speak to...I know you're passionate about working with young people. It's been a particularly violent year in Chicago. How has that impacted the work that you're doing and any new findings, new approaches with the young people specifically?

**Otis Moss:** One of the things that we are doing will kick off in October. It is what we call the Corner Prayer Ministry and we'll literally be reclaiming the streets. We're going to each corner, a corner where some people sell some other things and we are creating a team of four that will be praying on that corner, finding out the needs of the community, specifically. And we've also created a community newsletter. Not a church newsletter, but a newsletter for the entire neighborhood, not only talking about the ministries in the church but what the needs are for the immediate neighborhood. So we've moved into a reclamation period as a result of the violence of 31 young people who have been killed in the Chicago public schools system. Our young people at the church have been affected by that. This is their friends. So you have every other week some young people saying that my friend was shot, I'm going to this funeral. Or you may participate in one of those funerals, which is an incredibly heart-wrenching thing to be part of. We just feel as a church in the neighborhood that it is our duty to be a part of the reduction of violence in our community.

**Lillian Daniel:** Absolutely. That's a story, of course, that doesn't get told as often about your church. You've spoken a lot in our talk today about the media. And yet, we're the media right here. We're offering an alternative way to have those discussions. What are some of the discussions that you'd like to see happen that are missing in the public discourse?

**Otis Moss:** I would like a discussion about Howard Thurman and "Jesus and the Disinherited," which is really the foundational text for liberation theology. I would like to see a discussion about how the Irish community approaches faith and the Polish community approaches faith and the Korean community, along with the African American community; each drawing on their unique values but framing their relationship with Christ out of their culture which is a very powerful thing when you are in a Korean Presbyterian church and bringing a unique cultural

perspective to how they worship versus being in an Irish Catholic church and an African American church. We have this unique tapestry that literally, I believe, America is more of a gumbo. And specifically faith is more of a “Creole” faith because it draws from so many unique resources, that literally the composition for America is a jazz composition. And I would like to see the media discuss how we bring those jazz elements together.

**Daniel Pawlus:** When you get out and make some speaking appearances in certain places where you are called, what are you being asked to talk about in those venues outside of Chicago in a national format?

**Otis Moss:** Mostly just usually churches where I come to preach. Recently I was at St. Xavier University and they wanted me to talk about faith, justice and the next president. I didn’t talk about the next president, but I did talk about faith and social justice and talked about how...well, there are several presidents, if we look historically, that have literally been influenced or elected by Dr. King. If you talk about JFK and his presidency being energized by Dr. King. Lyndon Baines Johnson, literally, because he signed the Civil Rights, the 1964 voting rights act, elected because he expanded the electorate. Jimmy Carter, literally, runs because he heard Dr. King speak and he says this on the campaign trail. Jesse Jackson runs twice, ‘84 and ‘88, because of Dr. King and expands American democracy with other people who had never been registered before. And as a result of that, Bill Clinton runs and he is a beneficiary of that expanded electorate. He becomes president two terms and is kept in his presidency strongly because of the African American community. And Senator Clinton, his wife, benefits from that and is able to bring 18 million cracks in the glass ceiling as a result of that. And then he have Barack Obama.

All of them, beneficiaries of Dr. King and that has not been discussed. I would really like to see that kind of discussion. That’s what people are asking me to talk about: how do you see this? I see this as that we have put a “down payment,” in the words of John Lewis, on the dream.” And that we still have a lot more to go, but it’s definitely a down payment.

**Lillian Daniel:** And all those people also beneficiaries of the Christian social justice tradition in all its forms.

**Otis Moss:** Absolutely.

**Lillian Daniel:** Well, thank you so much for being with us, Otis. It’s always a pleasure.

**Otis Moss:** Thank you.

#### REFLECTION INTRODUCTION

**Lillian Daniel:** We turn now to a new series this season of reflections on the “Fruits of the Spirit.” Today, our friend Christine Chakoian, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Lake Forest, reflects on “love.”

#### REFLECTION

**Christine Chakoian:** Love is one of the most glorious feelings in the world. But love is so much more than a feeling. It’s an attitude, a choice, that lasts long after romance fades, or our children

are no longer charming, or friends disappoint us. The strongest love isn't the most passionate, but love that has been tried and tested. Newlyweds may feel giddy, but 25-years into a marriage, we *choose* to overlook faults, forgive hurts, and cherish each other's friendship. Newborns are innately adorable, but parents of teenagers *choose* to nurture our kids' character and delight in their interests. Think of it this way: when we choose to love *in spite* of another's weakness, we are simply loving others the same way God loves us.

#### CLOSING

**Lillian Daniel:** Thank you, Chris. And our thanks again to Otis Moss, Bill Buchholtz, 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.