



PROGRAM TRANSCRIPT

Program #5208

First broadcast November 23, 2008

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 the Very Rev. Samuel T. Lloyd III, Dean of Washington National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. Sam’s going to talk about how God goes to great lengths to make sure we’re paying attention.

Daniel Pawlus: We also welcome back the Very Rev. Joy Rogers, Provost of St. James Episcopal Cathedral, with a reflection on “kindness” in our ongoing series on the “Fruits of the Spirit.”

Lillian Daniel: And we begin with the story of a musical prodigy whose career was abruptly interrupted by a terrible accident. It was faith that gave her courage to continue, and faith that continues to sustain her. Let’s watch.

SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Rachel Barton Pine: Music is something that is one of God’s greatest gifts to us. I truly believe that. Probably before people ever discovered language, they were probably already singing, and probably as they were singing they were probably already experiencing a sense of the Divine. I grew up in a very music congregation. The sound of the violin was intriguing and according to my parents, I jumped up in my seat in the pew and I said, “I want to do that!”

Lot’s of people will watch me on TV and I’ll start getting famous. And the Chicago Symphony isn’t just any old orchestra. It’s a big, super-duper orchestra!

My father was unemployed most of the time. Just even paying for the gas to put in the car to drive to the lessons, sheet music purchases, paying for the piano accompanist fees, concert clothes which we would very often get at the thrift stores and then try to fix up; these were real difficulties in the life of my family. I’ve actually never spoken before on camera about I guess what you would call my near-death experience. In that moment when I was with God, it was really that I had a choice, that God was offering me a choice that I could either stay or return. In that moment everything that I’d always believed about the meaning of my life was just crystal-clear to me. I had not yet done all the things that I had been put on Earth to do. There was a period of time, just after I was injured, right at first, when I couldn’t play my instrument because I was just too ill to even sit up in bed and have that kind of strenuous activity. So far from music being able to sustain me during this difficult period of time, instead I had the added worry of

wondering when I would ever be able to make music again. How could I be angry at God for not somehow preventing this from happening to me? I would have to extrapolate that and be angry at God for not preventing the Holocaust or not preventing an earthquake that might have happened last week or a tornado. But where God's role was in all of this, God's place in my life was being with me at every moment during it. The one thing I've learned is that the way to get through a challenge is just to ask God not to change what's happening, not to make it OK, but just simply to be with me, to be with me in the worst of times and to be with me in the best of times. And for that I'm very thankful to God, who gave us our human potential to do these sort of physically amazing things.

I'm so excited to be alive right now and to be doing the things I'm doing and traveling all over and sharing music with people. It's just a great joy and I feel like it's what I was always meant to do and I'm so happy to be doing it. The inspiration, you know, to play the notes the exact way that they're coming out that night with all the inflections and phrasing and the emotions behind the notes. Where does that come from? That inspiration I really believe is God's presence.

SPEAKER INTRODUCTION

Daniel Pawlus: Rachel Barton Pine says her music is inspired by God. She, in turn, inspires us. Our deep thanks to Rachel for sharing her story. And for more information, you can go to our web site at 30goodminutes.org. Now, let me tell you about today's speaker.

The Very Rev. Samuel T. Lloyd III was installed as the ninth dean of Washington National Cathedral in 2005. There's perhaps no other place of worship in America that is more closely identified with our national life.

Sam is former rector of the Church of St. Paul and the Redeemer in Chicago's Hyde Park, and former chaplain of the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee. Prior to his call to the National Cathedral, he was rector for 12 years at the historic Trinity Church, Copley Square, in Boston. Sam holds a Ph.D. in English Literature from the University of Virginia and has written for several publications, including "Anglican Digest" and the "Journal of Religion." We're so happy to welcome Sam Lloyd back to "30 Good Minutes." Welcome, Sam.

MESSAGE

Sam Lloyd: Thank you. It's great to be with you.

I recently heard a talk given by a Minneapolis businessman named Ward Brehm, who with no warning at all began to see his life being turned upside down. It all started when his minister stopped him after church one day and asked him if he'd like to go to Africa. "He might as well have asked me if I'd like to go to the moon," Brehm said.

Seeing his resistance, the pastor asked, "Will you pray about it?" Brehm looked him square in the eye and said, "Arthur, you're the minister, you pray about it. I'll think about it."

About two months later this businessman found himself at an airport with a ticket booked to Ethiopia. But there were more surprises ahead. When he finally met up with the group he would be traveling with, they were surrounded by a group of "church ladies," as he called them, there to

send them off. This isn't looking good, he thought. And just before they boarded, the group decided to hold hands and pray right there in the airport lounge. Brehm said he prayed all right, but his prayer was that none of his clients or business partners would walk by and see him.

Well, they went off for ten days in Africa. And, he says, he's never been the same. "The moment I stepped onto African soil," he said, "my life was altered." He saw a world that before had only existed for him as a set of statistics. In Ethiopia he listened to surviving family members telling stories of loved ones lost during the years of famine; in Uganda he saw people everywhere dying of AIDS. For the first time, the senselessness of people starving to death overwhelmed him.

Brehm's experience began to scramble the ways he had put his life together. As he puts it in his book, "White Man Walking," everything he thought he knew about the world, his life, and God was up for grabs. God seemed intensely close, much closer than back home. Back there, he thought, with all our comfort and privileges, we are usually only able to see God when things fall apart. Now he was beginning to see God everywhere.

And he recalled an old saying, that sometimes God uses a pebble to get a person's attention. If that doesn't work, sometimes a larger rock. And for those who refuse to pay attention, God resorts to a brick. "Africa," he said, "was my brick." Since that first trip in 1992, Brehm has traveled to Africa regularly taking groups, especially of business executives, getting to see and experience what he had discovered.

I said his name was Ward Brehm. But I believe his real name is Nicodemus, that upstanding Pharisee leader Jesus encounters in the 3rd chapter of John's Gospel. His career has gone well. He goes to synagogue, he prays regularly, probably has well-behaved children to boot. But for some reason he's restless enough with his life to slip out under cover of night to find this rabbi named Jesus.

It's by any standard a bizarre conversation. There's a lot of talk but not much communication. Nicodemus leads off with a little cozy familiarity: "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God..." "We know..." You can almost hear the smug pretentiousness. After all, he's a ruler of the synagogue. You and I know the deal. Everything is under control. And what are they supposed to "know?" Probably that God is nice and safe and not very interesting or creative. People are supposed to keep the rules, be responsible. Live a good life. That's about it.

But Jesus blurts out, "You've got to be born from above, born anew," which confuses Nicodemus completely. What does that mean? So Nicodemus tries to get a grip: "But how can anyone be born after having grown old? Can somebody go back into the mother's womb and start over?" Our friend is a little literal-minded, you have to say.

And then Jesus just makes it worse when he says, "The wind blows where it chooses, you don't know where it comes from or where it is going." What kind of god is he talking about? Jesus uses two of the most uncontainable, uncontrollable phenomena, birth and wind, to talk about God. In both, something has to happen to you. We don't get ourselves born; a birthing process does it to us. We don't generate the wind; it drives us. Nicodemus can't find God, or the

kingdom of God, on his own. He has to start over, be born again. He can't plan it, achieve it, or put it on his resume. It has to come "from above," Jesus says, from beyond him.

This conversation was Nicodemus' brick. God got his attention in a confusing exchange he would never forget. We aren't told what happened to Nicodemus after his night meeting. Apparently nothing immediately. It must have taken some time for it all to sink in. But something shifted somewhere, because he turns up two more times in John's Gospel. He's in the Temple later when Jesus is accused by crowds demanding that he be arrested. One man stands up to defend him. His name is Nicodemus.

And at the very end, Jesus is dead, crucified, and there is Nicodemus right beside him. This time he isn't there at night as a seeker, but as a disciple, helping to take Jesus' body away.

Whether it's a pebble, a rock, or a brick, God wants to get through to us, but that's not so easy when we are all so competent, goal-oriented, and efficient. It isn't easy for God to get some time on our calendar, to get our full attention, to get us to take a chance on a deeper, different life. I believe that deep down most people would love to have God change their lives, but they either don't expect it, or are afraid that if that started to happen it would ask too much of them.

When God throws a brick, anything can happen. The wind blows, the Spirit moves, people start getting born from above into whole new lives.

Tony Hall, who was a Congressman from Ohio for twenty-four years, tells about a trip to Africa that also changed his life. From the moment he stepped on the ground in 1984, like Ward Brehm he saw a world he never imagined. He encountered a crowd of some 50,000 who had hiked as much as 100 miles in hopes of getting food and water to keep them and their families alive, only to find that no supplies had arrived at all. "I began to hear the moaning in the crowd," he said, as adults and children were dying all around him. "I never got over that," he said.

For this deeply committed Christian, the fight against hunger became the passion of his life, and for two decades he visited the most desperate places in the world and was unstoppable as an advocate in the Congress for stopping the scourge of hunger.

Bricks are flying these days. God is getting our attention in more ways than we can count. Our nation's financial crisis may be that brick in your life. It invites you to reassess priorities. Or personal crisis may see you reeling right into the hands of God. An invitation to help out at a school or food bank that serves the most struggling children may open a door just for you. Nicodemus had been hit by a life-shattering conversation that didn't make any sense at the time. But slowly a new way of seeing and thinking began to get through.

Have you noticed God tossing any pebbles your way lately? Or stones trying to get your attention? Maybe there's a brick coming at you right now. Our God is a restless God, a relentless God who won't turn us loose. God wants us to be born anew, to let the wind of the Spirit blow through us and fill our sails.

I don't know how God will get through to you: through a trip to Africa, or Honduras maybe; in a personal crisis that sends you reeling; through a conversation, a book, a friend, a sermon, a hymn, a course.

I do know that really to know God's love means letting go and making room and being ready to be born anew, only this time with God at the center. I know one other thing, God wants you. All of you. And wants us to loosen our grip, open our hands and eyes, and go where God needs us to go.

"I pray that each of you will find your Africa," Brehm writes. Africa is the place where you need to go so that God can find you, whether your Africa is a faraway continent or in Chicago or Dubuque or Sarasota, in your longtime job, or heading off in a new direction.

You must be born anew, from above. Where is your Africa? Where is your Africa?

CONVERSATION

Lillian Daniel: If you'd like a printed transcript, audio copy or DVD of the message you just heard from Sam Lloyd, 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 read the text anytime. But now, let's talk with Sam Lloyd.

Sam, I'm so happy that you're able to be a guest on the show. As you spoke about the struggles that busy, productive, talented people have with getting those messages from God, I wondered if you had an example in your own life, managing this complex and remarkable institution of the cathedral. How does God get your attention? What's your brick?

Sam Lloyd: It's almost never planned and it's always never on my calendar. It's always something that happens when, lo and behold, in the midst of a busy day a school child will come running up the aisle of the cathedral. Or I'm off to a meeting across town to do some planning for some advocacy work and someone stands up and speaks and whole window opens into the struggles she's having to hold her life together amidst enormous challenges and complexity. I find that my calendar doesn't leave much room for God to break in, but what I find is a God who is relentless in insisting on breaking on. And it's my job to keep my eyes open and pay attention.

Daniel Pawlus: Sam, could you speak to us a little bit more about the National Cathedral? I think a lot of us see it on television occasionally for different events and have one perception of it, but there's a lot that goes on there. Maybe speak about the mission and your perception of it for our viewers.

Sam Lloyd: Sure. Of course, the joy and honor of the National Cathedral is that we are there for the nation. We're the nation's spiritual home in so many ways and we certainly are there for the nation in times of crisis and celebration. But there is a lot more going on there. We are absolutely committed to using the honor and privilege of being where we are to be a voice of thoughtful, generous spirited Christian faith, the kind of faith that welcomes and honors all the religious traditions. We both want to be a specifically Christian place, but to live it in a deeply gracious way for all the spiritual traditions of our country. So interfaith dialogue is important. We offer

forums and talks and symposia all the time to let people experience what I think can often be very scarce these days, of thoughtful, intellectually alive, spiritually rich Christian faith. The kind that “30 Good Minutes” is offering itself. It’s our job to offer that from that tremendous platform for the nation. Then, of course, we’re out in the city making a difference. We have a congregation growing and thriving there. But our big work is to use that platform to hold out the depths and riches of this vibrant Christian faith we’re committed to.

Lillian Daniel: And yet, remarkably, it’s on the one hand the National Cathedral, but on the other hand it has a specific Episcopal identity. It’s an Episcopalian gift to the country, is it not?

Sam Lloyd: That’s right. It is an Episcopal cathedral. It’s the home of the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church. But we see that as our base, defining who we are so that we can then throw the doors open in the ways we worship, in the ways we invite people to make sure everybody feels that they are welcome there. So on a Sunday morning we have people absolutely from around the world, by the hundreds from around the country, from every faith tradition you can imagine. And we are careful to welcome them and tell them how delighted we are that they’re there, invite them to coffee and refreshments after, and say this is your home, too. We want them to sense that it is a home for everyone.

Lillian Daniel: I had the pleasure of experiencing that hospitality once as a tourist myself and when I was there you had guest choirs from around the country. Do you do that often?

Sam Lloyd: We do. We want to make sure that periodically—we have our own wonderful choir and music program there—that the riches of the nation are there. And so we do invite choirs to come in. We’re very careful on big public occasions that those are interfaith choirs. We want to make sure we present the richness of the city of Washington, D.C. musically, all the different traditions, but also of our country. We want to make sure all those voices get offered in that great space.

Daniel Pawlus: Sam, the reality of the political situation this day, there’s a lot of partisanship that happens. How does the church minister to that in the midst of a very difficult situation in Washington, D.C. and the politics in the life of our country?

Sam Lloyd: We try very hard, Daniel, to offer a context for civil conversation. A main example I would give is every Sunday at 10:00 a.m. between the two big services, we have a forum that is all about the conversation at the intersection of faith and public life. We invite a range of fascinating speakers week by week. I interview them for about an hour. It’s a webcast. We talk questions from around the country sometimes on the webcast. It’s archived for people to go and see themselves. We’re trying to model a way of bringing people from across the political spectrum and the theological spectrum to come in. I’m the host and it’s a very sympathetic interview. I want them to bring to gifts they have to give. And the questions are, by and large, very respectful. We’ve had them from across all the hot issues of the day trying to model a way for us to honor each other and the perspectives people bring while also being able to disagree quite strongly. So that’s one example. We’re having a major conference on American foreign policy with political leaders from across the spectrum—journalists, religious leaders—to show that in this nation’s spiritual home, that kind of conversation belongs.

Lillian Daniel: As a final concluding thought, some people will say about the rancor and the nasty tone of political discourse, “Well, that’s just politics!” How would you respond to that?

Sam Lloyd: I’d say that’s not good enough. Of course, politics is always going to entail rancor and strong disagreement, but it often has come to the point of breaking down the possibility of finding common ground in working together. And part of what we’re trying to do is model a way to discover and claim and relish the gift of common ground.

Lillian Daniel: And to take one’s faith into all aspects of your public life.

Sam Lloyd: The faith is to be lived out in every dimension of our lives and we’re trying to help people to do that.

Daniel Pawlus: Well, we’re very thankful for you sharing your story today and your message about looking for our Africa. It’s a powerful challenge to each of us to respond to and I know it takes great thought from each of us in that regard.

Sam Lloyd: Thank you, Daniel. Thanks, Lillian.

Lillian Daniel: Thank you.

REFLECTION INTRODUCTION

Lillian Daniel: We turn now to another in our series of reflections on the “Fruits of the Spirit.” Today, The Very Rev. Joy Rogers, Provost of St. James Episcopal Cathedral in Chicago, reflects on “patience.”

REFLECTION

Joy Rogers: A man fell among thieves on the Jericho road and was left for dead. “Who was neighbor to him?” asks Jesus. Not proper religious types, but the unlikely passerby, the despised, outcast Samaritan who acknowledged the real human plight that bound him to a stranger, rather than being bound by ancient hatreds that separated them. Thomas Cahill asks a stunning “What if?” What if, right from the beginning, Christians had put kindness ahead of devotion to good order, theological correctness and our own justifications? What if kindness was the first measure of faith, not sentimental gestures or self-righteous pious deeds, but a costly tending to the stranger, the other, to a neighbor in need, who is my neighbor simply because another human being needs me. What kind of world would this be?

CLOSING

Lillian Daniel: Thank you, Joy, and our thanks again to Sam Lloyd, Rachel Barton Pine 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 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.