



PROGRAM TRANSCRIPT

Program #5011

First Broadcast December 30, 2007

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 Rick Ufford-Chase, Executive Director of the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship. He’s going to talk to us about what it means to follow Jesus, even in times of fear.

Daniel Pawlus: We also welcome back writer, Tom McGrath, who will tell us how a childhood experience taught him a valuable lesson about fear.

Lillian Daniel: And we begin with the story of a woman who made a radical change in her life. Within three weeks of making partner at a large Chicago law firm, Christine Bodewes announced she was leaving. For the next eight years she worked as a Maryknoll Missioner and human rights lawyer in the largest slum in Africa. Today she works with the urban poor in East St. Louis. This is Christine’s spiritual journey.

SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Christine Bodewes: I always tell people I’m a reluctant missionary but eventually it caught up with me. I think the same call is given to each of us, you know, to be a witness to God. I knew I was going to be a lawyer from the time I was 12 years old. I started working in my dad’s law firm when I was 12 in the law library. The law was very much part of who I was. I felt that I was a person of privilege, that I had this fantastic education, a wonderful family, this great job, but that it wasn’t what I was really meant to be doing. I had been a cradle Catholic. I had been a Sunday-go-to-meeting, church going Catholic my whole life, but I had never really studied the Gospels. I had never tried to get under the message of Jesus.

I was invited to start a human rights office in Kebira slum. Kebira is notorious because it’s the largest slum in sub-Saharan Africa. These are scenes of some of the violence that we’d experience on a regular basis in Kebira. I never experienced despair in my life until I was in Kebira. That’s offset and balanced with the joyfulness, with the celebration. You don’t start a meeting, you don’t start a meal, you don’t meet a stranger without prayer. And that’s what keeps you going and that’s what connects you to the spirit and consoles you that God is very, very much present with these people in an extraordinary way. It broke my heart to leave those people.

I'm in East St. Louis because after returning from Africa I also wanted to expose myself to poverty in America. When I came to East St. Louis I was surprised at how many people were idle. Here the poor are marginalized.

The legal aid lawyers moved from downtown to this side of East St. Louis. So tell your church people, anybody that gets a problem, send them over there. And let people know that we're here now.

I believe lawyers play a fundamental role in society wherever we are and that role is to help people know the system, know the laws, get access to the system to advocate for their own rights. You can do that whether you're in the slums of Nairobi, whether you're in the south side of Chicago, whether you're in East St. Louis. I don't see us as knights in shining armor that are protecting the poor. It's a process where you somehow try to help those people understand their rights and their role in enforcing and implementing their own rights.

For me it's impossible to talk about a struggle for land or the struggle for housing right without looking at it through the eyes of what I believe is a Christian. What can we do? What are the issues that are facing the congregation and the community? Where can we be of service?

There are just so many needs in this community. We often run across people who are unable to afford lawyers.

Be sure and tell them that there are legal aid lawyers in their backyard

I'll do that.

So if they get problems they can come any time. Thanks for being with the people of East St. Louis. God bless!

People always come up to me and say, "What can I do? What can I do?" And they want to do it in two weeks. And I'm always telling people you don't need to go 8,000 miles to the slums of Nairobi to experience the presence of God or to touch into the Spirit. I think that when you look at people who have spent lifetimes, lifetimes toiling with the poor, they have the secret. They know the mystery. They have touched into it.

INTRODUCTION

Daniel Pawlus: Christine Bodewes gives voice to the voiceless as she continues working with the poor in East St. Louis. For more information, please go to our web site at 30goodminutes.org. Our thanks to Christine for sharing her spiritual journey. And now, let me tell you about today's speaker.

Rick Ufford-Chase has had a heart for peace-making ever since a high school youth minister taught him to wrestle with big questions through the lens of Jesus' life and ministry. Rick is Executive Director of the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship. He has worked along the US/Mexico border for twenty years, helping to support migrants and refugees in the borderlands. From 2004 to 2006, he served the Presbyterian Church as Moderator of the General Assembly, the church's

highest elected office. Rick and his wife live in an intentional community in Tucson, Arizona. We're honored to have Rick Ufford-Chase with us today on *30 Good Minutes*. Welcome, Rick.

MESSAGE

Rick Ufford-Chase: Thank you, Daniel.

During my term as the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA), I had the opportunity to travel all over the United States and around the world and experience both the great challenges confronting the Christian church and our interfaith partners and to see our best expressions of faithfulness as well. Among the most memorable of those experiences was a visit I made to Tek Tung Presbyterian Church in a small, rural community about halfway down the west side of the island of Taiwan.

The pastor of Tek Tung church was about my age—around forty or so—and he had been there ever since graduating from seminary eighteen years before. In the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan, pastors are assigned to their first parish, and the pastor, who was among the most energetic and creative pastors I met during my term, described his initial disappointment at being assigned to Tek Tung. When he arrived, he discovered that the small congregation, numbering only about twenty-five people, had been losing members for some time. There was a feeling of isolation and even fearfulness as the little group of Christians confronted what they saw as a hostile culture, more than 97% Buddhist, and not particularly welcoming to the small Christian church in their community. The most obvious sign of the members' fearfulness was that there was a six foot high brick wall surrounding the church property and turning it into a compound that could not be seen from the outside.

The pastor told me that he knew no creative ministry could happen there so long as the congregation was acting from a place of fear. After being there a year or so, he pushed the members to tear down the wall that surrounded the property. Though such a bold suggestion would probably have led to asking the pastor to leave in many churches that I've visited, in this case, perhaps because it was obvious that the church would die without bold action, the congregants agreed.

Little by little they tore down the wall on the street side of their property, eventually replacing it with a low, decorative wall to mark their boundaries. Then they followed their pastor's lead to try to make their worship life as transparent as possible to others in their community: they removed the heavy wooden doors on the front of the sanctuary and replaced them with glass office doors.

One member, a venerated elder in the community, arrived one day and went to work on transplanting a beautiful tree that he had planted some forty years before, right in front of the Sanctuary. The tree, now pruned into the shape of a cross, had grown so that it totally obscured the front of the building, and he and the pastor agreed that it had to be moved to another place on the property so that people in the community could see into the worship space.

Then the pastor put a large cross on the front wall of the sanctuary and he lit it up twenty-four hours a day, and as if that wasn't enough, he put a pink neon cross on top of the church's steeple.

No one could now miss the point: this was a Christian band of believers in the midst of that Buddhist village.

Shortly after making the physical changes to the church itself, the pastor approached a carpenter in the congregation and asked him to build what eventually became a three story, Swiss-Family Robinson style tree house in a large tree on the property, which of course became a magnet for the children in their community. Then, in a similar effort to make the property inviting for teenagers, he installed a climbing wall on the side of his house, which stood next to the church. Several days a week he invited young people to come and learn the skills of technical rock climbing. Within a couple of years, the property had been converted from a walled compound of mystery to a place of welcome and a beehive of activity.

Well, next that small band of followers of Jesus decided to go out into the community themselves. They began a program providing meals for elderly folks who lived alone. They opened a daycare program for children of parents who both had to work all day, which was becoming increasingly common there as it has around the world. They opened a computer lab to teach adults how to use the Internet, and eventually they struck a deal with the government to begin a school for problem teenagers who had dropped out of school or had been kicked out because of their behavior.

I've thought a lot about that small community in Taiwan as I've wrestled with the challenges confronting our own church here in the United States. We live in a time of fear. The fears have changed some since the end of the Cold War that defined my childhood. Maybe you remember, as I do, bomb shelter signs in the church fellowship hall and drills in our elementary schools where we practiced hiding under our desks in case of nuclear attack. Thirty-five years later, in a post September 11, 2001 world, the enemy has changed but the fear that drives us remains much the same.

My own son began first grade in the fall of 2001, and just as my childhood was defined by the Cold War culture of fear that I didn't even notice because it was so pervasive—it was, in a sense, the water in which we all swam—I'm aware that his has been defined by a similar culture of fear proscribed now by the War on Terror. Security alerts, travel restrictions, daily reports of death and carnage from Iraq and Afghanistan are all noticeable, at least at some level, to a bright twelve-year-old, but less noticeable to a child, perhaps, are our slipping standards on torture, the steady removal of fundamental civil rights that have been our country's hallmark, gated communities that many Americans now take for granted, and ever bigger walls and greater levels of technology to "control the border", the way they put it, where I live in southern Arizona. These are the signs that the culture of fear—"the water in which we swim"—defines our lives just as it did for my parents' generation during the decades of the cold war.

You know, Jesus had a lot to say about responding to those of whom we are most afraid. My favorite teachings for our time are found in the sixth chapter of the book of Luke. Following the stories of Jesus reshaping the laws governing the Sabbath, making it clear that "The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath," he then goes on to share Luke's version of the Beatitudes. Perhaps most remarkable in that chapter is Jesus' insistence that the only appropriate response to fear and to hate is love: "But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,

bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from anyone who takes away your coat, do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you, and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do unto to you.” (Luke 6:27-31).

Sounds pretty Pollyanna to a people living in the midst of the war on terror, but I believe that Jesus is naming a fundamental truth, that the only way to genuine security is through building right relationships with our enemies and those who hate us.

Imagine how different our lives would be today if we had responded to the terrorist attacks that tore at the very soul of our people on September 11, not with an enduring war on terror but instead with a never ending commitment to development and justice for all of the people of God’s world.

Imagine how we would be seen in the world today if, instead of spending five hundred billion dollars on the war on terror we had chosen instead to spend maybe one hundred billion dollars on basic security in our ports and our airports and four hundred billion on access to clean water, education, dignified housing, and economic opportunity for two-thirds of the world’s population currently living in misery and with greater insecurity than you and I could ever imagine.

What if no one could connect the hungry cries of their children with the over-abundance of mine? What would it feel like to live in a world where no one, here in the U.S. or anywhere in the world, is afraid of a terrorist bomb when they put their children on the bus to go to school or when they go to the store?

Can we imagine a world in which people who live under U.S. or Israeli military occupation in Baghdad or in Hebron don’t live in fear of a violent house search that will take away their loved ones with neither explanation nor just cause?

What about a time in which no one in north Philadelphia or New Orleans would live with the certain knowledge that the violence of desperate youth in their community is going to touch someone in their family somewhere, sometime?

Perhaps more concretely for many of us, can we imagine a time when we ourselves will not be so afraid that we feel we must cower behind more and more security gates and walls and borders and checkpoints?

I think Jesus had it exactly right. We will never find security at the point of a gun or a missile or as a result of a military occupation or a never-ending war on terror. Real security will come only when we trust that the basic goodness of all people, Jewish, Muslim, Christian, and those of other religious persuasion or no religious persuasion, can prevail. Real security and a future of hope will come for us, like it did for the members of Tek Tung Presbyterian Church, when we choose to tear down the walls that divide us, to turn outward when every instinct tells us we should turn in, and to take the boldest of all steps we could imagine, to love those of whom we are most afraid.

CONVERSATION

Lillian Daniel: If you'd like a free printed or audio copy of the message you just heard from Rick Ufford-Chase, 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 Rick Ufford-Chase. Rick, thank you for a strong message using the strong Biblical metaphor of the wall. It seems that, in just sort of a blink of the eye in the historical perspective, we've moved from the coming down of the Berlin Wall, to now the wall in the Middle East, and talk of a wall along our own border between the United States and Mexico. And you've just had the experience of traveling around the United States to ordinary Presbyterian churches all over the country, delivering this message of peace in a time of war. How have you been received?

Rick Ufford-Chase: I think, Lillian, that there's a deep hunger in people that I've met in churches all over the United States, Presbyterian and of all different persuasions. The hunger is they know deep down inside that this war is in fact antithetical to the very fundamentals of their Gospel. And they desperately long for a different vision of what it would mean to have true security. I think there's been a serious failure in our government and from all of our elected leaders, both Republican and Democrat, to offer a different vision of who we could be in the world. Many people talk, and it was my own experience that after September 11, 2001, we had a marvelous opportunity. I received emails from colleagues around the world saying we're with you in this time of struggle, we wish that it hadn't happened and we want to know how we can work together for something different. We took that opportunity and we squandered it on a pre-emptive strike against a people who had nothing to do with the attack that took place on September 11th.

Daniel Pawlus: Rick, could you share with us your discernment process of how...I guess we should tell folks that your father is a minister, that you grew up as a preacher's kid so to speak, you went into seminary and then you made a conscious choice to leave seminary to go on the front lines of what you're doing now. I'd love for you to share with us how you arrived at that in a way.

Rick Ufford-Chase: You know, I arrived at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1985. I was 21 years old. I graduated a year early from college. And I felt almost immediately that Princeton was in some ways too easy. I don't mean that academically and I don't mean it to sound kind of bold or boastful. What I mean by that is that it was what I had grown up in. It was already something I knew. And what I'd been struggling with during my college experience was how to get to the margins. The theologians who impacted me during my college experience were theologians out of Latin America who wrote out of a place of great struggle and they wrote about a Gospel that was really written and conceived with the poorest of the poor in mind, the kind of folks that we saw earlier in your segment in Africa. So I was looking for how to get to those places. And that's not easy for many of us who are people of privilege to do.

Lillian Daniel: I know that you don't follow this calling all by yourself but that you do it with your family. And we mentioned that you live in an intentional community. Some of our viewers may wonder: What is an intentional community and what does your community look like?

Rick Ufford-Chase: Most folks chuckle and talk about communes and shades of the 60s. It doesn't involve drugs and it doesn't involve any tie-dye! It's just a group of us who have made a decision that it's easier to live faithfully in a difficult time if we share resources with one another. So there are at the moment 11 or 12 adults in this little urban plot in the middle of Tucson, Arizona. We have six kids and eight chickens wandering around the yard and a few dogs and some cats. It's a way of sharing resources. We all don't have to own two cars to get to what we need to get to. We can share with each other. We share a meal once a week together to kind of create a sense of community. My son was born into this community. He's 12 years old. He's never known anything else. He thinks it's normal to talk about community brothers and sisters and it's been marvelous.

Lillian Daniel: Is it specifically a Christian community?

Rick Ufford-Chase: In this one, everyone in this community is what I would call a person of faith. Most of us would be most comfortable describing that faith as Christian, although probably not all of us in that community, so there is a deep spiritual center to the community. We gather twice a month in a little sacred space that we call our sanctuary space to share with each other in that way as well.

Daniel Pawlus: Now, Rick, you've had the unique opportunity to be on the border and with the refugees and immigrants. You must have learned a great deal about fear in that experience. I can only imagine what it must be like to be out in the middle of the desert running for your life, literally. Would you tell us a little bit about how that has affected your spiritual life, your life with your family, and on many levels I'm sure.

Rick Ufford-Chase: The border is a place of beauty and the reason it's such a beautiful place is because it's possible, if one is committed to doing it, to stand with a foot in both worlds on the border, to keep a foot in the world of privilege that I grew up in—and I'm not trying to escape, it's a part of who I am—and on the other hand to stand with a foot in the world of some of the greatest need that our world knows today. People who are trying to cross this border, hiking through the roughest desert we have to offer in this country, take unbelievable risk and they don't do it as a lark. They do it because there is nothing for them in their communities. There is no future for their children. And this is the only gamble they can imagine that might pay off the kind of dividends that would be needed to care for their families. I've had a deeply spiritual experience of my own faith as I've worked with Central American and Mexican migrants and refugees who have taught me what it means to truly trust that God is involved in every step of our lives.

Lillian Daniel: Rick, we've got 12 million undocumented immigrants working in the United States. A lot of people with different solutions, many ideas being thrown around. What in your mind is a faithful Christian response?

Rick Ufford-Chase: It's pretty carefully spelled out actually beginning in chapter 19 in the book of Leviticus where the people of Israel are wandering in the desert and God's clear instruction to them is that even though they feel at risk in this time of their history, their task is to open their doors, to welcome the stranger, and to share what they have with even the people who are poorer

than they are. It's carried on then through the prophetic tradition and into certainly Jesus's ministry. When over and over again, Jesus' teaching, particularly in Matthew 25: "I was hungry you fed me. I was thirsty, you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was named and you clothed me. I was sick and you came to me. I was in prison and you visited me." When, Lord, when did we do that? "I tell you, when you did it to one of the least of these, you did it to me."

Daniel Pawlus: Is your sense Rick that it's—we only have about 30 seconds left—is the dialogue moving in a positive direction and is there hope that there is going to be some solution on the horizon?

Rick Ufford-Chase: Oh, Daniel, I wish! No. I have to say that every year that I've been on the board, the situation has gotten worse. I wish that our churches were the bold churches that we're called to be as followers of Jesus and they were standing up for the rights of undocumented folks. It's not what I see and the task is huge.

Lillian Daniel: Well, thank you for your work on the borders and for what you do in the name of the Church, Rick.

Rick Ufford-Chase: Thank you, Lillian.

INTRODUCTION TO REFLECTION

Lillian Daniel: And now, writer and Catholic layman, Tom McGrath, brings us a final thought on the nature of fear.

REFLECTION

Tom McGrath: I learned a lesson about fear one summer when my mother finally agreed to let her two young sons sleep overnight in our screened-in patio. One side of the patio faced the alley so Mom hung a sheet to cover the screens on that side. She also turned on the porch light in the back of our house.

At midnight I woke up terrified. I sat up in my cot and there on the sheet I saw an ominous shadow. My heart was racing. I ducked down and the shadow disappeared. I popped my head up again, and the shadow reappeared. Now, I'm embarrassed to say it took me quite a few of those popping up and ducking down routines before I finally realized I was being frightened by my own shadow. Now, when I pray, I ask for the grace to recognize that most of my fears in life are just as insubstantial as that shadow on the wall.

CLOSING REMARKS

Lillian Daniel: Thank you, Tom, and our thanks again to Rick Ufford-Chase, Chris Bodewes, 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.