



PROGRAM TRANSCRIPT

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WELCOME

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

Lillian Daniel: And I’m Lillian Daniel. Our guest today, whom you’ll meet in a moment, is Dr. James Forbes, President of the Healing of the Nations Foundation and Senior Minister Emeritus of Riverside Church in New York City.

Lydia Talbot: We also welcome back writer, Tom McGrath, who has a few words for us about “desert spirituality.”

Lillian Daniel: We begin with a profile of journalist and poet, Judith Valente. She’s a familiar face on “30 Good Minutes” from her series this season on monastic values. When Judy went to Mount St. Scholastica Monastery in Atchison, Kansas to give a poetry presentation, it was a life-changing experience. She returns again and again and is discovering that ancient monastic values offer a great deal of wisdom for the modern world. Let’s watch.

SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Judy Valente: Many times I wonder, why was I allowed to come here? And sometimes I feel as if my whole life was leading me to this place. The thing about monasteries that fascinating is that they’ve existed for 1500 plus years, so there is something about them that allows them to have that longevity. People think of monastic life as a throw back to a bygone era. But then it dawned on me that what I was really looking at was a window to the future, a future that we really desperately need.

I also think the emphasis on community is so important. Decisions are made through consensus. And they have an expression: no grumbling, no grumbling allowed. There is something extraordinary about standing with these women who have such a deep spiritual life and who are really, truly every day of their lives trying to work on a life of love and a life of compassion. You’re praying the Psalms and they run the gamut of every human emotion that you can possibly have. When I first came to Mount St. Scholastica and began to experience the prayer life of the sisters, I had the thought that this is what’s holding the world together, the prayers of this monastery and other monasteries across the country.

One of the most important things that the sisters here have taught me is that every day can be a new beginning. No matter what happened that you were disappointed in the day before, every day is a fresh page. Their whole message is you’re okay, keep going. Just keep trying to be the

best that you can be, trying to do good every single day. Whenever you come to a monastery you're always impressed with the amount of physical beauty. That very much fits into the Benedictine way of thinking that creation is ongoing. I always love to visit the grapevines. The vines just grow and grow. They'll grow wild. But if the vinedresser isn't there to touch them and cut them back, they won't do anything, they won't produce any good. And I think it's a metaphor for those of us who run around trying to do so many things—be all things to all people—that we have to look at our own lives periodically and say what's really essential, where can we cut back. When I first came here I thought, oh, the monastery is such a beautiful building, lay people will be running it in another fifty years. There won't be any more sisters. But now my thinking on that has totally changed. I really see the importance of people dedicating their lives to prayer, to trying to live as compassionately and as lovingly as they possibly can. This is their work. This is their profession. And that's just as valuable as being a journalist or a lawyer or a doctor or anything else somebody can be.

SPEAKER INTRODUCTION

Lydia Talbot: Many thanks to Judy Valence for her story and her ongoing series on monastic values this season on “30 Good Minutes.” You can find out more about Judy by visiting our web site at 30goodminutes.org.

Now, let me tell you about today's speaker. The Rev. Dr. James Forbes is Senior Minister Emeritus of the historic Riverside Church in New York City and President of the Healing of the Nations Foundation. Dr. Forbes' reputation as a “preacher's preacher” was confirmed in 1995 when a Baylor University survey recognized him as one of the twelve “most effective preachers” in the English-speaking world. He was formerly a professor of preaching at Union Theological Seminary, and his speaking engagements have taken him from many of the great pulpits in America to the Democratic National Convention in 2004. It is a great honor to welcome Dr. James Forbes back to “30 Good Minutes.” Welcome, Jim.

MESSAGE

James Forbes: Thank you, Lydia.

Brothers and sisters, I am delighted to have the privilege to be back to “30 Good Minutes.” I was here some years ago, but since that time I've retired. Retired people often think about things that happened in the past. Well, in 1956 when I accepted my call to ministry I was excited that I had finally made the decision, but there was one disappointment. I had planned to complete my work at Howard University in a pre-med course and then go on to med school. By accepting the call to ministry I had to give up the idea of being Jim Forbes, M.D. Now this disappointment must have been strong because I felt that night when I said yes, that I heard the Spirit say, “Jim, don't be so disappointed that you're not going to be an M.D. You're going to be a healer but it's going to be of a different kind.”

Today I want to talk to you about that different kind of healing. Not just to reminisce over the days gone by, but to suggest—no, stronger than suggest—to make the case that both you and I are healers of a different kind. I'm not going to hold you in suspense about what I mean. Let's get right to it.

I have here with me the symbol of what I want to talk to you about today. It is a leaf. You and I are leaves of healing from the tree of life. And I want to make this case so strongly that even right now you'll begin to be aware, whether you see or not, healing powers are flowing through you and, I hope, also through me.

Let me explain this and give it some Biblical support. In the book of Ezekiel, chapter 47, verse 12, you will hear about a tree that had food for each month but also had leaves and the leaves were for medicine. So now, I want to tell you that that text speaks to me about our being leaves for medicine. There is also another text from the book of Revelation, Revelation 22, verse 2. The same image almost, that speaks about a tree that has food every month, and it also says, "and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations."

This concept, this idea of healing leaves I think is supported again in the Bible because in the Bible wherever there are plant metaphors, quite frequently it means people. For an example, you will remember from Psalm 1: "He shall be like a tree, planted by the rivers of water, whose leaf also shall not perish. Whatsoever he does will prosper." Also, in Isaiah: "They shall be called oaks of righteousness." And in New Testament scriptures we hear the words: "I am the vine and you are the branches." Now, do I make my case? When there is this discussion, either in Ezekiel or in Revelation, it's telling us that we are expected to be leaves of healing.

I want to suggest that this image is just powerful. First of all, it reveals that God is so invested in our being healers and are being well that health care should be as available as leaves on a tree. Also, this image makes it very clear that if anybody in the community has a need, they don't have to go to the pharmacy. If there is a brother or a sister or a mother or a father or a grandmother or a grocer or a mail person who is offering news from around the nation, such persons also are carriers of healing power.

Let's say a little something about what this means. To be a healing leaf is first of all to be conscientious about our own health. That is to say, if I am a healing leaf, it means that I am going to take care of my health, holistically understood: body, mind, spirit, emotions, relationships, vocation, community involvement and even environmental responsibility. But to be a leaf, it's not only to care for my health, it is to be open to the Spirit to lead me or you in finding some situation in which our immune systems, which helps to heal us, also has an extra measure of healing, so that we can offer that healing to somebody else beyond ourselves.

Now to speak of your being a healing leaf, I really suggest to you that there's so many ways that this can happen. Of course, we're still grateful for doctors and the pharmacists and the health care providers, but we can become leafs of healing in the following ways: a greeting card, a smile, a word of cheer, maybe a poem, possibly a song that we sing, or maybe an act of care, a bowl of soup, even a hand placed upon a friend. And sometimes even shedding a tear along with a friend actually releases the healing powers in that person. And you and I in such action become God's expression of care for the health and wholeness of our brothers and sisters.

Now I think I should acknowledge to you that over the years I have found this be true. I mean, one time I was preaching in Jerusalem and actually while I was preaching a man's ear was healed when I said the word *ephphatha*. He and his wife came to the stage and said, "You know,

we were waiting for Kathryn Kuhlman to do some healing but while you were preaching my husband's ear was healed."

There have been other people who've spoken to me about this while preaching or maybe some have said, "In your pastoral visit, when you had departed I felt like maybe some grace had been left with me." I heard some lady say last week, "Reverend, when you preach it's almost like I have molecular rearrangement! I come in sad, I go out happy. I come in despair, I go out with hope."

Now, I don't want to brag about myself being a leaf, you are a leaf, as well. Oh, you may not have been as aware of it but beginning today I want to urge you to begin to think about the fact that when you get up in the morning you're not just a person getting ready to go to work, all day long healing possibilities are taking place wherever you happen to be.

So now, I would say, you are wondering: what really would make me a true leaf of healing? Let me suggest several things. First of all, I think maybe you should begin to think of your body as the temple of the Holy Spirit. Treat your body like it is part of God's medicine for the healing of the world. Also, if you could join me because this is what I do: I am so excited about my immune system! I'm the only person I know who really gets excited about thinking how God has built into me the capacity to heal myself. And in addition to that has given me energy so that I can help heal somebody else. It is an exciting notion. Also, be open. When you get up, keep your ears open, your heart and your mind. Maybe there is somebody who needs that touch from you or a smile or a greeting. Maybe somebody needs you to walk with them, to hear their concerns, to deal with their burdens as best they can.

I tell you, we're talking these days a lot about health care, but when all of us begin to be aware that we are healing leaves, I almost believe that a trillion dollars worth of healing power could be released into our world. I've seen it happen before and I am determined myself to see if I can be a leaf, like a leaf with two sides, to receive carbon dioxide and then to work through the process of photosynthesis so that it becomes a source of healing in our world.

Well, my fellow healers, be a leaf today and God will nourish you and our world will experience a new age of health and wholeness. God bless you, my fellow leaves!

CONVERSATION

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

Now, let's talk with James Forbes. Jim, thank you for raising the issue of health care and the fact that so many people don't have it and yet, as people of faith, we want to be part of the healing for all the nations. Do you think that part of what might be released in that trillion dollars worth of health energy that comes out is maybe a changing of our hearts, where we might think we don't want anybody in the world to be without health care?

James Forbes: I believe that if we began to be aware of how much God wills health for everybody, and God has even given us the capacity to help heal ourselves and others, at least it begins to sound like it's feasible to live in a world where everybody can have health care. So I think the faith community—oh, I'm glad for the politicians that are trying to figure out a plan and an approach—but the faith community has a special responsibility for saying this is what God's will is concerning everybody being healthy and whole. And it is our responsibility to share our healing powers with each other.

Lillian Daniel: In a sense, to lead by presenting hope.

James Forbes: I think it is an important thing that we show while people say, "How can we do this?" we can say it's happening all the time because we in our communities are beginning to be aware that if we care for one another perhaps we even prevent some of the more catastrophic illnesses which may actually break the bank. So that's what I think church and the synagogue and the mosque ought to be doing.

Lydia Talbot: Jim Forbes, you are more vigorous and upbeat and fit than ever before, now in your retirement. What's the secret?

James Forbes: You know, it is so important that a man who is now 74 years old is finally free to do that which is central to my being. I've had a wonderful pastoral leadership, but now I think of myself as a person who in my "retirement" can just concentrate on how do we help heal people and how do we bring spiritual energy that in a sense makes us the beloved community. Now that reinvigorates the old boy and makes him feel like keeping on keeping on!

Lydia Talbot: But in your retirement, since you were at Riverside Church in New York, you have...are you the founder of Healing of the Nations Foundation?

James Forbes: Yes.

Lydia Talbot: Talk to us about that.

James Forbes: You know, when I retired I said that God promised me, "Jim, you're going to be a healer but it's going to be in a different way." So I figured now is my time to say: how is that supposed to happen? And what I was told is—this will seem very, very ambitious—your job is to try to help people to believe that they not only can become, but they are already healing leaves. And your job is just to do what you can to educate people to the healing powers within them, to help them know how to take better care of themselves in the areas that I mentioned in my talk. And also to help them to know that you really are not yet quite healthy until you are conscientious about being a channel of health to others, to help the various modalities of health to stop fighting each other and recognize that it is in compliment that helps schools of public health know that you must also know something about spiritual communities. 40% of our health care is about human behavioral decisions, lifestyle decisions that we make about what we're going to do: exercise, diet, and that kind of thing. So I'm just thrilled to have the opportunity to remind people. I don't even have to be a bad news preacher! There's healing in you. There's healing in you! Oh, I'd like to do that for twenty more years, to be able to do that.

Lillian Daniel: And that makes you feel better to get to proclaim that. You get to preach to yourself about that.

James Forbes: I preach to myself!

Lillian Daniel: I was so interested to learn that you had originally wanted to be a doctor and that you became in essence a different kind of a healer. Our society, I think, recognizes doctors as healers, pays them well, gives them respect, and I think recognizes the healing inherent in the ministerial function. I wonder about the folks who change the bedpans in the hospital, who keep the rooms clean. It seems like our society is less likely to recognize them for their healing work.

James Forbes: So for the people in the hospitals who do this work...you know, when a great surgeon is going to perform a very delicate operation, they have to check the vital signs. And if the patient doesn't have sufficient immunity at the time, it is the job of the "lowly" nurse to help with those fluids until the person is strong enough to take the operation. I'd like to think it's kind of like the Holy Spirit, not always being the grand surgeon, but building us up. Whoever does the building up should get at least as much credit as the surgeon. You know, I think that's the case.

Lydia Talbot: Jim, when you talked about healing, being channeled through...we each have a capacity, aren't you really talking about an intentional presence with another, solidarity with another's pain and suffering? Real care. So I wonder, have you ever received that yourself?

James Forbes: Oh, yes.

Lydia Talbot: What are the times that you can share with us.

James Forbes: Oh, my goodness. I had such high blood pressure when I was in South Africa during the days of apartheid. One day I was late for my meeting when my car took me way around, out in the back of nowhere, and I thought that it was possible that that may be the day of the ending of my life. But somehow I was brought back to my hotel and there was a little card under my door that was from a brother who was in the meeting and it simply said: No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper. I relaxed and it was okay. There have been times when in my ministry I've thought what in the world would I do and I get a call from Gardner C. Taylor who said, "Jim, I know it's rough, but you hang in there, boy! It's going to be all right." That's the healing.

Lillian Daniel: We're so glad that you're back with us today. When it comes to healing, we could talk forever!

REFLECTION INTRODUCTION

Lillian Daniel: We turn now to our friend, Tom McGrath, Vice President for Product Development at Loyola Press. He has a final thought on finding spiritual water in the desert.

REFLECTION

Tom McGrath: Have you spent time in the desert? It's a place where God can really surprise you. A few years back, I spent a week on retreat at Ghost Ranch, New Mexico. Over the week, I'd become accustomed to the desert's muted tones: the tans, the browns, the dusty green of the sage. And then I climbed atop a mesa I'd been noticing all week. When I got to the top I saw in the distance what seemed to be a ribbon of green and gold spread out on the desert floor. It was the golden fall cottonwoods and green shrubs that thrive along the banks of the Rio Grande as it flows through that land. Here, life was abundant all because water flows in the desert.

Sometimes modern society can seem like a desert. That ribbon of green and gold reminded me of the life that thrives in local churches, those places where people come to refresh and nurture themselves in faith. It called to mind all the meals served to the hungry, beds provided for the homeless, counseling offered to the troubled, and joy and companionship shared with the elderly. I thought of teens who raised money to supply a medical mission to Colombia, and a local men's group that coaches those who have lost their jobs, and so much more.

Grace flows like water in the desert, and where there is grace, life abounds. Why not come to the water?

CLOSING

Lillian Daniel: Thank you, Tom . And our thanks again to James Forbes, Judy Valente and you for being with us today on "30 Good Minutes." I'm Lillian Daniel.

Lydia Talbot: And I'm Lydia Talbot. Before we go, I encourage you to visit our website at 30GoodMinutes.org, where you'll find an extensive collection of reflections and stories, on video and in print, to enrich your spiritual life. Now, from all of us at "30 Good Minutes," may peace be with you in the week ahead.