



PROGRAM TRANSCRIPT

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WELCOME

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

Daniel Pawlus: And I’m Daniel Pawlus. Our guest today, whom you’ll meet in a moment, is The Right Reverend Eugene Sutton, Episcopal Bishop of Maryland. He’ll be talking with us about reconciliation.

Lillian Daniel: We also welcome back our friend, Judy Valente, for another in her series of reflections on monastic values for everyday life.

Daniel Pawlus: We begin with a profile of writer, spiritual director and frequent “30 Good Minutes” guest, Rabbi Sherre Hirsch, from Los Angeles, California. She was recently in Chicago and we took that opportunity to find out more about her personal journey of faith. Let’s watch .

SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Sherre Hirsch: My name is Sherre Hirsch. I am a conservative rabbi in Los Angeles. Also a mother of three children, Emet, Eden and Alia, and a wife. Most people look at me and they think, “Oh my God, she had a blessed childhood, so perfect. She’s so happy.” And, in fact, I had the very opposite. I had a very dysfunctional childhood, a very complicated childhood. And I think sometimes the most imperfect childhood forces you to strive for something more. In many ways looks can be deceiving and often some of the most perfect, shiny looking things are sort of the most troubled inside.

I thought about God a lot and I often prayed in my closet under the drawer. Even though I spent hours and hours in synagogue with my family talking to God the traditional way, it wasn’t where I really divulged my soul. And in it was in the recesses of the closet that I really came to know God. I think I’m constantly discovering my spirituality. It wasn’t like there was this epiphany and God called for me from the burning bush and said, “Rabbi Hirsch, this is your destiny.”

I always look to people and often felt them more than I saw them, if that makes sense. I could feel their texture and feel their pain, which was both a blessing and a curse because you can also feel how someone feels about you. But I sensed that that was something deeper and I was supposed to use for something greater.

You can’t deny who you are. Part of me is so proud of being a mother, but being a rabbi is also who I am and gives me tremendous meaning. And being a writer and being an author is another

aspect of me, so if I denied one or the other, it would feel unfulfilling. You know, I think most people are waiting for that burning bush, for God to come at them and say, “Here is the direction of your life.” And for me it was much more subtle. It was a sense of wholeness that I was exactly where I was supposed to be and that I was being lifted and carried when I couldn’t carry myself. I’m in process and God is in process. And so together we’re in this sort of journey to figure out who each other is and how to find meaning in this life and make it the most impactful for others.

I don’t have a plan for where I’m going in my spiritual life. I don’t have this sense of when it’s all put together then I will be this little Buddha, that everybody will come to me as this wise old woman. I don’t feel that at all. In fact, I feel that God is making me more human. I do feel often like I’m running out of time, that my mortality is eminent. Not tomorrow, God willing, but that I want to make the most of each day because I’ve got a lot to do here. Thank you very much.

SPEAKER INTRODUCTION

Lillian Daniel: Our thanks to Sherre Hirsch for sharing her spiritual journey. In a few weeks, Sherre will be joining Eboo Patel, founder of the Interfaith Youth Core, and me for a special 3-part series called “Our One God.” I hope you’ll make a point to watch. You can visit our website at 30goodminutes.org for more information.

Now, let me tell you about today’s speaker. The Right Reverend Eugene Sutton is Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland. Prior to his election in 2008, he was canon pastor of Washington National Cathedral and director of the cathedral’s Center for Prayer and Pilgrimage. Bishop Sutton is a former professor of preaching and liturgy and is a well-known leader of retreats and conferences on prayer, preaching, spirituality and mission. It’s a great pleasure to welcome Bishop Eugene Sutton back “30 Good Minutes.” Welcome, Eugene.

MESSAGE

Eugene Sutton: Thank you, Lillian. It’s good to be here.

There’s a memorable line from Robert Frost’s famous poem, *North of Boston, The Mending Wall*. It goes:

*Something there is that doesn’t love a wall,
That sends the frozen ground swell under it,
And spills it upper boulders into the sun...*

Something there is that doesn’t love a wall. And yet today, in the Holy Land there is a wall that cuts through the city of Jerusalem, the city that Jesus wept for upon entering in the final week of his earthly life. And just as Jesus wept for that walled city two thousand years ago, Jesus still weeps today. You see, it’s the so-called “security wall.” A wall that was designed to provide a much needed and much deserved security for the citizens of Israel. But if history is any guide at all, all walls that are borne out of hostility and conflict ultimately fail. Those walls have to come down because the walls cannot ultimately separate peoples.

We know even from antiquity, in the ancient scripture of the Hebrew bible, we find early on in the book of Genesis the Tower of Babel, the first skyscraper, as it were, in human civilization. It

was to be a monument and a temple for human pride and achievement. God tore down those walls and in the process confused the common language of all human beings, resulting in many different languages and civilizations. It's almost as if God were saying, "My creation will be marked by diversity not sameness. I desire unity not uniformity." The Tower of Babel had to come down.

Also in the city of Jericho. In that walled city, the people of God went to it but they couldn't enter it because of the wall built out of fear and insecurity. So they marched around the city, forming an army of choir members who sang songs of liberation and freedom. The walls of Jericho came tumbling down. They always do, from the ancient Hadrian's Wall in England to the Great Wall of China. Walls of hostility and conflict never ultimately stand.

It is true even today. In 1987, President Ronald Reagan, at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, said to the then head of the Soviet Union: "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" And the Berlin Wall, separating East from West, came tumbling down. Not by violence or bullets or bombs, but by the will of people who wanted to see unity instead of disunity.

Of course these are all physical walls but they are physical manifestations of an inner wall, a more invisible and insidious and dangerous wall. I refer now, of course, to the walls of injustice, of hatred, and of bigotry.

In South Africa the walls of apartheid came tumbling down, apartheid being that unjust system of separating rich and poor and black and white based on law. Those walls came tumbling down, again not by violence but by people singing and marching and saying this wall must come down.

And even in our own country in the Civil Rights era, there were many who marched and sang and prayed—the walls of slavery and Jim Crow laws and segregation—that these walls would come down. Those walls had to come down because a wall of conflict and separation was not the intention of our Creator God. I am now bishop of Maryland, the first African American bishop of a diocese that was born in slavery. The wall of segregation came down in Maryland. All walls do.

In ancient times, St. Paul, writing a letter to a divided faith community in the city of Corinth, in his second letter in the fourth chapter, said: "If anyone is in Christ"—that is, if anyone is in this new reality of asserting again and again God's intention—"there is a new creation. Everything old has passed away and, behold, everything is becoming new."

"All this," he wrote, "is from God, whom in Christ is reconciling the world to God's self and has given us the ministry of reconciliation." That is, wherever that reconciling work is done, no matter what faith community, when people do so they are doing the work of God.

In my last trip to the Holy Land, I did not take many pictures. I was too discouraged. It was a very discouraging situation, political and religious, there. But in the last day I did take one photograph in the city of Bethlehem. Yes, the city of David where the Prince of Peace was born, it is now a walled city. It is very difficult to enter or leave that city because of the checkpoints, especially for the citizens, most of whom are Palestinian Christians. But there our pilgrimage

group had spent its last day. We went to a section of the wall that had bisected the once main commercial strip in that city and we were trying to support the local economy by buying things. But I had my chance to go to the foot of that massive wall. And there I saw spray painted on the bottom of that wall these words, undoubted by a young Palestinian Christian. It said, "Jesus will tear down this wall." And Jesus will. That wall will come down one day because all walls must.

As an excerpt from Georgia Douglas Johnson's famous poem, "Interracial," puts it:

*Let's build bridges here and there
Or sometimes, just a spiral stair
That we may come somewhat abreast
And sense what cannot be exprest,
And by these measures can be found
A meeting place, common ground
Nearer the reaches of the heart
Where truth revealed, stands clear, apart:
With understanding come to know
What laughing lips will never show:
How tears and torturing distress
May masquerade as happiness:
Then you will know when my heart's aching
And I when yours is slowly breaking.
Commune, the altars will reveal.
We then shall be impulsed to kneel
And send a prayer upon its way
For those who wear the thorns today.
Oh, lets build bridges everywhere
And span the gulf of challenge there.*

CONVERSATION

Daniel Pawlus: If you'd like a printed transcript, audio copy or DVD of the message you just heard from Eugene Sutton, 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 Eugene Sutton. Gene, thanks for joining us again today. It's a pleasure to see you.

Eugene Sutton: Thank you, Dan.

Daniel Pawlus: In your message you talked about reconciliation quite a lot and I want to start by asking, does the idea of people having false perceptions play a major role in the process of reconciliation? You gave us a lot of examples, but this came to mind as you were talking about this.

Eugene Sutton: Yes. False perceptions. And the chief false perception is that I and my people, my way, my customs, my civilization, are really the way for everybody and there's no appreciation for diversity or the interplay of the different cultures that God has set into motion. I think that's the chief misconception that we have and the misperception that others are wrong or

they're mistaken or somehow they're "less than" because they're not like us. They don't talk like us, they don't act like us, they don't believe like us. I think it's a present day Tower of Babel and that needs to be brought down again.

Lillian Daniel: I often find it easier to identify the walls in our history like, for example, the issues of the abolitionist movement or the walls in somebody else's country, South Africa or Israel. But what's the big present day wall in our country right now that you see?

Eugene Sutton: I live in the city of Baltimore, the See city of my diocese, and there are walls there every bit as real as those ancient walls that I spoke of, although they aren't physical ones. It's the wall between rich and poor, between the haves and the have-nots, between the highly educated and the poorly educated, in my city and throughout the state. The state of Maryland now, by per capita income, is the richest state in the Union and yet I see a lot of boarded up houses and communities, drug infested and crime ridden communities where people don't have any access to the riches of the rest of the state. There are walls there that are every bit as real and people don't cross those walls. The rich don't go into rural and urban poor areas. And the poor are trapped just as they were in ancient walled cities. There is a lot of work yet to be done and reconciliation in our day.

Daniel Pawlus: What can be done on the church level, or for you as the bishop now leading the flock in the Maryland area? How do you begin to address some of these things and talk about them and get that conversation out there?

Eugene Sutton: Well, I'm a follower of Jesus. Obviously I'm a Christian. And one of the reasons I love being a religious and spiritual leader is I get to work full-time at doing something that I think is true for everyone. The work of reconciliation begins right here in the human heart. It's hard to reconcile with others when we're not at peace with ourselves. We're not at peace within ourselves and we're not at peace with our Creator God. So the first thing I like for people to do is to be at peace with themselves through the work of spiritual formation. And, again, this is done in many, many religions. Then we can begin the work of reconciling people in our own households, in our families, in our neighborhoods, our communities, and ultimately the nation and the world. So it begins in the heart. It's a spiritual problem. Then from the heart it seeps out into the work of the hands. We actually have to—and I should say the feet, as well—walk across the walls and we have to be willing to shake hands with people on the other side and say, "What can I learn from you and how can I help you?"

Lillian Daniel: Ideally it should be our faith communities that would lead the way in reconciliation and we would have in our faith communities models of reconciliation and people crossing walls, when in reality so often it's in our faith communities where we have some of the hardest struggles and there are so many walls there. I know your own denomination, the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion, is really wrestling with the question of the ordination of gays and lesbians and there are walls. Are you experiencing those walls in the church now and what promise do you have for that?

Eugene Sutton: Yes, but not as much in my diocese. You see, historically, you are exactly right. Religions which are supposed to be the biggest force for good in the world in the breaking down

of walls are all too frequently ones that build up the walls. In the Christian church, this same movement that has cared for the poor and the oppressed, that builds schools and hospitals, and won over a whole civilization, the Roman Empire, because of the way that it loved and how we loved everyone, unfortunately in its history has too often been the agent of because you're a woman you can't do as much as I can, because you're a different race you can't be as I can. The church was wrong, I believe, about women. It was wrong about the Crusades. It was wrong whenever it stuck its head in the sand with scientific revelations. It was wrong on slavery. It was wrong on civil rights. And it's wrong when it tries to build a wall between those who are oriented to the same sex and those who aren't. But those walls are rapidly coming down. Not everybody is there yet, but I believe it's the work of God. We need to get beyond that.

Daniel Pawlus: I was going to say, the things you talk about, Gene, seem to be the challenges that people have with the institutional church in several different denominations. It's not that they don't want to be a part of a faith community or be a believer, but the stances that the institutions are taking on some of these issues are very challenging for folks.

Eugene Sutton: Oh yes.

Daniel Pawlus: I think that, as you said, continuing the conversation and time has shown in many instances that the different walls do eventually fall.

Eugene Sutton: That's right. We've got to hang in there in the confrontation. Hey, listen, as an African American, I'm in a denomination whose first bishop in the diocese of Maryland and many of the Episcopal clergy owned my ancestors. We never gave up on the church because we thought it was our calling by God to help the church become what it was supposed to be. That would be my advice to all those now who find themselves oppressed and shut out by the church. Don't give up on us yet because the church can be an agent for positive good, and it is in many of its parts and it is in the diocese of Maryland. We're working full steam ahead with a truth and reconciliation commission in our own diocese. We're setting up communities where people can talk about reconciliation. We're also working to build our communities and dealing with the urban poor, dealing with the degradation of the environment. All of this comes from a religious impulse. If I can give any plug for religion today is that the good religious impulse heals the world, it does not divide it.

Lillian Daniel: Where did you get this passion for reconciliation? It's obvious that you have it and you have a calling to this. Was there something that happened to you in your childhood where the church was a part of reconciliation or you experienced grace through that?

Eugene Sutton: Well, of course, I was raised in the Church but by high school, unlike everyone else, I fell away! I went through a period where I was so angry at the church. I only thought of it as a tool for oppression. And it was only as I began to experience religious people actually doing the work, and I did in my hometown of Washington, D.C. It was the people by their actions that drew me back to the church. Earlier this year I was at the National Prayer Breakfast where President Obama was. And he, as president's do, gave, in a sense, his journey of faith. He talked about not being raised in a religious home. But he came to Chicago to work on the Southside in community organizing and what he said at that prayer breakfast was he began to notice that those

who are making the most difference in that community, those who are feeding the poor and clothing the naked, those who are at the forefront of providing for all people and their needs, they were church people. He said, “I better go to church and find out what these people are up to.” He became a Christian, baptized with his family, because he found a community of reconciliation.

Lillian Daniel: Maybe it’s not so much what people say they believe but what they actually do.

Eugene Sutton: Absolutely.

Daniel Pawlus: Well, we’re glad that you’ve joined us again today, Gene, and many congratulations on your new role. We hope you continue to enjoy that, as well.

Eugene Sutton: I hope to continue to enjoy it, too!

Daniel Pawlus: Thank you for being here.

REFLECTION INTRODUCTION

Daniel Pawlus: We turn now to Judy Valente for another in her series on monastic values for everyday life. Today she reflects on the contemplative life.

REFLECTION

Judy Valente: Sister Lillian Harrington is ninety-one years old and one of my best friends at Mount St. Scholastica Monastery. When I asked Sister Lillian if she ever contemplates the end of life, she informed me, “I don’t think about death. I think about living.”

Living mindfully, in the present moment. Monastic men and women refer to this as “the contemplative life.” It’s what author Joan Chittister calls “living beyond the obvious.” St. Benedict in his Rule urges us to “listen with the ear of the heart.” Contemplation asks us to see with the eye of the soul.

That’s not always easy for busy professionals juggling work, family and community commitments. When I was a reporter for The Wall Street Journal, I’d arrive around nine in the morning. Suddenly, I’d look up from my desk, and it would be dark outside. The whole day had passed, but with my head buried in work, I’d missed it!

My stays at the monastery have taught me to pay attention to the day’s natural rhythms of sunrise, sunset, moonrise; to the interesting faces, and scenes of life unfolding around me. Whether you’re in a monastery or the middle of Michigan Avenue, contemplation asks us, as Sister Imogene Baker puts it, to “be where we are, and do what we’re doing.”

CLOSING

Daniel Pawlus: Thank you, Judy. And our thanks again to Eugene Sutton, Sherre Hirsch and you for being with us today on “30 Good Minutes.” I’m Daniel Pawlus.

Lillian Daniel: And I'm Lillian Daniel. 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.