



PROGRAM TRANSCRIPT

Program #5318

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WELCOME

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

Lydia Talbot: And I’m Lydia Talbot. Our guest today, whom you’ll meet in a moment, is writer and Quaker pastor, Philip Gulley. He’ll be talking to us about the connection between faith and caring for the planet.

Daniel Pawlus: We also welcome back Judy Valente, for another in her series of reflections on monastic values for our day-to-day lives.

Lydia Talbot: But let’s begin with the story of a Shakespearean actor who was inspired to bring the lives of St. Francis, St. John of the Cross, St. Augustine and other saints to life on the stage. Leonardo Defilippis lives in Washington State and was recently on tour in Chicago. Let’s watch.

SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Leonardo Defilippis: I became interested in acting probably in my high school years. I was in the theater living the life of most actors, a little erratic, sporadic, and not always morally correct in terms of how I was expressing myself. I left the church, like a lot of actors, actually.

[Where was I in the 16th year of my body’s age, and how long was I exiled from the joys of your house? And it was that the madness of lust, licensed by human shamelessness, but forbidden by your laws, took me completely under it’s own scepter and I clasped it with both hands.]

I began to come back to my faith when I was starting to help a friend on mine who had a heroin addiction and that was the kind of a tipping point, shall we say. I tried all the social issues to try to help her and I realized that that wasn’t working. But it came upon me, I wonder if I should pray for her. All of the sudden it opened another door or reawakened in me my childhood innocence again that I had lost. So once I started to pray for her, I started to become interested in prayer.

[If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.]

One of the plays that I do in my repertoire is the Confessions of St. Augustine. He has the same dilemmas that the modern person has today. He gets involved in sexual addiction. He was always searching. He was swollen up with vanity.

[In the bitterness of my remembrance, I tread again my most evil ways so that you may go sweet to me. Oh sweetness that never fails, whose sweetness happy and enduring, which gathers me together again from that disordered state in which I lay in shattered pieces. Wherein turned away from you the one I spent myself upon the many.]

Everyone has an Augustine in their family or everybody has been an Augustine.

[If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn and give them the other. If someone takes your coat, give them your shirt, as well.]

Playing the roles of these great saints throughout history and also playing the life of Christ, it has helped, I think, awaken in me a sense of there's more in this life than death, there is more in this life than just materialism.

[But because I am resolved to serve God, I return to him the money on account of which he was so perturbed. And also the clothes I wore, which are his. And from now on I will say, "Our Father, who art in heaven..."]

We make mistakes, sometimes through ignorance, sometimes through indifference. But all of that eats us up. If that awakens in people something spiritual, it will lift them to another realm so that they can say life is beautiful if we pursue the truth.

SPEAKER INTRO

Daniel Pawlus: Our thanks to Leonardo Defilippis for sharing his story. For more information, you can visit our web site at 30goodminutes.org.

Now, let me tell you about today's speaker. Philip Gully began his writing career as a pastor in a Quaker church, publishing stories in the church bulletin. Today he's the voice of small-town American life. It all began with his first book, "Front Porch Tales," and continued through a popular series of novels about life in the fictional town of Harmony, Indiana. Philip's new book is non-fiction, called "If The Church Were Christian." We're delighted to welcome Philip Gulley back to "30 Good Minutes." Welcome, Philip.

MESSAGE

Philip Gulley: Thank you, Daniel.

My younger son Sam and I went camping in southern Illinois this past summer in an area called the Garden of the Gods. It's a series of sandstone cliffs and deep gorges formed some 350 million years ago when its sandstone base was uplifted by geological forces.

One evening, we hiked to the tallest cliff, sat at the top, and watched the sun set into the trees across the valley miles away. On our way up the cliff I was anxious, thinking about some difficult issues with which I was dealing. I wasn't carrying a backpack but it felt as if I were bearing a heavy load. Have you ever felt like that? When we reached the top, I stared out at the vastness and thought of all the ancient people who'd sat in that exact same place mulling over

their problems, as I was doing. Then I thought of how majestic the view was around me and how one day I will die and how all my current problems that now feel so large and looming were so insignificant in the great, grand scheme of life. And the world and our future, instead of seeming so fragile and hazardous, seemed solid and enduring and powerful to me.

I was reading a biography of the writer E. B. White not long ago and it mentioned how E. B. White was a hypochondriac and spent most of his life, from the age of ten on, worrying he would die. Instead, he lived to be 86 years old. At the age of 81, when it finally occurred to him he might not expire anytime soon, he bought a canoe, tied it to the top of his car, went on a trip, and finally began enjoying life. But it took him 81 years to realize his situation wasn't as precarious as he'd imagined.

I'm a lot like E. B. White. If there is the smallest wisp of a cloud in the sky, I will see a thunderstorm, maybe even a tornado. Maybe I'm not the only one like that. There seems to be much anxiety in our world. I suppose that's always been the case but now it seems especially so. If we're not fretting about the economy, we are worrying about health care, or political intolerance, or global warming, or what kind of world we'll leave our children, and whether their opportunities will be as abundant and full as our own.

Unfortunately, religion has not always been a helpful partner. Sometimes, instead of teaching us about faith and trust, it has simply given us another set of problems to worry about—the state of our souls, God's opinion of us, whether we measure up, and where we might end up. This has the unfortunate effect of making us self-centered, and we become so concerned about ourselves we forget about others.

But occasionally I will meet someone whose experience with a loving God is so overwhelming and powerful, they see in an instant that all the things they were taught to worry about are not a threat at all. They're like E. B. White, they've discovered their situation wasn't nearly as perilous as they'd imagined.

That experience is often accompanied by a shift in priorities, a change of focus. They move from centering on self to centering on others. Their world opens. Their compassion, once confined to their own kind, has blossomed into a deep passion for the earth and everyone on it.

Not long ago, I was speaking about caring for the earth at a conference, just a few remarks in response to a question someone had asked, and a man came up to me afterwards and said he was tired of this new emphasis on caring for the earth.

New emphasis? I thought, how is that new? It was the first responsibility God gave us. The environmentalists didn't dream this one up. God did. Genesis 1:26: "Then God said, 'Let us make people in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth...'" This idea of earth care isn't new. We just haven't been doing it, so it seems new to us.

"Have dominion over..." The Hebrew word used here means "to lead in procession." Isn't that an interesting image? To lead in procession. So God creates the earth and the heavens and all the

animals and plants and humanity, then says to men and women, “I’m putting you in charge of leading the way.” Well, that’s a privilege, but it’s also a responsibility. It’s a sobering thought. Because humans have the responsibility for caring, for leading the way, for setting the example. That’s part of the deal. We humans get to be up front but we can’t ever forget that others are coming behind us. We have to be mindful of that.

That’s why our land is in such jeopardy right now, why our nation is in such peril. There has been a collective forgetfulness that others were coming behind us. Our churches forgot it. Our political leaders forgot it. Our business leaders forgot it. We were leading the procession, but forgot others were following behind us and would have to suffer the consequences of our decisions.

From an early age, many of us were taught it was our job to save souls. But what if our souls were never at risk? What if God loves us as we love our own children, who have nothing to fear from us? What if we began to think seriously and deeply about the real work God calls us to—having dominion over the earth, leading the way. Not in an oppressive, dictatorial sense, but with a sense of stewardship, mindful of those coming behind us; mindful of our children, their children, and their children; making this earth once again, a true garden for God and a true garden for all God’s children.

Perhaps that’s what that wise Quaker, William Penn, meant when he said, “True religion doesn’t turn us out of the world, but enables us to live better in it and excites our endeavors to mend it.”

That, friend, speaks my mind.

CONVERSATION

Lydia Talbot: If you’d like a printed transcript, audio copy or DVD of the message you just heard from Philip Gulley, 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 Philip Gulley. Welcome back, Phil.

Philip Gulley: Good to be here.

Lydia Talbot: Seeing you transports me back to where I grew up in Indiana. It’s a joy to have you back.

Philip Gulley: Always good to see you.

Lydia Talbot: It almost seems as though the message you’ve just conveyed is a love song for your children, Sam and Spencer, and for the future of your unborn grandchildren and all of ours, caring about the future of our planet.

Philip Gulley: Isn’t it funny? When you have kids you finally start thinking about those kinds of things. We just live in this bliss and then when we have children and then start to have grandchildren, we think, “Boy, what kind of world am I leaving them?”

Lydia Talbot: But you say in your book, “If the Church Were Christian,” that the church may not truly be the vehicle for rejuvenation and regeneration.

Philip Gulley: Well, I would certainly argue that in the past it hasn’t been and that the priorities in the church have really been misplaced, especially in causing us to be concerned about things that were never in jeopardy and things that we didn’t have to fear and all of the things that we should have been tending to. This sense of stewardship we’ve let slide.

Daniel Pawlus: I wonder if we can unpack that a little bit more, Phil. You fascinate me as a writer because you’ve got the Harmony series and Porch Talk and this small town aspect in your writing. And then your spiritual writing is very provocative. It asks some very deep questions of our understanding of God, of organized religion. Do you have the greatest challenges with the institutional church? Is that what you’re trying to say in part through this book, that there’s a lot of different ways to worship, but we should really have a healthy skepticism about how things have been done and perhaps how we’re going to do them in the future?

Philip Gulley: That’s a good word: healthy skepticism!

Daniel Pawlus: Speak to that a little bit.

Philip Gulley: Well, I remember the great Southern Baptist preacher, Will Campbell, who said that all institutions are evil for they invariably become more interested in their ongoingness...

Daniel Pawlus: Self-perpetuating?

Philip Gulley: Self-perpetuation, than they do in the virtues and values that gave them birth. And I think that’s happened in the church, where we now see and I suspect it’s always been the case.

Daniel Pawlus: How do you communicate it? There are a lot of people that are unchurched, there’s a lot of people that have fallen away and called them spiritual now but not of a certain religion. How are you going to communicate the word of Jesus, and so forth, if you don’t have an institution or a place for people to gather to do that?

Philip Gulley: Well, I think that’s always the tough issue and the tough matter. I think it’s why I stay in the church, though I tend to be critical about it. I do find that when it gets it right, when it lifts up those qualities—and it does get it right—but I think there needs to be people in the church, just at there have been people in every religious movement, who kind of have a prophetic edge who call people back.

Lydia Talbot: But the prophetic edge is what makes one faithful, isn’t that right? And isn’t that why your credentials have been in question by a movement over some time to rescind them in the Religious Society of Friends? Can you say more about that?

Philip Gulley: Yeah. I just had my big heresy trial and I hate to say I won, but my recording as a Quaker pastor wasn't rescinded. And it was because of the very issues that I raise in the *Grace* book.

Lydia Talbot: Say more about those issues.

Philip Gulley: This idea that God's really does include all people, that God is eternally concerned about the well-being of all people and that some of the orthodox theology that we have been taught and have perpetuated really don't embody the ethic of Jesus.

Lydia Talbot: And that we're called to be open and affirming of all people regardless of sexual identity, regardless of racial or ethnic, that we are all God's children.

Daniel Pawlus: I'm curious, Phil, you have this innate need to question things. It's part of your calling. Where does that come from in you, do you think? You talk in the book how you grew up Catholic a little bit. That didn't work for you. You searched and found Quakerism. It's worked. You've had some challenges within that. But that's part of your consistent theme in your writing, to ask these questions.

Philip Gulley: Probably from my mom. She was principal of a Catholic school when I was growing up. But was very...I won't say cynical, that's too hard a word, but had a healthy skepticism about religious matters and really taught me to question not only religious authority but particularly religious authority.

Lydia Talbot: The institutional church perhaps?

Philip Gulley: She taught me to question that.

Lydia Talbot: What was your mother's name? We have to name our mothers!

Philip Gulley: Gloria Gulley. A wonderful woman.

Daniel Pawlus: So what do you hope when people read this book that they're going to take away from it? Is it just an expanding of looking at the institutional church? What are your hopes in writing this book?

Philip Gulley: If the only thing they do is realize that the church is a human institution founded by humans and that we can change it. We can change its priorities. We can change its doctrines. We can make it more responsive, more caring, more loving, more reflective of the values in the heart of Jesus. If that's all they do, realize that it's a malleable institution and we can change it, then I will be happy.

Lydia Talbot: Tell us about Ben and Dora.

Philip Gulley: Oh yes. They were one of the first Quaker couples that I was exposed to, who really embodied this notion of earth care in their simple way. They lived very simply, were quite

wealthy because of inheriting a lot of land in an area that was developing, but lived on one social security check so they could give the other away, used their land to raise crops which they distributed to the poor people in our town, and just lived very modestly. When they died I was just amazed at the wealth they had and then how it was dispersed because I had just always assumed they were people of very modest means but in fact they weren't. They shared widely and lived simply and were just a wonderful example to me of how people ought to live when they've been given this great treasure.

Lydia Talbot: You use the word "share" and another story in your book is about Roland Kreager, sharing the world's resources.

Philip Gulley: Yeah. He heads up a little Quaker organization called the Right Sharing of World Resources. Roland, about 20 years ago, began doing this micro lending largely to women in developing nations, funding their start-up businesses. In the past 20 years it has turned around village after village employing women in local businesses who then employ other people and really raise the standard of living in those communities.

Daniel Pawlus: There was another passage in your book that struck me, talking about a fresh and a relevant experience of God. Phil, you say, "We desire a fresh, relevant experience of God but fear any insight beyond our creeds and Scriptures believing it will be unfaithful or even sinful." Can you speak to that a little bit more?

Philip Gulley: Well, it seems to me that's the trap that we're in now and it's largely because, I think, the church has been so creedally based that we have convinced ourselves that any spirituality beyond or outside the creeds is somehow displeasing to God. We forget that what creeds are is simply a snapshot of where the church was at one time and that we're always called, I think, as people of faith, to grow beyond that and to further our understanding of what God might be calling us to do in this age. I think that might be one reason I remain a Quaker.

Daniel Pawlus: This is part of what attracted you to Quakerism, wasn't it? Less of a creedal base, but you've encountered some challenges even within that.

Philip Gulley: Sure. Historically, Quakers have not subscribed to creeds.

Lydia Talbot: Or war.

Philip Gulley: Yeah. Or war. But then again I think that points to the inevitability of institutions becoming fossilized and becoming ice instead of flowing water. And that's always the tendency.

Daniel Pawlus: There's a story in the book about a pastor that you mention. We're always focused on church growth, bringing more people in the door. This woman pastor that you had met was very confident in her role and realized it wasn't about growth. Talk a little bit about that.

Philip Gulley: Right. What she realized was it's simply about hospitality and accepting people where they were. So she moves into this community that, by its very nature, is a very traditional community. Yet her openness and her willingness to accept people where they were, to question

long-held truths, made that place a very vital place where people who were very broken, people who were searching, people who had been hurt in life—and isn't that all of us?—found that they could be welcomed and had their questions taken seriously. So soon this little place became a bigger place and a vital, loving place.

Daniel Pawlus: That's a great example.

Lydia Talbot: Philip Gulley, it's a joy to have you back.

Philip Gulley: Well, it's always good to be here.

Lydia Talbot: Keep on keeping on. Disturbing the comfortable and comforting the disturbed!

REFLECTION INTRO

Lydia Talbot: We turn now to Judy Valente, for another in her series on monastic values for daily life. Today she focuses on "Humility."

REFLECTION

Judy Valente: Humility is a word that catches in the throat of most Americans. We're taught to be assertive, to dream the impossible. And yet, after one of our loftiest achievements, the landing of a human being on the moon, astronauts returned to earth with renewed awe at the fragility of our planet, and our trifling place within the vast universe.

Humility is the subject of one of the longest chapters in the Rule of St. Benedict. "Day by day remind yourself you are going to die," Benedict says. "Hour by hour, keep careful watch over all you do, aware that God's gaze is upon you," Benedict's take on humility reflects the root of the word, from humus, meaning "of the earth." Humility is not the same thing as humiliation. Humility recognizes our common humanness. It reminds us we're not in this alone.

In Benedictine monasteries, vespers service begins with the prayer, "Oh God, come to my assistance. Oh Lord, make haste to help me." We say these words standing, facing one another, as if asking, also, for one another's support. It's a recognition of our own weaknesses, and a reminder to accept the limitations of others, humbly and with love.

CLOSING

Lydia Talbot: Thank you, Judy. And our thanks again to Philip Gulley, Leonardo Defilippis and you for being with us today on "30 Good Minutes." I'm Lydia Talbot.

Daniel Pawlus: And I'm Daniel Pawlus. 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.