



## PROGRAM TRANSCRIPT

**Program #5304**

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### WELCOME

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

**Daniel Pawlus:** And I’m Daniel Pawlus. Our featured guest, whom you’ll meet in a moment, is The Rev. Jacqui Lewis, Senior Minister of Middle Collegiate Church in New York City. She’ll be talking with us about God’s love.

**Lillian Daniel:** We also welcome back our friend Michael Siegel, Senior Rabbi of Anshe Emet Synagogue in Chicago. He has a few words for us about “salvation.”

**Daniel Pawlus:** And to begin, we have a profile of Quaker author and educator, Parker Palmer. He says his vocation is the spiritual life, and his avocation, the quest for knowledge. Parker is the founder of the Center for Courage and Renewal, and the author of several books, including “A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life.” We met Dr. Palmer recently at his home in Madison, Wisconsin. Let’s watch.

### SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

**Parker Palmer:** I grew up in a family with a father whose main quality in life, I think, was a kind of grace. And fairly early on, I think, through just hanging around him, I realized that there were powers at work in the world that sort of originated in the human heart. And then I was very fortunate to get a very good education, a very solid education, where many of my teachers were people in whom faith and reason co-habited with great ease; that there was, in fact, no collision between what is visible and what is invisible.

One of our biggest problems in Western culture is that we see everything in terms of either/or, rather than both/and. And I am not saying that everything is both/and. There are some things that just don’t go together. There are some things that are, in fact, contradictions. And you have to choose one or the other. Niels Bohr, the Nobel Prize winning physicist once said, “The opposite of a fact is a lie. But the opposite of one great truth may be another great truth.” That appeals to me because as a Christian I have no idea how you could read the Bible without an appreciation of paradox. I mean, Jesus is always saying paradoxical stuff that makes no sense if you try to cram it into this Western mentality of either this or that.

Early in my spiritual journey I thought of spirituality as sort of “up, up and away,” a kind of rising above the fray. Getting up to an altitude where the air would be clean and you could move with ease. One of the biggest things that I have learned in the course of my 70 years is that the

direction of the spiritual journey is not upward but downward. It is down to what Paul Tillich called “the ground of being.” So part of my spiritual journey has, for example, been three extended wrestling matches with clinical depression, which is not only down, but underground. Clinical depression isn’t like being lost in the dark, it is more like becoming the dark. My experiences with depression have been one of the most profound schools of the spirit that I have ever been to. The truth about each of us is that we are very complicated mixtures of shadow and light, of gold and dirt. It says in Scripture, we are a little lower than the angels and a little higher than the beasts. And that is not an either/or, that’s a both/and. I learn a lot more from my failures than I do from my successes.

### SPEAKER INTRODUCTION

**Lillian Daniel:** We’re so grateful to Parker Palmer for sharing his spiritual journey. If you’d like to find out more about him, you can visit our web site at [30goodminutes.org](http://30goodminutes.org).

But now, let me tell you about today’s speaker. The Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis is Senior Minister of Middle Collegiate Church in New York City, a multicultural, multiracial, multi-faceted congregation in the East Village. Jacqui grew up in Chicago, where she first sensed God’s call to ministry. Following college, she spent eight years at the Eastman Kodak Company before entering Princeton Theological Seminary. She went on to earn a PhD in psychology and religion before joining the Middle Church staff in 2004. Jacqui is the author of “The Power of Stories: A Guide for Leaders in Multiracial, Multicultural Congregations.” We’re delighted to welcome her back to “30 Good Minutes.” Welcome, Jacqui.

### MESSAGE

**Jacqui Lewis:** Lillian, thank you. I’m so glad to be here!

Hello everyone. Let me share this brief text from I John 4:16: “So we have known and believe that this is the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.”

If I ask you to close your eyes and picture God, what do you see? How would you describe God? What is your image of God? In I John, there is this simple image that God is love, and those who abide in love—who live in love—abide in God and God abides or lives in them.

In the Christian New Testament, the word abide is *meneo*. It means to sojourn, to continue or to be held. So when I read this text I hear two things: when we live in love, we are held in God; and when we love God, God is held in us.

I want to talk for a bit about this last piece, how God abides in us, how we are the holding place for God. The writer is saying that we are God’s abode, God’s apartment. We’re God’s condo, God’s dorm room, God’s house or God’s SRO. We are God’s Love Shack!

Why does God choose to live in us, to be held by us? Just because! Not because we are beautiful or smart or rich or perfect or fabulous or because have worked hard or prayed hard—just because. We are God’s tent, God’s home. As the B52s sing, we’re God’s “Love Shack, Baby!”

And here is what really excites me. This scripture from the Judeo-Christian tradition is not the only theology that indicates that God is inside of us. The Yogi's chant an ancient Sanskrit Blessing: Om Namah Shivaya. Why? It means, "I bow to Shiva," the Supreme Reality, the Inner Self. It is the name given to consciousness that dwells in all of us. This mantra is free of all restrictions. It can be repeated by anyone, young or old, rich or poor and no matter what state a person is in, they will be purified. The belief is that bowing to Shiva is bowing to God—the Great Almighty. The repetition of the name of God is equivalent to being merged in God's very being. Many Buddhists, Taoists and Hindus greet each other with "Namaste," which literally means "I bow to you." So the concept is that the divine spark in me recognizes the divine spark in you.

I have a thesis that we human beings don't really fully know who we are. Most of us have a case of mistaken identity. If we really believed that God lives in us, how would our lives look? How could we be cruel to anybody, blow up anybody, fight with anybody, destroy the souls of anybody if we thought they housed God? How could we put poison in our bodies, let somebody hurt us, not take care of our bodies if we believed God was inside? How could we even bear to hurt the feelings of the other if we thought that God would get God's feelings hurt at the same time?

I say we don't believe it—not nearly enough, not for long enough—for it to shape whom we are and how we live. And so we wander about, lost and lonely, frightened and false, angry and agitated, listless and lifeless. Or—let me tell you a secret, this is my disease—we run about with such speed and haste so as to avoid ever noticing that we are empty inside or afraid.

We live life without balance. And most of our world religions understand this concept. The Taoists call it "imbalance," Buddhism calls it "ignorance," Islam blames our misery on rebellion against God, and the Judeo-Christian tradition calls our lack of understanding of our oneness with God "original sin." What would it mean for us to live as though God lives in us? As though the Divine resides in us?

I think we need an extreme house makeover to make more room inside for God to live in us. From broom sweeping to a total gutting we need to make room! We need to do some clean up. There is some junk in there that needs to go. I think this house makeover idea is about three things: prepare, pray and participate.

First, we prepare by making room inside so we can see that God is indeed in there. I have a friend named Lincoln. We grew up in the same neighborhood in Chicago. Lincoln is one of those really scary, frighteningly smart people. When he was in college he hit a rough spot, like an existential crisis at eighteen. He was miserable and went through a phase where he drank vodka for water. I remember he called me one day when I was in grad school and said, "I am either going to talk to you now or I'm driving into the tree!" The vodka was an analgesic; his spirit was broken. His "house" had too much junk in it for him to look inside and recognize God living there. It took some time, but he went to counseling and found a great place to worship in community, and threw away his fear, his sense that he was not worthy of being a Love Shack and saw in himself the goodness God sees.

Second, we pray. Since God lives inside, we can't redecorate without being in conversation. We can't draw up remodeling plans without some give and take. We can read our holy texts and get great suggestions, but in order to really know the Holy, we need to pray. And prayer is a conversation, not a list of demands. God wants so much to be in communication with us. Sometimes our lives will heat us up so that we will start talking with God.

The woman who wrote the best selling book, "Eat, Love, Pray" is Elizabeth Gilbert. Liz's marriage was falling apart and she was devastated. She had never prayed, never had a conversation with God. Sitting on the bathroom floor, weeping, feeling really at the bottom, she spoke to God like the polite writer she is.

She introduced herself to God and said, "Hi God, this is Liz. I have never done this before but I hope I have communicated my gratitude at least. Please, if you can just tell me what to do, tell me what to do." She said heard a voice—not Charlton Heston, and not Whoopie Goldberg. But she heard her own voice, her own best, purest, unwounded voice. And that voice was what she needed to hear. The voice said go back to bed. It sounded right and real to her. Her best inner, divine spark, God in the flesh, talking to her in her own voice. And God just may do that, you know, so we actually recognize what God is saying! So we are not startled out of our clothes, so we can believe what we hear.

If you were to take a moment now to be silent, to hear your own Godly self, that part of you where God resides, what would you hear that voice saying? I hope you would hear it say, "I love you so much. You do not have to do anything for me to love you. You are not the sum total of your mistakes nor are you the sum total of your successes. You are just mine and I love you!"

And finally, we participate. We do not serve a puppeteer. We are on this planet to do something, to be something. I think it is to partner with the Holy—to become who God wants us to be—and so we move with God, we dance with God, we push and shove and tussle with God. God survives our anger and we survive our anger, too. In the turning and the twisting we become who God wants us to be.

I'm 50 years old and I'm not finished becoming, but I am on my way. I am no longer afraid of what people think of me. I am just here. When I make mistakes I don't collapse, I just say oops! I get up and I believe that I am forgiven. All of my dreams have not come true. I grieve—a child I did not have—I think I would have been a great mom. And there are wonderful children in my life and my husband and family make me feel so happy. I feel like God and I have partnered pretty well and I sense that I am participating in what God is doing in the world.

How about you? God lives inside all of us, you little Love Shack! And we are not finished.

### CONVERSATION

**Daniel Pawlus:** If you'd like a printed transcript, audio copy or DVD of the message you just heard from Jacqui Lewis, we'll tell you how to place an order at the end of the program. Or you can visit our website at [30goodminutes.org](http://30goodminutes.org) to watch the video or read the text anytime. Now, let's talk with Jacqui Lewis. Jacqui, thank you for that passionate message full of great humor.

**Jacqui Lewis:** Thank you, Daniel.

**Daniel Pawlus:** You called out something that was very interesting to me. I think it's pretty profound this idea of a mistaken identity. A lot of us seem to sense that God is "out there" somewhere. But you're talking about a God within.

**Jacqui Lewis:** That's right.

**Daniel Pawlus:** As a pastor—and Lillian might be able to speak to this, too—how do you help your congregations get to that place, because you come together as a community, but there is also a separate, individual journey here, isn't there?

**Jacqui Lewis:** I think that's right, Daniel. I think it's like what Palmer Parker talks about, a both/and. It's managing a polarity. God certainly is transcendent, out there watching us, as Bette Midler might sing, "from a distance." But truly God is also inside, deep inside. And lots of scriptures in lots of traditions talk about this. I'm particularly fascinated always with the Genesis creation story. God scooping up the clay and shaping the human being, but it isn't until God blows into the human being the breath of life that the human becomes a living one.

**Lillian Daniel:** I think so many people have trouble imagining that God can be inside them or that they're created in God's image because they feel like my life is such a mess or I've made such a mess of my life, or if my life were perfect I could see that. And I really appreciated at the end of your remarks that you share that your life wasn't perfect and yet still you could imagine God being apart of you.

**Jacqui Lewis:** Yeah, I think that's right. I think it's our humanness. I think our brokenness, our disappointment, our "regularness," our everyday failings are just all apart of being human and God made us that way. I think God created us in God's own image but there's a kind of refraction, a bending. One of the things we do to help people to get that is we make our worship pretty down to earth. Worship is pretty rowdy at Middle Church!

**Daniel Pawlus:** Let's talk about that a little bit. I mean, a multiracial, multi-congregational, tell us about that experience. You've specialized in this in your doctoral thesis. How many of these kinds of churches exist because I have a feeling many of us may not have that experience at all?

**Jacqui Lewis:** There are about 300,000 Christian congregations in the United States and 7.5% of those of them would say they are multiracial and multicultural. But half of those are in transition. Some people are moving out, neighborhoods are changing. But the ones that are purposeful are about 4%. One of the things that we do at Middle Church every Sunday is to try to make worship a celebration of our humanity. So there is art and drama and puppet shows. Our passing of the peace, Lillian, is so crazy I have to cut it off sometimes! Everybody has to hug everybody. But it's the down to "earthness." It's the safe place to cry, to laugh, to hug, to be unformed so God can keep forming us. And I think if more congregations would get that sort of more of a relaxed, playful environment in order to experience God's holiness, I think we could deconstruct the space between us and God and make it more like *parachoros*, we would say, the dancing together as we explore becoming who God wants us to be.

**Lillian Daniel:** A lot of people feel like in order to even walk through the door of a church they have to have their act together, that everybody in there has 2.5 children and looks nice and is dressed up. If I'm at the end of my rope there's no place for me there. How do you work with those folks who can't even walk through that door?

**Jacqui Lewis:** We take really seriously the message of the Christian scriptures about Jesus not coming for the well or the perfect or the fabulous, but coming for the regular, for those who are in need of God. And also scriptures that talk about coming as a child. So it's that playful self that we welcome. And we really do work hard at welcoming everyone just as they are as they come through the door. Not only that, I think it's important that we think about polarity, so it's God out but God in. It's personal piety, but it's also a kind of corporate salvation. So we work really hard to make worship not just about what happens on Sunday morning but we make sandwiches and take them to the park on Sunday afternoons. We serve 65 meals a week to people living with HIV/AIDS. We take our teenagers to New Orleans. So worship or church life keeps pushing out beyond the boundaries of the church into the world.

**Daniel Pawlus:** I bet that's one of the challenges. When you have great music, great choirs, certain people are attracted to that experience, but that's not all church is. It's not a performance, it's this process of allowing people to go deeper together. So how do you keep that balance between it not becoming about the arts or the culture?

**Lillian Daniel:** Or a performance.

**Daniel Pawlus:** Or performance, but informing the faith journey for people.

**Jacqui Lewis:** It's a really good question. I think one is the entry point—like the worship, the music—that just gets people in. And then we put people in relationship with each other, a lot of small groups and classes, safe places to tell a story. I want to talk about a guy named Nathan who joined us because of the music. You hear the music outside, the doors are open, you find your way in and there's a place you sit in the back. You then move toward the front. Pretty soon he joins a small group. He has a safe place to talk about his addiction. He is a guy who is struggling with recovery. It's not easy for him, but he knows that all three of his pastors are there for him. He can come and sit in our offices and cry or laugh. So again, it's a movement from out to in, like the movement from out to deep down. We talk about a deep and wide faith, out in the world but also deep down in the soul to know how much God wants for us our best selves.

**Lillian Daniel:** It sounds like you're also talking about how to cultivate a community of faith in which you can really be honest and that you can really wear your pain on your sleeve and that you don't have to wear a mask. I mean, so many people probably rushing around Manhattan who are wearing masks. And can church be a place where you can break that down?

**Jacqui Lewis:** Well, we hope so, right? And we hope that if we really get it that each of the people in the congregation—but not only them, the people in the world—everybody houses God. Everybody is the place where God resides. There are implications not only then for personal piety or a self-love—God loves me, I need to love me—there's implications for community and

the congregation. God loves her, him. We together will join together to make the world a better place. But there's also, I think, implications for a kind of social ethic, that if God lives inside not only me but also the Buddhists and the Muslims and the Jews and even the people who don't know God, can we believe that?

**Lillian Daniel:** And the guy who cut me off on the highway!

**Jacqui Lewis:** Exactly. Suddenly we're responsible to and for one another. We have to care for each other. We share our resources together. We make the world a better place together.

**Daniel Pawlus:** Jacqui, thank you for joining us today. It's always a pleasure to have you here.

**Jacqui Lewis:** Thank you, it's great to be here.

### REFLECTION INTRODUCTION

**Daniel Pawlus:** We turn our attention now to Rabbi Michael Siegel, Senior Rabbi of Anshe Emet Synagogue in Chicago. He has a few words for us on "salvation."

### REFLECTION

**Michael Siegel:** Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev was one of the best loved of all of the Hasidic Masters. Like other Rebbes, Levi Yitzhak was thought to have remarkable spiritual powers. When he prayed, it was believed that this Rabbi had direct access to God Almighty. Levi Yitzhak was also known as a tireless advocate for the Jewish people.

One Yom Kippur Levi Yitzhak's prayer was so powerful he found himself standing in heaven on the Day of Atonement. There before him were the scales of judgment. As Levi Yitzhak prayed the scales judging the world began to move in a positive direction. The angels could not believe what was happening. They cried out, "Levi Yitzhak, you are saving the world, don't stop praying!" Suddenly, Levi Yitzhak looked down from heaven and saw Hayim. A poor man, he did not have enough food to fill his stomach before the great fast, and now as the day wore on, Hayim had fainted and was near death. Levi Yitzhak left heaven so that he might attend to Hayim. As he returned to earth, the angels cried out; "Levi Yitzhak, you could have saved the world!" Levi Yitzhak then heard another voice, the voice of the God Almighty, "He is saving the world."

Friends, the world will not be saved in a world movement. No, the world is saved one soul at a time. Saving Hayim the water drawer, the most downtrodden of men, is a step toward saving the entire world. All of us can play the role of Levi Yitzhak.

### CLOSING

**Daniel Pawlus:** Thank you, Michael. And our thanks again to Jacqui Lewis, Parker Palmer and you for joining 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](http://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.