



PROGRAM TRANSCRIPT

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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.

Lillian Daniel: And I’m Lillian Daniel. Our guest today, whom you’ll meet in a moment, is Barbara Lundblad, the Joe. R. Engle Professor of Preaching at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. She’ll be talking to us about

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

Lillian Daniel: But let’s begin with the story of a Chicago artist who practices the age-old art of sacred illumination. Using the same techniques as the Renaissance artists, Jed Gibbons’ work sheds a light on the great stories of the Bible. Let’s watch.

SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Jed Gibbons: As a young kid I was pretty much drawing all the time on something: on the walls in the basement, the living room. I just always enjoyed the tactile feel of the paint and creating images. I never envisioned myself doing religious art. I went to a design school. I worked in advertising. One day I went to a bookstore and there was one book in particular that stood out. It was in this really beautiful gold and red box and it was filled with all these really beautiful images of saints and of different religious scenes. I looked at it and said I could probably do that.

Illumination is the art of lighting up the page. The monasteries began illumination and they copied the Bible. The subject matter is largely religious. They go into churches. They go into chapels. They go onto people’s walls at home. And eventually the demand became so big that it moved out of the monasteries and became a layperson’s profession. It utilizes a lot of different materials such as gold, colors made from semi-precious stones that are ground into pigments. Lapis lazuli looks like blue marble and the best grade comes from Afghanistan, the same mines that Michelangelo and many of the illuminators got their lapis lazuli from.

I’ve done individual illuminations of particular saints such as St. John the Baptist. In this scene St. Nicholas is the bearer of the gifts to the nations, which is the Gospel. The *vera* icon is the image of Christ that was left on the veil of Veronica. The church has a very rich visual vocabulary made up of incredible symbolism and much of it has been lost. What I try to do is bring that visual vocabulary back and get people to understand it.

I designed the floor of St. John Cantius in Chicago. You can't put an image on a floor that you're going to walk on so it all had to be done through symbols. First of all, the star of David, the Nativity, that's the birth of Christ, the manifestation, which are the three crowns. Then after that you move up to the Passion symbolized by a crown of thorns and other instruments of the torture. The vexillum is the Resurrection banner. I think the artwork really leads you into probably more of a prayerful way of life or thoughtful way of life.

We're going to lay the gold onto these and then we're going to burnish the gold, then tool the gold not to create neat little patterns but it breaks it up into like a prism and helps the gold to sparkle. When you're always designing pieces depicting the firmament and the heavenly court with all the saints and you're polishing their halos, you're hoping that you're somehow, in a way, polishing yours.

SPEAKER INTRODUCTION

Daniel Pawlus: We thank Jed Gibbons for sharing his spiritual journey. For more information about his work, you can visit our web site at 30goodminutes.org.

Now, let me tell you about today's speaker. Barbara Lundblad is one of America's foremost practitioners of the art of preaching. An ordained minister in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, she served 16 years as a parish pastor in New York City. She has taught preaching at Yale and Princeton, and currently serves as the Joe R. Engle Professor of Preaching at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. Barbara is a frequent guest preacher throughout the U.S. and is the author of two books on the art of preaching. We're delighted to welcome Barbara Lundblad back to "30 Good Minutes." Welcome, Barbara.

MESSAGE

Barbara Lundblad: Thanks, Dan.

A reading from the Gospel of Luke (Luke 13:10-17 RSV):

Now Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit of infirmity that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the Sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days to be cured, and not on the Sabbath day." But the Lord answered him and said, "You hypocrites! Does not each one of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the Sabbath day?" When Jesus said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.

She had grown accustomed to looking at feet. After eighteen years bent down, she could recognize people by their bunions. Today we might say she had osteoporosis, but it could have been years of women's work: carrying water, scrubbing floors, washing feet. The text says she

had “a spirit of infirmity.” Isn’t it possible that she also had an “infirmity of spirit”? Oh, this wasn’t her own doing. She could have coped with her physical condition – she had done that for eighteen years. But it was the way she was treated by others that caused this other infirmity, often more devastating than the first. It was the way people sometimes spoke over her back as though she wasn’t even there. Or walked away from her in the middle of a sentence, or kept their distance as though her condition might be contagious. It took more than a little gumption to even come to Sabbath services because she knew that some considered her condition to be God’s punishment for some sin, either hers or her parents.

Nancy Mairs is a woman who knows something about such things. A gifted writer, she has lived for years with multiple sclerosis that gets worse year by year. In her book “Waist-high in the World” she describes her vantage point from a wheelchair. “The truth is,” she says, “that unless you are squatting or six years old, I can never look you straight in the eye...” That’s not so different from looking only at feet. Nancy Mairs knows what it means to have an “infirmity of spirit.”

She says, “Because the soundness of the body so often serves as a metaphor for its moral health, the body’s deterioration thus implies moral degeneracy. That puts me and my kind in a quandary. How can I possibly be “good”? Let’s face it, wicked witches are not just ugly (as sin); they’re also bent and misshapen (crooked). I am bent and misshapen, therefore, ugly, therefore wicked. And I have no way to atone.”

I’m aware of the things I say without thinking: “Walk on your own two feet!” Self-reliance. “Look me straight in the eye.” Honesty. “We are often deaf to the cries of the poor.” Moral failure. It’s not hard to imagine that, after eighteen years bent down, the woman had an infirmity of spirit. Did anybody ever bend down to look into her eyes? Did anyone think to say, “Can I get you anything from the market?” or “Would you like to walk to the synagogue with me?” Did anybody ever touch her?

The text doesn’t tell us such things. We don’t even know her name. We only know that she appeared in the synagogue as Jesus was teaching. She didn’t go to him or cry out for attention. She would have gone unnoticed, except, when Jesus saw her, he called her over. She became more important to him than what he was teaching.

Listen carefully to what happens next. Jesus said to her, “Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.” Then after saying that, Jesus laid his hands on her and she stood up and began praising God. But Jesus’ first words are very important: “Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.” Even before she stood up, even before her physical condition changed, even before she was cured, she was healed.

She was set free. Was that what was so upsetting to the religious leaders? Note that they don’t chastise Jesus, they shouted instead at the crowds, including this woman. After all those years looking at feet, she stood up to see faces contorted with rage. It was enough to make her look down again! But Jesus heard their outburst. He returned to his teaching and began to argue case law like a rabbi: “Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the

manger, and lead it away to give it water? Ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from her bondage on the Sabbath day?"

I wonder what she was thinking about while Jesus was talking. Maybe she thought about the tenth commandment where wife and ox and ass appear in the same sentence: "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife nor his man-servant nor his maid-servant nor his ox nor his ass, nor anything that is your neighbor's." When I was in Sunday School we tried to say the words really fast. When you do that, wife and ox and ass blur together as though they were all a man's property. I have no idea if she thought about such things, but she must have been delighted when Jesus called her "a daughter of Abraham," a member of the family cherished by God.

This was no small thing, for she often felt judged because of her condition, shunned by others even within her own family. Social isolation is too often the reality for people with disabilities, including far too many wounded soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. How can we be communities of healing where people with disabilities are welcome? Every curb cut in the sidewalk is an invitation for someone in a wheelchair to be part of the larger world. In New York City, where I live, I always marvel that people sit patiently, even people in a hurry, on the bus while the driver gets up, lowers the lift and raises it again to bring a person in an electric scooter onto the bus. Hopefully our churches are as welcoming as city buses. People with disabilities can be our best teachers if we're paying attention.

"I mean to make a map," says Nancy Mairs. She's talking about a map to negotiate the unknown territory in front of her—and in front most of us sooner or later. And she goes on: "My infinitely harder task is to conceptualize not merely a habitable body but a habitable world: a world that wants me in it." We pray and work for such a world, a world that wants Nancy and other people with disabilities in it. We pray for one another even as we understand that healing may come when a cure never does. Jesus said, "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity." Now, Jesus calls us to set people free from whatever it is that bends them low.

CONVERSATION

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

Barbara, it seems like so often in the life of the church, the time that we think about people with disabilities is around building campaigns and when we're renovating the building, but I think you're pushing us to do more than that, more than think about the physical space.

Barbara Lundblad: Well, I'm pushing people to also think about the text, because in so many of those Bible texts that we have, everybody is always cured and so you imagine people sitting in the congregation who won't be cured and is there ever any good news for them. Somebody like Nancy Mairs, the author I talked about, really pushes us to think of people with disabilities as whole people rather than partial people.

Lillian Daniel: If I can follow up on that, I couldn't help but listen to her words against the words of Jesus where he says that this woman has been in sort of captivity to Satan for eighteen years. How do you as somebody who wrestles with the text make sense of that statement?

Barbara Lundblad: Well, I think that's a very tough part of the text. I sort of skipped over it as preachers sometimes do!

Lillian Daniel: Sorry!

Barbara Lundblad: No. I think in some ways...I did a workshop a few years ago with another Nancy, named Nancy Eastland, who just died this last year. She said to me, "You have to put the person with the disability in the speaking center." So I thought, that's hard to do, and in that case I would really, in a longer sermon, want to struggle with that part about Satan binding her because that sort of leads into the whole issue of people being punished somehow for having a disability.

Daniel Pawlus: Your message reminded me, Barbara, in my parish we have a woman in a wheelchair who takes part in the service by doing one of the readings. And it really calls attention to the idea that someone allowed and encouraged this to happen. I wonder, for both of you I guess, are our churches conscious about trying to engage people with disabilities or is it really just a building campaign? I'm sure that there are many people that watch our program who aren't able to go out to church that get spiritual nourishment from what we're doing. So is it something that really needs to become more in conversation to really actively engage people with disabilities?

Barbara Lundblad: Oh, absolutely. I mean when you say that someone who is in a wheelchair does the reading, do people in a wheelchair ever serve communion? You know, when you receive the bread or the cup from someone in a wheelchair you're suddenly aware that that person is there. I think we could do much more. Somebody told me not long ago that 93% of households that include a person with a disability are unchurched.

Daniel Pawlus: That's a fascinating number.

Barbara Lundblad: Incredible. 93%.

Lillian Daniel: I can imagine that's true. I think sometimes in churches we get overly smug about what we have done. I remember at my church somebody arrived in a wheelchair and they said, "Where can I sit?" I felt good about the fact that we had this place here. They said, "Why don't you have that in the middle of the pews. We're always asked to either sit at the back of the church or in the very front row. And why can't we choose?" I thought that just having multiple options would make such a difference.

Barbara Lundblad: That's great because I think people with disabilities have so much to teach us here. There are some wonderful poems about disability written by people with disabilities. One of the things they said is, you know, you're going to make mistakes, you're going to be embarrassed, you're going to say the wrong thing, but I think we have to be willing to just be

embarrassed because it's really worth it to be able to do things in a different way than we now do them.

Daniel Pawlus: And to your example, when we notice people with disabilities they really bring us into the moment in a different way, don't they? To not only be grateful for perhaps what we have our health in that regard, but also to think about what they need to encounter on a daily basis. Your example about a bus in New York City is just a fascinating one because everyone is running a million miles a minute there. It happens so rarely, I can relate to that.

Barbara Lundblad: I'm always so surprised that people just don't get up and get angry about it, but I've seen many times that people just sit there and wait. I think that kind of access, to be able to go places, to be able to be on your own, I think, is such an important gift.

Lillian Daniel: I want to go back to the Biblical story again and the idea of this woman. You talked about the cultural context that people might have believed that she had done something to bring this osteoporosis upon herself or that her ancestors had done something wrong. Do you think some of that still continues today and is part of our discomfort with this topic?

Barbara Lundblad: I think so. I mean, even though rationally we would just like to not believe that, I think that we want to have an explanation for something. Either you may say that it's the fault of Satan, that power of evil in the world or that it's some kind of punishment. I think people feel that in their bones even though they might be arguing with themselves about it. But I think that kind of feeling is very, very strong, even with people that are thinking people. I was in a workshop once where there were several people with cerebral palsy and they said, "One of the things we think about a lot, we talk about among ourselves, is if I could take a pill tonight and wake up completely free of CP, would I do it? And she said, and she was very clear, she would never take that pill. She is saying this is who I am.

Lillian Daniel: This has shaped my personality.

Barbara Lundblad: Right. She said, "I wouldn't want to be in heaven as somebody who wasn't in a motorized scooter." Boy, from my perspective I assume she would want to take that pill.

Daniel Pawlus: We're so grateful for you bringing this to the conversation today, Barbara. I want to shift gears just a little bit in the time that we have left. You're an expert in the art of preaching. I want to ask both you and Lillian, as pastors and so forth, what makes a great preacher? What are our viewers looking for or what in your mind makes a great preacher? We have so many great guests on this program, but what do you think about that? Just curious.

Barbara Lundblad: Well, that's hard. It would take us another whole show. For me, it is that place where there is a deep connection between the Scripture text and the text of the community. And if there isn't that connection with people, if you don't care at least as much about the people as you do about that text then you really should read the text and stay home or let the people read the text on their own. So for me it's that really electric moment where there is a meeting between that scripture text and the text of the people's lives.

Lillian Daniel: I can imagine that you would be very disappointed if our viewers left this program not remembering what the Bible text was, that you really implanted that in our minds in a different way but connecting it to present day reality. Giving us an image and really taking us into that character.

Daniel Pawlus: Is that teachable? Do some people have more of an affinity toward that naturally, to sense that they're connecting with the community?

Lillian Daniel: I think everybody can learn that. I think some people come to preaching, as you would come to dancing or painting or singing, with some gifts. And even I could learn to be a better dancer. I mean that would be great. But I think it's a matter of paying attention and honoring people. Really saying to yourself, "These people are as important as this text." Some people don't believe that. I think you really have to talk to people, get to know them, and listen to them. I think anybody can learn that.

Lillian Daniel: Well, you honor all of us by being here today and helping us to see that text in an entirely new way. Thank you Barbara.

REFLECTION INTRODUCTION

Lillian Daniel: We turn now to Judy Valente, with another in our series of reflections on monastic values for ordinary people. Today she reflects on "Silence."

REFLECTION

Judy Valente: One of the things I appreciate most about spending time at Mount St. Scholastica Monastery in Kansas, is the reverence people have for listening and for silence.

One day, sitting in chapel, I noticed some Latin words from the Rule of St. Benedict written across a stained glass window: *tempore* and *silentio*. Time and silence. At the time, I'd been traveling from city to city, giving presentations on a book I had written while still working as a journalist. The words of St. Benedict's helped me realize how "talked out" I had become. I needed the rejuvenating balm of silence and solitude.

Once a month, the monastery observes a "silent Sunday." A peacefulness seems to enter the very stones of the place. I remember eating my lunch on one of those Sundays. I looked out the window and noticed some prairie grass, just beginning to turn green. The grass, the window had been there the day before, but I was probably too busily engaged in dinner conversation to notice either of them. When I walked the grounds, it was as if the wind was speaking to me. The day became one prolonged prayer.

While on a rare journey outside of his cloister, the Trappist monk Thomas Merton wrote, "I get the feeling that so much talking goes on that is utterly useless. The redwood forests, the sea, the sky, the waves...it is in all this you will find answers." In other words, it is in the silence where everything connects.

CLOSING

Lillian Daniel: Thank you, Judy. And our thanks again to Barbara Lundblad, Jed Gibbons and you for being with us today on “30 Good Minutes.” I’m Lillian Daniel.

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.