



PROGRAM TRANSCRIPT

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WELCOME

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

Lillian Daniel: And I’m Lillian Daniel. Our guest today is the Rev. Dan Matthews, rector emeritus of Trinity Church Wall Street, in New York City. He’s going to talk about how, in a culture of such great abundance, being consumed with wanting more makes it difficult to be grateful for what we already have.

Lydia Talbot: We also welcome back Michael Siegel, senior rabbi of Anshe Emet Synagogue in Chicago. He has a few thoughts about how faith is enriched when we’re able to give thanks.

Lillian Daniel: And we begin with the story of a man whose generosity will inspire you. When Gordon Imrie decided to donate a kidney to a friend, his reward was a grateful heart for the life he was able to save, as well as a deep gratitude for the blessings in life. Let’s watch.

SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Gordon Imrie: Thankfulness or gratitude is a big deal to me. I like to end the day with thankfulness for big things, little things. I’m just grateful for my wife. I met her in church and here we are thirty-one years later. People who have been given a lot in their lives tend to be more willing to give of themselves.

I grew up in Hinsdale. My family has always extended itself to people. My mom and my dad took in twenty-seven people; some for four months, some for four years. They were always people with problems, big divorces or mental problems or alcohol or whatever. They just did this. That is what I call “shirt sleeves philanthropy.”

I’ve given blood for a long time and I’ve always thought that because I have a spare kidney, I could spare it! I thought about that for twenty years. Mary Ferguson, I met her in high school. She said, “I’ve had to quit my job because I’ve had some serious health problems. In fact, I’m doing dialysis. And it’s hell. But I’m on the waiting list.” So I said, “I’ve got a spare. You know, if it’s legal, I’d be happy to loan it to you. Or—wait a minute—give it to you!” So we laughed a little bit.

We went to get tested. On six out of the seven criteria we were a match. We got right down to business. It was covered by her insurance and it turns out cheaper to do a kidney transplant than

sixteen years of dialysis. It's a \$550,000 operation. I was self-employed at the time so I did have the flexibility to do it. The surgery was between two and four hours. My first feelings when I came to were, "How's Mary doing?" She apparently woke up and looked down at her toes, and there were her loved ones around the foot of her bed with their heads bowed. She thought something along the lines of, "Oh my God, I've died!"

One of the people who wrote to me afterwards said this wasn't really a gift of life, it was a gift of love. The heroic part of it is, I think, a lot overrated. What about the guys who go into the fire department or into the police department or off to war? Your chances in the Middle East are three in one hundred. Your chances of dying as a donor are about one in ten thousand, which is trivial. So this is something that I hope that we'll see more of because it's a tremendous amount of philanthropy. If it's a half-million dollar operation, you become the biggest philanthropist on your block for some time, even if you didn't write the check! We've kept in touch. Are we brother and sister or confidants? Probably not, but fast friends for sure!

INTRODUCTION

Lydia Talbot: Gordon Imrie is a member of the First Church of Christ, Scientist in Hinsdale, Illinois. Our thanks to Gordon for sharing his story.

And now, let me tell you about today's speaker. When the tragedy of 9|11 happened six years ago, Dan Matthews was a few blocks away at Trinity Episcopal Church, where he was the rector. Their Chapel, across the street from Ground Zero, was miraculously spared in the destruction and became the spiritual center for many thousands of rescue workers, mourners, and people from around the world.

Dan was born in Chicago and in high school moved to North Carolina. He spent the first half of his of ministry in Tennessee and Georgia, before moving to New York City in 1987, where he led the people of Trinity Church Wall Street until his retirement in 2003. We're so delighted to welcome Dr. Dan Matthews back to "30 Good Minutes." Welcome, Dan.

MESSAGE

Daniel Matthews: Thank you, Lydia. It's good to be here.

For more than 20 years I have lived in New York City. For the person who enjoys shopping, New York is a paradise, except for those people who love to shop at Wal-Mart. It just so happens there is not one Wal-Mart in the whole of New York. Someone told me recently it is about 35 miles from Manhattan to the nearest Wal-Mart.

Some months ago I was visiting my wife down in western North Carolina in the mountains and found that I needed a small battery for my camera. I realized that the only place I could find that unique battery was at Wal-Mart. I waved a goodbye to my wife as I borrowed her car and drove the fourteen miles down into town. When I walked into Wal-Mart, I headed straight to the camera department, which is in the back of the store. On the way back there, I stopped and spotted cases of Coca Cola stacked up for a price that was utterly unbelievable for my New York mentality. So I got one of those big carts, and on that bottom rack I put three or four cases of Coca Cola at a price so low I felt they were being given away.

Well, I had not gotten very far before I discovered paper towels, and compared with New York City, they were also at a ridiculously low price, so I piled them into the cart as well. After getting my battery, I headed out and saw some more bargains and by the time I checked out I had enough stuff to practically fill my wife's small Subaru station wagon. When I got home she came out to greet me. She saw the car filled up. Then slowly she wandered around it without saying a word. After looking into all the windows she remarked, "And we don't need any of it."

Ever done that? For those of us old enough to remember the depression era, the abundance of goods in our present world is staggering.

The Wall Street Journal ran an article some months ago describing the fastest growing business in America today: the development and the construction of mini warehouses, these small storage facilities that you see in every town and in every city. We first fill the closets and the attic and the basement and the garage and then we go across town and rent some space to store our stuff. The reality is that in the midst of all this abundance of stuff, we have a mentality of scarcity. We think we need a little more. We are yearning to buy, if the price is right. In short, we can't get enough of what we don't need. Imagine our present day culture in any historical perspective. We have more possessions than any culture in the history of the world. We think of ourselves and our own personal value in terms of how much stuff we have. And our basic way of seeing the world is by virtue of scarcity. And if we are honest, almost no one of us is free of that yearning to have a little bit more. Oh, we don't want to be accused of being greedy. We simply don't quite have enough. "Maybe other people do," we say to ourselves, "but I don't. I need just a little bit more."

John D. Rockefeller was asked at the height of his career by a reporter, "Mr. Rockefeller, how much is enough?" And he responded, "Just a little more than I have."

It is hard to be grateful when our primary motivating factor is a sense of scarcity. We think to ourselves, I need more: more things, more money, more space, more of almost everything. And we never even stop to challenge that way of thinking. A genuine sense of prayerful gratitude for our abundance has lost its base in our ceaseless passion to perpetuate our myth of scarcity.

Jesus exuded a sense of gratitude. When we look at the story of the feeding of the five thousand in the New Testament, we find disciples anxious about the scarcity of food. They nervously asked Jesus, "What are we going to do with so many people? There is a scarcity of food." And Jesus said, "How much do we have?" You remember the story about the young lad with the loaves and the fishes. Jesus gave thanks for the little bit they had and, in that moment of gratitude, there was enough for everyone. Gratitude is the central theme of the feeding of the five thousand and that exciting story and miracle appears in all the four Gospels.

Or the story of the woman who came into the dinner party where Jesus was reclining with others. She stood at Jesus feet and poured expensive ointment on his feet, and as she poured the ointment on his feet, the other guests wondered why would he allow this woman of the streets to waste this expensive ointment on his feet. "It could be given to the poor," they thought, but Jesus saw this act in a radically different way. He saw himself as being grateful for the gift this woman

was giving. He honored her with deep gratification for what she was feeling and expressing in the pouring out of that ointment.

You remember the incident when ten lepers came to Jesus? They wanted to be healed and only one of them returned to give thanks and express gratitude. Maybe that is a pretty good average. One out of ten. "Where were the nine others who were healed?" he asked.

We grow up in families where mothers or fathers or grandparents insist we say, "Thank you." We are trained by good etiquette; if for nothing else, just to repeat those words, "Thank you." We are trained to keep that expression central in our relationships with others. And yet, those common sense words from our family training are swallowed up by an enormous market-driven world in which we live, where advertising and the consumer culture is central in every day of our lives. It takes much more than our etiquette or our common sense of polite manners to challenge the onslaught of consumer advertising wherever it might appear. Hundreds of times a day to every one of us, it beckons us to want more. It reminds us that the world is a place of scarcity, not abundance. It sabotages gratitude so we can rarely stop to rejoice in God's abundance but rather presses on with the myth of scarcity.

We have made our virtues with endless dreams of perpetual acquisitions and have become oblivious to their unintended consequences. Gratitude is the victim. I have often heard a businessman say to another businessman words to the effect, "Don't forget, cash is king." Well, if we had to use that same sort of over arching sentiment in relationship to Scripture, we well might say that in the New Testament, "gratitude is king."

Oh, by the way, remember that little battery I bought at the Wal-Mart in the North Carolina mountains? Well, when I went to the closet to get the camera, I realized I had two other cameras. I really did not need that battery at all. Amen.

CONVERSATION

Lillian Daniel: If you'd like a free printed transcript or audio copy of the message you just heard from Dr. Dan Matthews, stay with us and 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 download the text anytime.

Now, let's talk with Dan Matthews. Dan, you've had a long career at Trinity Church on Wall Street. When the stock market is going down, when the housing market is in trouble and people aren't buying houses or selling houses, this message you have of abundance amidst the culture of scarcity, how does that play differently on Wall Street than somewhere else in the country?

Dan Matthews: It's the center of greed! It really is a place that is so out of touch with what I was trying to say about gratitude because when you get on the cycle of greed you can never get enough. You keep wanting more. My twenty years in that area made me believe that one of the real issues for our culture is the fact that we can't be grateful because there is not enough. There might be enough for you, but not for me, you see. You might think it. And yet greed we know is bad and wrong and destructive, but we still have it. So it's deeply central to the way we think about ourselves and each other and God's world.

Lydia Talbot: While you were at Trinity on Wall Street, Dan, you were the brains behind the founding of the Vision Satellite Network, the interfaith satellite network. I'm wondering, how your jump into television changed the way that concepts like gratitude are shaped in an authentic way for the public consumption?

Dan Matthews: The concept that television can change lives is a very real concept, and it does. We know it does. What we're about in the religious world is changing lives. For me, one of the most fundamental axioms that needs to be changed is the axiom that there's not enough—I don't have enough, I need a little bit more. *You* might have enough, but you don't understand that *I* don't. It doesn't matter where you are on the spectrum, it's I don't have enough. Television can do that. Television can help with the concept that there is an abundance. In Scripture, everywhere Jesus went, there was plenty in the stories. You remember the wedding feast at Cana of Galilee? Mary said, "They've run out of wine." And the scholars tell us there were six vats, each containing 25 gallons. That 150 gallons of water he turned into wine. They needed an AA chapter right there at that wedding feast! Enormous generosity, overflowing abundance was always in the presence of Jesus.

Lillian Daniel: It's interesting that God can use a medium like television to proclaim a message like this but also television is where so many of us find our temptation. It's where so many of these ideas about scarcity and needing more are propagated.

Dan Matthews: Touché! Absolutely.

Lydia Talbot: The twin gods of money and image.

Dan Matthews: That's right. We're having a hard time with this, but we know in our hearts we're beginning to turn that corner. The ecological movement is helping us somewhat with the whole idea of back to the Earth; the whole idea of conservation. How much *do* you need? Do you need all those light bulbs on? We're beginning to do that. And that's beginning to allow us to say, "I'm grateful for what I have. I don't have to have more in order to be grateful." My wife went to a prep school in New England. Every Wednesday they trained them to have a formal dinner party. One of the things they taught them to say was, "Thank you. I've had sufficient." Isn't that a wonderful line? "I've had sufficient." Wouldn't it be great if we could say to ourselves, "I have sufficient." We would change everything, change the way you think about yourself, your family.

Lillian Daniel: Instead we say, "Super size me!"

Dan Matthews: That's right.

Lydia Talbot: Your family, Dan. You have three most accomplished children: a folklorist, a pastor—who, by the way, assumed the pulpit you used to have in Atlanta, Georgia, in the Episcopal church there—and a teacher. How did you and your wife teach these principles of gratitude to your children as they were growing up and your eight grandchildren as they are growing up?

Dan Matthews: I'm wondering if I did!

Lydia Talbot: Then let me reach further back. What do you remember about what your parents taught you?

Dan Matthews: When I grew up in this city, Chicago, it was the middle of the Depression, the worst time. My father was out of work. He had a doctorate in music and musicians were not immune. But I never once remember thinking that we didn't have enough. We went out to the stockyards where there was a poor family. We adopted them and we drove out after church every Sunday and took things to them. We took food, took clothing, took our toys. Gratitude was a basic. But that's changed since the Depression. We don't have that same philosophical assumption that there's enough. We have a philosophical assumption—an axiom—that says there's *not* enough.

Lillian Daniel: Spiritually speaking, are we better off now or in the Depression? Would you want your children growing up as they grew up in the Depression, with the risks?

Dan Matthews: That's a hard question. Obviously health care is much better and there are a lot of things that you wouldn't want to go back to. On the other hand, the *attitude* that we had toward each other, I think, was healthier in that we shared more, we cared more. There wasn't this need for acquisition, a constant need for more.

Lydia Talbot: What do you say, Dan, to people living in poverty, others who are angry about their lives, the loss or death of loved ones, who would say to God, "Take back your gift!"

Dan Matthews: That's very hard. Poverty I'm not talking about. I'm talking about the average American family now. The average American family believes it doesn't have enough, it is terribly poor, if you will. And that attitude is, philosophically speaking, a way we know about the truth and then knowing the truth that has to do with acquiring things and the truth of my value: I'm not a very valuable person because I don't have much. If you have more, you're of more value. No, not in God's eyes. That's very hard to preach and teach in a culture that, as you say on television, tells me I'll be better if I have this product or that product or if I have more and bigger. It's a very serious issue. It's a very serious religious issue.

Lillian Daniel: Thank you so much for preaching and teaching about it today with us.

INTRODUCTION TO REFLECTION

Lillian Daniel: And now, Michael Siegel, Senior Rabbi of Anshe Emet Synagogue in Chicago, has this final thought about gratitude.

REFLECTION

Michael Siegel: Our rabbis teach us that when the Messiah comes, all forms of prayer will cease with the exception of expressions of thanksgiving. Why should this be? The ability to say thank you is nothing less than the beginning of faith. Offering words of thanksgiving is the most effective way of acknowledging that there is a Creator in the world and the blessings that

surround us were given by the gracious hand of the Almighty. The rabbis were also aware of the fact that without prayers of gratitude people are prone to praise themselves and ultimately close themselves off from the Almighty. The rabbis understood that a world lacking thankfulness is a lonely place even if the Messiah is present. Friends, God gave you a gift of 86,400 seconds today. Surely you could use one to say thank you.

CLOSING REMARKS

Lillian Daniel: Thank you, Michael, and our thanks again to Dr. Dan Matthews, Gordon Imrie, and to you for joining us today on “30 Good Minutes.” I’m Lillian Daniel.

Lydia Talbot: And I’m Lydia Talbot. Before we go, I encourage you again to visit our website at 30GoodMinutes.org for more information about today’s program and a wonderful collection of messages, reflections, and stories to deepen your faith. Now, from all of us at “30 Good Minutes,” may your faith be strong in the week ahead and may your heart be open to God.