**Jacqui Lewis
“Where Is the Crucified Body of Christ Today?”
The Universal Christ Conference, March 2019
Unedited Transcript**

Jacqui Lewis: Hey everybody. I said hey.

Audience: Hey.

Jacqui Lewis: Ho.

Audience: Ho.

Jacqui Lewis: I'm sorry. How are you? Did you have a good lunch?

Audience: Yeah.

Jacqui Lewis: I need you to help me get back in the space with a really sacred quiet Taize-ish hymn. Will you help me do that? So let's just try to find your feet on the ground, and then stand up. Find your feet on the ground. I think you know the lyrics to this Taize type hymn, but let me say them to you, because this is spontaneous and the team doesn't know, so the words are not here. The words go I feel good-

Audience: I feel good.

Jacqui Lewis: And I knew that I would.

Audience: And I knew that I would.

Jacqui Lewis: I feel good.

Audience: I feel good.

Jacqui Lewis: And I knew that I would now.

Audience: And I knew that I would now.

Jacqui Lewis: So good.

Audience: So good.

Jacqui Lewis: So good.

Audience: So good.

Jacqui Lewis: I've got love.

Audience: I've got love.

Jacqui Lewis: Are you ready to help me do that? Do you think you know this Taize hymn?

Audience: Yeah.

Jacqui Lewis: All right, I'm going to count you down. One, two!

Jacqui Lewis: Okay. Thank you so much. Okay, so I want to talk about how to move things forward when constrained by institutions. I'm going to talk a little, I'm going to ask you to turn to someone next to you at your table and talk a little, I'm going to wrap us up, and then we're going to get a benediction. Does that sound like a way to use 45 minutes?

Audience: Yeah.

Jacqui Lewis: It's a lot to do in 45 minutes.

Jacqui Lewis: To personalize something before I do a little theory on it, I am the oldest of five kids. We found and fell in love with a half brother later, so there's six of us now, five and a half of us and six of us. But I'm the oldest of five kids and in my family, in my African American family, two parents raised in Mississippi in Jim Crow, segregated schools, segregated hospitals, segregated water fountains. I drank out of a segregated water fountain as a child in Mississippi. There's something that I think happened in the development of the kids in our family where our folks were like, "Your job is to be better than we could be. Your job is to take the things we give you and run in the world and do an excellent job at being a human being." What we took in was a kind of pressure to excel. I mean our grades would be on the refrigerator, you know. Our standardized testing would be posted on the blackboard. You only got the 98th percentile and last year you got the 99th percentile, what's wrong with you this year? There's a lot of pressure to be perfect.

Jacqui Lewis: As a young person, I took in their anxiety about American life. I took in their nervousness about whether I'd be safe in the streets. I took in their personal experience of prejudice and racism that made them think the way for their children to miss that was through the excellence of education et cetera. I interjected my parents stuff, and the way it showed up in my insides is I could never make a mistake. I would stay up all night studying to make sure I got straight A's on exams. I would get stomach aches thinking, "God, if I fail, I'm going to fail them." My whole young life, childhood, adolescence, was guided by the internalized anxiety, nervousness, expectations of my parents. That ruled my life. I didn't even need their curfew. I didn't need their discipline. I took it all in, and it was me.

Jacqui Lewis: I could make you laugh at the way the perfection showed up. It would be embarrassing some of the things I would tell you, but it actually was kind of a false personality. When I wasn't perfect, I pretended to be perfect. When I wasn't "good", I pretended to be good. When I wasn't holy, I pretended to be holy. So I had a thick kind of callus, or persona maybe Yung would say, around myself that wasn't real at all for a really long time. I couldn't cry if I was hurt. I couldn't admit that I was wrong. I couldn't, I just couldn't. I couldn't admit that I was a sexual being. I couldn't admit that I had really strong desires for boys. I couldn't own any of what was a normal teenage girl thing because the perfection inside was out here like a buffer to the real world. Are you with me?

Audience: Yes.

Jacqui Lewis: Can anybody relate to that?

Audience: Yes.

Jacqui Lewis: All right. All the people that feel like, "Uh-huh" to this thing that I'm describing in a personal way, happens to lots of people in the world, but let's just stay in America for a moment and it's because Donald Winnicott would say it's the quality of our holding environment, the quality of our container. This is a British psychologist who talks about good enough parenting. He said good enough mothering in the 50's, but I'll say good enough parenting.

Jacqui Lewis: Not that a parent has to be perfect, but a good enough parent will understand how to respond to their child's cries, how to change a diaper when the baby is wet, how to bandage a knee when the child falls. The thing I was talking about in an earlier talk about how we're held, he said if we're held in a good enough environment, we will develop the ability to do a couple of things for our own selves. One, to comfort ourself, to create for ourself a transitional object. You know what I mean, but in just a second you'll be like, "Uh-huh".

Jacqui Lewis: When a child is held well enough, if we're held in a good enough container, everything that's about the parents goes into the kid. The beautiful things in them, not perfect things, but they go inside the kid. In a good enough container, the kid learns how to comfort themselves. I was taking the bottle, but I know how to take my thumb. My thumb represents the bottle. I was being held in my mother's arms, but now I can have a blanky, a kiki that smells like Mommy, and the kiki comforts me. You see it with kids, they're rubbing something soft on their face. They're doing the rooting impulse. Pretty soon my mom and dad can leave the room, and I get clear because I'm held well enough that they're going to come back, and I can comfort myself while they're gone.

Jacqui Lewis: Here's what I'd like you to do though, because you're just sitting there and something else will come. Why don't we use this moment for turn and talk. Okay? Is that all right? Okay. Just your neighbor, not getting the threes. Do not move. No moving. I'd like you to talk to your neighbor for a few minutes about this question. When is the first time I ever heard, learned, was told that there's a thing called race? Tell a short story, okay? Either first time I ever heard, learned, was told that there's a thing called race in America. Just talk to your partner, do all the things you know. Take time, say your thing, give good eye contact, and then your turn. We'll do that for five minutes, all right? Yes, Jacqui?

Audience: Yes, Jacqui.

Jacqui Lewis: There's a thing called race. I heard it how? How did I learn it?

Audience: [crosstalk 00:09:34]

Jacqui Lewis: Okay friends, how's that going? Okay. I don't want to stop you. I want to add a question so you can keep talking. I want you to know that he's stabilizing and an ambulance is on its way in. Thanks be to God. That just showed up.

Jacqui Lewis: So let me ask you to just do another question, just keep talking to your partner. We've talked about the first time we knew there was a thing called race and how we learned it. I would like to ask you to take it a step further if you can and say when were you raced upon? In other words, when did it hurt you, hurt you, or did you ever hurt anybody? The first time race was a troubling moment, because someone turned it on you or you turned it against somebody else. Are you with me on that? That's like a slightly riskier question, but if you feel comfortable, I'd love for you to do that. Keep talking.

Audience: [crosstalk 00:17:59]

Jacqui Lewis: Okay. Now friends, just want to give you a prayer report that our beloved comrade is conscious and going off to the hospital. So thank you to all who were over there offering love and care. Thank you so much. Thank you amazing first responders, we just love on you all the time. Thank you so much.

Jacqui Lewis: So we're a little out of sequence because you did the turn and talk I was going to ask you to do, but you did it. So good on us. I'm going to back up a little and tell you a little bit of what I wanted to say and then we're going to try to stay on schedule.

Jacqui Lewis: So this whole idea of this container, this holding environment being good enough, good enough that we are able to comfort ourselves. Good enough that we learn how to play, like a pacifier is a play breast. A pacifier is a pretend bottle. That children learn how to take what's on the outside of them and what's on the inside of them and merge those, that there is a beautiful, vibrant playability. The good enough caregiver puts in front of the baby a blanket, puts in front of the child a bunny rabbit, puts in front of a child a pencil and paper, puts in front of the child a Bible, puts in front of the child math, science, art, dance, and the child learns how to grow in that space in a good enough container.

Jacqui Lewis: Pretty soon the child takes in the parent's discipline. Oh that's wrong. That's not good for my body. I love Kool-aid, but I'm going to stop drinking it, you know what I'm saying? Pretty soon the child has their own ability to regulate. All this happens in a good enough environment, but guess what friends, that family is in America, and America, the United States of America, I'm going to say is not always a good enough container. Are you with me?

Jacqui Lewis: So that container, that family's life, happens inside a Chicago ghetto, or happens inside a barrio in Texas, or happens inside a food desert, or maybe happens inside the most amazing, Westchester county, Manhattan, big colonial house, but it also happens with some parents juggling with their own false stuff and they're on opioids. So it's not just about poor people only, the American context is fucked. Somebody say amen.

Audience: Amen.

Jacqui Lewis: So it's inside that child's playpen, what's inside that child's container are the projections of other stuff. You're not good enough unless you're a white, straight male. You're not good enough unless you're tall, huh Richard? You're not good enough unless you're tall. You need to be skinny and have a Barbie doll body, whoever made that doll. All of those things, the media, the stories in the media, the commercials, the drama on social media, all of that stuff is in the container with the kid. And all of those things are stories. They're short stories, but they're stories.

Jacqui Lewis: They're stories that are shaping that kid's identity. We are the people who are creative. We are musicians in our family, a short story. Girls don't go into ministry, a short story with a long history. Boys don't cry, a short story in that child's container. Jews don't belong to God because they killed Jesus, a terrible story in the container. Are you with me?These stories, Native Americans are alcoholics, Blacks are oversexed, it's in there, and White people can't jump, it's in there, or dance. All of these crazy stories, Asians are not really minorities because they're almost white. Can you imagine how that dismisses Asian people's identity? Are you with me?

Jacqui Lewis: All of these stories are in this container, we call it America, and those stories effect us. You heard of as a little person, suddenly some place, a story about race. You heard it. You heard it before you were supposed to. Uncle John was saying, "Those N-words, they're lazy." You heard a story about gender. You heard a story about, I can't even say that word, the F words kissing on each other in the street. Those stories get in us so quickly before we even know it. It's like ... they're like air, and those stories effect us, change us, create us, and they impinge us. This is where I'm going. We are impinged by these stories. We are constricted by these stories. Our wild, beautiful imagination, that everybody is everybody and love is love is love, is impinged by the rules in those stories that somebody teaches us that we're not even on guard for. Suddenly our identity is wired by those stories. Are you all tracking with me?

Audience: Amen.

Jacqui Lewis: Right? So inside yourself is a no. No to that. That's not okay. Inside yourself is a polite no, I can't tell the truth because somebody is going to be offended by what I say. All inside you is this impinged, constrained self that your family may have storied, can I make that a verb for you? Or the culture may have storied for you. So pretty soon the most restricting thing, the most constraining thing, on your freedom is you. You, the self in you that is afraid to be rejected. The self in you, the little self in you that is still outgrowing the story that somebody stuck in you about you and about the other.

Jacqui Lewis: So how do we move? How do we create a movement? How do we change the world? How do we build the reign of God on earth as it is in heaven right now, without waiting to be parachuted out to heaven when we die? Gosh I hate that theology. Just you wait, Henry Higgins, just you wait. There will be heaven and you won't be too late. Of course you will be. Right now we're supposed to move, move, move towards God's reign together, but inside we're a person squeezed by other people's expectations.

Jacqui Lewis: So one, how do we get unconstrained? We need to do some personal psychological work. Can I say that again? We have to do some personal psychological work to rewrite the story that's inside us, impinging us. I don't mean you need therapy, but you might. You might just need a spiritual director. We might just need a best friend. But the thing that's locked up inside of us, preventing us from being able to tell the truth, is a false self. I told you mine. She was perfect. She was a goody two shoes. She refused to play spin the bottle while everybody else was having so much fun. Seriously. Why?

Jacqui Lewis: That thing inside us that makes us not honest, restricts our moral courage, because if we're not honest about this, we're not honest about that. If we're impinged, we're impinged. We don't have like the secret bold, brave place and the other place is impinged. So we have to get ourselves in a relationship, I believe in a talking cure, a relationship where we can unpack the boss inside us that won't let us speak truth, either to ourselves or in our relationships. That's one. Can you amen that?

Audience: Amen.

Jacqui Lewis: Does that resonate, is what I'm trying to say?

Audience: Yeah.

Jacqui Lewis: Yeah? You know how some people unpack that. They drink too much, they eat too much, they work too much, that's my disease. Hi, my name's Jacqui and I'm a workaholic. Thank you, thank you. But we can't bear the falseness, so we medicate it or we run from it. I'm suggesting to be in motion, to make a movement that really works, to find our brave, morally courageous self is to go right at that thing, right at those stories. Right at the heartbreak, the hurt little self that can't stretch out because girls don't talk like that, or I can't come out.

Jacqui Lewis: So I'm inviting you to go inward, inward on an inward journey toward a true self by getting into therapy, getting a spiritual director, doing your sit around this. Those of you who actually can sit still, not me, do your sit around this, focusing on this inner person that's all trapped up in stories that are not true and stories that impinge. That's one.

Jacqui Lewis: Two, I'm inviting you to come out. Like our gay brothers and sisters don't get to be who they really are until they come out, I'm inviting you to come out on the thing, to the real place you feel about all the things. What do you really think about the economy? Do you really think we don't have enough resources for everybody to have enough? You don't. Come out to what you really think. To know it is to say it. To claim it is to be able to teach it and move on it. Are you tracking with what I'm saying?

Jacqui Lewis: What do you really think about that? Not what do you think you're supposed to think about that. Not what does your political party tell you to think about that. Not what does your friend base tell you to think about that. What do you really think about that? About the economy, about human sexuality. Do you really think, do you really think that children choose to be gay, so they can grow up and be teased and harassed and picked on and rejected? Do you really think that, is what I'm saying. Not what do you think the Bible says about it. Please forgive me God. Not what do you think your pastor thinks about it. What do you really think about it? And if you don't know, what would you read, so you'd know what you think about it? Are you with me?

Jacqui Lewis: What do you really think about racial ethnic people, mostly white audience? Do you really think white people are inherently better than black people?

Audience: No.

Jacqui Lewis: Do you really think that? Of course you don't, but in how many places are you forced to, encouraged to collude with that lie? What do you really think about it? Because if you really know what you think about it, and choose to come out about it, when you're at work and someone at the water fountain is using the pronoun "they", and what they mean is all the Latino people who are all exactly alike because there's no diversity, they're just all Spanish speakers, it doesn't matter whether they're from El Salvador or Spain, someone is using the word "they" and because you haven't put in your mouth your truth, you're silent when they're saying that. And you're constrained by the culture that tells you to shut up and not make waves. What do you really think about that, feel about that, know to be true about that?

Jacqui Lewis: I could walk all the way around my five positions of where the ... Do you really think that the Indians, the Native people, gave ... Okay, do you really think Columbus discovered America and do you really think the First Nations people's threw a party for the Puritans and gave them turkeys and said, "Thank you for coming and giving us small pox"? We don't really think that, right?

Audience: Right.

Jacqui Lewis: So we have to come out on the truth of the things that we know to be wrong. So I'm talking about in a ... I'll take your claps, but I'm clapping for you because the insight on this is this, guys. Every one of us has to be an activist to cure this world. There can be no closet prophets, my friend Yvette Flunder would say. I would say there can be no bystanders as we try to grow the reign of God. We are, of course, impinged by a culture that's just mad, crazy, a hot mess, crazy. Of course it sticks things in us, wounds us, hurts us, causes us to shut down. We've got all kinds of false stuff in here, but we're grown ups now. We're all grown ups now and we don't have to think the things we used to think yesterday, because liminality is cool. We can change our minds and it starts in here, but if it only stays in here, it doesn't fix out there. So I'm talking about activism as a spiritual practice.

Jacqui Lewis: Activism as a spiritual practice grounded in the earth, grounded in your soul, grounded in your love, grounded, grounded in your hope, but brave because you're the only person where you are located on your block, in your neighborhood, at that board room table, on the school board, sitting around having barbecue with your friends, you're the only straight white man sitting there, you're the only Latinx woman sitting there, you're the only you that came to this conference and heard Richard and heard Dom, and God knows, heard me yelling at you right now. You're the only one to have a Christ consciousness, to have a vision for a healed and whole world. You're the only one at that moment to speak the truth to power. You're the only one.

Jacqui Lewis: So you've got to do it because the stakes are too high. I think the recipe is moving from the inside out, and that's moving from the inside to the outside of ourselves, and then I think it's moving from the outside of ourselves to the other who is us, because we are actually one organism. We've got to get to the place where my stomach is growling and yours is too. We've got to get to the place where, as Shug Avery would say in Alice Walker's work, if you cut a tree you'll bleed. We've got to get to a place where what happens to Mother Earth happens to us. Children in cages, that's us. Those are our babies. Gay kids being harassed, that's us. Interior work.

Jacqui Lewis: Know what you know. No excuses about what the Bible says. Sorry. What does God say? What does love say? What does love demand? I want to see you be brave, bold, courageous, risk taking. What if tomorrow is our last opportunity to heal the world? How do we want to be seen doing that? Bunches of us jumped up to go help our friend who was hurting. Our human family is hurting. The creation is groaning like a woman in childbirth, waiting to see the revealing of the children of God. How will we show the creation that we're children of God? We will stand up and be God-like in God's image as healers and way makers and creators. We can do that together.

Jacqui Lewis: Cliff has a little piece of music to close with. This is like an anthem. I want to see you be brave comrades, revolutionary lovers, everyone, called by God to boldly claim healing for our nation. Thank you.