

START OF TRANSCRIPT

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The following is a message from Wellsprings Congregation.

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Hi, everybody.

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It's still a little strange to me to not be able to see all your faces. But I have been in touch with so many people this week. I've had so many people reach out to me. From wellsprings, I've seen so many comments and updates from you all online, and I know that for a lot of us, last weekend was kind of a whirlwind. There was a lot of shock. And I think this week was the week when things got a little more real. It's really been about 10 days if you're watching this on Sunday morning. Thursday afternoon last week was when Governor Wolf first talked about Montgomery County businesses being shut down. And I think a lot started to shift really rapidly after that. It made me think today of. There was a funny tweet like a year ago that people were sharing.

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It was something like.

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You know, I didn't I didn't realize we were all supposed to know what to do by our second rodeo. Right, that's still a very, very low number of rodeo's. We are totally in our first rodeo. None of us, you and I. None of us have ever done this before. None of us have probably done church or felt like we were gathering as a community entirely online before. Maybe some of you have.

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But this global pandemic thing is new. It's a whole new rodeo.

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And if that's where you are with it right now and you can't think much past the shock, then I know that I can relate and a lot of people in our community can relate to just the feeling of strangeness. And that's maybe exactly where you are. I know that this week as a million different things were happening, as I was trying like a lot of us to sort out what to do and work life, what to do in family life, what to do in home life, just how to be what my routine would be like. What choices to make? I found myself. googling the 1918 Spanish Flu. Now, it didn't actually start in Spain. Apparently it started in Kansas. Long story, you can Google that for yourself. But I had heard people mentioning it and talking about it in the news this week. And I realized I don't I didn't know anything about it. It turns out that for the hundred year anniversary of the pandemic, the CDC did a storyteller's project, a history project. They combed back through health records. They pulled old newspaper clippings. They interviewed survivors or the children of survivors. And they collected a huge library of stories about what that time more than one hundred years ago in our country was like. And I pored over those stories probably for about two hours and I could have spent a lot more time because there was a ton of material. If you want to find it, if you Google it, the link is too hard. If you Google C.D.C. Spanish flu stories, it'll be the first result that comes up. I read through those stories. And some of them were bleak. Some of them were very sad. But it was also one of the first times this week that I felt some relief. I felt like someone understood what this was like. I felt like there was some sense of camaraderie and comfort with people who had been through this and come out on the other side.

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Because even though you and I have never done this before. We have. We as a human family. We have done this.

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We have been through this and we have made it through.

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Some of the things about that hundred year old, 102 now year old pandemic were remarkably the same, particularly when you remember that we're talking about 19, 18. Right. It's the year 2020. Nobody at Wellsprings, nobody watching this. As far as I know, nobody in our community was alive in 1918. Our favorite elder at Wellsprings, everybody's favorite elder, our oldest member, Lois. She will be 95 in May. So even Lois was not around during that pandemic one hundred and two years ago. And by the way, if you are wondering, Lois and her daughter Kathleen and her son in law, Pete, are all at home and they're all well. Kathleen reached out to me a couple days ago. So it's it's amazing when you consider how much has changed in this country in a hundred and two years, how much the experiences of the 1918 survivors actually mirror what we are living through right now. One of the survivors that they interviewed is a man named Bill Sardo. He lived in Washington, D.C. as a child, and when he was just 6 years old, he got sick. He remembers very little about his own experience, but he remembers some things. And he's also heard his family tell him stories about what it was like.

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He says he does remember that his mother was terrified seeing her son fall ill. He said they separated me from everybody else in the house. They quarantined me in the bedroom. He said all of the members of his family had to wear masks. He said the schools were closed. He remembers that, he said the whole city had shut down and it was eerie. You couldn't go to the playground excuse me anymore, you couldn't go to a theater. Social gatherings, he said, were all banned. Clergy, he said, had to cancel their church services. Everything slowed down. Until he said it felt like it grinded to a near halt. Bill said that there were rumors back then that the Germans had spread the disease, rumors that Bill did not believe. And he said in a list of rules to prevent the disease's spread. There were things that we have all heard in the last week, avoid needless gatherings and crowd rings. Wash your hands regularly, especially before eating. Bill remembers that one slogan that the kids all learned was Cover up, each coffin sneeze. If you don't, you'll spread disease.

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Catchy.

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He also remembers people throwing buckets of water. He says with disinfectant mixed in onto their sidewalks to wash away the germs from people who would spit onto the street. We see less of that nowadays, but maybe that's today's equivalent for swabbing your phone with a Clorox wipe or something. When the CDC released this hundred year anniversary project and remember, this project happened years ago before the word coronavirus was in most of our vocabularies, the CDC talks about how the research from that time showed the value of something called social distancing, particularly in the two weeks before flu cases would peak in any community. Back in 1918, practicing social distancing seemed to cut the flu rates in half in those places. And they found that the more social distancing measures were used and the longer that they were in place, the less severe the effect of the pandemic was. They said back in 1918, the measures that appeared the most beneficial were things like restricting sales and businesses, limiting your time in public. Canceling church and quarantining those who became sick. Some things are so remarkably the same.

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And then some things are different, totally different.

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Right. I mean, here here's a short list of things that are literally happening in this moment that were inconceivable in 1918. For one, you can see me talking to you right now. Right. This was not a thing in 1918. You have at least one device in your home. If you're watching this and you probably have four or five or six of them that can show you other human beings in other places talking to you live. That was not true at all. Or probably even imaginable.

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In 1918.

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You are attending church on the Internet. You can type over there and everybody else watching right now will see what you type and say in real time. You can have a conversation. You can pick up your cell phone and you can send some kind of text based message to anyone in the world. None of that was true in 1918. Also, your preacher is a woman, which probably wouldn't have been true in most places in 1918. Some of you are sitting next to spouses that you might not have been able to marry in 1918.

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Some of you have children whose births or adoptions. Would not have been possible in 1918.

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Children who might have never been a hundred and two years ago.

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Some of you are here today alive because of surgeries or medications.

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We're technology that wasn't around in 1918. Some things are totally different. Some things are better.

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Now, maybe you feel like, well, yeah, Leo. Sure. But some things are worse. Right. This does not necessarily give me hope. We can't draw these kinds of big conclusions. Right.

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There are things happening right now in our country that weren't happening in 1989. We all have this sense. I think these days that we are so divided that more people are in trouble. And I hear that. It's not wrong, and I know that none of us was alive back then, so we don't know how they felt about the world. We know that the depression was coming. We know that they had just lived through a world war back in 1918.

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And yet.

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We also know that they made it through because we're here. We know that humanity made it through. And humanity is still here. And we do now. That more people today have more rights and more power. To share our gifts. Than a century ago. More people are free to give their very best to the world in this moment. More people are free to share their best thinking. Their creative energy. They're really good hearts. More of us have more freedom and more power. To make a difference in how this turns out. To act differently now. For a future.

[00:13:06]

In my original plans for this message for today. I was going to talk about one of the articles that's on our resource sheet, the one that the Spiritual Development Ministry creates for each of our messages with articles and spiritual practice ideas and journaling prompts and discussion questions. It's on our Web site in the news section, if you scroll down a few articles.

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And I was going to talk about an article that's on there about this idea of what people are calling digital campfires. Folks who study how we connect online and how we use the Internet and how online communities have changed, and even just the last 10 years they've talked a lot about how younger people don't use social media as much or in the same ways as they used to. But they're also starting to notice that people of a younger generation, some of the studies are people under 35. Some are people under 25.

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They're not exactly abandoning online spaces, right. There's no real like neo Luddite movement where tweens are just kind of gathering at home to play canasta, churn butter. Right. That's not really happening. What they're finding is that the next generation tends to use technology to create smaller and more intimate ways of connecting. The author of the article talks about the metaphor of an airport. Right. So if you log on to Facebook or Instagram or a lot of these different social media platforms, it feels like a crowded airport terminal. Right. Everybody's allowed in. It's super noisy. It's very busy. It's loud. And there's just people kind of coming at you with stuff from every direction. It can be kind of overwhelming. It's one big, loud room.

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The author of this article says that nowadays what we find is that more and more people are using online technology to build smaller group spaces with a common center at their heart. Those are the digital campfires. They're things like private or group messaging apps. Those have become super popular. And anybody who's ever been on a really good group text, maybe with close friends, a group of friends that you went to school with who don't live in the same place anymore, with family members who like to keep in touch, if you've ever been in that kind of a group on a messaging app, you know that there's a way that having that close group of friends at your fingertips for support can be a godsend. Right. You have them there with you when you're standing in line forever at the grocery store. You have them there while you are waiting for the scary news at the doctor's office.

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It can be a godsend to have those close connections with the people you love literally at your fingertips. A godsend that was not available to people even just 20 or 30 years ago.

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Digital campfires also show up in what the author calls micro communities. So these are the groups within the big groups, right? Like a Facebook group within Facebook or Instagram has a feature now that lets you choose who your close friends are and share some of your stories and your pictures only with them. She says that micro communities can also form around shared experiences that we have online. So maybe the people that you play games together with remotely or fans of the same TV show or band or sports teams who connect with each other on the Internet, these campfires take old real common threads, old real ways of connecting in the physical world and they make them possible and all kinds of new ways. When Bill Sardo talks about what he remembers from 1918, he says one of the hardest things for his family was the feeling that in the midst of a pandemic, with people sick and dying, with fear spreading and uncertainty around every single corner.

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He said there was this feeling that they couldn't turn to God other than to pray. He said there was no way to be the church. There was no way to gather. It was forbidden. And he said it made everybody afraid. It made everybody afraid to go see anybody. It changed a lot of how society worked. We became more individualistic.

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Some things are the same and some things are totally different.

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It has been a really long 10 days.

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I know that if we are just starting to catch our breath with all of these changes and what feel like new waves of closures and reports coming down the pike. Some of us are trying to figure out how we spend our time. What we do with ourselves. What we do with our relationships. What is up and down, what matters? And maybe that's exactly where we are.

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I heard a friend recently talking about wanting to create his teen teen, that's his quarantine routine. I'm definitely to use that one and I need to do that. I need actually to take some time to find a new routine that makes sense for me, at least for now.

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For me, that's the next step. Just to remember that in this moment in our fragile bodies. It's OK to slow down. And it's OK to take good care of ourselves. And that step is an important one.

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And I think after reading about these experiences of our ancestors this week, I think after I've done that. After I found my footing, at least for now. Then it's time to start asking myself.

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And maybe all of us to start asking ourselves what will be the same and what will be different. Because we are going to be the ones who make it that way.

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I hope that we can choose to not become more individualistic out of this time.

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I think we have a chance to. I think we have a real chance.

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Wellsprings, we are a community called to make the world whole. That's what our vision statement says. We are a community call to make the world call.

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So who are we called to be? Right now.

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A few weeks ago, I told that story about the lesbian who saves the cats. Now some of you are like, what? Go look on the podcast. It's called Fully Known that message.

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This was a woman who was known she was clearly known for who she was in her community. So remember those questions at this time?

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Who are you? How are you known? And how do you want to be known?

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Which camp fires? Will you plan to gather around which camp fires? Will you tend at this time when all of our energy for tending is going to be mixed up and probably limited?

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As we slow down, as we let ourselves off the hook of this idea that we're all going to adapt perfectly and do it all and do it well as we let go of that, as we probably all start to really do less.

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What then will we prioritize?

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Well, almost everything that's normal is stripped away from us.

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Where can we focus? Where will we look for the light of that fire that is burning here between us? And on what vision for the future will each of us set our hearts?

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The educator Paulo Faery used to say we make the road by walking. So you get to choose who you are and how to be in response to this moment. We all get to choose. Our faith.

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This camp fire between us. It asks us to choose a few things.

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To be kind. To choose presence. To work with what is difficult for us instead of running or numbing from it. To remember that we are beloved and that so is everyone else. And hopefully to keep showing up. And being a friend with and for each other. And may you live in blessing.

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Take a moment to close your eyes. Maybe bow your head and relax your shoulders and pray with me. God of all our connections. Great power that lights the light inside of each of us. That mysterious literal source of heat.

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That makes us alive. That lives in our bodies. That warms. Our skin and our bones and our muscles. That can be shared. With someone else. May we all in this moment find some serenity? May we find ways to remember what we can and what we cannot control? Maybe remember to use that precious energy on the things that we can change to live our character, to be who we were called to be in this moment, to resist the temptation, to try to predict the next step and what will happen and what we will do instead to trust who we are at our core.

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To trust that we have that seed of goodness and blessing that we proclaim every time we blessed and dedicate a new baby.

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Remember that? That is inside each of us. And to not forget that the fires lit between us. We'll keep burning on. For the prayers I've spoken and for the prayers that everyone watching is holding on their hearts in this moment.

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END OF TRANSCRIPT



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