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START OF TRANSCRIPT

[00:00:00]

The following is a message from Wellsprings Congregation.

[00:00:04]

Good morning, it's good to see you again, or rather I should say, I guess it's good to be seen by you on this Easter morning.

[00:00:12]

Just want to say how good it is, how happy it makes me to be connected with you again in this way and that I hope this Easter message finds you healthy and safe. I want to start out today by talking about how Easter kind of begins in emptiness, the emptiness of that tomb, the way the story is told, slightly different in the four different gospels is that Mary Magdalene and the woman is called the other Mary or sometimes simply they're called the women arrive at the tomb and they find it empty. And at first, maybe just imagine how shocking this would be. Where is he? Where is the body? The person we cared about that we called Jesus.

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Where is he? The story begins in absence and emptiness.

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But as the story unfolds, we see that that emptiness actually creates the conditions for a larger sense of presence and connection. Well, the things I love about the Easter story is that helps me make sense of what the wonderful author and Lemar says when she says a lot of her theology is about Grace batz last. That's what I think Easter is about, that, yes. Death is a part and a presence in life. And sometimes, especially like at moments such as we're all living through, it can feel like a really strong, scary and at times overwhelming presence. But that the Easter story says that love ultimately is larger and can overcome the presence of death in our lives. And that is unitary universalist. We are all invited to make the many meanings of that teaching that apply most fully to us. So it makes sense in our own hearts. So when I think of the empty tomb today and the kind of shocking nature of it. I think of all the empty spaces that surround us all, the formerly full places that we now see, perhaps we occasionally walk in or we see on the news that now look so barren and deserted.

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There's a whole bunch of writings online that I've seen recently that are really kind of beautiful in their analysis of what these empty spaces mean, and one of them that I love so much is by a Massachusetts poet named and Boyer.

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And she encourages us to see these negative spaces or these empty spaces and to see them not just in the way that we sometimes see our positive spaces, all the things that we can do. But to see these negative spaces, the things we are not doing as full of brilliance and love, that in these empty spaces we can see her caring, our desire to protect ourselves and keep ourselves safe, and also not to spread the virus, the desire to keep other people safe and healthy and whole that we can see in these empty spaces an expression of love and our belonging to each other, even though we are distant from each other.

[00:03:32]

In the emptiness of our spaces in the age of Covid-19 and Corona virus, I'm connected back to that story of the empty to see, because for me, I don't think the most compelling part of what Easter is about is an argument for the survival beyond death.

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That's part of what Easter is about. But I don't think Easter particularly has to do with kind of having a right doctrine or a right theology. And so many of the world's traditions kind of postulate or hope that there is a life beyond death.

So I don't think it has anything to do with right belief. But actually, I don't really think that's what Easter is about, is not about the immortality of the individual soul. Surviving death.

[00:04:19]

No, rather. Well, Easter is about is about people. Families. And communities who in the face of death continue to live. That's what Easter is about. Most fully to see how this is.

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So we have to go back in that Easter story and the Christian scriptures.

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To go to that moment a few days before Jesus's death through the quote unquote, what's called the Last Supper, and I kind of want us to move beyond the artistry or the iconography of that and just kind of recognize this is a dinner between friends. You know, they've been called the apostles or the disciples, but these are Jesus's friends.

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These are the people most important to him who he wasn't gonna see anymore.

[00:05:14]

And so just kind of put ourselves in that setting. And he asked them to do something so human, so humane, so open hearted.

[00:05:23]

He asked them essentially, will you remember me? Could there be anything more human than that? Right. Will you remember me while I'm gone? Don't forget me. And he says specifically, would you remember me do this in memory of me? He says through these commonplace things. Through. Yes, representing the body in the blood.

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But this bread and this wine, this basic stuff, and I know there's an argument between Protestants and Catholics, but as a Unitarian Universalist who grew up Jewish, I don't really have a dog in that hunt.

[00:06:08]

So beyond literal or metaphoric or symbolic, I think there's something essential in this practice of the Christian community that is not just limited to the Christian tradition because of what it says is that the most commonplace things, bread and and something to drink. That these things are sacred because what they represent to us and what they bring back to us is that ongoing connection with people we have loved who have died so that we remember how truly connected we are with each other, that there are unbreakable bonds and ties that bind us to each other that can never, ever be severed or cut off.

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I had one of these memories like this my past past week. Friday would have been my mother's seventy fourth birthday. She died twenty seven years ago, unexpectedly, unnecessarily.

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The one of the things I was thinking of this past week was, was these was my hands. You seemed like all of you. I hope we're washing our hands a lot for safety, for health.

[00:07:15]

This single most important thing we can do, but also on the primary food prepare because I like to cook good at cooking.

[00:07:23]

Some of the primary food prepare in my household, which means I am washing these a lot and I've been noticing how dry my hands are. And so I've been moisturizing my hands a lot. And that's what connected me back to my mom because my mom had this very specific kind of hand moisturizer that she always kept in the glove compartment in our car. And my younger sister and I, we could always tell from the backseat when we were getting close to the end of our journey, because my mom would pop open that glove compartment and she would take out that hand moisturizer and she'd just start slathering on her hands. And the thing is, that stuff didn't smell very good, like this metallic, acrid smell. But my mom swore by it. I can't remember what the name was, but she used to order it by the boxful and it had a white container and a black top.

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And it was the only kind of hand moisturizer I ever remember her using. And so over 27 years later, I can smell that kind of acrid smell of her hand moisturizer. And it brings up a feeling of love and connection.

[00:08:28]

And it also brings up something else, something that I've shared with some of you in the past. I think that's a practice that she taught me that over the years I've shared with other people who I love.

[00:08:43]

Practice she taught me I was very, very young. It's one of my first memories of her. Maybe like 3 or 4 years old. And I specifically remember as we were crossing the street, you know, kind of a scary thing for 3 or 4 year old. And so she would take my hand. And by the way, I want to model a good sanitizing of our hands here. So to make sure I'm clean here, I know these hands have been all right. So now now we can proceed. So my mom would take my hand in hers.

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When we cross the street and then we get to the other side. And she would squeeze my hand three times.

[00:09:27]

One, two, three and I would squeeze back four times. One, two, three, four. And that was kind of our worthless language for her saying to me, I love you and me saying back to her, my little hand, I love you too.

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The last time I remember us doing that was in the year that she died at my college graduation, which was kind of an emotional nightmare and a lot of ways, I mean a fun time, but also like, you know, preparing to leave college.

[00:10:08]

And there are a lot of feelings.

[00:10:10]

And I remember we were walking across the quad the night before I graduated and we were holding each other's hands and kind of out of nowhere, she just squeeze my hand.

[00:10:20]

I love you. And I love you, too. Back.

[00:10:27]

It stays with me so much because it was her, again, wordless way of letting me know that even though our hands would have to part as inevitably all our hands must pass from those that we love. And she didn't know that she was dying when she first taught it to me. What she was teaching me was this essential human skill.

[00:10:51]

How to hold on. How to let go.

[00:10:57]

How to be connected. Even when we're separated. Even by death.

[00:11:05]

It was a parting gift for what never can be parted.

[00:11:10]

She was saying in many ways. Do this in memory of me. And I still do to this day.

[00:11:26]

It reminds me of the words of a poem I used last fall for our annual All Souls Day service, very moving service were the highlights of our year at Wellsprings.

[00:11:41]

I think in many ways when we build that memorial altar and we process past it and on it are all the names, faces and people we loved have lost but who are still with us.

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And the message for that day I took from a poem is called Epitaph.

[00:12:03]

With this specific line.

[00:12:06]

Love doesn't die, people do. Love does not die, people do.

[00:12:16]

I think at any moment that we can practice that sense of teaching, that Easter faith, that doesn't require belief.

[00:12:23]

It's more commitment and practice of connection. Whenever we can do those, do this in memory of me. Practices that connect us. I think we remember that we all have ties that even death cannot break. Think of your loved ones. They're essential qualities. The people who you love the most. And what was most important to you about them?

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And recognize that, of course, the sting of their deaths perhaps is still here for you this day.

[00:13:02]

And it may bring up tears or sadness. And perhaps if it does, there is also a sense of connection.

[00:13:12]

That their love, their essential qualities don't die now, you know, if we were in Bell Hall back at Wellsprings, I might say for a moment, stop and pause and think of that stop. Maybe stop and think of the keepsake or the momentos or the pictures or the trees or the plants or the places where your loved one's memories rest.

[00:13:34]

And think of that for a moment. But here's the thing. Maybe we can take advantage of the fact that we're not in Bell Hall and today, because I imagine that many of you are watching this from home. Maybe you can look around the room and you see reminders that picture, that photograph, whatever it is.

[00:13:57]

That lets you know that the connection with those you loved who have died still abides with you. Or maybe it's not even an object. Maybe it's just who you are, your body, your blood.

[00:14:12]

The way that you laugh, the way that you smile, the way that you inclined the year, but not just the year, but the year of the heart. To listen to those that you care about who are still here with you in all of these ways.

[00:14:26]

We can scratch the surface of who we are and find that we have been given gifts by those we loved to remember them and do these things in memory of them and to remind ourselves that their love does not die and stays with us. This, I think, is one of the most important things we can remember in our healing from our griefs. And perhaps as we move through this time of COVA 19, we really know how important this is to be able to do, because for more and more of us, we would come more and more familiar with the losses of this time.

[00:15:11]

And to remember that, yes, eventually the healing of grief comes so that the death and the pain that the death does not overshadow the life that was lived. But it's not just about letting go. It's not just about moving on. I think even more it's about integrating, carrying the meaning of those lives that we have loved with us and integrating them fully into what matters in our lives, bringing those essential qualities into who we are right this very day. Now, one of my favorite books that I've been reading recently that kind of gets to the heart of this is this book Finding Meaning The Sixth Stage of Grief by David Kessler. Now, David Kessler worked and knew Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, who is famous for kind of putting forward. There are five stages of grief, loss of death hours or the people that we love. And David Kessler in this book takes great pains to say, you know, that's not linear and it's not even necessarily universal. It's just very common that these feelings, you know, struggling with depression, sadness, bargaining, which you otherwise anger, and then eventually, you know, acceptance.

[00:16:26]

But again, not a straight line at all. Not linear. He says that that shows up for so many of us. And here's the thing. He wants to propose a sixth stage or step in healing from grief. And he calls that finding meaning. I'm talking about here today. Is that doing in the memory of integrating those we have lost into our lives? And I wanted to share a couple of these stories in closing today.

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One is from another, deeply disruptive time in the life of our country, different from now, but still kind of bringing up echoes, if you will, from then to what we're experiencing now was September 11th and the days and months afterward.

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And this one is about Liz and Steve Alderman, who suffered just horrendous loss, the death of their son, Peter, who was 25, who on the morning of the attacks of September 11th was on, I think the hundred and seven floor, the Windows of the World restaurant that used to be on top of one of the Twin Towers.

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And he was killed.

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Now, their son was so young, only twenty five, as I said, and was taken in an act of terrible violence and suddenly no preparation. They didn't get those final goodbyes with him. And they had times after he died in which they wondered, could they really make it? Could they survive without their son? And one of the things that help them find their way through was one night they were watching the news and there was a report on other people who had survived acts of political terrorism or political violence or mass violence.

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And what the story was about was about survivors, trauma, how sometimes people are so overwhelmed by what

has happened to them that their lives become so deeply interrupted by the trauma, that it's as if they're ensnared in that web.

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And it's fully they said like one sixth of the world's population has experienced some kind of this trauma. Political violence or terrorism. And so what the Ottomans did is they decided to set up and launch what they called the Peter C. Alderman Foundation, which provides mental health care, staffing and serious money behind it to care for trauma survivors in places like Cambodia, Kenya, Liberia, to help people heal.

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And this is what Liz Peters mom said. If we can return some of those people, the people who've been traumatized, if we can help return some of them to life in Peter's name, there is no better memorial for Pete than that. If we can return some of these people to life in Peter's name. That, I think is an Easter faith beyond any doctrine, beyond any dogma. It is a way of being in the world. It is a do this in memory of me that can help people integrate even the most saddening and sorrowful losses.

[00:19:52]

One more story I want to share with you is from Carrie Fisher, beloved to us as princess and then Commander Lay. I think I got that right. Commander Leia. Yeah. You know, Princess Leia was someone I grew up with and Carrie Fisher was someone who I really admired a lot. I know many of us did. And if you know anything about Carrie Fisher, you know that she she could curse a blue streak. She could be really profane. And so the story I'm going to share with you doesn't actually have any cursing with it, but it has her distinct style of humor. You might know this, that Carrie Fisher loved the northern lights, but she never got to travel to see the northern lights with her beloved daughter, Billy. And so Billy, after Carrie Fisher died, took a trip to see the northern lights in memory and in honor of her mother. And this is what she wrote. She called her mom a specific name. She called her Mombie. She said mombie had an other worldly obsession with the northern lights.

[00:20:56]

But I never got to see them with her. And so we journeyed after her mom's death.

[00:21:03]

We journeyed to northern Norway to see if we might. And this is the kind of funny, profane part to see the heavens lift up her dark skirts and flash her dazzling privates across our unworthy irises.

[00:21:18]

And the northern lights did. And then she returned to addressing her mom. Mommy, I love you.

[00:21:26]

Times infinity. Do this in memory of me.

[00:21:37]

This is beyond simply just a day of this holiday.

[00:21:41]

However you choose to interpret it or whatever meaning it has for you.

[00:21:47]

It is about recognizing that when we do these things in memory of. We are carrying on, holding within us the essential qualities of those we have loved who have died.

[00:22:03]

We are testifying to the fact that, yes, there is sometimes emptiness all around us and sometimes in the deepest places of our grief, we find that emptiness within us.

[00:22:15]

But also fire. Also, we can testify to this truth that every emptiness holds within it the presence.

[00:22:24]

I'd love. Connection.

[00:22:28]

Of belonging to.

[00:22:30]

And with those we love that can never, ever. We parted from. And who we will always be connected to.

[00:22:43]

Amen. May you live in blessing. And I wish you all a happy Easter.

[00:22:52]

Would you please unite your hearts with mine in prayer? You can close your eyes if that is comfortable for you, assuming the pose or position of prayer that is most meaningful for you. And ever we stand or wherever we sit in this moment, recognizing the sacred breath, the spirit, the spirit, who's here in our lungs giving us life and us giving the breath back. Holding on and letting go right now in this very moment. It's already the template of our lives. We don't so much have to learn it. It's just practice it. Holding on and taking for a moment what is ours and then offering back.

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And then seeing the cycle repeat itself.

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So as we hold on and as we'd let go, we recall in this moment those most beloved to us who have left this life.

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May we recognize how we still carry the meaning of their lives, how that meaning does not ever die?

[00:24:02]

And how they never die because we can carry this meaning this love this connection forth into all parts of our lives. They are here with us. In fact, for so many of them, they made our own lives possible.

[00:24:21]

May we live today in their honor?

[00:24:25]

May we do these things, whatever these things are for us in memory of them and make their love truly lift us up?

[00:24:38]

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END OF TRANSCRIPT



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