

START OF TRANSCRIPT

[00:00:00]

The following is a message from Wellspring's congregation.

[00:00:07]

Good morning, Wellspring's. It's good to be with you again. About three years ago, two and a half years ago, I attended an unveiling for a sculpture at the Allentown Art Museum. Now, the reason this sculpture was commissioned, it was in honor of my father, who at the time was 86. He's 88 now. And he was recognizing that after many years of service, serving on the board of trustees of the Allentown Art Museum, serving on definitely more than one occasion, maybe even to three occasions as the president of the board, the hiring of various curators and executive directors, it was kind of time for him to retire from his volunteer work at the art museum.

[00:00:55]

And so there was a party to celebrate this time of his service and the sculpture that was commissioned as a gift to him to kind of honor the service. But here's the thing.

[00:01:11]

If you were to give me a line up of five different sculptures, I could not pick which sculpture was unveiled on that night, even though I remember it was nice. That's about all I remember about it. But there are so many details of that evening that I do recall of the more than two decades of service that my dad offered to the art museum, of the relationships that he had formed, of the fact that my family's relationship with the Allentown Art Museum went all the way back into the 70s because my mom had a job there from the 70s into the 80s. And even though or I should say, especially because she died in 1992, that night, in all the stories that were told, all the speeches that were offered, all the invocations of my dad's time of service and of my mom and of our family's involvement, that stays with me.

[00:02:06]

That's what was unveiled to me that night that shared beautiful history. Sometimes unveilings, they bring comfort and sometimes unveilings, they bring sweet sadness and that night brought ample amounts of both and sometimes unveilings bring upset. And pain. And sometimes unveilings revealing spring, all those things and more.

[00:02:43]

There's a particular resonance to the word unveiling as they start this new message series today, and that's because of a word that many of us have heard or said over this past year, the pandemic, and that's the word apocalyptic or the apocalypse. And so often when we think of the apocalypse, we think of destruction or we think of living in the post apocalyptic world, or we think of the zombie apocalypse. But the truth is, in the original Greek apocalypse, wasn't any of those things.

[00:03:15]

Apocalypse literally means an unveiling, a revealing of what is here, of perhaps what has been here all along and has been forgotten or ignored. And so apocalypse is an unveiling and potentially a time of awakening, of enlarging the doors. Of our perception and what we allow our lives to open to and with.

[00:03:50]

Many of us have been thinking, especially recently, with the terribly sad marking of the half million death from covid in this country because of coming up on the year anniversary of kind of what felt like the official beginning of the covid-19 pandemic, many of us have been aware of a lot of memories. And in fact, it was one year ago today that Wellspring's had its final in-person worship service.

[00:04:23]

One year ago today. My God. And so the series, which recalling the new normal with the subtitle How Not to Waste in Apocalypse, it is an invitation into a deeper listening to and with our lives about this past year before we might go rushing back into a recreation of the old normal, asking ourselves the question, what is it we have learned during this time of the pandemic that we might want to take with us and hold onto and in learning from it, in light of what we have faced, participate in the transformation of our lives in different directions, instead of just saying, let's go back to what was before. This message series myself, Reverend Leigh, Chris Chepel, Kathy Berk-Howe, over the next two months will ask us into some acts of creative imagination. Yes, yes, please. I believe we are

closer to the end than we are to the beginning. And so now is at the anniversary. As we may be starting to envision life getting back to what we hoped for, we can also ask this question about what do we need and want to take from this time to engage in a life that is not just return, but also a life that is more resilient and transformed.

[00:06:17]

So it was about a year ago, and like me, you may have been noticing that your mind is kind of going to and through and with a whole bunch of different memories. Like I saw something in my Facebook feed from a couple of weeks ago, a reminder of something that I said. The question was like, remember the hand washing? We were supposed to wash our hands, you know, like twice through to the Happy Birthday song. And I said, you know, kind of jokingly, you know, asking for a friend the speed of twice through the Happy Birthday song. How long are we supposed to wash our hands for? Is it at the pace of a really annoyed teenage wait staff at a theme restaurant who has sung Happy Birthday to five year olds all day long and cannot wait to get out of there? Or is the pace a little bit more leisurely, like Marilyn Monroe singing to JFK? Happy birthday. Remembering as well to doing this kind of thing that I think a lot of us are doing. I've heard other people refer to this way as well. Kind of a personal pandemic archaeology. I remember this when I was going through our pantry not too long ago here in our home, and I came up across a really thick pack of napkins. I remember the exact time and place when I bought these. It was March 16th after the stuff had really started to hit the fan. It was late at night at Conshohocken Giant and the t.p. And the paper towels that I was like Locusts had come through.

[00:07:49]

There was nothing left except for these kind of sad, little pathetic packages, napkins. I said, well, from around a t.p. We got out or something. So I bought four of them. And eventually my wife and I think about a week later we were able to score through, I think, Office Depot, some of those industrial size, you know, like roll of toilet paper that feel a little bit like sandpaper.

[00:08:10]

But so eventually we just kind of stuff those stuff, those packages and napkins somewhere else.

[00:08:18]

And I came across them and kind of remembered what it was like about a year ago that many of us heard. You know, again, we'd heard this song many times in our life. Most of us, you know, RTM song. It's the end of the world as we know it now. I feel fine, except, you know, jokingly when seriously, many of us did not feel fine when we thought of that song. And so today, as a way, it kind of checking in where we are in this week, leading into the kind of official anniversary of things really changing. I thought I'd pop something in here, a little inquiry between us. It's the anniversary of the end of the world as we knew it. And I feel fill in the blank and leave this up here for a moment. I'm going to ask you to fill in that blank if you are in our chat, if you're watching this live and if you're not, maybe just taking a moment to just kind of maybe even pause the video and notice.

[00:09:20]

How do I feel now?

[00:09:25]

This act, this act of pausing and noticing, it is so essential in this series what we're exploring together if we do not want to waste the valuable lessons of this apocalypse.

[00:09:47]

Noticing will be and is key.

[00:09:52]

It reminds me of one of my favorite stories about staying awake, staying alert, staying in tune, and it's a relatively brief story from the Christian scriptures and it's the night before Jesus is arrested and he knows this will not end well and will be scary for him. And he asks his disciples, his friends. To stay awake, that's all he asked them, stay awake and he goes off and he prays, he comes back and they fall asleep and he goes away again and they fall asleep again. I think this powerful invitation.

[00:10:40]

Can we stay awake with each other, especially during a time when I recognize I feel it to so many of us are exhausted and so it's not the awake of like a caffeine rush.

[00:10:52]

It's the quieter and consistent weakness. Pausing.

[00:11:00]

I noticed, because I think this is one of the truth that has more deeply sunk in in my life over the last year, which is that it is always the end of the world as they knew it to someone, somewhere individually. That is always true. And in this past year, it's been more collectively true. More true that stopping and noticing. Are absolutely essential to be able to cultivate a heart of compassion, to open ourselves to the struggles and the sufferings of this world, do we make room to notice and enlarge the heart in this way? And so in this way, we recognize that this is a space and time making act of love.

[00:11:55]

It's the way of the great poet Pablo Neruda. The poem that I think has probably been the most important for me that I have spent time with as part of my spiritual practice this last year.

[00:12:08]

And he says that if we can just keep quiet for a moment, the cost is of never understanding ourselves and threatening ourselves with death. Through an apocalyptic time, one of our greatest assets is being willing to have our lives disrupted. So that our hearts can grow. How not to waste an apocalypse is being willing to accept those quiet moments and sometimes loud moments of invitation to pause and to notice and to open the heart. This willingness to be disrupted also means kind of stepping outside of sometimes the limitations of our own position, especially if it's a position of power or privilege.

[00:13:06]

I heard a kind of variation of this that I think was well done on a recent podcast. Some of you are aware that former President Barack Obama and Bruce Springsteen, two people who I tend to really like and admire, have a recent podcast is kind of talking with each other about the best podcast ever heard. But it's good and I find it very worthwhile. And in it, Bruce and President Obama are talking about when did they start to become aware of race and racism. And President Obama says, well, for him, it was pretty early on and Bruce kind of took a little while longer as a white guy from New Jersey. And he talks about his song, My Hometown, which is a song from 1984, was born in the USA album. And he talks about an incident that really did happen between a car of black kids and a car of white kids. And a shotgun was taken out. And the line in the song concludes Troubled times had come to my hometown.

[00:14:06]

But that's all he says about it. And again, this question, whose trouble was it beforehand who might have known that trouble beforehand?

[00:14:15]

And from Bruce's perspective, from his family's perspective, maybe they didn't know that trouble had been there. And in the podcast, he does, in fact, provide more detail.

[00:14:24]

He talks about the structural inequalities for darker skinned people in the town in which he grew up, the ways in which black and brown people were frozen out of power.

[00:14:40]

And so he provided a little bit more necessary nuance to this idea that troubled times had come to his hometown only recently.

[00:14:51]

In fact, the awareness he points to is that it may have been there for a much longer time that he had previously been aware.

[00:15:00]

This willingness to have our sense of what is upended can lead toward the way of the opening of the heart and towards transformative change and why I think it is important, as we will talk about in this series, not to waste this time and what we have learned and perhaps what we have grown to perceive more broadly in this last year, this willingness to perceive and to perceive, again, in a way that not just opens the mind, but opens the heart. This capacity to perceive and open the heart, it's very much related to what we were talking about in our last series, all about spiritual practices. And so I want to close today with a particular kind of practice that we did not talk about in the last series.

[00:15:59]

And it's associated with a word that some of us maybe knew before this last year, but might especially know more of now. The word is anosmia and it is many of us are aware, one of the primary symptoms of covid-19.

[00:16:17]

And for those of us who are foodies, it's one of the real concerns that if we might contract the virus, that we would lose our sense of smell and taste. And the truth is, even if food isn't your thing like it is for me, the loss of smell and taste is very much linked to a loss of pleasure and connection and tied to a much greater risk of depression and anosmia as something people have experienced and long hauler people with covid people who have had extended you know, they survived the initial infection, but they continue to have symptoms and anosmia something people lived with for weeks or for months. And this is from a writer named TESOL Rayo Talarico. She is the California restaurant critic of The New York Times.

[00:17:04]

In December, remember what she does for a living restaurant critic? She contracted covid and experienced anosmia, and it was devastating to her. Professional food critic and just in her heart, foodie like she is and was and she found her way back to she writes about this this last Sunday in The New York Times, a form of smell, training, of practice, of learning to retrain the brain. And she writes about it this way.

[00:17:39]

Smell training isn't magic, but it's a way to possibly form new neural pathways to slowly reorient to yourself if you're feeling lost, she said.

[00:17:50]

Before I started smell training, I'd imagined that it was like to the theme song of Rocky. I'd zip up my shiny tracksuit and jog in place in front of various ingredients, identifying the correctly one by one as strangers gave me a thumbs up. Sesame oil? Yes. Black peppercorns? Yes. Marjoram? Yes. It was a jaunty montage and a total fantasy.

[00:18:14]

In fact, the process of sitting down and sniffing were called Little Bunny. Sniffs, concentrating quietly on registering aromas or even fragments of aromas is lonely, tedious and mentally exhausting. It's also the only clinically indicated way that people might be able to regain their sense of smell eventually to how she got her sense of smell back.

[00:18:49]

And, as you can imagine, incredibly liberating, she said. Every single aroma I could detect again was more precious, intense and illuminating. Even my dog's fishy breath. Although it hadn't been more than a few weeks, I considered ending daily conditioning altogether when I could smell the foods that I was eating and cooking faster and with more precision. The comforting tickle of garlic hitting the oil, the cinnamon eucalyptus of fresh curry leaves crumpled up in my fingers.

[00:19:22]

But some days my sense of smell is still distorted and everything in my orbit smells wrong of day old cigarette butts, heavy and chemical, some days the vividness of what I've recovered is muted or slower and harder to process and access. She concludes, smell training doesn't end when you start to pick up a few smells again. It begins.

[00:19:58]

A year anniversary, this is where the work is, it begins of recovery and resilience, anosmia or no anosmia, especially in light of the fact that so many people in this country and in this world are feeling drawn to a story that says if only we could get back to a golden age, all nationalisms, all authoritarianism rests on this.

[00:20:24]

The golden age. That, again, was not a blessing for many or only if we could. And this is the conspiracy thinking that has done such damage in this country and continues to if only we could latch on to the right conspiracy.

[00:20:39]

We will reveal the unveiling of who's been causing this harm all along and then all the troubles will go away. But of course, the magical thinking of the golden age and the magical thinking of conspiracies just perpetuate more harm and more cruelty. They are a variation on two old questions, which do not lie at the heart of our Unitarian Universalist tradition, they are.

[00:21:13]

Were you there a long time ago when the truth came into being in its fullest forms? And where will you be when the apocalypse comes someday? Where were you back then?

[00:21:26]

Where will you be? It's not the heart of our tradition, the heart of our tradition. The pausing and the noticing is this question. Are you here?

[00:21:41]

Are we here? Awake through the change to be able to participate in whatever transportation transformation towards goodness, decency, greater justice, greater compassion and greater love.

[00:21:58]

This work is always beginning and may we join ourselves to it. Amen. And may you live in blessing. I would ask if you would pray with me in this moment.

[00:22:22]

To pray is to pause and to notice and to open ourselves to the timeless divine here and now present most in the breath in the spirit.

[00:22:40]

May we allow ourselves this moments in this small and incredibly important, essential ways of pausing long enough to notice of continuing to keep the hearts and the mind open, of continuing to allow the mechanism and process of our growth, of our development into the fullest of our being human that we can imagine.

[00:23:09]

This time. It is the time that we have. May we make the best, the fullest and the most loveliest of it? As we are able.

[00:23:30]

If you enjoyed this message and would like to support the mission of Wellspring's, go to our Web site. Wellsprings UU dot org. That's Wellspring's the letters UU dot org.

END OF TRANSCRIPT



