

## NAME

The Fire Next Time Audio.mp3

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## START OF TRANSCRIPT

**[00:00:00]**

Good morning, Wellsprings. It's good to be with you again. There's a familiar trope, a recurring theme in horror movies and particularly in what are called slasher films, which were very much the rage when I was growing up in the 70s and the 80s. And it kind of this this theme happens towards the end of slasher films where the Survivor or the survivors believe that they have killed the killer and they kind of take their foot off the gas. They kind of relent. And then predictably, what happens is the killer comes back to life or wasn't even dead in the first place and the mayhem and the murder start right back up again. Now, this is so much of a familiar recurring plot point that it's become something of a cliché, like other movies make fun of this happening within slasher movies. And actually, there's a recent Geico commercial that features four kind of older teens, young adults on a farm at night, kind of running scared for their lives. And it plays it for laughs because they make one bad decision after another, after another that imperils them. And at one point, the camera pans over to the serial killer, to the murderer, who just kind of rolls their eyes at the really kind of pitiful decision making process of these four young adults. And so this theme, this trope has become something of a joke, a kind of cultural touchstone that's kind of look at these stupid people and the decisions they're making.

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But what I want to offer is a different angle. On this moment in slasher films. The survivor where the survivors bedraggled, overwhelmed by what has befallen them in the last 90 minutes on screen, they just. They just want it to end. Maybe that's why they relent and they think the killer is dead when the killer is not. So what I want to offer is the kind of psychological or emotional reason behind this is not that maybe they're stupid, maybe that's why this was so regularly recurring that it became a cliché. Maybe there's something true about it. I'm sure that they're not stupid. They're traumatized. And traumatized people can sometimes make traumatized choices. I think of this moment in slasher films in terms of this moment of our being alive. covid cases and covid deaths are going down and they have been going down for quite a while now, a number of months. And there is promise in this moment. Opening up is happening in various parts of our society and some people in places and the society appear to be opening up with great care and consideration, and some people in places in the society seem to be opening up with very little care and consideration at all. And a couple of weeks in our online worship service, Reverend Lee asked people to drop into the chat heart or a heart emoji representing people that they have known.

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Who have contracted the virus or perhaps even died because of the virus and so many of us dropped. Recognition that that has happened to us and I have to say that even in the last two weeks, I have personally known people, perhaps you do as well, who have since contracted the virus. It is not over. Yes, there is light at the end of the tunnel. But seeing the light at the end of the tunnel is not the same thing as actually arriving at the end of the tunnel and sometimes I think so desperately wanting to be at the end of the tunnel, paradoxically. May. Actually create more distance between ourselves where we are right now and the true end of the tunnel and not just simply right now seeing its light. When the pandemic started, a number of people, and you may have seen this on social media, kind of posted a meme that was not entirely true, actually has some factual inaccuracies in it. But overall, it is true, which is that here in Philadelphia in 1918, during the dreaded terrible influenza pandemic of that time that killed so many people worldwide, that there was a parade to kind of build a sense of kind of national solidarity around the world where one effort and what happened because of that parade and this part is true is that it led to a really painful, terrible spike in influenza cases and thousands of deaths here in the Philadelphia region.

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There was an editorial in that same year, right around the time of the parade and the Philadelphia Inquirer that said this verbatim. Talk of cheerful things instead of the disease, the authorities seem to be going daft, what are they trying to do? Scare everybody to death. Talk of cheerful things, not a disease. We hear the voice of what we would now call toxic positivity, and that that somehow focusing on difficulty assures difficulty rather than giving us the opportunity to learn to work skillfully with difficulty and perhaps not create more difficulty. At the one year anniversary recently of the pandemic of the start of it, I put together a playlist of songs about four and a half hours of them, songs about grief and loss, but also love and hope and resilience. And one of them is a song called Pompeii by a band named Bastille. It's about Two and a Half minutes, just kind of perfect, I think, kind of techno pop song. And it uses

the old destroyed ancient city of Pompeii by Mount Vesuvius, by the volcano as a kind of meditation on destruction and also the repetition of destruction that happens when we kind of check out. And there's a question asked in the song by the singer, how am I going to be an optimist about this? And it's very clear from the context of the meaning of the song that was a rhetorical question.

**[00:06:55]**

He's not feeling very optimistic. That the repetition of the destruction won't just continue. So I do personally have hope in this moment and I recognize that some of you might be in different places than me. Some of you might be feeling more optimistic. And my goal is not to argue with optimism today. It is to offer that perhaps there is something more that we need. Other than optimism or even hope, and you'll make your decision about what I'm talking about today is whether it is something that feels better or more skillful. What I'm talking about today is a part of this message series for the spring, recalling the new normal subtitled How Not to Waste an Apocalypse. And it is about an opportunity for all of us to reflect on this last year of our lives as we do whenever it comes move keep on moving towards the end of this pandemic and asking ourselves when we do return to normal, maybe we don't just want to go back to what was, but that we've learned something this year about what truly holds significance and meaning for ourselves and that what is emerging can be better than what was. In the Hebrew Bible, there is a recitation regularly recurring pattern in the Hebrew Bible is also a little bit in the Christian scriptures as well, too, with something that I would say for the first decade after I became familiar with it really annoyed me.

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Like I really found it terribly unfair and unjust and just kind of awful, like one of these parts of the the the Bible that just made no sense other than just to be cruel. And it's the kind of lineage that says, you know, may the sin or made the blood of this person or may the evil that's been done by may be visited upon my children and my children's children. And and again, it sounds so awful to the ear that somehow to predict that our children, our children's children, our children's children's children should suffer because of what we have done. It's certainly not my experience of God or the divine, and I don't believe human beliefs about that. I do not ascribe to that understanding of divinity. But then there's something that shifted my perspective a few years ago around these types of passages, what if what they're saying is not prescriptive, this is what should happen, but maybe from there way thousands of years ago, way before, you know, Pre scientific mindset. That maybe they're not being prescriptive, they're simply being descriptive, which is that pain and difficulty sometimes travel through families and communities and countries, not because it's right that it should be so, but simply because it is an observable phenomenon that it is so. I think in a pre scientific way. What the writers of the scriptures are trying to get at was this thing we call transgenerational trauma.

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There's a somewhat well-known meme that I'm sure I have shared in the past and some of you have shared as well, too, that says trauma travels through families until someone is ready to heal. Trauma travels through families until someone is ready to heal. And it's true of communities and countries as well, too. And what I believe about that is that it is a decision, a choice, a courageous one. This change just doesn't happen automatically. The title for this message, The Fire Next Time, is taken from an old African-American spiritual kind of a reading of the Bible. And again, I read in this is not ought not ought to be, but simply this is an observable phenomenon that happens. It's based on the Noah story, the flood God gave Noah the rainbow sign. No more water. The fire next time. That's a bold kind of opens my eyes when I read that, and again, I don't read that through the sense of God delivering plagues, that's not my experience or understanding, again, of the divine. But an awareness making statement that's very helpful. If we don't deal with this, well, whatever the this is, we're going to perpetuate it. And it might even be worse not too long ago, watch the 60 Minutes story about scientists who are studying the next and preparing for the next pandemic. And I was like, oh, my God, do I really want to be watching this? But I did.

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And I was glad that I did because it was all about what we can learn from this pandemic that might spare us the suffering, disease and death of the next one, because the next one may even be more virulent. But you know, this question of the next or what might happen if we don't do the work now, it's not just about pandemics or plagues, it's about with so many of us have been noticing with broken hearts over the last couple of weeks and the life of this country around guns, racism and misogyny. And asking ourselves, when will it be enough, when will it end? What might be enough to be able to shift and open our hearts in such a way? That we cannot just keep on perpetuating the harm, the damage. There was, I think, a really powerful and positive in its context story this past week, Kim Janni, woman named Kim Janni, I really had not heard of because I don't live in Boston, I don't pay attention to a lot of Boston local news. She became the first woman and the first African-American mayor. Of the city of Boston, its entire history. And as a black child in the 1970s, she had rocks thrown at her when she was on those school buses that attempted to desegregate. Desegregate, excuse me. The deeply segregated schools of Boston.

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Again, this wasn't happened, the Confederate South, this has happened in North in a so-called liberal, quote unquote, liberal city like Boston. And so, yeah, if you look at it, hey, she's the mayor now, representation matters. This is important. And she becomes mayor of a city. I mean, this took my breath away when I read this in 2015, the Fed, the Federal Reserve Bank did a study of the net worth of white families and black families in Boston, and the median net worth of white families in Boston is two hundred fifty thousand dollars. The median net worth of black families in Boston. Was eight dollars. I didn't stutter. Eight dollars versus two hundred and fifty thousand dollars for white families. Allow that to sink in, we take a look at the historical legacy still playing themselves out of white supremacy and the reality of white supremacy in this country. It's against this backdrop that I think it becomes even more compelling that a city like Evanston, Illinois, decided to start a reparations program specifically aimed about housing. For black families. Again, I don't want to detour just towards this, you can read about this yourself if you haven't already. I think it is quite powerful and it's not all

the work, but it is something about facing. The vast sources of pain and trauma. And oppression in our culture right now still here. James Baldwin wrote a book back in the 1960s with the title *The Fire Next Time*, and it was explicitly an invitation to ask people, can we do the work back then? To face the reality of what this country has been and the deep suffering.

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Of black people, what their experience has been in America. One of James Baldwin's great quotes that I think addresses racism. And any form of transgenerational trauma trauma across the generations. He said, you know, the reason so many of us cling to our hate. Is that if we let go of those, hate's we're going to have to face pain. I understand what he was saying like this, that if we want Grace, if we want. New beginnings, hope, a new dawn, a new day, a new forms of life. And first, we got to figure out our karma, all the causes and the conditions that have led to these places perpetuated pain in people's lives. This is the deepest work of compassion is not just to be healed ourselves. But to be able to participate in the healing that is ongoing. In my own small scale way, in my own life, I know this through my own personal recovery from a substance use disorder, I think this plays out in microwave's in our lives and in macro ways in terms of our entire culture. What I understood in beginning with great fear and trembling, my own recovery process was that I had to make sense of my past. In order to envision a future that would be different, I had to face pain, both the pain that I had experienced and had been done to me and the pain that I had caused.

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And some of the most important words that were ever said to me that allowed me to face this pain but not face the pain. Unprepared. Or shut down in the face of the pain, just over guilt or shame or because it just seemed too difficult to do. One of my first guides along the recovery path said this, as you make sense, he said of your past. Don't just make it an immoral inventory. Remember what you love about yourself, remember what is good about you in the midst of all the pain and the things that you don't like about yourself? Some of the most important words ever said to me. Don't let it be just an immoral inventory, don't go into pain unprepared. But hold in your heart. That which your heart is most based on. Even if it feels somewhat distant from you. There's a British psychologist, author of a wonderful book, an influential book for me called *The Compassionate Mind*, a fellow named Paul Gilbert Gilbert, who has a name for this experience of being able to be in pain and with pain in a skillful and helpful way. He calls it safeness different than safety. He says we need safety. Safety is safety from harm. Safety from danger, safety from threat.

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But he says safeness is something else that's a different part of how we work with our emotional lives, safeness is that profound sense of being safe with others or within ourselves. That gives ourselves a profound sense of warmth and kindness and soothing. Safeness is Conexion. And I believe that safeness and being able to cultivate the conditions of safeness in our lives, I say this both within myself personally and as a mental health professional, it is essential in healing from various kinds of pain and trauma. I heard a kind of powerful story about this from someone named Phoebe Bridgers, some of you might know who she is. She's kind of an indie folk rock singer. Her album this past year is one of my favorite recordings from this from this from 20, 20 from this past year. And she's talking recently in an interview about something that actually a lot of us might have embarrassment or even shame about. Is she wet the bed? Well beyond when she was a child into her teen years, up until she was 20 and she tells a story about this, about how that pain, that difficulty came to kind of alter within her. She says the truth is, the last time I wet the bed, I was 20. She says it runs in my family, what I loved is that the person I was dating at the time. I did it, I wet the bed, they were in the bed with me and I thought.

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Are you kidding me? And I woke up the person, I was awake, I woke them up and it was like, really sorry but but I totally wet the bed and they were like. I'm tired. I'm just going to scoot over. Just like nonchalant, non shaming like that and Phoebe Bridgers goes on to say. After they said that to me, I never wet the bed again, it was like a magical fairy tale solution. All I needed was acceptance and someone who didn't give a blank and the problem was solved. I love those words, all I needed was acceptance and someone who didn't give a blank. She's talking about the reality of safeness. Now, I know for many of us in our pain, it's not a matter of just one act of safeness, of acceptance, of compassion, of being seen and unashamed by someone who cares about us, may not make it go all away immediately. And yet how often the experience of safeness. However long it might take. Really does breed in us a kind of. Courage. A kind of courage to face what needs to be faced and not just fall into certainly not toxic positivity or a kind of wishful optimism or a kind of vague hope. But a willingness to be able to face what hurts. And skillful and effective ways so that we do not pay the pain for any longer.

**[00:22:41]**

And so in closing, I want to come back to horror movies, actually. And come back to perhaps the most well-known horror writer that there is in the entire world, that's Stephen King. And by the way, I had a chance to meet the great writer a number of years ago. The first congregation I served, I was succeeded in that pulpit by one of Stephen King's children, a colleague of mine, and they invited me down to be a part of the beginning of Naomi's king's ministry. And I met very briefly, Stephen King, and I got to say he was just really humble and kind and kind of shy. And I got this sense of him that, you know, and I think, you know, if you follow, like, his Twitter something, this is a really deeply caring and compassionate person who cares about the world around him. And it kind of pointed at something that I read all his books. But the ones that I've read, something that has always really kind of struck me about them is that. In the midst of these terrible, horrible, horrific situations. He gets us to care about his characters. And his characters, very often, the survivors care about each other. What I see in Stephen King's writings and see it in it, I can see it in *Dr. Sleep*. Just name a couple of his titles. Is that he points at it in the midst of horror, in the midst of pain, in the midst of our fear, there is a necessity for safeness in connection.

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That allows us not just to survive. But to perhaps even thrive. And from that safeness, from that connection with ourselves and with

each other. That we cultivate the courage to be able to live. Aligned with who we really want to be. And so perhaps today. We can focus on in the midst of this hopeful and still uncertain moment. About who and what, including ourselves. Offers a safeness. The kind of safeness that invites us to face this life with all of its uncertainty. And all of it's danger. With courage. And the kind of commitment. That allows us to find our way through. Amen. And may you live in blessing. I ask if you would pray with me. Spirit. Divinity found in the breath and in the body and in the connections that abide even in the midst of distance. The kind of safeness that we know that we can be trustworthy even in the midst of what is difficult and painful. May we open our hearts and turn our hands this day to the who and to the what that inspire us, that put breath in the lungs when sometimes the breath is taken away because of fright or something? These forces of goodness and love and mercy. And allow us to continue to find a way forward and to keep on moving toward. That which our hearts are set most fully upon. Amen.

END OF TRANSCRIPT



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