

NAME

Life of the World to Come Podcast.mp3

DATE

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DURATION

27m 36s

2 SPEAKERS

Speaker1

Speaker2

START OF TRANSCRIPT

[00:00:00] Speaker1

The following is a message from Wellspring's congregation.

[00:00:05] Speaker2

Good morning, Wellspring's. It's good to be with you again, I think, but I'm not entirely sure, but I think I'm almost like in 90 to 95 percent positive that tomorrow is the anniversary, the twenty third anniversary of my ordination to the Unitarian Universalist Ministries, the 26th of the 28th of April. I can never recall exactly which one, but I do give myself some credit for this, which is that I can recall the date of the anniversary of my marriage. And I think given the choice between the two, I am remembering for sure the right one of those two. So, I mean, I started to preach even a couple of years before I got ordained. So it's been about a quarter century that I've been doing this. And I'm a big believer that for long standing commitments, rituals, relationships, it's really important to kind of keep those long standing things green and growing. And what that looks like is I set as a preacher little little mini challenges for myself, little expectations for myself. And actually I'm in the middle of one right now that I've been doing for about the last year and a half. As long as it fits the message series and the message, I will try to include at least one reference or reference point to my favorite band, The Mountain Goats. Some of you have heard me preach using Mountain Goat Mountain Goats references before. And again, I hope I have not failed that standard of at least making it relevant to the message at hand.

[00:01:49] Speaker2

And I'm not just like putting Mountain Goats references in just for the sake of it. That title today of this message, The Life of the World to Come is taken from a Mountain Goats album and well over a decade old. Now, the life of the world to come, the one constant in the life force that is the mountain goats. John Darnielle. He's been the one constant in nearly three decades of the mountain goats, and he is an unorthodox, although committed Christian. His faith is meaningful to him and it shows up in many different ways in his writing is both a novelist and also a musician. And the life of the world to come is a line taken from one of the earliest Christian creeds. Is that a longing that shows up in all kinds of different spiritual traditions for there to be a transformation of this creation in the most powerful, meaningful, holy and sacred ways and so the life of the world to come. This album is based on small snippets, small verses from Jewish and Christian scripture, and it has some of his most powerful songs, him reflecting on verse from the fortieth Psalm, you know, which has a very famous version interpreted by U2. I think his version is much closer to what that psalm is about, which is finding oneself kind of in a pit, a pit of despair and sometimes a pit of one's own making.

[00:03:31] Speaker2

And what it's like to be kind of lifted out a beautiful song verse from Matthew that he turns into a reflection upon his beloved mother's death. And this line, which just always hits me right here, you were you know, I think I would get this right. You were a presence full of light upon this earth. And I was a witness to your life and to its worth. Just adore that line. So I took the title of that album for this last message of this series, The New Normal, New Normal Excuse me, How Not to Waste an Apocalypse, the series, which for the last two months has been all about this question. What have we learned from this last year plus of this pandemic? And what are we still learning about how we might as we slowly, hopefully start to emerge towards moving towards a post pandemic life? What might we not want to go back immediately to from the before times? But what have we learned that sits on our hearts most meaningfully that we want to bring out of this time into the life to come so that this life would be more transformed and aligned with the deepest, most holy and sacred beliefs of our own heart? But I made a little change to this message title, The Life of the World to Come Asterisk. Because the life of the world to come post pandemic is not an inevitability, but a possibility, and that's what I want to focus on today in this last message of this series.

[00:05:33] Speaker2

One of the ways that we can imagine the life of the world to come here on this earth but transformed is to envision ourselves as part of that future, not as an escape from the present, but as a way to shift our perspective upon the present so that when we return to the present from that imagined or hoped for future, we bring back to the present a capacity to cultivate deeper resources for more enriched living. There was an article from the Christian Science Monitor very early on in the pandemic about a playwright's collective

in Boston that was called Dream Boston. And in a series of 10 minutes or less audio plays, these playwrights envisioned what life would be like in the future. Again, not as a way to escape from the now, but as a way to shift the perspective upon what is now in the direction of transformation. Melinda Lopez, who is a Boston playwright and helped to conceive this series Dream Boston, she said We were very clear, Melinda Lopez says. We were very clear. We wanted to offer our listeners a moment in the future when our present struggles would not be so overwhelming. Again, not as escape, but as resourcing to bring back from a perspective upon what is not yet. There's a word for this, actually, a phrase for this.

[00:07:14] Speaker2

It's called temporal distancing, getting a different perspective in time upon what is happening now. This is something I do in my mental health practice. There's a little exercise that I don't do with all of my clients, but with some of them called your 80th birthday party. And it involves sometimes four people, depending upon their age, traveling very far decades into the future or years into the future, envisioning not what they think will happen on the occasion of their 80th birthday, but listening to their hearts for what they most hope will happen. On that milestone birthday. Marking their 80th year of life again, the hope is that through clarifying what we most want in the future and for our future, for the life to come, our lives individually or our collective lives, is that we get to bring those resources, those hopes back into the present and so begin to transform our lives in the direction of what we most yearn for. Temporal distancing is not the only kind of changing up of perspective that might help shake something loose, some capacity for growth or development or transformation. There's also something called spatial distancing, again, not distancing as rejection and actually had a really powerful experience of this five, six, seven years ago. And it was spontaneous. I was actually sitting at a light. I've shared this, I think, with some of you in the past. I was sitting in the light about to turn on to Route 113.

[00:09:01] Speaker2

And all of a sudden, I swear, this was not a moment of losing touch with reality, but shifting my perspective on reality. It was as if my awareness, my consciousness kind of traveled up out of the car and I sort of kind of saw myself from hovering the perspective, looking down on my car. And then it kind of got further and further up, kind of up to the sky at one point into the stratosphere. And then it was almost as if the perspective I was kind of looking down from outside the earth, kind of going higher and higher and higher with a perspective. And again, I don't use substances like this is not a joke here. This is something I experienced. It was quick and happening, but it was a kind of alteration of my consciousness in that moment. And I remember eventually kind of coming back here into the car with a profound sense of peace and a profound sense of appreciation for my life. And I carry that experience of spatial distancing as a reminder within me, not the hope that I can get that altered consciousness all the time, because that's not the point of the spiritual life. But as a reminder, that helps me set my intention to hold my perspective lightly and lovingly and flexibly upon my life so I might enlarge my own heart. This perspective of being able to reflect on our lives.

[00:10:32] Speaker2

Take stock, what I did in the first message in this series when I asked us kind of a la, the old REM song, you know, it's the end of the world as we know it. And I feel fine, which was kind of so much the rage a year ago when the pandemic was starting up, kind of did a little thing fill in the blanks that people wrote in in the chat during the message. If they were watching it live a couple of months ago, I said it's the one year anniversary of the end of the world as we knew it. And I feel blank fill in the message. Got a lot of really cool reflections on from folks on their lives and how they were doing and how we were doing in that moment. And there were two very common themes exhaustion, understandably, exhaustion and gratitude and so on. This final message, this question sits with me. What would it be like in the life of the world to come in this earth if we truly prioritized rest? Truly allowed ourselves and other people to rest where we were exhausted and kind of unleashed ourselves from that grind that so many parts of our economy praise. And, you know, you got to wonder, when does the grind truly become just an excuse for excuse for Plano Plain old exploitation? If we truly prioritized our need for rest, how would that change? And if we truly prioritize the power of appreciating this life, not just our own individual lives, but this gift of being alive, including everyone, how might this change us and especially the difference that it might make for people whose social marginality leaves them feeling most exhausted and least appreciated in this culture? I believe that this is an incredibly vital question in the life that we would hope to see in time to come, especially after this week.

[00:12:51] Speaker2

So many people have pointed out an important distinction between the accountability of the guilty sentence. The guilty finding the verdict, Derek Chauvin, for the murder of George Floyd, the differentiation between accountability and deeper justice because nothing can give George Floyd his life back and deeper justice is not just one verdict of guilt. Justice is not just about finding guilt. Justice also has dimensions of asking what is due to all of us simply because we are alive and what can we do to restore the harms, generational harms, centuries long harms. That are a part of this life and have been for a very long time. Thinking particularly of this question of changing policing, perhaps radically in this culture, so that it serves truly all of us, and as many people have said, when justice serves black lives, then justice will serve and include all of us. There is a meme that I've seen a lot over the last year in the midst of the protests for Black Lives Matter.

[00:14:28] Speaker2

That poses this question that says when we witness communities who are really thriving, we don't see a huge police presence there. What we see are resources. Communities that are thriving are well resourced. We don't see huge presences of police. That's not what thriving is about. There was a study completed not too long ago that focused on the city of Stockton, California, a community that is majority comprised by black people and Asian folks and people from Latin populations and countries. It is a town, a city that has experienced profound marginalization. And what was done there is something that I'm a now firm believer in and I appreciate in the past. It's called Universal Basic Income. And what they did with certain select citizens, people who live in Stockton is that for two years they gave them 500 extra dollars every single month. No questions asked. What they found was this. And it aligns with what most of the rest of the research about universal basic income shows is that we use give people money, especially when they are in impoverished or marginalized situations. They pay their debt down. They have the opportunity to find employment that better serves

and suits their lives as they understand their lives and that there are significant, statistically significant improvements in emotional health and in well-being. This body of evidence is growing and growing, and I think it is so important in this culture and in this economy that is wildly successful at producing ludicrous amounts of wealth and terribly unethical in how this economy distributes the benefits of that wealth.

[00:16:45] Speaker2

So often the retort to things like universal basic income is, you know, people just they'll just stop working, they'll grow lazy. But that's not what the research tells us. It's a misunderstanding and itself a reflection of the very marginality, oppression and racism that so often marks our policy and policies towards people who are marginalized in this country. In fact, what we find when people do not have to live under the conditions, the grinding oppression, financially, emotionally, psychologically, the way that this grinds folks down. What we find is that people have the capacity to thrive more, and I think this goes right to the heart of our theology. I mean, it's written right there into our DNA, this Unitarian Universalist. Belief this hold upon our heart, this conviction right there are Wellspring's DNA in a part of our larger tradition, this belief not an original sin that we originally broken, but original blessing. And, you know, I think that this question that so many people seem to assume, we just give people money they'll wasted. They use it on drugs. Again, look at that language of they right there rather than what the reality tells us, that if we can allow people to be released from the grind of their lives, that allows them to thrive. I think that is such a beautiful demonstration of the reality of original blessing.

[00:18:25] Speaker2

I invite you in for just a moment to a little experience of the difference between the grind and a different way of being, and, you know, this might bring up some stuff for you. It's a little experiential exercise, a little meditation really do through pretty quick. And I'm going to invite you to you know, if this brings up stuff that feels a little too uncomfortable for you. Stop it. Open your eyes. You do what you need to to keep yourself safe. Always the first commitment. And I'm going to invite you if you'd like to join along to envision yourself as a child, like on the first day of class. Or maybe you want to envision a child that you really care about. And I'm going to invite you to envision two different kinds of teachers. I'll close my eyes for this as well. To the first scenario. I want you to envision, again, yourself as a child or a child that you really care about the first day of class and like they're given a set of math problems that they know they're not very good at. And when the problem set is collected, the teacher kind of stands up at the front of the room and calls you or this beloved child to you out by name and says, we have someone who's really bad at math in this class. You must stay after class. And if you don't get this right, you will fail and you will have to repeat the class.

[00:19:51] Speaker2

That's what the first teacher says. And I want you to just imagine how you were a child beloved to you would feel to be called out in this way. What do you notice in your motions? What do you notice in your attention? What do you notice in your body? And the first teacher kind of. Puts you under the grind of pressure. Of diminishment and then envision. Same scenario, but a second second in a different teacher, same problem set, not very good at it, first day of class and the teacher collects them. And the teacher waits until everyone is just ready to leave class and she approaches you and she says, looks like you struggled a little bit with this exercise. I know the first time I did this math problem, I really struggled. And in fact, some of my best students I've ever had in math. The first time they did it, they struggled with it, too. So what I want to offer you is that if you want to stay after class some time, I'll give you some, you know, extra tutoring, some extra help. And imagine that you this version of you or this this child, beloved to you, decides to have a little extra tutoring. And when you show up teacher appropriately distance from you so you feel safe, kind of takes a seat alongside you and kind of walks you through it, not lording it over you like the first teacher, but the second teacher kind of sits with you until you get it saying I know you can do this.

[00:21:34] Speaker2

I have faith that you can develop this capacity. How do you feel with that second teacher when you notice in your body, what do you notice in your emotions? And this is something I do somewhat regularly with my clients, especially people who have imbibed that harmful cultural message, that it is only the grind, only the pressure only being harsh on ourselves or on others that are the conditions under which we thrive. And so often people say with that second teacher, I felt safe, I felt at ease, I didn't feel called out, I didn't feel shamed. And what I think this little exercise invites us to consider is to ask us what we really set our hearts upon, what do we trust? Do we trust the grind or do we trust the grace? The conditions that allow us to thrive. Because we are being treated with the decency and the kindness. At each one of us deserves. We have in so many ways and in so many of our most harmful policies in this country. Hand ourselves over to this idea that it is only through the grind, only through terrible pressure, that we can produce lives of value, and I think especially this past year, we have seen the vast harms that come from this way of living in our own lives and especially in the lives of people.

[00:23:23] Speaker2

Who live under oppression. And so I want to end today and end this series with a beautiful quote from perhaps one of the most well-known pieces of apocalyptic literature, remember the apocalypse? Apocalypse means simply in unveiling. It's the Book of Revelation, the final book in the Christian Scriptures, the final book in most people's Bibles, or at least Jewish and Christian Bibles and. The thing that I think is so interesting is most people think of the Book of Revelation as like, you know, The Horned Beast and 666, but there's another part to revelation which talks about a new heaven and a new earth and speaks of this. God will wipe every tear from their eyes in this new heaven and earth. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things has passed away. Now, let me say that I personally think it is just as likely as not that there is some form of consciousness that survives our death. I don't know that for sure. I just think it's as likely as not. I also don't think that question is there some part of us that survives death or not is really all that compelling a focus of the spiritual life. I think we got better things to do. What really matters is not our destiny beyond death, but the quality of our lives before death.

[00:24:59] Speaker2

And so what I take from that vision of a new heaven and a new earth is a question. The possibility for the life of the world to come here and now in our midst, that we can be the ones, even if we cannot stop death, that we have a hand in stopping unnecessary deaths. And that we are here to create the conditions for each and every one of our lives to thrive. That this can be our participation in an ongoing revealing. And unveiling of a realm of compassion and goodness. That could be. Asterisk the life of the world to come. May we set our hearts on it and may we work towards it? Amen. And may you live in blessing. I ask if you would join your heart with mine in prayer. Divine of the always has been and the always coming to be you who are pregnant as possibility for goodness, justice, compassion and love within us within every moment that we are alive. I mean, we open our hearts this day so that we are able to learn from this time that each of us has lived through. And is alive right now within. May we ourselves, each of us, be midwives of the greater realm of compassion and the sacred and the goodness that we so yearn to see. May we each be a part with our effort, our hearts and our hands? The life of the world to come.

[00:27:22] Speaker1

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

END OF TRANSCRIPT



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