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WS Message 5-3-2020.mp3

DATE

May 5, 2020

DURATION

24m 51s

START OF TRANSCRIPT**[00:00:00]**

The following is a message from Wellspring's congregation.

[00:00:05]

Hi, everybody. It's good to be connected with you again in this way. And please excuse, if you would, the raspiness of my voice. I'm not sick. It's just seasonal allergies are real full effect here. So a couple of weeks ago, my wife, Teresa and I, we sent a video over to the five year old daughter of a couple of our closest friends. The five year old's name, Charlotte. And it was a video that my wife took of me making scrambled eggs, which Charlotte has called for a few years now. Uncle Kennex, it goes back to the first time she stayed overnight with us, with her parents. I think when she was maybe 18 months or two years and I made scrambled eggs for all of us and she proceeded to eat all of hers and all of her dad's and then half of everything else that was left over all the scrambled eggs from that day forward. She called them Uncle Ken Eggs. So Charlotte already knows the secret Uncle Ken eggs that we were reiterating in this video, which is low and slow, very low heat and it, makes it takes me about twenty five minutes to make scrambled eggs and make them very slowly.

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And if you want the recipe here to talk about it, we can talk at another time about that. So getting back to the story, we said, you know, we just miss you.

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We wanted to say hello. And also Charlotte now is the younger sister who may not know the secret to Uncle Ken Eggs. So we thought this could be a great opportunity for her to share the secret of low and slow with her two year old sister.

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We got a text almost immediately back from our friends saying how happy they were to connect with us in this way, and Charlotte was so delighted to watch the video. And then two hours later, we got a video directly back from Charlotte that her parents sent to myself and to Theresa. And in it, she very loudly proclaimed low and slow. So it really resonated with her.

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And she also proceeded to tell us what she was eating, which was raisin bread with homemade whipped cream. With honey and garlic hummus, and she is as happy as happy could be about this concoction that she had put together.

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And the first thoughts that came to my head were were words from a line, from a Wilco song, Jesus, etc, that says you can combine anything you want. And that's exactly what Charlotte did. So I want to take these words.

[00:02:38]

You can combine anything you want. As we start here today, the new message series called Love the Hell Out of the World, which is about the universalist part of our Unitarian Universalist tradition.

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And by the way, I want to put in a plug for just a second today at one o'clock. There's asked the ministers anything.

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Reverend Lee and myself will be 1:00 p.m. on our Zoome channel. So you can get on line with us and ask us anything about Unitarian Universalist history. So in this series, Love the Hell Out of the World. We're going to be specifically focusing on the universalist part of our traditions. This universalist teaching that says the world and everyone in it, we're all worthy of saving. And this quality, this depth of beloved A.. Especially now, especially while

we are simultaneously so distant from each other and yet so close and so connected in terms of caring for each other. This universalist part of our tradition feels so very important. And I think this Wilco line you can combine anything you want is really close to what universalism is all about, especially with sometimes the odd or the rejected parts of who we are, who we think we are, or the parts we think we have to reject in order to belong.

[00:04:06]

What I want to focus on today is that, quote, applied to a particular story. Someone who I've never, ever preached about in my 13 years of preaching. Almost 13 years now. Here at Wellspring's. And actually, I think in the 20 years I've been a preacher, I've never talked about this person either. It's not because of any hard feelings about him. It's that I don't really think about them very often until recently.

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And by the way, the article I'm going to talk to you about was brought to my attention by Kathy Bercow. So, Kathy, another shout out for bringing this article to my attention. Kathy is going to be giving one of the messages in this series later on and love the hell out of the world. So when I talk about combining anything you want, I want to kind of bring to mind a little juxtaposition. I got to ask you all to think about in this moment a large rock and roll arena and that moment just before the main act comes on and the crowd has this almost fever pitch, this energy, and you get the sense of building to something really exciting, really wonderful. And the lights start to dim and the main spotlight comes on and in the center, that spotlight where the rock and roll band is going to be, you see.

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An accordion.

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Maybe not what you were anticipating when I said rock and roll, because today I want to talk about Weird Al Yankovic.

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And I have to tell you, this article about him that Kathy brought to my attention. It was one of the most delightful things I have read in months, if not years. It taught me a whole bunch of things about weird al that I didn't know about his meticulous.

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Meticulous ways that he crafts songs and his immense skill and also his kindness.

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He is thought of in legendary terms in Hollywood, which is not known as being one of the most kind, thoughtful, considerate places in the world.

[00:06:09]

He is legendary for his profound kindness, even his shyness. How un-egocentric he is in this story. New York Times Magazine, you can go and search for it. They talk about Weird Al's growing up years in which he was the man who eventually would turn like a virgin into like a surgeon.

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And I love rock and roll into I love Rocky Road or turned Gangsta's Paradise into Amish paradise. The man who came up with all these kind of amazing parody songs.

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He was a lonely, shy, deeply awkward boy, intellectually curious. But he didn't go on sleepovers or didn't have friends sleep over at his house. He didn't go on dates.

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He was so sequestered, almost in a religious sense, cloistered by his parents that the school that he went to for some years was right across the street from his parents house, and his parents used to spy on him during gym class with binoculars. That's how kind of locked down his world was when at the height of the 1960s, when I'm not sure there was a kind of more sexy, more alluring instrument in the world other than the guitar. When a traveling salesman came to their door and asked Weird Al Yankovic's

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mother, Would your son like a guitar or would he like an accordion? She she picked the accordion and the die was cast.

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He was incredibly devoted to learning the accordion. He learned a lot of rock and roll songs on his accordion, but he didn't really share his gift with anyone. And he was incredibly bright and he went to college early and he was just as awkward there and just as shy. And that's actually where he got the name Weird Al Yankovic. It wasn't

meant as a term of endearment, if you know Weird Al with his kind of crazy hair and his big glasses, at least back in the 80s. And, you know, the way he kind of screws up his face, I'm not going to try and do it cause I can't do it justice.

[00:08:11]

He would kind of pass by in the hallways when other people were hanging out together in their dorm rooms. And at one point, someone shouted out, there goes weird, Al, and he kind of screwed up his face in this way that that he does. But weird, Al also at college, starting there when he was only 16. Also started to find his gift. He played it Open mic Coffeehouse and he ran through a set of Elton John songs and Beatles songs. And the crowd ate it up. And that was the beginning of this person that we now know, emerging from the shell of his feeling, rejected of his feeling awkward. So here's the thing about this article that I love so much. It's not just about who Weird Al is. It's about this kind of community of devotion, of love that's grown up around him and particularly focusing on one of his concerts that the writer went to. And in the middle of this article, the author drops in this kind of weird phrase. There once was a boy. And he continues, there once was a boy who what his pants once was a boy who wet his pants at home, at sleepovers, at travel. And it caused him shame and embarrassment. There once was a boy who threw up wherever he went. And travel at at home in cars, threw up Technicolor, he says, and it caused him shame and embarrassment. It was a boy who, when the other kids in the elementary school playground would play a kind of kissing tag game was never picked to be kissed.

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And so I want to take this portion right from the article.

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And so the boy spent many recesses alone on the edge of the playground, picking up trash to earn the whole class bonus points. So the teacher would allow them to watch a special movie together as a class at the end of the year.

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Sometimes the boy would stand near the play structure, hiding his uncool shoes behind a metal pole, watching the other kids play. And he would repeat a mantra in his head. I wish I could just be normal. And then the writer of the article says that boy was me.

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That boy always had, when he grew up, a fascination and the love for Weird Al because he kind of saw his uncoolness in Weird Al Yankovic's uncoolness that somehow became cool.

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In a bizarre, paradoxical way. But he always thought it was a private thing until he grew up and he decided to do the story about Weird Al. And he discovered all these people who love him. Weird Al is still an incredibly shy, unprepossessing person. And yet when he meets his fans, he trains his total attention on them. He looks them in the eye and he listens to the stories that they tell him about how much his music has meant to them over the years.

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Thank you, they say, for adding joy to my life. Thank you for making happy your moment. Happy moments in my life. Even happier.

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Thank you for being you. And then one interaction that the writer witnessed.

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A young man balding, wearing a brown suit who approached Weird Al after a concert and said, I got introduced to your music when I was going through, and he paused.

[00:11:45]

Struggles in my life.

[00:11:49]

You helped me pull through.

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The writer says that the word struggles was surrounded on all sides by an unfathomable gulf of feeling.

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This is weird, Al, hearing from one of his fans that. Essentially, he helped to save his life.

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The lion's share of this article is the writer at a concert on a very hot day in Forest Hills, Queens, New York. Fourteen thousand people there screaming for their hero and he describes it. He says is a concert with so many Hawaiian shirts floridly mismatched that paradoxically, everyone seemed to be matching. It was a great harmony

of clashing. A love that is the image of Universalism, not based on sameness, a great harmony of clashing. He talked about as the music built and Weird Al hit all the high notes and was doing high kicks and just was giving it is all he said. We felt rolling through the crowd a kind of tantric nerdgasm, a sustained explosion of belonging, it felt religious to me.

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I could feel within myself. Deep pools of solitary childhood, emotion, loneliness, affection, vulnerability and joy beginning to stir inside of me, beginning to trickle out and flow into this huge common reservoir. Towards the end of the article, they quote, Weird Al's most longstanding friend. Actually, the first person who ever befriended him when he was at college as that shy, awkward 16 year old. He says about people who come to Weird Al Yankovic concert Al is, he's giving them validation. They feel a kindred spirit. When they're at his concerts, they are in a safe space. They are able to be stupid or outlandish or whatever. Exactly as they want, and nobody judges them. In fact, it's the opposite.

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People appreciate them for what they are, not what they are not.

[00:14:05]

I think when we talk about loving the hell out of the world, we can recognize that. However you interpret that phrase, one of the things that is truly hellish about our world and is particularly something that is a risk for so many people worldwide right now is loneliness. And that's what I heard all throughout this really beautiful article.

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Is loneliness, healing and finding connection?

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And in fact, that is one of my favorite stories and very much a universalist story. An outsider feels the pain, the sting, the rejection of being an outsider and rather than growing embittered or small.

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Through that rejection of being an outsider. Transforms their pain and transforms their pain in such a way that they create other outsiders to have a place to belong.

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And they stop being outsiders. At all.

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And so Weird Al Yankovic, I recognize a few times in this message. I almost wanted to call him Reverend Al Yankovic because that's almost what I think of him as now with this ministry of belonging.

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And I don't think I've no reason to believe he is a Unitarian Universalist. But I know he is a universalist.

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Because actual universalism, which is bigger than just our tradition that loves the hell out of the world. It is not a belief.

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It's not a doctrine. It's a way of relating.

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And weird, Al's particular form of that is to combine all that leakiness and all that awkwardness and all that stuff that makes us maybe feel like we stick out and don't belong and to make that stuff, the stuff that allows us to know that we fit in.

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When people ask me about my professional life and I describe the ministry part of it and talk about Unitarian Universalism, I have a. Kind of one sentence phrase that sums up what is the heart of universalism for me? You talk about a love that is so special that we don't need to be special to be loved. And when I say that, I'm not saying that there aren't special gifts or amazing talents that people have. And especially after reading this article, Weird Al Yankovic is definitely one of those to me. But here's the great thing. That with a universalist love, it doesn't require us to be famous or great or special. In fact, it can be built even from those things that make us feel like we are not special at all and make us feel like we are being set adrift. There is a love so special we don't have to be special to be loved and. Weird Al now has a place in my heart, and I hope in yours perhaps too, as someone who manifests and shares that love with the people that he interacts with.

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There's a video, part of a training video for the psychotherapeutic circles that I run in the other part of my professional life. And it's a video that starts with a quote about the difference between rejecting our commonality

and having that create separateness between us and acknowledging the ways in which we can be so similar to each other, sometimes even in the midst of differences, recognizing the deeper similarities and having that be the bond that holds us together, acknowledging our connections. And in the video after that quote, there's a song that plays and you see a whole bunch of people actually think there are they are professional therapists who've gone through training and they're holding up signs and they read like things like, I am I am not enough.

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Or if you only really knew me, you wouldn't like me or I have failed so many times.

[00:18:05]

And it goes on and on for about five minutes. And you get the point after just a couple of minutes. All these things that people carry around that they think.

[00:18:13]

Draw them away from relationship are, in fact, all the things that can bring us together in relationship and build belonging. I have my own versions of those things that I think make me unlovable or unworthy or not valuable. Truth is, for a good portion of my life, those stories, I told myself, led to a whole bunch of unhappy, unhealthy behaviors that did end up separating me from other people.

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Noun person, long term recovery is a bunch, you know, and the stories are still around. And actually here's the difference. I just don't get hooked by the stories anymore.

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In fact, I even welcome those stories. I don't reject the feelings or the fear of being rejected, because for me, that's the very seat and heart of growing my own compassionate heart. In fact, instead of getting hooked by those stories anymore, I try to be really deliberate about unhooking from the stories in particular ways. About a year ago, 30 months ago, I did a weekend retreat broadly based on what I would call cultivating mature masculinity, not the kind of masculinity for those of us who identify as male and identify as men.

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Not the kind of masculinity that's built on misogyny or homophobia or transphobia or any form of power over other people, but rather the kind of masculinity that is built on power with and naming and claiming the right of compassion that we need for ourselves.

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Many of us who socializes as men didn't get that. I know I didn't.

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Growing up and so on the first night of the retreat, there was a fairly kind of emotionally intimate exchange I had with another guy. And I got to tell you, during that exchange, I wanted to run the hell out of there. I wanted to go home and sleep in my own bed. And I was a scared, awkward 15 year old just wanting to go home, you see, because the guy was talking to was one of these big barrel chested guys who is exactly the kind of guy who scared the bejesus out of me, made me feel small and intimidated. But here's the thing I like to unhook from that story. And so he and I had a really meaningful exchange on the last night of the retreat. I went up and I told him about what was kind of going on in my head, what the story was that I was telling myself and how it was necessary for me to move beyond that. And he just listened with a warm glint in his eye. And then he told me his story.

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And happy ending. We've been friends and connected ever since.

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There's a line in the Hebrew scriptures that says, I'm going to change one word and it says the word aliens, but I think I'm getting closer to what the deeper meaning of that word is. It says. Remember that you were outsiders in the land of Egypt. So do not be cruel or unkind, do not oppress the outsider who is in your midst. For me, the kind of psychological, spiritual insight of that is we don't need to reject our own feelings of being rejected. And maybe some of your stories are coming up right now for you about the things that make you feel like you don't belong. And maybe you don't have a story like that. I'm not going to reject you for not having stories of rejection. But I think many of us, if we search hard enough, we will find those stories within ourselves, even if we bury them. And to me, that's the invitation. Remember, you were outsiders. Allow that to be the seed in the soil of growing the compassion for yourself, of remembering our connections with each other and indeed. That when we can remember the sting and the pain of our own feelings of being inadequate to reject, rejected or awkward that instead of pushing that away or submerging it, but also not getting hooked by it, we're feeling any shame about it. That if we open ourselves to it, what we will find there is a deep and abiding love.

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We will find a love so special. And we will know that if we follow the call. Of that love. That indeed, we will be able to make our own contributions to loving the hell out of this world.

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Amen. And may you live in blessing.

[00:23:09]

Would you pray with me in whatever pose or position is most comfortable for you to enter into that state of openness that we know as prayer?

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Spirits. God, the breath, by whatever way, we open to you.

[00:23:31]

We maybe noticed your presence right now here in this moment, in our breath, in our bodies, in the recognition. Of whatever it is that we are carrying in this moment. It may be joy. It may be fear. It may be belonging. It may be disconnection. May we allow ourselves in this moment to open fully to the fullness of who we are. And so when we encounter those places, those feelings within ourselves. That feel or make us feel as if we need to take a step back from connection. And instead, if we scratch the surface of those feelings. That within it, we may find the deepest desire and memory of our belonging to and with each other.

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And to follow that call of belonging. In Healing, Helpful and whole ways. Amen

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END OF TRANSCRIPT



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