

NAME

Troop Zero Sunday Service for June 28, 2020.mp3

DATE

June 30, 2020

DURATION

21m 17s

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

The following is a message from Wellspring's congregation.

[00:00:05]

Hi, everyone.

[00:00:08]

I've done this a few times, recorded videos for Wellspring's in this virtual time, both as a worship leader and as treasurer. But this is the first time I'm preaching virtually. And I have to say it really makes me miss your beautiful, smiling faces even more than I already did. And at the same time, I'm so grateful that we have this opportunity to connect safely. So thank you for showing up. These past fifteen weeks. And especially, thank you for showing up today when I was nine years old.

[00:00:56]

I started the fourth grade and though I'd never been a particularly popular kid.

[00:01:07]

It was nothing like what fourth grade had in store for me.

[00:01:13]

I had never experienced anything like it.

[00:01:18]

It felt to me like the entire class was conspiring to pick on me. I became that kid. The rest of the class truly seemed to bond over bullying me. I can't even give examples that make sense today. Forty five years later, none of the individual things seem all that horrible. Mostly they just chipped away at my self-esteem and self-confidence as a kid after kid said some mean thing to get a laugh out of the rest of them.

[00:02:00]

I'm still not sure why.

[00:02:05]

I knew I was the only girl in my class who was in the gifted program and for years I minimized my intelligence because I thought it might make people like me better. It was in fourth grade that I had my first accident where I peed myself while sitting in my desk at school. I say first accident because there was a second. It's not uncommon for nine year olds to have bladder control issues.

[00:02:40]

There were at least two other kids that year who suffered the same humiliating fate.

[00:02:48]

My second accident, though, happened when I was 13 years old. In eighth grade, still at the same school.

[00:03:00]

Standing at the chalkboard doing a math problem in front of the whole class, largely that same class that had bullied me so deliberately in fourth grade. The sad thing is, I don't even remember feeling humiliated that time I had so internalized the bullying that it just seemed logical to me that someone is strange and pathetic as I was would do something so gross. So when I watch the movie Troop Zero, I felt an instant connection to Christmas flinch, so much so that I agreed to preach about this movie in our spirit.

[00:03:47]

Spiritflix message series. Every summer here at Wellspring's, we enjoy spirit flicks. Finding the deeper meaning

behind films, TV shows and really all the stories we watch on our screens. So Christmas Flint is a nine year old girl. In 1977, Georgia called Bedwetter by the popular bullies at her school.

[00:04:19]

I realized as I sat down to write the sermon, I was a nine year old girl in 1977 during that awful fourth grade year. The movie opens with Christmas shining a flashlight into the night sky to signal the aliens. Her mother gave Christmas the flashlight the previous summer. And we learned that she has since died, in part because of the loss of her mother. Christmas is consumed with alien life. She says momma believed that sound waves travel out into the universe. She said, if I ever get lonely, I should just send my message out.

[00:05:11]

The audience understands that Christmas is only a lot.

[00:05:17]

Soon, we meet her father, a hapless attorney who never wins and never gets paid. And miss Rayleen her father's a parent. Sorry, her father's a parent office manager played by Viola Davis, who has Christmas puts it crash landed here instead of going to law school. Miss Rayleen has become a reluctant mother figure in Christmas's life. When she asks, Don't you have any girlfriends? Christmas responds.

[00:05:57]

They all say, I pee myself, even though I don't.

[00:06:04]

All the most popular girls at school are in true five of the Birdie's Scouts, led by troupe mother and school principal Miss Massey, played by Allison Janney. Christmas overhears Miss Massey telling her troupe that the Birdy Scouts will have a special prize this year at their jamboree. The winner of the talent competition will have the opportunity to record a greeting on the golden record. OK, so this story is fictional, but the golden record, that was an actual thing. In 1977, NASA sent two robotic probes, Voyager one and Voyager two into space. In fact, they're still traveling through intergalactic space. Both spacecrafts carry a 12 inch golden phonograph record that contains pictures and sounds of earth. The records contain musical compositions, recordings of brainwaves, images of life on our planet. I could find no evidence that NASA participated in talent competitions to send greetings from nine year olds. What I did find was an interview with the writer of the movie, Lucy Albar. Lucy learned about the golden record and was fascinated with what she calls the idea of making ourselves permanent. She read about the process of gathering stuff for the record and about how much had to be left off to save time. She kept thinking, who didn't make that record? Because the impulse to be permanent. The desire to leave something behind is so deep. And all of us. We grapple with that today, right? Who decides that Christopher Columbus deserves a federal holiday? Or that a Confederate monument is important to history.

[00:08:31]

How many of us celebrated Juneteenth before this year?

[00:08:38]

The white male scientists who decided what made it onto the golden record.

[00:08:48]

Tried among the classical pieces of music was a recording of Chuck Berry singing Johnny B. Goode.

[00:09:00]

When some claimed that rock music was far too adult lesson for the golden record, Carl Sagan, the committee chair, replied, There are a lot of adolescents on the planet.

[00:09:16]

So Christmas, desperate to have her voice recorded on that record, tries to join the Birdy Scouts. Typical mean girl taunts ensue. And Christmas is rejected. So Christmas decides to start her own troop. She enlists Miss Rayleen as troop mother and convinces every misfit in Wiggly, Georgia to join her troop troop.

[00:09:50]

Zero.

[00:09:53]

Because apparently all the other numbers were taken. The plot is honestly pretty predictable from here, but there is something so heartwarming about the story being told from the perspective of this eternally positive and hopeful little girl. And that's not an accident. The writer directors. Yes, there are two producers and the majority of the production crew for Troop Zero are female. One of the directors explained why this story needed to be told. She said, When we were reading the script, we realized that there's never been a girl adventure film where it's a group of girls that go on an adventure to achieve something greater than themselves by working together, not because of boys. But because they want to be greater than themselves. There are some twists in the movie. I won't spoil them, but it's probably not much of a spoiler to tell you that the girls and one dance loving boy who make up Troop zero grow closer to one another and more confident in themselves.

[00:11:19]

By the end of the movie, on the surface, Troop Zero has a simple message. Be yourself. Or as the directors put it, let your freak flag fly. It's hardly a new theme.

[00:11:43]

Maya Angelou once wrote, If you're always trying to be normal, you'll never know how amazing you can be.

[00:11:54]

I could end my sermon there, but I think there is more that we can take away from this movie.

[00:12:01]

Scratch the surface and you'll see that Troop Zero is also a reflection on how the systems we build conspired to keep us from truly being ourselves and embracing each other. When Christmas asks the Troupe five ring leader, why are you all so mean to me? Piper replies, I don't know. Just feels right. I'm at the top and your at the bottom. When the bullies stuff Christmas into a locker, Miss MASC tells her when we get put into a locker.

[00:12:39]

It's because one way or the other we got ourselves in there. Understand?

[00:12:49]

There's talk of Birdy Scouts having a strict quality code and someone even says young ladies are here on this earth to create beauty where ever they set their feet. When Miss Rayleen confronts Miss Massey on her nastiness. She says life gets easier if you don't want so much.

[00:13:21]

What kind of world would it be if every homely, strange little girl thought she could go out and do whatever she wanted?

[00:13:34]

What kind of world would it be if every homely, strange little girl thought she could go out and do whatever she wanted? Children aren't born being bullies.

[00:13:50]

It's a learned behavior and you don't have to look too far to see that it's not just nine year olds who reject differentness.

[00:14:02]

This movie actually received some criticism for the way it portrays racism in 1977 Georgia.

[00:14:10]

Actually, it's more accurate to say it doesn't portray racism. It completely ignores it.

[00:14:19]

I hope it was intentional.

[00:14:22]

I found it refreshing in the midst of a lesson about standing your ground and embracing your uniqueness to show a world where racism isn't a systemic way of holding people down. But I'm a white girl who identifies strongly with the little white girl portrayed in this movie. I think it particularly spoke to me because so much of the production staff was female.

[00:14:55]

I picked this movie to preach about on May 22nd.

[00:15:00]

Three days later, George Floyd was killed in Minneapolis by a police officer kneeling on his neck.

[00:15:10]

I thought for a while about choosing another movie, one more relevant to this moment in time, but the more I thought about it, the more I realized that no one needs to hear me preach about what it means to be black. Honestly, I don't think I can even authentically preach about being an ally.

[00:15:36]

I have so much more to learn after the police officers involved in George Floyd's death were arrested.

[00:15:45]

I found myself thinking great. The protests worked. They got what they wanted. Time to stop protesting and get back to normal. I am not proud of that reaction, but I'm glad I kept listening. So much more needs to change. I watched the movie. I am not your Negro. The one Reverend Ken preached about last week. And I was struck by the words of James Baldwin from decades ago.

[00:16:24]

He could be saying the same things today. So little has changed.

[00:16:33]

It is a step in the right direction that arrests are being made and charges are being filed. I'm also noticing that friends of mine are speaking out against racist racism. Friends who I thought were Mike more likely to say all lives matter.

[00:16:54]

I can recognize progress without accepting that it's enough.

[00:17:02]

Similarly, I was happy with the Supreme Court decisions last week, one for big businesses from firing workers based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. The other stop the Trump administration's efforts to end DACA, a program that protects undocumented immigrants who were brought to the United States as children. These rulings are progress. Many people feared these decisions would go in the other direction.

[00:17:38]

And at the same time, it's so sad to me that we live in a world where anyone would fight for the right to fire someone simply because they're gay or transgender, or that anyone would think it's a good idea to send someone to a country they don't ever remember living in. We have so much further to go.

[00:18:10]

I do not have the answers. The best I can do is pay attention. Listen to the ideas of the people most affected by our flawed systems.

[00:18:26]

Maybe by seeking out writers and directors who are black, brown, gay, transgender, different from me, and maybe by pointing others in their direction to near the end of the movie Christmas, Flint pees herself on the stage of the jamboree instead of running away in shame and accepting her weird, homely girl fate. She says this.

[00:19:04]

My name is Christmas Flint. I am a human female.

[00:19:13]

Sometimes I pee myself when I get nervous. I don't know why. I don't want to. I just want to tell you, I hope you live a good life. I hope you have a friend. I hope you got everything I got.

[00:19:34]

And later, Christmas and her friends scream into the heavens.

[00:19:39]

I'm here. I'm here.

[00:19:46]

I'm here.

[00:19:50]

May we all channel our inner Christmas Flint and send our sound waves out into the universe?

[00:20:00]

And may we pay attention and listen carefully?

[00:20:06]

To the sound waves of others, especially those muffled by our flood systems.

[00:20:15]

Amen. And may you live in blessing.

[00:20:22]

Will you pray with me? The spirit of the universe.

[00:20:28]

Of all the planets and stars and space to us.

[00:20:32]

I'm here. They're here. We are here.

[00:20:44]

Listen to our prayers.

[00:20:48]

The ones we speak out into the universe and the ones that remain in the silence of our hearts.

[00:20:58]

Amen.

[00:21:03]

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END OF TRANSCRIPT



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