

NAME

Groundhog Day - June 14, 2020.mp3

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

The following is a message from Wellspring's congregation.

[00:00:04]

Hi, everyone. I always like to say or think I want to say at the start of one of these recorded messages, it's good to see you, but we both know that's not happening right now.

[00:00:14]

So what I can say authentically is it's good to be seen by you. And I do hope you're doing well in this moment.

[00:00:23]

Some of you know that I get together annually with a group of friends that I've known for many years that we kind of tongue in cheek call our man-cation. Man-cation Nine. The ninth consecutive was supposed to be this past spring. And I was supposed to host it here in Conshohocken. But because of, you know, hashtag pandemic, it didn't happen.

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So I do look forward to when I can get back together with him safely. This group of friends, it's associated with a time in my life almost three decades ago when I was in divinity school in the early 90s, and not all of this group of friends, kind of core group of five or six guys that show up every single year for a vacation together, went through the same program with me. And if I was going to describe how exactly we all came to know each other and got connected, it would involve like footnotes and flow charts and bar graphs. And no one has time for that. Least of all me to put it together. So just suffice it to say, we're all really close friends. After many years of knowing each other and when we have this yearly medication, it does involve the core five or six of us.

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But it also involves we'd like to call the yearly guest stars who are kind of friends of friends, but we all know each other and we've a good time we get together. And so one of these special guest stars who showed up a few years ago, he actually lived with a subset of my man-cation buddies in Boston in the mid to late 90s. And the story goes and I got to tell you, one morning he came downstairs and he wandered into the living room, into the TV room. And one of the guys was watching the movie that I'm preaching on today, Groundhog Day. And he said, without missing a beat, just totally deadpan.

[00:02:09]

Every morning I come downstairs and Groundhog Day is on. And then he left the room, which is a very kind of Groundhog Day joke to make.

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And now those of you've been a part of Wellspring's for a while may be starting to think I can make a joke about the fact that every time Reverend Ken preaches SpiritFlix, he preaches on Groundhog Day. And you have seen this show before to a certain extent. This is the second time that I am preaching on Groundhog Day, and it's for a particular reason. It's to address part of where we are right now in our lives. But even more so, it's that's the most sacred stories. And to me, Groundhog Day is very much a sacred story. It's got a deep spiritual message. These most sacred stories, they keep coming around and around and around again in our lives and find us in different circumstances in our lives. They invite us into continued growth, challenge and development. And Groundhog Day has been coming up a lot these days. As you might know, in the midst of this pandemic, in the midst of Covid 19, with this repetitious nature of many of our days and sometimes needing to be reminded what day is it exactly? Because they can all blend together into at times a kind of sameness. And one of the things that's shown up is a particular meme that I'm going to share with you right now. We'll show on the screen about Groundhog Day and a

person posted it on Twitter. This question. Okay, I have a question. How did the movie Groundhog Day finally shift to the next day for Bill Murray? And have we tried that yet? And someone answers. He breaks the cycle when he shifts the focus from himself to devoting himself to helping others. And yes, that's exactly how we get out of this.

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All of this.

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And so what I want to talk to them about today is that meme or I want to unpack it a little bit and say it's not wrong. Actually, it's quite right many ways, but it's simply incomplete because it doesn't give us the depth of how the main character, Bill Murray's character, meteorologist named Phil Connors, how exactly he get to that next day, how he gets to February 3rd. So when we first meet Phil Connors, who is in the business of.

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Prediction. That's what meteorologists do. That's why we turn to them for what's the future going to contain, what's the future going to be about?

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It's a shift from a guy who very selfishly is always kind of... to always kind of looking to the next thing, how he can get through, how he can get over, how he can get around. He's kind of a schemer, not really in many ways, a very nice guy at all. It's about a guy who learns to go from predictions. That's why he there in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, to get the mythological groundhog shadow. Forget which one knows shadow or shadow. Six more weeks of winter or not. But you can all Google it right now if you want to. And it might be showing up in the comment thread underneath because you guys are smarty pants and you know that. So anyway, the story of Phil Connors is of a guy who has to live Groundhog Day over and over and over again.

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And he goes through a whole bunch of different stages and steps to understanding what's happening to him. At first, it's shock, as any of us would be shocked if the same day kept literally repeating itself over and over and over again.

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And then because he is kind of a selfish, self-centered jerk, he uses this repetition to escape all consequences of his actions. Kind of like, what's that great old Sex Pistols line "when there's no future that cannot be sin" He kind of fully inhabits that. He indulges all of his tastes. He's kind of a sexist as well, too. And so he uses it to become a really kind of skeezy womanizer. He's really unpalatable. And what his character finds is that no matter how much he indulges all of his kind of base desires, it doesn't make him happy.

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And the day keeps repeating. No matter how egocentric he is, actually just makes it worse for him.

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At times, he enters into a kind of despair. Eventually, he even tries to end his life. But even that doesn't work. At some point, he thinks he's a God, that he can control things. But there's certain things that he cannot control. Yes, there are no consequences of his actions, seemingly because he just wakes up every day after going to sleep on February 2nd again.

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And that despair kind of starts to deepen him a little bit.

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There's a recurring character, an old man who's come to the end of his life. And Phil Connors starts to care about him. You can see his heart starting to spark a little bit and come alive. And Phil Connors starts to care about him. He starts very kind to this old man who appears to be impoverished as well, to homeless.

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And he gives them extra soup. He feeds them. He tries to make his last day on Earth pleasant, and he tries to save them, but he just can't. And you see in that moment that Phil Connors is starting to wake up to a life that is bigger than him and still it goes on and on and on, day after day, month after month, year after year. It is always February 2nd again.

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The cause kind of psychological, spiritual meaning of Groundhog Day for me is all about realizing one's karma, the causes and the consequences and the causes and the consequences to lead us that lead us into our current state of being. And then we can fully realize our karma.

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We can change and experience grace, the grace of a of a new beginning, which is ultimately what Phil Connors is able to experience when he goes from wanting to predict or get around everything to beginning to practice real

presence with his life. Which leads him into connection with other people.

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Now, in the movie, it's estimated that he was reliving the same day for 10 years. Some of you might know that the original script written by a serious Buddhist, had him reliving that same day for ten thousand years. Ten thousand is a really big number in Buddhism. It kind of signifies everything, the ten thousand things. That means everything in the world.

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And what happens with kind of Phil Connors Pilgrim's Progress is that he accepts eventually this invitation that if you can't get out of it.

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You might as well get into it. And he begins to inhabit the presence of this repetitious life fully.

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There is the final or kind of pen ultimate segment, the second the last segment in the movie in which we see what turns out to be his final February 2nd. And we see a guy who is living a fully realized life, who is not so much focused anymore on getting through to the next day or getting over or getting around or trying to get one over on someone else or exploit them or use them for his own selfish purposes. But this is a guy who has become an accomplished pianist and now can sculpt and is there to benefit all the other people in the town. He saves people over and over again.

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Ultimately, what Phil Connors learns and this is a lesson for us, too, that if we can't get out of it, we can get so fully into it. And ultimately, this is how he and we can get out of it. You see the moment when the inspiration for his learning how to play piano and become expert at it starts. He's just sitting in the coffee shop one day, as you can see him starting to mellow and become kind of a more decent, kind person. And he hears piano music in the back. And you get this sense of this thought, this curiosity, like what would it be like to use this time to develop this gift? And what the movie only shows us for a certain amount of time is actually the most important part of the movie.

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All those days, all those years. In which he didn't know what would happen any longer. And he kept after his life. Anyway.

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He kept after his gifts development, his skills development, his caring about people every single day. It is such a perfect analog teaching about the value of spiritual practice showing up, not because we think we're necessarily going to get anything out of it, but because we want to become a certain kind of person, awake and aware and connected.

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And that's what that meme that I read you early on. Kind of misses because, yes, he does become devoted to the service of other people, but he does it through fully inhabiting his own life. And ultimately, that's what sets him free. That's what allows him to see. February 3rd. And so just for a moment.

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Now, what I'd like to ask you to do is to think of what we might call a culmination day in your life, a day of great achievement, or kind of a capstone day or a day where you feel fully you feel fully realized something's come to fruition. So maybe it's a wedding day or a graduation day or a day of a new job or a day where you finished a huge, significant project in your life or maybe anything else. I'm just going to pause for just a moment. I'm going to get a drink of water while you do this.

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Maybe just close your eyes and think, what's that culmination day for me?

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Ok, maybe you have one now.

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And what I want you to try to imagine are all the days that led up to that, all the not so special, unrecognized or valorized, kind of not terribly important. Or maybe you think they're not all important, maybe even boring days that made that combination day possible.

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All those days of work. Dedication. Devotion. The days when no one else was necessarily watching.

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But you kept at it. And that made the culmination day possible. I think this is particularly important right now in our

lives at this moment, at this time of being alive. Depending on our age, you may have the feeling that you've been here before.

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If you're older than me, you may have the sense of, hey, remember this in 1968, tumult and change and unrest and maybe the promise of transformation or maybe for some of us, if you're my age, you remember 1992 and Rodney King and not just Rodney King, but you remember what was revealed about the deep, systemically awful state. I remember Daryl Gates. I think his name was that police chief in all the awful things he said and and believed and did and how he formed the LAPD in his own image and militarized it. And it wasn't just, we realized about Rodney King and his beating and his mistreatment. Or maybe you think of just a few years back in Ferguson or Freddie Gray in Baltimore regardless.

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Now we know certain names really close to our heart. May they rest in peace. May they rest in power.

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Brianna Taylor, Ahmad Aubrey. And, of course, George Floyd.

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And many of us right now, we are as focused on the original and ongoing American sin of white supremacy as we have ever been.

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And it is so powerful and potentially so promising right now.

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We're focused there and it feels like maybe we might keep the focus there. And not all those times in the past, we felt like something might transform and we won't transmit our pain forward of this culture that values some of us. But absolutely not all of us, especially not those with black and brown skin. And so our focus is here right now.

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But at some point, something will. Something else might capture some of our attention. The next shiny object, next things say, oh, look over there, a squirrel.

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And will we just move on?

[00:15:37]

At least some of us, especially the people like me, white skin folks really need to do the work. Well, we get distracted or we'll get bored. And then the next time, God forbid, we hope it doesn't happen. But the next time, if it happens, when there is another George Floyd and we say, my God, how could this happen? And we think, oh, yeah, we missed the focus this time because we didn't keep on paying attention.

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All of us right now, especially those of us who have white skin.

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Those of us who like me, we are white.

[00:16:16]

There is an invitation to do work at a deeper, more sustained level, to get uncomfortable, to be uncomfortable, to really deconstruct our whiteness and commit to anti-racism and have the challenging conversations and feel vulnerable and feel like we don't always know what we're doing and not look to people of color for validation, but to commit to ourselves and to the other people who are doing this work that because it is so important.

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This pain that we don't want to pay forward any longer, that we will engage in it and stay engaged in it, that we might recognize what's the word what's the title, the...

[00:17:02]

Nelson Mandela's autobiography, No Easy Walk to Freedom. It's not easy. It is a marathon. It is not a sprint. And it requires us to stay engaged for a long time. And at this point, the message have kind of shared a challenge and opportunity, a chance for transformation. Invitation for all of us, myself included. Absolutely. I am not expert in this. Very far from it. I mess up all the time.

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Typically, this is where I share a story kind of, you know, beginning, middle, end, or at least something that feels like an end to kind of caste division for this is what it can look like. But actually, I think that would get in the way of what I'm trying to say, that right now we're in the middle the story and we got to be willing to stay in February 2nd for a long time if we want to fully realize the karma of what has led us to this time and to this place so that we can

finally merit the grace of a new beginning. We cannot get impatient with too many February seconds yearning, hoping, wanting.

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When is February 3rd coming? When is February 3rd coming? Instead, we're in the middle of the story. And so what I would offer you today instead of a story is an image. Something that happens that a number of you.

WellSpringers first brought to my attention, that is kind of like a marathon, but it's actually more like a marathon Plus. It's something called the Ragnar relay, which is a relay race for longer than marathon length that a team of adults runs together. As I understand it, there's kind of wristbands that function as a baton. And when they've gotten to the end of their portion and then they'll go and rest before they themselves as individuals go and run another leg of the journey. They will kind of touch batons with the next teammate and they'll take it from there. I think the segments are anywhere between three and 12 miles. And for those of you who have kind of piqued my own interest, if I ever get back into running to want to run a Ragnar relay

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What you've given me a sense of, you know, not everyone's running the same pace. You're not all running under the same conditions, the same weather conditions and may rain and may be sunny, it may be night. Some of you, when I talk to you about what it's like when you are running literally in the middle of the night, your leg, perhaps if you come up the schedule that time, it can get somewhat lonely.

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But what I've heard from some of you is that you also remember that you're part of a team. And then you're connected that maybe you're not all running the race in the same way, in the same exact way, but you're all connected and devoted to running that race. I think of now as a Ragnar relay time of being alive. We don't have to do this work alone. We do have to do our individual work. I know from running distance races on my own in the past that especially when it would get painful.

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The worst thing, the least skillful thing for me to do was just to start focusing on the prediction. When am I going to be done? When am I going to be done? When's the finish line when's? February 3rd.

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And to return myself to the present moment with one conscious step.

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And one conscious breath.

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To seriously commit ourselves to this work of anti-racism. To move out of the business of predictions and into the business of presence and holding a vision.

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That is the originators of Black Lives Matter tell us, and I believe them fully. That when it is finally true that black lives matter in this country, when there is peace and justice, when black lives matter, then and finally in this country, all lives will matter.

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And there will be peace and justice in a new way that we have never experienced before in this country. And so I want to end with a quote from.

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The Indian author, our own Dotti Roy.

[00:21:09]

And she wrote this at a time earlier in the pandemic. But I think it's even more true now.

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It's even more true now in this time of the necessary challenge. Of making black lives fully matter in this country. She says we can see this pandemic time as a portal, a gateway between one world and the next.

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She says we can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred. We can walk through it dragging our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas are dead rivers and smoky skies behind us.

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Or we can walk through this time lightly with little luggage ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for that other world. May we recognize in this time of realizing painfully, necessarily, painfully, our national collective karma of white supremacy? What it is like to do the work. That will allow a new grace of true belonging.

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For all of us to finally be. Amen. And may you live in blessing.

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I wonder if you would please join your heart with mine in time of prayer.

[00:22:51]

Deep and abiding spirit of love that calls us into the fullness of our being.

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May we recognize in this moment when the shaking of the foundations is happening, that that shaking of the foundations is happening for a reason?

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That the appearance of peace without justice is neither.

[00:23:13]

That the opportunity before us is to grow into the fullness of our being are being alive individually and collectively, so that our words, our systems, our structures may finally, finally reflect some of our deepest, deepest, most noble aspirations as human beings.

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And may we recognize that this will only come about? By doing the work before us right now. By staying focused. And by being willing to fight for it. Fighting truly in the name of that broader, all encompassing love. That is our birthright, every single one of us.

[00:24:01]

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END OF TRANSCRIPT



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