

NAME

13th - Sunday Service for July 26th, 2020.mp3

DATE

July 28, 2020

DURATION

30m 12s

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

The following is a message from Wellspring's congregation.

[00:00:06]

Good morning, Wellsprings.

[00:00:09]

I'm so glad that we have these new and different ways to spend time with each other, and I'm really glad that I get to spend some time with all of you this morning.

[00:00:20]

I want to start off by showing you something, a picture. This is a photograph of my father's family back in 1967. That is him there on the right hand side. He's the middle child. I think he looks adorable, don't you? Good genes. He's standing a little bit apart from the rest of the family. I notice in this photo you can see my Aunt Diane. She's at the top. My Uncle Eric is the little one at the bottom. And my grandmother and my grandfather are seated. My father stands apart from that little four person diamond that they're in.

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And it's probably fitting that he's a little bit apart from them, because one of the things I know about my father is that he's not very close with his family. And as a result, I have not been very close with his family.

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I know a few things about that family photo and the people in it, that 1950s and 1960s perfect looking image. I know mostly the good things and they are good.

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I know that my grandparents were first generation Americans, that their parents were immigrants to this country. I know that my grandfather in that photo, he had a Purple Heart from World War Two. He was a paratrooper, my dad's dad at Normandy on D-Day in 1944, a member of the 101st Airborne Division, Screaming Eagles, they called them that Purple Heart was framed in a shadow box on a shelf in their home. I know that after the war, my grandfather got an education and a mortgage with the GI Bill, the help that was provided to veterans of World War Two that helped so many people get propelled into the middle class. He bought that tiny suburban tract home in King of Prussia where my dad grew up, a whole mile from where I grew up, in a different suburban development. But in the same town and King of Prussia in the 1980s, we are one of the precious few to generation King of Prussia family lineages.

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I'm pretty sure I know of. That is what I do now. That's what we did talk about. You know, there's a lot I don't know. I have no idea what my grandfather's experience must have been like to be wounded in war. An ocean away from his home. To see I'm sure it has to be true, his friends. Killed on that beach in Normandy, some of them drowned in their parachutes. I have to believe he took people's lives while fighting in that war. I have no idea how he felt about any of that. He didn't talk about it.

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We also never really talked about what happened to my aunt, even though I know that she lives in an institution now, there's no real conversation in my family about diagnoses or prognosis or what's going on with her. The discussion is all pretty oblique. We certainly never talked about that town, my town growing up in King of Prussia and why almost everyone who lived there was white.

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We didn't talk about the way the benefits of the GI Bill, that one that propelled so many people like my family into

the middle class, we didn't talk about the way that the benefits of that bill were not available in practice to black soldiers, because even with help, they couldn't get mortgages in nice suburbs like ours.

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They were redlined out. They couldn't gain admission to most colleges which were segregated in the 1940s and 50s and get that education. We didn't even talk about how still in the late 90s in my high school of six hundred or so students, there were about five black students. I can remember their names. I hardly knew any of them because they also weren't in my AP classes or my honors classes. So much I do know, but also so much we didn't talk about, and the older I get, the more real it becomes to me that regardless of whether we talked about it or not.

[00:05:37]

All of this is part of my inheritance.

[00:05:46]

This week's Spiritflix movie is a documentary, it's called Thirteenth, it was directed by Ava DuVernay and it's about our American inheritance. It probably talks about things you do know and things you don't know, things that were talked about and that you have never heard talked about. But it is all part of our American inheritance.

[00:06:16]

I watched this movie for the first time all by myself, and as I was watching, I texted a friend just to ask, you know, have you ever seen 13th? Because I had to tell somebody I was just 25 minutes into this movie and I was already exhausted and also kind of exhilarated, kind of energized. I was energized because to me, that's that feeling I get when people are telling the truth, when people are talking about something that's been kept quiet and making that thing from long ago, that thing that nobody wants to speak of. Oh, it's finally real.

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It's painful, but it's also clarifying. Right. It helps us look around at all these things we see now, all these things we've inherited and say, oh, right.

[00:07:05]

That's why I feel this way. That's why we are who we are.

[00:07:12]

It wouldn't be possible for me to share all of the information in this movie. I took notes on it actually while I was watching, like I was back in high school and I filled up four pages of my notebook.

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Ava DuVernay essentially packs the central arguments of about four books into 90 minutes.

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She's got the new Jim Crow book in here by Michelle Alexander. She's got Just Mercy in here by Bryan Stevenson. She's got pieces of Between the World and me. She's got like a real solid chunk of the People's History of the United States. This movie is your anti-racism reading list.

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If you haven't watched it, I hope you do, because all of that information is important and it all matters. But what matters most to me and preaching about it today is how we grapple as people of faith, as Unitarian Universalist with our inheritance.

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In the movie, Ava DuVernay takes us through interviews with dozens of historians, lawyers, authors, academics, activists, elected officials, people from both political parties.

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She makes one central argument that the racist ideas that undergirded slavery are still operating in our social and our political structures today. Those old ideas are still here with us in our politics, in our criminal justice system and in our corporations, and just like as before, there are people in our country today who are still willing to exploit those racist ideas for profit and for political gain. And sadly, those people have succeeded in new and innovative ways with each successive generation.

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Those racist ideas, not just the ones that we can point at easily and see with white hoods on, but those ideas are still helping people make money and hold power today. And the cost of that profit and power is black lives. Those ideas and those systems are destroying black lives today.

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I know many of you know the quote from Maya Angelou.

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She very famously said and was quoted by Oprah also, when you know better, you do better. Ever since Memorial

Day weekend when George Floyd was killed and everywhere around us erupted into protest, members of our congregation have been asking me and asking each other, what do we do?

[00:10:04]

A handful of you have actually sent me a few of the same articles this past month, articles written by people of color that all make the same point in one of them. Just this week from the Atlantic, the professor Sara , I'm sorry. Grundy says when offered in lieu of actionable policies regarding equity, consciousness raising, book reading, movie watching, training can actually undermine progress by presenting increased knowledge as the balm for centuries of abuse, by presenting increased knowledge as the bomb for centuries of abuse.

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She's making the point that learning and awareness isn't change.

[00:11:00]

Maya Angelou didn't say when you know better, you're all good, right? She said, when you know better, you do better.

[00:11:14]

There's an author and a trauma therapist named Reshma Manickam, who was interviewed on Krista Tippett's "on being" podcast recently on NPR.

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He told a story about how one of his friends, one of his white progressive friends, took down his Black Lives Matter yard sign in early June last month.

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And Reshma said to him, what, this June last month? That's the time when you brought your your side and said, why would you bring it in then?

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And his friend told him, you know, I'd heard there have been reports, you know, in our neighborhood that with all the protests this summer, houses with Black Lives Matter signs were the ones being targeted. And Reshma said, I told my friend, you know, I can't bring my black skin inside.

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I can't bring my wife or my kids black skin inside either I live inside the target. So I need you, he said, to stay with me on this, I need you to be willing to put something on the line. That's what's needed here. He doesn't need us just to know or to understand what he goes through. He said, I need you to help change it. None of us can solve this on our own, which is always a temptation, right?

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We so often think, what about my limits? I can't do this. I can't do that.

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That's OK.

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We have to remember that this issue still matters. It's just as real as it was a month ago and as real as it's always been. Even if we if you're white, like me, haven't always talked about it or heard about it.

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Let's let go of the fantasy that we will find that one golden key and then be able to devote all our time and our money and our marching energy to that strategy, all of us need all of us working in our different lanes to build a movement.

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If you haven't already, I ask of you today after you read those books and watch this movie and so many others is to find your lane. Try something, try anything. You will either succeed or you will learn from what you've done, maybe both.

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And your action, whatever it is, even if it doesn't work in the moment, it builds more power in this world, because whenever you act, there might be a kid in the room who looks up to you, who sees what you do, or there might be a friend who didn't realize it was safe to talk with you about this and now knows they can come to you. Or there might be a family member who is on the fence themselves about saying something and really just needs like one buddy that they can get through Thanksgiving dinner with. Right.

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And if they know that you'll be that buddy now, they'll have the courage to speak up and do something to you are acting so that people know they're not alone and so that you know you aren't either.

[00:15:06]

I have so many ideas for things to do to get involved, and I want to hear yours. But I'll start by saying that right here within our Wellsprings community and here in Chester County, for so many of you or southeast Pennsylvania or northern Delaware for a few of you or wherever you might be, there are things to do. There are dozens of things you can do. Our Justice Works team at Wellspring's has two subgroups working right now, one on voter turnout for November and one on actions for anti-racism.

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If you read your weekly email on Wednesday, then you saw this past week that the voting group already has one project started writing and sending handwritten letters to traditionally underrepresented registered voters in PA who are unlikely to vote to encourage them to get to the polls.

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It's a proven strategy. There's research done that if people receive a handwritten letter like that, it moves that needle. It makes it more likely that they will go out to vote. And of course, we know this benefits us in all kinds of ways. Right now, as a country, in my lifetime, we have never needed an engaged voting public more than we do right now. You can sign up directly to join through that link. That was in Wednesday's weekly this past Wednesday on July 22nd. It's through the vote forward campaign and you can join a future team meeting. This work is ongoing and you can be part of discerning and planning future projects. Justice Works had a meeting at the beginning of July with double the attendance that they usually have. So keep an eye out. Be on the lookout for our next meeting to plan some collective work for all of us at Wellspring's. If you want more information right now, you can email John Melnick or Virginia Kirk. Their email addresses were also in the weekly from the 22nd. I've also been working with three, WellSpringers for the past month to develop an anti-racism small group for our community.

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We've had small groups on topics like this in the past, but we're hoping to start something in September that might be a little different, kind of recognizing that at this moment when so much has changed in our country in so many ways, that there is potential for maybe a different kind of engagement from people. We're thinking about running this group a little longer term, having it go for six months, and we're not sure yet exactly about the structure. But if we meet for six months, it won't be every week. Maybe it'll be twice a month, once a month for a discussion session, but once a month for some kind of practice session so that in each month, members of the group would not only read or listen to or watch and learn from some news source. They'd also commit to an action to do something that month that has an impact to practice and build those skills so that we can all continue to use them in our daily lives.

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I'm really glad to say that while I was very willing to commit to facilitating this group on my own, I knew my leadership would be limited by my perspective on anti-racism as a white person. So I reached out to three. Well, Springers, who would bring a different perspective and lived experience and also their own passion for this work.

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Jen Nettingham and Rodney Wittenburg and Tonie Scullion completely expecting that maybe zero to one of them would say, yes, I'm interested in being part of this, and I am abundantly pleased and blessed that they all said yes.

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So there's more info coming soon on how to participate in that group later this summer. There's so many ways that we can take action and we so often let our overwhelm stop us, but small things are OK. Many small things add up. If you went to a protest in May or June or a vigil, have you looked up? Who organized it? Have you looked up? What group put that together? Have you looked to see if they still are working? And have you looked to see what kind of help those groups might need? Now, five weeks later, see if they're part maybe of larger networks or organizations or coalitions that you can support donate to volunteer with. I learned for the very first time this summer about a group I hadn't known about called chester County stands up. It's local. It's led by people of color in our area. It's doing ongoing work on racial justice issues in Chester County.

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And I think also that one of the most important things to realize about how we can create change is that it doesn't also have to involve taking on a new role or a new project. So much of it is about responding differently in the moment to the situations that are already present in our lives.

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How do we encourage and support each other to speak up at the meeting, at work, the meeting at work where we realized that we might need to say something to expand the perspective of a colleague, a decision making colleague who is using a race based assumption.

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How do we speak up to ask everybody around the table to stop for a minute and take a second and different kind of look at a job candidate who is being dismissed a little too quickly? How do we get everybody to pump the brakes for a minute and think bigger about this decision that we're about to make that will have some negative consequences only for certain groups of people and to think think outside the box about how to prevent that from happening.

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How do we speak up differently when we find ourselves in conversation with a friend about good neighborhoods or good schools and make sure that we are interrogating what that really means and what it should mean?

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How can we be more proactive with local elected officials, social media, for all of its headaches actually makes this much easier. You can tweet your congressperson with a question. You can send a direct message on Facebook to your school board rep. You can ask what the district is doing about policing in schools or expanding the American history curriculum. Sending somebody a message on social media makes it very easy. And it's not the same thing as flaming somebody in a comment thread. Right. That might help us blow off steam, but it's not really communication.

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And we actually have amazingly easy tools for communication now at our fingertips. These opportunities present themselves every day if we have eyes to see them. And many of us already have some of these tools for truth-telling and speaking up for taking the painful ingredients of a difficult inheritance and remixing them, pulling them apart, adding in something new to create something that is growing and thriving. If we have families with complicated inheritances, as I know, perhaps all of us, but certainly most of us have families with complicated inheritances of things we do and don't talk about, of multigenerational stories of trauma or pain. If your family has that kind of inheritance, then you know that healing it is a long term process. It's not a big light bulb moment. Those light bulb moments are important, but that's not what does the work, right? This is not the last two minutes of an episode of Full House.

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Danny Tanner cannot sit us down on the couch and fix this in any family, including our American family. When details of a painful inheritance come before us, we have to choose to be part of that healing process actively. We learn to see the habits we've inherited that we may not even realize we have, then we learn that there are other options for how to be. And then we have to practice those new options, maybe set up support structures, reminders, buddy agreements that help us choose those healthier habits in the moment, especially in the moments we feel scared or stressed and most likely to fall back on our old ways. If you've done this work in any way, you know, breaking through any cycle of harm, any old karma, we carry around the consequences, the fruits of actions from the past, the cycle isn't broken just because we've realized it needs to be.

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It takes effort and practice. It takes action.

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I want to close with a story from a friend of mine, she's not a close friend, but she's someone I got to know about 10 years ago. And now she is a minor elected official in her township. She's a township supervisor in a different part of Pennsylvania. She's moved away. At the beginning of June. She got a call from one of her constituents. It was a typical call for her about some such unimportant thing, where at some minor local township issue and they discussed it and she made a note to herself to follow up. But she said just as her constituent was getting ready to hang up the phone out of the blue, he said to her, you know what they should do? They should have the cops all inside the mall. And then when the looters break in, they should just shoot them all. My friend is white. And so is 88 percent of her township. In her job, she deals with traffic and zoning, boring local township drama, hurt her elected role, isn't even her full time job. She has a whole other corporate career. So she said, you know, whenever our country is going through a tough time like this, I think to myself, nobody needs to hear my opinion. And everybody who already knows me knows where I stand anyway. So she says, you know, I go online, I post photos of my kids and my vacation. I keep it light. But when her constituents said that to her, when she realized her constituent was comfortable saying that to her, she realized in this moment, if he thinks this is a thing he can say to me, maybe my silence has been noticed and not interpreted in the way that I intended to be. She posted this whole story online the next day where all of her constituents could see it, and she made it clear that for her this was only a first step. But she said, let me make my opinion perfectly clear, the penalty for looting is not death. This is America.

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She said, adding my voice to the chorus of people for or against what's happening in our country is not about latching onto the thing of the moment.

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Protests have to be inconvenient or no one wakes up and listens. Do you feel a little unsafe right now? People, white people?

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Well, black people feel unsafe going about their daily lives, jogging, driving, bird watching every damn day. What do they have to do to be heard? She said. And why can't we start now? With gratitude for her story, for all the stories that have been shared that we need to hear and that need to be responded to with action and for the new chapters, that I hope we all begin today and every day.

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We say amen and may you live in blessing.

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I invite you to join me now, take a moment maybe to let your eyes foreclosed.

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And join me in the spirit of prayer. God of our deepest yearnings.

[00:28:46]

Fill us with that sense that we have when we know we are beloved and so is everyone else. Come to us in moments when we are scared, especially when we doubt, when we doubt the beloved ness of the people around us, when we see only the worst in them and not the best. Help us in those moments when we see the flaws and the failings and the limits in ourselves and help us not be discouraged. Help us remember that the reason you made us all that we are all here exactly the way we are supposed to be. It's because we need each other. And we're lucky that we have each other.

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Maybe remember that every day.

[00:29:46]

For the prayers have spoken out loud and for the prayers that all of the people joining us this morning hold in our hearts, we say amen.

[00:30:00]

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END OF TRANSCRIPT



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