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Unorthodox Sunday Service for September 6th, 2020.mp3

DATE

September 8, 2020

DURATION

26m

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

The following is a message from Wellspring's congregation.

[00:00:10]

A few years ago, my friend Jen lost her home in a fire. She's OK. She got out safe, as did her wife and her two kids and their dog. But I will never forget the conversation we had the first time we talked on the phone after the fire because she left and she said to me, OK, listen, this is going to seem silly, but if you are ever in this situation, if you ever find yourself woken up in the middle of the night with your fire alarm going off and you need to get out of the house, grab a bra. And I know. Right, especially in 2020, A bra seems like the last thing we need. But Jen said, I'm telling you, it seemed vastly unimportant in the moment. But I met a lot of strangers over those next few hours and I had a lot of conversations and well lit offices in the middle of the night. And I would have been a lot more comfortable if I had grabbed that one thing, not that I ever would have known. So that's why I'm telling you, Jen told me a few other things that she wished she had grabbed in the middle of the night. She says, try to find real shoes. Flip flops are going to seem like a great idea in the moment, she said. But the next day, when you are walking through the waterlogged remains of your home, you're going to wish you had real shoes that your feet weren't soggy.

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Jen also said that she had learned what the experts tell you to prepare before a house fire. She says that they recommend you keep a tiny, little fireproof safe in your home with all relevant documents, necessary receipts and accounting and inventory of everything in your house and its value. And she says that way, when the fire alarm goes off in the middle of the night, you can just pick up and carry out the door your little fireproof safe as you walk out of your burning home. Jen told me that at the same time she felt like this advice was both incredibly reasonable and helpful and absolutely ridiculous. Yes. She said, having gone through the experience, of course, that would have been helpful. It would have reduced a lot of headaches having all of that paperwork ready to go. But she said that wasn't really what she needed after the fire, what she needed most was the neighbor who held her daughter, who took her son's hand, who asked if he could pack the kids lunches for school the next day. What she really needed most was the friend who showed up in the middle of the night and didn't mind taking the phone away from her as she stood there in shock, watching her house burn while the insurance agent asked her again to describe the extent of the damage.

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What she needed most was the friends who drove her and her family to the hotel and then offered to come back the next morning to get the kids ready for school, braiding her daughter's hair. What we needed after the fire, she said, was never inside that house. What we needed was a web of people who would hold us and love. What we needed was never inside that house. In the opening scene of today's Spirit Flick's story, unorthodox. We see 19 year old Steve Shapiro, she's packing her own bag in desperation. He lives in an insular community of ultra-Orthodox Jews in Brooklyn, New York. It's the only home she's ever known. It's the only place she's literally ever been. And suddenly she needs to leave. She's packing quickly, but you can tell that she had prepared something for this moment. She pulls stacks of cash, wads of bills, American and euros from hiding places in her room. She tosses a full bag of toiletries, all ready to go onto the bed. She grabs her phone, an envelope of documents for international travel, a small framed photo of her grandmother. And she packs it neatly, ties it in a shirt, tucks it in a plastic bag. But after she walks out of her apartment, she comes back only seconds later. You see, something has gone wrong with her plan and she realizes now she won't be able to carry that bag outside without arousing the suspicion of her neighbors and thwarting the escape.

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So in order to leave, he has to unpack and repack. The phone gets left on the bed, the toiletry bag is forgotten, and the photo of her grandmother is removed from its glass frame. Stopped along with the cash and the paper documents into one envelope that stuck down the front of her skirt. And then she leaves. On the most urgent and

dangerous trip of her life. Over these past six months now. We've had to pack suddenly in many ways for a crisis. We've had to figure out what to grab, what to hold on to without much notice, we grab some things first, right? Instinctively the damn toilet paper for some reason, the bread, the eggs, the milk, the Clorox wipes and the hand sanitizer. I can still clearly remember that Thursday afternoon when Governor Wolfe shut down Montgomery County, that was kind of a light bulb moment for me. I was in Downingtown that morning and I got right into my car and I drove straight home to South Philadelphia, right to that acme in South Philly. I remember roaming the aisles and kind of half strategizing while I shopped as if I was kind of just stocking up on food for a normal week while also thinking about what would keep for weeks, maybe months. I grabbed an extra box of pasta here and a few cans of tuna there. Did you make a grocery trip like that to.

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Do you remember what you reached for in that moment? You remember who you reached for and who you call. What we reach for first in a crisis, in an urgent or frightening moment, that tells us a lot. And at the same time, we often come to learn that some of what we reach for is not what we need the most. I was talking with one of our members at Wellspring's, Liz, during my Tuesday lunch last week that I'm doing now on Facebook Live. We were talking about those great big color coded charts that parents were making for their kids in the early days of that at home routine in March. Right. How many of you anybody still using that same chart that you made back in March? Right. No adjustments. Not a single lapse in the schedule, I'm sure. Right. For the last six months, Liz said that in her house that lasted maybe a week on Conan O'Brien's late night show this week, I saw some more evidence of this. He shared, you know, what he called the latest covid data from the CDC. He said this right here is the chart that shows a 68 percent increase these days in deciding not to learn a new language after all. And then this one, he says, an 82 percent increase suddenly in asking the food delivery person to hold you gently. The things that we need change.

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And my friend Jen story the story of Esty packing and repacking in unorthodox, all of our experiences so far this year, they remind us that in a frightening moment, a moment of crisis, what we reach for first, what we grab onto and hold on to it gets us through. In the beginning, it tells us something. But what we reach for a second. Might tell us more. What we need later, what we really need. That tells us more. With all of the crises unfolding. Around us these days. This pandemic that has not yet ended the fight for black life and black dignity in our country. The ideological battles and our politics that seem to get worse and worse by the day. The crisis of democracy. That seems to threaten the election coming up now in just two months. With all of these crises unfolding around us now, I think we need to take a look at what we grabbed onto first and start wrapping our minds now around what we will reach for second. What will get us through the rest of this year? What might we even need to let go of that we first reached for as these waves hit us one after another all through this damn year? And what will truly see us forward? Last week, a science journalist named Tara Hayle wrote an article for Medium called You Feel Awful because your surge capacity is gone.

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In it, she talks about the early part of this year, the first couple of months in the pandemic, when she was still using what she calls surge capacity to operate, she says human beings have this collection of adaptive systems, mental and physical systems that we draw on for short term survival in stressful situations like a natural disaster. Tara Hale is a science journalist. Right. So when all of this started unfolding in the beginning of twenty twenty, she said, I've written about infectious disease for a decade now. I was on fire. Right. I was cranking out stories. I was explaining epidemiological concepts on Facebook to my friends. I was trying to help everybody around me make sense of this pandemic. I was ready for this. But it couldn't last. She said stressful situations like natural disasters, even a hurricane or a fire or a flood. They occur over a short period. Recovery may be long, but the disaster is short. Pandemic's, she says, are different. The disaster itself stretches. Recovery comes much later. Sarah was on fire in those early months, but by June, she said, I wasn't doing so hot. I burned through all of those short term adaptations of my search capacity, those first good coping mechanisms that got me through, and yet the relief of a new normal was still nowhere in sight. So she realized it was time to adopt a different way of coping. She needed to stop and take stock and figure out what she was going to reach for a second for her, that looked like a few things.

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She had to give herself permission, she said, to really grieve this ambiguous loss that we're all facing. She had to accept that life is different right now. She said a big one for her was that she had to expect less from herself. And to remind herself all the time to be flexible with herself and with other people way, way more than she normally would. She had to find some things that she could do consistently and feel good about, even if they felt silly or small for her, it was little household projects replacing all the light bulbs, things that she'd been meaning to do for a long time. And she had to focus on maintaining and strengthening the most important relationships in her life. It was time for her to let go of some of those coping mechanisms that helped her at first. Because she was going back to those wells and starting to discover that they came up empty. They were depleted. She just needed to figure out what to reach for today. In the aftermath of any kind of trauma. Any crisis or big disruption. There are always responses that help us make it through the moment. But they may not be the things that keep us going in the long run. And we're looking ahead now in September, we're looking ahead to a new school year, to a fall and winter season, to the potential for a huge political shift on multiple fronts.

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What we grabbed on to this spring may not be what we need for the rest of the year. If you've been feeling that way like it's not working anymore, you're not alone. So what will it be for you? What will you reach for a second? What do you really need now? In unorthodox, we follow Esty after she leaves. She travels all the way to Berlin, halfway across the world. And she's made it that far, which is extraordinary, and yet once she arrives, the tenuous hold that she had on a plan beyond her escape. It starts to unravel. You see, she has that money that she packed, of course, but it won't last forever. It gets depleted. She brought an address for a place to stay that could have worked out, but then it isn't what she expected and she doesn't want to stay there. It becomes clear very quickly that Esty's newfound freedom is not the end of her struggle. Remarkable as it is. It's just the very beginning of a new one. And once again, she has to figure out what she needs now. You know, it's not spelled out exactly in the story and unorthodox, but to me, the flashbacks that take us between Esty new life in Berlin and her old life in Brooklyn.

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It brings full circle a beautiful kind of redemption of where she has been and what she has been through. Esty seems to know instinctively because of her past, that finding her way is not something she will be able to do alone. The community she came from her whole life, this collective society that has hurt her in so many ways, has also given her a tremendous gift in removing any shred of illusion from her mind that it's possible to actually make it alone in this world. That's a fable, I think, that we too often believe. That we can really do it by ourselves. Esty seems to know in her bones she has never known anything else, that she won't make it without connection and relationships. And she is stunningly resourceful in Berlin and completely unashamed, she makes small talk in line at a coffee shop with the first kind stranger that she meets. She offers to help him carry his purchases and then kindly and persistently and even a little bit creepily but genuinely, she asks if she can follow along. She asks if she can join in with his little band of friends as they go around the city, slowly building lifelines for herself, accepting kindnesses wherever they show up that pull her along from one meal and one opportunity to the next. In this new world she finds herself in. That's totally strange and foreign to her in Berlin.

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Is learning about herself and about her new environment and building the life that calls to her, not simply the one that was thrust upon her. She flourishes because she stays in that learning mode, curious and open and flexible, and when the old story is tried to call her back, to pull her back to Brooklyn, whispering in her ear that she won't survive without the only normal that she had ever experienced. She doesn't believe them. She trusts the compass in her own heart and it begins to guide her towards a new community, a new understanding of her gifts and her identity and even a new understanding of God. It's an incredible story to watch, one that is hard to preach about for all of the layers and directions that you could take the story and also to not give it away for any of you who haven't seen it yet. But it's one of the few stories I've seen recently that has given me hope for myself and for us in these times. Because it really does show us how staying open and flexible translates into concrete goodness and survival and flourishing. Open and flexible was what she needed the most and what people she needed from people around her in her old community, and she takes that and pays it forward in an incredible way as a gift to herself. That kind of openness and flexibility means that sometimes we will need to let go of the things that we grabbed for at first.

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That we will need to think about what to reach for now, second, what we really need to move forward. And it's perfectly in line for us at Wellspring's with our own faith, one that says that truth and revelation are not only available long ago and far away in the old books and days or through the old normal ways that we're used to. Truth and revelation are unfolding still all around us. The divine is still speaking to us even today, even this morning, even in the tears or the isolation or the stress or the fear, even in these struggles that we face now. The divine is still here with us, the possibility of revelation is here with us now, always open wherever we find ourselves. What my friend Jen needed after the fire was never just in that house. What is needed could still be found away from that only home she'd ever known. And what we need now did not get left behind in early March. That can be found here. It can be found here and now in our new normal. God Love the Divine is still with us. Even in the setbacks and the unraveling. No matter what we may have reached for first this year, we can all honor how it got us here. It got every single one of us gathered this morning this far.

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And now we're invited to live into what's next. I have faith now and in the days ahead that we can weave together whatever it is that we will all need to make it through. Amen and may live in blessing. I invite you to take a moment now to close your eyes, maybe relax your shoulders and bow your head and join me in the spirit of prayer. God of our hearts only presence that we trust never leaves has always been and always will be beyond our understanding. May we find ways to be inspired by the stories of strength that we see around us by stories of flexible strength, strength like water that moves as it needs to, that makes paths and stone and dirt. May we flow like water through these rocky days, may we flow back into common streams and lakes? We flow into the ocean remembering that we are each a part of each other and that these cycles of life and time and struggle and healing are eternal, even when we can only see them in part, they continue on and we will be carried by them. May we feel that truth, that we are part of a greater whole in each moment? No matter what happens or where we find ourselves and the rest of this year to come. For the prayers I've spoken out loud and for the prayers that each person with us this morning is holding in our hearts. We say amen.

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END OF TRANSCRIPT



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