

**NAME**

The Midnight Gospel - Sunday Service for August 23, 2020.mp3

**DATE**

September 1, 2020

**DURATION**

26m 26s

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

The following is a message from Wellspring's congregation.

**[00:00:06]**

Good morning, Wellspring's. It's good to see you today. I recognize I might look a little bit odd, so hold on one one one second. One second.

**[00:00:19]**

Let me let me fix this up. There we go.

**[00:00:26]**

Better, isn't it? You're probably more used to me this way. I'm more used to me this way. Thanks for indulging my goofiness. Today is for a purpose. It's that the show I'm going to talk about for today's Spiritflix series, Spiritflix this summer series that we do on the stories that we watch on our screens and the meanings that we find in those stories. It's a weird show. It's a very weird show. And the kind of upside down that I presented with upside down, obviously being popularized by stranger things, stranger things does not have a thing on the show for today. The Midnight Gospel when it comes to the oddness and the weirdness department. And so before I get into talking about the Midnight Gospel, I wanted to share with you a story that kind of sets up what I'm going to talk about today. It goes back 13, maybe 14 years ago, right around the time actually within a year or two of when Wellspring's was launched in 2007.

**[00:01:29]**

It's about a person who I knew outside of Wellspring's who fully intended to come to and attend Wellspring's, but they they never did because by the time we had launched and this person had died and this person had lived a long and in many ways pretty meaningful life, like packed a lot of years, a lot of life into a lot of years.

**[00:01:53]**

And also had not lived a very easy life because of some of the struggles that this person lived with, some of the struggles that they had that kind of rippled out chaotically into the network of their beloveds.

**[00:02:09]**

Grieving this person was not easy for the people left behind.

**[00:02:15]**

And because the extended family knew that I had formed a meaningful bond with this person, they asked me to do the funeral to preside at this person's funeral. And when we started to talk about who would offer eulogies, one of the first names that came up was the granddaughter of this person, of this woman who had who had died because there was a strong bond, a strong connection with the granddaughter. And she spoke at the funeral. And I remember how moving it was because it was so beautifully honest and truth telling without any sense of judgment, just honesty. I mean, she got up and she talked about how she loved her grandmother so much and also how her grandmother was not an easy person in many ways to love. And she went on to share some more details about her grandmother was and I remember almost when the granddaughter got up, like there was this collective sense of tightness, the like, with someone going to allude to, you know, who her grandmother really was.

**[00:03:15]**

And then as her granddaughter did it, with such honesty and grace, kind of this collective sigh of, yeah, we can move into the truth of this person's life, the full truth of who they were and who she will continue to be to the people who remember her and loved her. And at the end of the granddaughter's words, she played the song. I think it's simply called For Good from the musical Wicked, the Broadway musical Wicked. And it goes something like this. I'm not going to sing it, but I can't say that I have been changed for the better.

**[00:03:50]**

But because I've known you, I've been changed for good. I can't say I have been changed for the better, but because I've known you, I have been changed for good.

**[00:04:03]**

And that just puts such a beautiful point, honest point on what the granddaughter was saying.

**[00:04:12]**

I think of this sense of being changed, not necessarily for the better, but for good.

**[00:04:21]**

In the midst of our own current circumstances, in the midst of this pandemic, in the midst of covid-19, which has revealed so much about our society that was not working back in the Times before, and most people I talked to connect with talk about having been changed in some ways, really meaningfully changed for good.

**[00:04:47]**

I know that's the case with me as well, but I think the jury is kind of still out collectively on this question. Have we been changed or are we changing for the better?

**[00:05:00]**

I don't think we know yet.

**[00:05:01]**

We may not know for quite a while, I think, of this question of being changed for good and changing for the better. In the light of an article I read not too long ago by the writer Andrew Sullivan, who talks about in a kind of wide ranging, wide, sweeping historical piece about how plagues are apocalypses. They reveal they open up what was concealed.

**[00:05:27]**

They show.

**[00:05:30]**

Some of the fault lines or many of the fault lines in societies in which plagues pandemics, apocalypses, as he calls them, occur, and he writes, As someone who is the survivor of a pandemic of the AIDS pandemic, someone who has HIV. But in this day and age now, and with the access to resources that he has, it's a manageable condition for him, not a death sentence. But in the early days of the plague of AIDS, he lost so many friends and so many loved ones who he writes as as a survivor. And when he's doing then this wide scale analysis of plagues throughout human history. He says so often when they open up those fault lines, they cause profound chaos and disordering. And sometimes what happens afterward is a reordering of society in ways more accord with some of the core commitments of our Unitarian Universalism, greater justice, greater equity, greater attention to human care and human bonds and to society as a whole and not just certain parts of that society. Again, it's always an imperfect journey, never completed.

**[00:06:47]**

And Andrew Sullivan analyses this and wonders is, is that going to happen for us after when ever after is? One of the things he talks about is in the wake of pandemics, religion becomes kind of become really odd and funky and death cults come up. People who kind of make almost like a fetish of of death and engage in all kinds of like you ever heard about the flatulence that came out of the time of plague in the Middle Ages.

**[00:07:17]**

But he also says forms of religion, forms of spirituality that are more oriented to the human heart, to kindness, love, compassion, justice, belonging. These kinds of spirituality can also flourish in the time after as well, too. So I think of all of that in connection with today's SpiritFlix show with the Midnight Gospel.

**[00:07:41]**

It is very much an R rated show for older teens and for adults. It is animated and it is about a character named Clancy Gilroy who is what they call or what he calls himself a space caster. He is a podcaster who lives in space on the far, far regions of the known universe way, way out there. I think it's called the chromatic ribbon. And what he does is he travels through a simulator that is just, shall we say, based on part of human anatomy. He travels through the simulator to visit. World's planets that are undergoing their own apocalypses, he travels to a version of Earth in which he interviews the president who is fighting off a horde of zombies, a zombie apocalypse that will bring kind of the curtain down on earth. He travels to another planet, a blank planet that only has a water slide on it with no water. And he ends up getting into a dialogue with death, with the personification of death, the grim reaper, although kind of twisted, given what this show is and how it presents itself talking about. And this is actually based on a real mortician, a writer in which she talks about how death has not been always seen the way that it is in modern American society where death is removed.

**[00:09:09]**

And that's a small section of the history of the world. For most of our ancestors, death was something much more

intimate, something they were much more acquainted with. So woven all throughout the Midnight Gospel. And again, it has that word gospel right there in the title, all kinds of questions and concerns about religion and particularly kind of mystical forms of religion and contemplative spirituality and depth psychology, because the source material for this very, very far out and bizarre and at times not quite all that palatable. I mean, it pushes the boundaries. In some ways. The show is not for everyone. It gets kind of violent and it gets pretty scatological as well, too. But what this show is based on is a podcast series from the early 2010s from the Comedian and podcast or Duncan Trussell. And it's based on interviews that he did with people talking about matters of spirituality and spiritual practice. And I think there's something so beautiful in the show at this time of pandemic and apocalypse. And the show wasn't planned for this.

**[00:10:17]**

I just think it was, you know, circumstance serendipitous, well timed, that all these questions of kind of matters of the heart and cosmic belonging and what breaks the heart and life and love and death set in these fantastical situations just feels so kind of well suited for how challenging our world is right now and also at the same time, how meaningful our lives are right now. The question of who matters and how do we include more people in the circle of love and belonging and justice and compassion?

**[00:11:02]**

These are profoundly meaningful times that we are living through, even if these are abnormal times that we are living through.

**[00:11:11]**

That's what an apocalypse is. It reveals fault lines and apocalypses reveal possibilities.

**[00:11:18]**

One of the things I am noticing in the people who I think are navigating this time most skillfully, most flexibly is they are people. And I try to do this myself.

**[00:11:28]**

I'm not always very good at it, but people who are allowing themselves to normalize how abnormal this time is.

**[00:11:38]**

Just learning to say themselves, this is hard, this is scary, I don't quite know what I'm doing. I'm learning as I'm going, I, I like to believe when I can treat myself and other people with grace that, you know, we're all being graded on a curve right now, or at least we should be if we can normalize abnormality, we may go a little bit easier on each other and turn towards our lives.

**[00:12:02]**

There's greater compassion which may open up greater capacity by accepting ourselves to actually change and grow and adapt to all these things that are so challenging.

**[00:12:18]**

The show actually reminds me of the writer Ann Lamont. And by the way, she is I think she's in the second episode, not as herself, but as one of the bizarre characters. She's from the original podcast and she shows up in this show. Makes me think of her great little chapter and one of her books that we utilize in Wellspring's 2.0, listening to our lives called Into Thin Mud. And in it, she sets the context of her life a really difficult time, kind of a mini apocalypse in in her life in which she had a profound heartbreak end of a relationship. And the beloved older people in her church were dying and sick and her car broke down in the loaner car. She had four that she calls it a big Blues Brothers kind of thing, which gave her a momentary lift that broke down, too. And she was having struggles with money and and her elementary school age kid had a sty in his eye and like everything wasn't working. And she tried all of her well-worn go tos to kind of lift herself out of it quickly. And they all just had as many of those well-worn goto's that we can go to, especially for instant gratification. It works for a while, but it wasn't sustainable, actually.

**[00:13:31]**

Ended up having her feel worse until she took a walk with a friend, one of her oldest, dearest friends, the kind of friend that she says she has no more face to save with. She could be fully, authentically, vulnerably herself. And they took a walk in the kind of marshy, swampy, mucky area close to where they grew up in Northern California. And they landed, as she said, on their butts in the mud. And they were covered with silt and covered with mud. And she said she just started to laugh maniacally. And I can't remember if it's in this piece or another piece. But Ann Lamont says that laughter's carbonated holiness and she feels a lifting of the weight and the burden of what her life had become at that moment with all of its real hardships. And she and her friend kind of fell back into the mud and almost kind of drifted off for a while. When she came to she saw that the stars were starting to come out. She looked up into the stars and she thought of all the hardships in her life. And she said to herself, God, I love the permission giving the grace in this.

**[00:14:34]**

She says, No wonder you're this sad. She just started to ease up by accepting the truth that her life was really quite difficult.

**[00:14:47]**

This is what I see. This is a practice that I engage with. In fact, with many people I work with being able to turn to our lives and saying something, maybe with the hand on the heart, noticing the breath and a moment of difficulty just validating ourselves.

**[00:15:01]**

This is a moment of suffering. This is a moment of pain.

**[00:15:09]**

It's OK not to feel OK. And what's so often happens, no one can make us do this. No one should want to make us do this.

**[00:15:19]**

But the invitation is there when we feel kind of out of our depth that instead of just chugging along and moving through all the time, I understand we got to get things done.

**[00:15:29]**

But if we never allow ourselves to turn towards our pain, we will find ourselves out racing our own shadows. Which, of course, we can't they're always with us. And instead, if we can turn to normalize, validate our own experience with compassion, kindness and curiosity, we may find underneath that permission giving approach to ourselves a greater vitality, a hidden wholeness that was there all along and some resources to be able to deal with the challenges of our lives, our heartbreaks, our losses, the strangeness of all of this with greater love and depth and resilience, the kind of resilience that connects us to and with each other and to our own hearts.

**[00:16:25]**

This takes me back to the final episode of the season of the Midnight Gospel. It's only had one season so far. I think there's a second season coming at some point.

**[00:16:37]**

And like I said, this is a bizarre show. And Clancy Gilroy, that space caster, can only get the sense that there's a little something off with him, like maybe he's been avoiding his life. Like that's why he finds himself way out there on the outer edge of the known galaxy in the multiverse, kind of not facing himself. He's on a quest for information. He grows tired with that. He's on a quest for enlightenment, but in a very spiritually materialistic way. I'm enlightened. I'm enlightened, he says, until he recognizes he's not enlightened at all.

**[00:17:07]**

At one point he's just on a quest for ice cream until the final episode. Now, I would have liked this show if not for the final episode, but because of this final episode. I love this show and it will have a place ongoing in my heart.

**[00:17:24]**

They kind of break down the sense of is this Clancy Gilroy or is this Duncan Trussell? Because they refer to Clancy as Duncan in this particular episode. And it's for this reason, the podcast, the source material that this episode is taken from is from a very particular interview with a person named Denine Vendig.

**[00:17:46]**

It was Duncan Trussell's mother. The podcast happened when. Duncan interviewed his mother three weeks before she died of cancer in 2013.

**[00:18:04]**

And you get the sense listening to Denine that this is a person she was a psychologist even more, you get the sense she was a healer. This is a person who had done their work, a person who had learned to show up for their lives with compassion and validation in and with and through the struggle. And came out through it with a big old heart, big old heart, full of love, and because this is a wild, fantastical show, we see the moment where she gives birth to Duncan and we see him growing up in the two of them talking all along about death and love and all the things that matter and their relationship. And then we also see Duncan Clancy laying her down in her deathbed and she expires.

**[00:18:54]**

And then we see Duncan giving birth to his mother. Again, beautiful.

**[00:19:01]**

And we see the two of them transmuting, transforming, becoming a planet and stars in space.

**[00:19:09]**

And we see them hurtling toward the inevitability of her death, represented by a black hole in this show, which can

be bizarre and at times off-putting unpalatable in its kind of over-the-top violence and gore and scatology. But here they are studied by a group of psychedelic teddy bears who want to study a mother and son who love each other.

**[00:19:32]**

It's really just gorgeous.

**[00:19:34]**

And as the episode starts to come to a close, as they move through life and death and rebirth and life and death and rebirth, now made of stardust, made of the things that make all of us.

**[00:19:54]**

Talking about loss and love again, three weeks in the real world before Denine's death, Duncan speaking to her, she says it breaks all of this love and loss.

**[00:20:07]**

It breaks your heart open.

**[00:20:10]**

Our hearts have been closed because we've closed them, because we defended ourselves against pain and this is the great matter of life and death. This opens our hearts.

**[00:20:29]**

And we see them rebirth into space, not what they were, but still a part of this existence.

**[00:20:38]**

And Duncan Clancy says to his mom, well, I love you very much and remember, this is happening in the real world.

**[00:20:47]**

And she responds, I love you. I love you, too.

**[00:20:52]**

I love you, Duncan. And that kind of love isn't going anywhere. And there's another thing you find that I may leave this plane of existence sooner rather than later. But the love isn't going anywhere.

**[00:21:13]**

I'm as certain of that as I am of anything. And I've got to tell you, I'm sitting there on the couch watching this.

**[00:21:26]**

And for some of you know a little bit about my personal history, it was my mother's untimely death that for a long time changed me for good, but did not change me for the better.

**[00:21:38]**

I can't say that's true anymore. Thankfully, I think it's changed me for good and it has changed me for the better. But not at first, especially not for the first decade after her death. And I am sitting there. I am openly weeping on the couch.

**[00:21:52]**

It is a beautiful episode.

**[00:21:58]**

Being able to allow ourselves to be not just changed for good by these times, but to be changed for better.

**[00:22:08]**

I think it means accepting this invitation.

**[00:22:13]**

To as Paul McCartney would say, let it out and let it in life, love all of it and close with this story from Rachel Naomi Remen, who's a doctor and even more a healer who at the age of 15, when she received a diagnosis of severe Crohn's disease that led her to well over a dozen intensive operation surgeries in her life, was told by the doctor point blank, you will not be able to live a full life. And how much depression that despair caused her. But she found her way to the other side and became a healer, became a collector of healing stories, and she tells a story about an E.R. doctor, a very skilled E.R. doctor, but a doctor who wasn't quite connected to his heart and he knew how to do what he needed to do.

**[00:23:06]**

Well, and sometimes that included right there in the E.R. delivering babies. And he took a lot of pride in it. But in a kind of detached clinical sense, he was good at it, but his heart wasn't. There was one time that he delivered a baby in the E.R. and he was holding the baby because he was clearing the baby's lungs, about to hand the baby back to mom and the baby's eyes. Popped open.

**[00:23:39]**

And he thought this doctor did this clinically detached Dr..

**[00:23:46]**

His heart wasn't really in his work, he thought, this person I am the first person this new person is ever going to see, and something shifted in him immediately.

**[00:24:04]**

Something opened and he came alive in a way he had not been until that moment. Something full and rich and meaningful opened in him.

**[00:24:23]**

I love this story because it talks about how we can allow ourselves to perceive with the receptors of our heart to look upon life again, fully, meaningfully, even in the midst of disruption and death and disorder, kind of like an emergency room sometimes as often as.

**[00:24:47]**

But if we can perceive through the openness of our own hearts that even as we move through a time of disruption, death and disorder, we can individually.

**[00:24:58]**

Collectively and yeah, I trust the midnight gospel here, perhaps even cosmically, come alive in ways we have not yet come alive. May you open and perceive with the reception receptors of your own heart today.

**[00:25:20]**

And may you live in Blessing. Will you pray with me? A simple prayer today.

**[00:25:34]**

Spirit breath. We be as fully alive as we are capable of in this moment, may we recognize that we are in the middle of it right now and it is OK not to be OK if we give ourselves permission to have the feelings and the thoughts and the N.S.A. and the angst and the anxiety, but also the love and the connection and the belonging.

**[00:26:03]**

That is parts that are parts of this full life.

**[00:26:10]**

Today, may we live truly a full life, if you enjoy this message and would like to support the mission of Wellspring's, go to our Web site. Wellspring's UU That's Wellspring's the letters UU ,dot ORG.

**END OF TRANSCRIPT**



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