

NAME

The Care of Souls Sunday Service for September 20th, 2020.mp3

DATE

September 22, 2020

DURATION

30m 58s

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

The following is a message from Wellspring's congregation.

[00:00:06]

Good morning, Wellsprings.

[00:00:09]

It was on Friday evening when I got word just after I had concluded recording the message that you'll see in a few minutes, it was on Friday evening that we all got the news that Ruth Bader Ginsburg had died. I am like so many of us this morning in mourning, and I am like so many of us wondering about as well. What now, what next for the future and well-being of this country, especially calling to mind those people living within this country whose rights are most likely to be denied or violated because it was for this commitment of wider justice and compassion and belonging that Ruth Bader Ginsburg, life drew its deepest meaning as a person, as an attorney, as a justice on the Supreme Court. It was these qualities that she upheld and promoted that are so deeply aligned with our own Unitarian Universalist traditions. These qualities also given voice to from within Judaism, the tradition that raised me and the tradition from which Justice Ginsburg came from.

[00:01:35]

The Prophet Micah, who asks, poses the question then what is required of us and the answer to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God, her deep and steadfast and strong humility, grounded in a profound sense of confidence of what she was called to her mercy, her compassion, and her deep and abiding commitment to justice. These things are now given into our hands to carry forward as she has come to the end of her journey through this life.

[00:02:22]

It is in some ways terribly sad and in some ways terribly fitting that she, the first Jewish woman to serve on the Supreme Court, would come to the end of her life on the first night of Rosh Hashanah, the beginning of the Jewish New Year, the start of the high holy days, the most sacred time in the Jewish calendar of the year, when the tradition poses the image, the invitation to recognize that during this time the Book of Life opens and we are invited to do the kind of discernment that allows us to see if our name is written within that book of life. And I think we can say with confidence that literally or metaphorically.

[00:03:06]

Ruth Bader Ginsburg, life is fully inscribed in that book of life. There is excuse me, there is within Judaism, the mourners Kaddish, the prayer that we say for the dead.

[00:03:26]

I grew up saying this prayer and I have recited it for a whole host of people over the years who have been so dear to me. And for some of you, these words might be familiar. For some of you, they may not be familiar at all. I will offer them in the original language today for Justice Ginsburg, for Ruth Bader Ginsburg, for RBG. And just let me say one thing. The interesting thing about the mourners, Kaddish, is that it does not mention death at all in its translation. Rather, it is a call, it is an aspiration to a new creation, the creation that will exist fully for every single one of us.

[00:04:13]

It is so fitting and so right now to offer this mourners Kaddish for the life, for the gifts, for the service of Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

[00:04:28]

Yitgadal v'yitkadash sh'mei raba b'alma di v'ra chir'utei; v'yamlich malchutei b'hayeichon u-v'yomeichon, uv'hayei d'chol beit yisrael, ba-agala u-vi-z'man kariv, v'imru amen.

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[00:04:28]

Y'hei sh'mei raba m'varach l'alam u-l'almei almaya.

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[00:04:28]

Yitbarach v'yishtabah, v'yitpa'ar v'yitromam, v'yitnasei v'yit-hadar, v'yit'aleh v'yit'halal sh'mei d'kudsha, b'rich hu, l'ela min kol birchata v'shirata, tushb'hata v'nehemata, da-amiran b'alma, v'imru amen.

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Y'hei sh'lama raba min sh'maya, v'hayim, aleinu v'al koi yisrael, v'imru amen.

[00:04:28]

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Oseh shalom bi-m'romav, hu ya'aseh shalom aleinu v'al kol yisrael, v'imru amen.

[00:05:57]

Good morning, Wellspring's. It's good to be with you again. One of the interesting and I think kind of cool things about this generational cohort that I'm a part of, this Generation X, is that as I have grown up, so has digital technology grown up as well to particularly video games.

[00:06:18]

I don't know how many of you might recall or even aware of what I'm about to share with you.

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It's this image right here.

[00:06:27]

I associate this with Channel 11 New York City WPIX, this was a game that would air during commercials that kids would play for prizes and it would be someone from the station would call the child and the child would shout out the word picks and a little blue blob like kind of you see here, frozen in time would be sent out to try and hit the monster or alien or I mean, honestly, whoever who even knows what this is could be a saltine cracker. But that's some of the rudimentary kind of digital technology that I remember from my childhood. And then, you know, Space Invaders and Defender and Galaga. And I was never a real big gamer. I think the last gaming console I owned was probably an Atari, but I went to the video arcade with friends of mine back when there were such thing as video arcades. And I don't know, maybe they're back now. I mean, Vinyls made a comeback, some maybe video arcades in public at malls, actually. I guess Dave and Buster's is kind of arcade. So just scrap all this, forget this part of the message. But it's been really fascinating to see video games develop over the years with beauty technology, with the capacity for expressiveness.

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And recently I did something that I have not done in a very long time. I purchased a video game.

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And I've been playing it on my computer, I'm nowhere near the end of it, from what I can tell, in many ways I've just begun.

[00:08:01]

But I read about this one in an article and I decided this is one I wanted to get and to play.

[00:08:09]

It's called Spirit Farer, and it has a very emotionally rich but very simple kind of story that animates the game. You are a character named Stella. Whose job it is to ferry recently deceased people across the water to the afterlife.

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It's got beautiful graphics and quite simple, some very stirring melancholy music, it's got some wonderfully rich, absurdist characters, this cat that follows you around throughout the entire game and likes to cuddle up with you, you have the first character you meet who says, I've been waiting on you. I've just been eating sardines and smoking cigarettes until you got here. It's got kind of this off kilter humor to it.

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But it also has these very enriching, very human characters.

[00:09:08]

Even if it's a little boy with a mushroom for a head who when you hug him, he just leaps right back at you. One of these recently deceased characters. And your job is what they call a management game, which I didn't really know much about, but in a management game you could be, you know, building a farm or building a city. In this case, you are running tasks and kind of little errands with one character who is deceased at a time in their life in which they're quite elderly. They can't walk on their own. And a lot of what you're doing with them is walking up and down the length of the ship of this ferry that you are the captain of as Stella as you're helping them get to the destination of their afterlife.

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I have to say that this game is in some ways more boring than I thought it would be, but I kind of like that. I'll get to that little later on in the message, but it's also even more moving.

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There's something about the care that you as Stella with at me as Stella got to express and kind of honoring the final wishes.

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Of these characters before they pass on into that great, great beyond that, we never really see in the show.

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I have to tell you that I didn't know how much I needed spirit farer until I played spirit farer, and the reason for that, that this game is based on this expression of care with these kind of goofy, eccentric, loving, imperfect characters.

[00:10:49]

It has to do with this message series that we start here today at Wellspring's called The Cloud over Everything. It is very much about the world that we have lived in for the last now more than six months. This were world of the novel coronavirus, this world of covid-19, this world that, as I record this on Friday, stands on the precipice of U.S. deaths of just approaching two hundred thousand.

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And so I imagine, sadly, with deep regret, remorse and a good deal of frustration, heartbreak as well, that probably will be at two hundred thousand by the time you see this on Sunday morning.

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There's something about Spirit Farer and the simple acts of care that builds within me a certain kind of resilience. This cloud over everything of grief and loss and unwelcome adaptation.

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Has cost us so much and perhaps like you, I know that life feels draining right now.

[00:12:07]

I find that things that used to take not so much time now take more energy as the pandemic does not have an end in sight, I just find that sometimes it is a struggle to kind of find that energy, that additional gear I'm living my life as I need to in the ways that I know how best to do so now. And I also know how much energy that takes. I'm talking with some of you as well. People in my life beyond the congregation, other people I serve in other aspects of my professional life, I know how much energy it takes right now.

[00:12:51]

And sometimes it's not just the energy, it's the. Frustration. This time of life. Seeing, at least from my perspective, how many people are not living through this pandemic time with a kind of quality of depth, of seriousness, of intentionality and care for other people, I mean, just this past week, maybe you have seen it as well.

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It is an image of a flash mobs that were popular in the early 2000s. In the early 2010s, group of people would go into a public space and kind of dance to some music. And very often they're joyous. There's a famous one at that that wedding, I think, a number of years ago as well, too. But this one I did not find so joyous. This was a group of people who were in a target, not sure where the target was. And all of a sudden they started playing the Twisted Sister song, We're not going to take it very loudly. And they ripped off their masks and they started getting in people's faces and yelling very loudly about freedom, about this pandemic is, you know, it was not real or should be questioned and there inside this whole time. So, in fact, they're engaging in things that are downright dangerous. In addition to putting themselves in jeopardy, they were also jeopardizing other people's lives.

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And I got to tell you, I just watched this and like, I didn't even know where to begin. What do you say to people so divorced from what is clearly a reality?

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A virus has so many people have said in the last six months it has no ideology, and yet some people are.

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Only willing to see it through the lens of that ideology and in so doing.

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Imperil their lives and other people's lives. I mean, there was just a story of a pastor in Idaho who didn't call the pandemic a hoax, but he was a big believer that, you know, a religious community still had to worship in person and that his freedoms were being infringed upon and that masks were overhyped.

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No pleasure in saying this. He got the virus. He's in the ICU right now. And his wife, who was also infected, says, you know, we have to take this thing seriously.

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It would be nice if the price that people paid for taking this. Pandemic, this virus seriously was not the imperilling of their own lives that they could recognize what reality is.

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And so one of the things that comes up for me when I take a look at a story like this, it just frustrates me and saddens me and just leaves me kind of almost speechless. Is that old quote by Voltaire that if you can convince people of absurdities, you can you can get them to commit atrocities.

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You know, I don't deny that there are incredibly hard choices we're facing in my professional life beyond the congregation, I'm a substance use and mental health professional, and I see the costs regularly of isolation and the griefs and losses of a death of others lives, of jobs, of livelihoods, of connections.

[00:16:04]

I mean, long term, we're not designed to live this way. And yet the cost of denying it, of magical thinking, of conspiracies, of toxic positivity, which is particularly a kind of American way of developing a kind of resilience, I guess, which only wants to focus on the positive things and getting through things and getting beyond things. But what it does, the pandemic is not going to speed up. Actually, in some ways it will slow down the more that we deny it's reality. And so the other quote, beyond the Voltaire one that comes up when I see a video like this is from one of my favorite teachers from a long time ago, Soren Kierkegaard, the leap of faith guy. And he says that there is a despair so deep that it is the despair not to be in despair. It is that toxic positivity. It is that magical thinking that it's all just going to go away. It is that capacity to believe conspiracies when in fact the harms are so real. And also the fact that a lot of people pushing these conspiracies are folks of privilege themselves. I mean, just this past week, I read this horrible story that just as the pandemic has affected marginalized communities, it is so much more likely to be more deadly and to be more serious for black and brown children. This is what happens when we deny reality, especially a difficult reality in the hard, difficult, sometimes grueling choices we have to make. And how imperfect those choices are, is we end up just adding to the difficulty already there and adding more pain and more pain and more pain on top of it.

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And sometimes we pay the price and sometimes others pay the price.

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And so what I'm noticing with this cloud over everything. Is that beyond the despair, not to be in despair, that kind of avoidant way of dealing with the world that at times. Despair is a proper response to all this grief and to all this loss. I'm not saying despair is good. I'm not saying suffering is good. I'm not saying that we should seek it out. We have enough of it already without seeking it out. I'm saying that there is a quality of despair that if we allow ourselves to feel it and experience it, that perhaps we will recognize that we are despairing in the first place because our hearts are open to the capacity to love and to care about ourselves and to care about other people. It is, for me, the most challenging line in the entirety of the Christian scriptures and one of my favorite ones. Because it cuts against so much of this human desire to move past and move through, what is difficult is when Jesus says blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted.

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Sometimes that means embracing despair, sometimes that means embracing our own broken hearts and letting ourselves be with it and let it in so that we might access that deeper comfort and connection if we allow ourselves to mourn.

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And there is no spiritual bypass for that. There's just the experience of it. There's a really wonderful group that I've become aware of that maybe some of you are aware of as well, too. They had a post early on in the pandemic is called NPP Ministry, and that is what it is about. It's about the power of naps and even more rest. The quality of

rest, the radical transformative quality of allowing ourselves to rest, that if we engage in that experience, we will actually find within it a radical tool in that ministry talks about for community healing early on, I think it was in early April in the pandemic they posted this. I want to read this to you now. They said that grieving is a process that cannot be rushed to get to the happy thoughts and self-satisfaction that our culture promotes as a nation, as a nation, we do not like to dwell on defeat or pain. We take pride in our can do attitude of overcoming adversity. Lament instead helps us to tell our stories of suffering and loss and pain.

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And it says that grinding, just grinding it out, not resting, grinding it out keeps us in a cycle of trauma.

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Rest can disrupt that cycle.

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Sometimes I think that above all else, what we could use in interrupting these cycles of just keeping moving forward is this regular invitation to grieve together. All the losses all the morning we need to do that interrupts our cycles of just perpetuating our pain and paying it forward.

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What not ministry kind of opens up a space for is a different way of experiencing ourselves.

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It's two ways of experiencing time comes from the Greek. A lot of people have written about this and talked about this over the years, that there's kind of two words for time or the experience of time in Greek. One is Cronos.

[00:21:23]

It's where we get the word chronology from Cronos. Linear time, sequential time. One thing follows, another follows. Another follows. Another is the word we live in is the world I'm living in today. I have to have a message ready for Sunday, so I'm recording it on Friday. I plan my week around preaching.

[00:21:37]

That's chronology. Cronos time. There's there's nothing wrong with it, but it's not all the time is because there's this other dimension which is called Kairos time, which is the time of freedom of creativity.

[00:21:52]

When that chronological time almost falls away, it tends to be associated with really opening up to pain or opening up to love and giving ourselves to those depth experiences. A lot of people describe chiros time as an experience of deep relationship. It's also associated very often as well with contemplative spirituality or mindfulness, any kind of spiritual practice where we're not so much focused on having the experience be good for something external to itself. But merely allowing the experience to be good for itself in itself is an old story, probably apocryphal, about Beethoven, where he played one of his concertos for the first time and and the crowd just rapturously applauded. And then someone in the crowd came forward and asked him what it meant, what does it mean? And he didn't say anything. He sat down, he played it all again. He got up. He said, that's what it means. That's Kairos time, the experience of something that's just good enough for itself. Orienting ourselves to the process of living our lives rather than turning our lives into a product, and that is why I discovered that I love Spirit Fair, even the boring parts so much, because it is an invitation to slow down and to express care for these imaginary creatures to help see them into the next stage of their journey.

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It's an invitation to rest to look up at the stars as often show in this game.

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Because the thing is, you know, our grinds, they will exhaust us.

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And instead, I think, you know, one of the invitations of this pandemic time, and it's not an invitation that any of us would have voluntarily issued, but the invitation is still there nonetheless.

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How might we turn our lives from being oriented as a product, as just one thing that leads to another, to another, to another, to more of that orientation, to process, to experience what is happening as it's happening, the full spectrum of living our lives and that we find when we find we can do that so often we find that we enter into that deeper relationship even with what is difficult relationship that is often a very loving, caring relationship. So often our best teachers in this way of living are those people who have come to the end of their Cronos lives or approaching the end of their Cronos lives and teach us to pay attention to the chiros. There's a message series we did years ago, I think it was 20, 30. Way back, way back in the history of WellSpring's. We've been around since we've launched in 2007. So like half a life, half a WellSpring's lifetime ago, we did a message series on this book called The Top Five Regrets of the Dying. And I'm going to list them all. You can Google this, but one of the most interesting things is so many of those regrets had to do with getting all stuck up in that Cronos time of just one

thing after another, after another, after another, and moving forward and paying forward our pain and not transforming. And the invitation of this book written by a hospice worker is all about that Kairos time. I regret I didn't have more time for relationships. I regret I didn't learn how to do those things that maybe I wasn't good of, that maybe could have made me happy. I regret that I worked so hard and miss so much of my life. What it boils down to so much is that the regrets are about missing connection.

[00:25:44]

And this is the cloud over us right now.

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The cloud over everything that if we can stop and notice those connections that we're missing, we can be even more intentional about still honoring that desire to connect in the best ways that we can, because that need doesn't change.

[00:26:07]

The expression of it does, even in the midst of this cloud over everything.

[00:26:16]

We can allow those who've been through the journey already and are coming to the close to speak to us. We can allow them to orient us to what truly sits upon and matters in our hearts. We can allow them to invite us to interrupt all the moving forward in the moving forward, in the moving forward.

[00:26:42]

And to come back into our lives, even in this difficult moment. And to honor a deep desire for connection with ourselves and with each other.

[00:26:55]

And close this message with another animated character from one of the weirdest things I ever preached on and just preached on it not too long ago, I actually think it was the prior message I gave in August on the bizarre, surreal, profane, but profoundly moving Netflix show The Midnight Gospel, which is all about death and loss and being changed in the clouds that hang over everything.

[00:27:19]

And it's the final image, the final segment of the final episode of the first season. Clancy, who's the space caster, the podcast in space, who doesn't know if he's dead or alive in that moment. It's a fantastical show.

[00:27:37]

If you haven't seen it sits down on a bus that's taking him somewhere almost like Spirit Fairies about to begin a journey. And he immediately lifts out his microphone and he wants to start recording the person next to him. What can he do to turn this into a product or project or a product?

[00:27:52]

I want to be interviewed for my podcast. And the person sitting next to him is Ramdas, the great spiritual teacher who has died a whole bunch of years before. And he just looks at Clancy with a sense of peace and rest.

[00:28:13]

And these are the actual words of Ramdas, his actual voice recorded many years before quoting his most famous book, Be Here Now.

[00:28:28]

Be here now.

[00:28:30]

And it reminds me of that my second favorite and famous quote and one that sits even more on the heart, many of you know it, that when we find ourselves traveling or trudging or grinding through. Invites us maybe to slow down and rest. And be with our spirits and our lives and our bodies, our own and each other, when he says we are all just walking each other home.

[00:28:59]

May you be at home?

[00:29:02]

This day, my friends. As best you can. In the midst of all of this, in the midst of this cloud over everything.

[00:29:13]

Amen, and may you live in blessing. I invite you to pray with me. To join your heart with my.

[00:29:28]

Your spirit, the breath in our lungs, the movement within us and all around us, reminding us that connection is not something we have to reach for, connection is something we merely have to realize.

[00:29:44]

Maybe these days, rest is difficult for us. In the midst of all this. And so this basic, simple prayer in this moment, may we rest right now, may we stop?

[00:30:02]

May we take a sacred pause? May we breathe in? And may we breathe out?

[00:30:16]

And keep on doing that. For as long as we need to.

[00:30:22]

And until we allow love to find us again.

[00:30:35]

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END OF TRANSCRIPT



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