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Sing a New Song.mp3

DATE

September 29, 2020

DURATION

23m 54s

START OF TRANSCRIPT

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Good morning, Wellspring's. Good to be with you again.

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One of the kind of recent innovation innovations in this time in which not a lot of new entertainment content is being made, is a repurposing of a fairly traditional practice and making plays and movies and television shows called The Table Read. The traditional table read happens kind of early on in the process of assembling a cast. And after they're all together, they it is what it says is they gather around a table and they read through the script and they kind of see what it's like to start to bring life to the words on the page before the play is actually put on or before the movie or television show is filmed. And so table reads, I've been noticing I've kind of been a thing in the last couple of months, like early on the pandemic.

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It seems like every week there was either a new Web show, one time event or television show, one time event that was a benefit for some really good and worthy causes and felt like, you know, John Legend somehow was in absolutely all of them. But it feels like some of those benefits are not quite as common as they were early on. And recently, we're seeing more of these table reads as kind of this new old content of entertainment, like there was one recently by an all black cast reading physically distant, an old episode of Friends. And this is kind of kind of a really good in-joke because friends as influential a show as it was caught flak back then when it was on, and even more so now for being a show that represented a seemingly almost entirely lily white Manhattan that just doesn't exist in reality.

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And so this all black cast, I think the main actor and most well-known was Sterling K. Brown. I believe he of This is us, which I am kind of ashamed to admit. I'm like two and a half seasons behind on, but I will catch up. So that's that's one of these table reads recently. Another one was a table read of the 1982 movie Fast Times at Ridgemont High movie. I really remember from my teenage years. And this was notable because it brought back together Jennifer Aniston and Brad Pitt, who you may remember, you know, were really huge power couple in Hollywood 15, 20 years ago and then broke up and then Brangelina happened and all that. And it was kind of fun in the clips that I saw of this table read to see Jennifer Aniston and Brad Pitt kind of interacting and having fun with each other as they were doing this table. Read of the script of Fast Times at Ridgemont High. Another recent table read this one is actually, I think, done as a political benefit, was not a matter of recasting an old show or an old movie. It brought back together the original cast of The Princess Bride doing a physically distanced table read of that original script. Now, I know that The Princess Bride is a much beloved story, and I truth be told, I absolutely adore it. I love the fact that on one level it's all about kind of winking or a tongue in cheek take on some of the conventions of fantasy or epic or heroic storytelling, and at the same time it's winking at you. It's also my experience at least, is that it's drawn you straight into its big beating heart.

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One of the ways that I think The Princess Bride also really works is because it's what they call a meta story. It's a story about stories and the power of stories. And in this particular case, it's a story about the power of stories when life hasn't quite turned out. As we might have thought, or at least two of the characters thought they might have wanted it to, because the frame, if you remember, The Princess Bride, isn't just the story of the Princess Bride. Buttercup and Dread Pirate Roberts and Humperdink and all that, it actually is framed by the telling of the story of Princess Bride from a grandfather to a grandson. And although, as I'm remembering it now, I don't think we ever know the reason that the grandson is sick in bed, he is ill in bed. And you almost get the sense that maybe he's been ill in bed for a while, that, you know, he's kind of getting a little frustrated and maybe even a little bit scared and incomes. Grandfather wants to read him a story, this kind of musty, dusty looking book. And the grandson at first is like like really like I don't want this story and these kind of resistent.

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But then at regular intervals, we see his resistance being kind of worn down as he gets pulled into the story. The Princess Bride that all of us are seeing on the screen, so much so that at one point when they kind of go back, they cut back to the grandfather and grandson because something really traumatic has happened to one of the characters in The Princess Bride in the story we're watching. And it looks like that might be the end of the story. The grandson is totally distressed that the story he didn't care about when it started. Now he's completely invested in.

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And I think that's one of the layers, one of the levels that makes the Princess Bride so powerful is how sometimes when life does not turn out, how we want it to turn out. How?

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We may experience may experience an opening to a different kind of story, even if it's not the story that we thought our lives would turn out to be.

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That's one of the layers. On which the Princess Bride really works.

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This message series that we're doing, the cloud over everything, it is about this pandemic time when big deaths and little losses and daily losses. Kind of are a part of all of our lives. I mean, we're now well past two hundred thousand people that we've lost to covid-19 without seemingly an end in sight. This message series, The Cloud Over Everything, is about grief and about loss, intentionally and particularly about some of the common experiences, not necessarily all the same, not necessarily universal, but very common experiences that people in many different times and and places and cultures and eras regularly experience.

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In grieving, in mourning and in loss.

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One of the ways that we in America can talk about the process of grieving or mourning is unfortunately in a you know, in a linear way and one step falls, another step falls, another step falls, another step. You know, there stages to grief and you're supposed to move through the stages of grief to get to that place where you are, quote unquote, done grieving.

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This has been laid at the feet of Elizabeth Kubler Ross, who.

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She didn't have that intention to make it seem linear. She was talking about what she observed in working with people who were dying and some common experiences. But unfortunately, Kubler Ross, his work has become interpreted almost in a judgmental way, that if someone is grieving too long or grieving and quote unquote, not the right way or feeling too much or not feeling enough.

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That somehow they're missing the stages and so.

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There's other ways to talk about grieving, a loss that doesn't fall into kind of these linear, judgmental traps, some people who write about observing grief talk about that there are certain tasks that are very common, like acknowledging the grief, feeling the pain of the loss. Retelling the stories of the person or the experience that has been lost, telling a new story, reintegrating that person or that experience into our lives in new ways, even if they're no longer in life. And one of the things I really like about the tasks model versus the steps or stages is it doesn't compartmentalize so easily into one thing follows, another thing falls, another thing falls. Another thing, it seems more liberating, more actually of a matching up with the complexity of grief in our lives. There's another model of grieving or dealing with change and want to change or loss. That's like over a hundred years old. And it's by a guy named Arnold Van GetNet.

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He was a folklorist.

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And he wrote about these different parts of grieving, like one part he would say is like kind of the the experience of the death and the ending and the various emotions associated with that. And then he also wrote about a different part that he kind of referred to as the liminal part, the betwixt and between the the no longer and they not yet sometimes a period that we feel we kind of wander through, maybe have a tough time finding our bearings. But that's very often the part in which a new story might emerge. If we're paying attention deeply to our lives and giving ourselves permission to feel what we're feeling and experience what we're experiencing. And the other part

that he talks about is a process of reintegration, which I really love because it doesn't so much talk about mourning being done or over. And I think especially for those of us who grew up with models of grief in which we were taught very much, OK, you got to move on. You've got to get back to work. You got to go back to life. The reintegration.

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Aspect that he talks about is more about, yes, a change has happened and very often a very painful change, but at the same time, not all is lost from that change.

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And the meaning, the inner experience can be reintegrated into a form of life. So we're not so much getting back to something. We're not going back again. But we're also creating and experiencing a form of life that is new and emergent tends to be a very generative way of healing and working with healing and grief that I think for a lot of us who have been trained to kind of think get over, get past can actually be profoundly liberating. It's if we want to use an image of this sense of what it's like to give ourselves permission to be in that part of grief that is unknown or complex or liminal, that betwixt and between, that's no longer, but not yet. I think that we can regularly turn to these images of people who allow themselves to experience a kind of wildness or a wilderness in grief. It's something that I think scares a lot of us. It can scare me as well, too, but also there is profound healing in that wildness or in that wilderness.

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I've been reflecting on this as as the temperatures are no longer ninety five degrees every day. And I've gotten back out into walking around my Conshohocken neighborhood and all throughout Conshohocken into the the hills and the trails around us here is that I'm seeing a particular sign show up and it's this.

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Conchi Strong, it's a fairly common thing after a tragedy befalls an area or a group of people, you know, blank, strong, Boston strong, like after the the bombings at the marathon. And I don't think this is a bad thing in any way. I think a reminder of our strength, the resilience is great, but I think it's limited when it's the only model or frame that we go to or that we reflexively go to. And so when I walk around my neighborhood, I've been seeing these conchi strong banners or placards up. First of all, I do think that I love living in Conshohocken and it's a place I enjoy living a great deal. Conshohocken is very far from the most affected place by covid-19. So this will conchi strong thing is, I think, a bit much. But even more, I've started to rework some of these conchi strong until, like a conchi conchi uncertain, what if we normalize that or conchi and like the emoji of like the shrug conchi, I don't know, conchi or conchi what I've been thinking about Conchi Wise.

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Like, what would it be if we didn't immediately go to that kind of language of strength and just getting through and just getting back to normal, but instead gave ourselves more time to dwell on the wilderness a little bit longer, how that might seasonless or mature us? It's one of the most powerful stories from the Hebrew scriptures, the story of the ancient Israelites released from bondage, the story of the exodus as they make their way towards Israel. But as the story goes is told, it took them 40 years of wandering in the desert. Now, I hope the pandemic does not last 40 years, but it's not going to be over soon, from what we can tell. And here's the thing. As the ancient Israelites were wandering in the desert, they started to whine and complain. And they really wanted to get back to the again, to the time before even.

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If it was in Egypt where they were not free. Sometimes that's such a habit of ourselves as we go through these difficult times that we can refuse to give ourselves permission to be in the emerging spaces as uncomfortable as they are, or we get scared by other people. Who allow themselves to say, I don't know or not yet. It is in those places of the wilderness or the wild that we can also hear the voice of something that.

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Is giving rise to or giving voice to in the Psalms, you two made a very famous song out of it called 40. It's one of the songs that our band did in the before time. The back then, I will sing a new song.

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It's actually not just some 40 at some one forty four, I will sing a new song. And so often that capacity to sing a new song comes from the willingness to be able to dwell in the wildness of recognizing that grief sometimes is a time of exile.

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And in that outer exile or in that inner exile, we find ourselves in a different form of life and we discover things about ourselves, a deeper yes strength and resilience when strength and resilience is not the immediate go to. And my favorite stories about dwelling in the wild in the wilderness is the book in the novel, and it's been so long since I read one and have seen the other that I confuse them. So I can't remember what book or novel.

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But Cheryl Strads memoir called Simply Wild is made into that great movie with Reese Witherspoon in which she

goes into the wild trekking a hundred, I believe it's eleven hundred miles on the Pacific Coast Trail, although I think I'm actually wrong about that. It's the Pacific Crest Trail. Sorry I had to look that up because I thought I would forget about it in my notes. The Pacific Crest Trail.

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And she goes out into that wild of this eleven hundred mile trek because her life has just fallen apart, because the losses have piled up, because she's lost her beloved mother with whom she survived being early on in this abusive household in which both she and her mom were abused.

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And then mom, growing up, thriving, healing, enters college at the same time as her daughter, as Cheryl.

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And winds up with a devastating cancer diagnosis, which ends her life at 45 just in so many ways as she was growing into herself and Cheryl and her mom were so close. And then add to this as well to out of that pain the dissolution of what was once a loving marriage for four, Cheryl, and then the discovery of heroin, which she said to herself when she first took it because it took away all the pain. Here's the cure, she said. And for those of us who are in recovery, especially from addictive behaviours or from substances that kind of promise, they would take away all the pain but just ended up causing more pain. I remember that feeling myself from way back when. Here's the cure. But like Cheryl, it just ended up causing more hurt and more harm. And so she entered the wild. The place of the unknown, and if you remember the movie particularly, they really get into the nitty gritty of this, her toenails falling off and her boots falling apart, needing to tape them up with duct tape like old Tiva sandals and the bloodiness of her feet. But also the fear that she encounters and how she also learns to experience herself differently out in the wild.

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And she begins to heal one of the things that she discovers out there.

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I mean, she is Cheryl Strayed, an attractive person, an attractive woman in this culture that places such objectifying disproportionate attention upon women's appearance. And and she says that that she had lived inside of that story for so many years. And when she got out onto the trail, she discovered a new way of being in and with her body as part of her healing. And I remember I think it's in the book where she says she was on the trail and using a bathroom along the trail and there was a small mirror and she looked at her body. She was changing. She says, am I a babe or am I a gargoyle? Talk about like getting to know yourself new again.

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That's what Cheryl Strayed gets to do. When she experiences the full wildness within her and the wildness around her, and that is how she heals.

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Now, most of us are not going to trek 1100 miles, even if some of us might have the secret wish to do that, most of us are not going to do that.

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But that doesn't mean we can't honor the places of the unknown or the not fully formed yet, last week on my message, I talked about knap ministry, which talks about the transformative power of rest, individual and collective rest, and not just grinding through or getting through things or returning to premature understandings of strength.

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Instead, the NAP ministry talks about what it is when we step back a little bit, particularly with grief, particularly with loss, one of the rituals that knap ministry talks about is what they call a grief jar, literally can be any old jar, a mason jar. And I think this is particularly wonderful with the with the big unwanted changes and losses and losses and deaths, but also the little ones. I think this one can be really powerful. I've heard with with kids, you set up this Mason jar, you call it your grief jar, and you put out strips of paper with it and you will write down at least once a day, but as often as you want to. A specific kind of grief or loss and acknowledgement, you place it into the jar, you or and or others, and as you place in the jar, you could offer a prayer or just a moment of pause and breath. And it is that way of honoring that still forming, coming to be emerging awareness of what happens when we allow ourselves to sing a new song or to tell a new story with our grief. And it makes it a ritual. It makes it a practice, which I think is one of the most profound ways that we can give ourselves enough structure and enough grounding as we move through a time of uncertainty without immediately getting to the old forms of life, to the many systems or yearning for the many systems in this culture that, let's face it, we're not at all that healthy in the time before and now are being revealed in the time of pandemic to be so ill suited to serving real human need and real human suffering and pain. Finding these ways of honoring the grief in the midst of the story that allows us to maybe live into that real beautiful wisdom, but not at a cheap grace kind of way.

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I think of Cheryl strayed with this, I once was lost and now I've found. That Amazing Grace.

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One of the things I've learned over the years of working with groups or families is that when there is a death or a loss or disruption. It is not at all the case that everyone is experiencing the same thing.

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In their emotions, with their feelings as a result of that death, of that loss, it's actually where groups and families get themselves into a lot of trouble, is when people are in different places with those experiences and they start judging each other, that somehow they're lacking feeling too much or feeling not enough. And so I think this time one of the greatest graces that we can offer each other is being able to speak what is true for ourselves and deeply listening to each other as well, that as we move through this time, that is wild, that has a tremendous wilderness to it, that we will recognize that we can accompany each other, not on the basis of our sameness.

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But based on the quality of our attentiveness to and with each other.

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Amen. And may you live in Blaesing?

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

[00:22:54]

God of this very moment, this very heartbeat.

[00:23:02]

Of this unfinished and perhaps even yes. Unfocussed feeling life at times.

[00:23:12]

And we allow ourselves to grow large with the kind of love. That allows us to attend to and to be with our own experiences and others experiences, may we allow ourselves to grow into what we are not yet to continue to emerge.

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And in that emergence, take on those qualities of love and belonging. Of being with and being a part of. And in these realities, may we be reminded that we are not alone. Amen.

END OF TRANSCRIPT



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