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It's Not You.mp3

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

Good morning, Wellspring's. Man, I don't know about you, but these days I need all of the comfort and wisdom I can get. Doesn't matter where it comes from. Right. And so I am grateful for the fact that sometimes in a moment like this one, in a moment of great crisis, someone will share something so self, evidently wise and so effortlessly brilliant that you can tell they have tapped into the spirit of a nation.

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And then you hear that idea everywhere. That's how you know, right. It's undeniable. Truth pierces so deeply to the heart of the soul. And I am speaking, of course, of this tweet from way back in March, March 16th, 2020, that you might remember. It was the first week of national lockdown from the coronavirus pandemic. And all of our heads were spinning and we had just barely downloaded Zoom onto our computers. And Twitter user Molly Polski shared this nugget of perfection, she said. Protip for couples suddenly working from home together, get yourselves an imaginary co-worker to blame things on in our apartment. Cheryl keeps leaving her dirty water cups all over the place and we really don't know what to do about her. Cheryl, quote unquote, took off instantly before long, she's struck again in a completely different house. This one says Cheryl just broke the oven in our home office kitchen. We are livid, but we can't fire her, not in these uncertain times. Cheryl was joined by BIF, the co-worker. For those working at home alone. I have no idea, said this Twitter user, why BIF won't unload and reload the dishwasher. What a lazy officemate.

[00:02:02]

Our coworkers took the fall for all of our little foibles and all of our mishaps and missteps in those early days. And maybe for some of us, they still are. Our Biff's and our Cheryls, they picked up the blame for whatever went wrong, whatever got missed or fell behind and they filled an important role for all of us.

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Now, obviously, we know, right when we make up a Cheryl or a Biff that the missteps are ours, they don't belong to somebody else. It was one of us. It was ourselves or our partners or a roommate or our kids who did the thing that irked us.

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In those early days, that was true and it still is true now. But Cheryl gave us some space.

[00:02:59]

Our imaginary co-workers gave us something to laugh about when we really needed a. Some grace. To protect our relationships with the ones that we really love in the real world. That was a real gift that Cheryl gave us in a time when we needed to protect those relationships with the ones that we love more than we ever have.

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In our Message series this fall, we're talking about the cloud over everything, Reverend Ken and I can't take credit for that phrase.

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It actually came out of a gathering we held on Zoom this summer.

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Our second annual gathering of all of the people who deliver our messages and our spiritual content, you might call it, to people of all ages in our congregation.

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We started this last year in the summertime. At that point, we gathered around a table in Gresh Hall at the Montgomery School with all of our preachers, lay and ordained our youth spirit staff, Miss Carroll and the members

of our Spiritual Development Ministry. And we spent about two hours talking. We talked about what we were seeing and hearing, what was being carried on the hearts of all the people around us, the spiritual hunger and the aspirations that we carry and the things that we longed for. The seeds of those conversations then become the topics for messages in the year that follows. And this July, as we sat in our little boxes on our Azuma screens and we began to talk about what could possibly be coming in the year ahead, Jose Waldman, our worship leader from last week, she was the first one to use the word grief. I actually have it in my notes from that day, she said this all came down on us this year like an unexpected death in the family. She said, I find myself having these thoughts, like, if none of this had happened, my life would be like this or like that or my life would have gone so much more smoothly.

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And it's helpful to me, Jose said, when I remember that there is this sort of cloud over everything.

[00:05:38]

It's Greif. It's Greif.

[00:05:44]

It never magically disappears grief. With grief, there's no one moment that things get better. The loss will still be lost. Maybe that's the way we need to look at this year ahead. And just name. The cloud over everything.

[00:06:09]

That it's grief.

[00:06:13]

You know, when we point to Cheryl, our imaginary co-worker Biff, or as kids sometimes, right when we make up an imaginary friend and then suddenly that imaginary friend is the one who took the cookie out of the cookie jar or drew on the walls with crayons. When we point to those imaginary friends of ours.

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We're often pointing to the things that we're not yet ready to face. We're not ready to face up just yet to what's been done to what's happening around us or to how it is affecting us.

[00:06:58]

We're not ready.

[00:07:00]

These imaginary co-workers and friends help us work through our feelings when it's still all too much. When it's in that intense kind of stage that we can't quite handle and we know we are definitely not at our best selves, we are not ready to take it on fully.

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Having Cheryl around is really helpful, right? If any of you use that strategy, maybe you're still using it. I know some of you you call your pets, your coworkers. Right.

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But having having that around was helpful because no matter what, when we feel frustrated or disappointed, when we are not quite with it, we're not quite ourselves. Pointing at that imaginary friend or coworker gave us the space to laugh and to say, it's not me, it's not you, it's Cheryl.

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I wonder this fall as we look towards a winter that is uncertain and a whole new year ahead, that is very uncertain. I wonder if it would help us to make that a practice.

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To say it's not me, it's not you. It's Grief.

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How do we recognize this grief that is everywhere, it's all around us.

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In his message last week, Reverend Ken talked a little bit about the tasks of grief. Tasks was a word I really appreciated hearing and learning about, and I hadn't heard it before, right. It doesn't describe stages of grief like we may have often heard about stages implies that we're going to progress through and it's going to be orderly and it's going to look one way. When we imagine grief in kind of our popular imagination, we have an image of it. Right. Maybe it's an Edward Gorey cartoon for you. Maybe it's a movie, it's dark clothing and it's sobbing and crumpling to the floor.

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And we might look around us and say, I don't see that everywhere. But the tasks of grief are happening all around us and inside us.

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We are working those tasks to work through these big feelings that we have about what's going on this year in the pandemic, in our communities and our relationships, in our schools and our towns and our justice systems and our workplaces and in our country. We are working through these signs, these tasks of grief. And once we know their names and what they look like. We can see them in ourselves and in each other. Back in March. David Kessler, the psychologist and author who created that original framework of the stages of grief, along with Elizabeth Kubler Ross, he gave an interview about identifying these tasks of grief as we see them now, as we see them at work in this time of pandemic and as we use them all to cope, he listed them off and gave us examples. See if you recognize any of these. There's denial, of course, right, denial, he says, looks like this virus won't affect us.

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I won't catch it. My family won't get it. We don't have it. It's not that big a deal.

[00:11:01]

There's anger, you're making me stay home, you're taking away my activities, you're taking away my livelihood.

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I can't believe we weren't more prepared for this are our leaders aren't looking out for our needs.

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There's bargaining, right, bargaining says, OK, so if I social distance for two weeks and stay home, everything will be better, right? Or we'll keep the school closed till November and then we can go back to in person I.

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There's sadness.

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Sadness might look like saying, I don't know when this will end. And I miss so much, I miss holding hands with friends. I miss hugging and singing at church.

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And there is the task of acceptance.

[00:12:02]

That looks like saying this is happening. I have to figure out what I will do. I will make my choices, I will wash my hands and keep a safe distance, I can learn how to work virtually, I can learn how to parent, how to help my kids do school. I can learn how to connect to new ways.

[00:12:30]

Do you see any of these tasks that grief? These tasks of grief in your home. Do you see yourself working these tasks of grief and yourself? Do you see them at work and your friends or your family? This cloud over everything reigns on us all. And we each lean on different tasks of grief in different measures, in different ways, at different times. Maybe you're someone who works it out more through anger while somebody else really leans on the bargaining strategy while another friend really relies on sadness.

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To move through this.

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Maybe some of us work with acceptance tasks for a while, but then suddenly we have this day where anger flares up or maybe even we realize we need to just hide out in denial for one night or one afternoon.

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It's not you. It's Grief.

[00:13:45]

David Kessler says, we are feeling a number of these griefs right now, they're on top of each other, the loss of normalcy, the fear of the economic toll, the loss of connection, the feeling that things will be different. And we're not sure how this is hitting us, he says. And we're grieving differently and collectively, he said, we are not used to this kind of collective grief in the air over us all at once. I said earlier that inviting Cheryl into our homes, that it was useful because she helped us protect our relationships. With the ones we love most. She gave us that space when we weren't quite ready to face up to what was happening around us. She allowed us the room to move through this together with just a little cushion of extra grace. I wonder if noticing and naming are tasks of grief now could help us do the same. We recognize maybe that person who's not at their best. Might be acting out of one of those tasks of grief. And when we can name that, maybe we can be a little more compassionate or heck, set aside compassion for a moment, maybe we can just coexist, right, and function like two real co-workers working from home, maybe we can stand each other a little better. Maybe we can. Be in this world, however big or small it is for each of us. Despite the enormous stress just raining down on us all.

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Recognizing anger and sadness and denial and bargaining and acceptance as they come up in ourselves and in each other. And shaking our heads, what are we going to do about all of this grief?

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In spiritual communities, we know at least part of the answer to that question.

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And spiritual communities, we make space for grief.

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One of the rare places where that space is made. We know that grief must be held.

[00:16:36]

We know that it must be spoken of and showed.

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And shared. We know that it needs to be seen and heard. For it to move on.

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When we hold our griefs and common.

[00:16:56]

They don't necessarily go away.

[00:17:01]

But they hurt less over time.

[00:17:05]

When we are sharing them and seeing and hearing each other. They hurt us less. They hurt each other less.

[00:17:18]

They minimize the harm that we do. When we are in that tough spot. When we can share those tasks of grief and name them and honor them in common. This grief this year, of course, is not just about the pandemic. When we talk about politics or the election or the issues or how polarized our country has become. Sometimes we're talking about grief then to.

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We can talk about issues of equality coming up before the Supreme Court, right up here in an issue kind of way, but.

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The truth is, when a kid is thrown out of their home for being trans or queer. That's grief.

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We can talk about Black Lives Matter, about the platforms around policing, about immigrant detention centers and policies, but when a verdict or a decision comes down from our justice system that says your life and your freedom is worth less.

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That's grief. Even our divisions themselves bring grief.

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The progressive Christian author John Pavlovitch wrote a piece for his blog this summer called This Presidency is Killing Relationships and we're all grieving.

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Maybe that brings up a relationship in your mind right now.

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Pavlovitch says people I loved and respected, he says, people I've grown up with and served on mission trips with families who've had my kids over for sleepovers, older relatives, I spent decades looking up to a rapidly growing army of people, he said, who I was sure knew better than this. Are leading me to leave, to grieve the loss of living people. And he says as much as he can, reasoned out all of the contributing factors, as much as he can make sense of it.

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There's still grief. That needs nothing more than to be worked through held. The grief doesn't care about the reasons why. It doesn't go away just because we can explain it.

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And John Pavlovitch says, as much as I'm in mourning, I know that these people are likely grieving me right now to. They are implementing their own list of ways that they imagine I've changed or have abandoned my convictions or betrayed my religion.

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They're wondering and grieving how they lost me. The tasks of grief are everywhere, they're everywhere in our big national conversations right now, they're everywhere in our private, smaller ones, even here in our own community, even here at Wellspring's, you might have seen this week that we share the results of the survey that we sent out last month.

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We asked members of our community to share a little bit about what they were feeling regarding the potential that we might gather in person in some small way.

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And the comments from within our community were all over the map. We sent out a special email on Tuesday, and there's a link in your weekly. I hope you will read the comments for once, because the comments from within our community reflected so much of what is best about us and so much of what I love about Wellspring's, the honesty, the vulnerability, the grace that we display with each other and extend to each other.

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Fortunately, because of that, I think there wasn't a ton of anger in our communities responses, but there was certainly frustration and I saw a lot of sadness.

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I saw a portion of denial or at least bargaining. I saw a handful of acceptance as well. I saw us working out these tasks of grieving the loss of this.

[00:22:05]

The loss of me being able to look you all in the eye right now.

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John Pavlovitch says that in all of this, the grief is the smaller, more devastating story that we're not telling right now, the one far below the bold trending news.

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And the damage, he says, in all of this comes not so much from the grief itself, but from the relational wounds that come when we refuse to name our own or each other's feelings.

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When we end up blaming each other more than Cheryl, when we can't look and recognize the grief operating within us, that is not all of us, that is not the fullness and wholeness of who we are.

[00:23:09]

Sometimes things end, we all know that some of the relationships that may be ending around us because of issues or politics and the grief that they carry.

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Maybe they have run their course.

[00:23:30]

A big loss or a change can send people off growing and moving in different directions and sometimes maintaining unity only holds us back.

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But it's still OK to hurt over this loss. It's still OK to grieve over this loss of trust and togetherness. In big and small ways.

[00:24:02]

If this has ever happened to you before in those smaller and more personal ways in your own life, that personal kind of grief, you know that sometimes after a time has passed and the tasks of grieving, the intensity has subsided. Sometimes we can look back later on and realize, you know what, it wasn't me and it wasn't you.

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We are both still good people. We are all still good people at our core.

[00:24:34]

That is our faith. We are beloved and loving and trying our best. Maybe sometimes it really wasn't me and it really wasn't you. It was the grief. I think if we name that now, we stand a better chance of remaining connected, even if it's only by a thread. A thread might be enough to pull on to bring us back together when the intensity has passed.

[00:25:19]

It might be enough to remain compassionate, even if only privately right now. David Kessler's advice in this time is to keep trying, to keep trying, he says, because there is something powerful about naming this as.

[00:25:42]

It helps us feel what's inside of us. So many people, he says, have told me in the past week, I'm telling my co-workers that I'm having a hard time or I cried last night or I am so angry right now or I just can't I can't think about it for this evening or this weekend.

[00:26:08]

When you name it, you feel it.

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It moves through you. And he says emotions need emotion. Whatever grieving work you have to do is your own, and when we are offering each other spaces where it's safe to grieve, we are doing one of the things that spiritual community does best.

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It's sadly a very rare gift of grace that we can give.

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With all the energy I see around us to get back to something, and there are ways, by the way, that that manifests on all sides of every issue. Because getting back is all about the longing we feel for the safety and the comfort of what we knew and thought we had when so much has been changed and taken away and stirred up. The process of grieving and working through those tasks, it helps us work out how we move forward. It helps us sift through what has changed and what hasn't. It helps us sift through what is truly gone forever and what is still here.

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And maybe most importantly, it helps us sift through what can continue in new ways where the potential is to transform what was and to grow and bring new things forth. The lesson hidden in the struggle. The memory that now holds a new meaning. The love that carries on just in a new form. I hope that we will help each other, remember to point out our Cheryls and our Biff's when they show up. To name the work being done and honor it. To name the space that's being held by our imaginary co-workers on those tasks of grief that fulfill a purpose. If we can all agree to see and to name them. Then they can help protect the relationships that we want to see live through this time. It's OK for our sadness to be with us for a while or for our anger to show up in safe ways for that feisty bargaining spirit to play around with the possibilities. It's OK to rest for a moment in that cool pause of momentary denial. Or in the grounded and clear headed peace? Of acceptance. When they visit you and the ones that you love. Say their names. Because with friends on the journey, we're all more likely to make it. To our destination together.

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Moving forward and finding something new. Ommen. And may you live in Blaesing?

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I invite you to close your eyes for a moment. If you're comfortable, maybe take a deep breath. Your shoulders drop and join me in the spirit of prayer.

[00:30:01]

God of our hearts.

[00:30:06]

Mysterious giver of this life.

[00:30:15]

May we remember that we can look up at this cloud over everything? And remember that it is not over our heads alone, may we remember that we are together? Even when we're apart, we are together in this time that when we look up at the stars and the moon and the sun, it is the same one, the same one that everyone we know and have ever known and will ever know is seeing. There is more holding us together than we sometimes think. Or sometimes feel.

[00:30:57]

In the moments where that trust seems so thin.

[00:31:03]

I pray that we will find reminders of it.

[00:31:09]

For the prayers that I've spoken out loud and for the prayers that each of the people with us this morning under the sky.

[00:31:16]

Hold in their hearts. We say Amen.

END OF TRANSCRIPT



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