

**NAME**

We Can Be the Space for This Audio.mp3

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**START OF TRANSCRIPT****[00:00:01]**

Good morning, as you all know, next week is our annual Remembrance Sunday, a time when we as a congregation gather together this year virtually to create space to honor the experience of grief. We share photographs and memories. We tell stories and we grieve together in all of the difficult emotions that come after the experience of death. I have always been really proud to be part of a community that so directly speaks to and honors that experience not only as something that will inevitably happen to all of us, but it's something that if we're brave enough, we can actually embrace something that has meaning and purpose and transformative ability, obviously within our own lives will definitely be transformed when we die. But I think that if we're brave enough to face everything that comes from war, we can also be transformed by the experiences of death of those that we love.

**[00:01:19]**

I don't think that we we do a particularly good job of that as humans, especially in this country. We don't have holidays or keep up all year round to celebrate and honor the people who have passed. We tend to fear death and really avoided at all costs, trying to stay perpetually young. And most of all, we don't really talk about it. We barely even get a day off from work to go to a funeral and we don't make space for it in our life.

**[00:01:56]**

We know here at Wellspring's because we do make space for it that it is an important and valuable experience. One of the things that I myself am guilty of in terms of not talking about is my brother.

**[00:02:23]**

This is him this is my altar can show you a little bit more closely. His name was Andrew Fox and he died just a couple of months shy of his 38th birthday.

**[00:02:42]**

There are three stories about him, one that I don't like to tell, but I'm going to. One that I really like to tell or at least to remember, and one that I don't know. A story that I don't like to tell is that he struggled on and off with heroin addiction for the better part of 20 years before ultimately taking his life. It's Short. perfunctory.

**[00:03:15]**

Doesn't leave a whole lot of questions. Manes sense. Right. But it says absolutely nothing about the man that he was. And I don't like to tell it because it needs a couple more statistics. Addiction and suicide. We already know the story that I really like to tell is a memory that took place when I was 10 years old.

**[00:03:46]**

He was in eighth grade and I was in fifth, and our social studies teachers had arranged it so that we would all be studying the same subject at the same time.

**[00:03:58]**

And the subject of your study was a song We Didn't Start the Fire by Billy Joel. So you all know the song and you probably even heard it a few times this year, or at least the parody that's been going on this year in the dumpster fire.

**[00:04:14]**

Very funny. Very appropriate for this year.

**[00:04:19]**

We didn't start the fire. It's a bullet list of historical events, but social studies with a chorus in between. And one afternoon we both had our pieces of paper with all of the lyrics and the chorus written and and for reasons that I can't remember and probably never will, we decided that we were going to sing together. We went out into our

driveway while my parents were out. He stood in the middle and I rode circles around him on my bike and he sang out the lyrics from his little piece of paper that he held in his hand. And every time it came time for the chorus, I would say we didn't start the fire.

**[00:05:06]**

It was a really nice memory.

**[00:05:09]**

And I like to tell that story because it seems like something that a brother and sister who love each other. Would do. I Like to tell that story because I like to think that in that moment we loved each other well.

**[00:05:28]**

The story that I don't know is the story of who he actually was, we were never all that close growing up and unfortunately, his addiction started to take hold when he was still in high school. And I was still pretty young myself then because of his addiction and his illnesses and his depression and all of the constant fighting with my parents. I was never able to really get in touch with him and we would see each other at Christmas or maybe a birthday here and there. But, you know, once college hit for me, he wasn't really in my life anymore. And unfortunately, by the time he died, we had been estranged for more than a year. As is often the case for individuals who committed suicide, he had also had a falling out with my parents. I am sure that he did not feel like he had any other option.

**[00:06:41]**

I really wish that I could have known him and I will be forever changed because of death.

**[00:06:53]**

Probably noticed what I'm talking about today is that subsection of that which people talk about even less, which is suicide, deliberately taking one's own life. This is a huge and complicated subject, one that we could do an entire message series on. But that's not what this message series is, this message series. The cloud over everything is about death and grief and the experiences that we all share.

**[00:07:28]**

And I would like to talk about it. And as I said earlier, I've always valued that.

**[00:07:34]**

We do talk about it here, but I'm not as smart as my words sometimes. And when my brother died, I didn't talk about it.

**[00:07:46]**

I barely even told anyone. And if I did, I would tell them my brother died. End of sentence, no other information.

**[00:07:55]**

The only people who heard even one ounce of the emotions that I was experiencing when it happened were my boyfriend and Reverend Ken.

**[00:08:08]**

And although they both did a great job of holding space and simply breathing with me and just letting me be all of the things that I was, I didn't really feel like I had the right to grieve the way that one normally does, because we had been estranged, because we had never been that close, because, you know, we were related, but we were never really friends there in that moment in the driveway.

**[00:08:45]**

And I didn't really think that it was my grief to experience or to share.

**[00:08:52]**

My parents of course, they'll never be the same. But I mean, I just went on about my life.

**[00:09:02]**

Probably sounds funny to some of you, knowing that I'm a mental health counselor, I literally talk to people professionally and I very deliberately and specifically speak to people about suicide professionally.

**[00:09:19]**

And yet I didn't make space for it in my own life. I didn't talk to anybody and I just went on about my days, basically, that nothing had happened. And as seemingly happens to a lot of people after someone that they love through suicide, I one day found myself thinking about the same thing. He died in January of 2017 and in July, maybe June, I was out for a run one day like I did very frequently back then.

**[00:10:05]**

Not so since the pandemic, and I found myself thinking the way that one normally does, when one is running. Running Through to do list items, trying to think I remember to return that email to that person, thinking about their plans and thinking in a very logical and constructive way about how I would go about taking my own life. It came on the weight of those thoughts do, right? Like you don't really hold on to them. They're just there and then

they're replaced by something else. As you're running or biking or doing any one of those repetitive physical activities where your mind just sort of wanders like that. And I found myself just sort of mentally listing off the steps of what would need to take place, you know, first kind of withdrawing from my significant relationships so that I wouldn't hurt those people too much and then having to figure out what I would do with my remains, because obviously I couldn't have anybody find them. And I found myself sort of realizing what I was thinking and being horrified, as one tends to be when that kind of comes on suddenly and finally, after all of those months, realizing, oh, I'm in trouble.

**[00:11:24]**

I don't know how to deal with this. I am a mess.

**[00:11:30]**

And it took me a long time to dig myself out of that hole. And as you can tell, it did because I'm here. And in some ways I've sort of made it my life purpose to try to prevent suicide in other people. And that's what I do professionally. I talk about it every day. But for myself, it took a lot of really painful work, like it always does.

**[00:12:00]**

I had to speak, I had to share, I had to talk about all of the things that I was feeling that I struggled to put words to and all of the thoughts that I were thinking that didn't necessarily make sense to me and all of the millions of unanswerable questions that were left over with me after my brother's death, she left over with everyone after someone that they love chooses to take their life. You know, I'm not alone in this. I know that many of you have had personal contact with suicide. You may have had someone you love who has unfortunately openly competed.

**[00:12:44]**

I know even just last year in our relatively small community, a whole lot of us lost individuals that lost when a series of students in Downingtown East high school chose to take their lives all in sequence. All of those lives were changed forever because that's what happens.

**[00:13:09]**

I don't have any easy answers because there are none and I don't have any words of advice or encouragement to help all of us who are trying to hold the space for this ocean of sadness that comes after this type of a loss. But I realize for myself, for people that I care about who were able to hold the space for me and for all of the clients that I try to hold space for .

**[00:13:44]**

But that's not actually what is needed. What is needed is one of the things that is the most honest and core of all the things that we do in WellSprings. What is needed is to breathe people who have come back from that dark space, such as myself, have reported countless occasions during which someone that they loved and cared about was brave enough to listen and to simply not offer any words of advice, any encouragement, any platitudes of "it will get better," but to simply hold space for that experience of grief.

**[00:14:35]**

That's what brought me back from that really dark place and what allowed me to start sharing my grief. I really kind of coming full circle where I'm sharing with all of you and making my own virtual altar in preparation for next week. But it works the same for all of us humans.

**[00:15:01]**

As many of you know, for those of you who are on social media, seems to be everybody in the world except for me, last month was Suicide Awareness Day and this past weekend was Worldwide Mental Health Awareness Day.

**[00:15:20]**

Both of these serve to try to create a conversation around these things, which are not often talked about. So kind of doing my part as a mental health practitioner by sharing and talking about these things. There are countless organizations that are devoted towards preventing suicide. I'm sure you know many of them and they even have contact and have done advocacy for some of them. One of my favorites is an organization called To Write Love on Her Arms and for Worldwide Mental Health Awareness Day. They asked some of their advocates all around the world to share some of their experiences, both personally and in terms of sharing what helps, in terms of awareness, in terms of speaking about this thing that is so incredibly difficult in terms of allowing for all of this pain that is not easily solved and that you can't take away what works. And funnily enough, regardless of where they were in the world and what culture they came from and how different those cultures may be, which they are, they all said the same thing.

**[00:16:43]**

Connection. Once again, like so many of those really huge lessons that we try to make space for spiritually, it's all about the power of love.

**[00:16:57]**

And I don't mean that in terms of having people in your life love you, because we all do, even when we don't realize

it, even when we feel alone. But I mean, the experience of love, of simply holding someone's hand while they're crying or physically comforting someone with a hug, they don't know what else to say or simply breathing with someone while they're shaking in pain and anger and unavoidable anguish over all of the difficult things that we still struggle to talk about in this world. It's a connection. It's just been there. And there were a lot of words from a lot of different people. And then and well, as a therapist, we know in Australia someone from Germany, a girl from Canada, someone here in the United States. But interestingly enough, the words that spoke to me the most were from a woman in India. Her name is Kartikeya.

**[00:18:19]**

I don't know her. I've never met her. I haven't seen pictures of her. So I don't know how old she is or what her individual experience has been. But I know that she works with this organization because she, like everyone else, has had personal contact with suicide in some way.

**[00:18:37]**

And she says there's so much space shame to grow in conversations that don't acknowledge the vulnerability that accompanies the human experience, and she can silently cripple the spirit.

**[00:18:58]**

We have to raise our voices loud enough to silence shame. We must strive to be more empathetic because shame cannot thrive where empathy lifts and we can only do this by inviting each other into our stories.

**[00:19:20]**

That's what I've done with you guys today, and that is what I hope so desperately that all of us can be brave enough to do for yourself and for your pain and your difficult emotions across from people who you love, who undoubtedly struggle the same way you do. Because the thing about suicide is it's kind of a universal human experience. All of us are here simply because each day we choose to be.

**[00:19:57]**

And there is no way to ever make that go away. And yes, I have devoted my life to trying to prevent suicide.

**[00:20:09]**

But it is a part of our experience and we have to be able to talk about it. I pray that all of you can hold this peace for yourself if you, yourself or someone who is struggling. I encourage you to reach out to Reverend Lee. She's a pretty good space holder. And I promise you, even if you think no one can understand, we're a lot more similar than we are different and none of us are actually involved. And for all of you who have been personally touched, as I have, and you live with the unanswerable questions every day, I pray that you hold the space for your own experience and are brave enough to talk about it.

**[00:21:01]**

We're going to leave you all today with some words from that same organization that I talked about: To Write Love on Her Arms. It's a little piece of paper that is normally tucked into the back of my phone. I'm currently using to record this and weathered around the edges because it's in there every single day, but behind the plastic. And it says "tomorrow Needs You."

**[00:21:35]**

This world is better because you're in it, it needs your smile and your laughter, your honesty and your heartbreak, your hurdles and your trials, it needs everything you are and everything you will feel. The world needs you. Your friends and family need you tomorrow too. I would ask you all to join me for a moment, and during that practice, which is so core to what we do here at WellSprings. Close Your Eyes. Then Breathe. For all of the memories and emotions and unanswerable questions that may have arisen within you, if you have listened to this today, we welcome you for all of the pain and anger and hopelessness that we all have the capacity to feel.

**[00:22:58]**

We welcome you for all of the endless love it silently and invisibly connects every single one of us. And that cannot be destroyed by death or time or distance. We welcome you. We make space for everything that we are, everything we will be and everything that has already come to make us who we are. We welcome it all. Amen, And may you live in blessing.

**END OF TRANSCRIPT**



