

NAME

Break Your Heart.mp3

DATE

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DURATION

30m 26s

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

The following is a message from Wellspring's congregation.

[00:00:05]

Good morning, Wellspring's, here we are on November 1st, a day when I am guessing maybe that the election just might be on some of our minds today, probably an understatement, right? You know, it's not often that I sit down to think about what I will share on a Sunday and prepared to preach and find myself torn between two equal and opposite messages. On the one hand, this week, I so desperately wanted to give you all a message of it's all going to be OK. I wanted to bring out all of the stops, right. All of the reassurances, all of the hope, all of the hashtag love wins that we have in our faith, all those greatest hits. And I wanted to preach them to you because I love you, Wellspring's, because I love me, because I love our community and all of the communities that we're connected to. And I desperately want it to be OK. But that message of it's all going to be OK, did not feel honest.

[00:01:23]

This week.

[00:01:26]

And I also somehow equally desperately wanted to preach the opposite message. Part of me wanted to preach to you all that it is not going to be OK no matter what happens on Tuesday, I hear some of you talking about that, right, that we should not pretend Tuesday is a magical finish line for more than one reason. For one thing, we don't know that we will know the winner of our presidential election on Tuesday, perhaps some of the down ballot races. We've had unprecedented people voting by mail, voting, voting and alternate ways this year. And we're not sure when the counts are going to come in. So Tuesday is certainly not the finish line. But even once we know the results, there is work to be done in our country. We know that to as much as we might not want to think too hard about it, we know that if we sit back and assume that our leaders will fix it, that this world will somehow take care of itself, that we abdicate our responsibility for being part of building that better world, that we are the ones we've been waiting for. No amount of wishing or hoping or praying alone will fix this mess that we find ourselves in.

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I wanted to preach that in part because it is true, Wellsprings, and it matters, it's important. But a message that just said it's not going to be OK. Didn't feel very kind.

[00:03:11]

So many of us have been waiting for this week, so many of us are very afraid of what might happen depending on how this election goes.

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Some of us find that we are hit with fresh trauma these days, every time we turn on the television, every time we pick up our phones, we watched. The murder of Walter Wallace Jr. in West Philadelphia this week, we watched a Supreme Court change that put some of our marriages at risk, at risk. That threatens our access to health care for many of us, our autonomy over our own bodies. So to tell you that it is not going to be OK and that there is still all this work that we have to do that did not feel very kind or maybe like what we needed to be reminded of this weekend. Of course, as much as I want to give you either of these messages, the truth is I don't know.

[00:04:28]

I don't know what's going to happen this week. I do know that we are all torn apart by it. And if there is one other thing that I know, that might be some good news.

[00:04:48]

It's that are torn apart, ourselves broken hearts.

[00:04:55]

They're good enough. They're good enough for this moment.

[00:05:05]

They're good enough for the work that does need to be done. They're good enough for each other.

[00:05:12]

Our broken hearts are good enough.

[00:05:21]

If you're watching this on Sunday on November 1st. Then you are joining our community on the anniversary of my ordination.

[00:05:33]

The sun is five years to the day since I was ordained by Wellspring's to the ministry.

[00:05:43]

Some of you were there, you might remember it, but it's otherwise known as the day that Wellspring's got about 300 percent more formal. Right. I don't know if you'll ever see Ken and I in a robe in a stole again. You might if we have another ordination someday. One of the things that happens at you, your ordination is something called a charge to the minister, a charge in the same sense, actually, that we use that word in our mission at Wellspring's to be charged full of the charge of the soul. It's a charge that the ordained minister, newly ordained, asks a mentor or a colleague that they respect to share an exhortation and encouragement, words of inspiration that embolden the new minister in their work. And some of you might remember, Ken's, charge to the minister that day because he repeated one key phrase over and over, as most good preachers do, who want people to remember something.

[00:06:46]

He repeated in his charge to me. "Lee, let your ministry break your heart."

[00:06:57]

Let your ministry break your heart.

[00:07:00]

Now, I remember even then being like, OK, that's a little bleak. I mean, right. Aren't we celebrating today? Maybe we could go a little bit more leaning towards, like new beginnings and the promise of this moment and all the great stuff that's ahead for me and my ministry.

[00:07:18]

But since then, over these last five years, especially this year, I got what he was saying more and more.

[00:07:33]

Ken said, let your ministry break your heart, because Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. Like you. Wretch is just another word for what it means to be heartbroken.

[00:07:52]

Wretch is that feeling we have when our hearts break and Amazing Grace will visit us when we admit that we can't do this ministry life, any of it on our own, and we are in need of a power greater than ourselves.

[00:08:16]

This year, so much has broken our hearts.

[00:08:20]

Here at the end of this message series about grief as we have cataloged the heartbreak that weighs on our shoulders. We've come to learn in so many ways.

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That none of us does this alone.

[00:08:40]

Salvation, security, safety, none of it as a matter of personal choice.

[00:08:48]

None of it is private.

[00:08:51]

We can stockpile up our toilet paper, but not the things that we really need for life, for a life worth living, at least for that we need connection.

[00:09:06]

For that, we find we are bound to one another. Back in 2015, five years ago, Ken went on in his charge, he said there are so many who are now threatened with death. The Bible was right about Pharaoh, them and Pharaohs.

[00:09:29]

Now their hearts are hard, their hearts won't break, and so they break others hearts.

[00:09:42]

Your own hard heart can do nothing to overcome Pharaohs, but your heart breaking opens to other hearts broken by Pharaohs and together we can create something different. And better.

[00:10:05]

Smart guy, you know, Ken didn't use these words exactly that day that I'm about to say, but to my ears, one of the things I've reflected on in these last five years is how I have never heard a better description of why organizing and people power actually works, why the people, when gathered together, have a power that is greater than the leaders, even with all of the leaders advantages. Right. It's why at the end of the day, I have hope for democracy and even more than that, hope for community in its simplest form. Because when people's hearts break and open to other hearts broken, then together we can create something different and better. I see it happening in our own community right now. I see it happening when we buy masks for an entire elementary school full of children and donate food and send postcards to voters. I see it happening as we meet and talk and grow together even. On Zoom, you might remember late this summer, after the murder of George Floyd and the demonstrations that followed, I talked about setting up a group, putting a small group together about working against racism, working alongside three members of our congregation who very graciously agreed to help me create and facilitate this group and meeting him and Tony Scullion and Rodney Wittenburg, three people of color in our congregation, three black members of our congregation.

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We have 24 people in that group now we're two months into it.

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There are another 10 people besides that who are taking a group led by Page Buck, another member of our congregation called Waking Up White. In the group that I am leading, along with Jan and Rodney and Tony, people's hearts are certainly breaking as we learn together and read and watch and listen to stories. And from that, we are already talking about new things that we are noticing, things that we didn't see before. We're seeing changes in how we look at and understand our neighbors, we're seeing growth in how we understand that these broken hearts of ours do give us the power to create something better. Earlier this week, I listen to a podcast, one of my favorites, actually, it's a very wide ranging podcast. You might enjoy it if you've never heard of it. It's called Getting Curious. It's hosted by Jonathan Van Ness, who whose name you might recognize. He's one of the stars of Queer Eye on Netflix. And he just interviews people about things he's curious about. This past week, he interviewed a man named George Gale. George is the director of a group called People's Action that I've actually never heard of before. This interview, People's Action, as they say it, build the power of poor and working people in rural, suburban and urban areas. People's action is not a branch of any candidate or political parties operation. They do work, though, to win change through campaigns about issues and through elections.

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They work to win change. That aligns with their goals to support people who are left behind by our economic system. Right. Poor and working people. They also intentionally build multiracial coalitions as they do their work, George Gail actually opens the interview by discussing some of the misconceptions about rural and small town America. One of the places where people's action has really focused on building these multiracial coalitions since the elections. In twenty sixteen, he talks about how rural and small town America is becoming way more diverse than we often think it is. He says right now, 64 percent of our country of America is white, but 78 percent of rural America is white, which is more. But he says that's only 14 percent less diverse than the rest of the country and it is changing. The Latin population in particular, he says, is the fastest growing population in rural America, people coming from Mexico and from Central America, and families that are growing from immigrants of previous generations. And he says the rural south is heavily black, right, most of the country that most of the counties in this country that are majority black are rural southern counties. So the idea that rural America is only one image that we are sold sometimes on our TV screens is a myth. The other thing that George Gail says people forget about rural or small town America is that one in five Americans live there.

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Sixty million people live in rural towns as it's defined by the census. The census calls towns with less than 2500 people. That's 2500. That's very small rural towns. But those towns are here, right? In Chester County. We have places that are that small. We have those rural towns. That's Morgantown, that's Horeybrook, that's Elverson, that's Douglasville. That's places where people in our own Wellspring's community live. People's Action has been testing a strategy in these small towns in a few different states, including Pennsylvania. It's a strategy called deep canvassing. It was actually developed by the LGBTQ rights movement in California. And it's sort of this fascinating marriage between traditional community organizing and traditional campaigning. Since the 2016 election. People's

Action has gone out and essentially had 10000 different conversations on front porches as part of this deep canvassing effort. They knock on people's door and they ask people three questions. What issues do you care about? What do you think the solutions are? And who and what do you think is responsible for the problem? They don't bring information. They ask and they listen, and then they pull people together. They use all of that information to identify people who have similar problems and similar views or at least openness to what the common solutions might be. And then they work with local decision makers all together to try to make those changes. Now, people's action has a perspective. They are a progressive organization.

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George Gale is really clear. He says this isn't a project. Let's go hug a white nationalist. But in that listening process, there is something different that goes on. What ends up happening, he says, for example, is that people are brought together around an issue, let's say, the opioid crisis in their community, or maybe lack of access to a quality hospital in their area. And he says these people end up being people of different backgrounds who did not think they had a similar struggle in common. Those issues, those problems that broke their hearts, it pulled them together and it made them stronger. It built bonds between them. And as they work together, he says, they start to form real relationships that broaden their own perspectives, begin to bridge some of these other gaps that are between them. The other thing that they found, he says, in these deep canvassing conversations, is that big seeds are planted as people talk about the things that break their hearts. Canvassers with people's action are asked to do something that's kind of challenging. It's certainly hard to do with our families, but maybe it's easier to do with strangers on a front porch. They're asked to practice what they call radical empathy. Essentially, the canvasser has to commit to accept where this person they're talking to is starting from. They don't concern themselves, he says, with where somebody is starting in terms of their beliefs on the issue.

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They just listen.

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George Gale says that this is, of course, a great gift that the volunteer gives to practice that kind of radical empathy, but he also says that it makes a difference in the impact of the conversations. In one example, George says that they were trying to assess whether members of a rural community in the United States would be interested in organizing to support their undocumented neighbors. But they didn't lead with that question. The model for these conversations was to start out by asking someone to rate a health care plan, a health care plan that was described to them and somebody he said, you know, might go out. Sounds better than my health care plan. Actually, I'd rate that as an eight. And then the canvasser would ask, OK, great. So how would you feel about undocumented immigrants in your community also having access to that same program? And George Gale said for many people that dropped how they felt that dropped their favorability rating, they might write it down to like a five or four, which is where that radical empathy comes in. Right. That's that person's answer.

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That's where they are.

[00:20:53]

So then the canvasser asked the next question, asking the person if they have some immigration story in their own life, maybe in their family's history or a co-worker, and they ask, do you have a story like that that you could share to help us understand how you formed your perspective on immigration?

[00:21:17]

And the person would share, then the canvasser would share an immigration story that they knew one of their own, talking about how it informed their perspective on the issue.

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And then the final set of questions, the canvasser would ask the person to share a story about a time that they needed help and again, the canvasser would do the same, that end with maybe a little bit of follow up about whether the person is now open to being contacted again to work on this issue.

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And that's it. Usually 15, 20 minute conversations.

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George Gale said something opens up in these conversations that isn't just political. It's actually spiritual. He says it creates a space where people have these light bulb moments where they realize that they might need to reexamine something. These conversations are not valueless. They're not about putting things on equal footing in terms of our perspectives or our views, but they do pull us back from these same well-worn arguments that we are so sick of, about party and politics, about which news station you watch or who you support.

[00:22:45]

And they pull us back into the actual human lives beneath all of that. A genuine conversation that says, I want to understand the struggles you're up against and how you've come to your worldview, and I want you to understand

the struggles I'm up against and how I have been shaped and come to my views.

[00:23:11]

George Gale says that, believe it or not, some of these conversations, 20 minute conversations with a stranger, actually do change people's views when they are surveyed afterwards. But whether or not they change their views, all of the conversations, he says, plant a seed, that the group then returns to water and tend and harvest as they follow up and invite folks back into some ongoing work for local change. One conversation in particular, he said, really sticks with him, this one man that they were talking to during that specific campaign who realized after he was asked that question about an immigration story and stood there kind of quiet and slack jawed for a little while, he said to the canvasser, you know what, I don't really have a story.

[00:24:03]

I'm realizing everything I know about immigrants. I know from TV. I don't know any immigrants.

[00:24:14]

That man was open to learning more about the work that they were going to do in his community simply because he realized what he didn't know.

[00:24:25]

The data from that campaign showed that deep canvassing increased support for undocumented immigrants by 20 percent in those communities where they spoke to people.

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Some days and some weeks. We just want to win.

[00:24:47]

Some days are the day that the vote is called and counted, some days are the day to make a decision and it's time for many of us.

[00:24:58]

It's past time.

[00:25:01]

We want the victory because we want the protections and the safety that has been denied to us for so long. And I hope always that the choices our country and our leadership makes will be the choices that honor all of our lives, the choices that put people and planet ahead of property or profit, the choices that reflect the truth, that we know that all people are equally beloved on this earth.

[00:25:37]

I want those values to win. That is what my UU values teach me about who to vote for and about how to act.

[00:25:52]

I can't promise you that that will happen on Tuesday or Wednesday or Thursday.

[00:26:01]

I can't promise you that that will happen the next time any of your leaders or your boss or your school board or your insurance company or your justice system makes a decision.

[00:26:12]

God, I wish I could.

[00:26:17]

But that's why we make this our practice. To stay with it. To stick with our faith and our calling. To let this world break our hearts. A hard heart cannot connect to the millions of other broken hearts that are out there.

[00:26:45]

A hard heart cannot connect to the broken hearts that are calling out for things to be different than they are.

[00:26:55]

So that is the good news I have for today.

[00:27:00]

That our broken hearts are not only enough, they are exactly right.

[00:27:08]

You're exactly right for this moment.

[00:27:13]

Broken hearts are at the root and the ground of every social movement in this world every time, but things have changed. It has been born of the struggle and the suffering of hearts that keep on breaking until it finally becomes

too much. And the energy released by all of those broken hearts comes together. The heartbroken people in this world are the ones who say, enough, I can't take it anymore, no more.

[00:27:45]

So may we join that call?

[00:27:49]

May we let our hearts break and may our broken hearts lead us to each other so that we can become stronger in the places where our brokenness binds us together? Growing our circle of love.

[00:28:07]

Until someday, just as are you, you ancestors are ancestors in this faith dreamed.

[00:28:15]

Someday, no one will be left out.

[00:28:21]

Amen. And may you live in Blessing

[00:28:27]

Please join me for a moment of prayer.

[00:28:37]

God of our hearts.

[00:28:47]

The strength that you bring into this world, the joy. Love.

[00:28:57]

It is greater than anything we see counted up in votes.

[00:29:04]

It is greater than any law that humans make.

[00:29:12]

That love that we can all tap into, that no one can take away from us. May that be the loudest voice in our ear this week? May that be the most present coverage we see?

[00:29:30]

May we not forget that it is OK to let this world break our hearts?

[00:29:38]

Winner or loser, when things are going well and when they are falling apart.

[00:29:46]

May we remember that hearts broken open or broken open to you? To the larger love that cannot be defeated.

[00:29:58]

We pray your presence with us through the events of the week to come and all the days to follow. For these prayers, I've spoken out loud and for the prayers each of the people with us this morning is holding in their heart, we say amen.

[00:30:14]

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END OF TRANSCRIPT



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