

**NAME**

Can't Unsee Audio.mp3

**DATE**

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**DURATION**

21m 38s

**START OF TRANSCRIPT****[00:00:02]**

One of my colleagues, the Reverend Gretchen Hailie, lives in Colorado. I'm good friends, actually, with her co minister. So we tend as a result to follow the goings on in each of our congregations. And a few weeks back, she sent out a letter that caught my eye. She was talking in the letter about all of the things that we have seen this year that we just can't unsee. I know we've probably heard that shorthand before, right, that phenomenon of I can't unsee that sometimes it's funny, right? It's used in humorous ways online, something that shifts our perspective that's so unexpected that it almost feels like a welcome relief. It breaks up the monotony. Right. Take this, for example. This is an image I saw circulating on the Internet just before Christmas, a beautiful centuries old rendering of the Madonna and child in ornate metal work with a blue scarf on her head. And the caption, Once you see Cookie Monster, you can't unsee it. It's true. I can't see Cookie Monster in that photo anymore. So Gretchen says that as her two kids who are budding teenagers now have gotten older, she says this lesson of remembering what you can't unsee has had some practical applications. You see, Gretchen is trying to accept that her kids are going to be exposed to more and more things that she can't control. Especially actually on the Internet. And she said that for her and her wife, instead of trying to lock down the kids devices entirely, they decided to take the approach of reminding them before they click on the link or open a video or dig deep into somebody's Tick-Tock account. They remind the kids to ask themselves, is this really something you want to see?

**[00:02:15]**

Because once you see it. You can't unsee it. It's working. She says she sees them developing their good judgment, but every so often she says they will make a choice they regret.

**[00:02:34]**

And after they watch or read something, they'll say, she says to me, oh, no, mom, no, I can't unsee it. In that moment, she says, I feel that strange thing that a lot of parents probably know both and kind of emotion, a twinge of parental pride that I was right. They are learning something from me after all.

**[00:02:57]**

But also, she says, a deep sympathy. She doesn't want her children to know some of the harder things in this world. She doesn't want anyone to know them. Gretchen says lately there have been many, many things that I wish that I could unsee. So I understand. In our Message series at Wellspring's this holiday season that I am bringing to a close this morning. We've talked about the inevitability of our natural experience and emergence of fear. We've talked about ways to work with it instead of being consumed by it.

**[00:03:45]**

We've talked about the gifts of what fear can teach and signal to us and the reality that while we have often been taught to fear it, the truth is things grow and form at their earliest, but and spark within darkness.

**[00:04:05]**

We've talked about how to be afraid. And in these times, we've got lots of opportunities to practice. According to Gretchen, the challenge in times like these overwhelming times, anxious times. Is not for her to try to unfollow the painful or difficult realities around us.

**[00:04:32]**

Instead, she said, I think times like these ask us to build habits and develop the inner fortitude to manage anxiety and stress that arise when we do stay present honestly with reality, heartbreaking, overwhelming, breathtakingly beautiful, our generous, surprising, still unfolding reality.

**[00:05:00]**

Sounds like Gretchen and Wellspring's are on the same page here.

**[00:05:07]**

You know, sometimes after we face our fears and our discomfort, even when what we face is unexpected or even disturbing to our peace, sometimes what we can't unsee ends up being good for us.

**[00:05:23]**

And even more importantly, maybe it ends up being good, not just for us. But for people beyond ourselves.

**[00:05:33]**

Like many of you, I've spent even more time in front of screens in twenty twenty than I usually do, that that little iPhone data point that pops up at the end of the week telling you how many hours a day you spent on screen as kind of an attack these days. And spending more time on screen certainly has its drawbacks. But I've also dug a bit deeper into some movies and television shows that are maybe a little bit outside my usual wheelhouse.

**[00:05:59]**

And I might not have taken the time to watch all the way through. And because of that, I've actually seen and learned from some really incredible stories. One of my favorite sort of mini binge watchers of 20/20 was the reality series we are here on HBO. You might have heard of it. It follows three alumni, you might call them, of a different reality show, Rupal, Drag Race, Shangela, Wadleigh, Yuriko Harra and Bob the Drag Queen. And the team of the three of them travels to a different small town in the United States. In each episode. They don't go to make anybody over. They don't go to offer commentary even really on the place where they're going. They just go to put on a drag show for one night only.

**[00:06:51]**

And in the process of assembling the show, they invite residents of the town to be in the drag show with them. They always invite a mix of people, some straight folks, some trans folks, some cis gender folks, some queer folks, some parents of queer folks, some siblings of queer folks. Sometimes the town even has its own amateur drag scene, and they'll include a couple of queens in the show.

**[00:07:19]**

I watched every episode and I really loved this show because it is different.

**[00:07:25]**

It's not a competition like drag races. It's not a makeover show like Queer Eye on Netflix, which it's often compared to. Yeah, we do get to see the drag transformations of the folks who perform. So there's a bit of that before and after fun that it's still a joy to see. But at the end of the night, the wheels come off and the makeup is all wiped away and what remains the hosts of the show hope is that the town now knows queer people are here in our community, not often a corner, not on the margins, but center stage and visible and talented and joy filled and fully hear.

**[00:08:13]**

The hosts create an experience in the town so that something and someone new can be seen.

**[00:08:24]**

And we know that once you see something, even if you try hard, you can never really unsee it.

**[00:08:38]**

We know that fear can be one of the most stubborn emotions. And it's easy to get stuck in because it's rooted in our real desire for protection and safety and because there are real dangers out there in the world. We can get stuck in fear because we build walls and gates and fortresses against those dangers and then one day realize that even if those fortresses might be effective, we are now equally trapped inside of them.

**[00:09:11]**

Fear can keep us from living our vision of the world as we hope for it to be. Our vision of a world made whole.

**[00:09:22]**

And so to me, that's ultimately why it's worth it at all, to work at living and moving with our fear and not let it stand in the way of what we dream and believe might be possible. For me, our message series this fall was inspired in large part by one of my absolute favorite quotes from the writer and poet Audre Lord, I think I printed this out and hung it over my desk for the first time in college.

**[00:09:52]**

It reads, When I dare to be powerful, to use my strength in the service of my vision. Then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid.

**[00:10:09]**

When I dared to be powerful, when I dare to use my strength in the service of my vision.

**[00:10:17]**

Then it becomes less and less important.

**[00:10:21]**

Whether I am afraid.

**[00:10:27]**

Fear is real. We can't pretend it away, and so many of us are coping with helplessness and fear and dissatisfaction with what is around us right now.

**[00:10:40]**

But learning how to be afraid doesn't just benefit ourselves, what we do now with our fears shapes our world for those who come after us and for those who are already here.

**[00:10:58]**

It's the end of December, twenty twenty, we made it and we're moving through the last few days of this holy season on the Christian calendar as well, the 12 days of Christmas. And next Wednesday with the Epiphany, it's the day on the Christian calendar that commemorates recognition of the newborn Jesus as the savior, as the prophesied messiah by the three visiting kings after their long journey to Bethlehem. So it's a time of hope in the Christian liturgical calendar, but it's also a time of motion towards that future that we hope for.

**[00:11:39]**

The Christian minister and spiritual director and Dean leads retreats and prayer groups at a place called the Shalom Institute for Spiritual Formation. It's one of the best known retreat centers, actually, for Christians who are looking for an ecumenical or progressive environment to grow their spirit. She published a reflection recently about a story about the costs and rewards of moving through our fear.

**[00:12:05]**

This year you see four and she says in 2020, she noticed this disturbingly steady sense of being stuck in time. This constant feeling, she said, of waiting for change, of waiting for something to change, waiting for something in the circumstances around her to be different in order for her to become unstuck.

**[00:12:30]**

It's a form of feeling trapped, maybe you can relate.

**[00:12:36]**

I was waiting for any number of things to happen, she said before I took initiative and I've noticed this in so many others, she says that I have actually come to accept it as part of this year, part of this strange time. That was she said, until the election season came around.

**[00:12:58]**

And didn't think much of it, she had applied to receive her ballot in the mail like so many of us this year, and when it came, she tore open the envelope and she started to fill it out. And she felt something break open, she said. This tiny action is just coloring in a little bubble on paper and affixing the stamp, it almost felt like breaching a dam. The walk to the mailbox, she said, was so surprisingly exhilarating. And she realized. Oh, my God. I have put on hold, she said, for so much of this year, all of my natural impulse toward doing something. Towards acting and showing up, I had been so focused on restrictions and what I couldn't do that I hadn't felt I'd have thought about it, but I hadn't felt that freedom of enthusiasm for what I could do for what was important for me to do.

**[00:14:02]**

For a long time.

**[00:14:07]**

And as a Christian teacher and said this reminded her immediately of a story that Jesus tells in Matthew 25. A story about a landowner who gives out differently sized portions of his property to three of his workers in proportion to their abilities to essentially see what they can do with the land, a gift of potential. And after a long time, the land owner returns and the accounting shows that the two who were given the most land showed big, great, beautiful results.

**[00:14:45]**

And they were found trustworthy. The gospel says, and were given even more. But the one who was given the leased land said he had been afraid. He had buried it and did nothing with his gift. And it had produced nothing.

**[00:15:08]**

And not only was he not given more, his gift was taken away. And Dean says, damn, that's harsh, right? Yet the more I reflect on the story, she said, I realized it was because not of the man's lack of ability, but of his lack of faith, that he didn't even try to work with what he'd been given. His own potential, she said, was stuck. And he was so focused on comparison and inadequacy and fear.

**[00:15:44]**

That this Graceville gift did not produce anything for him or for the world. Remembering that story that Jesus told me today and look at this year differently once more.

**[00:16:01]**

She realized, she said, I have done a lot despite the limitations and the inadequacy of all this, I haven't been so stuck as that man with the land. I have learned new things she said about how to honor my call in the land of Zoom's still offering retreats and seminars. But I realized, she said, that in some areas I have been holding back.

**[00:16:23]**

And until that surge of energy that came from voting, I didn't realize the extent of my reluctance, she said, to believe I had any real power to change the outcomes and the circumstances that came down on us this year or to work towards a vision of what could be made better, even if the ideal I hoped for was out of reach.

**[00:16:51]**

I wonder this year or myself. And maybe some of you do, too. Do we ever hold back? Because we're unsatisfied with what we have to work with. Do we ever hold back because we're not satisfied with what we have been given? Do we ever bury our gifts out of fear or frustration comparison? Or inadequacy. And if we do, what possibilities are not unfolding? What features will we not see? Because we hold back on the gifts that we have been given.

**[00:17:46]**

So many of us have had our eyes opened in new ways this year.

**[00:17:52]**

To the realities of ongoing racism. To the fragility. Of our nation's democracy. To the sheer brutality of our economic system. The inadequacy of our safety nets for health care and housing and food, the inadequacy of all the ways the systems we have put in place to take care of our neighbors. And ourselves. What will we do with all that we can no longer unsee?

**[00:18:36]**

I think many of the events in our lives that change us forever also end up being things that save us. It's the great mystery to me of redemption. That even out of evil and heartbreak. Things that are healing and restoring and good.

**[00:19:01]**

I think our new awareness of the world around us, the things that we can't unsee. They change our lives for sure.

**[00:19:10]**

But they can change lives beyond our own. And that is good. And for that, despite it all, as we turn to this new year and all the possibilities we will create within it, I find I am exceedingly grateful. From what we have. And may you all live in Blessing? Take a moment if you would like to, to close your eyes. If you let your shoulders fall your head. And join me in the spirit of prayer.

**[00:19:58]**

God of our own hearts.

**[00:20:03]**

Force in this life who was here before us and will be here long after we are gone. Who gave us this life to live? May we not forget the gift of sight? And may we not take it for granted if we have an.

**[00:20:28]**

May we not take for granted the knowledge and the new perspective that we have gained this year?

**[00:20:38]**

Help us remember to trust what is still unfolding before us.

**[00:20:46]**

To know that if we have been paying any attention at all this year, that this year will have changed us and is probably still changing us for good.

**[00:21:00]**

And what we do with what we now know and feel and have lived, while the circumstances may not be up to us, what we do with that experience and that knowledge is always up to us in the end.

**[00:21:18]**

May we feel that power and may we use it for good?

**[00:21:26]**

For all the prayers I've spoken out loud and for the prayers that each person with us this morning is holding silently on our hearts.

**[00:21:36]**

We say Amen.



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