

NAME

Dead To Me - Sunday Service for July 19th, 2020.mp3

DATE

July 21, 2020

DURATION

24m 3s

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

The following is a message from Wellspring's congregation.

[00:00:05]

Good morning, Wellsprings. Good to be with you again.

[00:00:10]

Some of you might find what I'm going to say odd or maybe for some of you it makes complete sense. You'll see in just a second. Five times a day, I get a notification on my phone with these words.

[00:00:25]

Don't forget, you're going to die.

[00:00:29]

Open up for a quote.

[00:00:33]

It takes me to is an app on my phone that I intentionally downloaded, called kind of humorously, I guess, depending upon your definition of humor.

[00:00:42]

We Croak. And it is intended.

[00:00:46]

To be an aide, a guide towards remembering that we are all mortal, it's a core part of my spiritual practice, remembering that myself, all the people I love and everyone everywhere, we are all mortal.

[00:01:02]

This is critically important to me to remember this, not to be weird or odd or to be obsessive or to be morbid.

[00:01:14]

It's just necessary for me to remember remember, part of what my essence is as a human being, to remember as the great old Unitarian teacher or minister William Ellery Channing said, I am a living member of the great family of all souls and part of being a family member of All Souls for me is remembering that for someone at some place, at some time, all the time, somewhere and everywhere.

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Death is interrupting someone's life. And in choosing to remember that what I find within myself is that I pay more attention to this life, my life and hopefully the lives around me, and that's something within opens.

[00:02:06]

It is a core part of my spiritual practice, and that's why I get these interrupting notifications five times a day. Today's SpiritFlix Message. Spirit flicks this summer series that we do about the stories on our screens that we watch and the messages, the wisdom within those stories. It is appropriately entitled, from what I've been talking about, dead to me. It is a Netflix show that has had two seasons so far, and I think there's going to be one more season at some point after covered. And this shows really about what happens when death interrupts. But the invitation is kind of declined over and over and over again. Yet death is the ultimate interruption, keeps insisting until someone would pay attention. The two main characters of dead to me are Jen and Judy, who kind of represents two polar personality type opposites. Jen, who is kind of verbally all sharp elbows and very acerbically

lacerating wit and drops f bombs like like that like that good house on Halloween that has all the excellent candy and just generally gives it generously gives it out. That's kind of what Jen is like with her curse words. And then there's Judy, who first comes across as this sweet, almost innocent, almost flower child like person.

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And they meet fittingly again, first scene in a grief group, a grief support group. See, Jen is there because her husband has died suddenly, unexpectedly, awfully. He was killed in a hit and run accident. And Judy is there for her own reasons, although as we will come to understand very shortly, she is not everything that she seems to be. And Jen and Judy befriend each other. Jen, who appears very strong, and Judy, who appears very vulnerable.

[00:04:06]

They find themselves becoming friends.

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And part of this show, which is very much centered on the experience of these two women. It is about other aspects of their lives. Throughout this throughout these throughout these two seasons, we see them dealing with all varieties of sexism. And Jen being a single mom, trying to raise two kids. And both of them dealing with various varieties of abusive and narcissistic men in their lives. And one of things I like about the show is it doesn't make Jen and Judy seem at all like victims. It doesn't make them even like innocence. They make choices sometimes. Why? Sometimes skillful, sometimes funny, and very often not wise at all. And that kind of perpetuates the cycles of distrust or dis ease that they find themselves in. And what we come to know at the end of the very first episode is, Judy, is not what she seems to be. She has actually kind of stalked Jen to that grief group because of her own guilty conscience, because she is actually partially responsible with her gaslighting, manipulative, narcissistic on again, off again ex husband.

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She's actually partially responsible for the death of Jen's husband.

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The show has all kinds of secrets and twists and turns, and it's wickedly funny at times, it is very much comedy. It's a very sarcastic comedy and a sharp comedy. And it has these shifts and tones from kind of this sometimes side splitting laughs or at least I've found it that way to grief and loss and deep sadness and despair. And some folks have have found that that's actually something they criticize the show for. But for me, I actually think it's one of the things I love about the show, because this is television.

[00:06:09]

But these two folks lives.

[00:06:13]

It's about grief, the grief that they keep on kind of delaying or denying or putting off or thinking they can somehow manage by ignoring it.

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But why?

[00:06:26]

I like the shifts in tones of this show.

[00:06:33]

Is that for those of us who have lived through life altering griefs? And I'm certainly one of them and I imagine many of you have had that experience as well, too. I mean, the the person who kind of started the whole field on death and dying, Elizabeth Kubler Ross, and she's misquoted all the time. She said, you know, these five stages of grieving, they're not supposed to be linear. Where it all ends up in acceptance is not linear at all. It can be wild shifts in mood and tone and feelings, sometimes one moment to the next. And that's reflected in dead to me. And it's one of the things I think they get so through get so true about complicated grief.

[00:07:12]

They push it off and there's hiding and lying and secrecy. And I got the sense that an image came to me.

[00:07:21]

I was watching the show over its two seasons that this show is set in an affluent community south of Los Angeles. I mean, a place where it's hot most of the time. And it always appears that the sun is shining in this community. I think it's Laguna Beach. And I got the sense that this show is about a building's snowball of unacknowledged grief in Southern California. One of the ways that they convey this is that excessive use of alcohol and and drugs increasingly take center stage. And Jen and Judy's life reminds me as someone in recovery from a substance use disorder and in the work that I do professionally and working in drug and alcohol and substance use disorder treatment is that in early recovery, which can be so painful not just from addiction, but also from grief or from anything for that matter, early recovery. Sometimes our greatest win is simply not causing any more losses.

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And then just starting to dig ourselves out.

[00:08:31]

I think of this image of a snowball building and building and building through denial and not facing what is so self evidently true. I think of our own snowball.

[00:08:41]

This July, this warm season, this very hot season of the Covid cases.

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And it's not just due to increased testing. Yes, we know more of the cases now, but the deaths, especially in the last few weeks, are also rapidly starting to increase as well. All because some places felt this need to rush to get back to normal and in wanting to rush to get back to normal. The perpetuation of the cycles of loss, of death, of infection by opening up too quickly, it's all too predictable and sadly all too human in so many ways that it's just perpetuated the harm of this virus.

[00:09:26]

I've gone snorkeling, but I've never gone scuba diving. But I know some people who are pretty good scuba divers and one of the things you might know about scuba diving is that as you pass through either on your way up or your way down, especially on your way up, when you want to get back to the surface as you pass through these atmospheric levels of pressure, if you go up too quickly, you will get what are called the bends, that literally the pressure will collapse in on your lungs and you may have an embolism that may threaten your life. To me, it's like collectively we've got a huge experience, terrible and tragic of the bends.

[00:10:05]

We've just gone to unwisely, too quickly with not enough humility in the face of this virus. And we're paying for it.

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I've been off social media and I really like social media, recognizes risks and sometimes it doesn't have the best effect on my mental health. And so from time to time, especially when I'm really busy, I've been really busy in my three jobs this past week. I like to step back from it. One of the things I noticed as my kind of thoughts settle down a little bit more as I become so aware of my own grief and of the collective grief and how that grief is not falling equally across the society, especially during this time when many of us with white skin are waking up to the systemic nature of oppression in our country. And one of the ways that that systemic oppression is showing itself is that this virus is so disproportionate in its catastrophic effects in black and brown communities versus white communities. And that's part of enlarging the heart. That's simply saying, well, it's not happening to me or it's not happening near me. That fails the test of universalism, opening the heart to the wider love that includes us all. Recognize that in so many of us have said, and I firmly believe there aren't really too many good choices.

[00:11:23]

Some of the best wins we can have right now is simply about harm reduction. For a while, at least, in letting that be good enough of simply not causing more losses. I'm also aware that I'm not sure any one ever got rich trying to convince Americans of the virtues of tragedy and the fact that sometimes there are simply no good options, there are simply less bad options. I would hope that if we could embrace this space of the tragic of the no perfect or not even any good options that we might have taken or still could take some different decisions like they've done in other countries where they simply paid the most vulnerable economic vulnerably people to stay home to make sure they would not fall into destitution. And yes, that would mean that some of us would not be able to enrich ourselves in the ways that some of us, or least a few of us in this country have gotten used to accumulating wealth.

[00:12:25]

I wish we would balance our values differently collectively right now.

[00:12:31]

I'm not sure anyone ever got rich trying to sell Americans on the virtues of tragedy. But damn, there are plenty of people trying to sell other stuff snake oil, gas lighters and liars and charlatan charlatans and bamboo's liars.

[00:12:51]

They seem to sometimes make an awful lot of money doing it.

[00:12:55]

This past week, Chuck Woolery. Maybe you remember him? I grew up with him as a talk. As a talk show. Excuse me. Game show host. And for some reason, he is seen as an authority on the virus. He just tweeted less than a week ago. I think he said they're all liars or they're all lying. And he accused the media and the CDC and most doctors, he said, and a bunch of other people as well, too.

[00:13:20]

They're all lying. Virus isn't you know that much of a threat. And then predictably, just a couple of days ago, his son

came down with the virus and he did acknowledge it. The virus is real. And then he pulled down his social media presence.

[00:13:42]

Now, let me say, I've got a human mind like everyone else. Schadenfreude, it lives in here, but I don't try to feed it.

[00:13:49]

I take no chosen pleasure of the fact that his son's life has now been impacted by this terrible virus.

[00:14:01]

Things I believe as a Unitarian Universalist especially as a universalist, that viruses don't have any theology. I've lived through the age of AIDS before. There were the effective treatments and I lost friends to that dreaded disease, to that other pandemic during our lifetime. And I remember the viciousness and the cruelty of those who had a theology that would say this is God's divine judgment upon those lives.

[00:14:29]

I will not do the same thing now in reverse simply because I profoundly disagree with someone. It is a failure of my own universalism were I to do so of a love that truly does embrace us all. Rather, I think this is a time for all of us in our tradition, especially within Wellspring's. I thought of certain names who aren't even by name Unitarian Universalist, but had been so important to the life of this congregation. John Spong Ticht Naht Han.. Bernard Brown, Glennon Doyle, these teachers who don't offer us simple or easy answers, but instead encourage us in so many different ways to open ourselves to the uncertainty of life, to its vulnerability to open in such a way that we grow our hearts through compassion, especially in those times when we don't have easy answers so that we make that love that is always waiting for us, more broad, more bold and more expansive.

[00:15:33]

There is a grief counselor. Named Claire Bidwell Smith.

[00:15:39]

She said, you know, during this time of covered, we lost so many of our usual grieving rituals. But the thing is that grief, that grief is there and it's waiting for us. It is waiting for us eventually to experience.

[00:15:52]

And I think as I mentioned her just a moment ago, Glennon Doyle, when she says we can do hard things and grieving is one of those hard things, but we have to do it. We have to engage in it.

[00:16:06]

And this is one of the things I love the most about Dead to Me about the show is that that grief group that Jen and Judy, at least Judy, under false pretenses, meets Jen in they return to it later on in the second season. And Jen, who's sharp angles, are starting to soften a little bit. She goes back to the grief group, was kind of played for jokes in the beginning, the show this time not so much. And she opens up to a complex, complicated grief that she has been carrying for decades now, the death of her mother at age 19 when she was 19. And she said, my mom was sick my entire life. And I just I got tired of being her being sick. And I kind of wanted it to get over. But then once her body couldn't fight the cancer anymore, I got angry at her for not.

[00:16:55]

Being able to fight it anymore and you could feel how stuck Jen is in this place of this complicated grief for so long and the stuck in it starts to move, not by solving it, not by fixing it, not by having easy answers, but by her tears.

[00:17:13]

By the movement of the most elemental way that we express our compassion for ourselves and for each other. And the people in the grief group, they witness.

[00:17:25]

It's the most powerful thing that happens in our grief, we don't solve it. We don't fix it. We heal it. And very often when we can heal it, we can do exactly what I think. Jesus, as a master psychologist, said when he said, blessed are those are those who mourn for they will be comforted.

[00:17:46]

I think of this power of witness. Of what is hard, it is painful of what breaks the heart. And of what I hope we would leave more space for.

[00:18:00]

To be able to do right now. As a way of not perpetuating the harms. I think of the beautiful poem. Keeping Quiet by Pablo Neruda. Which I want to share with you right now.

[00:18:15]

Now we will count to 12 and we will all keep still for once on the face of the Earth.

[00:18:22]

Let's not speak in any language. Let's stop for a second and not move our arms so much. It would be an exotic moment. Without rush, without engines, we would all be together in a sudden, strange moment strangeness. Fishermen in the cold sea would not harm whales and the man gathering salt would not look at his hurt hands. Those who prepare green wars, wars with gas, wars with fire victories, with no survivors would put on clean clothes and walk about with their siblings in the shade, doing nothing.

[00:18:54]

What I want should not be confused with total inactivity. Life is what it is about. If we were not so single minded about keeping our lives moving and for once could do nothing. Perhaps a huge silence might interrupt this sadness of never understanding ourselves and threatening ourselves with death.

[00:19:20]

Now all count up to twelve. And you keep quiet and I will go.

[00:19:30]

I want to read one of those stanzas again. If we were not so single minded about keeping our lives moving and for once could do nothing. Perhaps a huge silence. Might interrupt this sadness. Never understanding ourselves.

[00:19:52]

And of threatening ourselves with death. So many of us are threatened with death right now. And it does not have to be this way.

[00:20:05]

We could make different choices to become more adaptive, more compassionate, more kind, more capable of doing the hard things. In and with our grief. Not pushing it off and recognizing that eventually it comes knocking on our doors. Well.

[00:20:26]

Want to leave you with the final image from the early days of.

[00:20:32]

The pandemic is just as we were kind of getting our sea legs, recognizing what we were dealing with and this happened here in Philadelphia, in Rittenhouse Square. Rittenhouse Square was flour bombed.

[00:20:49]

By vendors.

[00:20:52]

Who didn't know what to do with the flowers from all the canceled events, the weddings and parties and celebrations and bar mitzvahs and all the events that people order flowers for.

[00:21:04]

And these flowers are just gonna go to waste.

[00:21:08]

Instead, what these vendors did, they took them out. Here's an image of it.

[00:21:15]

He took them out and they decorated his open public space.

[00:21:20]

Rittenhouse Square and people gathered over many days. To look at these flowers. To witness them.

[00:21:33]

And to be together in the face of this new loss that we were just becoming familiar with. When we allow ourselves to pivot in this way and say, yes, life is not what we would have wished. Right now. And we don't keep insisting that we need to go back to normal. We can adapt.

[00:21:55]

We can share wonder and beauty and love with each other in repurposed and unexpected ways. We recognize that death will at one point or another. And my hope is that it's a long time in the future for all of us that death will interrupt our lives. And by accepting its invitation now in our midst, may we all be returned to life much more fully, much more kindly and much more lovingly.

[00:22:28]

Amen. And may you live in blessing.

[00:22:34]

Would you pray with me join your heart, with mine right now in prayer? Deep and abiding spirits of love. Very simple prayer.

[00:22:52]

Prayer is confession today. This is hard. It is difficult to watch the death. And the sadness and the grief.

[00:23:08]

So simply, this is what I ask. It's here. Maybe we give it space. In giving it space, may we contribute in time to come to there being less loss?

[00:23:25]

And less death and less grief.

[00:23:31]

It is said that hurt people, hurt people, but the opposite is also true to your spirit of love. That healing people help to heal people.

[00:23:43]

May we be accounted? Among the healing ones today. Amen.

[00:23:51]

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END OF TRANSCRIPT



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