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Lectio Divina Podcast.mp3

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

The following is a message from Wellspring's congregation.

[00:00:06]

Hello, and.

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Thank you for inviting me to be among you, Wellspring's friends, it is a gift to be with you this day for this series on spiritual practices, and I know it was sent to you in your written communication, but I'll go ahead and introduce myself. I am Michael Bush. I serve as the senior minister of the Cases Adobes Congregation of the United Church of Christ in Tucson, Arizona. But I haven't always been here for almost eight years I served at the United Church of Christ in Valley Forge in the suburbs of Philadelphia, and that is where I have the great pleasure of meeting and befriending your amazing pastors, Lee and Ken, and also had the opportunity at different points and in different ways to meet and get to know some of you. WellSpringers So it is good to be connected in this way in this strange pandemic time, but it does afford this great opportunity to be together like we couldn't before, wouldn't have thought to be together before. And I am really thankful for being entrusted to share with you a message. I know that Lee and Ken are amazing pastors and they love you deeply and so they are not going to let just anyone do this. So my prayer is that I would honor this trust. I was invited to speak with you this day to the spiritual practice of Lectio Divina, which is Latin for divine reading. Traditionally, this has been a practice centered in a sacred text in the Christian tradition, that would be the Bible.

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Other traditions, of course, have their own texts that are considered sacred, whether the Koran or for some of the bhagavad gita, for example. Well, what comes to your mind when you hear the phrase sacred text? Are there texts or stories that you experience as ones where the divine the spirit charges full your soul? You all are part of a community faith community that does not prescribe or claim one text, which brings forth a great deal of freedom. Of course it could in terms of this particular spiritual practice, also create a quandary. If you wish to engage Lectio Divina. What do you use as a resource? What is a sacred text for Unitarian Universalist? I playfully suggested in conversation with Ken that the canon might include the poetry of Mary Oliver. We'll come back to her, I recognize and honor that for some of us, the idea of sacred text or scripture can be fraught. It can be even a trigger. Some of us were on the receiving end of weaponized biblical or other religious verses. Or writings, and if that was the case, we may not wish to engage with those kind of texts at all, and that's OK. I'm sorry for that experience. And you do. Even if you want to engage, Lectio Divina Devine reading it can be using something that's not part of any religious tradition or sacred canon of a particular tradition.

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So there's something in writing that speaks to your soul and use that it really can be a Mary Oliver poem. Or maybe it's the lyrics to something from Hamilton or a song by the Mountain Goats.

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At the same time, I recognize some of you may wish to use a text that has spoken to communities over the centuries, so you want to use maybe something from the Bible for this practice, even as you authentically struggle with ways that you might have been taught to see or interpret books from sacred canons or texts. Although I am a pastor of a Christian church and the stories, poems and prophets of the collection of books called the Bible are part of our worship and study in my tradition. I certainly recognize the great harm has been done to folks, especially the most vulnerable, using what Phyllis Tribble calls texts of terror. And so I also invite those of you willing to use are wanting for some reason or any reason to use sacred texts from a religious tradition like Christianity or Judaism. That you can still do so, we just might have to intentionally let go of what I call biblical baggage given to us. For example, and I've run into this quite a bit, I'm in a Christian tradition, but it's the United Church of Christ, which is a non credal Christian tradition. So we don't require people to have particular beliefs or say, oh, I agree to this

before they become part of our church. That might sound familiar to you. United Church of Christ UCC. Some people joke stands for Unitarians considering Christ. So we often have people who are seeking refuge from religious traditions that were abusive or diminishing or oppressive. And so I have seen that. And then how do folks who are coming from that place, if they want to engage these stories and traditions, how did they do so authentically? How can we let go of some of that baggage? I remember in one church there was a woman who joined before I ever got there.

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Her name was Trish. And Trish joined the church because the church she'd been part of all her life had kicked her out, she said. This denomination, it was part of a denomination, was more conservative, theologically, took the Bible in a way that's called literal, and in that church, Trish had gotten divorced. It didn't matter to that church that her divorce came of a place where her husband had been abusive to her and the children. And the best, safest, clearest thing to do was to no longer be with him. But that church took biblical verses and said, oh, no, divorce is breaking the rules of God, and therefore you cannot be in full fellowship with this church tradition. And so Trish though still believed that there was God believe there was something to spiritual practice and journey and community, and so she found a church that looked at those biblical verses differently. And sometimes what we want to do is when those verses have been weaponized, just delete them, but it can be helpful to understand them in their own context, better so that we might hear, as we say in my tradition, how God is still speaking. So that verses that were used against Trish and her experience come from a book called The Gospel of Matthew. Words Attributed to Jesus and in the story that gets used, Jesus is being asked if it's OK to get divorced.

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And. She says, don't do it.

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Don't get divorced, and so people take those words out of context and use them to control women like Trish would not be controlled. God bless her. So what did Jesus, though, actually mean? What was the context of the story? Those things are often missing from some of the ways we were taught to see these stories and passages. So Jesus, for example, when these religious leaders asked him and they're really just trying to trap him, they're not curious. So they're trying to get him to say something that they can use as evidence against him, because that's sometimes what people in places of privilege and power do. So, Jesus, he receives their question really as a justice issue. He's in a culture and time and place where women are considered property. A woman without a man in a man's world was without much value and didn't have any resources or security nets. And so men could they have the power to divorce women. But then women were left powerless and then as discarded and not of value. And so really to be divorced by a man was to leave you with no options, to leave you on the farthest margins of the society. So, Jesus, he says, don't do that. Don't do that to women because it's only men who have the power to do it.

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And furthermore, he quotes a passage from his own scripture, what we would call Torah from Genesis, where he's referencing one of the creation stories. And there's a couple creation stories, but one of the creation stories where it talks about how a man and a woman cling to one another and what God has joined together. Let no persons separate. But even in that story, it's not about the legalities of divorce that was in a culture that even could have marriage to multiple partners, it's not marriage the way it looks like today, but it was a story that said that people created in the image of God, that people were in relationship, in the image of God, not individually. And so it's in relationship and a connection that we see the image of the divine. So don't just cut that apart willy nilly. So all of it was not about a rule saying you can't get divorced and if you get divorced, then you can't be part of God's community or God's life or God's world. But rather, this originally was a story about what's just and right about not harming the vulnerable, about recognizing a sacredness that can be part of human connection and that on a whim or because we are bored with someone that we don't just cut them out or cut them off.

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And that's at the heart of what Jesus was saying. He was honoring the divine image. He was wanting to care for the vulnerable, not creating a rule about who's in and who's out of some future thing called the Christian church. So it's a call to carefully consider and pray or meditate as to how we undertake and handle relationships. So I mentioned all of that just as one example, that we don't just read these text the way you might have been taught or in some literal way. So when you if you want to engage Lectio Divina and you're going to go to the Bible, that that we look at and it can be helpful. There's commentaries. You have pastoral resources. But where we can look at what did the story say in its own time or what was the point of this writing? And that can be some beginning work we do before we get even to the Lectio Divina practice. I mean, because imagine if what people did with the Bible, they did with a Mary Oliver poem. Imagine if people did with her work what they've done with scriptural texts. For example, in her poem, I worried she closes with this stanza. She writes, Finally, I saw that worrying had come to nothing and gave it up.

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And took my old body and went out into the morning and sang, which I love that.

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But imagine if people turn that into a rule. Oh, now, wait a minute. So if I'm worried, I have to go out in the morning and sing. Is that the cure for worry? I mean, it might be, but is it a rule? Is that what she's writing? And then someone would point out she mentions an old body and maybe then young people are exempt. Or others might want to know what kind of song is appropriate for the singing and worry, could it be Van Halen or does it need to be about nature? So all of that it would be silly, right? We'd get it, because we understand Mary Oliver is not creating a rule, but rather offering an invitation. So when one might see some sacred text fresh is to consider this question instead of what we might have been taught. What rule am I being given? Instead, let's ask, what am I being invited to see or to do? So, again, if you're coming to a sacred text, especially if you grew up in a tradition that was very rule bound or conservative. That you can ask of the text first before we even get into the practice, instead of what rule am I being given, ask instead, what am I being invited to see or to do? So once we have selected a text, there are four parts to this spiritual practice of Lectio Divina, and you have a resource that was shared with you that you can then look at as a reminder of this. But I'll still talk about it a little first, as with most spiritual practices.

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I want to offer this idea that it's good to have a quiet and safe space. So if you can create that kind of physical space, I know for some that's a privilege, but if you can play in that space, do it. And if you can't just do it in the best place you can, that's really helpful. Turn off devices. And if you're in a household with other people, it can be really useful to ask the other household members to honor that you are taking this time and space for yourself. And one of the things I found it helpful to do, especially when I had a child at home, was to say, I will be a better father to you if you just honor this quiet that I'm taking. If you honor this time and don't interrupt me, I promise I will be a better dad. And I will tell you later. He said you were right, Dad. You're always better after your quiet time. So it's a gift you might offer to a roommate or family members if you share a household and then find a comfortable place to sit for this. I mean, you're welcome to stand. But most people find it helpful to engage practices like this in a sitting position where you're not worried about balance, et cetera. So in a letter to me and there's these four parts, and I'll just instead of giving the Latin words of the state, basically the English words, which mean read and then.

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We reflect. Respond and contemplate or rest, so read, reflect. Respond and then contemplate or arrest. So. What does this look like?

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Well, I have a sample text that's shared with you that comes from one of the gospels about a story of a man who is blind, whose name is part of me, is outside the city of Jericho. So we're just going to use that as an example. So but first, I'll tell you what you do in each of these sections, and by the way, this isn't magic, but most traditions engaging with you to have these four pieces, you can look up other ways it's done and you'll mostly see the four, but some have five. But I'm going to go with the four. So read, reflect, respond and.

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Rest or contemplate.

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So first, before you even do the reading, take a breath. And whatever might help you sent her, so maybe you can gauge a breathing exercise, do a little yoga, whatever it is that gets you ready to pay attention, and then read through the passage once just to get a sense of the passage. So I'm going to do that with the text in front of us.

[00:16:13]

They came to Jericho.

[00:16:15]

As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Barthomaeus, son of Thomas, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside.

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When Bartomaus heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me. Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, son of David, have mercy on me.

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Jesus stood still and said, call him here. And they called the blind man saying to him, take heart, get up, he's calling you. So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus, then Jesus said to him. What do you want me to do for you? The blind man said to him, My teacher, let me see again. Jesus said to him, Go, your faith has made you well. Immediately, he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

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And then after reading it through that one time now read through it more slowly, another time noting what stands out for you. And I'm going to invite you to do this together with me right now, this piece. So I'm going to read a little more slowly. And as I do so, just notes in your mind or maybe it's an emotional response, but what words or phrases stand out for you?

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They came to Jericho.

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As Jesus and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho.

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Bartomeus, son of Tomaeus. A blind beggar. Was sitting by the roadside.

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When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth.

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He began to shout out and say. Jesus, son of David. Have mercy on me. Many sternly ordered him to be quiet. But he cried out even more loudly, Son of David, have mercy on me.

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Jesus stood still. And set. Call him here. And they called the blindman saying to him. Take heart, get up, he's calling you.

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So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Then Jesus said Ben. What do you want me to do for you? The blind man said to him. My teacher. Let me see again. Jesus said to him. Your faith has made you well. Immediately, he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

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So consider what words or phrases stood out.

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Now, the second time. We're going to read it through again. And this time.

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You're going to do it yourself. Pause at the words or phrases that stood out. So you're going to read it through one more time, this time on your own. And pause where the words or phrases stood out. And consider why they're standing out. What is grabbing you, what has your attention here? And sit with that for a while, reflect. Think deeply. Maybe there's one word or phrase in particular, and so go with that and sit in silence, meditate on that word or phrase, turn it over in your head, breathe the word or phrase in and out and just let it sink in. So I recognize we're doing this together, and so there won't be as much time as you might need. I'm just going to pause for a moment of silence for you to engage that practice at least first time through. And you can, of course, do it more on your own. But let's be in silence reading it through. Noting what stood out for you and considering now why it stands out for you and so reflect and think deeply about it and sit in silence for a few moments with a word or phrase. Next, we move into the response piece, the third step, so to speak. Whether you consider.

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In whatever way you imagine or image the divine to be present. Consider how you are connecting with God, with Spirit, with love.

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And ask.

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Again, centered around the passage and the things that stood out, what you might be called to see differently. Well, what are you being invited to do?

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So this is the response.

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What are you being called to see differently or what are you being invited to do? And bring those questions, whatever way you understand the divine or love. Bring those questions into that presence, that energy, and I find it really helpful to journal my thoughts and more focused. So if you have something to write down with or write with, you might find it helpful at this point. What are you being called to see differently? What are you being invited to do? And we'll leave another moment of silence now to just practice that and you can spend more time with it on your own. As an example in the process so far for me, and I've read and heard this passage many times, but what was standing out for me in that reading through was the part where after the man asked for help, Obama says, Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me. How many sternly ordered him to be quiet? But he cried out even more loudly. Son of David, have mercy on me. That grabbed me this time. That grabbed me and then as I meditated on why. I think of all the ways that I stayed silent in my own pain or distress, because whether it was spoken directly or implied or I watched it and the examples of people around me, what I learned was suffer in silence, suck it up.

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Don't tell anyone. And so a response which goes against all of that, those voices that say stuff your pain.

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Keep it to yourself here was part of Mass who not only didn't go with those voices, but even yelled louder, have mercy on me. He was hungry for mercy, hungry for hope, hungry for healing.

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And so I've gotten better, but in my own response, then why is that staring out for me? What am I being called to see or do differently? And I think it's no accident. This is about a healing of a blind person, which in the biblical images and ideas, isn't so much about a literal physical blindness and healing, but about asking what ways do we fail to see? What ways are we shut down or shut out? And there's this idea that we're invited into a connection with Divine that helps us to see what we did not see to live more clearly. And to bring greater clarity into the world. And so one of the ways that happens is to not be shut down or shut up, but to cry out, to ask for help in the places of pain, even though it's hard.

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You know, sometimes we've had communities or people around us who would shut us up even more, that the request for help isn't rewarded. But we're smack down.

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And here's a story that says trust that there are those who want to hear the cry for help, who want to come alongside, who want to help us, to see, to know.

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And so that's one element that stood out for me and then that last piece, the contemplation.

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After we're wrestling with these things and maybe the image or idea and then what am I called to do or consider or see differently, and then sometimes I want to just jump in and write. A lot of us are probably or people get things done. Well, let me just go act on that. But it's good to just rest in. That rests in the understanding. Rest in what's come. Let it be integrated. Have some time to process it. So just be in silence and rest with that, that's the last piece of it, and then I find it helpful after a few minutes of that kind of silence and resting that to close that time by offering gratitude, whether for you it's a form of prayer or just speaking a word of thanks, maybe writing it down. But that can be helpful. And so those are.

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The basics of Lectio Divina, those are ways I found it meaningful, and perhaps you will as well. That's wonderful. I love that you're doing the series where you're really getting this beautiful toolkit of opportunities and experiences and expressions. And I recognize, you know, how in that story it ended where once he sees it's not like I got mine and off he goes. It says he saw and follow Jesus on the way. So it continued in the path. And I have this imagining and that's one of the gifts of Lectio Divina. And it taps into our imagination. I imagine that Barnum's helped other people to see as well. We're gifted to be gifts, blessed to be blessing, helped to be helpers. And so I thank you for being a community that seeks to both receive and to share. And thank you for the opportunity to share with you.

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And as we say in my tradition, amen.

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END OF TRANSCRIPT



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