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We Remember MP3.mp3

DATE

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DURATION

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START OF TRANSCRIPT**[00:00:03]**

A retired colleague of mine shared a story with a few of US ministers late last year. You see her daughter, her adult daughter is a health care worker who worked at a nursing home. And in early December, that nursing home had a covid outbreak, something like 60 staff members and all but two of the 80 elderly residents at the home were infected.

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My colleague's daughter realized the risk that she was taking going into work every day, a risk that she was willing to take and needed to take because they were so understaffed. But she decided that she didn't want to put her family at risk as well. Her husband and her two young children, she did not want to come home to them after work every day in those conditions. So she did something that many people have had to do this year. She looked around through her network of friends and family and she found a temporary space in a room to live in for what ended up being three weeks until the outbreak had passed and was fully contained. It had only been a few days into those three weeks when she made her first visit back home. Just to leave some items on the front porch after a grocery run where she picked up some things for her husband and her two children. But while she was there, her seven year old came to the window. And he scrunched up his face and began crying. He banged and he smacked his little hands onto the glass and he wailed to his mother, crying and pleading and begging, Mama, come inside.

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Mama, I just want to hug. I'm not a mother myself, but this story. Got me anyway. And I think it's because I identify with both that small child. And with his mom. I know what it feels like to long for something that we miss. And I know what it's like to have to make a hard choice. To protect the people we love. We've all learned something about occupying both of those positions this year.

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After spending a little bit of time through the window, soothing and comforting her little boy after he calmed down enough to hear her. She said, OK, now, baby, I want you to listen carefully to me, OK, listen.

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Notice how this feels.

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Notice how this feels. Notice how it feels and your body, notice all of these emotions.

[00:03:42]

Remember them?

[00:03:45]

Remember this moment, what you're thinking about right now, remember all of it and feel all of it. Because I'm going to be back home, maybe not today, but soon. And at first it's going to be so wonderful. We're going to hug and we're going to snuggle and we're going to play on the floor together all day long. But, baby, she said there will be a day not long after that when you will get angry with Mama or when I'll get upset with Daddy. Or maybe we will just feel like we're climbing the walls again and sick of our house and each other.

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And baby, when that day comes, we will need to remember this moment. We will need to remember this feeling. So please, right now, can you do this for me? Can you just feel it?

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Can you do that? Can we do that?

[00:05:05]

Can we remember this moment? Can we remember this feeling?

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This week, we have all lived one year of our lives in a global pandemic. Welcome to the history books, we're in it and we're still in it. We are not quite yet through this time.

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I've spoken with so many of you in so many different kinds of ways, but since the turn of the year, since January, I've noticed a turning in some of us. I've noticed for some of us that it is pure end of the rope fatigue that we are just done, and that because of that doneness something is different, maybe emptied out. I've noticed for some of us, it is a turning of hope. It is a feeling that there is something better emerging.

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For some of us, that sense of turning comes from the slow realization that there is now a light at the end of the tunnel, and not only that, we're in the tunnel.

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We have complex feelings about all of this, as I've seen. Feelings at all, different kinds of levels, big and small.

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I am laughing every time I see someone express that sentiment of not being totally sure they're ready to go back. I saw one woman online this week in a tweet realizing what a return to normal might mean, and she was saying, So we used to wear high heels like the whole day.

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Why did we do that? Are we going to have to do that again?

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We have questions about what normal might mean and something has broken open. In this time for so many of us.

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Maybe for you, it is a tremendous sense of gratitude for your health, for your loved ones. I know I feel some of that for our jobs, for all of the things that have helped us get through this past year. Maybe you feel some anger, still some bitterness over all that we have lost, especially the losses that feel needless. I have some of that to.

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Maybe you carry a deep pain when you remember and look at all of the ways that we have failed each other this year.

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I have some of that.

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And just to add one more to that soupy mix, many of us now feel a tremendous relief, a relief of physical safety for maybe the first time in many, many months with a dose or two of the vaccine in our own bodies. We've seen so much laid bare this year. As Reverend Ken said last week. The root meaning of that word in our message series title this spring Apocalypse. Our message series, The New Normal or How Not to Waste an Apocalypse. The root word and the meaning behind that word apocalypse is uncovering. We think of it as pure destruction, but it is closer in the translation to an unveiling and an opening. In our world, in our local communities and in our private lives. The coverings of comfort that we thought would always be there, the privileges we did not even realize we had were pulled away this year. That's huge. And that's why our message series this spring is going to invite us to ask a provocative question, how do we not waste this moment?

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This uncovering.

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Because the great American return to normal is on its way. And when it gets here.

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We will need to remember this feeling. We will need to remember these moments. Can we do that?

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We have been on quite a journey collectively and personally, right? We've lived through a kind of social experiment that we never could have designed or created if we tried here in our community. It was exactly 52 weeks ago that we had our first online service.

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And it just goes to show, I think, how normal we thought normal was, how impossible it is to break open your whole worldview unless it's broken open for you. Even back then, I remember thinking we'd be doing this for two or three months at worst.

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In that song that I know many of you have seen and shared online, but keep going. Song by the Bensons, I recommend it if you haven't seen it right. They talk about packing up their three year old driving to Shawn's parents house and how they thought they'd be there for like 10 days tops.

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Do you remember last March when school teachers were told to bring home materials for up to two weeks of at home work? Maybe you got that same message from your office, right? We couldn't fathom it. Two weeks. And then there are the harder things that we couldn't fathom, the more sobering moments of this year, the predictions that we could not believe at the time. This past week, I saw one of you mentioned online that you were thinking actually about a quote I shared in one of those earliest messages back in March. It was a quote from an epidemiologist offering a grim, admittedly grim prediction on the year to come. She was saying people you know, will get this. And someone you know will die. As a member of our congregation said, I thought, oh, no. And I remember saying that in that message and saying, I hope she's wrong. She wasn't wrong. I've kept maybe the worst list of my ministry this year, a page in my notebook where I started keeping track of members of our congregation with loved ones who were sick.

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Who I knew about after the list of their names got too long for me to be able to trust that I could hold it in my memory.

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At least three of us. At Wellspring's. Contracted and recovered from the virus this year that I know of and many, many, many more of us had friends or loved ones who were sick and who thankfully also recovered. And again, as far as I know, there are nine families among those. Who lost someone close to them in this pandemic?

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Nine households in our congregation who lost another family member or a close friend. It has now been one year since this started, so I would like to ask us to take a moment today to remember, to honor.

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How this feels.

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If you are with us on Sunday morning and you're here with us in the chat. I want to invite you to type a heart type of heart into that chat, if you know someone who got this, who contracted covid-19 this year. You can make a heart with a little Sideways V and the number three, or you can just type heart, it's all OK. But I want to invite us in this moment, if you know someone who contracted covid-19 this year, then share a heart.

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And if you are among the ones who have lost someone. To covid-19, then I invite you if you're comfortable doing so, share their name next to that heart. So we can hold them from across the distance in this way that we have just for a moment in this sacred time and space.

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We honor their memory, we hold it together with you.

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And may all of us find comfort. Whether in our grief or our relief. Trusting that the loved ones we did lose this year will not be forgotten among us.

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This pandemic. This year, it has touched our community. Just as it has touched our world. It has touched each of us. It's personal.

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Everything that has been uncovered anew this year, all of the fruits of this apocalypse, it's all personal to us.

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There's the pandemic and the death and the pain and challenge and sadness and frustration that it has brought, and there are the other uncovering of this year.

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Of racism. And police violence. And white supremacy. The uncovering of discrimination, dehumanization of our beloved trans siblings. The uncovering of still living anti-Semitism in our country.

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The uncovering of that long needed focus in our society for taking mental health seriously.

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The uncovering of the reality that so many of us are just one crisis away from hunger. Or from homelessness. In the richest country in the world. These UN coverings and these problems are personal to us to. Every issue I just mentioned is personal to someone at Wellspring's.

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We have lived and made it through this time of great uncovering. And yet we can feel that great American return to normal is coming for us. And when it does, we will need to remember this moment.

[00:19:03]

We'll need to remember what we've seen and learned, how we have grown this year. And what matters most to us? Can we do that?

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I've borrowed that phrase that I've used twice now, the great American return to normal from an article I read last April. Feels like a long time ago now, I don't use the words prophet or prophetic lightly when I talk about something I've read or heard, but I will tell you that in the tradition of the Torah or the Christian Old Testament, where much prophecy is found, there are some common features of the people who are labeled as prophets. They're often people on the fringes of society, they're not well known, they're not the people who hold a pulpit or speak from any position of great power and prophets often say things that sound way too intense to most people at the time, like they are way overstating things right until later when folks realize their words were actually quite prescient. That is how I felt reading this article last April, published on April 10th, not even a month into the pandemic, from a man named Julio Vincent Butoh, an Italian American writer and director, not an epidemiologist, not a public health researcher, certainly not a household name. Yet he wrote less than a month into this pandemic, a viral essay about this that was read by 21 million people around the world. It was called Prepare for the Ultimate Gaslighting. Now, gaslighting. If you're not familiar with that term, it refers to the idea that sometimes people will try to paper over a problem.

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To convince you that you didn't see what you saw, to make you forget and way back in April, when even I thought this guy might be pushing it a little bit, might be coming on a little too strong.

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Julio in his article said this. As the country begins to open back up and move forward, very powerful forces will try to convince us all to get back to normal.

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Billions of dollars, he said, will be spent on advertising and messaging and television and media content to make you feel comfortable again, and you will want that. Of course you will. Right. You will want that feeling of normalcy, he says. We all want it.

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But what this crisis has given us. Is a once in a lifetime chance to see ourselves and our country in the plainest of views.

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At no other time, he says, ever in our lives have we gotten the opportunity to see what would happen if the world simply stopped.

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And because it is rarer than rare, it has brought to light all of the beautiful and painful truths of how we live.

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The article is it's included it's linked to in the Resource Guide for this Message series that our spiritual development ministry creates every time we have a new message series. I really encourage you actually to go find this link and read this article through in its entirety.

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And just sit with what he says. I bet you there will be some parts of it that surprise you, it doesn't fit neatly into one side of a political debate. The core of his argument. Is also a profoundly hopeful one, it's that we need to push back. Against the great American return to normal.

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Because amidst these forces, he says that will try to lull us back to sleep. To pull us back into an old normal of distraction and busyness and striving and numbness and disconnection amidst that overwhelming churn and noise of the normalcy machine is a profound power that can come from really remembering what we've seen this year. Julia says a car-less, Los Angeles has clear blue skies without pollution. Do you remember in a quiet New York City, you can hear the birds chirp on Madison Avenue? Songs were sung out balcony windows with our neighbors and pots and pans banged together for health care workers at shift change, whole cities were mobilized to feed lunch to schoolchildren. Streets were taken over by the largest mass protests our country has ever seen for the protection of our black neighbors lives. It's not that we don't care about each other in this country, Julio says.

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It's sadder than that. It's that we don't have time. It's that we forget. Because we're all out hustling to make our own lives work.

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We have goals to meet and meetings to attend and mortgages to pay, and the phone is ringing and the laptop is pinging. And he says what's really sad, what's really tragic is that we've been sold, that this way of being is necessary, that it's the only way for each of us to fight on our own for survival or to scrap and scratch towards those trappings of success, confused about where the line falls between what we need and what we need to make it through.

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But we caught a glimpse this year of the real truth, didn't we? That what we really need is each other.

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What we really need is each other.

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Can we remember that? Can we remember this moment?

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And before you start arguing with me in your head, before you start thinking about, well, yeah, sure, that's what I think.

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But how am I going to convince my old fashioned neighbor, my racist uncle, my colleagues and my co-workers who don't see it the same way before that?

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Can we just feel it? Can we just feel it in our bodies?

[00:27:06]

Can we remember how it feels, because maybe right now our job is to just feel it.

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So that we can let it sink in.

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And let what we have learned this year become a part of us.

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Maybe that's what helps us. Respond differently. The next time.

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I think about that mother and her son.

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I don't think she was saying that we'll never see another temper tantrum in this house. Or that we won't get upset or sick of each other.

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I think she was saying that what makes the difference and how we will respond in those moments is how well we remember this feeling.

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This feeling of banging and smacking our tiny fists on the glass.

[00:28:15]

Just to be touched. Just to be with each other.

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We can feel this. We can feel this deep longing we have for what we've lost. For what we miss. And maybe it can help us remember that we never want to be so careless again with each other's lives.

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Maybe we can remember. So we can grow.

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And may you live and blessing.

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I invite you to take a moment, perhaps close your eyes, let your shoulders relax, maybe even bow your head and join me in a spirit of prayer.

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God of this year.

[00:29:29]

God of this year, when so many of us felt abandoned, God of this year when we have been frustrated and sad and scared. Holy presence of mystery, giver of life.

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Be with us. Through what comes next.

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Be with us like a kind and loving caregiver or a parent or a partner or a friend. Be with us like a loving and kind person who tells us it's OK to feel what we feel.

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Who reminds us that it's good to be in touch? With what matters to us.

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To be in contact with that ferocity of our love. May we be fueled by that fire of remembering what and who we live for?

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And to know and remember also that nothing, not even the end of the world itself was able to take that feeling away.

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That feeling of fire, that feeling of life in our hearts and of love. That was given to us by the mysterious grace of you. May we remember, no matter what happens? That all things in this life are relationship.

[00:31:21]

Now, we are never alone.

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May that truth guide us. And all the days to come.

[00:31:35]

And for these prayers I have spoken and the prayers that everyone gathered with us this morning is holding silently on their hearts. We say Amen. We'll close today with the same song that we started our first online service with. From a year ago, Andy and Andrea singing Hail.

END OF TRANSCRIPT



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