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2 SPEAKERS

Speaker1

Speaker2

START OF TRANSCRIPT

[00:00:00] Speaker1

The following is a message from Wellspring's congregation. Good morning, Wellspring's, and I'm so excited to be offering my first message in our Summer Spirit Flick series today, because I know that by the time we get to the end of our Spirit Flick series, we will be back in person in Bell Hall this September. I hope that some of you are planning to join us on June 27th at one o'clock. Our band is going to have a reunion concert. They're going to play together live for the first time outside at the Montgomery School. And we'll probably have a couple more opportunities to gather in person before. Welcome back Sunday in September. So stay tuned. And that also means that it's time for my annual Spirit Flick's confession, you might call it, which is that I am not actually a big movie person, which is a little awkward for our summer tradition here at Wellsprings, when each year in this summer message series Spirit Flicks, we take inspiration from the stories that we watch on our screens from movies and television shows. And the thing is, I'm actually not just not a big movie person, I'm not even a big fiction person. Each summer you are pretty much promised at least one spirit flicks message for me, that's about a documentary and you should know that I am restraining myself from doing more documentaries every single year. But as luck would have it in 2021, I must have failed to cancel my HBO subscription after a promotional deal or something. And so I was actually vaguely aware of a new prestige show, a new limited series that premiered on HBO in April called Mare of East Town.

[00:01:48] Speaker1

The Afternoon, actually, that the premiere of Mare of EastTown was set to air. Reverend Ken actually mentioned it to me and I wasn't planning on watching it. But he reminded me this was the show that was set here in southeastern Pennsylvania like two years ago. Everybody was talking about seeing Kate Winslet at a Kmart parking lot in Coatesville. Maybe you remember that that was this show. It was filmed here in and around the suburban counties outside of Philadelphia. And he told me this was the crucial detail. Apparently, the costume designers did stakeouts in Wawa parking lots for wardrobe inspiration. Now, I was in and I'm really glad that I was because it turns out this show was very, very good. I am not the only one who felt that way. I can't promise that there won't be a Spirit Flick's part two message on Mare of East Town, maybe even a trilogy. Reverend Ken and , I haven't quite settled whether or not we might both do a message on this show. And actually, one of our lay preachers, Rodney Wittenburg, has the claim as our only current preacher who actually grew up in Delaware County and Delco, where most of the show is set. So, yeah, you might get a lot of Mare of Easttown this summer. I'm not sure yet. But for today, I will tell you that I could fill our whole service with reasons that I loved the show. I will not do that to you. I narrowed it down to five reasons, and I'm actually going to go for the first four pretty quickly. We'll spend most of today's message on the final reason that

[00:03:30] Speaker2

I love the show.

[00:03:32] Speaker1

Now, the first reason I was drawn to Mare of East Town, of course, was all of the Philly area touches. I live in southeast and south Philadelphia. I grew up in southeastern Pennsylvania and King of Prussia. I went to college in Delaware County. This show is set in a fictional east town, not actual east town. It's apparently, according to the show's creators, an amalgam of locations in the Philadelphia suburbs. But the characters do all of the things right. They ate Wawa hoagies. When they grab a beer. It is usually a rolling rock, occasionally a Yuengling. Kate Winslet, who plays Mare, the title character wears an Ocean City, New Jersey sweatshirt in one of the scenes and the accents, the beautiful, comforting Delco accents make me feel right at home watching. The second thing I loved about the show was that I thought the murder mystery aspect of it, which I'll talk a little bit more about, was incredibly well done. I spent hours reading and talking about all the different whodunit theories, but they still had me guessing until the final scenes. The third reason I love the show is that it was also a lot of fun. There was a lot of different stuff packed into the show and some of it was hilarious.

[00:04:48] Speaker1

There were laugh out loud scenes with Jean Smart as Mare's mother and also a few sequences that were so thrilling and suspenseful. They had me screaming at the TV. Out alone in my apartment, and the fourth reason I love the show, if you've seen it, you know that Kate Winslet performance was pretty remarkable and also that she did something that is unfortunately still somewhat revolutionary in the entertainment industry. As one headline I saw put it, she was a 45 year old woman who actually looked like a 45 year old woman on screen. This show was a treat for all those reasons and more. But our Spirit Flicks Message series isn't just about appreciating great TV or films. It's about stories that reflect something true about our lives and help us understand ourselves as part of a greater whole. And so what I really want to invite us all to dig into today is the last and most important reason that I loved Mare of East town. It's because the show told us a story about how a person can completely fall apart and emerge

[00:06:04] Speaker2

From it for the better.

[00:06:09] Speaker1

You know, we're often scared to do that first part. We never even get to the other side. Right. We are afraid to let ourselves fall to pieces. But Mare of easttown showed us the bad and the ugly, yes, of that and also the good, the good that can come from allowing a life in pieces to be what it

[00:06:32] Speaker2

Is

[00:06:33] Speaker1

To be in pieces

[00:06:35] Speaker2

And

[00:06:36] Speaker1

Reminding us that maybe that's the only way out

[00:06:40] Speaker2

Of

[00:06:40] Speaker1

That sort of collapse. Accepting where we are so that we can sort through the mess and put those pieces back together. Now, Mare of Easttown pulled no punches in that respect. By the end of the first episode, we learned that mayor's life is totally in shambles. She knows that we know what her life is a frickin mess. Right? If you've seen the show, you know that part of that mess has to do with mental illness. Part of it has to do with violent death and suicide, all of which are part of the plot. And you should know that I will mention all three of those things during my message today, though not in any detail. But just so you know, if today isn't the right day for you to hear about these subjects at all. Feel free to take a break from our service and rejoin us for our last song. In the space of just two years before the action of the show begins,

[00:07:39] Speaker2

Mare

[00:07:41] Speaker1

Loses her only son.

[00:07:44] Speaker2

To suicide.

[00:07:46] Speaker1

Four years before that, we find out she had watched his mental health deteriorate, his growing dependence on drugs, his addiction, all of which gutted their relationship in those last years before his death. Mare's marriage also collapsed during that time, and in her work as the detective for the local East Town Police Department, we learned that mare is also failing pretty spectacularly. She feels on a public stage she can't solve. A year old

[00:08:24] Speaker2

Case,

[00:08:26] Speaker1

The disappearance of Katie Bailey, a young woman from the town, the daughter of one of Mare's childhood friends. And as this first episode starts off, we find out that now there is a new murder. That mare also doesn't know how to solve, one that hits her even closer to home for seven episodes over the course of this limited series. We watch her continue to unravel as everything else around her unravels, too. It sounds bleak at times. It is,

[00:09:05] Speaker2

But it

[00:09:05] Speaker1

Is also so full and whole a story. It's complete and its grace filled and somehow very, very real. I think we all learn at some point that unraveling is sometimes a part of life. Over the years, I've grown to have a strange respect

[00:09:30] Speaker2

For the role that it plays

[00:09:33] Speaker1

When I was a student in ministry about a decade ago now, actually when I was still in school, I did my chaplaincy rotation, something that every minister in training is required to do at a hospital. I did mine in the emergency room at Hupp, the hospital, you Penn in West Philadelphia at Hupp, they paged the chaplain on duty for every single person who was brought into the level one trauma ward. And on a typical weekend, that might mean eight or nine trauma calls every day. By and large, they were victims of violence. Sometimes they were perpetrators of violence too or they were in car accidents or workplace injuries, a slow parade of people all having the worst day of their lives.

[00:10:34] Speaker2

I would go home tired,

[00:10:39] Speaker1

But there was also something very clarifying about that summer for me. I was completely exhausted

[00:10:49] Speaker2

And yet somehow

[00:10:50] Speaker1

Probably more awake than I've ever been at any other time in my life

[00:10:56] Speaker2

Because that work

[00:10:58] Speaker1

Put everything into perspective. The fragility of our lives was real to me. It wasn't just an idea. And the clarifying and enlivening thing actually about doing that work for me was that I have never spent more time consecutively where the little annoying things and life just didn't seem important anymore. I felt that clarity of focus on what really mattered. Now, I wasn't quite wired to do that kind of work all the time. Some people are, and I'm very grateful for them. But I did learn to appreciate the gifts of these times of complete unraveling

[00:11:50] Speaker2

And the

[00:11:50] Speaker1

Way that total devastation in our lives can actually

[00:11:55] Speaker2

Has a way if we allow it and

[00:11:59] Speaker1

If we're supported through it, to bring out the best in us. Now, I should be clear, I don't mean when I say the best in us, I don't mean looking our best. I don't mean doing our best. Most of us are not our most productive or our sharpest or our strongest in difficult times. Quite the opposite. We are often confused and our minds are foggy and we are weak. We need help.

[00:12:36] Speaker2

That's normal.

[00:12:38] Speaker1

But that's exactly what I'm pointing at. It's almost as if these times of devastation and unraveling in our lives ask us to unravel even the foundations of how we judge our lives, how we judge ourselves and each other. They invite us to think, you know what, maybe appearances and productivity and good work aren't even what best means. Maybe that's not even what it means to be at our true best as human beings. Because when things fall apart, what often happens is that our priorities shift.

[00:13:19] Speaker2

We find

[00:13:20] Speaker1

The way all of a sudden to do what we thought was impossible

[00:13:24] Speaker2

To

[00:13:25] Speaker1

Let what is really unimportant fall away and be forgotten. And remember that our best is not about how we perform, and it is certainly not about how we look from the outside doing it. The best of us is in how we love.

[00:13:40] Speaker2

Right.

[00:13:42] Speaker1

It's always been

[00:13:44] Speaker2

About how we love that's

[00:13:48] Speaker1

What life is for. We actually saw a lesson, I think, in this over the past week in the news, believe it or not, from the world of sports, some of you might have seen these headlines that tennis star Naomi Osaka, currently the second ranked female tennis player in the world. She made a choice this past week to prioritize her mental health and her well-being over her job. Naomi Osaka announced that she would not be doing press conferences after the French Open tournament games. This is part of an athlete's contract. Typically, the penalty for not participating in press conferences after the French Open games was a 15000 dollar fine for each game, which Naomi Osaka knew about and accepted. But the French Open organisers chose to double down, and they told her that actually, rather than simply continuing to find her, they would remove her from the tournament if she continued to skip out on press events. And so she withdrew from the whole tournament. If you've been following this news, then like me, you've probably seen a mix of responses, there is praise coming from all sorts of people, public figures, politicians, other athletes, all applauding Naomi Osaka for recognizing that she knows herself best and for prioritizing her mental health over her performance rather than trying to push through and suffer in silence. But unfortunately, there were other voices, too, that were also loud that criticized her. They called her a diva, a narcissist, an arrogant, spoiled brat. These are

[00:15:55] Speaker2

Quotes,

[00:15:57] Speaker1

An uppity princess. They said that she wanted special treatment. They criticized her for not being up for the job. They called her weak. Now, everyone has a right to feel however they want to feel about Naomi Osako or anyone's choices, right? But I read the criticism that was lobbed her way this week,

[00:16:29] Speaker2

And I said, my God,

[00:16:31] Speaker1

We wonder why people don't speak up

[00:16:35] Speaker2

When they need help.

[00:16:38] Speaker1

This is why. How is it that we are going to try to say as a society out of one side of our mouth that we want people to ask for help, that we want people to speak up when they need support, and then not just refuse to offer the help, but to criticize their character

[00:16:58] Speaker2

When they do.

[00:16:59] Speaker1

Is this not exactly what people fear will happen when they need help and they are too scared to say so? We wonder why people don't speak up. What is really most important? Right. What does it mean to be our best? I had an experience this week that is too much on my heart not to talk about, it's an experience that I wish I never would have had in a million years. A few of you know that I led the memorial service for a young man from Downingtown West High School,

[00:17:54] Speaker2

A young man who

[00:17:56] Speaker1

I know was connected to at least one family in our congregation, a young man, a junior in high school

[00:18:05] Speaker2

Who died by suicide just

[00:18:08] Speaker1

Two weeks ago in our community. Sitting with his family. Was an experience that will be with me forever, hearing the details of their story

[00:18:27] Speaker2

That

[00:18:27] Speaker1

Most people who know about this loss will never hear while simultaneously opening up my phone and watching conversations unfold online about this death in the wider community has been strange. And without sharing anything private, I can tell you all, all of you who were not able to be there for this memorial,

[00:18:59] Speaker2

I can tell

[00:18:59] Speaker1

You what this young man's mother shared publicly when she spoke

[00:19:04] Speaker2

At his service.

[00:19:08] Speaker1

She shared how this was not a family that was unfamiliar with the realities of mental illness. She shared that this was not a family caught up in stigma or shame or one that shied away from the tough conversations she shared, the support he was receiving. But what he needed was simply bigger than what the family alone could provide. What he needed was a whole world with its priorities in order. A world that understood and accepted what it really means to be at our best. At the service on Wednesday morning, this young man's mother

[00:20:05] Speaker2

Asked 800

[00:20:07] Speaker1

People

[00:20:08] Speaker2

In attendance

[00:20:10] Speaker1

At her son's funeral.

[00:20:13] Speaker2

She asked, I quote, What are

[00:20:17] Speaker1

We trying to accomplish as we raise our children? What is our system creating? Are we willing to tolerate our most beautiful

[00:20:31] Speaker2

Souls

[00:20:33] Speaker1

To be snuffed out or shut down? She closed by saying, I don't want to be surrounded by the toughest, the savviest, the grittiest, I want to be surrounded by hearts like my sons, whose priority in life was loving us and making sure we all love each other. I want that, too,

[00:21:07] Speaker2

I think a lot of us do,

[00:21:10] Speaker1

And I think sometimes we struggle, we don't know how, but

[00:21:14] Speaker2

I know

[00:21:15] Speaker1

That we can create

[00:21:18] Speaker2

That

[00:21:18] Speaker1

Kind of a world because we're human beings and nobody but human beings created this world that we live in now. We can change things. We know that. But it takes so much help. It takes so many of us reminding each other what it really means to be at our best, what we're really here for. You know, a year ago this week, our country was a mess, right? Do you remember early June 20, 20? We have been locked down and scared

[00:22:08] Speaker2

For

[00:22:08] Speaker1

A couple months. For most of us, our regular routines at this point had just evaporated. Right. And with that newfound space. The emptiness, the clearing of our lives unraveled with little less to little left to lose, some things happened and we actually paid attention when something

[00:22:31] Speaker2

Awful took place,

[00:22:35] Speaker1

When one of our fellow human beings was unjustly killed in Minneapolis.

[00:22:42] Speaker2

Do you remember a year ago?

[00:22:46] Speaker1

We and when I say we, I mean especially white people like me actually stopped and learned and listened. People who had never said Black Lives Matter before started to understand

[00:23:04] Speaker2

And

[00:23:04] Speaker1

Collectively, people took to the streets. June 6th, one year ago today was actually the peak of the demonstrations. It was the day that an estimated half million people participated in 550 recorded protests across the country in a single day, June six, one year ago. Scholars now are estimating that there were more than 10000 Black Lives Matter protests last summer, 10000 protests in three months, with about 20 million Americans participating, which would make it the single largest demonstration movement in U.S. history. And it was a start, was a start. That's how much hope it takes,

[00:23:58] Speaker2

There's

[00:23:58] Speaker1

More work to do to root out racism and white supremacy in our systems. But that start was meaningful. Our country took a big step last summer, and I know many of us in our Wellspring's community took big steps, too, in our own learning or unlearning, in our growth and in our compassion. Because when things fall apart, when the space is cleared, we have that opportunity to re-examine our priorities. And the empty ground can be exactly where compassion is watered as a seed and takes root when the unimportant things are cleared away. The spaces where things have fallen apart become the fresh ground with room for us to grow. I have to give Reverend Ken credit for this observation about mayor of his town also, because I actually have not seen this said anywhere else. We learn from Mary's mother that mare is a nickname. It short for Mary Mary Ann Sheehan. And despite her very Irish Catholic family, mare is not exactly on good speaking terms with God. You can't really blame her. Yet the title of the show

[00:25:30] Speaker2

Follows

[00:25:31] Speaker1

The naming conventions of the Catholic Saints. Right? Teresa of Avila, Francis of Assisi. Julian of Norwich,

[00:25:43] Speaker2

Mare

[00:25:43] Speaker1

Of East Town. We often spend so much time running from hard times and from suffering. So much effort is expended just trying to

[00:25:59] Speaker2

Deny it, too

[00:26:01] Speaker1

Pretend it can't happen here. It can't happen to our family. It isn't so big a deal. But it can never touch us. We spend so much time and energy expended running from suffering that we forget entirely about our role, our gift

[00:26:21] Speaker2

In

[00:26:22] Speaker1

Healing it. Just like Ben said earlier in our service, right, we can't change the past, but we can change tomorrow. Without spoiling anything in terms of plot, I can't do that to you. I can tell you that by the end of seven episodes, Mary finds her way to that place. She forgives herself for what is done. For what she couldn't fix. Which gives her the freedom and the energy to be present for what's happening now. To be present for tomorrow. She can let go of what she couldn't fix, and that gives her the space. To stand by the people she

[00:27:21] Speaker2

Loves, her daughter,

[00:27:24] Speaker1

Her best friend herself. There's a scene towards the very end of the series

[00:27:34] Speaker2

Where

[00:27:34] Speaker1

Mary on a regular old suburban linoleum kitchen floor takes on the figure of another famous Mary.

[00:27:45] Speaker2

A pieta

[00:27:47] Speaker1

From the Latin word, a word used to describe any piece of art or sculpture of the Virgin Mary cradling Jesus on her lap,

[00:27:57] Speaker2

The weak

[00:27:58] Speaker1

Body close to the ground held in lamentation and compassion,

[00:28:05] Speaker2

A sign of holy

[00:28:08] Speaker1

Acceptance that sometimes things fall apart and when they do, love can step in. With open space for humility and healing and support, things can actually get better. It just takes help. It takes showing up for each other, truly listening and our moments of suffering. And remembering that what is best in this life, what matters most. Is our love. Perhaps that's what makes the Saints, the Saints. They trust that. I'm an Wellspring's and may you live in Blaesing. I invite you to join me now, perhaps let your eyes foreclosed, your shoulders drop. And join me in the spirit of prayer. God of change.

[00:29:39] Speaker2

God, who

[00:29:40] Speaker1

Holds us even in times when we cannot hold ourselves up. When things are falling apart all around us

[00:29:53] Speaker2

And we

[00:29:53] Speaker1

Are reaching and grasping for support. In those moments, may we find what we seek? May we be offered the gift of grace of someone else in this life who can be there with us? Someone else who cannot fix it. If they can't, right? But someone else who is simply willing to be with us, to hear our story, to care and love us. Because together we will find

[00:30:51] Speaker2

That

[00:30:51] Speaker1

That is the first step of emerging on the other side of destruction. No one wants to emerge alone to a lonely place. We want to come out of these dark places. And a share of the joy that we find with one another. So maybe we remember

[00:31:22] Speaker2

God

[00:31:22] Speaker1

Of our hearts that this is the purpose of all of it, not to reach a mountaintop by ourselves, but to grow ourselves up out of the dirt

[00:31:35] Speaker2

In

[00:31:36] Speaker1

A forest, in a field surrounded by life

[00:31:42] Speaker2

All around us.

[00:31:48] Speaker1

Maybe hold that image as we move into the days and weeks ahead of ourselves, accompanied by so much life rising out of the dirt. The prayers that I have spoken out loud and the prayers that everyone with us this morning is carrying silently on their hearts. We say Amen. If you enjoyed this message and would like to support the mission of Wellspring's, go to our Web site. Wellspring's. UU dot ORG. That's Wellspring's the letters. UU dot ORG.

END OF TRANSCRIPT



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