

NAME

Nomadland Audio.mp3

DATE

June 29, 2021

DURATION

31m 30s

3 SPEAKERS

Speaker1

Speaker2

Speaker3

START OF TRANSCRIPT**[00:00:00] Speaker1**

The following is a message from Wellspring's congregation. Good morning, Wellspring's. It's really good to be with you today, especially because this is my last message coming to you from sunny south Philadelphia before my move this week. Here, I'll give you a little sneak peek. This is the current state of my apartment. Doesn't look too bad from here. It's about to get a lot worse the next couple of days. But I'm glad that I got to share one more message with you all from the spot, the spot that I never expected to share any messages with you from, huh? This morning, we're continuing our Spirit Flix message series for the summer where we find the meaning in movies, films, TV shows, any story that comes across our screens. And today's movie starts in some ways, 10 years ago when a sheetrock plant was shut down in a town called Empire, Nevada, and a whole town went with it. A company town with company housing owned by the plant, a town that had been there for 88 years, was shut down along with it. The true story of Empire, Nevada, is blended with the fictional story in this movie of a woman named Fern. Fern is a widow in her 60s whose husband worked at that plant before his death, Fern loses her husband. She loses her job in the town. She loses her entire community. Six months after the shutdown of that plant, the town's zip code is discontinued. It had been there for 88 years and now it was gone practically overnight. The story of Empire, Nevada is real. And even though Fern is fictionalized, her story is based on the true stories of a growing segment of our population in this country, elders in particular, who find themselves unable to make ends meet on their Social Security benefits, who never made enough for their own savings.

[00:02:28] Speaker1

Apart from that program in the first place and also other people of all different ages and generations and stages of life who have been left out in the cold, as many corporations provide low wages without benefits, gig work that comes in short bursts and is unstable. And our country's safety net fails to pick up the slack and support that that leaves behind for people. The Oscar winning movie Nomad Land bends the genre as genres of dramatic and documentary filmmaking in this very fascinating way. They cast Real-Life Nomads real life people who live in RV's or vans who travel around to work and make ends meet where they can. These real life people were cast alongside Frances McDormand playing the fictional Fern to tell this story in a fittingly complex way, with a mixture of bold fantasy and harsh reality, the mix of pride and also necessity in this way of life, the failures of the systems and also the unbelievable resilience of people realizing that the best choice available to them is not a life that they ever expected and that they have to create new ways and new communities to take care of each other and to survive. You know, right from the beginning, Fern's story made me reflect on my own family's biography, my grandmother story, my grandfather on my mother's side. My mother's father was a coal miner

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Lived just outside of Scranton, and he lived in company coal towns of northeastern Pennsylvania, most of which are now abandoned places, ghost towns, just like the sort that Fern was forced to leave behind. Maybe somewhere in your family's story, there is a similar experience, or maybe there's a similar story in the place where you live now. The irony for me, of course, as I thought about my grandfather, is that I know his granddaughter will soon be living in one of those same towns that has been resurrected. In a way, the apartment I'm moving to this week is in Phoenixville right, the former home of Phoenix Steel Corporation, which shut down three years after I was born. The apartments I'm moving into were literally built on the site of the company and the town around it. Phoenixville, of course, started as a company town just like Empire, Nevada. This corporation and Phoenixville created a whole new kind of place on that land company owned housing for the workers and a post office and schools were built. But then the needs and the circumstances of the economy shifted and things changed. And jobs disappeared, and it all makes some kind of sense economically, right? But from the human view, it's much more complicated and that complicated space is exactly where nomad land stays, really. There's a lot of interesting writing out there about this film, but none that spoke more to me than this quote from the film critic Eileen Jones. She says, No mad land addresses both our profound fears of and our poignant longing for an alternative way of life, an alternative way of living that makes sense given our nation's ongoing state of calamity.

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It addresses both our profound fears of and our poignant longing for an alternative way of living. Put another way, we know that things are not working. We see that our economy and our society leaves folks behind. And whenever we really are forced to encounter that truth, many of us encounter it every day. We find a mix of emotions. We worry that we might lose what little security and predictability we have if things change and we also feel this deep longing for a different way. There has to be a better way, as we say, in our core beliefs here at Wellspring's, we know that true fulfillment and happiness is not found in materialism. That is not what fills the God shaped holes inside of us. But at the same time, we know that we need material to survive. Right. And surrounded by material all the time. We need food. We need money in this culture, in this society to make it. And so there is a balance. But looking around, it does seem like our world is pretty out of balance. It's a tough line to walk and this film walks it unsparingly with its full complications, which is why I think it's so good, but also kind of unsatisfying in the end, because it leaves us, the audience, to wrestle with the answers to those questions.

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Are these exploited people whose lives had been ruined by heartless economic and political systems that we follow in this film? Or are they brave, resilient human beings finding new and maybe even better ways to form community, to offer support and live in harmony with the Earth and with each other? And the tricky thing, of course, is that the answer is yes. The answer is yes. Both it's all of that and more whether they are real people or imagined characters. The folks in this movie are not right or wrong. They are reflections of the world around us. They are a product of a society we've created. And each person in this film brings home all of that, the complex emotional reality of the loss, material loss and resilience in the face of it, the pride that gets mixed up with grief and anger and creativity. We see in Fern's character at times her deep soul, joy and solitude as she journeys out into this natural world around her and finds that it holds her and gives her something incredible. And then in other times, we see the intense pain and the numbing sense of loneliness and her isolation, the fear of knowing that she is her own safety net, that she is responsible for building whatever connections will sustain her. The desperation at times we see that she's awkward some days as she fumbles around to make these connections, and then another time she makes these beautiful, simple bonds with people.

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It's very real and it shows how, no matter our circumstances, all of us are much, much more than caricatures in someone's political debate. No matter what our circumstances are, we're all human and our systems may not treat people equally. But this film does, at least in the way that it tells people stories. Which I think is why it's such a powerful piece of art, one that helps us remember the truth, that no moral value as a person comes along with success or failure, with money or no money with good circumstances are bad. There's no moral value assigned to that. We don't always deserve what we receive. We don't always receive what we deserve. And maybe our system would do better to listen to people's stories and that same kind of way to inject some of that basic human compassion for each other. And remember that truth. And one of the articles I read about this film had what I thought was the perfect title. It was called Nomad Land is a great and terrible film. And it means that in all the senses of those words, great and terrible, which is exactly how I felt about it. One of the things that the article talked about was the residents of this movie for us as Americans right now, not just because we're grappling with these economic questions about our responsibilities to each other in this country, but also it resonates because of what we've all just been through.

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And it matters in some ways the emotional reality of our gradual re-emergence from the shock of the covid-19 pandemic ferns story of resilience, finding meaning after losing so much doing that was not easy for her. The film shows us how complicated and non-linear that process is, filled with forwards and backwards motion, just as many terrible moments as beautiful moments. And the article said this touches a nerve for us because, as I say, most of us have already gathered from our covid locked down experience that we're no good at this, that this is hard, the solitude, the lonely grind, the need to be self-reliant in the face of so much challenge and loss and grief and calamity. And if there's a way to infuse all that, as this movie does with beauty and art and hope and even grander, imagining a different, smaller scale, touchable, more humane way of being. Well, the author says we sure need to know it now. We could use that. Any process of making meaning of our lives after things have been all shaken up after great loss or betrayal, after a community or a system we thought we could trust evaporates. This movie speaks to that reality, that experience, and it speaks to the complex mix of truths that we find after we try to emerge from the wreckage, both at that re-emergence is possible and it can be done and it can be beautiful

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That it is disorderly. It works on its own time, reemerging and recreating and healing. It happens with our contribution, in fact, only with our contribution and our consent, but not by our force. We want often for it to all work out at the speed of our brains, but it much more often works at the speed of our heart. I was taking some time off last week to pack and prepare for my upcoming move, and I have a bad habit or good habit, depending on your perspective, I guess, of attending other church services while I'm taking time off. And I saw something so lovely in another congregation service last Sunday that actually reached out and asked if we could share the same practice in our own service here at Wellspring's this morning. My friend and colleague Sean Milburn from the Unitarian Church in Fort Collins, Colorado, graciously agreed to offer it to us. It's an invitation to a short visualization and meditation practice to help us make some sense of where we are on our path to re-emergence after our world has been shaken up. Where are we on this road that we're traveling towards? A new way of living and being together. So I want to invite you now. I want to let Shawn take it from here for the next few minutes. Just settle in, perhaps just to listen or to join in a moment of practice and reflect together,

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Take a few breaths and find a comfortable place if it feels good in your body to close your eyes. If that helps you focus in to your inner world, invite you to do so. Want you to visualize yourself in the place. Where you wake up in the morning. When you're all tucked in, maybe alone, maybe with another human or an animal companion. Recall what the texture is of that place. But the sounds you usually hear in the morning are maybe even the smells of that space. You're kind of waking up, your eyes are still mostly closed, but you can sort of make out the big shapes in the room as you're kind of looking around so can bring into your mind kind of the furniture. Windows and doors, as you're kind of waking up. If you start to feel that heaviness of your eyelids start to lessen and you realize you've had this really strange dream. A dream about a pandemic that spread across the globe. Forced us to shelter in place, to wear masks, to work and learn from home. It changed everything for everyone. And you kind of scrub through the images that stand out from your dream, which are your memories from the past year and a half. What are the moments that stand out for you? The big moments. The beautiful ones. The hard ones. What defined these different moments? Did they feel real? Did they feel unreal? You're kind of taking in this dream that you've had feels both real and not. You look at the time and date, maybe it's on a phone or on a calendar, on a clock, and you realize that it's the date before the pandemic began.

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The experience felt so real to you in that dream that you feel changed by it, but you also know it's a dream. And somehow, you know, it will remain a dream. This wasn't a premonition that the pandemic is not going to happen, but you've had this visceral experience of it happen. You are changed by what has occurred. And you feel compelled to document, to remember how you were changed, how you were. Moved by this experience, and so you get out a pen and a paper, you write a note to yourself, what I want to remember is. What you want to take from this dream that was so real, but not about how you want to live. You're not preparing for what is to come because it won't come. And this visualization, there's no covid pandemic. It's about remembering something essential about living and life itself. When you wake up from this dream. What is it that you want to remember? What are you going to say? Now that you see yourself writing it down. This message to yourself. You feel the energy of your awake this start to blossom. When you're done writing, maybe kind of stretch and look around. Kind of shake yourself off. I invite you to come out of this visualisations. And if you feel so moved, invite, I invite you to write what you wanted to remember from this experience in the chat. What is the lesson for you of this dream, a time for how you'd want to live? How you want to keep on living?

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What do you want to remember from this time? Reverend Sean shared with me a few of the responses that he heard from his own congregation right now. Maybe you're sharing a few of your own in our chat here on YouTube. Sean said that

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People in Colorado and his community wanted to remember that there's a preciousness in outdoor spaces. He said one person said they wanted to remember that they can retire, but they don't have to wait. Another person wanted to remember that there is a fragility always in what we have. Yet another wanted to remember that they got clean and sober in this time and they can keep doing that. A lot of folks in his community just wanted to remember that life matters, that there's a preciousness and being alive, or that they have got what it takes to survive big, beautiful things to remember life giving and sustaining things. Sean said that these are all powerful lessons from this time that we can live into or put another way in the film, Ferne reflects on the phrase that her father always used to tell her. He would say what's remembered lives. What's remembered lives. You know, what we will remember from this time will shape the road that we each travel from here on out, it will shape the world that we create for ourselves and the bigger world that we help create for each other. It will shape who we greet, who we remember to see along that road, who we welcome into our circle of care. And when we make conscious choices about what we will remember, then that is what will live. That is how we create the legacy of this time. You know, as we begin to regather, I want to offer us some space to weave our community back together with this same kind of purpose this afternoon in just about two hours, actually, we will all be together in the flesh for the first time as a full community at Wellspring's at the Montgomery School.

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And we'll be together in song, which is just about the best freakin way I can imagine a gathering for the first time after what we have been through these past 16 months. It's going to be awesome. And then there will be more weeks after today's reunion. There will be more Sundays, there will be more months. There will be more years, God willing, decades even of our life together in this community. There's still so much road ahead, so as we get ready to regather weekly in the fall. I'm going to reinstate something I did before the pandemic as we get ready for this starting in mid-July, after I return from vacation, I'm going to offer a drop in time over the lunch hour on Thursdays. Now, don't ask me where yet. I haven't quite figured that out, but. Oh, well, I'll find a place. We'll find a place, and we'll have a weekly space every single Thursday over lunch time with a way to drop in remotely to. Because I want this to be the kind of thing where we can come together, even if you only have 10 minutes or five minutes on your lunch break. But an opportunity for us to just see each other and be together and each week during these lunchtime drop ins on Thursday is all offer us up a single question if we want to talk about it, just to get our conversations with each other starting and to remember that we have an opportunity to be intentional about this time. I was inspired in this by the work of a woman named Priya Parker, an author and a facilitator who wrote a book on gathering on how we meet and why it matters relevant right now.

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She has been writing in recent months about the topic that is on so many of our minds of what it will be like when we start to come back together into the places and spaces that we knew, how will we navigate this transition, knowing that things have changed, that we have changed in some ways. And she asks a set of questions that seem simple, but of course are full of lots of beautifully complicated real life threads like what just happened. What just happened? All right. What just happened? What has this time been for you? And going a little deeper, what happened to our sense of place in this time? What happened to our sense of family in this time, what happened to our sense of ourselves? Who and what, she asks, did I miss and who and what did I not miss? What did I learn? What do I still need to learn? What was lost in this time? And what ways did I become lost? How did I become reoriented and find my way? And in what ways was I newly found and discovered to myself? What was revealed about myself, to me, about my relationships, about the world I live in, and what did these revelations ask of me? What do they ask now? And finally, what is the story we will tell about this time in the future? What is the story you plan to tell? When maybe your little ones are grown up and big enough to ask your grandchildren, the kids in your community, in your congregation,

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Is the story we will tell and how will we live into the story of these changes? So we'll take maybe one of those questions each Thursday, each week, starting next month, and for anyone at all who wants to join us, whether to reflect or just to listen sometimes to other folks, reflections can be so helpful to begin to make some sense of this for ourselves, seeing where we show up in someone else's story. Right. Or where we might differ, it's all helpful. That's all part of the gift of having each other, being a community. We can remember together and what's remembered

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Live. Amen Wellspring's and may you live in Blessing. I invite you all to take a breath, maybe let your eyes closed if you're comfortable, let your shoulders drop and join me in the spirit of prayer. God, who has made our lives. Holder and creator of this road that we travel. May we remember as we think about stories that affect us, as we think about this time and where we're going and where we've been. Maybe remember that this idea of a road is not just a metaphor that we drive on roads every day with other people, that we walk on the streets and we pass each other. May we remember that the road is an image for us that helps us make some sense of how things happen, how things unfold in our lives, but that we make the road by walking, as Brian McLaren says, we make the road by traveling it. And just like a good Samaritan in that Christian New Testament story. We have opportunities to reach out and to connect with people as we travel. We may think we have very little to offer that we don't have enough energy, that we don't have enough resources, but what we offer may do more than we think. And so maybe we remember today that as we continue to travel this road ahead of us, tired as we might be, we can rest and that we can move forward when we're ready. We don't have to sleepwalk back into our old lives. We can move with intention and choice and freedom. May we remember only one to use our freedom? Well. Today and all the days to come. For the person I've spoken and for the prayers that everyone gathered with us from all different places on this land, the prayers they're holding in their hearts this morning, for all of these, we say amen. If you enjoyed this message and would like to support the mission of Wellspring's, go to our Web site. wellspringsuu.org. That's Wellspring's the letters UU dot ORG.

END OF TRANSCRIPT



