

## NAME

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## START OF TRANSCRIPT

**[00:00:00] Speaker1**

The following is a message from Wellspring's congregation. Hi, everybody. I am smiling this morning just at the thought of picturing all of you in your homes. Joining us for Sunday worship, thinking about what is changing, thinking about how different last Sunday was. Last Sunday, I was actually in Belle Hall with some of you for our first in-person worship service since last March. And it felt really weird and it felt really good. And I was a little bit stressed and I was a little bit teary. And it was such a mix of emotions. But the only way I can think to describe it in words is to say that it's settled something inside me. It's settled something that had been mixed up and feeling sort of untethered for a really long time. So I have mixed feelings about doing this this week, though I am very grateful that we thought ahead and decided to give ourselves a little time between these first two in-person services. Our next one is planned for September 5th, because as you saw, if you watch the live stream, we still have some bugs to work out our plan. A set up of equipment will have a much better quality of picture and sound for you all. So cross your fingers and pray to whatever higher powers you ask for such things that we will be able to bring you both an in-person service on September 5th and a live stream of that service that you all feel you can fully be a part of.

**[00:01:53] Speaker1**

But, you know, there was something that Reverend Ken said last Sunday in his message that also stuck with me about what this time is like for us. He talked about this feeling that I think many of us are carrying in different ways of disappointment, of resentment, maybe crankiness, perhaps, that we are where we are right now after this past year and a half. Right. We had an outdoor concert. Reverend Ken talked about with the band over the summer. And at that point, we were all feeling like it was going to be smooth sailing into the fall. Clear skies ahead. We thought this summer that surely by September, everything would be more clear and calmer when it came to how we were going to live with this pandemic. We were supposed to be getting ready for the good times, basically. Right. And instead, this week, I feel more uncertainty in some ways. Worse uncertainty than before. Less clarity about what to do and what the right steps are to take this Delta variate that I am sick of. Saying that you were probably sick of hearing about it is frustratingly still somewhat unknown and unpredictable to us. Schools are reopening and families with young kids are back in the pressure cooker once again, just having to cross their fingers, your fingers, right. Or pray as you will make decisions about the fall for your children that you probably don't feel great about no matter what path you are choosing.

**[00:03:36] Speaker1**

And amidst all of that, as if that wasn't enough, we still have all of the crises that we have been dealing with, along with the withdrawal from Afghanistan that has laid heavily on many of our hearts this week as well. So many of the images and stories coming out of that country of people fighting for their lives to escape. They hit us in different places based on maybe what our own family's stories are or maybe our own connections to the military and to the war in Afghanistan over these past 20 years. It's a rough time for the American psyche, and I may not have listed the particular troubles on your heart this week and may be personal to you or they may be connected to something bigger. We are so ready for the joy to come back. We've been ready. And there are glimpses all around. Human kindness is overflowing. And I think it's going to rain today. You know, I think a big part of our communities work at Wellspring's our ministry this year. Is going to be helping each other walk through all of this. Walkthrough move through a time when we have to find joy to keep going. Even if the hits keep coming. I don't think we have another option because our joy, our joy doesn't depend on things going well. It is something deeper that we can find with each other. And it is the antidote to despair. There is something about being together in community that helps us find joy and also generate joy.

**[00:05:43] Speaker1**

I feel like that's a lot of my work and our work this year. I hope that what we do, your ministers, your staff, make that easier for you to find. There's an essay by the Irish poet William Butler Yeats. That includes the line too many things are occurring for even a big heart to hold. Too many things are occurring for even a big heart to hold. But I know that many hands together can hold up heavy things. And I know that many hearts. Together. Can hold a lot. I went back and forth this week about whether or not I wanted to stick with the spirit like story that I had planned for us. The HBO Limited series, *The White Lotus*, which I loved for the record and which is part kind of fun part cultural critique, part escapist mystery. The show starts the way that a lot of shows, popular shows start these days with this opening sort of clue, a dead body in a transport box being loaded onto a plane. And we don't find out who is in that box until the end of the limited series. And so some of the show is, you know, the whodunit who died right after that scene. We flashback to a point in time one week before that scene when a new group of tourists arrive at the *White Lotus*, a fancy luxury resort in Hawaii. And so the show is kind of a mix of things in an interesting way.

**[00:07:39] Speaker1**

It is part sort of fun and lighthearted look at a strange environment. It is HBO level, explicit at times. Don't say I didn't warn you, but I did decide to stick with it this week. Because I also think the show speaks to a desire that we feel right now to just get away and escape from all of this awful stuff around us. Do you feel that? I feel it. Maybe for me or for you. It doesn't look like a trip to Hawaii, but it might look like a whole lot of Netflix on the couch or not talking about certain things. Changing the subject when people bring their topics up. Now, that desire can be tricky because good boundaries are a good thing, right? We need to take stock of how much we can really take in at any given moment, and that can be healthy. But there is a line somewhere between boundaries and escapism. Between boundaries which are aware of how much we can take in and making a choice about it, and escapism, which is more about not even wanting to touch it. No awareness, a denial, a resistance that pushes back and refuses to see. The Buddhist tradition grounds its entire belief system in the idea that suffering is part of life. Suffering is inevitable in some sense. Right. It's an innate characteristic of existing. But even the Buddhists recognize that the very next noble truth. Right.

**[00:09:31] Speaker1**

The second innate characteristic of existing is that we long to be free from suffering. All of us. And therein lies the problem, because when suffering is part of reality and we long to be free of it, we do a lot of different things to try to satisfy that longing. And there are skillful ways to alleviate suffering. And there are unskillful ways, ineffective ways, even harmful ways that we try to alleviate are suffering. *The White Lotus* takes us headlong into a lot of those unhelpful and harmful ways, that impulse that we have to escape. The show introduces us to three sets of guests who are coming to this Hawaiian resort and at the same time to the staff who live there all the time. And they show us how their stories unfold in parallel, cataloging so many of the different ways that we try to escape through another person, right through travel, through drugs or alcohol, through just the cocoon of our worldview that we don't want to let anything into. And it shows us how all of those escapes are temporary, if they work, they only work for a little while. They are not very effective and they're often harmful. The series relentlessly brings us back to being in contact with reality, the way that real life fights for our attention, always insisting that we come back into touch with reality again. Damn reality, right? Why can't we just live in these fantasy worlds? I would love to live in the fantasy where Covid is over.

**[00:11:39] Speaker1**

I bet you would, too. I'm sure some of us would love to be living in the fantasy where we were safe 100 percent of the time from racism or from violence or hate directed our way because of who we are. I'm sure some of us would love to live in the fantasy where America is always America, the beautiful, and has never done anything wrong. It would be so much better, wouldn't it? I wish we could stay there. But we know that we can't. And, you know, maybe part of. This work of recognizing truth around us, which I think is part of what spirituality asks and does for us. Maybe part of the spiritual life is reminding us that it's better not to pour all our energy into squeezing our eyes closed and building fences up around these fantasy worlds. But maybe it's better for us to put that same energy into being here in this world that we have. Because then maybe we will actually focus on making this real world. Better. I think it's a question we are all going to be living with for the near future. It is one of the most enduring spiritual questions there is. What is mine to care about? Who is my neighbor? That's the question in this time of conflict, of refugee crisis, of climate collapse, of pandemic, it's the question who are our neighbors? What are our responsibilities to each other? In *The White Lotus*, the characters struggle with that question, just like we do.

**[00:13:46] Speaker1**

They're private ways of escaping and fantasies keep breaking down. Even in an environment that is relentlessly focused on being a fantasy world. Right, this resort environment and the brilliance of the show is how deftly it shows the different layers of reality at play. At one time, which is true, I think, in all of our lives. We see the interior lives of the guests and the staff, and we see the commonalities. Everyone deals with loss at times, everyone deals with the struggles of relationships. We all have the same kinds of private human struggles. But on another layer. This show reveals to us that in the exterior world, not our interior lives, but in the exterior world, other kinds of suffering are not equally distributed. There an undercurrent of awareness in this story of class and colonialism and the way we live within both of those realities. These characters, just like us, have inherited the ripple effects of centuries of white supremacy and the way that white supremacy has justified exploiting land and people. Even if we, you and me, don't believe that that is right or how things should be. The show is reminding us and all of these little moments and all of these little waves, that we are still tied up in it. And one of the most classic ways of trying to escape that discomfort of owning that, it comes out of the mouth of one character in this perfect scene.

**[00:15:36] Speaker1**

I Mark Mosbacher is the character. He's the dad in one of the wealthy families that's staying at the resort and his college age daughter. They have the perfect little dynamic, right, where she's just poking holes in everything he says and does. And she brings up the awkwardness of what's happening around them at this resort. She brings up the discomfort in the native Hawaiian employees of the resort performing for this wealthy white families entertainment. And her dad kind of goes off on a rant and he just says, well, what am I supposed to do with that in the moment? Right. What am I supposed to do? What you want me to do? Am I supposed to sit around to feel bad about myself all day? Huh? Is that what you want? I should never enjoy myself. Or maybe I should just not exist anymore to make space for these other people. Right? Should I just disappear as a white man? Maybe you've heard those questions in some conversations that you have had. Maybe they've come up in conversations about social justice or all the buzzwords these days that we hear wolke ness or critical race theory. Right. Maybe you've asked those questions inside your own head when you've been frustrated and not sure what you were supposed to do. About some suffering in the world, something uncomfortable that you encountered. It's hard to come in contact with reality when reality is not pretty. But I think it's interesting that. This is our go to for so many people.

**[00:17:25] Speaker1**

The only possibilities we can imagine. In response to suffering. Are either guilt or self-loathing sitting around feeling bad about it? Or escape. Disappearing. Why are those the options that come up when we get frustrated or upset? When we feel helpless and don't know what to do. There are so limited. And couldn't it be that there are lots of other possibilities for what to do with that information, with that discomfort, besides those two things? Couldn't there be a more skillful way? To work with what is difficult about that. All of us have been through some experience in life, I'm sure, where we have suffered and reached out to talk about it, shared that with someone. Maybe think of an example in your own life right now. One that is safe for you to recall, maybe something that you have recovered from at this point. Something there has time where some time has passed. But think of an example. Call to mind a time in your own life when you were struggling. Remember what was going on? Remember the circumstances? And now, remember whether you shared that suffering with someone. Was there anyone that you told what was going on? Anyone at all? Anyone that you shared your feelings with, how awful it was, how bad you felt, how it was affecting you. Remember that moment? And now try to recall the intention you had in that moment when you shared that with someone, your struggle, your suffering.

**[00:19:42] Speaker1**

Was the intention for that person to feel bad? Was your intention for that person to stop existing because they didn't share those same struggles that you had? Did you hate the sight of their face so much that you didn't want them to be there? Did you want them to feel guilty or sad all the time about what you were dealing with? Of course you didn't. When we share what we're struggling with, it's because we need some love. It's because we need to feel seen and cared for. Right. You probably wanted some kindness. You just wanted a little bit of compassion or support. Maybe there was something practical that you were hoping to be helped with. To alleviate some of that suffering. But maybe just the sharing of it was part of what helped alleviate it. Just knowing you were seen. And then someone still cared about it and about you. When anyone points out the reality of what we're struggling with, I think that is what we really want. And if we're on the receiving end of learning about the difficult things in this world around us that other human beings are struggling with. If all we respond with is defensiveness or escape. And we miss out. On the chance to give that gift to another person. Just being willing to see them. And care for them. I mean, it's not about us in that moment. Last year, one of the things that we tried out online that was kind of fun, actually, I think we might do it again in the coming year with our new ministerial intern when she starts.

**[00:22:01] Speaker1**

It was an online session that we held that was open to anybody called Ask Me Anything about Unitarian Universalism. Some of you were there. We did it on Zoom for an hour. Reverend Canon, I just took questions from anybody who had any question at all about our faith and our tradition. And we got a question that day from one of you that was so simple, really. But I realized I'd never been asked it before. I remember actually it was Denine who asked and she said, What is your favorite thing about being a Unitarian Universalist? Simple question, right, what's your favorite thing about being a Unitarian Universalist? And I, I do think for a moment and as soon as I filtered through that, you know, the abundant flowing coffee jokes that were coming up in my head, I realized that. The thing I love most. About being U. U. Is the way it has pushed me to grow outside my comfort zone. I don't think without this tradition that I would have met and known and loved a lot of the people that I do in this world. I have come in contact with people I might have never come in contact with otherwise because of our spiritual community, because of our faith, because Unitarian Universalism makes me say some things that I believe in, and therefore it pushes me to walk that talk.

**[00:23:34] Speaker1**

Right. If I if we believe that every human being as beloved. Well, then, why don't I know certain people with certain different life experiences, why was I raised in an environment where I didn't come into contact with people who live not far away, but there are these systems and structures keeping us apart. I want to know more about what different people's life experiences are because of our faith. And because I believe that every human being is beloved, when I learn that some people are dehumanized or when I learn that some people's basic needs for things like health and education and food are treated as more or less important than other people's needs for those same things. I can't just sit by and not do anything. I can't pretend not to notice that. It's against my religion. And that has pushed me to grow and be a better person, and I hope I have a better impact on the world, I'm still learning a lot and I'm still growing. But that. Is what it's all about. And it's humbling to realize that I probably wouldn't have done that. I don't know who knows? But I know that I did do those things and pushed myself in those ways because of this faith tradition. Now, some people will say that suffering. Can't be alleviated fully, right? There will always be a struggle. And that's the sort of helplessness that they get caught up in, why bother? Right. Even Jesus in the New Testament says the poor you will always have with you.

**[00:25:32] Speaker1**

But so much of what Jesus teaches in the same breath is about how to heal the injustice of poverty. And the Buddhists believe that suffering is part of life, but they do not say that it is meaningless to work to alleviate it. In fact, much the opposite, they say that that is the whole path, the whole way. Of living an awakened life. We have seen this play out in the last year and a half in the pandemic. Do you remember the joy that we were able to generate in those early days just by finding ways to notice and alleviate suffering around us, just the suffering that we could touch? We banged pots and pans for health care workers and we donated food and we sewed masks and we appreciated teachers for how hard it is to teach a child to read in all new ways. We made sure that no person would be evicted or without a home during those early days of the pandemic. We hope people pay their bills. There was so many ways that we stayed in contact with reality and helped. We did all of those things. And I can't stop thinking about that. I can't stop wondering why we can't find the will and the creativity as a society to keep doing those things. Now. But maybe we can. If more of us are willing to stay in contact with reality rather than giving in to guilt and despair and escape.

**[00:27:27] Speaker1**

Maybe we can work together to not just alleviate suffering, but generate some of that same joy that we did then. William Butler Yeats. Said too many things are occurring for even a big heart told. Yeah. But, you know, my heart might not be able to get that big, and maybe yours can't either. And yet in our tradition. We believe in something greater than us. That is love with a capital L. We believe in a sense of love that is able to hold all of it. All of us. In our tradition, we all have access to that love, no matter who we are. None of us can be that giant capital L love. But we can connect to it. Even at our most depleted and our most exhausted. That is the promise of our faith. And it's when we are most depleted and exhausted, that is exactly when we need to ask love to fill us up. To not be afraid, to show where we are struggling, to not run away from other people who are also having a hard time. But to get closer. And to trust that maybe many hands together can hold up all the heavy things. And maybe. Many hearts together. And in touch with this real life can generate more. May it be so for all of us in the week ahead? Friends. Amen. And may you live in blessing. I invite you to join me for a moment in the spirit of prayer.

**[00:29:55] Speaker1**

God of our hearts. Who knows what we carry? Who sees where we struggle? May we remember not only. To trust that we can show up fully, to trust that we can be honest about where we're at, but may we remember that when someone else does that with us. They may just want to be seen. But even if we can't help in the way that we wish we could. That it means something not to run away. And it means something just to stick together. And to say I see you and I'm sorry and I want to work on making it better for all of us. It's OK to not do everything right now. And it's OK to rest when we need to. But an open heart. A heart that is willing to see the other human beings around us. It will reenergize us. When we can connect with each other, we will find ourselves. More alive. God of our hearts, may we remember? That we always have access to your heart when our hearts feel small. And may you help us stay open to that presence of love that is always here. For the prayers that I've spoken out loud and for the prayers that everyone with us this morning is carrying silently on their own 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.org. That's Wellspring, the letters UU dot ORG

END OF TRANSCRIPT



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