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Under the Rainbow MP3.mp3

DATE

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DURATION

25m 17s

2 SPEAKERS

Speaker1

Speaker2

START OF TRANSCRIPT

[00:00:00] Speaker1

The following is a message from Wellsprings Congregation. Melissa has never performed that outside of a pre-recording in her own living room. If you can believe it, that's beautiful. Well, hi, everyone. You know, this morning, I don't know if it was true where you were, but where I woke up in phoenixville, there was a big, thick blanket of fog over everything. And by now it has lifted and that spirit of that song, that spirit of This Morning and The Fog has me hoping that more of these fogs are going to lift soon for us. I am very hopeful. I'm crossing my fingers and giving you just a heads up, I can't promise yet, but keep an eye out this Wednesday for your weekly email. The numbers in Chester County for COVID 19 have been back below the red for about nine days now. I think so. I am hopeful that next Sunday we will have about 50 people who can sign up and join us here in Bell Hall. It'll be nice to not sing to empty chairs. Five of them or so are not empty, but it's it makes a big difference. The great author Toni Morrison gave an interview in 2003. At the time, she was teaching at Princeton University and she was talking about her students and the lessons, the most important lessons that aren't about the subject, right? The life lessons that she tries to impart upon the college students that she teaches.

[00:01:51] Speaker2

She said this.

[00:01:54] Speaker1

She said, I tell my students when you get these jobs that you have been so brilliantly trained for. Just remember that your real job is that if you are free, you need to free somebody else. If you have some power, then your job is to empower somebody else. It's not included on that visual there, but the next line in that quote that you can find online, she said life is not just a grab bag candy game. This isn't just about I'm going to get mine and you're going to get yours. I really love this quote because it resonates with me, right, these are my values, too. And I think for us in this community, these are our values. Right. Look out for others. Share what you have if you have enough, even if you don't have enough. Pay it forward, work not only for your own good, but for the common good, for the greater good. These values are part of our spiritual covenant with one another as Unitarian Universalists, but also just as good people, right? We think of this as part of our common moral covenant in this society. And I think one of the things that we are grappling with today this fall this year. Is how we move forward when those covenants are broken. How do we deal with the fact? That we don't feel like everyone is looking out for each other.

[00:03:42] Speaker1

What happens when maybe we fail to look out for somebody else or when somebody else fails to look out for us and we are kind of treating life like a grab bag candy game? Just looking out for number one. It's one of the hardest things, actually, that I have heard many of you when you join me on Thursdays, when I do those dropping coffee hour times, when I just have conversations with folks in our community, I keep hearing us trying to cope with this as we start emerging from this pandemic. This realization that long after the concrete threats of COVID 19, hopefully one day will have faded. We're still left with these questions. Questions about how it feels, how to move forward when we don't feel like we can trust each other in the same way anymore. To look at our neighbors and maybe for the first time, see the consequences of our political differences, not just as disagreements, but in terms of a body count. That's real. And for some of us, it's not a count, it's a person that we know. Person, we've lost. I know that this experience has made many of us doubt that common covenant we have with each other as good people. Over these past two years, we have watched as our national leadership in the White House. Essentially, after those first couple weeks, maybe months, abandon the project of keeping us collectively safe from this virus.

[00:05:36] Speaker1

And instead shifted to a model of individual choice and preference instead of collective care. All right. We got mask debates, we got arguments about personal freedom and that approach filtered down. It filtered into our state and our local governments and also to people around us who shared the political beliefs of that former president. And as we watched that happen, we ourselves were forced to make a shift in response. Because we could see that the collective care was not holding and to some extent, all of us also had to make a choice, had to make our choices more on the basis of self-preservation just to survive. We had to focus on just keeping ourselves and our loved ones safe. Now, I know that's not the whole story, if anything, right, those first few weeks of the pandemic, our instincts were so good. The fact that we all adjusted on a dime without question, we shut things down. We did everything we could. In those early days to care for each other, that is evidence of what is really there. Our first instinct, right at the core. And I know many of us fought hard and are still fighting to keep that perspective alive to keep our hearts open. We donated whatever we didn't need beyond our own piles of food and masks and toilet paper.

[00:07:17] Speaker1

We stayed up into the wee hours of the morning. Some of us refreshing websites and signing up total strangers for the first available vaccine appointment. We fought to keep our hearts open, and many of us still are. But a sort of injury crept in alongside that. A kind of a wound. Psychologists, psychiatrists, spiritual caregivers have been doing research on this kind of injury recently. Most often, the research deals with veterans, but they have started researching it. Also in health care workers and first responders and in anyone who witnesses trauma, they call it moral injury. Moral injury. It's what happens when a person either does or witnesses without being able to stop something that deeply violates their moral conscience, moral injury. I think I see us dealing with moral injury, I see it showing up everywhere. I see it every time I notice someone musing on whether unvaccinated people deserve medical care for COVID. I see it in the emptiness of all of our fast draining wells of compassion for each other. I see it in the helplessness of a quote like this one, which I see all the time on social media. I'm sure you've seen it too. I don't know how to explain to you that you should care about other people. This is the exhaustion of moral injury. Of a broken covenant that we don't know how to rebuild.

[00:09:21] Speaker1

I talked last week about what covenants really are. However, more than just promises between two people, but they involve a third party, some deeper value or institution or deity, even that we trust beyond each other that we can ground our covenant in. And that's what makes it so hard when a covenant is broken because it's not just our relationship with these other people that's injured. It can also be our trust in that deeper grounding thing. I think many of us had an idea of our covenant together as neighbors and as Americans rooted in that sense of what it meant to be a good person of common morality. That means that you look out for me and I look out for you. And now we're feeling the whole ground of that idea shake. I do think it makes a lot of sense that we're feeling this right now because I think we've actually been feeling it in different ways for a while. I think it's been a little shaky for us ever since our country started decades ago to reckon with all of the different ways that we have failed to live up to our original American covenant. You know, the one that says all men are created equal. And endowed by our creator. I didn't write this down, I don't remember it exactly to with certain inalienable rights.

[00:11:10] Speaker1

Among these are the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. It was the middle phrase I didn't have. Thank you. It's right there in the covenant, right? All men. Some people just aren't seen. It's written in other places in the document that some people are three fifths of a person. We failed to live up to that American covenant from the beginning, and we are reckoning with that as a country. The pandemic may have brought some new light to these injuries among us, but the broken covenants among us are already a sore spot. You only need to look back as far as the massive Black Lives Matter mobilization against police brutality last summer to be reminded right that this covenant has been broken for people of color since our country's founding. They know this feeling what it means to walk around every day and move through this world with a shaky sense of trust in these common moral covenants that we claim. And women know this sense of broken covenant. Just yesterday in Westchester, at the courthouse, women in our congregation gathered to draw attention to it. Lgbtq folks, disabled people throughout our history. Two earlier Asian immigrants, Irish immigrants. Before that, poor folks know this sense of broken covenant. A lot of us know what this feels like to hear these promises to protect each other grounded in this American identity while watching all the ways that we fail to live up to those promises.

[00:13:12] Speaker1

I think that the sense of despair from the pandemic, that many folks who look like me. White, middle class, upper class, suburban, I think the despair that we are feeling now. Comes from a new level of realization that now our covenant is broken to the covenant, we thought we shared with all those neighbors who looked like us, who we thought wanted the same things and shared the same moral grounding. So what do we do with that? You know, as a preacher, sometimes I feel like I ask all these hard questions in the first half of my sermon and I sit back and I go, Yeah, what do we do with that? Reverend Lee? Well, the good news is it turns out this is a very old problem to have because when I started looking for spiritual wisdom to help answer this question of what we do with our broken covenants, I found a very old story. It's one of the oldest wisdom stories we have, actually it predates the Christian scripture, the Jewish scripture. Scholars believe this story was passed down by oral tradition long before the Bible and eventually folded in to the Book of Genesis as the scriptures were assembled. It's the story of the Great Flood.

[00:14:46] Speaker2

And Noah.

[00:14:49] Speaker1

You probably know this one. But you see, as the story goes,

[00:14:55] Speaker2

God,

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The creator of all things the giver of all our lives, had a basic covenant with humanity to sustain the Earth. To keep this beautifully made creation going. But as the story goes, one day, God got mad. Look it up, if you've never read the whole story in the Book of Genesis, it's as simple as that. Seriously, in the Bible, it says, basically, God took a look at what humanity was up to and was like, Oh, these people are awful. This is an actual quote from Genesis Chapter six. The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the Earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.

[00:15:48] Speaker2

Wow.

[00:15:50] Speaker1

Sick burn God, right? It says in Genesis that God regretted making human beings. That's how bad it was. And so God decided to break that covenant of life and protection and wipe everybody out. God saved one dude that God didn't hate. Have you ever jokingly been frustrated and been saying like, Oh, I hate everyone, and then you turn to your spouse, your partner or your best friend and you're like, except you. That's what God did in this story, right? I hate everyone, except, you know, you're fine. And that flood was awful. I mean, again, we get a sanitized version of this that's more about learning the names of the animals, right and Sunday school. But the flood was a catastrophe. Death and destruction on a near universal global scale. Can you imagine the trauma of that for Noah? He got to live. He had to work pretty hard to survive. And even God realized that Noah couldn't survive completely alone. So he got to bring his family. And he had to bring animals, a representative from every living species on Earth aboard a boat so they could all be saved together. But Noah did make it through. He survived the disaster. And yet this covenant from God to protect all of creation had been so deeply broken. When you think about the story of Noah and the flood in this way, it makes sense that it can't end there, right? With one lucky survivor. Now the story goes on and tells us that God felt the need to make some repair.

[00:18:07] Speaker1

To heal the great injury, and so when the floodwaters subsided, God looked around and realized that God could not promise to take perfect care of creation. Maybe God could not promise to never get mad or that hard times would not come, but God could promise to base his new covenant with creation in grace. And in mercy. At the end of the story, God sets this as a sign in the sky. The sign of the rainbow. Not promising that storms will never come again, but promising that they will all come to an end eventually. And he says to Noah Survivor, when you see this sign in the sky. Take it as a reminder that even the most broken things can be mended. With grace and mercy. With growth. That's what the scriptures have for us. I love this story. And I understand. Makes sense to me that it is older than the Christian scriptures older than the Jewish Torah because it does not describe a perfect God. Honestly, the perfection of God, if you study this, the perfection of God is a much more modern theological invention than we think. Now in this story, God grows. You can't grow if you're already perfect. In this story, God learns something God makes a mistake and regrets it and owns up to it, and in the end, God gets better at loving people. Maybe this is all we can do. With our own broken covenants. We can see them for what they are, and then we can decide whether it is worth it to us.

[00:20:45] Speaker1

To invest in grace and mercy. And in the growth that we will all need to build new ones. Maybe it's because I've been reflecting so much this week on our capacity for brokenness. But I actually found a commentary, a quote on the Noah story from John Calvin of all people, not somebody that Unitarian Universalist quote a lot. The founder of Calvinist theology. But the quote described this perfectly in talking about the Noah story. He said as often as the rain alarms you look upon the rainbow for, although rain may overflow the Earth. It shall be to you, the rainbow shall be to you, a pledge of returning dryness. Which will then lead you to stand with even greater confidence than you would under a clear and serene sky. We simply don't get the promise of perfection in this life. We don't get the promise of perfect plans coming perfectly to fruition. But we do always. Get some promise of repair. Our floods that we are facing right now have survivors. That's you and me. That's all of us gathered and listening and watching with us this morning. We are the survivors of this last year and a half. And after floods, we get rainbows, too. We get the possibility of rebuilding the space of some peace after the storm that gives us the time to do so and maybe even a little bit of beauty in the sky. To light our way. Judy Garland sings about life over the rainbow right, where troubles melt like lemon drops and happy little bluebirds fly.

[00:23:11] Speaker1

And as much as I love Judy Garland's voice and that song, I will take this life under the rainbow that Melissa sang about earlier a life where the rainbow is always over our head. A life of grace and love, no matter the mistakes that we make. And a life that calls us back into relationship with each other and with life itself. Amen. And may you all live in blessing. I invite you to join me wherever you are in the spirit of prayer. God of growth and change. God of learning. How to be better at taking care of ourselves and each other. May we look for the rainbows all around us? All of those places where we're shown all of the different colors that are always there that we usually can't see in the clear white light. And when we see those rainbows, whether literal or metaphorical around us, may we remember that they are a sign of a new day, that they are a sign that we are not at the end of our story? And we still have a chance to write a news story from this day forward. For these prayers that I've spoken and for the prayers that all of us are carrying on our hearts this morning, we say amen. Andy is going to do our last song this morning as a soul, if you enjoyed this message and would like to support the mission of Wellsprings. Go to our web site WellspringsUU.org. That's wellsprings the letters u u dot ORG.

END OF TRANSCRIPT



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