

NAME

Their Promises Audio.mp3

DATE

November 3, 2021

DURATION

15m 52s

2 SPEAKERS

Speaker1

Speaker2

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

The following is a message from Wellsprings Congregation Remembrance Sunday.

[00:00:06] Speaker2

There's a question. That I found myself reflecting on in preparation for today that I'd ask you to think about for just a moment. When was the first time? That you became aware of death. When was the first time that you became aware? Well, the fact that we are mortal creatures. Not sure. Yeah, some of you are. I see some head nods, I see some head shakes. Maybe if you're watching at home, you might if you have a memory, just drop it into the chat. For some of us, that awareness was occasioned by tragedy. By a profound upset in how we would have expected our lives to be, and for some of us, we had that awareness occasioned by, well, I guess you'll see in a moment after I tell the story by some laughter I was not aware of when I knew that we died, but I was told the story over and over again. As I grew up, I was walking down the street three years of age, doing that toddler total thing, holding my mom's hand, walking down the street. I think it was in Allentown, Pennsylvania, where we lived at the time and in our walk. My mom and I, we came across a woman who I'll just say was older. To me at the time, they must have looked ancient. I looked up. At this old woman, she looked down at me, we talked the three of us for a little bit of time and then when I'm guessing she was maybe three feet away, but I thought completely out of earshot.

[00:02:03] Speaker2

I turned up to my mom still holding her hand, and I said, I love talking to old people who haven't died yet. That story has been told over and over to me so often that I swear I can remember it all, I don't think I actually do recall it. But apparently, at three years of age, holding my mom's hand, meeting someone much older than I thought was entirely possible. I became aware. That there was this experience. Called death. The way that our calendar works here at Wellsprings. Is that most often this? Not always on Halloween, although it's very fitting this year. Towards the end of October, we have this Remembrance Sunday. And the way we plan it, it tends to be at the end of the fall message series, which means that at the end of most fall message series, we end up talking about death. Which, from my perspective, is a great way to end things. You could say that the first spiritual search that ever was in the history of humanity began with this recognition. That we at least in this form. I don't know what comes after open to it, but I don't know.

[00:03:43] Speaker2

We in this form. Don't last forever. There is an end to this. And I think that this year, especially this message series. We plan God laughs. About the fact that at some point. The plans we have made for ourselves are going to be upended. Obviously, we have gotten over and over and over again for the last year and a half, a crash course and repeated crash course and all of that. But the truth is this old Yiddish saying. We plan God laughs. It's always true. And there is nothing more upsetting to our plans. And the fact that we die. This is the invitation on this day. And this is how I like to hear, even if it's more figurative and metaphorical than literal gods, laughter. It's actually a relieving, graceful after. You didn't finish all your plans in this life. No one does. You are beloved anyway. You didn't get to do everything you wanted to do. Ok. This is the human condition. Emily Dickinson put it so well over 100 years ago because I could not stop for death. Death kindly stopped for me, and then it goes on, but I can never remember who's in the carriage, exactly. So I'm not going to say that part because I'm going to get it wrong. Death will stop for all of us. And it can pause us right now here today.

[00:05:49] Speaker2

To wake us up again. To invite us to ask the question. What is it like to seek something and there's this entire message series has been about? Deeper than simply our plans. A more powerful presence and way of being that regardless of the amount of time we have. We can bring that presence of love and compassion. And truly being here in this life. In the midst sometimes of incredibly difficult circumstances. That this is what death. The reality of death offers us. How can we awaken as fully? As we can today. Of course. There are those and I think they are the archetype of so many villains. Of movies and music and stories. There are days those who say no way. I won't stop. And so end up creating more harm. Because they would not have their plans in any way interrupted. When death? Enters the picture. But there's another happier side to this, which is that the archetype of just about every hero. Except deaths accepts death as a fact of life. And finds. A more harmful way to live. It is the question that Adam left for us in his opening today. How do we knowing that we are going to die, choose to live? To come alive. To be present. Even if we're not going to accomplish all of our plans. There's a woman named Kate Bowler, this is her.

[00:08:00] Speaker2

She is a new book called No Cure for Being Human. She is a professor of the history of Christianity at Duke Divinity School. Ok, I want to say this to be intentional. She takes her faith tradition very seriously. She is not anti-Christian. Kate Bowler, who at the age of 35 with no apparent medical risks, found out that she had stage four metastatic cancer. And so, Kate Bowler. Found herself one day in the hospital, hooked up to her IV. Wearing her hospital gown, asking to speak to the manager. In the bookstore of the gift shop of the hospital in which he was receiving treatment, and she got this from the teenager behind the counter because what she had done is she had collected all of the positive thinking books and it was one after another, after another, after another. Your best life now, prayer can cure you. All of this kind of if you just think the right way. Everything will be fine. Kate Bowler Specialty is studying what's called prosperity gospel, which she considers to be a perversion of the actual gospel. Which is that only if you think the right way or pray the right prayer, you will be showered with blessings and riches, and your plans essentially will never be interrupted. She says that's not the heart. Certainly not of the Christianity that she knew, and I would say by extension.

[00:09:48] Speaker2

Not any authentically deep and enriching and truly resilient faith tradition, by the way, I want to say that recently I've had the occasion to spend a little bit of time in a hospital and one of the days I wandered into this little chapel just to kind of say that, hey, some hospitals are actually getting this right. And there was a quote printed on one of the walls of this little chapel. And it actually was attributed to St. Augustine, although St. Augustine didn't say it. But it's one of my favorite kind of blow your head open mystical invitations to maybe understand how much we don't understand about God but still feel divine presence. The quote said that God is an infinite circle. Whose center is everywhere. And whose circumference is nowhere? All. An infinite circle. Whose center is everywhere? And whose circumference is nowhere? Also printed on the walls of this hospital chapel were those words from Ecclesiastes. There is a time in a season for every purpose under heaven. Life and death. Allowing all of it. But this was not Kate Butler's experience. I want to read you some of her words. Thirty five years old, stage four metastatic cancer. And again, she studies this for a living. She says our American admiration for boot strappers and optimists. Has made everyone, not literally everyone, but wants to encourage everyone to become an evangelist of good, better, best.

[00:11:48] Speaker2

Harvest your mind to change your circumstances. Salvation is only a decision away. But she says I cannot outwork or outpace or out pray my cancer. I can't dispel it with a can do attitude. After a diagnosis during a pandemic. This is the right time to question our popular theories about how to build a better life. We cannot have it all if we just learn how to conquer our limits. The problem with our lives is that we can't solve them. We can only live them. From that bookstore, I could see no formula that would get me that upgrade, guarantee my growth or use my cancer to teach me. So instead of as one of the best sellers there in the hospital said instead of my best life now. I'll have to settle into life now. The way the light streaks in through the blinds in my hospital room, the way the nurse allows me to pretend that he is a vampire who hoards the bright red vials of blood for his own sinister purposes. The way I'm sure this will be the not best. But, okayest day yet. There is such wonderful humanity. Grace and forgiveness. To take the pressure off. We all know not how this is going to end, but we know that it's going to end.

[00:13:36] Speaker2

And so instead of internalizing those message of good, better, best, I remember this thing from my childhood. Good letter. Good, better, best. Never let it rest. Something, something. Something passed the test. What a way to exhaust ourselves, right? Instead. Maybe we can recognize this. Is the video we're about to watch in just a moment shows us some faces very familiar to you, some faces unfamiliar to you. Some people who got a full measure of years that we might like and might wish for ourselves or for them, and some people who did not get anywhere close to a full measure of their years. All our plans will be interrupted. And still. What we do here today. To pause and to notice. And to remember the love of these lives and, yes, their imperfections as well. To recall that once again, we have an invitation today. To pause and to notice our lives. With whatever is here. To turn once again to the truest of hearts, gospel. That a lot doesn't turn out as we would wish. And still, our lives can be suffused by love and contained within that infinite circle. In which each and every one of us belongs. I ask you as you watch this video that's coming up for the next eight minutes or so. Whether you're at home or whether you're here. Attend to your own heart.

[00:15:40] Speaker1

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