

NAME

My Audio.mp3

DATE

January 10, 2022

DURATION

44m 29s

2 SPEAKERS

Speaker1

Speaker2

START OF TRANSCRIPT

[00:00:00] Speaker1

The following is a message from WellSprings congregation

[00:00:04] Speaker2

Today is not like the day that I first laid eyes on. The Montgomery School. It's raw and cold today. It's a little bit of ice out there. But the first day. That I ever saw the Montgomery School. Was in August 2006, a sweltering hot day. And as I drove up, I saw the familiar, slightly dented but still running Toyota Red Toyota truck of Larry Jeffers. Who had identified this location? As potentially maybe being a promising home. For our new congregation that would launch six months after that time in August 2006. No of you watching today, I'm sure you remember, Larry. His love for this congregation. His being here since its inception. And I was thinking of him. As I drove up this morning. On this raw January day. His memory is a blessing. So most of you who are watching, I imagine, have already read my letter. That I will be concluding my ministry here at WellSprings Congregation at the end of our congregational year. June 30th. Roughly six months from now. I have to say. That. The Sunday after that letter went out. Be looking out and see basically a whole bunch of empty chairs. Although thank you all for those of you who are also here making this service as possible, you all are incredible. But looking out and seeing mostly an empty room. You know, it's not what I would wish to hope for, but it is what it is, and in some ways it's totally fitting. Almost kind of works as a bookend.

[00:02:43] Speaker2

Because when I got here before, WellSprings ever had a name. August 1st, 2005, hired by our Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, our denomination. To plant and to eventually launch this congregation is back then lead minister CEO, eventually the title we now call the founding minister. That wasn't really anything here. And so as I am now thinking in terms of before and now. And now and then. It actually feels right. To be preaching to a mostly empty room. This morning. But I know how many of us are still gathered. That is what has changed. Being the founder of this community. You know, among the founders, founding minister. It shapes this ending in a very particular way. I've been ordained for almost 25 years. And in that time, I have observed many of my colleagues begin and end their ministries. And almost all of them have served churches, fellowships, congregations, societies. That had a before. And then after. But this is a little bit different. I mean, WellSprings wasn't even called WellSprings back then, as some of you know, it was the new Unitarian Universalist congregation of north central Chester County just rolls right off the tongue. Maybe we should have stayed with that, right? Because they picked a location and then the denomination hired me, it was almost 17 years to the day that I got a call from the director of ministry at the UUA asking me if I wanted to apply. To help lead this new life.

[00:05:01] Speaker2

So, you know, there's always a before because everything comes from something. But in the history of WellSprings, there really wasn't a before of WellSprings. Prior to 2005. I have loved. Serving this congregation. Even before we had a name. So some of you know that. There was about a 17 month gestation period between when I was hired in August of 2005 and when we actually launched in January of 2007. That was one of the most thrilling and surreal times in my life because my job. In addition, to help form the kind of small group that began WellSprings, the planting team. Was also to find out as much as I could about what might make this congregation thrive as it came to be. I talked with holistic healers and therapists and people own yoga studios. And although I am very clear then and very clear now. About what makes our tradition distinctive and why it is the tradition that holds my heart. I spent a lot of time with evangelical church planters. Because they were the folks who had been growing new dynamic congregations, and because my charge from the denomination was to help grow Unitarian universalism, to help invite in people who maybe had not yet found a home in our congregations or in any form of religious community. I wanted to understand what others were doing right, even if they were quite different from us. This is how I found myself in horse country, Ocala, Florida, just two months after moving from Florida to Philadelphia, back in Florida for a purpose driven church planter conference.

[00:07:20] Speaker2

I am a Brooklyn born Jewish kid. This was an atypical environment for me to experience. At one point they even segregated us, they said, now all of you who came with your wives, you recognize how important you will be to these pastors that you're supporting. We want you, the wives, to go into a totally separate room. Well, we have some straight talk here with the men folk. My God, what the hell am I doing with my life? That's not our model here, right, obviously, and. I learned a lot about how to. Actually build a congregation. From those folks that took down barriers. To allow people to find spiritual community that was relevant to them. I was a stranger in a strange land in those days. And I wouldn't give up any of it. Because it was all necessary and invested in forming this new life of this Unitarian Universalist congregation. We were charged to grow. Denomination was very explicit with me about that. They were investing a lot of money in us. And grow. Just in terms of the numbers we did. At one point not really involved in denominational matters anymore, but at one point I knew this, that we were the only new Unitarian Universalist spiritual community that started with fewer than 50 people that grew to larger than 250 people in the last quarter century. We did what we were supposed to do.

[00:09:27] Speaker2

The numbers don't tell the story. This morning, I'm thinking of Larry. And what is past and what is present? And the then and the now. I'm just marveling at what a whole new world it is in those 17 years. This is what a smartphone looked like. This remarkable is look at that color screen on that BlackBerry. Now some of you who follow technology trends know that this no longer works today. Basically, the company that created the BlackBerry research in motion. Their machines don't work any longer. This. The iPhone in 2005 was two years away from being launched. Facebook. Guess Facebook in 2004 was being shared at some colleges and universities. But I don't know. Did he have a MySpace page in 2005? That's what social media was for most of us. And I don't want to spend a lot of time. Talking about technology for good or for ill. Because, of course, it's what's connecting us today and has connected us through this pandemic over and over and over again when we have been yearning to be together. I will say is that it has been really interesting. To know myself as a minister before social media and after. Now that it is a given in our lives. The reason I bring all this up, just these little ways to mark change. It's not nostalgia. Sociology. It's that this is what matters about spiritual community. That we live our lives together. In time. Through all of these changes. One of the biggest changes from then to now, and it absolutely has altered who and what all spiritual communities are these days is what's called the rise of the nones.

[00:11:59] Speaker2

Don't think black habits and Catholicism think N-O-N-E-S People who are religiously or spiritually unaffiliated. It's the single largest growing segment in American spirituality today, and it has been for quite some time. We didn't know that back in two thousand five. Back in 2005, in addition to all the places I went to help learn to help grow myself in the ways that I needed to. So that could help grow this place. All the places were strange, I also found little pockets of people who like me were trying something new within progressive spiritual traditions. And I remember one of them, I can't even remember who it was. And it's from them that my message this morning takes its title. She said We. Must be involved. In the formation and the celebration. Of the communion of Saints. And however you understand that phrase, I know originally it comes from another tradition. But that has always so deeply stayed with me. That we must be involved in the formation. And the celebration. Of the communion of Saints. Living lives together through time. Through all the changes. Through all what remains constant. Through all the deaths. And all the losses. And all the love that binds us. Yes, I was hired. To grow Unitarian universalism. But that's not what this has been about. To be able to create community.

[00:14:10] Speaker2

In a world in which so many of us find ourselves attenuated from each other. Lonely. Sometimes adrift. This is why I was first here. And this is also. My one biggest regret in my ministry. Some of you have been around for a while. No. That after a period of very rapid change in the life of WellSprings needing to respond to a financial situation that was bordering on a crisis. We needed to be very agile and make a lot of decisions that were tough decisions. And we got through it, and WellSprings survived, and that was awesome. And we continue to grow. And I completely burnt out. That's not a secret, I haven't tried to hide that. Except back then I did. It wasn't a conscious choice. I so wanted myself to work in this role. Ceo and lead minister. Because, yeah, there was some ego in that. I liked being the minister among my colleagues who did who was able to do the growth thing. People are knocking down our doors to understand what we were doing, right? So, yes, there was ego there. But that wasn't it. So that what we were doing was working. Even if big parts of me were no longer working well within what was working. Recently, I rewatched a scene from Mare of Easttown, which in addition to being awesome, of course, is like the most Philadelphia show Philadelphia region show in the history of all shows. And there's a line in a very powerful scene between Mare and Zebes.

[00:16:38] Speaker2

She's he's much younger than she is. And he said I just wanted to do something great. And she says doing something great is overrated. Because then people will keep expecting you to do great things. This is what it was like back then for me to exist inside of my own head. And I am not saying you put me in that position. But it was a trap that I found myself in. When I finally got to the point of having to admit what I could not resist any longer that I absolutely needed to change. It got in the way of a lot of things here. My deepest regret is not that I burned out. Give Reverend Lee a lot of credit for letting us know she saw it on the horizon after the tumult and challenge of this pandemic the last couple of years. The shame is for me is not in burning out. It's this. It's that I did not come to you. You communion of saints. Earlier. And say that most powerful four letter word. Help. That's my one biggest regret. And that just is what it is. I wish I had trusted you better. And I wish I trusted myself better. With all the brokenness I was feeling back then. All the success and all the things we're doing right that I was still struggling so much. I wish I had said help earlier. And if you are still carrying some hurt or anger or whatever it is or maybe even thought about it a long time, and now just me talking about it as bringing stuff up for you.

[00:19:00] Speaker2

I would ask for your forgiveness. But your feelings or your feelings? And you have every right to feel what you are feeling. With what I'm talking about now. Or in the wake. I've since Friday when my letter came out. I am sorry that I did not trust you. My communion of Saints. Because that's what's so good about this place. That this is a place in which we can bring our vulnerable and imperfect selves. Indeed, I also know it was one of the great strengths of my ministry when it wasn't me who was hurting. My capacity to address or hurts or hungers and our hopes and our desire for wholeness. Is one of my great strengths as a minister. I'm just sorry, I didn't trust that a little bit more deeply. So this is what's so unique about being a minister. Most jobs when we leave it, we don't have six months to say goodbye. Do we? But I do. And we will. And perhaps the burnout time when I was here will come up, and if it does, we'll talk about it. But I hope we all know when I do that there is so much more here. That there was a before where there wasn't a WellSprings, and now there is. And that's amazing. For the last two and a half years. Since I graduated with my master of social work and began my mental health work as a psychotherapist, I have asked myself this question over and over and over again.

[00:21:02] Speaker2

When is my work done here? When am I done? When is it time to turn, turn, turn? Some of you know, the name Jennifer Finney Boyle. She's a columnist. Jennifer is New York Times and writes pointedly and beautifully and movingly. About her experience as a transgender person, she writes about her lived experience and also the wider movement for trans justice and rights. And Jennifer, who is a little bit older than I am, she. Not too long ago, we wrote a column around the turning of the year that said the title When is your work here done? See, Jennifer lived through a time in which there were very few trans voices. That were all being amplified. And she and a friend of hers created something called the December project. The December project, which takes its name from that time of the year, in which sometimes the pain of missing family or attenuated relationships can be really painful and particularly can be painful for trans people if they have been rejected, shunned, mocked or hurt by their families. And so the December project was Jennifer and her friends basically lifeline call line. Reach out to us if in this holiday season. You need someone to be there with you. Jennifer reflects on the fact that the December project no longer exists. But its work does.

[00:23:05] Speaker2

Because others have taken it on and taken it over. That's now it's time for her to step back. For the last two and a half years, I have really thought long and hard, when is my work here done? Recognizing that there would never be a perfect time or a perfect season. But the time is now for me. It is time for me to turn, turn, turn and to turn this after the next six months fully over to all of you. The communion of Saints here. One of my favorite quotes that has animated my ministry that I've used from this pulpit before is John Updike. It's from his you could say it's a novel, but really it's a collection of short stories all about, I believe the name of the couple was the marbles. The rise and the fall and ultimate end of their marriage. I remember I read this in one of my religious studies courses in undergraduate, and it's the first thing that called to me and said, No, you don't want to be a philosophy professor because all of the continental philosophy that the reading over there that's translated from German and French and the sentences go on four pages, upon pages, upon pages, and it just make your head hurt, your head hurt. And besides, what does that actually have to do with living a good, decent ethical, loving life and keeping our hearts open? I didn't find that in the philosophy department, that was the original point of philosophy.

[00:24:40] Speaker2

But I found in the religious studies department. And in this introduction to Updike's book Too Far to Go, he said these words that have stayed with me ever since I was that early twentysomething young guy. It's about marriage and marriage and ministry, not the same, although they are both covenant relationships. So swap out marriage for ministry here. He wrote that a marriage ends is less than ideal. But all things end under heaven. And if time is held to be invalidating the nothing real succeeds. And personalize it. That a ministry ends is less than ideal. But all things end under heaven, and if time is held to be invalidating, then nothing real succeeds. Everything ends, Rodney, you so beautifully spoke about this today we live in a world. Of constant impermanence. And I so feel. And imagine we all do the impermanence this morning. If time is held to be invalidating the nothing real succeeds. There has to be a larger, deeper measure for the validation of our lives. Other than just. That everything changes starts there. But there is a deeper affirmation. And for me to end today. I want to go to Whitman. Put that on in just a second, but wait one minute because I'll tell you story. Some of you know this already. And by the way, this is my charge for myself in the next six months. Like I started with the story about Larry and his red pickup truck. I'm going to be telling a lot of stories over this next six months.

[00:26:37] Speaker2

Let's share our stories, because that's how the communion of the Saints recognizes each other. Remember the day in that summer of 2006, after WellSprings had had its first round of small groups and the consultant who developed this idea of, you know, know your DNA, know your essence, he said, Wait for your mission, it will find you. And we were hearing back from the folks who are leading those small groups about what the participants in their groups had gotten, they had said, You know what, it had been a long day and I still had the dinner and I still needed to, you know, help my kids with their homework. And I still needed to maybe do some more work at my own job. And I was tired, but I came to my small group and I felt a sense of energy of connection. And a little light bulb went over my head, the first office we had, which was several offices ago up in eagle. And left the room we were in and I walked in, I got my old dog eared copy of Leaves of Grass by Walt Whitman, and I read the poem Sing the body, singing the body electric and that line. I charge them full with the charge of the sole. I shared with the planting team. How about that? That our mission. And has been ever since. And I turn to Walt Whitman again today. Who like me?

[00:28:04]

Go. Go back there. Thanks.

[00:28:07] Speaker2

He had a little tendency to despair. As do I. So I love this. The question despair, what does all mean, does it mean anything at all? Does it at all matter? Oh me. Oh, life of these questions of these recurring of the endless trains of the faithless of cities filled with the foolish of myself forever reproaching myself for who more foolish than I and who more faithless. Welcome to being inside my own head of eyes that vainly craved the light of the objects mean of the struggle ever renewed of the poor results of all of the plodding and sordid crowds I see around me of the empty and useless years of the rest with the rest me intertwined. The question Oh me, so sad recurring. What good amid these? Oh me. Oh life. Wow, Walt, you're so uplifting. But despair. Thank you again, Rodney, is sometimes part of our human condition. But Walt doesn't leave it there. Answer. That you are here. That life exists and identity. That the powerful play goes on. And you. May contribute a verse. Yeah. I have contributed my verse here at WellSprings. It has been remarkable. And thank you. If every culture is in fact, a language. I consider it one of the greatest blessings of my life that I was one of the first people to ever speak WellSprings.

[00:30:03] Speaker2

Indeed, to help speak it into being. Was my ministry. And I have now contributed my verse. Wow. So there may not have been before me here. But there will be an after. And my soul is charged full because of that. And in that I rest. Amen. And may you live in blessing. You unite your heart with mine and prayer. How charge of the soul. Oh, divine presence as large and as unfathomable and as intimate as and as close as this very breath. May we feel your presence here this day? And find ourselves within you. You the larger life. And us. The smallest parts. Remembering that our lives are gathered into the each that is a part of all. May we breathe? May we be. May we live from this place of connection? Amen. Before this next song, let me say this, I picked the songs today. I'm not trying to put words in your mouth that this is directed from me to you, if you feel it, that's all right, but this song? from you to me. Sorry. Get a little verklempt here. This song is for me. To you.

[00:44:17] Speaker1

If you enjoy this message and would like to support the mission of WellSprings. Go to our web site WellSpringsUU.org, that's WellSprings the letters UU dot ORG.

END OF TRANSCRIPT



Automated transcription by Sonix
www.sonix.ai