

NAME

Wholly Unravelling Audio.mp3

DATE

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DURATION

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2 SPEAKERS

Speaker1

Speaker2

START OF TRANSCRIPT

[00:00:00] Speaker1

The following is a message from WellSprings congregation.

[00:00:10] Speaker2

There we go. Turn your mic on. It's the little things, right? Good morning, everyone. Thank you. It is so wonderful to be here with you in body. I had a two day drive this week from my home in Wisconsin. Lots of time in my car to listen to music and to center in and to get ready to be with you. This message series, the great integration. The first time I heard about it, I was very excited because unbeknownst to the people who plan that message, integration is one of the themes that I made up for myself of my work in divinity school. As I answer my call to ministry. And so I've been thinking about integration a lot in the past couple of years. And in light of the pandemic, when it certainly has felt like the entire world is falling apart, how to pick up those pieces and integrate them seems like the work we're all doing. I'll also say, though, for me personally, as someone who said, sure, I'll go to grad school during a pandemic, the falling apart of the pandemic. Didn't touch me as much, and I realized it was because I had my own personal private falling apart quite a few years before. So I want to tell you a little story that highlights that private, personal falling apart. One fall evening in 2016. I was in my car driving across town in my home in Milwaukee to visit some.

[00:01:58] Speaker2

To go with some friends to see a play. This was a pretty common occurrence for us. I started studying theater when I was in college and this group of friends were friends that I had actually made in my undergraduate theater program. We had all done theater together behind the scenes on the stage and showed up to support other friends who did shows. I hadn't actually performed for about two years when this moment happened, but I'd shown up for shows and was on my way to do what was a normal every day and what had been a joyful thing. And as I was driving in my car, a feeling of dread and absolute terror started to overtake me. And the closer to the theater I got, the worse that feeling felt. And I actually had to pull over in park. And I sat in my car sobbing through a panic attack. It had panic attacks in my teens and early twenties and gone to therapy and thought I had fixed myself. But they started happening again in 2016. But I'd been ignoring it. Until that moment in the car when a thing that had given me purpose and joy for so many years was now the thing filling me with fear. And that that moment crystallized for me that I maybe needed some help. So within a few months I went back into therapy, found a wonderful person who helped me start to deal with my own tangled knot of fear and insecurity, old trauma, bad habits of enabling behaviors that had resurfaced.

[00:03:49] Speaker2

And I started to heal. And when the pandemic hit a couple of years later, I thought, Oh, thank God, I had started that healing already, because as I looked around, I realized that there were so many of us. Who like me for those few years leading into 2016, who had been going through the motions of our lives and ignoring warning sign after warning sign that something something needed to change. And then when the pandemic brought us all to a screeching, literal halt. For a whole lot of us. We could not ignore our souls whispers and screams anymore that were saying, this is not working. This this is not working. And so a whole lot of us, millions of us around the world, as we dealt with fear and grief. Also began to do the reckoning that our souls needed for us to say, Oh, this culture, with its tendency to give us too much to do to fill our lives with silence. We need we needed the stillness. We needed the stillness so that we could start to say, as Sonya Renee Taylor, who I mentioned in my first sermon with you, normal isn't working. And if we can't go back to normal, how do we go forward? In my own healing journey to say, how do I pick up the pieces of this falling apart and go forward? One One of the teachers I was able to rely on was actually someone I've never met.

[00:05:37] Speaker2

Parker Palmer. I'm seeing some nods in this room. So some of you are familiar with Parker Palmer's work. I actually had the pleasure of getting to hear him speak a decade ago at the college where I worked, and his some of his books on teaching specifically were required readings in my first graduate program. Parker Palmer is a Quaker, a committed teacher, a person whose life has been dedicated to helping other people find a path to what he calls quoting Thomas Merton a hidden wholeness. Parker Palmer founded The Courage for Center and Renewal, which does incredible, incredible work, including hosting and facilitating workshops, including one that a couple of folks in my home congregation were trained to do. And they brought the work that is called Geography of Grace to our home congregation. And I was invited while I was on that healing path to participate in that program. Which is guided workshops around listening to our inner teacher, as the Quakers call it, to creating silence with each other so that our own souls have the spaciousness to be heard. That process is called, in Parker Palmer's words, a circle of trust. And he outlines the work of that in his book, A Hidden Wholeness.

[00:07:07] Speaker2

A journey toward an undivided life. I highly recommend it. Reading that book and participating in that spiritual circle with the folks in my home congregation began to help me see that I was not alone in my feelings of What am I doing and who am I? Not alone in the ways in which I had fragmented my spirit. But amazingly, as powerful as that work was, it was a different book from Parker Palmer that truly helped me see. I'm not alone on this journey. In another of Parker Palmer's books that is called Let Your Life Speak, which is about vocation and not about what we do for a living, not about making a living, because, to quote Maya Angelou, making a living is not the same as making a life. Not the same as making a life. So Parker Palmer's book about Let Your Life Speak is listening to our our soul in the spirit that is calling us to vocation. And that that Colleen can shift and change over a lifetime, and that that can be the thing that scares us. I thought it was on this path, and now. Now it's saying something else. And with gentleness and with a candid vulnerability. Palmer Toxin. Let your life speak about how that is so critical to him because he has struggled for most of his life with debilitating depression. I didn't know that about him. I had read much of his work.

[00:08:44] Speaker2

As I said, I saw him speak. And when I discovered that and read his story, I was moved. There's a particular particular account that he shares of. Really dark days when the most that he could do was move from a bed to a chair. And he had a friend, lots of friends who tried to give him advice and help and nothing. Nothing got through but someone that he knew. Offered to come every day. And wash Parker Palmer's feet. His friend didn't really speak to him. They just were in silence together. With this tender loving Christ like care. And Parker Palmer talks about how that that moment of someone not giving advice or telling him it will get better, but just being fully present with him while he was able to reconnect with his body and know truly. But in this one place he had feeling and was alive. I thought about the people in my life who helped ground me, who reminded me that life was worth living. And I thought if. Parker Palmer. You can go through that. I there is a little hope for me and for all of us. That that sense of falling apart, of unraveling or of being crushed by the weight of the world's expectations that we have taken on. Parker Palmer was naming those things and saying that our need to connect meaningfully with each other. And with our own souls is the path forward.

[00:10:44] Speaker2

And another teacher who I've also not met. Who also talked about that very idea. Echoing Parker's thoughts is Bernie Brown, and maybe some of you are also familiar with Bernie Brown's work. I see more nods in this room. She's a she's a sociologist and a researcher. And there's TED Talks and lots of books. And she's incredible and amazing. And I've been following her work for a long time. The next slide is a picture of Bernie Brown is written about vulnerability and shame and about living a wholehearted life, which is how I was introduced to her years ago at an advising conference, was through this image that I had hanging on the wall in my office for years as I worked with students. How how do we live wholeheartedly? Which is the question Parker Palmer was asking, which is the question actually that most of our souls are asking of all of us. How do we live? Open, whole hearted lives. But it was actually not that specific work of Bernie Brown's that became part of my healing. It was a blog that she wrote back in 2018, and I will share this with everybody in the Facebook WellSprings Oasis. But it's a blog called The Midlife Unraveling. Bernie Brown in that blog said what she had observed in her long years of research and interviewing people is that midlife isn't so much a time of crisis.

[00:12:14] Speaker2

It's a time where we start to just unravel at the seams, especially when we are holding on to all the responsibilities of family and life and work and culture and expectations and what many of us tend to are perfectionism. It gets too much to carry, it gets too heavy, and the weight of it starts to unravel us. And reading that blog, I thought, Holy crap, Bernie Brown has never interviewed me, but I feel like she has been following me around. And not just me, but all of my friends. By the time I read that blog, I was two years into therapy. I was doing so much better and I was starting to speak my truth to people. Well, that unraveling had been private and silent. I was seeing through therapy that that was part of my problem. And so I started sharing with people. I've been feeling a little a little ragged at the edges, friends. And lo and behold, my friend said, we've been feeling the same way. And these were people like me who had committed decades to careers, who were career focused and family focused at the same time, who were doing so much in their communities, in their churches, in their civic organizations, and were struggling with, Oh, my God, who am I? And what am I doing? And in my work in therapy, in the spiritual circles at church, and then in connecting with friends, I was beginning to see, to really realize that it was in coming together with others, in doing the thing that Brené Brown has talked about for years, leaning into the vulnerability that actually frees us to move into wholeness.

[00:14:10] Speaker2

And like Parker Palmer, Bernie Brown talks about all of that striving, the making of constant noise and activity and energy that we do in trying to find purpose and meaning and fill up our days. While the universe, as Brown says it and our souls is, Palmer says it is finding ways to demand our attention, begging us to stop, fragmenting ourselves, to stop, stop. Cutting off our emotions. Stop pretending all the time that everything's okay when it isn't. Our souls are asking us to let go of the weight of shame and regret, to let go of the rigid grasp of control we try to cling to. Brown and Palmer were saying, we have to make space. We have to make space for all of the things that we've pushed aside. And that while it is scary and it is hard and it is not easy and there is actually no pat answer. The way forward really is tangled. Like a big ball of thread. But. Letting go of the control that we are the ones who have to make sense of it all. Letting go of our need for emotional security is the very thing that leads us into authentic wholeness, which is where our real security resides.

[00:15:54] Speaker2

It is actually in all of that wholly unraveling, the unraveling of all the old stories, our old ways of being, that we free ourselves to grow into the wholeness, the wholeness that is our souls, birthright. Even when we don't believe it. I was so excited by that blog post. I read it and reread it. I saved it. I have it saved in multiple places online on my computer, and I shared it with friends. Who had again said to me, We're unraveling, too. And I was like you all, Bernie Brown named what we're experiencing. I think we should form an unraveled club. I was joking, but they all said, that's a great idea. And we actually did form an Travelers Club. We created a private Facebook group. We shared inspirational podcasts and sermons with each other. We showed up periodically, about once a month in each other's houses just to hold space and listen, not to offer advice, not to try to fix each other. We didn't need that. We needed space to name our truths, to be honest and vulnerable about what we were experiencing and feeling, and to just have the support that our souls needed. We were in our Unravels club, creating a circle of trust. Where our souls could begin to be heard. In letting ourselves unravel together. We were giving each other some tools to start to knit our own selves back up.

[00:17:43] Speaker2

Part of that part of that work, which is what makes it so hard, is something that Parker Palmer names in a hidden wholeness. There's some the next slides is a quote from Parker Palmer, where he says, We'll come back to this one. I know now myself to be a person of weakness and strength. Liability and giftedness. Darkness and light. I know that to be whole means to reject none of it, but to embrace it all. That's the hard part. Embracing all of it. Because this the next slide. Paradoxically, wholeness does not mean perfection, which Rene Brown talks about a lot, but it means embracing brokenness as an integral part of who we are. We learn all these lessons about how we have to show up and be. And we do we need to show up for each other. We need to figure out how to show up. Not, I used to say as our best selves, but I changed it to our whole selves. But that means embracing. All all of what we've brought to this moment. In my unraveling club that I formed, I invited my husband to be part of that and more as an inspiration, although I don't think he knew. That's why I was like, You should join us because he was a little further along in the unraveling, unraveling process. The rest of us felt like we were in.

[00:19:38] Speaker2

You see, my husband had had a 20 plus year career in it that he accidentally stumbled into right after college because it was the mid nineties and he was like, I've got a degree in literature and religion. I guess I'll work in helpdesk. That's what you did in 95. But he actually got good at his job. He was he became a project manager and then an I.T. consultant. He was great at putting together really effective teams and bringing out the best in people. But. But. His soul was dying doing that work because it did not let him be his whole authentic self. And after 20 plus years. He said to me one day, You know that Master of Fine Arts I've been thinking about for over a decade? I think I want to go for it. And so he had applied to a master of fine arts and interdisciplinary arts at Goddard College, just an amazing school in Vermont. And then I, as his partner, got to witness the most transformative journey I have ever personally beheld. To see him let go. Of all the old stories he had told about himself, his old ways of being to start to truly flourish was a miracle. And it was also really, really painful because the work of being whole and authentic and creative in herself that my husband was doing also meant he had to do exactly what Parker Palmer said, which was embrace all the brokenness.

[00:21:19] Speaker2

All the pieces that he didn't like. And he did that work. He engaged in. What he and I talked about as a metaphor for what he was doing with the Japanese call. Wabi sabi and wabi sabi is about finding beauty in the old and the imperfect. It's about not throwing something away because it's broken, but finding a way to say there's beauty here. Beauty and wholeness. Even in the broken pieces. One specific aspect of wabi sabi is a form of Japanese pottery called Kintsugi, which you may be aware of, and it is where you take broken, cracked pieces of pottery and you fuse it back together with veins of gold. We don't throw things away because they are broken. We don't throw things away because they are old and tattered. We see the beauty and the wholeness that is still inherent in it. And yes, we might have to put the pieces back together in a different way. We might have to change the pattern we had gotten used to, but that is still the path to wholeness. Embracing brokenness is integral. Integral to the path. In witnessing my husband's transformation while I was doing my therapy and my spiritual work and participating in the UN club. All those pieces came together for me and I realized that I too was holding on to a heavy old story.

[00:23:22] Speaker2

And that heavy old story. It was partly at the root of my falling apart of that panic attack in the car all those years before. And that was a story that said you had a purpose, you had a calling, you had work in theater, in education, and as the eldest daughter holding it all together. And if you can't do that and be that, then you are a failure. You are broken beyond repair. I didn't know I was holding that story. I didn't know how heavy it was. Until I saw someone else put that story that was the same as mine down. And I realized, Oh. I can put that down to. I can let go of the shame and the regret. Those don't need to be part of the pattern. And I can pick up the threads of who I was. And we've it back together into a new a new battered and bruised pattern that will help me move forward. And it was that. That made me then a couple of years later be like, Yep, I'm ready. I'm ready during a pandemic to go and become a minister. Embracing, embracing the pieces of who we are, that that is all of our work, whether there's a pandemic beginning or ending or not, and whether we are 16 or 96. Listening to our souls with gentleness and tenderness. Making space alone and together to be still.

[00:25:26] Speaker2

To be honest, that. That weaving together our brokenness. That is the work that we are always doing. And we have to unravel and re ravel and unravel again and know and trust that the pattern will keep changing on us. But that does never, ever take us away from wholeness. And if we can trust that alone and together, if we can listen to what our souls are telling us, what our souls are telling us, is that in our embodied, worn, imperfect, authentic, whole selves. You and you. And you. And you. And we. We, all of us. Our souls are telling us our holy always loved. May it be so. Friends. Do you pray with me this morning? Spirit of life and love. We gather today. In body and in spirit in this room. And in distant homes. We gather because our souls long for the connection that heals us, longs for the meaning that we make in the stillness and the quiet of our breath. In the coming together as people who can hold space. We trust Spirit. That we may learn to hold our brokenness with compassion. And that we will meet the brokenness of others with that same loving compassion. May we today in this moment and in the moments to come, trust in the unraveling, unfolding wholeness. That holds us all together. We ask, we ask with gratitude and humility. We be well. That we be safe. That we behold. Amen.

[00:28:12] Speaker1

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END OF TRANSCRIPT



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