

NAME

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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.

[00:00:12] Speaker2

Thank you all. When I was a kid in eastern Kentucky. Every year we had a revival that we went to an outdoor revival that was all music for a whole week. And every now and then I'm like, Well, that's what church should be. It's just music all the time. But today we're going to have music and all the other stuff we had and story time, everybody. So we're going to start today's message with this story. How many of you are familiar with the European folk tale, Stone Soup? All right, I see some hands. So we are going to tell a version of Stone Soup, because if you don't know, Stone Soup being a folktale is at least four or 500 years old, started as an oral tradition. And so there's lots and lots of different versions of it that have been told and retold, written down and rewritten down. And so today's version is the one we are going to share in. So here is how Stone Soup begins once upon a time. That's how all the best details begin. Once upon a time, in a land not so far away, there had been war and famine and a plague. But people were finally recovering. And a young woman who was a musician was traveling around, going from town to town to earn her money and to share a little bit of joy. One day, though, she arrived at a small village and she had been traveling for a while and was now out of food and out of money.

[00:01:54] Speaker2

But this had happened to her before, and she'd always relied on the kindness of strangers. So she looked around the village and saw the friendliest looking house and knocked on the door and said, Hi, I'm a traveling musician. I was hoping maybe you just had some fruits or vegetables you could share with me today. And the woman on the other side of the door said, I'm so sorry. I really don't have anything to share. But you might ask my neighbor. And she knocked on all the doors and heard the same message. I'm so sorry. We just don't have anything to share. But the young musician did not despair. She came up with a plan and she identified what looked to be the nicest, biggest, maybe wealthiest house sitting right in the center of the town square. And she knocked on that door and she said, Excuse me, I'm a musician and I've been traveling around everywhere and people are having hard times no matter where they go. But this village is having the hardest time. So what I'd like is to ask if I could borrow a big giant pot and set it up here in the town square right in front of your house. And I'm going to cook a big pot of stone soup for everybody in the village. And the person behind that door said, Well, I've never heard of Stone Soup before, but I guess if you want to try to feed the village, you can borrow my pot.

[00:03:20] Speaker2

So she set up the pot right there in the middle of the town square and started to build a little fire and then look around for stones. And as happens in small little villages and towns, people started to notice. And so a bunch of kids came up to her and said, Hey, what are you doing? And she said, Oh, I'm looking for stones to make stone soup. And they said, What? Stone soup? And she said, You've never heard of stone soup? Oh, it's the best soup ever. Wait until it's done. And the kid said, Well, can we help you pick a stone and make the stone soup? Of course, she said, let's look for the best stones. And they all looked around. And then one of them said, What about this one? And she said, That is the perfect stone for making stone soup. Let's put it in our pot. And so she put it in the pot and they filled it with water. And then they started stirring. And as they stirred and the water started to boil, she said, Oh, this stone soup smells great. But one of the kids said, I don't know, it just smells like water to me. Don't you think it would be better if it had some herbs? You're right, it probably would be better with herbs, but I don't have any.

[00:04:39] Speaker2

But somebody else across the square said, Oh, well, if all you need is some herbs, I have some herbs and can put those in the soup. Thank you so much. The woman said. We won't even need all of it. Just a little will do. And they added the herbs and they started to stir. And then the scent of it began to waft over the crowd, which was gathering at this point, because word had started to spread that the crazy lady who had been knocking on their doors was making something called Stone Soup. And as the scent of the herbs wafted, one of the other kids said, That does smell better now. But you know what I always like in my soup potatoes. And the lady said, Well, I'm sorry, I don't have any potatoes, but a few people in the crowd said, Oh, well, if you just need a potato, I have a potato. And then three or four people came out of their houses and brought potatoes. And everybody only had one each. But just like that as they cut it up. Now, the stone soup was filled with herbs and potatoes, and the last person to put in the potato said, I'm so glad we had a potato that will work for you. It's too bad we don't have any carrots. But I'm fresh out of carrots at my house. But then, like magic, a few other people said, Oh, well, I don't have a ton of carrots, but I have one and somebody else had one.

[00:06:11] Speaker2

And then before you know it, lots of other people were bringing their carrots for the stone soup. Wow. Now our stone soup has herbs and carrots and potatoes. I wonder what else we can have? And then people were like, Hey, I just remembered I have a cabbage at my house and a few other people said, Wait a second, I remember I have some leeks. And then we had cabbage and leeks and carrots and potatoes and the stone soup began to smell so good that every single person in the village was now gathered around the fire. And before you knew it, they had enough stone soup to feed everybody in the village that day. And that is one of the many versions of Stone Soup. What? Does anybody have an idea about? What the point. What is the meaning behind Stone Soup? Go ahead. Everybody has a little something they can give. That is the lesson that I like to take from Stone Soup. There's, like I said, other versions. Sorry. I am going to enter the 21st century. And do my sermon on a tablet. So there's versions of it that are about, hey, you got to be kind to strangers. But really, the core is share what you have. And for me, that is the most powerful message of stone soup that even in the middle of what is truly may be objectively scarcity.

[00:08:02] Speaker2

Abundance can exist and that our small actions add up with other people's small actions to a sum greater than their parts. Because while it's true that my one carrot and your one potato aren't going to feed this whole room when we combine our resources, when we work together as a collective, we have more together than we do alone. And that is a lesson that I have to learn over and over and over again, because I will tell you that it is all too easy for me and maybe for you, especially during these turbulent political times, to just despair at the state of the world. A few things causing me despair. Just in the past two weeks is the ongoing war in Ukraine, the continued occupation of Palestine, the death of a journalist there. The attacks on reproductive rights. The ongoing violence of racial injustice in America, which are at the root of the attacks on diversity and inclusion that are happening in this county and the counties all over the country. And I feel and maybe again, you do, too. Now we just keep fighting the same battles over and over again that we are. We are doing a Sisyphean task. Do you know what I mean by that to many of you know, the myth of Sisyphus from Greek mythology. Sisyphus was doomed to push a boulder up a stone every day.

[00:09:37] Speaker2

And then it just came rolling right back at him. And it is really easy to feel that way that we are having a boulder of work roll back down on us. And I will tell you from my own life, deeply, personally, the ways in which I experience that. I love Stone Soup about the sharing of our resources, but particularly food. Because I've mentioned before and I've talked about this in other places in my life, I grew up really poor in eastern Kentucky and we didn't always have enough to eat. And I didn't know how deeply poverty and hunger had left their marks on me until I really began to heal and see that what were wounds had become scars. Some of my memories that are marked have marked me for all life. Specific in general are these? When I was 12, my family moved to Milwaukee. And for the entire first year, we had to regularly go to a soup kitchen to get our meals. I was 15. The first time I met somebody who told me they didn't know what a food stamp was. And I was 17 the first time I ate a fresh green bean at a friend's house, and I had to ask what it was. I was 22 in college, living on my own and grateful for the free meal I got at my waitressing job. And I was 25 when I got my first professional job that came with a whopping \$25,000 a year salary, which for me meant that for the first time in my entire life.

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I had regular food in my kitchen. And I was about 35 years old when I realized that I didn't panic anymore about food, which was also the first time that I knew that I had ever panicked about food. My heart used to beat faster at buffets and at restaurants. I didn't know that that's what that was until it didn't happen anymore. But you know, somebody whose heart beats faster when they approach a dining experience, you know, someone who probably can't afford to buy groceries this month or hasn't eaten fresh fruit this whole year because it just costs too much. You know, someone who is ashamed of their hunger and you may know many someones and you may be one of those someones. The soup kitchen that I went to with my family when I was 12 is run by a group of Capuchin monks in Milwaukee, and they have been feeding people daily for well over 50 years. My family was one of the people in that community that benefited from their generosity and the generosity of volunteers. But in the entire time of that work, the community's needs. Haven't gotten any less. And actually during the pandemic, they got worse. And that that for me is the biggest boulder that I feel rolling back on me all the time.

[00:13:01] Speaker2

Because while I am grateful, so grateful. But I don't live with food insecurity and hunger anymore. I am crushed by the weight that so many people do. I feel honestly enraged. That hunger is so widespread in this nation that has so much. I get enraged that black people are still being killed by the police when the first written report on police brutality was published 100 years ago. 100 years ago. I get enraged that people are dying for lack of affordable health care and for lack of access to body autonomy. And those boulders just keep rolling back. And I understand. While we get discouraged. I understand why it feels like why should we do anything at all when so little ever changes? It's understandable that our impulses people, is to lock our doors and say, I'm sorry, I only have one carrot. I can't do anything. Feminist theologian Sharon Welch calls that tendency to lock our doors. Cultured despair. Culture. Despair is the notion that I have no power, that our small actions are unimportant, and that we can't ever change anything. So we should just do nothing. Culture. Despair is wrapped up in perfectionism and urgency that are the hallmarks of white supremacy, culture, and the oppressive systems that grow out of it. And those systems keep too many people poor and hungry and desperate in this country and the world over. But there are antidotes to culture despair. And Sharon Welch in her beautiful work says What we have to do is actively work together to develop skills, to reach across difference, to reject scarcity mentality, and to work together in committed communities.

[00:15:31] Speaker2

Taking small action for change right here in front of us. Just like the villagers in Stone Soup eventually did. We have to ask ourselves what loving actions can we take to make a more just world? What work can we do and who can we be accountable to? What we do it? How do we measure progress that is affirming and real? Those are the kinds of questions that the Jewish Talmud exhorts us to answer when it tells us. Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief. Do justly now love mercy now walk humbly. Now you are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it. We don't have to complete the work. We actually can't have to complete the work. And that might be one of the most frustrating things for those of us who care so much about the world and our neighbors. The work of making a just world won't be finished in our lifetimes. That doesn't mean there isn't work to do right now. That actually gives me hope when I start to despair, because the implication that the Talmud has is that there is actually something to be done. There's something in my hands. In your hands that we can do. And since I'm reflecting for a moment on Jewish teachings, let me reflect on another Jewish teacher you may have heard of somebody called Jesus.

[00:17:23] Speaker2

I've mentioned in sermons here before that I was raised in Pentecostal churches in the South and then Baptist churches in the Midwest. And what that really means is that I was very deeply familiar with the Bible, which also means that I was often deeply disturbed by stories in the Bible. And I don't just mean the Old Testament, God of Wrath and vengeance. But in the New Testament, there was a passage that even as a kid, when I read it, it always bothered me. It bothered me for years. And it is a passage where Jesus says the poor will always be with you. I remember as a kid wondering what did that mean? Because here are the things I heard people say that it meant. It meant that if you were poor, that was preordained by God and you just had to accept it and there was nothing you could do. That's how God wants it to be. I also heard people interpret it this way If you are wealthy, that means God loves you. You are more worthy and that is better. And that's also just how things are and you just have to accept it and move on. Even as a kid, I didn't like either of those interpretations. What kind of loving God I thought would make the world this unjust.

[00:18:40] Speaker2

So I eventually left Christianity, but I could not leave that question behind about what does it mean that the poor are always with us? And when I tell you that it bugged me for years, I mean, it bugged me up until about four years ago when I read an essay by Reverend Liz Theoharis, who is the director of the Kairos Center that works to combat and end poverty in America. She is also the co-director of the Poor People's Campaign. And Reverend Theoharis had this to say about that passage of the poor will always be with you. Sh Her interpretation is a more liberatory anti oppressive interpretation based on the work of Jesus ministry, which she says was all about being in solidarity with the poor. Christ's work was about creating more just systems, about confronting corruption. And when we look at the totality of what we find in scriptures about Jesus work, what we find is that when He references that passage in Matthew, the poor will always be with you. He's actually referring back to a passage in Deuteronomy, which, by the way, all of his listeners would have been familiar with. In the passage in Deuteronomy that Jesus is referring back to. He's talking about that passage in Deuteronomy. It's talking about when we, as God's people, are living and working in alignment with God's love and vision for us, that means we are working to create more just systems.

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And if the poor are always with us, it means that our work is not done. It means not that we have to accept poverty and unjust conditions. It means we have to continue to confront them. So how do we do that? Because again, we can't change the entire world all at once. There is a proverb that I really love. I used to have it hanging on my office for about 20 years, and it says those who wish to move mountains must begin by carrying away small stones. I heard someone say once. Why would you want to move a mountain? Just go around it. Which is a legitimate response, I suppose. But. But when the mountain. When the mountain is racism and sexism and all the other isms that we have created to suppress each other, there is only so long we can go around that mountain. There is only so long we can sit under the weight of that mountain before we have to look up and say, This is not right. This mountain is not just and we have to move it. And when we look up, we can see, Oh. There have always been people moving this mountain. There are people right now carrying away small stones. Writer Rebecca Solnit. Some of you may be familiar with her. Rebecca Solnit is the person who coined the term mansplaining and I highly recommend her short book Men Explain Things to me. But she recently wrote that if you know someone going around saying nobody is doing anything about fill in the blank x, y, z issue, you can name if you know somebody saying nobody's doing anything about that, that person is wrong.

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Solnit says. And if we look up and see that every community on this planet has people within it actively engaged in justice work. It's just that that work is often local and small and goes invisible on the international scale. But that does not mean it is not important and powerful. Because yes, our systems are big and they might feel too big to change. And certainly here in America, that boulder that keeps crushing me, that our social safety net is just being torn away in the pursuit of profit. That is a big weight. But there are people everywhere doing something about it. Whatever it is you can name. And the important thing to think about is that we have to face the reality of how big the mountain might be in order to effect the change that we want. And we have to do that work because it is not just political work. Doing that work, carrying away the small stones, making our stone soup. That is how we build beloved community. And that that building beloved community is what we are called to do by the hunger of our spirits and, yes, by our universalist ancestors who looked around America 200 years ago and said, Hey.

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If we're all beloved of God the way we believe we are, and if we're all saved in love from birth the way we believe we are. And if we are all united in shared humanity and divinity the way we know we are, then this world is messed up. And what do we need to do to make what we know and believe real and true now? Not in some afterlife here and now. And that is the work that we've inherited from the universalist side of our ancestors. And it is wholly spiritual work. Feeding people is spiritual work. Dismantling white supremacy is spiritual work. Tearing down gender and body hierarchies is spiritual work. The work of addressing climate change is spiritual work, my friends. It's not just political. Rescuing animals, teaching sex ed. Committing to diversity, registering people to vote. Those are all acts that we take in our communities that yes, is for the greater political economic good, but it is for the work and the good of our spirits. Because when we create embodied realities that that reflect the divine truth. It's spiritual. In our systems that denigrate difference and dehumanize us, that deny our inherent worth, cause us. Emotional, economic, political. Bodily, spiritual, harm and healing. That is our work together as people of faith. And we have to remember. I have to remember that if the goal is I'm somehow going to change the entire system, the entire world, move the whole mountain all by myself, I'm going to fail.

[00:25:49] Speaker2

I'm going to give in to burnout and I'm going to quit. I'm going to despair. We can only move the small stones in front of us with the people who are moving their small stones with us. Writer and activist Adrienne Marie Brown in her book Emergent Strategy. Tells us from her work in organizing that small is all. There is always enough time for the right work, Brown says. And it grows more effective in deep relationships that are cultivated by fostering mutuality and respect. By going an inch wide and a mile deep with each other. We focus on the small, actionable steps in our power to take. And then if we dream and imagine with others a more possible world and together in community, move towards that dream. If we, to borrow from our metaphors from this series, plant small seeds. If we harvest fruits that we share with our neighbors, that that is a success. That's moving the mountain a little. If we remember the lessons from Stone Soup, if we remember the work of Jesus, we can take inspiration in how small actions and community contribute to the whole the whole change we're trying to make. And if we remember that we are each born worthy of love and dignity, that the divine moves in each of us and calls us to see the worth and dignity in each person we encounter, then we can be in solidarity with each other.

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And we might call that a small movement, whatever form it takes a success. So if we commit to small actions here now, today, if we commit to a small action this week, what might that look like for you? Maybe it's writing a letter to your legislators to advocate for a raise in the minimum wage or in support of diversity. Maybe you can make a meal and deliver it to a neighbor. Maybe you could donate blood. Volunteer at a local Planned Parenthood. Register for that diversity march that Jessica mentioned in the in the announcements. Maybe like Zoe, you can volunteer at an animal shelter or your kid's school or a neighborhood cleanup. I'm not here to tell you what to do. I'm just here to remind you that each action matters to the community in which you live. And in case you forget it, I want you to take away a small stone today. Along the wall where you found some of your vegetables for our stone soup. And in the back table. We've gathered stones for you, and I want everybody, including the little ones, to take a stone with them. You can take it as it is. Hold it in your hand. I actually have one in my pocket that I wrote for myself literally as I was working on this sermon. Dream big, act small. If you want to write a message to yourself on your cell phone, you can.

[00:29:21] Speaker2

If you just want to have it to hold in your hand. To say small stones matter. I invite you to do that? We're going to ask us to enter into a spirit of prayer in a moment. And then the band is going to play their last song. And then before you leave, take a stone with you, my friends. And remember. Remember that your small actions matter. Because, as Margaret Mead once said, never forget that a small, committed group of people can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has. Will you pray with me? Spirit of life and love. We are gathered here today in this community, both in body and in spirit. And we are aware. We are aware of the daunting challenges that face us when we leave these walls. Many of us are holding fear for our loved ones, for our communities, for the future of our children. And so we ask you. Spirit. Spirit of love. To hold us gently. And to remind us that we are not alone. That what we do matters. If what we do moves us ever towards justice and beloved community. I am grateful to be here. To be with these people who have become my community. And so spirit I ask in gratitude and love that you hold each of them in that same, same holy, holy love. May it be so. And amen. Please rise, whether in body or in spirit, and join us in our last song today.

[00:31:36] Speaker1

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