

NAME

PODCAST Us Kids.mp3

DATE

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DURATION

23m 56s

2 SPEAKERS

Speaker1

Speaker2

START OF TRANSCRIPT

[00:00:00] Speaker1

The following is a message from WellSprings congregation.

[00:00:06] Speaker2

So I have a high school friend who is a nanny. And she has a friend who is a teacher. And her teacher friend. Walked onto their school's grounds on Wednesday morning. And they were greeted by this. Oh, next one. They were greeted by. A memorial. That is 19 empty chairs in a circle. Representing fourth graders. The fourth graders who were murdered on Tuesday in Uvalde, Texas. And you can see that there's two chairs in the center of the circle. Those represent their two teachers. And we're also killed. There are flowers placed on each empty chair. The memorial is moving. And I'm sure that the school administrators who set that up intended it as a sign of solidarity, of remembrance and of grief. A way to honor and see each person. Who will never come home again to their families. And it is it is all of those beautiful things. And yet also I want to read you the caption that this teacher, this friend of my friend attached to the photo. She said. Today, I come to work again to a memorial for students and teachers killed in a mass shooting at school. She said so many things could be done to protect us. But the sad thing is, all we can really do is hope. That we are not next. 19 chairs outside of my building with flowers on them. To remind every teacher and student. That they should be prepared to die.

[00:02:22] Speaker2

When they walk through these doors. You know, I was a sophomore in high school when Columbine happened. I'm pushing 40. And I remember back then. It was one thing back then when this had never happened before. It did feel rare. Back then it did. It felt strange and unusual. It was credible to say back then that this was some kind of aberration, some strange twist of factors combining in one place with two messed up kids. Reminds me of a lot of the things that we see nowadays and the conversations we used to have about them. Reminds me of all the conversation about how things would not get that bad after the 2016 election, that folks were just overreacting. It would be a strange aberration, and then everything would get back to normal. It reminds me of how black folks have been telling us, white folks, our society telling us they don't feel protected by the police, that they get treated differently. While other people explained it away by saying that was very unusual. It was just a few bad apples. You know, what I've learned from all these things is that minimizing a problem does not stop it. In fact, it makes it worse. Minimizing a problem. Her God even worse, suggesting that it's not that bad because it only happens to a couple people, a minority of people. That's not only wrong, it's ineffective. Because problems spread. When we think we can look at these things and think it only happens to other people that we can contain problems to be their problems.

[00:04:25] Speaker2

That simply does not work. Pragmatically, it does not work. Because we are part of one human family. We are connected to each other for good and for ill. And there is no way around it. We simply have to matter to each other. I'm only loosely talking about a movie today. I will admit to you, each summer school lets out eventually and the weather gets hot. And we spend time here learning from and resting a little bit in the stories in films and TV that represent all different aspects of our experience as humans. We call it spirit flicks and it's delightful and it's touching, and those stories matter because they do shape us and reflect us. But I'm not going to talk in too much detail today about the little known documentary that I chose. It's one of many different documentaries that you can find about mass shootings. This one is called us kids. And it follows the teenagers who survived the mass shooting in 2018 that killed 17 people at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida. Some of those teenagers who survived became activists. And that's why I chose this movie and not any of the others, because this movie really focuses on the ones who lived. It shows the grief. And it honors the people who died through the eyes.

[00:06:09] Speaker2

Of their friends. Many of you know. I think all of you know that this week's shooting in Uvalde was preceded by a white supremacist massacre of black folks, mostly elders. Doing the grocery shopping on a Saturday afternoon in Buffalo. It was also preceded by a shooting in Southern California at a Taiwanese Presbyterian church. A nonprofit called the Gun Violence Archive, keeps track of mass shootings in the U.S.. They define it as any incident where four or more people are shot. And there have been 45. In May. You probably haven't heard about 45. We tend to only hear about the ones with lots of fatalities, which does tend to correspond to the type of weapon that is used. There have been 27 school shootings so far this year. This isn't rare anymore. Far from it. And why am I talking about this in church? At a Sunday service? You are right if you're asking that public policy is not my job and I'm not going to tell you about public policy today. I'm not an expert on that. But I am talking about it today because I'm starting to hear something disturbing. More and more also come from some of the public voices in our country on a topic that is in my wheelhouse. About the nature of good and evil. This is just one example that I saw this week. This is a tweet from a member of Congress.

[00:08:02] Speaker2

It says you cannot legislate away evil. Now, this was the comment right above it in my Twitter feed. There go. All our criminal laws. Sad face. I mean, it's almost funny. It's so ridiculous, right? We have laws because we don't just throw our hands up at the existence of evil. It's not a genuine argument, I don't think. But I keep hearing it and variations on it. I also heard it from the lieutenant governor of Texas this week in a news conference. I've heard it from public officials, from commentators on TV. This idea that evil will always walk among us. We can't eradicate evil. And I do have a response to that as a preacher. Which is to tell you that that is a faithless idea. For people who claim to have a lot of faith, it's appalling to me that they would try to wash their hands of responsibility to save children from being shot in schools because evil will always walk among us. What kind of faith is that? This is one of my favorite photos. I used to have a photo like this as my Facebook cover for a few years. I couldn't find the exact one, but it was the same idea. It says the devil is a liar. A colleague of mine, the Reverend Marisol Caballero, wrote about this phrase in a collection of Unitarian Universalist essays on evil. She said, I adore this phrase, the devil is a liar.

[00:09:50] Speaker2

Now, she says, I've never actually believed in some red horned, grotesque man who taunts us from the underworld. But I enjoy the melodrama of this accusation because it fits. It fits with the severity and the reality of evil. Evil is very real, Marie says. It can come from lots of different kinds of circumstances. But it always represents the loss. Of ability or desire to discern between good and hurtful behavior. You use believe that all humans are essentially good. But we all ignore our consciences sometimes. We all behave poorly from time to time. Our own DNA here at WellSprings says something similar that while we are all born into original blessing and wholeness. Life and its circumstances can fragment us. And if nothing is done. To interrupt that process, to heal that process, that fragmentation, that brokenness can get worse and worse and go very, very, very wrong. This idea that we are beloved and born blessed. It does not absolve us. From the harm that we do. The devil is a liar as a way of expressing all of that. It's said in some types of Christian churches to remind a person that they can choose good. When you hear those two voices on each shoulder, the devil is the liar. Do not follow that voice. Follow the voice of God, they say. And it's also said to reassert the ultimate power and goodness of God if the devil is a liar than God speaks truth.

[00:11:59] Speaker2

A beautiful example, I think, of faithfulness in that Christian tradition. But I actually think this is also a very Unitarian Universalist phrase. Because to me it also says that voice, the devil is wrong about who we are. It's wrong about who we are at our core. Because all the fragmentation in the world, all of our temptations toward evil and ignorance and disconnection and selfishness are not the truth. They are not the core of who we really are. And they don't get the final say. If I believe that. I can't give up. I can't throw my hands up and say evil is simply inevitable. That's what my faith teaches me. I would argue that what many of these officials are saying about the nature of evil being somehow inevitable is actually against our religion. In our religion. We fight back against evil with everything we've got. Just because we can't foresee the end of something in our lifetimes. It doesn't mean we stop working to make it better. That's what it really means to show up for our kids. For the kids who will be adults one day, who will sit here one day, who will inherit the world that we've created. That kind of selflessness that recognizes that the fight is worth it, even if you and I may not be the ones who benefit. That's the kind of faith that this fallen service members that we honor this weekend every year on Memorial Day showed in their service.

[00:14:02] Speaker2

Whatever your feelings are about war. Heck, whatever my feelings are about war, I respect deeply that so many times when we've seen clear, violent evil perpetrated somewhere in the world, we have had people in this country who are willing to try to stop it, even to the point of giving their own lives. Part of the reason. That soldiers are willing to make that sacrifice is so that you and I, private citizens, our children, don't have to experience this kind of trauma. That we are all now experiencing because of this violence and because of these mass shootings. So I don't want anyone in government telling us that they know about evil and they are the authority and that the existence of evil absolves them from their responsibility to solve these problems. Fighting to end this matters. And every time we move the dial in the right direction, it matters. Please don't let anyone teach you to be helpless in the face of evil. It's important to me because I think it applies again to so many things beyond even just this epidemic of mass shootings. I talked last week when all of our kids were here in the room with us about high expectations. About the long path it takes, sometimes the path of growth and learning and practice to get where we want to go.

[00:15:46] Speaker2

And I talked about the fact that we can't we shouldn't have high expectations about everything. We'll drive ourselves nuts. But there are some things that are always worthy of a high standard. Things like justice and fairness and how we treat one another. That is what the young activists in this film, the activist for Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, do. They don't accept that their friends lives have to be the cost of freedom in what is supposed to be a peaceful country, a country where we should be able to live our daily lives without the common threat of being shot by another citizen. And if you are feeling overwhelmed. We're just numb to all of this. I understand. We can't fix this alone. As Kathleen reminded us. None of us can. And we shouldn't have to. But we can find stones to carry and we can find communities to grieve with. And we can find ways to support our values. To support the people who have decided this is their fight. They will be going to the protests and the vigils. They will show up. We can support the people who run for office to make a change and not throw up their hands. We begin this week on Memorial Day. Appropriately remembering those we've lost. I want to invite you to end this week by showing up for the living. We have many opportunities. In all of our lives, big and small.

[00:17:42] Speaker2

To show up for each other. We do have some opportunities here. Because we are not separate from these problems that we see on the news. I wish I wish I could put some protection around all of you to help you be separate from those problems. But that is not how it works. There are people in our own communities. You are also arguing things against our values as Unitarian Universalists. There are people showing up at school board meetings. On social media, arguing that our children shouldn't be taught to respect our differences. Arguing that our children shouldn't be taught to be curious and kind with each other or include people like them. There are people advocating against social emotional learning in our schools. There's a whole other sermon in there that maybe I will preach after this week. But we don't have to throw up our hands. We have an opportunity to show up for our neighbors on Friday night. At a unity service at Congregation Beth Israel. We have an opportunity to show up Saturday afternoon at a march in support of diversity in Exton at the Linville YMCA. We can be present this weekend to say that our faith teaches us differently and join a whole bunch of other faith communities that will be there, other community groups, other educators who will be there to do the same thing. I will be there at both events.

[00:19:23] Speaker2

I will be wearing my clerical collar, which you might start to see a little more often. And I hope that you will join me. You might remember Rachel Rutter. Rachel was one of the speakers that we invited for our Neighbors and Helpers series this past winter. She talked with us in February. She's the immigration lawyer who founded Project Libertad, which supports newcomers and refugee children arriving in Chester County with legal assistance and afterschool programs. And yesterday she shared these photos with me and said that I could show them as well to our congregation. Their photos of cards. She said, You know, I really needed these today because this week has been so heavy for so many reasons. But there is still good in the world. A local elementary school class made these cards to welcome our newcomer students. Elementary school kids. Here nearby are neighbors writing cards in Spanish and in English. Some writing in their native tongue and some practicing a new language to be as welcoming as possible. To the other kids who need it. They say, welcome to the United States. Welcome to the United States. My name is Jacob. I'm eight years old. My name is Sam. I'm nine years old. I hope you feel happy in your new home. With love. This is coming back to our original blessing. This is how we hold ourselves to a high standard of good. So please don't let anyone tell you that we can't have this kind of faith.

[00:21:27] Speaker2

In who we can be. For each other. Amen. And may you live in blessing. Can I invite you all to take a moment if you're comfortable at your eyes? Foreclosed. Take a deep breath in and out if that helps you. And join me in a spirit of prayer. God of our hearts own language. Holy presence, holy one that holds us when we feel lost. When we feel too tired. May we feel and be grateful for these arms that support us. May we simply be with that feeling as much as possible in the week ahead? Please hold us close. Please offer comfort in the ways that we need it. And we ask you also to give comfort as much as possible to those who are most closely affected by loss. To those who are remembering loved ones that they have lost, whether recently or long ago this week. We ask for a gentle kind of strength. A deep kind of knowing and trusting. We ask for faith this week. May we touch into that faith whenever we need it. May we remember that there is something good at our core. And at the core of every human on this planet. Make our faith strong enough to see that. In the days and the weeks ahead. For these prayers that I've spoken and for the prayers that all of us in this room are carrying on our hearts today we say amen.

[00:23:44] Speaker1

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END OF TRANSCRIPT



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