

The Promise of Easter

A Message for All Faiths Unitarian Congregation

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Around the world today people are worshiping and celebrating the resurrection of Jesus. Perhaps you're one of them. The story of Jesus' resurrection offers faith, hope, the miracle of God's love. These are messages needed right now. Actually, they are promises. Promises made to the people, or the characters, in the story. When I read the story, I focus on the needs and the reactions of the characters. That is when we can most see the manifestations of promises made. The Gospel of Matthew tells us, "After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

² There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. ⁴ The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

⁵ The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."

⁸ So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

¹¹ While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. ¹² When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, ¹³ telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.' ¹⁴ If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." ¹⁵ So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.

¹⁶ Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

And so, for some Easter really is the culmination and the fulfillment of God's promise. It is much more than simply the celebration of a new season. It stems from the tradition Jesus celebrated as he joined his Disciples for the Passover feast. It is the completion of the scriptures

as brought forth by the prophets outlining God's covenant with His people. It is the sacrifice and death necessary for new life. It's about moving beyond the empty tomb. Can you imagine what the Disciples, Mary Magdalene and Mary felt on Easter morning when they came upon an empty tomb? All of their hopes and dreams had vanished, as apparently so had the body of Jesus. They are called to look beyond the empty tomb where there is life. It's not a dead space. It is a place for life.

The promise of Easter is resurrection, but as Unitarian Universalists most of us understand resurrection not of a deity named Jesus. But the resurrection or renewal of hope, nature, beginning again, and for some of us the Easter Bunny and its pagan roots. Easter still offers promises to us, this particular Easter especially. In our secular view, the term Easter is related to a goddess of dawn worshipped by peoples in early India and in later Roman times. According to this view, the word east comes from the early tradition in Western civilization of people facing eastward to worship the dawn. The secular festival of Easter was regarded as the beginning of the new year. Remnants of this kind of celebration may still be seen in southern Germany. Spring—the time of sunshine, of flowers, of new growth, of new life—was celebrated as the season giving promise of new life to mankind. If you pay attention this time of year you can witness all of this in southern Florida.

More importantly, Easter is a time for new life internally. That is, it is a time for us to consider renewal, begin again, letting go, throw down that which binds us and keeps us from living authentically and meaningfully. Easter brings us possibilities. I've been studying the writings of Thich Nhat Hanh and he tells us, "The best way to take care of the future is to take care of the present moment." And "Because you are alive everything is possible." For us these are the promises of Easter. Promises of possibility, awe, renewal, self-care, and reconnection to all that is truly living. We have more possibilities in each moment than we realize. At any moment we have a choice that either leads us closer to our spirit or further away from it. In regards to connecting to the living Thich Naht Hanh writes, "Getting in touch with the beauty of nature makes life much more beautiful, much more real, and the more mindful and connected you are, the more deeply the sunset will reveal itself to you. Your happiness is multiplied by ten, by twenty."

My hope is that you are beginning to realize and understand the promises of Easter. This couldn't be more helpful given the crisis we are currently living in. By now most of us are feeling the effects of isolation, quarantine, rising death numbers, the lack of the healing touch or embrace of another person. Maybe your toilet paper stash is dwindling. While confined by walls and living our masked lives there is still the promises of hope, the opportunity to look within to live more meaningfully, of gratitude, and a renewed understanding for the human connection and compassion that we will likely never forget when all is said and done. You see, Easter, this time in our lives, is laying so much before us to become better, stronger, more graceful, more tender, more empathetic, and living life with more clarity and more concern. We need to make a promise this Easter. A promise that we will not return to our old ways, but maintain all that we have learned during this epidemic.

We also need to recognize that we not only have responsibility to one another, but our community as well. As Unitarian Universalists we are responsible to bring comfort and hope to our community. Sometime over the next week a large banner will be placed on the front of our building. The banner will read All Will Be Well. When people in the community drive, walk,

run, or cycle past our congregation they will for a moment be reassured. They will for a moment have hope. It is our responsibility to bring both to our community.

It is important to remember that we are not in this alone. We are enduring this crisis together and we will arrive on the other side of this together. Together we'll learn about what wellbeing means in this new reality we're all living in. Together we'll learn what makes us feel good, what is really hard, how to connect with each other, move our bodies and look after each other. Together, we'll express our gratitude to the workers keeping our essential services running, to the healthcare practitioners, the workers caring for others in nursing homes, the farmers and field workers, gas station attendants, the cashiers and grocers.

While I don't know how long this outbreak will last, I do know that I'm here as long as I'm needed. I know that you are all here for one another and I'm grateful. Together we can get through anything and I love you every step of the way. May the promises of Easter be clear and comfort you.

May it be so.