

## Resurrecting Jesus - Joyce Ramay

April 9, 2023

The quote at the top of your Order of Service is by Mahatma Gandhi:

*Live like Jesus did, and the world will listen.*

When Gandhi was living in South Africa, he became acquainted with the Bible and the stories of Jesus. He was greatly influenced by the Sermon on the Mount. Today, we are considering the holy day of Easter.

Christianity borrowed many of its holidays and practices from earlier faiths. Easter first started out as a celebration of the Vernal Equinox, a time when all of nature is awakened from the slumber of winter, and the cycle of renewal begins.

The word Easter comes from Anglo-Saxon pagans, who celebrated this time of rebirth by invoking Eostre or Ostara, the goddess of spring, the dawn, and fertility. We are familiar with the resurrection of Jesus presented in the New Testament and Christian traditions. But there are other stories about the life and death of Jesus.

When I lived in Pakistan, I heard local legends about Jesus and Mary. There was a tradition that the missing years in the life of Jesus from the age of 12 to the age of 30 were spent in Kashmir. That was a time when Buddhism prevailed in the Himalayan region, and books have been written about the parallel sayings of Jesus and Buddha. Some of the legends say that Jesus did not die on the cross, but was taken down before he died. Then he spoke with Mary Magdalene and the apostles, before his “ascent into heaven” – which was his return to the mountains of Kashmir, where he died and is buried at the Rozabal Shrine in Srinagar.

There are claims that Jesus chose Kashmir because Kashmiris are considered as one among the ten ‘missing tribes’ of Israel, out of 12 Jewish tribes, who later settled in the new countries, especially along the Silk route in Afghanistan and Kashmir, after they were driven out of Israel by the Assyrians in around 700 BC. His mother Mary had accompanied him, and died along the way, and is buried at the shrine Mai Mari da Ashtan in Murree in the foothills of the mountains in Pakistan.

There is another legend that Jesus did not die on the cross but went to Japan where he lived a long life and was buried. So there are a variety of viewpoints about Jesus and his resurrection. The important thing to realize, though, is that there is a universal human appreciation for the importance of rising up to a new and better life, of transcendence to a new realm of existence.

That is what enlightenment is all about. That is what it means to be born again. That is what salvation and discovering the Kingdom of God on earth means to those who have had a direct experience of the Spirit of Life entering into their souls. Even among the most hard-hearted and cynical people, there seems to be an inner need to reconnect on some holy days.

I recently read an interesting article about CEO’s. No – not chief executive officers – but those people who attend worship services on Christmas and Easter Only – CEO.

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I think it is pretty easy to understand why so many people go to churches on Christmas – it is a strong cultural practice involving families and communities. We feel a need to come together in the darkness of the winter season to celebrate and to share what we have with others.

But what about Easter? Why is it that when Easter comes, people who have not attended a religious function since Christmas feel motivated to get up, have their Easter eggs, and then head off to a church service? What is it about this season of the year, or the concept of resurrection after death, that is appealing - even to secular minded people and non-believers?

Springtime is a season for rebirth. Throughout the world, for thousands of years, spring has been celebrated as a time for joy. Birds lay eggs in their nests. Baby rabbits are seen frisking about the earth. Leaves are emerging on branches of trees. Tulips and iris are bursting forth from the ground, announcing that the dark days of cold and death are behind us, and we can rejoice again.

Especially if we are intimately connected with nature, we feel a deep sense of the sacred, as we see all these representatives of the Spirit of Life calling us to join in singing – *The Day of Days is Here*. And then, too, we seek a kind of reassurance, that loved ones who have died have not completely gone away. We welcome a message that death is not final, that there is a kind of continuing presence of precious love and intimacy that can never be lost – even after the death of the body.

For me, the message of Easter is that **life and love are universal and eternal**. It is a time to appreciate that **we can live and love completely, with trust and joy, that the benevolent universe supports us**.

All that is, and all that will ever be, are in a constant process of rebirth and recombination into new and magical forms of being, manifesting the mystery of creation throughout all places and time. Easter is a time for a direct experience of intimacy with all that is. Easter calls us to recognize and embrace a deeper sense of the sacred. Easter calls us to have a genuine reverence for all living things. Easter calls us to gather together in communities of love and joy. Easter calls us to cherish our children by giving them special treats. And it is a time for us to rediscover Jesus.

Unfortunately, because we Unitarians do not have a literal belief in the Trinity, and because we reject the concept of Jesus being the only Son of God, some of us may turn away from him completely. We fail to see Jesus as the revolutionary, who stood up against the corruption and hypocrisy of powerful leaders of state and religion. We fail to recognize the importance of the Sermon on the Mount. We fail to see the significance of the myth and the metaphor of Jesus, crucified and resurrected.

For thousands of years, we humans have had many myths about gods who died and rose again – because these stories resonate with an innate yearning to transcend old ways of selfishness and greed, and to rise up in selfless love and service to all.

Jesus showed us how we can all live as proactive and creative participants of universal and eternal divinity. Mary Magdalene went to the graveyard and discovered that the stone had been removed from the entrance to the tomb. Mary, the devoted friend and follower of Jesus, was the first to experience the presence of Jesus on that first Easter morning. She was told to share the good news!

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She went forth and did so, because she had sincere devotion and complete trust that his life and his message would go on to inspire others to be more inclusive, more just, more compassionate, more caring, and more loving.

You can know this - Jesus is risen when his inspiring messages do become ingrained in our daily lives, in our decisions, our choices, and actions. When we love our neighbors as ourselves. When we can forgive our enemies. When we feed the poor and tend the sick. When we care for others and share what we have with them. When we embrace and support marginalized people. And when we can courageously speak truth to power. Consider the possibilities inherent in this awesome vision.

Perhaps we will experience a death of our own big egos and self-centeredness - to discover and give birth to a new-found universal identity – one that connects us intimately with the interdependent web of being of which we are all a part!

So today, I invite you to roll away the stones from your hearts and minds. Resurrecting Jesus – in our daily lives!!! That is our message today! Resurrecting Jesus – in our daily lives!!! That is the sacred vision, the challenge, and the opportunity that Easter presents to each one of us.

Spirit of Life, Come unto Me!!

Live like Jesus did.

May it be so!!!

Halleluiah!