

Easter 2008
Edgecomb, ME

RESURRECTION

In our prayer today, the Reverend Victoria Weinstein tells us in a clear way, “he is not coming back, you know.” Unitarian Universalists nod our heads in agreement, smiling slightly. Of course he is not coming back. Who does? We die and we’re gone...for good...forever...never to return.

Let us please not be too literal. Let us hear the sacred stories that guide so many people and let us understand them for ourselves today in this time and place. What does the resurrection story say to those of us who live in the United State of America in the 21st century? What does the resurrection story say to us who are baffled by the country-wide and global economic disaster? What does the resurrection story say to us who are watching our income decline as we watch the richest in our society get richer off of us and those who have so much less than we do? What does the resurrection story say to us who awaken in the dawn and struggle with the weight of getting up and going off to an unfulfilling job so that we might provide the basic needs for ourselves and our families? What does the resurrection story say to us who know and claim abundance and yet live in fear that we will lose all that we have? What does the resurrection story say to us who yearn for an authentic and deeper relationship with our partner, spouse, children and friends even as we go through the days

interacting with them as if we were full and satisfied?

It is Easter Sunday and what I am asking my friends is this.....how do we, people of faith, live in a world that encourages us to be dead to all but the most base wants and desires...a world that barrages us with the messages of greed, need, wants and cheap desires? We are human and we are taken in by the messages of our society. We cannot help it. We are not Amish people living in the farmlands of Pennsylvania outside of mainstream society—mostly untouched by its messages. We are affected by what passes our eyes, ears, bodies, souls and hearts every day as messages of what we must be and what we must have to live.

We become so enthralled with just keeping up with the never-ending messages of more, more, more, that we participate in the death of our hearts and souls. We begin to question the beauty that lives in us and among us. We question our talent, our abilities, our value and values. We become cynical about love; jaded about peace; less hopeful about the future. The Reverend Kathleen Rolenz writes “We roll stones across entrances; build fences instead of gates; close fists instead of open arms.”

The messages we receive from our 21st century American life-style society invite us to harden our hearts against those who are not “us.” We are invited to be full of fear, for fear keeps us from making community—

community that might stand together to say “no” to our soul deaths. We are invited, in this society, to fill our lives with worry and cares that offer false promises of happiness and success.

And this, my friends will kill us. Every day we are killed a little bit. And yet, every day we continue to live. But I sense that many of us live with the stone of death...the stone of soul, spirit, mind death leaning heavily against us. He is not coming back, you know. He is not coming back to push the death stone away from us.

But...we can do it. We can roll back the stone from our tombs. As you heard in the prayer today...the stone has got to be rolled back again and again every year. Today is Easter Sunday. A new beginning. Spring...rebirth. We have been given another opportunity to rise up from whatever death of spirit we struggle under—to roll back the stone. We Unitarian Universalists have this opportunity every Easter Sunday and, for that matter, every day. So...if (or rather, when) we backslide we know that Easter is coming. Roll up your sleeves and roll back the stone from your tomb.

What might that look like? It might look like joy, or hope, or courage, or strength, or integrity, or love, or peace or faith. It might look like all of those things together in one pot. But where will we put all of

these things? First we must empty out the grave....before we can fill the garden with all of this wonderful stuff. Let's get rid of hopelessness, dread, fear, anger, cynicism and worry. Throw 'em away. Open your backpack, your purse, your wallet...open your hearts and dump out those stones of death that are keeping you from birth and rebirth and living.

What about the authentic fears, worries and angers? Am I not diminishing those who suffer under the weight of true anxiety? Look at some of what I've been talking about today. Are they authentic, heart and soul anxieties or are they societal anxieties that are weakening our hearts and souls so that we will be unable to bear the burden of the real thing? Surely you know that we all carry those stones with us. That is why we need each other. That is why we need this community of faith. For when we are truly burdened by the sadness of life we need to come to the place that will open its arms and hold us tenderly. And so—it is a balancing act. When I am burdened I wish for you to hold me. And when I am well I will hold you.

But we cannot be the safety net of loving care when we are falsely burdened by the stones of death on our souls. It is these stones of death that I say ...roll away from your hearts.

And so, here we sit.....Unitarian Universalists on Easter Sunday.

Citizens of the United States of America.....people of the Western part of the world with our worldviews deeply engrained in our psyches. And with all of that comes the burdens of how we take in what our society has to offer. I am suggesting that we turn away from what we know in our bones. I suggest that we make an effort to become the rebirth that we see in nature at this time of year. I suggest that we heed the story of the resurrection – not for one man 2,000 years ago but for all men, women and children. We can roll away the stones of our lives and in doing so we will be the people in the prayer who change ourselves, our hearts and souls and our world.

Ah ha! It's the old "let's change the world" sermon. Welllll....yes. And no...and maybe. It's really the old "let's live in harmony with what our deepest inner longing and yearnings call us to be" sermon. We need to be warriors, not whiners. Although I know this is not true in this congregation, believe it or not, I have come across some Unitarian Universalists who are whiners! But we are called to be warriors of the spirit....warriors of our spirit for it is by being a warrior we begin to protect our hearts, souls, minds and bodies from the ravages of society's messages. When we provide strong protection for ourselves, we begin to get strong in spirit and well being. And then we can begin to care for each other and the world.

So often we Unitarian Universalists tend to lean toward Unitarian individualism rather than Universalist communalism. When I ask you today to become warriors of your spirits and souls, I know it sounds individualistic. It is. In a way. But it is only through taking back our spirits.....pushing away the stone that prevents us from getting out of the tomb that we can face and change the world.

There is a profound message for Unitarian Universalists in the Easter story. We have the capacity to live into fuller lives. Resurrection can happen every day...we can celebrate Easter every day. We can do this by promising ourselves that we will look anew at what we want and need. We can prioritize our lives so that that which we adore, that which we are passionate about leads us on our path. We can say no to what society tells us is important. We do not need all that we are told we need. We do not need to be perfect....having a perfect [read expensive] home, perfect children, a perfect [read expensive again] bodies and faces. We can claim our perfection by claiming the abundance that is put before us and living in gratitude. It may not always look like abundance, and we may not always feel grateful....but if we can practice finding the abundance and feeling the gratitude our lives will change.

A few years ago my beloved therapy dog, Naomi Jean, died of cancer

after a roller-coaster disease process where she was better one day and sicker the next. It took me a long time to find abundance and gratitude. But now I can say that I am immensely grateful that I had the ability to give her the best medical care possible and I feel abundantly full with the 10 ½ years of memory and love that we shared.

I am a great believer in spiritual practice. One of the things about spiritual practice that I believe completely is that ones spiritual practice can be anything that brings centeredness, peace, contentment to your soul. Anything that helps to roll the stone of death away from your soul. Some Unitarian Universalists use prayer, some use yoga or Buddhist meditation, some follow Ralph Waldo Emerson's path to spiritual peace with a walk in the woods. As Unitarian Universalists we are called to grow spiritually... we are not called to follow only one path to that growth. So, there is something out there for all of us.

There is a story about a couple. They are very compatible and enjoy many of the same things. They laugh together. They are happy together. However every morning one of the couple wakes up and shouts "Good morning God!" while the other burrows under the blankets and moans "Good God, morning!" Just for the record, I am a "Good morning God!" kind of person. So, I am going to invite you into the Good morning God

world. I believe that if we practice knowing abundance and celebrating that abundance with abundant gratitude we will begin to roll back the stone of soul death. So....I encourage you to celebrate Easter Sunday every day for one month. Every morning when you wake up I suggest that you shout “Good morning God!” or...”Good morning world!” or...”thank God I’m vertical!” It’s a step. It’s not the ultimate solution to soul death. But if we can begin each day in gratitude we have a chance to take on the world in a way that allows us to say “no” to the superfluous and “yes” to life.

This is the beginning of changing the world. Because if we can say “yes” to life, if we can roll up our sleeves and roll the stone away from our soul death, we gain a centeredness that gives us strength to care for the heart-broken, the soul-broken and the body-broken in our church, in our town, and in the world. And then we will be ready to, as our prayer invited us, lay healing hands on the reviled and rejected, rage for righteousness, love the sinner (even ourselves) and participate in God’s extravagant banquet of love.

This, my dear friends, is the resurrection. You, my dear friends, are the resurrection. May you be blessed to see the holy in you.

Amen