

An Easter Service
“Any Day, Any Time”
submitted by Rev. Elaine Beth Peresluha

Thoughts to Ponder:

“Jesus is not here. He has risen! He is going ahead of you”
Gospel of Mark (adapted)

"A resurrection is always a mystery, though it happens every day"
David O. Rankin

Opening Words (422):

Surely the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it.
How awesome is this place!
This is none other than the house of God,
And this is the gate of Heaven.
Genesis 28

Hymns:

There is a Balm in Gilead (# 1045 in *Singing the Journey*)

Lo, the Earth Awakes Again (# 61 in *Singing the Living Tradition*)

Readings:

(1) From *the Gospel of Mark*

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

"Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.' "

Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

(2) Adapted from *At Any Day, at Any Time* by Rev. G. Peter Fleck

Since whatever happened on that Easter Sunday some two thousand years ago, we have found that the Resurrection can take place on any day of the week, in any week of the year, at any place in the universe. All of us have had the experience that at the bottom of despair, when everything seems to have died and there is no hope left, new life stirs and what had seemed to be an end, the end, turns out to be a new beginning. One is reminded of Luther's observations: "At the very moment it seems all lost, we are on the verge of being saved." And of Wallace Steven's words: "After the final no there comes a yes, And on that yes the future world depends." It may consist of the evolution of the old into a newness that makes the old a part of the new, as when a widow or widower remarries, but does not forget his or her first spouse, or when an alcoholic learns to abstain, but does not forget their alcoholism. This newness is available to all of us at any time and at any place. Nothing can disqualify us from its grace. It is never too late; we are never too far gone. The Easter event invites us all. The Resurrection awaits us all.

Homily

No other religious holy day confuses UUs as much as Easter. Compelled to join their mainstream denominational sisters and brothers in attending church, but not knowing what to say or do what they get there. Easter is, after all, the remembrance of the resurrection of Jesus, as yet the concept of the "resurrection" profoundly troubles and embarrasses us. Every ounce of our logical and rational being argues against the idea of a bodily "coming to life". And so...we end up talking about Spring and flowers, and sometimes throw in the idea of the Easter Bunny for good luck.

Maybe we need to think about the resurrection in a new way, as an event which took place not just 2,000 years ago, but an event which takes place continually, an event which can, and does, take place at any time, at any place.

We're not alone in being confused about Easter. The early Christians were just as confused. As we heard in our reading from the Gospel of Mark, the first witnesses to the empty tomb were told that Jesus had risen, but they did not actually see the risen Christ. They were only told "He is going ahead of you". And they left the tomb because "they were afraid" That is where the traditional Gospel of Mark ends. No Easter visions, no appearance, no encounters.

Perhaps the Gospel of Mark tells the true story. But what is it saying to us? Maybe it is saying: Just up ahead, over the hill, around the corner, Jesus, who has entered into a new life with God, awaits us. We only need eyes that see, ears that hear.

As Peter Fleck reminds us, Who has not experienced despair?, Who has not reached the end of the road, the death of all things possible, and seen no way out of the tunnel? And yet, and yet, most (if not all) of us have also experienced a resurrection, a new life out of death. When I married my wife, when my daughter was born, I was rescued, saved from death. When my mother died, it was the end of one life and the beginning of another, as I left behind a physical presence and entered into the presence of a new physical and

spiritual community, composed of my two sisters, my wife and daughter, my nephews and grand nieces and, yes, my mother and father, now both deceased.

The resurrection did, I believe, take place in Jerusalem 2,000 year ago. And it has taken place many times since then, usually unrecognized, unappreciated. As David Rankin says, "A resurrection is always a mystery, though it happens every day". Let today be a resurrection for you.

Closing Words:

On this Easter morn, we lift our eyes to the sky and our hearts to the promise of this season. We roll away the stones that have kept us in darkness and invite the light of spring to awaken us to new possibilities within us and among us, assuring that the flow of life moves ever onward- one faithful spring to another, assuring redemption and the eternal resurrection of new life. Blessed be- Amen.