

April 12, 2009 Easter Reflection

Resurrections of All Kinds

You may know that I often have to pick the title for my sermon before I've actually written in. If I was better able to predict the appropriate titles for my sermons, I would have named this one... "Blessing the Blend." My colleague, Jane Rzepka writes: Every year, I fight the feeling that our Unitarian Universalist churches just can't win on Easter. Our familiar congregation will come through the door, alongside Easter visitors we've never seen before. Why do they come?

To hear familiar, traditional Easter music... or,

To NOT hear familiar, traditional Easter music...or,

To be reminded of the newness of spring, the pagan symbols of the season and the lengthening of days, without a lot of talk about Jesus and Resurrection...or,

To be reminded of Jesus and His Resurrection, without a lot of talk about the newness of spring, the pagan symbols of the season and the lengthening of days.¹ (pause)

So this morning, we celebrated a festival of spring- honoring our more pagan origins with the story about the Easter bunny. We pay our respects to the creative feminine aspect of the divine in Viradissima Virga- evoking not only Jesus' mother Mary- but the ancient mother, embodied in the earth that gives us birth and sustains us.

In our Lenten series, we explored what Jesus' life, death and resurrection mean in our lives. We balanced knowledge of the historical Jesus with the myth- the word "myth" meant in the best sense of the word- a story that teaches us something about our lives, how we should live and what sustains us- what offers comfort. At our Tenebrae service, this past Maundy Thursday, we read scripture and sang some old chestnuts like "Precious Lord Take My Hand" and "Abide with me". We shared communion in remembrance of Him, who would have us thrive in kindness and joy.

In sharing Robert Frost's poem, The Road Not Taken, we acknowledge that life always offers up choices. We are only one traveler and can only take one path at a time. It's a poem of discernment. The traveler struggles with having to make a choice about which path to take and anticipates sorrow in the future...

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:

A reminder that we don't need to live our lives anticipating regret about choices we make today. Life is uncertain... we can't know the meaning of our choices until we have lived our lives. It is painful enough to have regrets about our past, without also living with anticipated regrets. Let's get rid of that kind of anticipatory regret with the arrival of spring. Beyond making amends to those we have hurt, we need to also let go of regrets about past choices - so that we may live more fully now- in the moment. It's not about where you have been. It's about where you are now and where you are going.

This is not just a season about letting go. Rev. Betty talked about what there is to hang on to. Even when the worst has happened... as it did with Jesus suffering and dying on the cross... We are not alone. She says, "Wherever we find beauty and the response is ecstasy, the Spirit of Christ is embodied." A comfort indeed... and worth holding on to.

So maybe the title of my sermon is a better fit than I thought when I started writing. There are resurrections of all kinds. In letting go of the past and moving on. In rediscovering the gifts of a Universalist Christianity that puts a loving God and Jesus' teachings and good works at its center.

This Easter season, I've rediscovered these words from Barbara Kingsolver's *High Tide in Tucson* and I offer them to you as resurrections that are available every moment of your life.

"Every one of us is called upon, probably many times, to start a new life. A frightening diagnosis, a marriage, a move, loss of a job or a limb or a loved one, a graduation, bringing a new baby home: it's impossible to think at first how this all will be possible. Eventually, what moves it all forward is the subterranean ebb and flow of being alive among the living.

In my own worst seasons I've come back from the colorless world of despair by forcing myself to look hard, for a long time, at a single glorious thing: a flame of red geranium outside my bedroom window. And then another: my daughter in a yellow dress. And another: the perfect outline of a full, dark sphere behind the crescent moon. Until I learned to be in love with my life again. Like a stroke victim retraining new parts of the brain to grasp lost skills, I have taught myself joy, over and over again." (pause)

Over and over again... we can choose which path to take. And learn to be in love with our lives again. (pause)

As Jane Rzepka writes: We each have religious stories, spring dreams, seasonal celebrations. And on Easter they're with us, joining together in church. It is our glorious celebration and by considering the blend a blessing, we win every time.

¹ Blessing the Blend, Jane Rzepka from *Celebrating Easter and Spring*, Carl Seaburg and Mark Harris.