

Easter Message 2010 by Rev. Lori Staubitz

Ancient accounts tell of an important figure whose birth would be heralded by a star in the heavens, a god who would later judge the dead. He would be murdered in a betrayal by one close to him, his body hidden away — though not for long, as he would return in a miraculous resurrection to begin an eternal reign in heaven. “ To his legions of followers, he promise of eternal life”

The figure, Osiris, was the supreme god in ancient Egypt, only one of many gods worshipped thousands of years before the birth of Jesus. (Although) Jesus is currently the best-known example of a resurrected figure, he is far from the only one. “Resource: Resurrection: A History of Myths

By Benjamin Radford, LiveScience’s Bad Science Columnist; posted: 09 April 2009 09:51 am ET

“Most Christians seem to assume that the details of their faith system dropped out of heaven in a fully developed form. Nothing could be further from the truth.”

Moving closer to the life of Jesus, scholars now suggest that miracles were added to the Jesus story only in the 7th and 8th decades of the Christian era. The Virgin birth and the suggestion that resurrection meant physical resuscitation are products of the 9th decade, and the account of Jesus’ ascension enters the tradition only in the 10th decade. Perhaps the biggest gap in our knowledge of Jesus, however, occurs in those years between 30 C.E. when Jesus’ earthly life came to an end and 70 C.E. when gospels began to achieve written form. “

Resource: Bishop John Shelby Spong-Posted: August 29, 2009-Gordon Marino; Professor of Philosophy at St. Olaf Collegeo

On the surface, stories of resurrection seem archaic; vestiges of ancient human sacrifice and blood cults- not stories we want to tell our children....Many parents don’t even share Grimm’s Fairy Tales with young ones and the gruesome events found in sacred scripture around the world depict struggles far more fearsome than Hansel and Grettle! So we tend to skip over these if we can.

You might think the Christian Crucifixion story of Jesus’ death on the cross as too morbid for contemporary sensibility or his resurrection from the dead as simply unbelievable... well, if you think like this, you are not alone. Most progressive religious people choose to focus their attention upon Jesus’ life, teachings and ministry to cultivate meaning from the Christian Gospels. However, this morning...let us explore this idea of Easter...not in terms of a seasonal allegory (the return of spring) and not through a psychological framework-a story of “over-coming personal despair”-although both of these are powerful aspects of the Easter message. This morning, let’s grapple with this idea of resurrection as a transformational event in history –one that continues to transform lives today.

Sacred scriptures were never intended written to be taken literally...the ancients new this. Their authority lies in their power to speak to the human condition and to point the way to a deeper reality...the one that lies in wait ready for believers to deliver...up, out and into the light of our daily lives.

UU Minister Lynn Ungar "Blessing The Bread"-book of meditations

Entitled "Easter"

"What I want to know is this: Who rolled away the stone?
 Did Jesus, reviving from the touch of Judas' kiss turn a miracle to muscle of his own?
 Of did some savior of the Savior move the rock to let life enter from the outside-
 Resurrection as a sort of picking of the lock
 that separates the bridegroom from his waiting bride?
 Perhaps the stone itself got bored
 With waiting for a happy ending to the story and rolled itself away
 To set the body it had stored upon the royal road to new life and eternal glory.
 You might say it does not matter.
 But when you are waiting in the dark, a person wants to know if Life is company or caller,
 The friend you trust to seek you, or the waiting spark."

Over the years you have heard me mention Henry Nelson Wieman- author of "The Source of Human Good"; a process theologian and a Christian whose thesis is based upon the idea of creative events that have the potential to manifest life giving forces that bring about ultimate good- which he would call the presence of God.

One of my favorite ways of interpreting the Christian Easter Story is through the lens that Wieman offers ; a view of Easter as a "creative, transformational event".

From his chapter "The originating events of our faith" Wieman had this to say... "Jesus was engaged in intercommunications with a little group of disciples with such depth and potency that the organization of their (several) personalities was broken down and they were remade."

"It was not merely the thought and feeling of Jesus that got across. That was not the most important thing." (As a community, they were able to get in touch with something new...the inherent worth and beauty within even the least and lowliest. This "was not something handed down to the disciples but something that rose up from their collective sense of being together. "It was not something Jesus did.

It was something that happened when he was present...."He was able to

be a catalyst for others..to transcend their own personal ego, their own personal struggles to become "deeply responsive and freely receptive to others....simply by being the kind of person he was, combined with the social, psychological and historical situation of the time in light of the heritage of Hebrew prophecy"

The power of their collective ministry was not only transforming for them and their community...its power to influence and change the prevailing culture was (and still is) a possibility."

Of course, this epic account in the Christian Gospels is also a reminder of human frailty; our temptation to let go of our commitments in the face of adversity; our capacity to betray and even deny those we love- and how easily we can let go of meaning and purpose in the face of fear.

As their ministry grows and becomes more politicized, the disciples become more anxious and frightened- human frailty sets in...

When asked to stay awake and keep watch with Jesus as he prayed in the garden of Gethsemane, they fall asleep and cannot stand with him in his hour of need.

Judas Betrayed Jesus with a kiss, but all the disciples scattered like flies as he stood before the magistrates, was condemned, whipped and hung from the cross and placed in a sealed tomb.

At first it appears that everything is dead...this fiery and passionate ministry, so alive that it lit up the lives of thousands..was now reduced to nothing but a smoldering ember...with no apparent life at all. It was devastating enough that their leader is dead...but there is more...we hear in this story - the loss of personal integrity -as each in his own way contributed to the events that led up to the crucifixion. It appears that the meaning of the gospel message will die along with Jesus...as his followers believed him to be the only one who could do the saving.

Yet something miraculous happens in the story...what appears to be totally destroyed is resurrected and indeed transformed.

Ted Kennedy story of resurrection and redemption by Professor Gordon Morino, Huffington Post, April 2, 2010 John 18:15-18, 25-2.

" After Jesus' arrest, his disciple Peter is approached by the authorities and in fear for his life, denies Jesus three times. Such a failure would have been enough to drive most people to despair, but unlike Judas, Peter does not take his life, nor does he give up on himself. Instead he becomes the Rock of the Church. Peter was given a second chance and made good on it. So did the senator from Massachusetts. In 1969, Senator Kennedy was involved in a scandal that would have drowned almost anyone else. At about 11:15 on July 18th, a perhaps intoxicated Kennedy drove his car off of a bridge on Chappaquiddick Island, Massachusetts. While he was able to escape, Mary Joe Kopechne, who was in the back seat, drowned. Though some claimed that Ms Kopechne might have been saved if Mr. Kennedy had immediately called for help, Kennedy did not even report the accident until the next morning. There were inquests and manslaughter charges considered, but the senator received only a slap on the wrist for leaving the scene of an accident in which an injury was involved. Kennedy's license was revoked and the judge hammered him with a two-month jail sentence- promptly suspended." "A person lower on the power scale would have ended up in prison and probably would have been ruined in other ways. There has always been a part of me that resents the unequal treatment that the Kennedys and other trust fund babies receive in life and before the supposedly blind law. Nevertheless, Mr. Kennedy, who showed nothing but (a contemptible lack of boldness and resolve) in this incident, matured into a knight for the cause of the disenfranchised."

"Our first challenge is to learn to face our fears directly." "When we run from circumstances that feel dangerous, we generate additional fear and anxiety." "(What) we (can) discover is that we actually can feel safer moving toward that which frightens us most)" Wayne Muller "Legacy of The Heart"-pg.28

"There is a Zen Buddhist story about a general who, during a civil war led his troops through the countryside, over-running everything and everyone in his path. The people of one town heard of his coming and fled to the mountains.

When the troops arrived, the town was empty except for a single Zen priest. The general made his way over to the temple, walked up to the priest and drew his sword saying "Don't you know who I am? I am the one who can run through you without batting an eye." The Zen master looked back calmly responding "And sir, I am the one who can be run through without batting an eye." Hearing this, the general bowed and left." Wayne Muller "Legacy of The Heart"-pg.28

"Faith is not a fortress against danger," "It is not a magic formula that prevents suffering, it is a place of strength where we feel most vitally present in heart (mind) (body) and spirit.- "(as adults) we (can) discover this inner strength and use it to cultivate faith in our spirit, our true nature and our deep, inner wisdom" Wayne Muller "Legacy of The Heart"-pg.28

Mark 16-earliest gospel account

"On the first day of the week, at early dawn they came to the tomb, saying: Who will roll away the stone from the entrance to the tomb? They looked up and say that the stone had already been rolled back, and on the right they saw a young man. They were alarmed. But the man said to them:

Why do you seek the living among the dead?"

The story of resurrection is a story of choice...to reside with all that is lost, lifeless and destroyed or to cultivate new life amidst destruction.

H.N. Wieman offers a unique insight into the death of Jesus and the continuation of the gospel message...

'The story of Jesus' death is important to the message of salvation (redemption)

If Jesus had lived, the creative events that surrounded him and his ministry might have died with him in a natural death."

"The creative transformative power was not in the man Jesus, although it could not have occurred (without) him." Rather he was in it. It required many other things beside his own solitary self. It required the Hebrew heritage, the disciples with their (capacity) for responsiveness..."The creative power (of their ministry)

Lay in the interaction taking place between these individuals. IT transformed their minds, their personalities, their community with one another and all others."-adapted from page 41 "Source of Human Goodness " by Henry N. Weiman

The truth of Easter morning is in the discovery that the collective spirit of love, compassion and commitment to justice did not die with Jesus but was alive in, among and through the gathering of the community...Despite their betrayals, fears, abandonment and disgrace,

It was for them as if he lived...as if he rose from the dead...but the truth be told...

It was the disciples who came alive with a renewed sense of embodiment- that all they had experienced with Jesus was not confined to Jesus but was alive in them as well.

Resurrection comes to all who make the choice to lend their creative power to the enduring and eternal forces that can and will give rise to new forms of beauty, justice and community and love.... In every age...and in all times.

Closing Prayer: by Rev. Kendell Gibbons; UU Minister

Thou art the sum of my heart in the morning

Thou are the dawn of truth in my soul

Thou art the dew of the rose's adorning

Thou are the woven whole

Thine is the grace to be steadfast in danger

Thine is the peace that none can destroy

Thine is the face of the need riven stranger

Thine are the wings of joy

Thou art the deep to the deep in my calling

Thou art a lamp where my feet shall tread

Thy way is steep past the peril of falling

Thou art my daily bread

Thine be the praise of my spirit uplifted

Thou art the sea to each flowing stream

Thine be the days

that are gathered and sifted

Thou are the deathless dream

Rev. Howard Thurman- African American Theologian

"Ask not what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive...then go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive."

Benediction- words from UU minister Rev. Henry Emerson Fosdick

"Nothing else matters much- not wealth, nor learning, nor even health-without

This gift: the spiritual capacity to keep zest in living.

This is the creed of all creeds, the final deposit and distillation of all (important) faiths: That we should be able to believe in life.

So may it be, shalom, Namaste and Amen.

-Rev. Lori Staubitz; The Unitarian Universalist Congregation of the Chesapeake, April 4, 2010