

Rise Again

Easter is a time of hope, of potential and renewal. With all the metaphors for renewal in our world blooming and growing, it is hard to imagine that Easter should not occur during spring, yet in the southern hemisphere it is autumn. But for us, there are bulbs roused from their winter sleep to give us daffodils and tulips and hyacinths. There are chicks pecking their way out of shells to embrace a new life. And soon there will be tadpoles sprouting legs to become frogs and caterpillars cocooning their way to the wings of butterflies. There are many metaphors for transformation in nature. In Unity, we consider the Bible a text of metaphors also. We read the plain language with an understanding of the history of oral traditions and the challenges of translation and we look for a meaning beyond the words. And in that deeper meaning we find the Bible provides a map of our spiritual path and a sort of “everyone’s growth chart”.

The order of the writing and the arrangement of the books of the Bible place the Old Testament, the Hebrew Bible, the Torah, first. The focus of most of these writings is obedience to God and to the laws. The laws are often portrayed as actual rules for behavior but we also come to understand them as simply the spiritual laws of how life works. Jesus does not appear until the New Testament and most of us are familiar with the idea that Jesus worked miracles; manifestations that seemed to defy the workings of earthly laws or sense consciousness. Miracles such as healing disease, multiplying substance beyond ordinary measure and even healing those who appeared dead are attributed to Jesus in various stories throughout the New Testament. Yet there are those same types of miracles in the Old Testament. Prophets like Moses, Elijah and Elisha performed miracles. What made Jesus different and why is the New Testament a different place on our spiritual journey?

There is a shift in the New Testament from obedience to God to partnering with God. Jesus was the demonstration of what that partnership could be like. In the Old Testament, those who partnered with God were “prophets”, ones who were set aside as special and exalted. In the New Testament, Jesus says we all hold the same potential to partner with God and bring forth our own good.

The book of John in the New Testament is very different from the other three gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke. It is more mystical and contains a number of quotes attributed to Jesus not found in the other gospels. It is very much an exploration of Jesus' relationship with God. In that relationship, Jesus refers to God as Father, sometimes using a more intimate "Abba" which might be translated as "Papa". In John 10:30 Jesus says, "The Father and I are one." But the message of the New Testament is not just about Jesus as a new prophet but as a model of a new way of being. Therefore, in Unity we also focus on the message in John 14: "Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these." Metaphysically we would interpret "believes in me" to be "believes in the Christ power, in the power of the divine embodied in humanity that I have come to demonstrate". In John chapters 8 and 9, Jesus says "I am the light of the world" but in Matthew 5, after the beatitudes he says, "You are the light of the world."

So if Jesus came to share a new message, to shift our relationship from obedience to partnership, what is the miracle that sets him apart from the prophets of the Old Testament? The resurrection. Jesus was the first "Do It Yourself" guy. Miracles in the Old Testament depended on the prophets to invoke the power of Spirit. Even most of the miracles written about in the New Testament depend on Jesus to invoke the power of Spirit. But a shift is made apparent when he is often quoted as saying, "**Your** faith has made you well." And while prophets including Jesus raised people from the appearance of death, Jesus is the only story we have in the Bible of someone raising himself from death. Yet we believe that all of Jesus' story is a lesson for us so what does the Easter story tell us about our spiritual path?

Let's begin with Thursday, the celebration of the Passover with the disciples. Humans are pack animals and we love to gather together in community. Sharing a meal, serving one another and having common experiences gives us strength to weather the storms of life. We are supported by the love of one another. Yet as humans we can be fearful, we can fall into thoughts of lack and we can betray the trust and love of one another. We can fall short of being our best selves and act in ways that feel hurtful and painful, even to ourselves. The lesson however is everything that happens moves us along the path to where we are meant to be. We learn from those who love us

unconditionally and from those who challenge us to see beyond appearances and from those who challenge us to practice forgiveness. The suffering of any lesson is in direct proportion to our desire for the experience to be different.

Which brings us to the Garden of Gethsemane. Many of us desire that life will be a bed of roses and then we are surprised at the thorns. We long for a bowl of cherries and choke on the pits. Every human's lifetime will involve events that are painful and challenging; it is the suffering that we generate in our own mind by wanting to avoid the pain. We are all called to move beyond our comfort zone. Sometimes it is a choice we get to make voluntarily like choosing a new job or project, a new relationship, or having a baby. Sometimes it is a calling that comes in a loss, a disaster or a crisis. Jesus experience in the Garden tells us that it is our human nature to at least initially want to avoid the pain of any experience. Jesus asks for the cup to pass from his lips even as he knows he has chosen his path as social reformer and spiritual teacher. Mark 14 has this translation, "He said, "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want." We see that intimate relationship, that acknowledgment of all possibilities and an obedience to the path that is his to take.

Unity co-founder Charles Fillmore, in the Revealing Word says that the crucifixion represents "The crossing out in consciousness of errors that have become fixed states of mind; the surrender or death of the whole personality in order that the Christ Mind may be expressed in all its fullness." He also says "The Cross is not a burden as commonly understood, but a symbol of the forces in man adjusted in their right relation." As we progress along our path we come to identify those error thoughts that are the source of our suffering, the source of our lack and the source of our sense of separation from Oneness. Often it is during those times of challenge we identify the beliefs that have held us back. We discover that we have thought of ourselves as less than the divine children of the infinite creator. We have come to believe that we are not worthy of the inheritance of good that awaits our claiming it. We see ourselves as less than divine and lacking the gifts and attributes necessary for our success in this world. Fillmore says that "resurrection also suggests that there has been a falling short of the divine standard; therefore the necessity of being restored and revived." And where does this work take place?

Fillmore says, “For us, the tomb represents a high state of consciousness in us in which we improve in character along all lines. We not only grow into a broader understanding but also we increase in vitality and substance. We are resting in God, and at the same time gathering strength for the power of greater demonstrations to follow. In this state of consciousness the word of Truth is not idle, but quietly spreading.”

I, personally, am often not a big fan of the Supper, the Garden or the tomb. I am upset when I feel betrayed yet I know that it is just a different way to reveal what I need to know. I grow weary of lessons in forgiveness but am reminded that the less I judge the less there is to forgive. I get anxious when I feel that I am being called to be more than I think I am capable of but I am clear on what is mine to do. And when I am quiet, I am just not sure anything is happening however experience tells me new insights and a deeper understanding will result if I can still the chatter in my mind. OK, so that was my week. Honestly. I love living the message but I was hoping we could just skip to the resurrection part. Not happening.

The good news is that Good Friday, the crucifixion and the death, even the tomb is not the end of the story. There comes the resurrection and we rise again. Notice that in the definition of the tomb, Fillmore does not say that it is a time in which we wait for someone to raise us up. The Bible does not say that Mary and Martha went to the tomb and found Jesus waiting for Lazarus to return the favor.

In *Keep A True Lent*, Fillmore says, “The resurrection of Jesus takes place in us each time we rise to the realization of the perpetual in-dwelling life that connects us with God.” This is a critical spiritual idea. “Takes place in us” Everything that Jesus did and represents is an aspect of our own being. The Christ of Jesus Christ is within us. It is the “I AM” of our being and of all beingness. “each time” Chances are there may be more than one time in our life when we fall short, when we have an opportunity to overcome a limitation that has held us in pain or lack. Resurrections are not limited to Easter or once in a lifetime. Each time we find ourselves at the cross there is a possibility of a transformation. “we rise” Again, Jesus was the DIY guy, do it yourself. Those little tulip bulbs did not slumber in the ground waiting for someone to tug on their tips and pull them above the ground. In fact, trying to do that for them destroys them. We rise as an act of our own awareness,

consciousness and experience. No one can do it for us and we cannot do it for anyone else. It is not an act of love to try because if that were the message, some angel would have spared Jesus the whole Easter experience.

We rise “to the realization of the perpetual in-dwelling life that connects us with God” We awaken to what is always there and always true, we are one with God. We can forget it, we can close our eyes to it, we can create the illusion of separate and believe in illusions but the truth is always there, waiting for us to use it. That connection with God is our healing, our abundance, our strength, our wisdom, **our everything**. We discover some new aspect of the truth of our connection to God every time we let go of our limiting beliefs, our fears, our addictions and our attachment to the ways and things of sense consciousness. Every time we “cross out” some error that has taken up residence in our mind, we are transformed by the love that fills the space.

The Easter story is our story. It is the story of how we live and we are transformed by the realizations of our divinity that occur as we live. It is the story of our power to awaken and to live as an example of an awakened life. It is the story of how we rise again and again and again, through the very Christ of our being. Amen