

## The Easter Phoenix 2020

The first time I used the metaphor of the Easter Phoenix was 10 years ago, here at ULV. As I reviewed my notes I was a little surprised at how relevant it remains. So here we go again....

Spring is a time of mystery and new life. Tulips are one moment a tiny green tip nudging up through the cold earth and the next time we look there are pink and purple blooms. Chicks spring from eggs, as we learned on Wednesday reading A Surprise for Mrs. Bunny. Baby bunnies venture out from dark burrows. Simple biology but how does LIFE know how to do that?

Humans like to explain what they cannot understand and often use stories to do that. Even if the story seems somewhat outrageous, it is a way to explain what our mind struggles to comprehend. The bible is full of stories. Spiritual leaders try to teach a meaning for each story but it's the meaning we give the story in the context of our own lives that makes the story useful to us.

The story of the empty tomb is the resurrection story. Resurrect means to bring back to life or to return to use. The story promises that what is laid down dead can rise up new. Jesus died, was laid in the tomb behind a heavy stone and yet on Easter morning the women found the tomb empty.

Myths are stories too. Some people dismiss myths as fantasy and having no value. Still, scholars have done work with humans and the vast volumes of myths to find that myths relay common beliefs that usually show up in many different cultures. Myths seem to come from some primal belief that is inherent in all humans. Modern bible scholars are willing to admit the number of bible stories that carry the same theme as many myths known to exist at that same time.

I love the myth of the Phoenix. The story can be found as early as 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE in references by the Greek philosopher Hesoid. The Phoenix is a beautiful bird in Greek and Egyptian mythology. It was the symbol of the Phoenicians, or as the Bible refers to them, the Canaanites. The Phoenix is blood red, representing LIFE itself. It lives 500-1000 years and it knows when its time is coming to an end. When that time comes, it carefully builds its own funeral pyre of fragrant woods and herbs. It bursts into flames and is consumed by the fire, reducing it to the purified elements of ash. **Then**, from the ashes rises a beautiful new Phoenix, just as beautiful and vibrant and alive as ever. The Phoenix is resurrected from the ash. Just as the Phoenix knows, Jesus knew when his time of ministry was ending. He assured the disciples he would be with them.

Sometimes we know when a time for change has come. We know that we are not here together in this spiritual community by accident. We know that our lives, our spiritual community and indeed our world right now cry out for a change. It is just hard to lay down what has become familiar and commit to the new way. Often our resistance to change can produce the conditions that literally **force** us to change. Many people are observing that about the current pandemic—it is the Universe responding to our resistance to needed change. We'll continue to explore that idea in weeks ahead.

There are many change metaphors associated with spring and Easter: the caterpillar to the butterfly, the tadpole to the frog, the bulb to the tulip. The caterpillar doesn't choose the time to become a butterfly and the bulb doesn't check the calendar for the time to become a tulip. Humans get to choose!

Why would we choose change? Jesus was persecuted and tried by every body of authority there was and then he was crucified. The Phoenix is consumed in flames. The caterpillar comes apart and, in each case, we lose ourselves in the transformation to something new. What happens when you choose change? How many levels of discomfort are you feeling right now? How easy it is to forget that the crucifixion happens before the resurrection! The letting go and coming apart into something new is exactly why we often choose NOT to change. And sometimes, in the midst of coming apart, it is helpful to understand we are just in the midst of choosing change. Change that is the opening for something new.

In 2001 I left my corporate life for the path of spirit. I committed to looking to God as my only source and to making my life more about following guidance. My relationships changed as some people were baffled by my new goals and priorities. My finances changed. I left behind identities I'd been known by. In 2009 I repeated the process by leaving behind my home, my friends and family for this adventure in ministry. Right now so much in our world is being held up for us to examine. Disparity in access to a living wage, healthcare, education and fundamental rights abound. Suddenly the heroes in sports and music and movies have been set aside, distanced beyond our focus. Family, friends and neighbors have moved in front of us as we see our physical needs met by the sacrifice and work of others.

Radical change can invite us into the chaos of changing finances and relationships and values. As we move through the change process, we may find ourselves holding onto nothing at all for a moment. Little changes can begin to feel threatening.

But as humans **we choose change because we can imagine a new life!** Even when change is thrust upon us, we have the choice to use this opportunity to **imagine what we desire.**

We can **imagine** the radiance and glory and beauty of Spirit expressing anew through us and through our planet. We can **know** that no matter what we are called to let go of, Spirit is giving us something more. We will not be left empty but filled with something new.

Jesus chose the new way, knowing the ending. The Phoenix builds the pyre and prepares for the flames, knowing what comes next. We choose to set our feet upon the path of Spirit because we are assured of New Life! Faith is the assurance of things not seen. Humans have the power of imagination to see what is not visible and the faith to move that vision into reality. We can step confidently into the mystery of change not knowing **how** it happens but assured of the outcome. I Corinthians 15:51 tells us: "Listen I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet."

This verse feels like a prophesy of those change moments in history when everyone perishing feels like a reality and it gives rise to momentous change. Yet each time big change happens, someone has to take the lead. People have to be willing to change. Easter and the Phoenix give us the message that change is not death. Jesus said he would rise on the third day but the women came to anoint the dead body.

Here is what Ernest Wilson says in "The Week That Changed the World,": "We pray and believe not what we say. We ask and are surprised that there is an answer." Wilson affirms: "I believe in good outcomes. I expect the good. I await its fulfillment. I let patience have her perfect work. I work as I wait; work as if everything depends on me and pray as if everything depends on God. As the nature of God in Jesus was mighty to overcome even the 'last enemy' so I know God to be mighty in me to perfect and fulfill that which concerns me and those I love."

Something is arising in our world. Something is arising in ULV. Something is arising in each one of us. I cannot tell you what is ready to rise up but I can tell you it is possible. You know that in your heart and you can see it in your mind. I cannot tell you how to move through the change process but I can tell you the wisdom of Spirit is available to guide you.

Easter is a time to celebrate the mystery and the wonder of potential that lies within each one of us.

Even if everything we desire is not what we see, it is a day to celebrate the certainty of Spirit. In the process of letting go and laying down, we celebrate the rising up that follows.

Celebrate the perfection you are and the wondrous new ways Spirit has to express through you, through the ministry of Unity of Lehigh Valley and through our planet. Celebrate right where you are, knowing it is not where you will always be. There is always a new good rising into expression.

I invite you to spend some time thinking of the good you expect and how patient you are with Spirit doing its perfect work. Relax. Breathe. Imagine. Take action. In that order!