

## ***“Resurrection: Present Tense”***

*A sermon by the Reverend Doctor Peter Raible, STD*

*Interim Extension Minister*

*Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Bainbridge Island and North Kitsap*

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My favorite Easter story, which is true, took place in my former church in Seattle some decades ago. Part of the Easter service was the enactment. At one point, a young woman was to run from the wings and proclaim the event to a waiting congregation.

Unfortunately, she was a bit nervous in her thespian role, so that when she rushed in, she declaimed these words: “The rock has risen! Christ has rolled away!” There was a brief silence, followed by the congregation convulsed by two minutes of laughter.

The Biblical resurrection stories are many and so contradictory that they would be deeply suspect if ever subject to eye-witness accounts. The new Archbishop of Canterbury, head of the world wide Anglican Church, declared recently that the resurrection accounts give us “a fundamental ungraspability about the source of whatever power or liberty is at work in the community.”

At times Jesus passes through solid walls, or spends time with disciples, who do not recognize him. At other times his very wound can be investigated by the doubting Thomas. Sometimes Jesus has a meal with his disciples or goes fishing with them or engages them in discussion about the meaning of his mission; never to be used in so different that they would never be accepted. Obviously, resurrection tales have more to do with faith than fact; so believers will not be dissuaded by doubter’s challenges to the accounts; just as non-believers are hardly likely to be persuaded by the tales set into the Bible.

Easter, of course, was grafted onto an ancient spring festival in order to incorporate from nature religions that would be useful in the resurrection observance. Once, the rebirth of spring seemed a magical event brought about only by the proper permutations of the divine. But resurrection is a bit more than the flowers of spring in their annual thrust through the soil. As a one time professor used to observe: if you take the flower bed and cover it in a layer of thick concrete; and the flowers still come up, *that* is resurrection.

The question of resurrection is in some ultimate way can we say anything exists and abides and triumphs over the power of death? The import of that question is not what happened two thousand years ago on the first Easter morn, for as one biblical account records, non-believers will simply say either that the body was stolen or that Jesus resuscitated after the ordeal on the cross escaped to some simpler life where he lived happily ever after.

I have always found it remarkable that suicide rates hereabout peak, not in the cold, gloomy, wet winter months, but rather in the spring. It would seem that a depression is more tolerable in grim winter, when everyone seems a bit down and awaiting the

appearance of the sun. When spring does come, and we are still depressed, while everyone else is delighting in the wonders of the season, it just seems too much to bear. We are alone, our mood is still depressed, and everyone else is celebrating. Depression is dangerous to our survival; and a prime symptom of depression is that we can see no future, nothing out beyond the darkness which pervades our lives.

What we seek is resurrection present tense – a sense that life can be reborn. That relates not to an empty tomb of long ago, but to our faith in some future, even when that seems impossible. I believe! Help thou my unbelief! There are no easy answers, but there are some profitable pathways to explore.

First we need to grasp in our own being, the importance of the reality that nothing in this cosmos ever dies. We are composed of the same things as the farthest stars and the star stuff of our being is never lost; it is in a sense recycled. Now that belief in immortality is abstract, so is the traditional strange belief that we only get one shot at the target before we go to judgment for all eternity. No wonder that even in this land, the belief in reincarnation gains adherents; for at our best it seems that we are reborn many times in the course of one life.

Sooner or later in our years, we encounter what seems to us life-threatening. This is usually most obvious in illness, when we do travel through the valley of the shadow of death. But loss of job, the devastation of a once vital and intimate relationship, or a sudden realization we have been betrayed by a person whom we deeply trusted – all such blows are little deaths. They seem to belittle us, destroy our bonds to others, and make us doubt that the power of love is more than a delusion. We need to be reborn.

The first important act is survival; to accept what is so hard, that one day we'll wake up and everything will be okay, for it doesn't work that way. Studies in the personal loss of love, most often by death, reveal that only the discovery of a new relationship can heal us, but we must allow ourselves to be open anew to the risks of love, if we are to have the possibility of rebirth. And that means that we must turn and walk away from living only in the loves of the past. We must also practice love with those who need it, even if we know it is simply ameliorative. Work in a place where there is human need is one way to redeem the present and open the future.

Second, we need to be alive on the growing edges of our lives. We can risk a bit in the margins, where we need to grow. Perhaps there are things of import that we have always wanted to try, projects set aside in an earlier phase of existence, or new arenas for service, which beckon to us. Much in life, often close to the surface, is waiting to be born or resurrected.

Third, we can cultivate our own religious growth. The famed therapist Carl Jung once said that the venture of religion is a venture for the second half of our lives. We have, then, more time; we have then more realization of what is truly important in our being; and we have then a desire to know ourselves better. I am interested in how many

Unitarians in recent years have begun to explore disciplines of faith – meditation, spirituality, even ritual religious practices.

Always, our death instinct, our ability to defeat ourselves and live frantic lives of desperation, must go into combat with error – the quest for love and the life giving. Nothing is more powerful than the experience of resurrection in our lives, which is often no sudden epiphany, but a growing sense of vitality and renewal. What is most marvelous is this resurrection, when it comes upon our existence after a time of threat, or depression, or feeling that our lives are over.

The poet e. e. cummings tells us:

i thank You God for most this amazing day;  
for the leaping greenly spirits of trees  
and a blue true dream of sky; and for  
everything which is natural which is infinite  
which is yes.

(i who have died am alive again today,  
and this is the sun's birthday; this is  
the birth day of life and of love and wings and  
of the gay great happening illimitably earth)

how should tasting touching hearing  
seeing breathing any – lifted from the no  
of all nothing – human merely being  
doubt unimaginable You!

(now the ears of my ears awake and  
now the eyes of my eyes are opened)

The arisen, the resurrection, comes first in the recesses of our being. We have, each of us, the chance for an immortal life, worthy to be remembered. Our task is to give ourselves to life and life more abundantly.