

Easter Homily
Sermon by Rev. Hannah Petrie
April 12, 2009

So what would 'rolling away the stone' look like for you?

In our reading, Sara Campbell wrote, "Grateful for the darkness that has nourished us, we push away the stone and invite the light to awaken us to the possibilities within us and among us – possibilities for new life in ourselves and in our world."

Are you ready to push away the stone?

Of course, the stone that she refers to symbolizes the one that covered the tomb of Jesus, in the story of his resurrection, the Christian story of Easter.

Last Sunday, Jim put it well when he preached that Easter is an awkward holiday for Unitarian Universalists. Having grown up UU myself, I can attest to the confusion of what the holiday was about when I was a kid.

One of the best stories from my UU upbringing that my parents like to tell was when my Mother prepared a very nice meal for Easter one year. I looked at all the food and asked my parents with genuine curiosity, "Is Easter some kind of religious holiday?" I was about 8. They were amused, but my Mother also said, "thank God she didn't ask us that question in front of my Mother."

Even the more secular rituals of the holiday can pose some questions for a UU church. The Easter egg hunt is very popular in any church. But if the eggs are filled with chocolate and candy, it may motivate one child to find ten eggs and leave the less ambitious with only one or none.

This year, we thought we better leave the eggs empty to avoid this unfair result. But I wondered what we might fill the eggs with instead? Could there be written messages of wisdom and affirmation? But then they'd be like Fortune Cookie Easter Eggs. I could just see what these might say. "Your fortune is, Mmmm, your chocolate was delicious." Or, "The wisdom of the universe can be found in this egg. PS, it is not this message."

Perhaps we'll work on these for next year, and don't worry, there is still plenty of candy and chocolate involved for this year's Easter Egg Hunt.

When we dig a little deeper, well beyond the chocolate and the candy, and even deeper than the Christian story of Jesus rising from the dead after his execution, the Easter message is profound and totally worthwhile for all people – for young and old, and for people of all faiths. It is a universal message of hope and empowerment.

The Jewish holiday of Passover falls very near Easter. and though the two holidays commemorate something quite different, they share similar meaning. I heard a Rabbi recently describe the essence of what Passover celebrates: that we have to take action, that we have to take our lives into our own hands, that we have to reach out, and change the world.

And while we hear far more about the extremist brand of Islam than the moderate, the majority of Muslims are focused on a life of peace and self-improvement, as Greg Mortenson describes throughout the adult version of the story Sara read, called Three Cups of Tea. As he says, the true core tenants of Islam are justice, tolerance, and charity.

At the inauguration of one of the new schools built in Pakistan, which occurred right after 9/11, a Muslim leader said this:

"I request America to look into our hearts, and see that the great majority of us are not terrorists, but good and simple people. Our land is stricken with poverty because we are without education. But today, another candle of knowledge has been lit. In the name of Allah the Almighty, may it light our way out of the darkness we find ourselves in."

I reference all three of the world's Judeo-Christian faiths, because they and all people are entitled to these very simple things: they are peace, freedom, and enlightenment, which is often received in the form of education.

I suspect everyone in this room has been blessed with the access to these three things, to these tools of hope and empowerment. And it's often been because we took our lives into our own hands, and were able to lead ourselves out of a dark time in our lives. We were able to resurrect ourselves out of a time of death to a time of life – we were able to roll away the stone.

The only blessing greater than this, is to be able to empower others to do the same thing for themselves. To teach the children in our neighborhood how to read better, so they can succeed in school is one small way this can be done. To beautify a school so the students know that to be a good school you have to look like a good school is another.

We who have had access to peace, freedom, and enlightenment are blessed. But that doesn't mean we haven't experienced times of darkness in our lives, times we may be experiencing right now. Before we can serve others, we must strengthen ourselves, so we are strong enough to be of service. Eventually, then, we might discover, that to be able to serve humanity is the greatest blessing of all.

So let us embrace all that is beautiful and joyful about Easter – from the egg hunt and the Easter bunny, to the resurgence of new life in the natural world, to the resurrection of our very souls, in a world that struggles to push away the stone.

Happy Easter!

#276

Benediction:

And may "we
push away the stone,
and invite the light to awaken us,
to the possibilities within us and among us –
possibilities for new life in ourselves
and in our world."

AMEN.