



NEIGHBORHOOD UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH

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Resurrection Easter Homily

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Children, adults, teen-agers, and elders: I invite you to remember a time you experienced rejection. Another way of describing rejection is being told you do not belong. Remember a time when you felt denied, cut off, and in the end, confused about who you were, since who you wanted to be was not accepted or embraced. I ask you to do this because no matter how old you are, we all have such a story; it's a fact of life that, no matter how small or big the incident, we each have experienced the door shutting when we wanted to go through.

Personally, I can remember several rejections, mostly from childhood, when the key to fitting in was out of my grasp. But today I want to share a story about my aunt and her rejection story, and how, in the end, she made it a resurrection story.

My Aunt Karen is the middle daughter of three daughters, each born five years apart, one of my mother's younger sisters. About eight years ago, she received the call to ministry, in the round-about way that is common to many ministers-to-be: a prominent lay-leader in her Episcopalian congregation, she was asked to speak from the pulpit on one occasion, then she was asked to be the lead lay-leader, a position called the church warden. She enjoyed her responsibilities, and started to get curious about Seminary. Thus far she had enjoyed a solid career as an estate lawyer, drawing up people's wills, which also has its pastoral aspects.

Karen soon went to Union Seminary, also our Intern Minister Mari's alma mater. After a couple years of school, she had to approach her local diocese, to make her case as to why they should welcome her into the Episcopalian priesthood. She wasn't expecting too much trouble; after all, her path to ministry had a natural course; her credentials and her case were solid.

At this point I'd like to interject one of my favorite lines from a Grateful Dead song; mind you I don't like the Grateful Dead, but I like this song "Uncle John's Band", and this line: *when life seems like easy street, there is danger at your door*. Indeed, what my aunt thought would be one step in her path, turned out to be a blockade. The diocese rejected her claim that she would make a great Episcopalian pastor.

Now, generally speaking, you don't regain audience with the diocese after such a decree. It literally was a permanently shut door, and my aunt was devastated. One of the nicest things my aunt did during this time of great personal disappointment was to attend my ordination, nearly five years ago now. I didn't appreciate then as much as I do now how painful that must have been for her.

What was she going to do? Her dream, it seemed, had been cancelled. It didn't help that her church community did not rally to her side. Even with the support of her family, she felt abandoned and alone.

The thing about rejection is that it would seem it's mainly a matter of being left out. But the real danger of rejection is that we allow it to dictate who we conceive ourselves to be. *I'm not this, so I must be that*. In other words, we allow rejection to put us inside a box, and boxes can be hard to get out of.

Well, the good news is that my aunt's call to ministry was stronger than any silly box, and she found a way to continue her call. She left the Episcopalian church she had been a member of for well over two decades, and she found a UCC congregation, that felt like a good fit to her and my uncle.

Now, we UUs have a bad joke about UCC, which is the most liberal Christian faith; it stands for United Church of Christ. But since they're so liberal we sometimes joke it stands for Unitarians Considering Christ. I can tell you that is not terribly accurate, as I am pleased to say that just last weekend, I attended my aunt's ordination at a UCC service in Washington D.C. Even though she had selected all my favorite hymns that we would be readily familiar with, *Come My*

Way, My Truth, My Life, and How Can I Keep From Singing, the service was distinctly Christian, and way more comfortable with extolling the virtues of faith in God and Jesus than we Unitarians are.

There was a beautiful Assurance & Sung Response toward the beginning of the service called *Nothing Can Trouble*. We sang this over and over: *Nothing can trouble, nothing can frighten. Those who seek God, shall never go wanting. Nothing can trouble, nothing can frighten. God alone fills us.*

It seems to me now that that was my aunt's credo: being rejected did not frighten her, at least not enough to result in the trouble of entrapment. I think hers is a story of resurrection, of turning a dead-end into a new path of life and possibility. Her story reminds me of the common Christian saying, "When God closes a door, he opens a window." It's a lovely saying, albeit a bit schmaltzy, especially with the gender assignation of God. But I've come up with an addendum that may relieve the beautiful notion of its schmaltz. Sure, when God closes a door, he opens a window . . . but the point is, you get out! You get out, you don't stay trapped in a box that limits who you are and who you really want to be, maybe even who God intended you to be. You get out, and you find your freedom.

As Jim said to me this week, that's what Easter is about, and certainly an element of Passover is about this too: it's about freedom, perhaps in particular the freedom after death. Now, I don't know about the death of Jesus and Jesus rising; I wasn't there. But I do know that death is a part of life, that we often have to die in order to live, which is another way of saying that there are times we must change. We must change who we are, and that's a kind of death, especially when it's a change that is painful.

As many of you know, Unitarian Universalists like to praise the Earthy interpretation of Easter – the natural rebirth of Spring, the return to life. I was reminded of this when I was watching a nature show on the Discovery channel recently. The narrator was expressing the wonder of adaptation and evolution. He said something to the effect that, "there is so much diversity on planet Earth. But all life at one point had to earn its keep. A species must change in order to live." It causes me to ponder that each of our lives is a microcosm of natural selection and the need to adapt. Think back now on your experience of rejection, and that door that closed on you. Did you retreat to a box, to a single way of being, or did you find your window, did you find a way out? Did you resurrect? Did you die in some way, or change, in order to go on living?

It could be that, when you get down to it, you're still in that box somehow. But Easter is the time of year when we reflect on the ways we still need to resurrect ourselves, we still need to find a way to honor and enliven our better selves. There may be ways that we still need to find a way to evolve, so we can be free.

Let us not underestimate the importance of evolution. Think about the Easter Bunny, or bunnies in general. The bunny became Easter's mascot because there are so many bunnies in springtime. But the reason there are so many bunnies is in part because their brains are so tiny, and their instinct for self-preservation is not as sharp as other species. So the more bunnies produced, the better the species' chances are for survival, because many bunnies simply don't make it.

I was reminded of this late Friday night, when my husband and I were returning from the cinema after seeing *Hot Tub Time Machine*. A cute little bunny hopped out onto the road at a most unfortunate time, and even though I swerved best I could, all we heard was 'ca thunka thunk' as it met its sad fate under our Honda. It happened so fast, and seemed like such an ironic thing to happen in the wee hours of Good Friday, that I just burst out laughing. We just mowed down the Easter Bunny! was all I could think.

I also thought, surely I can relieve myself of some guilt if I find a way to weave this into my Easter homily. So I will end with this thought:

Death is a fact of life, and so are things like rejection and disappointment. What matters is how we respond. Sometimes we laugh because there's just nothing we can do about it. Other times we retreat into despair and an empty and lonely place, because we don't consider how there can be life after death. And other times, we respond with courage and with great faith, and find a way to resurrect our lives.

No matter how long it takes, find your way out, find your window, and find your freedom.

Happy Easter, and watch out for the bunnies.