



## NEIGHBORHOOD UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH

### Easter Homily

Rev. Dr. Jim Nelson, Senior Minister  
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301 N. Orange Grove Blvd. Pasadena, CA 91103 (626) 449-3470 [information@uuneighborhood.org](mailto:information@uuneighborhood.org)

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Let me start with a question: how do you know what is real? Let me ask the kids, especially – how do you know something is real? I don't mean true – true is like 2+2 equals 4 or that you like chocolate. But real?

Like this pulpit is real – know what I mean? Or a lawnmower is real. Or a chair. Or me. Or you.

OK – now, let me ask this: Is Spiderman real? Or is Donald Duck real? Well – discuss this with your parents.

OK. Now here is another question: which is better – to be afraid or to be free?

I have been a minister for thirty years now, and in churches for 27 years. I have given 27 Easter sermons, and every year I wonder what I should say. It is not our holiday; we are heretics when it comes to Easter, for the most part UUs don't believe Easter is real – not like a chair or a thing. It didn't happen – at least the resurrection part. Like other myths – many of which involve resurrections – it is a claim of belief, not of fact.

We are willing to allow the rest - the last supper, the Passover seder Jesus shares with his friends, the trial before Pilate and the even the crucifixion on Golgotha [that means the place of the skull]. All those might very well have happened – there is no good reason to believe they did not. They are real in that sense.

But Easter? Let me remind you of the story. Jesus has died and been buried in a tomb. The government is worried about his followers so they put a huge boulder in front of the tomb, with a couple of guards. They don't want anyone to take the body and then claim he has come back from the dead.

His friends spend Saturday and Saturday night in an upper room in Jerusalem; they are afraid and don't know what to do. They probably had a pretty bad night.

In the morning, the women go to the tomb to take care of the body. That is what they did in those days; it is what we used to do. Now we almost never see or touch the body of someone who died, and that is too bad. It is a final act of love, I think. A couple of weeks ago, our old dog Emma died, and we wrapped her up in an old towel she slept on, and laid her on her bed in the hole we had dug in our back yard. We put in a tennis ball and her food bowl – her two favorite things – and said goodbye.

It was sad – we loved her – and taking care of the body was our last act of love.

That is what the women are doing Easter morning; unlike the men, they got out and did what needed to be done. They got up that morning, went to the tomb, not sure how they would roll the stone away, and – surprise – the stone was gone. Inside was a young man in white robes [the later gospels call him an angel, but Mark does not] and the body is not there.

So what is the story here? Lots of things, I suppose, but it is a story about freedom, and how caring for things brings freedom and helps conquer fear. The women were freed from being afraid by going to the tomb to care for the body. In a way, too, Jesus was freed by sharing a meal with his friends, maybe free enough, as in Ron Padgett's poem, from pain and fear.

Friday was Earth Day; the Easter celebration with its rabbits [how many here expect there to be a bunny of some kind today?] and eggs and flowers harkens back to earlier traditions of the coming of spring. There are pagan roots behind Easter, and behind Earth Day as well, and Earth Day is about caring for the earth.

You know, all of us have stones that block us from getting where we hope or want. Stones of fear or pride or lack of confidence. Stones of arrogance or anger or addiction. Sometimes things appear, almost willy nilly, to keep what is best in us buried in a tomb.

A lesson of Easter, just like of Earth Day, and even of Passover, is that we can get up every day and go about taking care of what is around us and in front of us. Maybe we can roll those stones away by caring for what is real. A central teaching of all religions – Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, paganism, Hinduism, Taoism – all of them claim that we meet what is sacred when we give ourselves away. We are at our best, religion claims, when we care for what is outside of ourselves – our friends and family, stranger, the earth itself. Acts of love – that’s what we need.

Whether theist or atheist, pagan or Christian, Unitarian or Jewish – we can agree on that. The women at the tomb knew that. When the stone is rolled away – whatever that stone is – we can be more free to care for others and for the world.

Happy Easter.

Benediction:

From Blossoms

From blossoms comes  
this brown paper bag of peaches  
we bought from the joy  
at the bend in the road where we turned toward  
signs painted Peaches.

From laden boughs, from hands,  
from sweet fellowship in the bins,  
comes nectar at the roadside, succulent  
peaches we devour, dusty skin and all,  
comes the familiar dust of summer, dust we eat.

O, to take what we love inside,  
to carry within us an orchard, to eat  
not only the skin, but the shade,  
not only the sugar, but the days, to hold  
the fruit in our hands, adore it, then bite into  
the round jubilation of peach.

There are days we live  
as if death were nowhere  
in the background; from joy  
to joy to joy, from wing to wing,  
from blossom to blossom to  
impossible blossom, to sweet impossible blossom.

Li-Young Lee