



Easter

AT FIRST UNITARIAN
CHURCH OF DALLAS

SUNDAY WORSHIP AND CELEBRATION

9:30 and 11am services | 10:40am Egg Scramble

After the whole thing was over, the cross had some other fool on it. The tomb empty, cleaned out. The gardener shrugged when asked about it. The people went home and only a few curious, if it had mattered, remained. I mean, they saw the ridiculous parade a week ago with the palms and the people calling out to the king who looked like a scruffy guy on a donkey, not a majestic horse. They saw the man then march through the streets with a cross on his back until he was killed for asking questions about the authority of the king and the priests. So it seemed over and done with when the reporter arrived from Rome, his scrolls and inkpots spilling from his bag. He had been delayed by a storm and then the darkness that spread over the land and he was on a deadline for the Roman Gazette.

As he stumbled into Jerusalem, a dusty, hot and Godforsaken place expecting a shining temple. He wondered what all the fuss was about and whether his editor was going to crucify him. He felt the pressure to tell the story that would make headlines not be a byline on page four. So he decided first to stop at the Roman Legion office where he was rebuffed by a thirsty centurion who said they had no record of a Jesus being crucified. And anyway, so many criminals were out there on that hill. The reporter's second stop was at the temple office. They knew more, they said, but they wouldn't say much. "Yes, yes," said a young priest. "He blasphemed and the Romans wanted Him anyway, so His people called Him the Messiah and He met his fate. Now, get out of here before you make a stir." The priest left to take his shift at the sacrificial altar.

At odds with what to do next, the reporter stopped for a bagel and coffee and found a couple of scattered enthusiasts. "We were there," they said. "When He arrived, He was wise. Miracles? We don't know anything about that. Are you going to finish that cream cheese?"

The reporter was running out of ideas and gave his cream cheese to the two. He left the shop and he stumbled on an old man who looked like he had seen a few things in his life.

"Sure," the old man said, "I will talk to you. Sat here for days after that young guy was killed, wondered if anyone really understood it. You see, the people, they wanted magic. They wanted something to believe in. They need a savior and what He was was a special person. They called Him the sun, S-U-N. Write that down like I said it. They called Him the S-U-N because He shined light on most things people took for granted. And He did things that broke up what everyone else expected they should believe. Look at that old woman over there, the man said, gave her last dime to the temple. People mocked her for it, but not Him. He lifted her up on His back and danced around with her when she did that because He knew that she loved God more than anything. Everyone said she was wasting her last shekel, but not Him. He made her feel like a queen.

And you see that man over there begging, got one leg doesn't work. Well, by some miracle, Jesus coached that man from his perch and walked him around all day, spent the whole day giving him attention, taking him around by the arms and shoulders. Today, that man has changed, I tell you, even though his leg is back to failing, he's a kinder soul. Says 'good morning' to everyone. Gave me half his bagel the other day. Imagine that, a poor beggar giving away his last bite."

The old man paused and looked at the reporter to see if he was getting any of this down on his papers.

"And look there, you see that guy handing out money, his name is Zacchaeus. Used to be hated, collected taxes from everyone with his goons. Intimidating little fellow he was. Now he's on a mission to give away half of everything he owns to the poor. Tried to give me his best coat yesterday. I told him someone else needs it. The old man paused again, looked at the reporter.

"You see, the man they called the S-U-N made a difference, I tell you. He helped people be kinder to think about those darn invaders standing around causing us trouble and more things. His father say He's coming back. I hope He does probably return when it gets real bad someday, but maybe this is all more hogwash people want to tell themselves because they lost hope. When He died and the other said, 'I told you so, that He was a fraud,' but those friends of his want Him back just like you would. The real story is that He was here. He had a lot of good to teach. These people I pointed out are changed because of Him. They aren't the only ones. More love in their hearts. Kind and generous like He was. He also had a dog no one talks about still wandering around here looking for Him like a shadow, but a loving shadow. How about you stranger?" The old man asked the reporter was busy scratching away at his papyrus.

"Me? No, I never met Him. Just heard about him, got sent down here to report about it."

The old man replied, "Well, you met Him now. told you everything you need to know. " Can you do something with the story?"

"I think so," said the reporter. "Needs a little spice, but it'll sell," said the reporter who all of a sudden felt like he had met something holy. Maybe one of the gods was speaking to him, telling him he can

live for more than deadlines and gain, and he started to wonder if he'd said or done something wrong. The reporter snapped out of it in time for the old man, started wandering away and he said, "Wait, who are you, sir? Who should I quote for my story?"

The old man looked at the reporter and said, "That doesn't matter, but if you have to put something down, just call me the old innkeeper."

"Where are you from, sir?" Asked the reporter.

"Over those hills just west of town, town called Bethlehem. Seen a lot in my day. You know they called Him the only begotten son. You know that, right?"

"No, that said the reporter. Why is that?"

"Close to God, my man," said the old man. "Close to God. He comes to life today."

The old man started wandering off down the road and the reporter wrote on his scroll, "Only could be God's son crucified comes back to life today."

The reporter found a courier and sent his story off to Rome in hopes that his editor would print it and then headed east looking for some of the followers of this man they called the S-U-N, Sun.

All over the world today, stories like this will be told. This one, I think just as good as the one printed in the Bible are preached from on high. Some will say Jesus was the only one, could be God's son, only begotten son. You know, that could be lost in translation. What that actually means is that he was a uniquely true and special, legitimate son. And the legends of Jesus told by His followers wanted to tie this story back to Abraham's son, the only begotten, the lineage of Isaac who was saved from sacrifice. The imagery was deliberate, used to tell of Jesus's uniqueness, his special place in history, and it stuck.

I don't know if my story's going to stick or if they'll be telling it a thousand years from now, but it's just as well to hear it my way. You see, because the story that is told today in so many churches is that there was a resurrection and mine says that there is resurrection. Mine says that no matter what you believe about this man or this event or this religion that follows, that we can agree that Jesus was a uniquely begotten son. The fact that we're still talking about Him 2000 years later is proof enough that He was special, that He shone brightly and changed people's hearts. He was a bright star, an S-U-N, a rebel, a hope, a leader, a rabbi, a teacher, and His story, however it is told today has one theme in it that is constant, that this special person challenged how we see the world and asked us to live our lives for the purpose of one another and for God.

He preached love and asked people to give when they thought they had to keep, to take the last spot in the line when they thought they needed to be first, to hope even when they were knee-deep in despair. He preached that your worst faults do not define who you can be, that your failings can become gifts to others, that deep inside of each of us is a connection to God.

He taught us that to love God and neighbor was the only thing that would save us. And while the traditional view on today is that he was sent by God to give His life for humanity, to call sinners to repentance and give eternal life, we Unitarians for five centuries have said that Jesus came to call forth and strengthen piety in the human heart, that Jesus was a morally perfect human example whose life and ministry and teachings aimed to reconcile humanity to God, to promote personal virtue and to water our spiritual growth and to encourage love and justice.

And the Unitarians have always said that this was not accomplished through sacrifice, but through example. William Ellery Channing, who shaped American Unitarianism two centuries ago, believed Jesus enabled humans to awaken their own inherent dignity and to foster the unending moral and spiritual progress of all people. Because we don't take this story literally, we do not need to believe that there was resurrection. We just need to believe that there is resurrection because if we see with open eyes and live with open hearts, we see a uniquely begotten son of God who, by His example, shows humanity ways to spiritual progress and human goodness and helps resurrections happen throughout history.

And we know that the distortions of this core religious impulse found deep in all faiths, that the distortion of who Jesus was, let's say he was a bloodthirsty warrior or king is an ambush of the truth of him, that any sermon or service or prayer that locates his message just in sacrifice misses the fact that resurrection is real when people change. It is real when we learn to love, when we learn to stick up for the downtrodden or the oppressed, and therefore we encounter resurrections. The message I'm reminding you of today might as well have been the message I reminded you last year and the message that might have been preached 2,000 years ago, that no manner of political violence or soul crushing thoughts or actions by others can erase the core message that lives on past the man who preached them in the first century in Judea, that love wins, that celebrating with those who society deems without value is exactly what we should be doing, that no one is without dignity, that poverty is only poverty of spirit, that generosity changes the one who gives more than the one who receives that life is better with a hopeful heart than a doomed heart.

The Easter message is that nothing dies. Nothing dies that says every day that we wake up, a personal transformation is possible, that every day we can rise up and believe in the goodness of the world and act on it. And there is resurrection. It says that we can live as the poet describes barefoot daring to walk amid the thrashing eye glitter of what remains when the tide goes out, that life is what remains when things die or friends abandon us or we are alone, that no manner of death or setback, no manner of political idiocy or the very real struggles of the day can keep us from resurrections that awaken our hearts to generosity and to love.

The message today says that knowing that death is real and permanent, a cold silence like an empty tomb only means that life is more important, that life is not there in the tomb. Life is when you act on a change of heart to be kinder and available to those who need you. Jesus' life lesson is that life isn't hard. It's the living that's hard. And our lesson is that resurrection is real, not once upon a time, but today, even when we see the light and the darkness, that this doesn't happen for each of us like a lightning strike. It takes time to allow the goodness of life to get past doors of fear. It takes time for the

disciples to see after he is gone to believe, to touch, to behold, what truth he left them. Sometimes for the disciples, it's not even the figure of Jesus they see. Rather, it is generosity, the acts of generosity done by others that resurrects the dead spirit of the lost spirit of lost disciple.

Peter sees the man who offers fish and Peter is resurrected. Mary Magdalene, who is broken at the tomb, hears her name and she is resurrected in hope. The travelers on the road to Emmaus are broken by the failed promise of their story of their leader, and then they hear the words of the communion and they meet Him, whether in reality or in their hearts and life is given a second chance to them. The reporter in my story sees the people that Jesus changed and is changed himself. They are all resurrected by generous acts that they witness.

So it is possible, it's possible that this whole Easter story is actually not about Jesus at all, not about the empty tomb at all, rather that it is about us, that it is about what we do with the messages of love and generosity and compassion and extending a hand to those who are deemed worthless or without value in society. Perhaps this whole thing that we're celebrating today is about fulfilling promises to one another and remembering that resurrections happen when we act from the deepest loving place that we can find in the dark basements of our souls. When we let love billow out into the wind, like the shirt hanging in the sun, when we make rings and rings of radiance, when we dance with the old woman on our back, when she gives the last coin to the temple, when we share a meal with a friend who needs our love, therefore is resurrection. Maybe this is what it's all about. Maybe it's about saying yes to life and laughter, to love and lovers, to unwinding ourselves, to not living for dead ends, but living for the open space, to making peace, to dreaming dreams, to being glad of heart for the gift of life that we have.

So your challenge today between egg hunts and brunch and whatever your day brings is to ask yourself what is resurrection for you? What needs to happen in your life so that the life changing world altering death shattering message of redeeming love can be true in your heart? And if you can't answer that question, ask a more simple question. Who needs you? Who needs you to see them and hear them and love them? Happy Easter. And amen.

