

Breaking Patterns, Finding Freedom

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Abstract

Jesus brought wisdom, not confinement; praise of life, not welcome of death; honor of being, not insistence on one way of becoming.

Reflection: The Way

Today, all over the world, our Christian brothers and sisters are lifting up their celebration of Jesus, his life, his way, his truth, as an eternal and liberating presence in their lives. The assumptions made, the beliefs affirmed, the passages read, the stories retold cover a wide gamut of religious imaging and faith understanding. There are those who labor with the Biblical text as if each word of whatever translation they are using is the literal word of God. There are those who hold onto the tradition of ecclesiastical authority, beholden to the rituals established over the centuries that bond church members to the presumed words of Jesus. There are others who see the life of Jesus as a model and metaphor for how we all can live and come to fullness, a way of opening to what might be called the knowledge of God. And still others who would say that all ideas about Jesus are projections, that people should leave well enough alone, and deal with what is here and now.

I acknowledge that I, too, have assumptions and lift up beliefs that can only be approximated, for there is no eye-witness recording of the actual ministry of Jesus—the gospels were written down decades after Jesus' death. Jesus' story is all from oral tradition, which was later, over centuries given countless meanings through Biblical interpretation. So what we know of Jesus comes

from our collective consciousness.

One assumption that Unitarian Universalists make about Jesus is that he did not live, teach and model the courageous life that he led in order to be worshipped as God. Jesus did not bring his wisdom forward so that we could feel unworthy of it, unable to reach it, unprepared to manifest it without his intervention. Jesus did not come onto the earth to die—any more than the rest of us—and he wasn't trying to become the new outside authority for people to follow. Jesus taught about inner authority—yours and mine—teaching ways to articulate one's life for the good. What a waste of a glorious life to name it as something beyond our reach. What a diminishment of his gift to use it as a way to limit the potential of human life, that somehow only God could be this good.

I carry the assumption—and I am by no means alone in this belief—that when Jesus was reported in the gospel of John to have said, I am the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6), he was modelling a way of seeing and being that we all could arrive at through spiritual discipline and faith understanding. He was not instructing people to put him on a pedestal and create a distance from our own agency. He was not claiming a superiority to those he was addressing, as if their created selves had less god potential than his. He was not putting their own authority of

being in his hands. He was claiming a companioning, sharing an understanding, encouraging a leap of faith into liberative power.

Jesus began his ministry by saying you are the light of the world, not only me... you are the salt of the earth... each of you are a bit of that which seasons Creation's wonder.

It was a mistake to choose to worship Jesus as God, a mistake that dishonored the courage of his life and disempowered his liberating message. Instead of finding the way toward freedom, many set their sights onto imitating another man's journey. Instead of taking it upon oneself to see how truth arose in one's own being, many chose to compare themselves to the authority of another.

Jesus brought wisdom, not confinement. Praise of life, not welcome of death. Honor of being, not insistence on one way of becoming.

When we look at the sermon on the mount, what is often considered his first public teaching to his disciples, we see a kind of guidebook for principles of relating—a way through the challenges of life with and for one another. The compass to keep the way clear is our inborn dignity, the paths are revealed through honoring our being with one another. Jesus spoke of responsibility, mutual recognition, humility toward Creation's wonder and equanimity—equal being—amongst each other. His ministry was not about rules and regulations so that one way of engaging life would be the only way of engaging life. His ministry was about meeting the day as it is given with sensibilities of love, compassion and justice to guide our way.

And he gave a companioning prayer at the end of that first sermon, one that, again, was not supposed to be literal, but simply a guide to help when we lose our way in despair or crippling doubt.

I offer a translation that I have fashioned as one of my prayers in spiritual practice. A prayer that often, in GPS language, helps me recalculate:

Holy One of All Being
Hallowed by thy recognition
Thy wisdom be in our hearts and lives.
Thy way our way, let there be no separation.
Nurture our body spirits with the blessings of this day
And forgive us our trespasses.
Loose the fetters of regret and resentment, shame and blame, as we forego judgment of self and other.
And let us not follow what is false and fear based, but defy demonic consciousness that keeps us from soul's wisdom.
For thine is the beauty and the truth, the peace and the unity.
Now and evermore.
Amen.¹

Reflection: The Truth

Steeped in primary politics, the question of truth is lost in the shuffle. People see what they want to see and disregard the rest. With violence rippling throughout our world in acts of terror, the truth of who terrorists are and how this disruption is linked to Islam rolls and rolls around our confusion and fear-based reaching. Yet acts of violence are not only the horrific suicide bombs; violence is in our biases against others, in our self centism, in our need to be in control. We tend to find fault outside of ourselves. We tend to feel helpless by the actions of others.

It is heartbreaking that much of the rhetoric around Jesus' resurrection encourages magical thinking and a separation from humanity. It's tragically ironic, actually, because he was killed for teaching the exact opposite of what is now widely taught. Political authorities of the time wanted to eliminate him because he was teaching to a growing number of followers that they did not have to seek god outside themselves. They did not have to feel inferior to someone else's authority or some other realm of being. He was

¹Original Adaptation of the Lord's Prayer Matthew 6:9-13; Rev. Lisa Ward.

teaching—and getting through to enough people to make the authorities nervous—that the ground of Being, the essence of God is within our being; that the kingdom of God is an embodied wonder, that it is here, now, available to us if we open ourselves to its urging, to its inborn truth.

“These things I have spoken to you,” so goes a quote rendered in the Gospel of John, “that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.”²

That’s why he was executed—for this politically powerful message of praise of life and individual worth. He challenged the cultural assumptions of the time that pitted people against one another in hierarchies, economic injustice and political maneuvering.

How is it that Ted Cruz can say, with assent from his followers, that we should “empower law enforcement to patrol and secure Muslim neighborhoods before they become radicalized.”?³ How is it that another national figure, Donald Trump, running for the office of President, with astounding backing can say that Islam hates America?

We are stuck in “us” and “them.” We have little faith in the face of our fears. We do not know how to judge not, lest we be judged, a simple principle of relating offered by Jesus.

Easter touches on our heritage as Unitarian Universalists and calls us to bring Jesus’ life message back into notice, which is a definition of resurrection—to come back into notice. We are called to lift up the transformative message that has been distorted by systems of beliefs that divide and conquer, separate and judge, demonize and discourage.

There are other faith communities that claim the liberating ministry of Jesus’ life, bringing the resurrection back to earth so that his life message walks with feet, pulses with hearts and inspirits our days. Liberal Christians, spiritual evolutionaries, and mystics in most religions point to the

healing power available within each of us, honoring Jesus for modeling what is possible in our lives.

Jesus did not die for us. We are not vicariously saved in his death. We need to do the work ourselves of loving the world and praising life.

The meaning of Jesus’ life becomes clear in the living of ours. He lived god consciousness, to model, not to be separate. He healed to encourage, not to be deified. He challenged to transform society not reign over it. Jesus did not dwell on earth to die. He shared his life to help humans learn how to truly live.

This is not to say the Jesus’ death was not important. Jesus’ death was profoundly important. Something happened that day, something mystical and powerful. Jesus bravely died with such authenticity that his life energy infused a deeper knowledge of the truth and power of love in humanity’s consciousness. This truth has rippled through the centuries.

As expressed in this writing by Teresa of Avila, 16th century Christian mystic:

Christ has no body now on earth but
yours, no hands but yours, no feet
but yours.

Yours are the eyes through which to
look out Christ’s compassion to
the world.

Yours are the feet with which he is to
go about doing good;

Yours are the hands with which he is
to bless (men) humanity now.

Reflection: The Life

I like Easter, even though I grew up Unitarian Universalist, without the prevailing dogma of Jesus’ death and resurrection. I resonate with Easter as it resonates with the rhythm in our being—that coming back to life, that rising from within, that surge of celebration with the com-

²John 15:11 King James.

³thehill.com/blogs/ballot-box/presidential-races/273938-dnc-chair-slams-cruz-for-brussel-response-hes-a-disgrace/

ing of Spring. This period of time around the Spring Equinox, observed and celebrated since the beginning of recorded history, sits well with the message of life everlasting, sits well with Jesus' determination of praise, unto death, for the blooming of humanity.

In the transition of winter to spring, we naturally respond, on a cellular level, to the internal claiming of life's wonder and resilience. The women's ritual group rendered this claiming for us in the service last week. With the sun's warmth approaching, we feel more readily, the urging of spiritual awakening, we are more open to the invitation to awe.

I was asked recently, "how do Unitarian Universalists handle Easter?" We follow the messaging from the beginning of human consciousness and tell it in many ways: that life springs from death, that "everlasting" is a power of life beyond our control, that the gift before us reflects a gift within us, and that we can find the way of transformation which is the genius of creation.

Let me share this reading by James Broughton, entitled "Easter Exultet".⁴

Shake out your qualms.
Shake up your dreams.
Deepen your roots.
Extend your branches.
Trust deep water

and head for the open,
even if your vision
shipwrecks you.
Quit your addiction
to sneer and complain.
Open a lookout.
Dance on a brink.
Run with your wildfire.
You are closer to glory
leaping an abyss
than upholstering a rut.
Not dawdling.
Not doubting.
Intrepid all the way
Walk toward clarity.
At every crossroad
Be prepared
to bump into wonder.
Only love prevails.
En route to disaster
insist on canticles.
Lift your ineffable
out of the mundane.
Nothing perishes;
nothing survives;
everything transforms!
Honeymoon with Big Joy!

Happy Easter. Brave Blooming. Whole-hearted
Embracing. Life Giving.

Blessings Be. Amen. ■

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⁴Broughton, James. *Little Sermons of the Big Joy*.