

Resurrection

*It is not more surprising to be born twice than once;
everything in nature is resurrection*

—Voltaire

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Our mythic sense loves resurrection. Myths from the far East, the near East, the temples of ancient Greeks, the sands of Egypt, the fjords of Norway, and indeed from nearly every culture we can identify portray resurrection. A few that might be new to you include Egyptian Osiris, Greek Persephone, Norse Baldr, Japanese Izanami, Christian Jesus.

The impossible blessing—life returned in full glory after death—calls us all to wonder. Could it be that the human trajectory follows the seasonal pattern—that we, too, die for a time to be reborn again? Is it possible that only a special chosen few have this honor, and that they are then called forth as gods to lead us?

The most recognizable resurrection story in the dominant culture where we live is the story of Jesus: a prophet, perhaps a son of God, who was slain by arrogant forces of empire then born again to chasten humanity on a moral, faith-filled path to the kingdom of heaven on earth. The story of Jesus is read in as many ways as there are humans to read it. For some, he is a communist hero; for others, a moral defender of the oppressed; for others, a mythical prophet; for others, the only divinity to ever walk the earth.

Was Jesus resurrected from the grave to live eternally in heaven? Only your encounter with the story will elicit your musings, your answer. Unitarian Universalists

are not required to believe one thing. I invite you, however, to consider why we humans are so compelled by the story of resurrection—why it has found its way into our mythical lexicon from the beginning of storytelling to the present day.

Perhaps we simply like second chances... or as March Madness could prove, we like to root for the underdog! Perhaps seasonal changes have infused our minds (and even our bodies) with the seemingly eternal capacity for rebirth. Or perhaps we experience in deep and resonant ways the truth of resurrection whenever we lose someone we love. Our dear one may not be reborn to us in body, but the love she gave away, before she died, remains, and chastens us ever and always to live as she would have expected.

As this season unfolds, I welcome you to be blessed by the stories of resurrection—whether they are stories of tiny dead birds resurrected every year as bunnies that lay colored eggs (as the Oestra story goes); or of a god-man whose influence remains, long after he was buried; or of the tiny shoots of green emerging from the soil and buds emerging on the trees that have long been dormant. We are called to these stories for some ancient and real reason. Let them enliven your living.

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

Resurrection



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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Resurrection

Webster's dictionary defines *resurrection* as:



Bob Brown,
Board President

1. In Christianity, the Resurrection: the event told about in the Bible in which "Jesus Christ returned to life after his death.
2. The resurrection: the event told about in the Bible in which dead people will be brought back to life before the day of final judgment.
3. The act of causing something that had ended or been forgotten or lost to exist again, to be used again, etc.

Did Jesus actually rise from the dead? Was there an actual bodily resurrection? I have no reason to doubt this. I also think there is a mystery between life and death, one that involves the love we display from our souls while we are here. And while "here," I believe that at times we do come face to face with the abyss or with challenges that cause us to ask, "Why?"

I have witnessed friends, many in this congregation, as they were struck by adversity—and as they had the fortitude to not give up, to accept the situation, and to positively move forward in this mystery of life or death. When I see such perseverance, I believe we can resurrect ourselves, knowing it is the message of our souls in this world that trumps everything and leads to true spiritual enlightenment.

RELIGIOUS EXPLORATION

Returning to Life, Hope, and Joy



Linda Weaver,
Director of
Religious Exploration

In the fall, many plants release their seeds to the wind and die. The seeds then spend many months in the cold, dark earth waiting for spring. As the days become longer and the air becomes warmer, the seeds send roots into the soil and they send sprouts up toward the sun. Finally they bloom, coming into the full splendor of their lives. The flowers and plants are born anew each year. Life is resurrected from death. Like these plants, some

things in our lives must die. Animals, people, relationships, endeavors, dreams, or beliefs may all die or end. All of us will experience the death-like darkness and coldness of grief, despair, disillusionment, or uncertainty before life blooms once more with hope. We would like to think that our children do not and will not experience this. However, they

will. Even young children face disappointments or have pets die. Older children and teens may experience the death of a friend, be disillusioned by the violence and injustices they see in the world, or despair at the difficulty of living up to unrealistic expectations they set for themselves.

Children and teens need to know that it is alright to talk about these things. They need to hear how others have found their way through these cold, dark times to find hope, life, and joy. They need to see examples of many different ways people can live and be "successful" and how they can survive hardships and disappointments. They also need people to listen, comfort, and act as mentors as they face the challenges and celebrate the joys and successes of their lives.

It has often been said that it takes a village to raise a child. Many stories and studies show that the more adults a child has in her life, the more likely it is that she will grow to live an emotionally healthy life. All children and teens need to see that many adults care for them. They need to see many possible ways to live and be in relationship with others, and they need to learn from many different perspectives. Adults at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Sterling, especially those who volunteer in religious education, provide this for our children and teens. They show that they care about the children and teens. They provide a listening ear and they share their own stories. They let the children and teens know they are alright just the way they are right now, and that even though life can be challenging, they can make it through dark moments to find life and light. Through their stories and the lives they live, these adults show that life can be resurrected from the death-like dark and cold of grief, despair, or doubt. Consider how you can be a part of the village for the children and teens in your life and how you can share the possibilities of the rebirth of hope, joy, and life.

Children's Religious Education topics and a list of programs and events for children and families is on the calendar at the UUCS website, www.uusterling.org.

Want to share something in the May newsletter?

- ✓ Reflections or articles related to the May liturgical theme, *reverence*
- ✓ Announcements (including those related to events that will take place in May and the first two weeks of the summer)
- ✓ Group or committee updates (what you accomplished, what's planned coming up, etc.)
- ✓ Recent photos taken at UUS or during UUS events

Please send anything you'd like to include to newsletter@uusterling.org by April 15.

TWO SERVICES UPDATE

“You want me to do what?” That was pretty much my reaction when asked to write an article on the progress of the Two Services Task Force that would fit in with the April newsletter theme of resurrection. Resurrection, after all, is a difficult concept for Unitarian Universalists to embrace. The literal coming back to physical life after death defies every law we understand about the natural patterns of biology, and resurrection scripture is generally presented as the action of mystical forces that are questioned only at the peril of the questioner’s soul—definitely not a UU-friendly way of relating to the divine. Worse, the only obvious way I could relate the development of a two-services program at UUUCS to the resurrection concept was simply awful: “Our plan for two services will bring this congregation back to life.” Please—if there was ever a congregation that does not need to be brought back to life, it’s UUUCS. I honestly thought it might not be possible to write this article.

Obviously, I was mistaken. When I started to look more closely at some of the less orthodox interpretations of resurrection, especially regarding the resurrection of Jesus celebrated at Easter, and in particular how Unitarian Universalists interpret that resurrection story, I came across a UU sermon celebrating Easter (and no, that is not an oxymoron) written by Rev. Samuel Trumbore of the First Unitarian Universalist Society of Albany, NY.

Liberal theologians, although they reject the orthodox view of the literal resurrection of Jesus as simply an adaptation of the resurrection myth of Memnon designed to appeal to Greek audiences, nonetheless see great metaphorical significance in the resurrection story. What especially struck me was this excerpt from Rev. Samuel’s sermon addressing the passage from the Gospel of Luke that describes the disciples’ encounter with Jesus on the road to Emmaus:

The disciples were looking for a savior-king, a flesh and blood leader who would save them. Now they realize as their heart stirs listening to him that it is his words not his flesh which were the carriers of salvation. It will be the message not the person of Jesus which will eventually convert the Roman Empire into the Holy Roman Empire of Christianity which will then rebuild Jerusalem. Before this Jesus could only work with the people he had personal contact with. Now his message could be spread across the whole world.

In this interpretation, *resurrection* is instead *transformation*. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus made the

ultimate choice to “walk the talk”—turning his cheek to the Romans, who rewarded him with humiliation, torture, and a horrific execution; forgiving his betrayer and persecutors in spite of their treatment; urging his supporters to act in love rather than violence in his defense; having faith in redemption in spite of all evidence to the contrary. These extraordinary actions transformed Jesus from yet another messiah claimant appearing in Judea during the time of Augustus into the prophet whose teachings often inspire the best nature of humankind more than two thousand years later.

How does the transformation narrative of Easter relate to two services at UUUCS? Obviously, in no way as dramatic or terrifying—we do not face demise at the hands of a ruthless dictatorial government, nor do we face the destruction of our congregation and the question of how its work can continue without its physical presence. That said, in planning a two-service program, we are making a powerful choice to transform UUUCS into a congregation that will move beyond its current limitations and live into its vision. This choice requires commitment from all of us, both in terms of embracing how the congregation will be once the plan is implemented and in terms of the increased stewardship required to implement the plan.

Finally, and most importantly, the choice requires faith in the Two Services Task Force to plan well—in observing the work of the task force firsthand, I can attest that such faith is well placed. The amount of consideration being applied to all aspects of congregational life, from service scheduling and shared fellowship to enhancing and diversifying RE and music programs, is truly extraordinary and it reflects the outstanding leadership UUUCS is blessed to have. UUUCS will certainly be a different institution as a result of its transformation, but the essence of what brings us to UUUCS now will certainly carry forth, and the possibilities of the congregation to live out its mission will be beyond our ability to imagine. May it be so.

—Brian George

A MONTH OF SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

April: Resurrection

Members of our congregation are invited to engage the practice of *Lectio Divina*. *Lectio Divina* is Latin for divine reading, spiritual reading, or holy reading, and represents a traditional practice of scriptural reading intended to promote communion with that which is ultimately meaningful. It is a way of praying or meditating with sacred words that calls one to study, ponder, listen and, finally, rejoice within the soul. Unitarian Universalists embrace a wide-reaching definition of scripture, finding words of profound meaning in the works of the world religions, scientists, poets, and the experiences of our own lives.

Find the time in your day to read each piece every day. Read, pause, read again, pause, and then reflect. You may choose to write each quote in a journal and add notes from your reflections. You may choose to read each piece to your family at the dinner table. You may choose to read in the morning or before sleep. You may choose to use the piece to gather your spirit for prayer or meditation.

April 3—9

You were born a child of light's wonderful secret—you return to the beauty you have always been.

—Aberjhani, *Visions of a Skylark Dressed in Black*

April 10—16

*Hearts rebuilt from hope
resurrect dreams killed by hate.*

—Aberjhani, *The River of Winged Dreams*

April 17—23

It always amazes me to look at the little, wrinkled brown seeds and think of the rainbows in 'em.... When I ponder on them seeds I don't find it nowise hard to believe that we've got souls that'll live in other worlds. You couldn't hardly believe there was life in them tiny things, some no bigger than grains of dust, let alone color and scent, if you hadn't seen the miracle, could you?

—Captain Jim from L.M. Montgomery's
Anne's House of Dreams

April 24—30

The apathy of the people is enough to make every statue leap from its pedestal and hasten the resurrection of the dead.

—William Lloyd Garrison

It must be that I am not made to be a dead man, but these places and this discussion seem like a dream, and not a dream dreamed by me but by someone else still to be born.

—Jorge Luis Borges, *Dreamtigers*

HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE

The 2014 Northern Virginia Holocaust Commemoration will be held on Sunday, April 27, at the Jewish Community Center of Northern Virginia. This year's program is titled "On Deaf Ears: Media Coverage and Public Response in the Holocaust Years."

5:30–6:00 pm – The Reading of Names, Youth Projects & Professional Art Exhibits

6:00–7:00 pm Seminar on Media Coverage of the Holocaust and Contemporary Genocides

7:00–8:30 pm Community Observance (Featuring a multigenerational candle lighting, readings, prayers, the Holocaust Kaddish, and a community choir and musical reflections.)

Additional details, including the online RSVP and parking information, are available at www.jccouncil.org/VAShoa.



SACRED STORY FOR ALL AGES

The Phoenix

A long time ago, there lived a large bird with feathers that glistened like the sun. This bird, the phoenix, spent years and years flying on its shining wings and singing a song that was so beautiful the sun smiled every time the bird flew past. After hundreds of years of happily flying and singing, the phoenix noticed that it took a little longer to reach the heights at which it normally flew and its voice became a bit rough after singing all day. Many more years passed and the bird became tired and weak.

After soaring through the sky and singing to the sun for 500 years, the phoenix built a nest of sweet-smelling twigs and spices at the very top of a tree. Exhausted and aching, the bird settled on the nest and felt at peace. It then burst into flames and burned, leaving behind nothing in the nest but ashes. After a few days, a new phoenix rose out of the ashes to fly and sing for another 500 years.

Questions for Discussion

What have you experienced that seemed disastrous?

People often refer to something rising out of ashes like the phoenix. What arose from the disaster or experience you just mentioned? How were you transformed or changed?

What would you like to transform or change in your life now?



BUILDING ALL-AGES COMMUNITY AND LIFELONG LEARNING

My involvement with the Lifespan Religious Education Council has been a blessing in many ways. The council members all share a desire to contribute to this congregation and feel strongly about the importance of lifelong learning within this community. This council is a forum for furthering these goals in a practical way.

We strengthen the bonds between generations with our First Friday events, which encourage all of us to interact in fun and exciting ways.

We challenge our young people to grow, learn, and develop healthy relationships within our faith community and outside of it with our RE classes and social action events.

We help host traditions within our church—such as the holiday pageant, Easter egg hunt, and church picnic—which help us all to celebrate the seasons in familiar ways we can look forward to all year, building shared memories.

We ensure that at all gatherings, there is a welcoming and safe place for even the youngest among us to be nurtured and cared for.

Being a member of the Lifespan RE Council, for me, is a powerful, tangible way to interact with other members of UUCS, to keep apprised of church happenings, to assist our young people as they navigate growing up, and to have some fun too. So, if you've ever wished you knew more people here, wondered how you missed hearing about that latest interesting event, or just wanted to know how great it is to have children in our church rush up to say hello to you, come see us at the next Lifespan RE Council meeting. We would love to share all this with you.

—Kathy Ashland



**On Father's Day!!
Sunday, June 15th, 12-3:30pm**

CALENDAR

Stay Up to Date With UUCS Events

A P R I L	
Friday, 4/4	<p>6:30 pm pm <i>First Friday : Folk Dancing</i> Potluck begins at 6:00, dancing begins at 6:30. All ages, all abilities, all fun!</p>
Sunday, 4/6	<p>10:30 am— <i>Worship service: “Exploring Issues of Theology and Ethics Through Film”</i> Be ready to be surprised and inspired at this annual high school youth–led worship service.</p> <p>Noon—<i>Inquirer’s Class in Rev. Anya’s office</i></p>
Sunday, 4/13	<p>10:30 am — <i>Worship service: “Our Neighbors Behind Bars: A Palm Sunday Elegy”</i> The War on Drugs has resulted in one in nine African American males, ages 18 - 34, to be behind bars. Most of them will return to society. How can we be in relationship with former inmates and their families to help ease their return into society and support their integration and continued rehabilitation? Join us as we explore religious responses to this crisis. Rev. Scott Sammler-Michael, minister of the Accotink UU Church in Burke, VA, leads our service.</p>
Sunday, 4/20	<p>10:30 am — <i>Worship service: “When Jesus is Hungry”</i> An all-ages, story-based reflection on the moral meaning of Easter. Our choir will sing and an Easter egg hunt will follow the service.</p>
Sunday 4/27	<p>10:30 am — <i>Worship service: “Was Jesus a Zombie?”</i> A caterpillar will entomb itself in a chrysalis and emerge a butterfly. If biblical stories can be true while also not literal, then what emerged after Jesus was crucified? What is your story of entombment and transformation?</p>
M A Y	
Sunday, 5/4	<p>10:30 am — <i>Worship service : “Dependence and Reverence”</i> Independence makes it possible for us to follow the dictates of our consciences to live freely, with dignity. Dependence on other beings and on the basic building blocks of life makes it possible for us to understand a shared life—a life that calls us to reverence. Our band will play.</p> <p>Noon — <i>Inquirer’s Class in Rev. Anya’s office</i></p>
Friday, 5/9	<p>6:30 pm — <i>Gay Men’s Chorus Concert</i> Doors open at 6:30; concert begins at 7:30. This entertaining performance is a benefit concert for People of Faith for Equality, VA. Tapas, wine, and sangria will be served. Childcare will be provided.</p>