

**IDEAS ABOUT EASTER** – Sunday April 8, 2007  
 Mattatuck UU Society  
 Intergenerational Service with Emerson Group Class  
*Rev Carol M Wolff*

Ideas about Easter aren't easy for UUs to articulate.

Theologically, Easter is a conundrum – it is about the mystery – about things we can never know for sure. It is about imagined scenarios created to fit a prophecy, memorial stories used to lift up a person who meant a lot to those who wrote about him.

It is about the conquest of death, which we find hard to fathom – we believe in life BEFORE death so the Easter story throws us back into Jesus' life rather than focusing on his death. We prefer to hear the story as it was told by his followers and interpret it for ourselves.

We must always remember that ideas about Easter are just that – ideas – ideas that permeated the community after his death – stories that were told and embellished, made to look like the fulfillment of prophecy – in essence what we do when anyone dies – we try to remember the good stuff and celebrate the life well lived.

The mystery of Easter is tied up in its human reminders that we all can recognize – a death, a dark time, a place of persecution which eventually leads to a rebirth a resurrection of the spirit that allows us to go on. These events of the Passion story are about us – about our connection with nature and its return to life as a symbol of what we are capable of as human beings.

Do you think Jesus died on the cross? Do you think he was dead when they laid him in the tomb? Do you ever feel you have died to the world and yourself and are totally alone, abandoned for dead in the spiritual sense, lying in a dark place waiting? Perhaps that is exactly what the story is meant to tell us.

Death is one idea about Easter that we struggle with – how final is it? What happens to our consciousness and our spirit that was so vital to our living days? How can we reconcile other kinds of deaths that we experience throughout our lives?

Death is a necessary part of the life process. Life not only feeds upon other life, but beings must die so that other beings can live or be born. Without death nature would be in unchanging stasis; growth and evolution would be impossible. Spiritually, too, death and life interpenetrate; the one could not be without the other.

I see in Easter also the idea of our fear and denial of death – the things that prevent us from rolling away the stone – the things that keep us from the light.

The fear of dying that keeps us from living. You know what I mean – we all know those who live in fear of death thus are so focused on their health trying to prevent death that they cease to live and miss out on the joys and benefits of living in the moment, free from fear and able to really live before dying.

The stone is another idea about Easter – how heavy is it? What does it represent? It is an important character in the story. Can we move it ourselves, is it possible we need others to help us come out of our dark place and face the light of a new life? What does the stone represent? Is it our stubborn refusal to see the truth? Is it imprisonment by some force we cannot control? Is it our lack of faith and hope?

These ideas about Easter are suggestive of using the word Easter as a verb.

Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote:

“Let him Easter in us. Be a dayspring to the dimness of us, be a crimson cressed East.”

East - the direction of the dawn – the morning light when the shadows flee away. Sometimes Eastering takes a long time – it happens when we are ready.

Thoreau said “Only that day dawns to which we are awake.”

Is one idea about Easter that perhaps the story about Jesus is about us waking up to our own truth? Rolling away the stone that has imprisoned us and being willing to see the light at last?

We need Easter and we need to Easter because death puts life into perspective.

We need to Easter because death surrounds us and is within us. In the midst of life we are also in death. Life itself is a series of dying moments – once experienced, they are gone forever. Death is every moment, the thousand little deaths of the spirit, the lows and defeats of life.

To be eastered is to be re-spirited, in-spirited – lifted up from all that is death to the fullness of life and light. Easter is the promise that however dark the night, the dayspring will break and the shadows will flee away.

No one knows what lies on the other side of life as we know it. We do know that death is necessary to life and allows for growth and change as when we examine nature at this time of the year. How can a seemingly dead tree awaken to its glory and start putting out buds? How can a dry dead bulb come back to life and create a beautiful daffodil? This is the mystery we are faced with every Easter.

These reminders are what help us see that life is about dying and being resurrected. Some part of who we once were is dead but yet still alive in us. We carry with us all the deaths small or large we have experienced during our life so far.

What we must remember is: what we are is always giving way to what we are becoming – this is the essence of the idea of Easter. Death is an aspect of our existence throughout our life.

We do not know if death marks an ending or just another step of being and becoming. We don't know until we are willing to roll away the stone of isolation and face the new day. It has been said that Death is not the master, but the servant of life and this is the root of the Easter mystery.

The Easter story tells of life's triumph over death. The resurrection that matters is the spiritual event repeated in the lives of many people over generations.

Broken lives are mended and wounded souls healed; ----over and over again the dayspring breaks.

Eastering requires faith – a faith that Life maketh all things new - so choose life!

Easter says Halleluja to change and radical hope beyond imagination; so radical that an empty tomb can lead to an awakened spirit instead of despair.

The empty tomb on Easter becomes a symbolic spiritual message only if we can realize that the suffering it answers was and is real human suffering, the death we will all face.

The Easter faith is a promise that no life lived in dedication to the highest personal truth and goodness can be defeated in any ultimate sense, which is the resurrection within ourselves.

The Eastering we must do happens every day, every month, every year and has no reality except in that it is true – it is true in the sense that the human spirit is miraculously capable of triumphing over all kinds of odds. Believe it, live it and let your ideas about Easter be hallelujas of human joy.

*So friends, says Wendell Berry, every day do something that won't compute. Love the Lord. Love the world. Work for nothing. Love someone who does not deserve it. Denounce the government and embrace the flag. Hope to live in that free republic for which it stands. Ask the questions that have no answers... Expect the end of the world. Laugh. Laughter is immeasurable. Be joyful though you have considered all the facts... Practice resurrection*

You cannot hold on to even a nanosecond of this precious life. Life is constantly dying and constantly being reborn. Life wins because life itself is alive. May you indeed be eastered – may the dayspring break and may the shadows flee away.

Practice resurrection and come out of the tomb into the light of life.