



Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens

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“Easter Fool’s Day”

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A sermon reflection delivered on April 1, 2018

At the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens, GA

Centering Thoughts:

The earth laughs in flowers. Ralph Waldo Emerson

*Dawn and resurrection are synonymous. The reappearance of the light
is the same as the survival of the soul.* Victor Hugo

*Oh, rare as the splendor of lilies, And sweet as the violet’s breath,
Comes the jubilant morning of Easter, A triumph of life over death...* Margaret E. Sangster

Whenever you are creating beauty around you, you are restoring your own soul. Alice Walker

Sermon:

As noted earlier, Easter and April Fool’s Day fall on the same day. Rest assured, we did not let that influence the kid’s egg hunt. Unlike Mary at Jesus’ tomb, we did not let them open their eggs to find nothing inside!

You might think the Universe, or the God of your understanding has a sense of humor to have set these two holidays on the same date. One, Easter, is the highest of holy days on the Christian calendar, while the other, April Fool’s, is the highest of holidays on the Atheist calendar. Are you surprised atheist’s have a calendar? Or that April first, when common pranks make people look foolish, is an atheist holy day?

The idea emerged, appropriately, out of a joke. In short, an atheist goes to a judge to complain that religious holidays are unfair and should be stopped because atheists don’t get a holy day.

The judge responds: “Oh, but April Fool’s is your holy day because Psalm 14:1 states, ‘The fool says in his heart, there is no God.’ Non-believers, today is your day—rejoice and be glad of it! (Psalm 118:24)

In contrast to this Jewish view that non-believers are foolish, in later Christian scripture followers of Jesus self-identify as fools for Christ. In Paul’s first letter to the young Corinthian church, he writes, “We are fools for the sake of Christ.” (1 Cor. 4:10)

In calling Christians fools, Paul doesn't mean to belittle them. He's acknowledging that Christians must reject everything they've been taught about what matters in life, i.e. what the world considers wise.

To non-Christians, these early Jesus followers were foolish. They denied the Roman gods and Roman civil authority. Though the first disciples were Jews, they also denied Jewish law. In his letter, Paul reminds the church in Corinth, "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God." (1 Cor. 3:19) He's saying they should pay less attention to who wields power and authority in their fledgling group and should instead pay attention to helping others. Like Jesus, Paul encourages them to turn worldly norms on their head.

Jesus is the iconic fool because his life and death are totally ironic. His family is homeless, he's born in a manger beside animals, and yet he's visited by kings bearing precious gifts. He tells the rich to abandon their wealth and power, while he begins to lead thousands. Jesus is defenseless against Roman rule, he dies on a cross beside common criminals, yet he wears a king's crown. In death, he's taken down and buried in a forgotten tomb, yet he's defiantly raised-up, praised-up, and remembered for centuries.

Over two thousand years ago, Jesus acted the fool by not accepting the rules of his day, and it cost him his life. Whether fact or not, his resurrection meant death could not kill him, his final, masterful joke on Rome. If Jesus sits in heaven, he must be laughing still.

Because his memory lives on, Jesus did not die. He rises whenever we consider his teachings. When any of us die, we do not die as long as we live on in the memories of those who loved us and in the ways we impact the world. Unitarian Universalist minister Bruce M. Clary writes, "Life well-received, well-lived, well-given, well-remembered, is life no death can destroy. And that, my friends, is the Life Eternal. It is Easter." (*Celebrating Easter and Spring*, by Carl Seaburg and Mark Harris, page 72) Whether literal or symbolic, the Easter message of Jesus affirms that new life is available to all of us, no matter whom we are or what we have done. Easter offers us a valuable lesson of hope. Fools or not, we need that Easter message for the good of our souls. It's another irony that the name for the holiest Christian day actually comes from the name of a pagan goddess of dawn and springtime, Eostre. And it is from early pagan traditions that we enjoy the symbols of Easter and spring—bunny rabbits, colored eggs, newborn chicks, and flowers.

Since Easter embraces Christian and more earth-centered traditions, it allows those to celebrate who find greater inspiration in the turning of the seasons and Earth's coming alive again after a season of death, decay, and dreariness. As Earth dresses in a riotous array of color and fragrance, we receive another message of resurrection.

You may feel as if this past winter, if not year, has been a time of chaos, evil and death. You may be ready to awaken and emerge from a self-imposed tomb, perhaps hoping for a better spring to greet you. The world may still feel gray, but know this: the seasonal changes of springtime remind us that nothing stays dreary forever. Rain gives way to rainbows. Clouds give way to sunshine. Sadness gives way to happiness. And death gives way to new life. There will be new life and change ahead of us. Hold onto that truth to get through difficult times.

We are not the first to need the message of spring or Easter. Long before Christianity's arrival, people around the world celebrated spring's return for its explosion of new life and beauty. Unitarian Universalist philosopher and theologian Henry Nelson Wieman writes, "The function of beauty...is to make us aware of a reality which is richer and deeper and more marvelous than anything we can dream or conceive."

I agree. Reality—life!—is richer and deeper and more marvelous than anything we can conceive. So go enjoy it! Notice the beauty around you. Enjoy the miracle of life returning to the Earth. Enjoy a little foolishness with bunnies and colored eggs. And, please, laugh along with Earth's glorious flowers.

May it be so.

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

1. Does your spirit or outlook on life respond to the lengthening and warming days? If so, how?
2. What will you revive or give birth to in this season when new life bursts all around us?
3. How does the Christian story of Jesus' death and resurrection resonate with you? How is the Easter Bunny folklore meaningful to you? What are your experiences with these traditions?