

# Being the Resurrection

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So, this is just about the earliest it ever gets.

Unless there's someone here over 95 years old –  
or anyone who has an ingenious plan to live for another 228 years –  
this is the earliest Easter any of us in this room will ever see.

Which, in part, explains why we're having a "White Easter."

I, for one, can't remember ever celebrating Easter  
with temperatures below freezing  
and so much snow on the ground.

This is something new for me,  
and it may well be for some of you, too,  
given the near-record snowfalls of this winter.

Still, I've been a bit surprised at the number of people  
who have gone out of their way to apologise to me  
in recent weeks for all the cold and snow.

But, of course, no one is to blame.

And, besides, I never expected to escape winter  
by coming to Canada in the first place.

If anything, I hoped for the real deal this year.  
And, it would seem that my prayers have been answered,  
and then some.

So, perhaps, the fault is mine that this winter  
has been such a humdinger.

But, I must confess, that I couldn't be happier about it.

It's not so much that I'm a fan of frostbite and shoveling snow,  
as much as it is that I so desperately need winter

to help me pay attention to my life.

Now, don't get me wrong.  
I appreciate the other seasons, too.

When everything is in bud in spring,  
I am reminded of life's promise.

The bright light of summer calls me out to the fullness of life.

Autumn, in all of its silent majesty, tells me something of life's end,  
giving the assurance of the quiet dignity that comes at the last.

But, winter speaks to me in a language altogether different.

And, I find I need it most of all.

With its sharp chill and bleak sky,  
with its trees standing bare in their vigil of constant hope,  
winter's grip confronts me each year with the knowledge  
of all that has grown cold within me,  
the embers of dreams denied or too long-delayed,  
my burning coal of concern and commitment  
spent down to indifference.

It's not always easy to sit soundly  
in the winter of my own discontent,  
but more than any other season,  
I find that winter helps me to listen most closely  
for the restless stirrings of my soul  
that beckon me on toward better ways of being.

For it is there, in the silence that only winter can convey,  
that I gain a deeper understanding  
of the true meaning of faith and hope.

It seems only with the help of winter's quiet clarity,  
that I can hear the still, small voice of "life's longing for itself."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Khalil Gibran, "On Children," *The Prophet*.

As excited as I will surely be to spot a crocus  
poking up through the warming mud in a few weeks time,  
I am moved all the more  
in knowing that the seeds of those same flowers  
are beginning to quiver even now in the cold, hard ground.

And their example – now invisible to the eye –  
causes me to wonder at the seeds taking root in my own heart –  
the ones that, if cultivated,  
might bloom beyond all that inhibits my living  
and bring me ever more into the fullness of my own being.

As Franz Kafka spoke of our need for  
“an ice-axe to break the frozen sea within us,”<sup>2</sup>  
I look with great hope to those seeds,  
pulsing with all the persistence of life itself,  
that will open me, anew and at last,  
to deeper engagement with the world and the life that I am living.

Yet, it’s not so much that I require frozen soil and arctic winds  
to make me take stock of my life, though they certainly seem to help.

But with their steady aid, I’ve come to know year after year  
something of what Camus meant when he said that:  
“In the depths of winter I at last discovered  
that there was in me an invincible summer.”<sup>3</sup>

On this Easter morning, let us not turn away from winter  
until we’ve found that same great gift.

Let winter not give way to spring  
until we have taken into our hearts  
a vision for ourselves  
of that invincible summer that dwells within us all.

For that more than anything  
is, for me, the enduring invitation of Easter:  
the transformative opportunity that comes to us on this day,

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<sup>2</sup> Franz Kafka, from a letter to Oskar Pollak, 1902.

<sup>3</sup> Albert Camus, *Return to Tipasa*, 1952.

that with all of its complications and contradictions,  
still draw us together in the hope  
of catching a glimpse of that which is invincible in us, too.

And, so, it seems somehow fitting  
that Easter comes to us this year  
while the evidence of winter remains on full display.  
If every tree were in bloom and the parks already full of flowers,  
we might easily miss the unfolding metaphor in which we live.

The one that imparts to us the knowledge  
that winter comes before spring  
that despair comes before hope  
that death comes before resurrection  
and that Good Friday always comes before Easter.

It's a fundamental lesson of life that we seem so prone to miss or gloss over.

The writer Anne Lamott says that she often feels like  
“someone from the Book of Lamentations. . . .  
[and that] the best thing [she's] heard lately is the. . . saying  
that we're Easter people, living in a Good Friday world.”

She then goes on to say:  
“I don't have the right personality for Good Friday,  
[or] for the crucifixion:  
I'd like to skip [right] ahead to the resurrection.

“In fact, I'd like to skip ahead  
to the resurrection vision of one of the kids in our Sunday School, who drew a picture  
of the Easter Bunny outside the tomb: everlasting life, and a basket full of chocolates.  
*Now* you're talking.”<sup>4</sup>

Friends, it is tempting to want to leapfrog over life's struggle  
by moving ahead to the relief that we hope will follow.

In our era of instant gratification,  
it is so easy to look for a short-cut through our pain.

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<sup>4</sup> “Good Friday World” in *Plan B* by Anne Lamott; New York: Riverhead Books, 2005, p.140.

Or worse, to pretend it doesn't exist  
by succumbing to false hopes and off-the-rack resurrections  
that promise relief without any of the fuss.

But, in my experience, life doesn't work like that –  
or at least not for very long.

Instead, it comes closer to the hard truth found in the words  
of feminist theologian Beverly Harrison, who says:

“That which is authentic in the history of faith  
arises only out of the crucible of human struggle.”

And, that, I believe is the message of this day:  
that aside from the death-defying  
and sometimes death-denying rhetoric that goes along with Easter  
is the very human story of struggle.

The struggle to understand, to work through, to overcome.

All the while, without the benefit of certainty  
that things will work out well in the end.

Such is the cold, hard soil where the seeds of faith are sown.

Ann Lamott reminds us that:

“In Jesus' real life, the resurrection came two days later,  
but in our real lives, it can be weeks, years,  
and you never know for sure that it will come. . . .

“But,” she goes on to say,  
“I believe in the resurrection, in Jesus', and in ours.”

“The trees, so stark and gray last month,  
suddenly went up as if in flame,  
but instead in blossoms and leaves — poof!  
Like someone opening an umbrella.”

As a minister, it has been my privilege  
to see the same happen to people around me.

Poof! People in full-bloom,  
suddenly aware of their purpose,  
relentlessly dedicated to the true work of their lives.

It's what the great Howard Thurman described when he said:  
"Don't ask what the world needs.  
Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it.  
Because what the world needs is people who have come alive."

And, indeed, it does.

Now, I realise that the task of preaching on Easter  
is to proclaim the wonder of life overcoming death  
and to trumpet the triumph of hope over despair.

I've talked about winter a great deal,  
but in doing so, I've told you everything I know of Easter.

That the turning point when transformation takes hold  
comes in the moment of our deepest despair.

That, even amid life's suffering and its pain,  
we must look for what makes us truly come alive.

And that our Unitarian faith has a saving message  
that we are called to proclaim with our very lives:

that we believe in resurrection,  
but as something that does happen,  
not just something that did,

that we believe that hope overcomes despair,

that peace overcomes injustice,

and that love overcomes the divisions of a hurting world.

But we also believe that for those things to be true,  
we each have a vital role to play.

Resurrection isn't something that passively happens to us,

but is something that we, with all of life, must work to make so.

As Max Coots put it:

“Unless we move the seasons of the self  
and spring can come in us,  
The winter will go on and on...  
And Easter will remain a myth,  
And life will never come again,  
Despite the fact of spring.”<sup>5</sup>

Friends, we are called to share in the work of Easter,  
to make manifest its promise, for ourselves, and for all.

This idea is captured for me so beautifully in the poem  
“Being the Resurrection” by my teacher Victoria Weinstein<sup>6</sup>:

The stone has got to be rolled back from the tomb  
again and again every year.

Roll up your sleeves.  
He is not coming back, you know.  
He is not coming back unless it is we who rise for him  
We who lay healing hands on the reviled and rejected . . .  
We who rage for righteousness in his insistent voice  
We who love the sinner, even knowing that "the sinner"  
is no farther off than our own heartbeat  
He will not be back to join us at the table  
To share God's extravagant banquet  
God's love feast, [where] all are invited, come as you are  
And so it is you and I who must feast for him  
Must say the grace and break the bread and pass it to the left  
and dish up the broiled fish (or pour the wine)  
and pass it to the right.

And treat each one so tenderly  
as though just this morning she or he made the personal effort  
to make it back from heaven, or from hell

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<sup>5</sup> Max Coots, UUA Hymnal, *Singing the Living Tradition*, #627.

<sup>6</sup> Victoria Weinstein, “Being the Resurrection,” UUA Worship Web.

but certainly from death  
to be by our side.

Because if by some miracle (and why not a miracle?)  
He did come back  
Wouldn't he want to see us like this?  
Wouldn't it be a miracle to live for just one day  
So that if he did, by some amazing feat  
come riding into town  
He could take a look around and say  
"This is what I meant!"  
And we could say  
it took us a long time...  
but we finally figured it out.  
Oh, let us live to make it so.  
[For we] are the resurrection and the life.

Friends, let us pass on this good news,  
as though the world depends on it, because it surely does. Amen.