

Easter Reflection
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It happens every time. On the first Sunday of the month, we hold an informal session in the Parish Hall called “One Hundred Questions”. I lay out the table of contents of a book called “One Hundred Questions that Non-Members Ask about Unitarian Universalism”. As visitors and new members gather, I invite them to look over the list to spark their own thinking about our church. What do they want to know about this community and this faith tradition? The questions are as diverse as the people who attend these introductory sessions. However, without fail, someone will ask, “Are Unitarian Universalists Christian?”

Today is Easter Sunday, the most important holiday of the Christian calendar. There were times when Christmas was outlawed as a pagan celebration, not essential to the practice of the Christian faith. However, Easter remains a central observance, a holy time, a holy-day in churches around the globe. Why? Easter Sunday celebrates Jesus resurrection from the dead. Three days after authorities captured, tortured and killed him on a cross, Jesus body was laid to rest in a tomb. On this day, it is said that he rose from the dead. Mary Magdalene and other women went to anoint his body only to find an empty tomb. The Gospel writers also tell us that he appeared to the disciples who were to carry on his teachings.

So, are Unitarian Universalists Christians? One answer is that churches do not have beliefs, people do. I know that some of you are Christian. You hold a faith in Jesus as Savior and find inspiration in your relationship with a personal God. I know that some of you do not consider yourself Christian but draw inspiration from the teachings of other prophetic men and women or follow different spiritual paths.

The foundation of this church is liberal Christian. William Ellery Channing to whom our church is dedicated was the first to articulate Unitarian Christianity. In his famous sermon which helped established our religious movement in 1819, Channing said, “Jesus Christ is the only master of Christians, and whatever he taught, either during his personal ministry, or by his inspired Apostles, we regard as of divine authority, and profess to make the rule of our lives.”

Take a moment to look around this Sanctuary where we gather for worship each week and you will see the symbols of our Christian tradition. From the parable of the sower over the chancel to the lilies embossed in the ceiling, we are reminded of Jesus teachings—to sow the seeds of faith, to trust in God’s goodness like the lilies of the field that do not waste time worrying about appearance and yet are more beautiful than any wealthy person. The window over the font upholds the teachings of St. Paul: faith, hope, and charity (which is also translated as love), the greatest of these is charity. On the other side, we are reminded what Jesus called on his followers to do: welcome the stranger, give drink to the thirsty, and feed the hungry. All around us are life-affirming images,

not glorifying Jesus' sacrificial death but calling us to new life, a life motivated by truth, justice, and compassion.

Like many Unitarian Universalists, Thomas Jefferson had no tolerance for the supernatural. He made his own version of the New Testament by cutting out the miracles. Jefferson wanted to reveal the morals and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth without all the theological interpretations that clouded his image. The religion of Jesus instead of a religion about Jesus. Think about what a time consuming exercise this was in a time before copy machines or computers. Jefferson purchased multiple copies of the Bible and with a razor precisely cut and pasted the gems into another volume. He said that the actual words and actions of Jesus stood out like diamonds in a dung-heap. Scholars today do not think uncovering the historical Jesus is that straight-forward. In the Jefferson Bible, Jesus is born without mention of a miraculous birth. Jesus dies and is placed in a tomb without mention of a miraculous resurrection of his body.

What remains of Easter if you remove the miracles? We are left with a prophetic man whose ministry could not be eradicated. Whose teachings of radical love still challenge us to create a more just world. The natural world of which we are a part is miracle enough—that deserves celebration.

Why do we celebrate Easter if many of us do not hold Jesus Christ as our Savior? The root of salvation is salve, which means healing and wholeness. It is no accident that this holiday overlaps with pagan celebrations of spring. Just as the Earth bursts forth with new life, our spirits lift with renewed hope. At a time of year when the ancients honored fertility with the birth of new lambs, chicks, and rabbits, our bodies also have spring fever. We yearn to cast off our winter layers to feel the fresh air on our faces and the moist earth in our hands.

The gift of Easter is the creative power that exists within each one of us to rise up from the pain and challenges of living to experience joy, peace, and love.