

“Practice Resurrection”

Easter 2008
Unity Church

Easter isn't easy for us. Not only is the weather always iffy, but also our spiritual ancestors rejected the idea of the bodily resurrection in the 16th century. Each year Janne and I, engage in a now ritualized, knock down drag out fight over the essential meaning of the holiday. While I like to wallow in it, to grab hold of the old strong story of the cross and the tomb and the glory, Janne prefers to use Easter as an opportunity both to celebrate the equinox and to place the story in the timeless archetypal pattern of divine sacrifice as a necessary moment in the turning of the year. I'm well aware that painted eggs and rabbits echo Isis and Osiris, or Astarte; even Persephone with her pomegranate seeds all holy images of fertility and sacrifice. And Janne is fully aware of the centrality of the ministry of Jesus in Western consciousness. So, this year I've decided that we ought to rise above the fray and celebrate it all.

The great American poet, Hilda Doolittle or H.D. was able to point to the unity of the Easter impulse in her poem “The Mysteries Remain”

The mysteries remain,
I keep the same
cycle of seed-time
and of sun and rain;
Demeter in the grass,
I multiply,
renew and bless
Bacchus in the vine;
I hold the law,
I keep the mysteries true,
the first of these to name the living, dead;
I am red wine and bread.

*I keep the law,
I hold the mysteries true,
I am the vine,
the branches, you
and you.*

The mysteries do, in fact, remain. In spite of all the damage done, in spite of the many ways that you and I betray the earth and one another, new hope

comes to us and so we rise to try to bless the world again. As Albert Camus wrote, “In the depths of winter I finally learned that there was in me an invincible summer.”

Here is Camus, an existentialist, an atheist, a person devoted to telling the unvarnished truth, finding in the depths of despair, not the temporary relief that cynicism brings but instead an invincible promise. Cynicism, that great sin we liberals are prone to is no more than a way to protect ourselves from life’s resurgent power. It indicates minds without soul. The kind of spiritual buoyancy exhibited by Camus has little or nothing to do with hard evidence. Seamus Heaney writes, “History says, Don’t hope on this side of the grave,” but as fine a teacher as history can be there is something deep inside us, call it God or love or light, something deep inside that is trying to teach us a different and far larger lesson. As Luke tells it: *While they (the women who went to the tomb to tend to the body) were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel; and as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, “Why do you seek the living among the dead?”*

History asks, what really happened? Did he really live? What did he really do? How did he actually die? Faith asks instead, what can we learn from the story? How shall we live our lives? What should we do differently in light of the story? How might we live more hopeful, more useful and more loving lives?

I think the story is about hope. I think it is about a man who died as an individual and rose again as a community. I think the story shows us how to transform suffering into love. It points to the line of the prophets, to the lineage of righteousness and vision. It points to Amos who abhorred our solemn assemblies. It points to Isaiah and Jeremiah. It points to Jesus and Muhammad. And yes it point to that other Jeremiah, the prophetic voice down in Chicago who serves as minister emeritus of the great Trinity United Church of Christ on Chicago’s Southside. I have to say this morning that Jeremiah Wright does stand in the line of the prophets. Don’t tell me he should not have spoken out when he did. The prophet’s obligation is not to condemn the enemy outside the gates but to call us to account for the enemies we harbor within. His rage in the face of injustice is a prophetic response to the continuing racial nightmare here in America. And I don’t know about you but I want my president to be someone who is able to stand in the presence of prophetic rage, to listen carefully to the voices of indignation and then to turn that rage into positive action in the world.

One need not believe in a literal bodily resurrection to see how the ministry of Jesus takes root, first in the lives of his disciples and then in the full flowering the flows directly from the cross. One need not call oneself a

Christian to be inspired by this old strong story. Nor are its lessons limited to those who claim the name.

So let the Easter message in. Let your hearts be full this great, glad snowy day. Recall the words of the great Unitarian poet e.e.cummings

“I thank you god for most this amazing day:

for the leaping greenly spirits of trees

and a blue true dream of sky;

and for everything which is natural which is infinite which is yes (I who have died am alive again today, and this is the sun’s birthday; this is the birth day of life and of love and wings...(now the ears of my ears awake and now the eyes of my eyes are opened)

Then chase the scourge of cynicism from this place. We can’t afford the luxury of cynicism here. Make a new beginning. Practice resurrection.