

Easter is my favorite Christian holiday. For some it is Christmas, But for me it is Easter

Perhaps it comes from my all too lived sense of my own imperfection. I know each day I wake up I will mess up each and every day. You ever have one of those days -

You know you burn the toast, You forgot to do the wash, worse you forget and leave in the washer -you can't find two shoes from the same pair, and you forgot to charge the phone and it goes dead, all before you get to the work of the day! I've developed a little thing I say to myself.

So as I drive away from my house and check my rear view mirror and see the travel coffee mug flying off the back of my car I say to myself -"Well if that is the worst thing I do today this is going to be a great day."

It's why I like Easter. It is the Christian, theological existential cosmic do-over. We all get a second chance. I don't know about you but for me - getting a do-over - I just feel myself start to breathe a little deeper and slower. I don't have to make it all perfect. There are do-overs! And I know that other faiths also allow the do-over, but for me there is a power in this story from the followers of Jesus.

I also like Easter because even though it is at the core of Christian it is one of the most paganized of Christian holidays. I really have to giggle at Christians who insist on have a pure faith and then hide easter eggs and have bunnies as Easter decoration. The word Easter comes from the Northern European pagan celebration of Ostara. Northern Europeans celebrated her as the goddess of spring, of rebirth.

"*Ostara, Eástre* seems ... to have been the divinity of the radiant dawn, of up springing light, a spectacle that brings joy and blessing, whose meaning could be easily adapted by the resurrection-day of the christian's God. *Bonfires* were lighted at Easter and according to popular belief of long standing, the moment the sun rises on Easter Sunday morning, she gives *three joyful leaps*, she dances for joy ... Maidens clothed in white, who at Easter, at the season of returning spring, show themselves in clefts of the rock and on mountains, are suggestive of the ancient goddess.

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oestre#cite_note-GRIMM291-10)

So evidently the Easter dress is part of a very long tradition as are bunnies and eggs, None of them Christian in their origin.

It speaks to the power of this message of Easter, that of new life and a second chance, that it can pull in powerful imagery and words from other religions and still be its own holiday.

It is highly possible that Easter held its own because it had the Roman Empire to protect it. But I would like to believe that it is more than that.

I chose the reading from Mark this morning very carefully. The section that was read is the original ending. Mark is the earliest written of the four christian gospels - the stories of Jesus teachings. In this earliest story of the ending of Jesus' life there is no clear telling of him being seen again. The question is not answered.

"Morna D. Hooker writes "Mark insists that we must finish the story for ourselves." (*New Proclamation Commentary on the Gospels*). (Kate Huey Weekly Seeds April 8 2012 [uuc.org](http://www.uuc.org)) [http://www.ucc.org/feed-your-spirit_weekly-seeds_now-what]

This is the element of surprise in Mark's gospel. He leaves the end untold. He does not tell us what the surprise is - The surprise is ours to find.

I find the original ending of Mark's gospel so compelling. It ends with the empty tomb. There was no sighting of the risen Jesus. No one has seen or touched him. There was only the hope that he had risen, not the promise fulfilled.

James Tabor writes

"Since Mark is our earliest Gospel, written according to most scholars around the time of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 CE, or perhaps in the decade before, we have strong textual evidence that the *first generation of Jesus followers* were perfectly fine with a Gospel account that recounted *no appearances of Jesus*. We have to assume that the author of Mark's Gospel did not consider his account deficient in the least and he was either passing on, or faithfully promoting, what he considered to be the authentic Gospel. What most Christians do when they think about Easter is ignore Mark. " [<http://jamestabor.com/2012/08/25/the-strange-ending-of-the-gospel-of-mark-and-why-it-makes-all-the-difference/>] They ignore him because he leaves us with questions not answers. It seems to me that this ending of Mark's is more UU than most folks would like to admit.

I find this compelling because today in conversations with folks I often get the question do you really believe in the actual physical resurrection. Seemingly our world

of faith has been polarized into two camps on this issue - those who would believe that the bible is a written history true in every word, and those who cannot believe the phooey of the miracle stories, that fly in the face of our Western 21st century science.

There seems to be no middle ground. And yet that is where I want to be. I want to live in the surprise of Easter. Imagine what it would have been like to be the women who came to the tomb. They were not coming expecting to see something spectacular. Their hearts were heavy. A very dear friend and leader of theirs had died. And they were coming as early as possible, perhaps to avoid the soldiers because they too might get arrested. They were coming to do their chore, the thing that women were expected to do. They were coming to prepare a dead body. A body that had belonged to someone they loved and revered, but a dead body none the less. I don't know if it was normally a heavy burden for these women but I would think on that day it was. They were scared, they knew the soldiers would be watching. They had to be careful. And most of all they were alone. And they would need help moving that heavy stone. They were really worried about that stone.

Would your reactions include - Joy and exhalation in the resurrection of the person you love. I think not. For most of us almost all of the time death is a very final thing in terms of living here on this earth.

And I suspect that it was not that different for these women. Fear, confusion, anger. But no immediate joy.

Marks leaves the answer to us - What happened and what does it mean?

I cannot answer Mark's question for you but I can tell you about the answer I have shaped for myself:

Rev. Wendy Fitting wrote

"The resurrection represents the living presence of Jesus, an ongoing and unsealed revelation of God's compelling love. He is risen indeed, not to a sedentary throne in heaven, but into my life and alive everywhere that evil is persistently resisted and everywhere that a revolution for goodness is thoughtfully engaged. According to biblical scholar John Dominic Crossan, Jesus was a peasant, a revolutionary whose message was one of radical inclusiveness." (Wendy Fitting UU world 11/9/09)

Or I would say the truth of the story of the resurrection is that the sacred, by whatever name you call it, has an ongoing, alive and engaged presence and love in our lives and in the life of this earth. The sacred is most present most felt in those times and places where evil is persistently resisted and everywhere that a revolution for goodness is thoughtfully engaged. The story of Easter is not really about bunnies or flowers or even about how we are all saved it is a revolutionary message of radical inclusiveness.

I don't know what the resurrection meant to Jesus disciples, and I don't know what the women at the tomb felt or experienced when they got to the empty tomb. I wasn't there. I can only imagine what I might feel in that situation.

I was speaking with a young women a while ago. She was facing one of those adult decisions, college was ending, and she was unsure. Actually she was more than unsure she was panicked. Emotionally she was doing what cornered animals were doing - thrashing about. She was frightened, fearful, what if her b/f didn't hang around, what if she couldn't find a job, should she go to grad school, what if she had to move back home. She was frightened - where were the promises, where was her safety net. What was going to hold her up.

There wasn't a darn thing I could do for her, really. I could listen. I could tell her it would be OK. I could say that in 20 years this will just be one blip. But I couldn't take her fear away, I wouldn't take her fear away. She was afraid of the unknown of the surprises that might be ahead. Surprises can bring on fear not always joy.

There is the leap of faith that the sacred calls us to. It was calling her. And if it is truly going to be a leap of faith you cannot leap thinking Oh I know it will be OK I know that I will be safe. God will hold me, or God will give me wings. It is a truth in life that first you leap and then you get wings. and in between those two movements is a fear that sucks the breath out of you and leaves you flying through your existence with a panic that will keep you up for hours on end. In my theology the humanness of Jesus could not believe or understand that he would be made new, no matter how much careful listening and talking his godly nature did. Jesus took that leap of faith. And I believe he took it with no guarantees.

New life is a little scary to me. Make me new? I like myself I've worked hard to see the beauty in my imperfections. Be made new? I don't want to have to get to know someone new. What if all the rules change, what if I don't know what to do, Like the

young woman I was talking to it leaves me in a panic. I thrash about - reach out to my go to comforts, too much coffee and pedantic Tv.

Marks gospel does not do much in the way of offering clear assurances

Mark's narrative as we have it now ends as abruptly as it began. There was no introduction or background to Jesus' arrival, and none for his departure. No one knew where he came from; no one knows where he has gone; and not many understood him when he was here. (Richard A. Burridge, *Four Gospels, One Jesus? A Symbolic Reading* (2nd ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 64-65.)

But still there is the gift of the do-ver, another chance. The promise that hope can come out of tragedy. Death is not the final answer. That is the gift.

But the surprise is this:

What Jesus is offering is an invitation to a relationship. Far from worshipping a king trapped in untouchable heavenly glory, this relationship is present and challenging.

Dorothee Sölle—"When He Came" by

He needs you
that's all there is to it
without you he's left hanging
goes up in dachau's smoke
is sugar and spice in the baker's hand

gets revalued in the next stock market crash

he's consumed and blown away

used up

without you.

help him

that's what faith is

he can't bring it about

his kingdom

couldn't then couldn't later can't now

not at any rate without you

and that is his irresistible appeal

So how could you think about this Jesus. What will it mean to you? How will it change you? You only get the second chance if you take it. And so I say take it. Live the resurrection each and every day. Be afraid of the leap, for it is scary. But do not be afraid of the wings they are your salvation.