

It's the moment

of the first "I love you" before the response
of the "I'm sorry" before the "I forgive you"

It is the moment

when you let go of the bike but the child has not yet started pedaling
in the chrysalis just after dissolution but before the first wing bud

It's the moment

between "send" and "new message"
of being on the threshold - neither in nor out

It's the moment

between the last push and the first cry
between the jump and the growing of wings

It's the moment

between the rolling away of the stone and the stepping into the light

So I am going to tell you a not so well kept UU ministers secret Easter is a tough Sunday to preach. This is the Christian Holiday to end all holidays and it always, always falls on a Sunday, unlike Christmas. So as a UU preacher at some level you have to deal with it. We have folks here who count themselves as Christians and would like a pretty full on UU-Christian Easter service, we have folks who don't like Easter, have been hurt by Easter and the trappings of traditional Christianity that surround Easter, we have folks who have a different belief system and for whom Easter is simply a non-starter. When it is Easter and you are a UU minister it is a hard audience.

So I'm going to throw caution to wind here and tell you something that I have known for a while but have felt too **tentative** to share

WE. ARE. AN. EASTER. PEOPLE.

If any of you want to leave at this point I will totally understand but if you can just hang in here with me I might go somewhere you don't expect.

I want you to set aside anything you were taught about Easter as a child, or anything you have learned about it as an adult. Put aside images of suffering, or the crucifixion, of triumphalism - put aside ideas of redemptive

suffering, substitutionary atonement, original sin, predestination.

Think about the story of Jesus death and resurrection as a parable. Perhaps my Christian minister colleagues would balk at that sentence. But I do truly believe that myth is what holds a truth too large for history to hold. To say that the Easter story is a parable is not to take it too lightly but rather to take it as seriously as it should be taken.

WE. ARE. AN. EASTER. PEOPLE. -

For me Easter is not some triumphalist event where death is vanquished. For me that is an anxiety-based interpretation. Most humans are anxious about death at some level. To interpret the meaning of this story to "We don't really die" just doesn't do it for me.

But ... this parable is about transformation - Jesus, his followers, the world are transformed. When does transformation happen? Not on the cross, not in the garden outside the tomb, but in the tomb, a safe dark dry place a place of the in between - in the liminal space. Liminal comes from the Latin word limin (LEEMEN) meaning threshold. A threshold is in between isn't it? You come to a doorway and a threshold marks the separation between in and out. When you stand on the threshold you are neither in nor out or you are both or maybe neither. You can go back if you need to you can go forward.

Going through a doorway is usually not too risky but what about other liminal moments -

You give up a partner or friend because you know deep in your soul they are not longer good for you, but there is not yet the promise of another friend or partner. You give up your job - or it is given up for you - and there is not promise of another job - The Quakers say "Way closes" but that does not necessarily mean "Way will open" You say you are sorry - and it hangs in the air like a trapeze artist in mid-flight - will the "I forgive you come along?" these liminal moments, these in between moments always, always involve risk. Risk that can take your breath away, keep you up at night make your heart feel like it has stopped.

But what this parable tells us is that the transformation happens in the in

between. I talked to our children this morning about caterpillars, chrysalis and butterflies. Here is yet another powerful parable of transformation. Not metaphor because the transformation is real but there is a truth hidden in the course of the butterflies' transformation that is powerful.

Caterpillars that turn into butterflies do not spin cocoons they create a chrysalis a safe dark dry enclosure where they can make their transformation in peace. It's easy to think of a chrysalis as something a caterpillar makes, like a cocoon, but this isn't really true. The body that the caterpillar reveals when it sheds its skin for the last time is the chrysalis. Along with the ability to occasionally twitch in response to threats, this shell is what protects the caterpillar while it transforms.

And here is a detail that I love. The Chrysalis starts out as a soft outer skin. With time, patience and waiting it becomes the hard shell that the caterpillar needs to become the butterfly.

The caterpillar contains within itself the chrysalis it has within itself that in-between spot where transformation will happen.

I talked with the children about the change inside of the chrysalis. It's messy and uncertain. I don't know about you but when I am going to undertake a process that I know will lead to change I want a plan. When I went to seminary I knew it would be life changing and I planned - I knew what courses I would take each year. I had a young child I would divide my homework into that which could be done around the baby and this which had to wait until she was asleep. But butterflies? They have to be a soupy mess before the caterpillar can be a butterfly.

That's a pretty good description of what it takes for personal transformation. It's messy; there are no promises in the middle of the process. While you are transforming you might not feel like you are ready

for prime time - you might want some away time - time to get the legs and the wings just right

We UUs are an Easter people because we know what it means to be in between. When asked what we believe we often say things like well we don't necessarily believe in God, or we don't believe in a creed, or we don't believe in the Pope, we don't really have a Sabbath, we don't really pray, we don't - fill it in I am sure you can. We often say it this way because when you are the people who are on the threshold who are in between it can feel like your definition is just a negative space, defined by what is around it. This is a self-identity by exclusion and it leaves us wanting more and being less than we can be.

Let us define ourselves proactively.

What do we believe? We believe in the in-between. We believe that first you leap and then you grow wings. We believe that in the in-between there is a chance to build bridges. We believe that by building bridges we can be the people who can affect change. We believe we are the bridge builders. We believe that transformation is possible when you celebrate the in-between, learn to love it, don't rush for clearness too soon. When we love ourselves where we are, when we love others where they are then we create safe warm spaces where the messy work of transformation can happen.

This is the Liberation we offer the world and this is what makes us an Easter people.