

Unitarian Universalist Church of Wakefield
Easter Sunday, April 4, 2010

FIRST READING **Greta W. Crosby**

Creator of the earth's merry-go-round of times and seasons

(wheeling day and night—

Birth, growth, fulfillment, descent to rest)

And of the seasons of the human heart,

We would enter into awareness of the inward world shared by our deepest selves,

Be with us as we welcome, each in our own way, this high season

Spring for awakening,

Passover for freedom,

Easter for hope against hope—

All for love.¹

SECOND READING **Barbara Pescan**

Gloria!

The tenacity of Earth and its creatures.

Kyrie eleison

These children who will go on to save what we cannot.

Baruch ata Adonai

The ordinary tenacity of plans and of people.

OM

The center of the universe which is everywhere, not the least place in the human heart.

Alleluia

Love that survives anger, and winter, and despair, and sorrow, and even death.

Shalom

Love that persists.

Nam myo-ho rengo kyo

Calm that is the seed in the dark.

Amen

For endings that are beginnings, for beginnings that are endings.

¹ Seaburg, Carl and Mark Harris (2000). *Celebrating Easter and Spring*. Cambridge, MA: Anne Miniver Press, 14-15.

Alleluia

For the circle, the spiral, the web, the egg, the orbit, the center, the seed, the flower, the fruit, the opening, the death, the release, the seed.

Amen

We are going on.

Amen

It is going on.

Amen

Blessed be.

MEDITATION/PRAYER

Richard S. Gilbert

Please join me in the spirit of meditation.

A tomb is no place to stay

Be it a cave in the Judean hills

Or a dark cavern of the spirit.

A tomb is no place to stay

When fresh grass rolls away the stone of winter cold

And valiant flowers burst their way to warmth and light.

A tomb is no place to stay

When each morning announces our reprieve,

And we know we are granted yet another day of living.

A tomb is no place to stay

When life laughs a welcome

To hearts which have been away too long.²

THIRD READING “Life Again” John Banister Taub

Out of the dusk a shadow,

Then a spark.

Out of a cloud a silence,

Then a lark.

Out of the heart a rapture,

Then a pain.

Out of the dead, cold ashes,

Life again.

² Ibid., 97.

HOMILY “Alleluia—We Look Forward”
Easter 2010
Reverend Maddie Sifantus

We sing “Lo, the Day of Days is Here” and today we really mean it, after the recent rains and floods. The sun is out, basements and byways are drying up—except in Wayland where I live, but even then we can hope—and we sing Alleluia! We are looking forward. We are looking forward to the longer days, warmer days like this one, working in our gardens, walking around Lake Quonnapowitt, being outdoors, and in “fields...smiling in the sun.” We look forward to the bright green blades of grass, the buds and flowers, and the birds returning to nest in our yards, as one did to mine this week, trying to make a nest in my Christmas wreath which I have to admit I hadn’t gotten around to taking down. It’s down now. Alleluia! Time to look forward.

William Channing Gannett, who, as you remember, wrote the words to our opening hymn this morning, also wrote these words in the familiar hymn, “The Morning Hangs a Signal”:

The soul hath lifted moments
Above the drift of days,
When life’s great meaning breaketh
In sunrise on our ways.
Behold the radiant token of faith above all fear.
Night shall release its splendor that morning shall appear.³

This morning we sing Alleluia and our souls do lift for these moments above our drift of days. On days like this, we feel that the night is over, that a new morning does appear, and we look forward to the coming days. We say to ourselves, as Barbara Pescan said in our reading, “we are going on...it is going on.” We know in our very bones that “the tomb is no place to stay” (Gilbert) and that “out of the dead cold ashes, life comes again” (Taub). Life comes again. We just can’t help feeling lifted up when the sun is shining on us, even though some of those dead cold ashes still cling to us...the ashes of living. From moments of despair, hope...from the barrenness of loss to new life, new beginnings, even when we don’t know where the surprise of new growth may be, even when the losses are so great, we don’t even dare to think that we could hope. This is our resurrection—from death to life. We look forward.

So we all know about resurrection—that coming back to life after a great loss, whether of a beloved family pet as in our story this morning, a treasured family member or friend, or a recovery from a significant injury or illness...until such time when it is our time to leave this

³ SLT 40.

earthy plain. As my colleague Earl Holt says, “resurrection is real for all people—Christian or not—or it is real for none.”⁴

This is the day of Alleluia. This is the day that those Christian among us and in the larger world celebrate a particular story of resurrection, according to the ancient stories—the stories as told in the gospels of the New Testament. Each of those gospels came out of a different early Christian community which had grown up after the death of Jesus, each trying to understand who this man was and his teachings of a new commandment. All of these communities—those of Mark, Matthew, Luke and John, along with the communities described by the letters of the Apostle Paul—had a different take on what had happened. They had a slightly different answer to Jesus’ question to the disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” Sometime you might like to sit down and read the Easter narrative from each of these perspectives and see how different they are from each other. Who do you say that Jesus was? But all of these accounts have at least one thing in common—Jesus dies, just as all humans do—just as all living things do on this earth. But a second thing they have in common is that these communities tell this story by looking forward. They took what happened at the hand of the Romans and Pontius Pilate and found hope and new life where otherwise there might have been only despair. This Jesus of Nazareth died a horrible death on a cross, betrayed by some of those closest to him, but his hope and dreams lived on in those who experienced his teachings. His teachings, his hopes and dreams for a new world order, lived on in the communities that grew after he died, gathering from amongst the Jews such as the Markan community to the those influenced heavily by the Greeks, such as the Lukan community. Each community takes this death of a human being and expresses it in a different way. But ultimately, they look forward and life wins. Alleluia. His teachings last even to this day and life still wins. Alleluia.

This means that the possibility for transformation and renewal exists, even after the dark night of the soul, even through the worst of all circumstances, even when it seems that there is no way out. Just when it seems that spring will never come, the light begins to last longer, and the first snowdrops and crocuses push through the debris and remains of last year’s life. We look around us—and inside ourselves—and know that many have lost what might be most important in their lives—a person, a job, their mobility, their trust in an important friend or family member, or even their faith community. But we also see the ways in which they—and we—can move

⁴ Seaburg, 78.

forward, one step after another, living into the possibility that there can be new life, transcending the spiral into despair. Just as when Jesus died, after a terrible mourning by those closest to him, his death turned out not to be the end but another beginning. His ideas were carried forward by those who experienced his ministry and teachings. Because of what he said and did so long ago and what those around him said and did, we can experience his ideas as still lively in our world. Because of his confronting of oppression with love, he confronted the enslavement that hatred brings. This is the resurrection that brings justice and a new sense of dignity and worth. This love, coupled with a wide concept of what it means to be free, necessitates for us a path of standing with those less fortunate than ourselves, of confronting bullying when we see it, standing up to hate crimes, and walking with all those who need a companion on their way forward. We need to make it our business that life wins. We forgive ourselves and those around us and look forward. We find new ways of feeling grateful for all that life does give us, even the smallest sprig of green or the smile of a stranger who passes us on the sidewalk.

New life can come again. We do have the power to overcome our most serious losses, failures and humiliations. Jesus' message of love can live in us. There can be new life of the spirit. Let us make it a reality. Alleluia.

Blessed be.