

Unitarian Society of Hartford  
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## **Easter - A Spring Hilaritas**

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(An Intergenerational Service)

### **Children's Story:**

Today, Easter, is the time we remember extraordinary things about Jesus. For me, the most extraordinary thing about Jesus was how, day by day, For his whole life he taught people how to love each other. He taught them about developing compassion—noticing when other people are sad or hurt and offering to listen or to help. And he taught them about demonstrating passion for things they believed in.

Last week I told you about Palm Sunday as the day Christians celebrate Jesus going into Jerusalem, even though he knew he would be in danger there. I said that he went because staying alive was not as important to him as doing the next right thing. Today I want to tell you WHY he thought it was a right thing to go to Jerusalem on that very day.

On first glance it does not seem very smart to go someplace where the authorities want to kill you, and it seems really not smart to call attention to your arrival by letting people make a big parade and cheer and wave palm branches. But....Jesus did it on purpose on that very day.

The Romans were in charge of Jerusalem. They ruled over the Jewish people there, and treated them badly. The Jewish people wanted the Romans to go away and let them be free.

On that day, the Roman governor processed into Jerusalem, marching in a whole bunch of extra soldiers, because it was a Jewish holiday, and the Romans were afraid that the Jews might revolt and start to fight back. The Romans wanted the Jews to remember that THEY were in charge of things. And THAT was the day, on the other side of town, that Jesus processed into Jerusalem with a whole bunch of people waving palm branches and cheering. Jesus wanted the Romans and Jews to remember that GOD was in charge of things.

You see, Jesus was staging a demonstration, a nonviolent protest against an unfair government by processing in at the same time as the Roman leader was processing in.

Jesus wanted people to be free, to worship as they liked, and not to have to fight in order to have good jobs and a good future in their own country.

Lots of people remember that Jesus taught about love, as kindness, and compassion. Not so many people know that Jesus also taught about love as protest and passion for causes of justice.

Love is about compassion and kindness,  
and love is about passion for peace and for freedom.

Last week was the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our country having soldiers fighting in Iraq. It's important for us to remember to have compassion for people who have suffered and died, and to remember to have passion for peace. We don't know the right or the wrong way to take care of the fighting of war, but we know we feel sad for people who suffer and we passionately wish that there would be peace on Earth.

So, we're going to light our memorial candle, which we light in church when somebody we know dies, and we're going to be quiet for one minute, as a prayer of compassion for all who suffer during war and as a silent and nonviolent demonstration of our passionate wish for peace between all people.

Thank you for that respectful and still prayer and demonstration.

## **Sermon**

**Here it is.** The question upon which all religion is ultimately founded, upon which all truth claims and all plausibility structures are built. The question - Was Mr. Rogers real?

Many of you know who I mean. Rev Fred Rogers, who was on kids TV, who came in the house where we were waiting for him, took off his shoes and jacket, put on his other shoes and sweater with patches on the elbows, sat at the piano and sang to us... It's a beautiful day in the neighborhood, a beautiful day for a neighbor, would you be my .. could you be my ... please won't you be my neighbor?

Oh, THAT Mr. Rogers. The guy who had a train in the living room that would take you to visit king Friday and prince Tuesday at their castle. We know who Mr. Rogers was.

It's the other part of the question that's so hard. Was Mr. Rogers REAL? What does it mean to be real anyhow? Mr. Rogers was a guy on TV, an actor playing a man named Mr. Rogers, he also WAS Mr. Rogers... playing himself, on TV!

So...was that really his living room? And was he really playing the piano?  
Was the train ride to the castle real? Was Mr. Rogers real?

Toward the end of the story of the life and death of Jesus,  
the ruler Pilate asks him,  
“Are you real, really the son of God; really the King of the Jews?”  
What makes something real?

As religions evolve and religious sensibilities in us as persons evolve,  
we take certain truth claims as real, and we create plausibility structures, congregations,  
which support us in those beliefs.

Take 19<sup>th</sup> century Unitarianism for example, when theological realism held sway  
— that is, the understanding that theological claims  
describe the ‘reality’ of the world and history in the same way  
that the physical and social sciences describe reality.  
It was TRUE that Jonah was swallowed by a whale,  
and that Ganesh IS an elephant headed God.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century we turned from that emotion clouded truth,  
to the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the well reasoned truth of humanism,  
and for a time the main thing we talked about  
from our learned pulpits on Easter Sunday was how  
could anybody believe it was possible for someone  
to return from the dead.

It was impossible that the stone was rolled away.

Some churches began having our UU flower festival on Easter,  
a non-theistic ritual rooted in a thoroughly 20<sup>th</sup> century  
disenchantment with religious stories and rituals.  
We began having Sunday sermons with profound titles like  
“Upsy Daisy and other Easter truths.”  
Because we knew what was really true.

Today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we are turning again, to yet another truth,  
to a re-enchantment of the world,  
to some meaning..... beyond the realism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century  
and it's true facts, some..... meaning beyond the realism of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with  
its equally true....and opposite facts.

Meaning can halt the relentless march of realism and truth and facts,  
the march of the fundamentalists and literalists of both the theist  
and the humanist persuasion,  
each pounding out what they see as true and real.

An existentialist re-interpretation of theological beliefs  
shifts the question, from **is it true or real, to what does it mean?**

What does Easter, for example, mean for me,  
you, us, our country, our world, our web?

Easter describes something powerfully meaningful about the Universe,  
something beyond the literal truth claim that Jesus rose from the dead,  
something beyond the literal truth claim that Jesus did not  
rise from the dead.

Both beliefs are grave clothes that entomb our faith.  
And..... once we see that,  
we can embrace the **meaning** of Easter, and of **other** enchanting aspects  
of faith and religion, without fear . . of becoming tangled again in the grave clothes of  
emotion based superstition or in reason based superiority.

The stone is being rolled away in UUism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.  
We can now step beyond  
the mental or moral truth claims we've stubbornly clutched  
or vehemently disavowed.

Take Easter for example—a great festival,  
which celebrates death and life and love.

As persons, as a people of faith, as a great country, as a precious world,  
as an interdependent web,  
all of us walk the Via Dolorosa, we stumble, we climb onto our cross  
of the moment. We lose until we lose it all, and tumble into the tomb,  
where we find to our surprise that hibernation is healthy;  
sleep and rest restore us; that Gestation is essential;  
the chrysalis must be undisturbed as it prepares to become a butterfly;  
time in the tomb is time in the womb, and so.....  
in the fullness of time we rise from the tomb.

Made like him, like him we rise,  
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies.

Easter is the truest thing I know.  
It captures the meaning of our cycling lives.  
Spring does follow winter; light follows dark,  
and we find, season following season  
that like bunnies multiplying, there is more than we thought.

There is more here than the sum of our parts.  
There are eggs waiting all around us, to hatch new life.  
And, there are stones to be rolled away---  
which will be rolled away, as we develop compassion,  
and as we demonstrate passion.

If you were here last Easter, I invited you to join me in a ritual—  
to take home a stone from a basket here, to go to some high place,  
throw the stone out and away, and say aloud,  
“Behold I make all things new.”

I then suggested that in the days after that, you should watch to see who came out of the  
tomb, to watch in those places you felt the most broken for some new life to emerge.  
It would be so neat to hear what new things have emerged  
in your life in the past year—what Spring time has come.  
What has been made new in your life in the past year?

Lets do that stone ritual again, with a bit more intentionality.  
Think of a particular area of life where you are stuck,  
in the tomb, in winter,  
where the field of your heart seems winter dead and bare,  
where you wonder how anything could ever spring green there again.  
Think of that issue or concern where you yearn for renewal,  
as at the beginning.

The Ushers are going to pass around baskets, and I invite you all,  
young and old, to take one small stone.  
Then take your small stone, to some high place, throw it as far as you can into the air, and  
thinking about that particular thing, say,  
“Behold, I make all things new.”  
Then in future days, as that thing crosses your mind and heart,  
Say to yourself, “that is being made new.”  
And we’ll check back in, next Easter, and see what’s happened!

Dear ones, we can re-enchant the world, beginning  
on this blue sky Easter day, as we join our children  
in following the example of Jesus--practicing compassion,  
demonstrating passion, and engaging the day with the spirit of Hilaritas.

Amen.