

**United Unitarian Universalist Congregation**

**Sunday, April 4, 2021**

**Rev. David Kraemer, Mary Beth Danielson, Alex Chilsen, Michael Morrell**

**Gathering Music**

*Cotton Tale*, Alex Chilsen

**Welcome**

**Rev. David Kraemer**

Welcome to United Unitarian Universalist Congregation.

Today is Easter, the most mystical story in Christian tradition as Christ comes alive after death and promises eternal life to all. Often, we UUs are more naturalistic in our celebration. We speak of a return of life to the earth after a long, hard winter. We might mention Ostara, and the ancient roots of the holiday observed by people long before Jesus. This year, especially, we might think about emergence after a year of pandemic, making this Easter extra meaningful.

Today, Mary Beth Danielson and I will be a little more traditional in our service. We will reflect on the Christian story, and what it might offer for us as UUs in this time.

**Call to Worship**

*Holy is this Place*, Maureen Killoran

Blessed is this ground on which we stand. Holy is this place.

Holy are the places of memory,  
the places which have formed us,  
where we store the icons of success and shattered dreams  
and gather threads and pieces of what we would become.  
Holy are the places of memory.

Holy are the places of the dream,  
the places over the rainbow,  
where all children are wanted and all people are fed,  
where colors are the source of celebration  
and youth and age come to the table as one.  
Holy are the places of the dream.

Holy are the places of change and pain,  
the places of our struggle,  
where the rivers of our lives run wild and fast,  
and we hold on, hold on and grow.  
Holy are the places of change and pain.

Holy are the places of connection,  
the places where we risk our selves,  
where hands touch hands, touch souls, touch minds,  
and in awareness still, we change our lives.  
Holy are the places of connection.

Holy are the places of becoming,  
the places of clear vision,  
where life and world are intertwined  
and we can see forever in this moment  
and give thanks.  
Holy are the places of becoming

Blessed is the ground on which we stand.  
Holy — and whole-making— is this place.

### **Chalice Lighting**

*May this flame kindle within us the warmth of compassion, the glow of love, the fire of commitment,  
and the light of truth. Here together, we scatter and nurture seeds of spirit, service and community.*

### **Hymn**

#1000 *Morning Has Come*

**Time for All Ages**     excerpted from *The Velveteen Rabbit*, by Marjery Williams

There was once a velveteen rabbit. He was fat and bunchy, his coat was spotted brown and white, and his ears were lined with pink sateen. On Christmas morning, when he sat wedged in the top of the Boy's stocking, with a sprig of holly between his paws, the effect was charming.

For at least two hours the Boy loved him, and then, in the excitement of looking at all the new presents the Velveteen Rabbit was forgotten.

For a long time, he lived in the nursery. He was naturally shy, and some of the more expensive toys snubbed him.

The mechanical toys were very superior, and pretended they were real. The model boat caught the tone and referred to his rigging in technical terms. Even the jointed lion put on airs. The only person who was kind to him at all was the Skin Horse, who had lived longer in the nursery than any of the others.

"What is REAL?" the Rabbit asked the Skin Horse one day. "Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?"

"real isn't how you are made," said the Horse. "It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, you become Real. Generally. By the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and you get very shabby."

"I suppose you are Real?" said the Rabbit.

"The boy's uncle made me Real many years ago," said the Horse. "Once you are Real, it lasts for always."

The Rabbit sighed. He thought it would be a long time before this magic called Real happened to him.

One evening, when the Boy was going to bed, he couldn't find the china dog that always slept with him.

"Here," said Nana, who ruled the nursery. "Take your old Bunny. He will do."

That night and for many nights after, the Velveteen Rabbit slept in the Boy's bed.

The Rabbit grew to like it and when the Boy dropped off to sleep, the Rabbit would snuggle down under the Boy's warm chin and dream.

The little Rabbit was so happy that he never even noticed how his velveteen fur was getting shabbier and his tail coming unsewn, and all the pink rubbed off his nose where the Boy kissed him.

Spring came, and the Rabbit had rides in the wheelbarrow.

And picnics on the grass

And fairy huts built for him under the raspberry canes.

Once, when the Boy was called away suddenly, the Rabbit was left out on the lawn until long after dusk, and nana had to come and look for him because the Boy couldn't sleep unless he was there.

"Fancy all that fuss for a toy!" said nana.

The Boy sat up in bed. "He isn't a toy, he's REAL!"

When the little rabbit heard that, he was happy, for he knew that what the Skin Horse had said was true at last.

One summer evening, the Rabbit saw two strange beings creep out of the bracken. They were rabbits like himself, but quite furry and their seams didn't show at all.

"Can you hop on your hind legs?" asked one.

"I don't want to," said the little Rabbit.

The furry rabbit stretched out his legs and looked.

"He hasn't got any hind legs!" he called out. "And he doesn't smell right! He isn't a rabbit at all! He isn't real!"

I AM Real! The Boy said so!"

Just then there was a sound of footsteps and the two strange rabbits disappeared.

One day, the Boy was ill. His face grew very flushed, and his little body was so hot that it burned the Rabbit when he held him close. It was a long weary time. Then the fever turned and the

Boy got better. The doctor ordered that all the books and toys that the Boy had played with in bed must be burned.

And so the little Rabbit was carried out to the garden, and a great sadness came over him. Of what use was it to be loved and become Real if it all ended like this? And a tear, a real tear, trickled down his shabby velvet nose and fell to the ground.

And then a strange thing happened. For where the tear had fallen a flower grew. And out of it there stepped a fairy. She kissed the little Rabbit on his nose.

“I am the nursery magic Fairy,” she said. “I take care of all the playthings that children have loved. When they are old and worn out and the children don’t need them anymore, I come and take them, away with me and turn them into Real.”

“Wasn’t I Real before?” asked the little Rabbit.

“You were Real to the Boy,” said the Fairy, “because he loved you. Now you shall be Real to everyone.”

And she held the little Rabbit close in her arms and flew him into the woods.

In the open glade the wild rabbits danced with their shadows.

The Fairy kissed the little Rabbit again and put him down on the grass.

“Run and play, little Rabbit!” she said.

But the little Rabbit sat quite still.

He did not know that when the Fairy kissed him that last time, she had changed him altogether.

He might have sat there a long time if something hadn’t tickled his nose, and he lifted his hind leg to scratch it.

And he found that he actually had hind legs! Instead of dingy velveteen he had brown fur, soft and shiny, and his ears twitched by themselves,

Autumn passed and winter and in the spring the Boy went out to play in the woods. While he was playing, two rabbits crept out from the bracken and peeped at him.

One of them was golden brown but the other had strange markings under his fur, as though long ago he had been spotted. And about his soft little nose and round black eyes there was something familiar, so that the Boy thought to himself: “Why, he looks just like my old Bunny that was lost when I had scarlet fever.”

But he never knew that it really was his own Bunny, come back to look at the child who had first helped him to be Real.

## Hymn

#18 *What Wondrous Love is This*, verse 1

## Meditation and prayer

Rev. David Kraemer

What is it to be loved?

What is it to be real?

In this time of emergence, as green shoots pop up in gardens, and blue squill carpets yards

As the blackbirds become aggressive, guarding nests from would-be intruders, like me, who in truth, don't care, who are no threat at all, theirs a pointless aggression,

Like snapping your fingers to ward off tigers

Or the Gadsden Flag ...

In this emergence, from a year of caution, and loss,

As we begin to venture out, armed with vaccination cards, -- and masks, you should, still, wear one, --

There is a sense of hope in the nation

More oxygen in the room,

Less vitriol

Still the same problems

With health, and relationships, and politics, and making ends meet

Still a need to listen, and learn, and grow

And yet, we are making plans, looking ahead, thinking of visiting relatives we have not seen,  
or touched, in months

We are tasting the first delicious meal that someone else has cooked, as if we've never tasted  
food before

May Sarton writes of the "extreme delicacy of this Easter morning" which "Spoke to (her) as  
a prayer and as a warning."

"Somewhere and everywhere life spoke the word," she says.

"The dead trees woke; each bush held its bird.

"I prayed for delicate love and difficult,

"That all be gentle now and know no fault,  
That all be patient..."

"For on this Easter morning it would seem

"The softest footfall danger is, extreme. . ."

It feels like that now, in the hopefulness, that it still might break, that things might go bad if  
we step down too hard.

So be patient, she says. Take care. And pray for love.

May the holiness of this place of memory and dreams and time together in connection, guide  
us gently into the world.

May Easter remind us,

What it is to be loved.

What it is to be real.

## Joys and Sorrows

Each week, we share our Joys and Sorrows, milestones in our individual lives. It is a way for us to connect, to live together in community.

If you have a Joy or Sorrow to share, please send Rev. David a message, or call during office hours on Tuesday or Friday. We will share, with your permission, during this service and in the TUUsday email post, which is intended to help keep us together in this time.

Please join as Alex leads us in singing, "Walking with You."

## Sung Response

*Walking, walking with you. Walking with you is our prayer*

## Reflection

### *Easter Women*

**Mary Beth Danielson**

*ONE: This is how it started: This short passage is from Luke 8:2-3 and simply says some women became disciples. "Jesus traveled to cities and villages, preaching about the realm of God. The twelve disciples were with him, as well as some women disciples including Mary Magdalen, and Johanna the wife of the powerful household manager of Herod Antipas, and also Susanna."*

In conventional Protestant and Catholic Christian churches, these women are rarely mentioned. If they are mentioned, usually it's to show how even Jesus had ladies to raise money, make coffee, serve snacks, and collate the bulletins.

Yet according to scholars, several of these women were rich enough to financially support Jesus' ministry. In that place and time, these are women of some substance, who have chosen to follow a political and spiritual leader who has powerful enemies, some of those enemies within their own households - and he is making more enemies as he goes along. Jesus is neither a safe nor easy bet.

Why? Why are they following this Jesus character? As a Unitarian Universalist it's important to ask why spiritual leaders appeal to others. And to us. My answer comes from the experience of being a woman in our male-dominated and defined world.

In Jesus' company, among his followers, there is a place for women. They are not handmaidens or servants or support staff. Jesus is preaching a world upside down - and they feel



seen, heard, and valued. Here are people who want justice, light, a safe place for children, healing for those who are poor and sick. Here they find other women and men who want old poetry and new stories. Here is a leader who sees, acknowledges, and welcomes people of other cultures and ethnicities.

Something strong and new is going on here. This is a vision of spirituality lived out in the real and suffering world – and these women understand that in this community they are not afterthoughts. They are part of the team. They get to know and understand themselves by what they can give, not by what men want from them.

For three years Jesus and his disciples, male and female, will travel and preach a new realm that is geographical, political, and spiritual.

Political and religious power will respond - by killing Jesus. Johanna and Susannah and the Marys are there, then, too. They are the witnesses who stay with Jesus until he dies on that cross.

Can you imagine what that awful crucifixion feels like to them? They watch as this man whom they know and love dies. But part of them is dying, too. For a few years they had felt whole, awake, talented, and needed. They must have stayed up late at night talking and learning. They took care of each other's kids, cooked, then sat down to eat together. They shared so much, laughed, and gave and received. They probably entered new relationships with other men and women, some of them intimate and loving, where they were respected and trusted. They lived full lives ... and now they witness as Jesus is killed. They are definitely in political danger. But even more, who are they now? Where do they go? Where do they belong?

TWO: Then this happened: This is from Luke 24:10. "The first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb. They went into the tomb. There was no body there. Mary Magdalen, Mary Jesus' mom, Johanna, Susanna, were confused and surprised."

The next scenes are mystical and evocative, depending on which Gospel you read. There is an angel sitting on the rock that was supposed to close the tomb. There is a mysterious gardener. There is a presence in this place that will be understood as Jesus himself, come back from death to talk a little more with his disciples, both women and men.

Some say the problem with the Gospels is that they vary so much in these account that there is no cohesive truth.

I'd say the stories are proof something DID happen. Because, as we know 21 centuries later – that first Jesus community didn't dissolve. They kept talking. They kept feeding each other, watching out for the children, preaching to people what Jesus had preached to them. Those women took care of their own. They reached outward. Over the centuries those Jesus following women would invent cloisters, convents, missions, hospitals, colleges, and yes, ladies' aids.

Because once women know what it feels like to be seen, to be valued, to lead and invent and support and preach and prophesy - they don't go back.

Those first women are still among us now.

## **Hymn**

#18 *What Wondrous Love is This*, verse 3

## **Reflection**

Paradigm Shift

**Rev. David Kraemer**

The Easter story I want to reflect on comes also from the book of Luke, Chapter 24, Verses 13-35. It happens a little later in the day, as two of the disciples are on the road to a town called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. As they walk, a third person comes up and asks what they are talking about, seemingly unaware that that anything big had gone down, apparently not tuned in the Twitter feed.

The person is Jesus, of course, but the disciples don't recognize him, until much later, when they invite him to stay the night, and he "took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight."

In the conversation that follows, they ask themselves "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" They see in perfect hindsight that what was true about Jesus' teaching while he was alive is still true now, after his crucifixion.

This story is sometimes known as the “Journey of All Believers.” It is seen in traditional Christian context as the opening of your eyes to the risen Christ.

I have a somewhat different take on this, as you might guess. But before I dig into this story, I want to go back about six centuries to the prophet Ezekiel, who, you know, saw the wheel, way up in the middle of the air, not really a wheel at all but a kind of flying contraption festooned with four faces, and living creatures inside, and spinning things, and eyeballs all around. Makes you wonder what Ezekiel was smoking.

If you let go of a literal read of this story, there are all kinds of metaphors you could grab on to here. The way I like to think of this is to remember that Ezekiel is writing in the time of exile, when the Israelites have been displaced to Babylon. Before this time, the Temple in Jerusalem was hugely important to them because that is where you went to find God. The God of the Israelites, you might remember, was originally located in the Arc of the Covenant, which later came to be placed in the Holy of Holies inside the Temple. If you were an Israelite at the time, there was no other place to go to get in touch with what mattered most.

Which meant that, in exile, you were toast. No way could you get to the Temple. Kind of like how, in a much more minor way, we have been separated from our sense of community, often located in this building, since the pandemic.

But in the wheel, which Ezekiel sees, God gets Godself up out of the box, climbs into the flying thing, and jets out of the Temple into the hills. Pretty cool. And if you are an Israelite, for the first time you can see, OMG, God can Move!

Once again, let go of the literal translation, and suddenly, God becomes available, even in exile, Which is hugely important because it allows the Israelites to hang on to their self-identity, even in dehumanizing imprisonment. This is not so much a story about strange visions and a magical machine as it is about thinking differently in a way that lets you hold on to your deepest beliefs, even in the midst of disaster.

So back to the Road to Emmaus, the disciples in this story, like the Israelites, have suffered a shattering defeat. They were looking for a Messiah, who, in the understanding of the time, would triumph over their oppressors and lead them into a better time. Instead of that, not only did their

candidate lose the election, he was brutally tortured and killed, in full public display, in a horrific display of political power.

Then on the road, Jesus comes to them, and they don't recognize him. Of course they don't. He was just killed in front of their very eyes. But as he walks with them, and talks with them, they come to see that the things that Jesus had tried to teach them while he was alive – about the true meaning of the scripture, not its literal read, in my view, but its message of love, and justice – still apply.

Even if Jesus disappears from their lives again, they have been changed. They see things differently.

Like the Israelites, the disciples have one of those big Aha Moments, and come to see that the Messiah might not be the political leader they were looking for, but instead becomes available to human hearts.

On through the Centuries, we, as Unitarian Universalists, have come to believe that Revelation is not Sealed, that our understanding of what matters most changes and grows, and that the triggers for new understanding are not limited to only one set of scriptures, but are all around us -- in the lilies of the field and the birds of the air and the blowing clover and falling rain, and yes, even in the continuing works of humans. I am thinking of theory of paradigm shift offered by Thomas Kuhn in his book "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions," and of the feminist read of Scripture that Mary Beth just offered, in which the women of the story help us see the holiness that lives within each one of us in a new way.

What it takes is some Aha Moment, often triggered by a dramatic event, or at least some conundrum, some unsolvable problem that often requires a bit of magic – like Ezekiel's wheel – to jet us into a new understanding.

That's Easter. That's the stone rolled away. Where once there was death and despair, now there's life. And a new understanding.

So I think, will the pandemic be an Easter moment for us? Will we come to some new understanding of what matters most? Well, already we are finding community in cyber space, connection and meaning through tiny eyeballs embedded in our magic typing machines.

My hope is that the forced isolation of the past year paradoxically underscores the interconnectedness we share. That we come away knowing we are one body, the body of humankind. That even in our time of exile and despair, we can love, we are loved, and we can see one another.

Amen.

## Hymn

*Christ the Lord is Risen Today* (#268) verse 1

#61 *Lo, The Earth Awakes Again*, all

## Closing Words

I hope I am not too morbid with this, but I want to close us out with a return to a more naturalistic take on resurrection, and maybe a bit of April fools.

I remember a line from the writer Edward Abbey who said he would like to die alone in the desert, because he knows that within hours of his demise he would be soaring high above the earth ... in the belly of a buzzard.

Wherever you go, know that you are loved. Seek justice. Find Peace.

## Extinguishing the Flame

### Postlude

*Rockin' Robin*, Bobby Day

Alex Chilsen