

## **17<sup>th</sup> April 2022 – ‘Easter Sunday’**

Led by Rev Kate Whyman

**GATHERING MUSIC** ‘Sheep may safely graze’, JS Bach

<https://youtu.be/B1nyzGR3tUE>

### **WELCOME AND CHALICE LIGHTING**

Welcome on this beautiful morning to our Easter Sunday service. It’s lovely to see you here and to share this holy day with you. Welcome to you, whatever you bring at this moment in your life, and however you’re feeling, I’m glad that you’re here. Greetings to everyone online and to everyone in church.

I think it would be nice if we wished each other a Happy Easter – so you can say it out loud, write it in the chat box, whisper it to the person next to you...

Happy Easter to each and every one of us. And indeed, happy Passover too. By the way Jerry from the Synagogue up the road fixed the lock on the hall door yesterday as it was broken and we couldn’t get in or out, and the Sikh community were having their special gathering here – so there was interfaith dialogue in action.

Let’s begin, as is our custom, by lighting our chalice candle. And if you’re at home, you might like to light a candle with me now.

#### **Chalice lighting**

For holy days on which we recall the old stories, we light this flame.

For Passover, which reminds us of the courage and strength of those seeking freedom in the past, we light this flame.

For Easter, which reminds us that love is our greatest challenge, we light this flame.

For gathering today in this sacred space. For the opportunity to be together as a community, to remember the past, to plan for our future, to be alive in our present, we light this flame.

**33 (P) Enter, rejoice and come in**

Enter, rejoice and come in.  
Enter, rejoice and come in.  
Today will be a joyful day;  
enter, rejoice and come in.

Open your ears to the song.  
Open your ears to the song.  
Today will be a joyful day;  
enter, rejoice and come in.

Open your hearts everyone.  
Open your hearts everyone.  
Today will be a joyful day;  
enter, rejoice, and come in.

Don't be afraid of some change.  
Don't be afraid of some change.  
Today will be a joyful day;  
enter, rejoice, and come in.

Enter, rejoice and come in.  
Enter, rejoice and come in.  
Today will be a joyful day;  
enter, rejoice and come in.

*Words and music by Louise Ruspini*

Let us pray...

**Prayer** 'Easter Miracle' by Jacob Trapp

Divine Spirit  
I am amazed to the point of ecstasy  
at the miracle of awareness.

Life brings me its freshness as an ineffable gift.  
Every moment renews my vision.  
Death is permission granted to other modes of life to exist,  
so that everything may be ceaselessly renewed.  
The ploughshare of sorrow,  
breaking the heart,  
opens up new sources of life.  
The land bursts again into bloom.  
The possible and the future are one.  
The possible strives to come into being,  
and can be, if we help.  
Without sacrifice there is no resurrection.  
Nothing grows, flowers and bears fruit save by giving.  
All that we try to save in ourselves wastes and perishes.  
All things ripen for the giving's sake, and in the giving are consummated.  
Praise be.  
Amen

**STORY 1:** 'Free Flow', by Richard Bach from '100 more wisdom stories', Margaret Silf

Once there lived a village of creatures along the bottom of a great crystal river. The current of the river swept silently over them all – young and old, rich and poor, good and evil – the current going its own way, knowing only its own crystal self.

Each creature in its own manner clung tightly to the twigs and rocks of the river bottom, for clinging was their way of life, and resisting the current was what each had learned from birth.

But one creature said at last, 'I'm tired of clinging. Though I cannot see it with my eyes, I trust that the current knows where it is going. I shall let go, and let it take me where it will. Clinging, I shall die of boredom.'

The other creatures laughed and said, 'Fool! Let go, and that current you worship will throw you, tumbled and smashed, across the rocks, and you will die more quickly than from boredom!'

But the one heeded them not, and, taking a breath, did let go, and at once was tumbled and smashed by the current across the rocks.

Yet in time, as the creature refused to cling again, the current lifted him free of the bottom, and he was bruised and hurt no more.

And the creatures downstream, to whom he was a stranger, cried, 'See, a miracle! A creature like ourselves, yet he flies! See the Messiah, come to save us all!'

And the one carried in the current said, 'I am no more Messiah than you. The river delights to lift us free, if only we dare let go. Our true work is this voyage, this adventure.'

But they cried the more, 'Saviour!' all the while clinging to the rocks, and when they looked again he was gone, and they were left alone making legends of a saviour.

### **HYMN 109 (G) Life's rebirth**

A day like many other days  
has seen us gather here to sing  
and offer words which reach for thoughts  
that lie beyond their capturing;  
yet may those prayers our lives renew:  
from rocks of thought a vision hew.

We tell from land to land our tales  
where powers of hope shape life from death,  
in differing words that share a dream -  
with glorying shout, or whispered breath;  
to caves of cold, dark unconcern  
we bring our lights of love to burn.

Such warmth can melt a winter's cold  
in human hearts, as flower and field,  
and push aside the blocking stone

with which so many a heart is sealed;  
may I be never shut inside  
the tomb of selfishness and pride.

This day, like many other days,  
may see us roll the stone to find  
a kindred soul who thirsts for light  
yet to the darkness was resigned;  
so may we stretch our hands to lead  
to life's rebirth all those we've freed.

*Frank R. Clabburn*

**STORY 2:** Gospel of John 21:1-14 Jesus and the miraculous catch of fish

Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. 'I'm going out to fish,' Simon Peter told them, and they said, 'We'll go with you.' So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realise that it was Jesus. He called out to them, 'Friends, haven't you any fish?'

'No,' they answered.

He said, 'Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.'

When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord!'

As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, 'It is the Lord,' he wrapped his outer garment round him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred metres. When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

Jesus said to them, 'Bring some of the fish you have just caught.' So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn.

Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast.' None of the disciples dared ask him, 'Who are you?' They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish.

This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

## **SILENCE**

**INTERLUDE** 'In resurrectione tua', Taize

<https://youtu.be/M-hybuhxJg8>

## **ADDRESS Making the resurrection real**

Whatever way you look at it, Easter is a story of resurrection. That's the central theme of Easter, isn't it? Resurrection. And some Unitarians find that uncomfortable because the idea of the bodily resurrection of Christ doesn't sit well with their beliefs. But for me this ancient sacred story is far deeper than any one religion or dogma. It's a story that can touch us all and challenge us on many levels, if we're open to it. And this morning I invite you to be open to it - to that possibility - and to be willing to consider how resurrection might be real for *you* in *your* life right now, and what it might be asking of you at this time.

The Unitarian Universalist Mark Harris writes: 'If we believe in a creative power that shatters the icy tomb of winter with the life-giving miracle of spring, then we have *seen* resurrection.

'If we believe in a creative power that moves ...tens and more tens of thousands of people to cry out against the injustices of society and bring about change for good, then we have *fomented* resurrection.

‘And if we believe in a creative power lying within each human breast which enables us to break the bonds of personal pain and know the hope of new tomorrows, then we have *experienced* resurrection.’

Well I think we have all *seen* the life-giving miracle of spring – we have many times here waxed lyrical here about buds and blossoms, new shoots and emerging leaves, the return of light and colour and warmth to our world. We know this springtime resurrection well – it has followed us all our lives – and I think most of us do feel lifted up by it, at least to some extent. Our challenge is only to pay attention to it. Our call is simply to notice something new in it each year, each day. What will you notice for the first time this season, what will you see this day that will help bring you back to life and make the resurrection real for you? PAUSE

I think you will also know the feeling of excitement and aliveness that comes with being part of a group that is making difference. The bonding and connection of a collective endeavour that is creating change for the good, however small. Yes, there are also frustrations along the way. But when we are part of a team effort it can give the sense that we are building something, raising each others’ spirits and bringing a little more light and love into the world. We might feel it in political or other campaigning activities, or by running a community fridge, for example, or re-wilding a patch of waste land. (I met two women at the weekend who were doing exactly that and their eyes were bright with delight in and commitment to the work.) The challenge for each of us this Easter might be to answer the question – what is it that I care most about right now? And am I willing to work to raise that glorious or humble vision from the ashes, to be part of fomenting resurrection with others?

And then there’s really challenging one...the resurrection that takes place within ourselves, the one ‘which enables us to break the bonds of personal pain and know the hope of new tomorrows’, as Mark Harris puts it. The kind of resurrection we experience internally, one that is open to us over and over again. And here we might reflect on the two stories we heard earlier.

In the story ‘Free Flow’, ‘each creature in its own manner clung tightly to the twigs and rocks of the river bottom, for clinging was their way of life, and resisting the current was what each had learned from birth.’ I wonder whether those words and that image resonate with you at all? They do with me. I think I’ve clung to all sorts of metaphorical twigs and rocks through my life – relationships, jobs, opinions, ideas about who I am, and who I’m not – that had to

be let go of in the end, though I'm not claiming to be fully in the current yet. Nope, I'm still clinging to all sorts of nonsense. But might Easter a good time for each of us to notice what we might be holding on to, while resisting the current of life that would carry us if only we would let it?

We know, don't we – in theory at least – that we are each spiritual-filled beings, embodied souls, children of God, interdependent creatures who are part of the interconnected web of all life. We know, or we say we know, that we are part of the oneness, and the wholeness of all that is. And yet...still... it can feel SO important to hang on for dear life to the various twigs and rocks of our habitual ways and our limited thinking, or simply latch on to new ones, while simultaneously worshipping very one who chose to let go of theirs. How much easier to retell legends about those who dared to break free rather than make that leap ourselves! Might the call of this Easter be for you to let go something that is holding you back and surrender to the current for a while, at least, trusting that it will carry you with it to greater freedom and wholeness? If so, what would you let go of now? PAUSE

According to the story from the Gospel of John, Christ appeared to the disciples who were out in their boat fishing... but not actually catching anything. And what he says to them is very simple but profound. 'Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some,' he says. Or in other words, 'let go of your old ways, which clearly aren't working, and instead try this, and you will find abundance'.

The miracle of this life that we have been given is that the invitation is always there. There is always another chance, another day, another moment in which we can choose differently. There's always another season when *this time* we can pay attention, another day when we *this time* we will work together for a better world, another moment when we really will let go and let God. But the time to do it is only ever now.

On this day we get to offer ourselves to the world anew, open ourselves to love again, let go of our grievances and our hurts once more, and breathe in deeply the fresh renewing air. In this hour we get to take another step, turn a different corner, look at life another way. In this moment we can smile when we might have scowled, say yes when we might have said no. Everything is possible if we let it be. Life is one long resurrection!



Our faith – and it is a faith, whether we believe in Biblical story literally or not – is that we can be free from all our pain and disappointments and failings, and can live again, in light and hope. That doesn't mean we won't suffer. It doesn't mean the world and our hearts won't be broken, over and over again. They will be. They are being. But it does mean that we will rise again, that there's always another chance, a different way, a new door opening. The current is always there, ready and waiting for us.

Mark Harris says: *'When we think of our earth's ability to regenerate itself, our ability to join forces with others to overcome violence and oppression and bring about good, and finally, our personal ability to recover from a seemingly empty or forsaken life, then the meaning of the season can become powerful for us. We can make the 'resurrection' a reality in our lives. It is I, you and they who are risen from the dead. The traditional cry of 'he lives' becomes 'we live'.'*

May it be so. Amen.

## **HYMN 2 (P) A promise through the ages rings**

A promise through the ages rings,  
that always, always, something sings.  
Not just in May, in finch-filled bower,  
but in December's coldest hour,  
a note of hope sustains us all.

A life is made of many things:  
bright stars, bleak years, and broken rings.  
Can it be true that through all things,  
there always, always something sings?  
The universal song of life.

Entombed within our deep despair,  
our pain seems more than we can bear;  
but days shall pass and nature knows  
that deep beneath the winter snow  
a rose lies curled and hums its song.

For something always, always sings.  
This is the message Easter brings:  
from deep despair and perished things  
a green shoot always, always springs,  
and something always, always sings.

*Harmony David Dawson, words © Alicia S. Carpenter*

**CLOSING WORDS** Patrick O'Neil

Easter is an impossible story written for everyone who has ever felt the sting of death and wishes for something more.

Easter is a story for anyone who loves life so much that they pray for more life to follow.

Easter is a story for people who can envision a loving divinity that will not be conquered by evil.

It's a story of love that never dies;

Of immovable objects that get tossed aside;

Of happy endings in a tragic world;

Of miracles;

Of faith rewarded and vision restored and hope justified.

That is what Easter is.

May we each go in peace. A very happy Easter to you all.

**CLOSING MUSIC** You raise me up, Josh Groban

<https://youtu.be/aJxrX42WcjQ>