

ACTS 2:41-47

So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

41 They were convinced by his arguments, and they accepted what he said and were baptized. That very day about three thousand were added to the number of those converted. 42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' instructions and the communal life, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 A reverent fear overtook them all, for many wonders and signs were being performed by the apostles. 44 Those who believed lived together, shared all things in common; 45 they would sell their property and goods, sharing the proceeds with one another as each had need. 46 They met in the Temple and they broke bread together in their homes every day. With joyful and sincere hearts they took their meals in common, 47 praising God and winning the approval of all the people. Day by day, God added to their number those who were being saved.

JOHN 14:15-31

15 If you love me and obey the command I give you, 16 I will ask the One who sent me to give you another Paraclete, another Helper to be with you always— 17 the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot accept since the world neither sees her nor recognizes her; but you can recognize the Spirit because she remains with you and will be within you. 18 I won't leave you orphaned; I will come back to you. 19 A little while now and the world will see me no more; but you'll see me; because I live, and you will live as well. 20 On that day you'll know that I am in God, and you are in me, and I am in you. 21 Those who obey the commandments are the Ones who love me, and those who love me will be loved by Abba God. I, too, will love them and will reveal myself to them." 22 Judas—not Judas iscariot—said, "Rabbi, why is it that you'll reveal yourself to us, and not to the whole world?" 23 Jesus answered, "Those who love me will be true to my Word, and Abba God will love them; and we will come to them and make our dwelling place with them. 24 Those who don't love me don't keep my Words. Yet the message you hear is not mine; it comes from Abba God who sent me. 25 This much have I said to you while still with you; 26 but the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit whom Abba God will send in my name, will instruct you in everything and she will remind you of all that I told you. 27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; but the kind of peace I give you is not like the world's peace . Don't let your hearts be distressed; don't be fearful. 28 You've heard me say, 'I am going away but I will return.' If you really loved me, you would rejoice because I am going to Abba God, for Abba is greater than i. 29 I tell you this now, before it happens, so that when it happens you will believe. 30 I won't speak much more with you, because the ruler of this world, who has no hold on me, is at hand; 31 but I do this so that the world may know that I love Abba God and do as my Abba has commanded. "Let's get up now, and be on our way."

So, I'm a celebration kind of girl. I love having people over, and getting ready to give everyone lots of good food and drink, and talking in to the wee hours of the morning, and there should always be lots of laughter, and if we're really lucky, some singing. Even when someone dies, that's what should happen. I'm Irish and Scottish on my Dad's side, so wakes are in my genetic code.

Now, because of this, the hardest part of any holiday for me is when it's over. All the people go home. If we've hosted, there's cleaning up to do. And if it's a religious holiday, there's not just kitchen cleanup duty, but spiritual cleanup, too. And while I get the post-holiday blues pretty bad after events like Christmas, the biggest drain on me emotionally is Easter.

Even if I don't call myself myself a Christian, per se, I can deal with Holy Week. I theologically understand Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, Easter Vigil, and the celebration that Easter Sunday brings. I can even put aside my feelings about the absorption of the Vernal Equinox and festival of the goddess Eostre, because, hey, the eggs and bunnies are still around in some fashion. There is not a person in my household that believes in the bodily resurrection, but we all dress to the nines, spend the day looking for hidden treasures in the ground, and always end up talking about what it means to roll back the stone, because we are the denomination that believes he didn't get up.

And yet... I want to believe in magic. I want to believe in the impossible, in the "natural" and the super-natural, and more than any of those things I want, I think it's my responsibility as

a parent to ensure that my kids believe that any thing is possible... no matter how improbable.

And it's not because I want to think some guy rose from the dead 2000 years ago. It's because given the state of our country's overwhelming political oligarchy that is stealing our right to speak, our world's deep ecological crisis that threatens our existence, and a culture that teaches my son he is owed everything at the same time it tells my daughter that she is nothing more than an object to be consumed... I need my children to believe that they can raise the dead... not people, but ideas.

So what do we do with Easter? From the lowest moment when he dies in the cross, for speaking truth to power about the corruption and ostracization he saw, to the highest point

when his followers proclaim that “He is risen,” what do we do when the festivities are over? How do we trudge onward into resurrecting ourselves into the seemingly endless grind of fighting the good fight, day after day? When the people in our way seem to have all the money, all the power, all the soundbites, all the control? Even Jesus himself has been co-opted for an agenda very different from the one I think he would have wanted.

My relationship with Jesus is not about guilt for his suffering, or repayment for the bill of sins he supposedly paid off. My relationship with Jesus, and his ministry, is rooted in the love he showed those around him, and what we do as human beings in our behavior when we love someone other than ourselves. What do we do to show not just our love *for* them, but our love *of* them and what they hold dear? How do make

ourselves the religion *of* Jesus, and not the religion *about* Jesus?

So lots of people smarter and better trained than me see the moment in Luke when Jesus “turn his face to Jerusalem” as the moment when the story tilts, when he knows what’s coming. For me, however, it goes all the way back to John the Baptist, and a friendship that began in the river. It’s when his friend John is murdered that Jesus knows exactly what lies ahead of him if he continues their work. If he pursues this path... he *will* die. But he does it anyway. And the part of me that believes in magic, that believes in hope as an active agent that propels us forward, believes that he did not walk that path of radical love and of ministry to the forgotten and the discarded without a glimmer of hope, the smallest “What if I can change this world before it kills me for trying?”

Well... we know how it ended. We know it did kill him, and for many of us, he didn't get up. But as humanist and unitarian as I am, I can't ever allow myself to let go of the "What if?" And when that's just about Jesus, it seems... silly. Some I know might even call it an irrational delusion. But I think the refusal to let go of "What if he walked out of that tomb?" leads us to ask "What if?" in all sorts of other times and places.

Tell story of Princess Charming.

Just as Jesus used his influence and spotlight to tell the stories of those forgotten by the powers that be, so were we trying to increase whose stories were being told in books children read. And we were over a thousand dollars short of our goal with less than two days left to go in the campaign. In

a fit of pie-in-the-sky, my husband put up a new tier level, called Fayola's Angel, which was the amount of money we'd need to complete her funding and make her three books a reality. It was my humanist husband's "What if?" None of us *really* expected it to be bought, but the mere act of putting it out there made it a possibility, however improbable.

Just like that community in Acts:

44 Those who believed lived together, shared all things in common; 45 they would sell their property and goods, sharing the proceeds with one another as each had need.

Someone saw that we had a need, knew that more money would equal more books for children, and with less than 48 hours to go they raised their pledge from \$100 to \$1500. Now, at first, of course, we thought it was a mistake—an extra zero

accidentally typed into \$150. But we soon confirmed it was *real*. It was a something upon which we could depend, and build a foundation.

Now, keep in mind, that when this happened Caroline and I had already chosen the scripture for this Sunday. I spent most of yesterday *awed* at how this singular man, with no idea whatsoever that I was even preaching today, much less what I would be preaching on, made himself a living example of that passage in Acts. This member of our community, not necessarily even religious, much less Christian, only known to have shared beliefs about inclusion, representation, and diversity, spent that much money on helping make our vision of the future a reality. The Paraclete, the Helper, not just a figment of our religious imagination but a worker of miracles through the vagaries of the human spirit. During this Easter

season, I wonder how else the Holy Spirit works in us and through us.

I, a heathen, I come back to words Caroline chose from the Gospel of John. 18 I won't leave you orphaned; I will come back to you. 19 A little while now and the world will see me no more; but you'll see me; because I live, and you will live as well. 20 On that day you'll know that I am in God, and you are in me, and I am in you.

So on this Divine Mercy Sunday, I stand before you, a Unitarian Universalist, and I say yes, He is risen, indeed. He is risen in me, and he is risen in you. So mote it be.