



# Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens

The Reverend Alison Wilbur Eskildsen, Parish Minister  
The Reverend Don Randall, Community Minister

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## “New Life at Easter”

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### Centering Thoughts

*Nobody can go back and start a new beginning, but anyone can start today and make a new ending.* Maria Robinson

*To live fully is to let go and die with each passing moment, and to be reborn in each new one.* Jack Kornfield

*A tomb is no place to stay, be it a cave in the Judean hills or the dark cavern of the spirit.* The Reverend Richard Gilbert

*This is the Easter message, that awakening is possible, to the goodness of God, the sacredness of human life, the sisterhood and brotherhood of all.* Anne Lamott

### Reflection

When I was in Florida this past week my husband and I attended a spring training game, a pre-season religious ritual for baseball’s orthodox. Fortunately, the game was not a double-header. That much devotion lies beyond me.

I do welcome Easter, a double-header holiday that celebrates at least two traditions. One, a pagan spring goddess and the return of life on Earth after winter slumbers; and two, the defining Christian event—the death and resurrection of Jesus. Most Unitarian Universalists easily embrace Easter’s seasonal rebirth. But embracing that which makes Easter most meaningful for devout Christians may be more difficult. Perhaps it needn’t be.

Jesus, a Jewish reformer in ancient Jerusalem, angered Romans and a group of Jews in alliance with Rome because he challenged their authority and attracted followers. To stop his influence, Jesus was betrayed, arrested, tried, and convicted. His punishment was to die by hanging on a cross, a common execution method in the Roman Empire.

Gospel accounts written long after the events report that Jesus died on Friday before sundown, the start of the Jewish Sabbath when daily work must stop. His companions had enough

time to move his body to a cold, cave-like tomb for safe-keeping until the Sabbath ended. In Mark's gospel, (Ch. 16, Verses 1 - 8), written about 60 ACE, it says:

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. <sup>2</sup> ... when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. <sup>3</sup>They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" <sup>4</sup>When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. <sup>5</sup>As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. <sup>6</sup>But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. <sup>7</sup>But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you." <sup>8</sup>So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

Like poetry, these brief phrases allow for many interpretations only one of which is a bodily resurrection. Because a miracle, such as a physical return to life after three days in death, doesn't fit with our understanding of scientific possibility, many of us reject that interpretation. Instead, maybe the writer meant a spiritual rising from the dead or an appearance in memory. Maybe ambiguity suited the authors' purpose, to tell or sell the good news of their faith. Maybe mystery appealed to him since he didn't know exactly what happened. Maybe it doesn't matter.

Like Moses in Egypt, followers hoped Jesus was an earthly savior sent to free the Jews from Roman sufferance. Yet in the midst of the Passover observance, their hopes were crushed. Their dreams died along with their teacher's death. They became despondent over their own spiritual death and loss. But in some way Jesus appeared, instructing them 'to proclaim the good news' (Mark 16:15). The disciples must cast aside their despair and take on the commission to save others with Jesus' message of love.

We suffer loss and death, too. We lose dreams. We lose loved ones. We lose jobs, health, and homes. We lose control of our actions, our emotions, and our self-respect. We lose purpose and meaning to our lives. We can become despondent over these spiritual deaths, sometimes leading us to wish for our own physical death.

But for each deep loss we experience, we must learn to roll away the stone that would keep us entombed. We must resurrect ourselves just as the disciples did. Jesus reminded them they were needed, they were called by love to heal themselves and the world. We must still mourn our losses and feel our grief; these cannot be dismissed too quickly. But when self-pity and self-absorption binds us, the call to love and of love can break those chains, can resurrect us. Together with our personal resiliency, this community's love can help each of us see new life and new possibilities. Together, we can roll away our stones and live again.

Unitarian Universalist minister Richard Gilbert said it best in the following poem:

A tomb is no place to stay,  
Be it a cave in the Judean hills  
Or the 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 too long away.

May your heart welcome the possibilities that Easter's double-header suggests.

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