



Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens

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“Love Rises at Easter”

© by the Reverend Alison W. Eskildsen

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At the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens, GA

Centering Thoughts

We can be redeemed only to the extent to which we see ourselves. Martin Buber

People, even more than things, have to be restored, renewed, revived, reclaimed, and redeemed; never throw out anyone. Audrey Hepburn

The spirit of mutual love redeems and enhances human life. Alice Blair Wesley

Each morning we are born again. What we do today is what matters most. Jack Kornfield

A Timeless Tale

“The Answer Is in Your Hands”

www.uua.org/re/tapestry/children/tales/session11/123548.shtml

Homily

Today is Easter Sunday, a day we associate with colored eggs, magical bunnies, egg hunts, and beautiful spring flowers. After the dark of winter and bare tree limbs, we can celebrate the coming of spring with great joy. The gifts of spring decorate our world with a riot of color and fragrance. It's hard to be anything but joyful at Easter time.

But Easter is about more than Mother Nature's colorful new clothes and child-centered traditions. It also focuses on another new beginning. Christians retell the story of Jesus' death and resurrection, of new life after death for Jesus and his followers. The story affirms we are, or can be, redeemed because God loved humanity so much, in spite of our many human imperfections, human mistakes, and human sins. The story affirms we are not lost to God or to goodness. Our Universalist ancestors, and many of us still, believe that God's love is large enough to embrace all people, no matter how badly one has behaved in life.

We may understand the theological message of Jesus' death and resurrection differently, but I think we share the belief that love saves us. Redemption may come through God's love or inherent human goodness, but it is available to us every day.

In Morgan's story, a boy tried to best a woman who seemed to know everything. He believed he knew better and that he could trick her into making a mistake. He was willing to take the life of an innocent bird to prove this.

In our world there are many who are willing to hurt others for the sake of gaining or maintaining power or prestige. There are many who ignore what they know is right or ethical behavior in order to receive some gain. Car companies refuse to fix design errors even after fatalities result, tobacco companies insist their products cause no harm long after deaths and studies proved them wrong, foreign baby food companies knowingly include toxic materials, like melamine, in formula regardless of the health consequences, and climate change deniers continue to obstruct changes out of fear these will cut into monetary gains and require expensive retraining of laborers. This form of human sin is everywhere.

But in the story, the woman proved herself wise by giving the boy the opportunity to make his own decision. She told the boy, "The answer is in your hands." She gave him the power to choose life or death for the bird. And as he felt the bird struggle in his hands, he became ashamed. He apologized to the bird and set it free.

In that moment he was reborn. His willingness to use his power to harm a living creature ended. Although we don't know what kind of man that boy grew up to be, I believe his life took a turn that day. He redeemed himself because the wise woman gave him the opportunity.

The boy had the freedom to choose his own actions without the woman pre-judging him bad. The choice she gave him is one each of us holds every minute, every hour, and every day.

Recently, I had the privilege of attending the inaugural luncheon of the Athens Justice Coalition of Care. The event raised awareness of their community work and during it they gave out a few awards. Our own Kay Giese received the Milner Ball Social Justice Award for her work in Athens. I know the work she did to earn the award reflects her Unitarian Universalist values.

Also receiving recognition were two gentlemen who had turned their lives around with the help of the AJCC, formerly the Athens Justice Project. One of the men, Rickey Howard, spoke about how the organization had given him a chance to recover from addiction and stop his non-violent criminal behavior. He said, "You opened the door for me. You gave me dignity and respect, no matter what." Like the boy in the story, the AJCC did not judge Mr. Howard to be incapable of changing his ways, of choosing a better path. They told him he could do it and they helped him redeem himself. Because they had faith in him, he learned to have faith in himself.

Call it faith, positive reinforcement, or something else, I call it love. Mr. Howard was given love and respect, as our UU First Principle asks of us, and in return he became a new man.

There are many who act terribly in their lives – people who kill, abuse, and harm themselves or others. These people are hard to love, but their inherent worth demands it. Of course we should protect ourselves and prevent people from causing harm, but that does not give us license to treat them inhumanely. Further, I believe no one is beyond the possibility of redemption. Some may be further from it than others, but short of brain injury or other mental incapacity, we all choose how we are to behave.

Each and every day that we live, we make choices. I know we are not perfect. But I believe all of us want the best for ourselves and others. I believe we try to live up to our UU Principles. I know it's not easy sometimes. We make mistakes. Hopefully, we ask for forgiveness, and we begin again in love.

On this Easter Sunday, let us remember, today is a new beginning, a new day to redeem ourselves and be redeemed through the love, goodness, Godliness, and the generosity of every one of us.

May we be such a redemptive community.

Let's rise in body or in spirit and sing about love.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. Do you feel alienated from a person, idea, or something else? How might you restore that relationship or connection?
2. Do you stop and 'smell the flowers' blooming around you? What does it mean for you to notice new life emerging from winter's darkness?
3. What lifts your spirits and helps you feel joyful about life? Are you rejuvenated by longer days and more sunshine?