

*A New Hope*  
April 16th, 2017  
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Reading

**Mark 16:1-8 The Resurrection of Jesus**

**16** 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. **2** And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. **3** They had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” **4** When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. **5** As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. **6** 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. **7** 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.” **8** 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.[a]

Sermon:

This ancient Christian story is one filled with some impossible things. This story is brimmed with the inconceivable. Life made new from death itself, heavy weighted stones already moved. The impossible.

For many who are Christian this holiday marks the resurrection and life of Jesus. While many Unitarian Universalist do not believe that this story happened, though many UU Christians do, I think it's important to highlight those elements of the story that are contradictory and impossible that we Unitarian Universalists are often uncomfortable talking about.

I am not nor will ever be Christian. I am Unitarian Universalist with a humanistic theology through and through. I share this story to honor and reflect on the truths from another faith. I think it's important to honor the beliefs of another faith with respect and curiosity, especially when reflecting on their holidays. But I also think there is a lot this story, and it's more impossible elements, can teach us about our Unitarian Universalism. It reminds me to expect the unexpected, the impossible to unfold.

Three women all very close to Jesus, gathered up their strength to prepare a body for a funeral. Their dearest friend, found to be a traitor to the Roman Empire, and an enemy of the state, a dangerous criminal, was executed the day before. Everything was done and finish. They were bringing tools to anoint the body, to give it one last earthly send off.

Their leader and revolutionary was killed for treason, people in his own party betraying him. There was no point to continue on, but to bury the movement once and for all.

But that is not what happened in this story. As they sit in their grief, they wonder how they are going to roll away this heavy heavy stone. This gigantic stone blocking their way. To their surprise they see it has already been rolled away. And then they hear the news and are terrified.

While this story seems incredulous, the breaking through of unexpected and terrifying hope is all too human. While there is much in this story and in the world that points towards the pointlessness of hope, that is not what happens in our story.. And that is not what happens in our lives either.

Let me tell you a story I was told, where it was pointless to go on.

In a dark room, police officers begin to crowd in. It's expected. This place has always been a target. The people there deemed against the law just for gathering as they are. Everything was looking as fairly routine: The police would raid this place, it would be emptied out, people arrested, beaten, or worse. The place would close down for a few weeks. Most people would either hide or stay in other parts of town harder to target, like the piers. There was no point in resisting. It would happen again and again, until none of them were in the neighborhood or they found a better way of hiding. I can only imagine, that hopelessness was palpable.

But that night, Marsha Johnson had enough. In the face of everything that would say she should die, this black transwoman took up a bar stool and fought back. And out of one seemingly pointless and hopeless action, the Stonewall movement was born.

A Christian LGBT minister once told me, this for her was the true meaning of resurrection. Not spring, or renewed life, but hope that fights back. A hope that outlives anything we try to do to kill it or make it silent. A hope that points to a force of life and a force of love bigger than any one moment, or movement, or attempt to shut it down. There is a hope that not even death can take.

For Christians, that hope resides in the life and transformative power of Jesus life, teachings, and resurrection. While I am not Christian, as a Unitarian Universalist, our Unitarian Universalist faith also brings that kind of hope. A hope that makes the impossible possible. It's not easy. It's not something that just happens conveniently, when we want it to. It not a miracle worker that will suddenly wash away all the pain or suffering of the world, or swoop in to save everything at the last minute. No, this kind of hope takes tireless work and a lot of disappointment and grief. It takes courage to try again in the face of pointlessness over and over again. It takes knowing that it might not get you very far. It takes knowing that it might not show up when you are most in despair or when you feel you most need it.

But if you leave room for hope, like that kind of hope, you will be amazed at what might happen. Small moments, can becomes movements, and can change the world and turn it upside down.

I believe we need that ever new, ever renewing hope at this time more than ever. Because there is much in life that says, it's pointless. There is so much that would say to us it's impossible. It's impossible to change the direction of war or violence we are heading down. It's impossible to chart a new course. The voices of our overwhelming culture, of tor even just human grief in the face of death that says, why even try to keep going. There is no point.

But in our Unitarian Universalist faith, it says that we are the ones who have every possibility to transform the world. We are the ones who have within our grasp the possibility of a hope that can transcend even death. We are the ones who make it possible for there to be new life. We are the ones who try. Who try even when it seems impossible.

And when we try something amazing can happen. We can be utterly surprised, joy struck, blown away by what comes next. The unexpected.

There is this gospel phrase used by Christians sometimes that I have lately been using to talk about my Unitarian Universalist faith. There is a phrase that says "This joy that I have, the world didn't give it to me." I use that phrase to remind me of this kind of hope that is inspired by my faith.

There is a joy, a hope, inherent in our Unitarian Universalism, that says every single person is a gift, and can love even more than they yet imagine. A faith that says we have every possibility to transform this world for towards the vision of Beloved Community. This faith, says we can do it. Even when the world routinely says we can't. Even when the world only wants to squander whatever hope and joy we have. Our faith says we are the sources and agents of our own hope in this world.

And that joy, that message of hope, that is deep in our faith, nothing in this world can take it away.

So when I'm down, or when I feel hopeless, overcome with grief, I remind myself of that song.

This joy that I have, the world didn't give it to me.

This joy that I have, the world didn't give it to me.

This joy that I have, the world didn't give it to me.

The world didn't give it, and the world can't take it away.

These three women, they found their joy literally brought back to life, defying death itself. They found a hope that outlasts all death, and from that moment they would carry on their message of transformative love.

For us as Unitarian Universalist, we too have that kind of transformative hope. Whatever thing in your life brings you a hope, a joy that outlasts any grief, that can overcome the noise of the world that says it's impossible, I ask you today to hold on to it. To give it new life, to discover it as a new hope. Because we together can make the impossible of our world happen. We can be the change, we can be the drastic surprise of a life that battles through the toughest grief. And when we gather together to transform ourselves and our world, nothing can take that joy away.