

For Ministers, Religious Educators and Leaders



April, 2009 – Easter A Story for All Ages

Tapestry of Faith lifespan faith development curricula are published online by the UUA for our congregations to use, at no charge. Tapestry of Faith's print resources include the book, [*Stories in Faith: Exploring Our UU Principles and Sources Through Wisdom Tales*](#), by Gail Forsyth-Vail (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 2007), which provides this Easter story and guidance for exploring it.

Forsyth-Vail writes, "The story of Jesus of Nazareth's death and resurrection...is a story about followers and friends whose fear and despair were cast aside as they experienced the enduring power of Jesus' message. It is a story of rebirth and transformation that offers to Unitarian Universalists a way to understand and embrace this central Christian narrative."

See Tapestry of Faith programs for children, youth and adults: www.uua.org/tapestryoffaith.

Easter

In the days when Pontius Pilate, the Roman Procurator, ruled all of Palestine with great cruelty, there lived a Jewish prophet and teacher named Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus moved from place to place, offering hope to people who desperately needed reason to hope. He taught that every single person is loved by God, and that there is a place for everyone in the Kingdom of Heaven. He reached out to all kinds of people, including those who were hated or ignored by others: poor people, sick people, women without husbands, and tax collectors. Large crowds gathered around to hear Jesus' message of hope, love, and welcome. This made Pontius Pilate and the Romans worry that he was a dangerous troublemaker.

There came a time when Jesus decided to go Jerusalem, the big city, to challenge those in power by saying that all people were loved and worthwhile. It was a dangerous thing to do, but his message needed to be heard. On Thursday night of the week he entered Jerusalem, he shared a meal with his friends and went with them to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray for strength and courage. There he was arrested by Roman soldiers.

The next day, Jesus was sentenced to die a cruel death by being nailed to a wooden cross, which was the Roman punishment for people considered troublemakers. On the Friday that he was put to death, his friends all scattered, frightened that the Roman soldiers would hurt them too.

After Jesus' death, a follower named Joseph of Arimathea took his body and washed and prepared it for burial. He placed Jesus's body in a tomb and rolled a heavy stone across the entrance.

Jesus' supporters were sad beyond all words and terribly afraid. They felt hopeless. The messenger of hope was gone from them, crushed and killed by the cruel Roman Empire. What were they to do?

On the third day after Jesus' death, three women went to the place where Jesus was buried, bringing spices to anoint his body. On the way, they talked about how difficult it would be to roll away the heavy stone in front of the tomb. When they got there, they found the stone rolled away and Jesus' body gone! The women ran from that place, frightened.

Not long after that, Jesus' friends and supporters began to talk with one another about his teachings. They thought about his message of hope and his belief that each and every one of us is loved by God. They heard the reports from the women about the empty tomb. They wondered. Sometimes when they talked about the things Jesus had said, it seemed like he was right there with them. So strong was his presence that many followers said that Jesus had returned as a holy spirit. They said, as Christians do today, that Jesus was born again, or resurrected.

They remembered the love Jesus taught and gradually they began to feel hope again. Their sadness didn't go away completely, but it faded. As they remembered Jesus, they knew deep in their hearts that love is stronger than cruelty and stronger than death. His spirit lived on as it does today.

Meaning and Wisdom for Unitarian Universalists

Hearing a Calling

The Easter story of Jesus of Nazareth's death and resurrection calls us to renewed hope. Jesus' followers have reason to believe that all is lost and they scatter, nursing their wounded spirits, but three women refuse to succumb to despair. At the tomb, in the face of death itself, the women find hope in the form of a rolled-away stone. Death and cruelty are not the final chapter of the story, as love and hope triumph and the spirit and message of their beloved prophet live on.

Opening to New Revelation

This is a story usually told in the springtime, as the natural world is reborn. Dormant, seemingly dead plants set forth new shoots. Baby birds are born. The days grow longer and warmer. As we hear this story anew, it reveals an ancient truth and wisdom, echoed in the natural world and in the resilience of the human spirit: Even in the most trying of times, transformation is possible.

Finding Wisdom through the Principles and Sources

Unitarian Universalist tradition has its roots in the Christian tradition. Many Unitarian Universalists view Jesus as a teacher and a prophet and are skeptical of the Biblical story that includes physical resurrection. Whatever one's views about its literal truth, the story of Jesus of Nazareth's death and resurrection—a central story in the Christian tradition—has important wisdom for all of us. It offers a life-affirming message of hope and love, an antidote to despair even in the most difficult of times.

This version of the story places the blame for the crucifixion of Jesus squarely on the shoulders of the Roman government, whose cruel means of dealing with troublemakers is well documented. Because Western literature, theology, and tradition have a long and dangerous history of blaming Jewish people for the death of Jesus, it is important to present to children and adults a picture and telling that refute that charge.

Connecting with Our Lives

In Our Faith Communities

This story is one that children have likely heard from other sources, which makes it imperative to share the story from a Unitarian Universalist point of view. Retell the Easter story, stopping as necessary to answer children's questions. Be prepared to answer theological questions directly and to share your own views about the story. Guide children away from dwelling on the cruelty of Jesus' death, emphasizing instead the feelings of his friends and followers as they move from hope at hearing his message, to despair after his death, to a renewed hope as they realize that the message of love did not die.

Go outside and look for signs of rebirth in the natural world. Send children on a hunt to find new life in the midst of what looks dead; new sprouts in the midst of last year's dead foliage or under last year's leaves are examples. Invite children to consider how their discoveries in the natural world are similar to the Easter story of renewal.

At Home

Share with your family your own understanding of this story and what it means. Answer any questions, focusing the conversation on the message of hope and love. Children may want to talk more about Christian views of this story. Their increased understanding of different views of the Easter story and resurrection will help them come to their own conclusions. Explain different points of view in a way that models respect for others' beliefs even when you disagree with them. Emphasize that Jesus' teachings were so prophetic and aligned with many common religious values that they have been kept alive for centuries.

If your family has a garden, search for signs of spring, especially new growth coming from that which has died. Going further afield, search for dead tree or stumps that have given rise to new forms of life. Point out the parallel between the message of the Easter story and their discovery that life can begin again even in the presence of death.