

**The Unitarian Church of Barnstable, UU – April 21, 2019**

**“Awakening” – The Rev. Tracy Johnson**

One of the things I tell prospective mentors in the PathMakers Program that I manage for WE CAN that they will want to think about as a piece of their role is to offer their mentee a different lens through which to view their situation, their goals, their life. A way to look at things that they might not have considered before. Maybe something totally out of the box for them. The kind of thing that makes you say, “Ahhhhh – now I see it!”

This is what I imagine happened on that first “Easter” morning when, depending on which gospel or writer you follow, any number of Jesus’ disciples arrived to find an empty tomb, some of them greeted by him and some not, that resulted in a sudden shift in consciousness; a new understanding that redefined how they would live from that time forward. This resurrection story suggests that Jesus was raised to a new dimension of life that could not be destroyed by death any longer.

Retired Episcopal Bishop, John Shelby Spong, in his recent book, *Unbelievable: Why Neither Ancient Creeds Nor the Reformation Can Produce a Living Faith Today*, posits that Christianity is not answering relevant questions these days and that this is why it is diminishing as a belief system. There is a whole lot to explore there, but it’s Easter and what he says in the resurrection chapter resonates for me.

The language used to describe these appearances of Jesus following his death are not the same words that one would use to talk about seeing something right in front of you, like I see you all and you see me. The word itself translates into something more like a breakthrough in our thinking; a putting together of things that we wouldn’t have before; an innovative combination of ideas and understanding that form a new insight.

What they “saw” was this new way of life that Jesus had been modeling for them; new revelations in the stories of their people that they had been sharing as he told them with a different emphasis; a glimpse, perhaps, of what was most sacred to consider as one went about the business of their living. This idea of resurrection is about an ongoing process rather than a “once and done” event. It is about a focus on expanded living; unlimited loving and enhanced being. Jesus called his followers to transcend the boundaries and fears of their day; reminded them of their interconnectedness with all of life based in

their common bond as humanity possessed of that spark of the divine at center. Jesus posited an active sacredness, alive in our world through the day to day movement of people; alive in the ordinariness of human interaction; powerful in its grounding in love and connection.

This is what those early disciples awoke to. Like poet, David White, they arose out of their slumber and their deep longing for a new hopefulness. They were ripe for this and we could say that such a time was a once in all the world occurrence or we could look around us and say that we, too, are ripe for an awakening that will carry us into the future. This is the Easter message that calls to us in our era with our own longings for what James Conlon calls a new life that is seen as a thing of mysterious and sacred significance; a world that values community and wisdom; reciprocity, creativity and opportunity; that sees with new eyes.

And this, too, is the call of our faith; offering us a fresh lens through which to view our living. Our principles affirm a somewhat countercultural stance on relationship, I am sad to say. Sad that as culture, we still have not “seen” the Easter message into being. Easter calls us to Love in our encounters with one another, with family, with people on the street; with people we disagree with and have a hard time with. It asks us to employ our Principles, not to just give a nod to them.

Easter reminds us that Jesus was willing to die for what he believed in; knowing that it might take this extreme an ending for there to be a new beginning in our world; for the sacredness of Loving to take root in the hearts of humankind. Jesus lives in the stories we tell each other about this Love; stories that cannot be quelled; stories that carry the divine message into eternity. We are called to be the bearers of this story. May we in this season of remembrance and hope, be awakened to the Love expressed in our faith and present in our connections. May we purpose ourselves to be tellers of the story in ways relevant to our times, in order that a powerful Love be planted, take root and grow in our midst.

Blessed be and Amen.