

Hidden in Plain Sight: Resurrecting the Human Jesus

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If Mary had Jesus, and Jesus is the lamb of God, does that mean Mary had a little lamb? :-)

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Let us begin from a place of truthfulness: Unitarian Universalism no longer falls into the category of a traditional Christian denomination. I like to say that we are Christian with a small “c.” While we still espouse many of the Biblical values that the Christian faith proclaims, we have moved beyond that place where it is the sole source of our learning and worship.

It is not just the doctrines and the dogma that cloud our vision of the Jesus story, though. In all honesty, the Biblical account of his postmortem is not, for the vast majority of UU’s, part of **our** theological story. **Yet, here we are today singing our hallelujahs and paying our homage to the risen Christ.** Is it hypocritical or courageous that we dare embrace this most sacred of Christian holy days from a different perspective?

More conservative believers would undoubtedly say that any deviation from the standard interpretation of this pivotal Easter event in the Christian Gospel is nothing short of heretical. It is true that when we do speak of Christianity, our focus tends to be on the revelations of Jesus’ earthly ministry and not on the eschatological theology that has evolved around him.

With that in mind, I would say that it takes a great deal of courage and good old-fashioned chutzpah to hold that ancient story under the microscope of our 21<sup>st</sup> century sensibilities, where we, too, might shine

our own light upon that remarkable man from Galilee; and in doing so, perhaps find our own salvific message from the ministry of a very human Jesus—a message which I think oftentimes gets overshadowed by the possibility of personal redemption because of his death on the Cross.

There is no disrespect intentioned, here, only a sincere desire to learn from the Master Teacher, himself, how to rise above our own fears, pettiness, pain, and sorrow, to become agents of love and peace, healing and joy in the world.

For the purpose of today's reflection, I am not talking about applying the scientific method to any theological exploration into the veracity of the Resurrection and Ascension. Neither is this a debate as to where the truth may lie. **We cannot expect others to completely abandon blind faith while we are unwilling to put aside our own Doubting Thomas spectacles.** Instead, I invite you to join me on a journey that neither requires faith nor reason, but rather insists upon a heart that is unencumbered by doctrinal dictates or peer-reviewed hypothesis.

*And so with a fresh perspective, we ask the questions, What did he see in people that others failed to notice? (And) Could his notion of God be accessible to modern-day non-theists, and perhaps touch a chord in our collective humanity, whatever our belief systems, that we might all recognize what is sacred and redeeming within ourselves?*

While the Jesus story takes place in a historical context, his larger message speaks to us in a timeless fashion. It is about the duality of life; the union of heaven and earth: of what is spiritual and physical, emotional and objective. It is about living in a relational Universe, where there is cause and effect, where actions have consequences and we, most of the time, have the choice as to how we will respond to any given situation.

In Jesus' mind it is within this realm of human possibility that we have the ability and the power to connect with that deep transformative source, where hate and anger can be overcome by forgiveness and kindness; where pain and suffering can be overcome by compassion and gentleness; where fear and prejudice can be overcome by courage and acceptance. **The message that he lived is about the internalization of love (in all of its manifestations) as the most powerful, creative, transformative force on the planet.**

In everything he did, Jesus sought to bring the emotional experience to it all, *of helping people to see, to feel, to struggle to understand that God is a light of conscious awareness inside each and every human being.* Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, **“The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation,** nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because **the kingdom of God is among you...it is within you.”** (Luke 17:20-21)

Then, as now, people oft look outside of themselves for the answers to life's most difficult questions. For many who believe in God, God is an external force that dispenses compassion on some and vengeance on others. Jesus believed that humanity was out-of-balance with this understanding of the Godpower. For Jesus, true balance meant that the Godforce was both beyond and within, both masculine and feminine, and that **the human heart was where that communion took place.**

*There was an equality in the theology of Jesus that was non-existent in his day, and in large measure is still non-existent in many places in our own modern times.* But the marginalization of women, children, the elderly, the sick and infirm, people of different faiths, did not exist in his worldview. It was his theology of the Godself within every—human—heart that lifted people from their malaise and self-loathing. Jesus brought people alive from the deadness of their lives' circumstances and helped them rise into their true power.

It was this perspective that **each person was whole and worthy of love and respect, compassion and forgiveness** that was contrary to the religious fervor and cultural mores that prevailed. Yet, for those who encountered his unconditional love, his unwavering acceptance and loving gentle touch, he brought miraculous comfort and healing to their personal and communal world that was trembling in pain.

It was nothing short of astonishing for people to be in the presence of someone who *looked beyond the outward stigmata* of gender, social class, religious affiliation, physical appearance, age and mental ability. **To look into the eyes of the suffering, the grieving, the outcast, the oppressed and the oppressors, and touch their lives with dignity, compassion and unconditional acceptance and unconditional forgiveness** *was something beyond the realm of their experience.*

They held no knowledge of this kind of justice. They held no knowledge of this kind of love, this Godlove incarnate that he offered them...not as a divine specter, but as a human being, **just like them.** And then, as if *blowing on the coals of the heart*, he sought to kindle that very same Godlight *of conscious awareness* that dwelled within each of them as well, so that they might see themselves and each other in a new light.

What made Jesus so extraordinary was that he saw the extraordinary potential in all people to bring change and hope into their lives. All the tools they needed to do it, they already possessed. He just tried to open their eyes, and minds, and hearts to it.

Oppression and ignorance are mighty obstructions to enlightenment and growth. We can see that in ancient cultures, and we can most certainly see that in our own world. The Gospel of Jesus dissolves the notion of *otherness* and embraces the belief of *oneness*. **We are all of the same Creation. We all have the ability to bring healing to one another...**to access the Godself that dwells within the

brokenness and the beauty of this physical world. Wholeness is ours for the asking.

On this Resurrection Sunday in the Christian church, where we place our emphasis on the message of Jesus' life, and others place their emphasis on the promise of his death, we are faced with, perhaps, the greatest duality of all. In this life we are always confronted with the duality of letting go and holding on, of someone gone from our midst and remaining in our minds and hearts. Should his death be any different than his life? Can we, too, sing "Jesus Christ Is Risen Today"?

For those *with eyes to see and ears to listen*, for those who are courageous enough to see *the other* in ourselves, to hear their cries as our own, to serve human need and work toward justice for all; for those who find healing in forgiveness and believe that love is the most powerful force for transformation that we have; **then for us the life of Jesus did not end on the cross.** For us, his truth, his very life lives on when we choose to resurrect his message in the way that we live and walk in our own lives. *The Kingdom of God is among us.* It is within us. **It is not a matter of faith. It is not a matter of reason. It is a matter of the heart.** We just need to find the courage to bring its light into the world for all to see and know.

Hallelujah!

Amen and Blessed Be.

By Emily Dickenson

If I can stop one heart from breaking,  
I shall not live in vain ;

If I can ease one life the aching,  
Or cool one pain,  
Or help one fainting robin  
Unto his nest again,  
I shall not live in vain.