

Re-Writing the Hero's Journey... What If?



An Independent Interfaith Community
Practicing the Possible Through Prayer

Easter Sunday, March 31, 2024

Rev. Diana Johnson, IM, RScM, with Lucinda Alton, RScP, Chris Johnson, RScP, and musicians Dalton Fitzgerald & Gary French.

Easter

Call to Awareness – 3 Bells

Lucinda – Opening Prayer

Rev. Diana, Chris, Dalton & Gary – Opening Music

 **Welcome to the Mystic Heart**, written by Diana & Chris Johnson

 **One Big Family**, written by Robin Hackett & Gary Lynn Floyd


Rev. Diana – Introduction

Good morning and Happy Easter. If you're new with us today, my name is Rev. Diana Johnson, Pastor and Spiritual Director of Mystic Heart Spiritual Center. We are an Independent Interfaith Community. We teach Universal Principles and Practical Spirituality. I'm so grateful that you've chosen to join us in celebration this morning.

Let's begin looking around to see who is here with us today, celebrating this beautiful Spring day, joining in Sacred Communion and Community...take a moment to really see one another, and to feel the gratitude for these beings that make up your Spiritual Family...one of your support systems.

Now grounded in a deep sense of gratitude, let's settle into a moment of peaceful meditation...taking a couple of slow, deep breaths...letting go of all that has come before this moment...allowing the breath to dissolve any thoughts or concerns...relaxing the body...and on the next breath, allowing your awareness to move into the heart space...allowing yourself to rest there for a moment, giving yourself the gift of stillness...feeling content in this moment as you ground yourself in Spirit... and gently bringing awareness back, join us in musical prayer as we sing in celebration of all that is new in every moment...let yourself be refreshed and renewed by the Light and Love of Spirit...

Rev. Diana, Chris, Dalton & Gary – Community Sing

 **Morning Has Broken**, written by Eleanor Farjeon

 **I Am Remembering**, written by Rev. Melissa Phillippe

Rev. Diana – Turning inward to the Peace, the Love, the Beauty, and the Joy that are forever within you, settling into the eternal nature of your being, where you feel and know your Oneness with the Creative Intelligence of the Universe...where you feel at home in the here and now...feel yourself to be an irreplaceable strand woven into the fabric of Creation, perfectly and intentionally made...you are the very image and likeness of pure Spirit. You are pure Light expressing...

We recognize and honor the same Light in everyone and everything. There is nowhere that God's Light does not shine. From the *Book of Matthew*, "You are the light of the world...let your light shine."

We take a moment to feel the Oneness of our global community...Every human, every other-than-human creature, every plant...the sand and soil, rocks and mountains...every precious drop of water...teeming with Life...radiating Light...a perfect expression of Spirit...all are One. Bringing our awareness back into this space, we engage fully in this morning's Ceremony and Celebration.

Today is Easter Sunday. It commemorates the resurrection of the Rabbi Jesus from the tomb on the Sunday after his crucifixion. This story hails from the Christian tradition, but it is actually much, much older than that. Historically, the Celebration that became Easter began in pre-Christian times in Europe, where a pagan festival was created to celebrate the great Northern goddess Eostre. I'm not going to spend much time on Eostre this year, but instead, I'd like to give the Easter Story some time and attention and leave room for ceremony and lots of music. Is that okay?

The early Roman Catholic priests were pretty smart in adopting pagan practices to encourage people to 'convert' to Christianity.

The Easter Story actually comes to us as a retelling of earlier archetypal tales, present in many cultures...It is one example of *The Hero's Journey*. We may understand this particular story as a historical account, literal...factual... or as a mystical teaching, a symbolic tale that points to a deeper Universal Truth. The fact that our modern-day Easter has its roots in earlier traditions, and likely has mythological aspects, in no way denies the Truth or message it has to offer. Each day of Holy Week holds guidance for us in our modern world if we can look past Christian doctrine and dogma to the example Jesus set, to the message he was spreading.

The Rabbi Yeshua was an example of one who invited everyone to the table. He ate with poor people, lepers, prostitutes, tax collectors, and Pharisees (who were outwardly very critical of him). The people thought him unclean because he spent time with the untouchables of society...they judged him by the company he kept. This still happens today, yes?

It took great courage for Yeshua to minister to those on the fringes of society... to risk his reputation as a Rabbi in the eyes of the religious elite. He also modeled radical inclusivity by dining with his harshest critics. Yeshua's table ministry honored everyone

as spiritual equals...as offspring of the Divine...worthy of the same respect and esteem, no matter who they were or what their background or class in society.

Last week, we spent some time Rewilding Jesus...bringing him into a more historically and culturally accurate place than those of our childhood memories. We said that most modern-day scholars agree on three points: Jesus was a Jewish Mystic, he was a Wisdom Teacher, and he was a Social Prophet. His teachings ran counter to conventional wisdom, and to the Jewish teachings he had been raised with.

He taught Peaceful resistance and Unconditional Love in all cases. And because he stood in what he knew to be True, he was ostracized...and eventually put to death.

Let's take a quick look at Holy Week, the week prior to Easter Sunday, to see if it has anything useful for our time. Even in our culture, many people are not familiar with the activities that led to his trial and crucifixion. Let's approach it with curiosity...let's use the question, 'What If?'

Let's start with Palm Sunday, the Sunday before Easter. **What if** Palm Sunday, the day Jesus rode a young colt into Jerusalem to celebrate Passover, was actually a peaceful demonstration, staged by Jesus himself...a way of showing people how to peacefully stand up for what they believed in? What if his silent message was that humility is a more powerful stance than forcefulness? There is evidence to show this is true...and that the Roman Cavalry was processing into Jerusalem on horses at the very same time from the opposite direction. As a devout Jew, Jesus would have known the exact time and place that the soldiers would come to 'keep the peace' during the Passover Celebration. I never learned that in Sunday School.

What about the following day? **What if** Holy Monday, the day when Jesus turned over the tables of the money changers, was not actually about the master teacher losing his cool over the selling of animals in the Temple for sacrifice? This was a commonly accepted practice in the Jewish tradition. What if it was another staged demonstration in which Jesus was protesting the collusion of Jewish Priests with Roman political leaders in a system of domination that kept the rich *rich*, and the poor *poor*? What if his message was one of activism? Again, there is evidence...

What if the tale of Maundy Thursday...the Last Supper, the washing of the feet was one way that Jesus demonstrated the importance of humility and Sacred Service...and that being in Service to others enriches *us* beyond measure? That true mastery and leadership *require* us to be in Service?

The breaking of bread and sharing of wine was actually an ancient Practice, a Celebration of the sowing of the grain, in full expectation of its eventual harvest...and the harvesting of the grape, which by Spring would have had time to ferment. This Celebration was an act of thankfulness for the many gifts of this earthly realm...and a way to consciously receive those gifts and remember our dependence on, and connection with, the earth.

What if Jesus used this already-familiar Gratitude Practice as a way to represent the embodiment of something beyond the material...a way to remind an agrarian people that there is more to life than the physical realm. **What if** the bread and wine served as a metaphor, not for the eating of his flesh and drinking of his blood, but rather for the embodiment of his teachings, of his example... a reminder that we are best served by taking into our hearts and minds only that which feeds the soul, that which nourishes the spirit?

Let's move on to Good Friday. **What if** there is a message contained in the story of Good Friday, as well...that our life's journey is outgrowing harmful behaviors and patterns of thought...that we must allow our stinkin' thinkin' to be crucified (crossed out)...that our small self, the person we were, has to die before our Higher Self, the person we are becoming can come forth? **What if** the message is that no matter what happens, we must Love God and Love one another...and no matter what we experience in life, we must be willing to forgive? It is only through forgiveness that we move forward. We forgive ourselves for past thoughts, words, and actions that have not served our Highest Good. And we forgive others so that we can cut the chain that binds us to them, and to the hurt.

In praying about what our Easter Service would look like this year, Spirit said, "Go out on a limb..." I invite you to release any preconceptions you may have around the Sacred act of Communion...and receive it anew.

(Taken/excerpted from *Real Life Rituals*, by Karyl Huntley)

For as long as grain has been domesticated, the blessing of the first grain cut and the bread made from it have constituted holy acts. The blessing and eating of the bread in this ritual is reminiscent of the Christian Communion, but this ceremony actually has its roots in a much earlier time.

We have come together today, creating a sacred space for our work of honoring the cycle of the grain, which includes its planting, growing, harvesting, and consumption.

We give thanks to the grain that so willingly gives its body to be sacrificed so that the people who tended it when it was growing, and others, can be fed. Know with me that our ritual today is centered in holy time and holy space...we enter the realm of the holy ones...the ancestors who celebrated the grain harvest. We bring awareness to the One Source, trusting we are held.

This bread symbolizes the unconditional support we have on earth. We bless and give thanks for this bread now. Its form nourishes our form and reminds us that anything we need is already given...both the material and the invisible...ideas, guidance, support, connection...the qualities of Beauty, Love, Joy, Peace, Creativity, and Harmony.

By this loaf broken open, we are reminded that, in addition to all the blessings we enjoy in life, there are also sorrows. Each of us has been broken by the unhappiness and grief that comes with living. It is part of the mystery that, in our brokenness, the blessings of

love and connection often have a chance to go more deeply into us. We are broken open to be filled with Love.

As you take a piece of this bread, hold it in your hands and reflect on where it has been. This bread was made from dough, which in turn, was made from ground wheat. The wheat was originally in the form of individual kernels growing on a stalk with many other kernels and many stalks growing out of the center of one plant. This wheat plant was born in the spring as a single sprout poking up to the light. The sprout pushed its way out of a single kernel planted in the earth.

With this awareness, take a bite of bread now, realizing that the bread becomes your body as it is digested. Realize, too, that your body is made of earth, water, sunlight, and spiritual intelligence. Feel the earth in your body; feel the rivers in your body; feel the sunlight in each cell; know that the power of life directs every living process.

This bread represents the entire harvest, billions and billions of kernels of wheat, an unlimited abundance. The bread nourishes your body so that you can have harvests in your own life. And we share the bread in community to remind us that we are sharing this journey we call Life...that we are nourished by one another. This is also a symbol of all earthly blessings that we use, enjoy, and share.

This bread also reminds us that we are here to embody the Love and Generosity of Spirit...to be that Love in action...to forgive, always.

Just as the wheat has given its life for you, you are giving your life for all that you are harvesting. Your time and energy are given away each day for your activities. As you eat the last of your bread, make a vow that the life nourished by this bite of bread will be spent in the highest of ways. What will that way be? What healing will be facilitated by this bread? What high purpose will be expressed? What gift to humanity will this bread serve? What will you do with this small, but essential unit of your precious life energy?

Dalton – Communion Song

 **The Two Are One**, written by Gary Lynn Floyd

Rev. Diana – The final words Jesus speaks, at the close of his mission in this life, before he takes his last breath is this: “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.” These words imply a supreme confidence in the universe and in the immortality of the soul.

Rev. Diana, Chris, Dalton & Gary – Song

 **Into Your Hands**, written by Jami Lula

Rev. Diana – Two translations of that verse are ‘Into Your hands I commit my spirit’ and ‘Into Your hands I commend my spirit’. I offer my spirit, without question...I commit. And I *commend* my spirit...I *entrust* it to a Power, Intelligence and Process that I can’t see.

What If the Resurrection Story is really about rising above previous conditions and ways of being...realigning ourselves in thought, word, and action, releasing all that we think we know...all that is holding us back, to something bigger than ourselves?

We have to let go, in complete faith that all is unfolding for our Good. Unclench the grasp...put down the self-righteousness. It doesn't serve us. Before we can cultivate a new tomorrow, we have to let it go.

All of our past thoughts and experiences serve as nourishment...they lay the ground for new seeds to be planted. But sometimes compost gets kind of stinky...if we're not turning it and working it...practicing forgiveness, non-judgment, surrender, gratitude, compassion. These are some of the ways we work with our past experiences so that they can offer us nourishment and insight moving forward.

Take a moment now to call to mind a habitual pattern of thinking or being that is getting in the way of new life unfolding in your experience. Having spiritual community to witness as you commit to letting go of an old pattern is like having help in pulling up a great big weed that was choking out new growth. Set your intention...move it into the Imaginal Realm...see and feel whatever it is being carried off by the hand of the Divine...or bursting into flames, or whatever it takes for you to consciously release it to the Great Mystery, in faith that you are being transformed...feel your freedom from the ties that had you bound.

We are cultivating a new way of being in the world, both individually and collectively. The Latin roots of the word *cultivate* point toward *making ready for habitation, preparing for new life*. This doesn't happen overnight... cultivation is a multi-step process.

Anyone who has ever worked the ground for planting knows that we begin by breaking up the ground. In this way we make water, nutrients, and oxygen available in soil that has become compacted. Then we get rid of whatever weeds have taken root, making room for new seeds to be sown. We add nourishment to replenish what has been used up. Then finally, we sow the seeds and tend the plants until they have grown strong enough to stand on their own.

So, how does this apply to our spiritual life? We can use prayer and meditation to break up, or interrupt old, rigid, calcified ways of thinking and acting. Supporting one another in prayer and spending time in group meditation is a powerful way to nourish our new seeds. "Where two or more are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

Our daily personal Practices are also powerful tools for transformation. Of course the form that prayer takes is an individual thing. The intention, the conscious connection...that's what is important.

What If the Resurrection Story is symbolizing Renewal, New Life...What If the prayer time in the garden was to remind us where our True Support can always be found...***What If*** the day between the crucifixion and the resurrection was to remind us to pause...to take the time to connect with our innate Wisdom...to spend time in the imaginal realm, seeing and feeling a new way of being? Every time we pause...breathe in the Peace of the Divine and breathe out Love, more of the Christed Self is revealed in the world.

Every time I remember the Truth of who I Am and why I'm here, and think, speak, and act accordingly, I transcend all that I have been before. I am raised up to a new way of living. I move through the world as the Divine Human I was meant to be.

Rev. Diana, Chris, Dalton & Gary – Music

 **Christ In Me, Christ in You**, written by Gary Lynn Floyd

 **We Are Changed**, written by Peter Mayer (petermayer.com)

Rev. Diana – Prayer and Meditation are foundational practices at Mystic Heart. We practice the Possible through Prayer. As we contemplate the story of Jesus rising from the tomb, we see a metaphor for moving past limitation and stepping into Freedom...for stepping out of who we've been and stepping into the one we've come here to be. This day of resurrection, this season of renewal, reminds us that anything is possible...anything is possible. What if we lived our lives as though this were true?

What if we were to move through life, grounded in the faith that whatever we are looking for is also looking for us? What is it we are we looking for? Greater meaning, Purpose, Peace, Joy, and Compassion? It almost sounds like we're looking for God. What does it mean to be looking for God and to have God looking for me? Maybe it means that Infinite Intelligence is waiting for me to live the authentic life I was made to live...

...maybe It is awaiting *Its* opportunity to live *Its* full expression in, through and AS me...in, through and AS each one of us.

I invite you to once again, move into the imaginal realm, bringing all of your senses and feeling into the creation of a **Love-Soaked World**.

...where all humans are embodying and living from Peace, Joy, Abundance, Generosity, Justice and Freedom as Living Principles that guide our lives...where all humans practice Loving Kindness and Compassion, honoring and caring for one another, and for our beautiful planet as the Sacred Home that she is.

We are creating a world where all needs are met...where all beings have plenty of nourishing food, the safety of a warm and comfortable home...where mental/physical health, education, and healthy relationships are ensured by ...social systems grounded in Compassion and Wholeness...where right livelihood, creative contribution, and a sense of belonging are known as Gifts of the Spirit and experienced by all...

A world in which all beings are valued and respected for their inherent Goodness and Light...where the Peace we cultivate within shows up as a world free of hatred or violence.

We are creating a world that knows no greed, where there is abundance in having *enough*...where every being *deserves* and *receives* all that is needed for a full, rich, and contented life.

In this new world of our creation, every person is a caring and conscious vessel through which Generosity flows. By the Power of our collective intention, we write a new

story...we create a world that works for all beings. We know that our Good Work is bearing fruit.


We *will not* lower our Vision, no matter the appearance, knowing with our whole hearts that such a world is not only possible, but *inevitable*. We know that as we align our actions with our intention, it is coming into being now...and we trust that this prayer is an integral part of its Graceful unfolding.

We open our hearts, our doors, and our arms in Radical Welcome, erasing all lines of apparent separation. We create an open and loving community to which all are invited, and *in* which all have an equal voice.

We live into this amazing Vision, allowing it to bring a smile to our face and a song to our heart...raising our vibration. We carry this Powerful Prayer through the coming week, trusting that it is moving into form and experience in every moment, and so we simply let it be. And so it is...Amen...Sathu...Ashay...Aho!

The rest of our time together this morning is music, music, music! If you know the songs, feel free to join in...sing, dance, however the Spirit moves.

Rev. Diana, Chris, Dalton & Gary – Music

 **Hallelujah**, written by Leonard Cohen & Chris Johnson

 **Holy Now**, written by Peter Mayer (<https://www.petermayer.net/>)

I invite us to use the celebration of Easter each year as a reminder of how we might promote peaceful, grassroots, social change, empowered by faith and guided by prayerful communion. Let it remind us that natural law is always at work, that we can channel and direct it as Jesus did, consciously using it for our own Good and the Good of others.

May we remember that faith and expectation make a difference in outcomes, and by placing our faith in what is life-affirming, miraculous things happen.

John 14:12 tells us that Jesus spoke to his disciples this way: “Truly, truly, I tell *you*, he who believes in me, the works that I *do*, he will *do* also; and he will *do greater* works than *these*...”

It seems the people of his time were not ready to hear...I have to wonder, as a human family, are we? I think we are...I think it's time...big change is happening. We are not sure how fast it will happen, or what it will look like, but over 2000 years after this teacher's powerful message, we are waking up in powerful ways. It's like we have been in the dark ages and a new Enlightenment is occurring.

Let's wrap up and continue our Celebration next door. Celebration is a vital part of our Spiritual Practice. As a community, we celebrate by giving thanks for all of life's blessings. Together, we express our gratitude to God and to one another. We view celebration as a holy act, a creative act, an act of worship and devotion to the One

Source of all of Life. By celebrating, we feel and express our inherent Joy, which brings more to feel Joyful about!

And so, in celebration and deep gratitude, I thank you for joining us this morning for our time of devotion and celebration. It is in community that we come to know who we are.

Rev. Diana – Love Offering

We also offer you the opportunity to celebrate the work we are doing in the world by sharing your financial Good.

If you're joining us online, you can go to **mysticheart.org** to use our Donate Button or to find our mailing address.

We're going to share a tune from back in the 70's...if you know it, don't be afraid to help us out.

Rev. Diana, Chris, Dalton & Gary – Offertory Music

 ***Put Your Hand in the Hand***, written by Gene MacLellan

Lucinda – Blessing for the Offering

There is information available about upcoming events in the April Bulletin...take one home with you. And check out our amazing website.

Information Cards if new people

Prayer Requests: I am available after service – We invite everyone to help us make a private space for prayer here in the Sanctuary by joining us next door for lunch

Rev. Diana, Chris, Dalton & Gary – Closing Song

 ***What's Your Gospel Gonna' Be?*** written by Jami Lula & Gary Lynn Floyd

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