

Easter is the most important date in the Christian calendar. It's more important than even the birth of Christ, because Christianity is not built so much around the birth but rather the death and resurrection of Christ. The Easter story's significance lies in the message of the risen Christ.

While we can debate, accept or reject the storyline, along with New Years, 4th of July, Thanksgiving and Christmas, Easter is one of the most important holidays in our part of the world. As very young children we get pulled into the allure of Easter by colored eggs and the Easter Bunny. I have fond memories of dying eggs, both as a child and as a parent.

We all know the story behind Easter or season of Eastertide as it's known to some ... in a revised edition of the Bible (very recently published) when they rolled back the stone at the mouth of the cave, they discovered the groundhog had seen his shadow----they decided not to put away their shovels.

For many, the Easter story is mocked with such jokes or ignored all together. For increasing numbers of Americans, Easter has little value beyond egg hunts and the family getting together for dinner. While these things can be valuable in and of themselves, I fear we're in the process of losing something much more important to us as a society. And that which is being lost is not necessarily immediately visible or recognized by the populous.

We now can hold computing power in our hands that once took a roomful of computers to accomplish. We can make phone calls, perform calculations, do research, and make phone calls all with the same piece of equipment...that fits in the palm of your hand! That's progress, a tremendous achievement, but not without social impact.

We can take a video and make it available to the world almost instantaneously. We can tweet and tweeter, text message and read our mail...all while sitting in a restaurant, two feet across the table from our betrothed. ..lost in a world in the palm of our hands.

We no longer need to remember addresses or phone numbers. We are losing concern for correct spelling and grammar; the ability to do research rather than simply asking Google.

There is a social cost to this thing we call progress. And there is a social cost to placing such a high value on science, logic and rational thought that we act as if nothing else really matters.

There is no question, at least for non-believers, that the resurrection story is hard to take literally. It doesn't fit into a scientific, logical view of the world; or what we call "reality". No it does not. Accepted. It is not rational. But then, neither is spending tremendous amounts of time and money on a child that is significantly debilitated at birth. Or loving an alcoholic through one more bout of disappointment.

The world does not exist solely based on logic, rational thought and the laws of science. Imagination, intuition, mythology, compassion and love tremendously enrich our lives and ultimately may be more important to a life well lived.

So let's agree to move past a rejection of the Easter story merely because it is not something we can get to make rational sense. Let's rationally conclude that it remains a significant part of our culture for some reason.

So what can we take from this highly unlikely story of the resurrection of Christ? First, I think it's critically important that we not only acknowledge, but accept, there are large numbers of people who take the story literally and believe it to be true. AND that interpretation has had a very powerful and positive impact in their lives.

For Trinitarian Christians, Jesus is a man-God. He represents the physical manifestation of God on earth. The physical embodiment of logos, the Word; God incarnate, the Son of God; both man and God in one body.

As man he suffers the pangs of human life, is tempted but does not himself sin. As God, he cheats death of its power and arises to live again, demonstrating that a new life is available to us all.

Jesus is love and the epitome of what mankind should aspire to be. Trinitarians believe He is the light, the way to salvation. Those who follow Christ, expect to find new life, eternal life, in the here-after, in heaven, reconciled with their God. Jesus then is the literal link between the temporal and the eternal.

Unitarian Christians, along with many others, view Jesus as a model human being, a great moral teacher, a man who demonstrated the power of love. He was a man who was guided by something other than cultural norms and earthly considerations. In the vernacular, Jesus not only talked the talk, he walked the walk.

What I want to hold up this morning is that Jesus was and is a symbol of significance. Whether literally the Son of God and the link to life ever after, or merely—I say merely but don't really mean to imply it is a small fete—Jesus is also seen as a teacher, a moral guide; a guide, who if followed leads us to a new, better life on earth, in human form.

I want to stop here and make note of another historic story of new life. It's another story of some form of redemption and resurrection that is also celebrated in the springtime. It's the Jewish story of the Passover, an eight day festival in commemoration of the Israelites emancipation from slavery in Egypt.

In a very real sense, it too is a story of new life. It's also a story of miraculous dimensions. Moses, a prophet not a god, is essentially ordained by God to lead God's covenanted people out of slavery. God appears to Moses in the form of a burning bush that does not itself ignite.

The story tells us that Moses went to Egypt to demand the release of his people from slavery. When his demand was rejected, ten plagues were set upon the land. It was then that Moses led the Exodus of his people, the Israelites, across the Red Sea and out of Egypt and out of slavery.

The crossing of the Red Sea is something straight out of the movies. (Well maybe it was the other way around). Once on the other side, they wandered in the desert for forty years. At the age of 120, Moses climbs Mount Nebo and is able to see into the Promised Land. (Reminds me of someone else who went to the mountain top and was able to see over to the Promised land). There on the mountain, Moses dies before he is able to place a foot on that land.

A curious story. A miraculous story. An amazing story that is foundational to the celebration of Passover. Perhaps, all stories of redemption, resurrection and new life are amazing and easily seen as miraculous.

There is yet another story of new life that happens in the springtime. It's a story we all know very well and most of us celebrate with glee. When the snow recedes and days become longer and warmer, signs of new life emerging, appear all around us.

Spring bulbs begin to poke their green heads out of the ground. As if by magic, there they are. From nothing that appears alive, an amazing event begins to take place right before our very eyes.

Birds begin to sing again. And birds that we haven't seen for months suddenly appear at the bird feeder or on branches of trees and shrubs. Suddenly there are signs of new life almost everywhere we look.

We've just heard three stories associated with the springtime. Three separate stories centered around redemption, resurrection, and new life. I want to tie them all together by pointing to yet another form of new life that can unfold for us.

For this, I turn to Joseph Campbell who had an amazing ability to help us see more deeply into our selves and the world around us. Through the eyes of mythology, he helped us to break free of the mundane and enter a world of wisdom and insight.

In his book, *The Power of Myth*, I found words that infused all that I've had to say today. In talking about virgin birth he referenced the Indian system of seven psychological centers that describe stages of spiritual development. These seven centers can be found along the spine.

He says the fourth center, at the level of the heart, is the opening to compassion. He explains that the fourth center is where we “move out of the field of animal action into a field that is properly human and spiritual.” When that happens, “you awaken at the level of the heart to compassion, shared suffering: experienced participation in the suffering of another person”. Think about it: experienced participation in the suffering of others!

He says, “that is the beginning of humanity. And the meditations of religion properly are on that level, the heart level.” From virgin birth emerges a god, and that god is you.

“All of these symbols in mythology refer to you. You can get stuck out *there*, and think it’s all out *there*. So you’re thinking about Jesus with all the sentiments relevant to how he suffered—out there. But that suffering is what ought to be going on in you. “

He then asks an amazing question, a question with miraculous connotations, he asks “have you been spiritually reborn? Have you died to your animal nature and come to life as a human incarnation of compassion?”

To my ears that sounds an awful lot like asking someone if they have been saved! We can get so lost in the out there of science, logic and rational thought we totally miss what exists on the non-earthly plane.

When we get lost in the out there, we may well be missing something quite miraculous: the possibility of redemption, resurrection and new life. Campbell tells us these are the proper meditations of religion.

Have you been spiritually reborn? Have you grown to the point that you are ready to break through the eggshell of one existence into one where you can experience participation in the suffering of another person? For that is the beginning of humanity, the birth of a spiritual existence. That’s what Joseph Campbell tells us.

It’s springtime, a time of transformation and new life. Are you ready?