

**Some Glad Morning**  
Rev. Luke Stevens-Royer  
Sunday, April 1, 2018

**First Unitarian Universalist Church**  
Rochester, Minnesota

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**READINGS**

*Words of meditation come from Richard Gilbert*

*from Still I Rise by Maya Angelou*

*from the Gospel of Mark*

*Winter is Over by Rumi*

## HOMILY

Maybe you know the moment –  
you catch eyes with a small child,  
when they have found some new treasure  
that they aren't exactly supposed to have.

And they see your eyes – and they run for it.  
The chase ensues, the litany of “no, no, no, no, no” and “stop stop stop stop stop”  
And you catch them (hopefully)  
and pick them up  
and they laugh, unaware of the danger they encountered  
or the precariousness of their fragile life hanging in the balance –  
you just embrace them, and hold them,  
and take a sigh of relief, and laugh right along,  
because you know this is part of life –  
a child breaking free and testing boundaries  
because curiosity and life and laughter  
and stronger than their fear – even if not their own.

There are moments –  
when life breaks out of its constraints,  
the story flies off the page,  
the notes dance off the score,  
and something beautiful happens –  
sometimes expected, and often right at the moment we couldn't have imagined.

*One day, something very old happened again.*

writes poet Joyce Sutphen –

*The green came back to the branches,  
settling like leafy birds on the highest twigs;  
the ground broke open as dark as coffee beans.*

*The clouds took up their positions in the deep stadium of the sky,  
gloving the bright orb of the sun  
before they pitched it over the horizon.*

*It was as good as ever:  
the air was filled with the scent of lilacs  
and cherry blossoms  
sounded their long whistle down the track -  
It was some glad morning.*

The women woke early, before the sun,  
to go to the place where Jesus had been laid –  
they were going, as people have been going for centuries  
to many graves of many people,  
to remember their loved one and adorn their grave  
with spices and oil, with flowers and love.

It's this unbelievable story, larger than life, literally,  
and yet there is something at its core that is just so true about life and death.

*They were terrified and amazed, as the story goes.*

After some tragedy,  
after some loss,  
after some grief,  
is that not what happens?

Don't we meet whatever glimmer of hope,  
any little indication of possibility and life coming out of despair  
we greet it with skepticism, with hesitancy,  
with a little terror, a little amazement –  
we meet any possibility of finding happiness or joy  
when we're not sure it is appropriate yet,  
or we don't want to set ourselves for disappointment –

we say,  
*how can I be happy at a time like this?  
I can't believe something good can come out of something bad.  
I'm not sure if I can be happy again.  
I'm not sure gun laws are really going to change.  
I'm not sure, I can't believe, that some new life comes out of this; whatever it is.*

And there is truth to the hesitancy –  
there is a real place for naming and knowing  
real loss, and grief, and not pretending everything will be the same  
or everything can be fixed – often it can't, at least not in the same way.

And there is also truth to the hope –  
there is a real place for naming and knowing  
real joy, and possibility,  
where the tears of grief are all mixed up with the tears of joy  
and we stop believing that death and despair have the last word –  
and a little afraid, and a little amazed,  
we find ways to say yes to life again.

Jesus died as an individual –  
a person committed to justice and inclusion,  
of welcome to the outcast and marginalized,  
of disrupting the status quo  
and challenging empire and power face to face –

And the spirit of Jesus,  
and the love that he embodied and he taught,  
rose as a community –  
rose in the hearts of those who believed a different world is possible –  
that humanity could be in relationship with one another much better.

That's what happens  
when any teacher of wisdom or worker for justice dies -  
they die as individuals,  
and rise as a community  
that carries on the work.

That's what happens  
when anyone we love dies –  
they die as individuals, and they rise and live  
in our hearts, in our actions –  
their impact ripples out in ways we couldn't imagine.

*Some glad morning, when this life is over, I'll fly away*  
says the old spiritual.

It is a song out of the slave traditions  
not about escaping this world to a heavenly paradise out there –  
these were songs about escaping captivity into liberation,  
escaping slavery into freedom –  
and a refusal to let the ownership of the slaveholders  
own their soul – even in the midst of their captivity.

These were songs of liberation and hope in the midst of hardship –  
to give the mind, to give the heart,  
life and love stronger than fear and despair.

Each day, each glad morning, the soul can fly –  
the souls of the living, and the dead,  
they fly as we wake to a new day,  
as we imagine new possibility,  
as we begin to breathe again,  
and our soul begins to fly toward freedom  
toward a world reconfigured in love and hope  
out from the tombs of our indifference,  
our isolation,  
our fear.

A few weeks ago, our daughter tried ice skating for the first time.  
One might think, that having grown up in Minnesota,  
I would have learned how to ice skate.

As it happens – for whatever reason,  
I grew up with a deep aversion to putting anything on my feet  
that would increase the acceleration of my body at all.

On our class ski trip in elementary school,  
I failed the bunny hill crash course  
and became, what I now say, *more of a chalet type of person*.

Later on, after I was the only student to turn in the permission form to roller blade,  
I, and the instructor, took deep breaths as I fell to the ground quickly, and hard,  
twice, before him asking, *do you want to just to play softball with the rest of the class?* Those roller blades were off before the sentence was finished.

And, trying cross country skiing with my wife,  
we got to a small incline, and attempting to brace myself,  
I snapped the pole, fell over,  
and returned safely to our car.

So – then my 4 year old daughter, after getting on the ice for the first time  
and vastly surpassing my abilities in a matter of seconds,  
says, “Papa – next time you can skate with me.”  
Terror ensued within...”sure” I said.

I think she’s the only person in the world that would ever convince me to even  
consider such a thing.

The next week, I tried on some skates –  
Jenna, my wife, looked at my ankles wobbling just putting them on, saying,  
“umm...let’s take it easy here...”

I walked around the changing area,  
then, putting my foot on the ice just a moment to feel the slide of the skate,  
I said – “oh, wow, yes, this is a horrible idea.”

But the 4 year old said, “come on, Papa, I’ll help you.”

And I thought, “yeah, but if you try, you might get crushed.”  
So, I tightly grabbed the side wall,  
and about as slowly as evolutionary adaptation,  
moved along the side of the wall on the ice.

Jenna, looking on, thinking – “I wonder which limb he’ll lose use of today.”  
And my daughter, next to me, skating slowly, completely hands free –  
said, “I’ll skate next to you, Papa, to help you and make sure you don’t fall.”

I, again, thought – if I fall, you probably don’t want to be right there.  
But she stayed there, and I didn’t fall,  
and there along the side of the ice rink,  
was this terrified 6-foot man on skates  
being gently and calmly guided and guarded  
by someone a 10<sup>th</sup> his size.

*All we need is hope*, sings Andre Day, sings the choir this morning –  
*All we need is hope – and for that we have each other – and we will rise.*

We have each other –  
that's how we overcome our fear,  
that's how our hearts find their way out of the tomb,  
out of sorrow, into the light of a morning breaking open  
that's how we add our color, our petals,  
to the tree of life just waiting to spring into bloom.

To believe in resurrection  
is to believe that green shoots come out of the cold winter ground  
is to believe that the love and spirit of a person lasts far beyond their last breaths  
is to believe that love rises out of sorrow  
and creates something of beauty  
where we might not have expected it.

And all of the sudden, there you are, when you most need it –  
when you question your identity, your resilience, your ability,  
and someone says, from sacred memory living within you –  
or the fierce, loving presence right next to you –

*I'm right here alongside you,  
I'll be sure you don't fall –  
but if you do, I'll help you get back up –  
or, maybe just sit with you  
until you are able to rise  
and we'll rise together.*

That's when the story, the teaching, and love  
flies right out of the tomb  
and blooms into compassion and grace and hope  
when you were convinced death had the final victory  
and all was lost.

Love and life rise again, over and over and over –  
in the most simple ways possible –  
which are the only ways that really matter.

Like that toddler running away from their parent upon finding a new treasure,  
like the memory of a loved one gone whose life ripples out beyond their breath,  
like the first shoots of the spring,  
life has within it a re-creating force,  
said Rev. Eliza, minister here a hundred and forty years ago – life breaks through.

And you find yourself,  
up through the fear, up from the dust,  
in the light of springtime sun in the sky,  
when you were broken down and tired,  
someone shows up next to you,  
and like dust – all we need is hope –  
for that, we have each other – and together, we rise.