

Creatively Transforming and Emerging

I'm not sure if Rev. David Miller touched on this last week or not, so in case you missed the history of Easter, let me trace its pagan roots to you just a little bit by talking about this man named Attis, who had quite a following up in Vatican Hill – yes, the same one that is now home to an infamous Pope. Attis was known to die every year during “Black Friday.” But on the third day, he would rise again and the townspeople would celebrate this process of birth and rebirth and it would be in alignment with how they harvest their crops.

As we can see, the story of resurrection was not originally copyrighted by Christians! Almost every religious tradition and spirituality have tales about death and resurrection – Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism – if it's not a god/dess coming back to life, then it's some of us at a future date. If we're lucky, as in the case of Attis, we get to resurrect on a recurring basis.

These resurrection stories (as unbelievable as some are) obviously have some kind of meaning and resonance for people. They have survived in the human consciousness for so long down to contemporary pop culture. Even the third Matrix was subtitled “Resurrection.”

Indeed, that is the power of myth. Joseph Campbell says, "Myths are seldom real, but they're always true!" Perhaps the truth it reveals is the pervasiveness of suffering and our need for some kind of redemption

I believe Christianity made the mistake, however, of glorifying suffering instead of saying it ends right there on that cross 2,000 years ago. Even today, in places like the Philippines, Easter is celebrated with the annual choosing of a "lucky" man to portray Jesus, walking down the street bearing a cross, and using real nails (I kid you not) to nail him to a cross. It's not as if we are much more civilized in this country, with movies like "The Passion of the Christ," which in my opinion is a snuff film, making millions of dollars.

I would like to pause at this point to do a shameless plug for Rebecca Parker (president of Starr King School for the Ministry) and Rita Nakashima Brock's expose on sacrificial atonement, saying it took 1,000 years for Christians to kill their God in "*Saving Paradise: How Christianity Traded Love of This World for Crucifixion and Empire*"

As UUs, how do we find new ways to confront profound evil and hopelessness in our lives and in our world? Might I suggest a process called creative transformation? I must admit, the title of today's sermon was inspired by the magazine that comes out of the Center for Process and Faith in Claremont quarterly called "Creative

Transformation.” According to the home page of the website and according to process guru John Cobb, Jr.,

Creative Transformation takes its name from the belief of process theologians that God's work is always creative and always transformative, and that wherever creative transformation is occurring, God is there. This means that instead of clinging to past formulations of faith and the ways of action that used to work, we are striving to be co-workers with God by seeking new formulation and more effective ways of action.

Doesn't it sound like it involves quite a bit of reframing and acting in new ways and aren't we UUs good at reframing things?

So, I would like to reframe Easter as a moment when we can think of new ways of relieving suffering and that resurrection is truly an act of creative transformation. How's that for reframing?

Now you may be saying to yourself, that all sounds great in theory, but how does this apply to our lives? I don't know enough about your life to use you as an illustration, so I'll use myself instead!

Any kind of change whatsoever involves death, does it not?

For me, 2008 was such a “deadly” year!

1. In January, I had to bury the church I planted in Hawai'i back in 2005. Boy was that a grieving process, realizing the community was no longer sustainable.
2. Then, the economy started heading south and I was laid off from my job as ED of the Counseling & Spiritual Care Center of Hawai'i in April
3. Followed by packing up my bags and moving back to mainland by the end of May.
4. We had to give up our house that overlooked the ocean and the mountains into a tiny apartment in Long Beach. Some walk-in closets were bigger than this apartment and I had to share it with my partner, our bird, and our cat – the two of whom we had to relocate from Hawai'i.
5. The cat was so miserable in this tiny apartment, she decided to run away in August. We still haven't found her to this date, probably qualifying for an ambiguous loss situation at this point.
6. Remember how I was laid off? Well, I was unemployed for 3 months, collecting rejection letter after rejection letter.

7. When I finally found a job working on the No on 8 campaign, the whole marriage equality movement as you know suffered a blow with Prop 8 passing in November

That's a lot of losses in one year, eh? Any ONE would be challenging enough, but all coming at you at the same time. Needless to say, I suffered from a mini depression—death and grieving after death and grieving produces a tremendous amount of sadness.

Then, I read a New Age book a friend of mine gave me called “2012: Crossing the Bridge to the Future” by Mark Borax and that reminded me that spiritual death is necessary for new life to emerge. Again, a way to reframe my situation so that new ways of action and creative transformation can emerge.

I bet many of you have found yourselves “dying” to something at some point or another. Those who are in recovery process can probably relate to this resurrection experience – once you hit rock bottom and you feel like you've reached the end of your rope and a part you has died, that's when you can start emerging. Death needs to happen in order for new growth to spring forth!

Isn't this the lesson we learn from flowers? Aren't we in awe of their tenacity and resiliency? Every single step speaks of Creative

Transformation, especially those tulips – planted in winter as bulb under harsh weather conditions, but emerges anyway every spring— first as a bud, then transforms into a blooming flower, then as it dies, new life is right around the corner and the process begins again with that bulb. That’s the hope we can hang on to – death does not have the final word and is not the end of the story.

Every year, creative transformation is right around the corner and the story continues to unfold. Good thing my life didn’t end in 2008, with that dark place of despair and gloom.

Thanks to a rebate from the government (which I’ve yet to see), and a loan from my parents, my partner and I were able to purchase a modest home. We adopted a new cat last year, who is as cute as can be. And the passage of Prop 8 has given me job security with California Faith for Equality! I can truly say I am still creatively transforming and emerging...

Does this resonate with your story? We’ve certainly gone through a very dark recession for the past couple years, with so many folks laid off and unemployed or underemployed as a result. Or perhaps you have gone through a divorce process, or lost something near and dear to you. Just when you were about to throw in the towels, there was a glimmer of hope, a spark of imagination that helped propel you

forward, enabling you to sing, “the sun will come out tomorrow!” OK, maybe not that far! Nonetheless, the light of creative transformation has shone through!

Some might describe this as a mystical or spiritual experience, others call it a miracle. I call it a resurrection!

I believe our collective story as a society can be that way too if we open ourselves up towards that miraculous possibility. Remember the number of times healthcare has been pronounced dead? Yet, lo and behold, it emerged from the grave right before Easter appropriately enough. Our president even called it the beginning of spring. Well, that remains to be seen, right? Creative Transformation at every step, beauty unfolding all around us. The trick is to become more aware of the journey and it is also to emerge in the face of adversity and even death.

But we can't just sit idly by and wait for things to happen either. Notice the title of sermon reflects a present tense action? We've got choices to make and new actions to take.

This season of Easter, may we remember that our story doesn't end with death and destruction, but rather we are always creatively transforming and emerging as a beautiful Beloved Community