

Easter Search for Meaning
Kate Hand

When I was growing up, Easter was always a really mixed bag for me. I liked getting the Easter basket – who doesn't like chocolate? But it wasn't unalloyed joy biting into the chocolate bunny or the creme-filled eggs. I was a fat child, and so eating sweets was always accompanied by a certain amount of self-recrimination. We always received new dresses to wear on Easter. That was nice, but my beautiful, svelte, blond sister always looked lovely in hers, and I looked, well... not as lovely. Then there was the Easter Sunrise service at our church. I've *never* liked having to wake up early. I'm not sure whose bright idea it was to have an Easter Sunrise Service, but I suppose it was partly to acknowledge that sunrise was when Jesus' friends arrived at his tomb to discover that the stone had been rolled away, and the tomb was empty, and therefore an appropriate time to celebrate Christ rising from the dead. But I suspect it was more about how to handle that overflow crowd of twice yearly Christians – those who attended church only on Christmas and Easter, but not necessarily figuring on die-hard families like ours who attended both the sunrise service *and* the regular 11am service with the special Easter breakfast and Sunday School sandwiched in between.

And then there was the dogma itself. I tried for years to make it my truth that if I accepted Christ as my savior, that I would then be “saved” from eternal damnation. But now I think maybe the brand of Christianity I grew up with was missing the point. It was all so focused on life after death. Jesus' message, as I now understand it, was about creating heaven on *earth* through people loving and caring for each other, in the here and now.

I no longer call myself a Christian, and have, at times in my adult life, looked down my nose with a smug superiority at what seem like the silly beliefs I grew up with. And yet, when I look at what that man Jesus *actually preached*, he is my hero. He's singing my song.

In a few moments, the choir will sing “God Save the People,” from the musical *Godspell*. The refrain of this song is “When wilt thou save the people, oh God of mercy, when?” Well, I've come to realize Jesus' message was and is life-saving: Can you imagine a world where we Forgave 70 times 7, Turned the other cheek, Loved our enemies, loved our neighbors as ourselves (and therefore *loved ourselves*) and, regarded everyone as our neighbor?

Easily said. Not so easily done. The Rev. Dr. Victoria Weinstein, in her poem “Being the Resurrection,” says:

The stone has got to be rolled back from the tomb again and again every year.
Roll up your sleeves.

He is not coming back, you know.
He is not coming back unless it is we who rise for him
We who lay healing hands on the reviled and rejected like he did
on his behalf --

We who rage for righteousness in his insistent voice
We who love the sinner, even knowing that "the sinner" is no farther off than our own
heartbeat

He will not be back to join us at the table
To share God's extravagant banquet
God's love feast, *all are invited, come as you are*
And so it is you and I who must feast for him
Must say the grace and break the bread and pass it to the left
and dish up the broiled fish (or pour the wine) and pass it to the right.
And treat each one so tenderly
as though just this morning she or he made the personal effort
to make it back from heaven, or from hell
but certainly from death
to be by our side.

Because if by some miracle (and why not a miracle?)
He did come back
Wouldn't he want to see us like this?
Wouldn't it be a miracle to live for just one day
So that if he did, by some amazing feat
come riding into town
He could take a look around and say
"This is what I meant!"

And we could say
it took us a long time...
but we finally figured it out.

Oh, let us live to make it so.

You are the resurrection and the life.