

The Virtual Easter Egg Hunt (and Gentle Returning of Life)

April 4th, 2021

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Good morning and good Sunday. I hope that this Easter morning finds you well. My name is Leon Dunkley and I am honored to serve as minister to North Universalist Chapel Society (or North Chapel) in Woodstock, Vermont. Today is Sunday, April 4th. This is an amazing moment in the world. Fifty-three years ago today, Martin Luther King was killed in Memphis, TN. It's amazing to me that this anniversary is coinciding with Easter Sunday.

In any case, lead singer Bono of the famous rock group, U2, sings about this event so passionately...in a song called Pride (In the Name of Love). He mentions this very date in the song. He sings:

Early morning, April 4, a shot rings out in a Memphis sky
Free-At-Last, they took your life but they could not take your pride

Free-At-Last is what he called him. This was Bono's name for Martin Luther King.

Over these last 53 years, I like to think that we have become part of his pride, to some extent. Beautiful and brave, foolish and wise and fiercely devoted to love. Thank you, Martin, for showing us the way.

Today is Sunday, April 4th and today is Easter Sunday and the title of this morning's reflection is The Virtual Easter Egg Hunt and Gentle Returning of Life. It's a beautiful day today and I am very glad to see you. To all souls, I say, "Good morning. It is so good to be together."

Close, hold and then, open. This leads to great treasure in life. Let's close our eyes and breath in. Let's deepen into ourselves, listening as we are able to the river of life that is all

around us. It flows again so boldly, having so recently reawakened from its frozen state.

Close, hold and then, open. These were the only instructions, the only legible words written on an old treasure map that I found in the archives of North Chapel. I didn't even know that it was there...from North Chapel's pirate phase, perhaps. I don't know. I'll have to look into it.

Just last week, I was rummaging through these old, crusty-dusty boxes up in the attic. I was hoping to find some old North Chapel sermons delivered on Easter Sunday. I didn't find what I was looking for but what I did find was truly fascinating. Get this! I found the ancient pirate meaning of Easter Sunday at North Chapel. I did. I even found the old map that leads to buried treasure and everything—"X" marks the spot!

Just look at it! [show map] I'm so excited. I think it really leads to buried treasure. So, I have an Easter question for you. Do you still believe in buried treasure? Do you believe in the Easter Bunny? I do. In fact, I believe that the Easter Bunny was secretly a pirate, a pirate who left this treasure map at North Chapel way back in the day. AND I believe that the Easter Bunny Pirate left North Chapel a wonderful gift, hidden in a super-secret, extra-special location revealed by this treasure map! I think that if we look for the wonderful gift, we'll surely find it...maybe not every time, but sometimes we will. The trick is in keeping love alive. The trick is living in the newness of possibility.

It's so important to keep love alive. In fact, Love Alive is the name of a poem. It was written by two sisters, Ann and Nancy Wilson. They wrote it years ago. I don't think that they wrote it about Easter but the words seem to fit somehow.

The Sky was dark this morning when I raised my head
I stood at the window and darkness was my bane
Suddenly, a sunbeam arch thrilled me to my weary heart
It was the prettiest thing I'd ever seen

I knew I had to keep my love alive

A sunbeam arch is like a rainbow, another symbol of possibility...if, of course, you believe in that kind of thing. I invite you to believe. It's fun. It's fun to hold out for the miracles in life...no matter how large or small.

Have you ever seen a miracle? Have you ever climbed inside one of them? I did...at a place called Star Island. Star Island is a camp and a conference center. It is an island in the Atlantic. It's located ten miles off the coast of Portsmouth, NH. For those who the adventure of it, Star Island is wonderful. You can go back year after years. It becomes something of a tradition.

Summer days at Star Island are precious but sometimes, of course, it rains. Sometimes, it rains all week which is really a bummer. When it rains all week—ugh, dear Lord!—that experience is so demoralizing. It's hard to be trapped inside for so long—day after day. It's really hard. It's hard when you start to lose hope. Sometimes, it's hard to keep the love alive.

I was working on Star one year. I was on island all summer long. One week, it just rained and rained. You could tell that the people who were out there for the week were getting really sad. They stood longingly in doorways. They pressed their faces against the windows. They stood beneath the roof of the front porch, inches from the downpour and looking out on an empty field...hoping that the weather was soon to change. And then it did. Suddenly. Miraculously. It changed. The clouds broke open. Suddenly, the arch of a sunbeam came crashing down to earth. Suddenly, a rainbow appeared. It, too, came crashing through the clouds. It splashed down in the harbor, right in front of us! It was so clear. It was so close. You could almost reach right out and touch it.

And a bunch of us were ready to do just that. We put work aside for a moment and we climbed right on into the miracle...the miracle of life that was unfolding right before us. We climbed into the myth, into the tall tale of life. We climbed into the folklore and into the wonder.

We were already dressed in our raingear. So, being outside wasn't an issue—which was good because, in spite of the sunbeam and the rainbow, it was still raining outside. But that didn't matter to us. We all had the same idea. We grabbed shovels and rakes and hoes...any tool that we could dig with and we pretended to set out on a quest for buried treasure. We were screaming, laughing, yelling at the tops of our lungs, "We're gonna be rich, rich beyond our wildest dreams!! Ha, ha!!!" We captured everyone's attention and we kept the love alive.

We ran recklessly, timelessly, across the empty, open field, where everyone could see us. We made absolute fools of ourselves but everyone at the conference knew why we were doing it. We were doing it because...

The Sky was dark that morning when we raised our heads
We stood at the window and darkness was our bane
Suddenly a sunbeam arch thrilled us to my weary hearts
It was the prettiest thing we had ever seen
We knew we had to keep our love alive

It's so important to keep love alive. That's what I think that Easter is all about—daring to keep hope and love alive...against all odds, against the grain...and hopefully, with a little bit of humor.

That rainy week at Star, we set out for buried treasure and I can't remember whether or not we found. I only remember what it felt like when we climbed inside the miracle, when we climbed inside the miracle of life.

So, let's close our eyes and breath in, deepening into ourselves. Let's deepen down and listen to the river of life that

flows within, newly flowing and recently released from its frozen state. Let's take the broad view and hold the balance of all things within our soul. Let's rest a while. And when we're ready, let's climb into the miracle. Let's open up our hearts and let the good light in. It's springtime now, no matter that the weather keeps trying to tell us otherwise.

So, I found this treasure old map. It's totally authentic. It shows just where we have to go in order to find the buried treasure. According to the treasure map, there are three locations and there not too far away! There are clues in each location that tell us the nature of what we are looking for and the map shows us where we can actually find it, "X" marks the spot and all!!! Do you want to go? Do you think we can, right here and now? It'll be like a group excursion. It'll be like a field trip, a great adventure!! They say if we click our heals, we can make all things possible.

Let's go. I think we're ready. All we have to do is follow the directions on the treasure map. It leads us to three locations—The River's Edge, the Mountain Top and the Lake Side. At each of these locations, we'll find an Easter clue. These three clues combine and show us right where the treasure is buried—"X" marks the spot!

The first destination is the River's Edge. I went there and I found a clue, a singing clue. It sang:

River, heal my body
River, heal my soul
When I go down, down by the water, by...
...the water I feel whole

And River asked, "Is it this way for you?" Do you feel whole and healed when you spend time down by the Riverside? If you feel this way (or if you would to), just close your eyes, breath in. Let's deepen into ourselves. Let's deepen down and listen to the river of life within. What is the message of this

river? What clues does it offer us in life? Is the river trying to tell us something...as it rushes sometimes and as it flows, as it stands still or doubles back on itself? We are like the river sometimes. We rush. We flow and we stand still. We double back on ourselves sometimes. Just like the river, we flow. We depend on this. We know river to be true as we heal, held whole by a love that knows no bounds. Let's flow with the rivers of life and allow ourselves to be renewed.

The second destination is the Mountain Top, the one that looks over the town of Woodstock. I went there too and I found another singing clue. It sang:

Mountain, heal my body and, Mountain, heal my soul
When I go up high on the Mountain, by...
...the Mountain I'm made whole

And Mountain asked, "Is it this way for you?" Do you feel whole and healed at the top of the mountain? If you feel this way (or if you would to), take the broadest view of life. Look out upon the horizon and hold the balance of all things within. Breathe into the openness of the Mountain Top and rest a while. Deepen down and listen to the mountain that is within us. What is the message of this mountain? What clues does it offer us in life? Is mountain trying to tell us something and are we listening...as it stands so tall, so massive, so strong, so beautiful and brave...its winter ices, melting and rolling gently off of its back...like our troubles. As we heal, we learn just how to let them go. We are like the mountain sometimes, standing tall and strong, being wise and brave...and surprisingly playful. For short moments in the morning, we are big enough to hide the whole sunrise behind our back...and every morning we do. As strong as we are as mountain, try as we may, we can't hold back the gentle rising of the sun...especially not on Easter Sunday. [smile] And with the morning sunrise, in this season, comes new life.

Lo, the earth awakes again

From the winter's bond and pain
Bring we leaf and flower and spray
To adorn this happy day, Alleluia

Here comes the sun! We depend on this and we know this to be true as we heal, held whole by a love that knows no bounds. Let us rise like the mountain sun. Let us rise and allow ourselves to be renewed.

The third destination is the Lake Side—Silver Lake, the one by the Barnard General Store. I went there as well and I found the third and final singing clue:

Water, heal my body and, Water, heal my soul
When I go down, down by the Water, by...
...the Water I feel whole

At the river's edge, we closed our eyes and we learned how to breathe in. At the mountain top, we looked all around and we held the balance of all things. At the lake side, we open up our heart and we dive right in...maybe not today—it's a little cold—but soon enough, for sure.

Close, hold and then, open. We've been saying this all along. Let's close our eyes and breath in. Let's deepen into ourselves. Let's deepen down and listen to the river of life within us. Let's take the broad view of life, holding the balance of all things within our soul. Let's rest in this balance for a while [breath] and then, when we are ready, let's open up our hearts and let us learn to let the good light in.

All of this leads us to "X" marks the spot and the spot is right here, in the Sanctuary of North Chapel. The treasure that we seek is not buried beneath this building. It's not buried anywhere beneath the earth. The great treasure that we seek is buried in each of us. We all carry our part of the treasure everywhere we go—each to our gift. As they sing, "All of heaven is buried in your heart." I think that's true. That's the treasure...and the treasure is real. I don't know but I believe

it's real...or maybe we just make it real by climbing into the
miracle that keeps love alive.

May it be so. Blessed be and amen.