

## **Readings from BUUF Zoom service April 12, 2020.**

In most cases, I've listed the version/excerpt that was read during the service, but also linked to the source I used which may have it in more complete form. The more complete readings were all marvelous--I recommend going to the sources.

### **Chalice Lighting, read by Stuart Kaplan**

**For Holy Days on Which We Recall the Old Stories** By Dillman Baker Sorrells, minister emerita of the First UU Church of Rochester MN. Source:

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/chalice-lighting/holy-days-which-we-recall-old-stories>

For holy days on which we recall the old stories, we light the flame.

For Passover which reminds us of the courage and strength of those seeking freedom in the past, we light the flame.

For Easter which reminds us that love is our greatest challenge, we light the flame.

For gathering today in this sacred space, we light the flame.

For the opportunity to be together as a community, to remember the past, to plan for our future, to be alive in our present.

### **Opening Words, read (and illustrated) by Kathy Parham**

#### **Our Souls Speak Spring**

Opening By Evin Carvill Ziemer, who serves the UUA as a Congregational Life Consultant in the Central East Region. Source: <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/opening/our-souls-speak-spring>

If we lived in another climate

Our souls might speak other languages

We might speak oasis or permafrost, dry season or monsoon

But our souls speak spring

Our souls speak green shoots pushing through last year's leaves

Our souls speak flower buds stretching to sun

Our souls speak mud puddle and nest building, damp earth and worm castings, tiny green leaves and frog choruses

We speak spring because spring sings in us

We gather to nurture our faith in our own growing

Our own courage to push through

Our own blossoming in beauty

Our own small part in the spring of this world

Come, let us worship together

### **Reading #1 (prayer), read by Deb Casaccia**

**The Season of Flowers, Prayer** By Rev. Paul R Beedle, minister of the First UU Church of New Orleans. Source: <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/prayer/season-flowers>

Let us contemplate the Spirit together:  
Spirit of Life and Love, Justice and Peace:  
Six weeks ago our Christian neighbors held their rite of ashes,  
    and this past week they scattered palms  
from which next year's ashes will be made,  
and commemorated the death of the ancient leader  
whose ministry inspires their faith and traditions.  
Today they celebrate the story of a miracle,  
    which is known as his victory over death,  
and is said to be the salvation of all people.  
They have been doing this now for thousands of years  
    at the season when the earth awakes from winter,  
    the season of the flowers;  
Just as our Jewish neighbors at the same season  
celebrate a miracle of liberation from oppression;  
Just as our neighbors of other faiths – Hindu, Buddhist, Jain and more –  
    celebrate the births of gods and the start of new years;  
Just as we, each year, celebrate the Earth, our home.

Come what may, O Spirit of Life:  
Help us to see beyond belief to the goods and blessings and values  
    that we, in our common humanity,  
use these symbols and seasons to remember.  
May we and our neighbors of all faiths also remember what binds us  
    across our differences of custom and belief.  
May we see, beyond our common humanity,  
our common commitments.  
And may we, together, fill the world with love, understanding and peace.  
In the Spirit, by the Spirit, with the Spirit giving power, so may it be. Amen.

### **Reading #2, read by Linda Larson**

This next reading is heavily-excerpted from an article in the UU World Magazine in 2006, written by Rev Jane Ranney Rzepka, who served as senior minister of the UU Church of the Larger Fellowship from 1999-2010. Source:

<https://www.uuworld.org/articles/skeptical-sacred-stories%3F>

#### *Skeptical of Sacred Stories?*

Hooray for stories: the knee-slapper story you hear at a party; the astonishing story that widens your world; the quiet snuggly bedtime story; the heartwarming story that gives you hope, inspiration, or motivation; even the story that raises an eyebrow. Does that include the Passover story and the Easter story? Sure it does. For years I've preached, along with my colleagues in the Unitarian Universalist ministry, that stories bear truths. And that's a fundamental part of what Unitarian Universalism is all about, the "free and responsible search for truth."

Okay. To state the obvious, just because it's a story—even a religious one, even one that's survived through the generations—certainly doesn't make the story true in any sense of the word. It doesn't necessarily point to metaphorical truth, nor does it necessarily convey ancient wisdom.

And sometimes it just depends how the story is told.

When I was a child, my school didn't have much of a grip on the separation between church and state, and so at this time of year we heard a lot about Jesus dying on the cross. I was a Unitarian, and this was the first I'd heard of the gory aspects of the crucifixion story.

At church, the same story was not so much about nails and blood but about a good man's teachings living on after he was dead. His teachings came to life over and over again, not unlike the daffodil bulbs we planted in the autumn along the church's long driveway.

...

To some Unitarian Universalists, it matters whether the basis of a religious story is historical, factual. But some Unitarian Universalists find merit enough in the Jesus story to find inspiration or, indeed, a spiritual foundation. When a story offers a basis for hope, health, celebration, and good works, why not call it a keeper?

You probably have your own sources of stories that serve you well, that you remember with gratitude and a smile, that lie beneath your life to help to make it stable.

You are the person who decides which stories are your religious stories, which seem like trickery, and which speak to you as higher truths. You—you with your passions and your quirks and your particular preferences—are the person who chooses the stories for your life, the stories that buoy and sustain you, alert and amuse you, and fill your spirit.

Hooray for stories.

### **Reading #3, shared by Linda Larson**

During the service, I skipped over most of this interesting article, reading just a portion of the very end. Here is a still-very-much-excerpted version that I might have included had there been more time. Doug Muder is contributing editor and columnist for UU World Magazine, and this was published in 2013. Source: <https://www.uuworld.org/articles/wrestling-with-easter>

#### *Wrestling with Easter:*

I love being a Unitarian Universalist, but I don't show up for Unitarian Universalist Easter services anymore. I just don't know what I'm celebrating. It's Easter! Jesus is risen! Unless maybe he isn't. Maybe he just lived on in the memory of his disciples in some metaphoric way that seemed especially important to them. Not that it matters, because God was never going to send us to hell anyway. Assuming there is a God and an afterlife. But the Jews just celebrated Passover and the spring flowers are blooming.

Rejoice!

What do I do with that?

Whenever I get stuck, I go back to the beginning, like a detective re-examining the scene of the crime.

Every year, ancient peoples in the temperate zones witnessed two regularly occurring miracles: the sun turning around on winter solstice and the plant world coming back to life in spring. ... You didn't have to wonder what to celebrate. The sun is coming back! The plants are growing again! The Universe has decided to tolerate human existence for a while longer. Rejoice!

In spite of this clarity, spring was a particularly complex holiday, because even as it marked the annual victory of Life over Death, the battle was always long and costly.

All winter the harvest store had been dwindling. Diseases spread as people huddled together in cramped shelters, and it was hard for the sick to recover when they couldn't stay warm. Everyone who made it to spring had run that gauntlet. No doubt they felt relief, pride in the loved ones they had managed to pull along with them, and gratitude to those who had helped them make it—but also grief and loss and more than a little survivor guilt. ...

Scratch the gilded surface of today's spring holidays, and that underlying grimness still shows through. What passes over on Passover is the Angel of Death, taking the firstborn of every unprotected family in Egypt. The empty tomb of Easter means little without the blood-sweating anxiety of Gethsemane or the torture of Golgotha. Whether it's the son of Pharaoh or the Son of God, someone has died, and that is why you get to go on.

That heft and seriousness is a big part of what I've been missing in UU Easter services. Spring can't just be flowers and bunnies and brightly colored eggs. The stone that the angel rolls away from Jesus's tomb has to be heavy.

*... (some of this section is necessary to make sense of the end)*

Every year you would be invited to consider whether it is time for you to sprout where you are planted, to stop looking at the people around you as some random collection of survivors and ask if they might be the community you need. Maybe the thing you find yourself doing is what you're supposed to be doing. If you stop holding back from it, it could be a new mission, a new purpose, and a new identity.

That could be something to celebrate. Rejoice!

#### **Reading #4, read by Bill Pelto**

Excerpts from a Passover homily by Rev. Marti Keller, a UU minister who is currently co-transition minister at the UU Church of Jacksonville, Florida. Source:

[http://uuja.org/holidays/sermons/sermon\\_Dayenu.htm](http://uuja.org/holidays/sermons/sermon_Dayenu.htm)

*Dayenu*, a Passover homily

What I want to talk about this morning is another, less known portion of the Haggadah, the Passover story, and that is the Dayenu, the recognition of and giving of blessings for life, no matter what trials. No whatever we have been given to work with.

It is after the telling of the parting of the Sea of Reeds and the Egyptian army being turned back, after Miriam, Moses' sister, dances as she crosses over the shallow river bed, that Dayenu is sung. The Dayenu is a blessing for all that led to the deliverance of the Jewish people. The traditional Dayenu has fifteen verses, shaped and modified over the centuries: fifteen different thanks and praises. That the first man and first woman were created in the image of God, that would have been enough. That the people were freed from slavery and brought to Mt. Sinai, that would have been enough. That there was manna- bland and tedious as it became-- for nourishment, that would have been enough.

Dayenu. Dayenu. Dayenu.

It's the Zen Koan in the midst of a bible story. Even before we are freed, we are given enough, we are given what we need. Even before we cross into the Promised Land, even if we never reach it, we are given what we need.

Dayenu

This acceptance of what we already have, what we already have in some sense been given, allows us to move to the next moment and receive the next waiting gift.

Dayenu, the prayer of gratitude, teaches us not to despair when the ultimate "end" seems far away. It teaches us that in order to live in the spirit of liberation, as individuals, as a religious community, as a people, we have to fully acknowledge each step in the struggle.

As the Haggadah reminds us, the story of the Exodus was not just lived once. It repeats itself again and again, not just in the telling. We remain on the journey to liberation.

It takes the pain of letting go of what is known, even when it is enslaving us. And it takes courage, nearly unimaginable courage to go through the desert with gratitude and acceptance.

Dayenu.

### **Reading #5, read by Linda Larson**

This next excerpt is from the book *Seasons of Self* by the late Max Coats, was UU minister in Canton NY for many years. I took bits from pages 26-29. Source:

<https://books.google.com/books?id=KIgyCR95c6IC&pg=PA28&lpg=PA28&dq=max+coats+some+venerate+an+ancient+God&source=bl&ots=4j8NkNWBGE&sig=ACfU3U3Sg3G-7JM3VBdIAq1H46uoCsevRw&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwivo8XRj-boAhVPneAKHZBGc0Q6AEwAHoECAoQLA#v=onepage&q=max%20coats%20some%20venerate%20an%20ancient%20God&f=false>

[There's something almost pagan in the way I feel. It's almost as if I could believe, as ancient people did, that along in March or April, Winter fought with Summer for the earth, and finally compromised with Spring...

If I feel this, then I must understand just why it was the old ones, ages past, imagined Gods who died in Wintertime and rose again in Spring: Adonis; Attis and Dionysis; Osiris rising with the Nile; It had to be an April kind of thing to make much sense to people tired, like me, of Wintertime. ... ]

Some venerate an ancient God, attach themselves by strings of beads to Him, and grieve a Winter grief because he died....

But I need a celebration about my life that speaks the spring-inspired word about my life and death, about me as I live and die, through my cycling seasons, days, and years...

We need Passover and we need Spring; Easter and a sense of God incarnate in the least of these: myself and you. We need to know more than just that old men thought that old Gods rose again, and more than that every year some April comes and leaves a flowering shrub and warms the rain. We need the sense of deity to crack our own hard, brown, December husks and push life out of inner tombs and outer pain. Unless we move the seasons of the self, and spring can come for us, the winter will go on and on. And Easter will remain a myth, and life will never come again, despite the fact of spring.

### **Closing Words, read by Glenn Wing**

**It Is Our Journey Together** by Debra Haffner, minister at the Unitarian Universalist Church in Reston, and the President Emerita and co-founder of the Religious Institute.

Source: <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/closing/it-our-journey-together>

We are on a journey.

We didn't plan it.

We didn't have time for the bread to rise.

We may find ourselves in the wilderness, hungry, thirsty,

Doubting that we should have ever come.

But look around:

We are not alone.

It is our journey together:

A journey to our better selves,

A journey to a better world,

A journey to a more promised land.

### **Postlude: "Dayenu" performed by the Maccabeats**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CZgDNPGZ9Sg>

And here are a few of the readings that didn't make it into the service but that I liked very much:

Excerpted from **A Rite of Spring: An Eastertide Celebration in Three Acts By Erik Walker Wikstrom**

Source: <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/complete-service/eastertide>

The question is not whether we believe in resurrection but whether we have known it —known it in our own lived experience, seen it in the lives of others, felt it in the world around us.

Persephone returns to the world of light; Osiris is resurrected by the power of the love of his wife Isis; the Phoenix is born anew from its own ashes; Jesus leaves behind the tomb. Snow and ice melts, giving way to new life.

The promise of our Unitarian Universalist faith is the promise of the seasons and these stories—winter is not perpetual, the wheel will keep on turning, the tomb is not the end. We affirm the promise of rebirth, of resurrection; of life's ultimate victory over death; of hope's triumph over hopelessness—not just as some abstract concept but as the miraculous reality of our lives. This is what we celebrate today!

**Ready: Poetry By Rabbi Rachel Barenblat**

Source: <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/poetry/ready>

"So the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls wrapped in their cloaks upon their shoulders." —Exodus 12:34

You'll need to travel light.

Take what you can carry: a book, a poem,  
a battered tin cup, your child strapped  
to your chest, clutching your necklace  
in one hot possessive fist.

So the dough isn't ready. So your heart  
isn't ready. You haven't said goodbye  
to the places where you hid as a child,  
to the friends who aren't interested in the journey,  
to the graves you've tended.

But if you wait until you feel fully ready  
you may never take the leap at all  
and Infinity is calling you forth  
out of this birth canal  
and into the future's wide expanse.

Learn to improvise flat cakes without yeast.  
Learn to read new alphabets.  
Wear God like a cloak  
and stride forth with confidence.  
You won't know where you're going

but you have the words of our sages,  
the songs of our mothers, the inspiration  
wrapped in your kneading bowl. Trust

that what you carry will sustain you  
and take the first step out the door.

### **Passover Meditation By Kathleen McTigue**

Source: <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/meditation/passover>

When the escape from Egypt was certain, when the last furious wave had closed over their enemies' heads and the dangerous waters lay smooth again, when the Israelites could finally turn toward the future without fear that the past would snatch them back--what did they see before them? Not the Promised Land, flowing with milk and honey, but the wide and terrifying wilderness that would claim them for forty long, hard years of wandering. They were not carried along on a surge of vindicated faith, but stumbled forward with paralyzing doubts. And instead of enjoying sweet unity after all they'd been through, they were torn by bickering and division. They walked into relentless uncertainty and discomfort, and fell asleep on the hard ground to wake feeling ashamed for dreaming of the easier life of slavery they had left behind.

Our own stories will never be quite so dramatic. Yet each of us knows a little about what it means to be lost in the wilderness. We know the awful disappointment, akin to despair, of being suddenly pathless and alone when we'd expected to stride confidently straight into the promised land. We know how it feels to take a leap of faith toward some place we want to be--in love or relationship, in work or school or location--only to find that nothing turns out the way we'd hoped and expected. The familiar has been left behind, but what we yearn for has not yet come into view, and there we are, lost in the desert. We have no way to know how long our wandering will last.

These passages through the land of in-between are scary and uncomfortable, and the desert is a place we would rather barrel through as quickly as possible toward the welcoming ground of our destination. But our time in the desert is a passage of the heart, not a physical journey of the body, and it's not in our power to speed it up.

I have never been lost in a literal desert, but there was a time in my life when I visited one every year. When I lived in the San Francisco area, every spring for five years I traveled with a friend to the low desert just over the California border into Arizona, where we camped for a week in the middle of nowhere. Every year the experience was the same: At first, especially after the damp lushness of the Bay Area, the landscape seemed absolutely barren and dead. Then my eyes would adjust, and I'd start to notice all the complicated forms of life that thrived there. The dryness of the air made things crystal clear even at great distances, and the desert light drew breathtaking colors out of the rocks and shadows. At night, there were the incredible desert stars.

I hold my lessons from the Southwestern desert close to my heart. They can sustain me through the deserts of the heart and soul when I wander the wilderness of the in-between.

Our inner deserts have something to offer us. It's hard to fight the impulse to get out of the place of passage as quickly as possible, but each day we spend there, no matter how uncomfortable, is a precious day of our lives. What strange gifts might it offer to us, if we can calm ourselves

enough to look?

After forty years in the desert, the Israelites in the ancient myth finally reached its end. They touched life-giving waters again, and waded into the Jordan, amazed and glad. Maybe they knew, even in that moment of deep relief and readiness, that the desert wasn't accidental, that it had opened and cleansed them in some necessary way. Maybe they understood how the wilderness had sharpened their awareness and softened their hearts, so they could at long last receive, not just the gifts of the promised land, but the gifts of the desert that had brought them there.

### **Daiyenu: What Is Sufficient?**

**A Jewish UU's Struggle with Passover** by Lori Rottenberg

Source: [https://uuja.org/holidays/sermons/sermon\\_passover-rruc.html](https://uuja.org/holidays/sermons/sermon_passover-rruc.html)

...Passover is both the central celebration of Jewish identity as well as a holiday of deep gratitude, kind of like Christmas and Thanksgiving combined. (As many of you may know, Passover is far more important to Judaism than the more widely known Hannukah, which only became important in the U.S. because of its proximity to Christmas.) Passover refers to the final plague that befell the Egyptians when Pharaoh refused Moses' request to free the Jews from slavery. After locusts, rivers that ran red with blood, and other terrible events refused to melt Pharaoh's heart, the Angel of Death killed the first-born children of the Egyptians, including the Pharaoh's son. The Angel of Death passed over the homes of the Jews because God had wanted them to put lamb's blood on the doorways.

...Throughout the ages, both Jews and other groups have used the timing, imagery, and language of Passover as tools to gain freedom from oppression—from the desperate Jews of the Warsaw Ghetto who revolted against the Nazis during the holiday to Martin Luther King Jr. and others in the civil rights movement who saw American racial segregation as the modern-day remnants of Pharaoh's cruelty.

...So how can we interpret Passover in a UU context? I obviously will never be comfortable celebrating Passover in the way my grandparents did. But perhaps if we overlook Passover's problems as mere examples of Old Testament-era political incorrectness and view it instead at its cleaned-up best as an allegory for freedom from oppression, we can use this holiday to free ourselves from the oppression and guilt of maintaining religious traditions that no longer resonate in our lives. Just as my grandfather risked his own father's wrath from Passover to Yom Kippur for not entering rabbinic studies, and just as my grandparents felt free to observe Judaism in ways that were different than their own parents did, perhaps I, too, can use Passover as an opportunity to celebrate my own religious freedom, and to incorporate the new realities of my family's life in America into my religious outlook.