

## **Now things are Different**

Sermon April 12, 2020 for TJMC UU

by Rev. Alex McGee, MDiv, BCC

*Video of this sermon is also available on the TJMC UU website. The video was played as part of the interactive zoom worship at 11:15 am.*

*These are general notes from which I preached this morning.*

### INTRO

I miss shaking hands after service

I miss seeing people's faces  
as they arrive

I miss the little check ins and acknowledgments as people arrive.

And I miss looking at peoples faces when I preach.

I miss looking to see if a joke that I made actually make people laugh.

I miss watching to see whether a complex idea that I had worded and re-worded and revised  
and edited so many times actually came across as a clear statement and whether I needed  
to try one more time to re-explain it.

I even miss those moments when a person is looking out the window and I wonder whether  
or perhaps there's something going on in their life which is so great that they need a quiet  
moment in the sanctuary they've been yearning for a week and they actually need to turn  
out the sermon for a moment

And now it is different.

And now I am looking at the screen and you are looking at a screen.

And again I wonder what is going on in the background?

Is there something difficult and distracting and it's hard to pay attention to the screen?

It is very different physical space than being together in that 75 year old sanctuary.

Now things are different

### WORLD RELIGIONS

One thing that is the same is that the calendar tells us that certain holidays are here.

April 8 began the Passover in the Jewish tradition

April 12 is Easter in the Christian tradition

April 23 in the evening begins Ramadan in the Muslim tradition

Some of the good news for me in recent weeks has been how colleagues have come together offering resources...and so from that wealth, I share with you what has been lifting me up...to know that all around the country is a well-spring of creativity and leadership, faith leaders who return individuals back into their community with renewed hope, increased wisdom, and spiritual strength.

I would like to offer to you words of wisdom from leaders of Christian, Jewish, and Muslim traditions. As UUs we draw from so many sources, and on this particular morning, I have chosen these three.

**1) Passover....**

Commemorates the liberation of the Israelites from Egyptian slavery.  
A meal with three special aspects and here is one:

Norman Lipson, Rabbi Emeritus at Temple Dor Dorim shares this:

*“Maror/Bitter Herbs:*

*The lash of the whip, the bitterness of bondage and forced labor, all these are remembered when the Bitter Herbs are tasted at our Seder meal.*

*This year, however, upon eating the Maror, break from the habit of trying to mitigate its sharpness by rushing to drink wine or sweetening it with some Charoset, the cake of nuts and fruits. This year, really taste the sharpness, the bitterness; and realize that it’s not just a reminder of what once was, but is still the ongoing reality of what too many people experience every day.*

*True, this year, Passover Seder will be the strangest (and perhaps) loneliest Seder for Jews around the world, but it also might prove to be one of the most spiritually uplifting and enlightening Seder as well. Isolation in our homes will provide an opportunity to speak with our children and each other, about sacrifice, real struggle and hardship, and the gift of freedom.”*

**The point of Passover is...this is a different kind of time**

**2) Easter...**

To me the useful meaning of Easter is that in our lives endings are not the final answer. New beginnings happen in surprising ways. They happen after the incubation of winter. They come from invisible wellsprings deep in the earth. Deep in our souls. Love arises again. Love shows up again and again. New relationships form. New skills arise.

Here is some wisdom from a “Pastoral Prayer & Litany of Rising - April 21, 2013, Church of the Covenant” Written by Shelly Rambo

*“You are teaching us anew that....*

*Resurrection is about seeing life in the midst of death.....*

*--Not by looking away or glossing over what is there*

*But by seeing with the eyes of Christ, who taught his disciples a way of resurrection, even as they were with him....*

*And as he was leaving them, he promised them a spirit that would rise from the ruins of death--- an advocate, a witness, a comforter that would never forsake them.....*

*What it means to be a resurrection people is being rewritten this year, being rewritten to fit our surroundings in a way that we had not imagined*

*.....from the finish line on Boylston Street.....*

*....and to the hallways of Boston hospitals.....*

*....and to churches that swing open the doors of welcome.....*

*And it is from this home base that we have started to dream dreams and to see visions, started to strategize together, pray together, hold vigil together, mobilize resources together, and we have started to shout our Alleluia's differently, reaching back and seeking refuge and power in those longstanding truths”*

**The point of easter is...now things are different**

### **3) Ramadan...**

A time of fasting.

A time of going without, to remember what is important, and that a deeper sustenance comes from Allah.

One Muslim scholar has looked back to plagues in history, when the fasting of Ramadan helped people survive

**The point of Ramadan is...now things are different**

TIME, HOLIDAY, RITUAL

All of these religions have these rituals to help humans remember not to get stuck in the ordinary. The religion is helping them acknowledge a *different kind of time*.

Well good gracious! Right now we don't need that reminder. Sometimes in the history of societies in this world, we get it already!

We can't gather to celebrate!

Christian families can't gather to dye or hunt for eggs.

Jewish families can't gather to hear the Haggadah and eat their matzoh.

Muslim families can't gather to celebrate breaking the fast.

I've heard a lot of grief and sorrow at not being able to get together with friends and loved ones. We miss that!!

But when we look carefully, perhaps we can understand this equation:

Ritual + gathering = holiday

Now this is a very general frame, and I'm sure we could have long theological debates about it, but for now, come along with me, that perhaps, if we don't have the gathering, we still have the ritual, and in that is embedded the values

## APPLYING THE THEOLOGY TO RIGHT NOW

### Holidays vs. Rituals

In all of these examples, there is a theological meaning to a ritual.

We are seeing very clearly right now the difference between a ritual and a holiday. One is transformational, and the other is social and celebratory, playful.

People have become accustomed to the family, fun, and gathering of the ritual, but underneath, now, people are looking deeper. They are grieving the loss of that gathering, the loss of holiday---I imagine you are grieving the loss of gathering, but are also finding the deeper spiritual meaning.

Ritual comes to the forefront now. Values come to the forefront now.

### UU values in the pandemic

In this time, more than ever, we are living into reality our UU belief that the good of the whole is as important as the good of the individual.

In this time, more than ever, we are living into reality our UU values that we need to steward scarce resources.

In this time, more than ever, some of us are reminded that to be able to plan ahead is a privilege, while some already knew that.

We care for those we see, as well as those we cannot see

Yes, yes, yes, the world IS different now.

But what is the same is these values we live by

Amen, Blessed be.