**The Unitarian Church of Montreal**

**Easter/Passover Service**

Sunday, April 12, 2020

**Chalice Lighting**

Katherine Childs

Bonjour et bienvenue. Good morning and welcome to online worship with the Unitarian Church of Montreal. If you have a candle or a chalice with you today, I invite you to light it as I read these words adapted from Christine Robinson.

In our time of distance, we light a flame of sharing – the flame of ongoing life. In this time when we search for understanding and serenity in the face of uncertainty, we light this sign of our quest for truth, meaning, and community.

Come. Let us worship together.

**Gathering Music**

Sonata VI, I: Allegro by Antonio Vivaldi

tenor trombonist Matthew Hunt Russell, cellist Gary Russell, and pianist Sandra Hunt

**Opening Song**

“Morning Has Come,” by Jason Shelton

Eleuthera Dicona-Lippert

**Time for All Ages: A Message from the Easter Bunny**

Katherine Childs

Hello, everyone! My name is Robin Rabbit, and I am a proud member of the International Union of Easter Bunnies. Now, you may have heard some very important news about our industry recently. At first, it looked like we weren’t going to be able to deliver any Easter surprises this weekend, but then Easter bunnies were declared an essential service—which is great because I’m going to be able to do my favourite part of my job, which is bringing treats to kids.

But I have to tell you something: I’m also a little bit scared. Being an essential worker right now means that your job is important; it means that it’s helping people, and I’m so glad that I get to spread love and cheer this weekend. But I’m also worried that going out and making deliveries is going to spread a virus—maybe not to me—but even if I get it and don’t get sick, I could still make other people sick, and that doesn’t feel good at all.

So I have been thinking a lot about some of the stories that people tell at this time of year. Right now, people of the Jewish faith are celebrating Passover, and people of the Christian faith are celebrating Easter. And in both of these stories, people have hope, and they have trust, and they have faith—even when things look scary and dangerous and complicated.

In the Passover story, the Jewish people, as they were fleeing from slavery in Egypt, did not have time to make preparations—and maybe a lot of us feel right now like we’re living through something that we didn’t have time to prepare for.

And in the Easter story, Jesus’ friends may have felt like there was nothing left to hope for in the world after Jesus was killed. But they still did things to try and make it feel like everything was normal. They went to his tomb to collect his body, just like they would have for anybody else, and that’s when they discovered that the tomb was empty. And for Christians, this is the story of Jesus being resurrected—and it’s a moment of great hope and great joy and great love. And so I’m thinking about that.

I’m also thinking about all the things we can do to help one another. One of the greatest things about being a Unitarian Easter bunny is that I get to recognize how special every single one of us is—in creating hope, in creating faith, and in creating trust for one another.

So I’m going to need your help with something very special this weekend. As me and my fellow Easter bunnies are going out to deliver treats to all of you, I need to make sure that you’re doing the important things of washing your hands and staying safe inside, so that you can protect Easter bunnies and we can protect each other, and we can also bring hope and love.

I also need you to do something else—which is maybe be a little bit forgiving of me and my other Easter bunnies. This Easter isn’t like any other Easter, and, like lots of important things, maybe we can’t always get the things that we want to bring to you for treats, so maybe your treats will arrive on Monday morning—or maybe they won’t arrive at all. And I need you to be forgiving of your Easter bunny if that happens. I know that it would be sad but, really, it will be OK. Because if your Easter bunny doesn’t drop off any Easter chocolates this year, it’s because your Easter bunny is keeping you safe. Even if they are an essential worker, it’s important that we all do the things that keep each other safe.

I hope you have a great Easter! Bye!

**Finding the Spirit of the Season**

Rev. Diane Rollert

[The video opens with Rev. Diane, at home, seated in a workspace, decorating a traditional Ukrainian Easter egg as she speaks.]

I grew up in a family that was three quarters Jewish and one quarter Ukrainian Catholic. My grandmother was Ukrainian Catholic, so my dad wasn’t technically Jewish, but he always identified as more Jewish than anything else. When he was growing up, my grandmother would take him to church, and my grandfather would take him to temple—usually when they were fighting with each other. That was, sort of, the kind of revenge they would find. So my dad never had much patience for religion as a result.

When my grandmother died, my step-grandfather and I were going through her belongings, and there was a beautiful Ukrainian Easter egg that I’d always admired, and my step-grandfather said, “That’s not for you”—and that was because I was Jewish.

I always wanted to create my own Ukrainian Easter eggs, but I didn’t have a chance to do it until much later in life, and now it’s something that I really love doing. I love this time of year; I love being able to celebrate both sides of my family tradition—and it’s really hard this year to be separate from my community where, as a Unitarian Universalist, I can really bring together all of the traditions that I grew up with into this beautiful time of year, and it’s hard to be doing this at home instead of with other people.

I think our Easter/Passover service is one of my favourite times of the year. We also do a Passover seder, and we’re not doing that this year. And there’s no matzah out here, at least not where we are, so I’m going to make my own matzah this year. I’m going to give it a try—going to see what happens!

[The scene shifts to the kitchen, where Rev. Diane is preparing matzah and then baking it.]

OK. I’m making matzah. It won’t be kosher because I don’t have kosher flour—and I’m supposed to set a timer for sixteen minutes.

So, the Passover story is about the Jews fleeing out of Egypt, and they don’t have time to let the bread rise, and so they have to do it very quickly. That’s why the recipe calls for sixteen minutes or eighteen minutes—traditionally—and I have failed!

I think we all struggle with “Who are we?” and “What is our faith?” at this time of year—and “Can we tell these stories of Easter and Passover?” For some of us, it’s just a pagan celebration of spring—but how do we mark these milestones in our lives, especially now, when we really are waiting for a plague to pass over?

Just after I finished and took everything out of the oven, a neighbour came by with a big box of matzah—hand-made matzah—to wish us a happy Passover. And the irony is that that box of matzah was made in the Ukraine. Which just seems like a fitting ending to this whole story, this year, of the generosity of neighbours, of the connections and circles that seem to connect us back to our roots in so many different ways.

Whatever emotion you are bringing to this day, may this time together bring you peace, and the comfort that you need—and the joy, and the celebration, and the light that you’re looking for!

[The video closes with views of a plate of matzah, fresh from the oven, and a bowl of beautiful Ukrainian Easter eggs.]

**Reading: "Mitzrayim" by Rabbi Rachel Barenblat**

Shoshanna Green

The full, original version of Rabbi Barenblat’s text can be found at

<https://velveteenrabbi.blogs.com/blog/2020/03/we-are-exactly-where-the-pesach-story-calls-us-to-be.html>

**April Share the Plate**

Caite Clark

Hello. Bonjour. My name is Caite Clark, and I am one of the Religious Exploration teachers at the Unitarian Church of Montreal.

This month, for Share the Plate, we will be donating to Les Petits Renards. Les Petits Renards offers a wide variety of services to families in Verdun who are vulnerable or in need of special support. The organization provides medical and psycho-social services, legal advice, family workshops, art and occupational therapy, and activities for kids and adults, including art, yoga, music, and more.

Les Petits Renards has offered support to families from our community in the past, and they operate on a modest annual budget. It is especially important that we support them this month as they support families who do not qualify for provincial healthcare.

If you are in a position to give this month, please visit their website: [www.cpscverdun.com](http://www.cpscverdun.com) and we will also be including a link to their website in the description of this video.

Even if you cannot give financially this month, know that your gifts are enough—whether it’s delivering groceries to an elderly neighbour, or giving a friend or family member a phone call. It is important that we stay connected at this time.

Thank you for sharing your gifts.

**In and Out of Egypt: An Easter-Passover Meditation**

Rev. Diane Rollert

I feel that we’re living in times that are all too biblical. It’s like we’re in and out of a metaphorical Egypt where we seek refuge and we flee. These are the biblical stories of Egypt, which you might know, where the Nile feeds the Fertile Crescent, where Abraham and Sarah briefly seek safety, where Joseph—sold into servitude by his own jealous brothers—finds his fortune, and then sets aside enough silos of grain to save a nation and reunite his estranged family. Then, generations later, out of Egypt, Moses leads an enslaved people as the angel of death passes over and the Red Sea parts. Then, into Egypt, the infant Jesus, a Jewish child, is carried back by his parents to seek refuge in the place that Moses once fled. And maybe that saved his life, to go on to live out the story that would be told at this time of year.

In and out of Egypt, we are seeing the passing of time stretched out over centuries. What was once reality becomes something completely different. Change comes quickly in the blink of eternity’s eye, and change comes slowly in the ever-flowing breath that still belongs to humanity. And this is the “narrow place”: *mitzrayim*. We wait for plagues to pass over; we hope for deliverance and salvation; we look to our own ingenuity, to the brilliance of science, to the generosity of friends and strangers—while we fear the cruelty and selfishness that can live in human hearts as much as we fear an invisible virus that lives among us and takes away the lives of so many in one day.

My faith calls me to affirm the worth and dignity of every person, and I respond with this belief: that there are those who value commodities over life. And I can explain to you with perfect clarity why such cruelty is systemic, and yet I still find it hard to accept that anyone could be so calculating that they would value their own reputations over the lives and wellbeing of people I love, and people I’ve never known, who each deserve to be safe, who have a right to demand equal treatment. I know pharaohs and Roman emperors still walk this earth, but I still refuse to accept the reality as they step over the bodies of the vulnerable and silence the voices of those seeking justice. Is it possible to say with compassion that *I am angry*? How does anyone take the teachings of one who said “Love your enemies” and believe that his story could ever justify hatred and neglect?

But this Easter morning—this day of Passover—should be a day for rejoicing. This is where the praise and gratitude begin. Spring will surely come; the Earth will be renewed; a day will come when it will be safe to gather again.

So will you please join me in the spirit of prayer and meditation:

Spirit of Life, ground of our being, for now, let us give thanks for the ones who are keeping the world going, the ones who are tending to the sick, who are feeding the hungry, who are providing transportation for those who must still travel, the ones who are seeking cures, and the ones who give wise council. For now, let this be fertile time for each one of us—time to rethink our purpose, to reconnect to our deepest selves, to reconcile what we have left undone, to find what we most love and appreciate in life, to forgive ourselves for our worries and our fears, and to make peace with the history we are living—the times when we seek refuge and the times when we flee, the comings and the goings in and out of Egypt. On this day of hope and renewal, may we find the safety, the love, and the connection we need. Amen.

**Music for Meditation**

Gestillte Sehnsucht, Op. 91 No. 1 by Johannes Brahms

tenor trombonist Matthew Hunt Russell, cellist Gary Russell, and pianist Sandra Hunt

**Closing Song**

“Life Calls Us On,” by Kendyl Gibbons and Jason Shelton

Eleuthera Dicona-Lippert

**Postlude Music**

Michelangelo Sonetto XXX by Benjamin Britten

tenor trombonist Matthew Hunt Russell and pianist Sandra Hunt