

## **EASTER SUNDAY: RISE!**

**Rev. Richard Maraj**

**Sunday, April 5, 2026**

So, these three atheists die, and they're at the pearly gates of heaven, and St. Peter says to them that they all can have entry, but they must answer this simple question: *"What is Easter?"*

And the first atheist says, *"Oh, that's easy. That's a holiday in November when everyone gets together, eats turkey, and they're thankful, I think."*

Peter said, *"No; that's wrong."*

Then St. Peter asked the second guy, *"What is Easter?"*

And the second one replies, *"Easter is that holiday in December when we put up a nice tree, exchange gifts, and celebrate the birth of Jesus."*

And St. Peter just shakes his head. And then he asks the third guy, *"What is Easter?"*

And the third guy looks him right in the eye, and he smiles. And he's really confident, and he says, *"I know what Easter is. Easter is the Christian holiday that coincides with the Jewish celebration of Passover. Jesus and his disciples were eating at the Last Supper, and Jesus later was deceived and turned over to the Romans by one of his disciples. The Romans took him to be crucified. He was stabbed in the side, made to wear a crown of thorns, and was hung on a cross with nails through his hands. He was buried in a nearby cave which was sealed with a large stone."*

And St. Peter kind of nodded with approval.

And then the atheist continued, *"Every year the stone is rolled away so that Jesus can come out. And if he sees his shadow, it means there's six more weeks."* [Congregants laugh] All right.

What is Easter to you? What does Easter mean to you on a personal level? And how does it impact how you see yourself and how you live every day of your life, including today?

Traditionally, Easter is a celebration of the resurrection of Jesus, which is seen as the prophecy being fulfilled that the Messiah, through his atoning sacrifice of his life and his blood would wash away our sins that we may have eternal life.

In Unity, we don't see the resurrection as a future promise or a passport to eternal life. In fact, we don't believe that Jesus came to save us from our sins. We believe that Jesus came to wake us up to the truth of who we are; to know our oneness with God; to know our divine nature; to know our spiritual potential; and to demonstrate and express that potential. You know, Jesus' death and resurrection are a demonstration of the invincible, indestructible power of God that cannot be buried, that cannot be denied and cannot be destroyed. The same Christ power -- divine power -- that is within each of us.

You know, John Shelby Spong, Episcopal Bishop of Newark, wrote a book called *"Why Christianity Must Change or Die."* And here's what he said. He said: *"The function of the Christ is not to rescue sinners, but to call you and empower you to be more deeply and fully human than you ever realized that you had the potential to be. You and I are emerging people, not fallen people. Our problem is not that we are born in sin, but our problem is that we do not yet know how to achieve being fully human and being fully divine."*

And most of us think that the only resurrection that took place was with Jesus on Easter Sunday. And, in fact, in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, there are approximately eight accounts of someone who had died being resurrected. And that means that that resurrecting power -- that overcoming power, that restorative power -- has always existed and, quite frankly, is available to all of us.

You know, Easter is not just merely a remembrance of an event that happened long ago. It is a living doorway; an eternal invitation into awakening. You know, the story of Jesus is not about one man. It is about a divine pattern encoded in every soul. You know, Jesus didn't come to be worshipped. He came to reveal, to teach and to inspire, and to be followed.

You know, His life was a mirror just being held up to humanity to say, *"Hey, you know, you are so much more than you believe yourself to be."* You know, behind the illusions, behind the false identifications that we cling on to, that we are so much more than we realize.

Jesus walked as someone who remembered with every single step his unity and oneness with the Divine. And he came to awaken that very same remembrance in us.

You know, at the core of it, we are not broken beings in need of saving. We are sleeping spiritual giants in need of awakening. You know, the same consciousness that lived in Jesus lives in us. What he embodied as the son of God is not exclusive, it's universal. You know, Easter calls us to remember this unity and to rise -- not someday, but now! -- from the tomb of unconscious living into the light. and presence and awareness of the truth of who we are.

Som this morning, we're going to look at three lessons to learn to awaken us to that Christ potential and also to live with that resurrecting power and allowing it to rise in us.

So, the first thing is to **BELIEVE IN THAT DIVINE POWER THT IS WITHIN US** – the Christ power that is in us. You know, long before Holy Week, long before Easter, Jesus believed that he would be resurrected. He believed that he would rise from the dead. It was foretold and he believed. Nobody else believed, but he believed. Easter is an experience beginning with believing.

When you think about it, really, achieving anything begins with believing. You know, Thomas Edison absolutely believed that he could light up the world through electricity. You know, Walt Disney believed that he could revolutionize animation and develop a fantasy land. John F. Kennedy believed that we could put a man on the moon. Freddie Mercury believed that he could be a rock legend. Even with his buck teeth! And he came from India, which is not well known for rocket stars! He believed well before that happened to him. Believing is powerful.

The second step in AA: *"I have come to believe that there is a Power greater than myself that can restore my life to sanity."*

Jesus several times spoke about believing. In Mark 9:23: *"All things are possible to those who believe."*

Mark 11:24, *"Whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it and it will be yours."*

And in John 14:12: *"Truly I tell you, he who believes in me, shall do the works that I do and even greater things than these."* What he is saying here is: If you believe in the Spirit of God in you the way I've believed in the Spirit of God in me, through that Spirit, you shall do the things that I've done and even greater things than these.

You know, even with all of this great stuff about ourselves, it's amazing how we still doubt ourselves. And listen to the other things that we have been endowed with, in that we are told that we are in the image and likeness of God. We're told we're the light of the world. We're told we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. We're told the kingdom of God is within us. We're told that Christ in us is our hope of glory. And yet, we still doubt our greatness, our magnificence.

You know, we have an easy time believing that Jesus rose from the dead, but we have a hard time believing in ourselves of being great and magnificent. We have a hard time believing that we can overcome the problems or mistakes or challenges in our lives or the difficult situations.

You know, sometimes I think we believe more in Santa Claus than we believe in ourselves. And it's kind of a sad commentary. We are told we are so great and magnificent and this divine potential is in us, and yet we have a hard time actually believing it.

You know, sometimes, you know, we are told, *"Oh, well, you're trying to pull Jesus down to our level."* No! We're trying to call ourselves higher! Dr. Michael Beckwith said that the only blasphemy is that we limit ourselves or don't believe in our divine potential and don't use it.

So, everybody, I want you to think of a situation in your life that's a little challenging – where you're struggling, where you're a bit difficult and frustrated. And my question for you is: Are you willing to believe that the Spirit of God in you is stronger than whatever that situation is? Are you willing to believe that you have the spiritual and all the other resources you could ever need to resolve that ... and not only resolve that, but eventually have that become a blessing in your life? Are you willing to believe that?

And so, what do you believe about yourself? What do you believe is possible for you? And what are you willing to believe to allow yourself to rise to a higher level in all areas of your life? Achieving begins with believing. You know, believing is the actual foundation for us being able to transform our lives and to be able to rise.

The second thing is to **DIE TO THE OLD**. That sounds a little weird -- to die to the old. But, you know, for there to be a resurrection, there had to be a crucifixion. And it is a principle of dying to the old. We must die to the old to be born into something that is new.

But for most of us, we'd rather skip the crucifixion and go right to the resurrection. We'd rather, you know, gloss by the change or the ending, and we can go as fast as we can. We can go to a beginning. Because, culturally, we just don't like endings. They're sad. You have to say goodbye. There's an ending to a job; ending to a relationship. That endings we don't like.

And dying even scares us even more! You know, I bet most of us are like, *"I don't want any of my loved ones to die."* We don't want anyone to die. We don't want to die. We're kind of like Woody Allen who said, *"I'm not afraid of dying. It's just I don't want to be there when it happens."* [Congregants laugh]

Paramahansa Yogananda said this. He said, *"Dying to the old is fundamental to transformation."* Dying to the old is fundamental to transformation. We always just want to transform our lives. We just want our lives to turn out great all the time. But it requires to transform some form of dying to the old; some form of letting go or releasing to create a space for something greater in our lives.

The caterpillar must die to itself to be born into a beautiful butterfly. Lobsters shed their shell so that they could be born into a greater version of themselves. Lao Tzu said, *"We must let go of who we are to become who we are meant to be."*

So right now, think of who you are right now. And what do you need to let go to be who you are meant to be? What is holding you back that you need to let go and release to create the space for you to move forward to be who you are meant to be?

If you look at any area or any way for us to be transformed or improve our lives, it requires some form of releasing and letting go. Often it's a mindset. Sometimes we have to let go of old beliefs to be born into a greater awareness and a greater level of understanding. Sometimes we have to die to a mindset of lack and limitation to be born into a mindset of abundance and a mindset of prosperity. Sometimes we have to die to a mindset of blame and bitterness to be born into a mindset of accepting full responsibility for our lives.

You know, 2 Corinthians says, *"Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. Old things are passed away. Behold, all things become new."*

And the Apostle Paul even made it more concise with three words. He said, "I die daily." And what he's saying is: at the end of his day, he looks back and says, *"What is it that I might be holding on to? What grudge or resentment or negative energy did I build up today that I can die to? That I can let go so that tomorrow I start a new day fresh?"* And not just repeat a different version of the very same things that we keep holding on to ourselves.

It's a powerful principle | Dying to the old to be born to the new. It's a renewing principle of life. And the more that we resist it and hold it back, the more we limit ourselves and our ability to create and attract and enjoy greater things.

And the third one is to **BRING FORTH OUR GREATNESS**. To bring forth the good that is in us.

Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, who wrote the book, "The Power of Positive Thinking," said this. He said, *"When you lose your earnestness, when you lose your ability to feel, when you lose and no longer dream your dreams or see a vision, when life has become dull and lifeless, something in you has died, and it needs resurrection."*

So, what in your life feels a little lifeless? Feels a little hopeless? Where in your life do you feel a little bit stuck? Because that is an area saying to us we need a resurrection there. We need something to break through and to rise in us.

Jesus said, *"You shall do even greater things than these."* So, what's a great thing you want to do? What is some great possibility for your life in whatever area of life you might need that or desire that? What is an attitude that would be good for you to embody that would change your life and help your life rise to another? Would it be patience or kindness or love or generosity or being more decisive? Or to set better boundaries? You know, to take better care of oneself? I don't know what it is, but I know with all of us, something's calling us to rise -- some quality, you know, some ability, some talent, some skill.

In the Gospel of Thomas, it says this: *"If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you."*

That sounds a little harsh. However, it's saying if you've got all these talents and abilities and qualities in you and you don't use them, that they will begin to deteriorate inside. That you will feel like you are stuck. You will feel lifeless. You will lose your energy and joy.

But if you bring it forth, it will bring life. If you bring it forth, it will bless you. You will radiate with life, a liveliness. And it will also bless the people around you and our world. If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you.

So, what are you not bringing forth in your life right now that you know you are meant to cultivate and express that and demonstrate that?

I had a friend; he went for a physical. He found out his blood pressure was really high. He found out he had very high cholesterol. He was pre-diabetic. He was not in good shape inside. And so, he decided to make a change. He wanted something better than this. And so, he started walking five miles a day, and he started eating healthy -- much, much healthier. And within three months, he lost 25 pounds. He went and got retested, and his blood numbers were fabulous across the board. He's still living that way. He looks fabulous.

He brought forth! He could have brought forth that kind of behavior and changes years before, but something triggered in him that made him, and he was committed to it. And his life has improved, and he is better for it. He brought forth something greater that was in him.

How many people ever read the book "The Greatest Miracle in the World?" Anybody ever read that? By Og Mandino? And he said, "*The greatest miracle in the world is coming back from the living dead.*" He said we might be breathing; we might have a pulse. But it doesn't mean that we're living.

And sometimes we're just going through the motion. Just going through the motions and not risking; not doing anything, just settling and playing small. And that's not living. That's not what we have been called to do.

So, I think I told this story once a few years back. My brother and I were driving. I was heading south on 7th Street, about to turn right on Camelback. And we're at the red light, and this homeless guy had a sign. And he only had two words on his sign, beautifully printed. And the two words were: CHANGE, PLEASE.

And so I'm thinking, "*Well, that's really cool. He wants some spare change. And, you know, he's having some struggles and some change. That would make a difference.*" And then when I read the words a couple more times, I think he was talking to the world and maybe talking to myself.

Change, please. Improve our lives, please. Change how you show up, please. I mean, I thought it was such a powerful thing. Like, we were both thinking the same thing and were just really moved. Here's this guy giving this double meaning to this thing -- one, to help him out with some change, but for us to look at our own lives and say, "*what do I need to change?*"

Maybe I need to be kinder. And I love that he said, "*please.*" "*Change, please.*" There was nothing even aggressive about it; it more invites you in. "Oh yeah, to look at my life and say, 'Be kinder, please. Be more compassionate, please. Be more loving, please. Be more generous, please. There were so, so many things.

I bet you every single one of us right now could think of something that we could "change, please." That we could do a little bit nicer, a little bit kinder, a little bit more warm and friendlier.

We have the power to bring forth great things. And sometimes they're just simple little things. But they can make our lives so much better and make a difference in the lives of the people that we are with.

A man is driving along a highway and sees a rabbit trying to cross the street. He's trying to swerve to avoid hitting it. And unfortunately, he hits the rabbit. He gets out of the car, kind of panicked. He's an animal lover. He wants to make sure that the rabbit's okay. And much to his dismay, the rabbit is dead. And so, the driver feels awful, and he just there starts bawling his eyes out. He starts crying.

Then a beautiful woman driving her car sees the man on the side of the road, pulls over. And then she steps out of the car and comes and says, "*What's wrong?*"

He says, "*Oh, I feel terrible. I feel horrible. I accidentally hit this rabbit, and it's dead.*"

And the woman says, "*Oh, don't worry.*" So she goes to her purse, pulls out a spray can, and then she just sprays it all over the dead rabbit. And the dead rabbit bounces up and starts bouncing around and starts waving at them. And then it bounces 10 feet, turns around, waves. Ten feet again; waves. 10 feet again; waves. All the way until it cannot be seen.

And the man says, "What did you have? What was in that can that you gave?"

And she takes out the can and shows him the label, and it says, "*Hairspray.*" [Congregants laugh] "*Restores life to dead hair. And adds a permanent wave.*" [Congregants laugh and applaud] All right. Okay.

So, Jesus said ... I's weird to jump to Jesus after that joke. [Congregants laugh] But anyway.

So, Jesus did not come to save us from our sins. He called us to awaken to the incredible potential and spiritual power that is in each and every one of us. He's inviting us into awakening to the truth of who we are.

And we can connect with that when we start believing that that Christ power -- that divine power -- is in us. When we die to the old and are willing to let go of those things that no longer serve us so we could move forward to something new and greater. And, finally, is to bring forth the very best in ourselves. Because there is greatness in us! The question is: Are we willing to bring it forth?

You know, life is calling us higher to do even greater things. That life is truly calling. And the Easter message is calling us to rise.

God bless you all.

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