

Transformation at Easter©
Homily by Rev. Duffy Peet

Shared with the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Bozeman on April 21, 2019

“The Velveteen Rabbit was all alone.” Being alone, feeling disconnected or isolated, can be very lonely and painful. As social beings, we humans have a strong need for connection and we fill that need through the relationships we are engaged in. The relationships we form through the course of our life help us learn who we are, what is important in life, and what is good and true. And the relationships we open our hearts to give us the chance to learn about and experience life at the deepest level we are capable of.

Relationship is at the foundation of every religious tradition I have ever learned about. As you all know, today is Easter—one of the most important holidays of the Christian faith tradition. In Christianity, the story of Easter, like the story of *The Velveteen Rabbit*, is about being left alone, it is about pain and suffering, and it is about a transformation that seems magical or miraculous. It is a story that a significant number of people believe is the literal truth. Like any story, it has something to teach us. But it only has something to teach us if we are able to hear it with an open mind and heart. When we are open we may learn the truth it has to offer us, even if that isn't the literal truth as the story is written.

As I think about these two stories, *The Velveteen Rabbit*, and the Easter story, I find some common themes that are as relevant today as they have been since the origination of each of these stories. Just as is true in both of these stories, today people are often categorized. The categorizations may involve such things as religious affiliation, political perspective, skin color, citizenship, financial status, gender, gender identification or sexual orientation to name only a few. And in our culture today, those categories are claimed by some people to determine the worth or value of a person. Such categorization of people isn't new, it has been going on for centuries. And for centuries spiritual teachers such as Jesus have been telling us to change our ways.

What did Jesus tell his followers to do? Here is what is written in the Gospel of John, Chapter 13, verse 34. “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.” And by one another he didn't mean just those you know and are close to. And in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark it is written that Jesus answered a question about which is the greatest commandment with a two part answer. The second part of his answer was, and here I quote these two Gospels, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” And just who is your neighbor? For Jesus, one's neighbor includes everyone.

Yet today, even with all of our technological advances—advances which allow us to connect with our neighbors from around the world—many people isolate themselves from those who they perceive to be in a category different than their own. When will we learn that isolation will never make the world a better place? What will it take to have us open our eyes, our ears, our arms and our hearts to our neighbors? Where will we find the key that will unlock the love that resides within each one of us? I believe one place

we can find the key is in stories—stories such as the one we are hearing today as well as the Easter story.

Let's return now to the story of *The Velveteen Rabbit*. As the story continues, let's pay close attention to where the key to transformation can be found.