

Secular lessons to be learned from Passover and Easter



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First let me say “Pesach Tov” to my Jewish friends. For the descendants of the Hebrews, this is Passover season. As it has been for thousands of years, the timeless story of liberation and promise is retold in family and community. It’s a profound story with parallels in our contemporary world when we ask, “Who needs freedom today?”

A Happy Easter to my Christian friends and family. For Christians this is Holy Week, with Good Friday and Easter. The last days of the Nazarene rabbi are poignant reminders of what can happen when a truth-telling message is silenced by the controllers of truth — or so they think.

Yet there is something good hidden in Good Friday, and a surprise awaits the faithful two days later. The Easter story reminds us that death is not the end. There is joy and hope after the suffering.

For secular people, this is the beautiful season of spring. Native peoples speak of the season of popping trees. Winter removes her dark, warm protective cloak and puts on a bright, colorful

garment covered in seductive scents (use your own earthy images).

April rains replenish clear mountain streams that stir minerals flowing down into dark chocolate rivers spreading enrichment to the land.

Everyone celebrates spring. No matter the faith we have or do not have; no matter the stories we tell, the Great Story is our common story — nature’s playful creativity is active and we’re all a part of the natural saga.

This sounds so pagan doesn’t it? Well, “pagan” once meant country folk, just like “heathen” used to mean people of the heath or heather. A wiccan friend of mine would get us up and dancing for the sheer joy of life and earth and being one species among many.

We may not know it and certainly wouldn’t admit it, but we all become pagans when the seasons change. If we’re perceptive, we sense we’re only a small part of one immense universal cycle and show. There’s nothing we can do but watch, wonder and participate, if we choose.

I told the Holy Week story for many a year. As a minister, I read the passages, sang the hymns, led the prayers and loved the themes of dark and light, death and life. I’ve had decades to reflect on these things, and I continue to become reflective as the seasons hop by (they used to roll).

Here’s one basic question: Why did Jesus die?

Well, he upset a lot of people. Some say it was “the plan,” but I would suggest it had more to do with who his people were — the outcasts, the poorer and more powerless unheard folks (“pagan,” perhaps). Notice I didn’t say his people were the religious. As I’ve said for years, Jesus was not a Christian anyway, and maybe his Jewishness wasn’t that important to him either. He was one of us, the common people — the “son of man” is how they said it.

And, of course, some accused him of being a heretic infidel, an unpatriotic radical who asked too many questions and offended those who felt he was persecuting them (the same things secular people are accused of today). Saying his message was unpopular is an understatement. What he taught was dangerous, especially to the fearfully faithful.

Here’s another question I ponder: Why does it matter if one crucified criminal stumbled out of a tomb a few days later?

I remember being told that if Jesus did not emerge from the tomb after three days — if he did not rise bodily from the grave — the whole Christian faith would crack and crumble apart. We had to defend the Resurrection as if our life depended on it because our

faith sure did. The apostle Paul hammered that into 2,000 years of church history.

Yet if Jesus’ revolutionary message that flipflopped the world and made justice, compassion and truth-telling to the powerful and pious the central point, do we need him to perform miracles — capped off with rising from the dead — to get the point and get busy?

One last question: Does Easter today have much to do with those long-ago events?

Like our computers, our stories need updates. Passover reboots us: There are enslaved people today — captive in body or mind — who could use an encouraging story that tells them their lives matter and others stand with them. Easter restarts us: There are people today in the pain of poverty or hopelessness — who face suffering and death — who could use a new narrative. Not one that promises another world or dramatic miracles, but a reasonable message they are not alone through Nature’s cycles and circles.

I wish the goodness of the season to all.

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