

My Own Personal Easter

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It's been many years since I could identify myself by one particular faith tradition. I grew up in a mainstream protestant Christian tradition, yet since my early 30s, Hermetic Philosophy and the ancient mystery teachings have much more my "religion." Over the years, through these ancient teachings, I've grown in my understanding of how life works as energy in motion. And I've embraced mystical experience as a natural part of life.

These last two years have offered a rich and not always comfortable journey. Perhaps you can relate. I've experienced loss, sometimes deep and profound, yet there was also gain. There was death, and there was resurrection. Over the past few weeks, the idea of Easter has consumed my morning meditation and my thoughts, and it's taken me back to my father's death in June 2010. I now realize that it was through his death and resurrection that I experienced my first truly personal Easter.

My father was a very special man. A protestant minister, he was a man of deep faith. He grew up deep in the Appalachian Mountains, worked his way through college by washing dishes. At 19 years old, he became a licensed minister and began serving small country churches in Kentucky. He was an extraordinary pastor, and later became a leader within the church at the national level. He lived a rather ordinary life in his own extraordinary way. He was my greatest role model.

My father had a 16-year walk with cancer. Some of those years were relatively normal; others were incredibly challenging. Even though I was traveling a lot internationally for my work, at a certain point, I began calling him every day just to check in. Without fail, every single call, no matter how rough the day had been, he would start by saying, “It’s been a good day.” His love for life was amazing. No less than five times in his last couple of years, we thought, “This is it—he won’t live through the night.” Yet each time he rallied. My father became the embodiment of the resurrected spirit.

In his last spring season, just a couple of months before he died, he was asked to preach on Easter Sunday at a local church that was without a minister.

Without hesitation, he said yes, and we thought he was crazy! The cancer had taken over his whole body. We couldn’t imagine how he was going to do this—his strength was fleeting at best. Yet he insisted that he could, and that he would. I get my stubbornness from him!

After a lot of back and forth trying to convince him to decline the invitation, I finally asked him, “Why is this so important to you?” There was a momentary deafening silence. And then he quietly replied, “It’s my 60th Easter as a minister.”

Resurrection. His preaching that day was moving and inspiring. He stood at the pulpit without wavering for his 20-minute sermon.

A couple of months later on a Friday, the doctors told him there was nothing more they could do. There was not another treatment. It was time to call hospice.

My father was somber, yet fully accepting and at peace. My mother was struggling.

On the following Tuesday, my father asked my brother-in-law, also a minister, if he thought this was it—that he was going to die. My brother-in-law wisely replied, “I don’t know, what do you think?” My father shrugged his shoulders, gently smiled, and said, “Well, there were a few more things I wanted to do, but I guess it’s alright.”

On Wednesday night, my parents played bridge with friends they had known for more than 50 years. My father was a brilliant bridge player. He had trouble holding the cards that night—his fingers weren’t working so well anymore—yet my mother was amazed at how alert he was and how well he played.

The next morning, he began slipping fast. Hospice brought a hospital bed and got him settled; he never got out of that bed. Johnathon and I arrived on Saturday evening. I went straight to his bed, told him I was there and that I loved him, and he mumbled, “I love you, too.” Those were his last words.

I sat vigil with him through the night holding his hand and singing spirituals that he loved. My mother drifted in and out of sleep in the next bed. Her process of letting him go had finally begun. He gently took his last breath about 7:30 the next morning—a bright and sunny Sunday. A perfect day for him to go home to God.

Yet little did I know in that moment when he took his last breath that resurrection was soon to come. About two hours later, I experienced a profound shift of energy within my body in every cell of my being. It was like nothing I had ever

experienced before. Yet somehow I understood that my father's spirit was entering my body—not in a controlling or manipulating way, but in a joyful and enlivening way. I was totally overtaken by the experience. I began to realize that my father was going to live on through me. Resurrection. I had no words to explain what was happening inside of me—I still don't, really. Yet it was a gift beyond measure. Easter had come. My father lived on in a new way.

Twelve years later, when I look in a mirror, I often see my father's face before I see my own. As I get older, I see my father's hands in my hands. From time to time, I hear his voice coming out of my mouth. I am my own man, to be sure. Yet my father lives inside of me, inspiring and supporting me to be my own man every single day.

My father lives on. Resurrection is real. Easter is here.