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I Believe in the Eternal Life

"Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life."

John 6:67-68 AKJV

"Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."

John 11:25 AKJV

Blessed is the God who yet again brings to us the dawning of this holiday. "This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it", because this is the holiday of life: it is Easter.

It is wonderful to be together with so many of you, the present day disciples of Jesus. I might add, disciples who may have, time and time again during our lives, drifted away from the Master, as expressed in our Scripture verse. On this day all of us here are asked, just like Simon Peter was asked, to respond to that question from Jesus. That question seeks us out, directed at us even here, even now: "Will ye also go away?" Could there be a more comforting, a more hopeful, a more joyful answer than the affirmation that came forth from Peter's lips: "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

In this last quarter of the century we live in the age we proudly call the age of knowledge. Isn't it kind of antiquated in the age of science and technology to talk about the belief in and affirmation of eternal life? No, it isn't, because that belief is an integral part of us; nothing belongs to us more naturally, nothing has deeper organic roots in our

hearts, and in our lives than that belief. That is why it is timely to talk about it and to affirm it.

In our own Catechism, in that affirmation of our Unitarian Christian faith, the last words are: "I believe in eternal life." Our response to that: Amen, let it be done. But when it is not done, what then? Does life "Vanish like a dream, and all that remains is thin air"? That's a misinformed and misguided view. Today all doubts of that sort ought to be over, because Good Friday has passed. Even if you were surrounded by the dark clouds of hesitation and hopelessness, now a bright Easter has dawned. The heart is seeking and believing in true eternal life, not only the phrases about survival. It wants to go with Jesus, as he has the words of eternal life. As he said: "I am the resurrection and the life." Yes, we believe in that word of life, because if we don't, we would die. We would die twice, die forever.

When we look around we observe that the Earth and the sky are filled with the desire for resurrection and the faith in everlasting life. That desire is the manifestation of the spirit of God that moved into all objects of creation. It is represented in nature that springs to new life; it is represented in man who renews the younger generations through the development of their moral character; it is represented in the community that is revived from its lethargy; it is represented in humanity that constructs a Golgotha for an eternal ideal, and then witnesses the glorious resurrection.

When we talk about resurrection, it might be more appropriate to invoke the nowadays frequently used term: rebirth. Even more so, hence the resurrection, as a condition of and a prelude to eternal life, does indeed mean a rebirth for a new and splendid life. Nothing proves this better than the two requirements for resurrection, without which Easter would never dawn on us.

Only what is alive may reborn. This is a remarkable contradiction, but it is true: only what is alive may reborn. The plant with wilted leaves, but with living roots may reborn. The person with diminished physical abilities, but with a thriving conviction about honor and kindness may be reborn. The community which is alive in its deep roots of morals and in benevolent and righteous young men and women may reborn. What is needed for rebirth is soul, spirit, faith, and morals; spirit and life. The source of eternal life is life itself; only dying may come from death.

Is resurrection awaiting us? Can we reborn? Can we become the people of Easter? We can answer these questions right away. Yes to all those questions; as long as the spark of eternal life glows in us, the warmth of that glow makes the tree of hopefulness bloom.

Secondly, for resurrection we need a Golgotha, not just any kind of death. Those who die while living in moral decay, those who live a disengaged life, or those who have decided to live a life of cowardly servitude ought not expect resurrection. The Scripture states: those who live a sheltered and a pleasure-filled life will lose that life. On the other hand, those who fortify their lives with consistent work, discipline, faith and morality will secure that life. The name of the path: sacrifice. Sacrifice is that second condition of resurrection. With it, man advances to a spiritual summit; without it, man descends into nameless indignity, and into the lack of awareness about a more honorable and righteous existence.

Easter is a holiday of life, as Christianity is a religion of life. In other words, Christianity is the school of eternal life, and we attend it to hear from our Master Teacher the “words of eternal life.” Aren’t there many whose hearts were comforted by the belief in everlasting life despite losing everything precious that ever was in their lives? Yet, there are many more who are awaiting that kind of comforting. Aren’t there many who conduct their private and public lives, their work, their households, the raising of their children according to their belief in eternal life? Yet, there are many more who are young, scared, and unprepared as they approach eternity with total ignorance. This faith is our lifeblood; an uplifting power rationally accepted by the human mind, desired by the heart, and a faith that demonstrates God’s love through the life of Jesus.

If both the belief in eternal life, and the achievement of eternal life would be available to full human comprehension, they wouldn’t have a hold over us. God took them out of the realm of perceptible, and moved them over to the realm of spiritual, because He wanted us to acknowledge and believe in them, but He also wanted us to live our lives for them. Madach Imre writes about this in his play “The Tragedy of Man”:

Don’t ask for the secret that is generously concealed by the Lord’s hand from your inquiring look. If you saw, your soul found temporary rest on Earth, and there eternity waits. It would not be a virtue here to suffer, if you saw, the dust would absorb your soul, what would excite you to give up the delight of short lived minutes, in view of grand thought? While now looking at your future through clouds, you will sink under the burden of your life, you’ll be raised by the feel of infinity. If its loftiness would carry you away, you’ll be limited by the span-wide life. Greatness and virtue will be guaranteed.

Our lives are nothing else but constant growth and slow development: from the world of knowledge into the world of faith. At the beginning a child only sees the mountains, the valleys, the village, the town, the people. It's only later when the magnificence and true meaning of all that comes to light: this is my birthplace, this is my home country, and in it are the wind-scattered toys of my childhood, and the sunken, flower-covered graves of my ancestors.

We relate the same way to our own world. Beyond the perceptible world there is an invisible living world of the soul, unbounded by space or time. The question is whether we are willing to enter and grow inside that world, and discover with our mind's eye its secrets day after day, or do we relegate ourselves to sit at the doorway of that world throughout our life, and slowly give away our existence for cents on the dollar until we lose it entirely.

Eternal life is the desire of the human heart. There is no religion that wouldn't include it as part of their beliefs. Those who are non-religious and do not share this belief offer some substitute to express and to satisfy this fundamental need of human existence. We may read about the conservation of energy and the perpetual nature of matter. However, could it be comforting to know that our loved one who just died is now a newly rearranged state of that perpetual matter? We may read about the eternal nature of human culture; that people survive through the creation of their civilization. What is that worth? The heart is not satisfied with fake substitutions; the heart hopes for and believes in a personal eternal life. A type of life that encompasses our mortal experiences, and an ideal form of everything we lived for, fought for, believed in, wished for, and accomplished.

We have to include here the possibility of reunion. Those who do not strive to find and meet God, will not find their loved ones. But those who find God, will perceive in Him those long lost, mourned love ones, as they are all present in God's infinite love.

It is God's love that gives us eternal life. If we had no other promise besides that, it would still make life worth living as we are never disappointed when receiving God's love. Everybody may desert us, all memories of our talents and accomplishments may disintegrate, but God's love is ever present and alive. That is the love that grants us the possibility of eternal life.

That possibility opens up through Jesus and the Scriptures. Let us, in turn, clear the way for unconditional belief, hope and trust to replace the doubts and the skepticism on

this Easter holiday, so then we all can answer affirmingly that big question of our lives, just as Simon Peter did: "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." You are the only path to eternal life, "you are the resurrection and the life."

Let us then affirm our faith in Easter, our belief in the victory of eternal life over death and demise, and let us proclaim that with the conscious recognition that we are the recipients of that precious gift of God. He grants us a possibility to partake in the eternal life He is living. We, the recipients of that life, should not be indifferent about how we conduct ourselves in this continuum of ancestors and generations, should not be indifferent to this eternal plan of God, and to His intent to build a better future and a kinder world.

Let us then dedicate our entire lives to that belief, now and forevermore. Amen.