

**“From the Rising of a Son”**  
Sermon by Verdis L. Robinson  
Unitarian Church of Montpelier  
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Has anyone seen that video of the mother bear crossing a road with her cubs, carrying one of in her mouth and then going back to get the stragglers- while one was following close behind her as she was going back and forth to get the others who weren't following her. She had to make several trips in order to make sure that all her cubs made it safely across- stopping traffic on both sides of the road- the video has gone viral- with comments by parents saying...oh yeah, I relate and been there. And even though I've only had fur babies, I could relate too and also being one of those cubs. Probably the one following closely behind my late mother every step of the way.

Well, spring is here everyone with new life in its various forms emerging from the darkness and a relief from the cold of winter. In fact, the origins of Easter can be traced back to pagan festivals celebrating spring in the Northern Hemisphere, long before the spread of Christianity. These spring festivals became connected explicitly to the belief of Jesus having conquered death by being resurrected three days after his crucifixion as Christianity aggressive took hold

Eggs, as a symbol of new life, became a common people's explanation of the resurrection; for after the chill of the winter months, nature was coming to life again- like the belief in a resurrected savior.

For many Unitarian Universalists, the resurrection narrative is often more metaphorical than literal. Many kinds of resurrections emphasize: rebirth of nature; resurrecting dreams and hopes; resurrecting relationships. In a general sense, the ultimate triumph of life over death.

This Easter shares its day with the anniversary of the assassination of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. April 4, 1968. Jesus's legacy after his execution and Martin's legacy after his assassination have both been everlasting and influential in different ways.

But as we begin a new month and worship theme of Becoming- one aspect that I would like to lift up is the influence that others have had on us becoming who we are and us rising to who will become which can sometimes be neglect. It is important to acknowledge those who had a role in our becoming- even when the influence may not have always been positive.

For both Jesus and Martin Luther King Jr, before they became men, they were sons. Sons of Mary and Alberta Williams King.

In reflecting on the role their mothers play in them becoming who they became, I am reminded of an old proverb, and the New International Version's interpretation of it which says- Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.

We know that this is not always the case, but it has echoes of hope and a pathway to goodness, wholeness, and even greatness.

### *Teaching their Sons*

There is very little written about Jesus' early life. The Gospel of Luke recounts that a 12-year-old Jesus had accompanied his parents on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and became separated. He was found several days later in a temple, discussing affairs with some of Jerusalem's elders.

I can imagine Mary reflecting on how shortly after she gave birth to baby Jesus, she pondered in her heart everything that those who came to see him had been told about him and who he would become. Finding him in the temple at 12 years old- holding his own in adult dialogue was probably not a surprise to her.

Similarly, Alberta King whose family had long equated spirituality with social justice, had raised her son in the same direction.

In her newest book, *The Three Mothers: How the Mothers of Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and James Baldwin Shaped a Nation* published this year (thank you Peter Thoms for the reference), Dr. Anna Malaika Tubbs, recalled the story of when Martin was young, he was shocked and hurt when he was not allowed to play with his white friend and eventually prohibited from spending time together, as when they were very young, they were inseparable.

One night, he brought his pain to the dinner table. Alberta holding back tears, Dr. Tubbs writes that, "She looked him in the eye and told him that he was "as good as anyone." She held him, encouraging him to feel his pain and turn it into something positive."

According to Dr. Tubbs, "Martin would go to his mother with all of his concerns even as he grew up. He knew she would not only make him feel better but help him to know what he could do next. She made him feel like he had control over any challenge he might face." She believed in all of her children and taught them to believe in themselves as well.

Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old, they will not turn from it.

### *Encouraging their Education*

Fast forward, when Jesus was beginning his ministry, he and his disciples traveled with his mother, Mary, to a wedding in Galilee. The wedding host had run out of wine and Jesus's mother came to him for help. At first, Jesus refused to intervene, but then he relented to his mother and asked a servant to bring him large jars filled with water. According to the Gospel of John, He turned the water into a wine of higher quality than any served during the wedding. Did Mary know that he could do that or would do that? Did she first believe?

Well, we do know that Alberta believed so much in her son's abilities and had acknowledged them in various ways. He never turned water into wine, that we know of, but the notion of self-worth carried Martin to strive higher and eventually led him to be admitted to Morehouse college at the age of 15.

Not only was he following his father's footsteps, a feat that Rev. King, sr. could not have done without the backing and the tutoring of his wife, but Martin was also following the the footsteps of the men in her family.

Can you imagine sending a 15-year-old child to college? Well, they wrote to each other constantly...she was his anchor and his support system, and he was her pride and joy. She believed in him and so he believed.

Something apparently Mary and Alberta King had in common.

### *Burying Their Sons*

Another thing that they had in common was that they both buried their sons who were in their 30s when they died. Jesus was 30 and Martin was 39.

Jesus was executed with two other rebels, one at his left and the other at his right. Of the people at his feet, stood his mother, who I argue was the most influential person in his life.

The Gospels describe various events that occurred during the last three hours of his life, including the taunting by the soldiers and the crowd, Jesus's agony and outbursts, and his final words. After he took his last breath, he was taken down and buried in a nearby tomb. His mother visited his tomb daily.

Alberta buried her son as well. She could not protect her son from the many dangers of racial violence and white supremacy... she knew that and worried about him constantly. He had had conversations with her in preparation for the possibility of his early death. But according to Dr. Tubbs, “Alberta’s worry was outweighed only by her love and pride for her son.”

When she heard the news of her son’s death, Dr. Tubbs writes, “she cried in silence, unable to make any noise. After all the time she had spent worried sick about her boy, her worst fears had become reality. Her son, her precious and peaceful son, was gone, taken away from this world in an act of pure hatred and violence.”

Their griefs of Mary and Alberta were unimaginable but not unique. Yet both knew that they had to continue their lives and still had work to do.

Mary was one of first who delivered the news of her son’s resurrection to his disciples which essentially began Christianity. The everlasting legacy of her son is undeniable, so was the role that she played in it.

Alberta, [suffered another loss of her youngest son A.D. King who had mysteriously drowned in his pool July of 1969. He died at the age of 38. It still remains a mystery. But as Tubbs stated, Alberta, did not want hate to enter into her heart. The Kings “needed to keep faith and hope alive for the sake of the the rest of their family, especially their grandchildren.”]

She had taught her children how to survive in a world that denied their worth and dignity- Denied their humanity. But both Mary and Alberta King started their children off on the way they should go, and even when they were old they did not turn from it.

It is undeniable the effect that the power of their love had on their sons rising and their everlasting legacies.

We should take a moment to reflect on who has played a role in us becoming who we are. Who has influenced your life? Take a moment and think about at least one person who was instrumental in you rising to become who you are. Take a moment to acknowledge them and to thank them in your heart.

On this day, April the 4th, 2021, when the Sun is beginning to warm the earth as we rise from dark of winter, as vaccines are making its way through our communities prompting us to begin rising from the dark of a pandemic but not too soon, and as light shines on the darkness of the other pandemics of racism, of violence, and of hatred calling us to rise up to dismantle these oppressions. How will we rise now? How will you rise?

Well, I want to rise with hope, I want to rise with love, I want to rise with joy. And as I rise, I want to remember those who have influenced my becoming who am I, I want to honor and to thank them, but as I continue to rise up, I want to pay it forward and lift up as I climb. Lifting others with me to rise in hope, joy, and love.

On April 3, back in Memphis, King gave his last sermon, saying, “We’ve got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn’t matter with me now, because I’ve been to the mountaintop .... And I’ve looked over, and I’ve seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight that we, as a people, will get to the promised land. And I’m happy tonight. I’m not worried about anything. I’m not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.”

Well, my eyes have seen the Glory of the coming peace, the glory of the coming equality. We must believe that a beloved community is possible and become the hands and the feet of peace. WE must believe that joy will come in the morning after we have endured this long night of weeping. And when that sun rises, that glorious Sun of justice, when that sun rises in that morning, it will rise will healing in its wings. I cannot wait to truly unlock the creative energy of human agency to make that happen...to make the killings stop, to make racism stop, to make oppression stop, to make hatred stop. Can I get a Witness!!

So, let us rise, lifting as we climb. As Mary and Alberta King did for their sons, so must we do for each other.

May it be so, Amen, Ashe, and Blessed Be.