

CHANGE
BURNOUT
MINISTRY
MONEY

Our Four Challenges
A Worship Service by the
REV. JEFF BRIERE

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH OF CHATTANOOGA
APRIL 13, 2008

HYMN 352, *Find a Stillness*

ANNOUNCEMENTS & GREETINGS

Leslie. My name is Leslie Walters and I serve on the Board of Trustees. Thanks so much for joining us in worship today. We hope you find the service rewarding and that you leave here inspired and uplifted.

Please note the emergency exit over here to my right, now is the time to put your cell phone in “Worship Mode,” childcare for the young and the restless is available downstairs in the nursery. After the service today, please join us for coffee and conversation in the fellowship area right back there. If you have a particular joy or sorrow or something you’d like added to the prayer of the people, please clearly write it on an index card and drop it in the basket back there. You may sign it or not, as you wish.

The Unitarian Universalist Association, as part of the group, *Faith in Public Life*, is sponsoring **the Compassion Forum**, which will air tonight at 8 pm on CNN. Senators Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama will speak, not in a debate, but about issues of faith and morality. Senator John McCain declined to participate. For more information, go to <faithinpubliclife.org>.

A complete listing of announcements is included with the bulletin and is available on our web site. The best way to find out what’s going on around here is to receive weekly announcements via e-mail. To do that, please see Chris in the office. I invite you now to extend a hand of warmth to two or three people near you. So please rise now and greet your neighbors.

[Meet & Greet]

For music today, Marcia brings us the ragtime of Scott Joplin.

PRELUDE: *Solace, A Mexican Serenade*

LIGHTING THE CHALICE

In the light of truth and the warmth of love,
we gather to seek, to sustain, and to share.

THREE STORIES FROM IRAQ

Minister. Kan–ya–ma–kan! There was—and there was not—a time when Mulla Nasruddin lost his beloved horse. As he paced the streets of the town and ambled through the countryside in search of it, he praised God, “*Al hamdu il Allah!* Thanks be to Allah! Thank you, God, for my lost horse!” rang his cheery voice from the streets and fields.

Finally, Mulla Nasruddin’s neighbor stopped him and said, “My friend, why would you thank God for a lost horse?” Mulla Nasruddin smiled, “If I had been riding that horse, I, too, would be lost. I thank God it is only my horse who is lost!”

Remember to be thankful for little things as well as the big things.

Once there was—and twice there wasn't—a small town whose judge drank too much. He was often drunk, although not on the bench. Everyone knew that he drank too much.

One night, on his way home, he stumbled into a ditch by the roadside. The judge was so drunk that he thought he was already home, so he threw off his turban and cloak, curled up in the ditch, and went to sleep.

That same night, on that same road was Mulla Nasruddin out walking and enjoying the cool air after a hot day. He happened upon the snoring judge, who was sleeping off his drunk. Mulla Nasruddin gathered up the judge's clothes and continued on his way.

The next day, Mulla Nasruddin—who was a poor man—was seen in town wearing the judge's costly cloak and turban. And he was arrested as a thief, for everyone knew he could not afford such fine clothes. Without delay, Mulla Nasruddin was brought before the judge to answer charges of theft.

The judge was very angry with Mulla Nasruddin. "Do you claim that these fine clothes belong to you?" he barked.

"No sir," replied Mulla Nasruddin most politely.

"Well, then, why are you wearing them? Why don't you return them to their proper owner?"

"I would gladly return them if I could only find the owner," said Mulla Nasruddin. "You see sir, last night, I came upon a dreadful scene, offensive to any good person."

The judge began to squirm, but Mulla Nasruddin continued. "A man was so drunk he had taken off his clothes and fallen asleep half-naked by the side of the road. I thought I should protect his possessions from thieves by safekeeping them. I will gladly return

the clothing—God willing—as soon as the man can be found."

Clearing his throat, the judge found no easy reply. "Well ... er ... we ... er ... I mean to say, just what kind of man would disgrace himself in such a manner? We shall hear no more of this silly problem. Be gone!" And the judge dismissed the case.

If you don't take responsibility for your actions—even your mistakes—you will lose your cloak and turban.

Kan-ya-ma-kan! Once there was—and there was not—a kind, hard-working farmer, who had a beautiful farm that produced wheat and olives for many years. He had several lazy, greedy sons. This farmer always used to tell his sons that he would give them a great treasure when he died—a great treasure, larger than they could imagine. And his sons had dollar signs in their eyes, for they were very greedy.

Just before he died, the father told his sons that he had buried their treasure in a field near the house. Soon after, the old man died.

Without delay, the sons hurried to the field. Although it was more labor than they were accustomed to, the sons dug the field up from one end to the other looking for the treasure. But they found no treasure. But it was early spring, and the land was alive with the first shoots and blossoms. Having already plowed the field in their search for treasure, the sons decided to plant wheat, and by mid-summer, they reaped an abundant harvest.

The lure of the treasure, however, was never far from their minds. They never forgot what their father said. Thinking that they might have missed something from their first dig, they tore up the field from end to end a second time. Still, they found nothing. But it so happened that it was early spring again, and the land, in its myriad ways, hinted of coming fruitfulness. So the sons planted the field, and

reaped another rich harvest by summer's end.

After several years of this same routine, the sons began to slowly change. They found that they could appreciate the changing of the seasons, the rhythms of planting and harvest and the satisfactions of their own labor. Gradually, the lure of the hidden treasure grew distant in their hearts. They became honest, hard-working farmers, and soon came to realize that their father, in fact, had left them the greatest treasure of all.

That food is sweetest which we produce with our own labor.

HYMN 168, One More Step

OFFERTORY: Swipsey

Theodore Roosevelt was the 26th President of the United States. He died in 1919. He was both a big-game hunter and a naturalist. And he was a bit of a moral philosopher. On one of his hunting trips, before retiring to bed, Roosevelt and his friend William Beebe went out one night to look at the sky. They were searching for a tiny patch of light near the constellation of Pegasus.

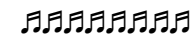
Finding it, Roosevelt said, "That is the Spiral Galaxy in Andromeda. It is as large as our Milky Way. It is one of a hundred million galaxies. It consists of one hundred billion suns, each larger than our sun." Then Roosevelt turned to his companion and say, "Now I think we are small enough. Let's go to bed."

I tell you that story not to make you feel small and insignificant, but to swell your vision and understanding of the universe in which we live. This is a very big universe and we are a part of it, each one of us an important part. No person, no thing can be what it is without each one of us being who we are. This is the mystery we call the interdependent web of existence. We get to be only because

everything else is.

And this church gets to be only because of you. We'll collect the morning offering now, for the support and ministry of this church. If you have a check for your annual pledge, please mark it that way. As always, the Dolores Wood-Louis Wilhoit Memorial Food Bank is happy to accept your donations of non-perishable food and household items, and the collection basket for that is by the front door. And thank you very much for your generosity.

If you wish to light a candle of personal joy or sorrow, you may step up here and Mary will assist you.



Eternal Spirit of life and love, we are profoundly thankful for the blessings we experience everyday. Would that we recognize what is truly valuable to us every day and be thankful for it. Marcia, please lead us in our *Hymn of Thanksgiving*. The words are in your program.

HYMN OF THANKSGIVING

Oh, we give thanks, for this precious day,
For all gathered here, and those far away,
For this time we share, with love and care,
Oh, we give thanks, for this precious day.

ORISON

Dona Nobis Pacem. Give Us Peace. Dona Nobis Pacem.

Members of longer than a few years will recall Sonny Carson. He died in January of 2006. Bonny Sinclair spoke with his mother last week. She was on her way to Memphis to attend the funeral of Sonny's older son, Demonde. She is grateful to the church for

support in the past and asked that we offer prayers for her safe journey to and from Memphis. If you want to send a card of condolence or call Sonny's mother, I have her address and phone number.

Bill Berry & Joe Lewis continue to recover from their operations and hope to be around soon.

March was not a good month for Dottie Antman. I think you know that she lost two people close to her. Both her beloved brother Dick and her cousin Frank died recently. She and Frank shared her Lookout home for many years and she had cared for him. On a happier note, one of her grandchildren was married in Jacksonville, FL on the last weekend in March. Dottie stayed there with her daughter to rest and recuperate in the Florida sunshine for a while. She should be home in May.

Thou, who art everywhere,
Many are your names.
May thy presence be with us,
May thy wisdom guide us,
In our deeds as well as in our dreams.
May we have what sustains our body and soul;
Lead us to forgive the mistakes of others
As we hope our own mistakes will be forgiven.
May we resist the temptation of the quick and easy,
And be delivered from that which demeans and destroys life.

May we live purposefully and joyfully
in every moment,
in every encounter,
now, and in the time to come;
Amen.

In these few moments of silence, let us hold near to our heart all those who are suffering in this world, especially those who suffer the

fallout of war.

Dona Nobis Pacem. Give Us Peace. Dona Nobis Pacem.

RESPONSE

When Our Heart Is in a Holy Place

When our heart is in a holy place,
When our heart is in a holy place,
We are blessed with love and amazing grace.
When our heart is in a holy place.

SERMON: Our 4 Greatest Challenges

The current newsletter promises you a sermon today about the head and the heart, the two poles of religious experience. It was to have been taken from this book by Gary Wills. I say was, because I cannot preach on this book. Well, I suppose could preach on this book, but you'd be bored to tears. And so would I.

And that's a reflection of the subject matter, not my preaching ability. If I had to, I could make the phone book sound interesting, but I am unable to make history interesting. At least this history. Professor Wills is quite the historian and if you are curious about how American Christianity came to be the way it is, I recommend the book to you. It's not hard to read, just filled with information packed so densely that reading it made me think I had returned to grad school.

Briefly stated, his point is this: American Christianity has been swinging between two poles of religious expression for several hundred years. One pole is represented by churches and denominations whose experience is mainly rational, or guided more by reason than anything else. Unitarians developed that aspect of religion to its logical conclusion.

At the other pole are Evangelicals and others who are often swept up in an emotional fervor during religious experiences; people who are guided more by their hearts than their heads. For them, religious experiences are *felt* more than thought.

Professor Wills charts the swings of American religious history and shows that at times, the entire population of Christians swings in one direction. And then back. And then forth. And back and forth. And always with the poles swinging the farthest in either direction. He says this is normal for American Christians and when he was writing the book, in 2006, he suggested that we were swinging toward the heart.

One point I wanted to make was that after a long swing toward the heart in the last 30 years, we have started swinging toward the head. And secondly, that an ideal religious experience ought to consist of both rational and emotional elements. It ought to be felt as much as thought out.

My observation of Unitarian Universalist religious worship and practice convinces me that we have too long been in our heads and not enough in our hearts. And so, in my ministry I have introduced more elements of the heart into worship.

There. In 253 words, you have the essence of what was to be my sermon about this book and its ideas. Be glad you don't have to endure more.

This morning, I'd like to say something about just four words, not 253. On the front cover of your bulletin you'll find four words that will strike fear into the heart of a small or mid-sized congregation. Change—Burnout—Ministry—Money. The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.

I want to explore these bugaboos a little bit and figure out what we're doing about them. One way to dispel fears is to name them, because

keeping silent will only make them stronger. So these are our challenges as we grow from a small congregation to a mid-size church. These are our greatest challenges. So say them with me now, please.

[Chanting] Change—Burnout—Ministry—Money.

Change—Burnout—Ministry—Money.

Change—Burnout—Ministry—Money.

Lions and tigers and bears! Oh, my! See? Already they're not so scary.

Change is scary to many people because it requires one to leave what has been comfortable and seek another comfortable place. What's uncomfortable is the transition from old comfortable to new comfortable. What's scary is not knowing exactly what new comfortable is like. This is the challenge to a growing congregation.

There are four questions we should answer concerning change and growth. Can we grow? Should we grow? How do we grow? How big do we grow?

Can we grow? The demographics of this area tell me yes. We are not exactly a hot bed of liberalism. Chattanooga is not Madison, Wisconsin, the center of the liberal religious world. Nonetheless, if a person is liberal and not attracted to the prevalent form of religious practice in this area, then we are the only game in town. Actually, we are the only game in town for about 75 miles in any direction. So we can expect a lot of curious seekers to drop by.

The minister preceding me, Dana Reynolds, was only here for one year in an interim position. Yet within that year he learned that there were probably enough former members of this church still living in town to make a church of 300 members. And I believe that. And

everyone knows that more Yankees are moving south and more Floridians are moving north, so we can expect visitors every Sunday.

For an example, I give you the Unitarian Universalist church in Greenville, South Carolina, which may be the only city in the south more conservative than Chattanooga. That's where Bob Jones University is. The Greenville Metro Area is smaller than Chattanooga by 174,000 people yet the church has 270 members, 100 more than this church.

So yes, the demographics say we can grow. Now, should we grow?

I say yes, primarily because the search committee which brought me to this congregation indicated that was a priority. I believed them and nothing I've seen since I was called to this pulpit tells me otherwise. Now, I also believe that when they were asked, many congregants might have said growth was important without knowing what that entailed.

Briefly, here's what's needed to grow: High-quality worship and religious education, covenantal behavior, a social justice project and a truly warm and welcoming congregational attitude. *And*. That all our ghosts are shaken out of the closet, dealt with and buried.

Let's unpack that, one at a time: I believe we produce high-quality worship. It's in a state of flux right now, as we fine-tune some elements to make the service more meaningful to more people. And I intend to offer a second service of a more meditative and introspective nature on Friday evenings in the very near future. Our religious education program is excellent, in my opinion. It continues to grow and attract children. Who bring their parents to church.

Shortly before I arrived, we adopted an agreement for fellowship, which guides our behavior toward one another. We have long participated in the Interfaith Hospitality Network. All of the feedback I get from visitors tells me that we are a warm and friendly

bunch of people.

I think this congregation and Dana did an excellent job of burying the ghosts that were scaring people. We may have an occasional gremlin now and then, but I like to think that the minister and the Board are forthright and are not afraid to name the spooks when they appear.

How big we can grow will be determined by two things: architecture and organization. This sanctuary will not accommodate more than about 200 people. And they would have to sit much closer than you are now, or the doors would have to be opened. Even so, the fellowship area will never accommodate 200 people, each with a coffee cup and some with children.

The rule of thumb is that half your membership will attend Sunday services—not always the same half—but about 50% of the membership. So if we grew to 400 members, theoretically, at least, we could exist in this building as we do now.

The other factor constraining growth is how well we integrate newcomers into the life of the church; how well we connect them to something that pushes their buttons and keeps them involved. I have some sobering news about this. We do not do this well, if at all. Let me take this opportunity right now to challenge you to come up with innovative and better ways to keep people connected to the life of the church. It's vital if we are to grow. Take your ideas to any member of the board or to Elaine Hill, the membership chair.

Change—Burnout—Ministry—Money.

Burnout occurs when the same people are tagged time and again to complete a task or hold an office or make something happen. After while, they want to take a break. Which is appropriate, because our programs can always use fresh talent and a new pair of eyes. My news about this is that we are—in some cases—teetering on the edge of burnout. Maddie Kertay has been guiding the nominating

committee this year, and she reports little or no improvement from last year when her husband heard the same chorus of, “No, thanks.” “Not this year.” and “Too busy at work.” And the most frequent reply that is heard when asking people to volunteer: “I’ll help out, but I won’t lead.” “I’m a worker bee, not the queen.”

Church is not all fun and games. It requires a little work. And it won’t work when the same people always do the work. And it ain’t all that difficult. Hell, if I can survive grad school and seminary at the age of 54, I know you can chair a committee. Burnout will bedevil this congregation unless or until congregants volunteer readily to hold office, lead a committee or drive a task force. If you feel guilty right now because you are more a spectator than a participant, that’s OK. Wait until that feeling subsides and then participate because you want to. If you have ideas, please see Maddie or any member of the board.

Change—Burnout—Ministry—Money.

The history of this congregation shows that more than one minister dug himself a hole he couldn’t climb out of or exercised authority she didn’t have. One minister was divisive. One minister was dearly loved, but died too soon. From the first minister it called, this congregation had a history of short ministries; four years, two years, six years.

With one exception: Melanie Sullivan, who was minister for nine years. That tells me that the congregation and the minister were coming to understand the nature of their relationship. I may have said this to you privately, I don’t know if I’ve ever said it publically: I intend to stay here.

Rather than moving away to a larger church, I want to grow this church. I am tired of moving around. All my life I have moved, moved, and moved again. I like it here. I love this church and this congregation and I hope that we continue to grow together.

If I’m lucky, I have maybe 10 years of decent ministry left in me, God willing. It is my belief that it benefits both the church and minister to have a long fruitful relationship. That’s what I’m going for and I have heard nothing from you that you want it otherwise. My perspective is skewed, of course, but I see this as a good match. We can learn much from each other over time.

Change—Burnout—Ministry—Money.

Money. At the Hamilton County Fair last year, a crowd had gathered around the strongman’s booth. He held up a lemon, then cut it in half, and squeezed both halves dry, draining all the juice. He then told the crowd, “There’s a hundred bucks for the person who can get another drop.” Up stepped Rich Dwyer and he squeezed and he squozed and—nothing. Not a drop. Eric Papendorp said, “Stand aside, son. Let me show you how it’s done.” And he squeezed and he squozed and—nothing. Not a drop. Even Adam Couch—a firefighter—could not coax another drop from the lemon.

Finally, Daidee Springer said she’d take a turn. The strongman laughed, and handed her the two halves. With just one hand she squeezed them—and out came another cup of juice.

Everyone oohed and aahed in amazement. “How did you do it?” the strongman asked.

“I’m the treasurer at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga,” Daidee said. Afterward, Daidee she told me she could squeeze a nickel and get 7 cents out of it.

One of the ghosts that Dana and Daidee shook out of the closet and buried is a lack of financial organization and accountability that was prevalent in this church for many years. Buck O’Rear tells me the story of how we had to have a special collection one Sunday to meet the payroll. Since I have been here, two of the five stewardship campaigns fell short, one was over-subscribed and two were a

success. So we've had mixed experiences around money issues.

But the Endowment Committee, the Finance Committee and the Board are all on the same page these days. The books look good and we continue to spend a bit less than we take in. To be honest, we face some challenges in the future, like the roof, which will have to be replaced. We may have to expand the fellowship area and perhaps this sanctuary some day, and such projects will be costly. But I am not scared of it. I think we have a good attitude about money and when we have a good attitude, we'll have good experiences.

The last time that Kate read us a passage from Eckhardt Tolle's new book, Carolyn Moore got a little light-headed and lied down for awhile in my office. We're gonna try again, and I hope everyone feels well enough to sit up and listen. This passage is from the chapter in his book on Abundance.

Kate. Who you think you are is intimately connected with how you see yourself treated by others. Many people complain that others do not treat them well enough saying, "I don't get any respect, attention. "Others want to manipulate me, take advantage of me. Nobody loves me."

This is who they think they are: "I am a needy 'little me' whose needs are not being met." And this creates dysfunction in all their relationships. It sabotages personal situations. If the thought of lack—whether it be money, recognition, or love—is part of who you think you are, you most likely will experience lack.

Acknowledging the good that is already in your life is the foundation for all abundance. The fact is: Whatever you think the world is withholding from you, you are withholding from the world. You are withholding it because deep down you think you are small and that you have nothing to give.

Try this for a couple of weeks and see how it changes your reality:

Whatever you think people are withholding from you—praise, appreciation, assistance—give it to them. You don't have it? Just act as if you did, and it will come. Then, soon after you start giving, you will start receiving. You cannot receive what you don't give. Outflow determines inflow.

The source of all abundance is not outside you. It is part of who you are. Let's start with this, acknowledge and recognize abundance without. See the fullness of life all around you. The warmth of the sun on your skin, the display of magnificent flowers. The acknowledgment of that abundance that is all around you can awaken the dormant abundance within you. Then let it flow out. When you smile at a stranger, there is already an outflow of energy. You become a giver.

Ask yourself often: "What can I give here; how can I be of service to this person, this situation?" I would add "this church"! You don't need to own anything to feel abundant. Abundance comes only to those who already have it. It sounds almost unfair, but of course it isn't. It is a universal law. Both abundance and scarcity are inner states that manifest as your reality. Jesus puts it like this: "For to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away."

Minister. The words of Eckhardt Tolle from his book, *A New Earth*. One of the things I've tried to do is speak plainly about money and dispel feelings of guilt or inadequacy that helped to grow a culture of scarcity. And I will continue to speak that way. This is a generous congregation, as our Share the Plate program indicates. Our plate income has actually risen since we have been giving away one collection a month. Our current stewardship campaign is successful and the plan is to repeat Celebration! Sunday next year. Just like a 1957 Buick, it will be bigger and better than ever.

Change—Burnout—Ministry—Money. What's our score?

From my perspective, if this church is to successfully navigate the change to a mid-size congregation, we need to focus on adapting to the change that growth brings and develop methods to keep our members connected. We do that and we can be a happy and well-adjusted 200-member congregation in four years.

Four years. Four challenges. We've wrestled with ministry and money. They chased us around the ring, but they didn't pin us. Now we'll wrestle with change and burnout and I feel confident that we can put a half-nelson on one and a hammer lock on the other.

I want to say that in choosing this next hymn, we mean absolutely no disrespect to the civil rights movement or anyone associated with it. That was an historic social justice effort of great importance and the people who marched and demonstrated deserve all honor and respect. This song has long been associated with the civil rights movement, yet the words speak of something larger, something universal. They speak of hope and that's something everyone feels now and again. So keeping that in mind, let's join our voices and sing Hymn 169, "We Shall Overcome."

HYMN 169, We Shall Overcome

EXTINGUISHING THE CHALICE

We extinguish this flame,
but not the light of its truth
the warmth of this community
nor the fire of our commitment.
These we carry in our hearts
and share with all the world.

POSTLUDE: Heliotrope Bouquet