

## 7 Into 3

*A Worship Service by the REV. JEFF BRIERE*

*Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga*

*November 9, 2008*

### CONNECTIONS

Welcome to the Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga. My name is Jeff Briere, I'm the minister of this congregation. We begin each Sunday at this time with Connections. This is a time of community and contemplation, where we share the joys and the sorrows going on in our lives. This is not a time for announcements, political statements or expressions of personal anger, but a time of deep sharing, where we are reminded that we are all human beings and we're all in this together.

Enjoy the experience of sitting in restorative silence until you are moved to speak. Please allow a breath of silence after each person speaks, so that we may focus our attention on what has been said.

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Let us pause to dwell inward. Spirit of Life, please meet us where we are, in the struggles we choose for ourselves; in the ways we move forward in our lives, and bring our world forward with us. It is right that we pause to remember those who need love and support; who are ill or in pain, either in body or in spirit; who are lonely or have been wronged. Let us open our minds and hearts to a place of quiet, to a silent prayer for the healing of pain, and the soft, gentle coming of love. In this time of silence let our thoughts be with those who have spoken or been spoken about this morning. Amen and Blessed Be.

I ask you now to rise and greet your neighbors at the door. Please welcome them into the sanctuary with a hand of warmth and a smile.

*HYMN 361*

*Enter Rejoice and Come In*

### GREETINGS

**Elaine.** I'm Elaine Watkins and I serve as Treasurer for this congregation. 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; and after the service today, please join us for coffee and conversation in the fellowship area behind you. 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.

**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 sign up for a weekly e-mail. To do that, please see Chris in the office.

We welcome Tiffany and Jeremy Envid to our sanctuary today. They chose several tunes that are familiar to us and they begin with "Morning Has Broken."

### PRELUDE

*Morning Has Broken/Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing*

### LIGHTING THE CHALICE

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

**ADULTS.** We, as member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote:

- 1. The inherent worth and dignity of every person
- 2. Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations
- 3. Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations
- 4. A free and responsible search for truth and meaning
- 5. The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large
- 6. The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all
- 7. Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are part

**CHILDREN.** As Unitarian Universalists, we believe:

- 1. Each person is important
- 2. Be kind in all you do
- 3. We're free to learn together
- 4. We're free to search for what is true
- 5. All people need a voice
- 6. Build a fair and peaceful world
- 7. We care for earth's lifeboat

We hold you in our love as you go, as you go  
 May your heart be at peace as you go  
 To nurture the spark of your precious life  
 We hold you in our love as you go.

OFFERTORY  
*No More Night*

Every once in awhile, this congregation gets to see the offering doubled. That will happen this morning. A generous member of this congregation has agreed to match the collection plate, dollar-for-dollar—excepting only annual pledge payments—up to five hundred dollars. So your donation today counts twice as much as its face value. George Washington turns into Thomas Jefferson, Abe Lincoln turns into Stonewall Jackson and US Grant turns into Ben Franklin. Sounds like a replay of the Civil War. 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. Otherwise, all donations will be doubled up to five hundred dollars.

As always, the Wood-Wilhoit Memorial Food Bank is happy to accept your donations of non-perishable food and household items for the Community Kitchen. The collection basket for that is by the front door. And thank you very much for your generosity.

If you wish to light a personal candle of 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 today. Would that we recognize our blessings every day and be thankful for them. Kate, 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.*

Today is the anniversary of two important events that occurred 51 years apart. Today, November 9<sup>th</sup>, is the day in 1938 known as Kristalnacht, the “Night of Broken Glass,” when Nazis rioted in Jewish quarters and broke the shop windows of Jewish merchants in Germany. November 9<sup>th</sup> is also the date in 1989 when the East German government announced that its citizens could visit other countries, which effectively dismantled the Berlin Wall.

So this morning I offer a prayer of gratitude for the progress freedom has made in the last seventy years. But more than that, I offer a prayer for the courage we showed last Tuesday and the progress we made in the last 145 years.

Slaves were freed by the Emancipation Proclamation in 1862; “separate but equal” as a way of life was swept away by the Supreme Court in 1954; the first Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964; voting rights laws were passed in 1965; miscegenation laws were ruled unconstitutional in 1967; fair housing laws were passed in 1968; all civil rights laws were applied to private institutions in 1988; employment discrimination laws were strengthened in 1991; and an African–American was elected president in 2008.

I am grateful for the progress, although it seemed slow at times. I pray these days are not marred by backward–looking people who see

in themselves the fear they so fervently hope to spread to the rest of us. I acknowledge the sacrifice made by James Reeb and Viola Liuzzo, among so many others.

Do you know who James Reeb was? Viola Liuzzo? The Rev. James Reeb was a Unitarian Universalist minister who was murdered in 1965 in Selma. He was there working with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and was attacked by several white men and clubbed to death. That was March 11, 1965.

Viola Liuzzo was a Detroit mother of five, and a Unitarian Universalist who went south in 1965 to help with the Selma–to–Montgomery march. After the march concluded, she was taking marchers back to the airport, when she was murdered by several men who pulled alongside her car and assassinated her. That was March 25, 1965.

The Unitarian Universalist Association sent flowers to the families of James Reeb and Viola Liuzzo on Wednesday and on Thursday, received this note from Sally Liuzzo, Viola’s daughter:

The flowers—yellow roses—were absolutely gorgeous and in a beautiful art glass vase. I have decided to refill the vase with yellow roses on significant days to remember my mom.

We have a policy at my job not to talk politics. All that was thrown out the window yesterday. My boss encouraged me to tell my mom’s story to anyone who asked. Many people wanted to know why I received yellow roses.

My daughters are twins born on the 24<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my mother’s death. They were able to vote for the very first time. Sarah lives in Chicago and was not yet registered to vote there. She flew home to Detroit just to be able to vote for Barack Obama.

I cannot begin to explain the sense of pride I have right now for my

mother and all the civil rights activists of that time. I feel like everything they fought for has now been realized. No child will ever feel “less than” and they will now know they can be anything they set their minds to be.

Here I am crying again.

Thank you for never forgetting our mother. My sisters and I were totally overcome with emotion. I feel like mom’s sacrifice has now been worthwhile. She made a huge difference. I am so proud of America for getting past race, and voting for what is best for our country.

Actually, we feel like mom reached out through the UU church to send those flowers. The yellow roses told us that she had a hand in it. She has a mighty strong spirit that is alive and well.

Thank you and God bless,

Sally Liuzzo

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.

In these moments of silence, let us joyfully celebrate the symbol that Barack Obama is and let us pray for 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  
We are blessed with love and amazing grace  
When our heart is in a holy place

*SERMON: 7 Into 3*

I’m just curious—were you here last week when I spoke about our creedless religion? Raise your hand. Nearly everyone. I will build on that sermon today as I speak about our seven principles.

Although at least one member of this congregation argues—sometimes vehemently—with me that Unitarian Universalism is a creedal faith, I maintain that it is not.

That is, no one is required to swear a loyalty oath, nor sign a non-revocable statement nor profess any particular belief as a requirement of membership. By the way, none of that is required of visitors, either. A non-creedal faith.

Any organization of like-minded people, be it religious, secular, professional or civic—any organization tends to attract people who are sympathetic to its goals and who are simpatico with its members. Thus we have here today, a group of people who like each other and who agree on a wide range of issues. This church did not create that ethos nor institute it, nor demand its acceptance; it was and is an organic thing, developing unaided and ungoverned.

Any person who happens to fall in with us at some point, and who later discovers that she is not in agreement with our goals or who dislikes our company will naturally fall away and find another organization that meets her needs. Such is human nature.

Note that this organization does nothing to exclude people based on their beliefs. We do however, have some standards of behavior, which we call our Agreement for Fellowship. At the end of the day, you *can* believe what you want. But you can not act in this church any way you want. We have a reasonable expectation that members and visitors will be civil towards one another and treat others with respect.

In my time at this church, we have had to get tough with only one person because of his behavior. And we tolerated him for quite awhile before we acted. We had big problems with his behavior, but no problems with his beliefs.

Thus, I state that Unitarian Universalism is a non-creedal faith. But why should a creed be an issue?

The need for a creed became apparent in the early history of the church, when hundreds of ideas about the nature of God and the nature of Jesus were floating around the Christian community. The Roman Emperor Constantine decided that everyone had to be on the same page, so he charged all the bishops to meet in Nicaea, in modern day Turkey, in the year 325 and hammer out a creed.

And they did. It's known as the Nicene Creed, and it defined beliefs for Christians up through the Reformation. During the Reformation, thousands of sects and new faiths were begun, each with their own little creed. Many were remarkably similar, differing only in what we might consider inconsequential details. But people argued over such details into the wee hours of the night and fought wars over them.

Other religions have creeds as well. The Muslim Shahada is simple, "There is no God but Allah and Mohammad is his prophet." Although some say Judaism is non-creedal in nature, others say it recognizes a single creed, the Shema. "Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord alone." Buddhists don't have a formal creed, but they do profess the Four Noble Truths and deign to follow the Noble Eight-fold Path.

People seem to find comfort in some statement of their beliefs, some creed. A creed is useful for identifying heretics, such as Michael Servetus, who was killed for denying the Trinity. Creeds are useful for strengthening group identity. Creeds are useful for public relations, telling others what you're all about.

Unitarian Universalists are not all that different in their religious needs, but from the beginning they got stuck on this idea of "freedom of conscience." In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, what they meant by "freedom of conscience" was that they believed they ought not be forced to accept the Pope's or the King's religion.

Here in America, everyone had "freedom of conscience," but they did not abandon this principle of their belief, instead, they turned it on themselves. By the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, "freedom of conscience" meant that no one I was obliged to believe what any other Unitarian Universalist believed. Everyone was free to believe what made sense. And thus began our tradition of a non-creedal religion.

I said that Unitarian Universalists are not all that different in their religious needs, and one of those needs is to express your beliefs so that you won't be confused with infidels or heretics. Over the years, there have been several lists, statements, credos and other publications that purport to outline Unitarian and Universalist beliefs.

Around 1850, it was said that Unitarians believed in "the fatherhood

of God, the brotherhood of man and the neighborhood of Boston.”  
Gotta love them Unitarians.

Well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Unitarians promoted “The Fatherhood of God, the Brotherhood of Man, the Leadership of Jesus, Salvation through Character, and the Progress of Mankind Onward and Upward Forever.” At the time of the merger, in 1961, the Unitarians and Universalists declared the principles of their free faith in the words on the insert in your bulletin. Follow along and be alert for exclusivity as I read them.

We unite in seeking:

1. To strengthen one another in a free and disciplined search for truth as the foundation of our religious fellowship;
2. To cherish and spread the universal truths taught by the great prophets and teachers of humanity in every age and tradition, immemorially summarized in the Judeo-Christian heritage as love to God and love to man;
3. To affirm, defend and promote the supreme worth of every human personality, the dignity of man, and the use of the democratic method in human relationships;
4. To implement our vision of one world by striving for a world community founded on ideals of brotherhood, justice and peace;
5. To serve the needs of member churches and fellowships, to organize new churches and fellowships, and to extend and strengthen liberal religion;
6. To encourage cooperation with men of good will in every land.

That was written sometime in 1960. Notice the gender-exclusive language? The mention of God? All that was gone by 1985 when

the Principles were revised and they were revised mostly because women got involved.

Throughout the 70's women (though not women alone) had been growing unhappy with the blatantly sexist language of the original bylaws, including a reference to “the dignity of man.” There were several “manhunts” to find and remove offensive terminology. Excised, for instance, were references to the moderator and president and every officer and to all ministers as *he* and *him*.

Two other emerging understandings also helped make the existing principles seem inadequate—first, that traditions other than Judeo-Christian are important to our heritage; second, that our relation to the environment is one of our primary religious concerns.

So today we have the principles as they were adopted in 1985, and which are printed on the back page of your bulletin and in the hymnal and elsewhere around the UU universe. They are part of Article II of Unitarian Universalist Association bylaws.

Article XV of those same bylaws demands that Article II be reviewed every 15 years and in 2006, that process began when the Commission on Appraisal took on up task of reviewing the principles. So next year or the year after, we may have a major overhaul or a moderate repair of the principles. It is possible, although unlikely, that there will be no change at all.

Let’s take a look at the principles, shall we? You can follow along with me if you like. Just open your hymnals to the third page before the first hymn. I say again, these principles were adopted by congregations and they are not binding on you.

We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote

**1. The inherent worth and dignity of every person;**

2. Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
3. Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
- 4. A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;**
5. The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
6. The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;
- 7. Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.**

Them's the Principles. Often overlooked are the Sources. I won't read them all, but in abbreviated form, they are:

The living tradition which we share draws from many sources:

Direct experience of transcending mystery and wonder;

Words and deeds of prophetic women and men;

Wisdom from the world's religions;

Jewish and Christian teachings;

Humanist teachings;

and Spiritual teachings of earth-centered traditions.

Grateful for the religious pluralism which enriches and ennobles our faith, we are inspired to deepen our understanding and expand our vision. As free congregations we enter into this covenant, promising

to one another our mutual trust and support.

You know, all those words are nice and nicely express some nice ideas. But I think the Sources are not very useful in daily life. They are better for mining sermon ideas. And the Principles are too many and too wordy. Taken together, as I just read them, they remind me of the Bowl Championship Series.

Do you know about the Bowl Championship Series? It's a cabal of people who own bowl games, ratings polls, and college football teams. They use arcane mathematical formulas to determine which football teams play in which post-season bowl games and which two teams compete for the right to call themselves the national champions. Prior to 1992, there was no universally-recognized method to determine which team was the champion.

And that was good, in my opinion. It allowed for vigorous discussion, an exchange of ideas, a little give-and-take and a few fistfights. And it allowed any team to claim the championship. It seems to me eliminating argument also eliminates some fun.

And that's sorta the way I feel about the seven Unitarian Universalist principles and sources. They are so broad as to prevent any conversation. They seem to be absolute; in other words, no room for interpretation or discussion. And what's truly regrettable is that they are written in academy-ese, a language used in higher education. I think the ideas should have been entrusted to a poet.

Let me start with the sources. I would keep only the first two, direct experience and the prophecies of men and women. The other four and everything else is implied in the first two. If we draw from our own experiences and if we draw from the prophecies of others, do we not therefore draw from Judaism, Christianity, other religions and primitive belief systems?

Now for the principles. When you read the principles, they are

arranged, either by accident or by design from the individual to community. Take out the other insert included in your bulletin—the principles adopted in 1985—and look at No. 1, which emphasizes the individual. Then look at No. 7, which emphasizes the community. I am not the first to observe that the order ought to be reversed.

I can't prove this, but I believe that because it is first in the list, the first principle has received undue emphasis among Unitarian Universalists. Honoring **“the inherent worth and dignity of every person”** has led us, I believe, to honor all the quirks, drawbacks and faults of people and to tolerate unacceptable behavior out of respect for their “individuality.”

To be sure, the first principle has also allowed us to include women, minorities and gay people in the life of the church. But we can certainly honor a person without giving free rein to boorishness. And so I am not for scrapping it, just for moving No. 1 a little further down the list. Like to the bottom.

Next we have **“Justice, equity and compassion in human relations.”** If we honor everyone as a person as we honor ourselves as people, then it seems this idea is contained within **“the inherent dignity and worth of every person.”** If we honor everyone's inherent worth, does that not force us to work for justice and equity and practice compassion in our relationships with others?

I now center on the fourth and look at the third and fifth. The fourth principle is **a free and responsible search for truth and meaning.** This principle implies both number three preceding it and number five, which follows. If we uphold a free and responsible search for truth and meaning, do we not also accept one another and encourage them to grow in spirit? If we uphold a free and responsible search for truth and meaning, do we not also uphold the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process? I say that if we affirm the fourth principle, we must affirm the third and fifth.

Look now at number seven, **Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.** If we accept that principle, are we not forced to accept the sixth; the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all? If we affirm the interdependent web, do we not also affirm a world community, living in peace?

And as I suggested earlier, the order is upside-down. I believe we should affirm our connections to everyone and everything first, then search for the truth and along the way, honor everyone as a human being.

So I fold seven wordy principles into this easy-to-remember statement: I believe that everyone is part of the interdependent web of existence, that everyone is free to pursue a responsible search for truth and meaning and that everyone on earth is imbued with human dignity and must be treated with respect.

That's my creed. Seven into three.

*HYMN 108*  
*How Can I Keep from Singing?*

Today I thought I should say something about democracy and the election last Tuesday. So I wrote something but then I moved it to the Orison instead, where it belonged. Nonetheless, I still have some good words—a benediction—from Sheenagh Pugh.

*Sometimes* things don't go, after all,  
from bad to worse. Some years, muscadel  
faces down frost; green thrives; the crops don't fail,  
sometimes a man aims high, and all goes well.

A people *sometimes* will step back from war;  
elect an honest man; decide they care  
enough, that they can't leave some stranger poor.

Some men become what they were born for.

*Sometimes* our best efforts do not go  
amiss; *sometimes* we do as we meant to.  
The sun will *sometimes* melt a field of sorrow  
that seemed hard frozen. May it happen for you.

*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*

*Simple Gifts/Be Thou My Vision*