

ANNOUNCEMENTS & GREETINGS

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.

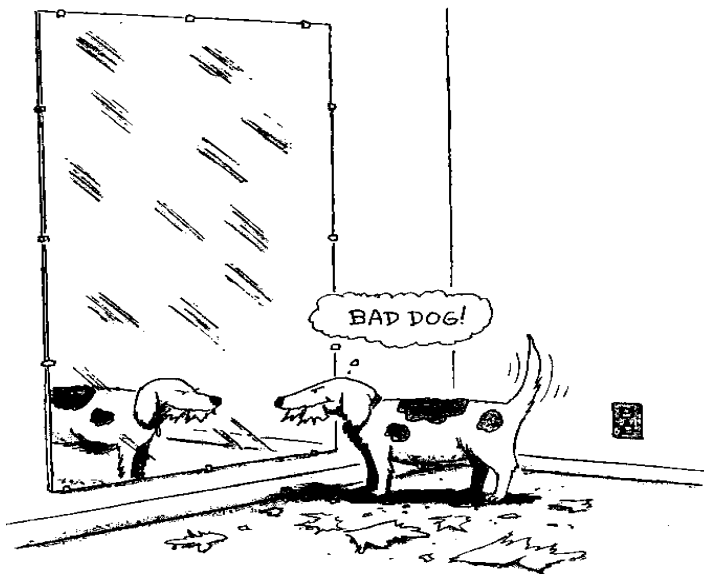
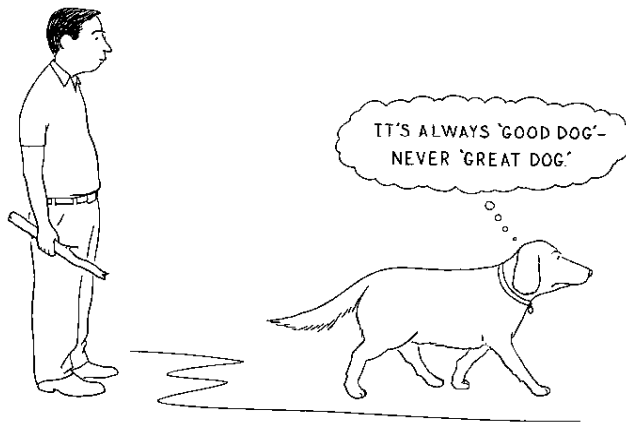
A complete listing of announcements is included with the bulletin and is available on our web site. The best way to find out what’s going on around here is to receive weekly announcements via e-mail. To do that, please see Chris in the office. I invite you now to extend a hand of warmth to two or three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

[*Chime*] For music, Ollie Grigsby brought his harmonica and begins with a very old hymn, known to us as “Here We Have Gathered.”

PRELUDE: *Old 124th*

LIGHTING THE CHALICE

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



It's Easier to Believe the Bad Things

*A Worship Service by the REV. JEFF BRIERE
Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga
April 27, 2008*

STORY: Inside–Outside

I have a few rocks here. Would you say they look beautiful? Handsome? Are these pretty rocks? What about these?

What do you know about rocks? Have you wondered about how rocks were made? How old rocks are? And what a rock's insides looks like?

Some rocks were made by volcanoes and others were made under the oceans as the pressure of earth and water pressed upon minerals and dirt for years and years. Rocks may be thousands, even millions, of years old.

Many rocks appear to be pretty dull on the outside. But if we could see the inside, we might find that those same rocks are quite beautiful, like this one. Look how beautiful this rock is on the inside. Now someone knew enough about rocks to open it gently so that its beauty inside could be shared with the world. Here's another one.

These rocks are called geodes. I have a couple more geodes here, and I thought it might be cool if we broke them open to see what they look like inside. Have you ever broken open a rock?

You know, we are sort of like rocks. Inside every one of us is a marvelous beauty that was placed within us when we were created. But sometimes that beauty can't be seen—unless we are willing to open ourselves and let it be seen. The beauty we have inside of us is the beauty to create, the beauty to love others, the beauty to smile, and the beauty to laugh and make others laugh.

A rock is a marvelous creation. But so are you!

*CHILDREN'S RECEPTIONAL
"As You Go"*

HYMN 112, Do You Hear?

OFFERTORY: The New World

Once a month this congregation shares the plate with another agency working to make the world a better place. At the suggestion of Catherine Long, we will share the plate today with the Children's International Summer Village.

I wonder if I told you of my experiences with SERVAS. SERVAS is an international organization of hosts and travelers dedicated to building world peace through one-on-one meetings between people of different cultures. I was a member of SERVAS when I took a trip around the world in 1989 and I stayed with many SERVAS members.

The organization was founded shortly after World War II in Denmark. Something about World War II prompted many people to initiate peacemaking efforts. Another organization begun shortly after World War II is Children's International Summer Villages (today known as CISV International).

The idea for this program came to Dr. Doris Allen in 1946. As a specialist in growth and development, Dr. Allen firmly believed that the ultimate source for a stable, long range peace lay with the children. And I think she's probably right.

Today, CISV International is a global community of volunteers, creating opportunities for young people to experience the enrichment of cultural diversity through educational programs. They are a charitable, independent, non-political, and a volunteer organization promoting peace education and cross-cultural friendship.

CISV provides a range of unique, educational group activities, which develop cross-cultural understanding in children, youth and adults

from around the world. By encouraging respect for cultural differences and the development of self-awareness, CISV empowers each participant to incorporate these values into their lives as they become global citizens and strive for a more peaceful world.

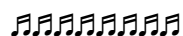
Several children and adults from this church have participated in one way or another: Taylor Jordan, Lindsay Jordan, Cameron Ziegler, Aaron Long, Mirel Cerulean, Isabella Vanderhoof, Sylvie King and Tim Trussell-Smith. Catherine Long is the current president of our chapter and Barbara Jordan is a past president. Fred Wright was the founder of the local chapter and is still an inspiration to the members.

The local chapter is hosting a Village in Chattanooga this summer. The Village will be populated with eleven-year-old children from India, Thailand, the Philippines, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Brazil, the United States, Spain, Italy, Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland. They will spend four weeks living, learning, and playing together. Volunteers and homestay families for the Village are needed, so anyone interested in learning about this can contact Catherine Long.

Our collection this morning will be used for scholarships for kids and for Village expenses. The chapter operates on the thinnest of shoestrings, so our support means a lot to them.

We'll collect the morning offering now, for the support of the Children's International Summer Village. 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. 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.

The news from Ralph and Laura Yates is sobering. They have found more tumors and Ralph will be referred to an oncologist. He says he is not sure where the path is leading and he is not inclined to have chemotherapy and his cancer is apparently not one easily treated by chemotherapy or radiation. He is not in much pain at present. If you wish to send him a card, Chris has his address in the office. They may return to Chattanooga in May, depending on what his physicians tell him.

Carl Hansen is in need of transportation. He lives near the airport and would appreciate a ride to church. If you can help him, see me after the service.

Harold Linn sat with Shela Van Ness's mother for a couple days last week until Shela found a regular sitter. Her mother is doing better, having survived a heart attack.

George Olin also faces some possible tough times ahead. About a year ago, he struggled with a long recovery from an operation. Now, he saw his physician earlier this week and is expected to have

a stress test on Monday. Depending on the results, which his physician thinks will be good, George will have another surgery on May 2nd. I'm sure he would appreciate your kind words and prayers.

[cards]

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: It's Easier to Believe the Bad Things

It must be something about the month of April. A couple weeks ago, I dumped an announced sermon and preached another. I have to do that again today. Just as a little exercise, does anyone know what I had planned to speak on today? "Pete Seeger's Rules for Living." I'll get to that another time, or if the worship group wants to produce a service this summer, I'll give you my notes.

Instead of Pete Seeger, I have three things I want to tell you today. The first begins with a little quiz. Without looking at your program, anyone know the title of the service today? "It's Easier to Believe the Bad Things."

I got that title from Julia Roberts. I was watching her in *Pretty Woman* the other day. You ever see that movie? Julia Roberts plays an independent prostitute with a winning personality, in good health, with good teeth, no bad habits and no addictions. Richard Gere plays a very wealthy and very ruthless businessman who picks her up and then they spend the rest of the movie falling in love.

Now I gotta say right here, I know better than to believe the picture of prostitution that this movie paints. 99.9% of independent street-walkers are not like that. They are addicted and homeless, in poor health, and in and out of jail.

They live a borderline life between despair and danger. And they don't have the makeup and lighting that Julia Roberts has. And they don't attract Richard Gere or any other wealthy businessmen. They attract pimps and perps and johns who prey on them.

So with that caveat and criticism out of the way, the movie is a good romantic comedy. His love redeems her from a nasty life and her

love redeems him from a nasty business. So they are good for each other.

About halfway through the movie, Richard Gere gives Julia some money and tells her to buy some decent clothes. So she goes out shopping on Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills, but all the snooty salesclerks refuse to deal with her because of her appearance and they make insulting comments about her that she overhears. And so instead of believing this Cinderella thing that the movie proposes, she believes what the sales clerks say.

And later, when she tells Richard Gere about her experiences, she is depressed. She says, "People put you down enough, you start to believe it. He replies, "I think you are a very bright, very special woman." And almost as if she didn't hear him, she says, "The bad stuff is easier to believe. You ever notice that?"

Yeah, Julia I have noticed that. The bad stuff *is* easier to believe. You ever notice that? Anyone here ever wallowed in self-pity because you believed the bad things people said about you?

It *is* easier to have a negative self-image. You don't have much to live up to. You can aim low and be successful. And when you believe the bad stuff that people hand you, *it shows*. And people hand you more bad stuff to believe. It's so easy.

It's easier to believe the bad things. And I am uniquely qualified to preach about this because as far as I know, I am the number one convert to the religion of believing bad things about yourself. I am the patron saint of self-doubt, the prophet of low self-esteem and the angel of the inferiority complex.

I've been a believer of this religion for many years. *Many years*. And it has provided me much comfort in times untoward. Especially during my formative years, when, as an impressionable child, I would absorb influences from many quarters, believing the bad stuff was

such a relief from the high expectations my parents had for me.

I converted at an early age, on the playground at the grade school I attended. I didn't live in that neighborhood, as all the other children did, so I was an *instant outsider*, a label that pre-saged today's *instant winners*. Being an outsider, I was a natural target for all the cruel things that children can say and do.

And, "Glory Be!" I believed it all. To say that it changed my life is an understatement of monumental proportions. When I converted to the religion of the negative self-image, when I believed the bad stuff, it changed my life so much that I cannot recall now what I was like before I got religion.

I wasn't the only one saved, of course, but I felt like I worshiped in a church of one. There wasn't *anyone else* who had the special relationship I had with the God of Self-Doubt. Not possible. I was the only one.

As I aged, my beliefs changed somewhat. I met a girl and fell in love. She loved me, too, or at least that's what she said. She complimented me sometimes. But every time I found myself backslidin' into feeling good about myself, the God of Self-Doubt would whack me upside the head and remind me that I was a bucket of slop. My God was a jealous God and commanded that I worship no other.

I was unchurched for a long time. I just quit goin' because I got the point. I absorbed all the negative things that anyone said to me and I decided that was what it was all about. I didn't have to go to any church to worship the God of Self-Doubt and Humiliation. I was like the two dogs on the cover of the bulletin, never satisfied with being good and always seeing myself as bad.

I think the religion of the negative self-image is probably the strongest, most oppressive religion in the world. The believers who

have negative self-images pray louder and longer than Roman Catholics, are healthier than Latter-Day Saints, go to church more often than Southern Baptists and are smarter than Unitarian Universalists. The religion of the negative self-image is so strong that I could not even take pride in being a member.

Then one day I got an Attaboy. You know what an Attaboy is? It's a sincere compliment, an award, a certificate suitable for framing. After years of receiving nothing but Awshits, I got an Attaboy. You probably know what an Awshit is, so I won't go into that. If you want more information about Awshits, see me after the service. I have a lot of them.

Strange thing about the Attaboy I got. The strongest religion in the world, the one of which I had been a card-carrying member for so many years, the religion of self-doubt could not take away my Attaboy. *Which meant* that I was stronger than my self-doubts.

Now I didn't put all this together at first. I was flat scared of felling good about myself. It took another few years for me to get adjusted to my new self-image, an image that reflected something worthwhile when I looked in the mirror. But in time, I made peace with the fact that I might make a contribution to this world and be proud of it. I never came right out and said as much—that would have been too much, too soon—but sometimes at night, before I fell asleep, I often had the disturbing thought that I might be worshiping at the wrong church.

Today, brothers and sisters, I am here to tell you that I am a recent convert to the religion of self-assurance. Not arrogance. Not pride. Self-assurance.

It *was* easier to believe the bad stuff. I *had* a dismal self-image. My self-image today does not sparkle like a diamond, but it's not splattered with the mud that people threw—or throw—at me. It took time, a lot of hard work, some counseling and a few more Attaboys,

but I can assure you now that Negative Nellies and Negative Neds have no sway with me.

I am not saying that I have finished all the work I have do to make Jeff Briere all that he can be. I am not perfect, nor do I have pretensions to be perfect. I have a lot of improving to do. But I am not looking down any more because I am criticized for doing the best I can. I intend to promote the whatever-it-is in me that is good so that the whatever-it-is in me that is bad becomes so small by comparison as to be almost imperceptible. I have quit the church of the negative self-image and turned my back on the God of self-doubt. It might be easy to go back to that old familiar church, but it's not fulfilling any more.

This sermon is not meant to be a confession nor a cry for pity. Turns out after I left the church of the negative self-image I found other recovering self-doubters. Lots of them. Some right here in this sanctuary. My sermon is meant to expose a basic human condition, that if watered and pruned and fertilized, will grow so large as to inhabit your heart and soul. You pray long enough to the God of self-doubt and you'll grow to doubt your own best intentions.

Rudyard Kipling had a few words to say about self-assurance. I will not quote him verbatim, but in part he said,

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when they all doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:

If you can dream and not make dreams your master;
If you can think and not make thoughts your aim;

If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same;
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If they all count with you, but none too much;
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it!

Here's the second and third points of my sermon today:

What I am about to say, you can read in the newsletter, but I thought you should hear it from me as well. A couple of months ago, we were approached by a possible long-term tenant. It's the United Church of God, and they inquired about renting our sanctuary for worship services on Saturday. Every Saturday. And a few weekdays here and there.

The pastor, Roy Holladay, was once the pastor of the Ft. Myers, Florida United Church of God. When he led that congregation, they rented space from the Unitarian Universalist church in Ft. Myers for 12 years. We checked their reputation and the Ft. Myers church administrator said they are model clients. They have a liability policy for a million dollars, so I think we're covered against any damage.

The board arranged a rental for them on Saturdays during the month of April as a trial to see if everyone would be pleased with the arrangement. The result is that they think our sanctuary is beautiful and they want to continue renting from us. At this point we have a verbal agreement for the rest of 2008. We will soon present them with a written agreement that covers the details.

You should know that the United Church of God is about as conservative as we are liberal. They practice their faith in a way that is very close to what was practiced by early Christians in the first century after Jesus died. Many of their rituals and holidays are similar to Judaism: They celebrate Passover, not Easter; they worship on Saturday, not Sunday; they don't celebrate Christmas.

They are biblical and conservative. But they are not arrogant nor militant. We often make a lot of noise about freedom of belief and the right of conscience, so this is an opportunity to live up to our principles. This rental and this relationship with the United Church of God, I believe, will be good for both congregations.

They have a website if you wish to learn more about them. Go to <www.ucg.org>.

The second item that needs to be mentioned is a change in the worship schedule. You are probably aware that we have been experimenting with elements of the worship service. You are probably also aware that the most contentious of the issues in structuring the worship service is what we call Candles of Community or Joys and Sorrows.

Some people want to stand up and speak for themselves. Others believe that such actions are disruptive and not worshipful in tone. Some want to hear people speak for themselves. Others cringe during Candles. A few months ago, I stopped including this element in the services and that was a blow to those, who after many years, had come to enjoy Candles. I apologize for doing so without consultation and I regret that some people were hurt or surprised. Chalk it up to the inexperience of a young minister.

I stopped including Candles because I had come to believe that both the content and placement of Candles, as practiced in this church, were not appropriate for worship services. I thank Carl Hansen for his insight that consistency in worship is paramount. He was right to point out that we cannot produce worship services one way when the minister is in the pulpit and another way when someone else leads the service.

The worship group has been discussing this issue for two or three months and they believe that the best way to accommodate those who like Candles and still avoid disruption is to conduct a candles session

at 10:45. At that time, those who wish to speak may do so; those who wish to listen may do so. No one need attend this session if they do not want to. We will call it “Connections,” as that is what we build during that time.

Accordingly, beginning next Sunday, we will invite any who wish to speak or listen to Connections, and that begins at 10:45. We will close the doors to promote a reverent atmosphere for the sharing of personal joys or sorrows. When all have had their chance to share, we will open the doors again. In my experience, Candles rarely exceeds six or seven minutes.

Will this satisfy everyone? Probably not. Already a congregant told me the other day that moving Candles outside the service is a poor choice. My response is that we are expanding the service to begin at 10:45 to accommodate candles. I believe its placement ahead of everything else indicates the gravity of what we share during Connections. This new procedure will be consistent, and according to the worship group, better than what we have now.

The Orison cards will still be available to those who wish to add their joys or sorrows to the Orison. In the near future, we will institute something for which we have no name at present. The worship group refers to it as the “Book of Life.” It will be a large book for people to record their joys and sorrows and prayers. We don’t know exactly where it will be placed, and we haven’t devised any procedures for using it or what people write in it. We believe that it will be useful in the worship service and when we get that figured out, we’ll let you know.

A slightly related issue is the beginning of the service. Many in the worship group felt as if we must begin the service differently if we wish to promote a worshipful atmosphere. Therefore, beginning next Sunday, here is the order for the beginning of the service:

~10:30 Coffee & conversation

~10:45 Connections

~10:52 Doors open, people enter and we enjoy a casual “Meet & Greet.”

~11:00 A chime, a formal greeting and the Prelude

The worship group hopes that these new procedures will address the spiritual needs of all in a way that is not disruptive nor demeaning. And while we’re on the topic of consistency, let’s blend our consistent voices in Hymn 134, “Our World Is One World.”

HYMN 134, Our World Is One World

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: Ode to Joy