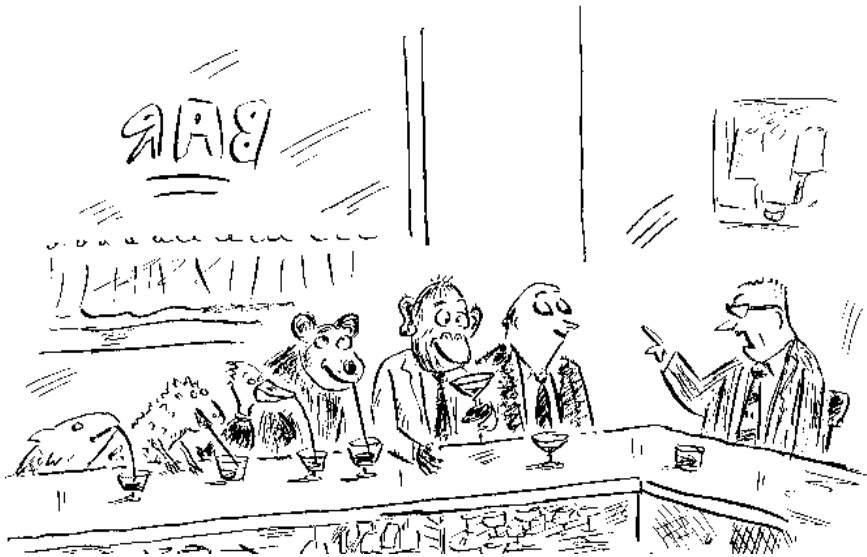


HYMN 360, Here We Have Gathered



“I still say it’s only a theory!”

JEFF. Good morning. Welcome to the Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga. My name is Jeff Briere; I’m the minister of this congregation. Let’s begin our service with Hymn 360, “Here We Have Gathered.” The name of the tune is “Old 124th.” That refers to the fact that this tune was No. 124 in the Genevan Psalter, a hymn book written in 1543. No. 360.

ANNOUNCEMENTS & GREETINGS

Linda. Our worship service will begin shortly, but first, here are a few announcements: Our religious education program is led by Jamie Sullivan. Please see Jamie or me and we’ll tell you how you can help make a difference. After the service today, please join us for a time of fellowship and conversation. Fellowship events are organized by Adam Couch and he could use your help afterwards to clean and straighten up the place.

The men’s group and the creative cards workshop both meet tomorrow night, the choir rehearses Wednesday night, the board meets Wednesday night and Wednesday Night Out is at Porker’s on Market Street. Next Sunday, Steve Hollingsworth and George Olin will be joined by several other musicians and singers in a presentation of music by Brahms, Schubert, Joplin and others. It happens at 2 pm, right here in the sanctuary and you can see Steve or George for more information.

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. And make a special effort to find someone you don’t know and make that person

*Science & Religion:
Time to Kiss & Make Up
A Worship Service by the REV. JEFF BRIERE*

*Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga
February 10, 2008*

feel welcome. So please rise now and greet your neighbors.

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 the arm chairs here in the Sanctuary are for those who need a little support when standing. 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.

Emily Harbin joins us this morning and she begins our service with a piece by Claude Debussy. This is “Syrinx.”

PRELUDE: Syrinx

KINDLING THE CHALICE

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

STORY: A Little Love & Attention

JEFF. Do you know what Thursday is? Do you know what holiday that is? It’s Valentine’s Day. What happens on Valentines’s Day? What will you give your valentine? I have a story to help you decide.

There once was a computer programmer named Howie Katzkin who lived in a huge penthouse apartment with a beautiful Calico Cat whose name was Phoebe.

Howie was very good at his job, and he spent almost all his time at

work—even the weekends. This meant that Phoebe had that big apartment all to herself. And although she was a proud and independent cat, just once in a while Phoebe wished someone would rub her ears or stroke her belly—or at least notice that she had shredded yet another set of drapes.

Of course, she couldn’t just come out and say so. It was not allowed by Cat Behavior Rule No. 17: Never beg for attention. Only dogs do that.

Days passed, and weeks and months and years. Phoebe had a lot of time on her paws, so she prowled, she roamed, and she watched info-mercials. She took correspondence courses from Feline University. She had degrees in architecture and art history, and a certificate in auto repair. Next she took up belly dancing.

Yes, Phoebe was one talented cat. She could even sing like Barbra Streisand. But Howie didn’t know that. He was at work most of the time. It wasn’t that he was a bad man; and it wasn’t that he was unthinking or insensitive to her needs. It was because he paid too much attention to his job. But one night, before Howie fell asleep, he heard Barbra Streisand singing.

PHOEBE. *[Singing]* People, People who need people...

JEFF. That’s right, he would hear the unmistakable sounds of Ms. Streisand coming from the closet where Phoebe slept. Now, it could have just been Phoebe playing her I-pod, but he thought not. So he crept over to the closet door and just as Phoebe was hitting a high note, he opened the door and scared her.

PHOEBE. *[Singing]* They’re the luckiest *[Screeching]* peeeeeeeeeee-puhl...

JEFF. Needless to say, Phoebe was miffed. While Howie was sleeping, she left a nice big hair ball on his pillow.

PHOEBE. [*Laughing at the memory*] When Howie woke up and saw the hair ball on his pillow, he thought it was a spider, and jumped straight up in the air.

JEFF. Later that morning, while Phoebe was napping, Howie got out her cat carrier and put her in it.

PHOEBE. Why must I be subjected such indignities? I mean, really! I hate that cat carrier. After all, it is, [*barely able to say the word*] plastic.

JEFF. Howie intended to take her to auditions for *American Idol*. He thought she'd win and they'd be rich. When he got to the auditions, Howie opened Phoebe's carrier, and she shot out like the cork from a champagne bottle. She landed right on top of a fine leather couch.

PHOEBE. [*Hissing*] What is this all about? And before you answer, let me remind you that I still have all my claws and this couch looks like it would give me a really nice manicure.

HOWIE. I thought you could enter the *American Idol* contest and sing like Barbra Streisand. Whuddya think, Hunh? [*She is non-plussed*] So, can you do Barbra, or should we go home?

PHOEBE. Maybe I can, and maybe I can't. What's in it for me? Howsabout you take a day off and we toss around a ball of aluminum foil? Or maybe you could get out that laser light?

HOWIE. I'll give you my gold watch if you sing like Barbra.

PHOEBE. A gold watch is not exactly what I in mind. But let me see... It makes a nice collar, I suppose. [*Singing*] People, people who need people...

HOWIE. You can sing like Barbra. That's amazing.

PHOEBE. Yes, I can sing. Better than Barbra, actually. I can also do many other amazing things, which you would know if you ever spent any time with me.

HOWIE. We're going to be rich!

PHOEBE. What do you mean, "We?" And who cares about rich? My motives are pure, like Fancy Feast instead of that cheap kibble.

HOWIE. How about if I give you my gold ring?

PHOEBE. I suppose I could wear it for a bracelet. [*Singing*] they're the luckiest people in the world. You know, being a star can be very stressful. I'll need some special attention, hmmm? Can you ease my stress?

HOWIE. You can have my jacket for a bed. It's genuine camel hair.

PHOEBE. Camel hair? Eeewww! You know, Howie, I don't need your jacket, your watch or your ring. I can do without all that stuff. All I want is some love and attention. And not all the time, mind you. Just occasionally. Rub my ears. Scratch my belly. Let me play with your shoelaces. Do you think you can do that?

HOWIE. Okay, I'll do it. What do you say I take a month off and we go to the country? We can run in the fields; you can catch mice. I'll sing you lullabies every night.

PHOEBE. Well, I can do without the lullabies. I've heard you sing before. But as for the rest, you've got a deal.

JEFF. Later on, Phoebe and Howie made their television debut and that night, Phoebe was a star. And right after that, Phoebe and Howie went to the country on vacation. And in the month they were gone, everyone forgot all about them, as so often happens to *American Idols*.

But it didn't matter. Not one bit. Because Phoebe finally got what she wanted. A little love and attention. And Howie discovered that he actually liked playing with Phoebe. Last I heard, Howie and Phoebe were talking about adopting a kitten.

You see, all the bling in the world doesn't matter to your valentine. What your valentine wants—like Phoebe—is a little love and attention. What your valentine wants is you, your presence, your company, your time. So when you wonder what you will give your valentine, think about how you'll spend some time together. Just batting around a ball of aluminum foil is good enough.

Although a little chocolate and a card wouldn't hurt. And we'll take care of that right now.

OFFERTORY

Bach: Sonata in A Minor

We'll collect the morning offering now, for the support and ministry of this church. 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 joy or sorrow, you may step up here and Mary will assist you.

HYMN OF THANKSGIVING

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.

Oh, we give thanks for this precious day,
For those gathered here and those far away,

For this time we share with love and care,
Oh, we give thanks for this precious day.

PRAYER OF THE PEOPLE

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

At this time, our hearts are filled with sympathy for those who were devastated by the tornadoes that blew through our lives this week. More than fifty people are dead and many more are without shelter and without a back-up plan. When a volcano erupts in Cape Verde Islands, or when a tidal wave inundates a southeast Asian coastal city, we feel sympathy, but we also feel a distance. We did not have that feeling of distance this week as storms struck very close to home. We are thankful that members of this congregation were spared the destruction that fell upon others, but that does not lessen our feelings of sympathy and sorrow. We pray the American Red Cross, the state and federal governments and other relief agencies are swift to aid people in need and if they are funded through donations, that their coffers swell to meet the need.

[Reading from cards]

This is the prayer of Dick Gilbert, for many years, minister at the First Unitarian Church, in Rochester New York.

Spirit of Compassion,
Enter our hearts, we pray
Be with us in the hard hours.
Help us to be kind this day.

Spirit of Unity,
Help us hold the pain of our neighbors.
Let us walk where they walk,
That we might speak a gentle word along the way.

Spirit of Love,
Enlarge our sympathies toward all troubled folk.
Let us be generous of heart,
That we might forgive and be forgiven.

Spirit of Thanksgiving,
Let us be grateful for hands that serve,
For those who give,
And for those who receive.

Spirit of Life,
Help us walk together in our weakness,
That by treading the path together
We may be made strong.

Spirit of the Spheres,
Help us to face the mystery of being.
Secure us in the larger patterns we can trust,
And bless us this holy day.

In these moments of silence, let us hold close to our hearts all those who suffer in this world, especially those who suffer the wrath of natural forces and those who suffer the fallout of war.

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

HYMN 131, Love Will Guide Us

SERMON: Kiss & Make Up

Today, I join 11,170 other ministers, priests, rabbis and clergy in centering our worship service around the notion that religious truth and scientific truth are compatible. This congregation, along with 798 others in fifty states, the District of Columbia and nine countries participates in a public relations gesture known as “Evolution

Weekend.”

Evolution Weekend is the brainchild of Michael Zimmerman, the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Butler University in Indianapolis, Indiana. He created this event, he says, because “the idea that science and religion are inevitably in conflict creates unnecessary division and confusion, especially concerning the teaching of evolution. Many clergy from most denominations have tremendous respect for evolutionary theory and embrace it as a core component of human knowledge, fully harmonious with religious faith.” The words of Michael Zimmerman.

Zimmerman instituted the Clergy Letter Project, which is an open letter from clergy members who support the teaching of evolution as scientific truth. It is addressed to whomever would restrict the teaching of evolution or those who would put it on par with intelligent design or “scientific creationism.” The Clergy Letter Project endeavors to demonstrate that religion and science can be compatible. I am a signatory of that letter.

Here is the letter:

We believe that the timeless truths of the Bible and the discoveries of modern science may comfortably coexist. We believe that the theory of evolution is a foundational scientific truth, one upon which much of human knowledge and achievement rests. To reject this truth or to treat it as “one theory among others” is to deliberately embrace ignorance and transmit such ignorance to our children.

We believe that among God’s gifts are human minds capable of critical thought and that the failure to fully employ this gift is a rejection of the will of our Creator. To argue that God’s loving plan of salvation for humanity precludes the full employment of the God-given faculty of reason is to attempt to limit God, an act of hubris. We ask that science remain science and that religion remain religion, two very different, but complementary, forms of truth.

When I read that letter, I was struck by its similarity to the words of the Unitarian minister, William Ellery Channing. In 1825, he preached a sermon in Baltimore which is titled, “Unitarian Christianity.” Here are a few passages from it:

Our leading principle in interpreting Scripture is this, that the Bible is a book written for men, in the language of men, and that its meaning is to be sought in the same manner as that of other books. We profess not to know a book, which demands a more frequent exercise of reason than the Bible.

We object strongly to the contemptuous manner in which human reason is often spoken of by our adversaries. If reason be so dreadful that its most decisive judgments on religion are unworthy of trust, then Christianity must be abandoned.

Say what we may, God has given us a rational nature, and will call us to account for it. We may let it sleep, but we do so at our peril.

The words of William Ellery Channing from 1825.

In letters to the editor of the Chattanooga Times–Free Press, we often hear from people who see science as inimical to religion. I don’t see it that way. I agree with Zimmerman and the vast majority of reasonable people, that science and religion are two different ways of seeing the world, two different ways of understanding our existence, two different ways of knowing. I think it’s time for science and religion to kiss and make up.

But why would some people believe science and religion were fighting? How did they come to be portrayed as opposed to each other?

Here’s the reasoning in three logical steps:

One. God is perfect. Therefore, whatever he writes or inspires to be written, is perfect. Therefore, the Bible is perfect, correct in every detail. Therefore, the creation of the world happened exactly as described in Genesis. Therefore, God created the world, the animals, the people, the rocks and oceans just as they are now and he did that about 6000 years ago.

Two. This doesn’t jive with what science tells us about the age of the earth, the ancestors of animals and how the mountains and oceans came to be where they are. It is definitely at odds with what science reveals about the history of humanity and how we came to be what we are.

Three. Science is a product of man, not God, therefore it’s not perfect—like God is—and it must be wrong, because if there are two true accounts of the beginning of the world, they must agree.

Steps two and three are really not necessary, because if anything *really is* perfect, it’s all over. There is no need for argument. But because there is, has been, probably will be, argument about this, that tells me that something is not perfect.

That science and religion are at odds is a conceit with a history just about as long as science has been telling us that the Biblical account of creation is mythical. In the 17th century, when Galileo told us the earth revolved around the sun, that was a first sign. When archeologists recognized dinosaur remains in the early 19th century, that was a stronger sign that scientific findings were charting a different history of the world than the Bible. And when Darwin published *On Origin of the Species* in 1859, that was the strongest sign yet that our previous knowledge of the natural world was incomplete.

At the time Darwin published, the prevailing view of creation was similar to “intelligent design,” that philosophy so often promoted by those who wish to sweep evolution from public schools. It was first

proposed by William Paley, who compared the intricate inner workings of a pocket watch to the intricate inter-connected workings of nature. This is what he wrote in 1802:

MARGARET. In crossing a heath, suppose I pitched my foot against a stone and were asked how the stone came to be there, I might possibly answer that for anything I knew to the contrary it had lain there forever.

But suppose I had found a watch upon the ground, and it should be inquired how the watch happened to be in that place, I should hardly think of the answer which I had before given, that for anything I knew the watch might have always been there. Yet why should not this answer serve for the watch as well as for the stone? Why is it not as admissible in the second case as in the first?

When we come to inspect the watch, we perceive—that we could not discover in the stone—that its several parts are framed and put together for a purpose, that they are so formed and adjusted as to produce motion, and that motion so regulated as to point out the hour of the day; that if the different parts had been differently shaped from what they are, of a different size from what they are, or placed after any other manner or in any other order than that in which they are placed, either no motion at all would have been carried on in the machine, or none which would have answered the use that is now served by it.

This mechanism being observed, the inference we think is inevitable, that the watch must have had a maker; that there must have existed, at some time and at some place or other, an artificer or artificers who formed it for the purpose which we find it actually to answer, who comprehended its construction and designed its use.

There cannot be design without a designer; contrivance without a contriver; order without choice; arrangement without anything capable of arranging. In the watch which we are examining are seen contrivance, design, an end, a purpose, means for the end, adaptation to the purpose. And the question which irresistibly presses upon our thoughts is, whence this contrivance and design?

Every observation which was made concerning the watch may be repeated concerning animals, concerning plants, concerning, indeed, all the organized parts of the works of nature.

The words of William Paley. On a first hearing, that's a pretty good argument for an intelligent designer, don't you think? How could anything so beautiful, which works together in every detail so well not be designed by some intelligent being? This world and universe could not just come together *by chance*. Therefore, it must have been made by God.

One big problem with Paley's argument is that he already knew what his conclusion would be. He was a Christian minister at the turn of the 19th century. From his earliest years, he must have been thoroughly schooled in Christian theology. For him to arrive at any other conclusion would have been impossible.

This is not his fault, any more than it is my fault to be ignorant of Hungarian grammar. Of course, if I wrote a treatise on Hungarian grammar, I would be foolish not to study it first. And Paley was no fool. He was highly educated, having studied all that he thought he could. He had exhausted all the libraries and books at hand.

Another problem—again not Paley's fault—is that he didn't treat the stone as he treated the watch. He could take apart the watch and examine it and marvel at its workings. He could not take apart the stone in the same way that I could take it apart today. He assumed the stone was ordinary and relatively uninteresting. He thought the watch unusual, and therefore worthy of study. Had he been able to examine the molecular structure of the stone, there's no telling where his reasoning would have led him.

Paley concluded that nature, by its inter-connectedness, was a product of design. And he needed a designer. Looking around for a likely suspect, he naturally landed on God. Who else could have done it?

Charles Darwin answered that question in another way. He found Paley's designer in something he called "natural selection."

Darwin—and everyone else—knew that if you needed a strong horse to pull your plow, you breed a strong stallion with a strong mare and you will, in time, have a strong plow-pulling 17-hand draft horse. You might refine your breeding technique and get a Clydesdale or a Percheron. Darwin—and everyone else—knew that if you needed a cow that produced milk with a lot of butterfat, like a Guernsey, but would graze on all sorts of grasses, like a Holstein, you set them on a blind date and in time, you will have a cow that blends these characteristics. This is common practice in animal husbandry and agriculture. It's known as selection, specifically *artificial selection*.

Darwin reasoned that if people were selecting for the traits they wanted, would not Nature also be selecting for the traits she wanted? And wouldn't she select for an improved ability to survive in one's environment? And, given the massive scale of time, wouldn't Nature's selections be way too numerous to count? Could there not be, he thought, *natural selection*? These are his words from 1859:

ELAINE. Can the principle of selection, which we have seen is so potent in the hands of man, apply in nature? Can it be thought improbable, seeing that variations useful to man have undoubtedly occurred, that other variations useful in some way to each being in the great and complex battle of life, should sometimes occur in the course of thousands of generations?

If such do occur, can we doubt that individuals having any advantage, however slight, over others, would have the best chance of surviving and of procreating their kind? On the other hand, we may feel sure that any variation in the least degree injurious would be rigidly destroyed. This preservation of favorable variations and the rejection of injurious variations, I call Natural Selection.

As man can produce and certainly has produced a great result by his methodical and unconscious means of selection, what may not

nature effect? Man can act only on external and visible characters: nature cares nothing for appearances, except in so far as they may be useful to any being. She can act on every internal organ, on every shade of constitutional difference, on the whole machinery of life. Man selects only for his own good; Nature only for that of the being which she tends.

Can we wonder, then, that nature's productions should be far "truer" in character than man's productions; that they should be infinitely better adapted to the most complex conditions of life, and should plainly bear the stamp of far higher workmanship?

It may be said that natural selection is daily and hourly scrutinizing, throughout the world, every variation, even the slightest; rejecting that which is bad, preserving and adding up all that is good; silently and insensibly working, whenever and wherever opportunity offers, at the improvement of each organic being in relation to its organic and inorganic conditions of life. We see nothing of these slow changes in progress, until the hand of time has marked the long lapses of ages, and then so imperfect is our view into long past geological ages, that we only see that the forms of life are now different from what they formerly were.

The words of Charles Darwin.

Natural selection is Darwin's gift to science and religion. A gift to science inasmuch as it explains the mechanism by which the many forms of life we see—the butterfly, the eucalyptus tree, the banana slug and the Pileated Woodpecker—how all these species came to be; a gift to religion inasmuch as it is the intelligent designer—that force which can make all the best come to the fore in every plant and animal—the intelligent designer that Paley knew existed but had not identified.

Natural selection, it seems to me, is awfully hard to refute. After having practiced artificial selection since we first tamed a dog and first planted a garden, it seems reasonable to me that natural selection happens all the time and without our say—so.

Where some folks get hung up is what natural selection *implies*. And what it implies is the evolution of life from forms now extinct to the forms we see today. Natural selection implies that in a thousand years or even in a hundred, we won't see the forms we see today and we may see new forms that don't exist today.

The theory of evolution, which states that plants and animals—including humans—evolved to their present form from other forms now extinct follows logically from natural selection. And, what many people overlook is that evolution did not stop in 1955. It can't be shut off, so that in a thousand years or so, human beings might appear quite different than they do today.

You can talk about evolution in terms of plants and animals, but when you talk about human beings evolving from other primate forms, well, for some people, that is just so much nonsense. For them, it's like being told your parents are not really your parents, your right hand is really your left and you are a woman not a man. Or a man, not a woman. It's like being told you are not who you are.

For some people, their place in the world is at the top of the food chain. Humans on top and everything else down there. The crown of creation. And the Bible supports this belief. On the very first Thursday, as noted in Genesis, Chapter One:

*God made the wild animals according to their kinds,
the cattle according to their kinds,
and all the creatures that creep along the ground
according to their kinds.*

*God saw that it was good.
Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image,
after our likeness, so they may rule over the fish of the sea
and the birds of the air, over the cattle,
and over all the earth,
and over all the creatures that move on the earth."*

*God blessed them and said to them,
Be fruitful and multiply! Fill the earth and subdue it!
Rule over the fish of the sea
and the birds of the air
and every creature that moves on the ground."
God saw all that he had made, and it was very good!
There was evening, and there was morning, and the sixth day.*

So, if you learn that lesson early on—remember the Bible is perfect in every letter—is it any wonder that you would reject the notion that you had *evolved* from one of those fish of the sea or a bird of the air or a creature of the ground? The theory of evolution threatens your world view, your place in the picture of life.

There are people, sophisticated in other areas, who still reject evolution. They are coming around. In time, only the most provincial and superstitious people will reject the theory of evolution. Most reasonable people now accept it. It makes sense. It's been vetted by smart people who have nothing to gain by its wider acceptance. No one will get rich if tomorrow, a thousand more people say, "I now accept the theory of evolution." It's good science and it does not threaten religious beliefs. Science is the story of the natural world. Religion is the story of the human spirit. Science and religion are different ways of knowing.

If science and religion were to kiss and make up, then one place they can get together is in the field of sex education. Science readily explains the mechanics of sexual reproduction, pregnancy and birth. Religion tells us of love and commitment, of children and parents. The pregnancy rate among teenagers proves that too many don't know what they're doing and the divorce rate reveals that too many don't know what it means.

Science is a dictionary, a thesaurus, an encyclopedia and the biggest list of facts ever compiled. Religion is a memoir by Anne Lamott, a play by Shakespeare, a poem by Whitman and a comic strip with

Calvin and Hobbes. If you were the librarian, wouldn't you keep a dictionary? Wouldn't you keep Shakespeare?

Science explains how the house is built, the oak rafters, the pine framing, the cedar shingles, the brick chimney, the aluminum siding and the automatic garage door opener. Religion tells us of the family that lives there, of her work as a French teacher, his skill at the barbecue, the children who play "Spin the Bottle" in the closet and the kitty cat that shreds the couch. The details of house construction and the picture of life inside are both critical to our understanding of what a *home* is.

The Buddha had good advice for you as you consider what to believe. In what is known as his "Farewell Address," he said, *Be a lamp for yourself. Light your own way. Hold on to what you know is right, just as you would hold on to a lamp as you walk in the darkness.*

HYMN 184, Be Ye Lamps Unto Yourselves

POSTLUDE: His Eye Is on the Sparrow