



*“Richard, we need to talk.
I’ll text you.”*

U U 101
*A Worship Service by
the REV. JEFF BRIERE*

*Unitarian Universalist
Church of Chattanooga*

October 5, 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.

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 389, Gathered Here

GREETINGS

Diane. I’m Diane Davison and I am the Treasurer of 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. 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.

I have four important announcements. First, the religious education department needs your help, especially if your child is in the program. Second, to accomplish that, a sign-up roster has been created for your convenience. It is posted on the bulletin board out front, so choose a Sunday and volunteer. Third, many students are not registered. You must register your children for the RE program, so please check with Jamie to make that right. And last, you must pick up your child from the RE program directly after their program ends. We cannot ask the teachers to supervise your children after they finish their class for the day. So get your child first and that cup

of coffee second.

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.

For a prelude, Emily chose a piece by Georg Phillip Telemann.

PRELUDE
Fantasia

LIGHTING THE CHALICE

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

OLYMPIA BROWN'S VOICE

Jeff. Olympia Brown was born in 1835, and when she was little, girls were expected to speak very little and when they did, to speak softly and gently. They weren't supposed to whistle. Girls weren't supposed to climb trees or run fast or catch frogs.

Kate. But Olympia did; she did all those things, all those things and more.

Jeff. Her parents told her, "You can do whatever a boy can do."

Kate. And Olympia knew it was true. She climbed trees and ran fast and caught frogs, and when she was in school, she answered the teacher's questions loud and clear.

Jeff. One lady in town said, "Little girls should be quiet. Little girls should be seen and not heard."

Kate. But Olympia spoke up. She had a voice, and she was going to use it, every day.

Jeff. When Olympia Brown was a teenager, young women weren't supposed to go to college. Young women weren't supposed to leave home to go off and learn complicated things.

Kate. But Olympia did; she did all those things and more. Olympia left home and went to Antioch College. She went to class and studied and learned all kinds of complicated things.

Jeff. One professor at the college said, "Young women should not be in college. But since they are here they must read their reports. Young women should not give speeches from memory, like the men."

Kate. But Olympia did. When it was her turn to present her report she rolled up the papers in her hand and said each and every word, loud and clear. Olympia Brown had a voice and she was going to use it, every day.

Jeff. When Olympia Brown was in college women weren't supposed to wear pants. Women were supposed to wear very long dresses that came all the way down to their toes.

Kate. But Olympia did. She wore dresses that came down only past her knees and under them she dared to wear pants! "Bloomers" the pants were called after Amelia Bloomer, the woman who had created them.

Jeff. All of her classmates were men and they said, "Women should not show their ankles in public! And women certainly should not wear pants!"

Kate. But Olympia did. She wore her bloomers every day no matter how much the men sneered.

Jeff. When Olympia Brown was finished with college women weren't supposed to be ministers. Women never stood up in front of a congregation and talked about God.

Kate. But Olympia did; she did all those things and more. Olympia Brown graduated from the Theological School at St. Lawrence University in 1863 and she was ordained as a Universalist minister right after she graduated. After that, she was known as the Reverend Olympia Brown.

Jeff. One minister—a man—said, “Women should not speak in public. Women should not preach in the pulpit or discuss the nature of God.”

Kate. But the Reverend Olympia Brown did. During the next thirty-five years, she was a minister in five different congregations, and she visited other congregations, too. She took the pulpit in every single one, and she spoke on the nature of God and love, and she did an excellent job. Olympia Brown had a voice, and she used it, every day.

Jeff. When Olympia Brown was born, women weren't allowed to vote. Women weren't allowed to have any say in who was elected President or Senator or Mayor or even who was on the school board.

Kate. But Olympia had something to say about that. Olympia had a lot to say about that. She traveled all over the state of Kansas in a horse and buggy, giving speeches to convince people that women deserved the right to vote. She wrote hundreds of letters. She spoke to the representatives and senators in Congress. She marched in parades. Olympia and her friends worked hard to get women the right to vote. Olympia Brown had a voice, and she used it every day—every day—for over fifty years.

Jeff. And finally, when Olympia Brown was 85 years old, women were allowed to vote. In November of 1920, Olympia voted for the

very first time.

Kate. Olympia had always had a voice, and she used it to make sure that she—and all the other women in the United States—had a vote as well.

OFFERTORY
Morceau de Concours

The next Vice President was on TV last Thursday night, and neither candidate stepped in it. They were models of civility and enthusiastic for their tickets.

I am glad they behaved and did not mis-speak themselves, because we've already endured one bumbling Vice President. I mean one who does not engage his brain before he starts his mouth. Our present Veep doesn't suffer this foot-in-mouth disease. Dick Cheney speaks pretty well, to be sure.

Not so Dan Quayle. Remember him? Our 44th Vice President. He served with the President Bush the Oncet in the office that John Nance Garner characterized as “not worth a bucket of warm spit.” Well, Garner actually said something slightly different, but you get the idea.

Quayle was well known for being inarticulate. At a Thanksgiving festival in Virginia, he said, *I suppose three important things certainly come to my mind that we want to say, “Thank you.” The first would be our family. Your family, my family—which is composed of an immediate family of a wife and three children, a larger family with grandparents and aunts and uncles. We all have our family, whichever that may be.*

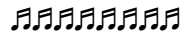
And speaking at a college graduation, Quayle mangled the slogan of the United Negro College Fund, which is *A mind is a terrible thing*

to waste. Quayle said, *What a waste it is to lose one's mind. Or not to have a mind is being very wasteful. How true that is.*

The verbatim words of our 44th Vice President. There must be something about being No. 2 for a President named Bush. Just brings out the best in a guy.

We'd like you to bring out your best and we won't mangle our words this morning as we ask for your help in supporting the operations and ministry of this church. If you have a check for your annual pledge, please mark it that way. 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 I 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.

We are in the midst of the most solemn and important Jewish holidays, the High Holy Days. It started with Rosh Hashana at sundown on September 29th. The second holiday is Yom Kippur, which begins this Wednesday evening at sundown. Yom Kippur is known in English as the Day of Atonement, and it's the most solemn and important of the Jewish holidays. Its central themes are atonement and repentance. Jews have traditionally observed this holiday with a 25-hour period of fasting and intensive prayer.

And the prayer that begins their service is the *Kol Nidrei*. It's chanted by the cantor in Aramaic, not Hebrew and it is a statement of absolution. The tendency to make vows to God was so strong in ancient Israel that rabbis and other religious leaders began to protest against the excesses of such obligations. Rash and frequent vows inevitably involved in difficulties many who had made them, and thus evoked an earnest desire for dispensation from such responsibilities.

Feeling oppressed by the high probability that such vows would never be fulfilled, they accordingly devised a general and comprehensive formula of dispensation which was repeated by the cantor in the name of the assembled congregation at the beginning of the fast of Atonement. This declared that the petitioners, who were seeking reconciliation with God, solemnly retracted all vows and oaths which they would make during the period this Day of Atonement and the next one.

In these few moments of silence, as we listen to the *Kol Nidrei* let us absolve ourselves of the vows we impetuously make in times of crisis. For we know that we will surely overstate our abilities in order to be released from our suffering, and this is not fair to us nor

to anyone else.

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.

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

SERMON: UU 101

Good morning, everyone. This is the one-and-only class meeting for UU 101, a concise, but comprehensive survey of Unitarian Universalist history. This morning we will cover 6008 years of religious history in 20 minutes. This is a 3-credit course for members or visitors, and it's a general distribution requirement for graduation. If you're supposed to be here and you're not, don't worry. I don't take attendance.

The reading list for this course contains the Bible, the Qur'an, the Upanishads, the Kama Sutra, the Analects of Confucius, the Tao Te Ching, the Egyptian Book of the Dead, the Tibetan Book of the Dead, the Dead Sea Scrolls and the New York Times. And all the other apocrypha and sacred texts written by human beings. I won't be quoting from those texts, but they are on the reading list. So, sharpen

your pencils and get out a clean sheet of paper. Here we go.

First, let me introduce the concept of religion. Religion has been called a fantasy, an illusion. If so, it's a mighty powerful illusion. I think it's real. Many people define religion as a society's attempt to explain how things got to be the way they are. A good example is the generally accepted belief that it's poor protocol to steal something.

When your child asks why stealing is a non-starter, you can say because it's the law. Since your child is inquisitive and bright, you know that won't satisfy, so you can point to the Ten Commandments and say, "Because God said so." Now that may not be a satisfying answer, but it will usually stop the conversation. In this case, we don't steal because God said we musn't.

Another way of explaining religion is that it's an attempt to give life meaning. When your child asks why we're here, a Buddhist answer would be that we are merely part of the unending cycle of life and death and that we're alive now but soon, we'll enter the wheel of life that is always turning through cycles of death and renewal. The point to existence is to learn as much as you can, to improve yourself as much as possible so that you might reach enlightenment. Again, not a very satisfying answer, but one which would steer the conversation in a new direction.

The best explanation of religion I know is that it's our response to the dual experience of being alive and having to die. And this response is expressed differently in different cultures. It covers moral behavior codes, such as *Thou shalt not steal* and it focuses our attention on the transcendent aspect of religion, the part that has to do with why we're here and what happens next.

This won't be on the test, by the way; it's all just background material so that you can appreciate this tree of religion. Religion developed at different times, in different ways in different parts of the

world and we can organize it this way.

Think of religion as eight trees, and within that forest of eight are two big trees several medium sized ones and a couple of saplings. The big ones are Judaism, which has branches of Christianity and Islam; Hinduism, which has branches of Buddhism and Jain. Then there are these shoots, Confucianism and Taoism, which were cross-pollinated by Buddhism. Shinto began in ancient Japan and still is practiced there today; the Sikhs are a little more than 500 years old, but do not trace their religion to another; same for Parsism, a religion that traces its roots to Zoroaster and is still practiced in remote parts of Iran today.

The eighth tree is primitive religions, such as Native American beliefs and the ethnic religions of Africa, South America, the Innuits and other aboriginal tribes and cultures. I really don't like the word primitive, because it implies such a religion will in time develop to a more advanced and modern state, as if that were something to be desired. But it does point out a major difference between that tree and the rest. And that is literature. Every other major religious tree is fertilized by written texts, nourished by sacred books that recite history and lay out prescriptions for living life the right way. Primitive religions are based in pre-literate societies, cultures which rely on oral methods to preserve their heritage.

Now if any of you eager-beaver students copied this lovely drawing in your note book, forget it. Tear up the paper and copy this one.

Religion can *appear* like eight separate trees, but in reality, it's like a big bush with its main trunk hidden underground. We could call it a burning bush, I suppose, if Moses hadn't already used that term.

I believe that among human beings, there is some impulse to explore our spiritual nature. And when we do that in a corporate way, when we do that together regularly, we call it a religion.

This impulse led us to come here today and be together while we contemplate something bigger than ourselves. And learn a little about our history. For me, the religious impulse is based mostly in my reason, my rational nature. I am not moved to be religious in the manner of Buddhists. The unending cycle of decay and renewal is an interesting concept and it helps me see the big picture, but it doesn't exactly inspire me. Likewise, I don't feel all that warm and fuzzy knowing that Jesus hung on a cross for me so that I might get a password to enter heaven. But I can appreciate his turning the prevailing moral values upside down.

You may feel spiritual in a different way. You might energize your spirituality by taking a hike every Sunday morning along the Tennessee River or the rim of the Grand Canyon to appreciate the grandeur of creation. But if you did that in the company of other like-minded people, and you did it repeatedly, you'd be religious. I believe the basic impulse to be religious exists in all human beings, and its expression is different in different culture and that's what this drawing is all about. As we will see, the scope of religious development is one of division and sectarianism, especially in the development of Protestant religions.

OK, to re-cap, now, eight major limbs on one burning bush: the Hebrew or Jewish limb with branches of Christianity & Islam; the Hindu limb with branches of Buddhism and Jain; the separate limbs of Confucianism, Taoism, Shinto, the Sikhs, Parsism and aboriginal spirituality. By the way, to be completely accurate, you ought to draw about a thousand little shoots near the base of this bush because new religions appear all the time. Like the Branch Davidians.

I want to concentrate on two limbs of importance in our history. You might think of them as eastern and western. Although our burning religious bush has eight limbs, in terms of historical impact, number of adherents and general strength, of those eight, two are of interest to us.

We can think of these two major limbs as the eastern one, containing Hinduism, Buddhism and Jain and the western limb containing Judaism, Christianity and Islam. If it hadn't been for World War II, the Korean War, Vietnam, Iraq and the advent of world-wide communications, we might not be talking so much about the eastern limb. In truth, the first time that most Americans were introduced to eastern religions was in 1893 at the Columbian Exposition. So within the last 70 years Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism and Taoism entered our awareness.

The eastern limb springs from an Indian root; it is more mystical, emphasizing the divine element found within. It also tends to deny the world, for lack of a better phrase, while it emphasizes the essentially spiritual nature of reality. The western limb springs from a Semitic root and include Judaism, Christianity and Islam. It is more prophetic, emphasizing the revelation of God to humans from without. It also tends to embrace the world, or seeks to redeem the world.

We are located on the major western limb, which has many smaller branches, stems, twigs, shoots, buds and leaves. The main limb started to grow about six thousand years ago in the area that today we know as Israel and Palestine. At that time it was not much more than another set of primitive beliefs, but two things about the ancient Hebrews were interesting.

They believed in a single deity, one and only one god, in opposition to all their neighbors in the ancient near east, who had many, many gods. And their God was personal, he had a personality and from time-to-time, he would intervene in human affairs.

The other aspect of the Hebrews that made them different from their neighbors is that they kept records. Starting about 1800 years before Jesus was born, the ancient Hebrews began to save all their oral history and stories and write it down. It took more than a thousand years. What we call the Old Testament did not come together until

about 500 years before the time of Jesus.

The main branch on this western limb is Judaism, and it develops into orthodox Judaism, which is traditional and attempts to follow God's plan as laid out in the Bible, conservative Judaism, which believes that laws and traditions can change to suit the times, and Reform Judaism, which holds that individuals can make choices about what traditions to follow. There are many smaller sects, like the Lubavitchers and Hasidim.

The second branch is Islam, and it really is not a branch, but because of its history, it is intertwined with Judaism, so I put it here. Strictly speaking, a Muslim would be uncomfortable—if not offended—if we implied that Islam is somehow an outgrowth of Judaism. On the other hand, Muslims claim Abraham as one of their patriarchs and generally accept what is written in the Bible about Abraham and his ancestors.

In time, Islam split into two branches, the Sunni and the Shia. This came about because of a disagreement over the proper successor to Muhammad. The Sunni believe that a leader ought to be elected, but the Shia believe that leadership ought to pass down through the lineage of Muhammad.

This branch is Christianity and it has two main stems, the western rite or the Roman church, and the eastern rite, known as the Eastern Orthodox. This split was a long time developing—it began in the first few hundred years after Jesus died and was caused mostly by differences in language, culture and politics. There was Rome and there was Constantinople, and they were jealous and afraid of each other. Matters came to a head in 1054. By then it had devolved into a clash of personalities and governing style and a little side show concerning theology. The split was complete when the leaders of both sides excommunicated each other. A member of an Eastern Orthodox church would tell you the pope has too much power and the bishops are better suited to lead their churches.

A little farther out on our Roman church branch is this split here, called the Protestant Reformation. This is 1517, the year that Martin Luther decided to take on the Roman Catholic Church over such excesses as selling indulgences, married priests, accumulation of wealth and 92 other annoying characteristics that Luther thought should be reformed. The Reformation gave rise to all the mainline protestant churches we know today: the Lutherans, Methodists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, United Church of Christ.

Aside from the Reformation, there was a Radical Reformation at nearly the same time. A regular old reformation was not good enough for some people. Luther never really understood what a fiasco he started by asking for some dialogue with the Roman church. Seeing that Luther could question authority, and live to tell about it, every crackpot in Europe became interested in theology. Thus began the Baptists, the Anabaptists, the Quakers, the Shakers, the Mennonites and the Amish. Many other not-so-well-known churches trace their history to the Radical Reformation and they include the Pentecostal Holiness churches, African Methodist Episcopal, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Mormons, the Church of the Nazarene, the Church of God, the Church of God of Anderson, Indiana, the Worldwide Church of God and the congregation that worships in this space on Saturdays, the United Church of God, an International Organization.

All these little sects are evidence of my point earlier that religion develops by division. And this tendency to form smaller and smaller sects that are increasingly separated by theology and culture is just like a bush, which has a strong single trunk and several branches, many more twigs, a thousand stems and a million leaves. With all this obvious diversity, it's a wonder to me that some religious people still reject the theory of evolution.

The Radical Reformation is important to us because it gave us radical ideas, like the idea that God is not a trinity, but a unity; the idea that salvation was available to all instead of a select few was a radical

idea. Thus were the intellectual beginnings of our theological heritage, Unitarianism and Universalism.

To give you a clearer picture, let's go back to the Reformation twig, right here. This is the church of England, which was established when Henry the Eighth got into an argument with the pope about whom he could and could not marry. Henry broke with Rome and declared the monarch of England to be the sole religious authority for the church in England. As time went by, zealots within the Church of England thought the break with the Catholics was not clean enough. They disliked the rich vestments, the incense, the music, the stained glass windows and the excesses of the Church of England, which had been imported wholesale from the Roman church. They agitated for their new church to be purified of all traces of the Roman Catholicism.

They were known as Puritans and a small group of them journeyed first to the Netherlands in search of religious freedom and from there to America. They were aboard the Arabella when it landed in Massachusetts in 1630 and we know them as Pilgrims, the ones who gave us the holiday of Thanksgiving. These Puritans had sentiments about religion which live within us today. Do you see any stained glass? Incense? How often do I wear a pulpit gown? Are we somewhat austere in worship? In some respects, do we resemble the caricatures of the New England Pilgrims? You betcha.

These Pilgrims, were actually a group of English aristocrats and the proud possessors of a charter from the King to establish a colony in the New World. They were to work the land and make money and send it all back to England. Along with their economic incentive, they had the idea of setting up a new church in the New World, one that would be purified of all popery and administered to their liking.

So they set up a system of churches in Massachusetts, a system that came to be called the Standing Order of Congregational Churches in New England. These were the only churches in New England for a

long time. Others were tolerated, but not supported. The Massachusetts Bay Colony actually used state revenues to support the churches they established. State support for religion in Massachusetts ceased in 1830.

From about 1750 onward, a liberal element grew within these churches. Over time, the liberal ministers preached less and less about the trinity and the sinfulness of human nature. Unlike today, in those days, ministers reigned supreme. What they preached, the congregations swallowed. And the congregations followed their ministers and by 1825, they called themselves Unitarians and the break with the Orthodox Congregational Churches was complete.

So here are the Unitarians, this leaf, which grows from a stem on the Congregational Church twig, which grows out of the Puritan stem, which grows out of the Church of England, which grows out of the Reformation, which is an off-shoot of the Roman Church, which is one of two main branches of Christianity, which is one of the branches of Judaism, which is rooted in the universal religious impulse of humanity.

But what about the Universalists? Back to the Reformation. One of the many sects that flourished after the Reformation were the Methodists. In 1750, a Methodist minister by the name of James Rely broke with his church and began preaching his belief that *all* people would eventually be reunited in happiness with God. Some of the really bad people might have to sit in a corner for awhile, but eventually, everyone would go to heaven. This is known as universal salvation and it's not a new idea with Rely. It was deemed heretical at the Council of Chalcedon in the year 451. But it was radical in 1750 and it influenced John Murray, who established the Universalist Church of America beginning in 1770.

In those days, most ministers preached hellfire and brimstone and shamed people into good behavior. Religious life was not fun, nor was it supposed to be. The notion of Universal salvation was a breath

of fresh air. So the Universalists grew and prospered in the New World, but by the 20th century, nearly every mainline Protestant church had stopped preaching hellfire and brimstone, and had begun preaching a gentler Christianity. They no longer preached the sinful nature of humans and eternal punishment as a theological concept was swept under the rug. The Universalists were co-opted by the big boys in the religious world. Their message of hope in this world and happiness in the next was just too good to ignore.

And so they began to look around for a friend and they found one in the Unitarians. In 1961, the membership of the Universalist Church of America and the American Unitarian Association voted to merge and become the Unitarian Universalist Association.

So here we are: This is us. An itty-bitty leaf at the end of this stem that grows out of both Unitarian and Universalist twigs, which sprout from the Church of England and the Methodists, cross-pollinated by the Radical Reformation, which was part of this big branch here, the Protestant Reformation, a major branch on the Roman Church limb, which grew out of the trunk of Judaism.

Thank you very much for your kind attention. If you wish to continue this exploration, please consider registering for my course, UU 201, Advanced Unitarian Universalist history.

HYMN 6, Just as Long as I Have Breath

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: Painting Pictures of Egypt