

Welcome to the Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga. My name is Matt Hoyt and I am a member of the 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, politics 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. If you have something to share, please come forward, tell us your name and what's on your mind.



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.

Please rise now and greet your neighbors at the door. Welcome them into the sanctuary with a hand of warmth and a smile.

*HYMN 221, Light One Candle*



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## *The Agreement for Fellowship*

*A Worship Service by the REV. JEFF BRIERE*

*Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga*

*December 13, 2009*

## GREETINGS

**BONNY.** Thanks so much for joining us in worship today. We hope you find the service rewarding and that you leave here inspired and uplifted. There is an emergency exit over here to my right, now is the time to put your cell phone in “Worship Mode” and childcare for the young and the restless is available downstairs in the nursery.

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.

Steve brings us music composed for a children’s drama today. This is one of six pieces by Paul Hindemith from a suite entitled, *We’re Building a City*.

### *PRELUDE: March*

### *LIGHTING THE CANDLES*

Did you notice that we are not lighting our chalice today? Check out the bulletin. It indicates we are lighting the candles, not the chalice. We are lighting candles in honor of Hanukkah, the Jewish holiday that began at sundown Friday.

This time of year is a Unitarian Universalist minister’s nightmare. There’s Christmas to deal with, both the secular and the sacred event, and if that’s not enough, Hanukkah as well. I thank God that the winter solstice is a week away and we don’t have to work that holiday into this service.

Today, as it is the Sunday nearest Hanukkah, we will include its meaning in our service. Hanukkah is not a Jewish Christmas, I want to make that clear. It occurs on the 25<sup>th</sup> day in the month of Kislev, so in relation to our civil calendar, it moves around somewhat. This year, it began at sundown on Friday. It’s not a major holiday in the Jewish tradition, but since it often occurs near Christmas, it has become influenced by our secular holidays that occur near the end of the year.

The theme of Hanukkah that resonates with us is freedom of conscience, liberty and human rights. The feast of Hanukkah celebrates the great victory of the Jews over the Syrians and Greeks and the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem after the Jews’ victory about 165 years before the time of Jesus.

During the time that the Syrians occupied Palestine, they imposed their way of life on the Jews—including their religion. So when the Jews booted the Syrians out, they re–claimed their temple and were able to worship in the way that was important to them. Religious liberty and human rights.

Please read with me now these words composed by members of the Beth El Congregation in Sudbury Massachusetts. Your words are in italics and this is a free translation of the traditional Jewish blessing recited at Hanukkah.

We gather in the chill of winter solstice, finding warmth from each other, nourishing hope where reason fails.

*Grateful for small miracles, we rejoice in the wonder of light and darkness and the daring of hope.*

Holy One of Blessing Your Presence fills creation.

*You made us holy with Your commandments and called us to kindle the Hanukkah lights.*

Holy One of Blessing Your Presence fills creation.

*You performed miracles for our ancestors in days of old at this season.*

Holy One of Blessing Your Presence fills creation.

*You have kept us alive. You have sustained us. You have brought us to this moment.*

Following tradition, I now light the shamus candle, the servant, and use it to light the first three candles of Hanukkah. This is the third day of Hanukkah. Tomorrow, Jews around the world will light the fourth candle and so on until the seventh candle is lighted at sundown Thursday.

#### LABYRINTHS

Anyone here ever walked a labyrinth? In Greek mythology, the original labyrinth was an elaborate structure designed and built by Daedalus for King Minos of Crete. Its function was to hold the Minotaur, a dangerous creature that was half man and half bull. Daedalus had made the Labyrinth so complicated that he himself could barely escape it after he built it.

A labyrinth is actually a type of maze. A maze is a complex branching puzzle with choices of path and direction; a labyrinth has only a single, non-branching path, which leads to the center. A labyrinth in this sense has an very clear route to the center, and back again to the entrance. It's not designed to be difficult to navigate.

This is a maze. You go in this door at the bottom and you find your way through the maze until you get to the door at the top and you can go out. Along the way, you can go right or go left or go back. You have choices.

This is the form of the classical labyrinth in Crete. It is not the one in which the Minotaur was trapped. In the Greek language labyrinth means maze. This is the oldest style of labyrinth we have. Here's a better drawing of it.

You go in at the bottom down here, and slowly walk and follow the path until you get to the center. At the center, there may be a book, a flower, or maybe a drink of water. And then you turn around and go back the way you came to the entrance. The point of the labyrinth is not to find your way out, like a maze, but to focus your thoughts, to meditate or contemplate. Walking a labyrinth, you can disregard all the world around you—or most of it—so that you can focus your thoughts on what is inside you.

When the Romans heard the story about the labyrinth and the Minotaur, they designed their own style of labyrinth. It's square and it's proportions are regular. You can slice off the corners and make another version, but it's still a Roman style labyrinth. You can expand it and give it ears, like this one in Reims, France. Or you can make it circular, like this one, at the cathedral in Lyon, France. And here is one with only three lobes and no corners.

People build labyrinths outdoors, too like this one, made of hedges on hillside in England. Or this one, made of stones.

The most famous labyrinth is this one, and it's in the cathedral at Chartres, in France. It was built about 750 years ago. This is a photo of the labyrinth as it looks in the church. And here are some people walking the labyrinth.

And so we come now to the labyrinth that will be installed in the cathedral at Chattanooga.

Thanks for bring the labyrinth here and you are free to go to your classes now.

CHILDREN'S RECESSONAL

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

*Showing the City to Newly Arrived People*

Psychologist Erich Fromm was fortunate to be able to flee from Nazi Germany to the United States. Although he enjoyed his freedom, he was puzzled by how the Germans could let a man like Hitler come to power. In his book *Escape from Freedom*, Fromm shares a possible answer.

“Sometimes,” he says, “the problems of life become so overwhelming that we despair of ever solving them. Should someone come along and say in a loud, confident voice, ‘Follow me without question, do everything I tell you to, and I will lead you out of this,’ many of us would find that a very tempting offer.

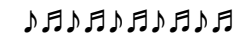
When life becomes difficult, we want someone to say to us, ‘Don’t worry your little head about it. Let me do it for you, and all I want in return is your gratitude and total obedience.’”

It can be comforting to have a friend, spouse, clergyman, or colleague offer to carry our burden for us. Comforting, yes. Healthy, no! Taking responsibility for our problems is better for us and healthier for the relationship.

Taisen Deshimaru wrote a book, *The Zen Way to the Martial Arts*, and in it are these words: “Life’s problems are different for each of us, and each of us needs a different way of solving them. Therefore, each of us has to create our own method. If you imitate, you’ll be wrong. You have to create it for yourself.”

If you stick around long enough, you will probably hear me say that this church does not get manna from heaven. We do not receive funds from a bishop or a pope or a national organization. As a matter of fact, we send money to a national organization in order to belong to it. Our bills are not paid by anyone else but us. We are responsible for our own religious life here. As Taisen Deshimaru says, we must create it ourselves.

We will now collect the morning offering for the support and ministry of this church. If you have an pledge payment, please mark it as such. 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.

Christina, please lead us in our Hymn of Thanksgiving.

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.*

This morning I pray for our friends. Friends who call when you are ill, friends whom we call when we need them, friends who stay with you when you need them, friends who meet you where you are. Thank God for our friends.

Thou, which are everywhere,  
Many are your names.  
May we always feel your presence,  
May your wisdom guide us,  
In our deeds as well as in our dreams.  
May we have what sustains our body and soul;  
Lead us first to forgive the mistakes of others  
Even as we hope our own mistakes will soon 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 this time of silence, let us hold close to our hearts those who are lonely or alone at this time of year, those who are cold or without a place to go, but let us never forget 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

*READING: from the Agreement for Fellowship*

As a reading this morning, I have a few words taken from the Agreement for Fellowship, which is a document that guides us in our relations with each other.

The Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga is a safe haven of trust where personal enrichment arises from serving the community.

The Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga is a welcoming shelter of many beliefs where minority and opposing views are accepted and respected.

The Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga is a place where we invite constructive criticism when it is free of animosity.

We acknowledge and respect our personal differences. When disagreements arise, we help each other resolve them before they escalate to destructive levels of conflict. We offer the gift of forgiveness and are aware that reconciling conflict allows us to remain in fellowship.

With this common purpose as our source, we agree to:

- Welcome all who come to us with acceptance and respect for the differences among us.
- Keep our discussions to topics and issues rather than personalities.
- Practice patience and speak the truth directly and with compassion.
- Reflect carefully about the potential results of our words and

actions before we speak or act.

- Acknowledge that we may not always agree with group decisions; however, we will support the consensus of the larger church community and seek to find our common goals.
- Seek to resolve our disagreements to our mutual satisfaction, and to ask for assistance when they cannot be resolved.
- Speak directly to those with whom we have disagreements rather than to a third party. If we have concerns about the conduct of a youth in our Religious Education program, we will speak directly to his/her teacher or parent. In no case will we act as messengers between parties in conflict.
- Contribute to the community at a level that is healthy for us as individuals— intellectually, financially, and with gifts of time and energy.
- Act with loving kindness as best we can at all times, seeking to promote justice, equality, and compassion.
- Understand that creating and maintaining fellowship requires learning and practice.

*SERMON: Agreement for Fellowship*

I want to begin my sermon today with a little fable. Some of this story may sound vaguely familiar and you might even recognize yourself, or someone you know. That's OK. No harm, no foul.

Once upon a time, in a mid-sized city, located in the mid-south region of a North American country, there was a church on the eastern side of a big ridge. The church had 115 members. Or thereabouts.

The people in this church were good people, and they worked hard over many years to make their church an enjoyable place where people came on Sunday morning to see each other and to attend worship services. Over the years, the church and the people had good times and challenging times.

They began in the County Courthouse, then moved to a church on the west side of the big ridge, then they finally built their own building. There were periods of prosperity and times of scarcity. But always, they enjoyed being with each other and they had a good time at church.

As time went on, the church progressed and added to its building and facilities. Things were going well, but when it was about 50 years old, the church stumbled. It stumbled, but it did not fall. This is the story of that stumble.

Fifty years is pretty young in church years; you might think of it as analogous to a 13-year-old child. And you know, that's the "awkward age." Young teens are not the most graceful or diplomatic human beings. Same for churches.

Because of a unhappy confluence of events, personalities and practices, many people began to feel that going to church was not as much fun as it used to be. People grumbled, people argued, and people shouted. There were scenes. Accusations were made, followed by denials, then came threats and counter-threats in quick order.

It seemed that people were quickly losing their tempers. And their minds. Some people got really hot at meetings and there were a couple of scream-outs. At one point, in a public setting, one person stood up and called another person stupid. You wonder how anyone could do that in church, but it happened.

The minister, who was relatively well-liked, and who was the longest-serving minister the church ever had, made a few questionable decisions, and angered many people. The minister was not stupid or mean, but was acting as she thought best. Perhaps she did not appreciate of the consequences of her actions.

The congregation became polarized. On one side were those who

supported the minister and on the other were those who did not. It could have gotten really ugly, because people were ready to explode, but it didn't. Something had to give. That was the minister. The minister left under some pressure and that took the wind out of most everyone's sails. Still, people were left in a pretty foul mood.

Fortunately, before the minister left, the president of the church and the Committee on Ministry realized that something needed to be done. So they got together and began to draft a document that would spell out in plain language how the people should interact in public while at the church.

At the time, the phrase "right relations" was popular and their first attempt to construct a document of right relations was voted down. The objection was that if the people would be required to follow a document which outlined "right" relations, it followed that their relations must have been "wrong." And if you've ever been in a family fight, you know no one wants to be "wrong." Unless everyone is "wrong." And that could not be. As we know, everyone is "right." Right?

By then, the group had morphed into a fully-fledged committee with a name and a charge. A couple veterans joined the committee as well as the interim minister. The interim minister, by the way, was a reasonable sort of person and brought to the table a measure of restraint. Throughout the congregation, people began to calm down.

So, starting again with the idea that everyone was "right," the committee researched other churches and discovered that they were not the "Lone Ranger" of churches. Other churches of similar size had the same problem. Or a similar problem which brought them to the same point. They got some tips and pointers from a church in Colorado and put together a document that they called an "Agreement for Fellowship."

Clever title, eh? Who could argue against fellowship? Or

agreement? They undercut a lot of rancor in the church by choosing a good name for their document. They put it to a vote and only one person spoke against it. Eventually it was approved and became part of the church culture.

Now the central point of the Agreement for Fellowship was that when you have a beef with someone, when you are annoyed with someone, when you really hacked off about something that someone did, then you—and the congregation—are better served if you tell that person what's on your mind. Calmly. In a reasoned manner.

No one is served if you tell another person. If you are angry because Jimmy told you that you need to shine your shoes before you come to church, it does no good to spout off to Joan about it. All you do is make Joan feel bad. You need to talk with Jimmy. Jimmy's actions are *your* problem, not Joan's. This sort of thing was happening regularly in the church before the agreement was approved. And it was making many people unhappy.

It's called triangulation, and if it isn't checked, it can bring down a church. Larger churches are pretty much immune to it because of size, but smaller churches can be devastated by triangulation.

After the congregation voted the Agreement for Fellowship, this sort of thing didn't happen so much anymore. Oh, it happened now and then, but it seemed to be more about inconsequential matters. By this time, the church had called a new minister and they liked each other and hit it off right away. For the next several years, everyone got along pretty well. No one shouted, no one got hot, no one called anyone stupid.

The new minister, because he hadn't gone through the "recent unpleasantness," was unaware of how deeply the congregation had dabbled in acrimony. By the time he arrived, everyone was pleasant again. He was aware of the Agreement for sure, because he was around when the Agreement was voted, but he didn't have the

experience the congregation had and didn't understand the depth of feeling and how that made the agreement so important.

The Agreement for Fellowship should have been trotted out about every three years or so for everyone to see and understand. But for several years, it wasn't. It wasn't ignored. People referred to it, newcomers got a copy of it and the minister actually cited it a few times. But it wasn't really presented to the congregation as it should have been.

One day, a member of the committee that drafted the Agreement suggested to the new minister that it ought to be the focus of a worship service now and then. Not only that, but it ought to be on the website as well. And the new minister understood right away. And that's how we got to where we are today. The Agreement for Fellowship is on the website and today it's the focus of this service.

In our little fable today, the President was played by David Reed and the committee that drafted the Agreement was played by George Helton, Buck O'Rear, Rich Dwyer, Shela Van Ness, Walt Jenison, Helen Solomon, Robin Vasa and the interim minister, Dana Reynolds. They deserve our gratitude.

Awhile ago, I opened my mouth wide enough to stick my foot in it. All the way in. I was working with a bunch of Wowzers, the worship committee folks, and I sent an e-mail message in which I used some very poorly chosen language. This rankled several Wowzers, but they didn't say anything to me. It sorta happened like this, and the names have been changed to protect the innocent.

**GEORGE.** Who does he think he is, anyway?

**DAVID.** Who do you mean?

**GEORGE.** Jeff; "Thee Minister."

**DAVID.** What's the matter?

**GEORGE.** He set us all a task, to produce a worship service. And that's what we did. All summer long. We produced the services while he was away. And then, when he returns, he hears good things about the services. So he writes us all a note of congratulations and says he was "pleasantly surprised" that the summer went so well. That's what he wrote; that he was "pleasantly surprised." Like he thought we flounder around without him and the church would go to hell in a handbasket or something.

**DAVID.** I'm pretty sure he didn't mean that.

**GEORGE.** Well, what did he mean, then? That he didn't know we could do it? We've been having worship services longer than he's been the minister here, and we know a thing or two about worship.

**DAVID.** Yeah, you're right. I produced a couple worship services with Nicky Ozbek and everyone liked them. We did that "Tough Questions" series a few years ago.

**GEORGE.** It's not only me, you know. He wrote that to all the Wowzers. I know a couple people who are more hacked off than I am. What's the point of going to all the trouble of producing a worship service if all you're gonna get is a condescending attitude?

**DAVID.** Yeah. I see what you mean. I'm glad I am not a Wowzer.

**GEORGE.** Well, maybe my time as a Wowzer is limited.

**MINISTER.** So you see where this is going? Here's a congregant who is reluctant to speak to someone about an issue for which the other person is responsible. Instead he ropes another congregant into the issue and now both of them are upset. This is classic triangulation; one person says something to another person about a third.

And to confound things just a bit the third person is the minister. I am aware that in some religious cultures, the minister is the boss, or you don't talk back to the minister, or question the minister's decisions. I cannot imagine every arguing with the parish priest of my youth. Just was not possible; when the priest said, "Jump," you said "How high?" And you said that on the way up.

Not so in this church. This minister may appear to be unapproachable, but that's only because he is often flat scared. I have not been doing this a long time, you know. I am learning more every day. And I hope you understand that. If you have a bone to pick with me, great. Try not to do it on Sunday morning, though. Please make an appointment. Eric Papendorp did that a while back when I said or did something stupid. I cannot recall now what it was—there have been so many—but he came to me and told me of his concerns. And he was right to do so.

So here is the same scene and how it might better play out.

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**DAVID.** Who do you mean?

**GEORGE.** Jeff; "Thee Minister."

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**DAVID.** I'm pretty sure he didn't mean that.

**GEORGE.** Well, what did he mean, then? That he didn't know we could do it? We've been having worship services longer than he's been the minister here, and we know a thing or two about worship.

**DAVID.** Have you spoken to Jeff about this?

**GEORGE.** No.

**DAVID.** You know, we're all governed by the Agreement for Fellowship. Jeff is a member of the church, just like you or me. Why don't you take up your concern directly with him?

**GEORGE.** Talk *with* him? *About* him? He wouldn't listen, anyway.

**DAVID.** Would it help if I came with you and stood there while you talked? I'm not saying I agree or disagree with you. But if you are intimidated or uneasy, I'll come with you.

**GEORGE.** I don't know. What good would it do?

**DAVID.** You'd get it out in the open. Talking to me isn't doing any good, you know. You need to speak with him.

**GEORGE.** OK.

**MINISTER.** Now whether or not George actually goes to the minister is not the point. What has happened is that David has refused, gracefully and gently, to be triangulated. This is not his issue and he should not be involved, except to encourage his friend. But if George does go to the minister, here's how it might play out.

**GEORGE.** Hey, Jeff, you have a few minutes to talk?

**JEFF.** Is it urgent? I really need to be available to everyone on

Sunday morning. If it can wait, I can meet you this week, any day but Monday. If it's urgent, we can talk in my office.

**GEORGE.** How about Wednesday afternoon?

**JEFF.** OK, fine.

**DAVID.** Wednesday afternoon rolls around, and George comes by.

**GEORGE.** I wanted to tell you that I had my feelings hurt.

**JEFF.** I'm sorry to hear that. Tell me what happened.

**GEORGE.** When you heard that the summer services went well, you wrote me that you were "pleasantly surprised" to hear how well everything went when you were away. And that made me feel as if you never had much faith in the Wowzers.

**JEFF.** Oh, my gosh. That's not what I meant at all. I really wrote that? Oh, I didn't mean it that way. I am sorry, George. Sometimes I really step in it. I am sure all the Wowzers can produce good services. I am very grateful for all they do.

**GEORGE.** Thanks, Jeff.

**JEFF.** I'm glad you told me. Maybe I gotta mend some fences with the other Wowzers.

**MINISTER.** In the big scheme of things, this is a minor matter. But it was large enough to irritate one person so that a meeting was needed. Something about someone else that bothers you like this should not be left alone to fester, because if you don't tend to it, it will spill out in a way and at a time that will be unfortunate. It ought to be brought out into the open and discussed with the person who is involved and not with someone unrelated to the issue. That's one very strong point in the Agreement for Fellowship.

You'll recall that I said only one person spoke against the Agreement when it was adopted. His objection was that it wasn't needed, that everyone knew how to behave. The same objection was raised when this church was going through the process that led to becoming a Welcoming Congregation. All the intentional activity to confront our feelings about gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans-gendered people wasn't necessary because we *already were* and open, tolerant religious society. Our first principle says so. And all the intentional activity to confront our feelings about behavior wasn't necessary, because everyone *already knew* how to behave. Our third principle lays it out clearly.

Except that some people were not welcoming and some people exhibited a lack of common sense about behavior. The Welcoming Congregation program are necessary and the Agreement for Fellowship is necessary because we need to be explicit about who we are, what we do and what we expect of those who partake of congregational life.

This is part of the growth cycle of a church. At a certain point, everyone needs expectations spelled out. This is not the "Church of Anything Goes." Just think about your family of origin. No one needs the rules spelled out when there are 6 members in the family. Even at 16 family members, things are manageable. But at 60 members, coordination is a virtue and at 160, coordination is critical for the life of the family or the congregation. 160 family members. Can you imagine the chaos at a family reunion of 160 uncoordinated members?

So we all need to know and follow the expectations we have for behavior. And that's what the Agreement for Fellowship is all about. And what about that church in the mid-sized city, in the mid-south region of a North American country, that church built on the eastern side of a big ridge? Last I knew, that church grew and prospered and lived happily ever after. Today it has about 160 members. Or thereabouts.

Please join me now in singing Hymn 233, a Christmas song set to a Provençal tune. *Un Flambeau, Jeanette Isabella*, “Bring a Torch, Jeanette Isabella.” Number 233.

*HYMN 233, Bring a Torch*

*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.

*BENEDICTION*

Our benediction this morning comes from Dick Gilbert, the longtime minister at the First Unitarian Church of Rochester, New York.

Faith, hope, love, these three  
I offer you this season.  
Faith that living affirms,  
Hope that caring illumines.  
Love that more matters than anything.  
Faith, hope, love, these three  
Not as gifts I offer them  
For they are not mine to give.  
They are yours and mine to share,  
Humbly, with one another.  
Fumbling, we hold their promise in our hands,  
Faintly, we speak the trembling words,  
Faith, hope, love, these three  
I offer you this season.