



*“Actually, the attraction wasn’t freedom from religious persecution, but rather, the all-you-can-eat buffet.”*

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## *I Am Thankful*

*A Worship Service by the REV. JEFF BRIERE*

*Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga*

*November 20, 2011*

Good morning. Welcome to the Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga. My name is Jeff Briere, I am the minister of this church and to begin our service let’s sing Hymn 349, “We Gather Together.” This is a new hymn for us. The words were written by Dorothy and Robert Senghas. She is a librarian and he is retired from the Unitarian Universalist ministry. They live in Burlington, Vermont. This text was written for a Thanksgiving Sunday service.

### *HYMN 349, We Gather Together*

We gather together  
in joyful thanksgiving,  
Acclaiming creation,  
whose bounty we share;

Both sorrow and gladness  
we find now in our living,  
We sing a hymn of praise  
to the life that we bear.

We gather together  
to join in the journey,  
confirming, committing  
our passage to be

a true affirmation,  
in joy and tribulation,  
when bound to human care and hope—  
then we are free.

### *GREETINGS*

**Thanks so much** for joining us in worship today. We hope you find the service rewarding and that you leave here inspired and uplifted. If you wear a hearing aid, please turn on the T switch or if you’d like a set of headphones, please see the sound tech. This being the third Sunday in the month, religious education classes for the children are suspended and they are welcome to stay in the sanctuary with us. Child care for the very young, of course, is still open for business in the nursery.

If this is your first time here, we’d be pleased to know your name and that of your family if they are with you. Please complete a **visitor’s**

**card;** you'll find them on the round table in the fellowship area.

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.

**On Thanksgiving Day**—that would be Thursday—please join us for a traditional meal right here at the church. Kate and I will prepare turkey, stuffing and gravy; you bring a dish to pass. If you would like to attend, please put your name on the roster on the door by the kitchen, so that we can capture the appropriate amount of turkeys.

This week, we are passing out the boxes for **Guest At Your Table**. To paraphrase a certain memorable line about a credit card, don't leave church without one. See Nancy Anderson or check out the display on the bulletin board for more information.

Please check out **the complete listing of announcements** included with the bulletin. The best way to find out what's happening around here is to sign up for a weekly e-mail. To do that, please see Chris in the office.

Later in our service today, you'll have an opportunity to express your gratitude for something or someone. Right now, we are thankful that Joseph Akins has returned to play for us.

*PRELUDE: Feeling Joy*

*LIGHTING THE CHALICE*

Page and Brian Maskarinac, would you light the chalice, please? Today, to accompany the lighting of the chalice, I have a story from a photographer about the sacred in the ordinary.

When one becomes disentangled from the discriminatory mind, a different kind of seeing is free to emerge. As a teenager, I believed that some subjects deserved to be photographed more than others. I didn't have a list in mind of what I thought was acceptable or not, but after a while I noticed that I always seemed to photograph the same cluster of subjects, family, friends, animals, landscapes, or sports events.

One day I had a shocking experience. Someone who had taken a picture of a door won first prize in a photography contest; I could not believe that such a common subject was worthy of a prize. Of course, that was before I tried to photograph a door. I had no idea how difficult it was to construct an image that would make an ordinary door interesting.

The incident provoked me to pay closer attention to the ordinary. Over time, I began to appreciate, in photography and in my everyday life, something said by Lao Tzu: *The secret of the Tao is found in the smallest detail of the ordinary day.*

*Story: The Teeth Are Gone, the Tongue Remains*

So remember what Lao Tzu said: *The secret of the Tao is found in the smallest detail of the ordinary day.* Would it surprise you to learn that I have a story about Lao Tzu? This story helped me to come to grips with my tendency to try and control outcomes. You should know that I often tell stories in worship more for my own benefit than anything else.

The hardest thing and the softest thing in your body are right next to one another. Did you know that? Do you know what I'm talking about?

Your teeth and your tongue.

Now you would think, that as you grow older the hardest thing in

your body would sustain itself and always be there for you. And you would think that as you grow older, the softest thing in your body would shrivel up or wither away.

Not so. And if you are of a certain age, you understand. I have a story as to why it's not so.

Do you know the *Tao Te Ching*? It's a classic text in Chinese philosophy and the basis for Taoism, a prominent cultural system and way of life. According to tradition, the *Tao Te Ching* was written about 600 years before Jesus was born. Tradition also ascribes authorship to Lao Tzu, a clerk at the Zhou Dynasty court.

Master Chang, who was the teacher of Lao Tzu, fell gravely ill. When Lao Tzu heard the news, he went to see his old teacher immediately.

When Lao Tzu arrived, he found Master Chang in bed, resting as easily as his illness would allow. He was on the brink of death and could barely turn his head to greet his finest pupil. Lao Tzu bent down so his teacher could see him more easily.

He folded his teacher's hands within his own, and he said, "Teacher, how are you now? Are you comfortable enough?"

The old man held his gaze and gave a small nod. Lao Tzu smiled and gave a slight nod in reply. Master Chang closed his eyes. They stayed like that, in silence, for a long time. Master Chang's breath was irregular and difficult.

Realizing that his teacher wouldn't last the night, Lao Tzu finally asked, "Master, I see you are very, very ill. Do you have some final teaching for me?"

Master Chang opened his eyes. Lao Tzu carefully helped the frail old man sit up a little, against some pillows, so he could address him

face-to-face.

Lao Tzu said respectfully, "Teacher, I am ready."

Master Chang began: "Do you know why I taught you to get off your horse as you pass by your hometown?"

Lao Tzu replied, "I get off my horse when passing by my hometown so as not to forget my old friends and my roots."

"Exactly," said Master Chang. Next he asked, "Do you know why I taught you to get off your horse when you pass by a large tree?"

Lao Tzu answered, "One pays respect to what is old. I always get off my horse when I approach a large tree because it reminds me that I must honor my elders as if they were my mother and father."

Chang Zhong smiled, "Yes, precisely right. You have learned well."

Some moments passed in thoughtful silence. Then Master Chang abruptly opened his mouth and pointed: "Lao Tzu, is my tongue still there?"

Lao Tzu answered, "Yes, of course."

Then Master Chang asked, "Are all my teeth still there?"

Lao Tzu looked again in the old man's mouth. "Only a few, Master."

"Why is that?" Master Chang asked. Lao Tzu paused, pondering the question.

At last he answered, "The tongue remains because it is soft. The teeth are gone because they are hard."

Master Chang replied, "Yes! Exactly! In all things, soft outlasts hard."

As water will wear down any stone, no matter how firm, gentleness will always prove stronger than resistance over time.” Master Chang smiled. “The relationships among all things— whether human, rock, or tree—are summed up in this understanding.”

He held Lao Tzu’s hand. “This teaching will guide you in the world. I have nothing left to teach you.”

With smiling eyes, Master Chang looked at his pupil one last time. Then the old teacher gently closed his eyes and took his rest.

Soft outlasts firm. Gentleness overcomes resistance. Paper covers rock.

*OFFERTORY: Thanksgiving*

Nearly every church has a special fund to help those in the parish who find themselves in trouble, or without a job, or needing some help in meeting their needs or obligations. We have such a fund, once called the Minister’s Discretionary Fund, now called the Benevolence Fund. I have used this fund to help people pay their rent, repair a car, buy food, pay a light bill or to relieve other intolerable situations.

Right now, the fund is pretty low and during this holiday season, I’d like it to be healthier. If you would be so kind as to mark your contributions to the Discretionary or Benevolence Fund, or use the envelope that’s in your bulletin, I’d surely appreciate it. And so would those who need our help. Anything you put in the envelope will go to the Benevolence Fund.

With that in mind, we’ll receive the morning offering now for the support and ministry of this church. Please be generous when the plate comes your way. If you have a pledge payment, please mark it as such. The Wood–Wilhoit Memorial Food Bank is always 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. If you wish to light a personal candle of joy or sorrow, you may step up here and Mary Hunter 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 remember to be thankful for them.

Kate, 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.*

Pat Mann lives right next door to the place on Bacon Trail that caught fire Friday. She was evacuated a few doors away to Martha Berry’s place. Both are fine.

By accident, I discovered that Fred Wright had a cornea transplant on Friday. I am sure he would appreciate your kind wishes and words of support.

Matt Hoyt has been in the hospital all week. He went to the emergency room a week ago yesterday because he was having real trouble breathing. It was a re-occurrence of congestive heart failure

brought on by failing kidneys. He was put in ICU Sunday morning. He was prepped for dialysis and had a blood transfusion because his hemoglobin level dropped as well (kidneys affect a lot of things). By Wednesday, Matt was doing better after dialysis. His lungs sounded clearer. He lost about 16 pounds—mostly fluid.

He was just about to be released from the hospital on Friday when Betsey noticed he was covered in cold sweat. Then he mentioned he was having trouble hearing. Then the nurse noticed his sweating. Within minutes there was a swarm of people into the room, putting Matt in the bed, lowering his head, doing a quick EKG, hooking up some saline, giving him a breathing treatment. Apparently, three successive dialysis sessions pulled out too much fluid and he was dehydrated and almost in shock.

On Saturday, I received this: I think Matt may be able to come home today, and his first out-patient dialysis treatment is tomorrow. In fact, until he gets his permanent dialysis catheter placed in his belly, I'm not supposed to take him far from home because of the temporary catheter in his right shoulder. My sister, the nurse practitioner, read me the riot act until she was sure that I understood that.

This morning I pray for help to write a thanksgiving on my heart. On clean lines I want to write my pleasures: a warm autumn day, a little music, smiles, the touch of my loved ones.

I want to write the names of all who were with me at moments of great discernment. Let gratitude pour from my heart as I recall their gifts of time, patience, and love.

I will draw empty lines for those whom I will never know, but who gave gifts to my mentors.

In this world of endless distractions and complications, I pray for the ability to humble myself in gratitude for these gifts beyond measure. I hope to thankfully give them to others.

This is the prayer of the people, so in these next few moments, please speak aloud the name of someone or something that needs our thoughts and prayers.

Please join me in the Orison.

Thou, which are everywhere,  
Many are your names.  
May we always feel your presence,  
May love and 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.

During this time of silence let us hold close to our hearts those who strive everyday to make the world a better place, 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

*HERE*

Here may no one be altogether a stranger,  
no honesty of thought ignored,  
no depth of feeling dismissed,  
no life belittled, and no life shut out.

Here may clarity of mind and heart  
be humbly treasured,  
brought to bear toward word and person.

Here may fellowship be treasured most of all  
and paths to sustain and renew it  
be sought and found.

Here may growth of spirit be our purpose;  
such understanding as shall lead us  
to make the world a better place.

*SERMON: I Am Thankful...*

In lieu of something only from me today, I'd like us to share the sermon. I have a few stories, I will tell you my story and I'd like to hear yours.

Have you ever heard the admonition that we should be thankful at thanksgiving? That the holiday is not all about a parade, a football game and a turkey? You've heard that, right?

I have a few stories about the need to be thankful. And it is a need, like potassium. Ask your body to work without potassium and your heart, kidneys, muscles, nerves, and digestive system will suffer. *You* will suffer. And you will suffer if you are not thankful.

In a few moments, if you are amenable, I'll ask you share your story of being thankful. Stories today, yours, mine and a couple others.

Are you rich? Are you one of the 1% or the 99%? You may see yourself as part of the 99%, but to the vast majority of people in the world, you are a member of the 1%. Or maybe the 5%.

An American physician once went overseas to visit countries in Asia. His purpose was to share his knowledge with his Asian colleagues. This was in the 60's at the height of the Vietnam war. In Thailand, he hired a guide to show him the country and they fell into conversation about America, which, at the time, was the envy of many countries all over the world. Not so much today.

Anyway, one day the guide and the doctor were talking about their homes and where they lived. The doctor said he lived in Richmond, Virginia.

"Oh, you are a rich man?" asked the guide.

"No, I am not rich," replied the American doctor.

"Do you have an automobile?"

"Well, yes, I do. Two cars, actually. And a motorcycle."

"What is your house like?"

"An average one, I suppose."

"How many rooms does it have?"

After thinking about it, the doctor said, "Nine."

"And do you have children?"

"I have two sons and a daughter."

The guide was silent for a moment and then he said, "You *are* a rich

man.”

In his heart, and in our hearts today, the doctor and you and I know that we are rich. We are rich. But he didn't, and I believe we do not always, think of it that way. And most important, are we thankful?

Viktor Frankl was an Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist as well as a Holocaust survivor. His best-selling book, *Man's Search for Meaning* chronicles his experiences in Auschwitz based on his psychotherapeutic method of finding meaning in all forms of existence, even the most sordid ones, and thus a reason to continue living. He died in 1997.

Among the lessons Viktor Frankl learned in Auschwitz, was to take time to be thankful. He wrote that prisoners in the camp dreamed at night about certain things more than others. Bread, cakes, and nice warm baths—the very things we take for granted every day. And Frankl said that the prisoners around him began to appreciate beauty as never before. He wrote these words:

**BART.** We were on a train, packed into a car with only two tiny windows. We had left Auschwitz and were going to a Bavarian camp. If someone had seen our faces, as we beheld the mountains of Salzburg with their summits glowing in the sunset, through the little barred windows of our prison carriage, if someone had seen our faces, he would never have believed that those were the faces of men who had given up all hope of life and liberty. Despite that factor—or maybe because of it—we were carried away by nature's beauty, which we had missed for so long.

**MINISTER.** Gerta Weissman was among the prisoners in several Nazi camps. She recalled an episode one spring when she and her fellow inmates stood at roll call for hours on end, nearly collapsing with hunger and fatigue. But they noticed in the corner of that bleak, gray place that the concrete had broken and a flower had poked its head through. And the thousands of women there took great pains to

avoid stepping on it. It was the only spot of beauty in their ugly and heinous world, and they were thankful for it.

On January 29, 1945, The Nazis forced Gerta and 4000 other women to march eastward in retreat before the advancing Allied forces. Their 350-mile journey took them through Germany and what is now the Czech Republic. Gerta was one of 117 women who survived.

Despite exposure, starvation, and arbitrary executions, Gerta never lost the will to live. She wrote these words.

**CATHERINE.** When people ask me, “How could you go on?” there is only one picture that comes to mind. The picture I saw was a picture of my home—my father smoking his pipe, my mother working at her needlepoint, my brother and I doing our homework. And I remember thinking, my goodness, it was just a boring evening at home. I had known countless evenings like that. And I knew that this picture would be, if I could help it, the driving force of my survival.

**MINISTER.** Gerta Weissman was thankful. Thanksgiving is essential to living every day. When I lived in Savannah, some years ago, a friend's wife landed in the hospital and it was touch and go for a few days. One day she was up and the next day, down. Her husband, my friend, would be alternately elated and crushed. She eventually recovered. He later said to me “It's impossible to be anxious and thankful at the same time.”

My friend was afraid his wife would die. When she didn't, he was sky-high. When her condition worsened, he was again fearful. What I realized, in hearing his story, is that he had forgotten to be thankful he ever met the woman he married. He forgot, until she recovered, to be thankful for her and their life together, whatever that life was.

Of course, his anxiety was prompted by events he couldn't control,

but I think that his insight applies to us because what we can control is our emotions. To some degree. *It's impossible to be anxious and thankful at the same time.*

Hans Selye was one of the first people to understand the relationship between anxiety and gratitude. He was an endocrinologist and one of the first to recognize the role of biology in the body's response to stress. He died in 1982. He discovered that stress differs from other physical responses in that stress is stressful whether one receives good or bad news, whether the impulse is positive or negative.

He claimed that two attitudes more than any other influence the quality of everyday life, and on these two emotions depends peace of mind, our feelings of security or insecurity, of fulfillment or frustration. The most destructive emotion is revenge. But in contrast, he said, "among all the emotions, there is one which more than any other, accounts for the absence or presence of stress in human relations: that is the feeling of gratitude."

That revenge thing is a tough one to shake. I know, because I am often tempted to revenge. But revenge is a product of anger, which is a product of fear. And, as my friend discovered, when you are afraid, you can't be thankful.

But try as I might, I can not truly shake that urge to revenge. It is just too human a response. I just have to scratch that itch. But what I have learned is that just the *thought* of revenge is enough to scratch that itch for me. Really. Just imagining that jerk in dire straits is enough for me anymore.

Revenge just takes too much energy. And it makes everything else take a back seat. It consumes my attention, like the worst mosquito bite in the world. So until that revenge itch is scratched, I am at a standstill. Unless I just *imagine* it. Then give it up and move on.

Gratitude, on the other hand, releases me. When I am grateful—

merely for the opportunity to participate or contribute—I am released of that fixation on an outcome. I am released, like the convict in the song by Bob Dylan, "I Shall Be Released." The chorus is

I see my light come shining  
From the west unto the east  
Any day now, any day now  
I shall be released

I shall be released. Gratitude is release.

When I was in seminary, I learned a short mantra that has helped me be grateful. Here it is:

Show up  
Pay attention  
Tell the truth  
Let go

This mantra, I have learned, is known by some as Ellyn Burstyn's four rules of acting. Perhaps she uses it, but it was first articulated by Angeles Arrien, a cultural anthropologist. It is used in medical, corporate and academic environments.

The explanation is:

**Show up.** Be present, on time, ready to participate. To show up means that we have to stop doing something else to start doing what we "show up" to do.

**Pay attention.** Listen—really listen—to other people. Complete attention is almost a lost art. To be fully attentive is a profound gift to another person, because you refuse multi-tasking or distraction. Those who are members of the small group ministry will recognize this practice.

**Tell the truth.** Say what you mean, mean what you say, tell *your* truth. It sounds easy, but it's not. Telling the truth is to live from the inside out and to "walk the talk." We often speak of "transparency," and this is part of it. The other part is authenticity.

**Let go.** Let go of results. Do your best and let it go. Be grateful for the opportunity to participate and contribute and let go. Let go and don't be attached to the results. This is the hardest one for me. This is not a problem when I am engaged in a creative project, but it's a real challenge to accept that the outcome of a process may not be what I believe it should be. It is the challenge of believing that something is bigger than my best idea and that grace can do what I cannot.

Show up  
Pay attention  
Tell the truth  
Let go—and be grateful.

And so what are you grateful for? Help me finish this sermon by telling us why you are grateful today.

*HYMN 128, For All That Is Our Life*

[after intro]

For all that is our life  
we sing our thanks and praise;  
for all life is a gift  
which we are called to use  
To build the common good  
and make our own days glad.

For needs which others serve,  
for services we give,  
for work and its rewards,  
for hours of rest and love,  
We come with praise and thanks

for all that is our life.

For sorrow we must bear,  
for failures pain and loss,  
for each new thing we learn,  
for fearful hours that pass:  
We come with praise and thanks  
for all that is our life.

For all that is our life  
we sing our thanks and praise;  
for all life is a gift  
which we are called to use  
To build the common good  
and make our own days glad.

*EXTINGUISHING THE CHALICE*

Page and Brian, please extinguish our 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*

The benediction today is a prayer by John Yellow Lark, a member of the Ute tribe of Native Americans. I added one line.

Earth teach me stillness  
as the grasses are stilled with light.  
Earth teach me suffering

as old stones suffer with memory.

Earth teach me caring  
as parents who secure their young.  
Earth teach me courage  
as the tree which stands all alone.

Earth teach me limitation  
as the ant which crawls on the ground.  
Earth teach me freedom  
as the eagle which soars in the sky.

Earth teach me resignation  
as the leaves which die in the fall.  
Earth teach me regeneration  
as the seed which rises in the spring.

Earth teach me to forget myself  
as melted snow forgets its life.  
Earth teach me to remember kindness  
as dry fields weep with rain.

Earth teach me to be grateful

*POSTLUDE: O Come, O Come Emmanuel*

Joseph Akins and his friend, Michael Dulin will present a free concert of holiday music on December 3<sup>rd</sup>, right here in our sanctuary. I hope you can join us. Thank you very much for your participation in our service this morning. Let's enjoy a time of fellowship with the best fair-trade coffee in southeastern Tennessee.