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the more you chase it,
the more it will elude you.
But if you turn your attention
to other things,
it will come
and sit softly
on your shoulder.*

—Henry David Thoreau



*A Worship Service by the REV. JEFF BRIERE
Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga
January 25, 2009*

GREETINGS

ERIC. Thanks so much for joining us in worship today. We hope you find the service rewarding and that you leave here inspired and uplifted. In order to make the most efficient use of our little space, I invite all the children to please come down here and sit on the steps. This will make more room for visitors.

Please note the 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.

PRELUDE: *Allegro*

LIGHTING THE CHALICE

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

STORY: *Mulla Nasruddin is Baaaaaack!*

Mulla Nasruddin is a character in Arabic and middle-east stories. He’s a little like Paul Bunyan, a little like Robin Hood and a lot like a clown. He is sometimes a wise man, and sometimes he’s a smart-aleck. And sometimes he’s just plain foolish. In that respect, he’s a little like you and me. Sometimes we’re smart, sometimes

we're not. And sometimes, we give in to the impulse to be a smarty-pants. That last one is a big temptation for me. I tell you these stories about Mulla Nasruddin so that we recognize our humanity in other people.

A man made an appointment to speak with Mulla Nasrudin, but when he arrived at Nasruddin's house, he found no one home.

He became angry and he took out his sharpie and wrote "Stupid Jerk" on Nasrudin's front porch.

When Mulla Nasruddin came home, of course he couldn't miss what the man had written on his porch, so he rushed over to his friend's house. "I had forgotten," he said, "that you were to call. I apologize for not having been at home. Of course, I remembered the appointment as soon as I saw your name on my porch."

Now the man could have restrained himself, right? He didn't have to call Mulla Nasruddin a stupid jerk. There might have been some very good reason why he missed the appointment. On the other hand, Mulla Nasruddin didn't have to suggest that his friend was a stupid jerk, either. Neither of these people were stupid jerks; one was forgetful, the other a little too angry.

One day Nasruddin was repairing tiles on the roof of his house. While he was working on the roof, a stranger knocked on his door.

"What do you want?" Nasruddin shouted out.

"Come down," replied stranger, "so I can tell you."

Nasruddin put down his tools and tiles, unhitched himself from his safety belt and very carefully, very slowly, climbed down the ladder.

"Well!" said Nasruddin, "What's this all about?"

"Would you like to buy a magazine subscription?" asked the stranger.

Nasruddin started to climb up the ladder and said, "Follow me up to the roof."

When he and the man had reached the work site, Nasruddin said, "The answer is no."

Now the man could have easily spoken to Nasruddin from the ground, and Nasruddin could have given the man an answer without making the man climb up on the roof. Sometimes I do something like this when another person annoys me. I must remember that other people do things *that annoy me, not to annoy me.*

One hot day, Nasruddin was resting in the shade of a walnut tree. After a time, he started thinking about the huge pumpkins growing on little tiny vines and the little tiny walnuts growing on a huge tree.

"I just can't understand the ways of Nature!" he said. "Why do these little tiny walnuts grow on such a majestic tree and huge pumpkins on those delicate vines!"

Just then a walnut fell off a branch and smacked Mulla Nasruddin's bald head. He got up at once and lifting up his hands, said:

"Oh, God! Please forgive me! You know what you're doing, after all. Where would I be now, if pumpkins grew on trees?"

And so Mulla Nasruddin learned his lesson that nature is the way it is, and we must be careful when we fool around with the way things are. We may not understand why things are the way they are, but we can be sure there is a pretty good reason.

Mulla Nasrudin was out one day in his garden sprinkling marbles around his flowerbeds. A neighbor came by and asked, "Mulla, why are you doing that?"

Nasrudin answered, “Oh, I do it to keep elephants away.”

His neighbor said, “But there aren’t any elephants within a thousand miles.”

Nasrudin replied, “Effective, isn’t it?”

Now that is Mulla Nasruddin the clown and the jokester in all of us.

The choir has prepared a special song for you today, and it’s a round. Do you know what a round is? It’s a song in which a line is repeated by other members in the choir. So hang out here for a moment and then you can go to your activities.

CHILDREN’S RECESSIONAL

“Sing a Song Today”

OFFERTORY: *Adagio*

In “The Wizard of Oz,” Burt Lahr, as the Cowardly Lion, sings these lines:

It’s sad, believe me, Missy,
When you’re born to be a sissy
Without the vim and verve.
But I could show my prowess,
be a lion not a mou-ess
If I only had the nerve.

Now would you like to be a lion, or a mou-ess? As a lion, you could show the brontosaurus who’s king around the for-ess. Wouldn’t that be great? Well, maybe.

There once was a mouse who, like all mice, was afraid of cats. A local wizard empathized with him and offered to help the mouse dispel his fear. So with the mouse’s blessing, the wizard turned him

into a cat. As it happened, the wizard accidentally changed his sex, too, so the he-mouse was now a she-cat.

She found herself cleaning her fur about every three minutes, but no matter. Being a she-cat was better than being eaten by a she-cat, so she didn’t mind too much. Now living the high life as a cat, she naturally feared dogs. So the wizard did his thing again and turned her into a dog. And rectifying his earlier mistake, changed her sex back to what it was before.

Having lived so long as a she-cat, it felt a little odd lifting one hind leg. But being a dog—any dog—was certainly better than being chased by a dog. Now the he-dog felt good about himself and walked proudly down the street with his head held high.

Not entirely aware of his surroundings, he bumped into a lion at the corner of M.L. King and Market Street. He was lucky the lion wasn’t paying attention either, and the he-dog managed to escape by running away. And so the he-dog implored the wizard to help him and the dog was soon turned into a lion.

Guess what happened next? The forgetful wizard forgot what sex the dog was, and sure enough, made him a lion-*ess*. He—I mean she—or is it he? You tell me. At this point in the story, is it he or she? You’ve got it, but the wizard and the lion were both completely confused now. As if that weren’t enough, the lioness discovered she was not king—nor queen—of the forest, as rumor had it. She discovered that human beings lived one step higher on the food chain.

So she implored the wizard to do something—anything—to make matters livable again. Unable to turn the lioness into a man—or a woman—the wizard gave up. “I’m sorry, but what you need is a change of heart. And that I cannot give you.”

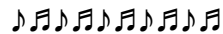
If we want to be happy, a change of heart is required. We can contrive all the ifs and buts ever spoken for being unhappy. But if we

stake our happiness on being bigger than what we fear, our fate will be comparable to the mouse's.

I'm not being catty when I say that we'll collect the offering now, for the support and ministry of this church. Show your prowess, not your mou-ess, because all dogs have their day. If you write a check for your annual pledge, please mark it that way. I'm not lyin'.

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 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 be thankful for them. Christina, please lead us in our Hymn of Thanksgiving. The words are in your program.

HYMN OF THANKSGIVING

Oh, we give thanks, for this precious day,
For all gathered here, and those far away,
For this time we share, with love and care,
Oh, we give thanks, for this precious day.

ORISON

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

The flowers on the altar today are a gift of John and Lynna Ruth Standridge. They celebrate the 100th birthday of Flonnie Webb Stephens, Lynna Ruth's mother. As of last fall, Ms. Stephens was

still mowing her lawn and tending her gardens.

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.

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

SERMON: "The Butterfly of Happiness"

I've been talking about happiness for the last two weeks, and I've been trying to get at the kind of happiness that endures, not the kind that comes from hitting the lottery or from buying a new car. I mean more the kind of happiness that comes from a shared meal, a warm fire or from a long friendship.

Today, it's time to hear from you about happiness. I asked you to send me your ideas about happiness, and several of you did just that. Charles Wright sent me several quotes, two of which are nice:

- I have found people to be about as happy as they set their mind to be. —Abraham Lincoln
- Happiness is not a destination to which we arrive, but a manner of travel. —Margaret Lee Runbeck

Charles has his own ideas about happiness. He writes, “It seems to me that happiness comes from having interests outside of oneself, and particularly other people.

“Many people live as if survival is the cardinal rule of the universe. This instinct helps us survive from one day to the next. However, we have an unthinking tendency to assume that more is better, to the exclusion of all other considerations.

“We cannot think about how little time and space our little body takes up without realizing that our ephemeral existence is not all-important. We are a little piece of lint in a very large tapestry.

“Happiness comes from getting our minds off of ourselves. When your mind is directed outward, you forget about your own wants and needs.

“A *Christmas Carol* carries a message worth repeating. Scrooge was miserable. Selfish people are like a vacuum cleaner. Nothing ever goes the other way.

“We feel the happiest when we have a sense that we are right with the way we were meant to be. Living simply and then looking outward feels right. Selfishness does not work! I have observed many people in my time and I can state this as an empirical fact. I have never seen a depressed or unhappy giver!” *The words of Charles Wright.*

Roger Davis sent me a short essay as he worked through his thoughts about happiness. He began with a quote from Jimi Hendrix.

When he was asked about happiness, Jimi Hendrix, in 1969, replied, “Not necessarily stoned...but beautiful”

Roger writes, “Happiness is a sudden sense of well being, a glow, an aura. All aspects of your life feel balanced, and in harmony. But you

must notice this convergence in order to feel happy. For instance, I just might experience happiness if I suddenly realize that my health is good, I like my job, the country is at peace, I love my wife, we don’t have any debt, there’s food on the table everyday, our neighborhood feels safe, I have lots of friends, my golf game is good, and so forth. All the basics are working in harmony! Gosh, life just feels good! The basics need to be there: peace, job, love, family, money, health and I’m happy.

“But then again, the happiest I’ve been in years was the moment that Obama won the presidency! That was a convergence in itself. I felt like freedom had been restored and I had been let out of prison. Nothing to do with my job, money, health. That complete glow and aura of happiness just washed through me, and I cried with the rest of the crazies at the Choo-Choo that night.

“But maybe I’m confusing feeling bliss, and experiencing a high, with being happy. Perhaps happiness is more of a steady state, not just a high. So maybe what I experienced with Obama's victory was high happiness!

“I can see why people devote an entire book to this topic. I’m obviously rambling, so I will stop here.”

I don’t think Roger was rambling, but allowing his ideas to mature and see where they led him. And I think they led him to that “steady state” where he can achieve a certain level of satisfaction and pleasure in living every day. Not sudden bliss, not the depressing setbacks, but the everyday life. Like Jimi Hendrix said, “Not stoned, but beautiful.”

Another congregant didn’t ramble, but came straight to the point. She wrote, “I suggest that happiness is found not in the acquisition of “things,” but perhaps in the loss of “things.” And my top three losses that make me happy are un-fulfilling jobs, toxic relationships, addictions.”

Kay McCurdy writes about the five ways she pursues happiness: “How do I pursue happiness? By pulling over when one of my kids shouts, *Look!*; by admiring the pink light at sunset that washes over the grime and grit and makes the world look like an MGM musical; by walking away from the television in favor of the radio—I like the sounds, not so much the sights; and by telling people what I like about them, however small the detail.”

Another congregant sent me a list adapted from Christopher Andre’s “Lessons for a Happier Life” found in the March 2008 *Ode* magazine. She said she keeps the list in clear view by her desk so she can read it often.

1. Accept that there will be unpleasant things in life
2. Open your eyes and look around
3. Take time out
4. Pay attention to your family and friends
5. Try to get in touch with nature everyday
6. Express your gratitude and respect for the good things you experience!

Sandy Kurtz, as you might imagine, derives her happiness from green things. She sent me a passage from *Deep Economy*, by Bill McKibben. He writes, “The formula for human well-being used to be simple: Make money, get happy. So why is the old axiom suddenly turning on us?”

“Research tells us that our continued growth is, on balance, making our lives worse. Growth no longer makes most people wealthier. Instead, it generates inequality and insecurity. Our growth is bumping up against physical limits like climate change, so that expanding the economy may be dangerous.

“And perhaps most surprisingly, growth no longer makes us happier. That’s as bizarre an idea as proposing that gravity pushes apples skyward. “Our single-minded focus on increasing wealth has driven

the planet’s ecological systems to the brink of failure, even as it has failed to make us happier. How did we screw up?”

“The answer is pretty obvious—we kept doing something past the point that it worked. Since happiness had increased with income in the past, we assumed it would inevitably do so in the future. We make mistakes like this all the time: Two beers made me feel good, so ten will make me feel five times better.”

That’s Bill McKibben, from his book, *Deep Economy*.

Steve Hollingsworth, like Roger, began with a quote. “The point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer.” That’s from Rainer Maria Rilke’s *Letters to a Young Poet*.

Steve writes, “I’ll get this happiness thing out of the way and tell you the purpose of life while I’m at it. Here’s the answer: Seek anything you care deeply about and which connects you with others. By living your connections, you will find happiness. As for the purpose of life, in short, it’s to pursue what you care deeply about and connects you with others. What could be simpler?”

Indeed.

Mike North sent these words: “I want to thank you and the members of the congregation for making Sunday mornings so pleasant and interesting. As I continue my visits and participate more frequently I hope I can return the favor in some small way.

“At 45 I was working as a land surveyor, had a son who was the Honor Graduate from his platoon in the Marine Corps, and I had recently served as a member of my local school board. I had written numerous opinion columns published in seven newspapers and across the internet. I was a member of the same church for many years,

where I both preached and taught and had recently been ordained a deacon. I had served as a merit badge counselor for the Boy Scout troop in my community. I had a respectable resume. You'd think this was plenty.

“But I wasn't happy. I thought there had to be more to life than a lukewarm relationship, a bigger paycheck or the next new toy.

“One day I caught myself marking another day off the calendar much as an inmate marks the days before his release. The same old hesitant, conservative way of thinking had gotten me so deeply into a rut that I had actually come to like the rut.

“By then, my years of Bible study had led me to a point where the questions outnumbered the answers. I knew that another piece of my happiness puzzle was to begin a new spiritual search. And I wanted more professional fulfillment and the opportunity to expand my horizons. The result was that my wife and I parted ways, I quit my job and left my church.

“I believe I'm on the road to happiness. I met my soul-mate. We have very different life experiences, and those experiences meld together beautifully. She has taught me more in a few short years than I learned in many before we met. We have both started learning to love ourselves so that we can love others.

“I work with a friend I've known for years. I make far less money than in my previous high-stress job, but I'm much more content. I have decided that knowing the answers isn't imperative. Having a sincere desire to learn will eventually lead to the kind of understanding one needs to be content.

“I'm learning that the secret to happiness is not in receiving, nor in giving, but in finding a balance between them. One should learn to receive graciously and give generously. In fact, it appears that every new lesson I've learned involves balance in some sense.

“I have lived more in the past three years than in the previous 45. That's a 15:1 “Life Enjoyment” ratio. And if enjoying life, getting up every morning with a fresh new hope for the day and a conviction that the Universe will work out the details, if all that equates to happiness, then I am indeed on the right path. No longer do I mark the days off as if I'm awaiting my freedom. I am free, and each day is a new opportunity to exercise that freedom.

“Life is good, love is good, friends are good, and the blessings of the Earth are good. The Universe is a blessed place to inhabit, both in body and in spirit.” *The words of Mike North.* I don't think I can improve on that.

You may know Marge Pasch as the “Kitchen Witch.” She gave herself that nickname, I didn't. She writes, “Sometimes when I am sitting and reading in my recliner, purring cat on my lap, and Ron is sitting reading on the sofa a few feet away, I feel a great warmth of contentment and happiness.

“In the spring and summer when I'm in my potting shed patting potting soil into plastic cups, planting seeds, or transplanting new seedlings, my hands provide the only sounds I hear.

“My hands makes a susurrantion as they scrape up potting soil, then a patting sound as I settle the soil in the pot. I turn on the water to wet down the new potting soil, and the sound of the water splashing provides another calming sound. Even though you might consider the work dirty or mundane, I will often feel a great happiness spread over me, working alone to make plants grow.

“Ron and I eat our late fall and winter meals by candle light. Even fourth-day leftovers taste good when you are surrounded by soft light and have a glass of wine and talk over the day. I often feel very happy in our candle-lit cocoon.

“When the weather is warm, Ron and I eat our dinner in our screened

in porch. We sit at a round glass table and face the small stream that splashes down our back hillside. We watch the birds bathe in the stream, come to the feeder, fly off to their shelters in nearby bushes and trees. Shoulder to shoulder, Ron and I watch the dusk settle and the day end, and I feel great happiness.

“Our vine house in the back yard is about seven or eight feet from the humming bird feeder. Inside the vine house is a wicker bench, where Ron and I sometimes take a gin-and- tonic or glass of wine. We sit and watch the hummer wars, smell the flowers in the garden, and allow our over–strained muscles to be warmed by the alcohol. I am happy.

“Walking in the woods, I become a “congregation of one” (as the minister of my church once said) and the woods are to me as a church is to a religious person. The tall trees are my cathedral pillar, the bird song my choir. However, unlike a man-built church which sits atop the ground, my cathedral in the woods is the Earth itself, and it is where I worship the diversity of life, where I am in awe of the evolution of life, and I am supremely happy to be alive and part of the world around me.

“After a strenuous morning, there is nothing better than a nap on my bed with a yellow puffy quilt. This quilt from my mother’s house is probably 50 years old, a slightly beat–up nylon covering over feather-light fiberfill. When I stretch my tired body out on top of the mattress and pull the almost-weightless quilt over me, I think, “It doesn’t get any better than this.” That is, until Willie, our cat, comes to join me. He makes biscuits on the yellow puffy quilt for a few moments, then he too curls up to sleep beside me. The cat and I both purr. Instant bliss.”

The words of Marge Pasch. I had to think about the cat making biscuits.

Elaine Hill writes, “People make me happy. I learn from my

associations with people and they help me to be who I want to be. I heard my father say, “You can learn something from everyone you meet.” I try to do just that. I seek opportunities to be with many different people and learn how they travel the journey of life.

“I first became seriously interested in people at the age of fifteen when I worked summers and Saturdays during the school year in our family dentist’s office. Coming from a sheltered childhood, I was anxious to hear how other people lived.

“My transient adult life and work in social service brought me into contact with a wealth of diverse people. It was through these opportunities that I realized how much pleasure I found in working with people and I learned how to be comfortable with myself.”

The words of Elaine Hill. She points to one consistent idea about happiness that we all noticed. Being around other people makes us happy. Charles Wright said that we are social animals. Marge, who likes her congregation of one, reports experiences with Ron and her cat that make her happy.

I stand by my assertion that making someone happy can make you happy. I believe, as does Mike North, that happiness comes from within, not from toys nor from money. And my last observation about happiness echoes Charles Wright and Marge Pasch. Being happy, for Marge is all about other things, things outside of herself. The humming birds, the dirt, the vines, the husband, the trees, the candle light, the sounds, the husband, the water, the shared meal, the husband.

Thoreau made the same point and it’s on the cover of your bulletin. Happiness is like a butterfly; the more you chase it, the more it will elude you. But if you turn your attention to other things (and I would add “other people”), it will come and sit softly on your shoulder.

HYMN 95, There is More Love Somewhere

I have two apologies to offer you. Probably lots more than two, but these I know about.

I must apologize for my actions of two weeks ago. When I began my first sermon on happiness, I looked at my script, and I didn't recognize it. I mean it looked like something someone else had written. I could not recognize my own words. I knew they were words, and I knew how to read them, but they were completely foreign to me. And I am glad I had a script, for if I had to preach from bullet points or notes, I would have been unable to continue.

I knew who I was, I knew where I was. I knew who the president was, and who would soon be the president. I knew I was supposed to preach, but the topic was a deep mystery and that kinda scared me. And it made me **un**-happy.

I understand that in my confusion, I made one announcement twice, and that was because I could not recall if I had made the announcement at all. I am fine now, and my colleagues tell me of similar incidents in their lives. I'm sorry if I startled you. I was probably more startled than you were. Kate was more startled than anyone. Now I know the true meaning of "senior moment."

I also owe you an apology for not being more available before and after the service. I have been told, by more than one person, that people like me. Not only that, but they want to speak with me or greet me on Sunday morning. Who knew?

Being available after the service is easily remedied. Starting today, I'll plant myself right back there, next to the sound booth and I'd be more than happy to greet you. I can do this if someone will take care of the microphones and straighten up the sanctuary. See me or Catherine Long to learn what to do.

I always thought the traditional reception line after church was

arranged so the minister could be praised for a wonderful service. I assure you that is not my intention. Feel free to tell me the truth as you see it. A lengthy discussion is probably better held at a later date. If there are more than two of you who want to greet me after the service, you might want to make a line against the wall so that others can walk more easily out the door.

Being available before the service is a little trickier. I love singing in the choir, but perhaps I could forego that. I also have Connections and I want to settle my mind before I begin. So we'll see. Worship is an evolving form which must meet the needs of the congregation. Thanks for your patience.

BENEDICTION

As we leave this community of the spirit,
may we remember the difficult lesson
that each day offers more things than we can do.
May we do what needs to be done,
postpone what does not,
and be at peace with what we can be and do.
Therefore, may we learn to separate
that which matters most
from that which matters least of all.

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: *Menuetto*