



Create, Evolve or Design?

A Worship Service by the REV. JEFF BRIERE

Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga

January 9, 2011

Good morning and welcome to the Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga. My name is Jeff Briere and I am the minister of this church. Let's begin with Hymn 389, "Gathered Here." This is a round, so Steve will play it once so we'll remember the melody, then everyone will sing it once, and then we'll break off into parts, so look up and follow your section leader.

HYMN 389, Gathered Here

Gathered here in the mystery of the hour.

Gathered here in one, strong body.

Gathered here in the struggle and the power
Spirit draw near.

Thanks so much for joining us in worship today. We hope you find the service rewarding and that you leave here inspired and uplifted. And thank you so much for helping to create a reverent atmosphere during *Connections*.

Two reminders: first, please return the Guest at Your Table boxes this week and secondly, parents, please pick up your children immediately after the service ends.

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. 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.

For the service music, Steve went to Argentina and came back with some tangos and the one he chose one for the Prelude is appropriately entitled "Fever."

PRELUDE: Fièvre (Fiebre de tango)

LIGHTING THE CHALICE

Today, we light our chalice with a responsive reading from the Unitarian minister, Waldemar Argow. Your words are in italics.

Ancient as the home is the temple; ancient as the workbench is the altar.

Ancient as the sword is the sacrificial fire; ancient as the soldier is

the priest.

Older than written language is spoken prayer; older than painting is the thought of a nameless one.

Religion is the first and last—the universal language of the human heart.

Differing words describe the outward appearance of things; diverse symbols represent that which stands beyond and within.

Yet every person's hunger is the same, and heart communicates with heart.

Ever the vision leads on with many gods or with one, with a holy land washed by ocean waters, or a holy land within the heart.

In temperament we differ, yet we are dedicated to one destiny; creeds divide us, but we share a common quest.

Because we are human, we shall ever build our altars; because each has a holy yearning, we offer everywhere our prayers and anthems.

For an eternal verity abides beneath diversities; we are children of one great love, united in our one eternal family.

STORY: Feeding His Clothes

Do you remember Mulla Nasruddin? I haven't told any stories about him for a while. Mulla Nasruddin stories appear in many Islamic countries, from Turkey to Indonesia. Generally, Mulla Nasruddin tales are humorous and yet contain a philosophical point. By opening our heart with laughter, the tales create a space and give us time to think about life. Some people use these stories as exercises. They tell you a story and ask you to think long and hard about what

happened in that story. They say that considering a Mulla Nasruddin tale for all its implications can lead to a breakthrough into a higher wisdom.

Sort of like a Buddhist koan. Do you know a Buddhist koan? What is the sound of one hand clapping? Charlie Chaplin does this very well. Disarm you with laughter and then, when you least expect it, point to the injustice of the situation. See if you can find the injustice in this next story about Mulla Nasruddin.

A little while ago, President Obama held a state dinner. You know about state dinners? Very fancy, the best food and the best wine prepared by the best cooks and those who are invited to state dinners are the most powerful people in the world. Everyone dressed to kill, wearing dinner jackets, long gowns, drinking from crystal goblets, eating with sterling flatware with the best White House china.

Everyone who was anyone in Washington DC was invited to this state dinner. Even Mulla Nasruddin received an invitation, as he represented his home in Iraq. Mulla Nasruddin watched as all the dignitaries and finely dressed guests arrived at the White House in limousines and passed through security. He was not a wealthy man, and he had no fine clothes to wear. He had no limousine nor chauffeur. He didn't even own a car. He walked everywhere he went. He thought about the tattered rags, his dirty hat and worn out shoes and compared them with the elegant silks and satins and brocades on the people who entered the festivities.

But he had an invitation, like everyone else, so he walked up to the gate and presented himself to the guards. Although they had to check the guest list twice and give Mulla Nasruddin a full pat-down body search, the guards allowed him into the White House. The chief of protocol, seeing that Mulla Nasruddin would cause an uproar if he went through the receiving line, ushered him discreetly to a seat at the very end of the banquet table.

Delicious food arrived on great trays. The servers placed the food from the left and withdrew from the right, as required at state dinners. There was an appetizer, a soup, a roast, vegetables, and a salad. And there was a different wine with every course and it was all followed by dessert. But by the time the trays arrived at the end of the table where Mulla sat, they were empty.

Mulla sadly left his unused plate and wandered out the White House gate. He went to the home of a friend and explained what had just happened. Mulla asked, “May I borrow a suit of clothes?” The friend gave Mulla a fine mohair suit, a silk shirt and tie, soft leather shoes, kid gloves and a top hat.

Mulla returned to the White House, and this time, he hired one of those stretch limos. When he presented himself at the gate, the guards did not recognize him, but thought he must be someone of immense power and prestige. Respectfully, the guards escorted him inside and seated him at the head of the table.

More trays of food arrived, and delicious delicacies were piled on Mulla’s plate. Before long, everyone was staring at Mulla. He dribbled soup onto his sleeve. He poured wine on his shirt. He smashed roast beef and gravy all over his suit. He ground vegetables into his tie. He put bread and butter and salt and pepper into his hat and smashed it on his head.

Finally, the guest seated next to him felt awkward and was moved to inquire, “Excuse me, but why have you rubbed your food into your fine clothing?”

Said Mulla Nasrudin:

A thousand pardons
if my clothes look now the worst.
It is these clothes
that brought me all this food.

I thought it only fair
that I should feed them first.

Have you ever heard someone say, “Clothes make the man”? That’s a quote from Mark Twain. And it applies to men and women, boys and girls. “Clothes make the man.” Many people take it to mean that if you dress well, you will be respected and have a better chance at success. And I suppose that’s true, to an extent. But you can easily get carried away with looking good but neglecting the more important parts of your character.

The most important part of your character, of what makes a person is behavior—not how good you look but what good you do. And I think Mark Twain understood this. Most of us have never heard the rest of the quote from Mark Twain. What he said was this: “Clothes make the man. Naked people have little or no influence on society.”

Thank you for listening to my story of Mulla Nasruddin, and remember that while clothes might make the man look good, they don’t make him act good. You are in charge of that.

CHILDREN’S RECESSIONAL

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 your go.

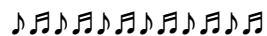
OFFERTORY: Imágenes 676

Once a month, this congregation donates the entire offering to an outside agency working to make the world a better place. We'll do that today as we share the plate with the Newton Development Center.

The Newton Center is an educational day care facility located on Grove Street in Chattanooga. Their goal is to provide child care during the parent's hours of employment, schooling, or job training and to properly prepare them for school. Children are served from six weeks through five years. The Center is funded partly by the Presbytery of East Tennessee, but mostly by local churches.

The center provides for the social, emotional, physical, mental, and educational needs of children while their parents are working. The child care atmosphere encourages the wholesome development of children by providing opportunities for problem solving, decision making and exploration of their environment. Children's self-esteem is fostered through a sense of trust, love and belonging. The safe and secure early childhood education setting has as its ultimate goal children's acquisition of skills to best prepare them for life's experiences.

We'll collect the morning offering now for the support of the Newton Development Center. Please be generous when the plate comes your way. If you have a 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. 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.

Christina—and Jesse—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.

Maurice Scheni is 90 years old. Cake after the service.

In our prayers today, we should remember Arizona Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, and Federal Judge John McCarthy Roll and their families and friends. Giffords was seriously wounded yesterday and Judge Roll was killed by a gunman who shot up a town hall meeting at a grocery store in Tucson.

The Pima County Sheriff said twelve people were wounded. Six people have died, including a nine-year-old girl and Judge Roll. According to doctors, the bullet that struck Giffords went through her brain and out her skull. She is currently in critical condition, but doctors remain optimistic that she will recover.

President Obama spoke to reporters at the White House, saying that the events are “a tragedy for Arizona and a tragedy for our entire country.”

Yes they are a tragedy. But no more tragic than any other instance of gun violence that happen every day in this country. And every tragedy involving gun violence that we endure brings us one step closer to clamping down on the easy acquisition of handguns. If the assailant were unable to purchase a pistol, if he could only acquire a pocket knife, a baseball bat, a pair of numbchucks, or even a slingshot, perhaps a good congresswoman and a good magistrate would be home tonight with their families.

I am convinced that handguns will continue to sow tragedy among our friends and families until the day they are reserved for the use of the military and the police. I pray that day arrives soon, but I don't believe it will. I don't think I'll live to see it. I am not the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. I have not climbed that mountain. I have not seen the promised land.

But I believe it's there. I believe that someday, somewhere, a representative or a senator will refuse to bow down to the gun lobby and will begin a movement to restrict the availability of handguns. This is called "speaking truth to power" and it has a long history in the Jewish scriptures and the Christian Bible.

For as powerful as the gun lobby is, it is not more powerful than the truth. The gun lobby has a lot of money, which makes it powerful, but the truth is—*the truth is*—that handguns make it too easy for deranged, disturbed and deluded people to wreak havoc in proportion far exceeding their own individual influence. And for that reason alone, they should be restricted to use by the authorities.

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.

During this time of silence let us hold close to our hearts those who are suffering and rejoice with those who are jubilant, 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: Create, Design or Evolve?

I have been taking chapters from this book and preaching on them this year. This is *Twenty Questions: An Introduction to Philosophy*. It's a college textbook. And it has twenty big questions in it, each occupying a single chapter. Each chapter introduces a big question and provides several answers from different philosophers. The chapter I will open today is entitled, "Which Should I Believe: Evolution, Creation or Intelligent Design?"

At some point in your life, I'll bet that you wondered how it all began. How did the earth and the solar system come to be? How did humanity happen? You can easily determine how soup happens. You mix a few ingredients together and there it is. When you got to a certain age, you could even understand how babies happen. You mix a couple people together, one gets pregnant and pretty soon, you have a baby.

But how did the first people come to be? And where did the first people find a chicken for their soup? And that leads to the question of how everything began, *everything*, from the stars to the worms; how did it all begin? What happened to make it just so?

Perhaps you first became aware of this question when you were introduced to religion in church or synagogue. When we are young, we are apt to accept whatever our parents or teachers tell us. Discrimination and critical thought comes with age. So, if we were taught that God made everything in the universe over the course of six days a few thousand years ago, that might have been enough to answer the questions we have about things. It certainly is comprehensive and easy to remember.

But with age, as I said, comes the power of reflection, of critical thought; and with age and exposure to other people, we might learn about evolution. Evolutionary theory makes no mention of God and it gives us a completely different picture of how things came to be the way they are.

So you might have had a bit of a dilemma. I'll bet that sometime after high school, you worked out an answer to the dilemma, an answer you can live with. However, there are some people who don't care how it began, only that it continue. And I can't blame them. In a certain context, it really doesn't matter how it began. I mean, whether or not God made the universe in six days doesn't really affect my life right now.

But people have been trying to answer this question for as long as people have been alive. Every culture that ever flourished—and some that didn't—has a "beginning-of-the-world-story." Some have the world hatching out of an egg, some have it beginning in the tear of a goddess, some have the world being pooped by a giant eagle. There are probably thousands of stories of the beginnings. Let me tell you briefly about three that are causing people fits right now. The three stories are "God Did It," "Nobody Did It" and "Somebody Did It."

The first story is "God Did It," and it goes something like this: On January 1st, 7127 years ago, God spoke everything into existence over the course of six consecutive 24-hour periods. Every living thing is now as it was in the beginning, 7127 years ago; animals, vegetables and minerals. There were always pinto and palomino ponies, eggplants were always purple, butterflies always fluttered by, squirrels were always squirrely, and human beings were always the way they appear right now and living where they live right now, from Australia to Zimbabwe.

"Wait just a moment," you might say. "Who is God?" Well, God is a pretty impressive fellow, and I don't have time right now to tell you

all about him. I just gave you the reader's digest version of the story. There's a lot more in this book. This is the Bible, the Holy Bible, to be exact. It is the complete story of God and his son, and it explains everything for you. It's all in here, between the covers. Actually, you don't even need this book. You can just Google God or Bible and you'll find everything everyone knows about God and how it all began.

The story in this book is told by people who are known as "Young Earth Creationists." Their answer to how it all began comes from a literal reading of this book. Actually, in this book are two stories of how it all began, which doesn't bother the Young Earth Creationists one bit. Further, very little of this book has been independently corroborated, so from a factual standpoint, it's pretty sloppy.

But it's *a great story*. It's full of adventure, love, war, betrayal, drama, intrigue, deceit, dedication, commitment, nation-building, murder, sacrifice, justice, integrity—all the characteristics of humanity that you would want in a good novel. It gives hope to people who might otherwise despair. This story is a very old story and it's been told and re-told so many times, and so well that everyone knows at least part of it. Portions of this story have even been made into movies, plays, operas and rock and roll songs. And the three leading religions in the world have adopted this book, either in part or *in toto* as their operating manual.

That's the story, "God Did It." Now the second story about how it all began is a lot more complicated and about 4 billion times as long. Don't worry, I'll give you the Reader's Digest version. This story is very hard to understand and nearly all of it concerns chemistry, biology, physics and geology. If this second story were a yardstick—36 inches long—human beings would enter at about 35 and nine tenths inches. I call this story, "Nobody Did It," and it goes something like this:

Geologists tell us the earth formed about 4½ billion years ago.

Exactly what happened next is not clear. It was a long time ago. No one knows exactly when or how life began, but we know that microbes were the first inhabitants on earth. Microbes are single-celled organisms—bacteria, fungi and protozoa. Microbes decompose the waste products of other living things, creating nutrients. They are also used to make beer, bread, and yogurt.

Early earth was dominated by volcanoes, a gray, lifeless ocean and a turbulent atmosphere. The ocean received organic matter from the land and the atmosphere, as well as from falling meteorites and comets. Here, substances such as water, carbon dioxide, methane and hydrogen cyanide formed key molecules such as sugars, amino acids and nucleotides. These molecules are the building blocks of proteins and nucleic acids, compounds common to all living things.

A critical early triumph was the development of RNA and DNA, which direct biological processes and preserve life's "operating instructions" for future generations. But the origin of life was triggered not only by special molecules such as RNA or DNA, but also by the chemical and physical properties of earth's primitive environments.

Most of life's history involved the biochemical evolution of single-celled microorganisms. The oldest microbial communities constructed layered mound-shaped deposits called stromatolites, whose structures suggest that those organisms sought light and were therefore photosynthetic. These early stromatolites grew along ancient seacoasts and endured harsh sunlight as well as episodic flooding by tides. Thus it appears that, even as early as 3.5 billion years ago, microorganisms had become remarkably durable and sophisticated.

You all still with me here? I said this story was a lot more complicated, didn't I?

Many important events mark the interval between 1 billion and 3

billion years ago. Smaller strips of land dominated by volcanoes were joined by larger, more stable continents. Life learned how to extract oxygen from water, and living things populated the newly expanded continental shelf regions.

Finally, between 1 billion and 2 billion years ago, eukaryotic cells (those with a nucleus) developed, with complex systems of organelles and membranes. These organisms then began to experiment with multicelled body structures.

The evolution of the plants and animals most familiar to us occurred only in the last 550 million years. Marine invertebrates appeared first, then fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds, mammals and lastly, human beings.

This whole 4½ billion years was guided by evolution, a process that selects the individuals who work better, who are more successful and more likely to survive. For example, the Neanderthals lived at the same time as our own ancestors and may have interbred with early humans.

But something about the Neanderthals worked against their survival. Humans were better at living and surviving, at propagating themselves and so their offspring survived at better rates, and they became our ancestors, not the Neanderthals.

So that's it. Great story, huh? No, it's not. It's a horrible story. It has no adventure, no love, not even a lousy war. No drama, no murder, no sacrifice, no nothing except boring evolution. And it's soooooo loooooong. You could never make a movie out of it; there's no leading character. And it's not even over, this story. It goes on today and no one knows how it will end. Or if it will end. Or if there is an end.

But it's not sloppy. If it were able to be printed and bound into a book, there would be a few missing chapters, but the story doesn't

seem to suffer for lack of a few chapters, especially when they concern something that happened so long ago.

However, as we think about this story more and more, we have observed, even in the short time that we have been here on earth, that this story is not sloppy. To support this story, we have independent corroborating facts recorded by people with no axe to grind. The longer we study this story, the more it seems to explain how it all began, how things got started.

But this story is not human. The first story I told you, "God Did It," is a *human* story. This story, "Nobody Did It," is an inhuman story. Or an un-human story. It won't be told around a campfire nor printed with red-letter editions, nor be found in hotel rooms. Or doctor's offices in Chattanooga.

This story, while very long, is very young. It took about 25 years to write and was first told only about 150 years ago. Compared with "God Did It," which took more than a thousand years to compile and is about 1500 years old, "Nobody Did It" is a punk. As a story, "Nobody Did It" made a lot of people angry. They thought it reduced humanity to the level of any other animal and took away from human beings a special place they had held ever since they could remember.

So that's the story I call "Nobody Did It." There is a third story that has been told in the last ten years or so that I call "Somebody Did It." It goes something like this:

"Somebody Did It" does not deny either "God Did It" or "Nobody Did It" but it builds on "Nobody Did It." "Somebody Did It" accepts all of "Nobody Did It," but adds another chapter by asserting that some aspects of life are so marvelous that they could not have evolved. Instead, they show evidence of a *design*.

For instance, the human eye, this story suggests, is so incredibly complex that it could not have evolved. It exhibits something called

irreducible complexity, so that if any one of its components were not exactly as it is, the whole thing would fail.

Take the rods and cones. If they are not present, no sight. If the retina were not present, no sight. If the cornea were not there, no sight. Compare this condition of irreducible complexity to a hand, without which I could still live, or a tail, without which a cat could still live or a radio, without which a car could still provide transportation.

By definition something having the condition of irreducible complexity cannot evolve, because it would not be what it is until every part of it is present. The eye, for instance, could not see until every part of it is present. So just before the last element is added to the eye, it is not an eye. Therefore, it did not evolve, but appeared. And things that appear fully formed and ready to go are evidence of a design. And designs have *designers*.

“Somebody Did It” doesn’t speculate on the identity of the designer, only that a designer must have been present during the evolution of humanity.

“Somebody Did It” came about because those folks who believed “God Did It” were angry that their story was deemed too religious to be taught in public schools. And so they re-worked “God Did It” and cleverly replaced *God* with *Somebody* so that it could be passed off as another scientific theory. In truth, it is not scientific, but it is plausible.

In fact, any of these stories are plausible. To some degree. They each serve a purpose. But the original question was “Which Should I Believe: Evolution, Creation or Intelligent Design?” And the important word in that question is *believe*. Belief implies the absence of a universally accepted explanation for some phenomenon. If we *knew* how the world began, we wouldn’t argue the merits of one story or another. We would still tell stories, but no one would tell stories

as historical fact.

We know how this country began. We know about the Boston Tea Party, the Stamp Act, and the abuses of King George. We know how the Declaration of Independence was adopted, how the revolution was fought, how the Constitution was drafted and how George Washington became the Father of his country. And yet we still tell stories about cherry trees, midnight rides, Minutemen and that Betsy Ross made the first American flag.

If we knew how the world began. But we don’t. No one *knows* how it all began. No one. And you can take that to the bank.

There is a lot we don’t know about life and how it began, but the way I look at it, evolutionary theory seems to have a better chance at someday explaining everything. But I still like the stories that people tell.

To answer our original question, “Which Should I Believe: Evolution, Creation or Intelligent Design?” I respond with another question: “Does it make any difference?” I don’t mean to be flippant or dismissive, but it seems to me that this should only interest textbook publishers, conservative school boards and preachers who love to get into shouting matches.

Did you read the best-seller of a few years ago, *Life of Pi*? The protagonist in the book relates a fantastical story and a mundane, but gruesome alternative story, each explaining the events of his life at sea over the past 227 days. The reader is asked to choose which story is preferable. The fantastical one, of course. The one with drama, heroism, love, integrity and so forth. The one with all those characteristics of humanity that you would want in a good novel.

Please join me now in singing Hymn 313, “Oh, What a Piece of work Are We.”

HYMN 313, “Oh, What a Piece of Work Are We”

Oh, what a piece of work are we,
How marvelously wrought;
The quick contrivance of the hand,
The wonder of our thought,
The wonder of our thought.

Why need to look for miracles
outside of Nature's law?
Humanity we wonder at
With every breath we draw,
With every breath we draw.

But give us room to move and grow,
But give our spirit play,
And we can make a world of light
Out of the common clay,
Out of the common clay.

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

Be not afraid.
And seeing there is naught to fear,
And bearing witness to what can never die,
Let us leave this place in peace.

Be of good courage.
Search all things
And hold fast to that which is good.
Render unto no one evil for evil.

Strengthen the faint-hearted,
Support the weak,
Help the afflicted,
Love all men, women, and children.

Love all souls.
Serve the Highest Good,
And rejoice in the power of the Spirit.

POSTLUDE: Romantico idílio (Sans ta présence)