

I BELIEVE IN...

Church Words

*A Worship Service by the REV. JEFF BRIERE
Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga
October 18, 2009*

CONNECTIONS

Welcome to the Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga. My name is Maurine Olin 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 188

Come, Come, Whoever You Are

GREETINGS

DIANE. 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. Today our service explores some new meanings and understandings of words that we may have forgotten or haven't used for a long time.

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.

Our service today is graced with the music of Hara Paper, who after a serious injury is learning to play her guitar again. She begins with her composition, "Segovia's Rag."

PRELUDE: Segovia's Rag

LIGHTING THE CHALICE

This moment is beautiful,
For we have gathered.

This moment is beautiful,
For we have gathered in common purpose.

This moment is beautiful,
*For we have gathered in common purpose
to do important work.*

This moment is beautiful,
*For we have gathered in common purpose
to do important work that only we can do.*

This moment is beautiful,
For together we recreate the world.

STORY: The True Story of the Big Bad Wolf

MINISTER. I'll bet that everyone here knows the story of the big, bad wolf and the three little pigs. Right? Anyone not know the story? Well, the story you have heard may not be the truth. Because you only know what you read in the newspapers, right? Sometimes what you read in the paper is the truth, but most often, it's not the whole truth. And that's because it's the truth of the person who wrote the story. Everyone has a truth and this story will show you what I'm talking about.

WOLF. Right. Everyone knows the story of the Big Bad Wolf and the Three Little Pigs. Or at least they think they do. But I'll let you in on a little secret. Nobody knows the real story, because nobody has ever heard my side of the story.

You see, I'm the Wolf. Alexander T. Wolf, at your service. You can call me "Wolfie."

NARRATOR 1. No one knows just how this whole Big Bad Wolf thing got started, but it's all wrong.

NARRATOR 2. Maybe it's because wolves eat cute little animals like bunnies and sheep and pigs. That's just the way they are. If cheeseburgers were cute, we'd think people were big and bad, too.

NARRATOR 1. But the whole Big Bad thing is all wrong.

NARRATOR 2. The real story is about a sneeze and a cup of sugar.

NARRATOR 1. Way back in "Once Upon a Time" time, our friend, the wolf, was making a birthday cake for his dear granny.

NARRATOR 2. He had a terrible cold.

WOLF. *[sneezes]*

NARRATOR 1. And he had ran out of sugar.

NARRATOR 2. So he walked down the street to ask his neighbor for a cup of sugar.

NARRATOR 1. Now this neighbor was a pig. His name was Peter.

NARRATOR 2. And Peter wasn't too bright, you know? He had built his whole house out of straw.

NARRATOR 1. Can you believe it? Who in his right mind would build a house of straw?

NARRATOR 2. So of course the minute the wolf knocked on the door, it fell right in. But Wolfie didn't want to just walk into someone

else's house. So he called.

WOLF. Mr. Pig? Peter Pig, are you in?

NARRATOR 1. No answer.

NARRATOR 2. He turned to go home without the cup of sugar for his dear old granny's birthday cake.

NARRATOR 1. And that's when his nose started to itch.

NARRATOR 2. And precisely at that moment, he felt a sneeze coming on.

NARRATORS 1 & 2. Well, he huffed. And he snuffed.

WOLF. *[pre-sneeze noises]*

NARRATORS 1 & 2. And he sneezed a great sneeze.

WOLF. *[sneezes]*

NARRATOR 1. And you know what? That whole darn straw house fell down. And right in the middle of the pile of straw was Peter Pig—dead as a doornail.

NARRATOR 2. He had been home the whole time.

NARRATOR 1. Wolfie was feeling bad about the straw house, but he still didn't have his cup of sugar. So he went to the next neighbor's house.

NARRATOR 2. This neighbor was the Peter Pig's brother, Paul. Now Paul was a little smarter, but not much. He had built his house of sticks.

NARRATOR 1. Wolfie rang the bell on the stick house.

NARRATOR 2. Nobody answered. So he called out.

WOLF. Mr. Pig? Paul Pig, are you in?

NARRATOR 1. Paul Pig was busy and he yelled back at Wolfie.

PAUL PIG. Go away wolf. You can't come in. I'm shaving the hairs on my chinny—chin—chin.

NARRATOR 1. Precisely at that moment, Wolfie felt another sneeze coming on.

NARRATORS 1 & 2. He huffed. And he snuffed.

WOLF. *[pre-sneeze noises]*

NARRATORS 1 & 2. And he tried to cover his mouth, but he sneezed a great sneeze.

WOLF. *[sneezes]*

NARRATOR 1. And you're not going to believe it, but Paul Pig's house fell down just like his brother's.

NARRATOR 2. When the dust cleared, there was Paul Pig—dead as a doornail.

WOLF. That's just how it happened! Wolf's honor!

NARRATOR 2. Wolfie was feeling awfully bad about the houses, but he still didn't have that cup of sugar for his dear old granny's birthday cake. So he went across the street to another house.

NARRATOR 1. This was the house of Peter Pig and Paul Pig's

brother, Pablo. He was the brains of the family. He had built his house of bricks.

NARRATOR 2. Wolfie knocked on the door. No answer.

WOLF. Mr. Pig? Pablo Pig, are you in?

NARRATOR 1. Pablo was in, alright. And do you know what that rude little porker answered?

PABLO FIG. Get out of here, Wolfie. Don't bother me again.

NARRATOR 1. Talk about impolite! He probably had a whole sackful of sugar.

NARRATOR 2. And he wouldn't give Wolfie even one little cup for his dear, sweet old granny's birthday cake.

NARRATOR 1. What a pig!

NARRATOR 2. Wolfie was just about to go home and maybe make a nice birthday card instead of a cake, but precisely at that moment, he felt another sneeze coming on.

NARRATORS 1 & 2. He huffed. And he snuffed.

WOLF. *[pre-sneeze noises]*

NARRATORS 1 & 2. And he sneezed a great sneeze.

WOLF. *[sneezes]*

NARRATOR 1. Pablo Pig blew up.

PABLO FIG. Go away, I said. And tell your old granny to sit on a pin!

NARRATOR 1. Wolfie was usually a pretty calm fellow. But when he heard somebody talk about his dear, sweet old granny like that, he went a little crazy.

NARRATOR 2. When the cops pulled up, of course he was trying to break down Pablo Pig's door. And the whole time Wolfie was huffing and puffing and sneezing and making a real scene.

NARRATOR 1. The rest, as they say, is history.

NARRATOR 2. The news reporters found out about the two pigs who died in their houses.

NARRATOR 1. They figured a sick guy going to borrow a cup of sugar didn't sound very exciting.

NARRATOR 2. So they jazzed up the story with all that "huff and puff" and "blow your house down" stuff.

NARRATOR 1. And they made him the Big Bad Wolf.

NARRATOR 2. That's it.

NARRATOR 1. The real story.

WOLF. I was framed!

NARRATORS. And now, you know the *rest* of the story.

MINISTER. Thanks for listening to my story today. And tell me what will you do next time you hear a story about someone?

Check it out. Get the other side of the story. And you are free to go to your classes now.

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 you go.

OFFERTORY: Spanish Love

Once a month, this congregation gives away the entire offering, less pledge payments, to an outside agency working to make the world a better place. We will share the plate this morning with Chattanooga Cares, the umbrella agency that advocates for people who struggle with human immuno-deficiency virus and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome.

Chattanooga CARES was organized in 1986 and has enjoyed non-profit status since 1988. Overseen by a board of directors, the agency employs 19 staff members and uses more than 200 trained volunteers to provide resources to anyone affected by AIDS. The agency treats every client with dignity and respect, neither condemning nor condoning behaviors that place individuals at increased risk for infection. They strive to be the leader in providing AIDS resources for people in this area affected by HIV and AIDS, while continuing an emphasis on prevention as the best tool for fighting HIV infection. They look forward to the day when a cure for AIDS is found, and they can close our doors.

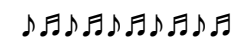
Some people are carping about President Obama being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. The president himself was a bit surprised. One person who won the Nobel Peace Prize and had no detractors is

Albert Schweitzer. He was a medical missionary, theologian, and musician who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his work in Africa in 1952. He died in 1965.

The phrase “reverence for life” aptly sums up Schweitzer’s philosophy. On a visit to the United States he was overwhelmed by many visitors. One group interrupted his dinner and asked him to explain his ethics. He talked patiently for twenty minutes. One of the visitors wanted a specific example of “reverence for life.” Schweitzer said, “Reverence for life means my answering your kind inquiries; it also means your reverence for my dinner hour.” And he was able to return to his meal.

On a train journey in the American Midwest, Schweitzer was approached by two ladies. “Have we the honor of speaking to Doctor Einstein?” they asked. “No, unfortunately not,” replied Schweitzer, “though I can quite understand your mistake, for he has the same kind of hair as I have. But inside my head it’s altogether different. However, he is a very old friend of mine. Would you like me to give you his autograph?” Taking a slip of paper from his pocket he wrote: “Albert Einstein, by way of his friend, Albert Schweitzer.”

I wonder what Albert Schweitzer would have done about AIDS. We’ll collect the morning offering now, for the support of Chattanooga Cares and their ongoing ministry to those afflicted with HIV and AIDS. If you write a check, please sign your own name, not that of an old friend who looks like you. If you have an annual 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 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.

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.

I heard from Cynthia Williams the other day. Her brother is laid up in the VA hospital with gangrene and may lose his foot. She asked that we remember him in our prayers. And she has a more immediate need. She lost her transportation and without it, may lose her job. If you can help her out in any way—even for a short time—please call her.

Paul Adler has begun chemotherapy and it's a tiring regimen he says. Nonetheless, he is upbeat and happy to be here.

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 suffer from cancer and other intimidating conditions, 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

RESPONSIVE READING 594

We affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person.

We believe that each and every person is important.

We affirm and promote justice, equity, and compassion in human relations.

We believe that all people should be treated fairly.

We affirm and promote acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth.

We believe that our churches are places where all people are

accepted, and where we keep on learning together.

We affirm and promote a free and responsible search for truth and meaning.

We believe that each person must be free to search for what is true and right in life.

We affirm and promote the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process.

We believe that all people should have a voice and a vote about the things which concern them.

We affirm and promote the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all.

We believe that we should work for a peaceful, fair, and free world.

We affirm and promote respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

We believe that we should care for our planet earth.

SERMON: Church Words

This year, I am preaching about once a month on “church words.” Words that you might have heard in other churches, words that you don’t hear so much in this church; words that meant something important but now may have lost some of their power. Words like *salvation, sin, heaven* or *prayer*.

I am doing this in an effort to reclaim religious language, or whatever religious words that still have some meaning for us. I think that if we completely abandon traditional religious language, then we leave it

to others to speak about religious matters and we will probably not be happy with what they say. Today I want to explore three related church words: *creed, doctrine* and *dogma*. Do you know the difference between these words? *Is there a difference?*

And starting with *creed*, I ask you, “Was that a *creed*?” I mean that responsive reading we just went through. Did that sound like a *creedal* statement to you? Was that a statement of our collective beliefs? It sounds like one to me. Your responses all began with the phrase, “We believe...” Now did anyone refuse to participate in the reading because you *don’t believe*?

If you have ever been a member of another church, perhaps you encountered a *creed*. The Catholics have one. As do several Protestant denominations. It may be the Apostle’s *Creed*, the Winchester Profession of Faith, the Nicene *Creed* or the Westminster Confession.

Muslims recite a very brief statement of their faith called the *Shahada*. You have probably heard it. In English it is, “I testify there is no God but God and Muhammad is his Messenger.” That is actually the first of the Six *Kalimas*, or Six Words. Read together, they form an Islamic *creed*.

Whether Judaism is *creedal* has been a point of some controversy. Though some say Judaism is non-*creedal* in nature, others say it recognizes a single *creed*, the *Shema*, which is taken from the sixth chapter of Deuteronomy. “Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One.”

Whereas Christians tend to divide themselves according to belief, Buddhists tend to divide according to practice. All Buddhists would agree with the Four Noble Truths—Life is suffering, the origin of suffering is attachment, the cessation of suffering is possible, and the way to do that is to follow the Noble Eight-fold Path—All Buddhists would support those statements, but the way they do so is different

in each of the thousands of communities throughout the world. So a Buddhist might not see the purpose for a creed.

A creed, commonly, is a statement of belief. When applied to religions, creed assumes some other characteristics. The word is used casually to mean a denomination or religion, as in describing a city park as, “A place where all creeds are welcome.” But mostly, the word refers to a spoken statement of belief that identifies the speaker as a believing member of a division of Christianity.

In the Christian church, creeds have been composed and published at various times, for various reasons, and one dates to the fourth century. In the years after Jesus died, there were many opinions about him, about God, and what it meant to be a Christian. When the Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity, he ordered all the bishops to gather at Nicea in 325 and would not let them go home until they sorted out all the differing ideas. They managed to hammer out an agreement that became known as the Nicene Creed.

The Nicene Creed worked as Constantine had hoped. It unified belief among the early Christians and that made them easier to control. As time went on, however, culture and language served to divide the eastern Christians, centered in Constantinople and the western Christians, centered in Rome. And in 1054, the Great Schism separated the Christian Church into the Orthodox and the Roman Rites. That divide persists today, primarily because the Orthodox and Roman churches cannot agree on the wording of a single creed. In other words, their beliefs divide them.

What a Christian believed became even more important after the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century. Because the Catholic Church was now not the only church in town, if they felt dissatisfied, free-thinking people began their own brand of Christianity. And up through the present day, Christianity has endured division after division. It’s a process known as sectarianism, the tendency to divide into smaller and smaller communities separated by minute articles of

belief. In time, a creed became a way to identify oneself and a statement of the right way to do Christianity.

Muslims and Jews are not exempt from sectarianism. There are two major ways to do Islam, the Shia and the Sunni traditions. They got their start shortly after the death of Muhammad when arguments arose as to how to administer Islam, either through direct descendants of Muhammad or elected leaders.

Likewise, Judaism is divided by culture among the Sephardic, the Mizrahi and Ashkenazi Jews. In this country, we see Orthodox, Conservative or Reformed Jews and some ultra-Orthodox Hasidic sects, like the Lubavitchers. But Jews will tell you that their divisions are all about practice, not belief.

Sectarianism may be a natural human response to live with those who believe as you do. Security and comfort in numbers. It also can be a matter of practice, driven by culture and geography, as we see in the Jewish world.

But sectarianism can be taken too far. A friend of mine told me this story once. He was in San Francisco, walking along the Golden Gate Bridge, and he saw this guy on the bridge about to jump. So he thought he’d stall or detain him, long enough that someone might come along and help.

My friend said, “Don’t jump!” and the would-be jumper turned around to face him. You’ve heard of the elephant man. He was kind of like that, he had a, well, you could say he had the head of a horse. And my friend said, “Why are you doing this?”

He said, “Because all my life people have called me mean names like horse-head or Flicka or Trigger...”

My friend said, “Well, life is good, you know. It can’t be that bad.”

He said, “Why was I put on this Earth? “Nobody loves me.”

He said, “God loves you.”

He said, “I do believe in God.”

“Are you Muslim, Christian or Jew?”

“Christian.”

“Me too. Protestant or Catholic?”

“Protestant.”

“Me too! What franchise?”

“Baptist.”

“Wow! Me too! Are you Baptist Church of God or Baptist Church of the Lord?”

“Baptist Church of God.”

“Me too! Are you Original Baptist Church of God, or are you Reformed Baptist Church of God?”

“Reformed Baptist Church of God.”

“Me too! Are you Reformed Baptist Church of God, reformation of 1879, or Reformed Baptist Church of God, reformation of 1915?”

“Reformed Baptist Church of God, reformation of 1915!”

To which my friend said, “Then for all I care, you can go ahead and jump, you vile heretic!”

Sectarianism, in my opinion, is not an altogether wonderful development. It might have served a useful purpose at some time, but I think we’re way past the point of needing more divisions among us. But in days past, I suppose creeds were important as a way to build your identity, especially when you were convinced that the other guys were going straight to hell. And when you add a nationalistic flavor to this mix, what you believe could identify you as friend or foe.

A few years ago, the Board of Trustees and I had to bear down on a member who had some behavioral issues. We insisted he get counseling before he came to church again. He never came back. Now this fellow considered himself a pagan, and still does, as far as I know.

Bruce Hollingsworth used to argue with me about this incident. Bruce thought that we kicked this guy out of the church. In fact we bent over backwards to accommodate him and get him some treatment, but he declined. Anyway, Bruce thought we kicked him out because of his beliefs. I said no, it was his behavior that precipitated our actions. But it didn’t seem to matter what I said. I could have painted it on the bell tower, Bruce maintained that we have a creed in this church and the fellow was ostracized for not accepting it.

But I ask you today, “Do we have a creed?” Can we all agree on some statement of beliefs? I doubt it. And the attempt would divide us for sure. Getting even two Unitarian Universalists to agree to anything would be a major accomplishment, let alone the entire congregation. I’ll bet, though, that if we all wrote down our beliefs and compared them, we would find about 99% agreement.

People sometimes say the seven principles are a creed. Not for me. I will promote them all day long, but I have a problem with the fifth which advocates for the right of conscience and use of the democratic process within the congregation and society at large. Sometimes, I

believe that democracy may not be the best method of government. Democracy works when the population is educated, connected and participates freely in the governing process. So in some places—Somalia comes to mind and maybe Mongolia—in some places, another form of government will probably work better.

So do we have an *unspoken* creed? I think we do, although since it's unspoken, I cannot recite it. I think that this congregation will agree on some things, but what they are remains elusive. It's not like I can name the items of our unspoken creed, it's more like I just sorta *know*. I am pretty sure that one article of our unspoken creed might be, "I believe that religious principles should not be used to govern the people." In other words, the separation of church and state. Another might be, "I believe that no one should be forced to accept any religion." In other words, the right to make up your own mind about religious matters.

Another thing about any creed we would have is that it be open to change as we have new experiences. I believe that we are not done learning about human beings nor about the world we inhabit. Our reaction to women as clergy, our support of gay men and women in mainstream society shows us to be unafraid of the unfamiliar.

There are probably many articles of faith that all of us would agree to. So the word creed has some resonance for us, but not in its classical sense, that of a litany of beliefs.

The second word I want to examine today is doctrine. This word is closely related to creed, but refers more to what we teach in this religious society. One would assume if we had a creed, that what we teach would be determined by that creed. But having no formal, identifiable creed, do we have doctrine?

I think we do, but it's casual, and adheres closely to our unspoken creed. So phrased better, What is the doctrine we teach?

In the Forum, we teach a free exchange of ideas. With the children, we teach tolerance, cooperation and respect. With the teens, you can't teach them too much, you know. You sorta act as a guide for them to get safely into adulthood, and sort through the stuff of adolescence. Maddie tells me that we stress compassion some, knowing that teen years can be a little me-centric.

And what do we—what do I—teach here in worship services? I admit that I am not objective about my own work, but I think I preach a lot about forming good relationships. I talk frequently about understanding power, that we should watch out for the little guy, and that's mostly cause I was the little guy. The story we heard today—the story from the wolf's perspective—teaches us to think for ourselves, to avoid accepting on blind faith what someone else says.

Because I lack objectivity, I asked a few people what I preach about, and the replies were that I preach about many things, although some topics recur, like being connected, essential fairness, stewardship, world religions, embracing doubt, social justice, uncertainty as part of life and the Chicago Cubs.

So do we have a doctrine? Not formalized and printed, no. And the word doesn't really have the right flavor for what we teach around here. Doctrine as a word carries notions of an established order and a closed system. I think our system, if we have one, is not closed, but wide open. So doctrine really doesn't adequately describe what we teach.

I'd say we have themes. Whereas a catechism has doctrine, this church has themes. So maybe doctrine is not such a useful word for us anymore.

Dogma is the last word I want to examine today. This word creates real bad feelings among some Unitarian Universalists. There is a difference between doctrine and dogma, although in common usage, the distinction doesn't amount to much. It occurred to me that the

step from doctrine to dogma is much like the step from hate to loathe. Or in a more positive vein, the step from cherish to love. It seems to me that it's a matter of intensity.

The dictionary traces both words to a common root word meaning to take or to accept. In philosophical circles, dogma often refers to a group of doctrines, or a particular school of thought, as in the dogma of Erasmus. In theology, dogma refers to revealed truths promoted by the church for its members to believe, as in the dogma of the Virgin birth.

And I think it's that last meaning that gets under the skins of many Unitarian Universalists. "Revealed truth." Going back to that unspoken creed, another part of our unspoken creed might be our acceptance of relativism in large parts of our lives. I mean we understand that we don't have a corner on *the-big-T-truth*. I think we all agree that we might have a little piece of the truth and someone else has another piece and someone else, a third piece and so on.

So when some item of belief is presented as dogma, as in *the-big-T-truth*, that just kinda rubs our fur the wrong way. At least it rubs my fur the wrong way. I guess the only dogma that we would accept is that there is no dogma, especially about the truth.

There is a bumper sticker on Rich Dwyer's car that sums up my thoughts about dogma.

MY KARMA JUST RAN OVER YOUR DOGMA.

HYMN 131, Love Will Guide Us

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

We speak sometimes of illumination, that moment when we *understand*. A little story about illumination for our benediction, from Holly Bridges Elliot.

I remember this illumination happening to me one day as I stood in the kitchen and watched my children eat peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. We were having a most unremarkable time on a nondescript day, in the midst of the most mundane of routines. I hadn't censed the table, sprinkled the place mats with holy water, or uttered a sanctifying prayer over the Wonder bread. I wasn't feeling particularly "spiritual." But, heeding—I don't know what—I stopped abruptly and looked around me as if I were opening my eyes for the first time that day.

The entire room became luminous and so alive with movement that everything seemed suspended—yet pulsating—for an instant, like light waves. Intense joy swelled up inside me, and my immediate response was gratitude—gratitude for everything, every tiny thing in that space. The shelter of the room became a warm embrace; water flowing from the tap seemed a tremendous miracle; and my children became, for a moment, not my property or my charges or my tasks, but eternal beings of infinite singularity and complexity whom I would one day, in an age to come, apprehend in their splendid fullness.

Illumination is always happening. Sometimes you see it, sometimes you don't. Remain hopeful and open; I hope you see it.

POSTLUDE: Country Jam