

Welcome to the Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga. My name is Jeff Briere, I am the minister of this church. 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.

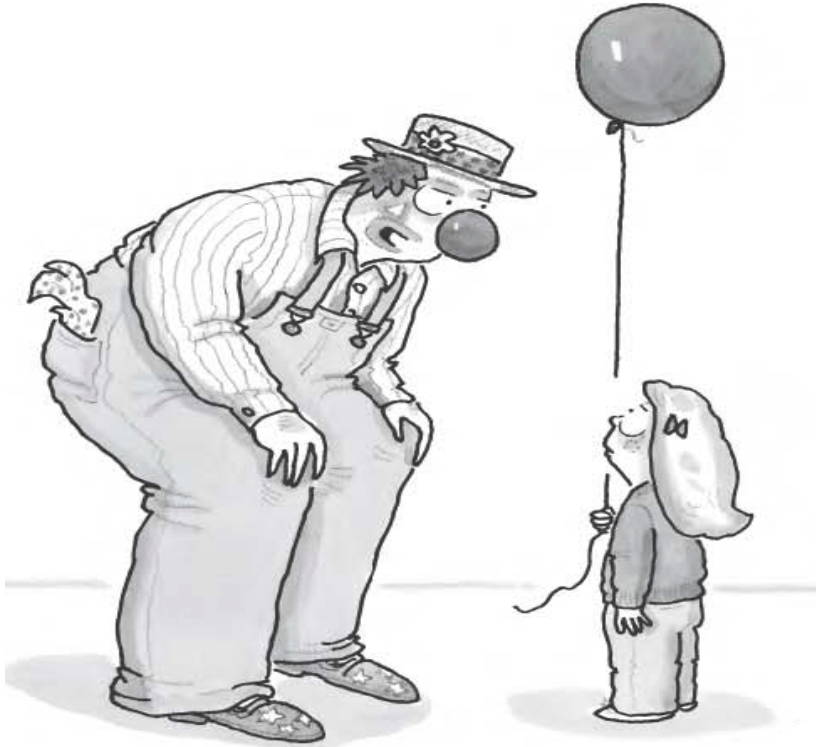


Let us pause to dwell inward. Spirit of Life, please meet us where we are, in the struggles we choose for ourselves; in the ways we move forward in our lives, and bring our world forward with us. It is right that we pause to remember those who need love and support; who are ill or in pain, either in 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.

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.



“Just remember, you are responsible for your own happiness.”

Happiness—An Illusion?

A Worship Service by the REV. JEFF BRIERE

Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga
January 13, 2009

Please note the emergency exit over here to my right, now is the time to put your cell phone in “Worship Mode,” childcare for the young and the restless is available downstairs in the nursery, and after the service today, please join us for coffee and conversation in the fellowship area right back there.

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.

I know you are envious of this hat. It can be yours—for one year. It will be awarded to the winner of our chili cook-off which happens next Sunday after the service. So mix up your best chili and bring it next Sunday.

Kate requested that you help her out with the Prelude today. So please stand and join her in singing “Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin.”

PRELUDE: “Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin”

LIGHTING THE CHALICE

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

STORY: “I DON’T BELIEVE IT!”

Do you remember that sometimes I will use a big word when I talk to you? A word like *loquacious*. Or *bourgeoisie*. And if I use a big word like that, I usually explain it. Last week I asked if you knew

what a mentor was. Sky Papendorp thought I said minotaur and he said a mentor is a mythological Greek monster. I think language is extremely important so I will continue to challenge you because when I was young, someone challenged me.

When I was in the fifth grade,—when I was ten or eleven years old—I was felt insecure, unloved, and pretty angry at life. In other words, I was tearing the place apart. I was a real *hellion*. And I knew it. Being a bad boy was just about the only thing I did well. My teacher, Sister Cyril, thought I didn’t know I was a big problem, because she reminded me everyday, “Mr. Briere, you are the worst behaved child in this school!”

If I had the courage to talk back to her, I would have said, “So tell me something I don’t know already!” But I didn’t. I just took it all in.

The fifth grade was probably the worst year of my life. Finally, I graduated. Or maybe I was passed on because Sister Cyril had enough of me. But I can still hear her saying, “Mr. Briere, you are the worst behaved child in this school!”

You can imagine how I felt about the sixth grade. I would rather have gone to kindergarten again. The first day of class, my teacher, Sister Roberta, went down the roll call, and it wasn’t long before she came to my name. “Jeff Briere,” she called out, glancing from her list to where I was sitting. I had my arms folded, just loaded for bear. She looked me over for a moment, and then said, “I’ve heard a lot about you.” Then she smiled and added, “But I don’t believe it!”

I tell you, that moment was a turning point, not only in my education, but in my life. Suddenly, someone believed in me. For the first time in my life, someone saw potential in me. Sister Roberta put me on special assignments. She gave me little jobs to do, like cleaning the erasers or taking notes to the office. She invited me to come in after school to work on my reading and arithmetic. She *challenged* me with higher standards.

I didn't want to let her down. In fact, one time I got so involved in one of her homework assignments that I stayed up until 1:30 in the morning working on it! Eventually my mother came down the hall and said, "What's the matter? Are you sick?"

"No, I'm doing my homework," I replied.

She blinked and rubbed her eyes, not quite sure whether she was awake. She'd never heard me say anything like that before.

So what made the difference between fifth grade and sixth?

The fact that someone was willing to give me a chance. Someone was willing to believe in me while challenging me with higher expectations. That was risky, because there was no guarantee that I would honor Sister Roberta's trust.

Everyone likes the end product of mentoring, especially when it yields a peak performer—the star athlete, the successful computer engineer, the brilliant lawyer, the impressive communicator. But who wants to deal with the hellion at the beginning of the process?

Who, indeed? So expect to be challenged by those who think you can do better and think about how you can challenge your friends to do better.

CHILDREN'S RECEPTIONAL

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: "Make Someone Happy"

I have another story for you this morning. This also is a true story.

A man sat at a metro station in Washington DC and started to play the violin; it was a cold January morning. He played six Bach pieces for about 45 minutes. During that time, since it was rush hour, it was calculated that thousands of people went through the station, most of them on their way to work.

Three minutes went by and a middle aged man noticed there was a musician playing. He slowed his pace and stopped for a few seconds and then hurried up to meet his schedule.

A minute later, the violinist received his first dollar tip: a woman threw the money in the till and without stopping continued to walk.

A few minutes later, someone leaned against the wall to listen to him, but the man looked at his watch and started to walk again. Clearly he was late for work.

The one who paid the most attention was a 3 year old boy. His mother tugged him along, but the kid stopped to look at the violinist. Finally the mother pushed hard and the child continued to walk turning his head all the time. This action was repeated by several other children. All the parents, without exception, forced them to move on.

In the 45 minutes the musician played, only 6 people stopped and stayed for a while. About 20 gave him money but continued to walk their normal pace. He collected \$32. When he finished playing and silence took over, no one noticed it. No one applauded, nor was there any recognition.

No one knew the violinist was Joshua Bell, one of the best musicians in the world. He played some of the most intricate music ever written, and with a violin worth three and a half million dollars.

Two days before his playing in the subway, tickets for Joshua Bell's performance at a theater in Boston were sold out and the seats averaged \$100.

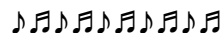
This is a true story. Joshua Bell playing incognito in the metro station was organized by the Washington Post as part of a social experiment about perception, taste and priorities of people. The outlines were: in a commonplace environment at an inappropriate hour:

- Can we perceive beauty in unexpected places?
- Do we stop to appreciate it?
- Do we recognize talent in an unexpected context?

The Washington Post won a Pulitzer Prize for its reporting on this experience. One of the possible conclusions from this experience is this: If we do not have time to listen to one of the best musicians in the world playing some of the best music ever written, what else could we be missing?

We'll collect the offering now, for the support and ministry of this church. If you have a check for your annual pledge, please mark it that way. 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.

It was hard this week to miss the reports about the incredible spill of ashen sludge from the retention pond at the Kingston power plant. And yesterday came the news that the TVA intentionally dumped a bunch of sludge last week into the Ocoee which killed fish and other aquatic life in the river. The report indicated the black and foul-smelling sludge overwhelmed the river and the Olympic whitewater area of the Ocoee in some places more than three feet deep.

Let us pray this morning for the earth, that she be healthy and clean for our children and our children's children. Our consciousness has been raised; let us now raise our voices and our arms to replenish our Mother Earth. These words are from the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 33. *Blessed by the LORD be this land, with the choice gifts of heaven above, and the deep that lies beneath; with the choice fruits of the sun, and the rich yield of the months; with the finest produce of the ancient mountains, and the abundance of the everlasting hills; with the choice gifts of the earth and its fullness.*

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 these few moments of silence, let us hope that when we extract
resources from the earth we do so in a way that creates the least
disturbance possible. And let us always remember 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

SERMON: Happiness—An Illusion?

My sermon today will be shorter than usual—I know you'll
appreciate that. It's the first of three sermons about happiness and
it's not definitive. It's meant more as an *apéritif*, something to
stimulate your appetite for more about happiness next week.

You know Ellen DeGeneres? Funny woman. She has a real talent
for self-effacing comedy. You ever watch her show? I catch it
sometimes. The other day her guest was Deepak Chopra. You know

who he is? He's an Indian-American physician and writer, who
focuses on spirituality and mind-body medicine. He's written
several books and produced some videos about emotional well being,
health & wellness and spiritual awakening.

Anyway, he was guest on Ellen's show and you know what she asked
him? *What's the secret of happiness?* I'll tell you his answer in a
few minutes, but the questions I ask are these:

Why would this be important? Why would Ellen think that her
audience wants to know what they should be doing to be happy? I
can understand why she would ask Deepak Chopra, but I wonder why,
seemingly, people want to know how to be happy.

It's not only Ellen. Visit any bookstore and you'll find hundreds of
books with advice about being happy.

It's not only writers and books. Advertisements tell us that things
will make us happy. Billboards and commercials tell us that cars,
boats, clothing, cruise ships, hot tubs and hand-held electronic
communication gadgets will make us happy.

Wall Street tells us that money will make us happy. E. F. Hutton
says to invest now and be happy in your retirement later on. And you
know that people listen when E. F. Hutton says something.

Match.com says that love will make us happy. In truth, what online
dating services say is that relationships will make us happy; that
people will make us happy.

Churches, mosques and synagogues tell us that religion will make us
happy. Get religion—any religion—get religion and get your ticket
punched to eternal happiness.

Quiznos, Ruby Tuesday and Steak & Shake tell us that food will
make us happy. Bottomless salad bowl! Two-for-One! All you can

eat! Happy Meals!

At the web site <coachingtohappiness.com>, you can register for a free happiness training course delivered via e-mail. There are a thousand more sites all purporting to show you the way to be happy.

Sam Adams and Jack Daniels say that booze will make us happy. And indeed, it will, sorta. For awhile.

But I ask again, Why all the concern about happiness? If an alien from the planet Tralfamadore came to earth and was able to interpret our languages, he'd ask the same question. What's going on here that's making everyone so concerned about happiness? Why all the fuss?

Is everyone really that *un*-happy? Is there an undercurrent of discontent in everyone's life? Maybe there is, but I don't see evidence of it.

Of course, I know that zillions of people are unhappy—*extremely unhappy*—and we find them sleeping under bridges, dodging rockets and bombs, and working in brothels. When you are not in control of your destiny, when you are homeless, when you live in a war zone or when you are enslaved, happiness seems as unobtainable as the moon.

But if you have a reasonable amount of control over your life, if you have shelter, food and clothing, you have the cornerstones of happiness. You could build on that with an occupation, some friends and family, some idea of how to secure your future, and you'd have the foundation of happiness.

What I think is that happiness is not an absolute, like pregnancy. You are either pregnant or you're not; there's no way to be somewhat pregnant or almost pregnant. But I think you can be mildly happy or happy most of the time. I think there are degrees of happiness.

And it seems that we develop happiness in degrees, like an oven. When you set your oven to 375, you can't bake a loaf of bread right away; it takes twenty minutes or so to warm up. Likewise, we don't have a happiness button that we can push to make us happy.

So what is happiness and how will we know it when we have it? The happiness I mean can be many things, perhaps as many things as there are people in the world. We can eliminate what it's not. It's not only security, for Donald Trump is quite secure, but he doesn't impress me as a happy person. It's not only possessions, power or money that make us happy. They help, sure. They alleviate some fears and extend our resources, but they don't make or break our happiness.

Happiness is not only the absence of anger or the state of being not sad. It's not only being pleased or content. You cannot identify happy people by their whistling. All these qualities are part of a bigger state of being that I call happiness. Security, a pleasant nature, money and power are not causes of happiness, they are more like by-products of happy living.

According to scientific research, there are some activities and factors that correlate with happiness. These include religious involvement, parenthood, marital status, age, income and proximity to other happy people. It seems that about 50% of our happiness depends on our heredity. About ten to fifteen percent is a result of variables, such as socioeconomic status, marital status, health, income, and so forth. The remaining 40% results from actions that we deliberately engage in for the purpose of becoming happier.

Republicans are happier than Democrats. Did you know that? The General Social Surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center show a consistent happiness divide from 1972 through 2006, with Republican men being happier than Democratic men, and Republican women being happier than Democratic women. A poll conducted during October 2008, when McCain and Palin were going downhill

along with the economy, confirmed this trend. The happiness gap was among the largest on record and that gap has been unbroken for almost forty years, no matter who is in the White House.

Happiness is infectious. If you didn't know that, I'll bet you can understand why. Being around happy people tends to create happiness in us. A study from 2008 in the British Medical Journal reported that happiness in social networks may spread like a virus from person to person. The study found clusters of happiness that spread up to 3 degrees of separation on average. Happiness tended to spread through close relationships like friends, siblings, spouses, and next-door neighbors. The research showed that happiness spread more consistently than unhappiness through the network.

Happiness seems to have a geographical component. That is, your country of residency may affect your happiness. I regret that with all the technological power we have here, I was unable to get this image projected on the screen. I am not up-to-speed on the projector yet, so I'll do this the old-fashioned way.

Here is something called the "Satisfaction with Life Map." It was published in 2007. The subtitle is "A Global Projection of Subjective Well-being." People in all but a few countries were asked to rate their own happiness and the results showed that those living in green countries, Canada, New Zealand, Switzerland, Austria, Ireland, Sweden, Norway, Nepal, Belgium, Netherlands, Malaysia and Panama were the most happy.

Moving through blue and purple and orange, we descend the happiness scale until we get to the countries that appear red, which are home to the least happy people on earth. Russia, large parts of central and northern Africa, Pakistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Belarus, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

The most immediate conclusion is that poverty has an inverse correlation with life satisfaction. You can stay alive with food,

shelter and clothing. But it's difficult to be happy when you have no occupation, no friends or family, and no idea of how to secure your future.

My conclusion is that Americans don't seem to have an idea about happiness. How did I reach that conclusion? Well, Americans rate right near the top in this map. We are pretty well satisfied with life. Many people don't, I know, but most Americans have an occupation, have friends and family, are more or less secure and have some idea of their future. Why then is there a market for Depak Chopra? Why are there so many suggestions from so many quarters about how to be happy? Why do Ellen, churches, restaurants, dating services, happiness coaches and Sam Adams tell us how to be happy if we rate ourselves as being pretty damned happy?

Did we lie to the people who created this map? Is it because we're missing something? What?

The title of my sermon poses the possibility that happiness is an illusion. I don't think it is, but I think it may be easier to see illusions of happiness than the real thing.

I asked a congregant what she thought happiness is. "It's a state of grace we give ourselves," she responded. She didn't take time to ponder the question, but answered immediately, as if she had given the matter some thought and was certain of her conclusion.

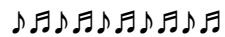
A state of grace that we give ourselves. I like that.

Now, as to what Depak Chopra told Ellen about the secret of happiness: Actually, he said many things, and very quickly. Ellen only gave him about five minutes on her show to tell us how to be happy.

He talked about embracing uncertainty, that is, be not afraid of the future. If we embrace uncertainty, he said, nothing can go wrong.

He said reduce our consumption and work more at building relationships with other people. He said happy people find opportunities where others find problems. So think about what you find everyday.

He said give your life a purpose. Reflect everyday—Who am I? What do I want? He said live those questions and life will move you to the answer. Live the question and life will move you to the answer. But the best way to be happy, he said, the best way to be happy is to *make* someone happy.



That of course, was “Schnozzola.” Jimmy Durante as heard in the movie, *Sleepless in Seattle*. “Make Someone Happy.”

Make me happy by telling me this week your ideas happiness. What makes you happy? Money? Food? Toys? Sex? What ever it is, I’d like to know. How do you improve your happiness quotient? What made you happy ten years ago? What will make you happy ten years from now? What’s your take on this happiness thing?

You can write me through our website, <uuc.org> or send your message to <minister@uuc.org>. That e-mail address is on the back of your bulletin. You could also send me a letter here at the church. I will include your wisdom about happiness in the service next week and if you’d rather not go public, I won’t mention your name. If you want to remain anonymous, please tell me so.

I recommend this book: This is *Stumbling on Happiness*, by Daniel Gilbert. He’s a professor at Harvard and a psychologist. He has some interesting ideas about happiness—he believes we can and do make ourselves happy. My sermon next week is based on this book. And your responses. Today I leave you with more questions than answers. You have all week to ponder your happiness. So, don’t worry—be happy.

BENEDICTION

I’d like to reverse the order of the last two elements in the service. The movie, *The Hours*, is a story of how the novel *Mrs. Dalloway*, by Virginia Woolf, affects three generations of women, each of whom dealt with suicide. It was made into a movie and the screenwriter, David Hare, wrote these words for the character Clarissa:

I remember one morning. Getting up at dawn. There was such a sense of possibility. We were going to do everything. Do you know that feeling? I remember thinking: “This is the beginning of happiness.” That’s what I thought. “So this is the feeling. This is where it starts. And of course there’ll always be more.” It never occurred to me, it wasn’t the beginning. It was happiness. It was the moment, right then.

HYMN 128, “For All That Is Our Life”

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: “Happy Talk”