



## *Can You Hear Me Now?*

*A Worship Service by the REV. JEFF BRIERE*

*Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga*

*December 4, 2011*

Good morning. Welcome to the Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga. My name is Jeff Briere, I am the minister of this church and to begin our service let's sing Hymn 323, "Break Not the Circle of Enabling Love."

### *HYMN 323, Break Not the Circle of Enabling Love*

Break not the circle of enabling love,  
where people grow, forgiven and forgiving;  
break not that circle, make it wider still,  
till it includes, embraces all the living.

Come, wonder at the love that comes to life,  
where words of humor are with freedom spoken;  
and people keep no score of wrong and guilt,  
but will that human bonds remain unbroken.

Join then the movement of the love that frees,  
till people of whatever race or nation  
will truly be themselves, stand on their feet,  
see eye to eye with laughter and elation.

#### *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. We are pleased to provide an assistive listening system. If you wear a hearing aid, please turn on the T switch or if you'd like a set of headphones, please see the sound tech. Child care for the young and restless is available the nursery.

If this is your first time here, we'd be pleased to know your name and that of your family if they are with you. Please complete **a visitor's card**; you'll find them on the round table in the fellowship area.

If you have a particular **joy or sorrow** or something you'd like added to the prayer of the people, please clearly write it on an index card and drop it in the basket back there. You may sign it or not, as you wish.

After the service today, please join us for an **open mike forum** focused on proposed changes to our by-laws. This is an important issue, one which will be voted at the Annual Meeting in May.

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

For our service, Steve chose music by the Norwegian composer, Edvard Grieg.

*PRELUDE: Sarabande*

*LIGHTING THE CHALICE*

Becca Fowlkes, would you light the chalice, please? To accompany the lighting of the chalice, I brought a responsive reading by Bonnie Vegiard. Your words are in italics.

When we are overwhelmed with the world  
and cannot see our way clear,  
*when life seems a struggle between tedium and apathy  
or frenzy and exhaustion,*

when today seems a punishment and tomorrow a torment,  
*may we find the courage of patience.*

May we recognize courage in ourselves and our companions, which is not dramatic, that elicits no fanfare, that commands little notice by the world, that is forgotten and taken for granted.  
*May we learn how to cope.*

Like those who live one day of pain at a time,  
who see the long path of suffering and do not despair,

Who inspire us with their patient courage, when we are impatient or afraid,

*May we know such courage and quietly celebrate its presence among us.*

*STORY: The Animal School*

Many years ago, all the animals in Tennessee decided that they wanted to start a school for their children. Until that time, all children had been home schooled. But times were tough, and many parents decided that they had to find jobs and could no longer stay home to teach their children what they needed to know.

And it happened that in Chattanooga, the first charter school was approved by the Hamilton County Department of Education. So they organized a school and hired teachers, teacher aides, special ed teachers, nurses, teacher coaches, technology gurus, secretaries, principals, janitors, food service workers, dozens of assistant principals, and, of course, they organized football teams.

The teachers met and decided upon a standardized educational curriculum to their animal students. They didn't want any child to be left behind. They devised a curriculum consisting of just four subjects: swimming, running, flying, and climbing. All the animals took all the subjects—because it was very important to them that no child be left behind. To ensure that students were progressing satisfactorily, standardized achievement tests were administered to all students. Every student had to take the same test at the same time.

Sound familiar? Well, here's what happened. The ducks were excellent in swimming. In fact, the ducks were better than their coach, who was a dog. He was hired on account of he was a Portugese Water Spaniel and knew how to swim. But some of the ducks made only passing grades in flying and all of them were very poor in running. Since they were slow in running, they stayed after school for remedial running practice, and they had to drop swimming

in order to practice running during their swimming class time. This was kept up until all their webbed feet were very sore. And the ducks were so tired, that soon they were only average in swimming. But average was acceptable in this new school, so nobody worried about that—except the ducks.

In running, the rabbits started at the top of the class, but they did very poorly in swimming. Also, the rabbits insisted on hopping around, and the teachers were concerned about that. They thought the rabbits suffered from hyperactivity and attention deficit disorder. So they made the rabbits walk everywhere instead of allowing them to run or hop. And the rabbits had to come in early every day for special swimming class. Many of the younger rabbits developed matted fur because they spent so much time in the swimming pool.

The squirrels were excellent in climbing and running. In fact, the squirrels were the best students at climbing the standardized tree. But they insisted on flying by first climbing the tree, then spreading their paws, and gliding to the ground. Who could blame them? That's the way squirrels fly. But in flying class their teacher made them start on the ground instead of at the treetop, and guess what? The squirrels could not master the course material. So every day, the squirrels had therapy—a flying therapist took the squirrels into the gym and made them do front-paw exercises to strengthen their muscles so they could learn to fly the right way. The squirrels' paws hurt so much from this overexertion that some of them only got a C in climbing. Some of the squirrels failed climbing altogether.

The eagles were definitely problem children—in climbing class, the eagles beat all the others to the top of the tree, but they insisted on using their own way to get there and were quite stubborn about it. The eagles said that clearly it was the goal that mattered, and that it was quite right for eagles to get to the treetop by flying. The school psychologist did some research on the Internet and diagnosed them as oppositional–defiant, which kicked in some mandatory time–outs. A strict behavior modification plan was developed for the eagles.

Now we can end this story in one of two ways. Here's the first way: The animals can continue to make the squirrels learn to fly by flapping their paws, make rabbits swim and walk instead of hop and jump, make ducks run and punish eagles for being themselves. However, no child is left behind and average test scores are acceptable.

Here's the second way: The animals can accept each and every student with all the abilities and drawbacks, which we can call “growing edges.” Every squirrel is a perfectly wonderful squirrel, regardless of how they fly. Every rabbit is a lovely rabbit whether or not they hop, skip, roll, or walk. Each eagle is an excellent eagle; and all the ducks can swim to their heart's content and not worry about learning to run. However, test scores are all over the map. Some students pass, some fail, some skip grades and some repeat.

So which way should we end the story?

And what is this story all about?

When we try to make everybody the same, nobody is happy. People can get hurt and their very best gifts can go to waste. But when we make allowances for people and the ways they are people, then all the people will be the better for it.

Thanks for listening to my story. You are free to go to your classes now, and remember to let everyone participate in the best way they can. Make accommodations for people.

#### *CHILDREN'S RECESSINAL*

How could anyone ever tell you  
you were anything less than beautiful?  
How could anyone ever tell you  
you were less than whole?

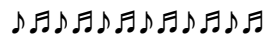
How could anyone fail to notice  
that your loving is a miracle?  
How deeply you're connected to my soul.

*OFFERTORY: Air*

It has become customary in this church to offer a holiday gift to the staff in honor of their work which makes this church run efficiently. The envelope in your bulletin is for that offering. If you appreciate the staff here, the director of religious education, the music director, the nursery workers and the custodian, please show your appreciation by placing your donation in the envelope and placing it in the collection plate.

I am not part of this. If you look at the budget, you will see that the largest expense this church has is for the minister. I appreciate that, I do. But the chance to work here is gift enough for me. I asked the board to exclude me so that your gift can be distributed more generously among the others, whose work makes it possible for me to do mine. You'll be giving me a gift when you give the staff a gift.

With that in mind, we'll receive the morning offering now for the support and ministry of this church. And I ask you to be generous when the plate comes your way so that we can make the holidays a little brighter for the staff. If you have a pledge payment, please mark it as such. The Wood-Wilhoit Memorial Food Bank is always happy to accept your donations of non-perishable food and household items for the Community Kitchen. The collection basket for that is by the front door. If you wish to light a personal candle of joy or sorrow, you may step up here and Mary Hunter will assist you.



Eternal Spirit of life and love, we are profoundly thankful for the blessings we experience today. Would that we recognize our blessings every day and remember to be thankful for them.

Kate, please lead us in our Hymn of Thanksgiving.

*HYMN OF THANKSGIVING*

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

*ORISON*

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

This morning I pray for patience. For myself most of all. Please join me in a responsive prayer. Your words are in italics.  
Spirit of Life and Love, we pray for all the people:  
Those who are blind and cannot see  
and those who can see but are blind to people around them,

*Spirit of Life and Love, help us touch each other.*

For people who move slowly because of accident, illness or disability, and for those who move too fast to be aware of the world in which they live,

*Spirit of Life and Love, help us work together.*

For people who are deaf and cannot hear, and for those who can hear but ignore the cries of others,

*Spirit of Life and Love, help us respond to each other.*

For people who learn slowly, for people who learn in different ways, and for people who learn quickly but often choose ignorance

*Spirit of Life and Love, help us grow in wisdom.*

For people who have chronic illnesses for which there is no cure, and for people who live in fear of developing chronic illness,

*Spirit of Life and Love, help us and heal us.*

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

Please join me in the Orison.

Thou, which are everywhere,  
Many are your names.  
May we always feel your presence,  
May love and wisdom guide us,  
In our deeds as well as in our dreams.  
May we have what sustains our body and soul;  
Lead us first to forgive the mistakes of others  
Even as we hope our own mistakes will soon be forgiven.  
May we resist the temptation of the quick and easy,  
And be delivered from that which demeans and destroys life.  
May we live purposefully and joyfully  
in every moment, in every encounter,  
now, and in the time to come.

During this time of silence let us hold close to our hearts those who strive everyday to make the world a better place, but let us never forget those who suffer the fallout of war.

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

*RESPONSE*

When our heart is in a holy place

When our heart is in a holy place  
We are blessed with love and amazing grace

When our heart is in a holy place

*HERE*

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

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

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

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

*SERMON: Can You Hear Me Now?*

*Can you hear me now?*

*Good.*

I first heard that question when this fellow said it. Paul Marcarelli is an American actor best known as the *Can-you-hear-me-now-guy* in commercials for Verizon Wireless. His real character name is "Test Man." He appeared in every Verizon commercial wearing a gray jacket and his own horn-rimmed glasses from 2001 until 2010. After his contract ended in April of this year, he came out as gay.

What struck me about “Can You Hear Me Now?” is that the crux of the ad campaign was Verizon’s efforts to get a good cell phone signal to every square foot of land in this country. And I thought that was analogous to a church doing everything they can to include people in its activities. In later years, Verizon switched to showing how many people were on its network, so we saw crowds with Test Man, like this.

Verizon concentrated on the populated places before trying to cover all of Alaska, but what they are doing is the equivalent of reaching out. Here’s their coverage map. They don’t cover parts of the Appalachians, the Rockies, the Adirondacks, the Okefenokee Swamp, the Everglades, the deserts, the badlands and other places like the north of Maine. But where there are people, they have coverage. Of course, they have a financial interest in increasing their signal coverage. There is no great financial interest for us to reach out. The reason we reach out is to include people. But what Verizon is doing and what we are doing is the same thing.

Do you know how it feels to be left out? If I said raise your left hand, I’ll bet everyone except Daidee could do that. But after her frozen shoulder warms up, she’ll be able to do that like the rest of us. So right now, Daidee is left out. But raising one’s arm is not all that big of a deal.

So let’s raise the stakes. If I said we’re all gonna walk down the hill to the lower parking lot and have a picnic lunch, catered by 212 Market, there would be several of us who couldn’t do that without a lot of discomfort, myself included. We have bum knees, or a broken ankle or some mobility issue. So we’d be left out. And being left out of a picnic can be a big deal.

But we don’t have to have that picnic lunch in the lower lot. We could decorate the sanctuary to look like the parking lot and have the picnic inside. And everyone would be included. And it would be warmer, too. But you see my point, I think.

Most of us are able-bodied. Most of us can see well enough. Most of us can hear pretty well. But some of us have trouble walking or rising from a chair, or reading fine print or hearing a speaker. And we don’t want those people to be left out. More participation makes a richer experience for everyone. In this case, too many cooks make a tastier broth.

So maybe now you understand—intellectually—why it’s important to include everyone as much as we can. But I want you to know how it *feels—emotionally*—to be left out. This oughta do it.

An excellent demonstration, don’t you think?

What do we, and by we, I mean Americans and people in general, what do we do to include people? What do we say, how do we act, what accommodations do we make so that everyone can participate in the best way they can?

For people who cannot see well, we install braille signage, especially in elevators; we publish large-print editions of books; we install beepers along with wait and walk signals; we record books on CD and record newspapers and magazines. These are just a few examples.

For those who do not hear well, we install assistive listening systems; we have devised real time captioning for TV and DVD, captioned note taking, sign language interpreters, and oral interpreters. These are just a few examples.

For those who have difficulty walking, we install handrails; make gentle slopes instead of steps; we build motorized wheelchairs; we install escalators & elevators. Just a few examples.

Why go to all this trouble? Why did it take an act of Congress—the Americans with Disabilities Act—to insure that people are included? I read a crude answer to that question the other day. Kate says I can’t

quote it verbatim, so I'll paraphrase the answer. The reason is because it's easier to give someone the cold shoulder than it is to give them a hand. It's easier to ignore people who cannot participate than it is to help them participate.

But beyond that it's all about economics, as you might suspect. It's costly to put in an elevator; it's not cheap to produce a braille version of a magazine; it costs a lot of money to buy and maintain an assistive listening system. It costs money and time to include people, but I am here to tell you that both you and they will feel better when you go out of your way to include them.

So what have we done around here to include people? There is a gentle ramp to the front door; no steps. Fred or Harold could easily push Nancy Wright's wheelchair into the building.

Uncle Paul Adler installed a tall toilet in our handicapped-accessible restroom. We have reserved several parking spaces near the front door for people who have difficulty walking. We purchased a dozen armchairs for this room so that you can have an assist upon rising. And today, we will dedicate our assistive listening system.

With what we have, what else can we do to make our church and our worship service more accessible?

We could identify ourselves by wearing name tags. That would help everyone, really. We could leave armchairs for those who need them. You could park in the lower lot and improve your cardiovascular system with a brisk walk up the hill.

What more could we do?

We could install an elevator.

We could hire an American Sign Language interpreter. Now you might say, "Do we need one?" I don't know. I do know that anyone

who needs a sign language interpreter cannot participate in the worship service or any other meeting here. My answer to this question, "Do we need one?" is this: Build it and they will come.

We could stream live video or make a DVD or put a video file on the website. We could stream live audio or put audio file on the website. We could make a podcast. We could institute a Twitter feed or become more active on Facebook.

For a couple years, I produced a large print bulletin, but I stopped as there did not seem to be a demand for it. But knowing that people are often embarrassed to ask for help, I could do this again.

We could buy a braille hymnal or two. We might be able to produce a braille bulletin. Some committee meetings could be held in this room to take advantage of the assistive listening system.

The United Methodist Church has an accessibility manual and in it are several questions that we should ask ourselves as we think about the accessibility of worship services. Here are some that I thought applied to us and they are taken from a list of about 35:

Are all aisles at least 36 inches wide?

Have a few of the rows of chairs been shortened to accommodate wheelchairs?

Is there a designated fragrance-free area for use by people who have chemical sensitivities?

Are unscented beeswax candles used or has the use of candles been eliminated from worship services so that people with chemical sensitivities can participate?

Have silk flowers been considered as an alternative to live flowers that have pollen and/or pesticides?

If there are steps to the chancel area, is a handrail provided for people—is there a handrail for people who can only use their right hand or their left hand?

Is a ramp or wheelchair lift provided to make the chancel area accessible to people using wheelchairs?

Is a wheelchair accessible pulpit or is a pulpit-substitute such as a sturdy music stand available?

Is the choir area accessible so that adults and children using mobility aids can participate in choir activities?

Are there large print hymnals available? Braille hymnals?

Are ushers and greeters trained to give information if a blind person asks for a description of the worship setting?

Are sign language interpreters available on request during worship services for people who use sign language for communication?

Is lighting good enough for the interpreter's hands and face to be seen clearly?

Is the interpreter positioned so that people can see both the interpreter and the speaker in the same line of vision?

If sign language interpretation is available, is it noted in your church's advertising and public information efforts?

Are printed copies of the sermon available for people who have hearing impairments or who wish to read the sermons at home?

Does the order of service (and newsletter) announce that listening devices are available and where to get them?

Is someone responsible for the upkeep of the assistive listening devices to make sure they are in good working order?

Are ushers trained to give out headsets or other assistive listening devices when asked?

Is the sanctuary well lighted so that people with visual impairments can read the order of service and hymnal?

I can make arrangements for a few of the needs brought out by those questions. Others may take an institutional effort. But my hope in reading those questions is that your horizons are expanded a little bit and that you could experience this space differently. Like through the eyes, ears or nose of someone else. Someone who can't see as well as you, can't hear as well as you or who needs help in some way in order to participate.

We took a big step in installing the assistive listening system. And the person most responsible for that is you, of course. Your donations to a fund set up to honor Bruce Hollingsworth made it possible. The fund was the brainchild of Nicky Ozbek, who regrets that she cannot be here today. She asked Marge Pasch to speak for her.

*[Marge speaks]*

Nicky said to understand, you had to know Bruce. One person who knew him very well is Steve, his son, and I asked him to speak today.

*[Steve speaks]*

Two other people were vital to this project, Ron Pasch and Paul Adler. Here's a picture of them as Ron was installing the loop. They first put it up with masking tape to check how it functioned, then they hid the wire in that race that goes around the perimeter of the sanctuary. The signal is heard anywhere in this room, even under the

alcove over there and a few feet beyond the doors. Thanks for installing it and making it look great.

As much as this system helps those with hearing loss, it complicates the task of the sound technician. Aside from monitoring the mix that you hear and recording the service, the sound tech must now create two mixes; one for the house, which doesn't include the piano and another for the assistive listening system, which includes everything. So I would like to extend my gratitude to the sound techs for learning how to make two separate mixes at once.

And while I am talking about the sound techs, I must say that the job requires their full attention. So if you want to speak to the sound tech, please wait until after the service.

Now let us dedicate this assistive listening system to increased access and the improvement of the worship service. In honor of Bruce Hollingsworth, who was a liberal Methodist minister I have made a responsive reading from his favorite hymn, "God of Grace and God of Glory." The words were composed by Harry Emerson Fosdick, a liberal Baptist minister, who was for many years, the minister at the interdenominational Riverside Church in New York City. He was as close to being a Unitarian Universalist minister as he could get and still be a Christian minister. Your words are in italics.

God of grace and God of glory,  
On your people pour your power.

*Crown this ancient church's story,  
Bring her bud to glorious flower.*

Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,

*For the facing of this hour,  
For the facing of this hour.*

Fill us with a living vision,  
Heal our wounds that we may be

*Bound as one beyond division,  
In the struggle to be free.*

Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,

*Ears to hear and eyes to see,  
Ears to hear and eyes to see.*

Although it is a piece of technology, a machine made by people, I pray this assistive listening system is never bedeviled by electronic gremlins and helps those with hearing loss be a part of this community. Please join me now in singing Hymn 298, "Wake Now, My Senses."

*HYMN 298, Wake Now My Senses*

Wake, now my senses, and hear the earth call;  
feel the deep power of being in all;  
keep, with the web of creation your vow,  
giving, receiving as love shows us how.

Wake, now compassion, give heed to the cry;  
voices of suffering fill the wide sky;  
take as your neighbor both stranger and friend,  
praying and striving their hardship to end.

Wake, now my vision of ministry clear;  
brighten my pathway with radiance here;  
mingle my calling with all who will share;  
work toward a planet transformed by our care.

*EXTINGUISHING THE CHALICE*

Becca, please extinguish our chalice.

We extinguish this flame,  
but not the light of its truth,  
the warmth of this community,  
nor the fire of our commitment.  
These we carry in our hearts  
and share with all the world.

*BENEDICTION*

Great Mystery incarnate in every person  
and dwelling among us  
in the midst of our relationships,  
we need your help.

In a world torn by violence and fear,  
do not let our hearts be hardened.  
Let us embrace those who need our support.

Help us to move beyond seeking justice  
to seeking a world governed by grace.  
Help us know what needs to be done  
and how to do it.

Where we find suffering,  
may we bring compassion.  
Where we find fear,  
may we bring courage.  
Where we find hate,  
may we bring love.

*POSTLUDE: Gavotte*

Thank you very much for your participation in our service this

morning. Remember the open-mike forum about the by-laws follows in about fifteen minutes. This is your opportunity to have some say in how we govern ourselves. Parents, please rejoin your children now and we'll enjoy a time of fellowship with the best fair-trade coffee in southeastern Tennessee.

*POSTERLUDE: Rigaudon*