



*So...Whaddya Know?*

*A Worship Service by the REV. JEFF BRIERE*

*Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga*

*April 10, 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 1003, "Where Do We Come From?" No. 1003. It's in the supplement, and you'll have to share. We don't

have enough supplements as yet; but we're working on it. Your part is quite easy—only one note. Kate will teach it to you, but before she does, I want to remind you that this hymn was inspired by this painting. This is "Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?" and it was created by Paul Gauguin while he was in Tahiti in 1897.

Mystery, mystery,  
life is a riddle and a mystery.

Where do we come from? What are we?  
Where are we going?

Where do we come from?

*GREETINGS*

**KRISTI. 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*.

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.

We are pleased to see Aaron Long again. The last time he played for us was some time ago and now he has a new guitar. He chose three pieces from a suite of guitar music that evokes Spanish castles.

*PRELUDE: Torija (Elegia)*

*LIGHTING THE CHALICE*

Mary Hunter, would you light our chalice, please? I think one reason we come to church is to make sense of the world we experience. And in that, we confront our dreams and fears. To accompany the lighting, I bring words of dreams and fears. Let's read them together.

Our dreams and fears  
become entwined  
in stories woven over time  
and shape the truth  
in trembling minds  
that want to know  
beyond all doubt  
what life is all about.

*STORY: Bumblebees Can't Fly*

Whaddya know about bumblebees? We know they are hard workers; we know they are yellow and black; we know they can sting if they get angry, especially if their homes are disturbed.

Some people say that bumblebees cannot fly. But we know they can. At least, I know they can. I have seen a flying bumblebee.

Do you know why people would say that bumblebees are not able to fly? According to some scientific calculations, the wings of bumblebees are too small to carry their weight. And this is true.

*If.* If you use the calculations based on an airplane. A fixed-wing airplane. You know what a fixed-wing airplane is? Here's a drawing of an old airplane, but newer ones are not much different.

Like a jet or a Piper Cub or a Gulfstream. Wings straight out like this. Needs a long runway to take off and land.

But there's another kind of airplane. Do you what it is? A helicopter. Looks like this. It has wings like an airplane, but they are small and they spin around on top of the helicopter.

A bumblebee doesn't look like a helicopter, it looks more like a fat fixed-wing airplane. Here's a bumblebee. So it looks like a fixed-wing plane, but you know what? It flies like a helicopter. It has small wings, but they spin around a little bit to make the bee fly.

No one ever told bumblebees that they couldn't fly. So they just do it! Every time we see a bumblebee fly, we are seeing one of earth's creatures do the seemingly impossible.

We can't fly, no matter how hard we try. Human beings are not airplanes and they are not bumblebees. But we can do what seems impossible. We can do it. As we study history, we read a lot of stories about how people have done things that seemed impossible. Having faith or belief in ourselves and in the power that is within us enables us to do more than we might have ever imagined.

So the next time you see a bumblebee, remember that it is flying, although it seems impossible.

Thanks for listening to my story of bumblebees. And remember that you can do what you want to do if you are dedicated. You can go to your classes now.

*CHILDREN'S RECESSONAL*

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: Siquenza (La Infanta Duerme)*

George Bernard Shaw was born in Ireland in 1856. He dabbled in photography, politics and economics, but made his mark as a playwright. His works show that he was most angered by what he perceived as the exploitation of the working class. He is the only person to have been awarded both a Nobel Prize for Literature (in 1925) and an Oscar (in 1938). And, I suppose, for landing on the cover of *Time*.

At a dinner party Shaw sat next to a young man who proved to be a bore of historic proportions. After suffering through a seemingly interminable monologue, Shaw cut in.

“My dear man,” he said, “It seems that between the two of us, we know everything there is to know in the world.”

“How is that?” asked the young man.

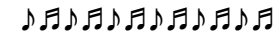
“Well,” said Shaw, “Obviously, you know everything—except that you’re a bore. And I know that!”

At that moment, the hostess appeared. “Are you enjoying yourself, Mr. Shaw?” she inquired.

“Certainly,” he replied. “There is nothing else here to enjoy.”

We’ll collect the morning offering now for the support and ministry

of this church. And whether you are bored or enjoying your time here, please be generous when the plate is 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.*

I am pleased that our government has enough money to pay its bills for the rest of the year, but I pray that our representatives in Washington never play chicken again. Their reckless disregard for the people is disgraceful. I blame the extreme elements within each party for this debacle and the continuing “scorched earth” atmosphere in Washington. I pray we find some way to squelch them or divert their influence.

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 the family  
of police sergeant Tim Chapin, 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: Whaddya Know?*

Anyone hear listen to NPR? That's what I thought. How about on  
Saturday morning? Unh-hunh. Do you listen to the variety quiz  
show with Michael Feldman? Feldman is like a 21<sup>st</sup> century Groucho  
Marx, able to improvise and riff on any topic. And he has an  
uncanny ability to make people laugh just by the tone of his voice.

He begins his show with a long monologue, talks about several  
things, the weather, the town they're in that day, people he met  
before the show, he moves around, maybe tells a joke or two and then  
slowly comes to a stop and he says, "Well, Whaddya Know?" And  
the audience says, "Not much. You?" So let's try that OK?  
So, Whaddya Know? Not much. You?

As it turns out, I don't know much either, and that's what I want to  
explore this morning. One thing I know is that this sermon will not  
be an exhaustive treatment of human knowledge, because I know that  
what I don't know about knowledge is an awful lot more than what  
I do know.

So what we'll do today will just touch on a couple aspects of  
knowledge—just a few thoughts that have been bouncing around in  
my head lately. I offer this to you so that you can think more about  
the topic. If you do, please write me with your conclusions.

The branch of philosophy that deals with knowledge, how we acquire it, what types of knowing there are, is it valid or not, and other aspects of knowledge is called epistemology. Epistemologists get into really arcane discussions of knowledge and what it is. I am not gonna do that. I am gonna simplify greatly right here and define knowledge as a bunch of facts and data gathered through personal experience or reason.

F'rinstance, you don't know how to ride a bicycle until you do it. The knowledge (and skill) needed to ride a bike is not available any other way except through direct experience. Someone could tell you about centrifugal force or Newton's Law of Motion and how to pedal and how to turn by leaning, but you can't know any of that until you do it.

This kind of knowledge is utterly reliable, because we've experienced it. It happened to us. We were there. We know. You know you put on that blue shirt this morning because you experienced it. Now we can be fooled into knowing, I have been hypnotized and I know that it's possible to know something that I can't know. But let's disregard that possibility for this sermon and focus on knowledge acquired through experience.

Or reason. Frinstance, I know that six times eight is forty eight. I know that because I inferred it from my experience when I discovered that two plus two is four. I put two cupcakes on the kitchen table and then I put two pancakes on the table. And then I counted the cakes on the table and discovered I had four cakes.

I repeated this experiment a few times with other objects and soon discovered that labels weren't necessary. Two anythings plus two more anythings always equaled four somethings. Pretty soon, I could *imagine* two plus two equaling four; I didn't need objects. And then I really made a leap when I realized that I could imagine that four plus two made six.

And it wasn't long before I devised multiplication. And that's how I *know* that six times eight is forty eight. I never put eight groups of six cupcakes each on the table and counted them; I didn't have to. I reasoned my way to the knowledge that six time eight is forty eight.

So. What we know is acquired through experience and reason. But I know more than just what I've experienced. At least I say I do. I know that the moon is round, but I've never been there to see it. I know that Poland is east of Germany, but I haven't been there, either. So how do I know that? Well, I don't know really. I *believe* it.

Belief is much more interesting than knowledge, in my opinion, so let's talk a little about belief. Belief is the faculty we have for accepting facts and data without evidence and acting on it as if it were knowledge. In simple terms, belief is knowledge without experience. The relationship between belief and knowledge is that a belief is knowledge if the belief is true.

F'rinstance, I believe that Ron Littlefield is the mayor of Chattanooga, even though I have never met him, never seen him, was not present when he was sworn in and did not personally verify the election results. But all those factors can be checked and it will be found that Ron Littlefield is a real person and was properly sworn in, and actually got more votes than his rival. So I believe it, it is true, and therefore I *know* that Ron Littlefield is the mayor.

A false belief is not knowledge, even if it is sincere. I might believe that the earth is flat, and I can say, "I know the earth is flat, because all my experience tells me it is." However, the shape of the earth can be verified, and it will be seen to be round, making my belief just a belief, and not knowledge. By the same token, a truth that nobody believes is not knowledge, because in order to be knowledge, there must be someone who knows it. Suppose there is a totem pole on the dark side of the moon. It's really there—a twenty-foot totem pole. But no one knows it, so its existence is not knowledge, even though it exists.

Beliefs are sometimes divided into core beliefs, those which are active in your life and dispositional beliefs, those which are developed for the moment. For instance, a simple core belief might be that you believe when you insert your key in the ignition of your car and turn it, the engine will start. Or at least it will try to start. You don't know that this will happen; you know that it *did* happen and you *believe* that it will happen again.

Dispositional beliefs are those developed for some issue. For instance, if I asked you, "Do you believe that tigers wear pink pajamas?" you might answer that they do not, even though you have no knowledge of tigers' sleeping habits, and have never thought about it before now. And aren't likely to again.

Beliefs are powerful things. People will cling to their beliefs, even in the face of evidence that the beliefs are false. Even educated people, well aware of the process by which beliefs form, still strongly cling to their beliefs, and act on those beliefs against their own self-interest.

It is often thought that holding on to one's beliefs in the face of criticism is a noble thing. However, I think your beliefs can and should change. It's proof that you are keeping your eyes open, living fully, and welcoming everything that the world and people around you can teach you. This means that peoples' beliefs should evolve as they gain new experiences.

Unfortunately, they don't always evolve. Sometimes beliefs harden like super glue. For instance, whaddya know of the KKK? Naaahh. I don't mean those guys with pointy heads dressed up in bed sheets. I mean David **Koch**, Charles **Koch** and **Karl** Rove. What do you know of them? Tell ya what I know. Not much. Never met them. Couldn't pick 'em out of a line up. But what I believe is a lot. I believe they are the spawn of Satan. Actually, I believe Karl Rove *is* Satan. I believe they want to destroy the middle class in this country so they can live high on the hog and have the little people

serve them.

And, I'm sad to say, I don't expect my beliefs about the KKK to evolve. I exaggerated what I believe about the KKK—not too much—But isn't that ridiculous? I mean really? How could I, an otherwise open-minded and reasonable person, believe that Karl Rove is the Evil One himself?

I have allowed someone else to shape my beliefs, that's how. It's all the fault of the liberal media, you know. I read a liberal paper, the New York Times, and a schizophrenic newspaper, the Chattanooga Times-Free Press every day. I watch Lawrence O'Donnell and Rachel Maddow maybe once a week. These are the sources of my beliefs about the KKK.

In all fairness, the chances of me meeting the KKK and learning through experience about their devilry are pretty slim. So it's not really a bad thing for me to form beliefs based on the reports I read or hear. It's the only way I will ever learn about some things.

The important thing is to be aware of the bias, because every one is biased. Period. Everyone is biased, even if they are fair and balanced. If you are not aware of the bias, you may seek out information that reinforces your beliefs, and disregard other information that contradicts your beliefs. The beliefs you create from what people tell you can be dangerous, so be aware of what you are doing.

For instance, if the only baseball games you see on TV are ones with the Chicago Cubs, you might come to believe that the Cubs will win the World Series, despite compelling evidence to the contrary.

I am not suggesting that we should read everything available on something before we form our beliefs. I am not anxious to read anything more about Karl Rove and the Koch bottles. I mean Koch Brothers. I know what I need to know about them. What I am saying

is that there is value in understanding the limits of your beliefs and how you acquired them. If you watch only Fox News, then be aware of the subtle ways your beliefs are shaped by Fox News. Likewise if you watch MSNBC.

Faith is a type of belief. It introduces an element of trust. Faith is the confident belief or trust in the truth or trustworthiness of a person, concept or thing. It's something more to say I have faith in my wife than to say I believe in my wife. I believe Kate; she usually tells me the truth. But when I say I have faith in her, I reveal that I trust her. I believe Ron Littlefield too, most of the time, but I don't have much faith in him. I don't know him, so it's difficult to trust him. Faith is a personal thing.

I'll bet that some people in this room put a lot of faith in John F. Kennedy, or Bobby Kennedy or Martin Luther King, Jr. or Barack Obama. I wonder how their faith fared.

I mention faith, because it's easy to develop faith in an unexamined and unquestioned source of information. Although I appreciate their reportage, and I believe what I read in it, if I say I have faith in the New York Times, it seems that I have lost some objectivity that I need in order to assess my beliefs.

Now I want to do a little Q & A. I am gonna ask you a few questions about what you really know. OK?

Do you know the date today? How do you know that? You looked at a calendar? How do you know it is accurate? Or maybe you looked at the newspaper? How do you know it's correct? So you really don't *know* what the date is today, you are taking the word of someone else.

Do you know where you are?

You're at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga and you

know that because you traveled here. It's part of your experience.

Do you know where you live?

You know where you live because you have many times opened the door and entered your house, and no one else has ever claimed ownership. It must be your house. Besides, you have a piece of paper issued by the government that indicates you live there.

Do you know your name? And your age?

Of course you do. You've known it all your life. Your parents told you your name when you were very young and it's always been the same. And you've always known how old you are. Besides, you have a birth certificate issued by the government indicating your name. And a driver's license. And we know that government entities are always correct when it comes to names and birth certificates, right?

Oh. Maybe the government can make a mistake?

OK, but your parents told you your name and they never lie, right? Do you know about Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny and the Tooth Fairy? How do you know about them? Your parents told you?

So your parents did lie to you. At least once. So you don't really *know* your name or your birth date. You *believe* what your parents told you.

Do you know where Barack Obama was born? How do you know that? Oh, you take the word of the state of Hawaii?

OK, sometimes, this can get a little tiresome or silly. In order to get along in this world, you must believe some things, no doubt about it. You are really not compelled to believe that Barack Obama was born in Hawaii, but if you don't, what's the alternative? What's the

alternative if you don't accept what your parents tell you about the day you were born? If you don't believe that Neil Armstrong walked on the moon, what are you gonna do with the millions of people who do?

When I conceived of this topic for a sermon, I had a grandiose vision of preaching about knowledge and belief and faith. I originally thought about creating a courtroom drama and interrogating a "witness" about what he *really* knew and proving that he didn't even know his own name. I had big plans and marvelous ideas.

As I researched the topic, my grand vision slowly faded. I became less sure of what I wanted to say. I realized there was much more to the topic of knowledge than I could, or wanted, to deal with. And I feel sorta incomplete right now, as if I should revisit the topic someday.

What I am pretty sure of is that we need to be honest with ourselves about how we form beliefs. Do we really look at an issue from several perspectives? I don't think we always check out something new from all angles. I think we too often land on the explanation that matches our world view. And we should be honest about that.

And I'll use myself as a good example. Concerning the current political climate and the run-up to the next presidential election, I don't watch Fox. I find Sean Hannity, Glenn Beck, Bill O'Reilly shrill and offensive. I was neutral on Donald Trump until he outed himself as a birther; now, I think he's gone 'round the bend. So I admit to getting information from sources that are not conservative. I admit that my beliefs are shaped in subtle ways by the sources I use to understand the world.

Funny thing, though. I can't take a steady diet of Rachel, Lawrence or even Keith Olbermann. Even though I appreciate their message, after an hour or so, I am spiritually worn out, and my brain is numb. I have a palpable sense of apprehension over what the Republicans

are gonna do next. I think MSNBC may be trying to foment fear in me, just as Fox does.

So we must be honest with ourselves. How do we come to believe what we believe? Do we allow our beliefs to evolve? Or, do we drink from the same well every day and harden our beliefs? Sometimes, I think I can feel mine harden.

I don't think that all our beliefs are as hard as super glue. Maybe some are and maybe others are not. Beliefs can and should evolve, but getting them to do that is very hard work. It's nice to have a place like church where the hard work can be done in the company of others.

Please join me now in singing a new hymn. No. 158, "Praise the Source of Faith and Learning." This is a new hymn for us, but it's not too difficult to sing. Just follow the choir, because they assured me that they know what they're doing.

*HYMN 158, Praise the Source of Faith and Learning*

Praise the source of faith and learning  
that has sparked and stoked the mind  
with a passion for discerning  
how the world has been designed.

Let the sense of wonder flowing  
from the wonders we survey  
keep our faith forever growing  
and renew our need to pray.

Source of wisdom, we acknowledge  
that our science and our art  
and the breadth of human knowledge  
only partial truth impart.

Far beyond our calculation  
lies a depth we cannot sound  
where the purpose for creation  
and the pulse of life are found.

May our faith redeem the blunder  
of believing that our thought  
has displaced the grounds for wonder  
which the ancient prophets taught.

May our learning curb the error  
which unthinking faith can breed  
lest we justify some terror  
with an antiquated creed.

Praise for minds to probe the heavens,  
praise for strength to breathe the air,  
praise for all that beauty leavens,  
praise for silence, music, prayer.

Praise for justice and compassion  
and for strangers, neighbors, friends,  
praise for hearts and lips to fashion,  
praise for love that never ends.

Mary Hunter would you please extinguish our chalice? Please  
read with me.

*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*

You can  
die for it—an idea,  
or the world.

People have done so,  
brilliantly,  
letting their small bodies

be bound to the stake,  
creating  
an unforgettable  
fury of light.

But this morning,  
climbing the familiar hills  
in the familiar  
fabric of dawn,

I thought  
of China,  
and India  
and Europe,  
and I thought

how the sun blazes  
for everyone just  
so joyfully  
as it rises

under the lashes  
of my own eyes, and I thought  
I am so many!  
What is my name?

What is the name  
of the deep breath I would take  
over and over  
for all of us?

Call it whatever you want,  
it is happiness,  
it is another one  
of the ways  
to enter fire.

*POSTLUDE: Turegano (Seranilla)*

Parents, please leave now to rejoin your children and let's enjoy a time of fellowship with the best fair-trade coffee in southeastern Tennessee.