



“Now, I’m a reasonable fellow, but it seems to me that in case after case and time after time, in these labor disputes, the fairer, more enlightened position has always been held by management.”

Who’s Really Laboring?

A Worship Service by the REV. JEFF BRIERE

Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga

September 5, 2010

CONNECTIONS

Welcome to the Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga. My name is Matt Hoyt 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.

Sit still for just a moment and listen to your breathing. When you are moved to speak, please come forward, tell us your name and what’s on your mind. Take a breath after each person has spoken so that we may focus our attention on the moment. And please hold the microphone like a violin bow, not like a baseball bat.



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 360, Here We Have Gathered

GREETINGS

BONNY. 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*.

- 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.

I have two important announcements: This week and the next two are your opportunities to sign up for a small group ministry. The groups start meeting in October and general registration ends on September 12th. Please stop by the table in the fellowship area after church. If you have questions, ask Dez Papendorp or Wendy Sapp.

One small group ministry, venUUeQ, will host a suicide prevention seminar this Friday and Saturday and it’s free and open to the public. Friday night’s session begins at 6:30 and includes a Q & A session and a memorial service. Saturday’s begins at 8:30 and features a panel with our own Dr. Nicky Ozbek. For more details, please ask Steve Hollingsworth or Kristie McKinley.

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.

Catherine Long was inspired by Labor Day to bring us songs that support the hard-working men and women of this country. To begin, she chose a song by James Gordon. This is “Mining for Gold.”

PRELUDE: Mining for Gold

LIGHTING THE CHALICE

_____, would you please light our chalice?

These are the words of Jane Austen. Incline us, O God! To think humbly of ourselves, to be saved only in the examination of our own conduct, to consider our fellow creatures with kindness, and to judge all they say and do with the charity which we would desire from them ourselves.

STORY: Big Words

Do you ever remember me talking to you about Fred Tregaskis? He was the president of this church in 2003 and 2004. He was a good friend to me and I am sorry he’s no longer here. He died in 2006.

One thing he used to tell me is that when I speak to you, I use too many big words. I thought, OK, maybe so. But if you don’t hear big words now and then, if you don’t use them, how will you ever learn them? So I thought carefully about what I say to you, but I didn’t stop using big words.

Do y’all know Jamie Lee Curtis? She is an actress, but she also writes books for children, and she wrote a book called Big Words. I thought you should hear it. Now she wrote this book as one big long poem. And as I read it, when I come to the big word, you’ll see it on the screen. So when it shows up, you say the big word. OK?

I know some big words.

I'll teach them to you.
Although you are small
You can use big words, too.
Big words aren't scary
They're fun to learn.
I was taught once
And now it's your turn.

If you need some time
To just be alone,
For doing weird dancing,
To sit still as a stone,
If someone is there
And you need to pee
Then say loud and clear,
"Hey! I need *privacy!*"

When your mom can't fasten
The brand-new car seat,
This is *impossible* Mom says to us
"Please! We can't leave for school
Till you help find the keys."

If you answer right
When you spell a big word
Your teacher might shout,
"*Stupendous! Superb!*"
And then you can *celebrate*
Laugh and have fun
'Cause you've worked really hard
To get the job done.

When you are at school
And you get into trouble
For chewing your gum
Then exploding a bubble

And you stay inside
When your friends get to play
Your *consequence* is
No recess that day.

When Dad takes you shopping
To buy new shoes
And all of you shout
"This one I choose!"
And the salesman looks angry
He's pretty *irate*
Dad wants us to behave
and *Cooperate*.

When something is perfectly
Right for your age
Like TV and music,
toys all the rage
When a G-rated movie's
The one that you seek
Appropriate is the word Mom will speak.

But many things are too old for you
That lots of your friends may still get to do
Inappropriate is the word your mom picks
When you want to watch PG-13 when you're six.

When you wait and you wait
for your chance at a turn
And your feet are both hot
And starting to burn
And there's still a long way
To the front of the line
Patience is the word you must try to find.

Mixing stuff up from

The kitchen to drink
That looks really gross
And has a big stink
As your green-snotted brother's
Nose starts to get picked
"Disgusting!" you'd cry.
It means Yucky and Ick.

To *understand* means
You know when we say
"A street is for cars—
It's not safe to play."

You *understand* cows
Make milk and not juice.
That you don't run on "Duck."
But you do run on "Goose."

Inconsiderate is
The word Dad would pick.
If you woke up Mom
When she's feeling sick.

But if you brought her
A flower and tea
A *considerate* person
Is what he would see.

I'm *responsible* you say
When you pick up your toys
And walk the dog, Leo
And try not to make noise.

Responsible people
try not to forget
To water Mom's bonsai

Or the table to set.

Persevere is to try and to try
Even though you might
Want to give up and cry
When doing a puzzle
That puzzles your mind
You *persevere* till
The right piece you find.

Different means
Nobody's ever the same
All bodies are *different*
And so are all brains
Different is what
Makes the world so great
Different is never
Something to hate

But not all big words
are as long as the rest
There are three—though short—
That I love the best.

Family is where we all belong
Keeping us safe, making us strong
Family is yours, no matter—whatever!
We care about you for ever and ever

Respect is the way we all treat each other
Mother to father, father to mother
Brother to sister, sister to brother
And brother and sister and sister and brother.

Love is the biggest BIG WORD of all
Four little letters that helps you walk tall

Love is your family, your siblings, your friends
Love is your ocean without any end

Thanks for listening to my story this morning. 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: Which Side Are You On?

From time to time, I hear jokes about ministers or priests or rabbis or recently, about imams. Sometimes they're funny. So I don't mind telling you this story about a lawyer. And a minister and a doctor. I can do this, you see, because like Detective Fontana, I'm authorized.

So a minister, a doctor, and a lawyer go out for a cruise on the Tennessee River one day and—wouldn't ya know—they're boat springs a leak and manage to stay alive only because they climb aboard a raft that comes drifting by. In time, they chance upon an island. There are signs of human habitation, but no persons in view.

Since the drift is away from the island, the lawyer volunteers to swim ashore and bring help. Just as he is about to dive into the river, the minister urges a word of parting prayer, so a brief religious service

is held.

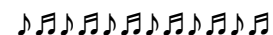
Then the counselor dives in and swims off to the island. Eagerly the minister and the doctor watch their companion swim away.

Presently they are horrified to see a huge shark making directly for the lawyer. At the last moment, however, the shark veers away and the swimmer is saved. Later, another shark comes into view and then veers sharply away when he comes close to the swimming lawyer.

“There!” says the minister triumphantly. “Observe the answer to our prayers. Because of our prayers, the Lord has preserved our friend from the hungry sharks.”

“Well, that may be,” says the doctor said dubiously, “but I'm inclined to think of it as a professional courtesy.”

We'll collect the morning offering now, for the support and ministry of this church. And it doesn't matter if you are a doctor, a minister or a shark—I mean lawyer—thank you so much for your generosity. If you have an 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.



HYMN OF THANKSGIVING

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 am heartened by the news from Chile, that drilling a hole to extract the trapped miners may proceed much quicker than first believed. Yet I pray for the miners and their families.

And beyond the miners, this Labor Day, I pray for all working people, in this country and abroad, that they have a safe and healthy working environment, that they have an appropriate time to work and an appropriate time to rest, that they have an occasional holiday, that they are not forced to work at a very young age and that they are paid an appropriate wage for the work they do. In short, I pray that managers treat their workers as men, not machines. I pray that working women are treated as sisters, not slaves.

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 trapped miners in Chile, 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

POEM

“Song of the Builders”
by Mary Oliver
from *Why I Wake Early*

On a summer morning
I sat down on a hillside
to think about God—
a worthy pastime.

Near me, I saw a single cricket;
it was moving the grains of the hillside
this way and that way.

How great was its energy,

how humble its effort.

Let us hope
it will always be like this,
each of us going on
in our inexplicable ways
building the universe.

SERMON: Who Is Really Laboring?

I have been thinking about Labor Day. You know that song from the sixties, “Alfie”? What’s it all about, Al-fie? That’s the way I have thought about Labor Day. “What’s it all about, Labor Day”?

Every other secular and religious holiday I understand. I know what Valentine’s Day is all about; I get May Day and Easter, I know what’s behind President’s Day and Memorial Day, Christmas and Mother’s Day, Thanksgiving and Father’s Day. I am not sure about Groundhog Day, but then again, it’s not a very big deal, except in Punxatawney, Pennsylvania.

OK, do you understand Labor Day? What’s it all about?

The Department of Labor dedicates the first Monday in September to the social and economic achievements of American workers. Labor Day is a yearly national tribute to the contributions workers have made to the strength, prosperity, and well-being of our country.

That’s all well and good, but aside from presidential proclamations, certificates and speeches, how do we honor “the contributions workers have made to the strength, prosperity, and well-being of our country.” And what about the contributions of non-workers?

It has always seemed a little odd to me, this Labor Day. Perhaps if I had been alive in 1882, when the first Labor Day was observed, I

would have felt differently; and that, I discovered, was the key to Labor Day’s meaning—at least for me. I’m too young to appreciate it. More about that in a moment.

I set out to understand Labor Day. One way to do that is to figure out what other people think about it. And one way to do that is to examine the images people create to express their feelings about Labor Day. I have learned that what people say about something is not as telling as the images they create about it.

So I did a Google search for images associated with Labor Day to see what people thought of it. You may know what I am talking about, but if not, I ran a search for all the images on the internet that are titled or subtitled or connected with the phrase “Labor Day.” Well, the search returned about 65 million photos, drawings, paintings, and clip art images. Here are a few that really express what we feel about Labor Day.

I found historical images like these. Parades, downtown locations, slogans, speeches and so forth. 1948 President Truman 1942 Detroit. First one

I found some mythological images, some icons. You know an icon, right? An image that symbolizes something more than just itself, often with a lot of mythology attached.

This one struck me as a little too close to the hammer and sickle of Communism.

Then I found some recent images. Can you say patriotic?

I also found some that blatantly used the sexual allure of an attractive woman to wish me a Happy Labor Day, but Kate said I couldn’t show those to you. Ask me after the service if you want a verbal description.

The origin of our Labor Day holiday is this: It began as a way to honor the labor movement, a loose-knit confederation of unions and trade groups which wanted to elevate the status of hard-working men such as carpenters, miners, welders, machinists, bricklayers, and other occupations that generally called for a lot of upper-body strength.

Some records show that Peter McGuire, general secretary of the Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners and a co-founder of the American Federation of Labor, was first in suggesting a day to honor those “who from rude nature have delved and carved all the grandeur we behold.” In other words, a day to honor those who make something using basic materials.

It seems also that Matthew Maguire proposed the holiday while serving as secretary of the Central Labor Union in New York. What is clear is that the Central Labor Union adopted a Labor Day proposal and appointed a committee to plan a demonstration and picnic. The first Labor Day was celebrated on September fifth, 1882, in New York City, and the holiday quickly spread across the country and was made a national holiday in 1894.

The back story is that President Grover Cleveland decided that reconciliation with the labor movement was a top political priority. He did that because 34 workers died at the hands of the US military and US Marshals during the Pullman Strike in Chicago. Fearing more conflict, legislation making Labor Day a national holiday was rushed through Congress and signed into law a mere six days after the end of the strike.

What happens on Labor Day, or what has happened on Labor Day was set by that first observance in 1882: A street parade to exhibit “the strength and esprit de corps of the trade and labor organizations,” followed by a festival for the recreation and amusement of the workers and their families. Speeches by prominent men and women were introduced later, as more emphasis was placed upon the

economic and civic—and dare I say, the political— significance of the holiday.

As we noted from some of the images, the character of the Labor Day celebration has undergone a change in recent years. Labor Day addresses by union officials, industrialists, educators, clerics and government officials are not given wide coverage in newspapers, radio and television as they once were. Presidents don’t go to Detroit to address the auto workers and there was no parade in downtown Chattanooga, although, with the advent of Volkswagen, you’d think there would be a resurgence of pride in auto industry workers.

Today, Labor Day is an excuse for a day off and a picnic, a chance to take a nap in the hammock one last time before autumn sets in and we’re all chased indoors by cold weather. I’ll freely admit that has been my understanding of Labor Day—until I began looking into its history and images. What I learned, as I said before, is that I’m too young to get it, just as my grandchildren will not understand the counter-cultural milieu of the sixties and the demonstrations against the Vietnam War.

In 1882, just thirteen years after the Civil War, there were pretty stark cultural and class divisions between people. There were a few very wealthy clans, the Vanderbilts, the Morgans and so forth, there were many barely-educated people who farmed the earth for a living, there were a few shopkeepers and there were workers who had migrated to the cities to take advantage of newly-created jobs in the construction industry, shipbuilding and the like.

Working conditions were, by today’s standards, appalling. Children worked long hours in factories, miners risked their lives every day, living conditions were nothing you and I would endure and the pay was barely acceptable. There were no benefits. That’s what the labor movement and trade unions set out to change.

And they succeeded, in my opinion, although the mining industry

could improve its safety procedures even more. By the time I was born, in 1948, the goals of the labor movement were within reach. And by 1968, when I began to understand society, for teamsters, auto workers, stevedores, lumberjacks, brickmasons, welders, machinists, carpenters and others, safety was first, pay was appropriate, benefits were usually available and working hours were humane.

The example set by the unions and labor movement migrated to all the other professions that have proliferated since the turn of the 20th century: technicians, the service industry, broadcasting, salespeople, teachers, civil service, transportation, publishing, the advertising industry, and all the other occupations that make this society run pretty well and which don't require a lot of upper-body strength.

With a lot of help from two world wars and a booming mid-century economy, the labor movement lifted its members into the middle class and that class included my father and mother, who, after World War II, worked in the aerospace industry and in social service. And me. By the time I began working, I enjoyed a clean and safe environment, decent hours and, in my naive opinion, more money than I ever had in my entire life. I was earning \$1.25 an hour in 1965 and got a raise to \$1.60 when I became an assistant manager at the flagship Burger Chef restaurant in Indianapolis Indiana. The unions and the labor movement had achieved their objectives.

So Labor Day, for me, never meant too much. But Labor Day is still here and I think I ought to find some meaning for it. The first thing that comes to mind are those who wish to labor, but are unable to find appropriate work. I say appropriate, because I believe there are always jobs available, albeit not desirable ones.

A textile worker who is laid off in Dalton is not a good match for the physical therapist position that opens in Ringgold. Further, I am aware that the appropriate job may not be available where the unemployed worker is. The textile worker in Dalton probably is unable to take the textile job in Wyoming. Or Singapore.

The present contraction in our economy is certainly putting a crimp in many people's lives. Having no job not only messes with your pocketbook, it messes with your mind. When you meet someone new around here, after your name and the church you attend, people will want to know your occupation. It's not only other people who use our occupations to define us; we do it to ourselves.

I'm a minister. I was a student, a salesperson, an announcer, a writer, a soldier, a drop-out. Each one of those occupations made me think differently about myself. When I was unemployed—it's happened more than once—I had real negative thoughts about Jeff Briere. And yet, I was still Jeff Briere—the same me I was when I was employed. Just Jeff Briere without a job.

If you're unemployed, I am not gonna tell you that you shouldn't feel bad about your situation. Feeling bad, feeling devastated, that's part of the experience, I think. However, I think you ought to know that your identity is not compromised by loss of employment. It's a little like grieving the death of a close friend. We are connected to each other and the rest of the universe in many ways. With a death, with a job loss, we lose one connection to the interdependent web of existence. That's painful. Just think of cutting off your thumb. To recover, to feel a part of life again, we have to build that connection with other people or with a new job. That's hard work. Just think of trying to prepare dinner without your thumb.

In my thinking about Labor Day, I asked, "Who are the laborers today?"

Got an answer? Who are the laborers today?

The answer I got is that today, they are workers. "OK, who are the workers?" Well, nearly everyone. Convenience store clerks, airline attendants, travel agents, insurance adjustors, auditors, golf pros, librarians, homemakers, janitors, nurses, security guards, sous chefs, bank tellers, waiters and vice-presidents. And ministers.

Some people work with their hands, some with their feet, some with their voice and some with their heads. When I was in broadcasting, I worked with my ears. But we're all workers. We're all workers. The labor movement, in my opinion, succeeded in wiping out artificial class lines that put all the blue-collar folks over here and the white-collar folks over here.

However, one distinction remains, that of management and workers. In these days when short-term profits are uppermost in the minds of the stockholders, I am concerned that management will bank those profits at the expense of the workers. It seems to me that it has become too easy for the human managers to hide behind an inhuman corporation and forget that other human beings are out there on the assembly line or the oil rig or the sales floor.

Two examples come to mind. One is Wal-Mart, which to hear some tell it, has a company-wide culture of devaluing the work of women. If so, that cannot stand. We'll see how it plays out in court. As the recent oil rig explosion that killed eleven workers and injured seventeen shows us, when management cuts corners, takes short cuts or ignores safety procedures, the workers take it on the chin or worse. Nowadays, the environment takes it on the chin.

Take a look at the front cover of the service bulletin. Sometimes it's very hard for one side to understand the other's predicament. Management is myopic and workers are self-centered—isn't that the typical stereotype? The self-centeredness of the unions in Great Britain killed off the British auto industry and nearly did the same in this country. On the other hand, some mining companies in West Virginia are managed with an eye first for profit and second for safety. I suspect profit first is what is driving the mountaintop removal method for energy companies. Contrary to the cover of the bulletin, management has *not* always held the more enlightened position. Nor have the workers, for that matter.

In some cases, especially in those occupations of high risk, like

mining and deep-sea oil drilling, I come down on the side of strong regulation and collective bargaining to insure fairness. In my experience, letting the company regulate itself, letting the market decide, is just too dangerous for the workers. It's akin to letting the fox guard the henhouse. In risky environments, I believe that management should assume more responsibility for the protection of the workforce. Put people first, production second and profits third.

And that's the way we should honor the hard-working men and women of this country on Labor Day.

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: Deportee

Catherine asked me to give you the back story on the song she chose for the postlude, but never hearing the song before, I had to research it. "Deportee" or "Plane Wreck at Los Gatos" was written by Woody Guthrie about a plane crash on January 28, 1948 near Los Gatos Canyon, in California. The crash killed 32 people, 4 Americans and 28 migrant farm workers who were being deported to Mexico. Guthrie was inspired to write the song by what he considered the mistreatment of the passengers after the accident. He was struck by the fact that radio and newspaper accounts of the event did not give the victims' names, but instead referred to them as "deportees." Guthrie's poem was set to music and given a haunting melody by a

schoolteacher named Martin Hoffman.