

*Mother's Day*  
*A Worship Service by the*  
*REV. JEFF BRIERE*  
*Unitarian Universalist*  
*Church of Chattanooga*  
*May 8, 2011*

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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 191, "Now I Recall My Childhood."

*HYMN 191, Now I Recall My Childhood*

Now I recall my childhood  
when the sun burst to my bedside  
with the day's surprise  
faith in the marvelous  
bloomed anew each dawn  
flowers bursting fresh  
within my heart each day.

Then looking on the world

with simple joy,  
on insects, birds and beasts,  
and common weeds,  
the grass and clouds  
had fullest wealth of awe,  
my mother's voice  
gave meaning to the stars.

Now when I turn  
to think of coming death,  
I find life's song  
in star-songs of the night,  
in rise of curtains  
and new morning light,  
in life reborn  
in fresh surprise of love.

*GREETINGS*

**FRANK. 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.

For service music today, Kate chose music from Disney films. The songs she chose either echo motherhood or in some way, reflect mothering. This is "Candle on the Water" from *Pete's Dragon*.

*PRELUDE: Candle on the Water*

*LIGHTING THE CHALICE*

Elaine Hill, would you light our chalice, please?

The reading that I bring to light our chalice is by Lyall Watson. Mr. Watson has decided to bless the wind instead of curse it and that is something for us to think about in the aftermath of the big wind that came through here last week.

Blessed be the Wind!

Without wind, most of Earth would be uninhabitable. The tropics would grow so unbearably hot that nothing could live there, and the rest of the planet would freeze. Moisture, if any existed, would be confined to the oceans, and all but the fringe of the great continents would be desert. There would be no erosion, no soil, and for any community that managed to evolve despite these rigors, no relief from suffocation by their own waste products.

But with the wind, Earth comes truly alive. Winds provide the circulatory and nervous systems of the planet, sharing out energy and information, distributing both warmth and awareness, making something out of nothing.

All wind's properties are borrowed. Our knowledge of it comes at secondhand, but it comes strongly. And this combination of a force that cannot be apprehended, but nevertheless has an undeniable existence, was our first experience of the spiritual. A crack in the cosmos that widened to let the tide of consciousness flow through.

We are the fruits of the wind-and have been seeded, irrigated, and cultivated by its craft.

*STORY: What Moms Can't Do*

I'd like to know if your experience is the same as mine. When I was your age, I was very impressed with my mother. She was bigger than I was, she was older than I was, and she was smarter than I was. She could drive a car, vote for President, cook the best soft-boiled eggs, wash clothes, hang them out to dry, go to work, drink a martini, and solve cross word puzzles with her eyes closed.

She went overseas with the Red Cross and fought in World War II, she knew how to ride a horse and coax it jump over a hurdle on the run, she flew to New York twice a year for her job and when she was young, she had so many boyfriends, she was never home on Saturday night.

She was Wonder Woman. I was very impressed. I thought she could do anything and everything.

But I was wrong. There were some things she could not do. I could outrun her. There were times she couldn't catch me. She couldn't play mumblety-peg with pocket knife. She didn't swim more than a few strokes, she couldn't carry a tune in a basket and she couldn't thread a nightcrawler on a fish hook even if she had a diagram. In time I learned that she did not have eyes in the back of her head, like I always thought. And I learned that sometimes, when conditions and lies were just right, she swallowed whatever I told her.

Now I wonder, is your mom like that?

I always moms could do anything. But in time, I learned what moms can't do.

There are lots of things that regular people can do but moms can't.

Moms can't wait to wake up kids in the morning.

They can't make a bed without a lot of help.

Moms can never pick out the right clothes.

And they have trouble keeping things cleaned up.

Moms can't have Yummos with purple marshmallows for breakfast.  
Only coffee, tea, yogurt or granola.

They need guidance when packing a lunch.

Moms can't run very fast.

Sometimes they can't hear themselves think. (Whatever that means.)

Moms are not good at saying good-bye.

Especially to the teacher.

Moms can't push grocery carts fast enough.

And sometimes they need help opening doors.

Moms don't know how to keep salamanders in their shirts.

Or toads in their pockets.

Moms aren't very good tacklers.

And they can't make a basket without a lot of help.

Moms are easy to squirt, but they have a hard time squirting you.

Usually.

Moms really don't like to watch movies alone.

And sometimes they need protection during the scary parts.

A mom feels much better with someone on her lap.

Moms can't let go of a hug without a kiss.

There are lots of things moms can't do. More than you can count.  
But there's one thing they do better than anyone else...

And that's love you.

When she goes around the bend, when she can't hear herself think,  
when she loses it, you may wonder if your mother loves you. Let me  
assure you, she does. No matter what.

Your mother—your father—your parents—they love you; they do.  
Sometimes, they may act like they don't love you, sometimes you  
may think they forgot about you, you may argue with them, you may  
want to run away, or you may wish you lived in Italy, but all that is  
part of living in a family.

It might be helpful at times like these to recognize that your mother  
is living her life and yours at the same time. She's gotta juggle  
home, food, clothing, recreation, and everything else in every day to  
make a good life for herself and for you. That's not easy. I don't  
say this to make you pity your mother, just to recognize that she loves  
you, even though it may sometimes be hard to see that.

Thanks for listening to my story and remember that your parents,  
especially your mother, love you. You can go to your classes now.

*CHILDREN'S RECESSINAL*

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: Baby Mine*

Once a month, this congregation gives away the entire offering to another agency working to make the world a better place. We'll do that this morning as we share the plate with the Chambliss Children's Home and Shelter.

The Chambliss Center began informally in 1872. A group of women from several churches began caring for families in need. They did this for six years, until a yellow fever epidemic hit Chattanooga in 1878. They formally organized, drew up a charter, and began work. Their first charges were young girls who were left without homes or families because of the epidemic, and who had been staying in rooms provided by a saloon owner. The women rented a house, and began their mission of helping children.

Today the Chambliss Center comprises two programs on one campus on Gillespie Road in Chattanooga.

The Children's Home is an Early Childhood Education and Care Program, that operates 24 hours per day, 365 days per year. This unique program serves children from six weeks to twelve years of age, with all fees based on the parent's income. There is a strong emphasis on early learning to insure that when children graduate from this program to attend pre-k or kindergarten, they have been given the best possible start in life.

The second program is the Chambliss Shelter. This is a residential home program for children under 18 who have been removed from their home for various reasons. Children stay at the Chambliss Shelter or in foster homes until the problems at home can be resolved, until another family member is found to care for the child, or until the child is placed can be adopted.

We'll collect the morning offering now for the support of the Chambliss Children's Home and Shelter. 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.*

In my prayers this morning, I am conscious of more than 300 people who died in this week's super-storm and the thousands who lost their homes, relatives, pets and possessions.

We are lucky people, you and I. We are the luckiest people in the world. We are here, alive and in pretty good shape, all things considered.

We have had some experiences this week, Kate and I. We lost power for nine days. No refrigerator. No telephone. No garbage disposal. No dishwasher. No oven. No TV. No hot water. No internet connection!

We felt as if we were reliving the life of our great-grandparents.

We learned a lot this week. We learned to cook anything and everything in a 10-inch cast iron pan on a propane camp stove. We learned to love cold showers. I learned that I could make hot water by laying the garden hose in the sun. We learned to do what mattered before sundown. We learned to use candles and flashlights and we learned to drive around, burning gas just to recharge our cell phones. We actually got tired of going to Starbucks to check e-mail.

More than once, the minor deprivations I suffered provoked some major outbursts of grumpiness from me. Simply, I over-reacted and went over-the-top in my relations with some people. And I offer everyone a blanket apology for my inability to hold my temper in a crisis.

We were inconvenienced is all. Put out, not put upon. Disturbed, not displaced. We were annoyed, not annihilated.

All week long, we had a house that kept us warm and dry. We had food, a bed, running water and a car. We had our stuff. We had everything except electricity.

We are thankful to have a house without a tree laying across it. We are thankful the real big tree twenty feet from our house fell away from our house. We are thankful. We are also chastened and chagrined that we carped all week long about our petty annoyances, when homes were wrecked and people killed.

It's tempting to question why you are spared when your neighbor was ruined. It's tempting to make sense of a tornado's destruction. It's tempting, like a chocolate éclair. But if you eat that stuff, you'll be sorry. There are events in this world and in this life that flat-out cannot be justified, like last week's tornados. Explained, sure. We can explain a tornado, but it makes no sense. And you'll lose your senses trying to figure it out and justify why this house is standing and that one is flattened.

I believe it is better to make peace with destruction and death and move on to the clean-up and restoration part of the story. I believe that we must accept that death is a part of life, that destruction is a part of development. Nothing lasts forever, nothing. What endures, though, are human relationships and love. Better, I think, to prop those up than lament what fell down.

Amid the devastation, there were moments of grace. Just yesterday, two women stopped in front of our house. They were from Cleveland. They had a chainsaw.

Without so much as a "by your leave," they began to cut up the giant tree that had fallen partly in our yard, partly in our neighbor's yard. The younger woman cut; the older one stacked the limbs at the curb.

The older woman told us a story. "When I was in third grade, a tornado destroyed my neighborhood—all except my house. I know it's probably survivor guilt, but I just had to help." "

We just want to help," the younger woman said, "so you won't have to pay a tree service to cut it up and take it away."

We are lucky people, you and I. We are the luckiest people in the world. We are here, alive and in pretty good shape, all things considered. And there are good people living with us in this world.

Osama Bin Laden is dead. I am not dancing in the streets, but I do not regret his death. He was a bad man, no question about it. I am somewhat taken aback with the pictures of people rejoicing at the death of a human being. One with a face and a name. Dancing on VE Day is understandable, because our enemy was anonymous, but dancing in the street when a person with a name and a face dies strikes me as revenge-driven faux patriotism and mildly xenophobic.

I am relieved that one misguided human being can no longer visit his hell on other people. I pray that his death does not incite his followers to more violence or to see him as a martyr. I pray his death will help cripple the evil which he instituted. I pray that the American people do not focus hatred upon Muslims or glorify his death. I pray that this death will not make Muslims the world over see America as an evil power. I pray that the death of Osama Bin Laden allows us as a country, and the world we inhabit, to move past old fears and toward a greater peace.

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 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: Mothers Who Turned Out Right*

I suppose your mother taught you many things. How to cook, maybe;

how to write, or how to appreciate a good book.

My Mother taught me about *Anticipation...*

“You just wait ’til your father gets home.”

My Mother taught me to *Question my Actions...*

“What were you thinking? Answer me when I talk to you!

My Mother taught me *Logic...*

“If you fall out off that swing and break your neck, you won’t be able to eat this chocolate cake I’m baking.”

My Mother taught me *Medical Science...*

“Don’t cross your eyes, they will freeze that way.”

My Mother taught me to *Think Ahead...*

“If you don’t pass your spelling test, you’ll never get a good job.”

My Mother taught me *Independence...*

“When that lawn mower cuts off your toes, don’t come running to me.”

My Mother taught me how to *Become an Adult...*

“If you don’t eat your vegetables, you’ll never grow up.”

My Mother taught me about *Genetics...*

“You must get it from your father.”

My Mother taught me about my *Roots...*

“Shut the door. Were you born in a barn?”

My Mother taught me about *The Wisdom that Comes with Age...*

“When you get to be my age, you will understand.”

And my Mother taught me about *Justice...*

“One day you’ll have kids, and I hope they turn out just like you...Then you’ll see what it’s like!”

I learned much from my mother and I guess that you did, too. I learned how to make a perfect soft-boiled egg, how to make French Toast, how to iron a shirt, and how to ride a bicycle. I learned how to appreciate the spoken and written word. I also learned concepts such as service, devotion and duty. My understanding of women’s issues, like wage discrimination and promotion policies, are rooted in my mother’s life and experiences.

It’s not all a garden of roses, though. My emotional connection to my mother is complicated. She was needy and I didn’t have what she needed. I am not complaining nor do I pity myself or her. If we use Donna Reed or June Cleaver as the model mom, then my mother didn’t measure up. And, I suppose, every mother has her issues.

Sometimes mothers get it right; sometimes, they get it partly right and sometimes, they are better at doing something else. Today, I want to hold up some mothers who got it right. At least in some respects. I’d like to share with you a few words from children about their mothers.

Would the first five readers come forward, please?

I asked several people to read short passages written by children who

did well in this life and who trace their success to the influence of their mothers. The readers are not talking about their own mothers. These are brief glimpses into the lives of mothers who got it right. If you want to know more About the mothers and the children, see me after the service.



Mother had determination because when you look, every aspect of what she has done, she was always determined to achieve the goal she has in mind. It didn't matter what distractions occurred along the way because she was determined to maintain a positive attitude so she could stick to her challenge until it's done.

Along with that, I would say Mother has a lot of integrity. I remember that before I left for college one of her comments was "Whatever you do, make sure it is okay for your actions to be the headline in the morning paper or the lead story on the six o'clock news. Whatever you do, make sure it is something you would be proud for the rest of the world to know about."



Mother made me feel as if I were the most important child to her, and yet I have six siblings who would say the same thing. She made us feel special by making time for each of us.

I had a defining moment about how my mother was connected to me and my siblings when, after my second child, I realized that these two kids were mine for the rest of my life. And I remember thinking that my parents had seven ways to say "I love you" to me and all my siblings. That is when I realized I could have my mother as a friend. After that I started sitting with her more often at the table, just talking to her about things I was feeling. And it's because of her example that I try and make time for each of my children as individuals, and that I don't choose one over the other.



My mother is street smart and has good core values of resourcefulness, honesty, and kindness. Everything she knows she basically taught herself, because of that, she can figure out how to get something done. It seems like other mothers were always waiting for their husbands to get home to fix something, but that was never the case with Mother. She could fix a tire and the plumbing or put on a wedding reception. She would just figure out how to get things done and she'd do them, and I think I learned from her how to get things done.



Living on our ranch, I had nobody to play with, so I fooled around with Mama and Daddy or I rode this horse and imagined I was anybody I wanted to be. But then anything I did in Cross Plains Mama knew about it by the time I got home. Well, one Sunday I rode on the back of a motorcycle in town, and when Mama found out about it, she was livid. She had just given me hell about it, when my aunt came up and started talking about what I'd done. I was in the other room and I heard Mama defending me. So when my aunt left I said to Mama, "Why did you just give me hell about this and then defend me to your sister?" She put her arm around me and said, "Honey, you need to remember this about your mother, every crow thinks hers is the blackest."



Mother had a poem for everything, and it was a wonderful, rich inheritance that marks my life. We lived with words and poetry so I have a heritage of words that were spoken in our home; I've earned my living with words, as a reporter, a journalist, an author, and a public speaker, and it all springs from her. But Mother was also a reader. I remember she'd get everything cleaned up early on

Thursdays because that was the day we got the *Saturday Evening Post*. Her dream was to crawl up in bed, have an apple, and read without getting interrupted She cherished that time.



The next group of readers can come up here now. I've told this story before, but it bears repeating. My mother grew up in a household of privilege, but she didn't let that stop her from serving. Her family had a cook, a chauffeur and a maid. My mother went to private schools and drank from crystal stem ware. So you wouldn't be surprised if she stayed home and read newspaper accounts of World War II.

But no. She joined the American Red Cross and worked as a soldier's aide in Europe. She traveled with a field hospital attached to General Patton's Third Army. She wrote letters for soldiers who couldn't use their arms or read to ones who couldn't see.

After the war, she worked for awhile in a department store as the hosiery buyer. But she spent most of her working life as a case worker for the American Red Cross. And that's where I think I get my ethic of service.



The other day I was watching *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and I realized that I might have discovered the Rosetta Stone of my mother's life. It was that movie. *Snow White* was released in 1937 when Mother was about seven years old, and I suspect it left a big impression on her at a time when she was young and grappling with assimilating as a first generation Mexican-American girl.

I see the scene of Snow White sweeping the dwarfs' cabin, and I see my mother sweeping the house. I see Snow White's tears, and I feel my mother's presence. I hear Snow White's laugh, and I hear my Mother's laugh. Mother would sing songs from the movie to us

when I was young, and she had that tiny falsetto, soprano-like Snow White tone as she'd "hum a merry tune" while working.

I remember as a child she would tell me, "You have to eat your beets because that's why Snow White had such rosy cheeks." So as I try to figure out the things in life that impressed my Mother to be a certain way, I see a lot in that film.



I have an early memory of Mother playing in a softball league. I must have been four or five years old, but I remember thinking how neat it was she could do that. She played third base, and I can still see her in her yellow T-shirt, jeans with the legs rolled up, and a baseball cap. I remember her assuming that athletic position at third base where she'd be down and ready for the ball to be hit to her. So I assumed everybody's mom played baseball, and I was really shocked when I got out of that town and realized that not everybody was having the same experiences.

I think my mom would have been the kind of person I would like to have on a team, because she has the qualities that make good team members—she's competitive, focused, and hard working. At 79, she golfs every day and is passionate about that. She gets up in the morning to go out to the course, and if there happens to be another guy out there then she plays with him, but if not, it doesn't matter. She just plays, because for Mom, golf is simply about making the next shot.



I remember Mother and I were talking one day and I said we were just poor people, and she said, "No, we aren't poor, we just don't have any money." I always think of that because it defines her attitude. That was Mother's philosophy, always putting things in the context of how she was going to deal with them.

She just had a great sense of balance. For instance, Mother's idea of cleaning was she'd get up Saturday morning and roll up the carpet and put it in the corner. She'd take down the curtains and blinds then tell us kids to clean the house. Then she'd leave. That's what I mean about a great sense of balance.

Once I came home from school and told Mother that a friend of mine gets a nickel for all the A's she made. I said, "You never give us any money for grades." She said, "Listen, child, I get up every morning and go to work and get a check, and you get up every morning and go to school and bring home good grades. That's my job and that's your job."



I don't think of Mama as unique; she was a good mother who gave us an ethical grounding and a sense of discipline. I wouldn't say we were ideal kids, but we didn't misbehave. We all had our duties like sweeping, dusting, setting or clearing the table, and washing dishes. And we were expected to help because she was Mama and we believed in her authority. If Mama said we couldn't do something, we couldn't do it. If she were in this room today, I'd still say "Yes, Ma'am" and "No, Ma'am."

Now I don't want it to sound too dreary, because we were a happy family, but when I was in high school I had two skirts and some blouses and that was it. But when I was inducted into the National Honor Society in high school, Mother saw that I had a new dress. But she didn't have one so she didn't go.

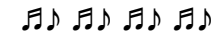


When I was sick, Mother would always bring me a tray with a flower, soup, ginger ale, and soda crackers. And I remember that she put her hands on my forehead and they felt smooth and cool. You know, when you're sick with a fever it feels so good to have these cool, comforting hands on your forehead. And when I can conjure that feeling, it makes me feel safe.

I remember her hands being so graceful and elegant, so lady-like. My grandfather was a jeweler, but my grandmother did not like jewelry, so he gave my mother many unusual pieces of jewelry. And I remember she always had on suits and beautiful jewelry and would let look at her fancy dresses and play with her jewelry.



Awhile back, Kate formed a choir of women to sing today, and the song they have prepared is "Turn Around," by Harry Belafonte, Alan Greene and Malvina Reynolds. The song has been covered many times, even by me. It was one of the first songs I learned when I began to play guitar. It peaked at number twenty-seven on Billboard and number thirty on Cashbox in December 1963.



The next group of readers can come up here now. When I was young, I followed my mother to work many times. I was a member of the Junior Red Cross. I had a pin and an ID card and everything. My duties were to help anyone in the chapter house who asked. So I did a lot of scut work for case workers and secretaries. To be completely honest, my reasons for volunteering at the chapter house were not wholly altruistic. It was a great place to meet girls.

When I was in high school my mother bought a 1965 Ford Fairlane 500. The big option was a seat belt. She would embarrass the hell out of me in that car. 1965, right? The car had a radio we'd be driving along and she tune in some station playing the Beatles or the Doors or Jefferson Airplane. And she'd get this wicked gleam in her eye and grin at me. Then she'd mock the dances and gyrations everyone did when that rock music played. She would do this stupid movement with her arm. I will try to replicate it, but only she could do it. Anyway, that's what she did and I would just about die of embarrassment.



I remember that when I was sick, my mother would rub *Mentholatum* on my chest, and I can remember how nice that felt. I got into this tattoo stage one time, and I came home with a smiley face drawn in permanent marker on my hand. It would not come off with soap and water; it took nail polish remover to get it off. So it was highly unpleasant, and of course I got the lecture while she was removing it. She cared enough to fix the problem, and she did it with patience.



Mom’s soul is generous and without regret, and I think I’d describe her soul as the color yellow because it’s so bright. In fact she loves sunsets more than sunrises because she finds them more colorful.

Since I was little we have gone to the beach almost every summer and crabbed and fished and played. But one image I always see in my mind is me playing in the background, picking up shells, and looking over and seeing Mom.

There might be different people in and out of the scene, but there she is sitting at the water’s edge in her yellow bathing suit with an ice chest full of boiled crabs beside her. And she is eating crabs, throwing their shells back in the ocean to feed the other animals, and seagulls.

And it is sunset.



I remember when I got crosswise with one of the adults at school, but Mother’s line to me was, “That person’s an adult and you’re a child.” Basically she was saying I needed to sit down and be quiet. It was only years later that I found out my mother had actually put her own job in jeopardy to defend me, but I didn’t see that. She was a teacher in the school, and knew what to do. And since there was only one school, where else would she have worked? So when I heard how

Mother had taken up for me at school, I saw her as a lioness protecting me at the chance of costing her a job.



Mama was resourceful. She always came up with something to earn extra money so she could provide us with better things. When we were little, the school put in a cafeteria, and most kids got free lunches, but we owned land so we didn’t get them. Well, Mama put in a beauty shop in order to be able to pay for our school lunches.

She was strong, and she accomplished many things because of her strong will. She didn’t care how hard she had to work. I can still see her in the branding pen helping my father, working right alongside him, tailing the calves and tying their feet together. And I remember once when she built a bathroom by herself. Every once in awhile, I’d help her, hand her a board or something, but she built it.



Today, I offer a prayer for mothers.

I pray for all the mothers in this room, in this city, across this continent, and in every land around this planet.

I pray for the mothers whose homes resound with children’s laughter, screeching toys, loud music, or the sullen teenage shrug.

I pray for the mothers who gave birth in joy or in agony or in grief.

I pray for the mothers who have adopted the motherless and discovered how wide love can reach; and I pray for the mothers who have given over their children to others.

I pray for all the women who have wished to be mothers and are not.

I pray for all the mothers whose children have ever gone off to war, for the worry they endure and the tension they carry through every hour of absence. I pray for the mothers whose children return whole and unscathed, or who return wounded in mind or body, or who do not return at all.

I pray for all the mothers who grieve—lost pregnancies, lost children, lost hopes, lost futures.

And here is my prayer: May peace come to you.

May peace come to you amid the noise and chaos of active children, peace amid the silence and the absence, peace with the choices you have made, the paths taken and not taken, peace with the grief you have endured.

May peace come to you, and may you greet it and welcome it, and may it live within you. May peace find a home in you, and from that home, may peace venture widely over this earth.

Please join me now in singing Hymn 212, “Dancing Sarah’s Circle.” We haven’t sung this song, to my knowledge, but you will recognize the tune very quickly. It’s the same tune used for “Climbing Jacob’s Ladder.”

*HYMN 212, Dancing Sarah’s Circle*

We are dancing Sarah’s circle,  
We are dancing Sarah’s circle,  
We are dancing Sarah’s circle,  
Sisters, brothers, all.

Here we seek and find our history,  
Here we seek and find our history,  
Here we seek and find our history,

Sisters, brothers, all.

We will all do our own naming,  
We will all do our own naming,  
We will all do our own naming,  
Sisters, brothers, all.

Every round a generation,  
Every round a generation,  
Every round a generation,  
Sisters, brothers, all.

On and on the circle’s moving,  
On and on the circle’s moving,  
On and on the circle’s moving,  
Sisters, brothers, all.

Elaine Hill, 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*

Our time together now ends.  
In the days before we come together again,  
may our actions match our words,  
may our thoughts be filled with love,

and may we truly make a difference  
in a troubled world.

*POSTLUDE: A Dream Is a Wish Your Heart Makes*

Before you leave, take a moment and enjoy these photos of some very important mothers. Parents, please rejoin your children in their classrooms and let's enjoy a time of fellowship with the best fair-trade coffee in southeastern Tennessee.