



Be Prepared

A Worship Service by the REV. JEFF BRIERE

Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga

June 5, 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. Julie Andrews said that the very best place to start is at the beginning, so let's begin today with the very beginning of the hymnal, No. 1, "May Nothing Evil Cross this Door."

HYMN 1, May Nothing Evil Cross this Door

May nothing evil cross this door,
and may ill fortune never pry
about these windows; may the roar
and rain go by.

By faith made strong, the rafters will

withstand the battering of the storm.
This hearth, though all the world grow chill,
will keep you warm.

Peace shall walk softly through these rooms,
touching our lips with holy wine,
till every casual corner blooms
into a shrine.

With laughter drown the raucous shout,
and, though these sheltering walls are thin,
may they be strong to keep hate out
and hold love in.

GREETINGS

GEORGE. 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.

Jim Scott will be here this afternoon. He creates a Circle of Sound at 6 pm right here in the sanctuary. He wrote "Gather the Spirit, No. 347 in our hymnal. For the concert, a donation of \$10 would be appreciated, and that's a bargain, I can assure you. Prior to the concert, Jim will lead a 2-hour guitar workshop, so tell all your guitar-picking friends. See Sandy Kurtz for more information and to register for the workshop.

On Saturday morning, we will sponsor a workshop on **Wrapping Up**

Your Life. It's not as bad as it sounds, really. There are some very important issues you should address before the end of your life, and now, when you can think straight, is the time to do it. I'm talking about wills, living wills, healthcare power of attorney, Do Not Resuscitate Orders and other considerations that will make your exit as graceful and stress-free as possible. That's Saturday at 9:30. There's a registration roster on the door next to the kitchen.

Please check out these two events and others in **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.

This morning we are happy to see Jay Craven again. He and Steve are playing Brahms for our service music.

PRELUDE: Allegretto grazioso (3)

LIGHTING THE CHALICE

Carolyn Cox, would you light our chalice, please? To accompany the lighting of our chalice this morning, I have words of gratitude written by Gordon McKeeman. Please read with me.

We light this chalice
For simple things that are not simple at all,

For miracles of the common way:

Sunrise, Sunset
Seedtime, Harvest
Hope, Joy, Ecstasy.

For Grace
that turns our intentions into deeds,

our compassion into helpfulness,
our pain into mercy.

For Providence
that sustains and supports our needs.

We lift our hearts in thankfulness
and pray only to be more aware
and thus more alive.

STORY: Annie Learns to Weave

MINISTER. Do you know what the address of this church is? 3224 Navajo Drive. Do you know the Navajo? Navajo are American Indians, and they live in the southwestern United States. When folks named streets around here, they considered Native American names. Right up the road is Seminole Drive. The Seminoles are another native people, they lived in Georgia and Florida.

Many of the Navajo people weave rugs like these. This is an upright loom and the Navajo weave wool strands into striking patterns like these rugs.

And many of them live in hogans, like this. A hogan is sometimes made of logs, but can be covered with earth, like this.

This is what the country around the southwestern United States looks like, where the Navajo live. This is a mesa. My story today is about a young Navajo Girl named Annie.

NARRATOR. Annie was a Navajo. And her world was good—a world of rippling sand, of high copper-red bluffs, of the low mesa near her own snug hogan. The pumpkins were yellow in the cornfield, and the tassels on the corn were turning brown. Each morning, she would open the gate to the night pen and the sheep were herded to pasture

on the desert.

Annie helped watch the sheep. She carried pails of water to the cornfield. Best of all were the evenings when she sat with her grandmother and listened to stories of times long gone.

Sometimes it seemed to Annie that her grandmother was her age—a girl who had seen no more than nine years, because they had such good times together. There were other times when her grandmother sat very still, and Annie knew that she was very old. Then Annie would cover her grandmother's knees with a warm blanket.

In the spring time of Annie's tenth year, her grandmother told Annie she was old enough to weave.

GRAMS. It is time you learn to weave, my granddaughter.

ANNIE. I'd rather stay here with you.

GRAMS. Watch your mother, Annie, and you will learn to weave.

NARRATOR. Annie sat beside the loom, watching her mother. Her thoughts wandered, but she watched while her mother twisted the weaving stick in the warp, making a shed for the strands of gray and red wool. Annie made herself sit very still.

MOM. You can learn how to slide the weaving stick in place among the strings of the warp. Are you ready to weave, daughter?

ANNIE. No.

MOM. If you are not ready to weave, you may go.

NARRATOR. Annie ran off to find her grandmother and helped her prepare the evening meal. After they finished eating, there was no sound in the hogan. There was no sound at all, except a small snap of

the dying fire. Then the grandmother spoke softly.

GRAMS. My children, when the new rug is taken from the loom, I will go to Mother Earth.

NARRATOR. Annie looked at her mother. Her mother's eyes were shining bright with tears that did not fall, and Annie knew what her grandmother meant.

GRAMS. You may choose the gift that you wish to have. What will you have, granddaughter?

ANNIE. Your weaving stick. It is polished and beautiful.

GRAMS. Very well. You may have my weaving stick.

MOM. I'd like the rug you wove when I was a girl.

GRAMS. Then you shall have it.

NARRATOR. Annie's mother picked the rug up from the floor and carried it outside to shake the dust from it. Annie followed her mother outside.

ANNIE. How can grandmother know she will go to Mother Earth when the rug is taken from the loom?

MOM. Many of the Old Ones know.

ANNIE. Yes, but how do they know?

MOM. My mother is one of those who live in harmony with all nature—with the earth, coyotes, birds in the sky. She knows more than many will ever learn. She just knows. Let us now speak of other things.

NARRATOR. In the days that followed, the weaving of the rug grew high on the loom. It was almost as high as Annie's waist.

ANNIE. Mother, why do you weave?

MOM. I weave so we may sell the rug and buy the things we must have from the trading post. Silver for making jewelry. Leather for boots—

ANNIE. But you know what grandmother said—

NARRATOR. Annie turned and ran. She ran across the sand and huddled in the shallow shade of the small mesa. Her grandmother would go back to the earth when the rug was taken from the loom. Annie decided the rug must not be finished. Her mother must not weave.

In a few days, the rug was higher than Annie's waist. That night she slept lightly, and awakened before dawn.

There was no sound from her mother's sheepskin. Her grandmother was a quiet hump in her blanket. There was no other sound on the whole earth, except the howling of a coyote from far across the desert.

In the dim light of early morning, Annie crept outside to the night pen where the sheep were sleeping. The dry wood creaked when she opened the gate and pushed it wide open against the fence.

She tugged at the sheep until one stood quietly. Then the others stood also, uncertain and shoving together. The lead goat turned toward the open gate and Annie slipped her fingers through his belled collar. She curled her fingertips across the bell, muffling its sound, and led the goat through the gate. The sheep followed.

She led them across the sand and around the small mesa where she

released the goat.

ANNIE. Go. Go fast.

NARRATOR. She ran back to the hogan, and slithered under her blanket and lay shivering.

ANNIE. Now they will hunt the sheep all day. Today mother can not weave.

NARRATOR. When the fullness of morning came and it was light, Annie heard the call.

GRAMS. The sheep are gone!

MOM. The sheep; the sheep—

GRAMS. But I see them. They are grazing near the mesa.

NARRATOR. Annie went with her grandmother and they retrieved the sheep before breakfast.

When night came, she curled up in her blanket, but not to sleep. When everything was still, she slipped from her blanket and crept outside.

The sky was dark and secret. The wind was soft against her face. For a moment she stood waiting until she could see in the night. And then she went to the loom.

She felt for the weaving stick in its place among the warp strings. She separated the warp and felt for the wool. Slowly she pulled out the strands of yarn, one by one. One by one, she laid them across her knees.

And when the row was removed, she separated the strings of the

warp again, and reached for the second row. And another row, and another until the height of the rug was even with her waist. Then she returned to her bed. Under her blanket, she smoothed the strands and made them into a ball. And then she slept.

The next night, Annie removed another day's weaving.

The third night, Annie crept again to the loom. And as she reached up to take out a row of yarn, a gentle hand touched her shoulder.

GRAMS. Go to sleep, granddaughter.

NARRATOR. Annie could only stumble to her blanket and huddle under it and let her tears roll into the edge of her hair.

When morning came, Annie unrolled herself from the blanket and helped prepare the morning meal. Afterward, she followed her grandmother through the cornfield to the small mesa where they sat together.

GRAMS. Granddaughter, you have tried to hold back time. This cannot be done. The sun comes up from the edge of earth in the morning. It returns to the edge of earth in the evening; earth, from which good things come for the living creatures on it; earth, to which all creatures finally go.

NARRATOR. Now, Annie understood many things. The sun rose but it also set. The cactus did not bloom forever. She knew that she was a part of the earth and the things on it. She would always be a part of the earth, just as her grandmother had always been, just as her grandmother would always be, always and forever.

They walked back to the hogan together. Annie picked up the old weaving stick.

ANNIE. I am ready to weave, grandmother. I will use the stick you

gave me.

NARRATOR. She knelt at the loom. She separated the warp strings and slipped the weaving stick in place, as her mother had done, as her grandmother had done. She picked up a strand of gray wool and started to weave.

MINISTER. Thanks for listening to my story. I hope you enjoyed it. And you can 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.

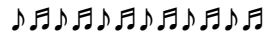
To nurture the spark
of your precious life
We hold you in our love
as you go.

OFFERTORY: Andante poco adagio (2)

At this point in the service, I try to lighten things up with a humorous story or two. The reason is because I am about to ask you to lighten up your purse or wallet and make a donation to the church. Not so today. I mean no humorous story. I'll still ask you to make a donation. I remind you that this church is independent and the members, independent-minded. We have no bishop or pope or regional council to give us money or tell us what to do. We rise or fall on the strength of our own association. We decide what we will do and of course, we have to pay for it.

We'll collect the morning offering now for the support ministry of

this church, and we encourage your generosity when the plate 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.

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: Wrapping Up a Life

I want to mention next week's service. It's called "The Question Box." Out in the fellowship area, you will find a handsomely-decorated box with question marks all over it and index cards beside it. During the service next week, I will do my best to answer all the questions you put in the box.

Any question is fine, as long as it's suitable for a worship service and not so esoteric that I'd have to research the answer for a week or more. I have produced this service every year but one in the last eight years and the variety of questions I get is amazing. I have collected a half-dozen cards already, some from children. So please put your question in the box and do your part to make the service a success.

I mention next week's service, because I want to answer one question from the question box in today's service. It seems to fit better. A congregant wrote to me:

I don't want to die and go into dark nothingness. I like living too much. I don't want to lose control. But I don't believe in a heaven where angels play harps and we rejoin our loved ones.

I knew a woman who prepared for dying by organizing her loose and life-long collection of family photographs into albums for her children. I knew man who was so thrilled at the idea of seeing his deceased family again that he dreamed of them every night for weeks before dying. I've known many orthodox Christians who faced death with peace and equanimity.

None of that works for me.

How does a Unitarian Universalist face the prospect of death and approach the end of the line with tranquility?

I'd have to say that the answer to this question is different for every person. But I'll tell you what I think.

The first thing you must decide is if a "you" will survive death. What I mean is you must decide if you have a spirit that will live on after your body dies.

Having a spirit is an attractive concept, first proposed by Plato, I believe. The problem is there's no way to prove it. Your spirit, if you have one, is intangible. You can't see it, smell it, taste it, feel it or hear it.

If you decide that you don't have a spirit, then you're all set. The end of your life is the end of the line. Period. Neat, clean and simple.

Maybe it's my culture or maybe it's just me, or maybe because I am a human being, I don't know, but it seems like I do have a spirit. And if you decide that you have a spirit, you inherit many other troublesome questions about which you must make more decisions, like "What's it like on the other side?" "Do my actions in this life affect my well-being in the next?" "Will I even need to be concerned about the well-being of my spirit?"

And hundreds of others, all of which are complete unknowns. And have been unknown ever since humans first considered these questions. No one has ever answered them to everyone's satisfaction.

Not that people haven't tried. The entire system of religion called Christianity is an attempt to explain life and death. Christianity has hundreds of guidelines and promises an eternal life after death if you follow them faithfully. Same for Islam and Judaism. Actually, an eternal life after death is promised whether or not you follow the

guidelines, it's just that a *happy* afterlife is available to you if you follow the rules.

So religion—western religion, really—is an attempt to make sense of life and death. Eastern religion, by and large, tends to address behavior in this life only; there is not so much attention paid to the afterlife. My late colleague Forrest Church said that “Religion is our human response to the dual reality of being alive and having to die.” Religion is our human response to the dual reality of being alive and having to die.

Let's review the question. In part, it reads, *I don't want to die and go into dark nothingness. I like living too much. I don't want to lose control. But I don't believe in a heaven where angels play harps and we rejoin our loved ones.*

See that's the thing about religious schemes like Christianity and others. They promise an afterlife that is attractive to you now. In this life. But there is no guarantee that your spirit would like heaven. Maybe your spirit would like a dark nothingness.

Any and all concepts of the afterlife are conceived by living human beings, so naturally they will be attractive—or repulsive—to living human beings. We truly have no idea—and *can have no idea*—of the afterlife. This life is all we'll ever know until we die.

Of course we like living too much; it's all we know. And of course we'd like to remain in control; that's one of the best aspects of living.

The other part of the question is *How does a Unitarian Universalist face the prospect of death and approach the end of the line with tranquility?*

So the congregant wants to know what this religion, Unitarian Universalism, has to say about death. Nothing, actually. I even went to the Unitarian Universalist Association website to check it out.

There are some resources there, but there are no guidelines, no rules, no theology about death. I don't have to remind you that this is a non-creedal church.

But the question is really this: *How can I remain composed and dignified in the face of my own death? Regardless of what I believe about death, how can I best anticipate it?*

I quoted Forrest Church a few moments ago. He was a Unitarian Universalist minister for thirty years at the Church of All Souls in New York City. When he learned that cancer would soon end his days on earth, he preached about it, as any good minister would do. His answer to the question our congregant asked is in that sermon. He suggests that loving and living gratefully is the best way to prepare for death. I can't do better than that, so I will quote him again:

“When grandparents, parents, even children died at home, death was an inescapable presence in our lives. Today, shielded from intimacy with death by the cold, mechanically invasive and antiseptic chambers of hospitals, we lose touch with how natural, even sacramental, death can be. If we insulate ourselves from death we lose something precious, a sense of life that knows death, that elevates human to humane, that reconciles human being with human loss.

“The word human has a telling etymology: it comes from the Latin and proto-languages before that, and it means earth. Human, humane, humility, humus. Dust to dust, the mortar of mortality binds us fast to one another.

“When dying comes calling at the door, like a bracing wind it clears our being of pettiness. It connects us to others. More alert to life's fragility, we reawaken to life's preciousness. To be fully human is to care, and attending to death prompts the most eloquent form of caring imaginable.

“Unless we armor our hearts, we cannot protect ourselves from loss. We can only protect ourselves from the death of love. Yet without love, nothing matters. Break your life into a million pieces and ask yourself what real value might endure after you are gone. The pieces that remain will each carry love’s signature. Without love, we are left only with the aching hollow of regret, that haunting emptiness where love might have been.

Hope is woven into the lifelines that connect us. To see our own tears reflected in another’s eyes is the most holy of intimacies. We enter the sacred realm of the heart, where the one thing that can never be taken from us, even by death, is the love we give away before we go. The most eloquent answer to death’s ‘no’ is love’s ‘yes.’

“For us to be here in the first place, for us to earn the privilege of dying, more than a trillion billion accidents took place. What a luxury we enjoy, wondering what will happen after we die.

“We see little of the road ahead or the sky above. And the dust we raise clouds our eyes, leaving only brief interludes to contemplate the stars. All we can do, every now and again, is to stop for a moment and look.

“Look. Morning has broken, and we are here, you and I, breathing the air, admiring the slant sun as it refracts through the windows and dances in motes of dust above in the air, calling us to attention, calling us homeward.

“Dust to dust.

“Heart to heart.”

The words of the Rev. Forrest Church.

The idea for this service was hatched by Wendes Jones, who advises us to make good preparations for our own death.

WENDES. One of my brightest childhood memories is of the day my father and I went exploring in the fields and forests surrounding our new home on the side of Blue Mountain. I was 9 years-old. It was late spring, the sun was shining, a soft breeze in the air, the temperature just right, simply glorious.

Together, we wandered down a hill and on to a logging road which we followed for a piece. Daddy had a walking stick, because he liked the idea of a walking stick, I think, but also because it came in useful pushing aside branches or just in case a snake came across our path. Soon we turned into the woods and made our way through the shrubs, trees, other obstacles, deeper into the woods.

This was a bit tiring for me and I might even have voiced a complaint or two. Then suddenly the forest stopped and before us was a woodland meadow with a spring, clumpy field grass, and tiny flowers. It was lovely. Across the meadow, dominating the scene was a dilapidated, long abandoned log cabin. A real one. In the woods. With several outbuildings. This seemed an incredible treasure to me, an avid fan of the Little House books by Laura Ingalls Wilder.

We explored the buildings. One was an outhouse. Another a chicken coop. The third, some shed which use we could not determine. Though the roof was giving way we went inside the cabin. It had only a dirt floor and seemed too small for a family to live in but I knew a family had lived there at one time. My imagination was aflame. Of course a girl just my age had been part of the family. Had she walked carrying her lunch bucket to the abandoned little white school house up the road a piece? While there, had she written her sums on a slate? as she grew had she been courted by a man in a buggy? And where was she now?

Oh, it was a fun day. Daddy and I had been adventurers. We had explored. We had discovered. We had a secret to share. It was like a storybook.

We headed for home. As we made our way back up the hill a hint of red along the old stone wall caught my attention. I stooped down and plucked a sun warmed wild strawberry from its vine. The treat was juicy-sweet in my mouth. I was delighted reaching for another to share with Dad. Still squatting I quite clearly recall looking up at my father half-blinded by the sun as it shone over his right shoulder. Reaching up I handed him a sun warmed berry and in that moment, Daddy said, “If I were to die right now I would die the happiest man in the world.”

My stomach twisted in fear. What was he trying to tell me? Everything had been going so well I’d thought. Now, here was my father saying he might be dying! What was I to make of that?

What indeed. Even at the age of nine I had learned that in our culture death was a fearsome topic to be avoided. Here in this moment of pure perfection, the very suggestion of death had taken the sun right out of my sunny day. Why is that?

And then, there is my Mother.

It is my good fortune to know this most amazing woman. There are many wonderful things about Mom tempered by a few shortcomings. Call it a shortcoming or a blessing one reality is that my mother has been dying for 25 years give-or-take. It began by regularly inserting little comments like, “I’m not going to be here forever. One day I’ll be gone and you’ll have to (fill-in-the-blank) without me.”

Soon she began asking each of us four kids to go through her home placing colored sticky dots on the items we wanted to inherit. None of us were inspired to follow through so Mom sent out a multi-page list of her possessions for us to write check our preferences and return. Her insistence was alarming, so much so that we spoke with each other about it.

“What’s up with Mom? Is she trying to tell us something? Has she

mentioned doctor visits or health concerns? What should we do about this list idea?”

For my sister, the answer to that last question was easy. “All I want is all the jewelry, the silver, the crystal, and the antiques, she firmly stated.” K.C. has yet to alter her position in this regard.

Over the years Mom’s dying has shifted areas of focus. She has spent days sorting boxes of paperwork and disposing of generations worth of material so as not to “burden us with it.”

She has made arrangements to be interred at Arlington National Cemetery along side my father so we will not need to think about, argue about or finance her final disposition.

As the last surviving family member of her generation, Mom has, for years, been gifting us siblings, our cousins, and now her grandchildren with mementos of departed relatives saying, “It’s yours. I don’t care what you do with it. I just want it out of my house so you all won’t have to deal with it at the time of my death.”

Following the death of yet another one of her friends, Mom sent everyone a letter spelling out guidelines for her memorial service.

One hour maximum.

Pleasant, non-religious music only.

There will be no crying.

If you cannot speak without crying, stay seated.

Most importantly, no one may speak more than three minutes tops!

She called to discuss her rules. I said, “Mom, why do you care what happens at your memorial service?”

“I don’t want my friends to be bored! she snapped. What’s wrong with my having input? Can’t you just agree to follow these guidelines?”

Laughing, I replied, “Mom, at your memorial service I’m going to say just exactly what I please for as long as I wish and no one is going to stop me.” I do believe she was miffed.

This month Mom is preparing to move into a smaller home, ‘downsizing’ they call it. A good idea if you ask me. In the process, she has taken up her mantra of years past only these days she reaches all generations at once via email. “I can’t move everything into this new place. It’s important to find good homes for our family possessions. Please let me know what you want me to send to you.”

I got into the act this time calling each of my three children, urging them to respond their grandmother letting her know what they would enjoy owning. With some encouragement, the boys each emailed their requests. However, Romanda, my daughter, refused to answer.

Finally, I pushed her to tell me why she was so reluctant.

“Mom, it just feels wrong to be taking Gramma’s things while she is still alive and might want them. Can’t I just wait? or you could get stuff you think I’d like and send it to me. I’ll feel like a vulture taking her stuff now.”

All the familiar feelings of 25 years ago came flooding back. Oh, how dearly I felt Romanda’s desire to avoid this parcelling out of possessions and her wish to pretend there was no need to do so. Yes, I remembered, but it was so different for me this time. Why? Well, for one thing I’d had 25 years of training. For another, clearly my mother IS going to be leaving this world in the not too distant future. But something else is different. I see what Mom is doing with a different heart.

I’m in between the generations now. This time, I can clearly grasp that when Romanda avoids responding to Mom, she is ignoring her grandmother and this is hurtful. On Mom’s end, she is trying

diligently to be a good steward of these items which have been entrusted to her through the generations. Romanda’s or anyone’s non-response is equal to disinterest. It is as much as saying, “Do what you want. Leave me out of it. I don’t care.” Ouch! So while I am understanding of my daughters position, I am equally protective of my mother’s feelings. And in this instance, I believe my mother’s wishes should over ride my daughters self protection. In this instance, as I told Romanda, we need to put the needs of ‘the other’ ahead of our own perceived discomfort.

And so she did.

As it happen the several pieces of artwork Romanda finally spoke out for, had already been tagged by someone else. That’s what you get for arriving late to the table!

Like I said earlier, my mother is an amazing woman from whom I have learned much. She’s gotten lots of stuff right. And by now, I’m ready to concede that this dying business fits the category of Stuff Done Right. I have been in training for 25 years. With all these years of preparation, I’m ready for her to go—and, NO, that is not the punch line to a joke—its just that I’m ready, she’s made sure of that. Do I want it to happen? NO Will it be easy? NO But just as she prepared me to be a strong, free-thinking, activist for the under-privileged, modern woman, just as she prepared me to live life to its fullest, so has she prepared me to live life to its fullest in her absence.

Mom, I’ll never be able to thank you enough. Well done.

Just last month Mom began talking to each of us about respecting her decision to establish a Do Not Resuscitate Order. She has met with her physician, her attorney, spoken with her neighbors, her friends, and her four children letting everyone know that, should she be found in a state of arrest, she does not wish to be resuscitated. “Just let me

be dead when I'm dead!"

POSTLUDE: Vivace (4)

Three of us said, "Sure, Mom. We can go along with that." And one of us, the one getting everything of value, my sister, said, "I'm not sure I'm comfortable with that. How will Mom know in advance that she really wants to be dead? What if it happens next week? Is she really ready to die? We need to think about this."

Ah, the troublesome family member, there's always gotta be one, doesn't there?

Which got me thinking, how do we prepare for THAT? By which I mean, what can be done to ready ourselves for the emotional and spiritual strain on family relationships should disagreement accompany this life transition?

Preparing for this last stage of life can be uncomfortable. But I suggest to you that NOT preparing for it can be even worse. This is why we are offering a follow-up workshop next Saturday morning for those of you who are interested in the full range of this topic from state approved End of Life forms to emotional preparedness. Won't you join us?

Minister. Carolyn Cox, 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.

Thank you very much for your participation in our service this morning. Parents, please rejoin your children now and we'll enjoy a time of fellowship with the best fair-trade coffee in southeastern Tennessee.