

It's About Time!
August 8th, 2010
Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga
Dr. John Standridge, Presenter
Steve Hollingsworth, Worship Leader

Connections (10:45)
Ringing of the Chime (11:00)

STEVE: Your worship leader this morning is Steve Hollingsworth. Oh, yes, that's me! Let's blend our voices in our opening hymn "Morning Has Broken" no. 38 in your hymnal. Please stand in body or in spirit.

Opening Hymn "Morning Has Broken" 38

Welcome – Board of Trustees representative, Donna Crompton

DONNA: Thanks so much for joining us in worship today. I'm Donna Crompton and I serve on your board of trustees.

Please note the emergency exit over here to my right, your left. Now is the time to put your cell phone in "Worship Mode." Child care for the young and the restless is available downstairs in the nursery.

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.

Our minister Rev. Jeff Briere has been on sabbatical, but he's back in town, working feverishly on the great services he will lead starting just two weeks from today.

Today we welcome back to our pulpit one of our own, Dr. John Standridge. Let me say, "It's About Time!" [pause]

If you have a particular joy or sorrow, or something you'd like added to the Prayer of the People, please write it clearly on an index card and drop it in the basket on the table at the rear. You may sign it, or not, as you wish.

After the service today, please join us for coffee and conversation in the fellowship area.

Prelude

STEVE: Wolfgang Poe, will you please light our chalice? We begin with the unison words for chalice lighting. Please stand in body or in spirit.

Lighting the Chalice

*In the light of truth and the warmth of love,
we gather to seek, to sustain, and to share.*

Now let us read responsively words from Ecclesiastes, "For Everything a Season," no. 558 in the hymnal.

STEVE: If the young and the young at heart will please join us up front, our peerless Director of Religious Education Kay McCurdy has a story for us. Welcome, Kay.

For Children of All Ages

STEVE: We have a song to send you to your classes.

Singing the Children out

*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.*

STEVE: With time the topic of the day, I was browsing topical quotes and read, “They say that time changes things, but you actually have to change them yourself.” Andy Warhol said that. I’ve always thought he was a better artist and smarter man than most people give him credit for. Among other things, he obviously understood congregational polity. Time will change nothing in our church. We must do it ourselves—with our efforts and our financial support.

If you have a payment toward an annual pledge, please be sure to mark it that way. As always, the Wood-Wilhoit Memorial Food Bank is happy to accept your donations of nonperishable food and household items; the collection basket for that is by the front door.

If you wish to light a silent candle of personal joy or sorrow, please come forward and Mary Hunter will assist you.

Offertory

STEVE: Eternal Spirit of Life and Love, we are profoundly thankful for the blessings we experience every day. Would that we recognize what is truly valuable to us every day and be thankful for it. Christina, will you please lead us in our *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'm proud to continue the tradition our minister Jeff Briere began to offer prayers every Sunday for those experiencing war and the fallout of war until all our troops are finally back home.

[process the cards and any other items given me]

The US Senate gave President Obama a birthday present this week by confirming Elena Kagan as an associate justice of the Supreme Court. OK, it *was* one day late. As we get excited about nearing parity on the court for gender, it's an oddity that we now have three Jews and six Catholics. I think we UUs might love to see a transgender atheist on the court someday. Stay tuned.

Thou, which art everywhere,

Many are thy names.

May we always feel thy presence,

May thy 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.

In these few moments of silence, let us remember those who suffer

but always, let us hold close to our heart the hearts of those who suffer the fallout of war.

[silence]

Dona nobis pacem. Give us peace. *Dona nobis pacem.*

[Gesture to pianist]

Musical 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.

Introduce John Standridge

STEVE: It's a particular pleasure to introduce our speaker today, Dr. John Standridge. I

hardly know where to begin. From his dedication to promoting geriatric medicine, the one specialty pretty much guaranteed to lower a doctor's income, to his memorable paintings, to his idiosyncratic sessions as DJ for an hour on WUTC, I've come to look forward to feeling good anytime I can hang around him. What I learned about him from his book on his birth family and finding and losing his siblings has been to me a pointed personal lesson about the preciousness of time. Well, John? It's about time!

JOHN STANDRIDGE: *It's About Time!*

We celebrate time.

This is from *Bookends*, by Simon and Garfunkle:

Time it was and what a time it was it was,
A time of innocence a time of confidences.

And from *A Hazy Shade of Winter*, also by Simon and Garfunkle:

Time, time, time, see what's become of me
While I looked around
For my possibilities.
I was so hard to please

And from *Woodstock*, by Joni Mitchell:

And maybe it's the time of year,
Yes and maybe it's the time of man.
And I don't know who I am,
But life is for learning.
We are stardust, we are golden,
We are billion year old carbon,
And we got to get ourselves back to the garden.

I am grateful for this time that we have together.

It's about time, but what is time?

Is time that most precious of all commodities? Is it the *sine qua non* – the without which none – of our lives? There are times in our lives when we seem to never have enough time. Not enough time to get everything done; not enough time for self, for family, for friends. We strive to learn to manage our time better, more efficiently. We assign values and priorities to those to whom we allocate our time, to those tasks or activities that get our time and attention. Conversely, there are times in our lives when we seem to have time on our hands, and we seek to fill the time.

This sounds like personal time. If you complain that you don't have enough time for this or that, it comes off as a personal problem. Your priorities are wrong, or your time management skills need development, or you have taken on more responsibilities

than you can fulfill in a 24-hour day, or an 80-100 year life. Personal time is finite that way...only so many hours in a day...only so many years available.

One can see the appeal of living in the present. "Be Here Now" summarizes the mantra of many Eastern philosophies where living in the present effectively *mutes the angst* of having *finite* personal time.

But time itself is infinite, with no beginning and no end. One can see the appeal of religions that promise infinite life – world without end – amen. Christians offer a heaven full of other angels, if you only believe. Hindus offer reincarnation. The details are a bit murky.

In May, 2010, a 9.6 billion-year-old cluster of about 60 galaxies was seen and reported by separate teams of astronomers in Germany and Japan. The most distant galaxies are 12.8 billion light-years away. That means the light we see today was generated 12.8 billion years ago. Time began long before then. Universal time is infinite. Our portion of that – I mean humans on Earth – is too tiny to assign a fraction to universal time.

Even our portion of Earth time is tiny, but at least it is sufficient to assign a fraction to it. The geologic time scale describes the timing and relationships between events that have occurred during the history of the Earth. Evidence from radiometric dating indicates that the Earth is about 4.570 billion years old. The largest defined unit of time is the supereon, composed of eons. Eons are divided into eras, which are in turn divided into periods, epochs and ages.

If one assigns all of Earth time to one day on the clock, these are the values, given that 00:00 hrs is equal to Earth's creation about 4,600,000,000 yrs ago and 24:00 is equal to present time. Shown as hours:minutes:seconds after the midnight:

Life on Earth	04:10
Land dwelling plants	21:31
Land dwelling animals	21:46
Dinosaurs	22:46
Mammals	22:49
Birds	23:14
Common ape-human ancestor	23:57
Homo sapiens	23:59:56.9
"Out of Africa"	23:59:58.1
Oldest civilizations	23:59:59.9
Industrial revolution	23:59:59.999

The human occupation time on planet Earth can be assigned a percentage: 1/10,172,903 or less that one one-hundred thousandth of a percent or 0.00000983%! We are a significant part of planet Earth after all!

So if humans are a significant part of Earth time, it's about time we *behaved* as if our time on Earth was significant. Positioned between personal time – the only time over which we have some modicum of control – and universal time – over which we have

no influence – lies Earth time. Earth time is finite. The earth – a finite object hanging in space... a small, water-covered sphere with 58 million square miles of land sticking up through the water – began as a spinning radioactive molten mass and will end when our sun explodes or goes out. *Life* on Earth is finite, too.

Let's take a moment to conceptualize *our* time on Earth. Is time linear or cyclical? Clearly there are days and nights – the *cycle* of the Earth's rotation – and months (lunar cycles) and years – the *cycle* of the Earth's orbit around the sun. Then there is the *cycle* of a long human life.

In the pre-Roman centuries, Italy was home to Etruria – a most mysterious and exotic ancient civilization. Around the 9th century BC, an old Etruscan Sybil issued a prophecy that their civilization would last for 10 lifetimes. Etruria was doomed. The fatalistic Etruscans came up with a ritual to measure “a long human life”. The Romans adopted the ritual and called it the *saeculum*. Etruscan priests kept track of “the one who lives the longest,” then began tracking the life spans of the next generation of newborns. Like all ancients, the Etruscans were well aware of the annual cycle of spring, summer, autumn, and winter, and they noted similarly seasonal cycles of growth, maturation, entropy, and death in the human life span of 80-100 years. This *cycle*, this *saeculum*, was their natural century. Moderns have noted that the *saeculum* underlies a recurring cycle of history. The *saeculum* is so special because our natural lifespan is precious to us, the circle that we can neither avoid nor alter.

The spring, summer, fall and winter of the sun cycle is analogous to the High, Awakening, Unraveling, and Crisis of the *saeculum*, the recurring cycle of history. The four generational archetypes of the *saeculum* – artist, prophet, nomad and hero – exercise freedom to reshape their natural and social environment and impress the next generation of the need for peace, or war, or justice, or art, or wealth, or holiness. So another generation may change direction and history gains the rhythm of a life span. Awakenings, the summer solstices, are marked by transcendentalism, woman's suffrage, civil rights movements among other highlights. Crises, the winter solstices, are marked by Revolution, Civil War, World War and great depressions. Transitional eras are the *saecular* equinoxes – the post-Crisis era warms and lightens; the post-Awakening era chills and darkens. The modern history wheel turns from Crisis to awakening and back with a remarkable regularity that ranges from 80 to 105 years. The imprecise rhythm of the *saeculum* occupies the complex, organic domain of natural time – more like the beating of a heart than the precision of a mechanical metronome. The Four Turnings are the *High* – an upbeat era of strengthening institutions and conformity; an *Awakening* – a passionate era of spiritual and civil upheaval from new values; an *Unraveling* – a downcast era of strengthening individualism and weakening institutions; and a *Crisis* – a decisive era of secular upheaval, when the values regime replaces the old civic order with a new one. Human history has its own natural cycle that recurs every 80-1000 years.

The longest time cycles were abstract periods of universal creation and destruction, ranging from the Hebrewdom (1,000 years) to the Mayan *pictun* (8,000 years), to the inconceivable Buddhist *Kalpa* (4,320,000,000 years). The 12,000-year “great year” or *yuga* was especially popular in the Babylonian, Hindu, and Hellenistic world. It

coincided with an astronomical cycle today known as the precession of the ecliptic. To the ancients sacred time was rounded. Hindus and Jainists described it as a *yantra* (circle) or *chakra* (disc); the Buddhists, as a *mandala* (wheel of life). To the ancient Chinese, the principle of stability underlying all change, *tai chi*, was drawn as a circle. Over the millennia, man has developed three ways of thinking about time: chaotic, cyclical, and linear. In chaotic time, the dominant view of primitive man, history has no path. This was the first intuition of aboriginal man, for whom change in the natural world was utterly beyond human control or comprehension. It is also how life and time appear to a small child. Yet pathless time has also become a supreme spiritual goal, the “knowing beyond knowing” of many Eastern religions. In Buddhism, one reaches nirvana by detaching from any connection to the meaning of space or time or selfhood. The practical shortcoming of chaotic time is that it dissolves society’s connective tissue. If cause and effect have no linkage in time, people cannot be held morally accountable for their choices.

Cyclical time is endless, yet also endlessly completed and renewed. Within cyclical time, classical societies are endowed with a prescribed moral dimension – a “participation mystique” in the divine recreation of nature’s eternal circle of life.

Enter the third option: linear time – time as a unique and progressing story with an absolute beginning, a middle, and an absolute end. America has come to embody the most extreme expression of progressive linearism. The “American Dream” refers to civic faith in linear advancement. Time is the natural ally of each successive generation. Thus arose the dogma of American exceptionalism. Linear time has succeeded in suppressing cyclical time. The suppression dates back to the early Christians who tried to root out calendrical paganism. Later the Reformation renewed attacks on pagan holidays (chopping down maypoles) but also popularized the clocks and calendars that enabled people to employ time more efficiently to a linear end – be it holiness, wealth or conquest. Technology further obscured the natural cycles. With artificial lights we obliterate the sleep-wake cycle; with refrigeration, the agricultural cycle; and with high-tech medicine, the rest-recovery cycle. Today some choose to believe that the Earth was created less than 10,000 years ago, we are on it here and now, and it will come to an end with the Rapture – a clear and linear beginning, middle, and end.

Linearism has shaped the very style of Western civilization. Before, when cyclical time reigned, people valued patience, ritual, the relatedness of parts to the whole, and the healing powers of time-within-nature. Today, we seem to value haste, iconoclasm, the disintegration of the whole into parts, and power of time-outside-nature.

It’s About Time that we strive to move beyond the concept of linear time. If so, with what shall we replace linearism? My vision is a hybrid of these three. Earth time becomes a cyclical-linear hybrid, like a stretched-out Slinky. We must not deny the cycles of man nor the periodicity of nature, but rather than statically resetting after each cycle we strive to define explicit moral goals (justice, equality) and material goals (a sustainable future). Each cycle is unique and original, granting a sense of authentic creativity.

Failure to appreciate the natural cycles of time cuts us off from the eternal. We lose any sense of participating in a collective myth larger than ourselves. Linear time promotes the self-directed goal of “a happy ending” – OK when things go well, but a horrible unfamiliar void if things go badly. Progress may be a good thing, but it can also give us gene-altering robotic technologies, bureaucratic statism, and a jaundiced pop-culture. The future in linear time becomes a straight-line extrapolation of the recent past.

The society that believes in cycles the least, America, has fallen in the grip of the most portentous cycle in the history of mankind. Many Americans like to imagine themselves immune to the forces of nature, the machinations of multinational corporations, or the serendipities of a slim electoral margin. We are, after all, one nation under God with a manifest destiny, marching through linear time.

But many more of us are sensing a rough patch ahead as the *saeculum* moves from the *Unraveling* to the *Crisis* – from the Millennial fear mongering, the attacks of 9/11 followed by the Bush doctrine, the long and drawn-out wars, the turning of the markets directionally from up to down, to unprecedented environmental spoilage in the Gulf and elsewhere, unrelenting population growth and debt, and last but not least, climate change in the age of Peak Oil. Please forgive this short list of real challenges. I know you all know the problems our sustainability faces, but I needed to introduce the issues before I could propose the approaches we need to make to deal with them.

It's about time we face the new realities and start changing our world. First, it may be a crude awakening for some, but petroleum has become an addiction of sort for the entire world. Peak oil means that we are not finding and developing replacement oil for the 70+ million barrels a day of oil depletion. While demand grows at a 2% annual rate, we experience a 3% decline in production. The solution is relatively easy. Our over-consumption is addressed by mentally and physically getting used to the idea of getting by on less stuff. Our quality of life was decent in the decades before the petroleum era. It can be even better post-petroleum, thanks to wind, solar, tides and geothermy. Walking, biking, horses, and mass transit are all part of a healthier and cleaner world of human scale communities and ecovillages. Reduction of oil dependence will start us on the path to cleaner seas, cleaner air, fewer excuses to go to war, a more physically fit society, and less global warming. A shiny green future awaits us in a post-oil world. The new energy technologies should provide an economic boon as well.

Second, imagine sustainability. The 10% of land that is considered arable supports the world's 6.4 billion people. The average American uses 24 acres, five of which are devoted to supporting their car use. An average person living south of the equator lives on 2.4 acres of Earth support. If everyone on Earth lived at US standards we would need 5 Earths to support them – 4 for the people and 1 just for their cars. If each of us 6.4 billion were to live the same consumptive lifestyle, we each would use 4.5 acres of land – less than each American currently spends on his or her car.

What we must try to accomplish with “sustainability” is a more or less steady-state economy in which we destroy nothing, reuse and recycle, and try to keep the natural

world, which provides us our every need, healthy and robust. We need to design a future with nature as our ally, our champion, not our opponent, our candy store, or our dump. We reconnect; we cherish; and we respect.

Lastly, we address our personal time. This is the part where I remind us that we each have enough time to do what needs to be done. We each are gifted with the same amount of time, and it is what we choose to do with that gift that makes all the difference.

Interestingly, the same four behaviors that can heal the world also prevent heart disease and Alzheimer's disease. These activities are diet, exercise, mental activity, and recreation.

The *best* diet, for us and for the planet, is the Mediterranean diet – fruits, vegetables, legumes (bean), nuts, low-fat dairy, whole grains, fish, olive oil and a little wine. The trick is to avoid the things I did not list. Eat *locally-grown* organic plants.

The best exercise for an injury-prone individual like myself is walking, or if you have access, swimming. Cross-training with weights and an exercise bike is good, too. The trick is to stay with it – a regular pattern. You have to find the time; take the time. Tai chi, yoga and similar activities are great, too.

Intellectual activity decreases Alzheimer's risk, but a purpose-driven life can also be used to teach others, network with others, and serve as a change agent to bring about sustainability. Read *Limits to Growth: The 30-Year Update*, watch *The End of Suburbia* ... Learn more and teach others – connect with your neighbors and form stronger local communities. It takes a village. Intentional communities thrive worldwide. The reality is: not all do thrive, and change seems to come slowly.

The fourth activity is recreation – rest, rebalancing, humor, leisure, meditation, a spiritual quest, a sense of wonder and awe, a glad heart, playtime with friends, lovers, children and pets. Whatever form recreation takes, a renewal of the spirit is vital for personal sustainability. If you can't do it for yourself, you can't do it for the world either. Arlo Guthrie said that once. Play games, play music, but play.

Find your personal chaotic time. Practice the quiet of having no agenda, no direction, no intrusive thoughts, the spirit quest of “knowing beyond knowing”. To have time, take time from something else if you must. Personally, I may have to quit a job or two. It wouldn't be the worst thing that could happen to me.

Lastly, slow down. Take time to smell the roses, as they say. An article in the UU World describes *slow fooders*, as followers are sometimes called, who respond to the rush of the modern world by intentionally enjoying life, especially food, and by making deep connections to people and places. A Slow movement grew out of the slow food movement in Italy. The Japanese call it “slow life”. Slow advocates have dedicated October 24 of each year as “Take Back Your Time Day”, symbolizing the 350-hour difference in work time between the U.S. and much of Europe. According to European law, if workers had not taken any time off by October 24, they should be

entitled to 9 weeks vacation – the rest of the year.

I shall close as I began, with song lyrics. These come from a song called *Time Is*, by the group It's a Beautiful Day.

Time is Too Slow for Those Who Wait
and Time is too Swift for Those Who fear
Time is too Long for Those who Grieve
And time is Too short for Those that Laugh
And Love is too slow for those who Wait
And Love is too Swift for Those who Fear
And Love is too Long for those who Grieve
And Love is too short for Those that Laugh
But for Those who Love
But for Those who Really Love
But for Those Who Love
Time, Sweet Time, Precious Time, Lovely Time
All the Time
Time Time Time Time Time Time Time Time Time
is Eternity

STEVE: Wolf Poe, will you please extinguish our chalice?

Join with me in the words in your order of worship:

*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.*

Our words of benediction come from theologian John Standridge. Two years ago he gave us this summation of Unitarian Universalism and time: “To question is the answer. In other words, it is the journey, not the destination, that is important. It is who we are in terms of what we believe and hold dear, how we respect and treat others, and how we affirm our lives that give our time on earth meaning and worth.”

Blessed be.

Namaste.

Please be seated for the postlude.

Postlude

STEVE: Let's all enjoy the best fair-trade coffee in Eastern Tennessee!