

## CONNECTIONS



*“Just remember, you are responsible for your own happiness.”*

### Synthetic Happiness

A Worship Service by the REV. JEFF BRIERE

Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga  
January 18, 2009

Welcome to the Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga. My name is Jeff Briere, I am the minister of this church. We begin each Sunday at this time with Connections. This is a time of community and contemplation, where we share the joys and the sorrows going on in our lives. This is not a time for announcements, politics or expressions of personal anger, but a time of deep sharing, where we are reminded that we are all human beings and we're all in this together.

Enjoy the experience of sitting in restorative silence until you are moved to speak. Please allow a breath of silence after each person speaks, so that we may focus our attention on what has been said. If you have something to share, please come forward, tell us your name and what's on your mind.



Let us pause to dwell inward. Spirit of Life, please meet us where we are, in the struggles we choose for ourselves; in the ways we move forward in our lives, and bring our world forward with us. It is right that we pause to remember those who need love and support; who are ill or in pain, either in body or in spirit; who are lonely or have been wronged. Let us open our minds and hearts to a place of quiet, to a silent prayer for the healing of pain, and the soft, gentle coming of love. In this time of silence let our thoughts be with those who have spoken or been spoken about this morning. Amen and Blessed Be. Please rise now and greet your neighbors at the door. Welcome them into the sanctuary with a hand of warmth and a smile.

HYMN: Siyahamba

GREETINGS

**MADDIE.** Thanks so much for joining us in worship today. We hope

you find the service rewarding and that you leave here inspired and uplifted. In order to make the most efficient use of our little space, we're gonna try something new, and that is, could all the children who would like to, please come down here and sit on the steps? This will make more room for visitors.

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

That faint enticing aroma of meat, beans and spices is evidence that our annual chili cook-off happens after the service. We hope you can join us and vote for your favorite chili.

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 and is available on our web site. The best way to find out what's going on around here is to sign up for a weekly e-mail. To do that, please see Chris in the office.

We are very pleased to welcome Joe Ridolfo once again to our worship service. We always enjoy his fusion of classical Indian and music from a Western tradition.

#### PRELUDE

#### LIGHTING THE CHALICE

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

#### STORY: "Blue Fox"

One day, a long, long time ago, a red fox, who was very hungry, was walking down Germantown Road in search of a meal. He had tried to catch a mouse, but the mouse slipped into a hole. He had tried to catch a rabbit, but the rabbit was quicker than Red Fox. He was very hungry.

Suddenly, a fierce pack of wolves appeared and chased Red Fox because they thought *he* would make a tasty meal for *them*. Running as fast as he could, he ran right into a house of a cloth dyer on Germantown Road.

Now, I said this happened a long time ago. In those days, people didn't know how to make colored thread or colored yarn, so all their clothes were either beige, ecru, eggshell and off-white. So to have colors, people would take their clothes to a dyer, a person who dyed material to give it color, the same way we dye Easter eggs.

And that's where Red Fox ran—right into the dyer's house, stumbling over over pots and pans and piles of cloth, and finally falling into a huge vat of indigo dye. Indigo dye is blue, deep blue, like my neck tie. And blue has always been the color of kings. We still use indigo dye today in blue jeans.

With his heart pounding, Red Fox waited until the wolves were gone. Then he crawled out of the vat and slowly began walking down Germantown road again.

The other animals he encountered were amazed at his extraordinary color. Dyed by the indigo, his fur was a deep blue, and nobody had ever seen a blue fox.

"Who is this exotic creature who has fallen out of the sky?" they said. "He is beautiful—and very strange!" They cowered in fear and awe.

Red Fox looked at himself and admired his own fur. Then he got an idea. He said in a loud voice, “Creatures of the forest, gather around and hear my words! I am Blue Fox, your new king!”

Word quickly spread through the forest as each animal informed the next, “A mysterious blue fox—a royal colored fox has fallen from the sky and is now our rightful ruler!” All the animals of the forest gathered to pay homage to the king.

Blue Fox was delighted as dogs, mockingbirds, mice, cats, snakes, rabbits, possums, skunks, coyotes, squirrels and woodpeckers bowed before him. “Tell us your desires, O great king!” they said, for they wanted to make happy.

Blue Fox began to give out jobs, imitating as best he could the royal bearing of a king. He appointed the woodpeckers as his prime ministers and lords. The cats became keepers of his bed chamber. The coyotes took turns carrying his parasol. The rabbits served his food.

Each creature except the foxes had a royal task. When the foxes came forward to bow before him, Blue Fox sent them away with disgust. He wanted nothing to do with them, for they reminded him of his own humble origins. The other foxes grumbled about the way they were treated.

Time passed and Blue Fox enjoyed the privileges of being a king. When he was rude, crude, or unreasonable, no one challenged him. After all, he was their leader. Everyone endured his behavior with great tolerance.

In time the foxes had enough and they began to complain about Blue Fox. “He does not give us any honor. We know who he is by his smell. That fancy blue color of his fur does not fool us!”

One old fox said, “What is in one’s nature is difficult to disguise.

Even a well-fed cat will still chase mice. Let us howl as a pack and watch how he shows his true colors.”

Now you know that dogs howl. And coyotes. And wolves. Foxes belong to the same family of animals and they howl, too.

The next morning as Blue Fox berated and bullied the animals who were serving him, the foxes began to howl together loudly. And when he heard them, he was unable to restrain himself. Blue Fox leapt up and joined in with a loud howl, too.

The mice, skunks and possums and the rest of the animals suddenly realized that “their king” was just an ordinary fox pretending to be what he was not. Well, all the animals were outraged and they jumped Blue Fox. Blue Fox took off and ran down Brainerd Road as fast as he could for about 15 minutes. When he looked back to see if anyone was still chasing him, he tripped on a stone and fell into the South Chickamauga Creek, right next to Wal-Mart.

Do you know what happened then? His blue color washed out in the water, so that when he got out of the river, he was a red fox, just like he used to be.

And Red Fox learned an important lesson. Do you know what that is? Be yourself. Just be yourself, because that’s better than being anything else and only you can do it. And don’t paint yourself blue.

#### 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

One of the reasons I live in Chattanooga is that I wanted to serve a congregation in a warm climate. Not too warm, but warmer than Chicago and upstate New York where I had lived for a long time. When I moved here, I thought I had found the right place. Until this week, which is the coldest since I moved here nearly six years ago.

In remembrance of colder times and to honor winter in all its glory, I bring you this poem by Thomas Campion, an English songwriter of the late 16th and early 17th centuries. Mr. Campion has an interesting suggestion for passing the long hours we spend indoors during the cold season.

Now winter nights enlarge  
The number of their hours,  
And clouds their storms discharge  
Upon the airy towers.

Let now the chimneys blaze,  
And cups o'erflow with wine;  
Let well-tuned words amaze  
With harmony divine.

Now yellow waxen lights  
Shall wait on honey love,  
While youthful revels, masques, and courtly sights  
Sleep's leaden spells remove.

This time doth well dispense  
With lovers' long discourse;  
Much speech hath some defence,  
Though beauty no remorse.

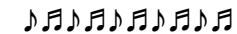
All do not all things well;  
Some measures comely tread,

Some knotted riddles tell,  
Some poems smoothly read.

The summer hath his joys  
And winter his delights;  
Though love and all his pleasures are but toys,  
They shorten tedious nights.

We'll collect the offering now, for the support and ministry of this very warm church. We are happy to accept cool cash or a stone-cold check. If you write a check for your annual pledge, please mark it that way. 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. And thank you very much for your generosity.

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 be thankful for them. Christina, please lead us in our Hymn of Thanksgiving. The words are in your program.

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.*

Recognizing that tomorrow is King Day, and in the recognition that this year's celebration of the life of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is magnified on the very next day by the inauguration of our next president, I offer this prayer by Howard Thurman, the pre-eminent African-American theologian and minister of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

I need Your sense of time. Always I have an underlying anxiety about things. Sometimes I am in a hurry to achieve my ends and am completely without patience. It is hard for me to realize that some growth is slow, that not all processes are swift. I cannot discriminate between what takes time to develop and what can be rushed because my sense of time is dulled. O grant me a larger perspective that I may do all things with a profound sense of leisure of time.

I need Your sense of order. The confusion of the details of living is sometimes overwhelming. The little things keep getting in my way, providing ready-made excuses for failure to do and be what I know I ought to do and be. Much time is spent on things that are not very important while significant things are put in an insignificant place in my scheme of order. I must unscramble my affairs so that my life will become order. O God, I need Your sense of order.

I need Your sense of the future. Teach me to know that life is ever on the side of the future. Keep alive in me the future look, the high hope. Let me not be frozen either by the past or the present. Grant me, O Patient One, Your sense of the future without which all life would sicken and die.

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.

In these few moments of silence, let us re-affirm our commitment to the Declaration of Independence and all its implications. And let us always remember 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

SERMON: "Stumbling on Happiness"

You know 1-2-3, right? Today I'll give you 2-3-1, OK? Here goes:

This is the *second* of *three* services on *one* theme, that of happiness. Last week, I introduced the topic with a question, "Why the blazes is everyone making suggestions about being happy?" I cited a TV show, commercials, restaurants, online dating services, churches, booze and several other commodities, enterprises or people that purport to make you happy.

I reported that Republicans are happier than Democrats—although maybe not in the Tennessee legislature—that happiness is infectious and that people in some countries are happier than those in others. We learned that Americans rate themselves as pretty darn happy, but oddly, they are the hugest consumers of happiness helpers.

And I made the point that one good way to be happy is to *make* someone happy. Get involved in something outside yourself and help someone else be happy.

I promised to preach about the ideas in this book, *Stumbling on Happiness*, by Daniel Gilbert. And so let me start with his big hypothesis. In simple terms, he says we are responsible for our own happiness. It doesn't come from outside us, he says, but from inside us. We have the power to literally make ourselves happy.

Now that doesn't seem to square with making someone happy, does it? If we are encouraged to make someone happy, how can their happiness come from within? Gilbert would say that what *we* do makes *us* happy and what others do make them happy; in this case, how the other person perceives and receives what we do *makes him or her* happy.

Gilbert's ideas didn't squirt out of his head one morning; they are based in legitimate research. Gilbert says that humans can do one thing that other creatures cannot. Did you know that? I'm not talking about speech and communication. Humans can simulate experiences. We don't have to mix up a batch of liver and onions ice cream to know that it wouldn't go down very well. We know—we can predict—that some flavors are best left untasted.

So using our power of prediction, we can make an educated choice about our future. For instance, if you could choose between hitting the lottery for fifty million dollars and being paralyzed from the waist down, it's not hard to decide which might be the more attractive future existence. Interesting thing about lottery winners and

paraplegics. One year after the event that determined their future, both paraplegics and lotto winners rate themselves equally on a happiness quotient. You would expect that paralysis would depress the hell out of someone and becoming wealthy would elate someone beyond measure. Such is not the case.

Happiness comes from within. But we think and often act as if it comes from outer space.

Research shows us that we have a tendency to over-estimate the importance that events might have on our happiness. Events like getting a promotion, winning an election, passing a test, losing weight or even winning the lotto. Apparently, with only a couple exceptions, such as the death of a loved one, the effect of good or bad events dwindles rapidly after three months. That is, events don't make us happy—or sad—for long. We get over it quickly.

Why? Because we can synthesize happiness. We can change our views, our opinions of the world so that we can be happier about the world in which we live.

Pete Best was the first drummer for the Beatles. They replaced him with Ringo Starr. Best is still a working musician and he maintains that it's good that he was not a Beatle, that he's happier now than he would have been if Ringo had never picked up a drumstick.

And we say, "Sure, Pete." We smirk because we cannot believe that his happiness—that he synthesized—is of a better quality than the happiness he would know had he remained the drummer for the Beatles.

Natural happiness is what we feel when we get what we want and synthetic happiness is what we make when we don't get what we want. And the really interesting thing is that synthetic happiness is not any worse than natural happiness. That seems counter-intuitive, though. What kind of economy would we have if we knew that not

getting what we want is just fine, no need to *actually* get what we want?

Daniel Gilbert suggests that synthetic happiness is just as real and enduring as the kind of happiness you stumble upon when you get exactly what you want. And from that, I conclude that Thomas Jefferson had it right when he composed the phrase “the *pursuit* of happiness.” I think that what really increases our happiness is pursuing it.

There’s much more to Gilbert’s book—lots of experiments and data, which is presented in a really entertaining manner. I commend it to you. But he was not the first person to notice that we can make ourselves happy. In talking about the political climate in Denmark, Hamlet has this interesting exchange with Rosencrantz:

**HAMLET.** What have you, my good friends,  
deserv’d at the hands of Fortune,  
that she sends you to prison hither?

**ROSENCRANTZ.** Prison, my lord?

**HAMLET.** Denmark’s a prison.

**ROSENCRANTZ.** Then is the world one.

**HAMLET.** A goodly one, in which there are many confines,  
wards, and dungeons, Denmark being one o’ th’ worst.

**ROSENCRANTZ.** We think not so, my lord.

**HAMLET.** Why then ’tis none to you;  
for there is nothing either good or bad,  
but thinking makes it so. To me it is a prison.

*There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.* Hamlet

asserts that our brains are responsible for the value something has. In other words, presented with a bowl of liver and onions ice cream, we can determine its goodness without tasting it. And if we can do that with a bowl of ice cream we can do that with other events in our lives. We can determine if the event will make us happy or not affect us at all.

Adam Smith also wrote about this. Do you know Adam Smith? I studied Adam Smith in seminary. He was born in 1723 and died in 1790. He was a was a Scotsman and a moral philosopher and a pioneer of political economy. The book by Smith that I had to read is *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. It’s very dense and full of 100–word sentences. Not fun reading for a modern 21<sup>st</sup> century boy raised with a television. And I never thought at the time that I would quote him at length in a sermon, but here goes.

“The great source of both the misery and disorders of human life, seems to arise from over–rating the difference between one permanent situation and another. Avarice over–rates the difference between poverty and riches: ambition, that between a private and a public station: vain-glory, that between obscurity and extensive reputation.”

What he’s saying is that we make ourselves unhappy when we believe that being wealthy, powerful or famous is better than poor, weak or anonymous. Or whatever our condition is. He’s saying that in over–rating wealth, power & fame, we fail to see how wealthy, powerful and famous we really are.

Smith continues, “The person under the influence of any of those extravagant passions, is not only miserable in his actual situation, but is often disposed to disturb the peace of society, in order to arrive at that which he so foolishly admires.”

And when we let our over–rated desires control our behavior, we can easily run amok and make a helluva mess. And for an example of

that you need only examine Marcus Schrenker. Mr. Schrenker wore Armani suits, drove a silver Lexus and flew his own snazzy airplane. With his wife, he hosted extravagant parties, complete with brilliant fireworks, at his home in an affluent Indianapolis suburb.

Mr. Schrenker had three investment consulting firms, lived in a sprawling stone-and-brick home on waterfront property next door to the Indianapolis Yacht Club. The 10,000-square-foot home has a boat dock and a swimming pool. Neighbors say Mr. Schrenker owned two aircraft and his house has been valued at \$3 million. The Schrenkers are an attractive couple, and some thought they seemed to have stepped out of the pages of a magazine.

But things were going downhill for Marcus Schrenker. He faced crushing financial woes, legal troubles including charges of fraud, and a divorce initiated by his wife, Michelle.

Last week, in a bizarre and reckless effort to escape his troubles by faking his death, Mr. Schrenker, a daredevil pilot, parachuted out of his own plane over Alabama. And then he fled on a motorcycle he had previously stored in a garage nearby. He left his aircraft to fly on autopilot 200 miles to the Florida Panhandle, where it crashed near a cluster of homes. *Irresponsible* doesn't seem to capture the essence Mr. Schrenker's reckless escape plan. He was caught in a campsite with a six-pack of Bud Light.

Now what would Adam Smith say about Marcus Schrenker? He'd say, "Wherever prudence does not direct, wherever justice does not permit the attempt to change our situation, the man who does attempt it, plays at the most unequal of all games of hazard, and stakes every thing against scarce any thing."

Smith could be interpreted to say that no one needs to better himself or herself, and it's not hard for him to say that, because he never wanted for anything in his whole life. Still, I think he's on to something when he implies that happiness can be achieved at any

station in life.

Smith tells this story. He wrote, "What the adjutant said to the king may be applied to men in all the ordinary situations of human life. When the King had recounted, in their proper order, all the conquests which he proposed to make, and had come to the last of them, his Adjutant said, 'And what does your Majesty propose to do then?'

'I propose then,' said the King, 'to enjoy myself with my friends, and endeavor to be good company over a bottle.'

'And what hinders your Majesty from doing so now?' replied the Adjutant.'

Smith writes, "In the most glittering and exalted situation that our idle fancy can hold out to us, the pleasures from which we propose to derive our real happiness, are almost always the same as those which, in our actual, though humble station, we have always at hand, and in our power.

One last sentence from Adam Smith. "Examine the records of history, recollect what has happened in your own experience, consider what has been the conduct of almost all the greatly unfortunate, either in private or public life, whom you may have either read of, or heard of, or remember; and you will find that the misfortunes of by far the greater part of them have arisen from their not knowing when they were well, when it was proper for them to sit still and to be contented."

I leave you with more from Daniel Gilbert. He says, when our ambition is unbound, we readily lie, cheat and steal. Witness Macbeth, whose excessive ambition to be king was his own undoing. When our ambition is bound, we can readily experience joy. When our fears are unbound, we are reckless and cowardly. Witness Marcus Schrenker. When our fears are bound, we act prudently, we're thoughtful and cautious.

And we can be happy in the pursuit of happiness.

Last week, I asked that you send me your thoughts about happiness. A handful of people responded, but I'd like to read more. So, I ask again. Please let me know what makes you happy or how you pursue happiness. My e-mail address is on the back of the bulletin. I'll use your thoughts in the service next week.

Please join me now in singing Hymn 149, "Lift Every Voice and Sing." This words are by James Weldon Johnson and the music was composed by his brother, John Rosamond Johnson. The song was originally performed in Jacksonville, Florida, by children in a celebration of the birthday of Abraham Lincoln. For many years, this song was known as the Negro National Anthem and it's now referred to as the Black American National Anthem. Hymn 149.

#### HYMN 149, "Lift Every Voice and Sing"

#### BENEDICTION

My benediction today is inspired by the Rev. James Kubal–Komoto, who serves the Saltwater Unitarian Universalist Church in Des Moines, Iowa.

On August 28<sup>th</sup>, 1963, on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. proclaimed his dream for the United States of America. His words, "I have a dream." are warmly remembered today. Two days from now, on Tuesday January 20, 2009, in front of the US Capitol, Barack Hussein Obama will take the oath of office to become the 44<sup>th</sup> President of the United States of America.

From the Lincoln Memorial across the National Mall to the steps of the US Capitol, is a distance of 1.9 miles. It will have taken 45 years, four months, and 23 days for this nation to make the journey from one historic spot to the other. That's a speed of 7¼ inches per day,

a glacially slow pace fueled only by hope, courage, perseverance and the patience of so many, and their willingness to always put one foot in front of the other.

If you are older than 45 years, 4 months, and 23 days, it is a journey that happened within your lifetime, and you can be proud of our progress. If you are younger than 45 years, 4 months, and 23 days, you are indeed fortunate to look ahead into a bright future as you live out the dream in this country and at this time.

I have heard this expression all too often in a context of political pandering, defiance, militancy and pseudo–piety, and, at those times, I did not share in its meaning. Now it seems all too appropriate for me to say, "God Bless America."

#### EXTINGUISHING THE CHALICE

We extinguish this flame,  
but not the light of its truth  
the warmth of this community  
nor the fire of our commitment.  
These we carry in our hearts  
and share with all the world.

#### POSTLUDE