

**The Acceptance of Denial**  
**Presented by the Worship Committee on April 17, 2011**

**There's an Elephant in the Room**

by Anonymous

There's an elephant in the room.  
It is large and squatting, so it is hard to get around it.  
Yet we squeeze by with "How are you?" and "I'm fine" and  
And a thousand other forms of trivial chatter.  
We talk about the weather. We talk about work.  
We talk about everything else--except the elephant in the room.

There's an elephant in the room  
We all know it is there.  
We are thinking about the elephant as we talk.  
It is constantly on our minds.  
For you see, it is a very big elephant.  
But we do not talk about the elephant in the room.

Oh, please say her name.  
Oh, please, say "Barbara" again.  
Oh, please, let's talk about the elephant in the room.  
For if we talk about her death,  
perhaps we can talk about her life.

Can I say "Barbara" and not have you look away?  
For if I cannot, you are leaving me Alone...  
In a room...  
With an elephant.

**Lesson For All Ages: Let It Be A Dance**

by Lenora Trussell

(Invite the children to come up front)

Do any of you remember a time when you were having a good time and it got late and you were sleepy. Your parents, knowing you better than anyone else, said it was time for bed and you said, "No I'm not sleepy. I don't want to go to bed. I'm having too much fun." Does that sound familiar? This is what we call denial.

Hundreds of years ago there were some slaves in a country in South America who also used denial to help them deal with the very hard lives they had. They had to do really hard work and were mistreated. They used music and dancing as a way of denying the pain in their lives whenever they could. They used drums and claves which are wooden

sticks to make the rhythm for the dances. Today we are using a UU Hymn #311, Let it Be a Dance, for our music.

I am going to show you a few dance steps that were created by the slaves using their daily lives as inspiration. The adults in the congregation are invited to join in and may move to the aisles or the back or up front if you want more space to move in than just where you are standing.

1. "Lazy foot". This is the way the slaves had to walk because they wore chains around their ankles. (Demonstrate)
2. This step is coupled with holding candles to light their way. (Demonstrate)
3. The next step is the machete chop when they were either clearing land or harvesting food. (Demonstrate)
4. The last step also has its roots in the African culture and it was popular during the disco period and it is a general boogey step widely open to individual interpretation.

(Music plays and we dance until the music ends.)

## **Oh Yeah?**

by Rick Kimball

We on the worship Committee were pleased when Lenora Trussell came up with the title for today's service. The Acceptance of Denial. How clever we were for her to think of that. The Acceptance of Denial. The triumph of the oxymoronic.

Driving home that evening I wondered when in my life I had first denied anything. Probably the first time I said "I didn't mean to" right after pushing my twin sister. Or "It wasn't my fault!" after I dropped the glass of milk that shattered and splattered on the floor. Acceptance of my denial was difficult for my parents, but it came easily to me. Of course I didn't mean to, even if my sister had just enraged me by grabbing the toy I wanted. And of course the spilled milk was not my fault. My mother must have handed me a wet, slippery glass.

As I moved into adolescence, the objects of denial became a little dicier, and the nature of denial more complex. Had I really smoked three cigarettes on the way home from school? Sure, but the other guys made me do it, and it didn't matter anyway because I never inhaled. So why was I feeling sick? It must have been something I ate. I accepted that denial, and when people or my conscience told me I was fooling myself, I said, "Oh yeah?" I denied my acceptance of denial. And yes, I then accepted my denial of the acceptance of my denial. I answered my "oh yeah" with "yeah."

Fortunately, adolescence and the need to argue about everything eventually passed, and I developed better approaches to the infinite than endlessly compounding the process of denial and acceptance. I began to explore the spiritual path, searching out the many opposites that help shape mystery, the

creative interplay of self and other, the surging push and pull of yin and yang, of dark and light, of silence and sound, of life and death.

No matter how far on this path I move, the mix of denial and acceptance remains critical to my progress. Do I deny the existence of God? Why yes. And do I accept my denial of God? Sure. I even sometimes cringe at the use of the word *prayer* in this room. Yet my denial has a crack. Had I lived in northern Japan last month I, like the atheistic soldier in the foxhole, would have prayed frequently and fervently.

“Denial makes the world go round” said a headline in a 2007 edition of the New York Times. And so it does. Denial is lying, from the tiny white lie that helps us through the working day and the social night to the larger lie which says that internal stabbing pain means nothing when instead it signals the approach of illness and death that can be stopped only by acceptance right now.

Denial is delusion, the dream of the immortal presence we expect to achieve.

Denial is humor, from the gentle quip that illumines truth to the angry guffaw that buries it.

Denial is escape. Sometimes the comforting music that cleanses our soul while blocking outside concerns for a concert’s length, sometimes the TV and Facebook that consume our lives.

And denial is required to partner with acceptance in life’s dance.

“Denial makes the world go round.” So it does, but often the world wobbles. Only rarely does it turn in gentle harmony through the winds its movement makes. What will it be? Truth or lie? Acceptance or denial or the mindful interplay of both? What will it be? The decision is ours. And making that decision is one of the reasons we gather here each Sunday morning.

This Sunday morning we approach the problem directly, exploring the interplay in several specific situations. Our thoughts may or may not apply to your own life. Feel free to stamp each one as “accepted” or “denied,” as you like.

Blessed be.

## **Dancing on the Edge of the Abyss**

by John Howard

We are surrounded by bad news today. We are actually destroying the most beautiful part of the universe that we know of. That we would just serve up such beauty to destruction is almost too much to bear. Our culture doesn’t deal well with bad news, and our consumer-driven industrial society has created a

population that handles stress by going shopping and watching reality programs on TV.

Is optimism also a form of denial?

Does the arc of history really bend towards justice, or is that just a comforting myth? Is the Universe really friendly, or do we just choose to behave as if it were? How can we rejoice in the beauty of the world while our hearts are breaking with the knowledge that this too shall pass?

Sometimes these questions don't yield to thinking, but must simply be expressed in art, music and poetry, as feelings that go beyond words and thought. Artists are those who have learned to dance on the edge of the abyss. It is the nature of things to change and pass away. We can't hold them. We can't possess them. We can't buy beauty and lock it up in a storage unit. I am inspired by the art of Andy Goldsworthy, who builds temporary art with natural materials that celebrate the fluidity and transience of nature. He dances on the edge of the abyss.

Truly, it is far too late, and things are far too bad for pessimism.

### **3.22.11**

by Rick Kimball

On March 22 of this spring, families and friends gathered in the gymnasium of a school in Kesenuma, Japan, for the annual graduation of sixth and ninth graders. People who had been sleeping in the gym since the earthquake and tsunami eleven days earlier rolled up their blankets and moved to the rear of the hall, making space for celebration.

Grief remained fresh. Some students cried while accepting diplomas, prizes, and gifts.

Standing in the line of ninth graders was a 48-year-old man, whose 15-year-old boy had not been seen since the earthquake. The man carried his son's photograph. He wore his son's T-shirt and white sneakers. He received his son's diploma, and said, "I want him to come back. My wife wants to hug him."

Here is denial at its bravest and best. Acceptance will follow when the father and mother are able to allow it.

[PAUSE]

Through our offertory each Sunday, we accept the fact of need, and we act on it by giving half of what we collect to an organization committed to good work. This month that organization is the Natural Resources Council of Maine, a nonprofit membership organization working to restore and conserve Maine's environment, now and for future generations.

We will now take the morning offering.

[After the music ends]

We are grateful for all that we are able to give and for all we receive.

Blessed be

## **Let Him Go**

by Miriam Congdon

What I'm about to tell you happened six and a half years ago, but I still feel it in my heart. That's when my husband Don was diagnosed with stage 3B lung cancer. But how could this be? He had never smoked! And the prognosis – Nine months? That's all!? I was devastated. There was no way I would so easily give him up. I was going to find a way to beat this unfair illness, to beat the odds.

When Don was in the hospital, I arrived early every day, for six weeks, so as not to miss rounds. If his doctors didn't stop by his bed, I chased them down the hall, begging for answers even when I knew there weren't any. When he came home, I cared for him day and night, and then, very late, I searched online for the drug trial or alternative therapy that would give him back his life. Never mind that my beautiful Buddhist Don, was content with his treatment and the support we both found at the cancer center. He didn't have the physical or emotional strength to leave his comfort zone, and I'm not sure I did either. Yet I persevered, hoping for a cure.

Too late, I realized that in being so busy I had forgotten the man wrapped inside the diagnosis. I still regret deeply that we didn't share memories, joys, fears, and laughter, nor did we really say goodbye, not even when the cancer spread. We both shut down, forgetting a married lifetime of honest and open sharing. We held each other and we cried, but without words. We – mostly me – didn't want to go near the subject of death. We expected that one day, far, far in the future, his doctors would say, Go home. Be with your family. There's nothing more we can do. And then, we thought, then, we'd have our special time together.

That Hollywood ending never came. Don had a stroke that took away half his body, slurred his speech, and affected his vision. He was often drugged, barely awake. I was still searching for miracles, willing to be his caregiver forever. Even in the brief visits allowed in the neurological ICU, I spent as much time with medical staff, trying to learn something, anything, as I did at his bedside.

But then came inhalation pneumonia, the last domino that played out from cancer. Now I said it, as I held his one good hand. "I'll always love you," over and over, my indirect way of saying goodbye.

Four days after his stroke, Don could no longer breathe on his own, and I knew he didn't want a respirator. The thought of invoking his living will was heart-rending, and I couldn't say the words that would kill him. I called the two doctors who knew him best, and they both said "Let him go." Don, now awake and lucid, saw my hesitation and motioned for a pen and paper, and he wrote in big letters, with three exclamation marks, "DNR!" Do Not Resuscitate. I still have that sheet of paper.

And so it was. He was disconnected from his tubes and wires, given more morphine, and moved to a private room.. There, he slipped into the world of drugs and dreams, and, later, he stopped breathing.

Afterwards, I was so consumed by sorrow and guilt that I lost all details of that last day. Had I gotten into bed to hold him, had I told him how much I loved him, thanked him for being my devoted husband and very best friend, for always accepting, supporting and encouraging me? Our daughter and our minister said absolutely yes. But I still can't remember.

And it was only after he died, that I came to realize what I wish I had known before. Never postpone intimacy or joy, don't be afraid of goodbyes, accept what is, and, if it comes to it, grieve together instead of working harder.

That's what Don, my Buddhist love, would have wanted for both of us. Wherever he is now, he is watching over me and he is quietly encouraging me along the path of learning, just as he always did.

## **Denial is a River in Egypt**

by Meret Bainbridge

*Author's Note: When the Worship Committee decided a few weeks ago to explore the spectrum between denial and acceptance, little did I know that a week later this would no longer be an intellectual topic for me, but a heart-wrenching emotional roller-coaster.*

*My father was diagnosed with a critical illness, underwent high-risk surgery and survived, only to die of complication the following night. All the while my family held on to every last shred of hope, unable to take in the full seriousness of his condition.*

*Rick Kimball wrote in his condolence note to me: "It is much easier to write or speak about life's mysteries than to experience them.", and I replied: "I don't think I can put any of this into words for a long time."*

*Yet throughout this first day - between phone calls and e-mails, crying, buying an airline ticket, and day-to-day chores – these images and lines kept coming to me, and at the end of the day this poem had formed itself in my mind.*

De Nile is a river in Egypt  
On its western shore, people buried their dead.  
On its eastern shore they built their villages, living in the rhythm of their daily lives.  
Its seasonal flooding cracks open the hardened desert soil  
Softening it into fertile mud  
Where new crops of food can grow

Denial is the veil  
that screens our eyes  
from seeing the full picture  
of the terrible truth all at once.

Denial is the airbag  
that softens the blow  
when life's tragedies  
hit us straight on.

Denial is the parachute  
that breaks our fall  
so we don't crush  
when we finally hit bottom.

Denial is the ebb  
that allows us to brace ourselves  
before the next wave  
might swallow us up.

Denial is the pause, the respite  
between contractions of labor  
that tear us open painfully  
in the process of birthing through our grief,  
softening us into letting go  
and accepting  
It is what it is.

Denial is God's way  
of feeding us the monumental greatness  
of life's mysteries  
in small digestible spoonfuls.

De Nile is a River in Egypt.  
On its western shore we bury our dead,

our losses and our sorrows.  
On its eastern shore we build our villages, living in the rhythm of our daily lives.  
Its seasonal flooding cracks open our hardened souls  
Softening them into fertile mud  
Where hope for new life can grow.

## **Denying Denial**

by Erica Bartlett

"I can't do this."  
I tell myself such protestation  
is not denial,  
simply truth,  
acknowledging my limits.  
But I also know  
another truth:  
I have no choice.  
I *must* do this.  
Which do I believe?  
Do I accept  
that I have a choice,  
that I can turn back,  
or that I have strength  
long denied,  
that I not only *must* do this  
but that I *can*?  
I feel like  
Schrödinger's cat,  
straddling possibilities,  
reality never defined  
until I move.  
Impatient to know,  
I decide.  
Denying denial,  
I choose to strive  
for the impossible.  
Doing so,  
I achieve heights  
never before dreamt,  
and embrace the self revealed  
by this new truth.

## **In Denial and Proud of It** by Lenora Trussell

Earlier in the service we did the lesson for all ages. My journey into Zumba has been one of my more successful experiences utilizing denial. Zumba is the modern popular version of Cumbia which is the folkdance created by slaves in Columbia South America. My Zumba instructor adds other movements such as martial arts, country/western, and just the other day she threw in some steps performed by the Lollypop Guild from the Wizard of OZ.

I thought my knees would not tolerate the dance movements, but much to my surprise they responded very positively even from my first class. I came to the conclusion that I am not only directionally impaired, I am rhythm deficient and I have a dwindling population of fast twitch muscles. I discovered that I am doing Zumba for my own entertainment rather than exercise. The production of sweat and endorphins keeps me coming back for more.

I was so excited with my newfound activity that I wanted to share it with friends. Most people laughed and declined my offer. One brave friend joined me and after class she inquired as to how long I had been doing Zumba. I proudly told her about three months thinking she was going to brag on my agility and fluid movements I felt I had been developing. She said in a fairly matter-of-fact manner, "Oh, I thought you would have gotten better in that amount of time."

Friends often get in the way of your denial. I will say that her statement did make me skip a beat, but then I am used to skipping beats. Undaunted, I told her that next time she joined me in class, she was going to have to stand in front of me instead of behind me.

I admit to being in denial about my dancing capabilities and I like my denial. It makes me happy and I am not giving it up for anybody. I recommend denial highly to anyone who wants to give it a try. I figure it is like a good bottle of wine. Of course you can overdo it and there are times when it might be inappropriate but it still has the capacity to enhance your quality of life.

Lynne Eldridge, who is a medical doctor, says that a new study looked at denial and its relationship to physical outcomes in patients with lung cancer. The patients with the most denial functioned better physically, and were less bothered by fatigue, nausea, loss of appetite, difficulty swallowing, and pain.

I rest my case. Even doctors are no longer in denial that denial can be just what the doctor ordered.