

Robin McGonigle
University Congregational Church
Aug. 25, 2013

“Religious Jabberwocky”

I Cor. 1:10, 19-20

‘Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
All mimsy were borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

“Beware the Jabberwock, my son!”
The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!
Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun
The frumious Bandersnatch!”

He took his vorpal sword in hand:
Long time the manxome foe he sought –
So rested he by the Tumtum tree,
And stood awhile in thought.

And, as in uffish thought he stood,
The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame,
Came whiffing through the tulgey wood,
And burbled as it came!

This poem, entitled *Jabberwocky*, is found in Chapter 1 of Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*. The poem is considered by many to be one of the greatest, if not the greatest, of all nonsense poems in English. Our response, however, may be much like Alice’s when she says, “It seems to fill my head with ideas – only I don’t know exactly what they are.”

I suspect that there are people who come to worship week to week for whom our words sound like religious jabberwocky, or as our scripture for today calls it: “fancy rhetoric”. I suspect that there are some of us who use the words, and even we aren’t totally certain what we mean when we say them. “reconciliation”, “acceptance”, “revelation”, “tithes”, “chancel”, “carillon”, “Guild” . . . these are words I hear around the church and I wonder if we all talked about it whether we would be able to agree on what

they mean. Furthermore, some of those words are so packed with history that I wonder if they confuse the average visitor to our church. To quote Alice, “These words fill our heads with ideas – but we just don’t know exactly what they are.”

In our scripture lesson for today, the apostle Paul addresses the factions and cliques in the early church. Some people claimed that they were following Paul, the founder of the church. Others were following Apollos, the pious and enthusiastic Jewish believer spoken of in Acts. Yet others claimed loyalty to Cephas - Simon Peter - who apparently had connections with the Corinthians. And there were yet others in the church who claimed loyalty only to Christ. Surprisingly, Paul does not even support this last group. Instead, he condemns the whole notion and practice of any divisions at all in the church.

I Cor. 1: 10, 19-20

"I have a serious concern to bring up with you, my friends, using the authority of Jesus, our Master. I'll put it as urgently as I can: You must get along with each other. You must learn to be considerate of one another, cultivating a life in common.

*It is written, 'I'll turn conventional wisdom on its head,
I'll expose so-called experts as crackpots.'*

So where can you find someone truly wise, truly educated, truly intelligent in this day and age? Hasn't God exposed it all as pretentious nonsense?"

My goodness! That ancient letter could have been written to the church today... or even our city, our state, and our nation.

- Some say, “I am of Boeing. Others are of Spirit. Still others are of Cessna.”
- Some say, “I am for the new library.” Others say, “Let’s not waste the money”.
- There are baptism sprinklers, pourers, and dunkers, but it is the same water.
- Some say, “We need more education funding.” Others ask for the budget to be balanced and no increase in taxes.
- There are Christians who are welcoming and affirming of the GLBTQ community and others who believe it is a sin.

- Some like the Koch ads. Some turn the channel.
- There are those who like a blue background on the new sign and others who prefer purple.
- Some of us want to grow the family ministries of this church and some of us would like to focus on the older population.
- Some say, “I like red wine.” Others like white wine. Others just whine.

Jabberwocky. All of it.

To paraphrase Paul, “Have we been chopped into little pieces so we can each have a little bit for ourselves? Don’t trivialize it into fancy rhetoric that divides.”

This is exactly the time for us to pull together – or as the scripture says it, “be considerate of one another, cultivating a life in common.” A smile-like Ted reminded us- has a universal meaning.

Think for a moment about all the divisions you see in the world around us... divisions between family members, divisions in religious groups, political divisions, economic divisions, racial divisions... it never ends.

This is exactly the right time for all of us to kick into gear. At the times of our greatest challenges, at the times of our greatest differences of opinion, we can shine. That’s because UCC was built on the idea that we are “One People” whether or not we agree. We are “One Body in Christ” regardless of our religious jabberwocky. We are “One Church” with many traditions. We know that in Christ Jesus there is more power to unite us than anything has the power to pull us apart. We pull apart the powers of division. We focus on the shining core of reconciliation with each other based on Jesus and his teachings. We gather around the Lord’s Table together, all equally blessed to be there – and give thanks! We agree to disagree about the issues at hand, so we can join hands to accomplish together the mission God places before us.

St. Francis is credited with saying, “Preach the Gospel... if necessary, use words.” At a time such as this, when pulling together is critical, we may choose to *listen* and even *act*, rather than *speak* jabberwocky.

In spite of all the evidence to the contrary, we have confidence that hope is still alive, and we accept our call to act like it! We accept our call to be counter-evidence, to be a pinch of life-giving salt, a twinkle of light showing the way to wholeness and hope. We are called to BE the Good News, loving and serving in the name of Christ, reaching out to our neighbors in tangible acts of love. We offer toiletries and soap, help to build homes, offering to respond to disaster and stop disease. We enter into

partnerships with those who bring God's love into war zones and places of deepest partnership.

One saying I like is: "The past is forgiven. The present is accepted. The future is open." What does it mean? It means that there is room for disagreement among us. It means that I can, in one moment, really think you are stupid, and in the next, sit next to you and join in singing and praising God, lifting my voice with yours. It means that it is okay if you pray a prayer I don't agree with. It means that I am willing to listen to you even though I don't understand you and it means that I am willing to discuss things with you that frustrate me. It means we are a collective people who are different in many ways but Christ binds us together so that we become more complete together than we were as individuals – a true community of faith.

So the next time you hear some jabberwocky about the goings-on in our city, or the divisive American political scene, or gossip about someone in the church, take a moment to ask yourself –

- has Jesus himself been divided?
- Does this build up or tear down?
- Is this valuable and true or is this just a bunch of jabberwocky?
- And, what can I do to cultivate some civility in this situation?

It's not about us. It's about the work God can do through us to speak to a world in need of love and peace.