

HILLTOPPER

United Methodist Church of Parsippany

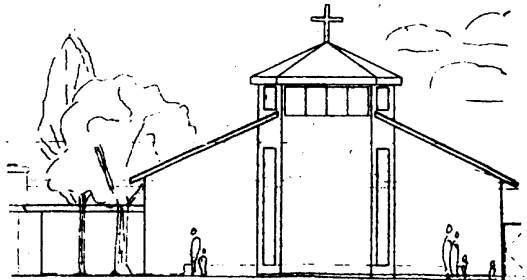
903 So. Beverwyck Road, Parsippany, NJ 07054 (973) 887-4657

http://www.parsippanyumc.com E-Mail: jedwards14@juno.com

Sunday Worship Celebration: 10:30 a.m.

In a hostile, hurting world we reach out to share kindness and laughter. Our spirituality is based on Jesus and his love and compassion. We provide a community of support and healing where all are welcomed and valued regardless of race, age, sexual orientation, disability, gender, or economic status. In a world where people feel they can love only those who are like themselves, we seek to celebrate the uniqueness of every human being.

"Making Room in the Circle"



FEBRUARY, 2010



A sermon by Pastor Jeff preached on January 10th, 2010, based upon Luke 3:15 - 17; 21 - 22, entitled "Flight of Fantasy."

Consider this flight of fantasy: What would it be like if through some magic or futuristic science it were possible for you or me to spend some time literally inside the life of another person. Imagine fully experiencing what it would feel like to be them, encountering the world through their perceptions as they go about the moment by moment choices they face, and then afterwards, return to ponder what we had experienced?

I suspect that to be inside somebody else's unique experience of the world would quite literally blow our minds. We would be humbled, to say the least. Though we may know better, we tend to assume in our human interactions that life is coming at everybody else pretty much the same way it is coming at us. We judge others as "idiots" when they don't make the choices we've made in what appears to us to be similar situations. The fact is, however, that each of us has an absolutely unique perception of reality arising from a totally distinct genetic code interacting with an unrepeatably environment creating a personal history that is all our own.



To experience pretty much any other person's life from the inside would probably do the trick, but imagine if sobriety comes easily to you what it would be like to experience the addictions of another, and how hard it is for that person to make the choice to turn down the drink. What would it be like to be inside someone suffering from the burden of mental illness? If you're an extrovert, to experience what it is like for the introvert who finds a crowd of people anxiety provoking? Or if you are an introvert, to experience how easy it is for the extrovert to put his or her foot in their mouth because they aren't weighed down by the same thought police that stand

guard at the doorway of your mind? If you are a man, to experience for a few moments what it is to be a woman, or vice versa. If you are straight, to experience what it is to be gay.

Imagine finding yourself in a situation that in your old life would have seemed pretty routine, but here in this other person's life, you find yourself stepping on emotional land mines, exploding with waves of anger and sadness.

Think of the possibilities if every person with strong political or religious convictions were to experience what it was like to be inside someone with a very different point of view.

Initially we would be struck by how different we are from one another. But I suspect that if we were able to undergo the experience for an extended period of time, we would begin to come around to seeing an underlying similarity to all human experience as well. We all have a different combination of strengths and weaknesses, talents and shortcomings, but everybody still has to deal the reality pointed to in the serenity prayer:

*Lord, grant me the serenity to accept that which I cannot change,
the courage to change that which I can change,
and the wisdom to know the difference. Amen.*

Over time, the significance of the external contexts of our lives would probably lessen. On a given day one person wins the jackpot lottery, and another suffers an auto accident that leaves him a paraplegic, and on that day their experience seems as different as night and day. But follow those two people a year or two or three down the road, and the interpretations of "fortunate" vs. "misfortunate" I suspect would begin to blur. (*Researchers indicate that the paraplegic is slightly more likely to describe himself as "happy" than the one who has so much money she no longer needs to work.*)

Over time, the external context of our lives may come to appear more like simply "window dressings"; interesting, but not the most important thing. Certain basic questions arise to be addressed in every life, in every context: *How do I come to terms with the fact that one day I will die? How do I give and receive love? Where do I find meaning?*

One person moves into her "dream house", and another is arrested for a felony, sentenced to several years in prison. In time the one in the dream house discovers that the house itself didn't make her as happy as she had imagined, and that there are these ongoing tedious responsibilities to deal with of paying the mortgage and making the repairs that occupy so much of her time and energy. The inmate discovers that even in the prison there are people to love and be loved by, and a life that has meaning, and that strangely, prison life removes some of the tedious burdens of daily living that can distract people who aren't incarcerated.

Underneath everything else, there is this question that everyone of us must face: ***What will I do with the life God has given me?*** Our life is distinct, no one else gets to live it. Will we?

In the Gospel story, the thirty year old Jesus appears for the first time. What has he been doing with the life that God has given him? We don't know for sure, but in terms of outwardly impacting the world, apparently very little. Presumably, he has been discovering his unique giftedness — the ways he is unlike any other man.

As Jesus shows up at the River Jordan he has a choice to make. What will he do with this extraordinary giftedness he has discovered within himself? He can, in theory, use it for his own personal glory. He can hoard it, so to speak. Or, he can live for the glory of God. He can dedicate his gifts to God's purposes in this world.

Choosing to enter the water of John's baptism expresses a couple of powerful themes. On the one hand, Jesus is choosing to be with all the rest of us poor slobs. This is what the incarnation is all about: God choosing to be **with us** in the muck of life; to experience our lives from the inside.

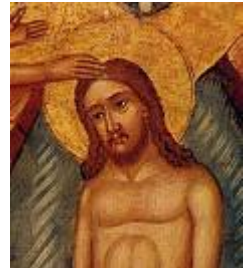
The creeds of the Church speak of Jesus being simultaneously human and divine, which is a tough idea to get our heads around. He is human – he is just like everybody else. But he is something vastly more as well. One way to conceive of the God-nature of Jesus is to consider the fact that God is the only one who is capable of fully carrying out the exercise I have fantasized about. God, having made each one of us, knows what it is like to be every single, distinct human being. Jesus, in turn, surely had a capacity far beyond ours to intuit what it felt like to be all other human beings, and to empathize with our plights, which we get a hint of in so many of the things he said, for instance, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

The choice to enter the waters involves solidarity with all us poor slobs, and it also expresses the willingness to risk all in faith. It involves letting go — trusting God to be with us, come what may, and trusting God to work things out as God sees fit as time moves on. As such, it’s a little like going into the deep water without a flotation device to support us to get dunked. Today is Stewardship Sunday in our church. Our time, our talents, our gifts and our money are all part of what God has given to us in our absolutely unique life. These things vary enormously. But the underlying issue is the same. What will we do with what we have been given?

Luke’s Gospel is the one that tells us about a rich man who apparently lived a respectable life and a poor man named Lazarus who lived on his doorstep. As different as their lives were on the outside, they both had to face the fact that one day they would die. For Lazarus, this was probably something of a no-brainer; he lived very close to death every day. The rich man, however, avoided the fact of his death, using his money as a buffer. But one day they do in fact both die, and there is a reckoning and a reversal of fortunes. To him whom much has been given, much is expected, and the rich man has not used what he has been gifted with for God’s glory. Lazarus, at his doorstep, went without food.

It is also in Luke’s Gospel that find the story of Jesus in the Temple watching people making their offerings, taking note of the poor widow who gave her two copper coins – all that she had. In terms of the spiritual meaning of her offering, Jesus said, her gift far outweighs the bags of gold placed by the rich people. She has given all, letting go, trusting God with her life.

What will you do with what God has given you? Will you embrace the gift of your life, with all the limitations, but with all the possibilities as well? If you don’t, who will?



In the kindness of Jesus,
Pastor Jeff



Haiti Disaster Relief

United Methodists have had a long-standing relationship with Haiti through the Methodist Church of Haiti. You are invited to contribute to the relief efforts through UMCOR. Make your checks payable to PUMC and put “Haiti Relief” in the memo.





Looking back...No meeting in January - and now none in February either!
We're hibernating for the winter – see you ladies in March!

NO MEETING IN FEBRUARY

**United Methodist
Women**

Feb 2nd – Groundhog Day
Feb 14th – Valentines's Day

Feb. 15th – President's Day
Feb. 17th – Ash Wednesday

Get well wishes to those of you who are ill, and
HAPPY BIRTHDAY to those of you celebrating this month with Denise White and Grace Agre.

God Bless,
Doris Bradley

Prov. 17:17 "A friend loves at all times."



**BEYOND WORDS: - Discovering God in The Lord's Prayer - An 8 Week Small Group
Experience with Pastor Jeff and David Turner – 2/24 thru 4/14**



JUST GOING THROUGH THE MOTIONS? If you find yourself simply repeating the words by rote when you pray the Lord's Prayer, you are not alone. For some of us, praying the words that Jesus taught has become little more than an empty ritual. How can we recapture the original meaning and power of this sacred prayer? You are invited to explore this question on Wednesday evenings, 7:00 - 8:30m beginning February 24th and ending April 14th. For more information or to sign up, please speak to either Pastor Jeff or David.



**Is Your
Pledge
Up to Date?**

If you have not had the opportunity to return your **pledge card** for 2010, you can receive one from the ushers, and place it in the offering plates. Everybody's support is greatly appreciated.



Our **youth group** meets approximately every other Sunday evening from 7 to 8:30 p.m. All 8th through 12th graders are invited. Josh Romines is our youth leader, assisted by Dawn Barhite.



Copies of the book, ***From Reveille to Appell: The Story of an American Prisoner-of-War in World War II***, are available for a \$20 donation. Written by Pastor Jeff and Sandy Bostwick, the book tells the story of the year Harold Gantert spent in a German prison camp. The book is full of drawings, journal entries, photos and letters from Harold's scrap book, and provide insight of the common heroism of Harold and so many others who served our country so valiantly. It also provides a lesson in trusting God. Harold describes his experience of parachuting from his plane this way: *"I said a little prayer and it felt OK and then I jumped. I could hear the sound of the air around me; I could feel it on my face. At some point my plane exploded, but still I continued to feel peaceful. You know, it's quiet way up there, looking down at the countryside below."*



Lent begins with **Ash Wednesday**, February 17th. Please join us as we worship at 7:30 p.m. There will be opportunity to receive the imposition of ashes.



Booklets of **Daily Lenten Devotionals** will be available in Church in February for you to take home and use throughout the 40 days of Lent. The devotionals are published by The Society of St. Andrew, a national, ecumenical, nonprofit hunger relief ministry. *"Each day of Lent, one of our gifted guest writers uses the theme 'Jesus is ...' to describe how they see Jesus and how His love has touched their life. As you make the journey to the cross this year, use this devotion booklet to see Jesus in all kinds of unique ways while remembering how much Jesus loves you and the incredible sacrifice He made for each of us."*



We've put together a **photo directory of our children and youth** in order to help us learn their names. If you have a child or youth who hasn't yet been included, please submit a photo to Pastor Jeff



Our church website has been revised and updated. If you haven't seen it lately, check it out at Parsippanyumc.com. At the website you will find a link to all of Pastor Jeff's sermons, as well as his occasionally bloggings.



Healing Prayer sessions are held every Wednesday morning from 10:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. in the prayer chapel. All are invited to come and be a part of this time of prayer -- for yourself or for others.



A **Men's Breakfast** is held every Tuesday at 7 a.m. at the Empire Diner on Rt. 46. It's a relaxed time with many jokes and laughter and conversation about whatever we care to talk about, concluded with a prayer. All are welcome



The **UMW** is selling **Food Certificates to benefit the General Budget** for ShopRite and PathMark as an *ongoing Fund Raiser*. The church will receive 5% of all purchases (you buy \$100 of certificates, the church gets \$5). Certificates are available in \$5, \$10, \$20, \$25, \$50 and \$100 denominations. Please see Betty Polen at the beginning of Coffee Hour if you would like to purchase Food Certificates. Checks should be made payable to The United Methodist Women.

Thank you,
The UMW



Consider becoming a part of one or more of our Musical Groups here at church:

Bell Choir – rehearses Thursdays at 7:00 p.m. The Bell Choir has been shrinking over the last few years and we sure would like more people to join us! Speak to Tom Smith or Barb Bradley - or just show up on Thursday and see what happens!

Choir – rehearses Thursdays at 7:45 p.m. We always have an "open robe" for anyone who loves to sing. We sing in 4-part harmony, so if you've sung in your high school chorus or any other equivalent, you have a great start! Speak to any choir member or Barb Bradley if you're interested.

Kids Choir – rehearses after Sunday service in the sanctuary. Children of all ages are invited to join Sarah Jernstrom and Barb Bradley as they teach your children songs and signing.

Jr. Choir – rehearses after Sunday service in the sanctuary. For kids too old for Kids Choir and too young for the adult choir! Speak to Sarah Jernstrom or Barb Bradley if you're interested.



Anyone aware of a **Prayer Concern** is invited to contact Grace Agre at 539-3855 who will put the **Prayer Chain** into action. If Grace cannot be reached, please contact Pastor Jeff. If you would like to add your name to the people who receive the prayer chain, please speak to Betty Polen



Parsippany Food Pantry - Wes Sitgreaves has called to our attention the ongoing need of the Emergency Food Pantry in Parsippany in these difficult economic times. There are more and more families turning to the food pantry for help. You can bring your donations of non-perishable food items to the church any Sunday. Our church has been collecting non-perishable food for the Parsippany Food Pantry for many years. There is a bin outside of the sanctuary for contributions. Wes Stigreaves takes the food over as the bin gets filled up. They have given us a list of items that they can use: Canned fruits, vegetables, meat, fish, poultry and soups; dry goods: cereal, pasta, rice, dried potatoes, peanut butter and jelly, tomato sauce, tea, coffee, hot chocolate, fruit juice, powered or evaporated milk, salad dressings, mayo, mustard, ketchup. Supermarket gift cards are also welcome - buy them from Betty Polen and raise money for the church at the same time!!! This is a very easy way to give back to the less-fortunate in our own township. Please consider buying some of these items every week as you shop for your own groceries.



SCRIPTURE READINGS FOR FEBRUARY

<u>Feb. 7th</u> Isaiah 6:1-8 1 Corinth. 15: 1-11 Luke 5:1-11	<u>Feb. 14th</u> Exodus 34:29-35 2 Corinth. 3:12-4:2 Luke 9:28-36	<u>Feb. 21st</u> Deuteronomy 26:1-11 Romans 10:8b-13 Luke 4:1-13	<u>Feb. 28th</u> Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18 Philippians 3:17-4:1 Luke 13:31-35
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2 nd Mia Savarin	11 th Valia Hawkins
3 rd Denise White	11 th Julianne Karr
3 rd Justin Cogan	11 th Ryan Wink
4 th Susan Valcoff	19 th Charlotte Romeo
5 th Barbara Munnely	22 nd Elizabeth Vance
7 th Charlotte Vance	24 th Al Booth
8 th Andrew Schnetzer	24 th Tracy Krisa Kempski
10 th Mark Dierbach	25 th Sarah Edwards
10 th TJ Cogan	25 th Keith Hawkins, Jr.
	28 th Grace Agre

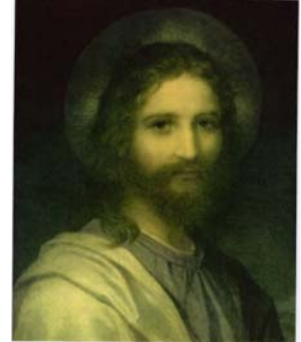
FEBRUARY ANNIVERSARIES

19th June & Russ Schnetzer



The **Skylands District Day of Learning** will be held on Saturday, **February 20th** from 9 – 3 at the Newton UMC. A variety of workshops are offered to strengthen local church ministries. Please speak to Pastor Jeff for more information.

Mark your calendar: On **Monday, March 1st** our church is pleased to host a Skylands Resource Day. **Dr. Rebecca Laird**, a wonderful professor and pastor associated with Drew Seminary will give a presentation on Spiritual Formation. A Laity focused gathering will happen from 7 to 9 p.m., and a clergy focused gathering from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., but you are invited to come to either session. Dr. Laird will offer valuable guidance in spiritual practices particularly helpful during the season of Lent.



“And now these three remain:

**FAITH
HOPE
and
LOVE.**



But the greatest of these is
LOVE.”

1 Corinthians 13:13

