

HILLTOPPER

United Methodist Church of Parsippany

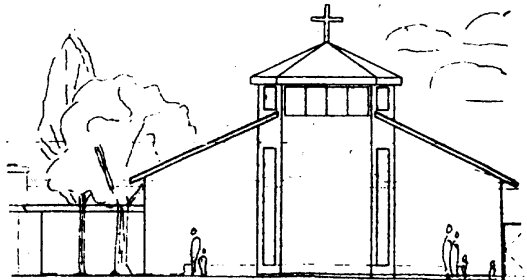
903 So. Beverwyck Road, Parsippany, NJ 07054 (973) 887-4657

<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"



MARCH, 2010



A sermon preached by Pastor Jeff on February 7, 2010 based upon Isaiah 6:1-8 and Luke 5:1-11, entitled "The Veiled God and Weird Stuff."

There is a funny little story, perhaps you've heard it: A little girl sits intently drawing a picture. Her mother asks, "What are you drawing, honey?" "I'm drawing a picture of God." The mom replies, "You know, sweetie, nobody has actually seen God, so nobody knows for sure what God looks like."

"They will after I'm done drawing."

We started our worship this morning with a passage from Isaiah, in which he actually describes having seen God. He was in the temple one day worshipping, when suddenly he was caught up in a vision in which he saw the Lord lifted up, seated on a throne surrounded by angels. Isaiah's response to this vision is to be absolutely terrified, crying out, "Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips."

This is one of the very few instances in the entire Bible when somebody claims to have a face to face encounter with God. God appears out of whirlwind to Job at the end of all his suffering. The author of Revelations describes an extended vision that includes direct encounters with God. Moses is said to have seen "the back side of God." That's about it.

The implication in these stories is that in our present state, we human beings are not ready to see God directly, that to do so would somehow obliterate us. It is somehow an act of mercy on God's part that God **doesn't** come to us directly, unveiled.

Nonetheless, it leaves us in a puzzling place. We are called to trust in a reality that we can not see, or touch, or hear, and yet upon whom, it is said, our very lives depend. I find I can't help but long for a glimpse behind the veil. I am fascinated by, and a bit envious of people who describe having received such a glimpse.

Blaise Pascal was a brilliant seventeenth century mathematician; an early scientist, and one of the truly great intellects of his age. His later writings turned towards religion. Following his death, a servant found sown inside his coat a journal entry he had carried around with him, close to his heart, describing an experience he had eight years prior his death: It read:

"The year of grace, 1654, Monday, 23rd of November..."

*From about half past ten in the evening until half past midnight, FIRE.
'God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob',
not of philosophers and scholars,
Certainty, certainty, heartfelt, joy, peace. God of Jesus Christ..."*

Alone late one night Pascal had an experience for about two hours during which all doubt about the reality and power of God altogether vanished, an experience he described as being like unto a consuming FIRE. Apparently Pascal had been anxious to hold on to the memory of this experience of absolute certainty, keeping the account close at hand at all times.

St. Thomas Aquinas the great medieval theologian is said to have had an experience of the presence of God late in life of such intensity that afterwards he refused to write any more theology. Having experienced God directly, he now viewed all the words he had written *about* God to be just *"so much straw."*

I find these stories fascinating, and for similar reasons, I have read all the books about people who have had what is called *"Near Death Experiences,"* because such people also claim to have seen *"behind the veil"*. As a result of what they have seen, they portray themselves as having left behind all uncertainty and doubt.

Such experiences may be more common than we realize. *(People are often reluctant to speak of such experiences because a) words are totally inadequate to describe what they have seen; and b) they are afraid people will think they are crazy).* Nonetheless, the vast majority of us are not privy to the sights such people have seen. We identify with the distressed father in the Gospels who brought his sick and suffering child to Jesus in a desperate plea for healing. Jesus says, *"All things are possible for the one who believes."* To which the father cries out, *"Lord, I believe, help my unbelief."*

Belief and unbelief: that's where we find ourselves having not seen face to face. Sometimes the belief part seems stronger, but at others, such as in times where we witness things like the suffering of children, it is the unbelieving part that comes to the forefront.

(Even atheists who claim certainty in their doubts are, I believe, deceiving themselves. They cannot prove the non-existence of God; their atheism means only that their unbelief dimension seems stronger than their belief. Who knows what doubts haunt their certainties within?)

So, those of us who haven't gotten to see behind the veil, how *do* we come to believe in a powerful God of love who is intensely invested in our lives?

This morning's Gospel story provides some direction here. Jesus shows up at the lakeside and begins to teach. People are instinctively drawn to him; so many people show up in fact that Jesus borrows Simon's fishing boat to manage the crowd. He is, to say the least, a compelling speaker, and in large part this is because of the sense of internal authority he conveys; he speaks as one who seems to know from first hand experience of what he speaks. He isn't a mere scribe, talking about what others have said before him. He holds their attention, which, in and of itself, is no small thing.

By the end of his talk, Simon and the others who have been listening are probably quite impressed, but not fundamentally changed. *"That may well be the best preacher I've ever heard, and I'm certainly going to give some thought to some of things he said, and if he comes to town again, I'll make a point of coming around to hear him speak again. But there's work to be done, a living to scratch out. I didn't catch any fish last night. I need to get back to my job."*

It is at this point that something weird happens. The preacher directs Simon to put his net down on the other side of the boat. For a variety of reasons, this suggestion doesn't make much sense. It's the middle of the day when the fish should be chillin' in the deeper waters, not hanging



about near the boat waiting to be caught. But out of politeness if nothing else, Simon does as the preacher says. Suddenly his net is bursting to the point of breaking with a great catch of fish.

Now here's the thing. God hasn't stepped out from behind the veil. Nothing has happened that is undeniably miraculous. Maybe the preacher just saw something the others missed, or maybe it was just a lucky guess. Maybe it's nothing more than a coincidence.

It's pretty weird though, and particularly in so far as it occurred in relationship to this man who claims to be so very close to God, it makes Simon stand up and take notice. It inspires a profound sense of awe.

So this is how it often goes with the faith journey. We're paying attention, and we notice weird stuff happening. Maybe it's just a coincidence, or maybe it's a God instance.

I suspect many of us here today could share experiences of this sort of weird stuff happening in your life.

Frederick Buechner tells a story of a time he had a stopover in an airport. In order to fortify himself against his least favorite form of travel, he stopped in an empty airport bar. Every seat at the bar was open. When he sat down, he noticed that in front of every seat there was a little card featuring the drink of the day, but at his seat, the card had a bit of metal attached to it. On closer investigation, he saw it that it was an old tie clip, made up of three initials. Exactly his three initials, in the right order.

Just a coincidence? Possibly. But Buechner could not help but feel as though it was a kind of calling card left by God, to let him know he wasn't alone, that he was expected and proceeding on the right path.

My wife has a friend Marty with whom she works. For the better part of a year, Marty had derived much pleasure and comfort from watching a family of three birds in a nest outside her kitchen window. When the three birds finally up and left the nest, never to return, Marty found herself feeling surprisingly grief-stricken. At some point soon afterwards a friend, unaware of the whole bird saga, happened to give Marty a card that featured on the cover a picture of three birds.

Just a coincidence or a comforting nudge from the veiled God?

Over twenty five years ago I was in a very stuck place, both psychologically and spiritually. My stuckness involved a particular young woman who lived at the time in another state. Though I rarely saw her, my thoughts went to her often. On a Sunday afternoon I set out to begin a week of vacation, heading away from where I understood this woman to live. As I drove down the highway, my thoughts returned to obsessing about her. I pulled into a rest stop on the Garden State Parkway to go to the bathroom, pulling in to the only open parking space I could find, and there, standing literally next to me, was this young woman. It could have been a mere coincidence, but it sure felt to me that God was giving me a pretty direct message: Deal with her. One way or another, get yourself unstuck.

A few years back I had a friend over to the house who was despairing. Though Carl spent a good deal of time in church, he found the whole notion of God pretty unbelievable. I asked him whether it seemed conceivable to him that when you die there is a heaven. He replied, with some cynicism, that it would be great to believe that when you died you went to Disney World.

A few minutes later, my son Bobby who was six or seven at the time, entered the room. He hadn't heard the conversation. He liked Carl, and he wanted to give him a present. He wrapped something up and gave it to him. Carl opened it to discover a Mickey Mouse figurine that Bobby's sister had brought him back from, of all places, Disney World.

Carl agreed; that was pretty weird.

I find in my own life that there are times when I seem to be in the flow of the Holy Spirit where the God instances happen fairly frequently. Doors open. Connections with the right people to get a project moving are easily made. God seems close at hand clearing the way.

Other times, the way is less clear; the God instances less apparent. What makes the difference? I don't know for sure. Even Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, experienced times when God seemed far away; the Garden of Gethsemane and the crucifixion are the most obvious examples. There appear to be times when the journey requires quite literally trusting without any kind of obvious encouragement coming our way.

But there is an interesting detail about the story of the catch of fish that should challenge us. The weirdness of what happens seems to reveal God's holy-though-unseen presence, but

Simon's response is to fall on his knees before Jesus and cry, "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" There is something disturbing about the possibility that God is indeed very real and very involved in our lives. It means, in a sense, that our lives are not our own. Our lives belong to God. There is a claim on us implied in this experience. It matters how we live our lives, and the close encounter with the holy may well reveal that our priorities, our agenda are skewed. If we begin to take into account the big picture that these experiences seem to be inviting us to consider, it may well mean that some significant changes will need to take place in the way we live our lives. So, we must consider the possibility that there is something inside us that is invested in the state of disbelief, and resists noticing those God's instances.

In the story, Jesus quickly reassures Simon. "Don't be afraid," he says. The implication is that the power that has a claim on Simon's life is merciful and has his best interests at heart. There will, however, be a change. From now on, Simon will be about fishing for people; helping them to catch a glimpse of the graciousness he has witnessed.

In the kindness of Jesus,
Pastor Jeff



United Methodist
Women

Looking back...No meetings in January and February.
If you're never attended a program, please join us. We are proud to still have a UMW in our church, thanks to the wonderful women in our church family. Join us...

Wednesday, March 3rd – 7:30 p.m.

PROGRAM: "Relay For Life" (American Cancer Soc)
Speaker: Kassie Dadaion (daughter of UMW member
Denise White)
Refreshments

March 5 – World Day of Prayer

March 14 – Daylight Savings Begins

March 17 – St. Patrick's Day

March 20 – Spring Begins

March 28 – Palm Sunday

March 31 – Homemade Cakes for Morris View N.H.

Get well wishes to those of you who are ill, and

HAPPY BIRTHDAY to those of you celebrating this month with Angela Nolan and Karen Wilk.

God Bless,
Doris Bradley

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



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.



Upcoming Youth Group Meetings (*Sundays from 7 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.*): March 7th and 28th, April 11th and 18th, May 2nd and 16th, June 6th. All youth (and their friends) from grades 8 through 12 are invited. Josh Romine is our youth leaders, 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."*



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.



On the second Thursday of every other month our congregation provides dinner for the families at **Homeless Solutions**. Our next scheduled dinner is March 11th. If you would like to take a turn in helping with this outreach, or if you would like to donate money towards the expenses, please speak to Laurie Wilken or Connie Wallace.



Easter Flowers - Easter will be celebrated this year on April 4. Connie Keller will begin taking flower orders on any of the Sundays in March. All orders will need to be placed no later than March 22. Once again the following flowers will be available for purchase: 6" potted Azalea \$8.00, 8" potted Azalea \$14.00, Tulips, Hyacinth, Daffodils are available for \$8.00 each and Lillies will be \$10.00 each. Order forms will be available in the church narthex or in the March bulletins.

Please make all checks payable to PUMC. If you have any questions, please contact Connie at 973-887-4384 or by email at connie@mhmonthenet.com.



We are collecting “**gently used**” **jewelry** for the spring UMW bazaar. If you’ve received new jewelry, it’s time to look through your old stuff and see what you might no longer want to keep. We can use it to raise money for the UMW so they can support their missions. If you have some jewelry you would like to donate, please give it to Karen Wilk or Diane Anastasi (or Doris Bradley). We can also use small jewelry boxes (that the jewelry comes in) to box the jewelry. Bring any jewelry as soon as you can so it can be readied for sale.



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.



The next **Administrative Council** meeting will be held on Sunday, March 7th, after worship.



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



On **Monday, March 1st** our church is pleased and privileged to host a Skylands Resource Day featuring **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 that are of benefit to all of us, and especially in the season of Lent.





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 MARCH

Mar. 7th

Isaiah 55:1-9
1 Corinth. 10:1-13
Luke 13:1-9

Mar. 14th

Joshua 5:9-12
2 Corinth. 5:16-21
Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

Mar. 21st

Isaiah 43:16-21
Phill. 3:4b-14
John 12:1-8

Mar. 28th

Isaiah 50:4-9a
Philippians 2:5-11
Luke 19:28-40 & 22:14-23



2 nd	Evan Nichols	20 th	Len Bostwick
5 th	Michael Weiss	20 th	Alexa Taylor
7 th	Ian Crawford	20 th	Rachel Weiss
7 th	Christina Sakelakos	21 st	Myrna Labis
7 th	Kristopher Hawkins	22 nd	Jared Gropper
9 th	Ryan Laux	22 nd	Briana Laux
10 th	Anna Gripp	23 rd	Jim Simmons
10 th	Maya Roelefs	24 th	Karen Wilk
12 th	Alex Hawkins	24 th	Angela Nolan
12 th	Sue DeJessa	25 th	Nancy McAllister
14 th	Debbie Mortensen	26 th	Kate Eiring
16 th	Paul Larsen Sr.	28 th	Arlene Sklow
17 th	Julia Sklow	29 th	Sarah Roberts
17 th	Daniel Wallace	31 st	Ron Gounaud
20 th	Andy Klekanos		



The images of our stained glass windows were inspired by Revelation 22:2b *“and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.”* May it be so. (The windows were designed by our own Joanne Rich and crafted by our own Monica Hawkins.)

March 2010

United Methodist Church of Parsippany

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday																																																																																																		
	1 7:00 PM Skylands Resource Day - Spiritual Formation	2 7:00 AM Men's Prayer Breakfast	3 10:30 AM Healing Prayer 7:00 PM Small Group Study 7:30 PM UMW	4 7:00 PM Bell Choir 7:45 PM Choir	5	6																																																																																																		
7 10:30 AM Worship 7:00 PM UMYF Ad Council After Church	8	9 7:00 AM Men's Prayer Breakfast	10 10:30 AM Healing Prayer 7:00 PM Small Group Study	11 7:00 PM Bell Choir 7:45 PM Choir	12	13																																																																																																		
14 10:30 AM Worship	15	16 7:00 AM Men's Prayer Breakfast	17 10:30 AM Healing Prayer 7:00 PM Small Group Study	18 7:00 PM Bell Choir 7:45 PM Choir	19	20																																																																																																		
21 10:30 AM Worship	22	23 7:00 AM Men's Prayer Breakfast	24 10:30 AM Healing Prayer 7:00 PM Small Group Study	25 7:00 PM Bell Choir 7:45 PM Choir	26	27																																																																																																		
28 10:30 AM Worship 7:00 PM UMYF	29	30 7:00 AM Men's Prayer Breakfast	31 10:30 AM Healing Prayer 7:00 PM Small Group Study	<table border="1" style="margin: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="7">Feb 2010</th> </tr> <tr> <th>S</th> <th>M</th> <th>T</th> <th>W</th> <th>T</th> <th>F</th> <th>S</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td></td><td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td><td>6</td></tr> <tr><td>7</td><td>8</td><td>9</td><td>10</td><td>11</td><td>12</td><td>13</td></tr> <tr><td>14</td><td>15</td><td>16</td><td>17</td><td>18</td><td>19</td><td>20</td></tr> <tr><td>21</td><td>22</td><td>23</td><td>24</td><td>25</td><td>26</td><td>27</td></tr> <tr><td>28</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> </tbody> </table> <table border="1" style="margin: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="7">Apr 2010</th> </tr> <tr> <th>S</th> <th>M</th> <th>T</th> <th>W</th> <th>T</th> <th>F</th> <th>S</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td></tr> <tr><td>4</td><td>5</td><td>6</td><td>7</td><td>8</td><td>9</td><td>10</td></tr> <tr><td>11</td><td>12</td><td>13</td><td>14</td><td>15</td><td>16</td><td>17</td></tr> <tr><td>18</td><td>19</td><td>20</td><td>21</td><td>22</td><td>23</td><td>24</td></tr> <tr><td>25</td><td>26</td><td>27</td><td>28</td><td>29</td><td>30</td><td></td></tr> </tbody> </table>		Feb 2010							S	M	T	W	T	F	S		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28							Apr 2010							S	M	T	W	T	F	S					1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30		
Feb 2010																																																																																																								
S	M	T	W	T	F	S																																																																																																		
	1	2	3	4	5	6																																																																																																		
7	8	9	10	11	12	13																																																																																																		
14	15	16	17	18	19	20																																																																																																		
21	22	23	24	25	26	27																																																																																																		
28																																																																																																								
Apr 2010																																																																																																								
S	M	T	W	T	F	S																																																																																																		
				1	2	3																																																																																																		
4	5	6	7	8	9	10																																																																																																		
11	12	13	14	15	16	17																																																																																																		
18	19	20	21	22	23	24																																																																																																		
25	26	27	28	29	30																																																																																																			