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United Methodist Church of Parsippany

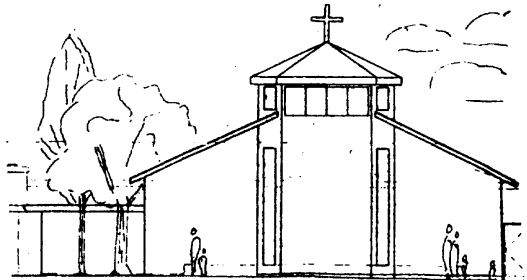
903 So. Beverwyck Road, Parsippany, NJ 07054 (973) 887-4657

<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"



JANUARY, 2011



A sermon preached on November 28th, 2010 — the first Sunday in Advent — based upon Matthew 1:18 – 23.

Every Tuesday morning six men from the church – myself included -- gather at the Empire Diner for breakfast. We conclude by holding hands in a circle for a prayer asking for the grace to receive the day as a gift and do something good with it. Everybody leaves a little more cash than required for the food they ordered, and the money left over goes to the discretionary fund to help people who need emergency assistance.

I haven't been to other Church men's breakfasts, so I don't know for sure what they are like, but I suspect ours is pretty unique. We talk about pretty much anything that comes to mind, and more often than not, that doesn't involve talking about God and faith. And when we do talk about these things, our conversation is probably distinguished from what you find at other Church Men's breakfasts.

Of the six men, five of us would identify ourselves as "believers;" one would not. In a certain sense the distinction is artificial, because in every person who identifies him or herself as a "believer", there is always, if the person is willing to be honest -- at times at least -- a good dose of doubt mixed in as well. Atheism itself is a kind of faith as well, and I suspect that atheists aren't without their doubts as well – that maybe, just maybe, there IS a God after all. The convictions claimed by faith speaks are ultimately beyond proof, so doubts go hand in hand with faith.

This isn't necessarily a bad thing. As one my favorite Christian authors, Frederick Buechner, puts it, "*doubt is the ants in the pants in faith.*" Doubt keeps faith lively, rather than stagnant. Doubts keep us questing, and as such, they serve a vital purpose.

And so our friend who shows up every Tuesday giving voice to doubts is a real gift to the group, even though he often apologizes for the things he says. **And we have room in our circle for him**, and not merely in a condescending sort of way. He's kind of like the kid in the "Emperor has no Clothes" story, challenging us to not simply accept things because it's the thing to do. If we try to put forth a thought that doesn't hold up under scrutiny, he lets us know.

So, he's a real blessing. He pushes the question: "*Why? Why do you believe in this God? Why do you believe in Jesus?*" These are important questions to ask ourselves, and to have conversations about. **Why, when it comes down to it, do we believe in a loving God — the God revealed in Jesus?**

There are a variety of levels on which we can try to answer the question.

We can make an intellectual argument. Being something of an intellectual myself, I enjoy these kinds of conversations, bantering about whether it is reasonable or unreasonable to believe in God. There are some people for whom such a response can be helpful, but for the most part this isn't the level on which faith is found convincing.

Some people may try to persuade another of God's reality by quoting scripture, implying that if "*God said it, I believe it, that settles it.*" But, unless you've already found reason to embrace the Bible, this line of thought won't do much for you.

For the most part, our deepest reasons for believing arise out of our personal stories, our experiences, our autobiography, so to speak. I believe in God because the belief fits the experiences of my life. A large part of these experiences have to do with certain people I've encountered whose convictions and the integrity of their lives have rubbed off on me. (*The same can be said, I'm sure for people whose faith is atheism.*)

For most of us, the experiences to which we point to account for our faith aren't the bolt from lightning kind (*though I do find encouragement and comfort from hearing others speak of such experiences – the people with other-worldly near death experiences, for instances.*) Most of us can only point to more subtle experiences: Odd coincidences that seem like more than coincidences... intuitions that we followed that turned out to be confirmed over time, seeming in retrospect like the voice of God.

If the Bible is going to have a part to play in the journey towards faith, it will be because we find ourselves able to relate to the characters in the stories we read there. We will find them credible – the sense that they are relating to life in this world as we experience it, while at the same time catching hold of something that arises from beyond this world.

Some times if you hang only around a certain kind of believer, you can get the mistaken notion that because of God and Jesus life is just hunky dory — that God is perpetually opening doors, finding parking spaces, and in general making for a smooth ride through life. Because of God, everything is peachy.

But that's not what you find in the Bible. You find Joseph, for instance, hoping for a smooth ride through life. He's going to live out his life in a small town far away from the troubles of the big city, marry a sweet girl, raising good-looking children. He's learned carpentry – a good, recession-proof trade.

Life, they say, is what happens when you're making plans. Suddenly Joseph discovers that his fiancée is pregnant, and it's not his child.

He goes to bed convinced that life sucks and in the course of the night has a dream that convinces him that, as crazy as it seems, God has a big plan, and that Joseph has a part to play in that plan. He awakes convinced that going ahead with his marriage plans with his pregnant fiancée is the right thing to do.

The dream doesn't suddenly make everything smooth -- far from it. In short order Joseph and his bride end up homeless, and then soon after that, they're on the run from a violent dictator intent on doing their baby some serious harm, like countless refugees in the world today.

And so you see, Joseph is dealing with the **real world** – not some kind of la-la land. It's an often hard, painful world. Chances are, despite his underlying faith, there were doubts that persisted. Was the dream he had way back when just the result of some movie I saw, and nothing more? Who knows for sure?

Earlier I quoted Frederick Buechner, who penned the line about "doubts are the ants in the pants of faith". His writings have been a help to me on my spiritual journey. He's in his eighties now. Part of Buechner's early childhood was spent not far from here in Essex Falls. His family was privileged, and yet there was a tragic underside to that privilege: Buechner's father committed suicide when he was just a boy of twelve. The family never attended church, and Buechner was raised without any religious faith.

Buechner found comfort in the world of books, becoming an English major in college and publishing his first novel shortly thereafter. In his early twenties, he underwent a conversion of a sort. A lover of words, a certain turn of phrase that he heard a great New York City preacher speak in a sermon moved him to tears. (Later I heard Buechner say that we would do well to pay attention to the moments that move us to tears – God is speaking us in such moments.)

With the encouragement of the preacher, Buechner went on to enroll in seminary to explore what he had experienced in those tears, being ordained following his graduation as a Presbyterian minister. He spent ten years or so as a chaplain at a prep school, before moving to Vermont to devote himself full time to his writing.

He's published several novels, as well as collections of sermons, but the books of his I've appreciated most were the memoirs he wrote reflecting on his life story, which from the outside, wasn't particularly dramatic or exciting. I was struck by his capacity to write honestly about his own struggles and to glean deeper meanings to his story.

There were some odd coincidences that spoke to him along the way. He describes how – finding flying highly anxiety provoking – he stopped in an empty airport bar for fortification. At the seat at the bar

where he happened to sit he found an old tie clasp engraved with his three initials. It was as if God had given him a sign that he had been anticipated.

He tells another story of a time when his daughter's life was in danger as a result of anorexia. The very real possibility existed that she might starve herself to death as a result of this mental illness that afflicts certain teenage girls. He stood at a railroad crossing waiting for a train to pass, overwhelmed with his fears about his daughter, when he happened to look at the license plate of the car in front of him. "TRUST." It was precisely the word he most needed to encounter at that moment. It didn't matter when he found out later that the owner of the car was in banking – God, it seemed, had arranged for him to read the word "TRUST" at precisely that moment.

These are some words Buechner wrote that speak to me deeply. Maybe they will for you as well. Faith he writes, *"doesn't know for certain about anything. Faith is homesickness. Faith is a lump in the throat. Faith is less a position on than a movement toward – less a sure thing than a hunch. Faith is waiting. Faith is journeying through space and time."*

"If someone were to come up and ask me to talk about my faith, it's exactly that journey through space and time I'd have to talk about. The ups and downs of the years, the dreams, the odd moment, the intuitions. I'd have to talk about the occasional sense I have that life isn't just a series of events causing other events as haphazardly as a break shot in a pool causes billiard balls to go off in many different directions, but that life has a plot the way a novel has a plot – that events are somehow leading somewhere. Whatever your faith may be, or my faith may be, it seems to me inseparable from the story of what has happened to us."

Buechner's words describe how it feels for me: *"that life has a plot the way a novel has a plot – that events are somehow leading somewhere."*

Who is writing the story of our lives? We are encouraged to take responsibility for the writing of our life stories. *"What do you want to be when you grow up?"* we were asked when we were young. But along the way, with so many unexpected twists and turns, perhaps we have the sense that there is another author at work at a deeper level in the writing of our stories.

In the familiar Christmas story, God is writing a story of redemption, enlisting characters for his story. You get the impression that the characters have some freedom to turn him down. Mary is pregnant with child of the holy spirit. Will she embrace the destiny the angel Gabriel announces? "Let it be to me according to your word."

Joseph is ready to walk away from the script. Who can blame him? This isn't his child. God sends the angel in the dream to tell him not to walk away from the story. He's needed as the child's earthly father and protector. Even so, Joseph could have said, "Hell no, I'm out of here." What then? God's redemption story would still have gotten written, but it would have required some detours in the plot.

If it is true that there is a plot to life, that our lives are, in spite of the twists and turns, heading somewhere – to that mystery that is the Kingdom of heaven – than there is always hope.

The question for each of us is – will we embrace the part that we have been given to play in God's great redemption story? No one can answer this for us.

In the kindness and courage of Jesus,
Pastor Jeff

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Check out our website, and Pastor Jeff's posted sermons and other reflections, at www.parsippanyumc.com. You'll also find the church on Facebook. Pastor Jeff invites us to submit questions and topic suggestions for him to write reflections on, as well as to preach about. You can place suggestions in the offering plate, or give them to Pastor Jeff directly. JEdwards14@juno.com

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In January we will begin a new tradition in our worship. Each Sunday, a different member of our church family will give a 1 – 2 minute talk regarding some aspect of our church's life for which he or she is grateful. We will be looking for volunteers to do take their turn. If you are interested please speak to Pastor Jeff or our lay leader, Bob Keller.



Looking back...2011 Officers were installed and the Christmas Gift Game was great fun and great gifts. We hope you had a wonderful Christmas, and wish you a Happy New Year. We welcome visitors and new members.

No January Meeting

**United Methodist
Women**

Jan. 1 – New Years Day

Jan. 6 – Epiphany

Jan. 17 – Martin Luther King Jr. Day

Get well wishes to those of you who are ill, and
HAPPY BIRTHDAY to those of you celebrating this month with Ruth Freerks.

God Bless,
Doris Bradley

Prov. 17:17 “A friend loves at all times.”

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Josh Romine is our youth leader, assisted by Dawn Barhite.

Youth Group Mission Project: Youth Group to raise green to make it clean!

Overview of Project: More than 1 in 6 people in the world don't have access to safe drinking water. The Parsippany United Methodist Youth Group is trying to help. During the Fall of 2010 and the Spring of 2011, the Youth Group will lead a project to raise \$2000 to build wells in Kenya to provide clean water to an entire community. The Youth Group will be working with an organization called The Water Project whose goal is to provide clean water one village at a time to the 1 billion people around the world who don't have access to clean water.

Overview of The Water Project Organization: The Water Project is an organization who has a very simple mission: Provide Clean, Safe Drinking Water by 1) Matching donors to proven partners who are drilling fresh water wells and constructing other sustainable water projects, 2) Sending up to 100% of public donations to fund these efforts, ensuring your gifts provide clean water where you choose, 3) Showing every donor the specific impact of their gifts through photos, short stories and GPS map coordinates.

In just a few short years, The Water Project has already completed over 200 projects and served over 100,000 people who prior to the wells being built, did not have access to clean water. Go to <http://thewaterproject.org/wells-for-kenya.php> to learn more about The Water Project.

How can you participate?--Support Fund Raisers The Youth Group will be leading several fund raisers in which all of the proceeds will go to this project. A few of the fund raisers are listed below:

- 1.) **December 17th - Movie Night in the Fellowship Hall and holiday gift wrapping.**
- 2.) February 6th - Annual super bowl sub sale
- 3.) Easter Chocolate Candy Sale
- 4.) Spring Car Wash

--Contributions

All donations large and small are welcomed and greatly appreciated. If you want to contribute, contact Josh Romine (jromines@gmail.com), Dawn Barhite (Lilgems4me@yahoo.com), or see Pastor Jeff.



Blood Drive

Our church is sponsoring a **Blood Drive** on **Sunday, January 16th**. The bloodmobile of the Blood Center of New Jersey will be in the parking lot of the church from **10 am to 2 pm**. Anyone sixteen and up is welcome to donate. (16 years old need parental permission.)

The primary medications that would exclude a person from donating are blood thinners and antibiotics (for the past 24 hours.) In America, every two seconds someone needs a life-sustaining blood transfusion. Bring a family member or a friend, too, to save more lives! We also need some help distributing posters in local churches, businesses and stores in the area to invite them to donate. Please email or call Anna Egorova, the chairperson of the drive, at 858-531-9686, anna.egorova@gmail.com, if you want to help or sign up to donate.

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Pastor Jeff leads worship at **Troy Hills Nursing Center** on Reynolds Road on the third Thursday of every month at 10:30 a.m. Anyone who would like to share in this ministry on is invited to join him.

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Sunday Morning alert: We've all become dependent on all of our electronic devices. Please take note of the announcement in the Sunday bulletin about your cell phones. Please remember, as a courtesy to those worshipping with us on Sunday mornings, to mute or turn off your cell phones. A random ring tone is not nearly as cute as a baby's cry. Thanks for your help!

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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.

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On the second Thursday of every other month our congregation provides dinner for the families at **Homeless Solutions**. Our next scheduled dinner is **Thursday, February 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.



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 Bell Choir – rehearses every Sunday after worship. All children and youth in 3rd grade and up (including junior and senior high school) are welcome. Directed by Aimee Letsch (973-585-7634).

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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.

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A **small gathering of men** from our church meet together every Tuesday at 7:15 a.m. at the Empire Diner with Pastor Jeff for breakfast, conversation, and a concluding prayer. All men are welcome.

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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

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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. Wes Stigreaves takes the food over as the bin gets filled up. 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.

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SCRIPTURE READINGS FOR JANUARY

Jan. 2nd

Isaiah 60:1-6
Ephesians 3:1-12
Matthew 2:1-12

Jan. 9th

Isaiah 42:1-9
Acts 10:34-43
Matthew 3:13-17

Jan. 16th

Isaiah 49:1-7
1 Corinth. 1:1-9
John 1:29-42

Jan. 23rd

Isaiah 9:1-4
1 Corinth. 1:10-18
Matthew 4:12-23

Jan. 30th

Micah 6:1-8
1 Corinth. 1:18-31
Matthew 5:1-12



1 st	Harold Gantert	22 nd	Heather Weiss
3 rd	Barbara Bush	23 rd	Ruth Freerks
5 th	Barbara Anderson	25 th	Jennifer Collins
5 th	Gene Lange	25 th	Chris Salink
11 th	Jim Sakelakos	25 th	Kathryn Montecuollo
13 th	Olivia Evans	27 th	Darryl Sokolowski
19 th	Dominick Pesquera	29 th	Michael Weiss
20 th	Pauline Rich	30 th	Chris Payne
20 th	Jim Cochrane		

JANUARY ANNIVERSARIES

12 th	Fred & Grace Schlosshauer
25 th	Ruth & Charles Faulend

Looking ahead: On **Tuesday, March 22nd** our church will host the **Watoto Children's Choir of Uganda**. They will give a concert at our church. Made up of 15 – 18 young people, the performances of this choir are a unique blend of native African rhythms, contemporary gospel music and ethnic dance. They have released several albums including *Cast Your Burdens*, *Jesus You Alone* and *Mambo Sawa* (life is good), their latest album. Their unique ministry also comprises four children's villages, three babies homes, two primary schools, a high school and a vocational school. If you would like to help in the planning of this event, please speak to Bob Keller or Pastor Jeff. You can catch a 2 minute video of the choir performing at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wylCcl8dd0o>

I received the following prayer from Tracy Booth that she would like to share with all of you – this was written at Thanksgiving 2010...

“Thank you, Lord, for fresh vegetables, Games magazine, white noise, learning to accept myself as I am, combination locks, the US Postal Service, insightful psychologists, warm, comfy sweats, quick reflexes and Jesus’ sacrifice that saved me from my sins;

For choirs, hot showers, a mother who is always happy to hear from me, egg salad sandwiches, tiny, portable radios, people who barely know me but genuinely care about me anyway, photographs from home, the AccuWeather channel, and volunteers who brave stifling heat, pouring rain, and over-sensitive metal detectors to bring us the Word;

For family, by blood, marriage, or divine intervention; for clean sheets, collect phone calls, and lots and lots of cards to remind me I’m loved; for historical romance novels, watermelon on the Fourth of July and pie on Thanksgiving, Sudoku, hands that do whatever I ask of them, relatives who are gone but never forgotten, getting to know someone from the inside out, and a father who looked cancer in the eye and said, ‘You’re not the boss of me.’

And for You, gracious, loving, patient, persistent, omnipotent, omnipresent God, who has seen me through my darkest days and brought me to a new peace and joy that can never be taken away. For these and all your mercies, Lord, your holy name be praised. Amen.”

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SEAMSTRESS / TAILOR WANTED - for reasonably priced clothing alterations. If you know of one, David Turner would appreciate hearing from you: 973-759-7850 or psalter103@aol.com.



January 2011

United Methodist Church of Parsippany

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday																																																																						
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