

HILLTOPPER

United Methodist Church of Parsippany

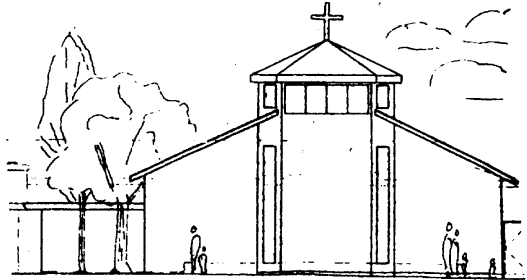
903 So. Beverwyck Road, Parsippany, NJ 07054 (973) 887-4657

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"



APRIL, 2011



Palm Sunday, April 17th - Service at 10:30 a.m.

Maundy Thursday, April 21st -- Service of Holy Communion, 7:30 p.m.

Good Friday, April 22nd - Community Cross Walk, beginning at St. Gregory's Episcopal Church at 1 p.m. A brief concluding worship service will be held in our sanctuary at approximately 2:30 p.m.

Easter Sunday, April 24th -- Celebration of the Resurrection, 10:30 a.m.

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A sermon preached by Pastor Jeff on February 20th, 2011 entitled, "Jesus, Lazarus and Al", based upon John 11:1 - 44, and on the occasion of the death of our friend, Al Booth.

Our Gospel lesson this morning tells the story of a family's grief, and a Savior who weeps. We hear of a family in Bethany consisting of a brother Lazarus and his two sisters, Mary and Martha. About four years ago, Al Booth preached from this pulpit on the occasion of the baptism of Bob and Joanne Vance's youngest daughter. Al based his sermon on Mary and Martha, comparing them to his own mother and aunt. Al recognized his family in the family of Lazarus' - families with a great deal of love for one another; where guests were often welcomed into the home, and great pleasure was found in sitting down together around a good home-cooked meal.

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill.

“Now a **certain** man was ill” — to the point of dying. All human beings are alike in some very basic ways – including the fact that one day we will die. But every human being is unique in the sense that we are given to a particular group of people to love and be loved, and it is this particular group that will weep at any given man’s passing.

Who was this Lazarus? Down through the ages, his name is known by billions, but we know very little about him. Here’s what we do know: Lazarus was loved by his sisters Mary and Martha, and he was loved by Jesus, and apparently by many others in the town of Bethany in which he lived. In the end, it is the loves of Lazarus’ life that are remembered; it is the love of a person’s life that defines us.

Now there was a certain man named Al Booth who was very ill. And he, too was loved by a particular group of people, including his wife Gail, and his children Tracy and Tim, his brothers and sisters, his nephews and nieces, as well as a whole bunch of people in the little church where Al worshipped every Sunday, cooked dinners, took kids fishing, and played Santa Claus. We loved him not so much for what he did, but because he was easy to love, and we felt loved by him.

So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, ‘Lord, he whom you love is ill.’

“He whom you love,” said the sisters to Jesus of their brother Lazarus, as though they felt they needed to remind Jesus of his love for Lazarus — get him to live up to his love of Lazarus. “Lord! Remember, this is a man dear to your heart. Come quickly and save the day!”

And in the days of Al’s illness, we too have reminded Jesus that he loves Al as well; we too, have called upon him to come and heal this man we love.

But when Jesus heard it, he said, ‘This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God’s glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.’ Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus* was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

Alas, Jesus delayed. He **chose** to delay. From our human point of view, this seems incomprehensible. Jesus could have come quickly, but instead he chose to let Lazarus die. He chose to let the hearts of Mary and Martha break.

And, alas, Jesus let our beloved Al die, as well. He let our hearts break. What are we to make of this?

Then after this (Jesus) said to the disciples, ‘Let us go to Judea again.’ The disciples said to him, ‘Rabbi, the religious authorities were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?’

At the center of our faith is this man named Jesus. This man who walked upon this earth in human flesh nearly 2000 years ago is the reason we are here today. He shared fully in our humanity. He didn’t run from a world of pain and struggle and conflict and broken hearts. He joins us in the death walk. He chooses to go to the place where there are people waiting to kill him, in order to be with those he loves. He knows death from the inside. Therefore he was there to take the hand of Al in his death walk.

Here’s one memory I have of Al. There was a Maundy Thursday service that took place many years ago, during a time in which Al was in a great deal of pain personally, going through the breakup of his first marriage, stuck in a job in which he found no pleasure. During the service we simply read aloud the story of Jesus’ passion, his arrest and betrayal, his abandonment, his torture, his slow, painful death. Al came forth from the service with tears in his eyes. He heard the story of Jesus’ suffering, and he knew that his own suffering was a place to be in communion with Jesus. He felt Jesus’ presence with him to help him find the strength to put one foot in front of another. Al found the courage to carry his cross. Around that same time Al’s son Tim realized just how much Al disliked his job, how hard it was for him to get up and go to that job. Tim asked his father, “How do you do it?”

“Well, I take comfort,” said Al, “in the fact that I really have no choice. I have a job. I’ve got to go to work.”

“Take up your cross, daily”, Jesus said, “and follow me.”

Jesus answered, ‘Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.’ After saying this, he told them, ‘Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.’ The disciples said to him, ‘Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.’ Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep.

Time and again in the Gospels, Jesus is a mystery to his disciples. His words and actions repeatedly confuse and bewilder them. Only over time is the meaning of it all revealed.

So it is with us. Things begin to make sense only by and by. It takes patience to make the faith walk. Al was the patron saint of patience.

Then Jesus told them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.' Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow-disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.'

In John's Gospel, the point is made that Jesus had friends. They were disciples, but they were friends as well. Jesus called them such. Often they didn't understand him — often they didn't know what it was he was up to. But beneath everything, they knew Jesus was their friend. And if it was time for Jesus to die, well, they would go and keep him company.

Sometimes friendship and faith are hard to distinguish — this basic, underlying loyalty that keeps us afloat.

Al was good at friendship. He was loyal. There was a lot Al couldn't figure out in this life, which is just the way life is. But one thing he knew for sure: he knew where his loyalties were. And that was enough.

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus^s had already been in the tomb for four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles^s away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother.

When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.'

Martha speaks for all of us, doesn't she? Now and then we hear remarkable stories about people who receive miraculous healings — patients whom doctors had given up hope on — and suddenly they were well again — the doctors know not how. The eyes of faith recognize the hand of God.

But alas, why then, and not now, Lord? Why have you chosen to let my heart break?

Jesus said to (Martha), 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.' Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' She said to him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.'

It is never easy, but where we have the patience to rely simply in our faith that God is good, that Jesus is trustworthy, come what may — even when our hearts are breaking, then a mysterious transformation begins to take place. We let go. A peculiar peace descends. Martha is able to say simply, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the savior. I will put my trust in you — come what may."

I was moved in recent weeks by Gail and the rest of the Booth clan. I saw them reach a point where they were ready to let go; they could release their tight grip on Al's life in this world. They came to his bedside and said simply, "I love you Al. I am so very grateful that you have been a part of my life. I'd love for God to bring about one of his miracles here so you could be restored to me. But if you and God decide that you are ready to leave this world and join the saints in glory, you have my blessing. Whichever you and God choose; I've got your back, buddy."

When Martha had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, 'The Teacher is here and is calling for you.' And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, 'Where have you laid him?' They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.' Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!' But some of them said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?'

Jesus wept. His tears, like everything else about him, led people to react to him in conflicting ways. He remains a mystery, misunderstood.

How **do** we understand the tears of Jesus at Lazarus' grave site? I think they have two meanings, both of which we are invited to embrace.

The first is simply this. Jesus loved Lazarus, his friend, and so he shares in the tears of sorrow at his death. This is a big part of what it means to be human. To love is to have your heart broken, and one way to respond to this fact is to keep your heart protected; love things, not people; that way you won't have to cry.

But this is a big mistake. We lose our souls along the way of playing it safe. Jesus' tears show us that tears are to be embraced. If Jesus — the manliest man ever, could weep at the graveside of his friend, then so can we. Tears are the lubricant of the holy spirit. They help bring us to that place of letting go.

The second meaning of Jesus tears is that he is weeping not so much for Lazarus as he is weeping for the rest of us in this world where death roams the land like this cold-hearted bully, intimidating us to live lives of timidity, cowering in fear. Jesus has come to take down the bully.

Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.' Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, 'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.' Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?' So they took away the stone.

Eighteen years ago, Al suffered his first heart attack. I remember visiting him in the hospital. The heart attack clearly expressed the darkness Al was going through in his life. Al was on his way to death. But life came back to Al's body, reflected by changes that were taking place in his life. He moved through the darkness of his divorce. He got more deeply involved in the life of our church, awakening his innate spirituality, finding expression for his wonderful, wacky creativity. And he met Gail. And life became good again.

And Jesus looked upwards and said, 'Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.' When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!'

For whom did Jesus perform this wondrous miracle? For Lazarus? No, not in the usual sense of the word. Lazarus wasn't better off being alive once more in this world. Lazarus had already entered into glory land, where there is no death, no tears, and every thing is made new. It was wonderful there. Lazarus had a home in glory.

No, Jesus was inviting Lazarus to be a servant of the Gospel — to take up his cross and follow — to give up his home in glory for a time and come back to this life so that he could have a hand in revealing God's glory to the people who have loved him, so that they might not be so bullied by death.

Jesus was inviting Lazarus to take on once more the burdens of life in this world, with the pain and hunger and decay that are part and parcel of having flesh and blood — come back to a world where lost souls commit violence with crosses and all manner of cruelty.

The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'

Lazarus came forth from the tomb; but in short order, Jesus would be entering the tomb. In a couple of days at a dinner party hosted by the family for Jesus, sister Mary, recognizing what others were missing, would weird folks out by cracking open an alabaster jar of expensive ointment, filling the room with the lovely fragrance. She would go on to anoint Jesus' body, in anticipation of his burial.

Not long after that, Jesus was nailed to a cross. And shortly there after Jesus began showing up in a new resurrection body — one that would never suffer death again.

It's John's Gospel that records the lovely little story of a bunch of old friends whose hearts were broken by grief who decide to go fishing. Fishing is what they had been doing when they met the friend for whom they were grieving.

But that night they caught not one fish. As the morning was just breaking, a stranger appeared on the shore. "Children, have you caught any fish?" he asked. "Cast your nets on the other side," he said.

They did, and there were suddenly more fish than they knew what to do with.

And in that moment they recognized their friend, who it turns out, was busy cooking them breakfast.

***Will the circle be unbroken, by and by, Lord by and by.
There's a better home - waiting in the sky, Lord in the sky.***

In the kindness of Jesus,
Pastor Jeff

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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Pastor Jeff is holding a **day time men's book reading group** that meets on **Fridays at 1 p.m. April 1, 8 and 15**. We are meeting for 90 minutes and discussing the book "Adam's Return: The Five Promises of Male Initiation" by Richard Rohr. Any man who is available and interested in attending should speak to Pastor Jeff.

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United Methodist
Women

Looking back...seeing the video of Connie and Bob's balloon ride was so very good and able to see what they saw on the ground. Dick Young, balloon pilot, a member of Denville UMC, answered everyone's questions.

ALL WOMEN of the church are invited to our next event, and bring a friend if you wish..

Wednesday, April 6th – 6:30 p.m.

Ladies' Night Out

At Annabella's – Smith Road, Parsippany

Dutch Treat

Hostess: Karen Wilk

Let Karen or Doris Bradley know if you will be coming

April 1 – April Fool's Day

April 17 – Palm Sunday

April 22 – Good Friday

April 24 – Easter Sunday

Get well wishes to those of you who are ill, and
HAPPY BIRTHDAY to those of you celebrating this month with UMW sponsored Indian Boy Trevyon, Gail Booth and Grace Schlosshauer.

God Bless,
Doris Bradley

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

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During **Coffee Hour** through the season of Lent everyone is invited to work on our **church's craft outreach project**. We are making a hundred or more butterfly ornaments that will be hung in public places throughout Parsippany during Easter time. Each ornament will have a note attached saying that the person who finds it is invited to take the ornament home as a reminder to be kind to others. The ornaments will be painted and strung with beads, and everyone is invited to be a part of this project.



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.

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.

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COTTON PATCH GOSPEL: Rediscovering the Good News of Our Faith -
A 6 Week Small Group Experience

HAVE YOU EVER WISHED that the familiar stories of our faith would jump off the pages of the Bible and come to life right before your eyes? If so, "Cotton Patch Gospel," may be just what you've been waiting for. This award winning musical drama retells the gospel story of Jesus with extraordinary vibrancy,

humor, tenderness, and joy.

During the season of Lent, David Turner will lead 6 small group gatherings to watch, enjoy, and discuss the Cotton Patch Gospel movie. You are invited to join us. **Beginning on March 15th**, we will meet in the sanctuary on **Tuesday** evenings from **7:00 to 8:30**. The group size will be limited to 15 members. If you have questions or want to sign up, please speak to David at church. Or contact him by phone (973-759-7580) or e-mail at psalter103@aol.com.

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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, April 14th**. 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.

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On **Wednesday, April 13th** our church is pleased to host a **District Day of Learning**. **Rev. Marcia Mcfee**, a nationally known consultant in creative worship will be on hand for two sessions: 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. (primarily for the clergy of our district, though laity are welcome) and 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. (primarily for laity.) **Volunteers are also needed to serve a catered lunch**. Please speak to Pastor Jeff for more information.



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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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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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.

The **UMW** is selling **Food Certificates to benefit the General Budget** for ShopRite 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



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

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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 APRIL

April 3

1 Samuel 16:1-13
Ephesians 5:8-14
John 9:1-41

April 10

Ezekiel 37:1-14
Romans 8:6-11
John 11:1-45

April 17

Isaiah 50:4-9a
Philippians 2:5-11
Matthew 21:1-11

April 24

Acts 10:34-43
Colossians 3:1-4
John 20:1-18



2 nd	Tracy Booth	16 th	Melissa Tribuna
7 th	Charley Bruxgulis	17 th	Gail Booth
8 th	Gail Lingerman	18 th	John Sedlak
8 th	Annabelle Vance	20 th	Ruth Seaman
12 th	Steven Chun	23 rd	Bob Krisa
12 th	Kylie Morgan	23 rd	Bob Vance
13 th	Jon Keller	26 th	Kathy Andersen
13 th	Eddie Abbott	27 th	Gina Trezza
14 th	Betty Davis	28 th	Grace Schlosshauer
14 th	Art Sakelakos	29 th	Debbie Gantert
15 th	Esther Chun		

APRIL ANNIVERSARIES

13th Lynn & Bob Barbarite



On March 22nd we were delighted to host the **Watoto Children's Choir from Uganda**. The children and their chaperones were hosted in members' homes the night after the concert. It was a mutual blessing of our common life in Jesus. We hope to have them come again next year when again pass through here on their tour.

On March 5th we held a delightful evening dancing to the music of a band called the Upsiders. The four middle-aged rock musicians have been performing for three decades, and said they had never enjoyed a venue as much as they did ours. From little children to senior citizens dancing with balloons, to the offer to help them take their equipment to their cars at the end, they were pretty impressed with the laughter and kindness they found here.

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We've begun a new tradition. Each Sunday right before the offering, a different member of the church takes a turn to speak for a minute on the theme of "I am grateful to God for our church because..." Below are our recent **moments of gratitude**:

David Kinsley 2/20/2011

Out of all of the people who have spoken on "what I'm grateful for" I think I'm the first one that was baptized in this church, and I have 42 years of things to be grateful for.

First, I grew up here where the congregation is real and human. We don't dress up in our Sunday best, pretending to be saints for 1-2 hrs. We come as we are and share our life experiences the good and the bad. What better way to see how relationships work and how to get through life, than by having all of these real life examples all around.

There is a song I heard a few weeks ago. It goes:
*"Instead of anger, instead of unbelief
Instead of weakness at the heart of me
Instead of a wounded soul that sometimes loses faith
I hope you see Jesus."*

I believe that it is in our humble moments that we can see glimpses of Jesus. This church is a great place to grow up in, and as Darryl said, continue to grow, because it is a place where Jesus is present.

This brings me to #2. Because I grew up in this church, I have never known the rejection from a church like Madie and Terry, and others have experienced. When I came out as gay, I was loved and accepted and was able to talk to our previous pastor, Susanna Cox. I was also able to speak with a gay couple that was right here in my own church. When I finally had the courage to tell my parents, my mother said "Is that all, I thought you had some big problem". I feel that this church handles our problems in the same open and understanding way. I have been in a few long term relationships through the years, and whether you agreed or disagreed with my choices, I was loved and supported and who ever I was with was accepted into the church family and was also loved and supported unconditionally.

The third thing I'm grateful for is Pastor Jeff. When my grandmother passed away, he gave a eulogy at her funeral that made me feel as if he'd known her all his life.

When I found my birth mother I wanted a mother outside of my family to talk to, and I called the Edward's house looking for Sarah. Sarah was not around, and Jeff said "let me get in touch with my feminine side and see if I can help", and he was a big help. So I know that whatever I'm going through in life, there is always someone in this church family I can turn to for support and advice. They may not be in the package you expect, but they are always around.

Last, I'm grateful for the choir. We always have a great time together and it is rewarding to give a message through song. It can be challenging sometimes, as Anita mentioned. For me, one of those challenges is sitting in front of the congregation having all eyes on you each Sunday. It can make you feel self conscious sometimes. In return we can see an occasional person dozing off, I mean deep in prayer. There is a blessing that comes with this challenge. The blessing is that you can also see when the words of a sermon, or a song touch someone's heart. I can't really put that joy into words. When I come to church each Sunday, and look out at the congregation, I can see glimpses of Jesus in each one of you and I can feel unconditional love. I'm grateful for that.

Monica Hawkins 2/27/2011

I'm Italian – brought up Catholic – went to church every Sunday – mostly because if I missed church and died, I was going to hell. I left the Catholic church in my teens mostly because of rules like that that didn't make any sense to me. Over the years I made the rounds to a lot of different churches. And, as many of you know, I came here because this is where my in-laws came to church. But they're in Florida now, and George rarely comes to church, and yet here I am, totally devoted to this church. Why? Well for starters, there's Jeff. I never felt sincerity from any other priest or minister like I do from Jeff. Now, I'm not saying it wasn't there, just that I never felt it. So many of them felt fake to me. Jeff is for real; this is not just his "job". And yet it's more than Jeff, it's this congregation of people.

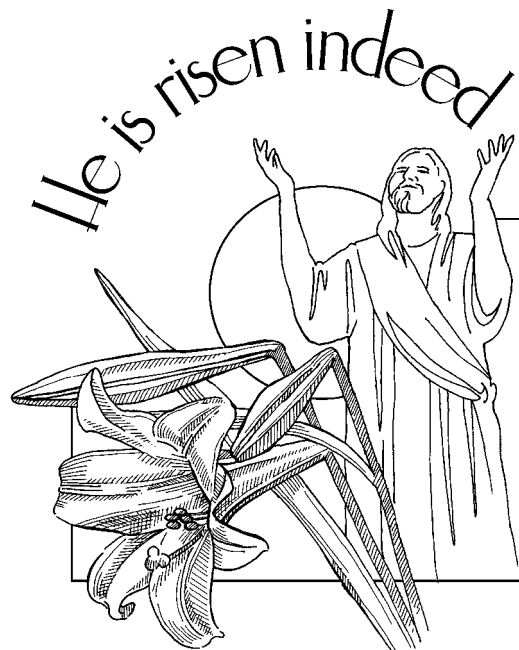
Those of you who know me, or generally sit near me in church (or can see me from the choir) know that my eyes are waterfalls. There's nothing I can do about it – I get easily overcome with emotion and I cry. By the way – a few weeks ago Jeff talked about sub-groups in our church – well, he left out the "weepers" – but we know who we are! Now thinking about how often I cry in church I realized that I rarely cry during the week. So what is it that I'm crying about here?

When I was much younger I heard someone say, "If you want to figure out what is really important to you, pay attention to those things that make you cry." And so I did, and it didn't take long for it to become crystal clear. Why do I cry? Love moves me to tears. This past week many of us did a lot of crying over losing our AI – yes, we cried from pain, but the source of that pain was a sense of loss of the love. It always comes down to love.

How many times have we all heard that when someone comes to our church for the first time, they can feel something special in this congregation? Well, it's the love that they feel – it's palpable here! The love of music, the love of children, the love of each other.....the love of Jesus. Now this week as I tried to put these feelings I have into words, the more I thought about it, the more I came to understand that the very special love that people can actually feel in the air here is probably just a hint of what the disciples must have felt when they were around Jesus. Frankly, I never could understand how those men could just leave their jobs, homes, and families and follow a stranger. But now I think if you multiplied the great feeling we have here with each other a hundred- or thousand-fold, I might leave everything to be around that all the time too! And then it occurred to me that the love surrounding Jesus was probably a fraction of the love one feels with God in heaven.....and now I'm starting to get it!

So to bring this all around to the point I'm supposed to speak on – why am I grateful for this church? Through this church I've finally, for the first time in my life, come to know the love of Jesus, and through this church I believe I've had a tiny glimpse into the love that awaits us in heaven.

If you'd like to schedule a turn to share your moment of gratitude, please speak to our lay leader, Bob Keller or to Pastor Jeff.



April 2011

United Methodist Church of Parsippany

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday																																																																																																		
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