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United Methodist Church of Parsippany

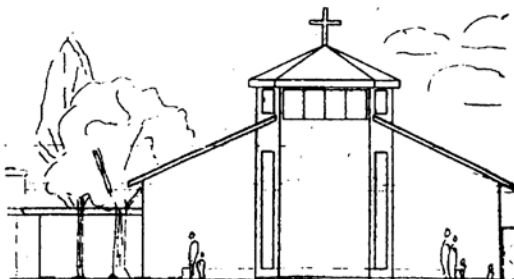
903 So. Beverwyck Road, Parsippany, NJ 07054 (973) 887-4657

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"



FEBRUARY 2013



Adapted from a sermon given Pastor Jeff on January 13th based upon Luke 3:15 – 17; 21-22, entitled "Climbing Up into the Lap of God."

In the particular moment of prayer we hear Jesus engaged in following his baptism by John, Jesus isn't praying "for" anything. And although we can assume that he had at this moment a grateful heart, giving thanks isn't really the thing he's about here either. In this moment a dimension of prayer is revealed that precedes and undergirds all other dimensions of prayer.

Jesus is simply letting himself be loved by God – basking in the love — soaking up the love, so to speak. He is the child who has climbed up into the lap of his Father – his "Abba" as Jesus elsewhere refers to God — his divine "Daddy." We hear that the Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus in bodily form like a dove, which I take to mean that this love soaks down into Jesus in such a way that he can feel it in his body – in every single cell. In this form of prayer Jesus isn't speaking; he's being spoken to. And this is what he's hearing: *"You are my son, the beloved; with you I am well pleased."*

It's important to notice that at this point Jesus hasn't done anything yet. His ministry hasn't begun. The love of his heavenly Father isn't based upon anything he's accomplished. It's the starting point of Jesus' life, not the end point. It is the foundation of his ministry.

So I'm going to call this kind of prayer, "Climbing up into the lap of God, the great Abba," and I think it was the foundation of Jesus' prayer life.

Has your prayer life ever had the quality of just climbing up in that gracious lap? For many of us there is an obstacle to be confronted before we might even imagine



trying to enter into this sort of prayer – this climbing up into the lap of God – the great Abba. We might call this the John the Baptist Obstacle – John who said of the coming messiah, “*I am not worthy to even untie his sandals.*” We don’t feel worthy of climbing up into the lap of God. Jesus can climb up there, but I can’t...

Something absolutely new has occurred in Jesus ministry. The kingdom of God has arrived. The Holy Spirit is present and ready and willing to birth children of God. That’s why it’s called Gospel – good news. It’s about a gift freely given, to all of us. In the kingdom of God we’re all God’s children; we’re all invited to climb up into the lap of God. In fact, more than anything else, that exactly what God wants most — for us to climb up into the lap of grace.

We tend to get something wrong about Christianity. If we ask ourselves, what’s the most important thing for a Christian, the answer we often give is: *Christians have to be loving.* We are to be people who love and care for other people.

There is a truth in this statement. But it’s the second thing, not the first... The first thing is simply allowing God to love you. The first thing is to receive the gift of God’s love. You can’t do anything to make yourself more loved than you already are.

And the thing is, the extent to which we will be able to carry out the second thing (loving other people) depends upon the progress we make on the first thing. That’s because, apart from a vivid sense of God’s love for us, our love for others will always be tainted. It will be in part an attempt to win love, an attempt to convince others and ourselves that we are worthy of love. It will involve subtle forms of manipulation. And as soon as we think we’ve failed in this attempt to win love in return, we’ll give up.

I was listening to a man describe recently a gracious period of time in his life in which he really “got it,” in which he was very conscious of that sense of being loved by God. He described how during this time he felt a desire to help others, and that it was quite clear to him he wasn’t looking for anything in return. There was a joy he felt, because the love he was offering was the overflow of the love that he felt filling him.

This, I’m convinced is what happened for Jesus in those times of prayer. Having spent that time sitting up into the lap of God, when he climbed back down he was able to give the abundant love he had experienced there away, with concern for what he received in return. Knowing who he was in the light of that love, he wasn’t susceptible to the world’s attempt to tell him who should be. He didn’t worry about peoples’ approval.

I was really touched by something a mother in our church told me this week about what her daughter had said to her about coming to church. She had told her mother how much she loved coming to church. In part this had to do with the friends she had made here. But it was more than that. She said, “*Mom, when I’m there, I feel like God is watching over me, and I can be myself.*” Feeling herself loved by God, she is free to let her light shine.

I realize, however, that for some of you the whole notion of climbing up into the lap of God may seem like an impossibility. There’s the sense of unworthiness I mentioned. But maybe you also just haven’t ever really felt in a clear way God’s love for us, at least not in any way that registered throughout your body the way it did for Jesus as he was sitting next to the River Jordan that day. You’ve never heard the voice of God speak to you in any thing resembling an audible voice, calling us the beloved child, in whom God delights. You’re at a loss as to how to even begin climbing up into God’s lap.

Well here are a few thoughts.

Jesus intentionally stopped what he was doing. Sometimes all our doing keeps us from experiencing the love. So following Jesus’ example, there need to be times



when we simply STOP. To simply *be* for a time, and not do a thing. And to patiently endure the unpleasant feelings that may arise within you when you first stop, trusting they will pass.

You might want to begin is with a simple prayer of petition. Ask God that in some way you might be able to feel God's love, God's delight in you, hear God's voice calling you by name. *God, help me to feel what it feels like to sit into your lap.* Or maybe simply, *God, help me to even feel like I have a right to climb up into your lap.*

In Ephesians you hear Paul praying such a prayer for others: *"I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."* (Ephesians 3:18)

Consider asking others to pray something similar for you. You can do the same for them. We need each other; that's why the Church exists.

There is this peculiar thing I've noticed in others and in myself. Sometimes it's easier to be loving towards others than to be loving towards ourselves. There are other people in our lives that we care for deeply while at the same time being quite aware of their failings and flaws. And yet there are times when our personal failures and weakness seem like an insurmountable barrier to having the same compassion for ourselves that we have for our loved ones. Sometimes we need someone else to advocate for us to give us a boost up into the lap of grace.

The form of prayer I am describing draws upon our imagination. We often think of imagination as being something unreal, but God gave us our imagination as a gift, and uses it to communicate with us. What would it have felt like to be Jesus sitting there beside the Jordan with water dripping off him and his body warmed by the sun? What would the River Jordan have sounded like? Let us your imagination play. Children play, and we are attempting to turn and become like little children.

In times when our own sense of being unlovable keeps us from climbing up in the divine lap, try imagining standing apart, watching yourself, the way you would watch somebody you love. Tell yourself, *the person before me is a child of God whom God cherishes.*

Or imagine climbing up into the lap of someone who you know does love you.

It's peculiar; we all perceive that babies are innately lovable. We baptize these precious babies and everybody agrees, these are God's beloved children. They've never done anything in this world to *"make"* themselves lovable. They just are.

Recently I found a picture of myself as a little boy at about the age of two, sitting on the lap of my mother. She is looking down at me. I'm looking out, safe and secure in her arms. My face is unusually open, peaceful. I am clearly feeling loved. I put this picture on my desk and gaze at it, and in doing so, I feel loved. A mother's love, just as easily as a father's love, can be the imaginative trigger that helps us climb up into the lap of God.

As I was writing this sermon yesterday and happened to look out the window. I saw a Dad leisurely walking down the street with his three little kids. It's Saturday and so he doesn't have to work, so there's no sense of hurry. There were two little twin girls just 3 or 4 in this adorable little pink motor car that they are driving, giggling as they go. Their older brother, maybe six and a bit more independent, is riding his bike in little loops. The father clearly delights in his children.



The thought occurs to me: The Great Abba delights in us like this father delights in his children.

When such a moment as this occurs don't be too quick to get back to work. As Jesus did, taste and savor the delight of God.

In the kindness of Jesus,
Pastor Jeff

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The season of **Lent** begins with **Ash Wednesday, February 13th**. Join us for worship **service at 7 p.m.** at the end of which the **Imposition of Ashes** will be available. Ash Wednesday emphasizes a dual encounter: we confront our own mortality and confess our sin before God within the community of faith. The service focus on the dual themes of sin and death in the light of God's redeeming love in Jesus Christ. The use of ashes as a sign of mortality and repentance has a long history in Jewish and Christian worship, and the Imposition of Ashes can be a powerful nonverbal and experiential way of participating in the call to repentance and reconciliation. This practice is the historic focus of Ash Wednesday observance and gave the day its name.

Lent is a season of forty days, not counting Sundays which begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Saturday. The season is a preparation for celebrating Easter. Historically, Lent began as a period of fasting and preparation for baptism for converts and then became a time for penance by all Christians. The first Sunday describes Jesus' temptation by Satan; and the Sixth Sunday (Passion/Palm Sunday), Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem and his subsequent passion and death.

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Looking back...No meeting in January.
And – due to the possibility of bad weather....

FEBRUARY 2013
Winter – No Meeting

United Methodist
Women

Feb 2 – Groundhog Day
Feb 13 – Ash Wednesday

Feb 14 – Valentine's Day
Feb 18 – President's Day

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."



Please mark your calendars to support the UMYF's annual Super Bowl Sub Sale on February 3, 2013. Subs are \$7 each and can be ordered from any youth group member.

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Anthony DiPietro is **collecting coins for Heifer International**. A little bit goes a long way!

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A day time men's discussion group with Pastor Jeff is meeting on **Fridays at 1 p.m.** at the church. We listen to short audio tapes and discuss what we hear during the 90 minute sessions. Any men available in the day time are invited to join us.

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Beginning in February, our church will hold **Spaghetti Dinners on the second Saturday evening of each month**. **Our first dinner will be Saturday, February 9th from 4 – 7 p.m.** The dinner provides many things: 1) an opportunity to demonstrate the warm hospitality of our church good, hearty, inexpensive dinner that demonstrates the warm hospitality of our church, bringing people from the larger community into our church home; 2) an opportunity for forging friendships within our church family for those who share in the meal, as well as those who work to present the meal; 3) fund raising for both our church **AND** a mission project of the month. A schedule of volunteers to work on the dinners each month is being developed, and if you haven't already expressed your willingness to serve this way (as 30 people already have) you are invited to speak to Barb Bradley, Connie Keller or Pastor Jeff.

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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 Valentine's Day, February 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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Something New: **Our church calendar is now available on the church's website.** If you are planning an event and need to book the church or a particular room, please check the calendar on the website, then call Gail Booth or Wes Sitgreaves to confirm availability and reserve your time. (Fred Coleman will also have a hard copy of the calendar here at the church that you can also check for date availability.

“Living in the Light” sessions with Pastor Jeff continue informally throughout the summer on Wednesdays beginning promptly at 11 a.m. and ending precisely at 12 noon. Join us for spiritual conversation and guided meditation and prayer.

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Anyone who is interested in serving from time to time as a **liturgist** in the Sunday worship service is invited to speak to Pastor Jeff.

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The **UMW** is selling **Food Gift Cards to benefit the General Budget** for ShopRite as an *ongoing Fund Raiser*. The church will receive 5% of all purchases (you buy \$100 of gift cards, the church gets \$5). Gift Cards 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 ShopRite Gift Cards. Checks should be made payable to The United Methodist Women.

Thank you, The UMW

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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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FLOWERS FOR THE ALTAR ON SPECIAL OCCASIONS – If you want to remember or honor a special occasion in your life by putting flowers on the altar, please get in touch with Connie Keller. Flower arrangements are currently being purchased at Shop Rite for varying costs depending on what you want. You are certainly welcome at any time to place flowers on the altar. If you want an announcement in the bulletin, please call Connie

Keller or send her an email with the dedication. Contact information: Connie’s cell: 973-568-5404; home: 973-887-4384; email: connie@mhmlender.com

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

Bell Choir – rehearses Thursdays at 7:00 p.m. If you are interested in joining us, please speak to Barb Bradley or Aimee Letsch - 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).



SCRIPTURE READINGS FOR FEBRUARY

Feb 3

Jeremiah 1:4-10
1 Corinth 13:1-13
Luke 4:21-30

Feb 10

Exodus 34:29-35
2 Corinth 3:12-4:2
Luke 9:28-36

Feb 17

Deuteronomy 26:1-11
Romans 10:8b-13
Luke 4:1-13

Feb 24

Genesis 15:1-12,17-18
Philippians 3:17-4:1
Luke 13:31-35


FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS

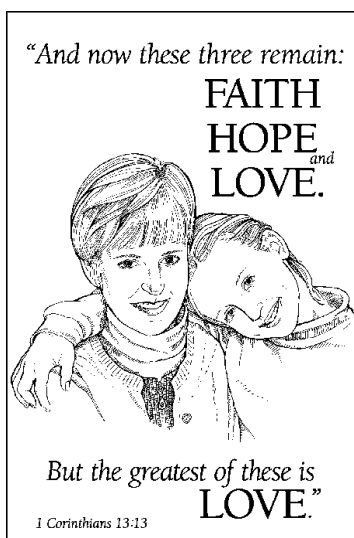
2 nd	Mia Savarin	11 th	Valia Hawkins
3 rd	Denise White	11 th	Julianne Karr
3 rd	Justin Cogan	11 th	Ryan Wink
3 rd	Diane Morgan	19 th	Charlotte Romeo
4 th	Susan Valcoff	22 nd	Elizabeth Vance
5 th	Barbara Munnely	24 th	Tracy Krisa Kempfski
7 th	Charlotte Vance	25 th	Sarah Edwards
8 th	Andrew Schnetzer	25 th	Keith Hawkins, Jr.
10 th	Mark Dierbach	28 th	Grace Agre
10 th	TJ Cogan		

FEBRUARY ANNIVERSARIES

16 th	Mariahna Suzan & Joshua Vedam
19 th	June & Russ Schnetzer

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Our Bishop has made the relief and recovery effort here in New Jersey for the effects of **Superstorm Sandy** a central priority of our conference. The Conference's goal is to repair churches and parsonages damaged by the storm, and to rebuild the homes of 300-500 low income, elderly and disabled individuals. If you would like to contribute to this effort, you can write a check out to "Parisippany UMC" and mark it "Hurricane Relief." Because of the apportionments paid by United Methodist Churches, 100% of this offering will go directly to the recovery effort.



February 2013

United Methodist Church of Parsippany

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday																																																																																											
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