

# HILLTOPPER

United Methodist Church of Parsippany

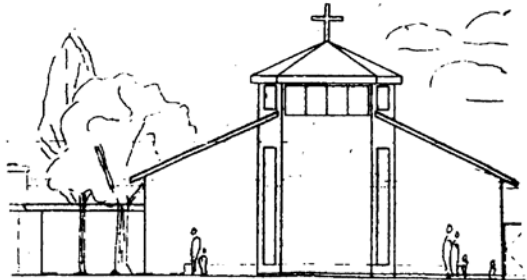
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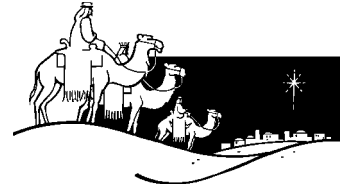
*Sunday Worship Celebration: 10:30 a.m.*

*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 2014**



*A sermon preached on December 8<sup>th</sup> based upon Luke 18:1 – 8, entitled, "What did Jesus mean by faith?"*

Jesus' parable ends with the words, "And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" We use the word "faith" routinely in church in a range of ways. When we ask the question, what is faith? We find it is hard to give a precise definition. Even Jesus himself did not define faith. What he did was point to people who embodied faith and in Luke's Gospel there are six times that he did this.

As I describe these six instances, perhaps you will recognize certain patterns.



Several people carry a paralyzed man on a stretcher to the house where Jesus is teaching. How long has he been suffering this way? Who knows? When they get to the house, there is such a crowd that they can't get in the door. Rather than give up, they climb up on the roof, where they tear open a hole, caring not that this just isn't something people do. They lower their friend down to Jesus. Luke tells us that when Jesus saw their faith, he said, "My son, your sins are forgiven."

A Roman centurion has a servant whom he loves that is sick to the point of death. He overcomes the wall that stands between the oppressor and the oppressed to reach out to Jesus the Jew for help. Not only that, he overcomes the barrier of his own pride and his humiliation in the eyes of his fellow Roman soldiers to humble himself in making this request, declaring that he is not worthy to have Jesus in his home, but confident in his authority to heal his beloved slave from a distance. "I tell you," says Jesus, "not even in Israel have I found such faith."

A woman referred to as “sinful” goes to the place where she is probably least welcome in order to get to Jesus, crashing a men’s only dinner party hosted by Pharisees, because Jesus is a guest there. She overcomes their condemnation in order to fall at Jesus’ feet, where she bathes his feet with her tears. “Daughter, your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

Similar barriers are overcome by another woman who has had been hemorrhaging for twelve whole years. How she must have struggled with the temptation to give up during that time in which, Luke tells us, she spent all her money on doctors who did her no good. The societal rules tell her that her flow of blood renders her unclean, and she does not belong in public, but there she is out in the crowd following Jesus, saying to herself, “if I but touch the hem of his garment, I will be made whole.” She touches Jesus, and instantly she is healed. “Daughter,” Jesus says, “your faith has made you well; go in peace.”



Jesus commands ten lepers who cry to him for help to go show themselves to the priest, and as they go, they are healed. One of them, presumably the only Samaritan in the group, turns back to fall at Jesus feet and give thanks. In doing so he overcomes the long standing animosity between Jews and Samaritans in which each was told never to associate with the other. Curiously, he also overcomes the directive Jesus spoke to all to go directly to the priest. Jesus marvels that only one, the Samaritan, returned to give thanks. He says to the man, “Get up and go your way; your faith has made you whole.”

And finally, a blind beggar at the side of the road receives word that Jesus is coming down the road, making his way to Jerusalem. In the midst of a large crowd of people he begins shouting, “Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!” The people around him tell him to mind his manners and stop shouting, but he shouts out all the louder, determined to be heard, which ultimately Jesus does. Calling the blind beggar forward, he grants his request for healing, saying, “Receive your sight; your faith has saved you.”

In each of these six stories there is some kind of adversity or resistance against which the people of faith persevere in order to receive the blessing they seek. Also, in each case there is some sort of back story almost nothing of which Luke tells us, but we can imagine, of a lengthy struggle that each person went through, that invariably involved times when they were tempted to simply give up.

So when we hear Jesus late in his ministry tell this parable we heard Bob read, we can’t help but think that the parable arose as a result of Jesus’ encounters with the people he had met who demonstrated faith in the particulars of their personal adversity. Their stories are in this story of a poor, seemingly powerless widow who perseveres against adversity, until finally she wins the justice she seeks.

There is a puzzling, indeed troubling aspect to this parable and it is this: Luke introduces the parable by telling us that its meaning is that we should always pray and never lose heart. If the widow is a stand-in for us demonstrating how we must persevere in prayer, is the unjust judge who finally grants her wish a stand-in for God?

Surely God is not like that perverse judge who cares not for people, and only responds because the widow’s requests become too irritating.



But sometimes, if we are honest, it can feel in life like we're up against an unjust judge. We can feel like a powerless, poor widow at the mercy of cruel forces that have no real concern for us.



Why does God allow there to be so much adversity as we make it along life's way? Why can't life come easily, smoothly without all the obstacles and resistance we encounter on our paths?

I know that if God gave me control over things, I'd get rid of all that adversity and resistance that gets in my way.

But God is God and I am not, and that is a good thing.

One thing the parable suggests is that there is a value to encountering these obstacles – a value we rarely can see in the present, but maybe further down the road.

This mystery we call faith, this mysterious quality God values so, only truly comes to light in the struggle to overcome adversity. It is only in the process of struggling against the resistance encountered in life that we forge our souls and come to shine the light of Christ.

Nelson Mandela died this week. He provided an example of this perseverant faith. In the 27 years of his imprisonment his faith war forged. He came forth from the prison cell with deep and radiant soul, capable of forgiveness and ready to serve as an instrument of national reconciliation.

It is striking that of these six stories in which Jesus commended people for their faith, not one of them involves a disciple. Jesus finds faith in unexpected places, in unexpected people – a humbling thought for us within the church. The only references to the disciples are of their lack of faith: as in that night out in the boat in the storm when their fear overwhelmed them: "Where is your faith?!" cries Jesus.

By chapter 17 the disciples can't miss the fact that they of all people are strangely lacking in faith, so they cry out, "Increase our faith!" In response Jesus says, "If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea, and it would obey you.'"

A curious image, faith the size of a mustard seed. The tiniest of seeds in Jesus' day --- that's not much. The thing about a seed is that it can lie dormant in the soil, doing nothing as it waits for the right set of circumstances – a certain adversity really – to break open its shell and begin to sprout.



I find the idea that faith is like a seed comforting, because there are times in my life, and I suspect all of us if we are honest, when it feels like I have no faith at all. But if faith is like a seed, perhaps at such times my faith is simply lying dormant, waiting to sprout forth.

There is another metaphor for talking about faith that I find helpful in this regard and it comes from the letter to the Hebrews where it declares, "Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us."



The race of which the author speaks is a marathon, not a sprint. In a marathon, when fatigue overwhelms, you can stop for a time. Feeling exhausted, you might consider quitting the race. But what matters is whether you eventually begin moving again, one step in front of another. What matters is that you persevere.

I suspect that the poor widow in Jesus' parable had her days when she wanted to give up, when, in fact, she did give up. But the race was a marathon, so what mattered was that eventually she went back to that unjust judge once again and banged once more on his door.



There is one final reference to faith in the Gospel of Luke, and it comes at the end, at the last supper. Jesus says to Simon Peter,

“I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.”

Jesus prays for Peter that his faith won't fail, and yet shortly afterwards, Peter would appear to for all intents and purposes to altogether lose his faith. That night he would deny Jesus three times; full of fear, he would abandon Jesus in the hour of his death.

But if faith is like a mustard seed, perhaps Peter's faith if faith is like a marathon, what matters some point resume the race. Which is precisely what Peter did, “strengthen his brothers” as Jesus predicted, “strengthen his brothers”

Here is a question: If Peter hadn't stumbled – if he hadn't had his time of doubt and despair, his time of being overwhelmed by his fears – would he have been able to strengthen his brothers and sisters?



Because Peter had stumbled – because he knew what it was to feel doubt and despair, to feel like a failure, to look in the mirror and feel contempt for the image reflected back at him – he would speak as someone who had been there when he sought to comfort and strengthen his brothers and sisters.

Because Peter was humbled, like the Centurion he knew the power behind his ministry wasn't his own power – it came from above.

That first story of faith – the friends carrying the paralyzed man to Jesus – provide for me one of the clearest images of what the Church is to be about. It was the friends who had the active faith – not the paralyzed man himself. His faith was dormant. They carried him to Jesus for healing. Maybe at some time later, he will carry one of those who carried him when they find themselves in a time of darkness. We are in this together, taking turns in carrying one another. And Jesus in the carrying, Jesus is with us.

In the kindness of Jesus,  
Pastor Jeff

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United Methodist  
Women

Looking back...the UMW pot luck supper was great – a good turnout of women and everyone received a nice gift from the gift game. It was a very Merry Christmas evening.

And now, it's 2014!

**JANUARY - NO MEETING**

Jan 1 – New Year's Day

Jan 21 – Martin Luther Kin Day

Get well wishes to those of you who are ill.

God Bless,  
Doris Bradley

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



The UMYF will be holding their annual **Super Bowl Sub Sale** --- you can order your subs from any youth group member on January 19 and 26 at church. The subs will be available for you to pick up on Super Bowl Sunday – February 2<sup>nd</sup> – after church.

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Pastor David Kang retired on December 8<sup>th</sup> after serving as the pastor for sixteen years of the Gospel Presbyterian Church which shares our building. I was privileged to preach at the service that marked his retirement, and have been even more privileged to have him as a colleague and friend. He is a man of great humility and faith. I will miss him. Pastor Choi will now serve as the pastor of the church. May God bless his ministry!

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Cassie Cogan had the inspiration of starting a children’s choir, which she calls “The God Squad.” They blessed us in worship for the first time on December 15<sup>th</sup>, complete with costumes. We look forward to hearing more of them, and applaud Cassie for being a channel of God’s Spirit.

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Tracy Booth directed our attention to a mission called “Operation Christmas Child.” We put together 35 shoeboxes of Dollar Store toys and toiletries, and shipped them off to be delivered to children in the Philippines.

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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.

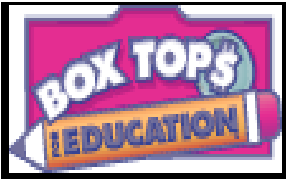
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The Cogan’s are couponing! We are collecting coupons to help purchase food for the Parsippany Food Pantry. We also have a book of coupons that any church member is welcome to browse and take any coupons that they could use. We plan on getting to church at 10am on Sundays to cut and organize, helpers welcome. Please save your extra Sunday coupons for us!

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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 **February 13th**. 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.



The local schools collect both Box Tops and Labels for Education. Anyone interested in saving these off of your general purchases can bring them to church, and one of the families with kids will be GLAD to hand them in. The closest elementary school, Troy Hills, uses the money earned from Box Tops to purchase new books for the school library. Bring them in and give them to Alison Cogan if you have no other school to donate them to.

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***A day time men's discussion group*** with Pastor Jeff meets **Fridays at 1 p.m.** at the church. We read together short readings and discuss them during the 90 minute sessions. Any men available in the day time are invited to join us.

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***"Living in the Light"*** meets on **Wednesdays** promptly at **11 a.m.** in Pastor Jeff's office. Pastor Jeff leads a Bible Study of the scripture lesson he will preach on the following Sunday, followed by a guided meditation and prayer. Anybody who is available at that time of day is warmly invited to attend.

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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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### **CHURCH CALENDAR and SCHEDULING EVENTS**

The church calendar on our website [www.parsippanyumc.com](http://www.parsippanyumc.com) has been updated. The calendar in the church office is no longer being updated.

If you want to schedule an event, you need to look at the website calendar to see if the date is available. All requests for use of the church facilities need to be approved by the trustees, Connie Keller or Amy Gripp.

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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](mailto:connie@mhmlender.com)



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 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)

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**SCRIPTURE READINGS FOR JANUARY**

Jan. 5  
Isaiah 60:1-6  
Ephesians 3:1-12  
Matthew 2:1-12

Jan. 12  
Isaiah 42:1-9  
Acts 10:34-43  
Matthew 3:13-17

Jan. 19  
Isaiah 49:1-7  
1 Corinthians 1:1-9  
John 1:29-42

Jan. 26  
Isaiah 9:1-4  
1 Corinthians 1:10-18  
Matthew 4:12-23

  
**BIRTHDAYS & ANNIVERSARIES**  
**JANUARY BIRTHDAYS**

1 <sup>st</sup>	Harold Gantert	20 <sup>th</sup>	Jim Cochrane
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Barbara Bush	22 <sup>nd</sup>	Heather Weiss
5 <sup>th</sup>	Barbara Anderson	23 <sup>rd</sup>	Joseph Dente
5 <sup>th</sup>	Gene Lange	25 <sup>th</sup>	Jennifer Collins
11 <sup>th</sup>	Jim Sakelakos	25 <sup>th</sup>	Chris Salink
13 <sup>th</sup>	Olivia Evans	25 <sup>th</sup>	Kathryn Montecucollo
16 <sup>th</sup>	Marissa Cintineo	25 <sup>th</sup>	Mary Keller
19 <sup>th</sup>	Dominick Pesquera	27 <sup>th</sup>	Darryl Sokolowski
20 <sup>th</sup>	Pauline Rich	29 <sup>th</sup>	Michael Weiss
		30 <sup>th</sup>	Chris Payne

**JANUARY ANNIVERSARIES**

12 <sup>th</sup>	Fred & Grace Schlosshauer
25 <sup>th</sup>	Ruth & Charles Faulend



“Dreams: A Christmas Play” was performed two times in December (the Saturday night performance was cancelled for snow.) A cast of 32



ranging in age from 6 to 87, and a production crew of 10 embodied Pastor Jeff's story of two churches; one that destroys



and one that builds up in love.





# January 2014

## United Methodist Church of Parsippany

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday																																																																																			
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