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United Methodist Church of Parsippany

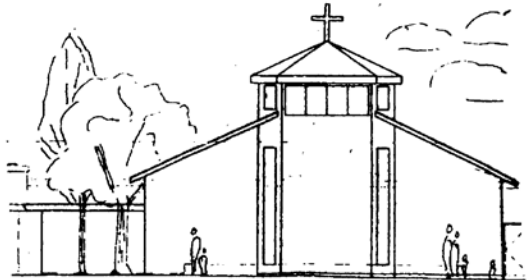
903 So. Beverwyck Road, Parsippany, NJ 07054 (973) 887-4657

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"



MARCH, 2014



A sermon preached on February 2, 2014 based upon Matthew 5:1 – 12 (The Beatitudes) entitled, "The Holy Breaking."

At the deepest level of reality, life is a blessing, a good gift given to us by God out of love; full of beauty and grace. It is a gift that by its very nature is designed to be shared, which is another way of speaking of what it means for us human beings to love. Love is sharing the gift of life.

This is truth – the fundamental reality that is obvious to very young children without even speaking of it. But unfortunately it is a truth that we gradually lose touch with as we get older. Over time we become immune to the inherent blessedness that is life. Like a fish becoming oblivious to the water in which it swims; we become blind to the love in which we live and move and have our very being.

Instead of life being a gift and a blessing we come to experience it as a great battle, a kind of competition to earn what we see as the limited quantity of good stuff there is in this world, whether that good stuff be money, or the love of others.



A hard shell develops around our hearts to keep out all the perceived threats. We don't even realize our hearts have become hardened; we mistake the hardness for strength.

Our relationship to other human beings becomes defined by comparison: Do I have more or less, of the good stuff of life than other people? Am I superior, or inferior to others? Our sense of self-worth becomes defined by these comparisons: I am worthy and valuable to the extent that I am winning the great competition: I am better looking, I am smarter, I am richer, I am more powerful, I have more friends and admirers than others,

therefore I have worth.

If, on the other hand, I look around at others and they seem to have more of these commodities than I do then it seems like I have no worth. Sometimes we ride a roller coaster; at



one moment we feel superior, at the next moment we feel inferior, all based on the comparisons we make in a given moment.

Even in those moments when we feel like a winner, our sense of self-worth can seem like a very fragile thing – so easily lost. (Whoever wins the super bowl today will feel like a winner – like they are standing on top of the world. But it won't last very long. This year's winners can easily become – and probably will be – next year's losers.)

Connected to all this is the fact that as we grow up, it becomes more and more difficult for us to live in the present moment. We become preoccupied with the future and the battles we will



face there to win the good things we feel we need to maintain our sense of worth and for life to feel worth living.

Oftentimes the inability to live in the present moment gets expressed with a preoccupation with money; I know it is that way for me. Money in our hand in the present moment has value only in terms of the goods we will exchange it for in the future. And so a preoccupation – my obsessive thoughts longing to reach the day somewhere down the road when the debts we have from sending our kids to college and such — translates into a kind of foreclosure of the present moment.

But the present moment is the only place life is really lived, and in losing the present moment, we lose contact with the blessing of life itself.

The more we come to understand life as a kind of great competition, the more we come to mistrust gifts, assuming they come with strings attached. When we were little children, we received gifts happily, but as adults, we feel compelled to pay our way – make sure we owe no one anything – that we keep our ledger sheets clean.

Many of us become pretty successful at this; we are achievers who seem to live life successfully. We are thought of as “well adjusted.” But what if the understanding of what life is we've become “adjusted” to is fundamentally out of touch with reality -- the truth that life is, in fact, a good gift meant to be freely shared?

What then? How do we turn and become, as Jesus said, like little children, so that we can dwell in the kingdom of God, which is that state of perception in which we experience the blessedness of life.

And that brings us to the beatitudes that Jesus spoke that day as he began his sermon on the mount. Convinced that the “normal” way of living in this world is the only way there is to live, the beatitudes make no sense. *Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who mourn; blessed are the meek, blessed are you when you are persecuted.* They beatitudes tell us that we are blessed



when bad things happen: when we become poor, whether literally poor or simply poor in the sense of losing all the certainties we have counted on; when we find ourselves thrust into grief; when we experience ourselves as meek, which means powerless; when we are persecuted.

The blessing that can be found in these kinds of experiences is the possibility they create that we might find through these crises an opening to that original sense of blessing which was always there, though we had lost the capacity to perceive it.

Take for instance the experience of grief: think of a time when someone we loved died. We see what so often we missed, that the person, with all their flaws and imperfection, was a gift, a blessing in our lives, though most of the time we took them for granted. In our grief we realize the depths to which we were connected to this person; that there was a great love there that we didn't fully appreciate. Time suddenly slows down and we realize how much of our lives have been spent hurrying to the future. Though there is pain in doing so, we re-enter the present

moment. The hardness of our hearts melts away, and perhaps we feel a great tenderness towards the other people in our life. It occurs to us that all those strangers who we passed us in the courses of our lives, seeming so alien to us, have all experienced their own losses as heart-wrenching as our own, and we realize that we are, in fact, deeply connected to them as well.

Why, we wonder, did it take the suffering of grief to awaken us?

Sometimes – not always – but often enough, people who are given the diagnosis and the suffering of a life-threatening illness, come to a place of seeing the diagnosis as a gift. It is one they would never have chosen for themselves, but it had the effect of awakening them to the blessedness of life. They clarified what mattered and what didn't. They ceased to live life as though it were a great competition with other people; they found themselves slowing down, appreciating the little things in life in a way they couldn't before.

People who have seen their lives crash and burn through addictions will talk about how hitting rock bottom was necessary for them to be on the road to recovery. They worked the 12 steps and learned to receive the gift of life and love day by day, and to live as a part of a holy fellowship of persons turning to one another for support on their common spiritual journey.

Similar things have been experienced by people when their love relationships have fallen apart, or when a job has been lost – events they would never have wished for, but which somehow provided the opportunity to awaken them to the reality of the kingdom of God.

It's as if a kind of holy breaking needs to happen in life, a breaking-open of the hardened heart, a kind of humbling, in order to perceive the inherent blessing of life. I think it was Leonard Cohen who said, "In the broken places the light shines through." But who wants to be broken?

Those who have never been broken may look like winners to be emulated, but in truth, very little light shines through them.

Where does this leave us? Do we have to wait around for something traumatic and tragic to bring us low to have our hearts broken open?

No. We can choose to consciously engage on the spiritual journey, embracing the little losses and heart-breaks that routinely occur in life as a pathway a deeper kind of living.

In a little while we will once more share in what we call "Holy Communion." It is not by coincidence that at the heart of this sacrament there is the image of a breaking: Jesus' body is being broken, expressed in the breaking of the bread. His life was broken for us, and when we open our hearts to his presence in the broken bread, our hearts are broken open to the love that binds us all together.

We leave behind, at least for a time, the habitual state of competition with one another; we realize that we are all in this thing called life together, and we discover the grace to become blessings to one another. We come back to the truth that life is a good gift, meant to be shared.



In the kindness of Jesus,
Pastor Jeff]

P.S. I am writing a play for Holy Week which involves characters present at the events of Jesus' last days speaking about what they experienced. I am looking for people interested in being a part of such a dramatic portrayal. **Please speak to me if you are interested.**



Lent begins with Ash Wednesday on **March 5th**. **Join us at 7 p.m.** with a worship service that will conclude with the opportunity to come forward to the altar to be marked with ashes. **Ash Wednesday** emphasizes a dual encounter: we confront our own mortality and confess our sin before God within the community of faith. The form and content of the service focus on the dual themes of sin and death in the light of God’s redeeming love in Jesus Christ.

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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Making Room for Jesus

A 6 Week Small Group Experience During the Season of Lent led by David Turner
 THE Scriptures tell us that Jesus wants to enter our lives—and wants to share his life with us. “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends” (Revelation 3:20). The season of Lent can be a time for those who want to slow down the pace of their lives...listen for the sound of Jesus’ knocking...and consider what it might mean to open up the door.

Making Room for Jesus will offer a chance for interested persons to do just this. To engage our thinking and spur our discussion, we will be using a selection of short scripture passages and devotional readings. David Turner will lead six group meetings on **Tuesday evenings, from 7:00 to 8:30, beginning March 11th**. The group size will be limited to 15 members. Got questions or want to sign up? If so, please speak to David or contact him at: (973) 759-7850 or psalter103@aol.com.

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Helen Miller died on January 30th after a long illness. We will miss her resilient and warm spirit in our congregation, but rejoice that her suffering has come to an end and she is reunited with her husband Paul in God’s blessed kingdom. Please pray for her son Mark.

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Our budget for 2014 is \$199,428. We anticipate our offerings will generate \$180,676 which breaks down to \$3,475 per week. The remaining \$18,752 needed to cover the budget will come from other income sources such as church usage, special offerings, dinners, food certificates, etc. Through Sunday, February 5 our total offerings are \$16,013 which is a weekly average of \$3,203.



United Methodist
Women

Looking back...February was a no meeting month.
All women are invited (and bring a friend). Come hear a church family member speak as we get to know each other better....

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 12th – 7:00 p.m.
PROGRAM: Kelsey Gripp
Refreshments served

March 5 – Ash Wednesday
March 9 – Daylight Savings Begins

March 17 – St. Patrick’s Day
March 20 – First Day of Spring

Get well wishes to those of you who are ill; and
HAPPY BIRTHDAY to those of you celebrating this month with Angela Nolan and Karen Wilk.

God Bless,
Doris Bradley

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

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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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Joe Mohan, the young pianist of extraordinary talent who has graced us with three performances in our sanctuary is graduating from Julliard and will hold his final recital March 20th, at 6pm at Julliard. We are also hoping to arrange for one more concert here at our church in May.

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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!

On the second Thursday of every other month our congregation provides dinner for the families at **Homeless Solutions**. Our next scheduled dinner is **April 10th**. 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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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 mediation 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 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. 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



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 MARCH

<u>March 2</u>	<u>March 9</u>	<u>March 16</u>	<u>March 23</u>	<u>March 30</u>
Exodus 24:12-18	Genesis 2:15-17,3:1-7	Genesis 12:1-4a	Exodus 17:1-7	1 Samuel 16:1-13
2 Peter 1:16-21	Romans 5:12-19	Romand 4:1-5,13-17	Romans 5:1-11	Ephesians 5:8-14
Matthew 17:1-9	Matthew 4:1-11	John 3:1-17	John 4:5-42	John 9:1-41



**BIRTHDAYS
&
ANNIVERSARIES
MARCH BIRTHDAYS**

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

MARCH ANNIVERSARIES

23rd Connie & Bob Keller

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PANCAKE SUPPER



SHROVE TUESDAY PANCAKE SUPPER

The Samaritans of **St. Ann Church** invite you to their Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper on **March 4 from 5:00 – 7:00 p.m.** at 781 Smith Road, Parsippany. Price of the meal includes: pancakes, sausage, tea, coffee, juice and dessert. **Tickets must be purchased in advance.** Cost: adults \$6 and children (up to 10 yrs.) \$2. (973-884-1986.)

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The **Skylands District Day of Service is Saturday, April 5th**. Volunteers will travel to the Jersey shore to assist in rebuilding homes damaged from the Hurricane. If you are interested in attending, please take a moment to visit the website: www.afuturewithhope.org. If you click on the "volunteer" tab, there is more information regarding sending a team of volunteers to serve with **A Future With Hope**. Please see the attached volunteer forms that we need filled out by each volunteer. Volunteers asked, though not required to contribute \$25 towards materials. Please note youth medical/release forms must be **notarized**. All adults accompanying youth must have verified **backgrounds checks** prior to arrival. No one under 14 is permitted on work sites.

March 2014

United Methodist Church of Parsippany

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday																																																																				
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