

HILLTOPPER

United Methodist Church of Parsippany

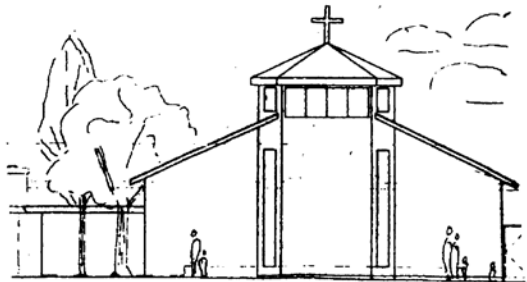
903 So. Beverwyck Road, Parsippany, NJ 07054 (973) 887-4657

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"



FEBRUARY, 2015



A sermon preached on January 11, 2014, the Baptism of Our Lord, based upon Genesis 1:1 -5 and Mark 1:9 – 11.

The primary reason people have believed in God throughout the ages is expressed in the first few verses of the Bible: In the beginning, there was this primal, watery chaos, "without shape or form," and the Spirit of God hovered over these dark and murky waters, like a mother hen brooding over her nest. With the command of God, the Spirit gave birth to creation, bringing order where before there was only chaos, creating the foundation upon which everything else could evolve. Suddenly there was light in stark contrast to the darkness -- a sense of order where before there was no order. Later God will look at the order and recognize that what he has created an recognize that it is good.

Deep inside of all of us there lives this basic question. It only arises to the surface, if at all, in moments of stillness and reflection, perhaps when we are outdoors experiencing the wonder of nature, for instance, under a clear and starry night. The question is this: *Why is there everything, and not nothing?*

Scientists call it the unanswerable question. Intuitively though, most of us sense that if there were no higher intelligence at work behind reality, there would be nothing but chaos, confusion, disorder, darkness, the great void. But that's not what there is: there is this remarkably ordered universe with light and darkness and extraordinary beauty, with all the reliable laws and principles of creation that can be studied by scientists and mathematicians to come to greater and greater understanding about how the creation works.



Why should this even exist, if not for some kind of designer -- a benevolent higher intelligence and power that has intentionally created order of the sort that allows good things to come into being? A creator who creates because his nature is love.

And here is the thing: that loving, intelligence that we call God whose spirit is pictured in Genesis hovering over the original chaos -- this God didn't just do his thing once and then walk away, like a master clockmaker might build a clock and then never have anything to do with it again. No, this God, the Bible affirms, and we affirm from our own experience, is a God who actively loves us, and continues to hover over the chaos of our lives to bring about order, purpose, balance, peace. If you listen to our second Scripture lesson through the lens of the Genesis passage, this is what you see happening. The same Spirit of God that hovered over the original chaotic waters, hovers over the scene at the Jordan River where John is baptizing.



There is something inside all of us human beings that tends to drive us towards chaos and confusion. It is the urge to go it alone, to put our egos at the center of our lives where only God belongs. Without God at the center, we lose perspective on what truly matters in life, and in doing so, we end up making a mess of things. On one side, we refuse to take responsibility for the havoc we cause. On the other side we try to be in control of that which we cannot control, which inevitably leads to frustration, resentment, and self-condemnation, because we think we ought to be able to control our destinies. The perception arises in certain places in our lives that we are spinning out of control.

Perhaps we manage to keep our desperation hidden from others, and succeed in portraying ourselves as people who have it more or less all together. But in our private moments there is this sense of sinking into the dark waters of chaos. We may reach a point where the facade comes crashing down. For a time the people around us see our lives as shipwrecked. And though this can feel like the worst possible thing, the pain of such moments can actually be a kind of labor pain -- the onset of a spiritual rebirth.

I've experienced this in small, private ways through the years; life gets more and more stressed, and with it a feeling that I'm losing control, until I reach this point of surrender, of letting go. And peace descends. Calm returns to my life, a sense of balance.

I experienced this in a more dramatic way that time (and it has a couple of years since this story has shown up in a sermon!) when as a child I was in utter distress to the point of panic about the fact that I had almost drowned while swimming in dark waters, I cried out to God, and a sudden peace descended upon me that permanently ended the sense of drowning in my anxiety over having come so close to death.

I experienced this again 26 years ago when my first marriage was disintegrating, and I feared the public humiliation this would mean. There came a point of surrender, of acceptance, and a kind of peace and calm came to me that I hadn't known was possible.

If you come to our church on Monday, Wednesday, Thursday or Friday at noontime you will have a hard time finding a parking space, and that is because of the AA meeting that meets in our fellowship hall. All these people come from diverse backgrounds with one thing in common: because of alcohol addiction their lives reached

a point of being unmanageable, wrecking themselves and harming the people they loved.

Each one of them reached a point in their lives where they were compelled to acknowledge they were personally helpless to bring order to their lives; they realized they needed help. They underwent a profound humbling, a kind of surrendering to the chaos, and began attending the meetings with others who had similarly been humbled, to encourage one another to keep the humble walk, reaching out daily, hourly to God, the higher power, the One who hovered over the original chaos.

I think there is something very instructive for those of us who aren't alcoholics to listen to the stories folks in AA tell, because this drive towards chaos and confusion lives in all of us.

I recently read an account of woman named Alicia who began drinking at age nine. She moved out of her on her own at 15 to live with other teenagers who wanted to run wild with alcohol. Alicia ended up out drinking all her friends, and they all moved out, all except a boy named Luke, They were bound together by mutual addiction. Eventually they married, and the next decade floated by on a sea of scotch.

"It was just one big long drunk," she said. "Round the clock. I didn't have any days of sobriety at all until I was pregnant with my older son. I was twenty six. That was the first time I was ever clean." Staying clean during her pregnancy fueled the illusion that she was not an addict; she could stop at will, after all. Luke continued his affair with cocaine, and a month after she gave birth to her son, Alicia began using cocaine and painkillers. Eventually she became pregnant with her second son. "And that was where I started to get to my bottom," she said, "because in that pregnancy I couldn't stay clean. I had crossed the line. And I knew I was really sick."

The spiral downward continued after her second child was born, as Alicia nursed her infant and tried to care for her toddler. She could barely breathe for all the chaos in her life and in her head. She and Luke would spend most of their take home pay on drugs, calibrating their highs and lows with a mix of uppers, cocaine, and alcohol. She had lost her job, she was stuck at home with crying babies, and she began to plot her suicide.

"I felt completely broken. How could this happen?" she asked. In retrospect, Alicia draws a straight line from that desperate moment to a sublime one that occurred a few days later.

On a Friday night, Alicia and Luke were buying groceries at Costco. "It was payday," she said, "and Luke had already spent all the money on drugs. We had loaded the bag and we were in line and he told me, 'You know, we can't pay for these.' And I just looked at him. And we had to leave the whole basket of groceries there. We came home and I remember the dishes were piled up in the sink. I just remember laying my head on the side of the sink and feeling the coldness of the sink right on my forehead."

And then she described how all of a sudden something literally moved through her, on the inside. "This alignment took place inside. And it started down low, like in my stomach and in the lower back, and it was like my spine was being straightened out. It's like when a cat gets scuffed by its mama on the back of the neck and they get kind of lifted up. And all of a sudden, I knew I was just done. That was it. I took my kids to my mom's and came back and told Luke I was going to get clean and sober, and he had to

go. And I was in rehab a couple of weeks later.” She said, “I think my soul got righted at that moment. And everything changed.”

Alicia has been clean of all addictive substances since that moment a decade earlier. Luke returned, sober, nine months later, and has remained clean as well. Her family has prospered in a manner that would have been impossible to imagine during the years of her drinking.

The one constant in her changing world is AA. It is built on admitting one’s brokenness, surrendering to a Higher Power, and experiencing a “spiritual awakening.” It relies on a God of one’s own understanding to reach down and help the addict overcome his vicious disease. It is the most spiritual of recovery programs. It is also the most successful. (*Account recorded in “Fingerprints of God,” by Barbara Bradley Hagerty.*)

Returning to our Scriptures... Water shows up in both our lessons. In the Genesis account the chaos is pictured as consisting of deep, dark water with no boundaries. Water expresses many things, but one of the things it expressed in the ancient world view was destructive chaos, the very opposite of creation. People who dared to go out in boats upon the waters to fish and travel and often wouldn’t make it back to shore alive.

And so John the Baptist had extended this invitation to all the people who had come to an awareness that living without God at the center of their lives was leading them in the direction of greater and greater chaos and confusion. He invited them to come to the waters of the River Jordan to be baptized by him, dunked down into the water.

In doing so, the way of life they had been living would be -- a life without God, a life centered on their own egos, would be symbolically put to death -- drowned in the waters. They would rise up into the sunlight of a new life lived with God.

Mark tells us that Jesus quietly came to the River with all the others. Instead of standing apart as the sinless one, he entered into those same waters to be baptized by John himself. Jesus fully shared in the human condition which involves living with a great deal of confusion and uncertainty. He entered into the chaos of the waters, undergoing that same sort of spiritual death, and as he arose, once more the Spirit of God -- the same Spirit that had hovered over the waters in the original story of creation -- descended upon Jesus bringing a clarity to him that had not been there before. The Spirit took possession of his life, and he knew in the very depths of his being that he was God’s beloved child.

As a result of this movement of God’s spirit over the waters, something altogether new has been introduced into the human experience -- there is a man who is whole – a man who walks upon this earth in intimate, unbroken communion with God.

We were baptized into Jesus’ death and resurrection. His new life has come to live inside of us. Time and again we will set it aside to try to be in charge, getting caught up again in the old way of living that leads us towards the sensation of drowning in our own chaos and confusion.



But we don't have to reach that point where everything comes crashing down around ourselves. We can humble ourselves daily before God by surrendering ourselves in moments of prayer, and joining others so inclined for this mutual humbling by gathering for worship on Sunday.



We believe in a God who brings order out of chaos. We believe in a God who, as in the song we sang just before this sermon, who brings something beautiful, something good out of all our confusion, our brokenness and strife.

In the kindness of Jesus,

Pastor Jeff

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Looking back...no January meeting. And....

NO MEETING IN FEBRUARY

**United Methodist
Women**

Feb 2 – Groundhog Day
Feb 14 – Valentine's Day

Feb 16 – 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."

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To make it easier for the Congregation to keep up with their financial pledges to the Church, a **PayPal link has been added to the PUMC Homepage**. If you've never used PayPal before, it's an easy and secure way to send a payment over the Internet. You can use your bank account or a credit card to make your payment, and PayPal takes a small transaction fee. For more information or a quick demonstration on how to use this new tool, please speak with Justin Cogan.



The season of Lent begins with **Ash Wednesday, February 18th**. Please join us is for **worship at 7 p.m.** The service will conclude with the opportunity to come to the altar to receive the imposition of ashes. 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.

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During the season of Lent Pastor Jeff will be offering a study group that will meet on **Tuesday evenings at 7 p.m.** Together we will read Philip Yancey's book that won the Goal Medallion book of the year award, "The Jesus I Never Knew," and a follow a study guide.

In "The Jesus I Never Knew," Yancey describes how in spite of being raised in church, when he read the Gospels for himself the figure he encountered there was altogether different from the Jesus he had been led to believe in. He proceeds to offer a fresh, uncluttered perspective on history's central figure—his radical claims, his challenging teachings, and his effect on others.

Reading the book together as a group will spark discussion, interaction, application, and growth. Together, we'll share life-changing discoveries about God, the Bible, and ourselves. We'll come face-to-face with the most compelling, creative, challenging, fearless, unpredictable, and ultimately satisfying person anyone can know: Jesus Christ.

Our first meeting will be on February 24th, but **participants will need to have the book in their hands prior to the first meeting so they can begin reading.** *Please let Pastor Jeff know if you would like to participate in our Lenten study.*

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The Confirmation class is holding a **Super Bowl Sub sale** and will be taking orders the next couple of Sundays for sandwiches. Made fresh for the **Super Bowl on Feb 1st. \$7 each**

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On **Saturday, March 14** we are planning a **St. Patrick's Day Pot Luck Dinner/Dance**. The highlight of the evening will be the band that played at Pastor Jeff's 25 Anniversary party. (Anita Laux's sister and company) They were GREAT! It's sure to be an evening of GREAT food and lots of fun and dancing. Save the date on your calendar!

Once again we will be collecting funds that night to defray the cost of the band with **anything over and above their fee going to the boiler fund.** If you have any questions or want to help put the party plans in place, please reach out to Connie Keller.

On the second Thursday of every other month our congregation provides dinner for the families at **Homeless Solutions**. Our next scheduled dinner is **February 12th**. 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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“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.

A day time men’s discussion group with Pastor Jeff that meets on Fridays at 1 p.m. We discuss short readings or videos during the 90 minute sessions. Any men available in the day time are invited to join us.

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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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WARMTH IN THE WINTER, HOT WATER AND WARM NOSES



We are launching a capital fundraising project over the next year to **replace the 60 year old boiler in our church**. It’s running on prayers and patches and we are keeping our fingers crossed that it will be a faithful provider of its services for one more Winter. It will be replaced by a cost and energy efficient model, 1/3 the size of the current boiler that is projected to reduce to our current heating bills.

In the next few months, we will be providing **RED** envelopes for any donations that you would like to make. Red is to help you remember that your “hot” donation is going to this one specific project. Any donation you make over the course of this fund raising campaign will be recorded on your giving statement along with your offering towards the general budget. We will accept any amount, big or small, a single donation, or many over the next year.

In the Fall there will be a chart posted in the narthex showing all of the *HOT* donations to date. We’ll be able to watch the thermometer heat up over the Winter and hopefully get us to our **goal of \$40,000 by July 2015**.

Thank you for your consideration and help on this project!!

The PUMC Board of Trustees

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 Thursday night at 6:15. 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. 1

Deuteronomy 18:15-20
1 Corinth 8 1-13
Mark 1:21-28

Feb. 8

Isaiah 40:21-31
1 Corinth 9:16-23
Mark 1:29-39

Feb. 15

2 Kings 2:1-12
2 Corinth 4:3-6
Mark 9:2-9

Feb. 22

Genesis 9:8-17
1 Peter 3:18-22
Mark 1:9-15



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	22 nd	Kylie Collins
7 th	Charlotte Vance	23 rd	Krista Kempski
8 th	Andrew Schnetzer	24 th	Tracy Krisa Kempski
10 th	Mark Dierbach	25 th	Sarah Edwards
10 th	TJ Cogan	25 th	Keith Hawkins, Jr.
		28 th	Grace Agre

ANNIVERSARIES

19th June & Russ Schnetzer



95 year old Grace Agre was one of 20 people who made it to worship on January 18th when an ice storm made driving nearly impossible. Grace has been an extraordinary gift of grace to this congregation, and an inspiration to us all. Thank you, Grace for blessing our lives.



The following is a note from Rev. Ed Wynne, who was the pastor at Parsippany UMC from 1962 to 1968, when our current church building was built.

Dear Jeff,

We saw the latest issue of *The Hilltopper* on our computer today, and it contained the announcement -- complete with Lois Kelshaw's picture -- of the need to replace the boiler.

Last April 26, 2014 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the first service of worship in the brand new building. Even at fifty years, that boiler has done yeoman service and is certainly worthy of replacement!

Enclose is our check in the amount of \$60 toward your campaign. I trust your boiler replacement will enable fuel-savings in the years to come.

May God continue to bless your ministry to the great people of Parsippany UMC. While only a few still remain who might remember our pastorate from 1962 to 1968, your labors have grown the faith community, have overseen the building of a beautiful sanctuary, and will continue to find creative ways in which to challenge Christian discipleship.

In Christian fellowship,

Edward J. Wynne, Jr.

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Our stewardship drive for the 2015 budget has come to an end. I want to thank everyone who made a pledge of financial support of our church and its ministry. It takes all of use working together to fulfill the ministry God has set before us. Your financial contributions play a vital role in making this ministry happen. **If you have not turned in your pledge, it is still not too late!** Please contact the ushers on Sunday or myself for assistance in obtaining a pledge card and making a financial pledge.

I also want to extend my sincere appreciation to the members of the stewardship committee who help me with this year's campaign.

Paul Adams
Stewardship Chair

February 2015

United Methodist Church of Parsippany

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 10:30 AM Worship	2	3 7:15 AM Men's Breakfast	4 11:00 AM Living in the Light	5 6:15 PM Kids Bells 7:00 PM Bell Choir 7:45 PM Adult Choir	6 1:00 PM Men's Discussion Group	7
8 10:30 AM Worship	9	10 7:15 AM Men's Breakfast	11 11:00 AM Living in the Light	12 6:15 PM Kids Bells 7:00 PM Bell Choir 7:45 PM Adult Choir	13 1:00 PM Men's Discussion Group	14 
15 10:30 AM Worship	16 	17 7:15 AM Men's Breakfast	18 11:00 AM Living in the Light 7:00 PM Ash Wednesday Service	19 6:15 PM Kids Bells 7:00 PM Bell Choir 7:45 PM Adult Choir	20 1:00 PM Men's Discussion Group	21
22 10:30 AM Worship	23	24 7:15 AM Men's Breakfast 7:00 PM Lenten Study	25 11:00 AM Living in the Light	26 6:15 PM Kids Bells 7:00 PM Bell Choir 7:45 PM Adult Choir	27 1:00 PM Men's Discussion Group	28

Jan 2015

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25	26	27	28	29	30	31

Mar 2015

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22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				