

HILLTOPPER

United Methodist Church of Parsippany

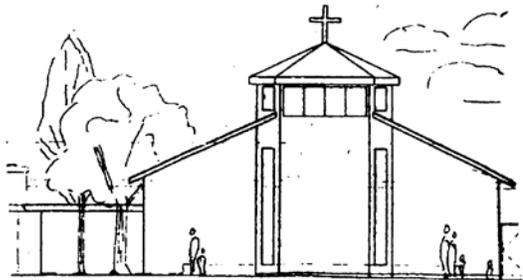
903 So. Beverwyck Road, Parsippany, NJ 07054 (973) 887-4657

<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"



MAY, 2015

"Broken", an original play written by Pastor Jeff with help from the Confirmation Adventure members will be performed on **Friday, May 1** and **Saturday, May 2** at 7:30 p.m. With humor, music and profundity the play presents a unique take on the meaning of the Christian faith.



The cast consists of the confirmation youth: *Earl Christofferson, Kayla Christofferson, Ryan Christofferson, Cassie Cogan, Edward Cogan, Anna Gripp, Erika Gripp, Brendan Laux, Julia Sklow, and Kaitlyn Sklow*; child cast members: *Frances DiPietro, Maggie Letsch, Abby Matheis, Jake Matheis*; and adult cast members: *Amy Gripp, Maidie Erickson, Arlene Sklow*. *Greg Elbin is the musical director*. Admission is free; there will be a free will offering.



Saturday, May 9 – Church Spring Garage Sale – 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Church members will be selling their own wares – garage sale “stuff”, crafts, and other goodies. Table price is \$25. See Barb Bradley or Connie Keller if you would like to participate. There will be a bake sale as well, so get out your recipes!!

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Joe Mohan, the young pianist of extraordinary talent who has entertained us with four performances in our sanctuary will be gracing us with his talent once again. We will be hosting Joe in concert at our church on **Saturday, May 16 at 7:00 p.m.** He performs a family-friendly concert, so bring your kids as well.

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United Methodist Women

Looking back...Good Fellowship at Charlie Brown's for Ladies' Night Out, and good to visit with Diane Anastasi joining us from North Carolina with photos of their house there.

NEXT - All women are invited to join us on.....

Wed., May 6th – 7:00 p.m.
PROGRAM: To Be Announced

Refreshments will be served

May 9 – Garage Sale/Bake Sale May 16 – Joe Mohan Concert
May 10 – Mother's Day (Bulletin Insert) May 25 – Memorial Day

GET WELL wishes to those of you who are ill, and
HAPPY BIRTHDAY to those of you celebrating this month with Anna Weiss, Lyn Krisa, Doris Bradley and Lois Kelshaw.

God Bless,
Doris Bradley

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



A sermon preached on April 12, 2015 based upon John 20:19 - 23 and Acts 4:32 - 35.

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.'

When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.' (John 20:19 – 23)

There is a big difference between merely having a belief that Jesus rose from the dead, and having an experience of his resurrection power. Presumably at the start of the story we just heard, the disciples who are gathered huddled together in that upper room had some kind of belief that Jesus had risen. Peter and John had seen the tomb empty, and Mary had told them she has seen him alive. But though they may have a belief, they do not have an experience yet of the power that was unleashed in his resurrection. And so they are still held captive by their fear, their grief, their guilt.

That is until that evening when Jesus suddenly came and stood among them. And it wasn't just that he stood among them, like a ghost, letting them know that he had survived death. No, he gave them two gifts: He gave them his peace -- the peace that the world cannot give -- only God. And he gave them power -- he breathed on them the Holy Spirit, and gave them the authority to forgive people -- free them from the burden of their sin as he had freed them. The experience of this peace and power transformed them from timid, overwhelmed phantoms of themselves to bold, joyful, loving, powerful apostles of Jesus.

The story that continues in John's Gospel tells us of the disciple Thomas who wasn't present the night Jesus appeared. He refused to believe what they told him.

Thomas is known as "doubting Thomas," and his unwillingness to believe is often seen as a shortcoming on his part, but there's an integrity to Thomas' refusal to believe simply because others tell him too. He is living inside a deep darkness, characterized, as I said last week, by equal parts grief, fear and guilt, and mere "belief" won't touch it. He needs an experience of transformative power. He needs the same experience that was given to the other disciples.



Interestingly, the gathering of disciples--the first church--doesn't tell Thomas to get lost --as many churches would in the centuries that followed--if he refuses to believe what they tell him is true. They accept him and hold him in their love. They understand that there is a sense in which faith is a gift, not an achievement. They have faith for him.

And sure enough, one night Thomas has an experience of Christ coming to him. He is given something more than mere belief that Jesus has risen; he is given the power that takes him out of his pit of despair. And it's significant that it happened in the midst of a community of people who were living in the power of the resurrection.

Three hundred years later the Emperor Constantine would embrace the beliefs of Christianity, at which point Christianity became the official religion of the Empire. Pretty soon pretty much everybody “believed” Jesus had risen from the dead. It was easy to believe; there was no risk involved. And along the way, the distinction between mere belief and an experience of the peace and power of the risen Christ often got lost. If belief doesn’t open us to experience that peace and power, it doesn’t mean much.

The group of men who gather with me on Friday afternoons listened to a talk by a man named Shawn Gordon who described how he grew up in the gang life of LA. His father and grandfather both died by violence. When he was a teenager his mother died of AIDS. He was an angry, bitter violent cauldron of hopelessness, and he fully expected to die young himself, but instead he ended up in prison. He spent his four years in prison scheming regarding the crime and violence he would commit once he got out of prison.

When Shawn was released from prison he was surprised to discover the love of a woman who he married and the gift of a child. For a man who had known little of love, these gifts of grace began to open his hardened heart. He still, however got back involved in crime, and once again he found himself in prison with a six year sentence. This time around Shawn had an added reason for despair: he had left a wife and now two children alone unprotected in the cruel, hard world he knew so well.

Midway through this second incarceration a fellow prisoner came into his cell repeatedly wanting to talk to him about Jesus. Shawn told the man to “get lost” several times – his words were far harsher than the ones I’ve used -- but the man kept coming back. The thing about the man was that caught Shawn’s attention was that he possessed a peace that was strange to him -- that same peace that those disciples locked in that upper room had received when Jesus appeared to them. The man had a longer sentence to serve than Shawn did, and yet he was strangely, happy – there was a freedom he carried with him in spite of being incarcerated.



And so eventually Shawn accepted the offer of a Bible and he spent the rest of his time in prison reading that Bible, and as he read, he began to experience the power that allowed him to begin to become a new man.

When he was finally released, Shawn might well have gone back to the life he had lived before. He was put in a halfway house in a part of the city with all kinds of familiar temptations and he was two hours away from his wife and children. He was a man with a record, and everywhere he applied for a job he was turned down. But one day he met a pastor on the streets who invited Shawn to come and stay with him and his family -- gave him in fact the master bedroom of his apartment and invited Shawn’s family to come and live there with him. The pastor mentored Shawn on how to be a husband, a father, a man.

Over time Shawn became a pastor himself, working with the least of God’s children in this world on the streets he knew so well. He didn’t come to mere belief -- he experienced the power two which his belief pointed. It is important to notice the key roles played in his transformation by two men -- the man who came to him in prison with the Gospel, and the pastor he met on the streets.

So our second Scripture reading describes the state of the church a couple of months after our first reading. The apostles have received the power of the Holy Spirit, and they have left their fear and shame behind to preach boldly about Jesus Christ. A remarkably diverse community has been drawn together, and it's growing rapidly, and the power of God to heal peoples' lives is on display.

Peter and John heal a man who hasn't walked since birth, not by their own power, but by the power they access in the name of Jesus Christ. They end up temporarily in prison, but like that man who visited Shawn in prison, the apostles are undeterred in the desire to share the Gospel.

People are amazed, because they are "uneducated and ordinary men" and yet they speak with an extraordinary "boldness." (Acts 4:13)

We hear (Acts 4:4) that the church has grown to 5000 people, a familiar number, because it was the number of people who followed Jesus out into the wilderness during his ministry. When Jesus offered up the little bit of food that and his disciples had brought with them, he inspires a miraculous surge of sharing among the people that results in everybody being fed. For a few hours, the kingdom of heaven touched down on earth.

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. (Acts 4:32 – 35)

The resurrection of Jesus was the center piece of the apostles' preaching. *"With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all."* As I said last week, the apostles themselves pointed to their experience of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus as the source of their transformation. Without that experience they would still be crawled up in the fetal position behind locked doors.

And the striking thing about this reading is the way it describes the members of the first church being quite literally willing to put their money where their mouth is. They sell their houses and land and give the money to the apostles who provide for the needs of all the people. He reminds me of Jesus giving his supper away, and the pastor who was willing to share his home with a convicted felon in order to bring him safely into the fold. There is a consistency between what they say they believe and how they believe: If God has raised Jesus, the man who had compassion on all, then I must care about my neighbor's needs.



So the most distinguishing characteristic most of this new community created by the power of Jesus' resurrection was that it was one in which everybody shared everything they had -- there were no private possessions— everything was shared and everybody was provided for equally.

I was watching a movie the other night about Senator Joe McCarthy and the witch hunt he conducted in the 1950s to identify and blacklist anybody who had even the least bit of sympathy with communists, as though communists were inherently and

capitalists inherently good. But the ideals that communism aspired to were similar to those embodied by the earliest church.

Communism failed, however, to live out these ideals, and unfortunately committed horrible atrocities in a misguided attempt to fix the injustice of society.

Phillip Yancey describes being a part of a group of Christians who were invited to the visit Russia in 1992 as communism was collapsing and the Soviet Union was crumbling. They were invited to meet with the editors of Pravda which had formerly been the mouthpiece of the communist party. They were shaken to the core and appeared sincerely for guidance, turning to religious leaders. They confessed that they had failed in their attempts to motivate people to be good – to have compassion on their neighbors. They seemed more interested in the escape provided by vodka than to help their fellow human beings. Yancey writes, “74 years of communism had proved beyond all doubts that goodness could not be legislated and enforced at the point of a gun.”

Karl Marx said that religion is “opiate of the masses,” and often it is. When religion induces a passivity in the face of oppression and injustice, focusing attention exclusively on a reward beyond this life, it is the opiate of the masses.



But what is described here in the book of Acts is anything but. The ideals that communism set out to embody can only be approached where there is a respect for freedom, and there is access to the power unleashed on the world when Jesus was raised from the dead.

On our coins it says that “in God we trust,” but for the most part, that’s a lie. Our natural inclination is to put our trust in money. It is only through the grace of God that a generosity of spirit becomes possible in human beings.

There is evidence that the early church had difficulty fully living out the ideal of full sharing. Just read a little further in Acts and there were problems. But this is what we should be aspiring for, and it is only as we are open to the power that comes from beyond ourselves – the peace and Spirit of the risen Lord Jesus – that we can move to be a community all are welcome and all are provided for.

In the kindness of Jesus,
Pastor Jeff

Anyone interested in becoming a member of the Parsippany United Methodist Church is invited to speak to Pastor Jeff. “There’s always room in the circle.”

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Pastor Jeff will be helping to facilitate a second **“Death Café”** at the Parsippany Library on **Tuesday, May 5th from 2 to 4 p.m.** This is an informal gathering of mindful people, dialoguing about their feelings, thoughts, and experiences about death with a view of helping to make the most of life. Cake and coffee is provided. To register please call 973 887 5150 ext. 209



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.

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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, June 11th**. 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.

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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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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

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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.

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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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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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.

There are **RED** envelopes available in the narthex 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.

There is 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**.

The PUMC Board of Trustees



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)



1 st	Beth Cogan	17 th	Don Gatto
2 nd	Alison Cogan	18 th	Kayla Hook
2 nd	Olivia Duran	19 th	Doris Bradley
3 rd	Anna Weiss	19 th	Lyn Krisa
4 th	Norma Aragon (Owens)	19 th	John Chauhan
5 th	Joshua Christian	20 th	Susan Elbin
5 th	Garin Roelofs	22 nd	Zak Jernstrom
6 th	Henry Isaacks	23 rd	Georgia Zibura
7 th	Dawn Colletto	24 th	Anna Gripp
8 th	David Brodock	25 th	Darlene Miller
9 th	Anthony DiPietro	26 th	Lois Kelshaw
10 th	Michael Smith	29 th	Darren Yacenko
10 th	Paul Larsen, Jr.	29 th	Lois Pongo
11 th	Erika Gripp	30 th	Isabella Duran
11 th	Kaia Joy Mihalko	31 st	Diane Anderson
12 th	George Hawkins, Sr.	31 st	Nichole Raier
12 th	Katie Rose Milhalko	31 st	Jessica Maclay
14 th	Kaitlyn Sklow	31 st	Austin Atkinson
14 th	Michelle Hess	31 st	Sophia Atkinson
15 th	Leigh Colletto		

ANNIVERSARIES

18th Anna & Michael Weiss
 20th Ted & Bekki Schnetzer

SCRIPTURE READINGS FOR MAY

<u>May 3</u> Acts 8:26-40 1 John 4:7-21 John 15:1-8	<u>May 10</u> Acts 10:44-48 1 John 5:1-6 John 15:9-17	<u>May 17</u> Acts 1:15-17,21-26 1 John 5:9-13 John 17:6-19	<u>May 24</u> Acts 2:1-21 Romans 8:22-27 John 15:26-27;16:4b-15	<u>May 31</u> Isaiah 6:1-8 Romans 8:12-17 John 3:1-17
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MOTHER'S DAY BULLETIN INSERT



Mother's Day is right around the corner, and the UMW will be sponsoring their annual special Mother's Day insert to appear in the bulletin on May 10th. The UMW offers you the opportunity to honor or memorialize your mother, grandmother, aunt, etc. by placing her name on a special bulletin insert. \$1.00 donation per name is requested.

Please use the form below and give it, together with your donation, to Doris Bradley by May 3rd.

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In HONOR of:

Placed by:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

In MEMORY of:

Placed by:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Total Names _____

Total Amount \$ _____

May 2015

United Methodist Church of Parsippany

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday																																																																																																
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