

# HILLTOPPER

United Methodist Church of Parsippany

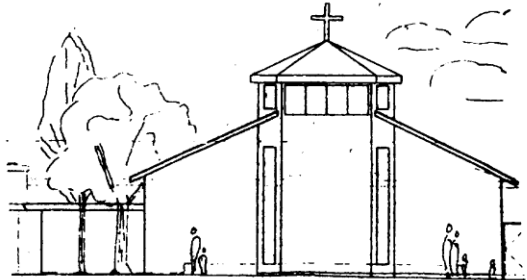
903 So. Beverwyck Road, Parsippany, NJ 07054 (973) 887-4657

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"



## JANUARY, 2016



**A sermon preached on December 13, 2015, the third Sunday of Advent, based upon Philipians 4:4-9 and Luke 3:7 – 18.**

On the surface, the two scriptures seem to be worlds apart. The apostle Paul sings, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say rejoice!" John the Baptist screams, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come." What could be more different?

But perhaps with a little reflection, there is a connection to be made.

In the story of John the Baptist, it is easy to get stuck on the fire and brimstone, but Luke sums up what the prophet has to say as "good news." For me the place I latched onto was the question and answer portion of the story. The question put before John is, what does repentance look like? The people ask, "What then should we do?"

Out there in the wilderness, wearing camel's hair, and eating locusts and wild honey John comes across as a true radical. He conjures an extremist – something like an ISIS member. We expect a radical and extreme answer from him -- some extraordinary demand placed upon his listeners: *Sell everything you have, reject your culture and come live out in the wilderness with me! Get ready for the coming revolution! Start up an extreme regimen of fasting and prayer disciplines, go door to door delivering a message of the coming judgment.*

But that's not what he says the people should do. He speaks instead of doing very ordinary things in the context of the places his listeners already find themselves. If you find yourself in a life where you have more than you need, share what you have with people who don't have enough. If you find yourself in the life of a tax collector, John doesn't say stop being a tax collector. Rather, be an *honest* tax collector. Don't cheat



hardworking folk out of their money. If you are soldier, he doesn't say, stop being a soldier. He says simply don't be a bully. Don't extort money from people with threats and false accusations. Be content with what you have.



Wherever you find yourself planted, be honest, be kind, share what you have, and be content with what you have.

You don't have to become something altogether different from what you are. You don't have to leave home. Go back home and truly live out your own life. Embrace the particular corner of the universe where God has placed you; be the person you were created to be.

There is this well-known Hasidic story in which a wiseman named Zusia tells his disciples of a vision he has had. He has seen what it is the angels will ask him at the end of his life. It is not, "Why weren't you Moses, leading your people out of slavery?" Nor will they ask him, "Why weren't you Joshua, leading your people into the promised land?" No, the question he will be asked is, "Why weren't you Zusia?" Why weren't you yourself?

In this context, John's words about fleeing from the wrath to come begin to sound different. Perhaps the fleeing he speaks of involves trying to get out of the life you've been placed in – to live somebody else's life. To reach the end our lives without having truly been ourselves.

We all have this tendency to wish we were somewhere else, to wish we were somebody else, to covet gifts that are not ours, and to overlook the gifts that are ours. We judge either ourselves or the setting of our lives or perhaps both as unsatisfactory.

The real challenge of our lives is to embrace the particular life, the unique story, the distinct group of people we find ourselves in. To accept our limitations while embracing the particular set of talents and opportunities to express love that we have been given. To bloom where you are planted.

John the Baptist embraced his life. He had no aspirations to be somebody he wasn't. When asked whether he was the awaited messiah, he said, "Nope, I'm simply the messenger." Not wishing to be somebody else, he fully embodied his life as the messenger.

There is this old Shaker Hymn:

*'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free  
'Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be,  
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,  
'Twill be in the valley of love and delight.*

And so perhaps this is the connection between the two scriptures: It is only when we embrace the life we have and stop trying to flee to some other life that joy is found.

It's the message of all the great movies we love. George Bailey embracing his life in Bedford Falls in "It's a Wonderful Life." Dorothy discovering that "there's no place like home" in the "The Wizard of Oz."

Ebenezer Scrooge discovering the joy of Christmas when he begins to share the bounty of his life with the people around him.

Embrace your life, and let it be a place for the God-given light and love buried inside you to come out.

It was also one of the messages of the Christmas play we produced Friday and Saturday, "Can You See Anything?"



The story begins with Mr. and Mrs. Hinkle concerned that Christ is getting left out of Christmas. It's a legitimate concern: the world does have a way of making Christmas season into an orgy of material consumption, choking the joy out of it.

But in the minds of the Hinkles the solution to the problem is to conjure up a pristine nativity scene where well-behaved children and teenagers think only "holy thoughts", so that in contemplating their otherworldly vision of holiness, we can leave behind this messy, seemingly unholy world in which we find ourselves.



Early on there is a scene in which the Hinkles are presenting their idea for "putting Christ back in Christmas", and the question comes up of who will play the baby Jesus. A real baby will present problems that will distract from their goal of presenting the pristine vision of holiness they are hoping to create. "What if the baby cries?" Mrs. Hinkle asks. And one of the children asks, "And what if the baby poops?" "Right!" Mrs. Hinkle replies. "We wouldn't want **that** to happen, would we?"



And then one of the teenagers locks in on Mrs. Hinkle's statement and asks a question that gets a laugh, but which nonetheless raises a profound theological question: "Wait -- the baby Jesus never pooped?"

But that's the point. The baby Jesus did poop, and cry, and sometimes keep his tired, frazzled parents up all night and that it was into this same messy, broken world with poopy, crying babies that God entered in the babe of Bethlehem. So to find God, we need not try to flee from the world we find ourselves in, but rather embrace it with our whole hearts and minds.

God is here with us in the muck of life, if only our hearts are open to perceive it.

Mr. Hinkle repeatedly expresses doubts that the teenagers are bringing the right attitude to his project, passing judgment on them for not having the right kind of "holy" thoughts, and for being self-absorbed and motivated by the money they are making, failing to see the ways in which he is no different. But it is these same, ordinary teenagers who are moved by compassion by the plight of a poor mother and her baby with no heat in their apartment, and the plight of a blind grandmother and her orphaned grandson, to share what they have been given.



And so they witness to the presence of the real baby Jesus in their midst, and set aside the glowing, plastic one.

May we too find the joy of the babe of Bethlehem born among us in this messy, confusing world. May we open our hearts and wrap our arms around the life we have been given to live.

In the kindness of Jesus,  
Pastor Jeff

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**Taking Down the Greens and Clean Up Saturday - January 16th 10:00 am**

We are looking for volunteers to help take down the Christmas decorations. While some of us are doing that, Tom Albert will be heading up a crew to clean out the old organ room in fellowship hall. We will be giving that space to the gospel Presbyterian Church for storage purposes. Please come out and help take care of your church. If you have any questions please speak to Connie Keller or tom Albert.

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Looking back... beautiful table settings and there was delicious food at the Potluck Dinner table --- 2016 Officers installed – and fun seeing what everyone received playing the Christmas Gift Game.



United Methodist Women

No January meeting due to the possible threat of bad weather.

Jan. 1 – New Year’s Day

Jan. 19 – Martin Luther King Day (obs)

GET WELL wishes to those of you who are ill, and HAPPY BIRTHDAY to those of you celebrating this month.

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.

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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, February 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.

On the **third Thursday of every month** Pastor Jeff leads a **worship service at Troy Hills Center at 10:30 a.m.** If you would like to share in this ministry to the people living in a nursing home, please join us. Speak to Pastor Jeff, Pat Winz, or Greg Elbin who brings along his guitar if you would like more information. Our next service is September 17<sup>th</sup>.

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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@mhlender.com](mailto:connie@mhlender.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.

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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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**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.



**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 Sunday mornings at 10 a.m. 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 JANUARY

Jan. 3	Jan. 10	Jan. 17	Jan. 24	Jan. 31
Isaiah 60:1-6	Isaiah 43:1-7	Isaiah 62:1-5	Nehemiah 8:1-3,5-6	Jeremiah 1:4-10
Ephesians 3:1-12	Acts 8:14-17	1 Corinth 12:1-11	1 Corinth 12:12-31a	1 Corinth 13:1-13
Matthew 2:1-12	Luke 3:15-17,21-22	John 2:1-11	Luke 4:14-21	Luke 4:21-30





<b>JANUARY BIRTHDAYS</b>			
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Barbara Bush	23 <sup>rd</sup>	Joseph Dente
5 <sup>th</sup>	Barbara Anderson	25 <sup>th</sup>	Jennifer Trice (Rychlicki)
5 <sup>th</sup>	Gene Lange	25 <sup>th</sup>	Chris Salink
11 <sup>th</sup>	Jim Sakelakos	25 <sup>th</sup>	Kathryn Montecuollo
13 <sup>th</sup>	Olivia Evans	25 <sup>th</sup>	Mary Keller
16 <sup>th</sup>	Marissa Cintineo	27 <sup>th</sup>	Darryl Sokolowski
19 <sup>th</sup>	Dominick Pesquera	29 <sup>th</sup>	Michael Weiss
20 <sup>th</sup>	Jim Cochrane	30 <sup>th</sup>	Chris Payne
22 <sup>nd</sup>	Heather Weiss	31 <sup>st</sup>	Joshua Christiango

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

**Invitation to Support Interfaith Furnishings:**

*(Four Saturdays a year volunteers from our church give time to help transport donated furniture to people living in Morris County who otherwise would not be able to afford to furnish their homes. Our next day to serve is **Saturday, January 16<sup>th</sup>**. Please speak to Claudia Bartek or Maidie Erickson. Below is IF's annual appeal for support.)*

In our 11 years, we have furnished homes for 170 families based on the requests of each individual's social worker. This is necessary as there is no financial help to furnish apartments, which is critical for homeless, mentally handicapped, and those temporarily displaced from job loss, fire, etc. Our service helps you dispose of unwanted furniture and recycle it for those in need.

We are a group of 10 faith communities who see the need for social service and working together to improve the lives of those less fortunate.

Join with us at this time of year and provide a bed or table to ones who often have nothing but an empty space. Please contact us through our website at [interfaithfurnishings.org](http://interfaithfurnishings.org) to donate your volunteer time, furniture or money. We accept financial donations through PayPal or you can contact Mary Jo Welch at 973-361-1666.

**We (PUMC) are hosting this event.  
Please invite your friends.  
Dispelling Misconceptions:  
Understanding Islam in Response to ISIS  
January 10<sup>th</sup>, at 7 p.m.**

A presentation will be given **Suzy Ismail**, followed by a time of open dialogue. Suzy Ismail is currently a Visiting Professor of Communication at DeVry University and the Founder and Head Communication Counselor at Cornerstone. She is the author of several books and is also a high school English teacher. Suzy received her Bachelor's in English, Communication and Middle Eastern



Studies, her Master's in Communications and Information Studies, and is currently working on her Doctorate in Human Services with a focus on Marriage and Family Intervention. Suzy is married and is the mother of three children. Several of our members heard Suzy speak at a recent educational event held at the Parsippany Hilton, and found her warm, engaging and enlightening. Please invite your friends!



# January 2016

## United Methodist Church of Parsippany

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday																																																																																				
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