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United Methodist Church of Parsippany

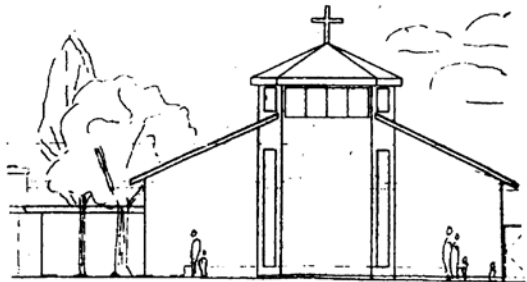
903 So. Beverwyck Road, Parsippany, NJ 07054 (973) 887-4657

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"



FEBRUARY, 2016



A sermon preached on January 17th, 2016 based upon John 2:1 – 11 entitled Red Foxes and Water into Wine

Knowing that I had been for some time living in something of a rut, on the last day of the year, in a Verizon Store buying a tablet for Freddie Coleman, I decided on a whim to buy myself a fitbit as a New Year's gift, realizing that at least a part of my rut involved the fact that my life has been too sedentary -- that I spent way too much time sitting instead of walking. A fitbit is a device that tracks your steps, and so since the start of the new year that's what I've been doing, with a goal of at least 10,000 steps. Over two weeks in the gadget has worked for me, propelling me to get up and out the door to go walking to attain my goal which seems to require that I add about an hour of intentional walking to my daily routine.



I prefer walking in the woods to walking around the streets of my neighborhood. To pass the time and avoid boredom, I've listened to interesting podcasts on a variety of topics, which allows me to justify the time in my mind as time well spent: I'm filling my mind with interesting new ideas that might make their way into a sermon.

This past week I've been doing my walking in Old Troy Park, just a half a mile from my house, the location of the Sunday School's annual fishing trip. One day last week as I pulled into the parking lot, I caught a glimpse of two red foxes streaking through the field and off into the woods. Unlike deer, red foxes are an uncommon sight. As the saying goes, sly like a fox, these creatures have the capacity to keep themselves hidden from sight. They are wild; somewhat mysterious.

Seeing the foxes seemed sort of magical, evoking in me a sense of wonder. I'd been walking through the habitat of foxes without a clue. The park is not large; the paths that lead through the woods of the park can be traversed easily in less than an hour. But having caught glimpses of the foxes, I began walking a little slower, a bit more carefully, scanning through the horizons of the woods as far as I could see in hopes of catching another glimpse. Sure enough towards the end of my hike that day one of the foxes darted out of some underbrush and up over a hill away from me, pausing once or twice to glance over its shoulders to see if I were in pursuit.

As a result of the fox sightings, the way I approach my walks has changed. I wonder, what else might be here that I've missed for failing to pay attention? Sometimes I don't listen to podcasts at all so I can be more present to the forest. Rather than viewing the forest as merely a preferable setting to get my 10,000 steps in, I've begun to appreciate it in its own right.

In the past week I've had another sighting of a fox dash out of sight over a ridge, and I think I've figured out where its den is. I find myself wondering about places where the lay of the land seems unusual. There's one place, for instance where the ground suddenly dips down in an oval shape with a diameter of twenty yards. What would cause this? A fragment of a meteor landing long ago? Some kind of sink hole?



I marvel at the extraordinary life force revealed in the trees. There are places where erosion has exposed the roots of trees, others where trees had been forced to shoulder the weight of other large trees that have fallen, and yet in spite of this adversity the trees persevere. In certain places I've noticed a great many acorns, expressing the primal urge to reproduce.

I've been struck by the number of trees that have fallen down -- more perhaps than would seem natural -- their roots severed, rising up into the air. Is there something working against the health of the trees in the forest?

I also notice the efforts of people who seem to value the woods. There are little pockets of small saplings growing that are marked by orange ribbons, which when I drew close to examine saw that they are a part of some kind of tree study by the Morris County Parks Commission, with notes saying "Do not disturb." Is this in response to the large number of trees that have fallen?

I've also noticed the efforts of park rangers, and maybe some Boy Scout troops as well, to clear new paths for walking through the forest. There's a new bridge over a stream. In recent years a couple of benches have been placed along paths inviting people to just sit and take it all in.

So I've been changing in relation to the forest. As I walk, I slow down inside, and begin to let go of the "to do" lists I carry around inside me that keep me from being present to the moment. A sense of reverence has awoken within me. I am reminded of the words of Jacob in the book of Genesis when he awoke from the dream he had while all alone in the wilderness having left home to venture into the world: "How awesome is this place; this is the doorway of heaven, and I did not know it."

I feel a sense of joy.

The gospel story this morning is perplexing. Reading the commentators, you get the impression they are all groping in the dark trying to declare what the story is supposed to mean, often contradicting one another. This fact seems to give a certain permission to play around with

the story, allowing me to find my own meaning in it in relation to where I am in this present moment.

The place I find myself resonating in the story is the way in which at least two levels of awareness or perception seem to be expressed by different characters.

The wedding planner exists on one plane. He's been hired by the bridegroom to manage the operation of the wedding, and from his point of view the story is about a crisis being averted at his job. It appears at one point that the wine is running out and these parties are supposed to go on for a whole week and this one, it seems is in danger of breaking up way too early, which would be a social disaster, one the wedding planner surely wouldn't want to have his name associated with. But alas, the crisis is averted because, he assumes, the bridegroom has anticipated the wine running out, and has set aside a very large supply of really great tasting wine, better, in fact than the stuff they had been drinking, which wasn't too shabby itself. He goes to the bridegroom and commends him: *"Well played, sir. Usually at these affairs people serve the good fine first, saving the inferior wine for when the guests have gotten good and drunk. But you've kept the very best wine for last!"*



The bridegroom seems even less aware than the wedding planner, having no idea what he's talking about. Like most of his guests, he's rather plastered, and hasn't even noticed the problem with the wine. Oblivious, he shrugs off the words of compliment from the wedding planner and heads back to join the conga line.

Only a few present seem to have taken in the fact that a miracle has taken place: the disciples, the servants who followed Jesus' instructions to take six large stone jars that are on hand which usually get used for the tedious task associated with the rites of purification, fill them with water, and then to take a cupful to the wedding planner. They are aware of the miracle, except in the Gospel of John, these events aren't called "miracles" -- they're called "signs" because their purpose is to reveal Jesus' glory, the very glory of God. Throughout the seven signs in the Gospel many people seem altogether oblivious, while others through faith perceive the glory revealed. They stood in awe of the fact that God was present, disguised in this otherwise ordinary looking guy in their midst, one Jesus of Nazareth.

The point is not merely that at this wedding some water got turned into wine, but that all of life in some sense is a veiled wedding party, the marriage of God and humanity, with the best tasting wine -- a symbol for great joy -- waiting to be tasted. That if somehow we can enter into this level of perception, we would see the whole world as a great wedding celebration in which God is inviting us to dance.

For reasons I can't altogether explain, some kind of shift in perception took place in me that allowed me to see that the woods are something far more wonderful than just a preferable setting to get my 10,000 steps in -- it's an enchanted forest with foxes and all sorts of marvels expressing the wonder of the life force that God has given to creation. And the shift I feel in the woods is carrying over to the rest of my life. I'm more present to the moment; more conscious of the presence of joy.

To my ears, our Bible story seems to be describing something similar.

The figure of Jesus' mother in the story is puzzling. She isn't called "Mary", and Jesus addresses her rather formally as "Woman." She is the one who alerts Jesus to the fact that there is a problem with the wine running out, and yet in the Gospel of John Jesus seems to know everything already, so did he really need to be told? Apparently his mother wants him to do something about it and he responds to her with annoyance and an apparent reluctance to act: "What is this between you and me? My time has not come." In John's Gospel, the time of which Jesus refers is mentioned several times: it is the time when his glory will be fully revealed, which is in his death and resurrection. He hasn't reached that time yet.



On the one hand, Mary seems to play an important role in preparing things for the miracle to take place. She tells the servants, "Do whatever he asks you to do." The servants follow Jesus' instructions regarding the six big jars being filled with water. And lo and behold the miracle occurs.

Perhaps the message here is, if we do what Jesus tells us to do, the glory -- the very presence of God -- the source of all joy -- will be revealed to us. Well, what does Jesus tell us to do? In John's Gospel, it's basically one thing: "Love one another as I have loved you." If you do this, then you will discover the joy.

On the other hand, Jesus' mother seems to be the voice of "Oh, no!!!!!" "Oh, no the wine has run out and this is terrible! You've got to do something, and do it now!!!"

This is the first of the seven signs in John's Gospel; the last one is the raising of Lazarus. The first takes place at a wedding; the last takes place at a funeral. In both, his glory is revealed. There is a curious similarity between these two miracle stories. In both, Jesus seems reluctant to act. In the Lazarus story the sisters Mary and Martha send word to Jesus who is quite some distance away that their brother Lazarus -- Jesus' dear friend -- is sick to the point of dying. The weird thing that happens is Jesus delays in responding -- he intentionally waits a couple of days before departing to their house. In the meantime, Lazarus dies.



In that story, Mary and Martha express the voice of "Oh, no!" Their "Oh, no!" seems a lot worse than Jesus' mother's "Oh, no!" Their beloved brother has died.

In the Lazarus story, Jesus weeps at the tomb. But what exactly is he weeping for? He knows all things, and so he knows that he will in short order bring Lazarus back to life. He doesn't seem, therefore to be weeping over the fact that Lazarus has died, but rather because we human beings suffer so by our terror of death, the greatest of all "Oh nos!!!"

The raising of Lazarus seems to point to the story of Jesus' resurrection at the end of the Gospel, where God's power over death is revealed. But so does the water into wine story. The first sign story begins with these words: "On the third day." One thing all the commentators seem to agree on is that this is an allusion to the resurrection, which took place, you may recall, "on the third day." The story of the wedding at Cana is meant to be seen through the lens of Jesus' resurrection.

“They have no wine!” and, “Our brother Lazarus has died!” are at opposite ends of the spectrum of “Oh, no!!” statements -- running out of wine at a wedding party seems pretty trivial in comparison to having your brother die, but they both express the sentiment that undermines the joy of life: They express: “What I want, what I need, is being taken away from me. Life is misery.”

“Oh, no!” statements arise from a mindset of scarcity, leaving us feeling bereft, hunkered down, just trying to get by. Life can be lived out as just one “Oh, no!” after another. This is the essence of what it means to be living in a “rut.”

But both stories, revealing the glory of God which has been hidden, are saying we don't have to live that way. That there is another level of perception we can enter into through the mystery of faith that allows us to perceive the extravagant grace of God in our lives -- to recognize that our cups are overflowing -- that death has been overcome -- that eternal life, and the joy therein, can begin right here, right now. That God is every bit as close to us now as God will be when we enter that dimension we call “heaven.”

If we can get our mind around the idea that death is not the terrible, fearful, sad thing that seems to be the way we routinely see death, that the life God gives us is far bigger than death, then we won't get bent out of shape when the we are threaten by life's little deaths – the possibility that the wedding party might end early because of a lack of wine.

It is not an insignificant detail that Jesus' first sign occurred at a wedding celebration. Weddings are supposed to be a special time set aside to experience joy. Having officiated dozens of weddings I know they often aren't full of joy because people get distracted by all the things that could go wrong, that do go wrong, as if these things have the power to take away the joy.

This past September my son Andrew got married. In the months leading up to the wedding the “oh no!” voice would arise within me from time to time. Is this wedding properly planned? Andrew and Sarah hadn't said much about what was actually going to happen; I simply knew it wasn't going to be “convention”, like anything like the dozens of weddings I have officiated at over the years. It was taking place by a lake up in Maine, without the usual liturgy.



How was everything getting paid for? How will interactions with the “ex” go? Are Andrew and Sarah truly ready to be married, to make their way in this world?

A lot of possible “oh, nos!” threatening to block the joy. But when we actually got there, something inside me was able to let go of the “Oh, nos!” and give myself over to the delight of the moment. The wedding was magical, one of the purest experiences of joy that I have experienced in my life.

We put out word that last Sunday night that a guest speaker, Suzy Ismail was coming to speak about Islam. Ten minutes before we were to start about four people were here. I felt the “oh, no!” voice rising within me. We're a chronically late church, and so at seven we had only about twenty people here, including several Muslim guests, but no Suzy. The minutes passed, and the numbers grew to close to seventy, with an even split of Muslims and church members, but no Suzy! “Oh, no!”

The idea came to me that while we were waiting it might be a good idea to pass the time by breaking up into small groups made up of both Christians and Jews, and let people begin

getting to know one another. So we did, and it went well: strangers made personal connections. Suzy showed up, and it was hard to end the small groups because the conversations were going so well.

Suzy began her talk and she was wonderful, and afterwards she answered all kinds of questions. In the end, people -- both Christians and Muslims -- left smiling. It had been a wonderful evening, a joyful evening. And it wouldn't have been so joyful, I'm sure, if Suzy had gotten here on time. The thing we had done to "pass the time" had become a central piece of the joy that was shared.

Are you living in a rut? Are you missing out of joy? Are you stressed out with what needs to get done, fixed, prevented to forestall yet another expression of death? The Gospel declares that our ruts are out of touch with reality; even now, the grace of God is quietly at work to raise us up out of the death grip.

The grace of God is quietly at work trying to shift the way we see our lives and to raise us up out of the death grip. There is water being turned into wine all around us, if only our eyes are open to perceive it. Both St. Augustine and CS Lewis made the point that the miracle Jesus performed at the wedding of Cana -- changing wine into water -- was simply a sped up version of a miracle that occurs every year in thousands of vineyards the world around. Rainfall seeps up into ground and up into the vines to grapes that over time ferment into make wine. Millions of people drink the wine without marveling at the divine origin of it all.

What if we actually never lose what we most need, and there is joy in this moment waiting to be discovered? What if we are free to give ourselves away in love, and that in doing so, the glory of God will be revealed to us and we will discover that God is as close now as God will be when we are in heaven, and there is nothing of which we need to be afraid?

In the kindness of Jesus,
Pastor Jeff

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We have begun having a child serve as **acolyte** each Sunday at the start of worship. The child will progress in with the choir and light the Christ candle on the altar as a sign that the light of Christ is in our midst. If you have a child who would like a turn, please Speak to Betsy Adams or Pastor Jeff.

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DVDs of the church Christmas Play, "Can You See Anything?" are available for \$5 from Eric Christiango. Proceeds go to support the church budget. It's a bargain, for sure.

Looking back... No January Meeting – no February meeting due to the chance of snow....



Next Meeting in March

**United Methodist
Women**

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

Feb. 10 – Ash Wednesday
Feb. 15 – 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 (97!).

God Bless,
Doris Bradley

Prov. 17:17 "A friend loves at all times."

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The season of Lent begins with Ash Wednesday, February 10th. 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.

The **season of Lent** lasts 40 days, not counting Sundays which are considered "little Easters" that goes from Ash Wednesday until the day before Easter. The forty days remind us of the forty days that Jesus spent in the wilderness before beginning his ministry. It is a special time in which we seek to examine our hearts and our lifestyles in an attempt to draw closer to God, and live closer to God's will. Some people give up something that is a part of their usual way of living as an offering to God and an attempt to greater personal discipline. The possibilities of what that might be range broadly from person to person. Some people add something to their daily lives during the forty days, for instance a time of meditation, prayer, or reflection on the Scriptures. Actively participating in the season of Lent can better prepare us for the singular joy that is Easter.



During the season of Lent a **Bible Study** will be offered on **Tuesday** evenings at **7 p.m. beginning February 16th.**



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 mediation and prayer. Anybody who is available at that time of day is warmly invited to attend.

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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 17th.

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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



Speak to Betty Polen.

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

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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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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 FEBRUARY

Feb. 7	Feb. 14	Feb. 21	Feb. 28
Exodus 34:29-35	Deuteronomy 26:1-11	Genesis 15:1-12,17-18	Isaiah 55:1-9
2 Corinth 3:12-4:2	Romans 10:8b-13	Philippians 3:17-4:1	1 Corinth 10:1-13
Luke 9:28-36	Luke 4:1-13	Luke 13:31-35	Luke 13:1-9



FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS			
2 nd	Mia Savarin	11 th	Julianne Karr
3 rd	Denise White	11 th	Ryan Wink
3 rd	Justin Cogan	19 th	Charlotte Romeo
3 rd	Diane Morgan	22 nd	Elizabeth Vance
4 th	Susan Valcoff	22 nd	Kylie Collins
5 th	Barbara Munnely	23 rd	Krista Kempski
7 th	Charlotte Vance	24 th	Tracy Krisa Kempski
7 th	Likitha Dasari	25 th	Sarah Edwards
8 th	Andrew Schnetzer	25 th	Keith Hawkins, Jr.
10 th	Mark Dierbach	28 th	Grace Agre
10 th	TJ Cogan	29 th	Coleen O'Grady
11 th	Valia Hawkins	29 th	Kelly O'Grady

ANNIVERSARIES	
19 th	June & Russ Schnetzer

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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, April 16th**. Please speak to Claudia Bartek or Maidie Erickson.*



This past January 10th our church hosted Suzy Ismail as she spoke on the subject of “Dispelling Misconceptions: Understanding Islam in Response to ISIS”. Forty people from our congregation gathered to welcome approximately thirty people from two local Mosques as together we listened to Suzy Ismail speak about Islam, dispelling the misconceptions brought about by extremists such as ISIS. She answered a range of questions, allowing those of us who are Christian to better understand and appreciate Islam. The evening was extraordinary, beginning with those of us gathering breaking into small groups in order to introduce ourselves to one another. We look forward to further opportunities for interfaith dialogue and friendship. The world deeply needs more opportunities to experience the sort of blessing we received with our face to face conversations.

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A labyrinth is a circular pattern used in the Christian tradition for meditation and prayer. People who slowly walk labyrinths often describe experiencing a sense of peace and clarity regarding finding the way forward in their lives. Several years ago we placed a temporary labyrinth on the floor of the sanctuary, and members of the church found it helpful to walk it as an aid to their spiritual journeys.

I am interested in creating our own permanent labyrinth on the ground just beyond the parking lot to the right of the shed. I imagined it to be something like the labyrinth in this picture that I recently took at a retreat center. If this is an idea that captures your imagination, I invite you to be in touch with me.



Pastor Jeff

February 2016

United Methodist Church of Parsippany

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday																																																																																																																
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