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United Methodist Church of Parsippany

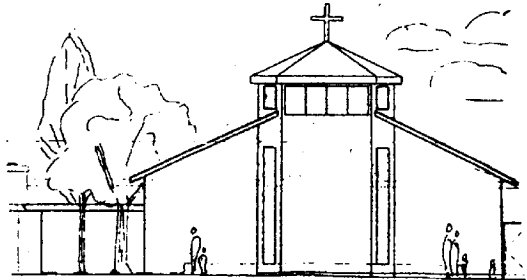
903 So. Beverwyck Road, Parsippany, NJ 07054 (973) 887-4657

<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, 2017



A sermon preached on January 15th, 2017 based upon John 1:29-42.

It is striking that the very first words we hear Jesus speak in John's Gospel are "What are you looking for?" It is the kind of a deep life question that if it is to be answered properly requires some significant reflection, like the question asked by the character Kadi played at the beginning of our recent Christmas play, "Why are you here?" If we don't set aside time to reflect on such questions, we will be swept along by what is referred to as the "rat race," accepting the answers the world proposes. I am looking for success, victory, wealth, status, power, comfort, pleasure, popularity. Though something within us tells us that there is more to life than these things – that all of the world's answers to the deep questions miss the mark -- the illusion that we aren't really going to die (at least any time soon) allows us to live as though we have forever to get around to answering the question. Which, of course, we don't.



So taking retreats in order to give time to reflect deeply on such questions are important, and hopefully coming to worship each week serves as a kind of mini-retreat for you in this regard. It is not surprising that at the "Search" retreat that five of our church's youth went on last weekend, the very first question they were asked was, "Why are you here?" At the closing worship service at 4 p.m. that the parents of the youth and I attended we heard all the youth briefly speak about their weekends and some of the youth acknowledged that their initial answer to the question was: "I'm here because my parents, or my friends pressured me to go. I'm not sure I want to be here," and that's exactly what they expressed at the outset. They soon discovered that they had come to a place where it was okay to speak the truth about their lives – they were in a safe space.

To return to Jesus' first words, they are addressed to two of John's followers who have gone to follow after him after John declares Jesus is the "lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world." Jesus turns and asks, "What are you looking for?" and interestingly they don't answer

directly, perhaps because they don't have the words to adequately express what it is they are searching for. They sense, however that in Jesus' presence they will find the object of their quest, so they ask, "Teacher, where are you staying?" and he tells them, "come and see." The two go and hang with Jesus for several hours, and John gives us the little detail that it took place at four in the afternoon.



He gives the time, I suspect, because after the time they spent with Jesus the two will never be quite the same again. They have been changed forever. Curiously, we are not told either what Jesus said during this time or what they did together. They didn't receive a new creed, a new belief system. They received an experience of the presence of God.

Up until this moment their whole experience of religion had been one that left them feeling guarded, self-conscious, asking, "Am I doing this right? Am I good enough?" But being with Jesus was different. They found themselves in a totally safe space in which they were unconditionally loved. They had an experience of intimacy

with Jesus – with God.

I read somewhere that "intimacy" means "in to me see." When we are intimate with another, this is not a polite way of saying we have had sexual relations with the other. It means that we have seen inside the heart of the other, and they have seen inside the heart of us. In John's Gospel, this is the meaning of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus – to be intimate with Jesus. It is to abide with him, dwell with him. Some variation of the word "abide" occurs 42 times in the Gospel.

When we are truly known by another, it means they know the good and the bad about us – our strengths and our weaknesses. Jesus knows all of this regarding the two men – the beautiful and the ugly -- and he loves them unconditionally. And the thing about this kind of being truly known with love – this kind of intimacy – is that when it occurs the best that is within us – our love and creativity – rises up from where to some extent it has been buried. We become our best selves, and want to share the love we have discovered. We want to pass it on.



The first thing the two men do after their time of abiding with Jesus is go and find Simon and invite him to come experience Jesus from himself -- to come and hang with Jesus. And Simon experiences what they experienced

and becomes Peter the Apostle.

So our five youth arrived at this retreat Friday evening, and finding themselves in a crowd of peer strangers, they probably reacted initially the way they had always reacted in such settings; say, the first day of school. They put their guards up, their masks on. "Am I cool enough? Attractive enough? Will I succeed in becoming 'popular.' And if not, will I at least avoid being rendered a social outcaste?"

But in short order they discovered that this gathering of their peers was different. They were stunned to find a safe space where they were invited to take off their masks and be real with one another, trusting that they would find acceptance and love. Along the way they listened to talks about Jesus given by people of their same peer group, and then invited to discuss the talks in small groups in a "get real" kind of way. In a matter of 34 hours they went from feeling anxious in a crowd of strangers to experiencing perhaps the most intense experiences of being a part of a circle of intimate friends they'd ever had. And they were awestruck. It was the peer connection that was so powerful, but they grasped that somehow the unseen presence of Jesus had made this deep connection possible, and had brought forth the capacity for love and caring that lived within them.

The “Search” retreat is held once a year, and the secret to its effectiveness is that with the exception of a couple of supervising clergy, the retreat is run by young people who in the recent past have been where the first time retreatants found themselves, anxiously showing up for the weekend in a group of strangers and to their amazement experiencing the awesome transformation of that group into a joyful, close knit circle of friends, which in turn inspired within them a desire to “pass it on” to others. They had worked with others in the months leading up to the retreat to make preparations for the weekend, and had arrived intent in creating that same safe space for others. They modeled the vulnerability necessary that invited other young people to let down their masks, get real, and experience Jesus’ presence.



A side note: I heard somewhere recently of research that revealed that most people come to a church for the first time because in some sort of pain in their lives – they come because of a sense of need. And the question they ask – and the question we should be asking – is whether they will find among us a safe space in relation to their pain and need.

I have always best understood “sin” as separation – from God, from others, and from our truest self. If we take seriously the idea that Jesus “is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” than it means we can begin to live now as if the habitual divisions that separate us have been overcome. We can allow ourselves to be vulnerable with others and experience moments of surprising intimacy in the course of our day to day lives because the presence of Jesus overcomes all divisions and creates safe spaces.

I had breakfast this past Friday with Gordon. Gordon and his wife Linda lived for many years here in Parsippany, but a couple of years ago they moved to Florida. They were back in town because they are the grandparents of the beautiful baby girl we baptized last Sunday.

Unfortunately Gordon has been battling cancer for some time, and just this past November he was given the news from his doctors that he wasn’t going to win the battle. He was told he had at best a year to live. The good thing that came out of this was the decision was made to stop the chemo and radiation that had been making Gordon feel horrible in a desperate attempt to turn back the growth of the cancer.

Now, having breakfast with someone who is dying might sound to some like a depressing experience, but though there was sadness present, my time with Gordon wasn’t the least bit depressing. Partly this is because of the conviction I have that God’s love is victorious over death, and that a beautiful new life awaits Gordon beyond this life.



But it was more than that. Part of the difficulty that comes for many with being in the presence of someone who is dying is the pressure that can be felt not to acknowledge the “elephant in the living room” – which is the fact that the person is, in fact dying.

But we didn’t seem to need to pretend the elephant wasn’t present. We were able to talk freely about the fact that Gordon was dying.

Another part of the difficulty with being in the presence of someone who is dying is that it has been ingrained in us to run from tears. But there is nothing

wrong with crying when crying is what is called for. And sometimes tears can, in fact, be healing.

So for me my time with Gordon was akin to what I think those two men experienced that afternoon in the presence of Jesus, and to what the youth experienced on their retreat. We felt the safe space to let go of all pretense and get real -- the safe space that the presence of Jesus creates.

With his life is drawing to a close, I asked Gordon about the best times in his life. He spoke of the birth of his son Bart and the love he shared with Linda. He went on to talk about the times he had done work that had been valued – that had made a contribution.

Gordon's spiritual journey is an interesting one. I first met Gordon perhaps fifteen years ago through his friendship with the Kellers. At that point Gordon identified himself if not an atheist, at least an agnostic. He had been raised a Roman Catholic, and although for many Catholicism can be full of grace, it wasn't so for Gordon. He was an altar boy and he had questions. 'Why is the bell rung three times during the mass' he wanted to know? 'Don't ask foolish questions' was the answer the priest gave. In time he gave up on church.

As is sometimes the case, it was his son Bart who led Gordon back to church. Bart joined our youth group, and then our confirmation class, and eventually Gordon started coming around as well. He liked to cook, and soon he had a place working beside Al and Tom and Justin in our kitchen with our church dinners.

The company that Gordon worked for as a draftsman closed, and the decision was reached to move down to Florida where Gordon and Linda have family. There is no longer much work for draftsmen in the present economy and so Gordon found work down there in, of all places, a big United Methodist Church running their kitchen. He ran a weekly dinner that raised money for an outreach to the homeless of their community. Gordon also did some custodial work for the church and got to know the staff of the church. He felt connected, involved. His life had a sense of purpose.

I came away from my time with Gordon feeling blessed. I was reminded of how precious life is – not something to waste on pettiness of any kind. The fact is, whenever we have lunch with someone, we are dining with someone who is dying. We just conspire together to pretend we have forever on this earth. I also was reminded by my time with Gordon how easy it is to be kind, to do something each day that can be a blessing to others. Life is too short to waste these opportunities.

In the safe space created by the grace of God, we can become real with one another. And even though part of that realness involves the fact that there is darkness as well as light within us, in the safe space of intimacy with Jesus, it is the light that is strengthened. We want to pass along the grace we have experienced to others.

So let me finish by referencing another deep life question, one referred to by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, whose birthday we honor today: "Life's most persistent and urgent question is, "What are you doing for others?"

In the kindness of Jesus,
Pastor Jeff

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We rejoiced in the baptism of Charlotte Rose Routhier, daughter of Bart and Natasha Routhier, on Sunday, January 8th.



Looking back... no meeting in January.



FEBRUARY – NO MEETING
Due to the possibility of bad weather

United Methodist
Women

Feb. 2 – Groundhog Day
Feb. 20 – President’s Day

Feb. 14 – Valentine’s. Day

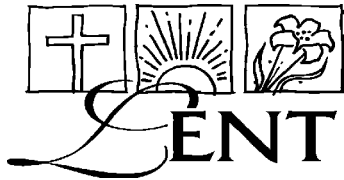
GET WELL wishes to those of you who are ill, and
HAPPY BIRTHDAY to those of you celebrating this month with Grace Agre (98) and Denise White.

God Bless,
Doris Bradley

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

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Looking Ahead:



Lent begins with **Ash Wednesday on March 1st**. Now is the time to begin thinking about how might you live a different life in the season of Lent? What might you add to your life, or give up from your life, to walk more closely with God?

We will once again hold an **Ash Wednesday service at 7 p.m.** in which there will be 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. This practice is the historic focus of Ash Wednesday observance and gave the day its name.

Lent is a season of forty days, not counting Sundays, which begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Saturday. The season is a preparation for celebrating Easter. Historically, Lent began as a period of fasting and preparation for baptism for converts and then became a time for penance by all Christians. The first Sunday describes Jesus’ temptation by Satan; and the Sixth Sunday (Passion/Palm Sunday), Christ’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem and his subsequent passion and death.

During the season of Lent, Pastor Jeff will offer a Tuesday evening gathering from 7 pm. To 8:30 p.m. in the sanctuary in which we will reflect together on a Bible passage, share our journeys with one another, and pray together. All are welcome to join us.

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 9th**. 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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Our **Youth Fellowship** will be meeting every other Sunday evening. All youth 8th through 12th grade are invited to attend. Please speak to Pastor Jeff if you have any questions.

Our youth will again be making **subs to sell for Super Bowl Sunday, February 5th** as a fundraiser. A portion of their profits will go to support our church's ministry providing dinners for the homeless through Homeless Solutions. See any member to order subs.

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Interfaith Furnishings - Once every three months our church provides volunteers to assist **Interfaith Furnishings** in transporting donated furniture to people living in Morris County who would not be able to otherwise furnish their homes. **Our next Saturday to serve is Saturday, February 18th**. Please speak to Bruce Letsch or Maidie Erickson if you would like to volunteer

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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 Andee Mihalko if you would like more information. Our next service is **February 16th**.

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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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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 7:30 a.m. at the Empire Diner** with Pastor Jeff for breakfast, conversation, and a concluding prayer. All men are welcome.



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.

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CHURCH CALENDAR and SCHEDULING EVENTS

The church calendar on our website www.parsippanyumc.com has been 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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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. 5	Feb. 12	Feb. 19	Feb. 26
Isaiah 58:1-9a	Deuteronomy 30:15-20	Leviticus 19:1-2,9-18	Exodus 24:12-18
1 Corinth 2:1-12	1 Corinth 3:1-9	1 Corinth 3:10-11,16-23	2 Peter 1:16-21
Matthew 5:13-20	Matthew 5:21-37	Matthew 5:38-48	Matthew 17:1-9



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

FEBRUARY ANNIVERSARIES	
19 th	June & Russ Schnetzer

“And now these three remain:


**FAITH
HOPE
and
LOVE.**

But the greatest of these is
LOVE.”

1 Corinthians 13:13

February 2017

United Methodist Church of Parsippany

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday																																																																																				
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