

April, 2020



The Epistle

“No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house” (Matt. 5:15)

The Lament Assent:
Christ and COVID-19
From Pastor Todd

Well, here we are in the early days after Easter, having finished what one social media meme called “the Lentiest Lent we have ever Lented.” Yet, despite our current situation—Christ is risen, indeed!

Thanks be to God that, no matter the chaos of the world, Easter still happens. Life flourishes in the face of death, and we are offered resurrection hope.

I am especially struck this year by the way the Gospel accounts describe the arrival of resurrection hope for Jesus’ first friends and followers: they do not all believe and receive comfort at once in equal measure, but rather in waves because – much like us – they are scattered and separated from one another.

In John’s Gospel, Jesus appears first to Mary Magdalene, then to the disciples huddled (self-isolating!) in a locked room, and then, a whole week later, to Thomas. The trajectory of moving from grief



"Just as there are seasons in the world around us, so there are in our interior life. We cannot expect it to be otherwise." – Teresa of Avila

to hope is different among these characters, just as it is different for each of us. Maybe in these days you are like Mary: vigilant, attuned to the voice of God, and ready to testify to the presence of the risen Savior. Maybe you are like the disciples, navigating fear and belief, joy and isolation, all at once, and drawing strength from your friends. Or maybe you are like Thomas: unwilling or unable to witness to Jesus' resurrection until you experience something more tangible, more real... at least, as real as the novel coronavirus.

Tradition calls Thomas the doubter, but it seems to me that Thomas doesn't doubt so much as he *demand*s. He demands that Jesus show up for him, just like Jesus, apparently, showed up for the other disciples. He demands that Jesus be present with him, too, so that the wave of resurrection hope may at last wash over him. Thomas' demand is less doubt or disobedience than sheer honesty. He knows what it will take for him to believe this remarkable, ridiculous news – especially in the midst of so much news about stark and sobering death – and he asks that Jesus provide that experience. Thomas needs to understand Jesus' resurrection not just in his brain or even in his heart, but in his body, with his senses, his whole self.

When I hear Thomas' demand, I do not hear impertinence; I hear lament. I hear a deeply biblical, deeply faithful relationship with the living God. I hear a plea for God to show up again *from someone who knows the many ways God has shown up for God's people in the past*.

And when Thomas demands that Jesus show up and present his wounds, a remarkable thing happens: Jesus shows up! He fulfills Thomas' need. Jesus answers Thomas' honest demands with compassion and presence. In response, Thomas exclaims, "My Lord and my God!" Thomas' grief-filled demand has been transformed into a testimony about the faithfulness of God.

In reflecting on this, I think it is completely appropriate for us to demand that God show up and bring our pandemic-weary world some resurrection hope. Surrounded as we are by sickness, deprivation, fear, and death, we have plenty of things to lament. But we have also witnessed God's saving acts in the world throughout history. Christians testify that the very same God who divided the waters of the sea so that the Hebrew people could escape Pharaoh's grasp has also raised Jesus Christ from the dead.

You know what God has done in the past, so keep reminding yourself what God can do in the present and in the future. But also, remind *God* what God can do. Lament. Testify. Demand that God show up for our hurting, feverish, unemployed, grieving, lonely world....

And may Christ's resurrection hope wash over us all. ■





Good News at the Human Needs Food Pantry!

Human Needs Food Pantry, 9 Label St. Montclair, NJ.

The Pantry reopened last week. Volunteers having been sorting fruits and vegetables for pick-up or delivery. There are fewer helpers but those who have come are making a huge difference to the clients. **Food is being home delivered to 230 shut-ins who are unable to get out of the house.**

In addition, canopies have been set up outdoors for food distribution so clients can pick up food there instead of having to go indoors. Distance precautions are in place and enforced. Food distribution takes place on Tuesdays

and Thursdays from 12:00pm - 3:00pm. The usual Thursday night food distribution has been suspended until further notice, along with clothing distribution. Also no food contributions can be received at this time. The best way to help is to donate money to support this vital mission during this desperate time. There are MANY more people who have signed up to receive food and less food to be distributed.

Many thanks to all of the volunteers. They are wonderful, caring people. If you suddenly find yourself sequestered at home and would like to volunteer some time, your help would be appreciated. Phone Mike Bruno at 973-746-4669. Thank you very much for any support you can give. Prayers are always accepted!

Gathering for Worship Online

Community and Communion on Zoom

As our community life is transformed in many ways, we are so grateful that we are able to worship each week via Zoom networking.

Being able to connect with so many of our families and friends on Easter Sunday, even with those who are scattered all over the country, was a blessing, indeed!

As you know, Session has suspend "in-person worship" until further notice. We will hold worship each Sunday at our usual gathering time of 10:00am. Invitations with the details for attending both the worship services and the weekly check-ins are sent out each week. Our zoom gatherings allow folks to participate via desktop computer, laptop, smartphone with audio and video. If you do not have or use any of these devices, a dial-in number is available for you to participate by phone, only. I invite you to follow United Presbyterian Church of Cedar Grove page and tune in each week. 📺



“...For where two or three are gathered in my name,
I am there among them.”

Matthew 18:20

Stewardship and Offerings

Just a friendly reminder that we are still accepting your offering! We need your support now more than ever. You can mail your offering to church, drop it in Cindy's or Jamie Lynn's mailbox (check the directory for our addresses), drop it off at the church, or use our fancy new [Donate button](#) on our [new church website](#) (if you can also cover the small fee for this service, that's even more appreciated!). We appreciate everything that you – our compassionate and loving congregation – do for us, not only now but always.

Thank you! – *Stewardship*

House and Finance

It is strange that for the first time in over 60 years, we are not together in the “house” of House, Finance & Mission. Oddly but still good, it still feels like we are together. While we are out of our church house, we are still working to maintain it, pay all our bills, and make sure it is ready to have us back when we are able. A huge thank you to Cindy who continues to check on things and get the mail for us. I can't do this without her!

We have made an agreement with Korporate Kids on their rent payment that is fair to us both. We cannot survive without them and we want them to come back strong from this as well. We have agreed that they will pay a portion of their rent that they can afford and the rest to be paid back once everyone is back. No interest will be charged, and we gave them a fair amount of time to both parties to get caught up. We are confident that our partnership will continue for years to come!

We continue to contribute toward our mission partners during this time of need while making sure we pay our own bills. We are working to ensure the place is maintained. Thank you to all of the helpers out there who make sure our church is not just a place to worship on Sundays but also a home we will be able to come to when this time of uncertainty is over and some normalcy resumes. Stay safe and healthy and we will see you soon! *Jamie Lynn Adams – House, Finance & Mission*

UPCCG Events

Yes, we will meet again. More than ever, our social gatherings will mean so much to us when we can be together again. It will certainly take some time to get back to a place of feeling semi-normal but we still plan to hold the pizza and craft day that was planned for Palm Sunday as soon as we are able to get back together again. Community and state guidelines will be followed, of course, and the event will be planned accordingly. Stay tuned for more details!

Here are some upcoming events we plan on celebrating in the future:

Pizza & Craft; Spring Clean Up; Summer Kick-Off Picnic (June?); Fall Craft (October); Homecoming Lunch – October 11th, 2020; Christmas Craft (December); Hanging of the Greens – December 6th, 2020

Jamie Lynn Adams – Congregational Care

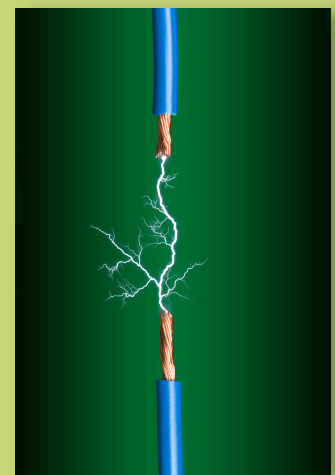
We're Online!

New Tools to Remain UNITED.

Come visit the new website of the United Presbyterian Church of Cedar Grove. The address is UPCCG.COM. From there, you can catch up on the latest COVID-19 news for our church and community, contact the church, and even make financial donations and leave prayer requests for the pastor.

You can also get “social” with United. The church has a new Facebook page that you should check out, too. Just go to facebook.com/upccg to see our new social media presence.

Now, more than ever before, it's important for us to remain United as the Body of Christ. See you on the Web!



The Journey of Love

During this season of self-quarantine and social isolation, spiritual focus and renewal are more important than ever. We remain an Easter people, dedicated to finding hope in the midst of despair and life where there is only death. The Journey of Love, laid out below, is a six-week tool (with some extra ideas thrown in for good measure) intended to help you re-focus on giving, connecting, sharing, and looking forward to the time when we will be able to meet with one another in fellowship face-to-face. May this tool enhance your relationship with God and with the people in your life.



FIRST WEEK: The Hand of Love

This week, write a letter a day to a friend – near or far away. Tell someone how much you appreciate him or her.

SECOND WEEK: The Voice of Love

Telephone two or three people each day for a short chat just to say what they mean to you or to say, “Thank You” or “I’m Sorry.” Call people you’ve intended to phone but, for whatever reason, you keep putting it off.

THIRD WEEK: The Deed of Love

Make something for two or three friends who mean so much to you but for whom you rarely express your love – some small remembrance that has your love as a wrapping. Alternatively, you might purchase something online and have it delivered to someone.



FOURTH WEEK: The Heart of Love

Make a list of at least ten people for whom you will pray daily. Include your friends, your enemies, those you don’t like; forgive them if they have wronged you; ask forgiveness if you have wronged them.

FIFTH WEEK: The Mind of Love

Use this week to pray for yourself and look inward. Read the Gospel of John. Spend some time sitting comfortably and concentrating on the breath of life moving in and out of your lungs.

SIXTH WEEK: The Victory of Love

This is the week for celebrating. God’s love for us is revealed in many ways. Get outside and breathe in the fresh air – wearing a mask and keeping an appropriate distance, of course. Schedule an online or FaceTime dinner or boardgames with family members and friends from whom you’ve been separated in these weeks. Let your joy be full of life that is abundant in faith, hope, and love.

MORE IDEAS TO IMPROVE YOUR SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

- Skip one meal a day and give the money to the poor.
- Start a prayer "rhythm." Say a prayer every time you brush your teeth, see a commercial, or check your e-mail.
- Read a chapter in the Bible each day.
(Matthew is a good book to start with)
- Forgive someone who doesn't deserve it.
(Maybe even yourself)
- Spend thirty minutes a day in silence.
- Call up and say one nice thing to someone each day.
- Pray for others while you do chores around the house.



Spring Clean Up

Years ago, we used to have a spring clean-up at the church. (I remember feeling weirdly excited about being able to wear jeans to church!) I'd like to bring the tradition back this year. And since we are all itching to get out of the house, why not make it a party? One Sunday after church – as soon as “the way be clear” – we will plan a time to take care of a few odds and ends, like cleaning the windows, doing a little yard work, and doing some planting around the property. Perhaps we could chip in and organize the church's storage shed, while we're at it. A list of possible chores will be completed as we get closer to being able to participate in this event. Also, you are more than welcome to suggest items for the Spring Clean-Up list, yourself. Even if we must push the event to the fall, it will be nice to be together. Refreshments and lunch will be provided!

Jamie Lynn Adams – House, Finance & Mission/Congregational Care

Church Secretary

The Session of UPCCG has made the decision to designate the Church Secretary position to unpaid or volunteer status, with the intention that the duties covered in this area will be fulfilled by members of the church. It was a difficult decision, but we felt that in these uncertain times, we would be able to utilize the funds normally designated to the Secretary's salary for things such as insurance, utilities and other immediate needs. Nicole Shaw has been a wonderful asset and we thank her for years of service here at UPCCG. I hope our paths will cross again!

Please utilize the below email addresses for anything you would normally send to Nicole. You may copy Todd on any and everything you see fit, at: UPCCG.Todd@gmail.com, or REVTDS@gmail.com.

unitedprescg@gmail.com – email address monitored by Jamie Lynn

- Any immediate needs to be addressed, such as bulletin comments (please copy Todd on prayer requests and service requests)
- Epistle articles
- Flower requests
- Any secretarial needs or other housekeeping items to be aware of

theupccg@gmail.com – email address monitored by a few members of the church, and Pastor Todd

- Anything that the whole congregation would be interested in
- Newsletters you think we should be receiving
- Inquiries from outside the congregation

Thank you.

–The UPCCG Session



We Need Your Contact Info

Our email list needs a lot of updating! It's important for the Church Office to have the correct and updated contact information for all of the members and friends of United Church. You can email us with any updates at theupccg@gmail.com. Please make sure to include: Name; Address; City, State, Zip; Home Phone; Cell Phone; Email Address; Birthday; Significant Anniversaries; Your Preferred Method of Contact. Thank you.

Future Epistles

As we “get with the times” and finally embrace social media and the digital world, some may wonder why we continue the Epistle. Well, it is tradition! We would like to produce the Epistle and send them out electronically, as well as a few print copies for those who require it. However, in addition to the news and announcements that are common in The Epistle (and since we now have multiple forms of communication), I would like to add some new and valuable areas to the newsletter.

Usually, Session members write about events and undertakings headed up by their committees; we learn about the food pantry and other missions that are doing good things for the community, as we have read in this issue. Moving forward, I would like to add a special “did you know” section, or advertise local events of interest happening outside our church, and anything else related to our faith, fellowship, and edification. Furthermore, it might be great to create a special section to keep everyone updated with what’s happening with members and friends who have moved away. Let’s open it up to everyone! If you ever have anything you would like to share, please email your article to Jamie Lynn at unitedprescg@gmail.com and she will take it from there. Thank you in advance for your contributions!

–The UPCCG Session

Thank You

I would like to extend a special thank you to our very own Pastor Todd for all his help and dedication that he put in to making sure we stay together during these uncertain times. We now have a website again! Regular emails are also being sent and he is helping me maintain the Facebook page I final got up and running recently among many other things! We even have a way to donate online during the times we can’t meet to make it easier for you to send in your pledge or make any donation. It has been great to be able to use Zoom to see and hear everyone on Wednesdays and Sundays and to have Todd help us through these surreal times we face. Thank you, Todd! I know we all appreciate everything you have done so far! Looking forward to keeping in touch even more now!



Make the Connection

The Church at Worship and Learning

Our Learning and Worship Program is still available for everyone.

It works like this. Children and Adults gather for worship. All are invited to pick up the biblically based education flyers, found next to the bulletins in the narthex. They contain games, crosswords; connect-the-dots, coloring items, etc to use with parents and/or other church members during the time of gathering or throughout the service. All the material will be associated with Lectionary scripture readings. Please feel free to take copies of all the issues you may want to share with youngsters you know or work on them yourself. Pass the word and invite.

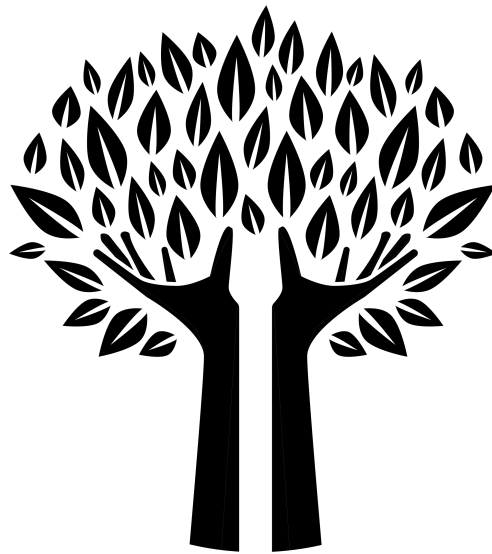
APRIL BIRTHDAYS:

David Werdermann - April 5

Nia Washington - April 16

Alexander Jones - April 26

*The Epistle is a monthly publication of
The United Presbyterian Church of Cedar Grove*



**The United Presbyterian Church
155 Commerce Road
Cedar Grove, NJ 07009**

upccg.com

(973) 239-8520

**An Inclusive Community of Christians
Rooted and Grounded in Christ
Since 1959**