

June, 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)

When I was a kid, I would occasionally peruse my mother's batch of old 45 rpm records from the '50s and early '60s. Worn and scratchy, these primitive vinyls contained some of the jewels of the great treasure trove of music from that era: Elvis' grinding out "Hound Dog," Buddy Holly and the Crickets' hiccuping "Peggy Sue," Chuck Berry's joyful hot licks in "Maybellene," AND — contained on one flawless masterpiece — the Double A-Side of "I Want to Hold Your Hand / I Saw Her Standing There" from The Beatles. "I Want to Hold Your Hand" was the single that put the Beatles firmly atop the US charts to hail the "British Invasion" of rock n' roll. And when you flipped that world-changing tune, you get nothing less than the spirited count-off of, "1,2,3,4!" and the hard-driving "I Saw Her Standing There," blows you away with its depth, carried along by Paul's 8-note bass line. EPIC!

God Remembers

From Pastor Todd

Here and there in this dusty stack, I'd find a country music offering straight out of "The Grand Ol' Opry," like the legendary and lonesome Hank Williams, crying in his whiskey and yodeling his way home to Montgomery, or the all-to-young and far-too-tragic Patsy Cline, lamenting and convincing herself that she's Crazy.

There was also an occasional blues recording in the eclectic collection, including a couple of songs by the great bluesmaster Jimmy Reed. A share-cropper's son, Reed brought the throbbing harmonica-and-guitar-driven rhythm-and-blues of the Mississippi Delta into the popular rock-and-roll mainstream, wielding his hypnotic rhythms and the pain-soaked cries of his mahogany voice on songs like, "Big Boss Man," "Bright Lights, Big City," and, "Baby What You Want Me To Do."

However, in placing the phonograph needle again and again in the grooves of Jimmy Reed's records, I began to notice something curious. If one listened very carefully, there could sometimes be heard, ever so faintly in the background, a woman's voice softly murmuring in advance the next verse of the song. The story that grew up around this — and perhaps it is true — was that Jimmy Reed was so absorbed in the bluesy beat and the throbbing guitar riffs of his music that he simply could not remember the words of his own songs. He needed help with the lyrics, and the woman's voice was none other than that of his wife, devotedly coaching her husband through the recording session by whispering the upcoming stanzas into his ear as he sang.

Whether or not this story is accurate, Christians will surely recognize a parallel experience. Jesus tells his followers that the role of the Holy Spirit is, in effect, to whisper the lyrics of the gospel song in the ears of the faithful. When Jesus was present, he was the one who instilled in them the right words, coached them through the proper verses, taught them the joyful rhythm-and-blues of discipleship. But now that Jesus approaches his death, now that he draws near to his time of departure, now that the disciples will be on their own without him, that task is to be handed over to the Holy Spirit: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth ..." (John 14:15-17).

The primary task, then, of the Holy Spirit is reminding the faithful of the truth, jogging the memories of the followers of Jesus about all of his commandments so that they can keep them in love, whispering the lyrics of the never-ending hymn of faithful obedience in their ears. When we recall the fiery chaos of Pentecost, it may surprise us to think of the Holy Spirit in this way — as a quiet, whispering teacher of the commandments of Jesus. Often the Spirit is advertised in flashier terms: The Spirit gives ecstasy; the Spirit evokes speaking in unknown tongues; the Spirit prompts dramatic and miraculous healings. Indeed, the Holy Spirit of God does perform such deeds, but these are all derivative of the one, primary activity of the Spirit — reminding the children of God about everything that Jesus taught and commanded, whispering the gospel lyrics into the ears of the forgetful faithful.

When Jimmy Carter was running for President of the United States, one of the more vivid moments in the campaign passed by almost unnoticed. One Sunday morning, candidate Carter had been worshipping at the Baptist Church in Plains, Georgia. When the service was over, he exited the church into the swarm of press encamped on the church's front lawn. Cameras whirring, video lights glaring, microphones thrust forward, the media mavens moved in for interviews, pushing themselves to think of clever questions to ask a presidential candidate on the way out of a Southern Baptist Church — "Did you like the sermon?" "Did you enjoy the choir this morning?" "Do you plan to remain a Baptist in Washington?" — on and on the banal questions spewed.

Suddenly, a reporter, probably in a stroke of luck, shouted out a question that genuinely mattered: "Mr. Carter, suppose when you are President, you get into a situation where the laws of the United States are in conflict with what you understand to be the will of God. Which will you follow, the laws of the state or the commandments of God?"

Carter stopped, looked up, and blinked into the bright Georgia sun, obviously turning the question over in his mind. Then, perhaps with the Spirit gently whispering the lyrics of the gospel into his ears, he turned toward the reporter and replied, "I would obey the commandments of God." Alert aides, alarmed by this candor, unnerved by their candidate's near-treasonous remark, hurriedly whisked him away from the press and into a waiting car. Carter the politician should have avoided the question, but Carter the Christian had the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ whispering in his ear, "Do you love me? Keep my commandments."

The reason we need the Holy Spirit murmuring the gospel in our ears, of course, is that we are notoriously forgetful. As one commentator has pointed out, "an early Christian definition for being lost ... was 'to have amnesia.'" We are amnesiacs who cannot keep our calling clearly in mind. Like the great Jimmy Reed, we are caught up in the rhythms and we forget the lyrics. We know that we are created to serve and love one another, but the pressure builds, and the temptation to seek revenge is strong, and we simply forget who we are and what we are purposed to do and be in life.

The doctrine of sin discloses that our loss of memory is not a momentary lapse. Having lost our memory, we now choose forgetfulness again and again, preferring the oblivion of amnesia to the sharp accountability of remembering the commandments. In his book *Lost In The Cosmos: The Last Self-Help Book*, Walker Percy describes a frequent device used in soap operas, movies and novels. A principal character will develop amnesia. He or she is in a new place, with a new job, a new set of friends, perhaps a new lover. This plot device, says Percy, is endlessly fascinating since it feeds our fantasies about a risk-free forgetting of the old self and the embarking on a new identity.

Percy decides to push the question of amnesia to its highest power. "Imagine," he writes, "a soap opera in which a character awakens every morning with amnesia" Every day, the character is in a strange house with a strange and attractive man or woman. Everything is new and fresh — the view from the window, the partner, the sense of the self. "Does this prospect intrigue you?" asks Percy. "If it does, what does this say about your non-amnesiac self?"

Percy's point, of course, is the lure of forgetfulness. One way to describe sin is "willful forgetfulness." We choose amnesia; we decide as an act of the will not to remember that we are God's very own son, God's very own daughter.

God's mercy is, in part, the grace of memory. God's Spirit whispers in our ear, telling us what we cannot — or will not — remember, refreshing our memory about who we are and to whom we belong. When, in situations of challenge and stress, we remember the comfort and demand of the gospel, it is because the voice of the Holy Spirit whispers the lyrics in our ear.

A minister in Atlanta once recounted her experience in taking communion to a woman in a nursing home who had Alzheimer's disease. When she arrived in the woman's room, she attempted to carry on a conversation with her. Even though she was a member of this minister's church and the minister had known her for years, meaningful communication was nearly impossible. The woman was confused and disoriented. She simply could not remember anything, including who she was or who the minister was.

When the minister set up the communion elements, the woman's confusion increased. Seeing the bread and the cup on her hospital table, she furrowed her brow and tried to sweep them off with her hand, "What's all this?"

But when the minister began the familiar communion liturgy, the woman grew calm. The Holy Spirit irrigated furrows in her memory deeper than any disease, more profound than any confusion. "On the night that our Lord was betrayed ...," the minister said, and the woman began to repeat the words silently with her lips. "This is my body, for you," the woman was now quietly speaking the words along with the minister, the Spirit whispering the lyrics in her ear. When the bread and cup were offered, the woman eagerly, hungrily, took them in her hands — the gifts of God for this daughter of God.

In his book *The Man Who Mistook His Wife For A Hat*, Oliver Sacks tells the story of Jimmie, a former sailor, now a patient in a nursing home, whose severe neurological disorder had left him with a profound and permanent amnesia. He simply had no memory of anything from 1945 on. Having no ability to retrieve the past and no ability to construct a meaningful present, Jimmie lacked the continuity that makes for a sense of the self. He was, wrote Sacks, a person who "wore a look of infinite sadness and resignation."

However, when Sacks asked the Sisters who ran the nursing home whether Jimmie had lost his soul, the Sisters were outraged by the question. "Watch Jimmie in chapel," they said, "and judge for yourself."

So Sacks did watch Jimmie in chapel, and there he observed an astounding transformation. He saw an intensity and steadiness in Jimmie that he had not observed before. As he received the sacrament, there was "perfect alignment of his spirit with the spirit of the Mass." There, in worship, Jimmie was no longer at the mercy of a faulty and fallible memory. "He was wholly held, absorbed" He whose mind was broken was given — through worship — "a continuity and unity so seamless it could not permit any break."

Jimmie in his own way is like all of us. In the final analysis, none of us is able to construct a self. We must all be given a story and a continuity not of our own making. Where we have no faithful memory, God remembers, and by the grace of God, the Spirit whispers the lyrics of the saving gospel in our ears. ■

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. ☐



JUNE BIRTHDAYS & ANNIVERSARIES:

Nicole Shumpert - June 3

Ian Steel - June 7

Bryce Jones - June 8

David Jones - June 10

Carolee Boger - June 16

Bruce Washington - June 18

Irene Deemer - June 23

Charlie & Lois McNamara - June 13

Ian & Margaret Steel - June 16

UPCCG Plans for Reopening

We are meeting this week as a Session to discuss a timeline for the reopening of the physical building here at UPCCG and will keep everyone updated with our plan. We know that we will make sure it is cleaned and precautions are taken to ensure the safety of everyone here. Please be assured that since March, there have only been visits by the owners of the daycare and by the few of us who are making sure the building is still standing. I am confident that we will be able to collaboratively plan ahead for the wellbeing of our loved parishioners. Please let a member of Session know if you have any concerns moving forward. Looking forward to being back in the building soon...since the building may be closed but church is still open!

- UPCCG Session

Updated Church Directory – COMING THIS WEEK!

Keep an eye out this week for the finally updated church directory! I am sure that I am missing some information, especially those who may have moved away. Please take a look at it and let me (Jamie Lynn) know what needs to be edited. Also, for now, we are sending out an online/email version only. Once we get back to normal and I have access to a better printer than the one at my own home, I will send them out to anyone who needs it. Thank you for your patience and to everyone who has helped me make it happen!

- Jamie Lynn Adams



Annual Picnic

I am still hopeful that we will be able to be with each other soon. We have a Session meeting on Sunday June 7th to discuss our plans to re-open but are thinking of going with Presbytery's guidance in waiting to open until the fall. We will keep you posted. In the meantime, we are continuing to plan events for when we can meet and be together again. I am likely going to postpone our previously planned summer events until the fall and start to combine some activities. In lieu of our annual picnics, I am thinking of hosting it at my home instead this year. I figure it would be a little more relaxed in our backyard and I'm less than a mile away! Plus, we have a natural gas grill and from what I remember, it did not work right last year. Less stress, more fun! Stay tuned for more details as we plan our re-opening and look forward to gathering together again.

-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 news for our church and community, contact the church, make financial donations, and leave prayer requests. 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.



UPCCG Events

I hope we will be together soon! I will follow the guidelines and plan accordingly, but we want to have a lot of fun this year and make up for the time we have been stuck at home. Keep an eye out for updates to our website, social media and emails and stay tuned for more details! Here are some upcoming events:

- Church Clean Up.....As soon as we can get back!
- Fall Craft.....TBD (October)
- Homecoming Lunch.....October 11th, 2020
- Christmas Craft.....TBD (December)
- Hanging of the Greens.....December 6th, 2020

-Jamie Lynn Adams
Congregational Care

Human Needs Food Pantry (HNFP)

The HNFP is currently operating Tuesdays and Thursdays from 12:30 to 3:00 with Thursday evening hours canceled until further notice. There are also many home deliveries made both afternoons. As mentioned last month, canopies are set up outdoors in the area of pickup. At this time, no food or clothing can be accepted from independent donors so please hold your donations until the Covid-19 crisis is over. The Pantry currently needs diapers and baby wipes, and those may be donated on site at this time. Monetary donations are always accepted and appreciated and are truly needed.

We are thankful for volunteers at the Pantry who continue to pack the food, check-in the clients, hand out the food, deliver to the homebound, and many other chores. It is interesting to note that many younger families have been coming with their children to help pack fruits and vegetables. What a wonderful example they are setting!

Carolyn has decided to make the trip up from the Shore to continue serving at the Pantry. Volunteers are always needed so you may want to considering joining her there. You can visit the HNFP on Facebook. There you will find pictures and more information which might be of interest to you. Thank you for your continued support of this church mission.

-Lois McNamara and Carolyn Davidson
Human Needs Food Pantry (HNFP)
9 Label Street, Montclair, Nj
Mike Bruno, Director 973-746-4669



REMINDER: This is the last Epistle for the summer.
BUT...stay tuned and keep checking out our Facebook page, our website, and your emails!

Stewardship and Offerings

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

Thank you!

-Stewardship

Church Email Communication

Just a reminder: For any email communication with UPCCG, please utilize the below email addresses for anything you would normally send to the secretary. You may copy Pastor Todd as you see fit as well.

unitedprescg@gmail.com – email address goes directly to Jamie Lynn

- Any immediate needs to be address such as bulletin comments (please copy Todd on prayer requests and service requests as well)
- 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

Future Epistles

Moving into the summer, we have decided to utilize the new format that Pastor Todd has created for us. These issues of The Epistle will be “email only” until we can regularly utilize the church printer again. Until then, please pass along any information to those who may not have email! Also, as we are in need of keeping everyone in the loop about all things UNITED, if you have anything to include in the church's monthly communications, we welcome and appreciate any additions! Email Jamie Lynn at unitedprescg@gmail.com with any content or notes you may have.

- UPCCG Session

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.



Make the Connection

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



**The United Presbyterian Church
155 Commerce Road
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An Inclusive Community of Christians
Rooted and Grounded in Christ Since 1959
UPCCG.COM**