

May, 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)

“Darkness” is shorthand for anything that scares me — that I want no part of — either because I am sure that I do not have the resources to survive it or because I do not want to find out. The absence of God is in there, along with the fear of dementia and the loss of those nearest and dearest to me. So is the melting of polar ice caps, the suffering of my children, and the nagging question of what it will feel like to die. If I had my way, I would eliminate everything from chronic back pain to the fear of the devil from my life, and the lives of those I love — if I could just find the right night-lights to leave on.

Following the Light in Times of Darkness

From Pastor Todd

At least I think I would. The problem is this: when, despite all my best efforts, the lights have gone off in my life (literally or figuratively), plunging me into the kind of darkness that turns my knees to rubber, nonetheless I have not died. The monsters have not dragged me out of bed and taken me back to their lair. Instead, I have learned things in the dark that I could never have learned in the light, things that have saved my life over and over again, so that there is really only one logical conclusion. I need darkness as much as I need light.

The problem is that there are so few people who can teach me about that. I wish I could turn to the church for help, but so many congregations are preoccupied with keeping the lights on right now that the last thing they want to talk about is how to befriend the dark. Plus, Christianity has never had

anything nice to say about darkness. From earliest times, Christians have used “darkness” as a synonym for sin, ignorance, spiritual blindness, and death. Visit almost any church and you can still hear it used that way today.

At the theological level, however, this language creates all sorts of problems. It divides every day in two, pitting the light part against the dark part. It tucks all the sinister stuff into the dark part, identifying God with the sunny part and leaving you to deal with the rest on your own time. It implies things about dark-skinned people and sight-impaired people that are not true. Worst of all, it offers people of faith a giant closet in which they can store everything that threatens or frightens them without thinking too much about those things. It rewards them for their unconsciousness, offering spiritual justification for turning away from those things, for, as it says in John’s first letter, “God is light and in him there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5).

To embrace that teaching and others like it at face value can result in a kind of spirituality that deals with darkness by denying its existence or at least depriving it of any meaningful attention. I call it “solar spirituality,” since it focuses on staying in the light of God at all times, both absorbing and reflecting the sunny side of faith. You can usually recognize a solar church by its emphasis on the benefits of faith, which include a sure sense of God’s presence, certainty of belief, divine guidance in all things, and reliable answers to prayer. Members strive to be positive in attitude, firm in conviction, and unwavering in faith. Which sounds like heaven on earth. Who wouldn’t like to dwell in God’s light 24/7?



If you have ever belonged to such a community, however, you may have discovered that the trouble starts when darkness falls on your own life, which can happen in any number of unsurprising ways: you lose your job, your marriage falls apart, your child acts out in some attention-getting way, you pray hard for something that does not happen, you begin to doubt some of the things you have been taught about what the Bible says. The first time you speak of these things in a solar church, you can usually get a hearing. Continue to speak of them and you may be reminded that, “God will never give you more weight than you can bear.” If you still do not get the message, sooner or later it will be made explicit for you: the darkness is your own fault, because you do not have enough faith.

Admittedly, there are days when I would give anything to share the Solar vision of the world, and the ability of some to navigate it, but my spiritual gifts do not seem to include the gift of solar spirituality. Instead, I have been given the gift of lunar spirituality, in which the divine light available to me waxes and wanes. When I go out to admire the moon at night, it never looks the same way twice. Some nights it is as round and bright as a headlight; other nights it is thinner than the bit of fingernail clipped from my daughter's hand. Some nights it is high in the sky, and other nights low over the trees. Some nights it is altogether gone, leaving the stars brighter in its absence. All in all, the moon is a truer mirror for my soul than the sun, which pretty much looks the same way every day.

It is a helpful reminder to all who fear the dark. Darkness does not come from a different place than light; it is not presided over by a different God. The long nights of Advent & the, “while it was still dark,” on the early morning of Easter point us toward the God for whom darkness & light are alike. Both are fertile seasons for those who walk by faith & not by sight. This darkness is necessary to new life, even when it is uncomfortable or we feel it goes on too long.

Remember: spring’s seeds break open out of the dark winter soil. Darkness may be referenced in mostly negative terms in the Bible, but pay attention to Moments of transformation, the narratives that took place at night or under cover of darkness: In the beginning, God’s Spirit hovers over dark water of chaos, preparing to create; God tells Abraham to look up at the stars in the night sky; Jacob wrestles with an angel at night with a vision of the stairway to heaven, followed by securing a blessing: “Surely God was in this place-and I did not know it;” in the Nativity story, the angel appears to Joseph in a dream at night; shepherds look up into a night sky exploding with angels singing “Glory to God;” the Magi follow a star through the night; God gives birth to the incarnation of Christ as he forms in the deep darkness of the womb.

Hear it again: Darkness does not come from a different place than light, nor is it presided over by a different God. When you find yourself in a prolonged period of darkness, try embracing it a little. Try asking, in the midst of it, “Okay, God: what transformations do you have in store? Open my eyes that I may see!” ••••

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! You can mail offerings to the church, drop it in Cindy's or Jamie Lynn's home mailbox (check the directory for our addresses), drop it off in the church mailbox (regularly being checked), 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!

-The Stewardship Committee

UPCCG Events

I hope we will be together soon! The church will follow the guidelines and plan accordingly but we want to (need 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 on our website, social media and emails, and stay tuned for more details.

Here are some of the events we're looking forward to:

- Welcome Back Party - Pizza & Craft
- Church Clean Up
- June/Summer Kick-off Picnic
- Fall Craft – October
- Homecoming Lunch – October 11th, 2020
- Christmas Craft – December
- Hanging of the Greens – December 6th, 2020



-Jamie Lynn Adams

Congregational Care Committee

Could YOU be the Next Clerk of Session?

UPCCG is seeking a new Clerk of Session to join us! The tasks for the job are listed below. Nothing too crazy! Most items on the list are handled quickly once a month, or even once a year. Our congregation is pretty self-sufficient, and experienced help is available for you, should you need it. Our main need is for someone to record the minutes of session and congregational meetings. If you feel you can answer this calling, your help will be most appreciated!

Clerk of Session Tasks and Responsibilities

Ongoing Tasks

- Keeps 2 permanent copies of Session minutes in two different locations:
 - Printed copy in the Church Office safe
 - Saved on a USB available to anyone who requests it

Clerk, continued....

- Keep Permanent Register for church updated i.e. dates of church member deaths, weddings, baptisms, ordinations, installations and transfer of members.
- Fill out Wedding, Baptismal, Membership, Ordination certificate, as needed
- Send Letter of Transfer when requested by a member
- Acts as liaison, with the pastor, between Session and congregation
- Contact Session members with updated information between meetings, if needed
- Write letters as needed for Session business

Yearly Tasks, with assistance of Recording Clerk and Pastor:

- Submit minutes in permanent record for inspection to Presbytery
- Submit Annual Report to Presbytery after approval by Session (January)
- Submit necrology report, mission giving, and Pastors Compensation report to Presbytery.
- Review membership roll with pastor and Recording Clerk for Session re: inactive members

For each Session meeting

- Ensures a quorum will be present
- Reminds Session of meeting date
- Requests items for agenda
- Creates agenda with moderator
- Records and distributes, via email, the minutes after each Session meeting, to include all reports, motions, upcoming events and next, meeting date Reads correspondence received
- Reports worship and communion attendance, weddings, deaths, births and transfer requests

For Congregational and Corporate meetings:

- Post announcement of meeting in Sunday Bulletin three weeks prior to meeting
- Remind pastor to announce meeting, during worship, three consecutive weeks prior to meeting
- Declare a quorum
- Records minutes

Yearly with assistance of Clerk of Session and Pastor:

- Submit minutes and permanent records for inspection to Presbytery
- Submit Annual Report to Presbytery after approval by Session (January)
- Submit necrology report, mission giving, and Pastors Compensation to Presbytery (online)
- Review membership roll with pastor annually
- Submit annual report to the NJ State Treasury (online, requires payment by the church and revision of any team members)

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PRAYERFUL CONSIDERATION!

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.

Session Member At Large

We would love for you to join us!

Session is looking for an individual (or individuals) to join the team. We meet once per month after worship for about an hour to discuss the business of the church. Along with being a member of the Session, you will also have the opportunity to chair one of the church committees, allowing you to have an important and direct impact on the future of our church. If you are considering this calling during this time of great need, we would love to have you! Ask any Session member (including the pastor) for more information.

On a personal note: I joined the Session when I was in high school after my grandfather (known to most as Bah Bah) got me involved with the Congregational Care committee. At first, I was afraid, since the committee was combined with the Christian Education committee. As a very shy person, I did not want to have to work with kids or do anything related to a Bible study! Bah Bah calmed me down and said we would work through it if anything ever came up. Since I loved party planning, I figured, why not? I didn't speak much at the meetings and had to learn as I went since I looked up to "the boss." I orchestrated the luncheons we had and wrote a little article for the Epistle and Annual Report.

Through the years, and especially after taking on more responsibilities after Bah Bah died, I have been able to rely on many of the greats, including Mr. and Mrs. Naef, Sandy Grillo, Cindy Coryell, our pastors, and basically the entire congregation as I learned the ropes. I still ask for help sometimes, and somehow, we all get things done as a team. I have learned a lot and continue to learn. We are all here to help each other and won't let anything or anyone fail. There is nothing better than that! I am juggling a full-time job, toddler, baking business, and serve multiple committees... and somehow it all gets done. If I can figure it out, then I promise you, anyone can!

Please consider joining the Session. We already love having you as a family member here at UPCCG. We would love even more to have you as part of our leadership team!

- Jamie Lynn Adams
UPCCG Session

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 online!



Church Clean Up

Even if we return after the spring, we will have our clean up! One Sunday when we return, I would like to have a small clean up where we would do odds and ends like clean windows, do a little yard work and plant some things. I think it would be a great excuse to get out of the house too! We will have donuts and bagels or refreshments of some kind and get the church ready for more worshipping! Stay tuned for more information and a sign up sheet!

-Jamie Lynn Adams

House, Finance & Mission/Congregational Care

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

Human Needs Food Pantry (HNFP)

Volunteers are always needed

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 virus is over. Monetary donations are always accepted and appreciated and are truly needed.

Did you know that this past week was designated National Volunteer Week? Our thanks to those who volunteer in many capacities in many places. Thanks to volunteers at the Pantry who pack food, check clients in, hand out food, deliver to 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 Davidson 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. Barbara Senney accompanied Carolyn last fall, and may continue when she gets home from Florida.

Please look up the HNFP on Facebook. There are pictures and further information which might be of interest to you. Carolyn and I thank you for your continued support of our church mission.

– Lois McNamara and Carolyn Davidson

*For more information, please contact:
Human Needs Food Pantry (HNFP)
9 Label Street, Montclair, NJ
Mike Bruno, Director 973-746-4669*



MAY BIRTHDAYS:

Kathy Ferguson - May 4

Bob Deemer - May 6

HyungKoo Yun - May 7

Jamie Lynn Adams - May 23

Robert Dunn - May 26

*The Epistle is a monthly publication of
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**The United Presbyterian Church
155 Commerce Road
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An Inclusive Community of Christians
Rooted and Grounded in Christ Since 1959
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