

# 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)**

*“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matt. 5:3-12).*

As the church year heads toward its end – marking All Saints Sunday, and preparing to begin a new year with Christ the King Sunday and the Advent season – the Lectionary has again directed us to a revisiting of Matthew’s version of the Beatitudes in our worship.

## Winners and Losers

*From Pastor Todd*

The promise in Jesus’ words make it seem like he’s congratulating the winners. The situations and conditions of the people he’s describing, however, make it sound like he’s talking to losers. It’s confusing: desiring the destination; dreading the journey.

This journey seems appropriate, however. Even timely. Necessary. Jesus’ opening words of the Sermon on the Mount are statements of hope and promise, and they are exactly what we need to hear as we reflect back on those whom we have lost this past year, or even those we might be expecting to lose.

But Jesus’ words of hope to the crowds and the disciples are interspersed by words of judgment about the hypocrisy of the scribes and the Pharisees, and their intentional acts of burdening others in order to exalt themselves. These words are both a warning and a call to action from Jesus – and these

words must **also** be heard. They contain both Jesus' admonition of the behavior of the scribes and the Pharisees, and description of what anti-Beatitude living looks like.

So all of these words – their hope **and** their judgement – are words for living a time such as this.

As we mourn our dead, both personally and communally, these words give comfort and hope. As we recall our dead, both nationally and globally, these are words that promise the presence of the Kingdom of Heaven here and now, and in our future. As we remember our dead who have died at the hands of hate and violence, these are words that remind us of how distant righteousness really is, asking us how truly hungry and thirsty we are for it. And as those of us in the United States pass through another election year, exposing us to the limitless depths that are exploited for the purpose of grasping and holding onto power and authority, Jesus' words embolden resistance and persistence.

As anti-Beatitude living becomes more acceptable, more normative, more regularized, these are words that call us out of our complacency and conformity. As we continue to experience the effects of national and global trauma, of natural and human-made disasters, these are words to believe in, to count on, to trust. As we feel the burden of compassion fatigue, of empathetic exhaustion, as a result of the many perils being faced by the people in our churches, our communities, our nation, and our world, these words bring peace. As we profess God as the creator of the universe, and then take advantage of and abuse the earth, these words insist that the earth deserves justice, too.

As churches mark and celebrate reformation, and yet continue to perpetuate practices that refute renewal and transformation, these are words that call us to account, that assert that the church can never stop reforming. As the church's institutions make statements about justice and inclusivity, and then do nothing to reform the systems born out of injustice and exclusivity, these words charge us to change – now. As the church's worship seeks to describe how to live into the vision of God's Kingdom, while the church's people choose to revert back to safety and security, these words vow that faith in God is less about speaking and more about being and doing. As the church's denominations celebrate their distinctiveness, but then allow difference to dissolve into dissension and dissonance, these words make a demand for unity.

As the church contends that it is a place of refuge, and then turns away those who have nowhere else to go, not lifting a finger to help, these words are quick to point out our charade. As we call ourselves Christians, and yet remain silent about or even deny white privilege and racism, these are words that require our humility. As we claim the worth of all human beings, preaching and teaching that all are made in the image of God, and then sit back and stay silent about discrimination on account of gender or sexual orientation, or about sexual harassment, these words tell the truth about our duplicity.

As leaders, both political and pastoral, call themselves public servants, and then seek only their own gain, these are words that tell the truth, in no uncertain terms, of their pretense. As pastors and politicians call upon the name of God to justify their speech and actions, and yet disregard and displace the very persons Jesus loved so much, these words say it straightforward – “You do not practice what you preach.”

I suppose, in the end, you can do anything you want to with the Beatitudes; people always have. Some have ignored them, some have admired them and walked away, some have used them as a yardstick to measure their own blessedness, and some have used them to declare revolution. The simplest thing to do with them, perhaps, is to let them turn you over and around so that you're no longer sure which way is up, so that you cannot see the world in the same way again, so that you cannot be sure anymore who are the winners and who are the losers.

Then, we will find ourselves ready to be led. And as we hear once again Jesus' words of blessedness and happiness, letting them lead us into living a life believing that those who humble themselves will be exalted, that we are called to lift the burdens of others, and to liberate those who bear the weights of this world, we will know we are truly blessed. ■



## COVID-19 Response

The Session met in October and decided, based on multiple factors, that we will continue to abide by the advice offered by the Newark Presbytery, continuing to gather for worship online only. We will revisit reopening the church building and in-person gatherings in the new year. Hopefully by then we may have a clearer understanding of where our nation stands in fighting the virus. Of course, we will continue to adhere to all safety regulations and protocols for our state, while keeping you in the loop on everything being done in order to be together again.

In the meantime, we want to try to make some fun activities during the holiday season to bring us closer together. We have a few things planned and I hope you will participate! We miss you and want to make sure you know we are all together in spirit. Always remember, while we are physically apart, we remain spiritually united! If there is anything you need, please let another member know about it. We are here to help!

*-UPCCG Session*

## Moments for Mission

### Thanksgiving Food Drive

Thank you so much to our UPCCG family who donated to the Korporate Kids food drive! With your support, we donated HUNDREDS of dollars' worth of canned goods, thanksgiving meals, diapers, wipes, pet foods and countless other items! Pictures will circulate soon. The food will be delivered to the food pantry next week with plenty of time for Thanksgiving distribution. A special thank you to **Lois and Charlie McNamara** for your help with this. We always have a box in the Narthex set up for food pantry donations, so if you missed this time and want to donate at any other time of the year, you are welcome to drop your goodies in the box and we will see that it gets there. (The Narthex is being checked on a regular basis.)

The kindness and generosity of this church never ceases to amaze me, and I am proud to call you caring people my family. Thank you so much for your support for the Human Needs Food Pantry during the 2020 COVID Thanksgiving. ■

## Annual Adopt-a-Family Event

Here at UPCCG, we pride ourselves in our mission giving and continue to enjoy helping those in need. We are still awaiting information from the Human Needs Food Pantry on the Adopt-A-Family program but expect it will be more along the lines of monetary gifts and food donations this year. We are hoping to find a family we can buy specific gift cards or still get toys for since the personal aspect of it helps make it extra special. We will continue to keep you posted as we learn more information. ■



# Fundraiser Opportunity

From Jamie Lynn Adams

I have been toying with the idea of putting together a baking fundraiser for the church. As most of you know, I have a side baking business and LOVE to bake! Although cookies are my specialty, I love baking cupcakes, cakes, pies, brownies and more. I would like to put together a little fundraiser that would benefit UPCCG. 100% of the profits would benefit the church – whether to pay bills or for a special use to be determined. I am currently taking orders for cookie decorating kits that can be delivered for local members. I can also mail multiple items to those who are not so local. Contact me if you are interested in learning more!

Some items can be found below. If you have a special craving for something not listed, let me know and I will see if I can bake it. I have a Facebook page that will give you a “taste” of some of my ideas, and I have a website that I am hoping to update soon with even more inspiration. Depending on the item purchased, \$5-\$10 or more would be left to benefit UPCCG after my costs are met. If there is enough interest in this fundraiser opportunity, I am happy to do what I can.

Check out my website: [www.sallysweetshoppe.com](http://www.sallysweetshoppe.com)

(I have not updated a lot in recent years but still some goodies here)

Follow me on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/SallySweetShoppe/>

(My most up to date goodies go here!)

## Holiday Craft Time Fun

I know we all had fun at our craft day last year so this year, I want to make sure we continue that tradition! We may be a little differently set up this year, but I think we need some fun now more than ever. For Sunday, November 22, we will be working together on a Turkey craft virtually after church and talking about what we are thankful for. In order to participate, please sign up with Jamie Lynn as soon as possible so she can get this delivered or mailed out to you! The craft supplies and instructions will be sent to you in time for the November 22nd craft time together.

On Sunday, December 20th, we will have a similar time together with the Christmas themed craft. Please let Jamie Lynn know if you wish to participate in this as well so she can plan and get them out with plenty of time. You can sign up for one or both! You can call, text or email Jamie Lynn with your name and how many kits you need. If you are local, she will likely deliver the craft kits “stoop side” or they will be mailed. They can also be left at church if anyone wants to go there instead. No matter how near or far, we hope you will have some fun!

## Hanging of the Greens – Virtually

How in the world are we going to decorate virtually this year for Hanging of the Greens you ask? Simple! Just think about your favorite decoration, tree ornament or item that represents your most exciting family tradition, and then share it online. On Sunday, December 6th, we will come together after worship to have a virtual show-and-tell explaining what the object is and why it is special to our family traditions. Please send a video (or even a few pictures) explaining your choice, along with a recording of your voice telling the story that goes with it. Once received, Pastor Todd will compile a

video to show them off and share your stories. With everyone having different connection speeds, it would be most helpful to have one video from one computer to decrease the possibility that the signal will cut out when someone is talking. If it is not possible for you to send a video or pictures via email, we still want to include you! You can send pictures and your story through regular mail to Pastor Todd (call or email for the address), or you can mail them to the church. Todd will scan the pictures and include your story in the video. Barring that, you're still invited to participate. Simply bring your favorite thing, plus some hot cocoa, and let's talk about how we are making the 2020 holiday season extra special, no matter what!

And don't worry: we still think the church should be decorated for the special season and Jesus' birthday. The elves are planning the decorations as you read this! We will submit videos and pictures for all to see. Speaking of, if you have any pictures of the church decorated anytime in the history of our building, please submit them to Todd and he will add them to our compilation!

## 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.

As you know, Session has suspend "in-person worship" until further notice. We will hold worship services online 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.

Further information about our online worship gatherings, and recordings of previous gatherings, can be found on the [church website](#).

Our zoom gatherings allow folks to participate via desktop computer, laptop, smartphone with audio and video. A dial-in number is also available if you prefer to participate by telephone. I invite you to follow the [United Presbyterian Church of Cedar Grove Facebook page](#) and tune in each week.



## Stewardship & Offerings

If you plan on submitting a pledge to the church for the new year, please make sure you mail your pledge cards before Sunday, November 22 – "Commitment Sunday." While you are not required to offer an annual pledge, your pledge is vital in allowing the Session to set a reasonable budget for the year, giving us a clear picture of your level of commitment and the churches ability to pay its bills and "keep the lights running," and to direct us in our mission giving to the community around us. We appreciate any donations you can give to help our strong little church year round!

You can mail your pledge card (and your offerings) to the church, drop it in Cindy's or Jamie Lynn's mailbox (check the directory for our addresses), drop it off at the church's mailbox, or use the "Giving" button on our church website (if you can also cover the fee we are charged for offering you this convenience, 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 for UPCCG. Please utilize the below email addresses for anything you would normally send to the secretary. You may also copy Pastor Todd.

[unitedprescg@gmail.com](mailto: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](mailto: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/ publications you think we should be receiving
- Inquiries from outside the congregation

## UPCCG is Seeking a Clerk of Session

COVID-19 certainly threw us a curve ball, but it also showed us that we are an even stronger family than we thought – if that was even possible. We have tried to keep normalcy, making sure the building is maintained, as well as our faith, no matter how we gather together. As the Session starts up again for the new year and looks ahead to the new calendar year, 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 church to discuss the business of the church, usually for an hour or less. Please: don't let this sound scary! We are a very low maintenance team, and there is a feeling of fellowship every time we gather. And, we are all here to help you. Ask any member of Session for more information. Most committees and areas of church involvement are up for grabs, so you can able to pick the part of church life that sounds most interesting and fulfilling for you to pursue.

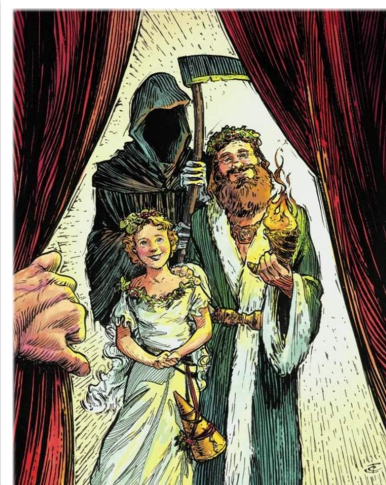
The Clerk of Session would take the minutes (notes) for each Session meeting, and help to keep us on track and focused, in terms of how we are proceeding in the meetings, while ensuring we are in keeping with the values and policies of our congregation and our denomination.

**Please pray about this. Please consider answering this call. We need you!** 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!

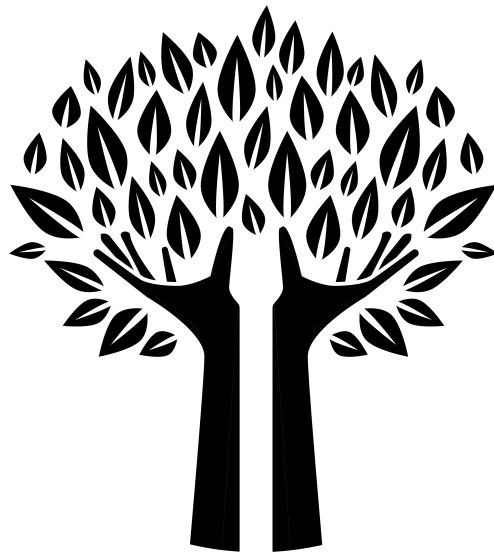
## “A Christmas Carol” Advent Study

The classic tale of Ebenezer Scrooge is a cherished symbol of Christmas and a wonderful story of redemption and hope – perfect for a study in Advent. We will utilize both the full original text of Dickens' A Christmas Carol as well as a four-part discussion guide that coincides with the four weeks of Advent. Led by Pastor Todd, we'll journey through our time together, incorporating the story itself with the study of Scripture, engaging activities, and thought-provoking discussion starters.

**Four Tuesdays during Advent** – December 1 through December 22 – at 11am, via Zoom. Watch for registration info and meeting materials!



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