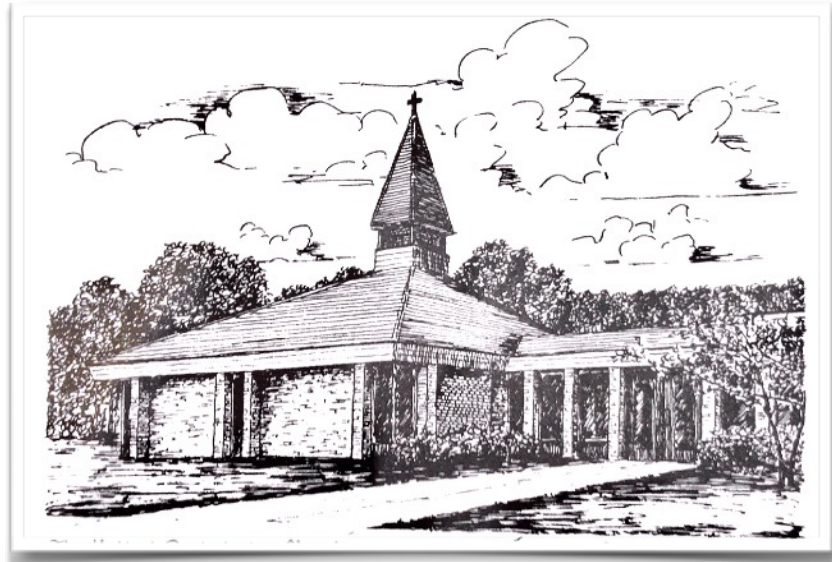


October, 2020



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)

In John's gospel, Jesus is nobody's victim. He needs no help carrying his cross. No one mocks him as he hangs on the cross. While he is there, he makes provision for his mother, he says he is thirsty not because he is but in order to fulfill the scripture (Psalm 69.21), and he pronounces his job finished without the loud cry that all the other evangelists agree on.

In John's gospel, he is in charge all the way. We do not have to worry about him, then, but we do have to worry about those he leaves behind. What will happen to his disciples? Will they be able to carry on his work, or will they end up as he has? What will happen to his mother? In those days, a mother's children were her Medicare, her social security, and her pension.

**Jesus in a
Time of Crisis**
From Pastor Todd

The Crucifixion story marks Mary's second appearance in John's gospel. The first happened three years before, when she badgered her son about the shortage of wine at that wedding in Cana of Galilee. "Woman," he said back then, "what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come."

Now, presumably, it has. It is the wine of his blood that is running out this time, right there where she can smell it. Fortunately, she is not alone. Her sister is there, along with Mary Magdalene and Mary, the wife of Clopas. The beloved disciple is also with her – a man who is never named in John's gospel, although he appears at least five times. Jesus' love for him is the only thing about him that matters,

apparently. That is his only identity: that Jesus loves him. We don't even know why.

Perhaps it is his loyalty, since he is the only male disciple standing there. The women are not in nearly as much danger as he is. Since a woman's testimony wouldn't hold up in court, they are not likely to be stopped and questioned, but he is, especially if he looks and sounds like a Galilean.

Where are the others? You will have to ask them. Safe, somewhere. Safe and guilty. This may take a load off Jesus' mind, since he does not have to worry about them, but it may also hurt him as much as the nails do, because they would not follow him all the way. We do not know any of this. All we know is that this is a time of great crisis – for Jesus, and for everyone connected to him. And we know that in this time of crisis, Jesus concerns himself with those who are there – with his mother, whose face is dissolving in grief right in front of him, and with the beloved disciple, who has appointed himself her bodyguard.

Although they are near enough to hear him, he does not seem to see them at first. There is a lot going on. The soldiers are dividing up his clothes into four piles: robe, prayer shawl, belt, sandals. Passers-by are straining to make out the sign over his head while the chief priests are arguing that Pilate should change what it says.

But finally, Jesus does see them, and when he does, he speaks. First, he looks at his mother. "Woman," he says – the same thing he called her before, at the wedding – "Woman, here is your son." Then he looks at the disciple standing beside her and says to him, "Here is your mother." Since his hands are not free, he has to do a lot of work with his eyes, indicating which woman and which man. When he is through, the adoption is final. From that hour, John says, the beloved disciple took Jesus' mother into his own home.

It is a gesture of surpassing sweetness, and yet you have to wonder which way it went. Was Jesus looking out for his mother or for his disciple? Who needed whom more?

That Jesus placed his mother in the care of his disciple is our clue that she is a widow. Although Joseph is mentioned twice by name, he never shows up in John's gospel at all. He has presumably died by the time Jesus reaches adulthood, which makes Mary an 'almana,' or widow, whose status depends on the surviving members of her husband's household. When Jesus dies, she will belong to no one. She will be responsible to and for herself.

If she were a wealthy woman, this might be good news to her, but she is not. It is far more likely that she will eat other people's leftovers for the rest of her life, with no father, no husband, or son to protect her from the cruel things people say and do.

So, it is merciful of Jesus to give her a new son. But it is also merciful of him to give that son a new mother, especially this one. Mary cannot be more than fifty years old when her son is crucified – younger than Sarah was when she gave birth to the nation of Israel; younger than Anna was when she recognized the redeemer of Jerusalem in a baby boy named Jesus.

When the beloved disciple takes Mary home, and when the other disciples come crawling out from under their rocks, they will find themselves in the presence of someone whose contact with the Holy Spirit has been far more intimate than theirs. She has seen things they have only heard about. She has felt things inside of her that they cannot even imagine. Perhaps that is why she stayed put by her son while they fled. Perhaps that is what allowed her to look full into the ruined face that no one but her

(and her new son) could bear to see.

While the principalities and powers believe they are tearing his family apart, Jesus is quietly putting it together again: this mother with this son, this past with this future. Although his enemies will succeed in killing him, he will leave no orphans behind. At the foot of the cross, the mother of the old becomes the mother of the new. The beloved disciple becomes her new beloved son.

"And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home." ■



Exploring Our Future Together

What an...interesting...year this has been. Who would have thought back in March when we planned to close for two weeks that we would still be home, worshipping virtually, seven months later? Strange, huh? I for one have found these last several months to be calming and enjoyable, having more time while working from home to spend with my crazy toddler and enjoying life more, instead of stressing over traffic and the rushing around in day-to-day life. I do, however, miss our traditions here at UPCCG.

We met as a Session last month and tabled reopening talks until this month, another week or so from now. We want to make sure we are adhering to Presbytery guidelines (who recommend remaining virtual through the end of 2020) but also want to explore different options to be together for special occasions, especially with Advent and the Christmas season coming up. So, while we do not have a reopening date yet – but stay tuned, we will as soon as we can – we want to make sure we explore some new options for both before and after we are together in person again.

Our annual Homecoming brunch would normally be this month. Since things are different this year, we are exploring ways we can celebrate our church history in the coming weeks, whether together or apart. Just because we cannot gather in “normal” ways does not mean we can’t do something! Let’s face it, are we really all that normal anyway? Personally speaking, I know I am not! So no matter how we celebrate, let’s remember our now 61 years as a family here and even if we can’t come “home,” we can enjoy the company of each other some way. Stay tuned!

Looking ahead to the holiday season, Pastor Todd is looking to host another Bible study, this time related to Advent and Christmas. I would also like to see if we can do a Christmas craft or social event, whether it be at the church, my home or somewhere together. We also will be looking into the safest (and warmest) way that we can celebrate the Birth of our Savior and worship together in some sort of traditional service. Stay tuned for those details as soon as we can plan safely.

Once there is more of an answer to COVID, and we can once again worship in person, we would still like to continue with the ability to offer our worship services virtually for those who are near or far. Don’t feel like getting dressed? Call in and listen to Pastor Todd! Can’t make the several hour drive from another state? Jump online and watch! We want to keep in touch with our family no matter where you are, and we will let you know what platform we will use going forward so we can make sure we don’t leave anyone out!

Session is holding meetings again after a summer break, and we are brainstorming better ways to get our heads around the “new normal” and stay in touch. The Epistle is back, as you can see, and we will be sending more updates out via email and keeping those without digital communication in touch, as well. If you would like to be added to our mailing list or our email list, please let a member of Session know so we can make sure you are included! Our directory is finished so please make sure you have saved it from your email back in May. If you need another copy, let us know. Also, now that we are in the office more often, a few copies of the directory will be placed in the Narthex. I will have hard copies mailed out to members who have requested it in the next week or so.

Do you have an idea about how we can stay together during these uncertain times? Let us know! We want to hear from you. We miss you!

- Jamie Lynn Adams, on behalf of the UPCCG Session

Updated Church Directory

The newly updated Church Directory was sent out back in June (thank you, Jamie Lynn!).

If you do not have it, you can access it online and download it here:

<https://files.constantcontact.com/a1arabo1801/b32ee937-025c-4185-8df6-3001978cdf93.pdf>.

The new directory can be mailed to you, at your request.

Copies will also be made available in the Church Narthex.



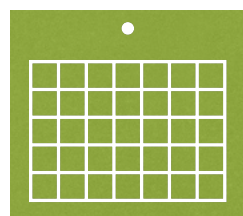
Gathering for Worship Online

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. 📺



UPCCG Events

It looks as though the final months of 2020 will be as strange as the beginning. Here's hoping we will be together soon! While following safety guidelines and planning accordingly, we're searching for fun and creative ways we can gather, both in person and virtually. Keep an eye out for updates to our website, social

media and emails and stay tuned for more details! Here are some upcoming events:

Fall Craft.....	November, 2020
Homecoming Celebration.....	November 2020
Christmas Craft.....	December, 2020
Hanging of the Greens – in personal or virtual.....	December 6th, 2020
Church Clean-Up.....	Spring, 2021

Here at UPCCG, we pride ourselves in our mission giving and continue to enjoy helping those in need. The annual Adopt A Family program will look different this year but we would like to keep the tradition, especially this year where so many more people need help. Instead of buying for a single family, we are working with the Human Needs Food Pantry as we usually do to understand how we can help the most. From donating monetarily, or providing gift cards, generic gifts, or food and household supplies, our longtime and gracious volunteers, Lois and Carolyn, are working to get the information soon so that we can have enough time to pool our resources and help out. Stay tuned for more information!



Human Needs Food Pantry (HNFP)

Over Thirty-Five Years of Helping Neighbors in Need!

Since March 3, when the pandemic began gaining ground in our area, HNFP has added 572 new households, equaling an additional 2,800 people – 1,800 adults and 1,000 children – beyond their usual numbers (as of 9/25/20). These numbers grow every week and will only go higher for the foreseeable future. While the Pantry is incredibly grateful for continued support, they will not be accepting any clothing or household goods donations until further notice. They ask that no one leave anything outside their building; it will only be discarded.

The HNFP has resumed accepting non-perishable food donations! You are kindly reminded, however, to check expiration dates before donating food. *Homegrown produce is welcome.* Donations of pet food, toilet paper, facial tissues, sanitizers, diapers, wipes, formula, and tall paper grocery bags with handles, are also being accepted at this time. These items may be dropped off on Tuesday or Thursday mornings.

Monetary donations are greatly appreciated in any amount to help the group purchase food for the Pantry. You can make a secure, tax-deductible donation on their website's [Donate page](#). If you prefer to mail a check, please send it to 9 Label St., Montclair, NJ 07042.

Lastly, you can visit the HNFP [Amazon Wish List](#) for various needed items.

And thank you for all the ways that you help us to help our neighbors in need!

-Lois McNamara and Carolyn Davidson



NEED HELP FROM HNFP? If you or someone you know might need the services of the Human Needs Food Pantry, please call 973-746-4669 or email hnpfdirector@gmail.com. You can also [click here for forms](#).

For access to a free cookbook called Good and Cheap: Eat Well on \$4/Day, [click here](#).

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 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 – 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/ 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 Generous Gesture

As many of you know, Route 23 – throughout Cedar Grove and surrounding towns – was FINALLY repaved recently. During that time, we were approached by the Cedar Grove Police Department and the paving company with a request to use our lower lot to store their vehicles while they are not in use. We were happy to be good neighbors. They offered to repair some of the bigger issues we have in the lower lot with patching which they are still working on between jobs. What we were not expecting was what we received in the mail recently – a very generous donation from the paving company as well! Being a small church, and during these uncertain times, this was incredibly appreciated. What a wonderful surprise and a huge thank you to Smith-Sondy Asphalt for their gift which will go a long way in our maintenance and mission giving!

Mission Committee

Hello everyone. Surely hope your summer was a good one despite of all the precautions and restrictions we had to confront. Now, are you ready for Fall? Looks like we will continue with Zoom for a little while longer. At least it is nice to be with you and be able to see some of your happy faces. It is a special time!

During the summer we had a bible lesson for six weeks on the Book of Revelation. Thanks, Todd, for helping us try to get a better understanding of the biblical book. Hopefully we can have another study sometime soon.

As a church, we have not done any unified mission work this year at all. We may not be able to gather together in our customary ways, but there is still plenty of mission work out there to be done. So, let's make it our *mission* to continue to help wherever or whenever help is needed during this time of need.

Stay safe.

Barbara Senney/Mission Committee



Three Great Things YOU Did Today!

Make the Connection

- **You Woke Up.**

Congratulations! This is something of an achievement in the era of the novel coronavirus.

- **You Are The Only YOU in the World.**

If you don't share the gifts and talents you've been given, the universe will NEVER be able to enjoy them again.

- **You Read The Epistle!**

Thank you for staying connected to the United Presbyterian Church of Cedar Grove!

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