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Jesus' Light Rises from our Darkness

By Jeff Braun, Senior Minister

Thomas Dorsey is widely considered the father of gospel music. During his nearly half century as Music Director of Chicago's Pilgrim Baptist Church, he authored both the genre and countless songs.

Gospel music combines Christian praise with the reflexive rhythms, structures, and spirit of jazz and the blues. The combination is a musical style that is utterly American and yet utterly universal in its ability to capture both life's struggles and the saving grace that Christ brings.

Gospel is not sequential so much as simultaneous. That is to say, gospel songs don't so much name our human troubles and then sing of how Jesus will help us.

Instead, they name life's trials in a way that paradoxically allows a sense of divine grace to rise up –not from some distant promised land, but from *the depths of our sorrows themselves*.

When Dorsey's wife, Nettie, died while delivering their first child, and when that child died as well, Dorsey was broken. He had every reason to turn from the pain.

But instead, he turned to Christ. In song. Barely a week after losing his wife and child, Dorsey composed and performed one of gospel's most famous pieces, "Precious Lord, Take My Hand." Through his willingness to dive deep, Dorsey was able to make it through. And his gratitude for life's fragile blessings both prevailed and deepened.

In the spirit of Lent – a season that invites us to deepen our gratitude for Christ's willing sacrifice – we, too, will turn to gospel's evocative power, as soprano soloist Tiffany Jackson, guest percussionist Craig Wilson, and pianist Sara Kohane lead us in the gospel powerhouse, "The Rain is Over and Gone," among other pieces.

Through Christ, heaven's grace does, indeed, rise from our very troubles themselves. His light rises from our darkness; and new life rises from death. Unexpectedly. Transformingly. Blessedly.

As we journey with Christ toward the Cross, so that we might better understand

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Easter's precious gift, let us do so with prayer, with silence, and with the gospel good news... of song.

God's Peace,
Jeff



Rummage Sale Is Coming

The Spring Rummage Sale is planned for the last week of April; why not volunteer to help during this fun and interesting event? Dates and times will be announced in April's Parish Post.

Meanwhile, please start collecting and saving washed spring and summer clothing for infants, toddlers, boys and girls, men and women. We also can use footwear, hats, belts, pocketbooks, accessories and jewelry, curtains, blankets, sheet sets, tablecloths, sewing and knitting items, knickknacks, etc.

Also: books, CDs, DVDs, videos, vinyl records, stationery, coloring books, crayons, toys and complete puzzles, clean kitchen items, working blenders, toasters, mixers, coffee makers and lamps. We can use pictures, paintings and frames, garden items, woven baskets, pots, luggage, backpacks, small electronics and sport items, big paper grocery bags, just to give you an idea.

Volunteers can help with incoming donations and sorting items. All items need to be organized in their own space. The point person is Sherry at 203-271-9860.

March Worship Schedule

Sunday, March 7: Services at 9 and 11. Jeff Braun preaching. Communion will be served. Food offerings will be collected; the food of the month is boxed macaroni and cheese.

Sunday, March 14: Services at 9 and 11. Alison McCaffrey preaching; Mission Team welcomed back from Mississippi.

Sunday, March 21: Services at 9 and 11. Jeff Braun preaching.

Sunday, March 28, Palm Sunday: Services at 9 and 11. Jeff Braun preaching.

Bereavement Series Offered

Parish Care is offering a new six-week bereavement series; it began on February 25. We invite anyone in the congregation who has suffered a loss and is struggling with grief to join us. We hope to offer a quiet, safe and comforting place to share your feelings, fears, thoughts and hopes. Quite often, it is in the sharing that some healing can begin.

Whether or not the loss is recent, the grieving is just as significant. Meetings will be held in Room 10.

We will conclude the series with a special remembrance service, led by the clergy. If you think that this may be helpful, please join us. Call Jan Garthwait at 203-272-5915 or Jan Cowles at 203-272-8441 to register or with questions.

The Board of Outreach Introduces Kiva Loans

The Board of Outreach has made two microloans through the website Kiva, a nonprofit, person-to-person lending site that facilitates loans between lenders and extremely low-income entrepreneurs in developing countries. Kiva's goal is to connect people, through microloans, for the sake of alleviating poverty.

They work through partner organizations throughout the world to identify recipients, offer loans and then facilitate repayment of the loans. We have loaned \$100 to two recipients: Sonia in Peru and Georgina in Ghana.

Let us introduce you to our first Kiva microloan recipients. Sonia is 34 years old and lives in Cusco with her domestic partner and four children. Sonia sells ice cream from a cart she pushes through the streets of Cusco five days each week. She has been doing this for five years, and requested a loan in order to increase her inventory of ice cream in preparation for the time of year when her business is most active.

Georgina is 53 years old, divorced, with a grown daughter. She lives with her grandchildren in the coastal town of Axim, where fishing is the primary occupation. Georgina sells fish in the marketplace and has been doing this for six years. She requested a loan in order to buy other merchandise to offer along with the fish, which she hopes will increase her business.

Both these loans will be repaid by early fall, at which time we can lend the money again through Kiva (www.Kiva.org).

Midnight Run: We made our first Midnight Run at the end of February. Our middle school youth put together 55 bagged dinners made with donations from the congregation, and we delivered the meals along with some donated warm clothing to the hungry and homeless on the New Haven Green and in a men's homeless shelter. Sign-up sheets for donations for the March Run will be put up on March 14. Please remember that we need sandwich bags and plastic grocery bags as well as the listed food donations. Donations of warm outer clothing and trial sized toiletries can be put in the bin marked 'Midnight Run' in the hall at church. If you are interested in helping to deliver the meals to New Haven, please sign up on the Outreach bulletin board in the parlor.

Food for All: Many thanks to all those who participated in the Food for All week at the beginning of Lent. Your donations, raised by simplifying your eating for a week, will help get our Midnight Run program off to a solid start and also help fund area food pantries. If you participated in Food for All, but haven't sent in your donation yet, you can send it to the church office, or put it in the offering plate on Sunday, noting 'Food for All' on the check or on the envelope.

Thanks to you: The Board of Outreach thanks all who so graciously and generously donated Thanksgiving turkeys, meal fixings and children's Christmas gifts last year. The Thanksgiving meals were

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given to 56 families under the supervision of Waterbury DCF. That's right; the congregation surpassed its goal of 50 meals and supplied 56! The donations were nothing short of amazing, with people going above and beyond to ensure that these families had a holiday food spread similar to their own. In addition, during this holiday season, 50 children's Christmas gifts were generously donated by the congregation. DCF and members of the sponsored families were so grateful for everything - the generous donations brought tears to their eyes and a smile to their faces. From the bottom of our hearts, thank you for your kindness, generosity and giving spirit.



Mission to the Gulf

Seventeen members of our congregation will be in Mississippi from March 6 through March 13 rebuilding homes destroyed by Hurricane Katrina. Please keep them and those they serve in your prayers and come to either worship service March 14 church to welcome them home.



Covenant To Care Winner

The winner of the Thanksgiving 'Thank You' raffle is the Daly Family: Peter, Elaine, Erin, Megan and Katelyn. The Dalys won a \$25 Stop & Shop gift certificate. Thanks to all who participated.

Left in the Library?

Have you left personal belongings in the church library, or in the library area of the parlor? If so, now is your opportunity to retrieve them. This applies not just to individuals, but to boards, committees, and other groups who have used library space for meetings.

In recent months, the Library Committee has noticed that some items apparently belonging to our members and friends have been left in the library. This does not help an already overcrowded situation!

The Library Committee has received permission from the Executive Board to dispose of all non-library items still in library space by April. If proper owners cannot be found, the items will either be donated to the church rummage sale or disposed of. Please stop by the library and the parlor to see whether anything looks familiar.

Parish Post by E-mail

If you are interested in helping the church save money by receiving your Parish Post electronically, please contact the office at 203-272-5323 and we'll put you on the list. Thanks!

While we are happy to send you the Parish Post by postal mail, getting it by e-mail means we don't need a stamp.

Acting CE Board Director Is Named

Hope Reinhard began in the acting Christian Education Director position on February 7. Hope will fill the position for three to six months while we are completing the interviewing for a permanent Director of Christian Education.

Hope has been a member of the church for a number of years, teaching Bible Journeys at the 9 a.m. hour. She assisted in the Music Board jazz program in February and has actively supported the choirs and music program. Her daughter Jillian sings in the choir, and was a soloist at the 2009 Christmas pageant. Hope's focus will be the many facets of keeping the Church School moving forward; she can be found in the Director of CE office in the basement. Please be sure to drop in and introduce yourself and your children to Hope on Sunday.

In other CE news:

Survey results: The CE Board survey on the church school closed January 27, and the Board is in the process of tallying the results. Thirty-eight responses were received, with 68 percent attending the 9 a.m. service and 32 attending at the 11. The respondents had a total of 46 children. Of the 27 people responding to the attendance question, nine said they attend services twice a month or less; nine reported three times a month, and nine reported almost every week attendance. We are in the process of tabulating the remaining results and evaluating the suggestions. More will follow next

month. The Board sends its thanks to all who completed the survey.

Search Committee: The Search Committee for the Director of Christian Education has published the position description in a number of external venues and has interviewed several candidates to date. The posting is also available on the Church web site. Please note that interested persons should send a resume and cover letter to Linda Milton at ljmilton@cox.net or to Linda at the Church Office. After March 1, the full Search Committee will interview the finalists, who will then meet with the clergy leadership. Then a candidate will be recommended to the CE Board.



Easter Programs for Children

On Easter Sunday, April 4, during the 9:30 and 11:00 a.m. services, there will be a Children's Program for ages 3 through Grade 2. Children will leave during the first hymn and go to rooms 8 and 9. Nursery Care will be provided at the 9:30 and 11:00 am services. (Please note that there will not be Nursery Care or a children's program at the 8:00 a.m. service.



Palm Sunday Processional

Children in the church may participate in the Palm Sunday processional on Sunday, March 28, at both the 9:00 and the 11:00 services. Details will be provided to parents by mid-March.

Christian Education in March

Church school in March will have to do with “healing stories” in the Bible.

Thou Art, Room 8: Children will learn about Jesus as healer through reading two healing stories.

Discussion questions will lead them to understand that we can care for and pray for people who are sick. Children will make get well cards to be sent to sick friends and sick church members.

Red Sea Productions, Room 9: In this workshop, students will act out the story, either in a skit or in an audience participation drama.

This will encourage them to remember the story by being a part of it. Older youth will use their writing skills to create a skit based on a Bible story.

Desert Tales, Room 10: Children will watch sections of the video ‘Jesus’ after reading a healing story in book of Mark. Discussion questions before and after the video will enable the students to learn that Jesus is our healer.

During a structured prayer time, children will pray for those who are in need of healing.

Gospel Games, Room 11: In this workshop, students will read accounts of Lazarus’ death and his coming back to life using the computer program Bibleland. They will put themselves in the story by writing letters to the editor of a newspaper that printed an obituary of Lazarus asking

for a retraction.

Snacks and juices: Three-year olds through first graders are served snacks and juice on Sunday mornings. We have found that asking parents to contribute once a year helps us keep within our budget. We welcome all contributions and offer a schedule as a suggested way to remember.

Please read labels carefully; snacks should have no nuts, peanut butter or peanut oil. Some suggestions of cookies which have no nuts are: nut free varieties of Chips Ahoy, Oreos, Teddy Grahams, Vanilla Wafers, and Lorna Doone.



Stepping Stones: Fun and Mission

Stepping Stones, our fifth and sixth grade youth group, meets on the second Friday of each month for fun and games and some mission work.

In February, 21 youth got together for an evening of bowling at Brunswick Bowl. Before we left Parish Hall, Linda and Whitney Milton led us in a card-making mission project. The cards were beautiful! The rest of the evening was filled with bowling and pizza and lot of cheering and laughter. We have some impressive bowlers in our group!

We are looking forward to our next meeting at 6:30 on March 12 in the Parish

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9:00

Date	Thou Art	Red Sea Prod.	Desert Tales	Gospel Games
March 7	Grades 3 & 4	Grade 2	Week Off	Grades 5 & 6
March 14	Week Off	Grades 5 & 6	Grades 3 & 4	Grade 2
March 21	Grades 5 & 6	Grades 3 & 4	Grade 2	Week Off
March. 28	Bible Jeopardy	Week Off	Bible Jeopardy	Bible Jeopardy

11:00

Date	Thou Art	Red Sea Prod.	Desert Tales	Gospel Games
March 7	Worship	Worship	Worship	Worship
March 14	Grade 2	Grades 5 & 6	Grades 3 & 4	Week Off
March 21	Grades 5 & 6	Grades 3 & 4	Grade 2	Week Off
March 28	Bible Jeopardy	Bible Jeopardy	Bible Jeopardy	Week Off

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Hall. Our mission project will be to make Easter baskets, so please bring bags of candy to fill the baskets. We are also planning some fun games, so bring your sense of humor, too.

If you have never been to Stepping Stones, please join us. There are always new faces, and everyone is welcome. If you have been to Stepping Stones, we look forward to seeing you again and ask that you invite a friend.

The leaders are Kerrie Dunne, Kate Hall, Mark Sprankel, and Steve and Joyce Mulholland. If you have any questions, ask any of these Stepping Stones leaders or call the Mulhollands at 203-272-0140.



News from the Yutes

Our first lock-in of the year was a blast! Thanks to all the Yutes who came and

helped make it a success. The youth group can't be what it is without the continued support of our faithful RA's. Many thanks to all of our resource adults. I think the adults look forward to lock-ins for the great movies. "Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs" was hilarious!

We have a fun-filled March in store. We'll have our regular Sunday meetings as well as a few other events this month. The first Wednesday of the month is our game night. Come join us for a fun evening of GAGA or other games you want to bring to share. We'll be spending some time this month getting prepared for Youth Sunday, April 25. Can you believe it's almost upon us?

We're also in the planning stages of some fundraisers to help support our mission trip to Mifflinburg, PA this summer. If you're planning on coming on

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the trip, if you have any fundraising ideas, or would like to be a part of team that gets them ready please contact Todd.

As always, please keep an eye on www.yutes.org for the latest updates, news, and weather cancellations.

7th and 8th Graders: A new group designed just for you! Join us the LAST Monday of every month to play some games and make some meals that will be delivered to the hungry in New Haven. We'll make bag meals as part of our event each month which will be delivered by members of our Board of Outreach THAT NIGHT to New Haven. We need your help!



Music Notes

Lenten Gospel Program: Guest soloist Tiffany Jackson will join the Senior Choir in singing American composer Paul Halley's gospel anthem "The Rain is Over and Gone" on Sunday, March 21, at both the 9:00 and 11:00 services.

Tiffany was born in Philadelphia and raised in New Haven. She attended the Cooperative High School and the Educational Center for the Arts, and earned a Bachelor of Music from the University of Michigan as well as a Master of Music and Artists degree from Yale's School of Music. She is a frequently sought after soloist throughout New England, and teaches at the Neighborhood Music School in New Haven.

Tiffany and the Senior Choir also will be joined by percussionist Craig Wilson, pianist Sara Kohane, and members of The Greater Middletown Chorale.

Snowbeck in recital: On Sunday, May 16, at 3 p.m., Gary Snowbeck, former First Congregational Church organist, will present an organ recital in the sanctuary. Gary has been

presenting this recital throughout



Connecticut and is looking forward to presenting it here. After the recital, a free-will offering will be collected to help support the church's music

program. The recital will be followed by a reception in the parlor.

Jazz on the Green: This year's "Music on the Green" event will feature, once again, The Heartbeat Dixieland Jazz Band, on the evening of Saturday, August 14. Last year, the Heartbeat Dixieland Jazz Band performed inside the parish hall due to rain. Those in attendance were astounded by their incredible sound, toe-tapping rhythms and melodies, and the sheer virtuosity of the players. Bill Logozzo, the band's leader, was thrilled to be asked back to our Green again this year. He promises that the band will thrill and delight a full crowd. So, please plan to bring a picnic with your family and friends, and be ready to experience an unforgettable evening of fun, music, and festivities.

'Elijah' Oratorio Coming in May

The Greater Middletown Chorale, along with our church's Senior Choir and the Eastern Connecticut Symphony Chorus, will present Felix Mendelssohn's great choral oratorio "Elijah" at the new performing arts center at Middletown High School on Sunday, May 2, at 4 p.m.

"Elijah," one of the world's most well known and beloved choral masterworks, tells the story of the Old Testament prophet, in English, through Mendelssohn's powerful and dramatic music. Joseph D'Eugenio, Artistic Director, will conduct the combined 200 voice chorus and professional soloists, accompanied by full orchestra.

Tickets for the event will go on sale in March in the church parlor on Sundays, as well as throughout the week in the main office. Tickets are \$40 for preferred seating; \$25 for general seating; \$20 for seniors; and \$10 for students. There will be specially-priced tickets available to our church's members, which will include transportation to and from the concert. All ticket holders also will have the opportunity to enjoy discounts at participating restaurants in Middletown; details will be available when tickets go on sale.

This event is one of the most anticipated concerts of 2010, and is not to be missed! Please save the date now so you can attend this thrilling performance and be there to support our Senior Choir and Music Director.

On Sunday, April 18, at the 9:00 and 11:00 services in our church, the Senior Choir and members of the Greater Middletown Chorale will present two choruses from "Elijah" during our morning worship.



Announcing a Change in Church Office Hours

Beginning immediately, the church office is open Monday through Thursday from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., as before. On Fridays, the office will be open from 8:30 a.m. until 3:00 p.m.



Milestones in the life of our church family

Baptisms:

January 17: Madeleine Elaine Kingsland and Olivia Petrie Kingsland, children of Mark and Regan Kingsland; Brennan Nuzzo, child of Paul and Darlene Nuzzo.

Deaths:

Charles Smith, father of Charleen Becker, January 11.



Notes from the Executive Board

As I assume the responsibilities as your President, I agree with Bob Mead that we have a vibrant church that is on the move. During the course of this coming year, I will endeavor to listen and respond to the needs and people of the church. I will work hard to help our congregation stay the course of doing the Lord's work as He leads us through the Holy Spirit.

On Saturday, January 30, the Executive Board held its leadership retreat at the home of Donna and Bob Mead. We discussed many organizational and administrative matters made necessary by the annual transition of the Board.

We then began discussion of the topic "Where Should We Be Going ... Spiritually?" initially breaking into small groups to consider this question.

The more specific questions we tackled were if Jesus were physically present as the Pastor of this church, what would we, as a congregation, be doing? What would we not be doing? How comfortable would we be?

After a delicious lunch provided by the Meads, we continued the discussion as one large group. The discussion was well engaged and very productive, providing several constructive ideas for the coming year. I left the meeting with the firm belief that the Church on the Green has in place an excellent leadership team.

On February 2, 2010 the Executive Board met in the Whiting House.

Church Administrator Leslie Holmes Meyer provided the Board with a presentation that suggested guidelines for interacting with the church office. This valuable information will enhance Board and Committee relations with the office.

The Trustees presented, and the Executive Board approved, the final proposal for the Columbarium. Construction will begin when the necessary funding has been realized.

A candidate for Acting Director of Christian Education has been identified, and the task force is awaiting reference and background checks before an offer is distributed. (Hope Reinhard was approved later that week, and is on board). The Search Committee for a permanent Director of CE has completed their preparations, and will soon begin interviewing.

The Trustees are presently working on the sanctuary sound system, and hope to find a final resolution to the long-nagging problem of poor sound. They will know more by the next meeting.

As this new year begins, I encourage all members and friends of the church who have concerns, questions, and/or ideas to communicate with the permanent Board Chairman. As the 12th Chapter of First Corinthians states every one of us is an important part of the body of Christ, and we need your participation. If you feel more comfortable, contact me. I'll listen.

Ford Cole

We Give Thanks

I wish to thank you for the beautiful poinsettia plan that was sent to me over the holiday season.

Robert E. Moseley

Thank you for the prayer shawl; it is so very comforting to wrap myself up on these cool evenings. The members of the Congregational Church have been so loving and kind. It has been difficult for me to lose Arthur. It is unreal and everyone tells me it does get better. Thank you so very much for your kindness.

Nancy Dayton

I wish to thank, with much appreciation, the many expressions of support and love, from my First Congregational Church family, in the passing of my husband and best friend, Bob, lost in May. The flowers, the visits and the lovely prayer shawl have made my loss much easier.

Doris Nims

I am indeed blessed to have reached my 95th birthday, particularly where Donna Mead kindly brought me a lovely flower arrangement from First Congregational Church.

Ruth Havlick

How can our family express our awe, gratitude and heartfelt thanks to you? As terrible as this time is for us, just knowing that we have such a supportive network in First Congregational Church makes this constant struggle a bit easier to bear. On January 31, we conducted a fundraiser at The Waverly. Many members of this congregation contributed with generous

donations and auction bids. Thanks to you our event was a great success. As a result of your financial support, Steve now knows he can pursue alternative therapies in his struggle with this deadly disease. Consequently, he has less concern that the cost of his therapy is becoming unbearable. Your attendance and gifts demonstrated the highest level of Christian caring, and it was appreciated greatly. We will always be in your debt.

The Pritchard/DeAngelis Family

Thank you so much for thinking of me on Valentine's Day. The card by James Luis was very pretty and I am enjoying it. You all must be enjoying doing things to bring happiness to others.

Blanche McKeagney

Lectionary for March

Sunday, March 7: Isaiah 55: 1-9; Psalm 63: 1-8; 1 Corinthians 10: 1-13; Luke 13: 1-9.

Sunday, March 14: Joshua 5: 9-12; Psalm 32; 2 Corinthians 5: 16-21; Luke 15: 1-32.

Sunday, March 21: Isaiah 43: 16-21; Psalm 26; Phillipians 3: 4-14; John 12: 1-8.

Sunday, March 28 (Palm Sunday): Psalm 118: 1-2, 19-29; Luke 19: 28-40; Isaiah 50: 4-9; Psalm 31: 9-16; Phillipians 2: 5-11; Luke 22: 14 - 23:56.