



# ASBURY CIRCUIT RIDER

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*Welcome to the Asbury Community!*

## Relationship not Religion

Religion has been with humans for a long time. Certainly from the early beginnings. Before the story of Abraham. Religion is about

~~Rules~~  
~~Religion~~  
Relationship

rituals although religions are rooted in humankind's need to connect to a power that is greater than the things that worry and frighten us. Fast forward to the 21st Century and religion is everywhere. So much so that in our language we use the word religion to refer to any set of strongly held beliefs. With strongly held beliefs

### Watch me

Children want approval. "Watch me" Johnny shouts as he hangs upside down on the playground using only his legs to keep from falling. "Watch me" Jasmine shouts as she prepares to jump off the ledge in front of the court house building. Perhaps this

comes rituals that we repeat as required by our religion.

While religions are likely inspired by God they are mostly human made. The rituals that we repeat are carefully crafted by us and for us — or at least crafted for someone. Just not so much for God. Not all rituals are bad. Perhaps most of them are good and when they can bring us closer to God they are serving a divine purpose. But religion too often gets confused with being obedient. Its as though we believe that God is focused on form over substance. Really?

Since our religious beliefs are strongly held and

practice is rooted in how our children watch us. With each act we shout "watch me" as we model the behavior that our children will learn to repeat.

Last week our message focused on authenticity. Our theme was WYSIWYG. "What you see is what you

are common to a group of people we often feel a need to justify the why and how that we believe what we believe. And when confronted with a contradictory set of beliefs fireworks can fly. Arguments break out that too often turn bitter and full of words that may attempt to minimize the beliefs of another group and lift up our own. This even happens when our particular religious beliefs claim that this sort of activity is forbidden.

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get" and its corollary "let your yes be yes" sometimes translated as do what you say you are going to do. The world would be much easier to navigate. Relationships would be much easier to keep together. A simple but powerful idea. Something we expect to come from Jesus. Last week our text came from the earliest teachings of Jesus in Matthew that we call the Sermon on the Mount.

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*Special points of interest:*

> **Leadership Team:** will be meeting on Monday, July 16th at 6pm in the Asbury Library.

> **Worship Design Team:** will meet on Monday, July 23rd at 6:00pm.

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**Watch me** ...continued from Page 1

This week we fast-forward through Matthew to the 23rd chapter. Jesus is warning the people about the state of religion at the time. Sadly, we are living in a similar time. Jesus' teachings are timeless.



Jesus does not sugar coat His message when dealing with people in positions of power. In this chapter of Matthew Jesus calls the religious leaders snakes and sons of vipers! Jesus then asks this question "How will you escape the judgment of hell?" (Matthew 23:33). Jesus' words could be construed as bullying were it not for the power imbalance that the religious leaders held over Jesus in their world. Eventually, they would retaliate and Jesus would be executed. They expected to have the last word but we know better. This week we focus our attention on the idea of

**Relationship not Religion** ... continued from page 1

What if God isn't really looking for religion from us? What if God is really looking for relationship. Take Abraham. God began a relationship with Abraham when God told him to leave behind all that Abraham knew about the world and to go to a place to be named later. Abraham's relationship with God began with trust. Abraham had to trust that the God who called him would come through.

God didn't promise Abraham a thing. This would come later after Abraham proved himself to be trustworthy. A friendship built on trust be-

"Do what I say but not what I do." One of our testimonies in our introductory video on our trilogy was a young woman who shared that her idea of relationship versus religion is that in her relationship with Jesus Christ she tries to mirror what she does in her life after Jesus. Since the religious leaders during the time that Jesus' words were first heard on this topic were seen as the keeper of the keys to divine salvation they held power over the people.

In this week's text Jesus doesn't take issue with the "head" knowledge that the religious leaders have about salvation. Jesus' issue is with their implementation in their own lives. Like the issue that we spoke about last week, what they say we should do is not what they do. And they are in denial. They believe their own deception.

What about you? First, do you have the head knowledge that you need to know how to model your life after Jesus? In Jesus' opening statements He tells us to do what they say. Just don't do what they do. So if you are lacking in head knowledge about what scripture tells us about daily

gan to take shape. Abraham, through his actions, showed that he could be trusted. Likewise, God showed Abraham that God could be trusted.

**So practice and obey whatever they tell you but don't follow their example. For they don't practice what they teach. They crush people with unbearable religious demands and never lift a finger to ease the burden**

*Matthew 23: 3-4 NLT*

living this should be a priority for you. Get involved in Bible study with others. If we don't have what you feel you need tell us so we can help you get what you need. Let's get moving on this.

**So practice and obey whatever they tell you, but don't follow their example. For they don't practice what they teach. They crush people with unbearable religious demands and never lift a finger to ease the burden.**

*Matthew 23:3-4 NLT*

Meanwhile, living the way Jesus taught us to live only begins with head knowledge. Ultimately, it is heart knowledge that will make all the difference. Even if you can't quote scripture or explain a parable you can live a life modeled after Jesus by the love that you show others. Join a group of persons, perhaps with similar situations to your own, where you can discuss how each week's scripture affects what you do day to day. Each week we plan to print some questions for your group to discuss. These are just to help you get started.

Jesus says in the beginning of chapter 23 of Matthew that the religious leaders are the "official" interpreters of scripture so "So practice and obey whatever they tell you." "But don't follow their example" Jesus adds. I suspect that most clergy try hard to live out their faith. I know I do and I believe that the other clergy that I hang out with do as well. And most of the time we do a pretty good job.

But this message is not so much about who helps you interpret scripture. This message is about you. Follow the example that Jesus set for you. Not just with your head, but with your heart.

## Relationship not Religion ... *continued from page 2*

An increasing number of persons, particularly young adults, claim that they are “spiritual” but not religious. Let’s be honest, religions have earned a not so helpful reputation. Religious groups that vocalize extreme claims which infringe on human rights are understandably dismissed as spreading untruths about what God expects or wants. Less radical religious groups that use violent tactics to get attention to their claims add to this reputation and add fuel to the argument that keeps many people

away from churches and other communities of faith. But what if church isn’t about religion? Jesus seemed to have His issues with religion as well. What can we learn from Him regarding this topic?

Jesus debated with the religious leaders who used law to circumvent love. Well intended or not, Jesus took issue with the consequences of their insistence on following rituals, even those based soundly on Biblical interpretation, when the result was alienation, op-

pression, discrimination or any other consequence that resulted in or prolonged suffering. Whether healing on the Sabbath or crossing social boundaries Jesus put relationship over religion. Most important, Jesus tells us, is our relationship with God. But our relationships with each are also critical. We cannot claim we love God if we do not love one another.

Pastor Tommy

### FREE SUMMER MEALS

Asbury UMC - 1653 Davison Rd Flint MI (810-235-0016)

## “Meet Up and Eat Up”

Free Healthy Meals \* Fun and Games \* All Youths ages 18 & under are welcome

(MONDAY – FRIDAY)

Breakfast served from 8:00am-9:30am \* Lunch from 11am-1:00pm

For more information visit the website at  
[www.fbem.org/programs/summer-food-service](http://www.fbem.org/programs/summer-food-service)

Food Bank of Eastern Michigan - Michigan Department of Education - USDA

FOOD THAT’S IN, WHEN SCHOOL IS OUT!

### In Our Prayers

Curtis Young	Shirley Craig
Rachel Bastine	Christopher Lewis
Norma Buzzard	Sarah Tanner
Virginia Bigger	Elizabeth Wright
Barbara McIvor	Judy Tanner
Jonathon Misner	Mary Lyons
Nancy Auger	Brenda
Austin & Mary Suffle	

### FRIENDS AND LOVED ONES WHO ARE HOMEBOUND OR IN NURSING CARE

Sharon George	Mary Nations
Elaine Lamoreaux	Carmen Misner
Mary Russell	



Prayer is at the heart of our beliefs

## Asbury Worship Series God has a plan...but FIRST

On behalf of our worship design team I am excited to announce a new worship series trilogy beginning Sunday, July 8. This is a 3-part "series-series" based on the idea that God has a plan that does more than just affect us. To be "affected" suggests that some how we are passive and the results of actions not involving us have an "affect" on us in some way. This is different. We are each a part of the plan. We each have a role.

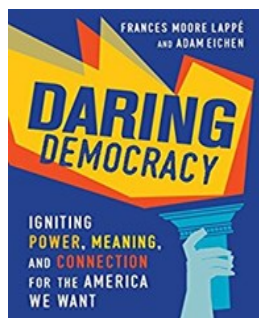
Our first series is titled, *Relationship not religion*. In this series we will focus on a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Are you "spiritual" but not religious. Come on in. You belong here. Stay tuned for more exciting news as our trilogy unfolds according to God's plan for Asbury and the community we serve.

In God's plan there are no stars, co-stars, stand-ins, extras, stunt men or women, or any other roles that set one of us a part from the rest in a way that puts one of us in competition with another. Nor can we be someone who we are not. It is not an act. It is reality.

## Book Club News

**NOTE - WE ARE NOW MEETING ON WEDNESDAYS AT 12 NOON.**

As the people of the Exodus grew in numbers Moses could not longer handle all



of their disputes so he had each of the 12 tribes choose a leader from among their group and a form of representative democracy was born. It was in the wilderness that God worked through Moses

and the other leaders to help the people emerge as a new nation.

be like other nations. They wanted a king to rule over them. God reminded Samuel that it was their God the people were rejecting. So a monarchy emerged among God's people. Despite God's warnings and despite a few periods of political and economic success the consequences that God warned the people about happened. Kings exploited the people taking the best for themselves and the people's voice was silenced. Is this happening again in our country? Are we being exploited by the rich and powerful?

Authors Frances Moore Lappe and Adam Eichen argue that "Democracy is not a choice. Creating democracies truly accountable to their citizens is essential to our very survival—to the flourishing of societies supporting human life, and now, because of climate change, to the survival of the Earth..." Do we have a democracy in our country? Does our government represent the hopes and dreams of the people that they represent?

Fast forward a bit and young Samuel, the prophet, becomes older Samuel and the people are grumbling that they want to

The separation between the very wealthy and the rest of us has never been

## Leadership in Worship & Service

Welcome Team	Tony, Mirium, Christine
Children's Time	Rev Tommy
Ushers	Anthony, Jim
Production Team	Jim
Nursery	Norma
Worship Leaders	Cyndi
Coffee Hour	

Connie Portillo	Office Secretary
Kevin Croom	Farm to Table
Israel Unger	Business Development

### Asbury Café

Plan to meet outside the sanctuary each Sunday before worship for coffee, tea, snacks, conversation and so on. The music will start when it is time to wrap up and head in for worship.

**Asbury Staff**  
 Rev. Dr. Tommy McDoniel      Pastor  
 Mark Vorenkamp      Children & Youth  
 Jim Craig      Leadership Chair

While we seem to naturally anticipate this in anything spectacular this does not seem to be God's way. At least not the God we know in Jesus Christ. In God's Kingdom there are no left-outs or even left behinds, contrary to what some people may think.

Our trilogy series is derived from prayerful discernment of God's words through the prophet Jeremiah where God puts a stake in the ground regarding the divine game plan. "They are plans for good" is the key message, which means that God is planning on a future for our community that will give us hope.

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greater and the influence of the very wealthy, and other countries, on our elections has never been greater. In our own beloved Flint, our governor was able to circumvent democracy with the stroke of a pen. The result: economics prevailed over people and we continue to suffer. We have a president who boasts that he is among the super rich and whose decisions favor their economics over ours. How does this happen? Is the voice of the people being heard or are voters and elections manipulated behind the scenes?

This is not about conspiracy theories. Certainly, we do not all agree on who and how policy and laws should come about. But an increasing number of us are ashamed of our country's policies and embarrassed by our choices to represent us. But what can we do? We can dare to make a difference by standing together and by using both our voice and our vote.

We encourage you to come to our Wednesday gatherings. Our small group hopes to widen our circle and so we hope that you will join in on our discussion. We meet each Wednesday at Noon. Come join us for a light lunch, fellowship and discussion. Our food selections have been fantastic and we always have plenty to share. And we are always on the lookout for our next book, video lesson or topic. Your participation and suggestions are greatly appreciated.

Pastor Tommy

\* Frances Moore Lappe and Adam Eichen. *Daring Democracy: Igniting Power, Meaning, and Connection for the America We Want*. (p. 4). Beacon Press, 2017.



## God has a plan ... but **FIRST** *continued from page 4*

If there is a catch it is this message it is “We are invited but God is not insisting.” That is, each of us are invited to participate in God’s plan but God’s love is so strong and so certain that each of us are given choice to decide if we will participate or go our own way. Nevertheless, God’s plan is the only plan that will prevail.

God’s plan is comprehensive. God’s plan includes more than you and I, more than our neighborhood. It goes beyond Flint’s master plan and includes other towns and other cities. God’s plan includes our nation and other nations. It includes our planet and other planets. Our solar system and the rest of the universe. God is the God of all creation. All that there is or ever was. Now where do you fit?

When lead was discovered in the water that comes out of the faucets in our homes we realized

that we were “affected” by what was in our water that wasn’t there before. The higher concentrations of lead and other impurities have been found to result in certain consequences. We did not participate in the decision to change our water source. We are not the chemists who decided how to treat the water. We are not the testers who watch out for the public good. Yet we are affected. Even if we never drank the water. Even if we don’t live in Flint. We are affected because we are connected.

Let’s presume that you didn’t vote for our current governor who appointed the emergency manager who decided to switch our water supply to save money. Does this make you innocent? So in your world the innocent are punished? The innocent are simply affected while the guilty are the actors in the play that captures your life? This is over simplified. But unless you are you are totally dependent on others, without

influence on their choices, you make decisions about whether you install a faucet filter. You decide whether you will drink filtered water. You decide whether you only drink bottled water. You decide how long it will be before you trust our water source and those who have a part in its quality.

We all have a part in God’s plan and our part begins with acceptance. First, we accept that God has a plan, even if our acceptance is mostly based on hope. Next, we decide that we want to be an active player in God’s plan. We want to be one of the players whose actions result in positive change in the world around us. We want the “good” that God promised through the prophet Jeremiah.

Which means we will do that which God’s plan calls for us to do. But you likely realize that you can’t do this on your own. Even knowing what your role is proves to be beyond your ability. Yes you are human — one of God’s creatures. And you now realize that you are not God. But you also realize that you want to know God better than you do now.

For all the apparent rigidity in the laws that we read about in the first five books of the Bible when we read all the way through we gather a more open-minded God. Don’t let first impressions be your last Bible lesson. For example, by studying the prophets whom God uses to speak to the people you should notice that the words we read that God spoke through them are not hard and fast details of a plan. They are words like good, hope, love and joy, when we follow God’s plan, and words like darkness, anger, violence, sickness, blindness, oppression and death, when we go our own way. The details are left to unfold day to day as we choose to stay connected to God’s plan or not. The Bible is the only manuscript we are given. All of the commentary available are our various attempts at interpreting this manuscript.

When asked about the most important of the laws, Jesus lifted two which He offered as the key to all the rest. Love God and love each other. So simple. So complete. So hard to do it seems. Impossible, when we try and do it on our own.

## Coming up this week

- Jul 16 Mon** 4:30pm StandUp Education Prog  
6:00pm Leadership Team Meeting
- Jul 17 Tues**
- Jul 18 Wed** 12Noon Pastor Book Club
- Jul 19 Thur** 1:00pm Cooking Classes
- Jul 20 Fri** 4:30pm StandUp Education Prog
- Jul 21 Sat** 1-4:pm StandUp Education Prog

- July 22 Sunday**  
9:30am Café Opens  
10:30am New Beginnings Contemporary Worship

### Last Week for Worship Attendance 26 Offering \$ 703

Look for announcements scrolling on the our screen prior to the start of worship.

Email announcements by the Friday before to:  
FlintAsburyUMC@gmail.com

## Ways to Connect

**Donate** –You can give online at [FlintAsbury.org/donate](http://FlintAsbury.org/donate)

**Music Ministry** –We are looking for vocalists and musicians.

**Community Gardening** – The Asbury Farm needs volunteers.

**Pantry** - We need food items, including meats, paper products; personal items diapers, and financial support.

**Social Media** allows us to tell others about the work that God is doing. All of us can

help enhance our presence in the social media by posting on our Facebook and utilizing our website for blogging.

**Housing** - the Asbury House offers local college students a way to use their gifts and passions together with their faith in building a better neighborhood.

**Women’s Circles** - The women of Asbury meet regularly in small groups.

**Pastor’s Book Club** meets each Tuesday at 12Noon for fellowship, food and learning.



**THE FLINT FARMING PROJECT**





# Welcome to the Asbury Community

1653 Davison Rd  
Flint, MI 48506



NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION  
U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
FLINT, MICHIGAN  
PERMIT #151

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## Neighborhood Connection



*We envision a community in love with God, each other, and our neighbors evidenced by the transformation of ourselves and our neighborhood. We are a center for worship & spiritual growth, a center for connections and a center for health & wellness.*

Our goal is a revitalized community where every resident can use their talents and passions for the common good, where children grow into citizens who contribute to building and maintaining a vibrant neighborhood, and all residents are able to enjoy safety, good health, a culture that fosters life long learning and satisfying lives.

We believe that such an ambitious goal can never be attained without God's grace and abundance and Christ calls each of us to be disciples willing to share our witness through words and acts.

## God has a plan...but **FIRST** *continued from page 5*

These two, most important expectations that God has for all creation depend upon each other. To love God is to love each other is to love God. So while our help comes from God this help is delivered through each other. We help each other which helps God help others and helps God to help us. Its all connected. Dependent. We are free to choose but we are not free to escape the consequences of our choices. Nor are our neighbors.

Our series trilogy which naturally suggests the divine trilogy of God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit, will take us on a journey of discovery. Together we will discover new pieces of God's plan for each of us and collectively. The more of "us" who participate the more we can discern within our community of participators.

Who will you invite to go on this journey with us? Don't just consider friends and family. You already know a lot about them. Consider strangers who are "strange" because, from what you can tell, you have nothing in common with them. But since we know that they too are a part of God's plan they can help us discover parts of God's plan that we otherwise may miss.

**For I know the plans I have for you." says the Lord.  
"They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope."**

**Jeremiah 29: 11 (NLT)**

Who are you certain to disagree with because their lifestyle is not your lifestyle? Invite them. Who are you certain that you don't

understand because they don't fit what you understand? Invite them.

Perhaps their idea of a life-partner goes against what you know and believe. Perhaps their idea of color, dress, food, musical taste and most other subjects you know are different than yours. Invite them.

In this way, our journey will be rich with diversity and new discoveries about ourselves and about God. Each of us will grow closer to God, more in love with God. Each of us will grow closer to each other, more in love with each other. Each of us will grow closer to our neighbor, who hasn't been with us on our journey and yes, more in love with our neighbor. Each of us will grow closer to creation and more in love with creation. And in this process, each of us will know more about ourselves, and learn to love this creature that God placed here for a reason — each of us perfected in our own unique way.

Pastor Tommy