

ASBURY CIRCUIT RIDER

Welcome to the Asbury Community!

Talking Donkeys

I promised last week that we would talk about the talking donkey this Sunday. So let's go back to the a chapter in the Book of Numbers where we learn about the prophet Balaam, whose story in scripture sounds like the answer to a trivia question. Yes it is true. God used a talking donkey to help a prophet gain clarity about what God had in mind.

Balaam was promised a big payoff by the King of Moab if he would put a curse on the encroaching Israelite people who had moved into his neighborhood. It was too late for the King to build a wall and he hadn't considered asking the Israelites pay for it.

The prophet is headed towards a gig that was sure to pay well if things worked out,

but it was not what God had in mind. Perhaps God decided to have some fun with him — well at least God found a way to get Balaam's attention. His donkey spoke to him. Really? Yes, a talking donkey.



At first, the donkey's actions were subtle, leaving the road and heading off into a field. Scripture tells us that the donkey saw an angel of God standing in the road ahead and knew not to try and

pass. So Balaam does the sort of thing a person does when they are determined to defy God. He beats the donkey until the animal submitted to heading down the same road.

Next the donkey, still subtle, rubs up against a rock wall smashing Balaam's foot against the stones, leading to another beating. This is great material for comic relief during an intense scene. But the angel was blocking the road again, seen clearly by the donkey but apparently not visible to Balaam who was determined to cash in on the King's increased offer for his services.

Page 2

ter divine signs in a number of different ways and scenarios. They can be signs of impending danger that warn against continuing along a particular road or they can be like green lights at an intersection signaling that God wants us to continue on our way. Signs can signal detours that allow us to continue but along a different route. Prophetic discernment requires looking for and interpreting signs with the help of divine insight.

"Well that may be fine for prophets but what if I'm not a prophet?" is a frequent asked question on this topic of making sense of God's will for us.

Perhaps no other story in scripture is richer than the story of Gideon when it comes to a non-prophet and divine signs.

Page 2

Volume 18 Issue 7
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Special points of interest:

> **Worship Design**—will meet in the Asbury Library on Monday, October 8th at 6:00pm.

> **Leadership Team**—will meet on Monday, October 15th at 6:00pm in the Asbury Library.

Signs & Wonders

Places where a road or walkway crosses a railroad track can be dangerous intersections. Generally even in the most remote places where cars and trains seldom meet, there will be a sign warning the would be crosser that there could be danger looming just down the tracks. Cross at your own risk is the message hidden behind the subtle notice of danger. Look both ways, heed the signals,

don't try to circumvent the warning, are all subtexts to the warning sign.



Prophets recognize and interpret signs as part of their vocation. A prophet may encoun-

Inside this issue:

Talking Donkeys	1
Signs & Wonders	1
New Worship Series	3
In our Prayers	3
Pastor's Book Club	4
Leadership in Worship & Service	4
Coming up this Week	5
The Flint Farming Project	6
Small Group Questions & Notes	7

Signs & Wonders ...cont. from Page 1

Found in the Book of Judges, Chapter 6, Gideon was hiding out so as not to be seen by the Midianite gangs that were terrorizing their neighborhood when a messenger from God spoke to him. "The Lord is with you, brave and mighty man!"

Gideon seems to ignore the sarcasm and return the message with his own comeback: "If I may ask, sir, why has all this happened to us if the Lord is with us?" Great question and one that gets asked by most of us at some

"Why has all this happened to us if the Lord is with us?"
Judges 6:13 GNT

point when our world seems to be going to the dogs and someone reminds us that

despite our misery and struggle, God is with us. What kind of a God would be "with us" and let bad things happen when we are doing our very best to be faithful, kind to our neighbor and be a good person?

Gideon gets straight to the point: "What happened to all the wonderful things that our fathers told us the Lord used to do—how he brought them out of Egypt? The Lord has abandoned us and left us to the mercy of the Midianites." Take that, angel!

So what does God do? God tells Gideon

Talking Donkeys .. cont. from page 1

The angel appears again in front of the donkey, this time in a narrow section of road, and not seeing any other option, the donkey lays down in the road. Balaam again starts beating the donkey when the animal speaks "What have I done to you to deserve you beating me three times?"

You got to hand it to the prophet. Instead of responding in disbelief, Balaam, still furious with the delays and now limping on a sore foot, talks back to the donkey rather than question whether he had lost his mind. "I beat you because you are making a fool out of me. If I had a sword I would kill you right where your laying" he shouts back in a rage.

to come out of hiding and do something about it. "Who me?" Gideon would be justified in asking. "I'm sending you" the messenger tells Gideon who goes on with a laundry list of why it can't be him. It is the modern day equivalent of "My life is a mess...I'm behind on my rent...I have a shut-off notice...the creditors are calling...I have this bad knee...I'm too old...I'm too young...I've got things to do, and so on. Pick your favorite. We all have a laundry list of reasons why it should be someone else.

Giving up on arguing with the God who created him Gideon wisely moves to testing the message. Let me be clear that Gideon's story is our story only as an illustration and attitude is everything. It is one thing to have some self-doubt, it is foolish to doubt God. Our best test is scripture. Is the message that we are hearing consistent with scripture?

"I am putting some wool on the ground where we thresh the wheat. If in the morning there is dew only on the wool but not on the ground, then I will know that you are going to use me."

Judges 6:37 GNT

Gideon first offers hospitality within a ritual of worship and offering. He is not doubting God. He is honoring God and wanting to be sure that his understanding is clear. May I suggest for us that attending

Then the Lord gave the donkey the power of speech, and it said to Balaam, "What have I done to you? Why have you beaten me these three times?"

Numbers 22:28 GNT

The donkey not only talks but he defuses the situation with logic. If God is going to give a donkey the power of speech why

not give him the ability to calmly argue with logic. This is good news for the rest of us when we are being a donkey. There is hope.

"Aren't I the same donkey that you have relied on all of your life?" the donkey asks Balaam. "Well yes — of course you are. But what does that have to do with now?" Balaam responded (this response isn't actually in the scripture). "Have I ever

worship, praising God, is a great start along with fasting, that is giving up something that is meaningful, and lots of prayer. Do this before you start asking for signs of affirmation.

When Gideon did this he encountered the Holy. He was convinced that God had spoken to him and he was overwhelmed with the reality. This does not mean that Gideon has clarity of direction. But he realized that God had spoken to him and he was ready to listen.

Gideon had his next step. He was to knock down the idols that his neighbors were worshiping. What followed at this point was more worship along with an invitation to his neighbors to return to worshiping the One True God. More offering. More prayer. Gideon needed to draw closer to God before he would be ready for specifics. And we read that the Holy Spirit filled Gideon and he was ready to follow faithfully.

Gideon's testing of his understanding of God's will is very interesting. He puts a wool cloth on the ground overnight, asking God to soak the cloth with dew while leaving the ground dry, and it works. The following night, he reverses his request, and the next morning the ground is wet with dew but the cloth is dry. Proof positive! Oh, if it were always this easy.

Before you go hunting around the house for pure wool to put out in the yard overnight consider the possibility that God will affirm your next step in a completely different way. God wants your ear close enough that you can hear a whisper. You will find your equivalent of the "wool test" when that which God is asking you to do is big enough. But remember that attitude is everything.

My concern for all of us is not that we expect too much from God. My concern is that we expect too little. We should anticipate miraculous signs and wonders because they happen every day even without our

Page 3

acted like this before?" the donkey asks his now calmer friend. "Well no" the prophet replies.

Page 3

Signs & Wonders ...cont. from page 2

participation. Jesus left His followers with a promise that the Holy Spirit would empower us to do even more than He showed in His teaching us what to do. So, let's do it.

Our second message in our new series, *Train wreck*, is a story of signs and wonders. Gideon realized in his worship that God had spoken to him and was calling him to do something that he couldn't imagine being possible. What is your next step? Come and travel with us over the next few weeks as we learn from scripture how to hear the voice of God, avoid disasters and to recover from those that we don't avoid.

Pastor Tommy

Talking Donkeys ... cont. from page 2

God then opens Balaam's eyes and now he can see the angel himself. The same angel that had caused the donkey to stop. Well Balaam regretted what he had done and laid face down in a demonstration of regret. The angel asked Balaam the same question the donkey had asked him. "Why did you beat your donkey three times?"

The angel goes on to explain that the donkey was being the smarter of the two and it's a good thing because had the donkey allowed Balaam to keep going the angel would have killed Balaam and let the donkey live!

God, however, decides to use Balaam's disobedience and salvage his wasted

energy by allowing Balaam to continue his journey and take the job offer. But now Balaam is back in tune with what needs to happen next. By the way, Balaam never collects on the job since God had him bless rather than curse the Israelites.

So Balaam returned back home, a little poorer, but also a little wiser, than when he

Have you ever been so focused on the possibility of a big payoff for yourself that you failed to realize that God was trying to keep you from a train wreck?

left, and the Israelites, not King Balak of Moab, lived happily together in the promised land.

I might as well confess that Balaam's story resonated with me. I also can have tunnel vision and when I fail to pay attention to or worse, don't take the time to listen and observe the signs around me. I become the classical idea of and name that we give a donkey. Balaam likely continued to limp for a while — perhaps a reminder to pay a little more attention to the donkeys in his life.

How about you? Have you ever been so focused on the possibility of a big payoff for yourself that you failed to realize that God was trying to keep you from a train wreck? Note that Balaam was already in touch with God and yet he still gave into the temptation to focus on his own fame and fortune rather than obedience to God. All of us are susceptible to feeding our own ego and ignoring God's plan. But hearing from God begins with listening for God and it's never too late to start.

Our first message in our new series, *Train wreck*, is a story of avoidance. Balaam realized that God was trying to help him stay obedient just in time to avoid disaster. Come and travel with us over the next few weeks as we learn from scripture how to avoid disasters and to recover from those that we don't avoid.

Pastor Tommy

Asbury Café is Open!

Asbury Café is opened for lunch on Fridays from 10:00am-2:00pm outside the Worship Center on the main floor.



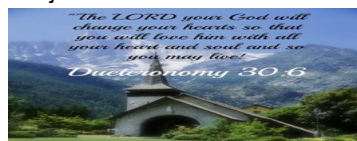
These selections will also be available on Sunday mornings before and after worship.

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 Train Wreck Third of Three Series

As we come to the end of the 2nd series in our trilogy where we focused on listening and discernment, we move into practical illustrations from scripture of real people either avoiding disaster or recovering from disaster by being obedient. Our 3rd series has a subtitle: *Recovery and*

avoidance. And yet another subtitle: *Overcoming temptation through obedience.*

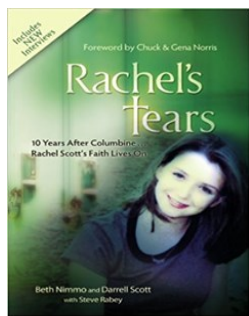
Most of us have felt like we were in a train wreck at some point or another. How do we recover from such a catastrophe? Even better, how can we avoid another train wreck? This series brings our journey into the heart of God's plan for us: Obedience.

Book Club News

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

Has any one ever invited you to watch a movie or read a book with the qualifier "Are you ready for a good cry?" For some of us, this "sweetens" the invitation and the answer is nearly always YES. For some, this qualifier is a disqualifier. Why set myself up to cry on purpose? Then there is the middle ground — the majority. We may dip our toes in emotionally but hold out as long as possible. "There's no crying in baseball!" is a line that comes to mind for me. That's a lie. I've coached hundreds of children in baseball and tears are a part of the game. And a part of life.

As we put our last book selection behind us we turn from analysis to real life. While our last book was non-fiction and full of reporting on life it was mostly at a societal level as we analyzed the



state of our democracy, or lack thereof, from a safe distance. Our next book invites us into the story — into the lives of a family devastated by our inability as a people to provide safety for our children. Not because we aren't trying hard. But perhaps our lack of democracy plays a bigger role than we may care to recognize.

In our study just finished, 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..." The burning question is "What is the world that we want to create together?"

Certainly, our children are at the center of our hopes. As school shootings continue at an increasing rate while politicians huddle in back rooms to find new ways to protect the interest of gun manufacturers and political contributions our youth are rising up and calling them to come out and look into the faces of children who are both afraid and tired of adults unwilling to take action. Our children are using their voices and their votes for change, even as some states try to create new obstacles that discourage them from voting.

Our next book takes us also into the heart of a teenager. A student at Columbine High School who once wrote in her personal journal, "I am not going



Page 5

to apologize for speaking the name of Jesus... If I have to sacrifice everything... I will." While I am not one who readily takes on a book that promises to turn on the tears I was hooked as soon as I began reading. And the tears...well have some tissues close by. Amazon's website describes our next book, *Rachael's Tears*, as follows:

The Columbine tragedy in April 1999 pierced the heart of our country. We later learned that the teenage killers specifically targeted Rachel Scott and mocked her Christian faith on their chilling, homemade videotapes. Rachel Scott died for her faith. Now her parents talk about Rachel's life and how they have found meaning in their daughter's martyrdom in the aftermath of the school shooting.

Rachel's Tears comes from a heartfelt need to celebrate this young girl's life, to work through the grief and the questions of a nation, and to comfort those who have been touched by violence in our schools today. Using excerpts and drawings from Rachel's own journals, her parents offer a spiritual perspective on the Columbine tragedy and provide a vision of hope for preventing youth violence across the nation.



Leadership in Worship & Service

Welcome Team Tony, Mirium,
Ushers Anthony, Jim
Production Team Mark
Children Mirium & Emily
Worship Leaders Cyndi
Café Christine & Norma

Jim Craig Leadership Chair
Connie Portillo Office Secretary
Kevin Croom Farm to Table
Israel Unger Business Operations

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
Sylvia Pittman Worship Arts

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.

* Nimmo, Beth, and Darrell Scott. *Rachel's Tears: The Spiritual Journey of Columbine Martyr Rachel Scott*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2000, 2008.

Asbury Worship Series ..Train Wreck *continued from page 4*

Trains were not around during the times of the Old Testament prophets but shorts were. So our theme verse uses a pair of shorts as a metaphor for a train wreck — which is in turn our metaphor for a really bad situation that we all would rather avoid. In Jeremiah 13:11 God reveals to the prophet the divine goal: *“Just as shorts fit tightly around the waist, so I intended all the people of Israel and Judah to hold tightly to me. I did this so that they would be my people*

and would bring praise and honor to my name.”

But, the people ignored God’s plan for intimacy and obedience, giving into temptations in the same way that the first couple did in Genesis. God’s message to Jeremiah is to the point: *“But they would not obey me.”* God’s threat that follows from this declaration in Jeremiah sounds a bit harsh. But, God is not happy with the people of Judah because they are chasing after other gods. Sound familiar?

A quick word about what is meant by “other gods” so there is no confusion. In the first of the Ten Commandments God spells out a divine insistence on where our focus belongs. On God and God alone. Worship of any other god is forbidden and a train wreck waiting to happen. What are other gods? The most obvious is money, but other gods include cars, other persons, drugs & alcohol, getting our own way, control, power, and more.

Page 8

Coming up this week

- Oct 8 Mon**
- Oct 9 Tues** 10am-2pm Water Distribution
- Oct 10 Wed** 12Noon Pastor Book Club
6:00PM Beginners Bible Study
- Oct 11 Thu** 10am-2pm Water Distribution
- Oct 12 Fri** 10am-2pm Asbury Cafe Open
- Oct 13 Sat**
- Oct 14 SUNDAY**
9:30am Café Opens
10:30am New Beginnings
Contemporary Worship

**Last Week for Worship
Attendance 17 Offering \$ 741**

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

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.

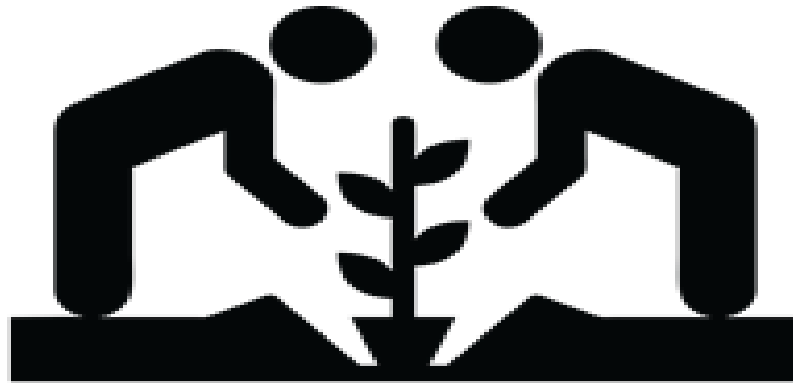
Women’s Circles - The women of Asbury meet regularly in small groups.

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

**** New Asbury UMC
Coffee Cups**



are available by bringing a friend or neighbor to Sunday Worship with you! Just fill out a Connect Card so we can get to know them too, turn it in to the Café ladies and you and your guest will be given one of these coffee cups.



THE FLINT FARMING PROJECT

PRODUCE FROM THE ASBURY FARMS ...



Welcome to the Asbury Community

1653 Davison Rd
Flint, MI 48506



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

Phone: 810-235-0016
Fax: 810-235-0016 (call first when faxing)
E-mail: FlintAsburyUMC@gmail.com

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.

Asbury Worship Series ..Train Wreck *cont.. from page 5*

In other words, anything that gets in our way of obedience to God.

We can quickly become so busy chasing after other gods we have little time to hear the voice of the One True God. And God tries to warn us we are either too busy to listen or unwilling to be obedient. God will warn us against doing what we are choosing to do if we are headed for a train wreck. Scripture is full of stories that illustrate the consequences. We are like a pair of underwear that gets hidden in a rock. They soon wear out and no longer fit our body. They are ruined. They are a "train wreck."

Like the pair of linen shorts that God told Jeremiah to put in the rocks, should we pursue other gods long enough, we are ruined. Our life becomes a train wreck.

Many of us come to realize that we are like the prophet Isaiah as he came face to face with God's call on his life: "There is no hope for me! I am doomed because every word that passes my lips is sinful, and I live among people whose every word is sinful"

(Isaiah 6:5 GNT).

The prophet encounters God and realizes that he had not obeyed God and lived among people who likewise did not obey God. This is all of us. This leads to a train wreck sooner or later.

Discernment involves a community open to the possibility that God is speaking through actions and decisions all around us. For example, why did our weekly book club small group study a book about democracy? Clearly, our situation in Washington has reached an all-time low, but some question whether the church should take a position on politics? When Jesus said to give to Caesar (government) that which they claim and give to God what God claims was He making a politically neutral statement? Or is Jesus calling it like it is?

Here is a possible discernment: What if God is calling Asbury to become more active in making a political statement of inclusion and democratic process? After all the work that we are doing in our community cannot be done in a vacuum. The City's Master Plan affects our community and the

people we serve. Decisions about land usage, whether we can combine lots, drill wells, eliminate streets and use buildings are all a part of God's plan for good.

Just as shorts fit tightly around the waist, so I intended all the people of Israel and Judah to hold tightly to me. I did this so that they would be my people and would bring praise and honor to my name; but they would not obey me.

Jeremiah 13:11 GNT

God has a plan for Asbury that includes all of us in one way or another. God has a plan for every person and it is a plan for our own good. But unless we are obedient to God's plan we cannot benefit from God's divine favor.

Whether you are recovering from a train wreck or hoping to avoid one, join us each Sunday for a practical message that can help you face your challenges. Pastor Tommy