

ASBURY CIRCUIT RIDER

Radical Generosity (Responding to God's Generosity)

This Sunday is called the "Second Sunday in Easter" according to the common lectionary. For the Western church Easter was last Sunday. In the Eastern Orthodox Church, Easter is this Sunday. But on this side of the Christian world, the Easter candy and decorations were put on clearance even as Sylvia and Cyndi were singing the Easter Song. It's time for Spring to be here for real. Mother's Day and Memorial Day are right around the corner. Easter is over. Or is it?

I decided to separate my Easter message from the Easter play by a week, extending our Multiply series by one week. Why? The subject of generosity is much too important to squeeze it in

between scenes of a play. Generosity is synonymous with faith. The writer of



James reminds us that faith is dead unless there is some action associated with our faith. The same can be said about generosity. Otherwise, we are only generous with our excess. This is calculated generosity. The kind of generosity that we hope that God doesn't use in answering our prayers.

Last week we read that Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and discovered that Jesus' body was no longer there. Mary

was distraught. Who could have done such a horrible thing? Mary had seen Jesus in the first person. Watching Jesus heal others. Seeing the miracles first hand. But Mary still wasn't quite ready for what had happened. The good news was so good that it simply didn't seem plausible.

Do you remember how Mary responded to Jesus while He was alive? She poured expensive oil on Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair. Mary responded to Jesus with *radical generosity*. The disciples were not happy. Judas reminded Mary that she should not have given all that she had. But she did. Mary's response to Jesus was true generosity. Mary gave out of her scarcity to the One who promised abundance. Mary believe Jesus was who He claimed to be.

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Crop Circles (Reaching the corners of our mission field)

The term "crop circles" has been around for a while. The dictionary that is connected to the app that I use for most of my writing defines a crop circle as an unexplained, flattened area within a farmer's field. But Nadia Bolz-Weber, in her book *Shameless*, offers a more practical explanation. First, the circles are not flattened, but are lush and green as compared to the surrounding area. From an airplane the lush areas form a

circle within a rectangular field.*



The farmer didn't plant her field in circles. This phenomenon dates back to 1940 when Frank Zybach developed the

idea of a center-pivot irrigation system. The source of the life-giving water turns on a pivot which results in those plants that are within the circular pattern of the scattered water receiving that which they need for life while the plants that came from seeds scattered in the corners are deprived. The difference is obvious from above. Circles of what appears to be lush, healthy greenery encased by unhealthy vegetation of a less appealing color.

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Volume 19 Issue 5

May 5, 2019

Special points of interest:

>>> **Worship Design will be meeting on Monday, May 6th and May 20th at 6pm in the Asbury Library.**

>>> **Leadership team will meet on Monday, May 13th at 6pm in the Asbury Library.**

>>> **Do not forget to RSVP to the UMW Spring Luncheon on May 11th. You still have time to call Norma Nattrass at 235-1116. (See enclosed flyer for more info)**

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Crop Circles (Reaching the corners of our mission field)...cont. from page 1

Nadia was setting her readers up to gain insight. This system of irrigation which is designed in such a way that some seeds become well-watered and others are left to wither is a metaphor for the traditional church. The center-pivot represents the locus of power within the traditional church. The life-giving water represents the means of salvation that is scattered in a predictable pattern of human design. Rain, on the other hand, which was developed by a loving, Creator God, reaches the corners as well as the center.

Jesus used rain as an illustration of a God designed system of irrigation when He explained that we are to love all persons, even those who we can't understand, or don't like, or that don't like us. Jesus reminds us that rain falls on all of us without regard to whether one of us thinks that some of us don't deserve it. God doesn't utilize a system that only waters those of us that God planted within a particular circle (Matthew 5:44-46).

Nada's metaphor grabbed my attention. God had put on my heart at a very young age that there are people living in the corners who do not receive what they need to

flourish. But I didn't understand at the time why my heart ached as it did. I was in the circle, close enough that I couldn't see the corners. I wasn't yet tall enough. I wasn't ready. And I wasn't thirsty.

We find people in the corners for a lot of reasons. It depends on how we draw the

For God makes the sun shine on bad and good people alike; and gives rain to those who do good and to those who do evil.

circle. Smaller circles exclude more people than larger circles. But the problem is in the center-pivot distribution of that which gives life. Not how big we draw the circle. We can be a mega-church with tens of thousands of people in our circle, but if we are still a circle, there are people in the corners who are not thriving.

Metaphors suffer from over use.

Since a metaphor is only a substitute and was not designed to be the real thing, metaphors breakdown at some point. But I'm not done with this one quite yet. It's a pret-

ty healthy metaphor. The water, in this case, can be thought of as acceptance. It matters when a person with the power to claim to possess a special insight into salvation draws the circle that is used to decide who is in and who is not. The more convincing, the more powerful — the more potential for harm.

Jesus clearly had his issues with the religious leaders of His time. While Jesus truly loved them I think that Jesus could see that they had drawn circles around what it meant to be acceptable to God. And this power had gone to their head and blinded them to the corners. And it wasn't that they weren't tall enough to see outside of their circle. It was as though the power to claim to know the mind of God was used to hoard that which gives life and to only offer it in calculated amounts to those living in the circle. The problem is that they drew the circle. They decided on the center point for the pivot. And Jesus called them on it.

As a pastor I get quite uncomfortable talking about the weakness and failures of religious leaders.

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Radical Generosity ... cont. from page 1

But Mary also knew that Jesus died on a cross like so many others had done before Him. Anyone daring to give voice, any one daring to take action, in opposition to those who claimed to be in control, are met with violence. And the daring hung on a cross, no longer able to confront injustice. No longer able to keep promises. No longer able to help others. And Mary knew that this happened to Jesus.

So Mary stood by the empty tomb and wept. Had all of her hopes and dreams also been crucified? Mary cannot go back and recover the expensive oil that she broke open that day. Perhaps she

should have listened to the voices of reason and held onto to the oil rather than use it on a man who was destined to be confronted by persons who did not hear His message as good news for them. After all, they had taken their position as first in line through force, and they had no interest in becoming the last. And whoever heard of the last being first?

Jesus stood in front of Mary and she mistook Him for someone with limited power. But a gardener might know what happened to Jesus' body? Mary needed closure. And then Mary was treated to yet another miracle. At the mention of her name she recognizes Jesus. Jesus had

risen from the grave just as He said He would. Jesus is who He claimed to be. Jesus is the Messiah. But now what?

How do we respond to such good news? What do we do when Jesus has stood right in front of us as alive as ever? How can life ever be the same once we know that Jesus is alive and His promises are kept?

We don't know what became of Mary Magdalene. After the Gospel stories concludes she isn't mentioned again.

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Radical Generosity...cont. from page 2

I'm guessing that she was there at Pentecost. I'm guessing that her needs were met. In fact, I don't have to guess. Jesus is alive and Mary believed. And I believe that my salvation, our salvation, begins immediately on the day that we first believe. But then what?

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

James 1:22 GNT

The Book of James is short, blunt and to the point. The writer is not one to hold back. "You say that you believe," I can hear the writer saying, "then I should be able to tell by what you do with what you know." Likely words that the writer of James heard Jesus say. The writer wants us to consider whether we truly believe that Jesus is a live. Are you holding back your "special oil" for later? Is it for your own burial? Are you, as the writer warns, like the person who looks at themselves in a mirror, catches a glimpse, but forgets who they saw?

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**In Our Prayers**

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

FRIENDS AND LOVED ONES WHO ARE HOMEBOUND OR IN NURSING CARE

Sharon George	Mary Russell
Elaine Lamoreaux	Mary Nations

Crop Circles ...cont. from page 2

It's a bit like a lawyer reading how Jesus argued with lawyers pointing out their misunderstanding of the law. But imagine that you have the power to draw your own circle. A circle that you decide who is in and who is not. Now imagine that you use scripture to justify the size of your circle. And you can quote chapter and verse those statements that support your choices and you can cleverly leave out statements that don't support your case. Or you settle on an interpretation that works for you.

The truth is that none of us decide on who is in God's circle and who is not. In fact, Jesus seemed to go to the corners where the people were malnourished when it came to acceptance and declare that they were closer to the center-pivot, if we can use this as a metaphor for God's love, than those who claim to be planted in the circle. Jesus didn't take His Bible with Him into the corners. Jesus was the Bible. He was and is the Word of God in human form.

I have met a lot of evangelist who claim to go to the corners to "save" those who aren't in the circle. The problem too often is that they come with their predetermined circle drawing compass insisting that those planted in the corners have to be transplanted inside the circle. Jesus didn't go to the corners to tell the people who didn't measure up to the standards of the circle to transplant them. Jesus was turning the circle inside out, stretching the boundaries that exclude so that they enveloped anyone left out. Jesus was not trying to transform those in the corners into circle dwellers. Jesus unwrapped the layers of protection that corner-dwellers have wrapped around themselves for protection from the circle-dwellers.

One of my favorite things about creation is the diversity. I like that my dog Duke doesn't look like Savannah's new puppy. And that they each have their own unique personalities. I've tried modifying some of Duke's quirks with treats but by the time the treat hits his stomach he returns to being Duke. His quirks are what

makes him who he is. And to him they're not quirks. They are his natural attributes. I love that pineapple doesn't taste like coconut but for me they seem to taste good together.

And I love that Cyndi's quirks are not my quirks. And that our children are each so different. I am amazed at God's creativity. God never runs out of unique patterns because if God does use patterns there must be enough of them that we can't find two alike. God begins with a divine image and the rest is left to so many complex factors that the results are not predictable.

As we begin this journey that we are calling *Chosen*, it is my prayer that we are able to have holy conversations around topics that in the past seemed off limits. It is my prayer that the Holy Spirit will remove the scales from our eyes, that the Holy Ghost will exorcise the demons within and that more of us will begin to feel what wholeness is like. For as our sister Sylvia says, quoting another friend, "wholeness is holiness."

We are a holy people wrapped tightly within layers of brokenness. This is particularly true those of us that religious systems, churches and denominations have decided belong in the corners. But the corner is a great place to find Jesus at work. Casting out the demons that have kept persons from receiving the nourishment that God intended. And welcoming all persons to meet the One from whom all life flows and salvation is assured.

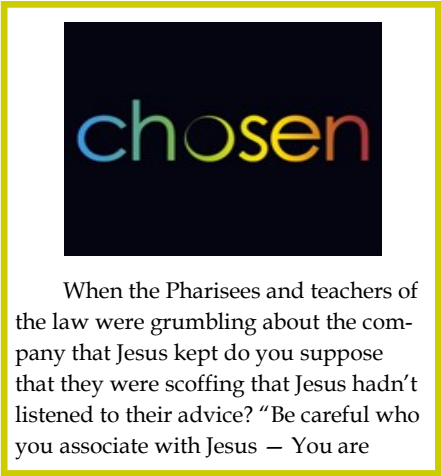
I pray that you will join us not just on this Sunday for for many more in the future. I only make one promise that isn't even mine to make. God will be with us. And if you allow yourself to lift Your heart to the holy One, Jesus will be with you. And Jesus will hold onto you and make you whole.

We worship each Sunday in the Asbury Empowerment Arts Center at 10:30 am. The Asbury Café opens at 10 and we have conversations about the week's scripture beginning at 9:30. I hope to see you there. Let us worship God together.

Pastor Tommy

Asbury Worship Series Chosen All are Welcome

We have all heard it from parents, from aunts, from anyone who is concerned about us. "You are judged by the company you keep." There are numerous other pearls of wisdom that come at us like a declaration of truth. And some of them are true. But a lot of them aren't. But even the less true ones have a seed of truth.

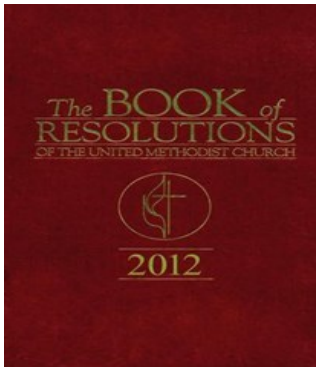


When the Pharisees and teachers of the law were grumbling about the company that Jesus kept do you suppose that they were scoffing that Jesus hadn't listened to their advice? "Be careful who you associate with Jesus – You are

judged by the company You keep?" After all, the tax collectors and "other outcasts" were coming out to hear Jesus speak. And Jesus was having meals with them. Scandal!
After beginning Chapter 15 with this observation the writer of Luke goes on to share that Jesus told a parable to "them." I'm guessing that Jesus told the parable to the gathered crowd knowing that His critics would be listening.
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Book Club News

We completed our study of the book *Love Does* by Bob Goff. This book was an easy read and a lot of fun. Bob's view of life comes through the pages and his literary skills allow his readers to feel a part of the action. And a part of the life lessons.



Our group is spending some time on the written beliefs and principals of

our denomination. At our April 24 gathering we took a brief look at the Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church using a short video presentation. And we will take a deeper look into this publication that comes out of each General Conference.

We also took a slightly deeper dive into the history of our doctrine. Our denomination became the United Methodist Church when the Methodist Episcopal Church merged with the Evangelical United Brethren Church. Therefore, our history is also a merged history.

Not all persons who claim membership in the United Methodist Church agree on how we should interpret scripture. In fact, our heritage encourages each generation to interpret scripture with fresh eyes and

open minds. We make a non-exclusive claim to a way of interpreting scripture that undergirds this idea encouraging us to read scripture through the lenses of tradition, experience and reason. And since we don't all have the same experiences or even the same traditional interpretations our reasoning ends in different places.

I believe that this richly diverse tradition is a strength. We are encouraged to engage each other in holy conversations around our beliefs. When our conversations take place in love and are surrounded and supported by prayer we are able to be more in love with God and each other. At least this is the intention.

Sadly, all of the United Methodists that I have ever met are human. And as humans we continue to carry the brokenness that can separate rather than unite us. Our conversations are too often far from holy because they do not always take place in love. Our last general conference resulted in a divided body with far too much hurt. And many of us have yet to recover. And none of us know where this will lead us in the future.

Leadership in Worship & Service

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

Sylvia Pittman Worship Arts
Jim Craig Leadership Chair
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
Connie Portillo Office Secretary
Mark Vorenkamp Children & Youth

Asbury Worship Series– Chosen (All are Welcome)... *Cont. from page 4*

Book Club News.. *Cont from page 4*

The parable was about searching for the lost. But “lost” applies to the outcasts whom God searches for and gathers into God’s kingdom.

The Pharisees on the other hand believe that they are righteous. They believe this to be true about themselves in contrast to the outcasts. Rather than celebrate with God that the outcasts had gathered to hear the good news that the kingdom of God is near, they scoffed at the idea that God would want to be in their presence at all.

Think about the attitude that too often comes across from us church goers. We declare ourselves righteous, or at least more righteous than those who we don’t see at worship. Imagine if we could see what God sees from a vantage point of seeing the whole picture. Might we see Jesus sitting with outcasts while we celebrate our righteousness without Him?

I’m not saying that Jesus isn’t present in worship with us. I believe

that He is every week and during the week. But in our worship we are to celebrate the lost being found. Not because

One day when many tax collectors and other outcasts came to listen to Jesus, the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law started gambling, "This man welcomes outcasts and even eats with them?"

Luke 15:1 (GNT)

they are less righteous and now can become like us. But because we welcomed them into our community and celebrated with them that each of us is searched for until found by the Good Shepherd.

One additional point to this parable. By the time that Jesus told this parable, shepherds were also considered outcasts. And Jesus had the audacity to compare God to a shepherd. God is an outcast in this context. No wonder we are more apt to find Jesus with the outcasts!

I pray that you will join us for our new series, Chosen, that begins on Sunday, May 5, 2019. As we prepare to celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, we will explore what it means to be chosen – to be an outcast whom God is especially fond of – and prepare for the celebrations to come as more of us outcasts gather together to worship the Shepherd who found us. Join us each Sunday at 10:30 am in the Asbury Empowerment Arts Center for a Spirit-filled worship experience. At 9:30 am a few of us meet in the Asbury Café to discuss the scripture for the week. Join us.

Pastor Tommy

Nevertheless, our conversations were and will continue to take place in love as we continue this tradition of interpreting scripture with fresh eyes and open hearts supported by prayer. We do not have to agree on the details but we must agree on love and respect for all persons. Even when we take issue with what they believe.

Our conversations about our shared and differing beliefs will take us into our next topic and book. I am grateful for all of the suggestions that have been shared. I continue to be in prayer about our subject matter. There are a lot of good books to choose from and we may be able to take on most of them in time. I try to bring us current books on subjects that are relevant to our daily lives. And I often try to connect our worship series so that book club allows us to dive deeper into our topics.

I encourage you to come to our Wednesday gatherings. Our small group is a diverse group and we are delighted when new persons join us. I 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

** The Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church. The United Methodist Publishing Company, Nashville: 2012.*

Coming up this week

- May 6 Mon** 5pm Youth Choir
6pm Worship Design
7pm Flint Jubilee
- May 7 Tues** 10am-2pm Water Distribution
7pm Community Gospel Choir
- May 8 Wed** 12Noon Pastor Book Club
6pm Beginners Bible Study
6pm Youth Group
- May 9 Thu** 4:30-6pm Gaming as Education
6pm Worship Band Practice
- May 10 Fri** 10am-2pm Asbury Cafe Open
6:00pm Asbury Youth Group
- May 11 Sat** 10am-12N Japanese Jiu Jitsu
11:30-2pm UMW Spring Lunch
- May 12 Sun** 8am-10am Japanese Jiu Jitsu

- May 12 SUNDAY**
9:30am Café Opens
10:30am New Beginnings
Contemporary Worship

**Last Week for Worship
Attendance 38 Offering \$ 605**

CELEBRATE SPRING WITH US!

The United Methodist Women of Asbury United Methodist Church invite you to join the Asbury Congregation in kicking off Spring and getting the Asbury Farm planted for this season.

Saturday, May 11, 2019 from 11:30AM ~ 1:00PM

Special menu prepared by our own Chef Kevin!

Vegetarian Lasagna - Garlic Bread

Asbury Fresh Garden Salad

Light Homemade Desserts

Hot and Cold Drinks

Program includes a special Testimony Speaker

Door Prizes and Fun!

Price is only \$7.00 (\$4.00 for children 4-8 and 3 and under are free)

Reservations must be made in advance by calling Norma Natrass at 810-235-1116 before Tuesday, May 7, 2019, dinner will be in the Asbury Fellowship Hall.

Asbury Farm to Table



While turning blight into beautiful and productive landscape is good on its own, transforming a food desert into abundance is life giving. But Asbury wants to make sure that produce is available on the tables of our residents. Our culinary arts and nutritional education programs offer residents the know how just as our farms offers nature's bounty. In addition, the Asbury Café is a culinary experience accessible to our neighbors and anyone with an appetite. Our "pay what you can" approach means that no one is turned away. Those who can help either on the farm or in the café are offered special MyFlintStones tokens that can be used either in the Asbury Café or in exchange for produce to prepare at home.

We proudly accept MyFlintStones

**The Asbury Café is open Fridays
10am to 2pm & Sundays
10 am to 12 Noon**



ASBURY CAFÉ MENU

Open Fridays 10am to 2pm

Pay what you can

DELI SUBS

Lettuce, onions, tomato plus
choice of ham, turkey or beef

STIR FRY

Local grown garden vegetables
sautéed with love and herbs

GARDEN SALAD

Local grown greens &
vegetables. Ham, turkey or beef
upon request

WRAPS

Lettuce, onions, tomato plus
choice of ham, turkey or beef

MUFFINS

Chef Kevin's special recipe with
fruit, love and other delights
baked in.

SMOOTHIE

Assorted flavors of the day

COFFEE

Regular or decaf

Life Group Questions & Notes

But now I tell you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may become the children of your Father in heaven. For he makes his sun to shine on bad and good people alike, and gives rain to those who do good and to those who do evil. Why should God reward you if you love only the people who love you? Even the tax collectors do that!

Matthew 5:44-46 GNT

NOTES FROM WORSHIP

QUESTIONS FOR LIFE GROUPS

1. Read Matthew 5:44-46 our this week's article titled *Crop Circles*. What images come to mind? In what ways does the text or article appeal to you? Where do you see yourself in this text or in the article? Are you in the circle or in a corner?
2. We call attention on the first Sunday of each month to next steps. Our spiritual life is a journey of next steps. Some are rather easy, like joining a life group. Other next steps are really hard to take, like getting involved in a particular ministry. Next steps often take us out of our comfort zone. What is a possible next step for you? What could you gain by taking it? What will you be giving up if anything? Can you see yourself taking it?
3. How can the members of your group help you this week and on-going to help you remove obstacles that stand in the way of your witness?

Welcome to the Asbury Community

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Flint, MI 48506



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E-mail: FlintAsburyUMC@gmail.com
CircuitRider@FlintAsbury.org

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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.

Radical Generosity.. Responding to God's Generosity cont. from page 3

I see this a lot with Christians. They fill the massive worship spaces with their numbers wearing the latest fashion and arriving in style. Grab a premium coffee on the way into the worship center. Enjoy the music. Raise hands and sing along. Worship is Sunday entertainment. A warmup to the day's events. A couple clicks on the iPhone to make a contribution for a great show.

Don't get me wrong. Churches cannot survive without the contributions. But there is more to responding to God's generosity than a token donation. Worship is not entertainment, even when the music is great and the message is moving. Worship demands participation. Worship demands surrender. Worship demands radical generosity even in the midst of scarcity. Worship demands that we break open the expensive oil that we were saving for a rainy day.

Our response to God's generosity speaks volumes about whether we truly believe that which we claim to believe. Put yourself in Mary's sandals. Imagine that you are sitting with Jesus and His divine radiance fills the room. You are so taken by the love that you feel from Him that you want to show your gratitude. You find the most valuable thing you own and you offer it to Jesus. And yet you realize what Jesus already knows. You

are still holding back.

Surrender is a journey for even the most radical Christians. Surrender begins with a desire to know Jesus Christ. But then surrender continues to find release that moves from putting our toe in the water to full immersion. We start putting aside our change for the offering plate. Loose change turns into folding money. We set up an automatic donation to make sure that we don't miss even if we can't make it to worship.

And then we break open the expensive oil. We are all in. There is no Plan B in case God doesn't deliver on promises. There is no back door in case God for some reason doesn't see us as worthy of abundance. We are in for life. We are God's for eternity. We no longer adjust our schedule to make time for God. The Holy Spirit sets our schedule and we awaken each day to a new adventure with Christ.

This is radical generosity. This is surrender. We are all in because we know that the tomb is empty. We know that Jesus Christ is who He says He is. We know that persons who are first in this world may be in denial about what is happening in the

kingdom of God. So we tell them and we

Worship demands participation. Worship demands surrender. Worship demands radical generosity even in the midst of scarcity. Worship demands that we break open the expensive oil that we

invite them to come to the back of the line with us. And sometimes they do just that.

Several weeks ago, on Ash Wednesday, we began our worship series, *Multiply*. My hope was that each of us would find our next step in our journey towards surrender. *Multiply* is a living truth. As we find our place in God's kingdom we can't help but express our generosity towards others. A big part of generosity is invitation. Come and join us.

We begin the month of May, the month of new growth and the breaking out of flowers, the new birth that comes out of God's love for creation, with a message of *inclusion*. God's kingdom belongs to all of creation for God created all. Creation was wonderfully and beautifully made by a loving God. The universe is expanding at an increasing rate of growth. And we must also grow. Come prepared to learn and to be surprised.

Pastor Tommy