

# ASBURY CIRCUIT RIDER

## Clean (Holiness among the unclean)

In the ancient texts of that which we call our Old Testament we find a distinction between the adjectives “pure” or “clean” and the word that is translated as holy. That is, there is a distinction made between purity and holiness. We come across the Hebrew word for holy in Exodus 3:5 when God tells Moses to take off his sandals for the ground that he is standing on is holy ground. In Exodus 16:23 God declares an entire day to be holy. Being a holy day makes the Sabbath Day special. A day when most daily activities that involve work are to cease. “Take one day off each week” God commanded the people of the Exodus.

Our struggle as humans seems to come down to this. We can’t control holy. God is in complete control of holy and doesn’t relinquish this control nor delegate it. Purity, on the other hand, is different. We can set up rules, boundaries and the like in an attempt to control purity. Many of the 613 laws found in our Old

Testament are purity laws. They deal with the idea of being “ritually clean” which should have the impact of grabbing our attention so that when God decides to have a holy moment with us we are paying attention.



But I also suspect that God doesn’t need us to be freshly bathed to provide holy moments or to declare that ground is holy. There is nothing that we do on our own to create holiness. God creates holiness and we participate in the experience. For me, holiness is everywhere. I like the illustrations offered by Nadia Bolz-Weber in her book *Shame-less*. When we share

our pain with another person and their response is “me too” we have experienced holiness Nadia writes. When a mother breastfeeds her baby both are experiencing holiness. Holiness happens in those moments when we manage to free ourselves from our ego and yet be totally connected to our self and something else. \*

Nadia describes holiness as harmony. What makes harmony so powerful is that it requires diversity. Two or more persons singing different tones on the musical scale that blend together into a beautiful harmony. Without diversity there is no harmony. Yet too often, and the church is more guilty than other institutions, we demand sameness. Which we confuse with purity. Which worse, we confuse with holiness. And sameness has nothing to do with holiness. They are oxy-morons.

And we cannot sing harmony alone. It takes a crowd of two or more of us. Does the phrase

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## Snakes (Who told you that you’re naked?)

Deuteronomy 23 begins with exclusions. In the Good News Translation the heading for the beginning of this chapter reads “Exclusion from the Lord’s People.” Using our center-pivot irrigation metaphor these are the people residing in the corners. They are the corner-dwellers. The left out and the left behind. The persons that the water that springs out of the source doesn’t reach. Christians who point to the Old Testament to support their case for exclusion are careful to avoid the parts of the ancient text that don’t support their case. Partic-

ularly those laws that exclude them from living within the circle. The laws they quote are selectively quoted. This allows exclusion of persons that do not fit their carefully constructed definition of insider—the circle-dwellers.



This text from the Old Testament laws does not mention women. They were considered property. Why do we think that the editors of Deuteronomy were men? Circle-dwelling men. This is one of the many reasons that I believe that even Holy Spirit inspired scripture must be read with a discerning mind and heart, rather than grabbing only the headlines that support our bias and blasting anyone standing in our way.

I received a letter from a couple last week that decided to leave their church and our denomination. This couple apparently wanted me to know what was

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Volume 19 Issue 19  
May 19, 2019

## Special points of interest:

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

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## Snakes (Who told you that you're naked?)...cont. from page 1

behind their decision. I'm guessing that it was a form letter that was sent to a list of pastors and perhaps other church leaders. Their claim is that they cannot just standby as scripture is reinterpreted to justify "alternative" lifestyles.

Really? With which interpretation do we stop reinterpreting? If we must stop with a particular generation's interpretation I vote that we stop with Jesus? But the early church that developed the canon (the list of writings to be included in the Christian Bible) discerned that Paul's voice needed to be heard. And what about the writer of the book that we call James? Do we stop there? In God's first covenant non-Jews were excluded and any others who did not meet the exclusionary laws like the ones that begin Deuteronomy 23. Which scripture do we ignore so that we can hold on to only that which we choose to believe that keeps us comfortable within the circle?

The problem is that the Bible is not a comprehensive set of reference books from which all decisions and interpretations are clear and final. Like the writers of our four Gospels humankind has been studying our ancient texts and drawing conclusions about how to interpret God's will for humankind from the beginning. And not so well meaning influencers are everywhere. Even in scripture. Even in churches.

Before the stones start coming my way allow me to also state that I do believe that the Bible is set-a-

## Clean... cont. from page 1

"two are more" remind you of other bible verses? Jesus said that "where two or three come together in my name, I am there with them" (Matthew 18:20). Let's break this down. It takes more than one but no more than two. We acknowledge Jesus. God is on our minds. Jesus is there with us. We can experience holiness. There are no other requirements. Holiness is a God thing.

**For where two or three come together in my name, I there with them.**

I believe that we are all invited to experience holiness and do so oftentimes without realizing that we are in the presence of holiness. The ground we are on is holy — whether we take off our sandals or not. Whether or not we remembered to wash our hands. Even if yesterday, even

part from all other writings and that the Bible contains all that we need for salvation. And all of the decisions that we ever need to make should begin with an interpretation of the biblical text. Go ahead and take your best shot. Because I also believe that if God wanted perfect clarity in scripture we would have it. But God, with the sort of wisdom that only God has, chose to hold back the "rest of the story" — on purpose I believe.

Why would God do this? One reason is that only God carries the burden of foresight. And God knew that left on our own we would listen to the influencers who most agree with what we want reality to be and we would get it wrong. Again and again. But on our better days we would get it right. The key is that we include those sent to the corners by influencers who missed the text on what love does. We have no choice — if we want to be faithful to scripture. We must read and interpret what we read together. And we must include the corner-dwellers who have been left out or kicked out of the circle.

And while I also have plenty to criticize about my own denomination I do like that our Methodist ancestors left us with the directive that we (each generation) are charged with reinterpreting scripture afresh. Our *Book of Discipline* on this subject reads: "Our theological task is constructive in that every generation must appropriate creatively the wisdom of the past and seek God in their midst in

if five minutes earlier, we did something that we know we should not have done. Jesus is with us. This has nothing to do with purity. Humans, particularly humans on a power kick, make up purity requirements.

I am not thumbing my nose at the purity laws in the Old Testament. I have a great deal of respect of persons who strive to follow them, although there are quite a few that I don't get and I follow the New Testament teaching that we are no longer obligated to follow them. As an adolescent I did not understand the connection between the teachings of Jesus with respect to Old Testament laws and would not wear clothes made of more than one type of fiber. My Mother suggested that if I insisted on wearing 100% cotton shirts then I needed to learn how to iron.

One way that "purity" is defined is "free

order to think afresh about God, revelation, sin, redemption, worship, the church, freedom, justice, moral responsibility, and other significant theological concerns." Perhaps this couple also selectively reads this source.<sup>1</sup>

I don't believe that the intention of the writers of this directive was that we will totally rewrite all interpretations. Nor should we simply throw out the interpretations of our ancestors. Rather we deliberate and discern through prayer, study and conversation so as to develop Spirit-led interpretations that oftentimes do depart from past interpretations. And we try and remember that our goal is not to defend that which we want to believe but to discern whether our beliefs are not as grounded in the will of God so much as our own will.

We do have a nasty habit of making this all more complex than I think that it needs to be. But the ramifications are important enough that we should this exercise our best efforts. But are there a few axiomatic statements that can be made about our interpretation? I believe there are a few. My favorite are the two that Jesus gave us when asked to rank the commandments.

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"free from contamination." We know that our public water here in Flint was not free from contamination a short time ago. And most of us have our doubts even now. A few of us aren't so sure even after our water passes through a sink filter. We worry that there are contaminants present. Keep in mind that contaminants are things that don't belong there. We "purify" water by removing contaminants. But this does not make the water holy. They are not the same thing.

At Asbury Church when someone is baptized I pray over the water that we intend to use. My prayer may vary in words from time to time but there are critical components. I like to utilize poetic expressions about the importance

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**Clean...cont. from page 2**

of water in our lives but the critical part of the prayer is to ask God to bless the water with divine power. I pray that through the act of baptism the person being baptized is transformed into the likeness of Christ. Together we pray that this person will live in harmony with our community.

The reality is that I don't do anything of importance on my own. It is the power of two or more and the presence of Jesus Christ that creates the holiness of baptism. It is the harmony of our gathered-ness in the name of Christ that gives baptism the power that it has. We say that baptism is an outward sign of an inward miracle. A miracle that likely began long before our prayer and will continue without end.

Contaminants come into our water and into other parts of our lives all the time. In humankind's insistence on abusing the earth for profit we must look like a world living in a cesspool of our own waste. And in terms of our own inner purity this disgusting metaphor of a cesspool seems even more appropriate.

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**In Our Prayers**

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

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

- Elaine Lamoreaux
- Mary Nations
- Mary Russell

**Snakes (Who told you that you're naked?) ...cont. from page 2**

Jesus did so with what I believe are two axiomatic statements. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." And, "Love your neighbor as you love yourself" (Matthew 22:37, 39).

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all our soul, and with all your mind...Love your neighbor as you love yourself.  
*Matthew 22:37,39*

I believe that this interpretation by Jesus is echoed in many places throughout the Gospels by Jesus and in other places like the letters that we attribute to John. And so when I consider the validity of interpretations, even those long-held by the church and by my own denomination, I measure them against love. And frankly, many of our interpretations, or at least how we live them out, is a gross violation of "love does."

I took the "long way around the barn" in this article. Thank you for hanging in there. Now I want to get to the point. But to do so I need to go back to the beginning. Back to the creation story that is often quoted as justification for telling others that they have to change who they believe God created them to be. But I want to focus on the first temptation and the sin of the snake. And I need to name the snake.

In Genesis 3:11 the first two humans had fallen prey to the lies of the snake and were hiding from God in the corner of the Garden where they apparently presumed that God couldn't find them and wouldn't attempt to find them. But God does find them and asks an important question. "Who told you that you were naked?"

The snake had provided the first humans with the argument for their shame by telling them that "You will be like God and know what is good and what is bad" (Genesis 3:4). Scripture doesn't tell us that the snake actually told them that their nakedness was shameful. Not directly. The snake only pointed to the fruit of the tree that they were told explicitly to avoid. And after this revelation the former circle-dwellers felt it necessary to move into the corner. We don't have a lot to work with — only that the snake gave a bad interpretation of God's will to the humans. And the humans drew the wrong conclusion out of the snake's

advice and counsel. And there were consequences for all of creation.

God asked the first humans "Did you eat the fruit that I told you not to eat?" And they did. And they moved into the corners of the garden. And God told them what it would be like to carry this knowledge and to pass it on to their descendants. There would be consequences for all involved. The humans and the snake. Shame has no place in God's kingdom. And there are consequences for the shamed and for the one causing the shame.

**Who told you that you were naked?**

Here is a stretch that I believe the Holy Spirit shared with me the other day. The Bible, like the fruit of the forbidden tree, contains the knowledge of what is good and what is bad. The Bible has both ends of the good-bad spectrum. And the church itself has too often been the snake in the story. And God responds by ministering to the corner dwellers that were sent to the corners by the cleverness of the snake.

And when God chose to live among people. The corner dwellers were especially cared for. Those persons who were told that they were naked and should be ashamed and do not belong in the circle that is the kingdom of God. But it is God who controls the circle and the Gospels suggest that the kingdom is not a circle at all. That it has no boundaries. Only a gatekeeper. Jesus Christ. The one who lived in the corners with the persons that the church had rejected. Now go and do likewise.

This Sunday we will continue our worship series, *Chosen*. Our title this week is *Shame*. Our subtitle is *Who told you that you were naked?* And our theme is straightforward. When the church shames a person there are consequences. And God goes to the hurting by sending those of us willing to listen to rebuke not the person but the snakes who caused the shame.

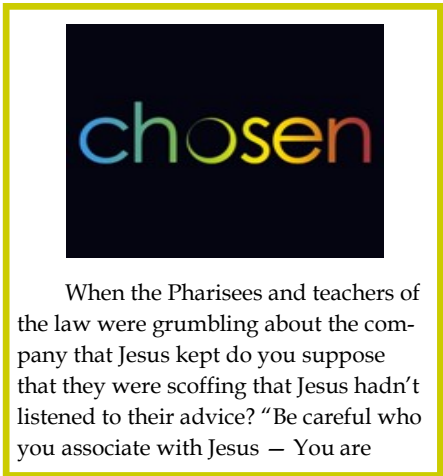
Worship is at 10:30 am. I lead a discussion of the day's scripture in the Asbury Café at 9:30 am. Come join us.

Pastor Tommy

<sup>1</sup> United Methodist Church. *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2016*. Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2017.

### 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.



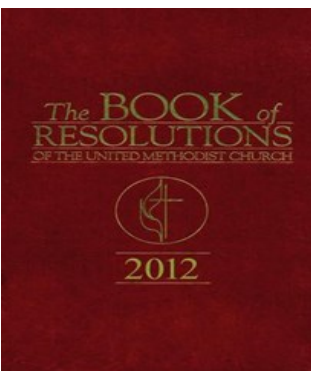
judged by the company You keep?" After all, the tax collectors and "other outcasts" were coming out to hear Jesus speak. And Jesus was having meals with them. Scandal!

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 20 Mon** 5pm Youth Choir  
6pm Leadership Team  
7pm Flint Jubilee
- May 21 Tues** 10am-2pm Water Distribution  
7pm Community Gospel Choir
- May 22 Wed** 12Noon Pastor Book Club  
6pm Beginners Bible Study  
6pm Youth Group
- May 23 Thu** 4:30-6pm Gaming as Education  
6pm Worship Band Practice
- May 24 Fri** 10am-2pm Asbury Cafe Open  
6:00pm Asbury Youth Group
- May 25 Sat** 10am-12N Japanese Jiu Jitsi
- May 26 Sun** 8am-10am Japanese Jiu Jitsi

- May 26 SUNDAY**  
9:30am Café Opens  
10:30am New Beginnings  
Contemporary Worship

**Last Week for Worship  
Attendance 41 Offering \$ 518**



Please keep the following families in your prayers as they mourn the loss of their loved ones. Also for all the other families who have love ones in nursing homes or home ill.

Sharon George, who passed way May 10th.

Dr. Merle (DOC) Supernaw passed way April 20th.

And to the many other special members of Asbury who have passed or fighting other illnesses right now or homebound.



If anyone wishes to send cards to the George or Supernaw family, you may send to the following:

For Dr. Supernaw: Christina Supernaw 9095 Overland Trail  
Flushing MI 48433

And for the George family, Nicole Poore-Sanchez 8116 N. Bray Rd  
Mt Morris MI 48458



## *In Sympathy*

*My thoughts and  
prayers are with you  
that God will Comfort  
you in your loss!*

# 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

*That evening they heard the Lord God walking in the garden, and they hid from him among the trees. But the Lord God called out to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard you in the garden; I was afraid and hid from you, because I was naked." "Who told you that you were naked?" God asked. "Did you eat the fruit that I told you not to eat?"*

Genesis 3:8-11 (GNT)

### NOTES FROM WORSHIP

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### QUESTIONS FOR LIFE GROUPS

1. Read Genesis 3:8-11 this week's article titled *Snakes*. 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? Have you felt like you were picking and choosing scripture to support your case?
2. This week our focus is on shame. Have you ever felt shame? What or who caused your shame? Can you separate shame from making mistakes? Mistakes are correctable behavior while shame suggests personal flaws that cannot be overcome.
3. How can others help you realize that you do not need to feel shame? 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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## 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.

## Clean ...Holiness among the unclean..cont. from page 3

We are saved by the grace of God who lived in the midst of our cesspool making so we could experience holiness first hand. Without regard to our purity. We still hope to be clean. We just cannot do so through our own power. And when we get dirty, like a Mother picking her son out of a muddy puddle and comforting him in her arms, Jesus does the same for us. The mother isn't concerned that her child's filth will harm her. She will be clean again. And so will the child. And so will we.

**The church has often confused purity and holiness. And people get hurt by the confusion when they are told that they aren't holy enough because they do not comply to the definition of purity held by, but seldom followed by, those living within the circle that enclosed that particular community.**

Our call to action this week is to let go of this idea that we must be a particular way or do a particular thing to earn

God's love. My prayer is that you will reach out to God from within whatever puddle that you have fallen into knowing that you are loved.

And know this. The church has often confused purity and holiness. And people get hurt by the confusion when they are told that they aren't holy enough because they do not comply to the definition of purity held by, but seldom followed by, those living within the circle that encloses that particular community. Don't listen to their lies. God created you to be who you are and loves you.

Join us each Sunday for our new worship series, *Chosen*. At Asbury we believe that God created a diversity of people. We are a mix of different skin tones, eye colors, voices, shapes, sizes and more. We are a mix of differing amounts and recipes of quirks and gifts. God brings us together like unique threads that make up a beautiful tapestry

of artistic harmony that is holy. We are ourselves part of a holy fabric.

Worship is at 10:30 am each Sunday. Join me in the Asbury Café at 9:30 for a short bible study. Let us worship the God who calls us together.

Pastor Tommy

Nadia Bolz-Weber. *Shame-less: A sexual revolution*. New York: Convergent Books, 2019