

ASBURY CIRCUIT RIDER

Identity (Who are you?)

Who are you? What is your identity? This can be a haunting question. To exist is to have an identity. We give names as a shortcut so that we can differentiate one identity from another. But we also create names for groups so we can categorize and organize what we know about common identities. Scientists have chosen to utilize Latin names as a way to organize living things so as to gain clarity about how a particular living thing differs from other living things. This can be really confusing and doesn't answer the basic question, "Who am I?"

Animals belong to the grouping *Animalia*. Our family dog, Duke, has a scientific label that makes his identity more complete — *Canis lupus familiaris*. Living things are categorized scientifically by genus and species. The genus, or generic name, puts living things into broad categories which is further defined by a species. Us humans are known as *Homo sapiens*.

Note that the genus is capitalized. Just one of the rules for naming things.



Us *Homo sapiens* tend to also have "family" names that identify us with a particular biologically, related group of *Homo sapiens*. Depending on how we feel about the family of our origin we may choose to downplay this part of our identity or to lift it up when our family name can open doors. With advances in discovering family lineage through our DNA there has been a wave of interest in finding out more about who we are in terms of where our ancestors may have lived in past centuries. We are naturally fascinated by our identity "Who am I?" is a very popular question.

But naming us does not define us. While the name that people use to get our attention matters, particularly the name that our momma used when we were about to be scolded, our name doesn't really tell us much about who we are. There is much more to our identity than our name. There is much more to our identity than our DNA when we consider that we are much more than a physical being.

Many people turn to creation stories for clues as to who they are. In fact, identity is so important to humankind that we find creation stories in every culture. From Australia to Egypt and from India to the descents of the Mayan culture, there is no shortage of stories that help to explain who we are through the perspective of how did we get here. Our faith tradition turns to the Book of Genesis in our collection of sacred scriptures that we call the Bible.

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are enforced selectively. 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 also does not mention women. They were considered property. The editors of Deuteronomy were men. Circle-dwelling men. 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.

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Volume 19 Issue 2
June 2, 2019

Special points of interest:

>>> UMW will be meeting Thursday, June 6th at 1pm in the Wesley Room.

>>> Kearsley Park Neighborhood Assoc will Tuesday, June 4th from 7-9:00pm in the Wesley Room.

>>> Worship Committee will meet on Monday, June 10th at 6pm in the Asbury Library.

Included (There are no exceptions)

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. The laws

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Included (There are no exceptions)...cont. from page 1

When Jesus Christ shared a meal with His followers on the night of His arrest He spoke of a new covenant (Luke 22:20). The Messiah came not to condemn the world but to save the world (John 3:16). This new covenant was a covenant of inclusion. Throughout Jesus ministry He went to the corner-dwellers and invited them into community. The new covenant was no longer a circle that included only those persons that fit a particular specification. The new covenant was a universe of creation that all belongs to a loving God who was willing to live among humanity in order to reconcile all of creation with God's self.

It is not our responsibility to "fix" other people. This is the role of the Holy Spirit. It is our responsibility to invite and to teach what it means to be a Christ follower. We too often take our role as teachers to mean that we are to tell people who to love. We too often take our role as teachers to be a role of condemnation in an effort to persuade others to live the way we live. We are also a work in progress and in my experience God uses other people to teach me as well.

Identity... cont. from page 1

In our tradition, before there was anything, there was God. And God decided to make room for something new and created the world by speaking the world into existence. And after creating the world with all of its wonderment including the sky, clouds, seas, plants and animals, God created humankind. Later translations take the Hebrew word for human and make it a name for the first man (Adam). This allowed the church to teach that man came first and then came woman with less confusion. This decision has also been used to do great harm, but this is a later article.

There are two creation stories in the Book of Genesis. The first creation story doesn't go into detail about the first humans (Genesis 1:26-30). Only that God created two humans initially. Male and female. The use of the conjunction "and" makes for an interesting discussion about gender.

First, our most effective teaching involves what we do and don't do rather than our verbal instructions that comes with correction. When we live as faithful disciples by loving others unconditionally we are teaching how to be disciples. Salvation is not about meeting some standard of behavior. Salvation is about a transformation from a person who lives for the benefits that the world offers into a person who lives in harmony with Creation.

In the Book of Acts we read about an encounter that Philip has with a foreigner. The man is from Ethiopia. The man is also a eunuch. We don't know much else about the man except that he clearly misses out on the rules of Old Testament qualification for inclusion. And that he had traveled to Jerusalem to worship God. So is it possible that Temple security was already making exceptions to some of the rules from the ancient past? Or was the man turned away at the door or asked to leave?

We read that the encounter between Philip and the Ethiopian man was orchestrated by the Holy Spirit. This

Were the first humans that God created, and all of the humans that followed, both male and female? This makes more sense than the traditional ideas that men are men and women are women despite obvious evidence that men have feminine traits and women have masculine traits. But this is the subject of a later article.

A 2nd account of God creating humankind appears in Genesis 2:7-25. In this story God first creates one human ('*adam* - which simply means human) and then decides that this first human needs a suitable companion so as not to be alone. So God creates animals and then introduces the human to the animals and marvels at the human's choices of names for the animals. But none of the animals were a suitable partner (Genesis 2:18-20). So God forms a partner who will share not only in the work to be done but in all aspects of

was not a coincidental meeting. When Philip was encouraged to move closer to the man he could hear him reading from Isaiah. Philip began their conversation with a question. Philip asked him if he understood what he was reading. And the Ethiopian's response would change his life forever.

"How can I understand unless someone explains it to me?" the Ethiopian man asks Philip. And with that invitation Philip began to testify about what he knew about Jesus Christ. There is nothing about Philip asking about the man's sexual practices or gender identity. Nor did Philip ask about the man's politics or whether he carried documentation. We read that Philip shared the good news with him.

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their life together.

This 2nd human, in the Hebrew scripture, is called '*ishshah* This Hebrew word, which English translations substitute Eve, has as its root two different words that both mean "man" although in this context it makes sense that God created a human with reproductive organs that differ and allows for more humans to be created without God doing surgery. And it makes sense that in order to reproduce it requires two humans with the right equipment. But not all humans and not all human relationships result in children. And not all humans are born either male or female in their entirety, but these facts are for a later article.

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Identity..cont. from page 2

This week’s message is titled *Identity*. Our subtitle is a question, *Who are you?* But in our case, identity is not about which part of the reproductive cycle that we are built for, or even whether we have reproductive organs at all. For identity is much deeper than physical attributes. When we contemplate the question “Who am I?” we may look into a mirror but even then we hope that our eyes can see beyond the image looking back at us. We want to see into our own soul that is not flesh at all, but spirit.

So for the question of identity we must do the same. And our starting point is also found in the creation stories of Genesis. In the 2nd Genesis story the first human is formed from the dirt and brought to life by God’s breath. But in the 1st creation story we find a bit more detail about the specifications God chose for humans. God created human in God’s own image. While this still leaves a lot to our imagination as we wrestle what God’s image might be, We do have God’s incarnation as human in Jesus Christ as a model for humanity. We were created to be an image of Jesus.

So what does this say about our identity? First, we can be clear that our physical appearances have little or nothing to do with our identity in terms of specificity. We look different from one

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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

Elaine Lamoreaux	Mary Nations
Mary Russell	

Included (There are no exceptions) ...cont. from page 2

And the Ethiopian asks another powerful and life-changing question. “What is to keep me from being baptized?” And the Philip’s response was not to enroll the man in a new member class or to ask him questions about his lifestyle or whether he lived with another man or preferred men. Some manuscripts state that Philip added a condition of belief with all of his heart. Perhaps this was a later addition. Perhaps religious leaders were already moving towards this idea of a center-pivot irrigation system of inclusion.

The official replied, “How can I understand unless someone explains it to me?”

Acts 8:31

But what we know is this. A man who at one time would have been excluded from living in community with the people of God was invited without condition to become a follower of Jesus Christ. Philip did not interrogate the man. Philip did not set conditions. And Philip did not tell the Ethiopian that he would have to commit to anything in particular. It seems to me that Philip trusted in the power of the Holy Spirit to work on the man from the inside out.

I suspect that one of the biggest fears that we share in our common humanity is whether we will be loved for who we are. Most of us, likely all of us, hold back as a result. We live in a constant state of play acting. Pretending to be the person most likely to be accepted by others. Rejection attacks our very core so we avoid it whenever possible.

But this is not what was intended for the kingdom of God. A community where everyone is accepted and loved. A community of former rejects, now accepted by the one

who matters most.

During these past few weeks at Asbury we have been on a journey of inclusion. My goal was for us to

It seems to me that Phillip trusted in the power of the Holy Spirit to work on the man from the inside out.

expire some of the outer edges of whatever imaginary boundaries each of us might have in place for our community. And then to cross those boundaries into new territory. My hope was for us to explore the corners of our neighborhoods seeking out persons who may have been excluded from community because of who God created them to be.

Next week we will explore another well-known, but often confusing story about exclusion. And once again, Jesus crosses the boundaries of exclusion in order to breakdown walls and include the excluded into the kingdom of God. Jesus demonstrated what love does.

We are not defined by what others claim to be true about the kingdom of God. Our source is scripture. What may set us a part, perhaps to the point of being excluded from other communities, is that we read and interpret scripture through fresh eyes, open minds and open hearts. Realizing that we too keep secrets about ourselves from others for fear of rejection. But knowing that we are not rejected by God. Jesus knows us completely and loves us just as we are.


Worship at Asbury Church is on Sunday’s at 10:30 am. This week’s message will be delivered by Pastor Jeff. Cyndi and I will be back next Sunday.

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

Meet Nadia Bolz-Weber who is also the Rev Nadia Bolz-Weber. Nadia is a writer, a mother and a Lutheran pastor who founded a church that is called The House for all Sinners and Saints. And Nadia has a calling that she takes own with a passion. Her calling is to take the good news to persons who have been sent to the corners by the church left to believe that somehow God made a mistake when creating them. Her passion is to speak the truth to powerful, but misinformed church leaders and pastors who preach a gospel that isn't good news for a large number of people.*



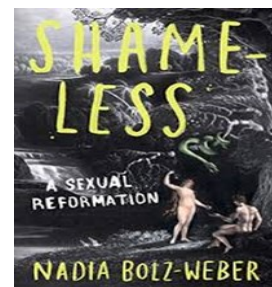
When Pastor Nadia speaks about her passion and her role as pastor she notes that "being a preacher is like having a not-very-interesting mental illness." But she goes on to say that the biblical story offers a great deal of clarity when we manage to read it with fresh eyes and leaving our own garbage by the curb. Welcome to Nadia's latest book, *Shame-less*.

Our book club began reading and discussing this book over the past couple of weeks. There are still copies available and there is one waiting for you to join us. *Shame-less* takes us into the corners where people have been left out of the circle drawn by churches and offers a more grace-filled way to interpret scripture. The purpose is not to change scripture to fit our preferences. Our purpose is to faithfully interpret scripture so that we are better able to fulfill God's purposes for each of us.

Each generation of believers are called to read scripture and to faithfully seek the will of God. Scripture is not crystal clear. And the church has made numerous erroneous interpretations over the centuries. And we continue to do so. The question is whether we can learn to offer the grace and love that God has offered each of us. Whether we live in the center or in the corners.

The Amazon websites describes Shame-less this way:

Christians are obsessed with sex. But not in a good way. For generations countless people have suffered pain, guilt, and judgment as a result of this toxic fixation on sex, the body, and physical pleasure. In the follow-up to her celebrated New York Times bestseller *Accidental Saints*, Bolz-Weber unleashes her critical eye, her sharp pen, and her vulnerable but hopeful soul on the caustic, fear-riddled, and religiously inspired messages about sex that have fed our shame.



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

I hope that you will join us for frank, but sensitive discussions about the topics of gender, sexual orientation and a way forward for the church to offering healing rather than harm to persons that don’t fit traditional mold.

Our conversations come out of both our shared and our differing beliefs which often lead us into new insights about ourselves, our world and our God. I am grateful for all of the individuals who have made this an every week item on their schedule. Our current worship series, *Chosen*, will parallel our discussions in a number of ways.

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

* Bolz-Weber, Nadia. *Shameless - A Sexual Reformation*. New York: The Crown Publishing Group, 2019.

Coming up this week

- June 3 Mon** 5pm Youth Choir
7pm Flint Jubilee
- June 4 Tues** 10am-2pm Water Distribution
6pm Community Gospel Choir
7-9pm Kearsley Pk Neighborhood Assoc
- June 5 Wed** 12Noon Pastor Book Club
6pm Beginners Bible Study
6pm Youth Group
- June 6 Thu** 1pm UMW
4:30-6pm Gaming as Education
6pm Worship Band Practice
- June 7 Fri** 10am-2pm Asbury Cafe Open
6:00pm Asbury Youth Group
- June 8 Sat** 10am-12N Japanese Jiu Jitsu
- June 9 Sun** 8am-10am Japanese Jiu Jitsu

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

**Last Week for Worship
Attendance Offering \$ 829**



We lost another long time member of Asbury this past week.
Please keep the Aldrich family in your prayers.

Bob Aldrich, who passed away May 27th.

If anyone wishes to send cards to the Aldrich family, you may send
to the following address:

Carolyn Aldrich 2383 Fairlane Burton MI 48509

Also, keep in your prayers all the other families who have love ones
in nursing homes or home ill.



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

You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous.

Psalm 139:13 (NLT)

NOTES FROM WORSHIP

QUESTIONS FOR LIFE GROUPS

1. Read Psalm 139:13 this week's article titled *Identity*. What images come to mind? In what ways does the text or article appeal to you? Have you ever struggled with your identity? In what ways?
2. This week our focus is on identity. We are identified by our physical characteristics, our roles (father, mother, brother, sister, etc) and a host of other ways including what we do. But this is not who we are. When God created us God declared creation "very good" yet sometimes we worry about God's standards. Yet God made us in God's image. What does this mean for you?
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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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.

Identity ...Who are you?..cont. from page 3

another. And we each look different than what we can imagine that Jesus looked like. So while our identity may be influenced by our physical attributes this is not our identity, but more of a way for us to identify each other in a line up.

We may look into a mirror but even then we hope that our eyes can see beyond image looking back at us.

Nor can we go below the surface, below the skin, for our identity. While we mostly have a common set of organs that allow our body to function there are nuances among each of us. I don't have an appendix but I have tonsils. Some of us have both and some of us have neither. Some of our organs are critical for life as we prefer to live it but they have little to do with our identity. We must go deeper. Not physically deeper but spiritually deeper.

We are oftentimes identified by our actions. I am in agony over the amount of theft that takes place in our community. But as much as I want to call those who are committing the theft thieves, I realize that "thief" is not who they are. Theft is the sin they committed. But more about theft in a later article since stealing has become an epidemic in our neighborhood and a major drain on our time, resources and our souls.

Identity, I have concluded, lies beyond what we look like, our internal organs, our gender or what

we do or don't do. My vocation is clergy but I also lead a non-profit. I am a husband, father and friend. I am a believer and I am a resident. I have numerous roles. I have my roles in common with others. But none of these roles identify although my role as believer does give me clarity over who I am.

You are who God created you to be and God didn't choose to use an inferior design. Rather, God chose to use God's own image to make you who you are. And throughout our creation story we read that God said that "it is very good." After all, creation was reflecting God's very image. And so do you reflect God's very image.

I am convinced that our identity is eternal. Our identity cannot be taken away nor can our identity be tarnished or changed and definitely our identity cannot be changed by another person. We are exactly who God created us to be and no matter what we may do or others may do to us we are still who God created us to be. We may choose to steal from another person. We may choose to inflict harm on another person. We may be stolen from or we may be harmed by someone. But we are still that part of creation that God said is "very good."

This is helpful on those days when we feel like we are damaged goods. It is helpful to know that who we are, our identity, is intact and is not damaged. And it is helpful to know that whatever

damage may have been done by others to our physical body and to our emotional well-being, even this damage will be no longer. God loved humankind and all creation enough to live among us. And to bring a message of good news for all persons that God's image is intact and that whatever separation from God that we might be feeling does not need to continue.

God knitted you together in your mother's womb and gave you your identity. You are a reflection, an image, of the Creator. And your identity is very good. Knowing this, isn't it a good thing to admit to God that this is comforting? Isn't it a good thing to show your gratitude that God chose to create you in God's own image?

We worship God because we realize that God not only created us but that God wants us to never be lonely. To never be in distress. To know that we are loved by our Creator. And we gather together to both support one another and to worship God together. I hope that you will join us this Sunday, and the next to do just that. To worship the One who knitted you together so that you will be wonderfully made.

Worship at Asbury Church is on Sunday's 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