

ASBURY CIRCUIT RIDER

Redeemed (Breaking free of the religious demons)

Our text for this week is from the Gospel of Luke 8:26-39. I'm not sure that I have ever read an interpretation of this week's



text that comes close to the one that I propose to be a divine insight into this text. Interpretations vary but essentially portray this story as Jesus encountering a man possessed by demons. The man is isolated from his community because of his behavior as a result of the demons. Everyone is innocent except for the demons. There is no support in traditional interpretations of the text for criticizing the community. Isolation was their only recourse against this mad man.

And the last word in my first paragraph is the label for the lack of innocence — “man” is never completely innocent. Just as we all tell less than complete truth.

I believe that I am called to reinterpret this text against the grain. In my interpretation the demons are still in the wrong. But who are the demons? Traditional interpretations connect the symptoms of the man's behavior and the consequences of the man's isolation to the demons which are presumed not to be connected to humankind but to satanic forces that oppose the rule of God. Which oftentimes means the rule of order or more to the point, how to control the behavior of others to suit our desires.

The man is isolated. He is in the corner, using our first week metaphor of a center-pivot irrigation system. But did he get there by his own choice? Not if we blame the demons which I'm inclined to do in harmony with other interpretations. It is the demons. But again,

who are the demons? In our irrigation metaphor we compared the church to the center of the system and the dispersment of the good news, or worse, God's grace. Controlled by this central source of power who claim to be the church and to represent God.

But it seems that too many people go to the corners to escape what feels more like acid than pure water. People escape the reach of the church's testimony because it burns rather than soothes.

So Jesus encounters a man, ostracized by the church. The man's reaction to his isolation is anger coming from deep hurt. The man has concluded that he is not redeemable. That he cannot be saved. The hurt is coming from deep inside and the man feels powerless to confront it. He is a corner dweller. An outsider to the church

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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 9

June 9, 2019

Special points of interest:

>>> Leadership Team will be meeting on Monday, June 17th at 6pm.

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

>>> Coming soon : Vacation Bible School—Summer Bible Camp at Asbury UMC. (see flyer inside this newsletter)

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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

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.

Redeemed... *cont. from page 1*

The community from which the man is isolated is the community of faith. But the demon within is the man's believing a lie. The lie that the man believes is that he needs to change before he can be saved.

The truth is that the man need nothing more than to meet Jesus face to face rather than be introduced to the Jesus as presented by the community who ostracized him. Jesus removed the demons and sent them to live with the pigs. What a wonderful metaphor Jesus offers us for people who condemn others.

In freeing the man from the dogma that condemned him Jesus is also freeing his community from the demons of fear and hatred. Jesus replaces the community's twisted view of diversity with clarity. Not foresight but insight. And not perfect wisdom. A better informed view of God's kingdom. The community, with new freedom and energy that is no longer displaced by

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

condemnation of the different. Now the faith community is able to thrive.

While the church was the source of their pain, the church can also be the source of healing for the victims and the perpetrators.

But Nadia insists that while the church was the source of their pain, the church can also be the source of healing for the victims and the perpetrators.

By reinterpreting our ancient texts, just as been done in every generation, is an important part of our journey together. I hope that you are not offended by my creative interpretation and if you are, I will pray for both of us.

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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Redeemed..cont. from page 2

A Retelling of the Text

Jesus and His disciples crossed the lake and stepped ashore where they were met by a man from the local community. As a youth the man lived in the community. But once the man realized that he was different than the other men around him and told a friend, word spread that he wasn't right. The man tried to explain. Yes, he was a born as a man physically but he was different. He felt much more like a woman. When he was being himself he acted much more like a woman. He was a woman within a man's body.

The townspeople claimed the man had demons in him. Eventually, his self-loathing took it's toll. He moved to a cave outside the town where people would leave him along. The taunting continued to haunt him. Occasionally, children would come to his cave and call him names that they had heard from adults.

But what hurt the man the most were the words of his pastor. The man had grown up in the church. The pastor had baptized him as a youth. He felt at home whenever he attended worship or youth group. His pastor was the first adult he told after telling his best friend. The pastor's words still bounced inside his head like an echo. "You must put these thoughts out of your mind or you will be forever condemned. Your salvation depends on it."

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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.*



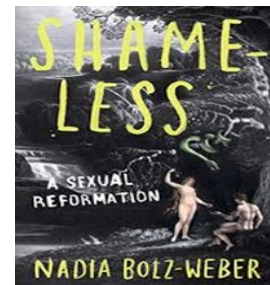
When Pastor Nadia speaks about her passion and her role as pastor she notes that "being a preacher is like having a not-very-interesting mental illness." But she goes on to say that the biblical story offers a great deal of clarity when we manage to read it with fresh eyes and leaving our own garbage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

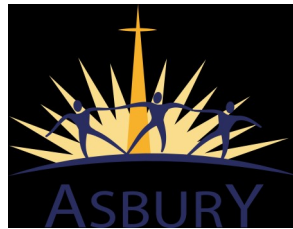
- June 10 Mon** 5pm Youth Choir
6pm Worship Design
7pm Flint Jubilee
- June 11 Tues** 10am-2pm Water Distribution
6pm Community Gospel Choir
- June 12 Wed** 12Noon Pastor Book Club
6pm Beginners Bible Study
6pm Youth Group
- June 13 Thu** 4:30-6pm Gaming as Education
6pm Worship Band Practice
- June 14 Fri** 10am-2pm Asbury Cafe Open
6:00pm Asbury Youth Group
- June 15 Sat** 10am-12N Japanese Jiu Jitsi
- June 16 Sun** 8am-10am Japanese Jiu Jitsi

- June 16 SUNDAY**
9:30am Café Opens
10:30am New Beginnings
Contemporary Worship

**Last Week for Worship
Attendance 34 Offering \$ 528**

Vacation Bible School
Summer Bible Camp
at Asbury UMC

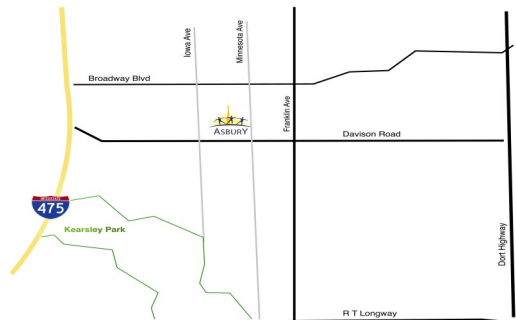
July 15th to 21th - Monday-Friday 6 pm to 8 pm
Saturday 11 am to 2 pm - Sunday 10:30 am to 11:30 am
Pre-school to 6th Grade



FlintAsbury.org

810-235-0016

info@FlintAsbury.org



1653 Davison Rd, Flint, MI 48506



Come create a musical with Ms. Sylvia Pittman—Vocal Teacher, Musician and Producer

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

When he saw Jesus, he gave a loud cry, threw himself down at his feet, and shouted, "Jesus, Son of the Most High God! What do you want with me? I beg you, don't punish me!"

Luke 8:26-39 (GNT)

NOTES FROM WORSHIP

QUESTIONS FOR LIFE GROUPS

1. Read Luke 8:26-39 this week's article titled *Redeemed*. What images come to mind? In what ways does the text or article appeal to you? Is Pastor Tommy's re-interpretation reasonable? Can you imagine what may have inspired such a radical interpretation?
2. This week our focus is on redemption — salvation. God promises us salvation through our belief in Jesus Christ. But what does salvation mean? In our text? What does salvation 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.

Redeemed...cont. from page 3

Salvation. This is what every one who believes in a God of salvation wants. Isn't it? This is what the man wanted but he simply could not get himself to change. He concluded that God had somehow made a mistake with him. He was one of the broken ones that could not be repaired. He was unloved. Even worse, he was unredeemable.

For a long time this man had worn "inappropriate" clothing and spent his time in the caves outside the city. When he saw Jesus, the man gave a loud cry, threw himself down at his feet, and shouted, "Jesus, Son of the Most High God! What do you want with me? I beg you, don't punish me!" The man was certain that Jesus was God who had come to punish him. Why else would Jesus be standing there in front of him? After all, the church had condemned him.

But Jesus said to the established church of His time, more than once, that they were the ones in trouble. That the blessed are the ones that the church doesn't think should be blessed.

Still the man has been condemned by many church-goers and had been a prisoner to their condemnation. It was as though his hands and feet were tied with chains. The only way he knew how to break the chains put on him by the demons was to go out into the desert. To live in the corners that the church was happy to forget

about.

Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" "My name is "hot mess." The man answered this way because he had been told this so many times it seemed. And as the church goers witnessed what was happening they begged Jesus not to send them into the abyss.

Coincidentally, in the telling of this story by Luke, there was a large herd of pigs near by, feeding on a hillside. And like the prodigal son who once wished that he could eat with pigs the

When he saw Jesus, he gave a loud cry, threw himself down at his feet, and shouted, "Jesus, Son of the Most High God! What do you want with me? I beg you, don't punish me!"

church-goers begged Jesus to let them live with the pigs — and he let them. From that point forward, they left the man alone and lived with the pigs. But we all know that eventually the whole lot of them are rushing down the side of a cliff into a lake. And if they do not turn their heads towards Jesus, they will drown in their own contempt.

When those who benefited most from the attitude of the church saw what happened they held a conference, issued a strong statement signed by each of them and preached even harder against inclusion.

But when the people began to understand what had happened — when they themselves came to Jesus — they found the man from whom the church-goers could no longer hurt sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed as the man deemed appropriate and in his right mind; and they were all afraid.

Those who had seen it told the other church people how the man had been redeemed. Then all the people from the condemning churches asked Jesus to go away because they were terribly afraid. Perhaps they were secretly worried that they had been living a lie themselves. But there is still hope.

So Jesus got into the boat and left and the man begged Jesus, "Let me go with you." But Jesus sent him out to tell the truth of the Gospel. Jesus said, "Go back home and tell what God has done for you." And so the man did. And lived happily ever after. But in a different church.

Have you listened to condemnation by people who claim to know scripture and responded by isolating yourself from the community that inflicted the pain? Sometimes getting out of town is the only way. But continuing to live outside of a loving, faith community is a bad choice. I hope that you will join us for worship each Sunday here at Asbury. We are not afraid to stand in solidarity with those who have been hurt and oppressed.

Worship is at 10:30 am. I lead a Bible study in the Asbury Café each Sunday at 9:30 am. Come join us.

Pastor Tommy