

# 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

Page 2

intense at times as our messages were intended to surface some controversial subject matter. Last week's message was uncomfortable for me. While I enjoy being creative with scripture it is unsettling for me when my discernment takes me too far off the well worn path. There have been a couple of news stories lately about hikers getting lost after venturing off the trail.

We began our discussions that we entitled *Chosen* with a metaphor. A center-pivot irrigation

Page 2

Volume 19 Issue 16

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### Special points of interest:

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

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

**HAPPY FATHER'S DAY  
TO ALL!  
ENJOY YOUR DAY WITH FAMILY  
AND FRIENDS!**

### Inside this issue:

Redeemed	1
Breathe—Life as Jazz	1
In Our Prayers	3
Asbury Worship Series—Grow	4
Pastor's Book Club	4
Leadership in Worship & Service	4
Coming up this Week	5
Updates—Summer Bible Camp	6
Asbury Farm to Table	7
Small Group Questions & Notes	8
Redeemed	9

## Breathe (Life as Jazz)

Apparently, we are not all musicians. At least, this seems to be the consensus. Otherwise, shows like *The Voice* would not have the public appeal that they have. We seem to be fascinated by each others talents only when a particular talent sticks out among the rest. But what if we are all created to be musicians?

from our Spring worship series, *Chosen*, to our Summer worship series, *Grow*. The past few weeks have been



This week we transition

## Breathe (Life as Jazz)...cont. from page 1

system that was designed to irrigate crops. This system provides life-giving water to those plants that are within its reach leaving a lush circle in the midst of less healthy vegetation. This metaphor for us was the gospel as dispensed by the "church" and not the gospel as lived out by Jesus and His followers. The plants that are left without water are apt to wither and die. The persons unreached by the gospel, those in the corners, are likewise left-out from the nourishment of the gospel.

Religion has a history of doing just this. Leaving out and leaving behind persons based upon a human-made system of boundaries. While these boundaries are negotiated through interpretation of the holy scriptures interpretations change over time and have never been static. Not in the first church, not in the 100<sup>th</sup> church, not in today's churches.

Finding perfect truth is elusive. And a claim to divine truth historically results in an oppressive power that is given out in a system of barter. Believers are told that they must declare their allegiance to the

## 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

belief in exchange for a ticket to heaven. Those who believe differently are excluded. I have been unknowingly a part of this. But God has gotten on my case about this subject. Now I know that I must respond to this situation with "Not on my watch." And the other leaders of Asbury have responded "Not on our watch."

**One day when many tax collectors and other outcasts came to listen to Jesus, the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law started grumbling, "This man welcomes outcasts and even eats with them!"**  
**Luke 15:1**

Our first step was to inform. To share insights into the beautiful diversity of scripture that is read differently based on our particular context. Again, the universal truth that we seek is known completely by God and revealed in scripture. And God empowers people, all people, to come together in living out these truths as we discover them together. And when we begin this process with the priorities that

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.

Jesus gave us that universal truth revolves around loving God and neighbor this influences how we read all sacred text.

One of the sacred moments that God has shared with me had a well-worn path at its center. I wrote a poem while I was in Kentucky with a bunch of high school youth to work on houses. After the physically worn-out teenagers were in their sleeping bags with the lights out I went out into the hallway to be alone with God and my journal. A poem came out of my pen that puzzled me.

It was a poem about a man choosing a well-worn path through life. The first three lines makes my point:

*I took a certain road that led me toward its end.*

*A way determined before me, by other men.*

*I did not question to where it led.*

The assumption that comes with taking the same road that others have taken before is that it must lead to a place where we hope to be. We often have a vision of the place the road leads to based on testimony or advice from people we trust. But people are vulnerable to repeating mistakes and the more people who repeat them the more accepted that mistakes are the norm. And when our mistakes harm people or the planet God raised up prophetic voices to shout "Not on my watch."

The funny thing is that when I wrote the poem I didn't really understand what it meant. The next day one of the mission leaders, a college student, sat down at the table where I was eating and asked if she could talk to me about a personal problem. She was struggling with what

## 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 man 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 its toll. He moved to a cave outside the town where people would leave him alone. 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."

Page 9



## 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	

## Breathe (Life as Jazz) ...cont. from page 2

felt like a call on her life to go to seminary. Yet, she had just finished a four-year degree and she anticipated that her parents would be disappointed after sacrificing for her to go to college. Her question to me, "If I was your daughter how would you respond?"

Perhaps she knew that I had a daughter attending college. Perhaps she just knew that I was a parent. I shared my poem with her thinking that it was intended for her. She politely read what I had written but had a puzzled look on her face. Hoping that the words would shed light on her dilemma I was let down by her reaction.

It would be a couple of years before this poem would resurface for me. The mission trips that I took collectively planted seeds in my heart that were growing. I had taken a certain road, one that was well worn. A road that was certain, I thought. Yet, the closer that I came to the place where the road led the more doubt that developed in my spirit. Am I really headed to where I hope to be?

Over the past several weeks we have been on a journey off the main path. We haven't gotten lost because we stayed within sight of God's Word as our map. Our choice to take a different way was prayerfully considered by our church leadership. Our collective discernment was that as a faith community we needed to do this. Our worship series was a first step towards our new destination.

Come to me, all of you who are tired from carrying heavy loads...for the yoke I will give you is easy, and the load I will put on you is light."

Matthew 11:28-30

The irony is that it was never the destination that was in question for us. It was the path. The road leading to

where we hope to go that was too well worn. Our destination is oneness with God through Jesus Christ. A destination that we have in common with Christians everywhere. While we also share that Jesus Christ is our way to oneness with God with other Christians there is an amazing diversity of interpretations of the road that takes us there.

I believe that this diversity is sacred. The diversity of creation is beyond my ability to comprehend. Each snowflake is different, each stone, each tree, each human is uniquely created by a loving God who seems to take great joy in creating diversity. God has an imagination that is beyond our capabilities to understand. And I believe that this diversely, created world, dances to a rhythm that we all can feel in our bones.

For many Christians, the Bible is absolute truth and they absolutely believe that they know what that truth says about God, creation and our relationship with God and creation. The problem for the rest of us is that they don't agree with each other. I also reserve the right to be wrong even when I am trying hard to be faithful. The problem for me comes in when I witness harm being done to people or any part of creation. Oppressive harm is what I am most sensitive to. This is how God created me.

I have said that I can feel power-imbances "in my bones." Like a joint that aches when it is about to rain, my body senses oppression well before my mind can recognize it. For me, this is a most inconvenient grace that God has seen fit to put into me. It is inconvenient because like the joint that aches until the rain has finished my bones ache until the oppressive force is removed.

Unlike rain that does eventually end it can seem that the propensity for humans to oppress one another is endless. Oppression was happening long

### Asbury Worship Series Grow Seed the Future

In the three synoptic Gospels Jesus tells a story about a farmer who goes out to seed his field. Farmers at that time scattered their seed by hand. A lot of us still seed this way for grass seed or cover crops. In Jesus' story the farmer was planting seeds for grain.

This farmer's field was not all fine loam. It was more like an urban farm with a variety

of soil conditions. A lot of clay and rocks. A lot of old driveway pieces and other items that don't belong in a farmer's field.



As the farmer scattered the seed in the field, Jesus noted, some of the seed fell

along the path. Soil that had been compressed by walking on it. While this was good for the birds that came and had a snack it wasn't good for the farmer's production. Like a couple of our fields some of the seed fell on rocky ground. In this case, the seeds sprouted but couldn't find room for their roots to provide moisture. And without deep roots the young plants soon dried up in the hot sun.

### 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 website 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

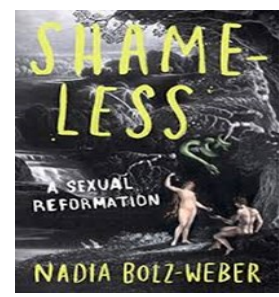
- Sylvia Pittman: Worship Arts
- Jim Craig: Leadership Chair
- Kevin Croom: Farm to Table
- Israel Unger: Business Operations

### 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— Grow (Seed the future)... Cont. from page 4****Book Club News.. Cont from page 4**

The Asbury Farmers deal with a wide variety of undesirable plants that we often refer to as weeds. And some of these weeds are quite aggressive. Some have very deep roots. Some are thorny like thistles and others send out vines that like to wrap around plants like tomatoes or strawberries. In our story some of the farmer's seed fell among undesirable plants which choked the farmer's newly seeded plants.

Fortunately, most of the time when our farmers put out seed it falls on nutrient-rich, fertile soil. And the seeds germinate into beautiful plants. And this happened in the story that Jesus told. Some of the farmer's seeds fell in good soil. And the farmer had a bountiful harvest as many of the plants produced large amounts of grain.

This story that Jesus told is not just a cute story about farming. Jesus told the story as a parable. This means that there are lessons to be learned. This story applies to other situations in life. There is a lot of symbolism. And Jesus taught that our insight into the meaning of His parables is a divine gift. The Holy Spirit helps us to apply the lessons that the parable teaches.

In this case, Jesus also offers an interpretation for His parable after first explaining why He uses parable at all. As a result of His explanation, there is little debate regarding the meaning of this particular parable. This can lead to the erroneous conclusion that there is nothing else to learn. Jesus says that parables confuse some persons and seem quite clear to others. Jesus said "they look, but do not see, and they listen, but do not hear or understand" (Matthew 13:13 GNT).

Insight is a divine gift that we receive out of our belief. We open our minds to the possibilities that God has in mind for us and surrender our bias to divine insight. A light bulb comes on. We come to realize something about God and our relationship with God that we hadn't understood before. We gain clarity. We experience insight. And we *grow* in our oneness with God.

On the other hand, Jesus explains that not everyone who hears one of His parables gains insight. Jesus says that this is "because their minds are dull, and they have stopped up their ears and have closed their eyes" (Matthew 13:15 GNT). Jesus is not calling those who miss the point stupid. They could be an absolute genius. A person who struggles to understand even the most basic subjects may get the point and the genius miss it. Insight is a divine gift that comes out of belief and not intellect. That is, faith that Jesus Christ is who scripture says He is.

This is puzzling for non-believers and for believers. This idea is not cut and dry. Just like the farmer seeding the field. While every seed has potential not every seed reaches its potential. Growth is a process that requires total commitment. A lot of crap happens along the way. Rocks, thorns, birds, well-worn paths, sun and rain. Things that we cannot control but may seek to control us.

How we respond to the world matters. Many responses are hurtful. Some responses are helpful. Left to our own we don't get it right often enough. Ask for divine help and some way, some how, things work themselves out. Like the musician playing jazz we come to feel the rhythm of the universe. The song that God has given creation. And beautiful music happens.

The further irony is that even after we taste the sweetness of divine insight our taste buds can become dull. We come to believe that we know what the scripture says. We make all of our decisions based on a static view of creation like we already know everything that we need to know. Our minds become dull and divine insight either ceases or is minimal. This happens to clergy in particular. We think "God hasn't changed. God is consistent." But life is jazz. The rhythm is constantly changing. We need to keep us. We need to listen and feel the beat.

While it may be true that God hasn't changed it is also true that none of us know everything that can be known about God. Our minds can't grasp God's greatness. But when we read a parable that perhaps we have read hundreds of time before. Even after we have written reflections, papers and articles about the insight that we gained. There is still more. God has more to say to each of us. If we will only listen. This is how we *grow*.

We start our new worship series on June 23. The Asbury Farms are already bustling with growth. Blair and Matt are harvesting every week. And new seeds are going in the ground every week. This is how our farm does what it was intended to do. To grow. Likewise, we need to harvest that which is ready and plant new seeds every week. This is how we grow.

I pray that you will join us for our new worship series, *Grow*. Also, our Summer Bible Camp (VBS) is coming up the week of July 15. Our summer youth program starts on Monday. Be sure to pass the word and find out how you can help. I hope to see you each Sunday for worship at 10:30 am. Remember Bible study in the Asbury Café is before worship at 9:30 am.

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.

**June 9 SUNDAY**

9:30am Café Opens

10:30am New Beginnings

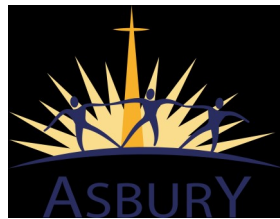
Contemporary Worship

**Last Week for Worship  
Attendance 31 Offering \$ 769**

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**Vacation Bible School**  
**Summer Bible Camp**  
**at Asbury UMC**

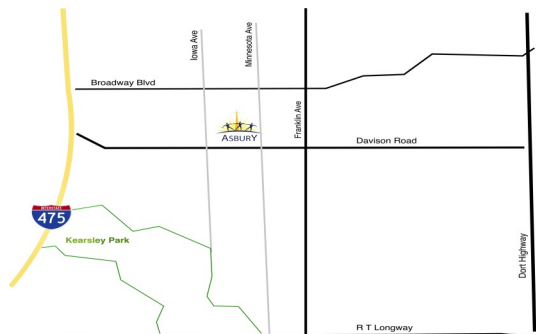
July 15th to 21th - Monday-Friday 6 pm to 8 pm  
Saturday 11 am to 2 pm - Sunday 10:30 am to 11:30 am  
Pre-school to 6th Grade



[FlintAsbury.org](http://FlintAsbury.org)

810-235-0016

[info@FlintAsbury.org](mailto:info@FlintAsbury.org)



1653 Davison Rd, Flint, MI 48506



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

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# 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

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

Luke 15:1 (GNT)

### NOTES FROM WORSHIP

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### QUESTIONS FOR LIFE GROUPS

1. Read Luke 15:1-7 this week's article titled *Breathe*. What images come to mind? In what ways does the text or article appeal to you? Have you ever felt lost? Where will Jesus find you when you are feeling lost?
2. This week our focus is on rhythm. Our breathing is a rhythm and with each breath there is an orchestra going on inside our bodies. Life can be thought of in this way. Like jazz. God breathed life into us at our birth and our role in life's concert began. In what ways do you see life this way? Do you sometimes feel out of tune or out of step with life? How does today's scripture help you with this?
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?

### Breathe (Life as Jazz)...cont from page 3

before God knitted me together in my mother's womb and it will continue long after I am gone, unless Jesus shows up for the final judgment. Like the competition that takes place between children when competing for attention humans compete with each other for power and control.

My prayer is that this is really a beginning of an emerging, inclusive community that welcomes all persons to the table of grace.

Pastor Tommy

As we come to an end of our current worship series my prayer is that this is really a beginning of an emerging, inclusive

community that welcomes all persons to the table of grace. My prayer is that God will help us each to focus on our own spiritual growth rather than try to fix others. That we will trust the Holy Spirit to do what it does. Our condemnation is not helpful and says much more about our own deficiencies than the person it is directed towards.

If I have offended anyone with my messages I am truly sorry. If anyone takes offense because they feel that condemning other people is necessary then you anticipate to be offended even more in the future. I will take you on even though I hate conflict. I have no choice. You are not God and you have no say in another person's

salvation or worthiness. And you are doing harm. Therefore, you are in the wrong no matter how right you are about the Word.

I pray that if you are already a part of Asbury that you will make it a priority to join us for worship each Sunday. You are greatly missed when you are not with us. If you have not attended worship with us I pray that God will lead you to us. We are far from perfect and we know it. But we try hard to faithfully love others.

We worship each Sunday at 10:30 am. I lead a short Bible study in the Asbury Café at 9:30 am. You can find more information about us on our website at [FlintAsbury.org](http://FlintAsbury.org).

Pastor Tommy



# Welcome to the Asbury Community

1653 Davison Rd  
Flint, MI 48506



Phone: 810-235-0016  
Fax: 810-235-0016 (call first when faxing)  
E-mail: [FlintAsburyUMC@gmail.com](mailto:FlintAsburyUMC@gmail.com)  
[CircuitRider@FlintAsbury.org](mailto: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