

ASBURY CIRCUIT RIDER

The faces behind the metaphors (Widows, Orphans and Immigrants)

Volume 20 Issue 17

May 17, 2020

The Bible is full of metaphors, words that we use as a stand-in to help us better understand complicated ideas. For example, we think of a widow as a person who lost their partner to death. They suffered the loss of someone dear to them. In scripture, a widow is any person that finds themselves thrown into circumstances where they need protection. Perhaps they counted on their spouse for more than companionship. They are vulnerable, and their livelihood is at risk.

In either case, the label widow does not mean incapable. A widow can be quite capable of taking care of themselves and leading others. However, widows are vulnerable because of the failure of the people and the systems

Older Together (The Wisdom of the elders)

Last week our conversation looked behind some of the biblical metaphors that make scripture applicable in all generations. Labels such as widows, orphans, and foreigners are much more than their simple definitions. They offer powerful lessons for us as we consider God's view on policy and practice.

Jesus often used phrases that elevated the importance of some ideas above others. For



An ambulance driver outside a hospital in New York...Credit... Spencer Platt/Getty

surrounding them. In scripture, God takes a firm stance alongside widows. In the first chapter of Isaiah, God reprimands the people. Calling for justice, God says, "See that justice is done— help those who are oppressed, give orphans their rights, and defend widows" (Isaiah 1:17).

The Book of Isaiah is a story of prophecy. As the

example, Jesus would begin a story with something like, "I tell you the truth." A reminder that



A resident at a nursing home in Kirkland, Wash...Credit...Grant Hindsley for The NY Times

book begins, God's people are struggling and feeling overwhelmed by calamity. As I read this chapter, I think about what we're going through and what we're learning. It was never about the merit or capabilities of widows and orphans. God condemned oppressive systems, whether political, economic, or religious, that resulted in the suffering of people. And God directs the call to correction squarely at anyone in a position to take action.

In our current series, *Risen*, we examine inequities highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic. In doing so, I can't ignore the political posturing, deflection and blatant untruths we hear in the daily

Page 2

what we hear next is both essential and divinely declared. And Jesus frequently cited examples of how the more vulnerable prevailed despite their disadvantages. And the underlying, foundational conclusion is that people matter a lot to God. All people matter.

In our current series, *Risen*, we pay attention to the inequities highlighted by the COVID-19

Page 2

Special points of interest:

*** All meetings have been cancelled until further notice.

*** Resources for LGBTQ Seniors on page 3 ...

*** A note from Connie on page 10 ...

Inside this issue:

The faces behind the metaphors	1
Older Together	1
In Our Prayers/Coming up this Week	3
Asbury Worship Series— Risen	4
Pastor's Book Club	4
Leadership in Worship & Service	4
Asbury Worship Series –Risen	5
The faces behind the metaphors	6
Join in the Conversation	7
Small Group Questions & Notes	8
Older Together	9
Note from the Secretary	10

Older Together (The Wisdom of the Elders) ...cont from page 1

pandemic. And research the issues behind the inequities with an ear for ways that scripture informs us, and helps us navigate the complexities. Ultimately, we look for the faces behind the metaphors found in scripture. Then we pray, reflect, and vote accordingly.

The average age of the population in the United States continues to rise. People are living longer, despite all of the obstacles. And so far, despite the COVID-19 pandemic. Is this making it even harder to follow one of the ancient laws found in scripture and conventional wisdom? The statute reads, "You are to rise in the presence of the elderly and honor the old" (Leviticus 19:32). And many of us do, when the older person is someone close to us.

You are to rise in the presence of the elderly and honor the old.

Leviticus 19:32

But as we age, our usefulness seems to decline. At least when we compare our older selves to the image, we have of our younger self. Yet scripture not only re-

The faces behind the metaphorscont. from page 1

quires respect for the elderly, references to the elders as influential leaders persist.

quires respect for the elderly, references to the elders as influential leaders persist.

In a 2017 article in Psychology Today, Dr. Lawrence Samuel noted that baby boomers are entering the ranks of the elderly, increasing this segment of our population by tens of millions. This means that the U.S. stands to benefit from their collective wisdom. Provided, of course, we heed the warnings of scripture. Science long ago validated the association between wisdom and aging. As humans get older, the mind further develops.¹

Dr. Samuel makes the case that older people are generally more proficient than younger counterparts in creative problem solving, life planning, and making future goals. Moreover, as we age, we have greater empathy, and we are more likely to recognize emotional clues and gauge the wellbeing of other people. Dr. Samuel calls this elderly superpower, 'emotional intelligence. "Memory worsens as we get older, but research also suggests that our strategy for the way that we process thoughts and information changes for the better."

Yet, the COVID-19 pandemic is cruelly reminding us that large numbers of the elderly live in conditions that are not becoming of the respect called for in scripture. In an editorial written by Richard Mollot, Executive Director of the Long Term Care Community Coalition, he writes that "Long before Covid-19, poor care and lax standards were widespread and well known." Mr. Mollot argues that many of the over 10,000 deaths in nursing homes, caused by COVID-19, were preventable.²

Page 9

So God includes all of us. None of us are excluded from the love of God. And none of us are excluded from God's expectations. All of us, including widows, eunuchs, orphans, immigrants, friends, strangers, family, and people we don't like very much. And each of us chooses. Either we accept God's grace by responding with love towards others, or we choose to oppose God and suffer the consequences.

In a conversation with Sylvia Pittman, I asked her to share her views on the inequities we know to exist and are highlighted by the pandemic. Sylvia is an artist, humanitarian, professional musician, and person of faith. And Sylvia is connected with people throughout the country. People from different ethnic and religious backgrounds.

One thing that gives Sylvia hope for all of us is the sense of coming together that she hears in people's voices. And the many examples of people paying it forward through their generosity and action. On the other hand, she is speaking to

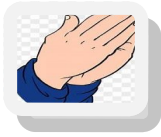
See that justice is done-help those who are oppressed, give orphans their rights and defend widows.

Isaiah 1:17

The stories that grab our attention cover real people rather than metaphors.

Chapter 56 of Isaiah begins by answering the question of who is included when it comes to God's favor. Again we find metaphors that confirm that God's favor is intended for all persons, all of creation, at all times. We uncover more metaphors, including eunuchs and immigrants. All people, whether they have children or don't have children, whether we know them or don't know them. All people, whether they are born in our hometown or immigrated here from another country. All means all in God's view of creation.

Page 6



In our Prayers

Curtis Young	Austin & Mary Suffle
Rachel Bastine	Miriam Watson
Norma Buzzard	Shirley Craig
Mary Lyons	Christopher Lewis
Barbara McIvor	Sarah Tanner

FRIENDS AND LOVED ONES WHO ARE HOMEBOUND OR IN NURSING CARE

Elaine Lamoreaux Mary Nations



Resources for LGBTQ Seniors

This is only a partial list, but follow these leads and discover available resources.

[National Resource Center on LGBT Aging](#)

[Human Rights Campaign](#)

[SAGE](#) (Advocacy for LGBT Seniors)

[Avenidis](#) (Reinventing aging)

Coming up this week

May 18	Mon	
May 19	Tues	10am-2pm Water / Food Distribution
May 20	Wed	No Pastor Book Club Until further notice
May 21	Thu	
May 22	Fri	
May 23	Sat	
May 24	Sun	



JOIN WORSHIP ONLINE

SUNDAY, MAY 17TH, 10:30 AM

FACEBOOK LIVE ([FLINT ASBURY](#))

OR

WEBINAR



JOIN BY PHONE

+1 929 436 2866

MEETING ID: 324 841 204

JOIN ONLINE

[HTTPS://ZOOM.US/J/324841204](https://zoom.us/j/324841204)

Asbury Worship Series Risen

Easter is over. I can usually tell by the clearance sales on Easter candy the Monday after. Was there Easter candy on the shelves this year? My avoidance of shopping during the pandemic kept me from impulse buying Easter candy. A small blessing in the midst of so much bad news.

Book Club News

We decided to suspend our study of our latest book, *God and the Gay Christian*, by Matthew Vines. This book is too important to exclude members of our group that have been unable to join our online discussion.



Meanwhile, with so much talk going around about the virus as a sign of the

end-times, our group chose to study the Book of Revelations. Last week, several of us got online using Zoom to begin our discussions. This coming Wednesday, and until further notice, we will



Governor Whitmer announced in an online town hall meeting, the formation of a task force that will guide emergency response and influence future policy. The justifi-

continue our discussions, a few chapters at a time.

While we still won't know whether there is a connection between the COVID-19 pandemic and John's dream revelation, we are certain to be a bit more knowledgeable about what is found in this mysterious, apocalyptic book.

Written somewhere near the end of the first century, the Book of Revelations was written during a time of persecution of Christians. The Roman Empire, led by Domitian, incarcerated, exiled, or executed persons unwilling to declare the Roman ruler as god. Jews and Christians living within the boundaries of the empire knew better.

cation for this focus is the recognition that, while COVID-19 does not check credentials before taking residence in a new host, systematic injustice means that some are more at risk than others. The reality is that racial disparities in health care exists in our state and nation.

The headline for an article in the New York Times reads: *As Coronavirus Deepens Inequality, Inequality Worsens Its Spread*¹.

Page 5

One of the many things about Revelations that makes it such a mysterious book is that the language uses symbols and codes, instead of naming people, places, and nations directly. As readers, we are left to marvel at the poetry, speculate on the imagery, and hypothesis on the meaning for the present time.

I encourage you to join us online for our Wednesday gatherings. We chose not to go on Facebook live since this is intended to be an interactive discussion. You can call in by phone, be heard, and hear what others are saying by calling (929) 436-2866, and entering the meeting ID, 482458815#.

We are a diverse group and we are delighted when new persons join us. I hope that you will join in on our discussion. We usually meet each Wednesday at Noon, but during the COVID-19 crisis we are meeting online at 12:30 pm.

You can contact our office with questions, by phone or simply type your question on our website's homepage — FlintAsbury.org

Pastor Tommy

Leadership in Worship & Service

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

Kevin Croom	Dir. Operations
Blair Neifert	Farm Manager
Matt Dee	Farm Operations
Israel Unger	Function to Funding
Kim Sims	Connections
Karl Collyer	Production
Katelin Maylum	Production

Asbury Staff

Rev. Dr. Tommy McDoniel	Pastor
Connie Portillo	Office Secretary
Sylvia Pittman	Empowerment Arts
Jim Craig	Leadership Chair

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.

Risen ...*Cont. from page 4*

The article argued that the spread of the coronavirus brought to light the connection between severity of impact and economic inequity. And the reality is that those of us nearer the bottom of the economic ladder are more likely to catch the disease, and also likelier to die from it.

And those who manage to remain healthy are likelier to suffer loss of income or healthy care as a result of quarantines and other measures. But the bad news spills over economic boundaries. Past research on influenza found that in an epidemic, poverty and inequality can exacerbate rates of transmission and mortality for everyone.

Our reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic certainly sheds light on the diversity of human nature. Our fall back labels, characterizations, presumptions, and the like, shatter under such stress. Instead, those characteristics which determine heroism and effective leadership become clearer. Rhetoric gets exposed for just what it is—thin layers of misrepresentation of facts.

Cowardliness and incompetence also share the spotlight. Along with years of allowing greed to determine policy. The competition for supplies is exposing systemic inequalities all over the world. Families, cities, states, hospitals, and countries are competing for life saving supplies. Money and influence uses power to competitive advantage. We all lose.

In our next series, *Risen*, we dig deeper into the inequalities that the COVID-19 pandemic is uncovering, and challenge ourselves to be among the ordinary, faithful people that keep the truth alive. How do our beliefs translate into actions? What difference can a few, faithful, but ordinary witnesses make?

It appears that most, if not all, of our time on *Risen* will be online. I pray that you will join us each Sunday morning at 10:30am. We plan to be live via [webinar](#), through [Facebook](#) live, or you can call (929) 436-2866 and enter the meeting number—324 841 204. We go live at 10:30am. You can find these links along with more information about us on our website at FlintAsbury.org.

Pastor Tommy

persons on the front line of the pandemic who witness, first hand, conditions that create further vulnerabilities for groups of people as a result of systemic problems. One example she cited involved a Native American community. We will hear more of Sylvia's experiences this coming Sunday.

"In Louisiana, blacks account for 70 percent of the deaths but 33 percent of the population."

Jamelle Bouie

Senator Bernie Sanders gave up his bid for the presidency, but his popularity remains. No other candidate raised money from as many individuals. But it appears that our nation may not be ready for such radical ideas. I'm not taking a side on whether his ideas solve our problems. But I agree with the headline of an opinion article that appeared in the New York Times recently that reads, "The Foundations of American Society Are Failing Us."¹ And so are our current leaders in Washington.

The Senator's article placed the blame for the disparities among us that the pandemic brings to light squarely on our policies and practices. Whether you love or dislike Bernie Sanders, his contemporary articulation serves as a wakeup call. Our policies and practices harm the most vulnerable among us — the widows, orphans, and immigrants. And not because they are less capable or less deserving.

In another article in the same issue of the New York Times, journalist Audra D. S. Burch highlighted a few of the civil rights actions taking place across our nation during the pandemic. These are not large crowds ignoring social distancing to protest policies intended to keep us safe. Instead, these are actions by handfuls of individuals keeping hope

alive for policy reform. Protesting policies that benefit the privileged while discriminating against others.

Ms. Burch writes that "The Covid-19 racial disparity in infections and deaths is viewed as the latest chapter of historical injustices, generational poverty, and a flawed health care system. The epidemic has hit African-Americans and Hispanics especially hard, including in New York, where the virus is twice as deadly for those populations."²

A few days earlier, in an article by Jamelle Bouie, we read that "In Louisiana, blacks account for 70 percent of the deaths but 33 percent of the population." Louisiana is not an anomaly. Similar disparities show across the country. Boule takes a definitive position on this issue, writing, "Black susceptibility to infection and death in the coronavirus pandemic has everything to do with the racial character of inequality in the United States."³

The article cites specific causes for the higher risks experienced by African-Americans. In his article, Boule notes that "Black Americans are more likely to work in service sector jobs, least likely to own a car and least likely to own their homes. They are, therefore, more likely to be in close contact with other people."

And these discrepancies have nothing to do with capability and everything to do with opportunity and historical policies that disenfranchised large groups of people. These are living examples of whom the metaphors found in scripture represent. The cases offered by Boule raise awareness of our obligations to a Creator who takes the side of the oppressed, standing against policies that result in oppression and the people who benefit from them.

I chose the title, *Risen*, for this series because, as Christians, we believe that God lived among people, was convicted,

and then executed. I believe that His conviction came as a result of systems, policies, and people who opposed this idea that privilege is held accountable for the wellbeing of the more vulnerable. But death did not and cannot stop God's judgment and radical redistribution of wealth and power. Executing Jesus did not stop the movement that He pronounced. Jesus has risen, and Jubilee is already underway. The good news is that we are all invited to join God in paying it forward.

For more information our series, *Risen*, see the article, *Coming up in worship* on our [website](#).

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A reminder that we publish this newsletter that we call the *Circuit Rider* each week. You can request this publication by email. Send a request to info@FlintAsbury.org or let us know when you send a message through our [website](#). We post an archive of past editions on our website under the tab, Connect - choose [Newsletters](#).

Pastor Tommy

¹ Bernie Sanders. "The Foundations of American Society Are Failing Us." © New York Times, April 19, 2020.

² Audra D. S. Burch. "Why the Virus Is a Civil Rights Issue." © New York Times, April 19, 2020.

³ Jamelle Bouie. "Why Coronavirus Is Killing African-Americans More Than Others." © New York Times, April 14, 2020.

Risen

Join in on the conversation

Indebtedness is as much an economic issue in scripture as it is about forgiveness. Jesus lived among and advocated for the poor and marginalized. In this series, we explore current examples of indebtedness, and our role as followers of Jesus’ teachings. What issues matter most to you.

For example, one member of our community noted that a person with a gender identity that differs from their biological identity are often marginalized. And it is not enough to avoid persons unwilling to consider that God created them with their identity. Some have been denied essential services during the Covid pandemic.

The pandemic is also shining a bright light on systemic racism. African Americans are disproportionately affected, exposing systemic racism. We serve a diverse community and a God that delights in diversity. What experiences or insights do you have that the rest of us need to hear about?

The people in jobs that help keep the rest of us safe are among the lowest paid. The pandemic is also shining a light on the inequalities of our economic and political systems. The economic separation between the small number of people with most of the wealth and those keeping us safe is large in the U.S. than it is in the rest of the world.

The pandemic is exposing the inadequacies in our healthcare system. Often touted as “world class” healthcare access and quality in the United States is based on economics. Yet fighting a pandemic effectively requires access to healthcare for everyone. Is this an issue that stirs your passion?

Minimum wage and compensation equity	Human dignity
Climate change	Voting
Incarceration	Clean and healthy water
Access to healthcare	LGBTQ
Quality and access to education	Other

Be sure to take a couple minutes to complete our [survey](#). You can find a link on our website’s [home page](#). The first question asked which topics are of interest that you are willing to research. This is the list of potential topics:

Several have already responded. If you haven’t completed our survey go to [Risen Survey](#) now and take our survey. This will really help us figure out which topics are important to our participants and who is willing to do and share their research.

For more information this series, *Risen*, see the article, [Coming up in worship](#).

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Life Group Questions & Notes

You are to rise in the presence of the elderly and honor the old.

Leviticus 19:32 (GNT)

NOTES FROM WORSHIP

QUESTIONS FOR LIFE GROUPS

1. Read Leviticus 19:32. Is this practiced today? Why not? What changed? Should this be our practice today? Why do you suppose God made this a law?
2. Read the article in this week's Circuit Rider, *Older together*. Are you age 65 or older? If so, in what ways do you identify with the information provided? Whether you are a senior or not, do you agree or disagree with the points made in this article? Why or why not?
3. How can the members of your group help you this week and on-going to help you to be more receptive to hearing and understanding the Word of God? Pray for each other to have the Holy Spirit bless you with more courage.

Molloy notes that there are 1.3 million residents in the roughly 15,000 nursing homes across the country. Citing specific examples, Molloy's article highlights one of the inequalities highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, 80% of the residents and staff in one Houston nursing home tested positive for COVID-19. The number of cases at this facility is four times the rate in the general population. This for-profit facility had a history of safety violation citations.

Older people are generally more proficient than younger counterparts in creative problem solving, life planning and making future goals.

The issue appears to be the enforcement of safety standards, which Molloy argues are adequate thanks to the Federal Nursing Home Reform Act of 1987. This bill was revised most recently in 2016 to require effective infection control and prevention, including handwashing and using personal protection equipment.

Nor is the problem due to a lack of profits from Medicare payments. Medicare reimbursements offer double-digit profits, according to the non-partisan Medicare Payment Advisory Commission. Moreover, Medicaid rates steadily increased over the past decade, according to the National Investment Center for Seniors Housing and Care. Nursing home profits are expected to further increase under a new federal payment methodology introduced last October.

Seniors, health-wise, are more vulnerable than those younger in age to COVID-19. And LGBTQ seniors are even more susceptible. According to a 2018 article on the Association for Healthcare Journalists website, this group of seniors faces higher rates of disability, physical and mental distress, and a lack of access to services.³

According to LGBT advocates, a lifetime of systemic discrimination and poorer health outcomes make older LGBTQ people more vulnerable. Moreover, LGBTQ Americans are more likely than others to work in industries affected by the crisis, such as restaurants and foodservice, hospitals, K-12 education, colleges and universities, and retail. Those make up 40 percent of the industries where LGBTQ people work, as opposed to 22 percent for non-LGBTQ workers.

Response to the pandemic has created greater isolation, increased health disparities, and lack of support for this demographic group compared with their heterosexual peers, according to a recent report from SAGE and Human Rights Campaign Foundation. Seegert, citing a recent story in the Dallas Voice, noted that the current mortality rate among LGBT elders from COVID-19 is 15 percent. Substantially higher than the mortality rate among the general population, or even among the elderly population.

Systemic discrimination and poorer health outcomes can make older LGBTQ people especially vulnerable.

This Sunday, we focus on our country's poor track record regarding adherence to biblical principals with regards to the elderly. As faithful followers, we are compelled to act. Consider how you can advocate for seniors. And be sure to include prayer in your options for how you can make a difference.

For more information our series, [Risen](#), see the article, [Coming up in worship](#) on our [website](#).

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Pastor Tommy

¹ Lawrence R. Samuel Ph.D. "Wisdom is nature's form of compensation for the body's insistence to age." © Psychology Today. Aug 20, 2017.

² Richard Molloy. "Nursing Homes Were a Disaster Waiting to Happen." © New York Times. April 19, 2020.

³ Liz Seegert. "National study finds LGBT seniors face tougher old age." Association for Healthcare Journalists. © July 18, 2018.

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.

A note from Connie ...

I Hope everyone is staying safe and only going out when absolutely have to. I will be stopping in the office here and there during the week to check messages and emails, but will be in on Fridays, should you need to call me for anything.

We are going into the 8 weeks of our stay at home quarantine, and it looks like our Governor has extended it **through May 28th now**. Please keep wearing your masks/gloves when around the public, and when coming into the building/church office.

If anyone has any questions, please send us an email at FlintAsburyUMC@gmail.com or call the church office 235-0016, and I will follow up with your concerns when in the office.

EVERYONE STAY SAFE!!