

# ASBURY CIRCUIT RIDER



## When? (Sheep, Goats and Decisions)

Our conversations for the past few weeks centered around the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, where the pandemic is highlighting inequalities in our systems. As a result, groups of people are disproportionately affected. Meanwhile, there is growing tension and division in our country.

Whether you are on the frontlines helping to save lives, take care of the dead, or some other essential worker, your service to others is crucial. And words fail us in expressing our appreciation. I'm wondering whether authentic gratitude requires more than words.

One of the many things that I love about my job is sharing what I believe to be

## 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

true about God. This is my not so secret recipe for coping with uncertainty. I recognize that God is the only sure thing. And as long as I can manage not to restrict my expectations too much, I can marvel at God's predictable unpredictability.



Sometimes I wonder if a lack of predictability has more to do with missing some of the pieces or clues that signal the answer to what's next. Predicting that people get anxious after

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

trying to stay home seems like a sure bet. Anticipating that people losing their job during this pandemic are eager to know what the future holds seems predictable to me. Who do they call first?

Who does not like predictability unless life gets so predictable that there is no variety? In the Old Testament, there is a story about people making their way from slavery to freedom, and eating the same thing every day. Guess what? They complained. And so would you and I.

I think it's fair to say that some variation is desirable. And I suspect that you and I differ in how much variety we prefer, and in which parts

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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

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Volume 20 Issue 24

May 24, 2020

## Special points of interest:

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

\*\*\* Zoom in was Zoom out last week, hopefully will not be a problem this Sunday on page 3 ...

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

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### 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-

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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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offered illustrations. I like the way that Jesus teaches. He wants us to think for ourselves, but with a dose of divine guidance. Our human nature isn't suited for grace and offering help, except when we dig deeper into that space where we discover and experience love.

One day Jesus was explaining what it will be like when the time comes that God holds us accountable for our actions. This is critical, Jesus told those first listeners. I have found that if people don't believe they need to answer for the outcome of their decisions, the results are predictably not so good. Statements like "Try it. What harm can it do?" are thinly veiled declarations of a lack of accountability.



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### When? (Sheep, Goats and Decisions) ....cont. from page 1

of our life we welcome change. Reliable, predictable, and always on time. That's what we hope for from others. Along with grace, when we fail. And help when we fall.

One of the problems with division is the scarcity of these last two preferences. These can be hard enough to deliver to the people who agree with us. So how do we decide when we show grace? When is it our job to help? Does it matter if I disagree with the person needing grace or help?

**When is it our job to help?**

The answer to these questions is cleverly hidden in plain sight, in scripture. My experience is that we look right at the answers when we bother to look at all. And we look right through to the other side. The side where we find our personal bias and an explanation that suits us.

Jesus often answered questions like these. But he preferred to answer with stories. Not riddles, but stories that





**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




**Zoom in was Zoom out last Sunday ...**

If you were frustrated by failed attempts to join worship last Sunday, you were not alone. I can only imagine what the confusion looked like on Facebook live. The folks in charge of the technology that thousands of churches rely on to connect us together couldn't explain it either. We knew we weren't singled out by a news headline that followed - Zoom investigating after U.S. church services disrupted by outages. Zoom claims to have over 300 million users so I suppose a glitch now and then is understandable.

Fortunately, Zoom did connect without problems to Facebook for our live broadcast and provided a recording afterward. The Facebook live recording was replaced with a cleaner version. You can find us on Facebook at [Facebook.com/FlintAsbury](https://www.facebook.com/FlintAsbury).

Go to our website to find an quick link to join us on zoom each Sunday. [FlintAsbury.org](https://www.FlintAsbury.org).

**Coming up this week**

May 25	Mon	HAPPY MEMORIAL DAY!	
May 26	Tues	10am-2pm	Water / Food Distribution
May 27	Wed	<b>No Pastor Book Club Until further notice</b>	
May 28	Thu		
May 29	Fri		
May 30	Sat		
May 31	Sun		



**JOIN WORSHIP ONLINE**

**SUNDAY, MAY 24TH, 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 Live Coming May 31st

What does life look like in the new normal? Forgetting for a moment that life is a constant sea of change and doesn't go backward, will we ever feel like life is back to normal again?

We come to the end of our series, *Risen*, on May 24, and begin a new

series titled simply, *Live*. Our pronunciation and emphasis differ depending on whether you read this title as a verb or an adjective. It's both in this case.



Will simple "open" signs become a nostalgic memory that we share with our grandchildren? "I remember when there was a time that people greeted each other with a hug." "Really," granddad, "Weren't they afraid of getting sick?"

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### Book Club News

If you are staying away from Asbury's Book Club because of zoom fatigue or you don't like participating without video, I hope you will get over it. While we are anxious to return to our building, we may find social distancing to be just as cumbersome as online meetings. Meanwhile, don't miss out on our conversations.

beliefs of other faiths. We each should speak for ourselves.



We finished our study of Revelations. Our conversations moved towards gaining a better idea of how the beliefs of people in other communities of faith differ from our own. If you suspect that your beliefs differ from ours, or you know someone who may be willing to share their beliefs, invite them to our conversation. None of us should attempt to represent the

With so much division over the basics in life, like getting our hair cut or going to a restaurant, public attention moved away from how others view God. Differences among religions seem less important when both groups want to know when tickets for Tiger's games will be available.

### 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 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 McDaniel: Pastor
  - Connie Portillo: Office Secretary
  - Sylvia Pittman: Empowerment Arts
  - Jim Craig: Leadership Chair

Yet, even in the midst of protests over whether the church should invite the public to get cozy together in the same space, our existential questions remain. Where is God in all of this? Where do you see God showing up? How do you know? Is God going to save us? How? When?

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](http://FlintAsbury.org).

Pastor Tommy

**Live (Coming May 31st) ...Cont. from page 4**

For most of us, there was always an idea of personal space around us. Persons coming too close crossed a line that set off alarms of an invasion of this space. Has this buffer zone increased to at least six feet, except for persons living under the same roof? Is this life in the new normal?

And then there is the protest. Persons standing up for individual freedoms using firearms to intimidate onlookers. Are they really suggesting that they will take another person's life over a disagreement on how far away I want them to stand? How about a million miles? Otherwise, my individual freedom to feel safe is under attack.

God sent me to the Gospel of Matthew for our theme where Jesus described what it means to live in the kingdom of God. Answering what the kingdom of heaven is like, Jesus tells a story. Didn't He always tell a story to answer our questions?



**Detroit Free Press. Photo by Paul Sancya, AP.**

What if we rephrase the question of how to reopen our country, our bars, and our shopping malls with a different question? What is it like to live in the kingdom of heaven? What should the new normal look like? How do we get there?

If you miss signing on for our conversation on Sunday, May 24, be sure to check out the video on our Facebook page. We end our series, titled *Risen*, with this story told by Jesus to answer this question. What is it like to live in the kingdom of heaven?

While we are working on answering the question of reopening, why not include the new normal that Jesus shared with His followers. Leave the weapons at home. While you are invited you have the freedom to choose not to come.

I pray that you will join us each Sunday morning at 10:30 am. 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 10:30 am. You can find these links along with more information about us on our website at [FlintAsbury.org](#).

Pastor Tommy

Jesus also like using metaphors. A metaphors is a thing that acts as a stand in for another. In this story, Jesus talks about sheep and goats. In this case, sheep and goats are metaphors for you and me when making decisions with better outcomes and bad decisions with less desirable results. But the point of His story addresses our questions about grace and help.

The story begins with the sheep and goats together in one place. And God plans to sort them out. Since this is God, a sheep can be a goat, and a goat can be a sheep. The distinction is based on whether the sheep or goat offered grace and help when Jesus was in need.

Jesus praises the sheep among us because when He was thirsty, hungry, naked, in prison, or sick, the sheep offered grace and help. And the goats didn't. Simple enough choice. I suspect that most of us would offer Jesus a drink, something to eat, the shirt off our back, or take Him to the doctor. I also think that most of us would not hesitate to help Him get out of prison. In fact, we would doubt that Jesus belongs in jail. We would conclude that something must be wrong with the system.

*I was hungry and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me a drink; I was a stranger and you received me in your homes...*

*Matthew 25: 35*

The irony in the story, along with the suspense, builds when Jesus tells the sheep that they are sheep, deserving a reward because this is what they did for Him. And they are confused. "When did we do one of these things for you, Jesus?" they asked. And His response is powerful.

"When you did any of these things for the least of us, you did it for me,"

Jesus says. I read His response as the key to answering the questions about when and to whom we show grace and offer help. Whenever there is vulnerability. Whenever there is a need. Whoever finds themselves vulnerable or in need.

I still remember discovering this story over a decade ago. I read the story many times before, but this time I did not look through it to see and hear what I wanted to see and hear. Instead, the story found a place, first in my brain. It rattled around in my head for a while. Eventually, it found a second home within me and settled into my heart. This story became a part of me. I think about it often. I wonder if I am a sheep or a goat. I want to be a sheep. Don't you?

We covered a lot of ground in our list of current events that scream at us through the carnage of what was once normality. But we didn't spend enough time on any one subject. For one, our right to vote is under attack here in Michigan. Even as Cyndi, Gabriella, and I return our application for a mail-in ballot, we fear that our vote may be in jeopardy. These are the issues that must matter to the church if we are to follow the Savior, who first told this story.

And this Sunday, we transition to our next series, Live. Your pronunciation and emphasis differ depending on whether you read this title as a verb or an adjective. You choose.

Our next series is a continuation of a journey we began just as COVID-19 became national news. Our journey started on March 1, the day after the first death from COVID-19 in the United States. We called our first series, Woven. God's timing was incredible. As our conversation went from sculpted to unraveling, we lived out this metaphor in life. Many of us felt like we were unraveling at the time.

With Easter, came Risen. Of course, what does it mean, amid a pandemic, that Christ is risen? This Sunday, we end our current series with this call to action from the lips of Jesus. And we begin the series Live on a Sunday when Christians around the world celebrate a time when the first church had its first membership drive, led by the very Spirit of God.

For more information our series, [Risen](#), see the article, [Coming up in worship](#) on our [website](#). You can find more information on Live elsewhere in this edition of our newsletter and on our website.

I invite you to join us this Sunday. 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 10:30 am. You can find these links along with more information about us on our website at [FlintAsbury.org](#).

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](mailto: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

# 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

*I was hungry and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me a drink; I was a stranger and you received me in your homes, naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you took care of me, in prison and you visited me.*

(Matthew 25:31-43 (GNT))

### NOTES FROM WORSHIP

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### QUESTIONS FOR LIFE GROUPS

1. Read Matthew 25:31-43. Is this story familiar to you? What is different when you read it this time? Did any of your experiences since the COVID-19 pandemic started affect your thoughts while reading this story now?
2. Read the article in this week's Circuit Rider, *When?* How important is predictability for you? How predictable was your life before the COVID-19 pandemic? How about now? How much predictability are you settling for at this point? How predictable is God for you?
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.<sup>3</sup>

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

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

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

<sup>3</sup> 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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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.

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### 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 10 weeks of our stay at home quarantine, and it looks like our Governor has extended it through June 12th 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](mailto: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!!

