

# 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

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

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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Empathy involves experiencing another person's point of view, rather than just one's own — and empathy makes it possible for us to help others because we want to help. Rather than helping others because of some other pressure. Yet, according to a study conducted by Professor Sara Konrath, as a nation, we are becoming less empathetic.

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## Empathy (Our Sons & Daughters)

Is there a shortage of empathy today? According to Kaitlin Luna, host of Speaking of Psychology, this is precisely what is going on. In a 2019 podcast, Ms. Luna stated that "Concern and care for others' feelings are virtues we seek to instill in our children." But research indicates that these attributes are sorely lacking in many adult Americans today.<sup>1</sup>

According to Psychology Today, empathy is the ability to recognize, understand, and

share the thoughts and feelings of another person, animal, or fictional character. Developing empathy is crucial for establishing relationships and behaving compassionately.<sup>2</sup>

Volume 20 Issue 31

May 31, 2020

## Special points of interest:

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

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

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### Empathy (Our Sons & Daughters) ...cont from page 1

As we begin our new series, Live, where our conversations focus on the new normal, we need empathy in large doses. But where and how do we draw upon this critical ingredient for creating a compassionate community?

Empathy involves experiencing another person's point of view rather than just one's own. And empathy makes it possible for us to help others because we want to help. Rather than helping others because of some other pressure. According to a study conducted by Professor Sara Konrath, we are becoming less empathetic as a nation.

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Bridget Quinn lives in a northern suburb of Detroit. In a New York Times article, she noted that "Empathy can feel really rare and hard to come by because everyone is so isolated and atomized." Ms. Quinn teamed up with two other young adults in the area, hoping to create a way for people to help each other get

through the COVID-19 pandemic. Their Facebook Group grew within days to include thousands of participants.<sup>3</sup> An encouraging sign that empathy can be found in abundance when we look for it.

In her interview on empathy, Dr. Sara Konrath argued that people either show the presence or lack of empathy when they go online. And people are generally who they are, whether online or not. In the case of the Facebook Group created by Bridget Quinn and her colleagues, empathy is expressed in persons using Facebook to connect in helpful ways.

Perhaps empathy can be awakened within each of us. After all, a complete lack of empathy is a strong indication of a more severe problem. A psychopath is incapable of feeling empathy. A condition requiring professional intervention.

In a reflection about the story of the first church, Eric Law writes that "We live in a world dominated by the voices of the powerful and rich, who use their power and money to influence our media and spread divisive information."<sup>4</sup> Intentional divisiveness is the antithesis of empathy.

Social media giants, like Facebook and Twitter, are caught up in this battle. How far should they go to police content? Twitter, in particular, is under attack by the president. His threats are in response to Twitter's decision to expose the president's blatant mistruths by adding a pointer for readers who want to know the truth.

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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

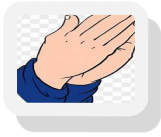
offered illustrations. I like the way that Jesus teaches. He wants us to think for ourselves, but with a dose of divine guidance. Our human nature isn't suited for grace and offering help, except when we dig deeper into that space where we discover and experience love.

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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**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



**Coming up this week**

June 1	Mon	
June 2	Tues	10am-2pm Water / Food Distribution
June 3	Wed	<b>No Pastor Book Club Until further notice</b>
June 4	Thu	
June 5	Fri	
June 6	Sat	
June 7	Sun	



**JOIN WORSHIP ONLINE  
SUNDAY, MAY 31ST, 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 Sunday, 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.

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#.

### 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

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).

- ### Asbury Staff
- Rev. Dr. Tommy McDaniel: 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.

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 groups question & notes

*I will pour out my Spirit on everyone. Your sons and daughters will proclaim my message; your young men will see visions, and your old men will have dreams.*

Acts 2:1-21 (GNT)

### NOTES FROM WORSHIP

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### QUESTIONS FOR LIFE GROUPS

1. Read Acts 2:1-21. This is the story of the creation of the first church. How are churches different today? What can we learn from this story?
2. Read the article in this week's Circuit Rider, *Empathy*. In what ways have you experienced empathy recently? What did empathy feel like for you? What did you do or not do as a result of feeling empathy?
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.



Law goes on to argue that we can feel defenseless against such overwhelming odds. Yet, this Sunday, we celebrate the beginning of the church. A day when a handful of diverse people, faithfully following Jesus Christ, gathered for prayer and worship. And God took action on that day, filling all present with a divine Spirit that gave them power beyond anything possible on this earth. They remained ordinary people, but with superhero powers.

**Your sons and daughters will proclaim my message; your young men will see visions; and your old men will have dreams.**

**Acts 2:17**

Their first leader was the colorful Peter, who often surprised on-lookers with his enthusiasm and lack of fear. On that day, Peter spoke words of truth that each listener heard in their own way. Peter reminded the crowd of God's promise that "Your sons and daughters will proclaim my message; your young men will see visions, and your old men will have dreams."

The Spirit opened the eyes and ears of everyone who chose to investigate the commotion that begged for attention. And this same Spirit is present today, orchestrating, empowering, and surprising anyone who dares to be courageous enough to believe that God is not done with us. Offering superhero power to ordinary people.

I thought a lot about this time in church history when ordinary persons began a movement that is so prevalent today. There are daily stories covering news about church activities as part of the conversation about life in a post-pandemic world. At Asbury, we are busy implementing changes in our worship center complete with disposable masks and hand sanitizer, in preparation for the new normal.

I thought about the first churchgoers accepting God's gift of empowerment and how their new normal emphasized the need to share resources and struggles. Their community was characterized by empathy. And I wondered how you and I can learn from their experiences as we move ahead into a new normal.

I wondered how these three individuals living a short distance from us feel about the prospects of a new normal built on empathy. After experiencing an overwhelming response to their request for people to help each other was a great success. People with resources to share are connecting with people in need of support.

How far is the distance from a Facebook Group that facilitates sharing from a community where every person has access to healthcare? How much empathy do we need to build a community where inequality is no more? Can you and I utilize divine superpowers to build a community that resembles the kingdom of God?

Let's be clear. The power comes not from within each person, but from the Spirit of God. The limitation of such power is that God's will determines how and when the power manifest itself. What if accessing superpowers begins with empathy?

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

**What if accessing superpowers begins with empathy?**

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Pastor Tommy

<sup>1</sup> "Speaking of Psychology: The Decline of Empathy and the Rise of Narcissism," © Psychology Today, Retrieved from: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/empathy>.

<sup>2</sup> "Empathy," © Psychology Today, Retrieved from: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/empathy>.

<sup>3</sup> Jennifer Medina. "Where Coronavirus Help on Facebook Is 'Inherently Political' ", © NY Times, May 28, 2020, Retrieved from :<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/28/us/politics/michigan-coronavirus-help.html?referringSource=articleShare>.

<sup>4</sup> Eric H. F. Law. "Spirit and Breath of Power," *The Upper Room Disciplines 2020: A book of daily devotions*. Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books. © 2019 by Upper Room Books.

# Welcome to the Asbury Community

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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 14th week 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!!