

# ASBURY CIRCUIT RIDER

## Speak (When silence is betrayal)

Emotions are running high across the world. Here in Michigan, life is searching for normality as the number of new cases of COVID-19 reached safer levels. And a couple of weeks ago, our conversations focused on our hopes for a new normal where systemic equities are at last the primary focus of our debates over policy and candidates. Our pleas insist on electing leaders who consider this to be a top priority and voting the rest out of office altogether.

But the brutal murder of George Floyd by a killer authorized by the very systems that we count on for protection moved millions

## Flies, Camels and Lemonade (Claiming the moral high ground)

I might as well get this out at the beginning since it's bound to come up at some point. I'm a hypocrite. I try hard not to be a hypocrite, but the truth is that I fail to do what I claim I want to do. Sometimes my actions don't reconcile with my beliefs.

I bought a used red truck a couple of years ago from an individual who



The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King at Riverside Church, New York, 1967. Credit: John C. Goodwin

of us from the safety of our homes to the streets. The intensity of topics around systemic inequality is boiling over. Despite attempts to divide us, the senseless killing of our brothers and sisters by misguided law enforcement officers united us. The time is now for action that results in the firing of any leaders holding onto

claimed that it belonged to his dad. I say "claimed" to suggest that I'm not convinced that what he said is a complete truth. Our relationship didn't start that way.



the old normal.

A classroom assignment offered by the non-profit, [RethinkingSchools.org](http://RethinkingSchools.org), caught my attention: Write the speech that Martin Luther King might deliver today if he were alive. Background for this assignment includes King's references to the giant triplets of racism, materialism, and militarism. And asks the students to consider how these giant triplets are at work in today's crisis? This is an excellent assignment for all of us needing inspiration for our particular role in bringing about a new normal.

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It is my nature in business transactions to prefer dealing with individuals and organizations I trust. I don't know a lot about trucks, except that some owners take good care of their vehicles and other owners, not so much. My rule of thumb generally is that if I don't trust the seller, I'm more likely to walk away regardless of my opinion of the truck.

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Volume 20 Issue 14

June 14, 2020

## Special points of interest:

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

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**Flies, Camels and Lemonade (Claiming the moral high ground) ...cont from page 1**

Trust is highly subjective. For me, you don't really earn my trust as much as you choose to break it. I prefer trusting people and do so when I really shouldn't. I suppose that rebuilding trust takes more time for folks like me.

That day that I looked at the red truck, I struck up a conversation with the seller. I explained that we needed a truck for our community. He also asked questions. And then he offered a commentary, telling me that he couldn't imagine how any pastor could vote for a candidate running as a democrat. When I asked why he felt this way, he responded, "Democrats are baby killers."

I assured him that I knew a lot of people who vote for Democrats, and none of them kill babies. This man self-identifies as a Christian. This bothers me. I don't want someone to think that I agree with this man because I also self-identify as a Christian. I feel the same way about our president and a lot of his supporters.

If they are Christians, then I must be something else.

The moral high ground is a space that we hope to occupy when we use arguments based on what we claim are universally accepted ideals for justice. Perhaps most of us associate these ideals with God's will for humanity. This is the way I prefer to interpret the moral high ground when I hang out there.



I purchased the red truck despite the person's misguided comments about people who vote for certain candidates. Several of the man's claims about the red truck turned out to be lies. Apparently, his religious beliefs don't include truth in business dealings. More likely, this man

suffers from a share humane condition that we call hypocrisy.

I am encouraged by the courage of the people around me. Particularly, those whose nature is to quietly serve and keep their own suffering a private matter.

Connie Portillo is one of those who quietly serve others. But in a conversation, I was privileged to have with Connie, she shared some of the pain inflicted by racial injustice that parades as acceptable. Moving to the U.S. as a child immigrant, her brownness, together with learning a new language, exposed her vulnerability to racism. Connie's story is far too familiar.

Kevin Croom grew up in Beecher. In a conversation, Kevin shared how blessed he feels that he lives and serves a community of racial diversity. As a darker-skinned black man with an athletic build, Kevin handles racial profiling in the same way he serves the public. Kevin speaks softly and allows the love of God to show through him. But I cannot do justice to speaking for Kevin. Nor do I need to.

**Speak (When silence is betrayal) ....cont. from page 1**

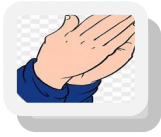
Our country struggles with systemic racism. And our claims to greatness are as empty as the thousands of mis-truths that come out as late-night rants on twitter, as long as racism continues. The difficulty of making the changes necessary to move us substantially closer to the ideals we claim is complicated by the other two parts of the triplet: materialism and militarism.

In 1967, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke to a group of clergy. The topic of his speech was concern over the role of the United

States in Vietnam. As he began, he played back the group's theme: "A time comes when silence is betrayal." Reverend King shared his own struggles with speaking out against this country's interference in Southeast Asia. As he dug within his own convictions, he realized that as a child of God, he had no other choice.<sup>2</sup>

Friends, we have no other choice. I am encouraged by so many people speaking out. It is time for us to speak. To speak out against policies and people that call for a return to the old normal.





**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



**A prayer for cooperation**

Free us, Lord, from our obsession with ourselves long enough to care for others; to be so concerned about the well-being of the human community that we don't have to worry about our place, our church, our class, our values, our vested interests. Help us to know the joy and freedom of putting all our trust in you. Amen. <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Walter Brueggemann. Five Talents' Response to the Coronavirus. © March 26, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://fivetalents.org/blog/2020/3/26/five-talents-response-to-the-coronavirus>

**Coming up this week**

- June 15 Mon
- June 16 Tues 10am-2pm Water / Food Distribution
- June 17 Wed **No Pastor Book Club**
- June 18 Thu
- June 19 Fri
- June 20 Sat
- June 21 Sun



**JOIN WORSHIP ONLINE**

**SUNDAY, JUNE 14TH, 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

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.

to represent the 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

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.

- #### 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.

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** ...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

Sylvia also graduated from Beecher High School. Despite the many gifts that Sylvia unselfishly shares with the world and her gentle nature, not everyone returns her love in kind. As a brown woman, Sylvia knows the sting and ugliness of discrimination. God also blessed Sylvia with an ability to love through the pain.

The writer of the Gospel of John and the 1st letter of John uses words translated as "love" more than any other New Testament book. Several times more than most of the other books. Words from the letter known as 1 John, is often quoted when it's time to speak love to a hurting world. God living among people was evidence that God loves creation.

The writer of 1 John pleads with us to love one another because love comes from God. "Whoever loves is a child of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love (1 John 4:7-8).

***Whoever does not love does not know God; for God is love.***

***1 John 4:8***

The events of the past several days offer us numerous illustrations that contrast the love expected from people who know God with the alternative. For example, compare the images of uniformed police officers kneeling, without a weapon in their hand, with the use of military force against protesters. Consider the images of thousands of demonstrators representing the diversity of humanity coming together to demand equality for all against a photo-op that disgraces a house of worship.

We don't have to look far at all to find the contrasts, but many of us must

dig deeper into our own vulnerabilities than ever before we can find the words that must be said. And even deeper before we can take the steps that must be walked.

I know that I am in good company when I turn to some of the speeches of the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. for inspiration. You see, I also must dig deeper into my own vulnerabilities, examine my own privilege, and find the courage to speak. And I was inspired by reading a transcript where Reverend King shared his struggles with speaking out against U.S. military actions in Vietnam.

Try as I do to speak and write in a way that moves people to action, I run the risk of falling silent from awe at the beauty and power of Reverend King's words. But I take comfort in knowing that the same Spirit that filled the most influential communicators among us also powers you and me. But we must dig deep enough within our own soul and empty ourselves of whatever barriers hold us back.

In the assignment to consider what Reverend King might say today, I first read what he had to say in 1967. I am also bothered by the scenes of contrast between love and hate played out in the streets of our nation. And I am disturbed by crowds destroying communities by breaking into businesses, looting, and setting fires. Yet, I don't have words for young men and women who are tired and frustrated by policies that treat them differently because of their skin color.

Reverend King spoke out against the use of power, resources, and people in Vietnam. In his speech, he repeated the warning from former President John F. Kennedy. "Those who make

peaceful revolution impossible will make violent revolution inevitable."

May God give us the words, the courage, the resolve, the intellect, and the ability to love our neighbor in sufficient quantities that violent revolution is unnecessary.

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

I invite you to join us this Sunday and hear from Connie, Kevin, and Sylvia in their own words. 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](#).

***Those who make peaceful revolution impossible will make violent revolution inevitable.***

***John F. Kennedy***

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

<sup>1</sup> Rethinking Schools began as a local effort to address problems such as basal readers, standardized testing, and textbook-dominated curriculum. Go to [RethinkingSchools.org](http://RethinkingSchools.org)

<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Beyond Vietnam -- A Time to Break Silence." Delivered April 4, 1967, Riverside Church, New York.

# 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](#).

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](#).

## Life groups question & notes

*You hypocrites! You give to God one tenth even of the seasoning herbs, such as mint, dill, and cumin, but you neglect to obey the really important teachings of the Law, such as justice and mercy and honesty. These you should practice, without neglecting the others. Blind guides! You strain a fly out of your drink, but swallow a camel!*

Matthew 23:23-24 (GNT)

### NOTES FROM WORSHIP

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### QUESTIONS FOR LIFE GROUPS

1. Read Matthew 23, paying close attention to verses 23-34. What do these words mean for you? Given the even of the past few months, and particularly the past several days, how might these words affect how you respond?
2. Read the article in this week's Circuit Rider, *Flies, camels, and lemonade*. Do your beliefs align with justice, mercy, and honesty? Are you a hypocrite? In what ways do your actions not follow your beliefs? What are some steps that you can take to change this?
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.



Hypocrisy is very much a part of the human condition. We say we believe a certain way and don't support what we say with our actions. For some, our problem is that we really don't understand what we say, or we lie about our beliefs. But most of us simply fail to act in ways that come out of our beliefs. Hypocrisy is not okay. We all should strive to do better.

More critical, hypocrisy is dangerous when leaders act in ways that are contrary to their stated beliefs. Hypocritical laws are also dangerous. Interpreting the intent of laws is the responsibility of our legal system. And we count on law enforcement to act in ways that represent the intent and letter of our laws.

The Preamble of the U.S. Constitution begins with five objectives. These objectives help clarify the intentions behind our laws. The first of these five objectives is justice. But how is justice determined? Many argue that justice is served when our actions are consistent with the law. Of course, this argument presumes that the laws are just and that the enforcement of the law is just. This is a dangerous assumption that clearly isn't the case today.

It's clear that the majority of us realize that the objective of justice inferred by our Constitution is elusive. Something is wrong with our laws and our systems. The moral high ground, in this case, doesn't really matter so much as the reality that people with darker skin are dying in confrontations with law enforcement. The deafening cry is to stop the killing.

Any attempt at occupying the moral high ground that defends unjust actions is hypocritical. And frankly, insulting, when said by a person self-identifying as a person who follows the teachings of Jesus. It's no wonder that the vast majority of youth and younger adults believe that most Christians are hypocrites. We earned this judgment by straining flies and eating camels.

Jesus was speaking to the crowds one day about the importance of our actions representing what we say we believe. He encouraged the crowd to be law-abiding. But He emphasized understanding the intentions behind the law as critical. And actions speak louder than words.

Calling out the hypocrisy of the leaders of His day, Jesus said, "You strain a fly out of your drink, but swallow a camel!" Who wants flies in their lemonade? No one, of course. Were the

leaders really swallowing whole camels?

The laws that Jesus referred to allow people to eat certain foods and avoid others. Flies and camels were on the "do not eat" list. The leaders claimed adherence to the letter of the law in formality and words only. Just before His statement about flies and camels, Jesus captures the real problem. He accuses the leaders of claiming the moral high ground by pointing to minor legal points.

What if the intent of the law is just, but the implementation doesn't work out to be just, at least for all of us? We are straining flies and eating camels. Jesus accused the leaders of neglecting the more important points of law, including justice, mercy, and honesty. The moral high ground claimed by the leaders was infested with flies, and no amount of straining would yield lemonade worth drinking.

*You strain a fly out of your drink, but swallow a camel!*

*Matthew 23:24*

Divine justice does not consider the color of our skin. God's moral high ground does not place a

# Welcome to the Asbury Community

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Flint, MI 48506



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E-mail: [FlintAsburyUMC@gmail.com](mailto:FlintAsburyUMC@gmail.com)  
[CircuitRider@FlintAsbury.org](mailto:CircuitRider@FlintAsbury.org)

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PERMIT #151

## 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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## Flies, Camels and Lemonade (Claiming the moral high ground) ...cont from page 9

higher value on human life based on economics, gender, or any other differentiation. Jesus consistently sided with victims of systems that treated persons differently and invited them to the front of the line. His actions included both corrective action and reparation.

Our nation is at a point where the moral high ground lies far outside our actions. The moral high ground cannot be claimed by leaders holding onto ideals that, in practice, discriminate against persons with darker skin.

Wherever our new normal may take us, our actions speak louder than our words. And whenever we lay any claim to the moral high ground, our metrics must include justice, mercy, and honesty.

Our journey towards the moral high ground begins with honesty. Once we admit our own hypocrisy, we are more likely to see where we fall short. And less likely to follow dishonest leaders and blindly follow laws without regard to justice.

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

***Any claim to the moral high ground include justice, mercy, and honesty...***

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Pastor Tommy