

ASBURY CIRCUIT RIDER

Volume 20 Issue 12

July 12, 2020

A Love Story (Wine, Water and Song)

According to the writer of John's Gospel, the first miracle Jesus did was to turn ordinary water into wine. I have read this story many times. Often while preparing to officiate a wedding when I will reference it as an illustration of God's interest in weddings. In this story, marriage is used as a metaphor for the relationship between Jesus and the church. Jesus is the bridegroom and the church is His bride.

Some translators use this story to emphasize that following Jesus has rewards beyond the spiritual. After all, Jesus dealt with the most basic of human needs from water to food to clothing. Practical, everyday needs. The idea that the first

recorded miracle performed by Jesus was the equivalent of a run to the party store to ensure the party did not end early leaves a lot of room for creative speculation.



Was this first miracle a warm-up act or perhaps foreshadowing? Welcome to week one of our new series, **Freedom**. Hopefully, the neighbors fireworks stash will soon be as empty as the wine jugs were in Cana on the night of that

of that first miracle. Our dog, Duke,, could use a rest from the every night explosions of firecrackers and rockets.

Democracy

It is a tradition in this country to celebrate our freedom on the 4th of July. A freedom based on a form of government that we call democracy.

Reinhold Niebuhr, in *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, writes "Man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible; but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary." I suspect that the framers of our Constitution believed this to be true. And a great experiment began that we call democracy taking shape around this idea of freedom with justice. **Page 2**



Please wear a mask while in the area and to enter church office...If you don't have one, let us know we will provide one for you.

Thank you!

Justice for all (Church in the Streets)

We are accustomed to hearing divisive language coming out of the mouths of politicians. Arguments that pit one group against another. Controlling a narrative that divides us into democrats and republicans, poor and well-off, working and jobless, and people of color and white. But the winds of change are blowing across this country. And it is past time to change the

public discourse from hate-filled lies to the language of justice.



"They are tearing down the statues of our country's founders.

"The voice of an incompetent president resonated with the imaginations of uninformed supporters. Their fears fueled by language that reverberated like the sound of a kettle drum marking time. Igniting a fear brought into clear focus. Fear of retribution by the victims of injustice.

I wasn't there when that happened," is a familiar battle cry. **Page 2**

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Justice (Church in the Streets) ...cont from page 1

A desperate plea is spoken out of desperation. Justification for a continuation of privilege based on the color of a person's skin, the accent of a person's dialect, or any other excuse for pitting one group against another. How can this happen here? How is this possible in a nation that claims to be united? United in a belief that all persons are born with rights given by a loving God? A declaration that convicts us of hypocrisy.

It wasn't that long ago

It was not that long ago that a mob shouted "Crucify Him," egged on by speeches of hatred combined with incentives paid by wealthy supporters. The scene was in an occupied country. A Jewish prophet's life hung in the balance. The sentence was death by hanging on a tree. It was a brutal way to die. But what is the harm of violence among God-loving folks?

It was not that long ago that white Christians broke into the homes of black families searching for a brown body to crucify. It was a family affair. After church let out. Bring a picnic lunch and your Polaroid.

A Love Story (Wine, Water & Song)...cont. from page 1

Democracy is said to be government by the people — for the people. Our version of democracy is a representative democracy. We elect people to represent us in the governing process, and if they fail to do what they promised — or prove to be incompetent — we elect someone different during the next election.

We don't all agree on what it means to be free. For some, freedom is personal choice. Walking into a building without a face mask, or ordering a fast food burger without the

It was 1955. Emmett Louis Till, a 14-year-old adolescent, while leaving a grocery store, whistled at a woman, and said "Bye baby." Four days later, Emmett was picked up at two in the morning. After which, he was beaten beyond recognition, shot in the head, and thrown in a river. The justification for his execution was offending a white woman.

This event shook the black community throughout the nation. In a sermon, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. described his murder as "one of the most brutal and inhuman crimes in the twentieth century." Bo's murder inspired the black community to rise above centuries of paralyzing fear. His death might have passed almost unnoticed by the rest of the country. Emmett's mother insisted that his casket be opened for the world to see. Testimony to the brutality that we are capable of doing.

Sixty-five years later, the black community, accompanied by the largest number of white people to ever speak up at once, is still in the streets. A symphony of harmonized

onions. For some, freedom is wearing a sidearm into a Walmart.

But freedom does not mean that we get to do anything that pleases us. We form a democracy for this reason. The people collectively decide on laws that help us to live together — as we pursue life, liberty, and happiness.

And as we debate how to structure and enforce laws and policies that make it possible for each one of us to experience individual freedom, we insist that all voices are heard — that

voices demanding that our nations find a way to live up to our original declaration. Freedom for all of us. Meanwhile, our president, bolstered by white, Christian clergy, egg on supporters towards acts of hatred and violence. 1955 was not that long ago.

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each person is given an opportunity to vote and that the rights of all persons are protected.

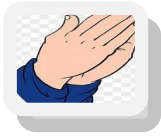
Freedom in a democracy is not intended to be only for the wealthy — or the powerful — or any particular group of people. We expect our government to create and enforce laws and policies that preserve freedom for all — regardless of their skin color, their gender — regardless of where their ancestors lived in the past — regardless of the style of clothes they choose to wear — regardless of who they love.

And, I would argue, that a democracy depends on a mutuality that only exists when love is the building block. Freedom, itself, requires a choice to love or not to love others. But can we govern ourselves, democratically, in the absence of love for one another as a foundational principle?

Fruit water and yeast

Before we rush into other critical topics that define what is required to be free, like justice, grace, healing, confession, and forgiveness, let's further love as a foundation for democracy. The wedding story that took place in Palestine, in a village called Cana, is definitely a love story. And it is a foreshadowing of the miraculous transformation that God had in mind for humankind since our eviction from the Garden of Eden.

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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

★ The COVID-19 pandemic ★ is serious and the numbers of new cases in Genesee County is rising again. If this continues we will suspend our in-person meetings again.

Masks are a requirement while not eating or drinking.
If your health conditions prevent wearing a mask plan to stay away for now for your protection and the well-being of others.

We are meeting in person at 12Noon in the upstairs Library conference room. If our numbers increase enough to prevent adequate social distancing we will move downstairs. For now, you must bring your own lunch. We are not having a potluck lunch due to health concerns.

Pastor Tommy

Coming up this week

July 13	Mon	
July 14	Tues	10am-2pm Water / Food Distribution
July 15	Wed	Pastor Book Club (in the Library Conference Room)
July 16	Thu	
July 17	Fri	
July 18	Sat	
July 19	Sun	



JOIN WORSHIP ONLINE

SUNDAY, JULY 12 -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 Freedom

July 4 is traditionally a big day in this country. But not for everybody. For a lot of people, the promise of freedom described in our country's declaration is elusive. For persons who must argue for, demonstrate for, and put their

life on the line for every policy that offers them a piece of the freedom claimed by our declaration, celebration waits for justice.

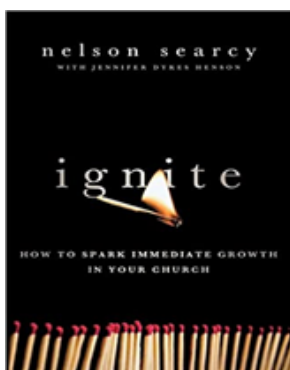


For many, Juneteenth is closer to a declaration of

freedom than July 4. June 19 is an important date because on that date in 1865, sufficient military strength arrived in Texas to enforce freedom for slaves. Two and a half years after President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation. But while that was an important step, it wasn't the giant step promised by our country's declaration. **Page 5**

Book Club News

Our plan is for a few of us to meet in person beginning this



Wednesday. This also means moving our time back to 12 Noon. We will continue to be online for those who are not ready to meet in person

or who do not want to wear a face mask. Unfortunately, the virus is still a threat and in-person gatherings quickly become super-

spreaders if precautions are dropped.

We finished our study of discussions of other religions for now. This proved to be a fascinating subject for us that is sure to come up again in the future. Learning about what other people believe to be true about God did not diminish our own beliefs. Instead, this new knowledge strengthened our faith.

This week we begin our discussions of a book recommended by the staff of Sycamore Creek Church in Lansing. Several of us are participating in a monthly network group with people from sev-

eral churches. Each month we discuss a topic related to designing worship, hospitality, and church leadership. Our group realized that this book may be of interest to a larger number of people.

The book offers helpful suggestions for reaching persons who aren't a part of a faith community. The writer offers his own success and failures at communicating with people who usually don't understand why we believe with we believe. Our hope is that we can all benefit as more of us learn new ideas that we are willing to put into practice.

I encourage you to join us either in person or online for our Wednesday gatherings. 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.

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

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.

Freedom (Coming July 5th) ...Cont. from page 4

What does it mean to be free? Freedom is a goal for every teenager I know, but what freedom looks like is different for each one. Does it mean I get to do whatever I want? Of course not. Freedom requires restraint. Freedom also means access to due process. That is, fair treatment in our judicial systems. Freedom is a big deal. And freedom requires the presence of justice.

There is this story about a time when an important community leader pleaded with Jesus to heal his daughter. So Jesus headed towards the man's home with a large crowd on all sides of him. There was a woman in the crowd who suffered terribly from severe bleeding. Jesus didn't know anything about her, but she believed that Jesus could help her.

The woman's condition had persisted for twelve years. She spent all her money on doctors and treatments that didn't work. Instead of getting better she got worse. She had heard about Jesus, so she came in the crowd behind him, saying to herself, "If I just touch his clothes, I will get well."

As the story continues, the woman touched the cloak of Jesus, and her bleeding stopped. The woman felt the difference at once. And so did Jesus, who stopped in His tracks and asked the crowd of people around Him, "Who

touched my clothes?"

Some of His followers who were close to Him all answered at once, "You see how the people are crowding you; why do you ask who touched you?" Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it.

The woman realized what had happened to her and she came forward, trembling with fear, to tell Jesus that it was her who touched His coat. The woman knelt at His feet, and told Him the whole truth. It must have been hard for her to do that.

She didn't know what Jesus might do. She didn't have a way to repay Him, and it is doubtful that she even realized the magnitude of what happened. What she did know without any doubt, was that she was healed. Touching the coat of Jesus accomplished what money and doctors were unable to do. And she was grateful.

But instead of blasting her, Jesus said, "My daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your trouble."

Wow! What a story. This woman whose future was uncertain, with a condition that seemed impossible to rectify,

finds healing. But there is more than physical healing going on. After her confession, Jesus sent her on her way with a blessing of peace. The woman was both free of the condition that created so much distress, and free to live in peace.

This is the promise that God makes to all of us who suffer from a condition that no doctor can fix. It is a promise of freedom from conditions that hold us hostage. Freedom from the circumstances that keep us from enjoying the peace that only God can offer.

Of course, not long after this incident with the woman, and after Jesus healed the daughter of the important community leader, the story turns ugly. Regardless of the numbers that Jesus healed, He would later be arrested, denied justice, and hung on a tree until He died.

Afterwards, the lynching tree became a cross. And the cross a symbol for freedom for anyone who turns to Jesus to be set free. The freedom offered by Jesus is unconditional and eternal. The freedom that humankind offers to each other is conditional and temporary. Nevertheless, God offers us a way if we are willing to accept it.

Turning ordinary water into wine is a process that humankind discovered Thousands of years ago likely before the end of the Stone Age. Long before Jesus used this idea to save a party. Fruit is harvested and combined with yeast which begins the process of fermentation. During fermentation, sugars and starches turn into something new which benefits our immune system and the absorption of nutrients. In other words, turning fruit water into fine wine.

The first miracle of Jesus is also a foreshadowing of the process offered to you and I. It is a process from bondage to freedom. To be free, is to be free from bondage. Jesus frees us from bondage out of love.

Dirty water

Scripture doesn't say anything about the condition of the water before it became wine. Only that the jugs used to fetch the water was for bathing. Was the water freshly drawn from the local well?

The condition of the water doesn't seem to matter. Residents of Flint understandably shutter at the thought of using water from the public source for consumption. How could Jesus be certain that His wine was free of heavy metals like lead? Surely, Jesus didn't start with dirty water.

You have kept the best wine until now!

John 3:10

So the condition of the water isn't the point. If Jesus can turn water into fine wine, He can turn dirty water into wine that is free of contaminants. Likewise, Jesus can transform you and me, regardless of our starting point, into something much better.

A love story

One of the most intriguing books found in scripture is the Song of Songs. A collection of erotic, blush-producing love poems that are seldom discussed in church. It is also the only book that is predominately the voice of a woman.

Both Jews and Christians assert that this love story reflects God's love for humankind, and God's desire for people to be free. The setting is a young, black woman, dominated and controlled by her older brothers. The woman worked in the family vineyards, without voice and without power over her own body, enslaved by systemic gender bias. She is treated as property to be traded for favor.

The woman not only uses her voice, she also empowers all women, even referring to her household as her "mother's" house. She is understandably skeptical and impatient with traditional wisdom. She is in love with another person that is of her choosing, going against the norm. The woman and her lover declare their freedom to pursue their love for one another, just as God offers you and me freedom to be who God created us to be.

Professor Renita Weems says this about the Song of Songs, "Intimacy can be as frightening as it is fulfilling...fraught with dangers, unknowns, demands, and unforeseeable consequences...relationships... must be cultivated, nurtured, safeguarded, and cherished." Relationships cannot be taken for granted. Whether relationships with each other or with God.

Love takes us beyond expected boundaries and self-interest past the limits of comfort zones. Love takes

risks, embracing new ways of thinking and doing. Love says to you that your importance does not diminish my importance. Love celebrates your dreams and accomplishments.

I hear my lover's voice. He comes running over the mountains, racing across the hills to me.

Song of Songs 2:8

Love does not measure your potential by my failures. Freedom without love is like wedding feast that run out of wine in the middle of the celebration.

Freedom

Love presumes relating to another person. But freedom and relationships are strange bed partners. For example, there is a common tradition of throwing a party for a friend to have one last fling before marriage. One final opportunity to let loose to be single and free, as though a commitment infringes on personal freedom. Yet freedom from the joy of being loved is an empty freedom.

Likewise freedom from no relationships is emptiness. We all have a need to be loved. A need born within us and a reflection of a God who loves us without condition. Unconditional love places a value on each of us that defies calculation. There is no formula that can calculate the value of a human life, despite feeble attempts driven by profit or power to do just that. To treat another human as property is the very essence of depravity and oppression.

Democracy helps assure freedom. But freedom is only possible with relationships based on love. Love is the foundation for a democracy that assures freedom. And love talk is clearly missing in our public discourse. So, tell me what we celebrated on July 4?

Coming up

This month we focus on freedom. We are not done claiming a new normal for ourselves. We begin July with a celebration of our declaration of freedom. But it is time to live as free people by first demanding freedom for all. We aren't interested in going back to the way things were with systems of injustice and segregation. We aren't trying to preserve a history. Our focus is to create a future. For more information our series, *Freedom*, see the article, [Coming up in worship on our website.](#)

I invite you to join us each 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](#).

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Pastor Tommy

Sources

Renita J. Weems. "The Song of Songs." *The New Interpreters Bible, Vol V.* Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997.

Life groups question & notes

They met a man from Cyrene named Simon who was coming into the city from the country. They seized him, put the cross on him, and made him carry it behind Jesus.

Luke 23:26-31 (GNT)

NOTES FROM WORSHIP

QUESTIONS FOR LIFE GROUPS

1. Read Luke 23:26-31. Why do you think that this part of the story is in scripture? Simon was from Cyrene. It is believed that he was a black man. Does the man's skin color offer any significance for you? What does the symbol of the cross mean for you?
2. Read the article in this week's Circuit Rider, *Justice for all*. The cruelty shown by whites towards people of color is hard to imagine. How do people reach this point? In what ways do we similar acts of violence towards people of color today? What can you do?
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.

It was not that long ago that God spoke out of agony from a lynching tree. “Forgive them,” He said before death came, and His body placed in a tomb. A stone sealed His story. At last, His executioners silenced Him. But they had to control the narrative. They had to lie to their supporters, threaten any remaining followers, and punish the activists if they bring it up.

But they took their worship to the streets. And Jesus was not dead but lived on. And God continued to speak, but too often to ears not listening, minds unopened, and eyes not seeing.

It was not that long ago that a man with the force of law behind him put his knee on the neck of a black man. “I can’t breathe” was all the man could speak. It was all he needed to say. The cries of injustice reverberated across our land, echoing in the churches, empty from the pandemic. His lynching tree, his cross, was the ground.

The people transferred their membership to a church more aligned with what Jesus would do. They gathered in the streets and worshiped with signs stating divine truth. “Black lives matter.” A call for justice is a call for divine order and shouts to crucify aimed at a lack of justice and perpetrators of injustice.

You will know that I am the Lord your God when I set you free from slavery.

Exodus 6:7

This time the crowds call for Jesus to be freed, and the religious and political leaders be removed. A freed Jesus speaking love to the crowds and to His executioners.

If punishment is necessary to preserve peace, let’s begin with our leaders who spew their hatred over microphones and airwaves calling for making us great again. Let’s be honest. We were never great. We are racists and hypocrites. Greatness can only be in our future since it was never present in our past.

God promised to free the slaves from bondage, and God offered freedom from slavery as testimony. “You will know that I am the Lord Your God when I set you free.” Justice is a freedom call. An opportunity for the privilege of whiteness to be past history. And for all persons, oppressed and oppressor, to be free at last.

Another word for love is justice. Democracy is impossible without love, and love is not possible without justice. Not so much a justice that punishes the perpetrator as a justice that frees everyone to pursue life as God intends life to be. Justice abhors a lynching tree.

Jesus was not the first man to hang on a tree, and He was not the last. The lynching tree, like the cross, is any policy, any law, any form of execution, that fills the plate of one person by denying justice to another. The lynching tree, like the cross, is any person whose lust for power denies freedom to others. The lynching tree is any system that afflicts suffering on another because their skin is a darker shade.

“Father, forgive them,” cried the Son of God, as He pleads His closing defense for His executioner. This is love. This plea is the essence of empathy. An appeal that expresses a love that cannot be wiped out by hatred. This plea is a promise that freedom lies just on the other side of justice.

Coming up

This month we focus on freedom. We are not done claiming a new normal for ourselves. We began July with a celebration of our declaration of freedom. But it is time to live as free people by first demanding freedom for all. We aren't interested in going back to the way things were with systems of injustice and segregation. We aren't trying to preserve a history. Our focus is to create a future. For more information our series, *Freedom*, see the article, [Coming up in worship](#) on our [website](#).

The lynching tree is any policy that fills the plate of one person by denying justice to another ...

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Pastor Tommy

Sources

James H. Cone. *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011.

Welcome to the Asbury Community

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Freedom ...cont from page 5

It is a way to freedom that insists on freedom for all persons, unconditionally.

One of the many influences in my life is Dr. James Cone. Dr. Cone died a couple years ago, but his books, insights, and dreams live on. As I read a couple of chapters out of the last book he published before his death, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, I realized something we both had in common. Dr. Cone was also born in Arkansas.

But that is where our similarities end. As a white man, I am a representative of the group who oppressed Dr. Cone along with his ancestors, and all people of color whose bodies resided in this country. Any series on the subject of freedom is hollow if we fail to acknowledge the lack of freedom provided to our black and brown sisters and brothers.

And any acknowledgement of the centuries of injustice is hollow if there is no way forward to a time when we can celebrate our freedom together. But the call for action is not a whisper small, incremental steps. Rather, the call is a deafening and

unsettling cry for justice and retribution.

Like the woman who bled for twelve years, our brothers and sisters are bleeding in the streets of our cities, from the hands and knees of violence. It wasn't long ago that our ancestors lynched black bodies from trees and celebrated their power over life and death. Not unlike those who tied Jesus to a tree. Claiming righteousness in the midst of violent injustice.

We are also bleeding from a condition that requires healing. We are suffering from the sickness that afflicts every oppressor. We crave forgiveness even more than we crave freedom.

The people of our capital city killed Him by hanging Him on a tree...

Acts 10:39

We all need to touch the coat of Jesus, and to confess that it is us who drained His energy in the hope of finding a solution to our suffering. And peace is ours when we at least surrender our privilege at the feet of the lynching tree.

Our next series, begins the day after our nation traditionally celebrates our freedom. This year is different than past years. The pandemic brought to life our utter helplessness without a cooperative and collaborative effort. And we are not yet on the other side. Wouldn't it be just like God to hold our feet to the fire until at last, we confess our sin, not just with our intentions, but with decisive and lasting action.

The journey ahead promises to be difficult. The lynching tree on which Christ was executed in an effort to silence Him and return to normal, is both a symbol of salvation and despair. But God is never silent when it comes to injustice and oppression. And God speaks with decisive and lasting action. The Word of God never returns empty.

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.

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