

ASBURY CIRCUIT RIDER

Ripples (The breath of life)

A couple of weeks ago, Cyndi and I tackled a problematic limb extending from a huge black walnut tree. Most of the branch was void of life. Calling what fell on the ground even before finishing my cut, a branch doesn't fully capture its size and weight. It was more like cutting down a full-sized tree. But when compared to the size of the tree it fell from, it was just a branch.

Earlier this week, while writing in my prayer journal, I found myself recounting several events that seemed to come one right after another over the past 24 hours. Some days are like that. Several things

come to fruition even though each one began at different times, and each with its own story. Some events happen over hours, while other events take days, months, or years.



And some events take decades, like the growing of the branch we removed from the walnut tree. Once upon a time, there was a walnut that no one noticed, and today there's a

giant tree. And a couple of years ago the life went out of one of the branches. And last week, this branch was no longer a part of this tree.

Sometimes seemingly insignificant events cause a ripple effect. Very few, if any of us, see the initial action that caused the ripple. Sometimes we can trace the ripples back to a source. Sometimes it's clear. Other times our best bet is to enjoy the shade and be thankful for seeds.

Page 2

Volume 20 Issue 9

August 9, 2020



You must 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 & Stay safe Everyone!

Purpling (The World Needs More Purple People)

The hot and dry days of July are behind us for another year. Our farm team is getting help from the rain a little more often. Plants, like people, require moisture to sustain life. We all know this. So the prophet Isaiah used this common understanding as a way to explain the impact of God's Word. Like the rain, whatever God speaks makes a difference in sustaining life.

For those of us who follow the Christian bible, God's Word includes all of the text found there. While our language and emphasis vary from church to church, the basic concept is the same. Whatever scripture says matters. We even say that God spoke or sang the world into existence. Whether you believe in a big bang or another theory about how the universe came into existence, God's Word is the power behind creation.



The bible tells the story of God's revelations to humanity. God chose to let us in on some of the greatest mysteries in life, inspiring and guiding hundreds of ordinary people to share God's revelations with others.

Page 2

Inside this issue:

Ripples	1
Purpling	1
In Our Prayers/Coming up this Week	3
Asbury Worship Series— Shameless	4
Pastor's Book Club	4
Leadership in Worship & Service	4
Asbury Worship Series –Shameless	5
Ripples	6
Ripples—Asbury Farms Market	7
Small Group Questions & Notes	8
Purpling	9
Shameless	10

Purpling (The World Needs More Purple People) ...cont from page 1

This process began centuries before humans learned to record words in pictures and eventually developing an alphabet for writing. And this process continued as more revelations were recorded, and more persons cobbled ancient stories together, all inspired by the author of the universe.

Life continued during long periods when God seemed silent. Leaders know that an information void doesn't end conversations. Humanity never stops talking, building, and living. And I believe God never stops revealing. The process remains a mystery. None of us know the mind of God, although many lay claims to insights.

Scripture offers us insights into God's thinking. Most of us have experienced breakthroughs while reading scripture. The same story revealing something about God that we missed the first dozen times we read it. Perhaps it was a different translation using different words and arrangements. Or maybe something about us changed since the last time we read it.

The writer of Hebrews describes God's Word as a double-edged sword, cutting whichever direction the sword swings. This sounds dangerous. A double

-edged sword arriving on our front porch today would come with a long list of safety precautions and warnings and a legal disclosure that its use could result in serious injury and death.

The bible contains similar warnings. Scripture offers comfort to the afflicted and alerts for afflictors. The Word of God is powerful. And its power gets invoked in churches, courthouses, conversations, and more. It has the power to heal and the potential to conceal.

What scripture conceals includes the mysteries that remain—the mind of God. But scripture can also reveal our intentions. The writer of 2 Timothy, sharpened the sword we called scripture with the edge of a razor by reminding us that all of scripture is suitable for correction. And when we use scripture to correct others, we run a substantial risk. But we were warned.

The first proverb in chapter 12 of Proverbs tells us that "It is stupid to hate being corrected." I think that this observation applies to all parties. The church included. And thousands have died and are dying as a result of stupidity.

Perhaps this is one of the many reasons that humility rises to the top as an essential characteristic of God. An aspect that we are encouraged to strive for. God caring enough about creation to talk to us at all, rather than wiping us out and starting over, is a colossal act of humility. Jesus showed humility in all aspects of His life, and He emphasized the importance of humility in His teaching.

In one story, Jesus compared the humility of a man despised for his occupation, with another man revered for his job. Tax collectors were despised by the community during Jesus' time. Resented because they used the power given to them by a corrupt government to mistreat the residents of Palestine. In the story, the tax collector went to church to pray, admit his faults, and confess that he abused his neighbors.

The other man belonged to a political party known as the Pharisees. Members of this political party included the wealthier residents. They demanded attention wherever they went.

Ripples (The breath of life)...cont. from page 1

As I reflected, my attention quickly turned to the only audience that sees it all. I learned some years ago after the death of my first grandson that only God carries the burden of foresight. We are left to marvel, as best we can, at what this means. Knowing the effect of a ripple before the cause sounds like an awesome superpower until we realize that it might be the end of life as we know it.

God reminded Jeremiah that his purpose was decided even before the prophet was born. The Psalmist reminds us that God knitted us together in our mother's womb. And God knew our destiny beforehand. So God knew that my grandson would be conceived and die before his first birthday? Please don't tell me you know the answer to this question. God chose the egg?



In Our Prayers

Lisa Bohnsack Mirium Watson

FRIENDS AND LOVED ONES WHO ARE HOMEBOUND OR IN NURSING CARE

Nancy Elston Elaine Lamoreaux
Shirley Craig Norma Buzzard
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

- Aug 10 Mon
- Aug 11 Tues 10am-2pm
Water / Food Distribution
- Aug 12 Wed Pastor Book Club
(in the Library Conference Room)
- Aug 13 Thu
- Aug 14 Fri
- Aug 15 Sat
- Aug 16 Sun 10:30am New Beginnings
Contemporary Worship

Join worship online
Sunday, August 9th -10:30 am

Facebook Live 
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 Shameless

One day, a teacher, a person who studied the bible for a living, asked Jesus a question that is on the mind of anyone who wonders what happens when we die. Jesus answered with another question. And His question is critical to anyone hoping to answer the question posed by the teacher.

The Good News Translation reconstructs the question Jesus asked as, "What do the Scriptures say? How do you interpret them?" Jesus acknowledged that the teacher's answer was good. But the teacher wasn't satisfied and



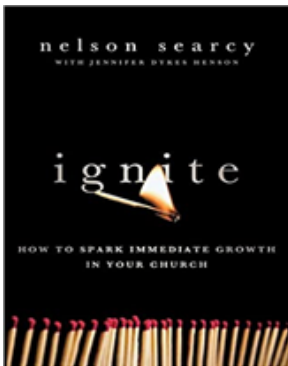
asked a follow-up question.

This is the nature of biblical interpretation. We try to answer Jesus' question. But try as we do, we have follow-up questions. And just as we think we reached a point of consensus, more questions arise. God invites each of us to look for answers. And to keep an open mind to the possibility that the answer is not what we expect.

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 several churches. Each month we discuss a topic related to designing worship, hospi-

tality, 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 (235-0016) by phone or simply type your question on our website's homepage — FlintAsbury.org.

Pastor Tommy

Leadership in Worship & Service

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

Asbury Staff

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

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.

Shameless ...Cont. from page 4

Throughout history, human-kind interpreted scripture and lived out their interpretation. The more convinced the teachers were that they finally figured it out, the more society became indifferent to the suffering of those victimized by their understanding. The gospel stories are rich with illustrations that illuminate the pitfalls of certainty when it comes to biblical interpretation. For any who believe they finally figured it all out, the gospel is less a story of revelation filled with new possibilities, and more like a recipe book.

The colossal failure of the current administration is renewing interest among psychologists to determine how we arrive at different conclusions given the same results. In a recent opinion article in the New York Times, Thomas Edsall offers a reflection on several theories. One of the questions raised by his article considers why we don't agree on whether scientific information should drive policy decisions.

His article reminded me of a concept from sociology known as cultural lag. Cultural lag is how long it takes society to acknowledge a brewing problem in sufficient numbers to address it. Climate change comes

to mind. For me, and thankfully the vast majority of people, this growing problem must be solved now. Yet, there remains a large enough group who prefer to let it go for now.



My own political ideology changed over the past fifty years. Which party's platform I supported flopped back and forth a few times. My approach to choosing the person that got my vote depended on my assessment of the candidate's character. I don't have to agree with a candidate on every issue, but I want to trust them when they think no one is watching. Integrity and transparency are essential attributes for me. But that's me.

One of the greatest benefits of democracy is that diverse opinions are voiced and debated. And as frustrating as it can be to hear the arguments from persons that see the world differently than I do,

I'm grateful that my ideas aren't always the ones that win out. I've been wrong enough times to realize that collective wisdom is far superior. And humans are terrible at mitigating their own power.

Edsall's article recounted a well-known quote found in an article by John Stuart Mill, titled "On Liberty." His quote captures the importance of accepting the possibility that our ideas about a particular subject are entirely wrong. Trusting a person's judgment should be based on a perception of whether the person can listen to opposing views. And whether they admit when they are wrong, and go a different direction than they initially planned. Democracy relies on this sort of leader.

Sadly, in politics, political candidates are apt to cite examples of flipping on particular issues to demean their opponents. While consistency and even a little stubbornness are helpful in public debate, a healthy democracy depends on finding common ground. And our collective ability to respond to new information, such as global warming, determines our future.

Each generation lives with ripples that began by those who came before. Sometimes the source is handed down. Most times, the cause is forgotten. How did we get here? Is left to investigation and speculation. Both are imperfect processes leading to incomplete conclusions.

When a detective investigates a crime, motive plays a crucial role in piecing a story together. Without motivation, a jury cannot justify total acceptance of the detective's retelling. Yet motivation is itself speculation. Even a confession leaves room for some doubt. Memory has a reputation for reshaping stories based on new information that didn't exist when the ripple first began.

I chose you before I gave you life, and before you were born ...

Jeremiah 11:5

In 2019, 23 candidates participated in one or more debates while competing for the Democratic nomination for president. All of the candidates were at odds with a large and influential voting segment known collectively as evangelical Christians. One candidate, Pete Buttigieg, drew immediate and hostile criticism when he dared to share an interpretation of scripture that had a substantial impact in past presidential elections. The subject of abortion.



At the center of the argument is God's view on abortion. Or so this is the claim. If scripture declares that God is against abortion, then why not enact laws that prevent abortion? Setting aside this idea of the separation of church and state, the ripples radiating from this source of controversy are far-reaching.

According to one source, a divorce occurs every 13 seconds in this country. That's a lot of people doing something that scripture appears to frown upon. I suspect that God is not in favor of divorce, based on what I read in scripture. I can understand why. Divorce is extraordinarily painful. I believe that God grieves when one of us experiences pain. But divorce is often a choice that seems better than the alternative.

The creation story found in the 2nd chapter of Genesis suggests that life begins with our first breath. But this doesn't mean that God isn't upset when an abortion takes place. Abortion is painful in every way imaginable. And I believe God is there.

Whether God gives you and me the freedom to choose is often controversial. I believe God decided to let us choose. For me, this makes a choice to love much more powerful. I choose to love God, even when I'm disappointed. And I believe God chooses to love me, even when God is disappointed. For me, this is authentic love. Each decision is a ripple that carries consequences that aren't always good for us.

There is a story about a time when Jesus intervened in a trial by an angry mob. The crowd claimed that a woman was caught cheating on her husband.

They argued that the punishment prescribed by law is to pound her with rocks. They challenged Jesus to give His opinion.

Jesus puts His body between the angry crowd and the woman. Jesus didn't take the woman's side or claim that she didn't do anything wrong. Why didn't the crowd just throw rocks at both of them? Jesus starting writing in the dirt with a stick. Scripture doesn't say what He wrote. One speculation is that He named off a few of the things that He knew that men in the crowd did wrong that could put them in the same jeopardy as the woman. Pretty soon, it was just Jesus and the woman standing there.

This story helps me when I want to throw stones at someone else because I don't like what they did. This story also helps me when I recognize that I did something I shouldn't do. I don't think that God simply excuses my bad behavior. I'm guessing God gets disappointed and even a bit angry. And then God puts a body between me and the rock throwers.

Pete Buttigieg was correct in his statement. Even evangelical Christians, not that long ago, argued that life begins with birth. Peter may be aware of other ripples that came out of this change of interpretation. Motivations that are a lot less self-righteous than throwing rocks at a woman who believes that abortion is her choice.

The tie between conservative economics and evangelical Christian beliefs dates back to the imperialism that created the United States. The church, the government, and the wealthy were strange bed-fellows that found synergy in their partnership. The government wanted more citizens to pay taxes, more resources, and more power. Wealthy investors hoped to expand trade. And the church wanted to spread the Gospel and increase church attendance.

This partnership took on a new twist in the United States in events such as the National Association of Manufacturers' annual meeting in December 1940. At this gathering of industrial giants and government, including FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, the Reverend James W. Fifiield, Jr. addressed the gathering. The pastor's message was music to their ears. God favored conservative economics and opposed Roosevelt's New Deal approach. Once again, the church, government, and wealth found common ground.¹

Over the decades since this meeting of industry's wealthiest benefactors, pastors have found common ground with politics and business. The issue for me concerns the manipulation of believers using scripture to achieve a political agenda. I recognize the benefit to the church's budget when persons in powerful positions nod your way. But at what cost?

Last week I lifted up the warning from Hebrews that scripture is a double-edged sword. The holy text is often used to cut down opponents to political agendas. The power of inciting a crowd

throw rocks when we believe that harm was done that should be rectified is as old as scripture itself. And the conversation about God's plan for humankind is a worthwhile subject.

Our upcoming election is predicted to be ugly. Lawsuits to prevent citizens from voting by mail and tweets that undermine our election process are daily occurrences. Of course, scripture offers guidance for you and me to select the candidates we support. But avoid manipulation. The ripples that come out of our choices have consequences.

Whichever one of you has committed no sin may throw the first stone at her...
John 8:7

Coming up

I invite you to join us next Sunday as we begin our new series, *Shameless*. 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 or let us know when you send a message through our [website](#). We post an archive of past editions on our website under the tab, Connect - choose [Newsletters](#).

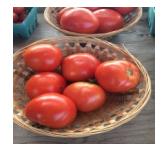
Pastor Tommy

¹ Kevin M. Kruse. "How Corporate America Invented Christian America." Politico Magazine, April 16, 2015.



**ASBURY FARMS
PRODUCE MARKET
WILL BE OPEN ALL
WEEK!**

Stop by and purchase some produce from our Asbury Farms Market! Hours that we will be open are Monday through Friday from 10am-2pm in the parking lot of Asbury Church. If you have any questions, call us at 235-0016.



Just a few of our produce..

Life groups question & notes

Whichever one of you has committed no sin may throw the first stone at her." Then he bent over again and wrote on the ground. When they heard this, they all left...Jesus was left alone, with the woman still standing there. He straightened up and said to her, "Where are they? Is there no one left to condemn you?"

John 8:1-10 (GNT)

NOTES FROM WORSHIP

QUESTIONS FOR LIFE GROUPS

1. Read John 8:1-10. This familiar story is an interesting one to discuss. Note that verse 11 is included in most translations but doesn't appear in some of the ancient manuscripts. What do you suppose Jesus was writing in the dirt? Have you ever felt like the woman? The crowd? Why?
2. Read the article in this week's Circuit Rider, *Ripples*. Where do you stand on the subject of abortion? Why? In what ways does your interpretation of scripture affect your opinion? In what ways does your opinion affect who gets your vote? How does your opinion on this issue affect your the opinion of candidates with whom you disagree with on other issues, such as racism or the environment?
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.

People were expected to treat them with respect and to follow their instructions. They had a reputation for following the laws to the letter and expecting others to be like them.

I thank you I am not like that tax collector over there.

Matthew 18:11

The Pharisee, in the story, prayed out loud so others could hear what he said. "Thank God I'm not like that tax collector," he said at one point. He said it loud enough for the tax collector to hear it. Can you imagine how the tax collector felt? He was already feeling bad about himself. He didn't need to be reminded that people didn't want to be like him.

Of course, Pharisees and tax collectors likely hung out at the same clubs and helped each other out with secret deals. But scripture doesn't say much about this possibility. I just know how Pharisees and powerful politicians cooperate today.

The story ends with a twist. Jesus says that God favors the behavior of the tax collector and not the Pharisee. It didn't matter to God as much that the Pharisee followed the rules and was well-liked. It didn't seem to bother God that the tax collector had done things he shouldn't have done. The humility of the tax collector put him in favor with God. The arrogance of the Pharisee negated any good he was doing.

The Pharisees had a reputation for knowing and closely following scripture. Somewhat the "religious right" of their time, they read the scriptures word for word. And they lived out their interpretation and demanded that others do the same.

Not much has changed. Pharisees influence policies and laws today. And declare how thankful that they are not like the rest of us.

We continue to have Pharisees among us. And before I open my mouth to say, "Thank God I'm not like them," I must remember this warning. It's doubtful that my interpretation is entirely correct. I do the best I can and continue to learn just how stupid I was in the past. And remember just how stupid I can be in the present as well.

The tax collector was told more than once, "You should be ashamed of yourself." And apparently, he was. But God doesn't hold our failings over us when we humbly admit that we failed to do what we should. Or we did things we shouldn't do.

My point for this article takes us back to the beginning. God's Word never returns empty. It accomplishes whatever God has in mind. God's Word doesn't answer to you and me. Our role is to interpret God's Word the best we can so that we can live as God intended us to live. And realize that we could be wrong in our interpretation.

God's Word is a dangerous tool in the hands of a Pharisee. Read scripture, interpret scripture, and live out scripture as best you can. And know that some of your interpretations could be wrong.

Throughout scripture, we learn characteristics to which God lays claim. God is love, and God is humble are two of the most prominent. I prefer to resort back to these two characteristics whenever I find myself or others questioning interpretations. Does my reading show God's love to others, or does my understanding reek of "Thank you that I'm not like them?"

Manipulated by self-interest and leaders with debilitating emotional sickness, our country is deeply divided between red and blue. I recently read a new book. It was written for children by adults struggling to respond to their children's questions about why the news was so full of hateful speech. The book is titled *The World Needs More Purple People*. And I agree.¹

Coming up

I invite you to join us next Sunday as we begin our new series, *Shameless*. 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](#).

The World Needs More Purple People

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

Pastor Tommy

¹ Kristen Bell & Benjamin Hart. *The World Needs More Purple People*. New York: Random House, 2020.

1653 Davison Rd
Flint, MI 48506



Phone: 810-235-0016
Fax: 810-235-0016 (call first when faxing)
E-mail: FlintAsburyUMC@gmail.com
CircuitRider@FlintAsbury.org

Shameless ...cont from page 5

The church is among the oldest institutions. Withstanding changes in national borders, new ways of thinking, monumental shifts in culture, such as the enlightenment, the church weathered numerous storms. Some argue that the church's stubbornness to give-in to new ideas is one of the church's greatest strengths.

The church is not a democracy in its purest sense. It is a monarchy with Jesus Christ as the ultimate authority over all matters. Yet, God appears to leave mere humans in charge of decision making, using an ancient book of laws, stories, poetry, letters, declarations, and history, as a guide. "What do I do if..." questions come up every day. And we who claim some authority in this ancient institution, are expected to use scripture as a reference to guide our answer.

This was true before the time of Jesus, and it was true when the teacher asked his question about eternal life. While our scriptures expanded after the

time of Jesus, most of what we have available today existed before that day.

"What must I do to receive eternal life?" the teacher asked. And Jesus answered him, "What do the Scriptures say? How do you interpret them?"

We call our new series Shameless. This title comes from a book of the same name. The author raises our awareness of this issue of interpretation and its impact on the answer the teacher gave. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind; and Love your neighbor as you love yourself," the teacher answered "You are right," Jesus replied; "do this, and you will live."

What do the Scriptures say? How do you interpret them?

Luke 10:25

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