

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.

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Visiting Angels (Come and Rest Awhile)

Union Square Cafe opened on East 16th Street in New York City in 1985. The cafe was the vision of an up and coming chef, Danny Meyer. Fast forward to the present day, and Union Square Cafe is known for teaching future chefs and restaurant owners how to show great hospitality.

Times restaurant critic Pete Wells, in a 2017 New York Times article, writes about the subject of hospitality



using Union Square Cafe for his illustration. His hospitality lesson turns on an essential distinction between the term "customer" versus "guest." A guest, argues Wells, isn't expected to pay, while a customer pays the bill before leaving.

In a review several years earlier, Mr. Wells referred to patrons of the cafe as customers and was corrected by a reader. This cafe refers to patrons as guests. Why this distinction for a restaurant that charges 19 dollars for a kale salad? I'm guessing my server expects me to pay before leaving. The answer lies in the ethos.

When he first opened Union Square Café, Mr. Meyer drew on a motto he learned as a Boy Scout. Always be helpful,

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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!

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Visiting Angels (Come and rest awhile) ...cont from page 1

friendly, courteous, and kind. Hospitality for this restaurant owner begins with locally sourced, fresh ingredients brought together with hospitality that makes visitors feel like guests receiving much more than they paid for. The secret sauce is ensuring that diners don't notice or think about the cost.

This story resonates with me on several levels. Our staff at Asbury aspires to a similar level of hospitality. We grow our own fresh, locally sourced ingredients right here in our neighborhood. And we charge a fraction of what Union Square Cafe charges for a kale salad. More important, instead of borrowing a motto from scouting, God's insistence on humility is our center of gravity. If Jesus ran a cafe, how would He treat patrons? Would they feel like customers or guests?

The bible says a lot about hospitality. A common expression found in the Old Testament is, "Remember that you were once foreigners." Showing hospitality to strangers, including foreigners, was not only a customary practice. Hospitality was an essential part of God's covenant with believers. A vibrant restaurant, like a vibrant church, anticipates a steady flow

of first-time guests. Whether guests return or stay away is based in large part on whether they experience hospitality.

Yunte Huang immigrated to the United States in 1991. As a college student in China, the Tiananmen massacre shook him to his core. Choosing to move from China to Alabama was easy for Mr. Huang. Alabama came first in an alphabetical list of states. The destination didn't matter nearly as much as finding a place of safety. And, at first, it seemed like he also found hospitality.

During his first few years in this country, Mr. Huang depended on rides from strangers to get around his new neighborhood. Mr. Huang was a churchgoer. On Sundays, he headed out with bible in hand, and pretty soon some friendly, Christian family stopped to offer him a ride. Talk about helpful, friendly, courteous, and kind.

Twenty years later, the possibility of an Asian-born immigrant hitching a ride on a Sunday morning vanished. The State of Alabama passed a law making it illegal to offer a ride to an immigrant, without proper documentation. But how



would you know whether the stranger to whom you offer hospitality is an immigrant? Ask to see their green card? A little embarrassing,

perhaps, when you discover that the stranger is a citizen-professor at the local university?

This week we explore hospitality in scripture as we continue our series we call *Shameless*. Since one of our goals is to recover interpretations of scripture lost in a rush to justify what we choose to believe, an old-fashioned hospitality story comes to mind. One that we all know to one degree or another. Except that few of us realize that the point of the story is about hospitality. Most of us were taught that the story justified, not showing hospitality. Let me explain.

Once upon a time, a couple of men visited a city for the first time. These were no ordinary men. They were angels sent by God to check out the city. They were like restaurant critics

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 17 Mon
- Aug 18 Tues 10am-2pm
 Water / Food Distribution
- Aug 19 Wed Pastor Book Club
 (in the Library Conference Room)
- Aug 20 Thu
- Aug 21 Fri
- Aug 22 Sat
- Aug 23 Sun 10:30am New Beginnings
 Contemporary Worship

Join worship online
 Sunday, August 16th -10:30 am

Facebook Live **zoom**
 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



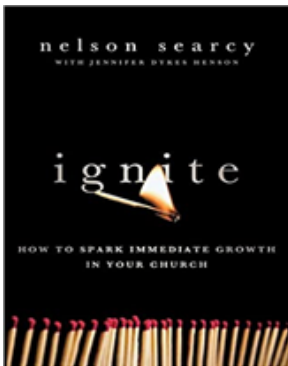
asked a follow-up question.

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.

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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, humankind 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. Fifiel, 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](#).

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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.



Teaija Robinson, from Teen Quest

*Just a few of our
produce ...*



Life groups question & notes

When the two angels came to Sodom that evening, Lot was sitting at the city gate. As soon as he saw them, he got up and went to meet them. He bowed down before them and said, "Sirs, I am here to serve you. Please come to my house..."

Genesis 19:1-17 (GNT)

NOTES FROM WORSHIP

QUESTIONS FOR LIFE GROUPS

1. Read Genesis 19:1-17. Are you familiar with this story? Did anything surprise you when you read this story? You may want to read the story again after you finish with the next question.
2. Read the article in this week's Circuit Rider, *Visiting angels*. What feels like hospitality for you? Have you ever hitchhiked or picked up a hitchhiker? What was your experience? Where do you think hospitality falls in God's priorities? How do you think God views the immigration laws in our country? Why? What should we do with regards to immigration?
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.

on assignment from their publisher to write about their experiences. Fortunately, there was a gracious host on duty.

Since Sodom was a city and not a restaurant, there was no guest services staff person to greet the strangers. However, a man named Lot was sitting near the main gate when the men arrived. Lot learned hospitality from his uncle Abraham who learned hospitality from spending time with God. So Lot ran right over to the strangers and welcomed them to the city. More important, Lot insisted that the men stay with him and his family.

The men accepted Lot's offer of hospitality and followed him home, where they were treated to a great supper. Lot treated the men like they were old friends. Scripture doesn't say anything about differences in skin color, mode of dress, or any other details about either the men or Lot. I assume such details aren't necessary. But somehow Lot knew they weren't from the city.

The Book of Hebrews didn't exist at the time. Scripture didn't exist at all in written form. But perhaps Lot knew what we can read for ourselves today. Hebrews reminds us to "Remember to welcome strangers in your homes. Some did that and welcomed angels without knowing it." Lot knew that God insists on hospitality, and this reminder points us back to his story.

After dinner, Lot invited the strangers to come and rest for awhile before retiring to bed. Suddenly, their peaceful evening was interrupted by an angry mob pounding on the door. Apparently, Lot was somewhat of a newcomer to Sodom himself and didn't realize that he violated some sort of law or custom by hosting the

the strangers. Perhaps like Alabama, there was a law that required him to check their green card before he invited them home.

This is where the story goes from PG to R-rated. And this is also where the story's meaning gets hijacked for other, less hospitable purposes. The story's creator uses an illustration of arguably the least hospitable response imaginable. The angry mob threatens to rape the visitors. Lot reacts with an absurd response that illustrates the importance of hospitality. Lot offers his daughters instead.

I told you it was R-rated. In antiquity, daughters were valued similarly to livestock. I'm convinced that Lot's offer was not intended to give us a ready-made response to angry mobs. This story illustrates just how important hospitality is to God. In the story, God destroys the city after getting Lot and his family to safety.

***Some who host
strangers into their
homes welcome angels
without knowing.***

Hebrews 13:2

The lesson is powerful and frightening. Consider the law passed in Alabama in light of this story. Reflect on how God might view the absurd cost going into a wall on our southern border with Mexico. Worse, consider the treatment of refugee families arriving at our borders after fleeing from certain death. What about the practices of ICE over the past couple of years? In what ways have we become an angry mob demanding that it is our right to violate strangers?

This story, sometimes referenced as the "sin of Sodom," was historically used as justification for treating homosexuality as a condition deserving punishment. This interpretation itself illustrates the danger that accompanies a lack of hospitality. Mis-treating people because they differ from our expectations is unacceptable, according to scripture.

Professor Huang shared that he didn't realize that being Asian made all the difference. He learned later that had his skin been a darker shade, hitchhiking to church in a white neighborhood in Alabama may have ended differently.

Coming up

I invite you to join us next Sunday as we continue looking at scripture from fresh perspectives as part of a series we call *Shameless*. Join us online or in person. Be aware that we follow social distancing practices without exception. Free face masks are amiable and must be worn in our building.

You can join us online 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

***Join us online via
webinar or Facebook***

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

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Pastor Tommy