

ASBURY CIRCUIT RIDER

Identify (Who do you say you are?)

The Reverend Alonzo Vincent is scheduled to offer our message on Sunday, August 23. Reverend Vincent is a friend and colleague with over 50 years in ministry. Retired from the United Methodist Church, he continues in active ministry with his wife, the Reverend Elmira Smith-Vincent, at Mission of Peace Pentecostal Temple.

At this point, this Reverend Vincent anticipates sharing what God has put on his heart about a story found in Matthew's Gospel and some wisdom from the Apostle Paul found in his

letter to the church in Rome. I'll attempt in this article to offer a little bit of background.



Each day in the news we learn about natural and human-made disasters that damages property, injures or kills thousands of people, and displace survivors. Place matters when it comes to identity. Who I say I am is connected to where we are when asked.

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.

There was a time when Jesus asked His followers a question about His identity. According to the story, Jesus was in the region of Caesarea Philippi. This places Jesus at the base of Mount Hermon near the Jordan River. It was adjacent to a spring, grotto, and related shrines dedicated to the Greek god Pan. Now nearly uninhabited, Caesarea is an archaeological site in the Golan Heights. Today, this would place Jesus in the Village of Baniyas.

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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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Volume 20 Issue 23

August 23, 2020



2020 Church Conference Reports

Please continue to work on these reports and get them in to me as soon as you can. I would like to take the week of 9/7 off but will need to mail most of these reports out to District Office by then.

Thank you! Connie



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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



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 24 Mon
- Aug 25 Tues 10am-2pm
 Water / Food Distribution
- Aug 26 Wed Pastor Book Club
 (in the Library Conference Room)
- Aug 27 Thu
- Aug 28 Fri
- Aug 29 Sat
- Aug 30 Sun 10:30am New Beginnings
 Contemporary Worship

Join worship online
 Sunday, August 23rd -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 Invited Coming September 6th

Some invitations seem too good to be true. Healthy skepticism helps to protect us from scammers trying to fool us into falling prey to their schemes. The extensive usage of cell phones, email, and a simple mailbox puts

us on the guest list for a wide range of best ignored and discarded invitations.



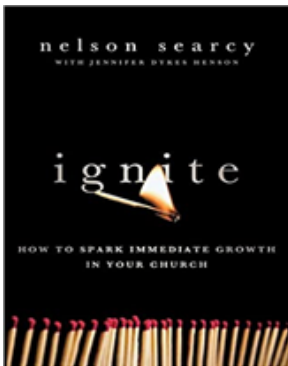
But who does not want a good return on investment? What is wrong with receiving a lot of benefits for a little effort? Someone is going to win the next mega-lottery. Why not me?

I remember when I was a child, the Christmas edition of the Sears Catalogue was a must

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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

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 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.

Invited (Coming September 6th)

...Cont. from page 4

read. Thumbing through the pages of games and toys carried me to a place where each day is filled with fun and entertainment. All that stood between me and paradise was convincing my parents that they should vouch for me with the big guy – Santa. But why stop there? Undoubtedly one of my older siblings could handle the price tag for some accessories.

There are many sayings born out of an experience that guides us away from chasing dreams that ultimately aren't good for us. How about "All good things come with a price." Another favorite is "If it seems to good to be true, it probably isn't."

Today's version of the Sears Christmas Catalogue for me comes from Northern Tool Company or Johnny's. There's a catalog for every person in need of something with an invitation to buy. Who doesn't love a bargain?

God wants us to be happy – right?

Throughout a lifetime, most of us receive invitations to parties, weddings, baby showers, dinner, lunch, Quinceañeras, bar mitzvahs, baptisms, and more. Whether we accept and attend or toss the invitation in the recycling bin depends on several factors. A common determinant is competing invitations. We can't really be in two places at once. While Zoom and Facetime help, we usually have to choose.

We place a value on each invitation we receive in determining how we respond. An invitation to spend time with one person may not seem as inviting as a similar invitation from a different person. How we choose to respond to an invitation reflects our values.

The apostle Paul reminds the folks in Corinth that our values change as we mature. "When I was a

child, my speech, feelings, and thinking were all those of a child; now that I am an adult, I have no more use for childish ways" (1 Corinthians 13:11). I don't want to press this too far, however. Child's play is healthy at all ages, and there is a lot we can learn from children.

I switched to the Northern Tool catalog because their products suit me better than the latest electronic game suits me. My values changed, but I still love electronic games. Just not as much as a tool that makes a job easier.

In addition to our values, reputation also affects whether we accept an invitation. I used Northern Tool Company as an example because my experiences with ordering from them are mostly good. When one of our children invites Cyn-di and me to visit, we place a high priority on their

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Historians refer to Caesarea Philippi as a "Greco-Roman" city. Greek culture heavily influenced this entire region. And even after the Romans conquered this region, Greek influence continued. The Greek language was prevalent among the more literate although Aramaic was more common among the people following Jesus. The city was near another ancient city called Dan, in the norther part of Israel.

One commentary noted that if you follow the Baniyas stream to the cliff area, there is no doubt that you are in a very unique place. In the century before Jesus was born, Herod the Great built the Temple of Augustus (Augusteum) to honor Caesar. The temple sat in front of the cave that was believed to be the gateway to the underworld, and where the Greek god Pan lived. Herod's son, Philip, ruled over this part of Palestine, who made this city the capital, honoring Caesar Tiberius. It was believed that the waters in this area was the origin of the Jordan River.

For years, the residents of this area offered sacrifices to the Greek god Pan and other gods. The area became off-limits for Jews due to its history of pagan worship and association with satan. Don't you find this an interesting place for Jesus to reveal His identity to His followers? Standing in a place that His followers associated with the great tempter. Perhaps the symbolism points us to an impending battle between light and darkness.

Decades after Jesus and His followers visit Caesarea Philippi, Paul reminds the community of believers living in Rome that while they live in the world, they should not conform to the ways of the world. Instead, Paul urges all believers to be transformed by the power of God's Spirit into a new way of thinking and acting.

Paul also reminds us that each of us are created with special abilities. And our abilities are not ours to keep to ourselves. Rather, we are to work together to build a world fashioned after the kingdom ushered in by Jesus Christ.

I sometimes imagine Jesus among us today. Sporting a Black Lives Matters t-shirt and leading a peaceful protest. Stepping up to the microphone without neither apprehension or notes, I imagine Him speaking truth to those in power. "Black lives matter a great deal to me," He says. "This doesn't mean that I love any one else any less."

Coming up

I invite you to join us next Sunday as Pastor Sylvia Pittman offers our message. Sylvia will wrap up our current series, we call Shameless. When scripture is used to justify oppression we need to consider whether we misunderstood the message. Join us online or in person. Be aware that we follow social distancing practices without exception. Free face masks are available and must be worn in our building.

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Romans 12:2

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](#).

**Join us online via
Webinar or Facebook**

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Pastor Tommy

invitation. When I receive an email inviting me to donate to a particular political candidate, I can't hit the delete button fast enough. I'm not interested in some invitations.

One of the most potent invitations found in scripture comes from God, speaking through the Prophet Isaiah. God's angle in this invitation is one of comparison and drawing on shared experiences. "Why spend money on what does not satisfy?" (Isaiah 55:2). Great argument. Who has not wasted money on something that disappointed us? God's invitation offers compelling evidence. Almost too good to be true.

Why spend money on what does not satisfy?

Isaiah 55:2

Yet, millions of people accept God's invitation and discover that this offer, that sounded too good to be true, delivers just what was promised. A lot depends on the reputation of who sends out the

invitation. For those who have felt disappointment targeted toward God, this invitation may go straight to the junk-mailbox.

This is where those of us who found God's invitation truthful come into the conversation. We are the torchbearers singing praises of thanksgiving. We offer the testimony that makes an offer believable that otherwise sounds too good to be true.

But sometimes we decline an invitation because we're already committed. We sent an RSVP for Stan and Dave's wedding. Meanwhile, an invitation arrives from Sally and Joan to help them celebrate their anniversary. We choose between two great options. Based in large part on our values.

Jesus tells this story about a big party as an illustration of how God's love works. In His telling, Jesus explains that many of the invited guests started making excuses as to why they could not come to the party. And since it was a big party and all the deposits were non-refundable, the



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

If you haven't had a chance to stop by to check out our produce from our Asbury Farms Market, please do so! Hours that we are 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

Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Matthew 16:13-20

NOTES FROM WORSHIP

QUESTIONS FOR LIFE GROUPS

1. Read Matthew 16:13-20. Who do you say that Jesus is? Who do you say you are? In what ways does where you live or work, affect your identity?
2. Read the article in this week's Circuit Rider, *Identify*. Why do you suppose that Jesus choose Caesarea Philippi as a place to reveal His identity to His followers? What does this mean for you?
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.

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Pastor Tommy

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webinar or Facebook***

Welcome to the Asbury Community

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Invited (Coming September 6th) ... cont. from page 7

guest list was expanded to include anybody willing to show up.

Jesus explained that this is how God's love works. We can make excuses all we want about why we're too busy to show up. But this does not negate our invitation. It just delays our joy until we're not so busy.

Meanwhile, everyone is invited to the Lord's party. There is an abundance of everything good. Most of all, there is plenty of love to go around. No one is left out or left behind. So go tell everyone you see that God is waiting on them to show up.

We call our new series *Invited*. The topic is motivated by the traditional return to school. But this year is different.

The pandemic continues to wreak havoc with our plans to return to some version of normalcy. Some families welcome this opportunity for in-person school, while others choose to decline. The invitation and the RSVP are complicated.

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