

ASBURY CIRCUIT RIDER

Rocks and Hard Places—Exile and the blame game¹

"You made me mess up!" the four-year-old says to her sister as the blocks she carefully placed into a work of art tumbles into a pile of chaos. "What did I do?" her sister shouts back.

It starts young, as though blaming others is in the human DNA — a part of the original plan. Andrea Blundell begins her article on this topic by defining blaming as "the fine art of making others responsible for all the difficult things that happen to us." Sometimes we call it the "blame game."

Psychologists call blaming others a "self-serving bias." Research uncovered that many of us take the credit when things go well, but we prefer to blame others when things don't go well. It's difficult to admit we're wrong, we made a decision that turned out bad, or we simply messed up. Mainly when the consequences are undesirable.²

The Book of Jeremiah's prophecies describes a time when the people of Judah were confronted with the consequences of their choices. They found themselves

with tough choices. Let's say they were between a rock and a hard place. Let me explain.



First, it's essential to distinguish between the people with privilege and power from the poor and marginalized.

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January 31, 2021

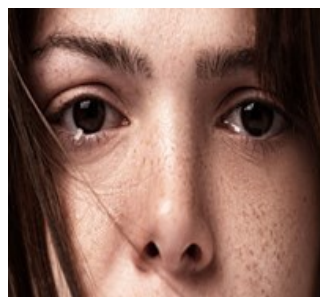


You must wear a mask while in the area and to enter church office. If you don't have one, let us know we will provide one for you.

Thank you & Stay safe Everyone!

Leftovers—Vaccines for the heart

According to an article provided by the Cleveland Clinic on their website, tears are an essential part of a healthy life. Dr. Michael Roizen, a wellness expert at the clinic, reminds us that tears help us see clearly, wash away debris, and alert others to our emotional feelings.



While physiologically, tears are not a direct result of activity within our heart, metaphorically, we connect heart conditions to emotional tears.

One of the causes behind emotional tears is feeling empathy, according to the American Academy of Ophthalmology. We see others suffering, and even though we aren't experiencing what they're experiencing, we are moved by their plight.

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Leftovers—Vaccines for the heart ..cont from page 1

We form an affinity with them by sharing some of the feelings they may be feeling. And we're moved to tears.

The other day, our nation crossed another horrible threshold as more than 400 thousand people have died due to COVID infections. It is difficult to feel empathy towards a number — even a huge number. Feeling compassion towards a family member, a friend, or even a stranger, when we recognize the pain they're feeling from their loss, comes with being human. And most of us show a strong alliance with pain through tears unless there is some other physiological problem preventing what is otherwise a sign of normality.

Our world is full of suffering and reasons for tears. And the pandemic is unique only in its global effect. In Rwanda, hundreds of thousands were murdered within weeks by soldiers and militias from a rival ethnic group in 1994. Instead of stopping the slaughter, the United States, along with much of the world, stood by. A psychologist named Paul Slovic decided to investigate the apparent apathy of so many. And his conclusion was troubling. ²

For example, when his researchers showed people a picture of a 7-year-old girl dying of starvation, they responded positively. He repeated the experiment with larger and larger groups of children. While it seems logical that the more children pictured, the greater the response, Dr. Slovic discovered that this wasn't the case. In some cases, the response was less empathetic.

"In fact, the more who die, sometimes the less we care," Slovic said in an interview. As the numbers increase, it seems that death becomes impersonal, causing increased hopelessness that our actions can have any effect.

Dr. Slovic offered this worrisome observation — "Statistics are human beings with tears dried off. And that's dangerous because we need tears to motivate us." We need tears to motivate us, but numbers, as they increase, become a drying agent for tears. How do we maintain a balance of empathy and sanity as we unite to overcome the deadly forces that threaten us?



★ Coming up this week ★

In Our Prayers

Richard Oram
Kevin Croom
Sylvia Pittman
Shirley Craig



FRIENDS AND LOVED ONES WHO ARE HOMEBOUND OR IN NURSING CARE

Nancy Elston Elaine Lamoreaux
Norma Buzzard
Mary Nations

(Pastor Book Club will be via Zoom until further notice—call the church office for more info 235-0016)


The COVID-19 pandemic is still serious and the number of new cases in Genesee County continues to rise.

PLEASE CONTINUE TO WEAR YOUR MASKS WHEN COMING INTO THE ASBURY BUILDING.

Pastor Tommy

- Feb 1 Mon
- Feb 2 Tues 10am-2pm
Water / Food Distribution
- Feb 3 Wed Pastor Book Club
(Via Zoom until further notice)
- Feb 4 Thu
- Feb 5 Fri
- Feb 6 Sat
- Feb 7 Sun 10:30am New Beginnings
Contemporary Worship

Join worship online
Sunday, January 31st—10:30am

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 Bridges Coming February 17th

The image should be familiar. It's the same one from our January series, *Daring to Hope in an unstable world*.

The image stays with us because a lot of us accepted the

the challenge. We're daring to hope despite the anxiety we're feeling from the threats that surround us.

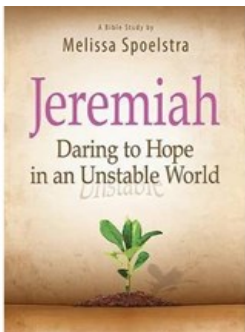
The Speaker of the House recently named the source of at least one of the threats as coming from within. In the case of Congress, the Speaker was referring to members of Congress threatening other legislatures.



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Book Club News

We complete our discussion of the book and videos by Adam



Hamilton, *Incarnation*. Our group utilized the study group videos available on a new resource that is available

to all of us called Amplify. This library of study materials is accessible online. More information will be coming if you want to start your own study group or do some learning on your own.

This month our attention turns to Hope. But we realize that hope can be harder to hold onto when there is so much turmoil. The availability of a vaccine offers hope that life will eventually return to some form of normal. But there continues to be a lot of reasons to feel dismayed.

In January our group will take a deeper dive into the Book of Jeremiah. We plan to use a book written by the wife of an Ohio pastor, Melissa Spoelstra. The title of her book is *Daring to Hope in an Unstable World*.

Each week we watch a video featuring the author as she takes us through Jeremiah, not page by page, but theme by theme. Join our meeting via Zoom if possible so that you are able to watch the video. If you call in by phone, you should be able to hear the audio well enough to participate in the discussion that follows.

I encourage you to join online for our Wednesday gatherings. Alternatively, you can call in by phone, be heard, and hear what others are saying by calling (929) 436-2866, and entering the meeting ID, 282 039 5568#.

Leadership in Worship & Service

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

Asbury Staff

Rev. Dr. Tommy McDoniel	Pastor
Connie Portillo	Office Secretary
Sylvia Pittman	Empowerment Arts
Jim Craig	Leadership Chair
Kevin Croom	Dir. Operations

Matt DePalma	Farm Manager
Kevin Croom	Farm Operations
Israel Unger	Function to Funding
Kim Sims	Connections
Karl Collyer	Production
Katelin Maylum	
South Flint Soup Kitchen/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.

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.

Pastor Tommy

Bridges (Coming February 17th)... Asbury Worship Series

But the threat from within also includes the church that we hold dear. The domestic terrorists that stormed the U.S. Capital did so, they claim, because the violence they perpetrated was God's will. They claim a version of the truth offered to them by false prophets claiming biblical authority. But their truth contradicts the trajectory of the biblical narrative. The threat is from within.

Bridges is a series about "pursuing God's heart for racial reconciliation." But let's be clear. Race is a human construct created for the purpose of creating a social, economic, and even religious hierarchy. Reconciliation begins with recognizing the raw truth that humans are fond of creating our own sense of the truth.¹

Our current series is based on the prophecies of Jeremiah. By January 31 our message reaches a startling conclusion. We are the people of Judah. Our denial and blaming others for our own failings is coming to a predictable conclusion. God is confronting our nation. Surrender to exile by giving up privilege and power. Share our resources with our neighbors. Rebuild systems that perpetrate injustice. Take care of God's planet.

God is merciful. The stories found in scripture offer testimony that God insists on love. God demands love first and foremost towards the One True God and no others. But loving God requires that we love one another, our planet, and ourselves. So reconciliation is a process that frees us in all four directions.

Our book club concludes our study of Melissa Spoelstra's book, *Jeremiah: Daring to Hope in an Unstable World*, in a couple of weeks.² We plan to read and study Latasha Morrison's book as part of our celebration of the Easter Season that we sometimes call Lent. It is a time of reflection, repentance, and reconciliation. Plan to join us each Wednesday at 12 Noon either in the main meeting room (Library) or online.

I pray that you will join us each Sunday morning at 10:30 am. We plan to be live on both Facebook and YouTube. We go live at 10:30 am. You can find these links along with more information about us, or join our live broadcast on our [website](http://www.FlintAsbury.org) at **FlintAsbury.org**. And especially, I look forward to being with you, wherever you are, on Christmas Eve at 6 pm.

Pastor Tommy

¹ Latasha Morrison, *Be the Bridge: Pursuing God's Heart for Racial Reconciliation*. Yates & Yates and Penguin Random House, 2019.

² Melissa Spoelstra. *Jeremiah: Daring to Hope in an Unstable World*. © 2014. Nashville: Abingdon Press.

Rocks and Hard Places—Exile and the blame game¹ ... *cont. from pg 1*

While no one group of people had a monopoly on bad decisions, this story's focus is on the people who knew better and had the power to make better choices. And God, speaking through the prophet Jeremiah made this abundantly clear.

The nation of Judah were descendants of tribes first chosen by God to be an example of why we should all want to live according to God's plan for humanity. But somewhere along the way, their priorities shifted towards, shall we say, a "self-serving bias." The idea that all people are of value and putting others' needs ahead of their own was replaced with an "everyone for themselves" and "I matter more than you" approach. And their day of reckoning was coming near.

Historically, God's covenant with their ancestors meant that they enjoyed divine protection. Somehow things nearly always worked out for them. They prospered, and their nation was the envy of the world. But during Jeremiah's time, this was no longer the case. And the latest bully on the block had plans to take over. It was clear that should Judea's enemy, the Babylonians, attack them, Judah's people were on their own. God was on the side of their enemy in the impending battle.

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God pleaded with the people through Jeremiah and other preachers, priests, and prophets to change their ways. But they refused. God warned them that Babylonia would soon attack and prevail. And their only choice at that point was to surrender. Let's call this their hard place.

The leaders had two choices. They could have turned back to God and lived by the covenant that God offered. I'm calling this choice their rock for a couple of reasons. First, God is immovable, permanent, and insistent on God's way. For some reason, their knowledge, wealth, and power were more important to them. The idea of giving up their privilege and sharing with the poor was apparently too much for them.

But if they surrendered to the Babylonians, they would lose their power and privilege anyway. The Babylonian military would take them away into exile. And God warned them through Jeremiah that exile would last a long time. But God also promised that exile would eventually end and God would welcome them back into covenant.



The people of privilege found themselves between a rock and a hard place, given their two choices. So they did what any four-year-old learns how to do. They blamed everyone but themselves. They blamed the victims. If only they were smarter, worked harder, they could have more. They denied that systemic racism was real, despite the apparent facts of the case. They created their own version of the truth that kept them in power while marginalizing others.

So those at the top who had the most power and the most to give up took a third option. They would fight to hold onto power despite Jeremiah's warning from God that they would not prevail. And history proved Jeremiah's prophecy was correct. Those at the very top perished at the hands of the Babylonians. Those with knowledge, wealth, and privilege lost what they had, except their knowledge, and went into exile.



Asbury Farms offers fresh produce every week!

Go to our website, FlintAsbury.org to place your order for a Veggie Box, or sign up for a subscription. You can also call our office at 810-235-0016 to place your order. We accept EBT and Double-up Bucks for a limited time only!!!

Call By Noon on Wednesday for Thursday delivery.

Life groups question & notes

Don't let the wise boast in their wisdom, the powerful boast in their power, or the rich boast in their riches. Boast in this alone: that they truly know me and understand that I am the Lord who demonstrates unfailing love and who brings justice and righteousness to the earth...

Jeremiah 9:23-24 (NLT)

NOTES FROM WORSHIP

QUESTIONS FOR LIFE GROUPS

Read Jeremiah 9:23-24. What is our experience with people boasting when they have power and privilege over others? How does it make you feel? What might it mean not to let the powerful boast in their power, knowledge, or wealth? What might it mean to boast in your knowledge of God?

Read the article in this week's Circuit Rider. *Rocks and Hard Places*. Have you ever felt like none of your choices were options you wanted to choose between? Did you find yourself blaming others for your limited options? How did you go about making a choice anyway? What was the outcome?

1. How can the members of our 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.

FEBRUARY—ANGEL CLOSET/FOOD GIVEAWAY DATES SOUTH FLINT SOUP KITCHEN

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February 3rd, 11am-noon, we will be accepting **WALK-INS** for the Angel Closet!

Please be ready to wait in line. Appointments will be on a first come first serve basis for our Angel Closet and clients are encouraged to bring a list of items they need to make the process go faster. Masks are required and only 1 person at a time may enter the Angel Closet. Temperature checks will be completed before clients come through the door.

South Flint Soup Kitchen will be having their Food Giveaways on **February 10th and February 24th from 11am to 12Noon**. No need to sign up! Stop at the Vermilya Avenue side of the building and say you want food from our Pantry. **ALL ARE WELCOME!**



ANGEL CLOSET/
FOOD GIVEAWAYS
3410 Fenton Road
Flint MI 48507
3 Blocks North of Atherton Road

Phone: 810-239-3427

Email:

southflintsoupkitchen@gmail.com

The Babylonians left the poor and marginalized to enjoy whatever was left behind by those going into exile or stolen by the invaders. We don't learn a lot about this group except that they weren't being punished. They were the victims, and God would find some other way to care for them. But they also didn't get to write the story. But that's a topic for another day.

This is the issue, isn't it? As a nation, we find ourselves roughly in the same place as the people of Judah did centuries ago. We finally removed a person willing to do anything to hold onto power. Still, we're left with other leaders willing to keep looking for that third option. I'm not trying to name our Babylon, but there are plenty of threats to keep us on edge. And an invisible virus seems to be holding most of the power as of late.

We're left with two choices where life continues. Those of us with knowledge and the privilege of making choices can surrender to exile. We can do this knowing that exile is temporary. But this means giving up our privilege. But we can hold onto our knowledge. Eventually, we end up back at the rock.

We can choose the rock now. We can surrender our privilege and anything else that sits between the God who created us and us. Last week, our topic was a heart change. We can surrender to the Spirit of God in anticipation of a heart change.

We don't have to go somewhere else to exile. As long as we are living apart from God, we're already in exile. Eventually, we learn that there is only one choice if we want to live. And that's the immovable, permanent, and eternal Rock of Salvation.

I pray that you will join us each Sunday at 10:30 am as we learn together from the successes and mistakes of Jeremiah's community. Invite your friends to join us online or in-person.

Don't let the wise boast in their wisdom or the powerful boast in their power, or the rich boast in their riches, boast in this alone; that they truly know me...

Jeremiah 9:23-24

We have a new button on the homepage of our [website](#) - [Click here to watch](#). This button takes you to a viewer to allow you to join live or watch later in the week. We're also live on [Facebook](#) and our newly launched [YouTube channel](#). 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](#).

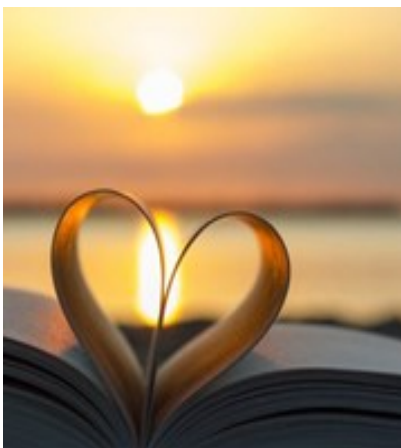
We post an archive of past editions on our website under the tab, Connect - choose [Newsletters](#).

Pastor Tommy

¹ [Some of the content for our series comes from Melissa Spoelstra. *Jeremiah: Daring to Hope in an Unstable World*. © 2014. Nashville: Abingdon Press.](#)

² Andrea Blundell, "Why We Put the Blame On Others – and the Real Cost We Pay," © Harley Therapy Counseling Blog, September 10, 2015.

I often think about a claim that I found buried in the preface of one of the many books I used for research several years ago. In his book, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, the late Dr. Dallas Willard argued that the church has, in our possession, the only solution to what underlies most of the world's problems. If this is true, and I believe that it is true, how do we distribute this potent vaccine to a hurting world? How do we convince people that this vaccine is safe and effective without the rigor that usually accompanies new vaccines?



Asking people to simply trust God isn't working

so well. Retired chaplain, David Fetterman, asks the question that complicates acceptance. "Why should we trust God when we see so much hatred, violence, and anxiety daily? How can we be expected to believe in good news when we're barraged daily with bad news?"

Fetterman reminds us that Jesus doesn't really answer these questions directly. Instead, Jesus offers us the hope of faith.³

This is the new covenant I will make with the people... I will put my instructions deep within them, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people.

Jeremiah 31:33

This past week most of us witnessed the celebration of a transfer of power of the U.S. presidency. Among the numerous guests offering words through music, statements, and poetry was a

young, African American woman -- the daughter of a single mother living in Los Angeles. Her poem, inspired by the magnitude of the tragic events she has witnessed over the past few years, moved from naming our human condition to claiming hope.

Amanda Gorman begins her poem with this question — "Where can we find light in this never-ending shade?" But she ends her poem with this challenge — "The new dawn blooms as we free it. For there is always light if only we're brave enough to see it. If only we're brave enough to be it."

As the virus violates millions of bodies, racism violates justice, and greed violates our planet. The mounting numbers dry our tears and leave us numb. Empathy is erased, and hope hides in the shadows unless we look beyond the numbers and see the tears on the faces of front-line workers and grieving families.

This logistical problem cannot be solved by simply finding more efficient ways of putting a vaccine in the arms of larger numbers of people. Yet, the solution is incredibly simple while frustratingly evasive.

We must dare to repeat and live into Jeremiah's prophecy as he shared the Word of God with a people hungry for words of hope. God said, "This is the new covenant I will make with the people ...I will put my instructions deep within them, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they be my people." (Jeremiah 31:33)

The vaccines promise to eradicate the threat of the COVID virus. However, the issues that divide us remain. The new normal must not be a repetition of failed attempts to ignore our neighbors' grievances or our planet. What remains is a heart condition.

And the church has the proven antidote that can move us from complacency to profound courage. But this heart condition is both physiological and spiritual. Our human condition leans toward self-preservation and self-promotion. We simply, cannot on our own, eradicate the virus that degrades the human heart and reduces our empathies to statistics.

The solution begins with humbly accepting our own incompetence. We confess that we're incapable, by our own power, to cure the disease infecting our metaphorical heart. We acknowledge that we are ready to accept God's cure for our apathy. And we invest our time and resources in a new way that puts God ahead of all else.

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² William Wan and Brittany Shammass, "Why Americans are numb to the staggering coronavirus death toll." © Washington Post, December 21, 2020.

³ David Fetterman, "Hope Beyond Today." *The Upper Room Disciplines 2021: A Book of Daily Devotions*. © Upper Room Books, 2020, pp. 37).