

ASBURY CIRCUIT RIDER

A Love Story¹ (Pride and Prejudice)

Valentines Day is both a strange and a familiar day of celebration. Although not an official holiday, at least one greeting card company doesn't mind if we call it a "Hallmark Holiday." A reminder that some of us check the trademark on the card's back to determine if the sender cares enough. For the record, I'm not one of those.

An expert in the history of the Christian church, Professor Lisa Bitel of USC Dornsife College, writes that Valentine's Day began as a celebration of an individual, beheaded for his beliefs. This happened during the time of Roman persecution. There are actually two stories, according to Professor Bitel,

of individuals with the transliterated name St. Valentine that came to the same dreadful end. Individuals are declared Saints



Relics of St. Valentine of Terni at the basilica of Saint Mary in Cosmedin...by Dnalor 01 , Wikimedia Commons, CC-BY-SA 3.0)

after a careful validation of historical evidence of holy miracles.²

But my favorite explanation of how Valentine's Day came to be about love comes from the Roman celebration of Lupercalia that took place in mid-February. This celebration, involving the sacrifice of goats and dogs, became a sort of urban carnival. It was known for the half-naked young men who ran through Rome's streets wearing thongs cut from the skins of newly killed goats. Legends surfaced that there was a connection between this ritual and the birth of healthy babies.

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Volume 2 Issue 21

February 14, 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!

Exceptions (Consequences are not rejection)

As we come to the end of our series, *Daring to hope in an unstable world*, it's fitting to turn our attention to the good news that is the source of our hope. Otherwise, we run the risk of losing hope when we discover that we are frighteningly close to the situation that the Judean's reached during the time of Jeremiah. We, too, can be rejected by God and left to the

We, too, can be rejected by God and left to the consequences of our bad choices.¹



Yet, we dare to hope in an unstable world because we know that often what feels like rejection is

not rejection at all. God allowed the people of Judah to suffer from the consequences of their choices. Faced with an increasing gap between the well-off and the poor in our country, we have similar choices to make. We are also faced with how to dismantle systemic racism amid a resurgence of white supremacy threatening violence

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Exceptions (Consequences are not rejection)..cont from page 1

and empowered by political leaders. And the attack on the U.S. Capital illustrated for the world the urgency of our impending confrontation.

This week we explore our feelings of rejection to help us realize that God did not reject the people in Jeremiah's time. God simply allowed them to suffer the consequences of their decisions, which took them to the place that those of us in privilege are uncertain we want to go. They lost their privilege. God always sides with the poor and marginalized. And while open carry laws might intimidate a lot of us, intimidation won't change God's mind.

Linda Graham is a marriage and family therapist. In a recent post on her website, she shared an exercise that helps us to identify how our body responds to the sting of rejection. The exercise goes something like this:

*Allow yourself to sit quietly for a moment, eyes gently closed. When you're ready, imagine yourself walking down the street on the sidewalk, someplace familiar to you. You're fine, humming along, and then across the street walking toward you, but on the other side of the street, you see someone you know, and you wave hello – and they don't wave back. They don't wave back. Stay quiet for a moment. Simply notice what happens inside as you perceive and react to not being seen nor responded to by them.*²

Psychologists call what happens to us "separation distress response." Our brainstem triggers an unconscious response that can quickly escalate into a conscious effort to try and make sense of what just happened. Linda Graham noticed that there is an endemic of "It must be me" in our culture that results in feelings of unworthiness among us.

This separation distress response happens at some of the most inconvenient times. Our fear of triggering this response can cause us to stay with a crowd beyond when we realize that we disagree with what the crowd is doing. Or to support a political leader or party that no longer represents our ideals to avoid rejection by other supporters.

Separation distress response holds us in unhealthy relationships and convinces us that we are the exception to divine grace. We are the rejected. Under such threat, otherwise rational people can conclude that they are sick and tired of feeling like they are the problem. And they rebel, finding justification for responses antithetical to the love stories found in scripture.



★ Coming up this week ★

In Our Prayers

Richard Oram
 Kevin Croom
 Sylvia Pittman
 Shirley Craig



FRIENDS AND LOVED ONES WHO ARE HOMEBOUNDED OR IN NURSING CARE

Nancy Elston Elaine Lamoreaux
 Norma Buzzard Mary Nations
 JoAn Kirby

Feb 15	Mon	Presidents Day
Feb 16	Tues	10am-2pm Water / Food Distribution
Feb 17	Wed	Pastor Book Club 6:00pm Ash Wednesday Service
Feb 18	Thu	
Feb 19	Fri	
Feb 20	Sat	
Feb 21	Sun	10:30am New Beginnings Contemporary Worship

(Pastor Book Club will still be via Zoom until further notice—but will slowly start to meet in person, depending on how the next few weeks will go... Please call the church office for more info 235-0016)

EVEN THOUGH OUR GOVERNOR HAS OPENED UP BUSINESSES., WE MUST CONTINUE TO WEAR OUR MASKS WHEN COMING INTO THE ASBURY BUILDING, AND USE HAND SANITIZER THAT IS PLACED THROUGHOUT THE BUILDING. THANK YOU AND EVERYONE STAY SAFE!

Pastor Tommy

Join worship online
 Sunday, February 14th—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 finished our study of the book and videos by Melissa Spoelstra, *Jeremiah:*



Daring to Hope in an Unstable World. This often misunderstood book of the bible offered important lessons applicable to our lives together. We

learned just how much we have in common with the people of Jeremiah's time. And this insight can help us make better decisions to help us avoid the exile that they experienced as a result of their turning away from God.

From now until after Easter our attention turns to building bridges. The fact that the church perpetuated slavery, segregation, and racism is no longer a family secret. Even high school history classes, known for teaching a version of our history that tries to put our past in the best possible light, are beginning to share bits and pieces of truth. There is a rumbling in our core that the universe is demanding change now.

Even though the church is not a very credible witness when it comes to racial reconciliation, we believe that our past doesn't have to determine our future. We can take actions now that will help to change the world. This is the nature of God. To never give up on overcoming darkness with light. And to learn new ways to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. A gospel of reconciliation.

Beginning on February 17, our Book Club participants take a 9-week journey together under the tutorage of Latisha Morrison. Her book, *Be the Bridge: Pursuing God's Heart for Racial Reconciliation*, will be our guide. Our plan is to complete one chapter each week. Our study promises to be challenging and fulfilling.

A few of us meet in person each week as long as the number of new coronavirus cases remain in the lower range. We each make our own arrangements for lunch at this point. We look forward to a return to pot-luck lunches at some point in the future.

If you prefer to avoid groups or live too far away, 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#

We are a diverse group and we are delighted when new persons join us. I hope that you will join in on our discussion.

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

Leadership in Worship & Service

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.

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](http://www.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.

A Love Story¹ (Pride and Prejudice) ... *cont. from pg 1*

More directly connected to our version of Valentine's Day comes out of English folklore. It was reported that certain birds choose their mate and lay eggs during February. And when author Geoffrey Chaucer compared the February feast of St. Valentinus to birds' mating, this struck a chord with people. February became a popular month for writing love letters. Similarly, Ophelia called herself Hamlet's valentine in Shakespeare's famous play.

Entrepreneurs smelled a market opportunity to commercialize our need to love and be loved. An estimated 190 million valentine's day cards are purchased each year to allow us to express our love to others who are special in our lives. Whether a teacher, the cute guy or girl that sits next to us in class, our partner, or a good friend.

Love is very much the business of the church. The bible is not only a historical account of salvation; the bible is a love story. There are stories describing God's love for creation found throughout scripture. The bible is God's valentine for humanity.

This helps us to realize the tremendous humility that love requires. Without humility, love is superficial. God chose to live among humans as an expression of love. And Jesus did not live like a king with power and authority. Instead, God lived among the impoverished without a bank account or any form of financial security. God's humility makes it clear that God's love is sincere.

Jesus expects His followers to love others with the same degree of humility that defined divine love. A humility that sees another person as loved by God without condition. We are called to see past our own biases and expectations for each other and see the other as God sees them. God calls us by our name and not by our mistakes.



We are God's beloved children. We are Mary, Jim, Bobby, Latasha — we are the persons God created with love and attention to detail. We are not liars, cheats, whores, addicts, prostitutes — we are not the mistakes we make no more than we are the good things we accomplish.

There is a story about Jesus told by the author of Luke's Gospel about love. Like many love stories, this one is a bit edgy (Luke 7: 36-50).

Jesus is having dinner with a local authority named Simon when a woman invites herself and sits behind Jesus. Apparently, this woman had a rather, let's call it, a reputation. We really don't know anything about her. Even her name is left out. What we know is the opinions of the man Jesus was visiting and the narrator of the story.

The woman brought a jar of perfume and stood behind Jesus, crying and wetting his feet with her tears. And then she dries his feet with her hair, kisses his feet, and then she poured some perfume on them.

So the homeowner is somewhat annoyed by the whole scene, or perhaps a bit envious. He says under his breath, "If this man really were a prophet, he would know who this woman is who is touching him; he would know what kind of sinful life she lives!"

I suspect Simon was intentionally loud enough for his other guests and Jesus to hear what he said. And Jesus didn't miss the sarcasm of his host. But Jesus didn't confront his host with a snappy comeback. Instead, he asks his host if it would be alright to tell a story.

Two men owed money to a money-lender. One owed him five hundred silver coins, and the other owed him fifty. Neither of them could pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Which one, then, will love him more?

Simon answers with reasonable logic. "I suppose," answered Simon, "that it would be the one who was forgiven more." "You are right," said Jesus.



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

[A woman] ... stood behind Jesus, by his feet, crying and wetting his feet with her tears. Then she dried his feet with her hair, kissed them, and poured the perfume on them.

Luke 7: 36-50 (GNT)

NOTES FROM WORSHIP

QUESTIONS FOR LIFE GROUPS

1. Read Luke 7: 36-50. Have you read this story before? What are your immediate reactions? Can you imagine yourself having enough humility to do what the woman did for Jesus? If not, what are some of the obstacles in your way?
2. Read the article in this week's Circuit Rider, *A love story*. Happy Valentine's Day. Tell a story about a Valentine you received or gave once — what were the circumstances and reaction? After reading this week's article, read the story in Luke again. Any new revelations?
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.



FEBRUARY—FOOD GIVEAWAY DATE
SOUTH FLINT SOUP KITCHEN

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South Flint Soup Kitchen will be having their Food Giveaway on **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, BUT PLEASE WEAR YOUR MASKS!**



FOOD GIVEAWAYS

3410 Fenton Road
Flint MI 48507
3 Blocks North of Atherton Road

Phone: 810-239-3427

Email:

southflintsoupkitchen@gmail.com

Jesus then turns toward the woman but says to Simon and his other guests, "Do you see this woman?" The truthful answer is no. Simon didn't see the woman. It's unlikely that any of his guests saw the woman. What Simon saw was the woman's reputation. She was named by the mistake that Simon believed she made. Simon saw a problem and not an act of humility, love, and faith.

The truth is that millions of people have heard this story and didn't see the woman. And millions see a person but don't see who they are. Instead, they see what they choose to believe. Sometimes it's the way they wear their hair, the hoodie that's covering their head, their posture, or a myriad of other clues that hide who they are from view.

The truth be told, in our culture, it is their skin tone that speaks the loudest. This clue is so woven into our history and culture that it was lost to our consciousness generations ago. Most of us claim that we do not act on prejudice as a result of skin tone, but this is a lie. Consciously, we may desire to be unbiased, but subconsciously, race became a part of the lens through which we see the world.

Ironically, Simon wasn't much of a host. Jesus reminded Simon that he was not given water to wash his feet when he came into Simon's home. An essential custom of the time. Nor did Simon greet Jesus with the affection that a good host shows to a person they're hosting. Simon did not show the humility that a good host shows their guests.

But the woman that Simon did not see was a holy illustration of humility. She recognized that it is customary to make sure that your guest can wash their feet. She washed the feet of Jesus herself. With her own tears.

Nor did the woman simply offer Jesus a cordial handshake or superficial hug. While Simon did neither, she offered intimacy that comes from humility that can be found only within the depths of our spirit.

After helping Simon realize that his impression of the woman was mistaken, Jesus turns to the woman and says, "Your sins are forgiven."

With this powerful statement of revelation, Jesus opens Pandora's box. According to the writer, Simon's other guests offered their own commentary. "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" they asked.

I can't help but compare their reaction to the sort of blowback I hear when someone offers us a lesson in our own cultural blindness. We often respond with a, "Who do you think you are?" statement of denial. It takes a lot of humility to show love to someone—a level of humility that doesn't come naturally.

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.

Do you see this woman?

Luke 7:44

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](#).

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Pastor Tommy

¹ [Most of the content for our series comes from Latasha Morrison, *Be the Bridge: Pursuing God's Heart for Racial Reconciliation*. Yates & Yates and Penguin Random House, 2019.](#)

² Lisa Bitel. "The 'real' St. Valentine was no patron of love." © The Conversation, February 13, 2018.

Sadly, there is pain in the world. And while much of our pain comes from disease and accidents, most of our pain comes from our decisions. We know that there is a connection between forest fires and climate change. We know that a virus spreads when given an opportunity. The people of Judea suffered because they turned to leaders and the machinery of war for their liberation. We, likewise, suffer for many of the same reasons. Pain seeks us out when we depend on human motivation and creativity alone.

British novelist C. S. Lewis wrote, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain." Pain gets our attention. Lewis referred to pain as God's megaphone. When the world isn't listening, pain stops us in our tracks and grabs our attention. And if we turn our attention to God, we learn how best to manage within the quagmire we created.

Most of us suffer rejection more than once during our formative years. And these experiences, unless they are paired with contradictory experiences of love and acceptance, can dominate our response to totally different circumstances. The neural pathways in our brain

may be stuck in a one-way superhighway that takes us to hopelessness. These pathways lead us to conclude, "It must be me." When we visit this place often enough, messages of hope are shouted down by our other inner voices.

After the Judeans were taken into exile, Jeremiah wrote a letter that shared God's message of hope. "I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope" (Jeremiah 29:11). This declaration by God to the people of Judah can be our declaration of hope as well.

"For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.

Jeremiah 29:11

We dare to hope in an unstable world because we know that God holds our hand during our pain. And while good plans work best when they become tangible, we know that God calls you and me to turn good plans into reality.

The source of our hope lies in the recognition that God loved us enough to live among people. And this love is a gift. We don't earn it, and we can never be the exception that misses out. Unless we choose otherwise.

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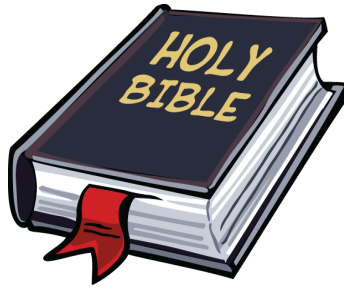
Pastor Tommy

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 Linda Graham. "The Neurobiology of Feeling Unlovable," © Linda Graham-MFT.net.

Asbury United Methodist Church
Christian Resources International

COLLECTING BIBLES OR DEVOTION BOOKS



Please help fill the empty boxes that are up front by the Platform! Christian Resources International is asking for our help in donating older or unused Bibles and devotion and faith-based Christian books. This agency was started in Fowlerville, MI in 2000 and they gather books to provide 72 different countries in learning more about their new-found Christian faith. We ask if you could go through your book collections to see if you could spare some Bibles or devotion books to send on to those people that just don't have the luxury of reading about Jesus Christ like we do.



Thank you for sharing in this ministry. For any questions, please contact Michele Weston (810) 624-1184.

