

# ASBURY CIRCUIT RIDER

## Selfies (Switched at Birth)



ADOBESTOCK\_420741644 IMAGE LICENSED

Many of us hide our true identities from the visibility of others. We hide who we are even from people close to us.

J. J. Warren, in his book, *Reclaiming Church*, shared a childhood story about a Halloween costume that his mother made for him. That year, J. J. took to

the streets of his neighborhood as an Airplane.<sup>1</sup>

The young J. J.'s problems began as soon as he tried to get through the first door. His costume was too wide, and he had to walk through doorways sideways. His costume made it impossible for another person to share the same sidewalk as he went door to door.

His costume was awkward. But then aren't all costumes a bit

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Volume 2 Issue 20

June 20, 2021



You may still wear a mask while in the area if you are more comfortable. If you don't have one, let us know we will provide one for you



## Googolplex (Catching Fire)



*Catching Fire* is the 2nd novel of *The Hunger Games*, a trilogy series written by Suzanne Collins. The setting is a dystopia called Panem, located in North America. Panem consists of a

wealthy Capitol and 13 districts in varying states of poverty.<sup>2</sup>

Each year, children are selected by lottery from the districts for a reality program based

on a death match. The winner's district received survival resources, but the primary goal behind the reality show was entertainment. In the first novel, a primary character named Katniss volunteers to take her sister's place in the reality show. Katniss and her family are from the poorest of the Districts.

In *Catching Fire*, Katniss, in alliance with another contestant named Peeta, refused to conclude the show by

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## Googolplex (Catching Fire) ..cont from page 1

fighting each other. The producers decide to capitalize on the couple's popularity, and Katniss emerges as a thought leader. She becomes a galvanizing symbol of rebellion against oppression which begins a chain reaction inspiring rebellion in the districts.

*The Hunger Games* was most popular among persons born after 1996. Now known as Generation-Z, this up-and-coming generation is more racially and ethnically diverse than any previous generation. Non-whites make up approximately 48% of this generation. And Gen-Z'ers are likely to be the most well-educated generation in history.<sup>3</sup>

Generation Z'ers are all familiar with what it means to "google" for information. Google is the company name that launched the most popular internet search engine in use today. And this series is based in large part on a book written by a member of Generation-Z, J. J. Warren.<sup>1</sup>

My point is that vocabulary changes over time. New words come into widespread usage. Today we google to find information, and Gen Z'ers aren't familiar with *Encyclopedia Britannica*. The domain, Google.com, was registered in 1997. The word "google" didn't exist before then and thus unfamiliar.<sup>4</sup>

One version of the story about Google's origin involves a spelling error and a seldom utilized mathematical term, googolplex.

Initially, developers Larry Page and Sergey Brin called their new search engine BackRub. When they realized they needed a cooler name, googolplex came to mind since it represents a huge number.



I begin this week's article with this background as a way of easing into the subject of biblical translation. Or dare I say mistranslation. My dad called this "taking the long way around the barn." The origin of words in widespread usage plays a significant role in what we believe the Bible says. Can you imagine Jesus saying to Peter, "Why don't you google disciple and tell the others what it means?"

Tradition, what we're told when we are young, is perhaps the most powerful force at work when it comes to translation. "We've always done it this way" implicitly includes we've always believed this about that. Which is a lie. Tradition changes, often in subtle ways, with each generation.

Interpretations and translation evolve over time. Biblical interpreters use tradition, experience, a particular translation bias of the actual text, and reasoning to arrive at a specific presentation of the text. And in the spirit of clarity, some translations are rewritten using widely used language that retells the stories based on a particular understanding. Interpretations change and sometimes move further away from the truth.

Biblical translation is tricky. Most biblical interpreters try to address some of the complexity by breaking down the factors that affect how we read scripture. Which invites each

generation to read scripture with fresh eyes and open minds. Otherwise, we're prone to simply believing what we're told. Even though generations before us chose new interpretations based on their particular cultural bias and what they knew at the time.

Nevertheless, we each come to scripture with a frame of reference. We come with past beliefs that, more often than not, results in our reading scripture as an affirmation of our existing beliefs. This is fascinating when we consider that one of the primary themes of scripture is changing one's mind about God.

What might happen if we read scripture with the idea of learning something we didn't know before? What if we approached the Bible assuming that some of our beliefs may not be true?

THE BIBLE IS DIVINE TRUTH. I want to be clear on this point.

The main point of this week's episode is that human interpretation is often mistaken for divine truth. A couple of examples should prove helpful at this point. But let's start with a way to test our interpretations.

"God is love" is a prevailing theme in scripture. Perhaps we might make fewer interpretative mistakes if we run every interpretation we claim from scripture against this notion. Mistakes that cost thousands of lives. Love your neighbor as you love yourself is a part of this love theme found in scripture. The golden rule should be the gold standard that we use in evaluating our understanding of scripture.

**In Our Prayers**

Kevin Croom  
 Sylvia Pittman  
 Shirley Craig  
 Mirium Watson



**FRIENDS AND LOVED ONES WHO ARE HOMEBOUND OR IN NURSING CARE**

Nancy Elston Elaine Lamoreaux  
 Norma Buzzard Mary Nations

★ **Coming up this week** ★

Pastor Book Club will still be via Zoom, but will slowly start meeting in the Wesley Room depending on the size of our group. Please call the Church Office for more info 810-235-0016.

You may still wear your mask when coming into the Asbury building. Please use hand sanitizer that is placed throughout the building.

Thank you and everyone stay safe!

- Jun 21 Mon
- Jun 22 Tues 10:00am-12:30pm  
Food/Water Distribution
- Jun 23 Wed 12Noon Pastor Book Club  
11am-12Noon Food Giveaway at  
South Flint Soup Kitchen
- Jun 24 Thu
- Jun 25 Fri
- Jun 26 Sat 12Noon Food Not Bombs
- Jun 27 Sun 10:30am  
New Beginnings  
Contemporary Worship

(We are 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](http://FlintAsbury.org).)

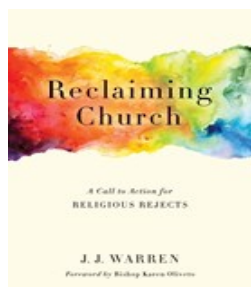
# Asbury Worship Series

## Coming Out

### June 6 to July 25



## Book Club News



We finished our study of *The Marvelous Pigness of Pigs* by Joel Salatin and completed our worship series, *Living Water*. We learned how connected we are to each other, to our own identity, to the earth, and to God.

The world is an interwoven tapestry, and Joel Salatin's book brought to life the connection between scripture and organic farming. God's plan is for you and me to live healthy, happy lives, but we're often misled by profit motives and false promises.

Our book for June was written by seminary student J. J. Warren. J. J. is a speaker, preacher, and advocate for LGBTQ+ rights in the church. He is a graduate of New York's Sarah Lawrence College and is currently attending Boston University School of Theology.

## 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 & Exec Dir
Connie Portillo	Office Manager
Sylvia Pittman	Empowerment Arts
Jim Craig	Board & Leadership Chair
Kevin Croom	Exec Chef & Dir Opers

The Center for Disease Control issued new guidelines for wearing face masks on May 13 that offer great hope for more of us coming out into the open. After a year and a couple of months of isolation from seeing smiles and frowns, many of us are excited to rejoin the show in progress. A production that was interrupted when a deadly virus spiraled out of control.

The guidance mandates the wearing of face masks for the unvaccinated. This affects a much smaller

As a certified candidate for ordination in The United Methodist Church, J. J. faces a process that traditionally disqualified openly gay candidates. However, the UMC is in the midst of a historical argument that makes way for J. J. and hundreds of other candidates to respond to God's call on their lives. While able to live as the persons God created them to be.

J. J.'s visibility increased quickly after an impassioned plea for the inclusion of LGBTQ+ persons at a special meeting of the UMC's top lawmaking assembly in 2019. After his speech went viral, J. J. was later interviewed by HuffPost, NBC, and WXXI Radio.

In his book, *Reclaiming Church*, J. J. Warren calls for his generation to come together in transforming the contemporary church from an exclusionary club to a movement that is open to all people. A church that not only welcomes the LGBTQ+ community but offers leadership and ordination regardless of gender identity and sexual orientation.

Matt DePalma	Farms Manager
Chris Freeman	South Campus Bldg Mgr
Israel Unger	Finance Director
Kim Sims	Connections Suprv
Terrance Williams	Arts Center Mgr
Katelin Maylum	Sr Mgr Local Food
Jose Trejo	<i>Enlace de Idioma Español</i>

### 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.

group than one might think since persons refusing to get vaccinated are often the same group refusing to wear a face mask. "It's about freedom" is one retort I've grown weary of hearing. Fortunately, businesses still have the option of requiring a face mask to be worn along with healthcare facilities and public transportation. The pandemic isn't over — it's just less of a threat.

A few of us meet in person each week, and we invite you to join us for our conversation about J. J.'s book. New cases of the coronavirus are at their lowest levels in a year in Michigan. However, we continue to encourage diligence.

While our regular attenders are vaccinated, we realize that there remains a large number of persons that are not vaccinated. Therefore, we require masks in our building for all persons when not eating or drinking. We strongly urge all persons to get vaccinated as soon as practical unless advised not to by your doctor.

We each make our own arrangements for lunch at this point. We look forward to returning to pot-luck lunches later this summer if the national targets for vaccinations are met. The CDC relaxes recommendations for wearing face masks.

If you prefer to avoid groups or live too far away I encourage you to [join us online](#) for our Wednesday gatherings. Alternatively, you can call in by phone, be heard, and hear what others say by calling (929) 436-2866 -- enter 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](http://FlintAsbury.org).

Pastor Tommy

<sup>1</sup> Warren, J. J. *Reclaiming church: a call to action for religious rejects*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2020.

## Coming Out (June 6 to July 25) ... Asbury Worship Series

Coming out is easy for a lot of us and not so easy for most of us. "Is it really safe?" we ask. "Is it really safe to reveal our vulnerabilities to one another?"

Part one of our new series coincides with the celebration of Pride Month. An annual tribute to the victims of a police raid in 1969 of the Stonewall Inn — a place where persons could gather whose gender identity or sexual orientation differed from their gender at birth. Coming out for persons coming to terms with their actual identity is substantially more terrifying than choosing to leave my face mask at home.

Fortunately, activist Brenda Howard, often referred to as the Mother of Pride, organized a way to keep the subject on the minds of a growing number of people. Including people with friends and family struggling with fears of coming out before being found out. And Pride Month took root and grew into a national time of recognition.

That these two life-giving opportunities share the calendar looked like a problem at first glance. Standing in solidarity with people made to feel abnormal for being who God created them to be, is crucial to the Asbury community. After all, we claim to be an inclusive community that puts the teachings of Jesus Christ into action. And as our spiritual leader, I don't want to take away from celebrating the coming out of any who risk relationships and hurt to be who they are wherever they go.

Yet, I realize that the losses created by our response to the pandemic are painful. Everyone was affected because so many of us were infected. And some of the same brokenness that is the human condition led to the needless loss of hundreds of thousands of lives. It's time to come out again and face a new normal. And we need to talk about it now.

Stay tuned. Meanwhile, share your thoughts, prayers, and creative gifts with our community. Testimonies are powerful. What you feel and believe matters a great deal. Let's plan to celebrate together.

I would be remiss if I did not emphasize that vaccinations are essential for everyone. Understandably a few have medical conditions where vaccination could be inadvisable. But the rest of us can protect our more vulnerable community members by ensuring that we aren't able to spread the virus. It's time to come out of whatever fears or biases keep you from being a part of the solution. Get vaccinated.

I pray that you will join us each Sunday morning at 10:30 am. We share our weekly explores 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).

Pastor Tommy

## Selfies (Switched at Birth)... *cont. from pg 1*

uncomfortable? Whether we are dressed as an airplane or a farmer wearing a business suit — costumes are an attempt to fool the world into thinking that we are someone that we are not.

Whether our costume tells others that we are straight when, in reality, we are gay, a costume is awkward. Whether our costume tells others that we are gay, when in fact, we are straight, costumes are uncomfortable.

We wear costumes for self-preservation. Yet, it is the awkwardness of the costume that can cause the most damage.

The Trevor Project's *National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health 2021* notes that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning youth faced many unique challenges during this past year. The pandemic magnified existing struggles too often with damaging results.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to the disparities caused by the pandemic, the survey also looked at mental health care disparities, discrimination, food insecurity, conversion therapy, and suicide. An alarming 42% of the youth surveyed reported attempted suicide within the prior 12 months. Moreover, 3/4's of LGBTQ youth reported symptoms associated with anxiety disorder. Almost as many reported symptoms associated with depressive disorder.

One of the many fascinating discoveries in scripture is the Bible's unwillingness to skip over the messiness of life. And the poster child for life's messiness is the stories about the descendants of Abraham from which the nation-state of Israel gets its name. This story is about finding and coming to grips with one's identity. The main character, initially named Jacob, is a metaphor for Israel.

Isaac was the son of Abraham and Sarah. Twenty years after marrying Rebekah, the couple gives birth to fraternal twins. Esau was everything his father wanted in a son. He was strong and a great hunter. On the other hand, Jacob preferred hanging out with his mother and learned his way around the kitchen.

At that time, first-born sons were assumed to be the primary heirs of the family's estate. Since Esau was born first, the societal expectation is that he would emerge as Isaac's successor. Jacob would assume a supporting role. Since Esau was also his father's favorite he was assured of his future role.

As readers, we know that a twist is coming as the narrator reveals an insight that plays out decades later as Isaac nears death and loses his eyesight. The second-born son, Jacob, will emerge as Isaac's protégé. Taking matters into her own hands, Rebekah plots with Jacob to make sure this plan becomes a reality.

Rebekah helps Jacob trick Isaac to promise him Esau's birthright. When Isaac discovers his error, he is furious, but the damage is done. When Esau learns what happened, he was understandably angry. When Rebekah learns that Esau was plotting to kill his brother after their father passed, she sends Jacob to live with his uncle.

The story turns toward Jacob's own struggle with his identity and purpose. We learn that Jacob realizes in a dream that God had blessings in store for him. God did not turn back the clock and remake Jacob. God did not even bring up the deception that Jacob used to trick his father. God simply promised that the ground under Jacob's feet was itself holy.

Jacob is blessed by God, not for a costume that he wore, pretending to be someone or something else. God did not dredge up Jacob's past. God did not remind Jacob how he had deceived his older brother and stolen his birthright. Jacob was blessed by God for just being the Jacob God created.

Often we use real gold, let's call it economics, as our gold standard. Whatever is good for me personally becomes our gold standard for interpreting scripture. Knowing this, when scripture is challenged by individuals speaking on behalf of oppressed groups, we claim that their interpretation is self-serving. Perhaps it is self-serving, but freeing the oppressed is undoubtedly consistent with scriptural mandates.

Given this background, consider how you answer the question, "What was the offense of the people living in the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah that angered God?" The most common response to this question is the offense of sodomy. However, keep in mind that the word "sodomy" was created sometime around the year 1049, according to J. J. Warren. Although there are various pathways in the etymology of "sodomy," it's clear that this word was made up centuries after the Bible was compiled.

Fortunately, the sin of Sodom is summarized in the Book of Ezekiel. The prophet Ezekiel compares Jerusalem to Sodom in explaining God's anger with the people living there. The Good News Translation states that "they did not take care of the poor and the underprivileged." The prophet also called the people of Sodom "proud and stubborn" (Ezekiel 16:49-50).

Hospitality, putting love into action, is a dominant theme of God's expectations for you and me. Most of us describe God's expectations for hospitality as radical. The story of Sodom's destruction found in Genesis offers an exaggeration of the opposite of hospitality. The men of the village act inhospitably when they threaten to rape Lot's house guests.

Lot and his family were spared when Sodom was destroyed. Unlike the rest of the village, Lot acted hospitably. Notice that if we focus on interpreting this story through the lens of homophobia, we miss a critical lesson that should inform how we choose to treat immigrants and other strangers.

Paul, a follower of Jesus Christ, in a letter to the church in Corinth, writes that "While knowledge makes us feel important, it is love that strengthens the church." Paul continues by saying, "Anyone who claims to know all the answers doesn't really know very much" (1 Corinthians 8:1).

If you take nothing else away from this week's episode, my prayer is that you consider interpreting scripture from this vantage point. As a preacher, it is my job to speak in convincing sentences with the confidence of someone speaking on behalf of God. This is a vulnerable place to be since I also make mistakes in interpretations. We all need to own our mistakes and learn from them.

What if this is all part of God's plan? What if we need each other to come to conversations with an open mind and open heart, ready to change our minds?

God promised to provide an advocate and guide to help us. We call this advocate the Holy Spirit. Scripture uses a Greek word, pneuma, meaning breath. In classic philosophy, this word referred to an inner creative spirit. Poetically, we say that God breathes the Holy Spirit into each of us, willing to accept this gift, which is the breath of life.

Anyone who claims to know all the answers does not know very much.

1 Corinthians 8:1

May God's Spirit fill you with wonderment about God's plan for your own life and how you uniquely fit into God's plan for the universe. Come out as the person that you believe God created you to be and trust that God's Spirit will be your guide and advocate.

Welcome to episode one of our 2-part series, **Coming out**. In this series, we focus on claiming our true identity while reclaiming a perception of God based on the truth of scripture. We learn that God sides with the oppressed, marginalized, and rejected.

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

<sup>1</sup> **Most of the content for our series comes from:** Warren, J. J. *Reclaiming church: a call to action for religious rejects*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2020

<sup>2</sup> "The Hunger Games," © Wikipedia. Various citations.

<sup>3</sup> Kim Parker and Ruth Igielnik. "On the Cusp of Adulthood and Facing an Uncertain Future" © Pew Research Center, May 14, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> David Koller. "Origin of the name "Google"," © January, 2004.

### Life groups question & notes

*Your name will no longer be Jacob. You have struggled with God and with men, and you have won; so your name will be Israel.*

Genesis 32:23-28 (GNT)

### NOTES FROM WORSHIP

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### QUESTIONS FOR LIFE GROUPS

1. Read Genesis 32:23-28. This text is a short episode within a longer story, that begins with chapter 25, about the identity of Israel. Have you wrestled with God about your own identity?
2. Read the article in this week's Circuit Rider, *Selfies*. Do you ever feel like you are wearing a costume? Can you imagine yourself being who God created you to be? What might this look like?
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.



## “FLINT FOOD NOT BOMBS”

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Providing a HOT MEAL and/or local, organic  
PRODUCE weekly.

SATURDAYS starting around 12NOON

Asbury United Methodist Church

1653 Davison Rd, Flint (810) 235-0016

**Food Not Bombs** is a loose-knit group of independent collectives, sharing free vegan and vegetarian food with others. **Flint Food Not Bombs** believes that access of food should be viewed as a right, not a privilege. Yet in a nation with a military budget many times that of other nations, people continue to go hungry. This is immoral and unjust.



JOIN THE CONVERSATION!

Facebook.com/flintfoodnotbombs

Twitter.com/flintfnb

Email: flintfnb@protonmail.com

Website: foodnotbombsflint.wordpress.com



We're currently looking for volunteers so we can expand. If interested,  
send us a message! Solidarity!

A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense  
than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.—MLK



JUNE DATES  
**Angel  
Closet &  
Food  
Giveaways**

June 2nd & 23rd - 11am-Noon  
Food Giveaways

June 9th & 30th - 11am-Noon  
Angel Closet (Walk-ins only)

**MASK AND TEMPERATURE CHECK  
REQUIRED FOR ENTRY.**



South Flint Soup Kitchen  
3410 Fenton Road  
3 Blocks North of Atherton Rd.  
Flint, MI 48507

810-239-3427



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**\* CONVENIENT PICKUP AT ASBURY OR AT THE SOUTH FLINT SOUP KITCHEN \***

While he believed that his blessing came from God, Jacob's coming out was still ahead of him. The day of reckoning was near. Jacob would meet his brother for the first time since the big deception. How would his brother respond when he meets the real Jacob?

In his restlessness, Jacob once again encounters God. And Jacob wrestles with who his brother sees and who the real Jacob was intended by God to be. Jacob's realization leaves a wound that he would carry with him. But Jacob was no longer the person others knew. With his costumes left behind, Jacob would come face-to-face with his brother as Israel.

Jacob wrestled with his own identity and chose to come out as the person God created Jacob to be.

**Your name will no longer be Jacob. You have struggled with God and with men... your name will be Israel.**

**Genesis 32:28**

It is challenging to know each other whenever we wear costumes. When we work together or when we play together. When we go through struggles together and when we celebrate together. The more we show up as who we are, rather than sporting a costume intended to distract from who we are, our engagement is more authentic.

Welcome to episode three of our 2-part series, **Coming out**. In this series, we focus on claiming our true identity while reclaiming a perception of God based on the truth of scripture. We learn that God blesses us for who God created us to be.

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