

# ASBURY CIRCUIT RIDER



## Independence Day (Crossing the River)



July 4th hasn't fallen on a Sunday since 2010. I preached my first sermon on that day the first week I arrived in Flint as Asbury's pastor. God's call on my life to speak to others about the good news of Jesus Christ

has proven to be the greatest gift I have ever received. It was one of my all-time favorite birthdays. And I get to do this fifty times a year! It's as though God gave me a weekly subscription that gets renewed every year.

Independence is a common theme in scripture. This theme of independence is found in the language of ancient prophets and echoed throughout Jesus' ministry. For example, Jesus declared that His mission was to set the prisoners free.

However, in scripture independence is paired with interdependence and even dependence. Even Jesus was dependent on God and the Holy Spirit. And the three have a form of interdependence.

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Volume 2 Issue 4

July 4, 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



## Reclaiming Queer (Reclaiming the church)



J J Warren speaking at United Methodist Church General Conference...credit Mike DuBose UM News

In a call to reclaim both the church and the meaning of "queer," J. J. Warren, in his book, *Reclaiming Church*, writes that "The Church has institutionalized

racism, sexism, and homophobia." <sup>1</sup>

These are serious charges that are sure to result in blow back from

both church leaders and faithful followers. But are they true? Doesn't the church welcome everyone? The answer is that it depends on the church.

Former Michigan journalist and Pulitzer Prize winner Robin Givhan in a Washington Post article differentiates between religious institutions, churches, and faith. Givhan argues that, "The church is a community of imperfect people who create a safety net for the fearful or the broken." <sup>2</sup>

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## Reclaiming Queer (Reclaiming the church ..cont from page 1

Her argument suggests a church that welcomes anyone regardless of whether the church leadership might disagree with their opinions or life-style. Givhan's article focused on the very public knowledge that President Biden is known to be a devout Catholic. The Biden's regularly attend church and usually choose a Catholic church to attend.

Joe Biden should be a breath of fresh air for traditional church leaders. Unlike his predecessor, Biden consistently attends worship and does not try to hide his religious beliefs. Yet the Bishops that oversee the Catholic Church in the U.S. are plotting to refuse communion to the President, citing his support for abortion rights.

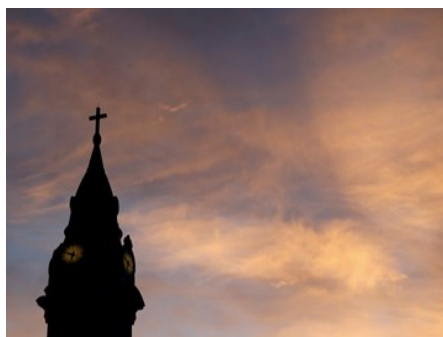
According to an article in the NY Times by Elizabeth Dias and Ruth Graham, a conservative movement within the church gained power during the previous administration. And they plan to use this power to make a political statement. <sup>3</sup>

The Christian church began during a time when politics and religion were publicly and culturally intertwined. Yet national tradition states that this country was founded by individuals fleeing from religious persecution. The freedom to worship God as we see fit is a fundamental right protected by law.

Publicly, this is what the action taken by Bishops aims to do. Joe Biden is free to go to a different church where his political opinions do not keep him from participating in the sacred acts of worship. Since

Biden is only the second Catholic President in history this suggestion creates headlines and political soundbites.

"Devout" is apparently reserved for persons living in step with the teachings of the church. More accurately, devout, in this case, is reserved for persons adhering to the teaching that those in power choose to focus on. And in this particular case, the focus is clearly on politics.



A Catholic church in Philadelphia. The city had stopped placements with an agency, Catholic Social Services, after a 2018 article in The Philadelphia Inquirer described its policy against placing children with same-sex couples. Credit...Julio Cortez/AP

Representative Ted Lieu, a Catholic and Democrat from California, raised the question of how Republican politicians who support the death penalty seem to be left out of the scrutiny of these same bishops.

This rift isn't new. In 2016, Biden was selected to be honored at a Notre Dame's commencement ceremony. At the time, Bishop Rhoades, who is leading the charge of a conservation faction of the church, publicly protested choosing Biden.

In an article published by the *Catholic News Service*, Bishop Rhoades stated that, "We should make sure there is a basic consistency between their political decisions and sound Catholic moral and social teaching. At the time the bishop was referring to Biden's support of same-gender marriages and a woman's right to an abortion. <sup>4</sup>

But the latest rift is laser focused on the single issue of abortion rights. Biden has publicly stated that his support for a woman's right to choose an abortion does not mean that he is not troubled by abortions. His past statements indicate a recognition of the complexity of the subject and an understanding that compromise takes precedent over his personal beliefs.

So why did abortion rise to the forefront of the conversation and same-sex marriage fall to the background?

One explanation is found in a recent Gallup Poll that shows for the first time a majority of Republicans support same-sex marriages? And, overall, more than 70% of Americans support same-sex marriages. <sup>5</sup>

And while the majority of U.S. voters support a women's right to have an abortion, this question is much more nuanced.

In an often referenced story about Jesus we gain insight into the hypocritical practices that



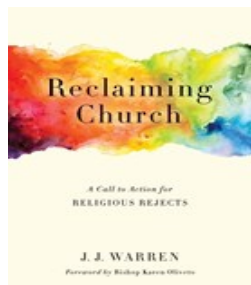
# Asbury Worship Series

## 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

## Independence Day (Crossing the River)... *cont. from pg 1*

But what does our nation's celebration of independence have in common with coming out into a post-pandemic world? Beyond our country's goal of a 70% vaccination rate, there is undoubtedly an air of reclaiming independence all around us. It's estimated that over 43 Million of us will drive somewhere else to celebrate Independence Day.

There is a theme of independence that permeates both the gospel and claiming our new normal. We had more autonomy before the pandemic. We could gather in crowds, hug people we don't live with, and go to crowded restaurants without the fear of a life-threatening infection.

The people coming out of the exodus comes to mind as I reflect on a theme for this Sunday. The Exodus refers to a nation of people freed from slavery, living in the wilderness to pursue a future promise of abundance. The Book of Exodus covers their story in detail.

What was it like for those first followers of *Yahweh*, formerly called *Elohim* by their ancestors, God by their descendants, and Jesus Christ by us? What was it like to go from wilderness living to a new normal in a strange new world?

My reflections lead me to the Book of Joshua. This book picks up the story about the exodus people as they crossed the Jordan River into the promised land. Their story offers several metaphors for interpreting what their story means for us.

Beginning with what is the river that we need to cross to come out of isolation? And, in what ways is a new normal like a promised land for us? In what ways was isolation a wilderness?

While in the wilderness, the people had very little independence. They possessed no land they could call their own. They lived in tents away from the rest of the world. They depended on services in the form of bread and meat falling from heaven. They needed everyone's cooperation to flourish and not perish — which proved difficult. They didn't always agree, and whining became an everyday way of life for many of them.

During isolation, Cyndi and I tried to eat

out at least once a week. Our motivation was a mix of solidarity with food service workers missing out on tips and wanting to taste what normal was once like. Unfortunately, restaurants that serve healthy alternatives are scarce on the Eastside. And wait times were often long. It was not unusual that no one answered the phone at all.

As foodservice businesses found ways of coping with the changes and we adjusted to different expectations, we sometimes managed to order out twice a week. But, overall, meals were a struggle during the pandemic. I'm personally looking forward to a time when my choice is based more on the genre and quality of food rather than safety.

Now that new cases of COVID, at least in Genesee County, have fallen to a few each day, I've grown accustomed to life without wearing a mask. Cyndi and I are both fully vaccinated, but she is still hesitant to go places without her mask. We each have our reasons for our choices. For me, walking into a crowded store without a mask feels really strange and a bit dangerous, but I'm pushing through my hesitation.

While news about the pandemic is much less overwhelming, there continues to be plenty to be anxious about. Millions are keeping the pandemic raging by refusing vaccinations. With each new variant, there is a risk of beginning a new cycle of isolation by rendering existing vaccines ineffective.

As it was for the exodus people, cooperation is a struggle for our nation, and whining has become a way of life.

This makes me angry. While I realize that vaccinations are not a good idea for many individuals, the majority appear to be either self-centered or woefully misinformed. Otherwise, why would anyone who could help avoid losing millions of more lives not be willing to cooperate with the majority of us?

The answer may be independence for a lot of people. We want the freedom to make our own choices. We want something other than manna and quail for supper. We want to have the freedom to build our own god with our own hands. We don't want to be controlled by rules we didn't write. Isn't this what freedom is all about?

Our nation was founded in part by the promise that freedom requires a democratic form of government. This notion of democracy is historically seen as experimental since democratic societies are more textbook than reality. The United States became an experiment in democracy.

However, our nation began with democracy still on the other side of the river. Initially, voting was restricted to white, male landowners. It's taken a Civil War and decades of debate and political evolution to reach a point where most citizens can vote without undue hardship.

Democracy and freedom are close companions. And most of the countries that we consider suspect when it comes to upholding human rights and promoting freedom have authoritarian governments.

In authoritarian governments, a leader emerges that demands and receives absolute power. As a result, the people work for the benefit of the government. In democracies, it is the other way around. The government is accountable to the voters.

This doesn't mean that countries with authoritarian government structures don't hold elections. They just control who can vote and who is on the ballot. Policy choices are rarely on the ballot. Election winners are predetermined by whoever holds power at the top. We witness this in numerous countries around the world.

During the first century, the part of the country where Jesus lived and taught was under the authoritarian regime of Rome. The supreme leader's title was "Caesar," and power was passed on through power struggles at the top. The idea of elections was not a part of their vocabulary.

Holding onto power in such a vast empire took both a large military structure and a cult-like belief system perpetrated by those in power. In Rome's case, Caesar was promoted as divinely appointed. This notion played out in the streets by claiming that Caesar was the son of God.

often creates stumbling blocks for church leaders.

A few devout followers tried to trap Jesus into making a gaff that could be used against Him. One of them asks Jesus a politically connected question about paying taxes that supported the Roman Empire. The tax rate imposed on the residents of Palestine were oppressive, and religious doctrine brought into question whether devout Jews should refuse to comply.

Jesus asked whose image appeared on the coins used to pay taxes. So they fetched a Roman coin which had the Emperor of Rome's image engraved on it. Jesus responded with the instructions that even devout Jews should "give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give to God what belongs to God" (Matthew 22:21).

When they handed him a Roman coin he asked, "Whose picture and title are stamped on it?"

Matthew 22:19-20

And what belongs to God? We do. We were created in God's image and given the breath of life along with purpose and capacities. And God asks for one thing in return that forms the basis for all that we owe to God for our lives. We are to love God and our neighbor (Luke 10:27).

This is what separates the notion of religion from what it means to have faith. Religion is a rulebook and a structure to assure adherence. Faith is based on the belief that we are to give to God that which belongs to God. Faith is not based on rituals, rules, or perfection. Faith is

offering to God and to our neighbor the person God created us to be. No substitutes and no fakes.

Givhan writes that, "The rules of religion matter; but they are not the essence of faith."

J. J. Warren ends his book with a call to action. He writes, "It's time we separate ourselves from the empire again and align ourselves once more with the underpaid, the unhoused, the previously rejected and condemned. It's our time in history to reclaim what it means to be the Church."

Asbury echoed his call to action when our church body voted unanimously to publicly declare our alignment with a movement known as a reconciling church. This movement's mission is reflected in the title of the book this series was based on.

This means that our church welcomes LGBTQ persons without reservation. This also means that we respect and honor all variations of gender identity and sexual orientation. Which puts Asbury in conflict with the actual policies of our own denomination.

One of our worship band's favorite songs usually reserved for the days that we take communion is titled "Come to the Table." The invitation with the song's lyrics is for the listener to join a group of misfits. And the bridge names the labels given to both misfits and the usually included.

"Come meet this motley crew of misfits. These liars and these thieves. There's no one unwelcome here." And "that sin and shame that you've brought with you, you can leave it at the door, and let mercy draw you

near." We hope that you will come to the table regardless of whether you agree with what we believe.

We can find common ground to stand on.

Welcome to the conclusion of Part one of our 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.

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 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](mailto: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. *Reclaiming church: a call to action for religious rejects*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2020

<sup>2</sup> Robin Givhan. "Faith in silence," © *Washington Post*, June 22, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Dias and Ruth Graham. "In Rift With Biden, a Dramatic Show of Force by a Conservative Catholic Movement," © *New York Times*, June 20, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> "Bishop Rhoades disagrees with Notre Dame's decision to honor Biden," © Catholic News Service, March 16, 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Justin McCarthy. "Record-High 70% in U.S. Support Same-Sex Marriage" © *Gallup*, JUNE 8, 2021. All rights reserved.

## Life groups questions & notes -

Be sure that the book of the Law is always read in your worship. Study it day and night, and make sure that you obey everything written in it...Do not be afraid or discouraged, for I, the Lord your God, am with you wherever you go.

Joshua 1:1-9 (GNT)

### NOTES FROM WORSHIP

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### QUESTIONS FOR LIFE GROUPS

1. Read Joshua 1:1-9. The Book of Joshua recounts the story of the Exodus after the people of God spent 40 years in the wilderness. Imagine you're with them. What sort of adjustments do you suspect they had to make? What may have been some of their fears? What were they looking forward to?
2. Read the article in this week's Circuit Rider, *Independence Day*. How are you doing with adjusting to a new normal? Are you vaccinated? If not, what is keeping you from doing so if not due to recommendations from your doctor as a result of your health? What does independence mean to you? What is the new normal that you hope to claim?
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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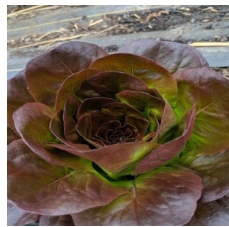
Providing a HOT MEAL and/or local, organic  
PRODUCE weekly.

SATURDAYS starting around 12NOON

Asbury United Methodist Church

1653 Davison Rd, Flint (810) 235-0016

**Food Not Bombs** is a loose-knit sharing free vegan and vegetarian **Flint Food Not Bombs** believes necessities of life-should be Yet in a nation with a military nations, people continue to go hungry. This is immoral and unjust.



group of independent collectives, food with others. that access of food among other viewed as a right, not a privilege. buget many times that of other



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



South Flint Soup  
Kitchen presents....

# JULY ANGEL CLOSET & FOOD GIVEAWAY DATES

July 7th and 28th - Angel Closet  
July 14th and 21st - Food Giveaways

**ALL CLOSET AND GIVEAWAY DATES ARE  
FROM 11AM-NOON!**

810-239-3427 3410 Fenton Road, Flint, MI 48507  
southflintsoupkitchen@gmail.com

\*\* We have also updated our mask policy. Masks are no longer required to enter the building or submission to a temperature check. We ask that folks that are unvaccinated or under the age of 12 still continue to wear a mask, however, we are not requiring anyone to do so.



ASBURY FARM FRESH

**- TRY OUR WEEKLY VEGGIE BOX FOR \$10.00 -**

**SIGN UP FOR A FREE ASBURY FARMS ACCOUNT TODAY**

**AND**

Receive a \$15 credit on your account for your first purchase

**CREATE YOUR OWN VEGGIE BOX**

Select what goes in your box from each week's harvest. Get \$5 off your next order when you fill your box with \$15 of produce.

**WANT US TO DECIDE FOR YOU?**

Choose Veggie Box Subscription and we will fill your order with a variety of each week's harvest. Pay when you pick up your box. **A \$15 VALUE FOR \$10.**

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

The political wars currently raging across our country pit the ideals of democracy against the threat of a more authoritarian form of government. The daily news includes record numbers of new laws aimed to restrict who votes in elections. Laws that prioritize privilege over democratic ideals.

This is the world that we face as we remove our masks and the threat as we cross the river from the wilderness of lockdowns into the promise of freedom. I'm grateful that our God is aware of our struggle. But fortunately, we aren't the first to face such life-altering transitions.

Being able to gather in larger groups safely means a safer return to assemblies, rallies, and demonstrations. It means fewer restrictions on coming together and working together for the common good.

First, stay informed. Avoid news commentators with a personal agenda of promoting their own privilege. For me, this means avoiding Fox News altogether.

**Do not be afraid or discouraged for I, the Lord your God, am with you wherever you go.**

**Joshua 1:9**

The story, found in the Book of Joshua, begins with assurances, challenges, and clear instructions for success. Perhaps Joshua heard the voice of God in his reflections as he prepared to speak to the group on Sunday. "Get ready now, you and all the people of Israel, and cross the Jordan River into the land that I am giving them" (Joshua 1:2).

Are you ready?

Joshua was convinced that God promised to be with them. Moreover, God called on Joshua to be confident and determined.

According to the story, the key was for the people to not forget to be informed by holy scripture. So Joshua was instructed to make sure that scripture was a part of worship. And that the people needed to study scripture together for guidance on how to live into their new normal. If they did this, God assured them they would be prosperous. And Joshua believed this to be true.

As you celebrate Independence Day this year, I pray that you will remember the exodus people. I pray that you will find peace in knowing that God is with us in our struggle to find a new normal together.

I'm sorry if you're missing out on this opportunity to declare your own personal independence from the risk of severe illness because you've chosen not to be vaccinated. I pray that you will change your mind and become part of the solution.

If you cannot be vaccinated or have children who are either too young or haven't had an opportunity to be vaccinated, I pray for your safety and an expedient eradication of this deadly virus.

Most of all, I pray that you, too, will believe and be comforted by God's message to Joshua and the people he led. "Do not be afraid or discouraged, for I, the Lord your God, am with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9).

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Pastor Tommy

