

# 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 11

July 11, 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



## Anxious ( How do I look? )



I realized back in the fall that despite entering the pandemic with a goal of improving my eating habits, my weight reached a new high.

Unfortunately, it still took me a couple months to react and deal with some bad habits adding to my expanding waistline.

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The anxiety of lockdown, together with other worries were taking an unnecessary toll on my wellbeing. I say that my worries were unnecessary because I know better.

The Center for Disease Control issued new guidelines for wearing face masks on May 13 that offered 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.

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## Anxious (How Do I Look ?) ..cont from page 1

A production that was interrupted when a deadly virus spiraled out of control.

The guidance mandates the wearing of face masks for the unvaccinated. The leadership of our church made the decision last month to allow persons to enter our building without wearing a mask. However, unvaccinated people are encouraged to wear masks to avoid the possibility of infecting a person unable to receive a vaccination because of age or medical conditions.

Coming out is easy for a lot of us and not so easy for most of us. "Is it really safe?" we ask.

Oli Aworth is a 24-year-old student from Surrey, England. In an interview with BBC News Reporter Annabel Rackham, Oli shared a few of his worries about coming out of isolation, back into the world of social mingling.

Oli believes that coming out of isolation is more complicated for him, stating that it "Piled on quite a lot of pressure, especially for me being in the LGBT community. It brings up issues of do I look good enough? Or will my friends want to see me? And whether I've achieved enough during the lockdown."

A survey conducted by the American Psychological Association found that half of American adults—even those who were vaccinated—were uneasy about returning to in-person interaction. But I'm wondering if even more of us are concerned now that re-opening is finally here.

This uneasiness goes by several names — lately, we hear more about re-entry anxiety. The adjective added to anxiety, in this case, refers to the discomfort created when we're forced to leave the safe

and comfortable environment we made over the past 18 months to cope with isolation.

Persons experiencing re-entry anxiety experience symptoms of a more common condition called social anxiety disorder. This condition refers to a wide range of sometimes crippling symptoms. Symptoms including changes in our mood that may play out as sudden outbursts of anger, long periods of sadness that seem to hang around, changes in appetite, or a feeling of hopelessness. This is only a partial list.

Social anxiety can cause us to lose interest in doing things that are usually enjoyable. We may experience feelings of being overly stressed and anxious. We may not want to leave the house — or avoid situations where going might be difficult. As a result, some lose their desire to socialize at all.

Taken to the extreme, social anxiety disorder can result in feelings of harming yourself or suicide. And sadly, many turn to drugs or alcohol to help them cope. As a result, overdoses rose substantially in Genesee County during the pandemic.

Do not worry about tomorrow it will have enough worries of it's own. There is no need to add to the troubles each day brings.

Matthew 6:34

While Scripture has quite a lot to say about worry and anxiety, the bible doesn't promise a quick fix. Instead, the bible is more like therapy — offering a longer-term cure with benefits accruing along the way.

My problem with weight didn't suddenly start with the onslaught of the pandemic. I wasn't a healthy weight one day and over-weight the next day. And losing weight is taking months to accomplish, with benefits and setbacks along the way. My success or failure depends upon the decisions I make today.

One day Jesus was standing on the side of a hill speaking to a gathered crowd. He spoke to the crowd about various topics that challenge each of us with an opportunity for a healthier, more fulfilling life. At one point, Jesus says to the crowd, "Do not worry about tomorrow; it will have enough worries of its own. There is no need to add to the troubles each day brings" (Matthew 6:34).

A simple invitation that is easily missed and seldom accepted. We who worry for a living figure that this particular invitation isn't intended for us. After all, a big part of my job is to worry about and put actions into motion that help make tomorrow better than today. Nevertheless, I'm confident that these words apply to every one of us — including me.

Experts seem to agree on one suggestion — focus your attention on the present. While the experts likely heard this recommendation in the classroom and read it in professional journals and books. Jesus knew this from divine insight. Regardless of how you came to know this pearl of wisdom try putting it into practice.



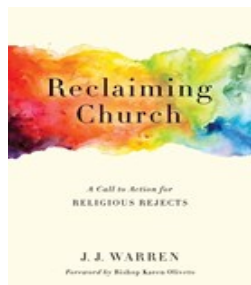
# Asbury Worship Series

## 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.

This month our series, Coming out, turns the spotlight on coming out of isolation now that restrictions are ending. But what is the new normal that we hope to come out for? Next week we examine the debate over critical race theory that is raging in some states. The topic for our final episode is climate change. Plan to join us.

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 [connect@FlintAsbury.org](mailto:connect@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 "5 Steps for Overcoming Social Anxiety After COVID Isolation," © Newport Institute, April 7, 2021.

2 Annabel Rackham. "Covid: How to deal with social anxiety as restrictions ease," © BBC News, May 17, 2021.

3 Joseph Harper. "Too many men ignore their depression, phobias, other mental health issues," © Washington Post, July 3, 2021.

July 11, 2021

## Life groups questions & notes

Do not worry about tomorrow; it will have enough worries of its own. There is no need to add to the troubles each day brings.

Matthew 6:34 (GNT)

### NOTES FROM WORSHIP

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### QUESTIONS FOR LIFE GROUPS

1. Read Matthew 6:24-34. What comes to mind in your own life as you read these verses? What are some of the things that worry you? Is this helpful advice? What gets in the way of doing what these verses tell us to do?
2. Read the article in this week's Circuit Rider, *Anxious*. Are you experiencing symptoms associated with social anxiety disorder? Which symptoms in particular? Is going back to life as it was before the pandemic something you want to do? If not, why? What worries you most about going back to live as it was before? Do you have ideas for how you hope life will be different as the pandemic ends? What ideas do you have for a new normal?
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 among other necessities of life-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.



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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