

ASBURY CIRCUIT RIDER

Final Judgement (The God you did not make up)

Volume 2 Issue 26

September 26, 2021



One bible story I remember learning about as a child in Sunday School is the Tower of Babel. Perhaps I remember this story because of the funny-sounding

word for what we hear when someone doesn't stop talking. If so, I may have missed how closely this word can fit my own propensity to keep talking long after the people

around me quit listening.

But as an adult, I've come to appreciate this story in a totally different light.

I'm guessing most of you are familiar with this story But just in case I'll summarize by saying that the people living on earth were at one time all very much alike. They spoke the same language, used the same slang terms,

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Please continue to wear your masks when in the building. If you don't have one, let us know we will provide one for you.



Re-born (How can we be born again?)¹



Courtesy of Faithworks.life blog

I don't know about you, but the images of planes flying into buildings are on repeat in my head this week. Perhaps the prediction made by George W.

Bush that these images will remain in our heads forever came true for me. But, for me, disbelief was replaced by a recognition that religion is dangerous, except

the sadness hasn't gone away. And I'm not as sure about the unyielding anger he predicted. It's hard to stay angry at the intangible.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks begins his book, *Not in God's Name*, with the declaration that "When religion turns men into murderers, God weeps." The Rabbi comes to this conclusion from reading the book of Genesis. After making humankind in God's own image, the first humans disobeyed God's first instructions, and the

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Re-born (How can we be born again?¹) ..cont from page 1

first murder took place soon after. It wasn't long before God's new world was filled with violence, and "God regretted" what had become of humankind (Genesis 6:6).²

The history of religion is filled with violence. And much of the violence is done in the name of God. Rabbi Sacks argues that religion began as polytheism, the belief in multiple gods, as the "vindication of power," and religion was used as justification for power structures. This allowed the few to rule over the many by leveraging deeply held convictions to safeguard against uprisings in response to oppressive demands.

Monotheism, the belief in one God, became a "sustained protest" in opposition to hierarchies justified by claims of divine ordering. The idea of one God made a provocative claim that all humans are created in God's image. And, this claim was valid regardless of heritage, culture, birth parents, or any other human-made ordering. Moreover, the account of Abraham's covenant with God was based on concepts that included the sacredness of life, righteousness, justice, mercy, and compassion.

Abraham's covenant emerged as the origin of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. And remarkably, the original ideals captured in our collective holy scriptures are consistent with other religions that claim different origins and sources of enlightenment.

Yet, violence continues to be perpetrated by individuals and groups towards others, citing God as the divine arbitrator. That is, God inspired the very acts that God declared as evil. Could it be that we just simply don't understand?

We find the story of Nicodemus in the Gospel of John. Poor Nicodemus — the blind guide — the Pharisee who simply didn't get it. Is the point that we don't want to be like Nicodemus or that we're all a bit like him? Let's compare.

It's after dark when Nicodemus makes his way to where Jesus is staying. The consensus for the late hour is that Nicodemus has a reputation to protect and doesn't want anyone to see him. This is all speculation since the writer doesn't reveal his motivations.

What we do know is their conversation begins with flattery. I'm guessing it was blatant superficial flattery when Nicodemus says, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher sent by God. No one could perform the miracles you are doing unless God were with him" (John 3:2).

Now we know this to be true, but Pharisees sat on the other side of the aisle on most issues when it came to the reputation of Jesus. If Nicodemus really believed what he was saying to Jesus, why wouldn't he show up earlier in the day? Remember that almost everything found in John's gospel is symbolic, and things said and done in the dark are suspicious unless they come from Jesus.

Jesus doesn't bite on the flattery. Instead, He ceases a teaching moment and reminds Nicodemus that he can't know whether what he says is true or not. Unless Nicodemus is first born again.

Re-birth is taken for granted by most of the Christians I meet. It's often a status that comes along with a willingness to join a church. Sometimes re-birth is associated with baptism or some form of a catechism. Others apply a qualification of the obvious presence of the Holy Spirit with varying ideas about how to test their assessment.

Nicodemus is more honest. He asks the question that we don't ask but hope to listen in on the answer. "How can a grown person be born again when it's impossible to reenter their mother's womb?"

So Nicodemus asks an obvious question — he is the Pharisee version of Peter. The Peter who asked questions the rest of us wonder about but don't ask.

But the answer is confusing — or at least nebulous. So first, Jesus explains how a person is re-born of spirit, which doesn't help much. And then Jesus reminds us that God's Spirit is like the wind. We don't know where it comes from or when or in which direction it may blow.

I don't mean that the weather forecast that predicts winds out of the South at 20 miles-per-hour isn't a good indication of whether you burn leaves. Instead, at any given moment, we don't know if a puff of wind may blow our leaf pile. Similarly, we don't decide the if and when of God's Spirit.

In Our Prayers

Kevin Croom
 Sylvia Pittman
 Shirley Craig
 Richard Oram



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 NEWS:

Pastor Book Club is still meeting via Zoom. Please call the Church Office for more info 810-235-0016 as it changes.

Meanwhile, as a lot of you are already aware, sharp increases in new infections of COVID are pushing us back into isolation. While our regular attenders are vaccinated, we realize that a large number of persons are not vaccinated.

Therefore, we reinstated our policy to require masks in our building for all persons when not eating or drinking. If you don't have a mask, we can provide one for you, just ask the office.

Thank you and everyone stay safe!

CHECK OUT OUR OPEN MIC NITE ON PAGE 14 FOR MORE INFO!!

- Sept 27 Mon 6:00pm Worship Team Meeting
- Sept 28 Tues 10:00am-12:30pm
Food/Water Distribution
3:00pm CDC Board Meeting
- Sept 29 Wed 12Noon Pastor Book Club
11:00am-12Noon Food Giveaway at South Flint Soup Kitchen
- Sept 30 Thu
- Oct 1 Fri
- Oct 2 Sat 12Noon Food Not Bombs
- Oct 3 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](#).)

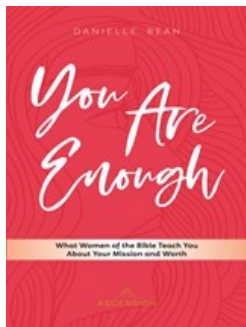
Asbury Worship Series Better Together Coming this October



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Book Club News

We're concluding our discussions of Barbara Brown Taylor's book, *Holy Envy*, so we're ready to jump into our next topic. Barbara is clearly a stand-out among women of her generation. A priest, professor, and frequent speaker, her words and stories continue to inspire us.



Over the past year, we've experienced the election of our first woman Vice President. The election of Kamala Harris places her both in the history books and in the spotlight. Kamala was one of six women who sought nomination as President. A 2019 survey conducted by LeanIn.org found that 53% of registered voters were either "very ready" or "extremely ready" for a woman president.

Leadership in Worship & Service

Tony, Mirium
Anthony, Jim
Jonathon, Terrance
Mirium
Cyndi
Christine & Norma

Welcome Team
Ushers
Production Team
Children
Worship Leader
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

You can't make this stuff up. And you don't have to because it's right there in print. Turn to the book of Judith, and you'll find an intriguing story of sacrifice, deceit, and bravery by a woman willing to risk her life to save her country. A woman with her own book, Judith was a faithful, wealthy widow. When her country is threatened by the Assyrian army, and the people are ready to surrender, Judith

hatches a plan, confident that God will protect her from harm.

But I don't want to spoil the ending.

Better together is a 2-part worship series based on women found in the Old Testament. Much of the content for this series comes from the book,

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For our new series, *Better together*, our life group chose a book by a lesser-known yet influential female writer named Danielle Bean.¹ She is the brand manager for CatholicMom.com and former publisher and editor-in-chief of Catholic Digest. Danielle is also the creator and host of a weekly Catholic women's television talk show called *The Gist*. In addition, she has published several books, is a popular public speaker, and hosts her own podcast.

From the back cover of *You are Enough*, we read that Danielle Bean's book is an "invitation from God for belonging and love." Each of us is unique, worthy of love, and called to greatness. But in a divisive world, we get distracted from that truth and begin to doubt God's love is real.

Sadly, too many of us, particularly women, are told that we are not smart enough, pretty enough, sexy enough, or thin enough. So it is no wonder that so many forget that we are already made perfect. We are already enough. And God has made each of us for a unique purpose.

In her book, Danielle Bean introduces us to several women found in the Old Testament. She invites us to see how God's love for each of us shines forth through their stories. She invites us to connect with these remarkable women's hopes, dreams, struggles, and experiences. And to learn how their lives offer valuable lessons for our lives today.

Recent increases in new infections of COVID among the unvaccinated are pushing us back into isolation. While our regular attenders are vaccinated, we realize that a large number of persons are not vaccinated. Therefore, we reinstated our policy to 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 by your doctor. Avoid news sources that promote baseless claims and pay closer attention to the experts we depend on to keep us safe.

We each make our own arrangements for lunch at this point. However, we look forward to returning to pot-luck lunches when infection rates fall. We anticipate this happening as the number of vaccinations reaches herd immunity levels, and the CDC relaxes precautionary measures.

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](#).

Pastor Tommy

¹ [Danielle Bean](#). *You are Enough: What Women of the Bible Teach You about Your Mission and*



Better Together (Coming this October) ... Asbury Worship Series

You are Enough, a book about many of the women found in the Old Testament.¹

Our worship team is inviting you to share your favorite women of the Old Testament. Perhaps you identify with a particular story or character. Why? What fits? What doesn't fit? Send a selfie video to ArtsCenter@FlintAsbury.org so we can share your story with others.

Check out Rahab, Abigail, Bathsheba, Tamar, Judith, Delilah, Sarah, Hannah, the un-named Widow helped by Elijah, the Shunammite Woman, Miriam the Princess, Rachael and Leah, Ruth and Naomi, and of course, Eve. Which of these stories intersect with your story?

Man, woman, non-binary, or any combination, you're invited to participate in our series. Share what you admire about one or more of these women. In what ways do they remind you of a particular person in your life? What do you have in common?

Our Book Club plans to follow along in Danielle's book during our series if you want deeper discussions on our weekly themes. We have a few books available, or you can check with the library or order your own copy from several sources.

The latest variants of COVID are more contagious. As a result, there is a resurgence of new infections among the unvaccinated. 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 our [YouTube channel](#). 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](#) at FlintAsbury.org.

Pastor Tommy

¹ Danielle Bean. *You are Enough: What Women of the Bible Teach You about Your Mission and Worth*. West Chester, PA: Ascension Publishing,

Final Judgement (The God you did not make up)... *cont. from pg 1*

dressed similarly, and so on. You get the point. Can you spell B-O-R-I-N-G? It was like a meg-church with no small groups.

Their boredom finally reached a point that they decided to start a massive building project. First, the plan was to build a tower that reached heaven. Then, perhaps they planned an insurrection and takeover. This way, they could make sure that everyone in heaven was like them. Sound familiar?

Regardless, God had a different plan. The tower was destroyed by God before it was finished, and the people scattered. Instead of the same language, multiple languages emerged. Instead of one way to dress, people started going to someplace other than the Gap to buy their clothes. You get the point. Instead of one large group that looked, talked, and thought alike, they became many different groups.

Can you spell D-I-V-E-R-S-I-T-Y?

Of course, there were consequences. There are always consequences.

If you aren't familiar with this story, you may not realize that I embellished the story of Babel quite a lot. I even made some of it up. Nevertheless, it's a good story, and my version may be closer to the truth than the

way others tell it — or not. But I take comfort in knowing that the technical details of the story aren't the point.

Part of what it means to be human is filling in the blanks when trying to make meaning out of vagueness. And we have little choice but to fill in the blanks with whatever insights we've gathered from other sources. So when detail is missing, we make the rest up often without realizing that it's happening.

This is how our vision works all the time. Our eyes miss a lot of detail because our eyes have a lot of blind spots. So our brain fills in the missing pieces for us based on past experience. As a result, we see a partially accurate and somewhat inaccurate version of what actually exists.

We go through a similar process when we describe God. What we don't know about God we make up. Including persons who don't believe there is a God. They don't know for sure, so they make up a story to convince themselves that how they see the universe is the real thing. This means that other versions of the story are less valid for them.

Barbara Brown Taylor writes that:

Spirituality is the active pursuit of the God you did not make up. My view of God is my

creation, made from bits and pieces of received or perceived knowledge about divine reality that I hope or fear are true. Love God in the person standing right in front of you, or forget the whole thing, because if you cannot do that, then you are just going to keep making shit up. The one who does not look, think, or act like the rest of us may offer us our best chance at seeing past our own reflections in the mirror to the God we did not make up.¹

The simple answer for Christians is that we turn to Jesus Christ to fill in the blanks. But the simple answer has a lot of blank-filling that's needed to complete the picture. The Bible contains all that we need to know for salvation. Not just what we need to know for eternal life but also what we need to know to live abundantly right now.

And a lot of us stop there and claim we know all the answers. But ask anyone what they know about God and you're going to learn more about the person than you learn about God.

This is because our spiritual eyes are very much like our physical eyes. We still fill in the blanks to

But the empty flattery offered by Nicodemus suggests that he thinks he knows that Jesus was sent by God when he doesn't. No one does unless they are re-born of the Holy Spirit. Which none of us have power over.

"How can this be?" asks Nicodemus. This is a great question and likely an honest one coming from a person the community sees as an expert on matters of God. This is perhaps why Jesus asks Nicodemus, "How could you not know?"

After Jesus asks how he could be an expert in religious knowledge and still not understand, Nicodemus stops talking.

One of my Dad's favorite sayings for me was the importance of keeping my mouth shut. "Better to let others think You're a fool than to verify it by saying something foolish." Perhaps this story is about Jesus telling Nicodemus the advice my Dad gave me.

No one can see the Kingdom of God without being born again.

John 4:3

Sometimes it's better to sit quietly and listen to God. Nicodemus thinks he knows the mind of God when he doesn't. The truth is that no one does. Barbara Brown Taylor reminds us that this is what it means to be human.

This brings us to making sense of the rest of this story. After Nicodemus quits asking questions, Jesus expands on His lesson, explaining the essence of what continues as controversy today. But, first, Jesus tells Nicodemus that God wants to save, rather than condemn, the world. And this decision comes out of God's love for the world.

Jesus explains an even more challenging to understand reality when He describes the means of salvation. First, God loves the world so much that the Son of God will save us. And salvation begins with the belief that this promise is true with the hope of re-birth.

Out of this story and others, Christians come to the conclusion that salvation comes through this process. But, while we're willing to accept that Jesus alone is the mediator of our salvation, we seem hesitant to entirely give up our desire to be a co-mediator. We want some say in which way the winds blow and who gets re-born.

The human Jesus was born into a Jewish family and raised in Jewish tradition and beliefs. We read that He adhered to the rituals and traditions that He learned since childhood. This is not to say that Jesus adapted to and adopted every nuance. He argued with teachers and made controversial statements and claims.

And Nicodemus heard first hand the most controversial of all the claims made by Jesus. And Nicodemus was understandably confused and then silent for the rest of the story.

We don't know if Nicodemus was ever re-born, even after spending time with the world's greatest evangelist. Jesus didn't ask Nicodemus to pray the "sinners prayer" or join His church. He didn't offer to baptize Nicodemus or suggest he go to the Jordan River and find John the Baptist, who baptized Jesus.

Instead, Jesus shared what He knew to be true about God. And it appears that Nicodemus sat and quietly listened.

I get the feeling that there is room for Nicodemus in the Kingdom of God that Jesus described that day. I think there is room in the heaven that I believe Jesus oversees. And if I'm right about this, perhaps I'll get to meet

Nicodemus someday. I've got questions of my own.

Do you believe that Jesus is the way, the truth, and arbitrator of eternal life? Then, may we all learn to let Jesus do what God has done since the beginning and will do long after our bodies return to the dust we came from — even without our advice and counsel. Let's leave the decision of who receives salvation to the One we believe owns it.

Our series this month is called *Holy Envy* and this is episode three. Join us each Sunday as we navigate life's challenges using the Word of God as our guidepost. And recognizing that none of us have a monopoly on knowing the mind of God. So we're better when we work together.

This month we look for God in the faith of others. In doing so, we expect to experience holy envy from time to time. We anticipate once in a while wondering whether the water might be a bit sweeter coming out of our neighbor's well. 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](#).

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Pastor Tommy

Life groups questions & notes:

Lord, did we ever see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink? 38 When did we ever see you a stranger and welcome you in our homes, or naked and clothe you? 39 When did we ever see you sick or in prison, and visit you?

Matthew 25:31-46 (GNT)

NOTES FROM WORSHIP

QUESTIONS FOR LIFE GROUPS

1. Read Matthew 25:31-46. If you are already familiar with this story begin with reflecting on anything you noticed this time that you hadn't noticed before — share this with your group. What are some of the implications that this text has for you? What does this text say about God's priorities? What does this say about God's view of non-Christians?
2. Read the article in this week's Circuit Rider, *Final judgment*. Which are you? Are you a sheep or are you a goat? How do you know? Who is Jesus in your life? There is a lot of need in our community. What boundaries do you keep to prevent bringing harm to yourself while responding to the needs of others?
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.

“Feed Flint”



“Feed Flint”

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A meal goes a long way for a senior living alone, a family struggling to make ends meet, or a child fearful of empty shelves at home. But for the residents of Flint who carry the effects of lead-tainted water, nutrition is critical. Feed Flint provides locally grown, chemical-free, fresh produce to residents living in and around Flint. And we're hoping that you can help us provide 10,000 meals this summer.

Feed Flint includes takeout meals, produce boxes with recipes, and home deliveries as part of our work to guide and support families in moving to sustainable abundance. The reality is that Michigan's food insecurity levels got worse during the COVID-19 pandemic, and this summer's recovery is leaving behind those at the most risk of having to miss meals.

Flint families continue to struggle with the ongoing effects of the water crisis.

We're bringing together the resources of the Asbury Community Development Corporation. This includes Asbury Farms, the South Flint Soup Kitchen, the Asbury Community Help Center, multiple food pantries, and our Sizzling Culture Mobile Food Trailer. Our plan is to care for our neighbors when they need it most. We accept all people as they are, and our doors are always open to anyone.

Asbury Farms provides locally grown produce used to create fabulous and nutritious meals. Our seed-to-table approach is community-based. This not only helps families make it through emergencies and crises. We help move families towards sustainable abundance.

Our Sizzling Culture program provides jobs and new skills to our city's youth. This includes year-round employment. Our staff and most of our volunteers come from the neighborhoods we support. We call this sustainable abundance because families move from need-based on scarcity to enough based on community-generated abundance.

Our work is also about food and justice. Our vision is a revitalized community where every resident can use their talents and passions for the common good, where children grow into active citizens. And all residents can enjoy safety, good health, and a culture that fosters life-long learning and satisfying lives. This summer, help us address food insecurity and strengthen Flint's budding local food system by supporting the Feed Flint campaign. Thank you for taking the time to see what we're doing and considering how you can help.

**Donate to our Feed Flint Campaign by visiting:
flintasbury.org/feed-flint-donate**



LET'S HELP THOSE IN NEED!

September South Flint Soup Kitchen Food Giveaways

**SEPTEMBER 8TH & 29TH
11AM-NOON BOTH DAYS**

**South Flint Soup Kitchen
3410 Fenton Road (Located three blocks north of
Atherton Road) Flint, MI 48507**

Questions??? Call 810-239-3427

No appointment necessary!



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

create the version of Jesus that most agrees with what we choose to believe. Some of us tune in to the "Fox News" version, while others look to sources with less bias. Meanwhile, we miss the other side of each story which brings us back full circle to Babel.

My all-time favorite story from scripture may be the most demanding of all. I suspect that it is common for us to wonder if there really is a day of reckoning. Death presents such a finality to all that we know. Yet, who doesn't hope for something beyond that moment when our life is over? But will there be a day of reckoning?

Jesus filled in some blanks for us about a final judgment on several occasions using stories to illustrate what to expect. For example, in Matthew's telling of one story, Jesus uses livestock as a stand-in for people. The very name "live-stock" infers being alive. So I don't mind Jesus comparing me to an animal, depending on which animal He chooses.

Whenever you did this for one of the least important...you did it for me!

Matthew 25:40

At the end of our life here, according to Jesus, there will be a sorting out. The sorting will be like a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. Jesus must have liked sheep but may have gotten butted by a goat at some point. Because in this story, it far better to be a sheep.

One fascinating point in this story is that neither the sheep nor the goats knew that they were sheep or goats. Perhaps it's like a fish that doesn't realize that it lives in water, but there are birds overhead that live in the sky. Until the day they become fish food.

The deciding factor for whether I am a sheep or goat, according to Jesus, is determined by how we respond to persons in peril. But in His telling, Jesus uses a very subtle test. He says to the sheep that when you saw me thirsty, hungry, naked, a stranger, in prison, or sick, you didn't just ignore me. Instead, you treated me with dignity, offered hospitality, or sometimes you took action to help relieve my suffering.

The confusion comes from the lack of recognition that any of us, sheep or goats, actually recall seeing Jesus in peril. The gut-punch comes when Jesus says that whenever we take action to help the most vulnerable among us, we're actually doing something for and to Jesus. When we see a person in peril, we should see the very God who determines our fate. But we must look closely to see God.

This, my friends, is the God that we didn't makeup. This is the God who created diversity among us to be a unique image of our must look closely to see God.

This week is the final episode of our series we called *Holy Envy*. Join

us each Sunday as we navigate life's challenges using the Word of God as our guidepost. And recognizing that none of us have a monopoly on knowing the mind of God. So we're better when we work together.

In this month's series we looked for God in the faith of others. In doing so, we expect to experience holy envy from time to time. We anticipate once in a while wondering whether the water might be a bit sweeter coming out of our neighbor's well.

Plan to join us next month for Part one of our new series, *Better together*. Between now and Thanksgiving we will be hearing from several women found in the Old Testament and their contemporary versions we can actually see and hear from. Bring a friend with you.

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](#)**.

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**ASBURY CHURCH
PRESENTS....**

OPEN MIC

LIVE STREAM OPEN MIC
07 PM TILL 10PM

**RAFFLE
\$1**

10.22.21

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ALL ARE WELCOME!!!

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