

ASBURY CIRCUIT RIDER

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Irrational Optimism (Love & Courage)



I try hard to be an optimist even when I don't see a way forward. Nevertheless, I have left jobs and situations after concluding that the grass must surely be greener in a different pasture.

But did I make the best decision? On my more optimistic days, I will answer yes, despite a loud voice demanding attention, screaming, "Are you sure?"

Page 2

Edges (Where the wild things are)



When I'm working on a platform, I'm careful not to work too close to the edges. The higher the platform, the greater the danger. The smaller the surface, the larger the risk of stepping off an edge.

Living on the edge, the margins, is an uncomfortable dwelling place. You may see relief only a few feet away, but it may as well be miles. You feel pressure pushing you closer to the

edge already uncomfortably nearby.

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**EVERYONE
HAVE A
WONDERFUL
AND SAFE
WEEK!!**



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As we come to the end of our first series in 2024, it's taking a lot of energy for me to remain optimistic about the future of our country. I'm grateful for the attention to detail and thoughtful reflection offered by David Leonhardt in his book *Ours was the Shining Future: The Story of the American Dream*. I have used content and quotes liberally from his book over the past five weeks and learned a great deal about the forces that shaped our current political landscape.

I'm also grateful for our author's optimism, even as he writes, "American democracy today seems more vulnerable than many people imagined it ever could." So is optimism, at this point, irrational?

Michael Fishbein, in an article titled "Irrational Optimism: The Entrepreneur's Blessing and Curse" describes optimism bias as a "cognitive bias that causes a person to believe that they are less at risk of experiencing a negative event."

Fishbein was writing about the risks involved in starting a business while facing the reality that almost three-quarters of new businesses no longer exist after five years. This dismal track record for new business starts suggests that at least some entrepreneurs suffer from irrational optimism.

In his article, Fishbein emphasizes informed optimism. Remain optimistic but realistic about the challenges and risk. Risking failure requires courage.

But when it comes to restoring the factors that make the American dream possible, Leonhardt argues that irrational optimism is not our fundamental problem. Instead, our progress is hampered by cynicism and negativity. An attitude echoed by presidential candidates when trying to convince us they can implement change for the good.

Pessimism seems rational since the problems we face are overwhelming. And we clearly don't agree on the best path forward nor which candidates for political office are more likely to get us there.

I have been moved by the kind words shared by friends and the admirers of the recently deceased country singer Toby Keith. In a New York Times article, Bill Friskics-Warren writes "Mr. Keith was often a lightning rod for controversy, especially where politics were concerned."

"I don't apologize for being patriotic," Keith replied in a 2007 interview with Newsday. This came after releasing his controversial song, "Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue (The Angry American)," which he wrote in response to both the 9/11 attacks and the death of his father, a disabled veteran. For years, he described himself as a conservative Democrat, but later said he re-registered as an independent.

In one song titled "If I Was Jesus," Toby Keith sings "If I was Jesus, I'd have some friends that were poor. I'd run around with the wrong crowd. Man, I'd never be bored. Then I'd heal me a blind man, get myself crucified by politicians and preachers who got something to hide."

IN OUR PRAYERS

Kevin Croom Jonathon Misner
 Sylvia Pittman Terrance Williams
 Kim Sims



FRIENDS AND LOVED ONES WHO ARE HOMEBOUND OR IN NURSING CARE

Dean Lamoreaux
 Norma Buzzard Nancy Elston

PLEASE JOIN US EACH SUNDAY FOR OUR SERVICE AT 10:30AM. AND OUR SPECIAL SERVICES COMING UP WITH OTHER FLINT AREA UNITED METHODIST CHURCHES.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 25TH -

REV. NAYLO HOPKINS,
 PASTOR OF BETHEL UMC

SUNDAY, MARCH 10TH -

REV. KIMBERLY METZER,
 PASTOR OF OPEN DOOR UMC

THESE PREACHERS WILL BE OUR GUEST FOR THESE SUNDAYS. SO JOIN US!

**** PLEASE KEEP SYLVIA PITTMAN AND KIM SIMS IN YOUR PRAYERS AS THEY BOTH RECOVER FROM SURGERIES ...**



COMING UP THIS WEEK

FEBRUARY 19 - 25

- Feb 19 Mon President's Day
6:00pm Leadership Team
- Feb 20 Tue 10:00am Food Distribution
5:00-7:00pm City of Flint
4th Ward Neighborhood Meeting
- Feb 21 Wed 9:00am- till Gone Food Giveaway
at South Flint Soup Kitchen 3410 Fenton Rd Flint
- Feb 22 Thu
- Feb 23 Fri
- Feb 24 Sat
- Feb 25 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](#).)

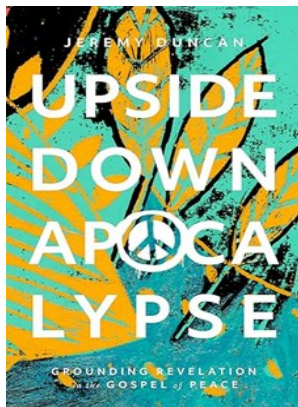
Upcoming Worship Series "Revelations"



Welcome to our long-awaited series, *Revelations*. While I've occasionally referred to scripture from this mysterious book this is the first time we're dedicating multiple weeks to cover the entire book. Ready?

First, *Revelations* may be one of the most theologically abused books in the Bible. It's used to justify a myriad of questionable opinions and prejudices. *Revelations* lends itself to a variety of interpretations due to its layers of symbolism, metaphors and meaning. However, it is part of our bible and, as such, consistent with the God of Salvation found throughout the scripture.

Book Club News



Our companion book for our new worship series is Jeremy Duncan's review of the Book of Revelations,

titled *Upside-Down Apocalypse: grounding revelation in the gospel of peace.*

Amazon's website describes his book this way:

The book of Revelation—which deals on a cosmic scale with good and evil, politics and empire, community and eternity—has intrigued and frustrated readers since it was written. How do we make sense of John's prophetic vision of cosmic war in light the nonviolence Jesus embodies in the

gospels? What does it mean to tell us about Jesus, our world, and the future of all things? As End Times conspiracy theories surge, it's more important than ever that we read the final book of the Bible without distorting the true message of Jesus.

In *Upside-Down Apocalypse*, author Jeremy Duncan draws on biblical scholarship and nonviolent theology to guide readers through the book of Revelation, understanding the vision of John in the light

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Anthony & Jim Ushers
Jonathon & Terrance Production Team
Yasheah & Mirium Nursery
Christine & Norma Cafe

Upcoming Worship Series — “Revelations” ..cont from pg 4

And this is the main point of our series. Our plan is to review Revelations through the lens of the Gospels. After all, it is the same Jesus in all situations. The same Lord and Savior. The same God.

We are doing this series in cooperation with other Flint area UM churches. Two of our Sundays will feature guest preachers. The Reverend Naylo Hopkins, Pastor of Bethel UMC will be at Asbury on February 25. The Reverend Kimberly Metzger, Pastor of Open Door UMC will be with us on March 10.

We have both a companion book and an outline of Revelations to follow. Our guest speakers will follow the outline of scripture, but the companion book is unique to our journey (see Book Club article).

Here is the outline for covering Revelations with chapters from our companion book:

	<u>Scripture</u>	<u>Upside-Down Apocalypse</u>
Feb 18	Revelation 1:9-18	Chapters Forward - 2
Feb 25	Revelation 6:1-8	Chapter 3
Mar 3	Revelation 7:9-17	Chapters 4-5
Mar 10	Revelation 16:13-17	Chapter 6
Mar 17	Revelation 21:1-5	Chapters 7-8
Mar 24	Revelation 5:1-10	Chapters 9 -10
Mar 31	John 20:1-18	Chapter 11

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


Jeremy Duncan. *Upside-Down Apocalypse:grounding revelation in the gospel of peace*.
Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2022.

“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

LIFE GROUP QUESTIONS & MORE:

Don't be afraid! I am the first and the last. I am the living one! I was dead, but now I am alive forever and ever. I have authority over death and the world of the dead

Revelation 1:9-18

NOTES FROM WORSHIP

QUESTIONS FOR LIFE GROUPS:

1. Read the first chapter of Revelations, paying close attention to Revelation 1:9-18. What did you learn about this mysterious book in the first chapter? What are your reservations about studying Revelations? What are you looking forward to?

2. Read this week's articles titled *Edges*. What is your familiarity with the Book of Revelations? What does the word apocalypse mean to you? Where are your edges? How close are you to one of your edges?

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.



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Any questions, please call 239-3427 or 235-0016 or

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of the Jesus we know through the Gospels—the full revelation of the Divine. Along the way, readers will discover what the writer imagines as he weaves this profound revelation of non-violent triumph and see with fresh eyes how the Prince of Peace turns violence on its head once and for all.

We have a limited number of copies Jeremy Duncan's book. But copies are available through most book retailers and libraries.

Here is the schedule of chapters for our *Revelations* Series:

Feb 18	Chapters Forward - 2
Feb 25	Chapter 3
Mar 3	Chapters 4-5
Mar 10	Chapter 6
Mar 17	Chapters 7-8
Mar 24	Chapters 9 -10
Mar 31	Chapter 11

Our Book Club does not meet as a group. However, our weekly messages reference that weeks chapters. You can anticipate spoiler alerts unless you keep up with the pace. You can purchase your own copy or visit your local library.

You can contact our office with questions, by phone or simply type your question or enter a prayer request on our website's homepage — FlintAsburyChurch.org.

Pastor Tommy

Jeremy Duncan. *Upside-Down Apocalypse:grounding revelation in the gospel of peace*. Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2022.

Cash or checks can be sent to/dropped off at South Flint Soup Kitchen, 3410 Fenton Road, Flint, MI 48507. Please make checks out to South Flint Soup Kitchen!

Online at www.mightycause.com/feedflint

Donations can be dropped off Monday-Friday 11am-12Noon. Calling ahead is not necessary, but our needs change frequently, so calling ahead of time is a good idea!

Give time! We need volunteers!!! Volunteers arrive at 9:30am and are done by 12:30pm. Tasks include handing out lunches, assisting in the Angel Closet, light cleaning, putting together items to pass out to clients, and more.

Refer people!!

Questions??? Call 810-239-3427
or email southflintsoupkitchen@gmail.com

With each stop, a line formed by the time I finished pumping my gas.

The U.S. was coming down from an economic high that began after the Great Depression. And although I was driving a Mustang 2 with a stick, larger cars were still the norm. Princeton University historian Meg Jacobs summarizes the era this way. "Everybody was completely dependent and in love with their cars as a symbol of American triumph and freedom."

An "energy crisis" coming on with no warning created a shockwave. The U.S. appetite for energy was huge and growing, creating a dependence on oil imported from the Middle East, in particular.

According to David Leonhardt, the energy crisis completed a perfect storm of pressures that unleashed businesses from the cross-checks that allowed most Americans to flourish.

The stage was set for Ronald Reagan to win the presidency equipped with policies based on supply-side economics. His campaign platform emphasized lower taxes, deregulation, and free-market capitalism.

Although Reagan never used the phrase "trickle down," his speeches resonated with blue-collar workers and families hurt by increasing tax rates on incomes unable to keep up with rising costs.

The ideas are simple. Take away governmental controls, reducing cost and allowing U.S. companies to reap higher profits. Their success benefits everyone. Business leaders easily adopted a philosophy that higher incomes for themselves was good for America.

Another complicating factor contributed to the challenges facing most Americans. Immigration, during the boom years for American families, remained in the background. Immigration laws favored immigrants from Great Britain, Germany, and Ireland. Countries where their citizens were mostly not interested in leaving home.

Since immigrants from Mexico and other Latin American countries were not limited, corporate farms benefited from lower-cost labor without complication. Freer movement of people between borders benefited businesses by keeping labor rates down.

The idea of the U.S. being a melting pot of people from different cultures and national origin was only a footnote. With the help of a successful book by Senator John F. Kennedy, called *A Nation of Immigrants*, the notion became mainstream. Historian James Truslow Adams is credited with creating the phrase "American dream," in telling the success story of an immigrant from Russia, Mary Antin, who later would end her memoir with "Mine is the shining future."

President Johnson signed a new bill into law eliminating immigrant quotas by country and prioritizing family members of people who were already in the country and workers with high-level professional skills.

No one supporting the new immigration policies anticipated the impact the bill would have on the number of persons coming to the U.S. The bill did not count family members as part of the annual limits on new applicants, and the majority of immigrants looked for blue-collar jobs. In 1965, less than 5% of U.S. citizens were foreign born. Today, that number exceeds 14%.

There are a lot of edges in life to watch out for, and most of us are feeling dangerously close. It's an election year. And our House of Representatives seem completely dysfunctional. I think it's time to "clean house" in our legislative branch.

Many United Methodist churches feel like the edges are too close for some of our traditional beliefs and theological positions.

Asbury Theological Seminary President Timothy C. Tennent, in a September 2022 blog post, argued that many United Methodist congregations were "pushed to the edge" by churches progressively interpreting scripture in ways that, in their view, are inconsistent with published denominational doctrine.

A reporter from ABC News asked a couple of our Flint-area UM pastors to offer insights into the departure of churches from our conference. Thousands of churches across the country voted to disaffiliate with the United Methodist denomination, primarily over theological disagreements. The more visibly public dispute involves the ordination of LGBTQ clergy and same-sex marriage.

Amna Nawaz, in a PBS story this past December, reported that over 7,000 churches voted to disaffiliate since 2019. Apparently, there were a lot of folks too close to edges they did not want to be near.

Let's be clear. United Methodist doctrine, historically, demonstrates flex. The Book of Discipline, which reads a lot like a legal document, spells out a process for interpreting scripture using the text, tradition, experience and reason. And most theologians realize that experience weighs heavily on how we individually read scripture.

We come to the bible as individuals, created in the image of God and shaped by the world. And the closer the world pushes us towards the edges, the greater the likelihood we're a bit misshaped by world standards.

The Book of Revelations, in particular, with its bizarre imaginary, invites a wide diversity of interpretations.

John begins Revelations letting his readers know the Spirit was influencing his thoughts and actions. Sent to the Island of Patmos for sharing the gospel, John was experiencing his own edges. So his circumstances provided empathy for his colleagues facing pressure to conform to the world around them.

Welcome to the first episode of our Lenten Series *Revelations*. Over the next seven weeks, we will explore the strange and mysterious poetry revealed to John and chosen to conclude our holy scriptures. During our series, we will turn to Pastor Jeremy Duncan's book titled *Upside-Down Apocalypse*, along with other sources, for guidance in navigating John's symbols and references. We will look for the edges of reasonableness based on what we know about Jesus Christ from the gospels, in particular.

Don't be afraid! I am the first and the last. I am the living one! I was dead, but now I am alive forever and ever; I have authority over death and the world of the dead.

Revelation 1:9-18

John wrote Revelations over two thousand years ago. It was a different time. Rome was the prevailing world power and led by a ruthless dictator demanding the respect that Christians reserve for Jesus Christ.

Perhaps he is on to something. There is a certain wisdom in modeling our lives after Jesus, who portrayed a realistic optimism grounded in His knowledge of a certain future despite the circumstances surrounding him.

One of the primary characteristics attributed to God is wisdom. The Book of Proverbs positions itself as a book dedicated to teaching wisdom. The book promises to teach you how to live intelligently and how to be honest, just, and fair.

Right now, we're short on wisdom. Honesty, justice and fairness are not fair descriptions of our country. The American Dream was hijacked by well-meaning, but ill-informed voters, wooed by self-serving political leaders.

Our lack of investment in education and transportation explains, in part, why the cost of income support and healthcare continue to rise as a percent of our economy. Our healthcare system is the most expensive and least effective among prosperous nations. We lag most other nations in the education of persons under 50 and the efficiency of our transportation systems.

Meanwhile, the gap between the wealthiest Americans and the rest of us widens. Our solution won't be found in electing politicians lacking in wisdom and disinterested in honesty, fairness and justice for all.

But I'm optimistic, even if my optimism is irrational.

The Proverbs can teach you how to live intelligently and how to be honest, just, and fair.

Proverbs 1:3

Joy-Ann Reid offered tremendous insight into what it will take for our optimism to prove rational. In an interview with Stephen Colbert, she said, "Small acts of courage can save our democracy, but to have courage you have to love something... To really have courage you have to access that love."

But my optimism is not irrational. We're created in the image of a God who loves us and all of creation. And my optimism is grounded in my faith that love will overcome lies, name-calling and dishonest politicians.

You can join us each Sunday in person or online by clicking the button on our [website's](#) homepage - [Click here to watch](#). This button takes you to our [YouTube channel](#). You can find more information about us on our website at FlintAsburyChurch.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 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

Parts of our series was inspired by David Leonhardt. *Ours was the Shining Future: The Story of the American Dream*. New York: Penguin Random House, 2023. Bill Friskics-Warren. "Toby Keith, Larger-Than-Life Country Music Star, Dies at 62." © New York Times, Feb. 6, 2024. Retrieved from: [link](#)

Phil Madeira and Chuck Cannon. "If I Was Jesus." © Produced By Toby Keith & James Stroud, November 4, 2003. Michael Fishbein. *"Irrational Optimism: The Entrepreneur's Blessing and Curse."* © Michael Fishbein. Medium, Sep 1, 2016. Retrieved from: [link](#)

While it is often challenging to see our current circumstances in ancient stories. It is all there. In the first century, the empire was Rome. Today, it's Russia, China, the U.S. and their allies. Then it was Titus Flavius Domitian. Today it is Vladimir Putin. Kim Jong-un and Xi Jinping. A generation earlier, it was Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin and Mao Zedong.

The genre of Revelations is apocalyptic. An apocalypse, in modern English, describes the end of the world, most often with special effects and storytelling that explore the edges of our imagination. However, this word in ancient Greek, the language of John, means simply the "uncovering of something hidden." While Revelations was written, John's aim was to make clear what was hidden.

Duncan explains that "while an apocalypse is an end—an end to one's imagination, an end to a vision that is incomplete—it is also always the start of something new; a more authentic way to imagine our world."

We expect scripture to reveal life-saving knowledge to us. We expect brilliance and wisdom radiating from the pages. And John does not disappoint us.

Led by the Spirit of God, his utilization of commonly used symbols and metaphors effectively illuminates that which Jesus revealed. God is in charge, not world leaders and empires.

Heaven on earth" is God's promise to humanity. "Peace on earth" is the gospel's deliverable. Not the sort of peace that humans promise and cannot deliver. Rather, God promises an eternal peace.

Jesus Christ, among other things, expresses God's love. Jesus is the logos of God. That is, Jesus is the idea behind the thing. Jesus is the beginning and the end. The alpha and omega. And, in Revelations, John reveals Jesus Christ.

I invite you to travel with us as we explore the edges of Revelations.

You can join us each Sunday in person or online by clicking the button on our [website's](#) homepage - [Click here to watch](#). This button takes you to our [YouTube channel](#). You can find more information about us on our website at FlintAsburyChurch.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 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

Parts of our series was inspired by Jeremy Duncan. *Upside-Down Apocalypse: grounding revelation in the gospel of peace*. Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2022.

Timothy Tennent. *Let our People Go: The Cry of Disaffiliating UMC Churches*. © Timothy Tennent, September 21, 2022. Retrieved from: [link](#)

Amna Nawaz and Adam Kemp. *Why thousands of congregations are leaving the United Methodist Church*. © PBD, Dec 27, 2023. Retrieved from: [link](#)

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