

ASBURY CIRCUIT RIDER

Volume 5 Issue 21

SEPTEMBER 21, 2025

Confidence (Hurricane)



Free speech is a fundamental element of democracy and is protected by the First Amendment. Maybe “protected” is too strong, considering recent events. In our second episode of the *Hurricane* series, we examine the link between confidence, belonging, and free speech.

Research has confirmed a strong connection between free speech, belonging, and confidence. Recent studies reveal that free speech encourages genuine participation, which enhances a sense of belonging and boosts participants' confidence. Conversely, when speech is limited, our sense of belonging drops, and without that feeling of belonging, confidence also decreases. *Page 2*

Formation (Hurricane)



According to Spaceplace, a website for kids maintained by NASA, tropical cyclones are the most violent storms on Earth. Tropical cyclones that form over the Atlantic Ocean or eastern Pacific Ocean are called “hurricanes.”

The site describes hurricanes as giant engines that use warm, moist air as fuel. The warm, moist air over the ocean rises upward from near the surface, causing an area of lower air pressure below. This process continues to develop a full-fledged hurricane:

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VEGGIE BOXES FROM
ASBURY FARMS!



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When free speech is seen as threatened or insecure, people feel less confident speaking out. This is especially true for those in less powerful groups. It lowers their confidence in expressing themselves or participating. When people feel less safe or able to express themselves, they may feel excluded or marginalized. In other words, they feel less like they belong.

Belonging and confidence are essential for democratic participation, mental health, and social trust. People who feel they belong are more likely to trust institutions and feel confident in sharing their opinions. Conversely, when free speech is upheld or perceived as upheld, the environment becomes more open to a diversity of ideas, allowing people from different backgrounds to share their views, which promotes belonging and increases confidence.

This week in our companion book, Hai lands a job at a fast-casual restaurant in East Gladness known as HomeMarket. He finds the job by reconnecting with his cousin Sony, who also works there. Hai learns that Sony hopes to post bail for his mother and Hai's aunt, Kim, who is in jail for arson.

HomeMarket becomes more than just a job for Hai. It turns into a place where he finds a sense of belonging. Hai's boss, Big Jean, known as BJ, has a personality that blends toughness and ambition with nurturing care. Alongside his coworkers Maureen, Wayne, and Russia, they create a kind of "found family" for Hai as he starts to feel more accepted at work. His job becomes a way of holding on, of establishing a place in his world beyond his grief, caretaker duties, and feelings of limbo.

Meanwhile, Grazina's dementia episodes become more frequent and intense. Hai begins actively helping her through them. Many of Grazina's episodes take her back to her childhood when Russia invaded Lithuania, so Hai joins Grazina in pretend gunfights as Sergeant Pepper.

Along the way, we learn more about Hai's relationship with his mother, his past, his hopes and frustrations, and the burden he's carrying in terms of losses, responsibilities, and debts, both literal and emotional.

Belonging is a central theme in scripture, especially in the New Testament. In a lengthy

monologue known as the Sermon on the Mount, found in Matthew, Jesus begins his teaching by describing those who belong to God's kingdom. The spiritually poor, those who mourn, the humble, people whose greatest desire is to do what God requires, the merciful, the pure in heart, those who work for peace, individuals who are persecuted because they do what God requires, and those whom people insult, persecute, and lie about because they are His followers.

Jesus doesn't tell us to pursue these attributes, but rather that God will support us when others come after us. He seems to be describing us when we're feeling vulnerable and like outsiders. We also feel like we have to be cautious with our words, so we don't become the next target ourselves.

And He says things like the Kingdom of heaven belongs to us, and God will comfort us. Jesus also says that we will receive what God has promised, and we'll be fully satisfied. We'll see God and be His children. If this isn't belonging, I don't know what is.

IN OUR PRAYERS

Virginia Bigger
Sylvia Pittman
Mirium Watson

Fred Hans
Jonathon Misner
Terrance Williams

FRIENDS AND LOVED ONES WHO ARE
HOMEBOUND OR IN NURSING CARE

Dean Lamoreaux Norma Buzzard
Nancy Elston

**COMING UP THIS WEEK: SEPTEMBER 22—28**

Sept 22	Mon	11am-12N	Angel Closet (SFSK)
Sept 23	Tue	9am-until gone	Produce will be available each week, along with canned goods, until further notice
		11am-12N	Angel Closet
		3:00pm	CDC Board Meeting
Sept 24	Wed	11am-12N	Angel Closet
Sept 25	Thu	11am-12N	Angel Closet
Sept 26	Fri	11am-12N	Angel Closet
Sept 27	Sat		
Sept 28	Sun	10:30am	New Beginnings Contemporary Worship

*** PLEASE GET YOUR CHURCH CONFERENCE REPORTS INTO ME **BY**
OCTOBER 3RD. THEY ARE DUE OCTOBER 13TH TO DISTRICT OFFICE,
AND I NEED TO PREPARE THEM TO SEND OUT DIGITALLY AND
MAILED OUT. CONNIE

(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 "Hurricane"

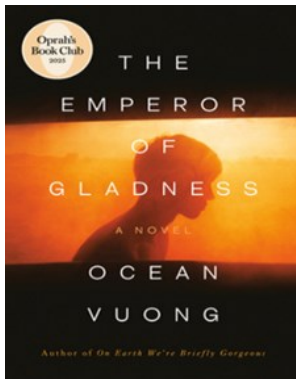


In this series, *Hurricane*, we explore how God is our shelter and always ready to come to our aid in times of trouble. And troubles come that only God can get us through. However, God allows us to suffer the consequences of our collective decisions.

For a companion book, we're using Ocean Vuong's best-selling novel and Oprah Book Club selection, *The Emperor of Gladness*. One of the main characters, Grazina, is an elderly widow dealing with dementia who persuades Hai, a young adult, to become her caretaker. Over the following months, the unlikely pair forms a life-changing bond based on love, empathy, spiritual reflection, and heartbreak. Through this, their relationship changes Hai's view of himself, his family, and a community on the edge.

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Book Club News



Miracles happen all the time. In our last two series, we explored both miracles and the prayers that often precede them.

In our new series, *Hurricane*, we put miracles aside for a while to focus on everyday reality, where miracles

often come wrapped in the ordinary.

A New York Times best seller and Oprah Book Club selection, *The Emperor of Gladness* is a thought-provoking novel. The author is Ocean Vuong, known for his innovation, syntactic dexterity, and the ability to combine grit with grace through tenderness.

The setting is the post-industrial town of East Gladness, Connecticut,

where the story begins as nineteen-year-old Hai stands on the edge of a bridge in steady rain, ready to jump. It was a late summer evening when Hai heard someone shout from across the river, urging him not to jump.

Grazina is an elderly widow dealing with dementia. She also appears to be out of options and persuades Hai to become her caretaker. Over the following months, the unlikely pair forms a life-changing bond based on empathy, spiritual reflection, and heartbreak. Through this, their relationship changes Hai's view of himself, his family, and a community on the edge.

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Asbury Staff

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Kevin Croom	Executive Director/CDC
Connie Portillo	Office Secretary
Kim Sims	Finance Director
Terry Kinze	Ops Manager/CDC
Sylvia Pittman	Empowerment Arts
Jim Craig	Board & Leadership Chair
Israel Unger (Izzy)	Business Service Mgr
Terrance Williams	Arts Center Mgr
	South Flint Soup Kitchen

Leadership in Worship & Service

Tony & Mirium	Welcome Team
Cyndi	Worship Leader
Anthony & Jim	Ushers
Jonathon & Terrance	Production Team
Yasheah & Mirium	Nursery
Christine	Cafe

Upcoming Worship Series — “Hurricane”

Both hurricanes and dementia are destructive forces that form without regard to our hopes and dreams, interrupting life with a destructive force that we're unable to stop once they're underway. But do we play a role?

The debate about the existence of climate change ended years ago. No one can force us to believe it doesn't exist, but we all have the power to ignore the warnings. Despite our personal views, storms are becoming more severe and frequent, leading to a rising toll of lives and property. Among weather events, hurricanes are the most powerful, occurring more often and with greater strength.

The Department of Energy published a controversial report written by five authors who were hand-selected by Energy Secretary Chris Wright, a former executive in the fossil fuel industry. Not surprisingly, the report concluded that "carbon dioxide-induced warming appears to be less damaging economically than commonly believed." This group was subsequently disbanded in response to a lawsuit filed by the Environmental Defense Fund and the Union of Concerned Scientists, which alleged that the group had violated the Federal Advisory Committee Act by failing to disclose its formation and by deliberately presenting a one-sided argument.

Tracy J. Wholf, Senior Coordinating Producer of Climate and Environmental Coverage for CBS News, covered the science community's response, claiming the report did not fairly represent a scientific understanding of climate change. The report was reviewed by more than 85 climate experts, who noted that the report misrepresented scientific literature and cherry-picked data to support its conclusions.

The policies of our current administration appear to be suffering from memory loss brought on by a disease that causes them to choose to ignore factual data and instead fabricate their own reality.


“Feed Flint”

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“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:

Do not try to stop him because whoever is not against you is for you.

Luke 9:49-50

NOTES FROM WORSHIP

QUESTIONS FOR LIFE GROUPS:

1. Read Luke 9:49-50. What does Jesus' statement mean for you?
2. Read the article in this week's Circuit Rider titled Confidence. Do you feel confident in speaking your opinion? Why or why not? To what groups do you feel like you belong? Do you feel as though you can speak your mind in this group?
3. How can your group members help you be more receptive to hearing and understanding the Word of God this week? Pray for one another to be blessed by the Holy Spirit with greater courage.



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More Information :



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funding@flintasbury.org

Ocean Vuong is also the author of the poetry collections *Night Sky with Exit Wounds* and *Time Is a Mother*. He wrote another New York Times bestselling novel, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*. And, he received the MacArthur Fellowship and the American Book Award. Vuong was born in Saigon, Vietnam.

In our companion book for our new worship series, Vuong creatively illustrates the profound ways in which love, labor, and loneliness form the bedrock of American life. At its heart is a brave epic about what it means to exist on the fringes of society and to reckon with the wounds that haunt our collective soul. It is a story of loss, hope, and how far we're willing to go for a second chance.

If you choose to follow along, I suggest using the following schedule:

<u>Sunday's</u>	<u>Pages</u>	<u>Chapters</u>
Sept 14	1 - 69	1 - 4
Sept 21	70 - 133	5 - 7
Sept 28	134 - 208	8 - 13
October 5	209 - 274	14 - 17
October 12	275 - 344	18 - 21
October 19	345 - 401	22 - 25

We'll have a few books available for purchase for \$15. New copies of the hardcover edition are available through Amazon for \$19.08, and used copies in good condition are in short supply, starting at \$17.47, including shipping. This book may also be available at the local library.

Our Book Club does not meet as a group. However, our weekly messages reference that week's 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

Ocean Vuong. *The Emperor of Gladness*. NY: Penguin Press, 2025.

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

The truth is that we all belong to God and, therefore, to one another. The cruelty, lies, and divisiveness that confront us almost daily aren't coming from God. Nor is God only on our side. There is enough room in heaven for everyone. And while the pathway is found in scripture, God is the creator of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

We sometimes disagree on what scripture means. But we should agree that any valid interpretation is based on love for God and others, even when we disagree.

Luke writes about a time when Jesus' closest followers came to Him complaining that he and a couple others from their community witnessed a person, not in their group, performing acts of kindness for others, and using the name of Jesus as their authority. This is one of those really important lessons that can be easier to hear than it is to put into practice. The idea that none of us have a monopoly on kindness. "Don't stop him," Jesus said, "Whoever is not against you is for you."

*Do not try to stop him
because whoever is not
against you is for you.*

Luke 9:49-50

The numbers of issues that we face as a nation, and as a world, are overwhelming. We need leaders who are smart enough to realize that they aren't smart enough, capable enough, or powerful enough to be our savior.

We already have a Savior, who is Christ, our Lord. A Savior who lived among ordinary people and invited those same ordinary people to join Him in His mission to bring heaven to earth. These included minimum wage workers, entrepreneurs, smart people, not-so-smart people, enthusiastic people, less enthusiastic people, reliable people, and not-so-reliable people.

We're all invited to help save the world from itself. But we need to be able to speak out and connect with each other, knowing that we likely won't agree on most things. Still, none of us have a monopoly on good ideas, and there's more than one way to accomplish something.

We owe this to each other and to ourselves, and also to our children and grandchildren. It's not about reclaiming our country or our world but working toward the future we desire. A future with heaven on earth.

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.

This is a reminder that we publish a weekly newsletter called the Circuit Rider. You can request this publication by email by sending a request to FlintAsburyUMC@gmail.com, or let us know when you send a message through our [website](#). We post an archive of past editions on our website under Connect - choose [Newsletters](#).

Pastor Tommy

Our companion book for this series: Ocean Vuong. *The Emperor of Gladness*. NY: Penguin Press, 2025.

Air from surrounding areas with higher air pressure pushes into the low-pressure area. Then that "new" air becomes warm and moist and rises, too. As the warm air continues to rise, the surrounding air swirls in to take its place. As the warmed, moist air rises and cools off, the water in the air forms clouds. The whole system of clouds and wind spins and grows, fed by the ocean's heat and water evaporating from the surface.

Mass destruction may appear chaotic while happening, but there is a lot of organizing that usually precedes catastrophes. Hurricanes organize power as they move over warm water, beginning as a "tropical disturbance," and slowly gaining velocity and destructive energy.

Nevertheless, hurricanes are a part of the Earth's ecosystem and, as such, deliver benefits along with the destruction caused. For example, hurricanes redistribute nutrients that support marine food chains. For humans, however, the cost far outweighs the benefit.

The organizers of the MAGA political party spent months planning and promoting Project 2025 as the movement shifted from disruption to an unfortunate reality. Millions see a benefit in their success. But most of us know that the cost greatly outweighs any gains.

For example, ignoring climate change while promoting an increase in fossil fuels and ending investments in alternative energy greatly benefits a handful of mostly wealthy individuals. But the cost to the vast majority of us is deadly.

In the first four chapters of our companion book, *The Emperor of Gladness*, we're introduced to the town of East Gladness, sitting along the Connecticut River. Hai, who is 19, stands on the King Philip's Bridge, "the last way out of town," in the rain, preparing to jump. As Hai climbs over the railing, he sees a bed-sheet floating in the water, mistaking it for a dead body.

Fortunately, Grazina, an immigrant from Lithuania, sees Hai on the bridge and convinces him to climb down and offers him shelter. She invites him to stay the night and convinces him to become her caregiver in exchange for room and board. Grazina has dementia and needs help managing her medications.

Dementia also takes time to organize before it reaches a destructive stage where it interferes with daily life. Hai quickly learns ways to help Grazina get through her dementia episodes, which are often quite vivid. Meanwhile, he grieves over the loss of Noah, and his own life is in flux. Grazina teaches Hai a ritual of stomping on dinner rolls as a symbolic act of victory over sorrow.

The town of East Gladness is portrayed as a place marked by loss, poverty, and hopelessness. However, Grazina's stubborn insistence offers an example of how survival often comes in rough, imperfect forms.

Life is forever a divine love story. God created humankind out of love and never abandons us when calamity strikes, whether or not we played a role in causing it. However, this doesn't mean that God doesn't have favorites. Scripture consistently shows that God considers the poor, widows, orphans, and immigrants as people needing a little extra help—and expects those with the ability to provide it to do so.

This poor widow put in more than all the others. For the others offered their gifts from what they had to spare of their riches.

Luke 21:1-4

We begin our journey recognizing and identifying with the tension between remembering and letting go, always keeping in mind the importance of grace offered out of love, more so than familiarity. Grazina and Hai began their story together as strangers. Grazina didn't save Hai because she knew him and believed he was worth saving. She saved him because it was the right thing to do.

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.

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Pastor Tommy

Our companion book for this series: Ocean Vuong. *The Emperor of Gladness*. NY: Penguin Press, 2025..

ASBURY FARMS PRESENTS



Asbury Farms invites you every Friday to pick cherry tomatoes, **a pay what you can farm stand**, and urban farming planting technique demonstration.

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PRESENTS

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FORWARD

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**"WHEN YOU GIVE, SOMEONE GROWS.
WHEN YOU SHARE, OTHERS SHINE.
LET'S PLAY IT FORWARD—TOGETHER."**

**PLEASE DONATE AT:
WWW.THEALLYCHALLENGE.COM/CHIPIN**

The Alzheimer's Association website describes dementia as a general term for the loss of memory, language, problem-solving, and other thinking abilities, especially when these symptoms are severe enough to interfere with daily life. And dementia is usually the result of Alzheimer's. Dementia is not a single disease. Instead, dementia refers to a collection of symptoms representing a variety of diseases.

To diagnose Alzheimer's and other types of dementia, doctors review the patient's medical history, conduct a physical examination, collect data from laboratory tests, and look for changes in thinking, day-to-day function, and behavior associated with each type of dementia.

Notice the importance of both historical context and scientific data. Ignoring either one makes it difficult to come to a factual conclusion. The disease is likely to go undetected, but the symptoms will persist and likely worsen. The patient and their family suffer whether or not an accurate assessment is made.

What do hurricanes and dementia have in common? The first similarity that comes to mind is the destruction and turmoil caused by our climate, in the first case, and by disease in the second. We're all familiar with the damage caused by hurricanes. More of us are also facing the heartbreak of dementia. The effects of both hurricanes and dementia are evaluated in stages. Hurricanes are rated by categories based on wind speeds, while dementia is measured in progressive stages. The higher the category or stage, the more severe the impact.

*God is our shelter and is
always ready to help in times
of trouble. So we will not be
afraid, even if the earth is
shaken and mountains fall in-
to the ocean depths, even if
the violence shakes the seas;
roar and rage, and the hills.*

Psalms 46:1-3

Our national dementia goes undetected if we all choose to ignore history and scientific data. Moreover, in the case of our recent onslaught of national dementia, we're all facing a rapid increase in suffering. Fortunately, most are not fooled by fools, and many are sounding the alarm.

Similarly, the Word of God spoken throughout scripture sounds alarms that we all need to hear. God's alarms are timeless and thus beg for faithful interpretation by persons chosen to speak truth to power. However, since God's Word requires interpreters, there are always false prophets who convincingly deceive those for whom their interpretation may fit the listeners' preconditioned ideas.

Church bells remind me of the prophetic voices found in scripture and elsewhere. Speaking truth to power, prophets throughout history have spoken and sang warnings both to leaders and to the people they aspire to lead.

*What do you feel when you hear Church bells?
Is it a sound that signals hope?
Like the lost seaman hearing the lighthouse horn,
it sings comfort to my soul.*

*But an alarm also sounded, time to change course
before my journey ends.
What do you feel when you hear Church bells?
Do they stir your heart to sing?
The fog horn has sounded danger ahead,
For my path was well worn.*

Maybe you're walking along a familiar but unsettling path. Maybe you've passionately supported our current president, hoping for a better tomorrow. Hopefully, you're beginning to focus more on facts than on lies.

So far, the U.S. remains a democracy, offering hope that new leaders will be elected. But we're going through a very dark time. Our leaders have failed us, but instead of listening to the warnings, they continue to organize around principles that fail to care for God's beloved. A hurricane is forming, and the destruction is already underway.

Here is the outline of our series:

<u>Episode</u>	<u>Sundays</u>	<u>Title</u>
One	Sept 14	Formation
Two	Sept 21	Confidence
Three	Sept 28	Freedom
Four	October 5	History
Five	October 12	Truth
Six	October 19	Agency

Please join us each Sunday at 10:30 a.m. We share our weekly episodes on [Facebook](#) and our [YouTube channel](#), and go live at 10:30 a.m. You can find these links and more information about us, or join our live broadcast on our [website, FlintAsburyChurch.org](#).

Pastor Tommy

Ocean Vuong. The Emperor of Gladness. NY: Penguin Press, 2025.

"How Do Hurricanes Form?." © Spaceplace, 2025. Retrieved from [link](#)

Tracy J. Wholf. "More than 85 climate experts say Energy Department report on greenhouse gases is 'full of errors'," © CBS News, September 2, 2025. Retrieved from [Link](#)

Rev Dr Tommy McDaniel. "A Certain Road." © Tommy McDaniel, June 18, 2006.