

ASBURY CIRCUIT RIDER

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Equal (Truth)



Southern man

My parents were sharecroppers in Arkansas before moving to Memphis after I was born. They worked alongside other poor farmers in the cotton fields of wealthier landowners to help make ends meet. I was the fourth of six children, so my parents decided they needed to search for other opportunities.

My father loved farming. After serving in World War II, he used his education benefits to study fruit farming. Years later, when I asked why he and my mom chose to leave farming, he told me that farming someone else's land was simply too risky when you were trying to raise a family.

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Dignity (Truth)



As Father's Day approaches, I can't help but think about my own father.

I admired many things about him. He worked hard. He was humble. He treated people with respect. He believed a person's character mattered more than their status. Looking back, I realize much of what he

taught me about life came not from what he said, but from how he lived.

My father's faith was practical. I never heard him quote scripture. I never heard him discuss theology. Yet he often repeated sayings that sounded a lot like the wisdom found in Proverbs.

Last week, I shared one of his favorites, "You can't know a man until you've walked a mile in his shoes."

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One of my father's favorite sayings was, "You can never know a man until you've walked a mile in his shoes." When I was growing up, I didn't think much about that. Then my family moved north, and I finished school in Ohio.

I remember sitting in history classes learning about slavery, the Civil War, and racism. I felt ashamed because it felt like my family's Southern roots made us responsible for the ugliest chapter in American history.

That feeling stayed with me long enough that I decided I needed to know more. So I enrolled in a course on Civil War history while in college.

What I discovered surprised me.

The story was more complicated than I had been told. It turns out, the entire nation was entangled in slavery and its consequences. This included churches and the clergy that led them. Even though no one in my family ever owned slaves, I suspect that had more to do with poverty than virtue.

But I also realized something else. My father's words kept coming back to me: "You can never know a man until you've walked a mile in his shoes."

What's important?

My father's generation understood something that many of us have forgotten.

You can learn a great deal about a person by looking at their shoes. But you can't know a person until you've walked a mile in their shoes.

The same is true of societies.

For years, many clergy have repeated a simple observation: if you want to know a person's priorities, look at their calendar and their checkbook. We may say one thing, but our time and money often reveal what we truly value. I don't care much for this observation when it comes to the families I know. For them, their calendars and checkbooks reveal circumstances that are mostly outside of their control. They prioritize survival.

The truth is that most families are working harder than ever and still falling behind. Their calendars are full. Their checkbooks are empty. Their struggle is not laziness. Their struggle is survival.

On the other hand, I think this observation holds true for most nations. Particularly, those, like the U.S., that are wealthy enough to have huge budgets.

The struggle is that human beings have always been tempted to assign greater value to some people than to others. We admire wealth. We seek access to power. We are impressed by status, titles, influence, and success. It's as though people who have more must somehow matter more.

At the same time, we often look away from those who are struggling or, worse, blame them for their circumstances. The poor. The refugee. The immigrant. The disabled. The elderly. The person working two jobs and still unable to pay the bills. The family choosing between groceries and medication. The child whose future is determined by a zip code they never chose.

And too often, churches have participated in this thinking without realizing it.

Sometimes we speak as though people struggling financially simply need to work harder, make better choices, or show more responsibility. While personal responsibility matters, such explanations often overlook the larger systems that shape people's lives.

Meanwhile, we live in a time when the government increasingly rewards those who already possess wealth, influence, and access. Resources flow toward the powerful while support for vulnerable people is debated, reduced, or treated as expendable.

A nation's budget is a moral document. It reveals what a society values and who it values. It reveals whose concerns receive attention, whose voices are heard, and whose suffering is considered acceptable. Our budget tells a story. It reveals what we fear, what we value, and who we believe deserves our attention.

IN OUR PRAYERS

Virginia Bigger Paula Gamble
 Sylvia Pittman Richard Oram
 Mirium Watson Jonathon Misner


FRIENDS AND LOVED ONES WHO ARE
 HOMEBOUND OR IN NURSING CARE

Dean Lamoreaux Norma Buzzard
 Nancy Elston

COMING UP THIS WEEK:



JUNE 22 — 28



June 22	Mon	
June 23	Tue	9:00am–until gone Produce will be available each week, along with canned goods, until further notice 12Noon–6pm Taco Tuesday (see flyer pg. 26)
June 24	Wed	
June 25	Thu	
June 26	Fri	
June 27	Sat	
June 28	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 "Truth"

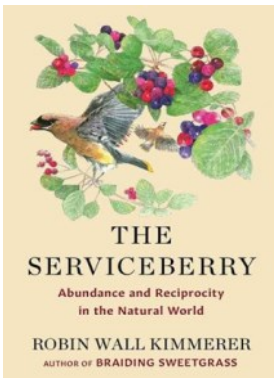


As the United States approaches its 250th anniversary, Americans are once again arguing about who we are, what we value, and whether truth itself still matters. Nevertheless, our experiment in representative democracy has been the model to which other nations strive. Unfortunately, we are living through a moment when public trust is collapsing. Driven in large part because the truth is increasingly treated as flexible.

Facts are dismissed as inconvenient. Conspiracy theories spread faster than wisdom. Cruelty is rewarded as strength. Neighbors become enemies. Fear becomes a political strategy.

Sadly, too often, the language of faith is twisted into a tool for power, exclusion, and control. And we're often watching this happen publicly in the name of Jesus. **Page 5**

Book Club News



Beginning July 12, we begin a new worship series titled *Mortgaged*. You likely already know what a mortgage is. We

borrow from the future in order to enjoy something today. Sometimes that borrowing helps us build some-

thing lasting. A home mortgage, for example, may create stability and opportunity for generations.

But not all mortgages work that way. Throughout this series, we'll explore a simple but important question: What are we borrowing from the future, and what are we leaving behind?

To accompany our conversations, we will be reading *The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural*

World by Robin Wall Kimmerer.

Many of you may recognize Kimmerer as the author of the bestselling book *Braiding Sweetgrass*. A botanist, teacher, and gifted storyteller, she invites readers to look at the natural world not merely as a collection of resources to consume, but as a community of relationships built on gift, gratitude, and mutual care.

At the center of the book is a simple observation.

When a serviceberry tree produces fruit, it does not create scarcity. It creates abundance. Birds eat. Animals eat. People eat. Seeds spread. New life grows. The tree participates in a cycle of generosity that benefits the entire community.

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Christine	Cafe

Upcoming Worship Series — “Truth”

The bending of the truth for personal gain by those in authority is not new. The prophet Isaiah described a similar moment long ago: “Truth stumbles in the public square, and honesty finds no place” (Isaiah 59:14).

This summer at Asbury, we invite you to join us for a new worship series called *Truth*. Over six weeks, we will explore some of the deepest questions facing our nation, our communities, and our faith:

What happens when people stop trusting one another?

What does Scripture say about truth in an age of manipulation and outrage?

What becomes of a society that proclaims equality while practicing exclusion?

What could happen if we allow Christian nationalism to replace neighborly love?

How do followers of Jesus remain faithful when political movements demand unquestioning loyalty?

This series is inspired in part by Walter Isaacson's latest book, *The Greatest Sentence Ever Written*. In his book, Isaacson reflects on the enduring and often controversial words of the Declaration of Independence: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal...”

Those words have inspired generations. They have also been ignored, distorted, and denied throughout much of our history. And “these truths” are, once again, under attack. This tension is not new.

When Jesus stood before Pilate, a political leader more concerned with preserving power than pursuing truth, Jesus declared that He came to speak about truth. And Pilate responded with a question that still echoes today: “What is truth?” (John 18:37-38).

We continue to live with the consequences of that question.

What is new is how openly deception, grievance, and the pursuit of power have begun reshaping public life — often with religious language wrapped around them. The result is a culture that is growing more cynical, more divided, and less capable of recognizing the truth when it appears.

When truth bends, trust breaks.

And when trust breaks, communities fracture. Democracies weaken. Churches lose credibility. Human beings made in the image of God become easier to dismiss, fear, or dehumanize.

Yet Scripture points us toward another way.

Upcoming Worship Series — “Truth”

No more lies, then! Each of must tell the truth to the other believer, because we are all members together in the body of Christ.

Ephesians 4:25

The prophet Zechariah writes: “Speak the truth to one another, render in your gates judgments that are true and make for peace” (Zechariah 8:16).

And perhaps that work begins with a simple but difficult commitment: “No more lies, then! Each of you must tell the truth to the other believer, because we are all members together in the body

of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:25).

Scripture calls people of faith in another direction.

Jesus did not call his followers to dominate culture. He called them to embody truth through humility, courage, mercy, justice, repentance, and love of neighbor. In a world filled with noise, distortion, and outrage, Christians are called to become trustworthy people again.

This series will not ask whether America was ever perfect. It wasn't. Nor will it pretend our divisions are simple.

Instead, we will ask harder questions: What truths are worth holding onto? What kind of people are we becoming? And what does faithfulness require from us now? We hope you will join us this summer for *Truth*.

From the Sunday following Memorial Day until the Sunday after our celebration of 250 years since the signing of the Declaration of Independence, we'll celebrate our mutual anniversary by looking at the truth of what is arguably the “greatest sentence ever written.”

<u>Episode</u>	<u>Sundays</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Scripture</u>
One	May 31	Us	1 Corinthians 12:12–27
Two	June 7	Evident	John 18:37–38
Three	June 14	Equal	James 2:1–9
Four	June 21	Dignity	Acts 17:22–28
Five	June 28	Pursuit	John 10:10
Six	July 5	Together	Ephesians 2:14–22

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

*The series concept and some content come from: Walter Isaacson. *The Greatest Sentence Ever Written*. NY: Simon & Schuster, 2025.*



“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:

I see that you are very religious in every way. For as I walked through your city and looked at the places where you worship, I found an altar on which is written, "To an Unknown God."

Acts 17:22–28

NOTES FROM WORSHIP

QUESTIONS FOR LIFE GROUPS:

1. Read Acts 17:22–28 and this week's Circuit Rider article titled Dignity.
2. This week, reflect on these questions: Will we define people by categories? Or will we recognize the image of God within them?
3. Will our deeds match our creeds? Will we continue contributing to a culture of fear and exclusion? Or will we help build a culture of dignity?
4. 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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Kimmerer asks what might happen if we learned to see our lives through a similar lens. What if fulfillment comes not from accumulating more, but from participating more fully in relationships of generosity? What if the things we value most cannot be bought or sold? What if the future is something we are called to nurture rather than consume?

These questions lie at the heart of our faith as well. Scripture consistently reminds us that life is a gift, that creation is entrusted to our care, and that our neighbors are not competitors but companions. You do not need to read any or all of this book to follow our series. However, the book is a short and accessible read. We simply invite you to read along as we explore these themes together. Here is a suggested reading schedule:

Sunday's	<u>Chapter (s)</u>
July 12	Intro & Ch 1
July 19	Ch's 2 & 3
July 26	Ch 4
August 2	Ch's 5 & 6
August 9	Ch 7 & Invitation

Whether you read every page or simply join us for worship, we hope this book expands your imagination and helps us ask a deeper question together:

What kind of future are we creating for those who come after us?

We'll have a few books available for purchase at \$10 each. Additional copies of the hardcover edition are available through Amazon for \$11. This book is available in paperback, but at a slightly higher cost on Amazon. You should also be able to find this book at the local library.

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

Robin Wall Kimmerer. *The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World*. New York: Scribner, 2024.

At the time, I thought he was simply encouraging empathy. Years later, I realized he was teaching something much deeper. Before we judge another person, we should try to understand their story. Before we dismiss someone, we should remember that we rarely know the burdens they carry.

It is a lesson our world badly needs.

This Sunday, as we continue our *Truth* series with a message titled *Dignity*, I find myself grateful for fathers and father figures who taught us, not only with words, but also by the example of their lives.

Over the past few months, I've been intrigued by what I've read about and heard from Senator and pastor Raphael Warnock. Senator Warnock often speaks about his father.

His father was a veteran, a pastor, and a hardworking man who spent years repairing and restoring automobiles. He was not wealthy or influential by society's standards, but he taught his children lessons about character, responsibility, and respect for others.

Good fathers teach dignity.

Not necessarily through sermons or lectures. They teach it by how they treat people. They teach it by showing respect to those with less power than they have. They teach it by whether they recognize the worth of every person they encounter.

Many of us learned those lessons from our parents, grandparents, teachers, coaches, and pastors. The question is whether our society is still teaching them. Warnock has argued that America is experiencing a spiritual crisis. I believe he is right.

In a recent interview, Warnock posed a question: "Do our deeds match our creeds?" It is a simple question, but an important one. And it keeps coming up.

Many people, especially younger generations, have become skeptical of organized religion. There are many reasons for that decline, but one is difficult to ignore. People notice when our deeds do not match our creeds.

Warnock suggested that the true test of faith is found in our commitment to those with the least power and the fewest resources. The prophets asked that question. Jesus asked that question. The church has been wrestling with that question ever since.

It is also a question worth asking of ourselves.

A spiritual crisis does not necessarily mean fewer people believe in God. America remains a deeply religious nation. Politicians quote scripture. Churches remain active. Public officials regularly invoke God's blessing.

The crisis runs deeper. We are becoming less capable of recognizing the dignity of one another.

The evidence is all around us. It is as though our focus has become distorted. We see labels more clearly than people. We revert to categories before we discover stories.

We hear it in the language that dominates public life. Entire groups of people are described as threats before they are recognized as human beings. Immigrants are discussed as problems to solve. Members of the LGBTQ+ community are too often reduced to issues to be debated rather than neighbors to be known. Political opponents are treated as enemies rather than fellow citizens. The poor are often blamed for their circumstances while wealth itself is celebrated as evidence of virtue.

We see it when fear becomes more persuasive than compassion. We see it when outrage attracts more attention than understanding. We see it when public policy increasingly asks, "How do we protect ourselves from them?" instead of, "How do we care for one another?"

We see it whenever a person's race, nationality, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or economic status becomes more important than their humanity.

This is how prejudice works. This is how discrimination works. This is how societies become divided.

The process always begins the same way.

People notice when our deeds do not match our creeds. They notice when faith is used to judge rather than to heal. They notice when some groups are welcomed while others are treated with suspicion. They notice when public expressions of religion are accompanied by rhetoric that portrays entire groups of people as threats rather than neighbors.

These attitudes are not just words. They have shaped policy. And they have ushered in a spiritual crisis. They have determined who receives protection, who receives assistance, whose voices are heard, and whose suffering is ignored.

The result is not merely political division. It is a loss of dignity.

We have become less curious about one another's stories. Less willing to listen. Less capable of empathy. More likely to define people by labels than by their humanity.

Senator Warnock is not the only prophetic voice raising these concerns. Others, including Pope Leo, have repeatedly warned against cultures of exclusion, indifference, and fear. Though they speak from different contexts, their concern is remarkably similar.

A Society cannot remain healthy when some people are treated as though they matter less than others. This is why I believe we are facing a spiritual crisis. The process always begins the same way.

We stop seeing people.

The truth is, this is not a new problem.

I see that you are very religious in every way. For as I walked through your city and looked at the places where you worship, I found an altar on which is written, "To an unknown God."

Acts 17:22-28

Nearly two thousand years ago, the Apostle Paul arrived in Athens, one of the great intellectual and religious centers of the ancient world. Everywhere he looked, he found temples, shrines, and altars dedicated to various gods. The city was deeply spiritual, but not in the way Paul understood faith.

Based on our earlier observations, most of us expect that Paul would begin with criticism. Instead, he begins with curiosity.

Standing before the people of Athens, Paul says: "I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked through your city and looked at the places where you worship, I found an altar on which is written, 'To an Unknown God'" (Acts 17:22-23).

Paul disagreed with much of what he saw in Athens. Yet before he challenged their beliefs, he recognized their humanity. Before he spoke, he listened. Before he condemned, he observed.

Paul saw people.

That approach did not begin with Paul. Centuries earlier, the prophets challenged those who claimed to worship God while neglecting justice and compassion. Through the prophet Isaiah, God declared: "Learn to do right. Seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Help the orphans. Stand up for the rights of widows." (Isaiah 1:17)

The prophet Micah summarized God's desire even more simply: "Do what is right, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8)

Jesus continued that same tradition. When others saw sinners, Jesus saw people. When others saw outcasts, Jesus saw people. When others saw enemies, Jesus taught his followers to love them.

Again and again, Jesus refused to reduce human beings to labels.

That is why Paul's speech in Athens eventually arrives at one of the most important truths in scripture: "From one person God created all human beings and made them live over the whole earth." (Acts 17:26)

Paul reminds us that our identity is not found in our nationality, race, politics, wealth, religion, gender, or social status. Rather, "It is through Jesus that we live and function and have our identity" (Acts 17:28). Our identity

begins with God because every person shares the same Creator and bears the image of God. Every person possesses dignity.

Dignity is not something we earn. It is something we recognize.

Perhaps that is why dignity begins with seeing. Paul invites us to sharpen our focus—not on labels, but on the people God created and loves. To see what God sees is to recognize the dignity already present in every person.

This week's companion reading is one of the most interesting chapters in Walter Isaacson's *The Greatest Sentence Ever Written*. The chapter is titled "Endowed by Their Creator."

Many Americans assume the founders shared a common Christian faith. Isaacson points out that reality was far more complicated. Some were deeply religious. Others were skeptical of traditional doctrine. Many disagreed sharply with one another about theology.

Yet they found common ground on one revolutionary idea: Human dignity does not come from government. Nor does it come from wealth. Dignity does not come from social status. It does not come from race, nationality, or family heritage.

Dignity comes from something deeper.

That conviction found its way into the Declaration of Independence: "All men are created equal" and are "endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights."

The founders often failed to live up to those words. The existence of slavery is painful evidence of that failure. Women were excluded from political participation. Native peoples were frequently denied their humanity. The contradiction was obvious.

Yet the ideal endured.

Generation after generation, Americans returned to those words to challenge slavery, segregation, discrimination, and exclusion. Why? Because the Declaration pointed beyond government to something larger.

Long before Jefferson put pen to paper, Paul stood in Athens and proclaimed: "From one person God created all human beings and made them live over the whole earth." The source of dignity was never government.

The source of dignity was God.

The founders did not fully realize that vision. Neither have we. But the vision itself remains worth pursuing. A healthy society is not built upon fear of those who are different. It is built upon the recognition that every person possesses dignity that cannot be earned, purchased, granted, or taken away.

If our spiritual crisis begins when we stop seeing people, then healing begins when we learn to see them again. Perhaps that sounds simple. But in practice, it may be one of the hardest things we are called to do.

The challenge before us is surprisingly simple: sharpen your focus. See what God sees.

It requires us to look beyond labels. Beyond political parties. Beyond race and nationality. Beyond religion. Beyond gender and sexual orientation. Beyond wealth and social status.

It requires us to remember that every person we meet has a story, a struggle, and a dignity that comes from God. My father understood that. Raphael Warnock's father understood that. The prophets understood that. Jesus embodied that. Paul proclaimed it in Athens.

The founders attempted to write it into the very fabric of our nation. The challenge now belongs to us. Will we define people by categories? Or will we recognize the image of God within them?

Will our deeds match our creeds? Will we continue contributing to a culture of fear and exclusion? Or will we help build a culture of dignity?

The future of our communities, our churches, and our democracy may depend on how we answer those questions.

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 article is part of 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

The series concept and some content come from Walter Isaacson. *The Greatest Sentence Ever Written*. NY: Simon & Schuster, 2025.



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Today, the gap between the rich and the poor is growing even faster. Recently adopted tax policies delivered enormous benefits to those already possessing the greatest wealth, while many working families continue to struggle with rising costs. Some analyses estimate that the wealthiest 1% will receive tax reductions totaling trillions of dollars over the next decade, while middle-income families face increasing economic pressure.

At the same time, the national debt has reached record levels, with annual deficits measured in trillions of dollars. The question is not simply whether these policies are fiscally wise. They aren't. The deeper question is moral. What do our priorities reveal about whose shoes matter most?

Congress approved unprecedented levels of spending for immigration enforcement, detention facilities, border security, and military activities while reducing or eliminating funding for many humanitarian, health, refugee, and anti-poverty programs.

Billions of dollars can be found when power is being projected. Compassion is often subjected to a much more rigorous cost-benefit analysis.

This is not merely a political problem. It is a human problem. It is our problem and our challenge to reverse these trends. What a great way to celebrate 250 years. Let's stop the insanity and get our nation back on track.

The details change from generation to generation, but the temptation remains the same: to value people according to what they possess rather than who they are.

That is why the words found in our Declaration of Independence, "created equal," continue to challenge us. If all people possess equal worth, then our personal choices, our institutions, our churches, and even our national priorities should reflect that truth. The question is not whether we believe in equality. The question is whether our lives reveal it.

The struggle we have been describing is not new.

Faith measured by action

Long before the Declaration of Independence. Long before the Civil War. Long before Jesus walked the roads of Galilee. Long before James wrote to the early church. The prophets were already confronting societies that measured human worth by wealth, status, and power.

Again and again, the prophets spoke with a common voice. Pay attention to the widow. Pay attention to the orphan. Pay attention to the immigrant. Pay attention to the poor.

In nearly every generation, these were the people standing outside the circle of power. They had no army to defend them. No wealth to protect them. No political influence to advance their interests. They were often left standing while others were invited to sit.

If God shows any preference at all, it is toward those whom everyone else overlooks.

The prophet Amos was one of the clearest voices in this tradition. Amos was not a king, priest, or member of the elite. He was a shepherd and a farmer. In today's language, he wore work boots, not polished dress shoes.

And Amos was not impressed by wealth.

He watched powerful people grow richer while the poor struggled to survive. He saw worship services filled with songs and sacrifices while justice was nowhere to be found. Speaking for God, Amos declared: "Let justice flow like a stream, and righteousness like a river that never goes dry." (Amos 5:24)

For Amos, faith was never measured by what people claimed to believe. Faith was measured by how people treated one another.

Jesus continued this prophetic tradition. He touched lepers. He welcomed children. He spoke with Samaritans. He ate with sinners. He announced good news to the poor.

Again and again, Jesus crossed boundaries that others considered untouchable. He saw people whom society had learned not to see.

Which brings us to James.

Many scholars believe James was the brother of Jesus and a leader in the church at Jerusalem. His letter is among the most practical books in the New Testament. James is less interested in what Christians say they believe than in whether their lives reflect those beliefs.

The early church proclaimed that every person mattered to God. Yet even the early church struggled to live up to that conviction.

People still judged one another by appearances. They still made assumptions based on wealth and status. They still looked at the shoes before they looked at the soul.

So James writes: "My friends, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism." (James 2:1)

Then he describes a scene that feels surprisingly familiar. A wealthy person enters the gathering wearing fine clothes. A poor person enters wearing old clothes. The wealthy person is offered the best seat. The poor person is told to stand in the back or sit on the floor.

The details may have changed, but the temptation remains. We still judge people by what they wear. By where they live. By what they earn. By the language they speak. By the color of their skin. By whom they love. By gender. By the nation they call home.

In other words, by whether we think they are useful to us.

James is relentless. He refuses to let the church hide behind good intentions. If we claim that all people possess equal worth before God, then our actions must reflect that truth.

The question is not whether we believe people are equal. The question is how we treat them when they walk through the door.

Imagine we're all equal

The authors of the Declaration of Independence proclaimed that all people are created equal. Yet they lived in a society that treated many people as less than equal. The contradiction was obvious then, and it remains obvious now.

Love your neighbor as you love yourself. But if you treat people according to their outward appearance, you are guilty of sin.

James 2:1-9

In our companion book, Walter Isaacson reminds us that the Declaration's most famous sentence became powerful precisely because it was larger than the people who wrote it. Generation after generation has returned to those words and asked whether we truly believe them.

The history of the United States can, in many ways, be understood as an argument over a single proposition: What does it mean to say that all people are created equal?

In order to explore this idea further, I'd like to take you all on a short excursion. It won't take long, but I think it'll be worth it.

The scene is a dedication. The dedication is a cemetery in Gettysburg that is now the final resting place for thousands of soldiers who fought there. It's November, so the air is cold. You can't help but notice that the ground beneath your feet is still scarred from one of the bloodiest battles in American history.

Just four months earlier, more than 50,000 soldiers had been killed, wounded, or gone missing on these fields surrounding Gettysburg. Everywhere you look, there are reminders of grief. Fresh graves. Mourning families. Empty places where sons, fathers, brothers, and friends once stood.

The nation itself seems uncertain. The Civil War has already taken hundreds of thousands of lives. Some wonder whether the Union can survive. Others wonder whether the ideals upon which the nation was founded were ever true to begin with.

Although he is in attendance, the featured speaker for the day is not the President. The crowd has gathered to hear Edward Everett, one of the most respected orators in America. He speaks for more than two hours. You're tired of listening by the time President Abraham Lincoln rises to offer what many hope and assume will be a few brief remarks.

And he didn't disappoint. He was quite brief. However, in just a couple of minutes, Lincoln reframes the war's entire meaning.

Lincoln didn't begin with armies, politics, or states' rights; he began with an idea."

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and **dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.**

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate -- we can not consecrate -- we can not hallow -- this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced.

It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us -- that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion -- that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain -- that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom -- and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

Lincoln reaches back to the Declaration of Independence and lifts up a truth larger than the men who wrote it. The nation had never fully lived up to those words. He realized that the authors themselves struggled to live up to them. Yet Lincoln refuses to abandon the ideal because people have failed to achieve it. Instead, he argues that the Civil War is testing whether a nation dedicated to equality can endure.

Standing among the graves, listening to the President speak, you begin to realize that equality is not merely a political slogan. **Equality is a moral claim about human worth.** The question before the nation is whether those words will remain ink on a page or become a reality for the people God created.

Lincoln stood on a battlefield surrounded by death and dared to imagine a nation that might yet become what it claimed to be from the beginning. He is looking beyond the present reality toward a future possibility.

The reality is that our Declaration of Independence contains both a soaring truth and a profound contradiction. The men who wrote, approved, and celebrated the sentence "all men are created equal" lived in a society that denied equality to enslaved people, women, Indigenous peoples, and many others. The reality is, if we look at the results that followed, you might conclude that the reference was only to land-owning white males. The paradox is not hidden. In fact, the paradox is embedded in the nation's founding.

What makes the story interesting is that the Declaration's authors did not fully resolve the contradiction. In some ways, they couldn't. The compromise they left behind became a moral debt passed to future generations. A debt that you and I, our children, and our children's children still owe.

And it is a debt that many powerful people would rather default on.

Now, try to imagine a community where no one has to prove their worth before being treated with dignity. Imagine a church where wealth, race, education, politics, nationality, and status do not determine a person's value.

Imagine a nation that measured greatness not by who has power but by whether every person is treated as bearing the image of God.

Happy 15th Anniversary to **ASBURY** **CDC**



Here's to many more!
To Give



What's next?

The challenge before us is not new.

For generations, prophets, apostles, pastors, teachers, and ordinary people of faith have called us toward a simple truth: every person possesses God-given worth.

Not because of what they earn. Not because of where they were born. Not because of the color of their skin. Not because of their citizenship, education, influence, gender, sexual orientation, or status.

But because they were created in the image of God.

The unfinished work Lincoln described at Gettysburg is not only America's work. It is the Church's work. It is our work.

This week, I invite you to take two simple steps. First, pay attention to the people society often overlooks. The poor. The immigrant. The elderly. The disabled. The lonely. The person whose shoes tell a story different from your own.

Second, ask yourself a difficult question: What do my priorities reveal about whose shoes matter most?

James reminds us that faith is not measured only by what we believe. Faith is measured by how we treat people when they walk through the door.

So let's keep moving toward the world God imagines. A world where no one has to prove their worth to be treated with dignity. A world where we stop looking at shoes and start seeing souls. A world where "created equal" is more than an idea. A world where it becomes a reality.

The question is not whether we believe people are equal. The question is whether we're willing to walk a mile in their shoes. The prophets pointed the way. Jesus walked the road. James challenged the church to keep moving. Lincoln called it the unfinished work. Two hundred and fifty years later, the journey continues. Keep walking.

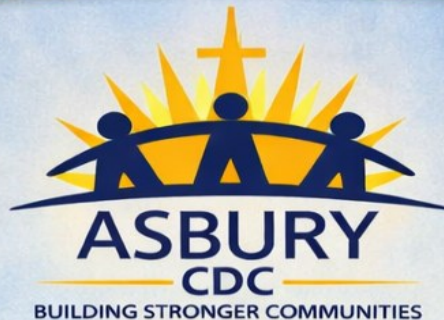
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Pastor Tommy

The series concept and some content come from Walter Isaacson. *The Greatest Sentence Ever Written*. NY: Simon & Schuster, 2025.

Asbury CDC Celebrates 15 Years of Impact!



Asbury Community Development Corporation (Asbury CDC) is a nonprofit 501c(5) organization located on Flint's east side, dedicated to improving the quality of life for residents. through food access, community development, and workforce opportunities.



In partnership with **The Ally Challenge** — Supporting Community Growth

Together **supporting** Urban Farming & Youth Workforce Development!

Through initiatives such as Asbury Farms, South Flint Soup Kitchen, The Help Center and Food Pantry, and the Sizzling Culture Youth Workforce Development Program, Asbury CDC provides fresh produce, nutritious meals, emergency assistance, job training.

The Ally Challenge Events

- **Family Fun Night**
Thursday, August 27 • 5:00PM - 7:30PM
- **Folds of Honor Friday**
Friday, August 28
Opening ceremony & Parachute Jumper
- **Concert @17** presented by
Soaring Eagle Casino & Resort
Estimated start time: 6:30PM
(featuring Wildflowers)
- **Ally Community Concert**
Saturday August 29
- **Zhenders Chicken & Waffle Brunch**
Sunday, August 30
Free for Sunday Ticket Holders

DONATE NOW:

theallychallenge.com/chipin

FREE MEALS
ALL SUMMER LONG
(For all kids under 18 years old)

WHERE: South Flint Soup Kitchen 3410 S. Fenton Rd Flint

WHEN: June 22, 2026 through August 22, 2026

TIMES: 1:00pm—1:20pm (Monday-Friday)

MEALS: Lunch (Food Truck)

(Food Bank of Eastern Michigan is an equal opportunity provider)



FREE MEALS AT FLINT ASBURY UMC!!

**FREE MEALS
ALL SUMMER LONG**

(For all kids under 18 years old)



WHERE: Flint Asbury UMC 1653 Davison Rd

WHEN: June 22, 2026 through August 22, 2026

TIMES: 12:35pm—12:55pm (Monday-Friday)

MEALS: Lunch (Food Truck)



(Food Bank of Eastern Michigan is an equal opportunity provider)



**African Drum and Dance
Parent Association presents**
TACO TUESDAY
FUNDRAISER
In June

**EVERY TUESDAY
IN JUNE:**

**June 2, June 9,
June 16, June 23,
and June 30.**



**TIME:
Noon to 6PM**

**Tacos start
at only \$2!**

WHERE:

**Asbury United Methodist Church
1653 Davison Road
Flint 48506**

Contact:

**Baba Kevin Collins
at (810) 394-3880**





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JUNE 27, 2026

@ BUSH PARK DOWNTOWN FLINT

12:00 NOON TIL 3:00 PM

WE ARE REDEDICATING
OUR CITY
THROUGH UNITY, PEACE AND LOVE ♥

REBUILDING 🔥 RESTORING WITH 🔥 FERVENT RESILIENCE

JEREMIAH 1:10 AMP

"I will destroy, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant."