

# ASBURY CIRCUIT RIDER



## Rocks (Overcoming hard obstacles)

Rooting is important for strong plants. It is interesting that a tree's nutrient reach exceeds the depth and width of its root system. Healthy trees have an entire underground, microscopic network that brings nutrients that are otherwise out of the reach of the tree's roots. As we learn to care for the fruit trees on the Asbury Farms we do things like add mulch around our trees that will breakdown



and help to build this life-giving network and help our trees be more resistant to disease and pests. This is a key part of a healthy, organic orchard.

But sometimes root growth is obstructed by rocks. Dirt that has become so compressed that we quit calling it dirt and call it rocks. Some rocks are so dense, like granite, that they seem impenetrable. The roots of plants must either find away around dense rocks or wither in the hot sun. The scientific study of rocks is called petrology. One of the areas of study known as geology. But for this article we won't need a lot of background on how rocks are formed or classified or even what minerals we may find in rocks. We want to consider how rocks, metaphorically, fit into a parable that Jesus told about rocks obstructing roots as an illustration of some of the obstacles that get into the way of us hearing and doing what Jesus is asking us to do.

During our current worship series, *Grow*, I will continue to drill down into this parable and add a couple more parables that

Jesus also used to further clarify this important subject. This week we will look at Matthew 13:5-6. The parable is about a farmer scattering wheat seeds in his field. The goal of the farmer is for the seeds to sprout into wheat plants which in turn will produce wheat berries, which can then be turned into food such as bread or become seed to grow even more wheat. Berries from grain can be stored and last for centuries. But once we crack open the berry to make flour it becomes perishable. But this is a different metaphor.

The farmer in Jesus' telling of this parable scatters wheat seeds and some of the seeds fall on rocky ground. Seeds do what seeds were created to do. Germination consists of sending roots out.

Page 2

# our text for this week Jesus used bird seed as a metaphor. A farmer spreads seed and some of the seed falls on the path. Compacted dirt that the farmer hadn't loosened and wasn't where the seed was intended to land. There were probably birds watching the farmer that day as well. Waiting for the farmer's seeds to land on their dinner plate. The path. And the seed did not become wheat. The seeds hoping to become grain instead became bird seed.

Page 2

Volume 19 Issue 7 July 7, 2019

#### Special points of interest:

>>> Coming soon : Vacation Bible
School—Summer Bible Camp at
Asbury UMC. (see flyer on
page 6) JUST A WEEK AWAY!

>>> Worship Design will meet in the Asbury Library on Monday, July 1st and July 22nd at 6:00pm. All involved please plan

>>> Leadership Team will meet on Monday, July 15th at 6:00pm in the Asbury Library.

>>> Deadlines for Church Conference reports due to Connie. (see page 3)

>>> FREE CONCERT (see page 6)

# **Bird Seed (Preparing our Hearts)**

"Birds gotta eat too." This is true. Birds keep a sharp eye out for food. I noticed that when I am using the broad fork to loosen compacted, clay soil where I hope to replace sod with new plantings, birds will come close by to check out my work. The birds aren't gathering to watch me work, however. The birds can smell lunch. Worms living just below the sod in the moist

clay make a great meal.



Jesus talked about birds and lunch more than once but in

## Inside this issue:

Rocks—Overcoming hard obstacles	1
Bird Seed—Preparing our hearts	1
In Our Prayers	3
Asbury Worship Series—Grow	4
Pastor's Book Club	4
Leadership in Worship & Service	4
Coming up this Week	5
Updates—Summer Bible Camp/Concert	6
Asbury Farm to Table	7
Small Group Questions & Notes	8
Bird Seed—Preparing our hearts	9
Rocks—Overcoming hard obstacles	10

#### Page 2

## Bird Seed (Preparing our hearts)...cont. from page 1

Later in this same part of Matthew Jesus explains that the farmer's seed is like the Word of God. The good news. And the soil in the pathway represents persons who miss the point of His parable. In their case, the seed of the message becomes bird seed rather than life changing seeds that plant inside of their hearts. The seed instead becomes lunch for another creature that can taste the good news. But instead of life changing the seed falls on some person's windshield as bird poop. Jesus didn't actually say this part about poop but He might have thought it.

The point is that while the Word of God never returns empty its impact misses a lot of folks who could benefit but who miss out. We can argue over whether the problem is timing or if it was God's will that the person not hear and understand but neither position changes the reality that a lot of us miss the point. Our mind and heart are like the compacted soil of a path where the seed is unable to penetrate the surface.

fruitful.

So there is a missed opportunity to be

How can we become less like the compacted soil of a path and more like receptive soil where seeds can find a home? That is, how can be become more receptive to the Word of God so that God's Word can penetrate our outer layers and find a home in our hearts? Is there a kind of human "broad fork" that can loosen out outer layer?

I suspect that all of us have our moments when we are less receptive to God's Word. The point of this worship series is to explore some of the obstacles we face that can result in us miss-

Once there was a farmer who went out to sow grain. As the farmer scattered the seed in the field, some of it fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up.

Matthew 13: 3b-4

ing out on this divine gift of understanding and insight. My prayer is that some of the points that are said, written and sung find an opening in one or more hearts. Loosening minds and hearts so that divine seed can find a place to grow roots. Worship is one of the many ways that this takes place.

This summer the Asbury Farms invested in a new broad fork. This particular broad fork is proving quite effective in our local soil which has a high concentration of clay. The tongs are made of strong steel that can break through the clay allowing air to get into the soil. And the soil loosens so that seeds can find a home below the surface. We anticipate higher yields in the beds where this tool is utilized. But this means that our farmers must be intentional. The broad fork has to find its way out of the tool trailer and into the hands of a person preparing the soil for seed.

Page 9

# Rocks... cont. from page 1

The tiny amount of nutrient contained in the seed is just enough for the plant to establish a way to feed on nutrients found wherever the plant takes root. But rocks are usually too dense for roots to penetrate. So the plant makes the best of what it has available. In this parable, there isn't really enough dirt for the plant to establish roots and the plants wither and die. The farmer doesn't get more wheat berries from these plants.

Sometimes, Jesus explains, the Word of God is like the farmer's seed that falls on rocky ground. Like the plants that don't have deep enough roots to withstand the hot summer heat the Word of God doesn't take deep enough root into the listener to make a difference in their lives. The Word instead finds something that is hardened within the person.

Perhaps the persons was hurt by someone they thought represented the church and projected that person's poorly rooted understanding of God's Word onto God.

When the sun came up, it burned the young plants; and because the roots had not grown enough, the plants soon dried up.

Matthew 13:6

The problem isn't with the seed, the rocks, or the soil. The problem is the particular combination of timing and obstacles. Roots are persistent. But while roots sometimes aren't able to find their way to the nutrients and water needed to sustain the plant, the Word of God never returns empty. God's Word will always do what God has in mind

despite rocks, hard hearts and misinformed people. God, speaking through the Prophet Isaiah, reminds us that God's Word is not like the things that humans speak. (Isaiah 55:8-11)

As doers of the Word we need to have patience. But like the roots of a plant determined to survive by finding a way around hard obstacles we must be persistent. It is not our job to break a part the rocks. On the Asbury Farms you can find hundreds if not thousands of rocks that we have moved out of the way so that plants that we hope will flourish and provide a good harvest can find nutrients.

Page 10

Volume 19 Issue 7 Fage 3



# In our Prayers

Curtis Young	Shirley Craig
Rachel Bastine	Christopher Lewis
Norma Buzzard	Sarah Tanner
Virginia Bigger	Elizabeth Wright
Barbara McIvor	Judy Tanner
Austin & Mary Suffle	Mary Lyons

# FRIENDS AND LOVED ONES WHO ARE HOMEBOUND OR IN NURSING CARE

Mary Nations Mary Russell

Elaine Lamoreaux

#### **CHURCH CONFERENCE REPORTS 2019**



Tuesday, August 13, 2019 at Court Street UMC, 6:00pm

All reports that are marked due 2 weeks before church conference should be in the church office by NO LATER than Monday, July 29th. All others need to be in office by Monday, August 5th.

IT IS VERY IMPORTANT THAT YOU KEEP WITH THESE DATES. I WILL BE TAKING SOME DAYS OFF LEADING UP TO THESE DATE,S AS MY DAUGHTER IS GETTING MARRIED AUGUST 10TH. ANY QUESTIONS, DON'T HESITATE TO CALL ME.

CONNIE

# 🚺 Coming up this week 🏻 📗

July 8	Mon	5:00pm	Youth Choir
		6:00pm	Worship Design
		7:00pm	Flint Jubilee
July 9	Tues	10am-2pm	Water Distribution
		6:00pm	Community Gospel Choir
July 10	Wed	12Noon	Pastor Book Club
		6:00pm	Beginners Bible Study
		6:00pm	Youth Group
July 11	Thu	4:30-6pm	Gaming as Education
		6:00pm	Worship Band Practice
July 12	Fri	10am-2pm	Asbury Cafe Open
		6:00pm	Asbury Youth Group
July 13	Sat	10am-12N	Japanese Jiu Jitsi
	~	0 10	
July 14	Sun	8am-10am	Japanese Jiu Jitsi
		9:30am	Café Open
		10:30am	New Beginnings
	Contemporary Worship		



Page 4 ASBURY CIRCUIT RIDER

#### Asbury Worship Series Grow "Seed the Future"

In the three synoptic Gospels Jesus tells a story about a farmer who goes out to seed his field. Farmers at that time scattered their seed by hand. A lot of us still seed this way for grass seed or cover crops. In Jesus' story the farmer was planting seeds for grain.

This farmer's field was not all fine loam. It was more like and urban farm with a variety

of soil conditions. A lot of clay and rocks. A lot of old driveway pieces and other items that don't belong in a farmer's field.



As the farmer scattered the seed in the field, Jesus noted, some of the seed fell

along the path. Soil that had been compressed by walking on it. While this was good for the birds that came and had a snack it wasn't good for the farmer's production. Like a couple of our fields some of the seed fell on rocky ground. In this case, the seeds sprouted but couldn't find room for their roots to provide moisture. And without deep roots the young plants soon dried up in the hot sun.

Page 5

#### **Book Club News**

Our group completed our discussions of the book Shame-less written by Nadia Bolz-Weber. This coming Wednesday our group will be hosting



our youth who are working with us for the summer and a youth choir from Omaha, Nebraska. Come and help out to prepare a salad bar for all of our youth and families who come for lunch next Wednesday, July 10th. Come and meet and eat with families and children from our community and with the youth.

By this time we should have an idea that has turned into a discernment and decision for our next book to study. On Wednesday, July 17 we will watch a video and have a discussion about its meaning and what we learned that can help to be more effective followers of Jesus.

I encourage you to come to our Wednesday gatherings. Our small group is a diverse group and we are delighted when new persons join us. I hope that you will join in on our discussion. We meet each Wednesday at Noon. Come

join us for a light lunch, fellowship and discussion. Our food selections have been fantastic and we always have plenty to share. And we are always on the lookout for our next book, video lesson or topic. Your participation and suggestions are greatly appreciated.

Pastor Tommy

# Leadership in Worship & Service

Welcome Team Tony, Mirium
Ushers Anthony, Jim
Production Team Jonathon
Children Patrice & Mirium
Worship Leaders Cyndi

Café Christine & Norma

Asbury Staff

Rev. Dr. Tommy McDoniel Pastor
Connie Portillo Office Secretary
Sylvia Pittman Worship Arts

 Jim Craig
 Leadership Chair

 Kevin Croom
 Farm to Table

 Israel Unger
 Business Operations

#### Asbury Café

Plan to meet outside the sanctuary each Sunday before worship for coffee, tea, snacks, conversation and so on. The music will start when it is time to wrap up and head in for worship.

#### Asbury Worship Series- Grow "Seed the future"... Cont. from page 4

The Asbury Farmers deal with a wide variety of undesirable plants that we often refer to as weeds. And some of these weeds are quite aggressive. Some have very deep roots. Some are thorny like thistles and others send out vines that like to wrap around plants like tomatoes or strawberries. In our story some of the farmer's seed fell among undesirable plants which choked the farmer's newly seeded plants.

Fortunately, most of the time when our farmers put out seed it falls on nutrient-rich, fertile soil. And the seeds germinate into beautiful plants. And this happened in the story that Jesus told. Some of the farmer's seeds fell in good soil. And the farmer had a bountiful harvest as many of the plants produced large amounts of grain.

This story that Jesus told is not just a cute story about farming. Jesus told the story as a parable. This means that there are lessons to be learned. This story applies to other situations in life. There is a lot of symbolism. And Jesus taught that our insight into the meaning of His parables is a divine gift. The Holy Spirit helps us to apply the lessons that the parable teaches.

In this case, Jesus also offers an interpretation for His parable after first explaining why He uses parable at all. As a result of His explanation, there is little debate regarding the meaning of this particular parable. This can lead to the erroneous conclusion that there is nothing else to learn. Jesus says that parables confuse some persons and seem quite clear to others. Jesus said "they look, but do not see, and they listen, but do not hear or understand" (Matthew 13:13 GNT).

Insight is a divine gift that we receive out of our belief. We open our minds to the possibilities that God has in mind for us and surrender our bias to divine insight. A light bulb comes on. We come to realize something about God and our relationship with God that we hadn't understood before. We gain clarity. We experience insight. And we grow in our oneness with God.

On the other hand, Jesus explains that not everyone who hears one of His parables gains insight. Jesus says that this is "because their minds are dull, and they have stopped up their ears and have closed their eyes" (Matthew 13:15 GNT). Jesus is not calling those who miss the point stupid. They could be an absolute genius. A person who struggles to understand even the most basic subjects may get the point and the genius miss it. Insight is a divine gift that comes out of belief and not intellect. That is, faith that Jesus Christ is who scripture says He is.

This is puzzling for non-believers and for believers. This idea is not cut and dry. Just like the farmer seeding the field. While every seed has potential not every seed reaches its potential. Growth is a process that requires total commitment. A lot of crap happens along the way. Rocks, thorns, birds, wellwom paths, sun and rain. Things that we cannot control but may seek to control us.

How we respond to the world matters. Many responses are hurtful. Some responses are helpful. Left to our own we don't get it right often enough. Ask for divine help and some way, some how, things work themselves out. Like the musician playing jazz we come to feel the rhythm of the universe. The song that God has given creation. And beautiful music happens.

The further irony is that even after we taste the sweetness of divine insight our taste buds can become dull. We come to believe that we know what the scripture says. We make all of our decisions based on a static view of creation like we already know everything that we need to know. Our minds become dull and divine insight either ceases or is minimal. This happens to clergy in particular. We think "God hasn't changed. God is consistent." But life is jazz. The rhythm is constantly changing. We need to keep us. We need to listen and feel the beat.

While it may be true that God hasn't changed it is also true that none of us know everything that can be known about God. Our minds can't grasp God's greatness. But when we read a parable that perhaps we have read hundreds of time before. Even after we have written reflections, papers and articles about the insight that we gained. There is still more. God has more to say to each of us. If we will only listen. This is how we *grow*.

We start our new worship series on June 23. The Asbury Farms are already bustling with growth. Blair and Matt are harvesting every week. And new seeds are going in the ground every week. This is how our farm does what it was intended to do. To grow. Likewise, we need to harvest that which is ready and plant new seeds every week. This is how we grow.

I pray that you will join us for our new worship series, *Grow*. Also, our Summer Bible Camp (VBS) is coming up the week of July 15. Our summer youth program starts on Monday. Be sure to pass the word and find out how you can help. I hope to see you each Sunday for worship at 10:30 am. Remember Bible study in the Asbury Café is before worship at 9:30 am.

Pastor Tommy

#### **JUST ONE WEEK AWAY!**

#### **JUST ONE WEEK AWAY!**

Vacation Bible School
Summer Bible Camp
at Asbury UMC

July 15th to 21th - Monday-Friday 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm

Saturday 11:00 am to 2:00 pm - Sunday 10:30 am to 11:30 am

Pre-school to 6th Grade



FlintAsbury.org

810-235-0016

info@FlintAsbury.org



1653 Davison Rd, Flint, MI 48506

Come create a musical with Ms. Sylvia Pittman—Vocal Teacher, Musician and Producer



# You're Invited!!

A free concert, Wednesday, July 10th, at 7:00pm at the Asbury Empowerment Arts Center, 1653 Davison Road, Flint, MI 48506.

Come hear the Youth Choir of Countryside Community Church of Omaha, Nebraska, as well as a Community Gospel Choir and other local artists.

# Asbury Farm to Table











While turning blight into beautiful and productive landscape is



good on its own, transforming a food desert into abundance is life giving. But Asbury wants to make sure that produce is avail-

able on the tables of our residents. Our culinary arts and nutritional education programs offer residents the know how just as our farms offers nature's bounty. In addition, the Asbury Café is a culinary experience accessible to our neighbors and anyone with an appetite. Our "pay what you can" approach means that no one is turned away. Those who can help either on the farm or in the café

#### We proudly accept MyFlintStones

The Asbury Café is open Fridays 10am to 2pm & Sundays 10 am to 12 Noon



# **ASBURY CAFÉ MENU**

Open Fridays 10am to 2pm

Pay what you can

#### **DELI SUBS**

Lettuce, onions, tomato plus choice of ham, turkey or beef

#### **GARDEN SALAD**

Local grown greens & vegetables. Ham, turkey or beef upon request

#### MUFFINS

Chef Kevin's special recipe with fruit, love and other delights baked in.

#### STIR FRY

Local grown garden vegetables sautéed with love and herbs

#### **WRAPS**

Lettuce, onions, tomato plus choice of ham, turkey or beef

#### **SMOOTHIE**

Assorted flavors of the day

# COFFEE

Regular or decaf

Volume 19 Issue 7 Page 8

## Life Group Questions & Notes

Once there was a man who went out to sow grain...Some of it fell on rocky ground, where there was little soil. The seeds soon sprouted, because the soil wasn't deep. But when the sun came up, it burned the young plants; and because the roots had not grown deep enough, the plants soon dried up

Matthew 13:3b, 5-6

NOTES FROM WORSHIP				

#### **QUESTIONS FOR LIFE GROUPS**

- 1. Read Matthew 13:3b, 5-6 this week's article titled *Rocks*. What images come to mind? In Matthew 13:20-21 Jesus explains that the seed that fell on rocky soil represents situations where the Word of God is obstructed from taking root deeply enough to withstand life's obstacles. Have you had this experience where you found yourself retreating from living as you know Jesus had led You because of life getting in the way?
- 2. Life's struggles can easily cause us to lose sight of God. Talk about a time when this has happened to you. What might have made a difference for you? Can your experience help others who may be having a similar experience right now?
- 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?

I think of worship music as a sort of spiritual broad fork. The various parts of the music are like the various parts of the broad fork working together to penetrate our hearts and allow God's Word to find space to take root. The beat of the drum, the rhythm of the lower, bass notes, the melody of the instruments all resonate within our bodies. And God's Word comes to us through the lyrics that are intended to make way for the divine seed to fall on fertile hearts and minds. We are all created with an innate desire to experience the presence of God. Music is one of the ways that we awaken this desire.

Our bodies respond initially to music out of stored memories. The beat. The rhythm. Where have we heard this sound before? Our body becomes a repository of memories. Stored feelings from a time before. If our mind finds comforting memories the music may evoke a feeling of comfort in us. If the rhythm connects us to a less pleasant memory we may tense up. But hang in there. The broad fork has to go into the soil more than once. The whole bed needs work.

Allow God's Word to be holy seed rather than bird seed.

This Sunday during our music don't let the first feelings that you have take hold for the entire song. Instead, let the rhythm wash over you. Move your body to the beat. Raise your hands. Sing the words.

Open yourself to the message behind the words. Anticipate that the Holy Spirit will find space. Feel the goose bumps as the Spirit moves you closer to God. You have become fertile rather than compacted soil. God's Word has an inviting space to land.



Every member of our worship band is there for worship themselves. They are not there to entertain. God has seen fit to have us lead others into worship by our own worship. Some vocalists say that when they sing they imagine their words to be a prayer. Others will say that they can imagine singing to God. All of us seek the Spirit of God in our midst. And our prayer is that you will too.

Do you ever find yourself annoyed when a chorus or bridge is repeated a few too many times? Repetition occurs both intentionally and in obedience to the Spirit. Allow the repetition to be a broad fork loosening all of the compact parts of your body, mind and soul. When repetition is done in obedience to following the leading and guiding of the Holy Spirit there is an invitation to all present to engage with the Spirit of God. The Spirit is calling your name. Inviting you to participate. Hoping that the rhythm will become booth soothing and inviting as the Holy Spirit moves.

One of our newer songs features a powerful bridge about the experience of the writer with Jesus. The first verse begins with "Before I spoke a word You were singing over me." God knitted us in our mother's womb and was already singing to us. As we were formed the rhythm of the universe was singing lullabies. Before we ever speak a word God is singing over us.

The song's bridge is repeated intentionally at first but often repeated in obedience to the Spirit. It speaks of grace and protection. It tells of a God who never gives up on us.

There's no shadow You won't

Light up

Mountain You won't climb up
Coming after me

There's no wall You won't kick down Lie You won't tear down Coming after me.

The writer has experienced grace upon grace. Found when he became lost. Finding light in darkness. Jesus overcame every obstacle that the enemy constructed. Just as Jesus has done for us. Just as Jesus does for us whenever we become compacted and unable to understand the Word of God. Let worship this Sunday be a spiritual broad fork for you. Open your heart to worship and be amazed by God.

I hope that you will join us. We worship each Sunday at 10:30 am. I lead a short Bible study in the Asbury Café at 9:30 am. You can find more information about us on our website at FlintAsbury.org.

**Pastor Tommy** 

# Welcome to the Asbury Community -

1653 Davison Rd Flint, MI 48506

Phone: 810-235-0016 Fax: 810-235-0016 (call first when faxing) E-mail: FlintAsburyUMC@gmail.com

CircuitRider@FlintAsbury.org

NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION
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PERMIT #151

# Neighborhood Connection



We envision a community in love with God, each other, and our neighbors evidenced by the transformation of ourselves and our neighborhood. We are a center for worship & spiritual growth, a center for connections and a center for health & wellness.

Our goal is a revitalized community where every resident can use their talents and passions for the common good, where children grow into citizens who contribute to building and maintaining a vibrant neighborhood, and all residents are able to enjoy safety, good health, a culture that fosters life long learning and satisfying lives.

We believe that such an ambitious goal can never be attained without God's grace and abundance and Christ calls each of us to be disciples willing to share our witness through words and acts.

#### Rocks...Overcoming hard obstacles..cont. from page 2

Likewise, we are all called to be rock movers. Helping those who we offer witness to see past harmful words and actions from people who themselves had rocks that had not been moved out of the way so that God's Word could take root in them.



Grass rooted through hole in fence

Last week I focused on worship as a spiritual broad fork that loosens us when we arrive at church like compacted soil. This week my focus is on hardened obstacles that even a broad fork cannot penetrate. Rocks need to be removed or the roots coming out of the seed must find their way around the rocks. When I think of the sort of hardness that prevents the Word of God fully taking root I think more about the Pharisees of today than I do about persons who are avoiding church altogether.

When a person grows up in a tradition that excludes persons who are different than

they are and when they blame their discrimination on God their hearts can become hardened. Other emotions, such as fear, can further hardened their hearts against others. We see this play out in politics all the time. Where persons holding positions of power play on these fears and persons claiming to be people of God follow a person who clearly exhibits behaviors that are inconsistent with the Word of God.

And when a person like me shares the Word of God and the message does not further solidify their existing beliefs the message may not take root. There are many ambiguities in Scripture. But the ambiguities grow out of the obstacles created by people inspired by the enemy. For me, when I find myself struggling with what to believe I return to the priorities given by Jesus. Love God, love neighbor, love God.

There are no "fear immigrants" found in this clarification by Jesus. There are no "condemn homosexuals" found in these words from Jesus. In fact, Jesus made it quite clear throughout the Gospel that we are to love and serve one another. No exceptions. No exclusions. Jesus seemed quite clear that when we condemn others we are instead condemned. And when the Pharisees challenged Jesus He would use an illustration to reinforce this simple measure of love God, love neighbor, love God. Jesus would tell the person who asked, "Who is my neighbor?" A story about a person that is exactly like a person that His questioner feared or condemned and how this person did the

Word of God rather than debating it with the experts who walked on the other side in order to avoid showing love to their neighbor.

Love God, love neighbor, love God

We all have our rocks. Our neighborhood is full of them. But together we can move them to their proper places where rocks can better serve our community. Don't allow your rocks to keep you from understanding and living God's straightforward commandments. Love God, love your neighbor, love God. Your love for God cannot be separated from your love for your neighbor. Whether they are your identical twin or nothing like you.

Perhaps we can even help those in power who speak in hate-talk and use words to bully and divide to remove their rocks enough to allow God's Word to take root. But we do this by illustration. Living as Jesus did without excluding others simply because they don't meet the requirements that we set for salvation. After all, we don't get a vote and Jesus is in charge of entrance. And Jesus went out and invited the excluded to be a part of God's Kingdom. We should do likewise.

I hope that you will join us. We worship each Sunday at 10:30 am. I lead a short Bible study in the Asbury Café at 9:30 am. You can find more information about us on our website at <a href="FlintAsbury.org">FlintAsbury.org</a>.

Pastor Tommy