

# 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

## Thorns (Facing thorny problems)

Some plants protect themselves with thorns. Anyone who has grabbed a rose stem or a thistle or rubbed up against nettle has learned that our bare skin is no match for the protection systems of some plants. A couple of the youth visiting from Omaha found this out when they attempted to pull a thistle out of the strawberries while helping out at the Asbury Farm. They learned that cloth work gloves don't provide enough protection.



Thorns are challenging. Ask anyone who has picked wild blackberries, collected roses or tried to remove a thistle. Caution is the watchword if

we want to avoid being pricked. Trying to make our way through nested briars in a field is challenging and can be painful. The rabbits that live next to the parsonage know that when our dog Duke spots them their best escape is to head for the black raspberry bushes where Duke's size and awkwardness would result in too much pain to make it worth entering this area of the yard. In the case of the rabbits, thorns are a good thing.

Page 2

Volume 19 Issue 14

July 14, 2019

### Special points of interest:

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

>>> **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)**

### Inside this issue:

Rocks—Overcoming hard obstacles	1
Thorns—Facing thorny problems	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—Church Youth Choir	6
Asbury Farm to Table	7
Small Group Questions & Notes	8
Thorns/Children's Health Expo	9
Rocks—Overcoming hard obstacles	10

## Thorn (Facing thorny problems)...cont. from page 1

But thorns are more of a metaphor than a plant characteristic in this article. When we think of how our body responds to the prick of a thorn we can compare this response to other things that make us say “ouch.” For example, we try to do something good anticipating both a good feeling and even a little gratitude from the person we are helping. Instead, we get hurt. We may wish we hadn’t tried to help just as the youth wished they hadn’t grabbed the thistle.

And there are plenty of things that can make us say “ouch” emotionally. Unkind words are spoken to us or about us. Condemnation by others. Bad news about our health or livelihood or about someone close to us. The pain caused by some of life’s “thorns” can be immediate and the pain can last for years or even for a lifetime. Life is full of thorns. We sometimes refer to difficult situations filled with the potential for things to get worse as a “thorny” problem.

Some of us are “worriers” who just can’t seem to find rest in the midst of so much to worry about. Anxiety can become a normal part of every day. Anxiety may be invisible but it is felt by more than just the anxious persons. Anxiety can infect a household, an entire neighborhood, a city or even a nation. Anxiety can infect a community of faith. Anx-

## 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.

ity usually provokes a reaction. This is what makes anxiety so popular with politicians and other drama enthusiasts. Want to convince someone to vote for you then create anxiety by pointing a finger at a cause that you claim you can stop. Need some attention then create some drama.

When anxiety about every day tasks is persistent it may be diagnosed as “chronic” anxiety by mental health professionals. Persons suffering from chronic anxiety may discover that when reasons for anxiety are missing they become unsettled and often-times create reasons for anxiety thus returning themselves back to what has become their “normal” way of being. Chronic anxiety is associated more with ordinary events that are generally not stressful for most of us. These are not thorns in our use of this metaphor. Help for chronic anxiety is best left to those whom God has gifted with mental health expertise.

Anxiety about anything that takes our focus away from God is not a good situation for us. Jesus taught about the dangers of anxiety in other circumstances. Not so that we would worry about being worried, however. Jesus wanted us to know that God is with us

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

when there are situations that make us anxious.

In our current worship series, titled *Grow*, we are spending time on a parable that Jesus told about a farmer planting wheat. In His parable, Jesus explains that

Some of the seed fell among thorn bushes, which grew up and choked the plants.

*Matthew 13:7*

not all of the seeds fell onto soil that was offered the best conditions for the seeds to mature into healthy plants. The seeds that fell among the thorns in Jesus’ parable struggled and apparently succumbed to the more aggressive thorn-bearing plants. The yield from these seeds was lost.

In His explanation of this parable, Jesus uses thorns as a metaphor for worries. Anything that makes us anxious. So

*Page 9*

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*



### 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 ↓

<b>July 15</b>	<b>Mon</b>	5:00pm	Youth Choir
		6:00pm	Leadership Design
		7:00pm	Flint Jubilee
<b>July 16</b>	<b>Tues</b>	10am-2pm	Water Distribution
		6:00pm	Community Gospel Choir
<b>July 17</b>	<b>Wed</b>	12Noon	Pastor Book Club
		6:00pm	Beginners Bible Study
		6:00pm	Youth Group
<b>July 18</b>	<b>Thu</b>	4:30-6pm	Gaming as Education
		6:00pm	Worship Band Practice
<b>July 19</b>	<b>Fri</b>	10am-2pm	Asbury Cafe Open
		6:00pm	Asbury Youth Group
<b>July 20</b>	<b>Sat</b>	10am-12N	Japanese Jiu Jitsi
<b>July 21</b>	<b>Sun</b>	8am-10am	Japanese Jiu Jitsi
		9:30am	Café Open
		10:30am	New Beginnings
			Contemporary Worship

★ **SUNDAY July 7th** ★

9:30am Café Opens

10:30am New Beginnings

Contemporary Worship

Last Week for Worship

Attendance 39 Offering \$ 1,227

### 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 an 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.

### 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



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.

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

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

I encourage you to come to our Wednesday gatherings. Our small group is a diverse group and we are

### Leadership in Worship & Service

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

Sylvia Pittman	Worship Arts
Jim Craig	Leadership Chair
Kevin Croom	Farm to Table
Israel Unger	Business Operations

#### Asbury Staff

Rev. Dr. Tommy McDoniel	Pastor
Connie Portillo	Office Secretary

#### 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

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, well-worn 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



---

## Countryside Community Church Youth Choir

Page 6

Our community was blessed by a group of youth and adult chaperones this past week. A youth choir on a concert tour spent a day helping out on the Asbury Farm and participated in a concert Wednesday evening. The group left Omaha, Nebraska the Saturday of the July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend, stopping to visit Mackinac Island on their way through Michigan.



The sixteen member youth choir divided their group so that half could help Blair and Matt plant over a 100 new transplants at our main farm campus on Jane Ave behind the Asbury Learning Center hoop house. The other half worked with Pastor Tommy at the Hamilton Ave site planting strawberries and at the Bennet Ave site planting fruit trees. The youth and adults were accustomed to the hot, 90 degree plus temperatures but hot is hot. Nevertheless, everyone did their part and a lot of work was completed.

Later that same evening Asbury hosted a concert that featured this gifted choir. The evening began with a selection by the Asbury Worship Band. Tom Allen led those in attendance in singing an original song that he wrote. Recording artist and pastor Nick Hill performed two of the selections from his latest album, Breakthrough. And our own Community Gospel Choir offered a couple of their favorites after singing a song with our guest choir. All who attended were truly blessed by the presence of the Holy Spirit and the praises that came from the instruments and voices of all of our artists. The youth choir is directed by Tyler Gruttemeyer.

Countryside Community Church is part of a community of all three faiths that come out of the tradition of Abraham: Islam, Judaism and Christianity. Three communities of faith decided several years ago to purchase land together and to each build a new house of worship on the jointly owned land. All three have relocated to their new buildings and plan to continue building an activity center and school together. Their willingness to put aside differences in our most precious beliefs about God is an inspiration. There is no doubt that their visit was not coincidental.

Asbury's leadership decided several years ago that God was calling our community to offer radical hospitality. In our case, radical hospitality begins with the acceptance of all children of God. This means all people. Even those with whom we cannot reach total agreement. We have progressed a long ways along this path of peace, love, and acceptance. This visit offered us a living example of a kingdom of God that truly embraces peace and love.

You can find out more information about Countryside Community Church from their website at <http://countrysideucc.org/>. You can also find them on Facebook. Both CNN and Oprah Magazine have published articles about their plans to work together as a diverse community of peace and love. Imagine a community where instead of arguing over who is right and who is wrong about God we all turn to a common directive that God has given to all persons to love God and to love our neighbor. Imagine a community of abundance and you will have an idea of what God has in mind.



Pastor Tommy

---

# 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 available 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

### STIR FRY

Local grown garden vegetables sautéed with love and herbs

### GARDEN SALAD

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

### WRAPS

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

### MUFFINS

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

### SMOOTHIE

Assorted flavors of the day

### COFFEE

Regular or decaf

### Life Group Questions & Notes

Once there was a man who went out to sow grain. 7 Some of the seed fell among thorn bushes, which grew up and choked the plants... The seeds that fell among thorn bushes stand for those who hear the message; but the worries about this life and the love for riches choke the message, and they don't bear fruit.

Matthew 13:3b,7, 13

### NOTES FROM WORSHIP

---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---

### QUESTIONS FOR LIFE GROUPS

1. Read Matthew 13:3b,7, 13 this week's article titled *Thorns*. What images come to mind? In Matthew 13:13 Jesus explains that the seed that fell upon the thorn bushes are like the situations when worries get in the way of our hearing the good news of the Gospel. Has this ever happened to you? Name a worry that has caused this in the past.
2. Worries about life can take our focus away from God. If you constantly worry about even the simplest things it may be a good idea to speak to a healthcare professional. Name a current worry that is taking a lot of your attention right now (or today). Ask the members of your group to pray about it with you.
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?



anxious that when we hear God's voice we are so preoccupied with worry that instead of responding to God we focus our energy on our problems. Like the young plants that are overcome by aggressive plants that will not produce fruit God's Word to us that will produce fruit is lost among our worries.

Jesus said to a gathered crowd "Do not be worried about the food and drink you need in order to stay alive, or about clothes for your body" (Matthew 6:25). But Jesus was not naive about thorny issues. In this same teaching Jesus noted that each day will have its own problems that may distract us from hearing God. Perhaps Jesus was saying "Don't sweat the small stuff" but I'm inclined to believe that while Jesus realizes that we are all worriers to some degree if we really believed what Jesus knew to be true about God's nature, we would realize that we do not need to worry at all.

We are in the capable hands of a loving God. Just as important, when we worry about things our worry not only distracts us but can be the beginning of or at least an indication of a bigger problem. We cannot serve two masters. We cannot serve two Gods. If that which we are worried about is that important to us perhaps we are guilty of putting something else or someone else ahead of God.

Life has its thorns. And thorns often demand to be noticed. But if we are paying attention we can still enjoy the abundance that God provides us. We can have black raspberries with our French toast without requiring a band aid for the scrape of a thorn. We can smell the roses or even clip one for our table without the need to heal from a thorny scratch. We can dig up a thistle and remove it by the roots even with cloth work gloves.

Most of all, we can hear God's voice even in the midst of our worries. And God's voice may offer a solution to the thorny issues that are facing us. God reminds us through the Prophet Jeremiah that "I alone know the plans I have for you, plans to bring you prosperity and not disaster, plans to bring about the future you hope for" (Jeremiah 29:11). This is the harvest that God has in mind for us. The future that we hope for but may not be able to see. A future of abundance, peace, and love.

I alone know the plans I have for you, plans to bring you prosperity and not disaster, plans to bring about the future you hope for.

Jeremiah 29:11

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](http://FlintAsbury.org).

Pastor Tommy

JOIN US FOR THE ANNUAL "HEALTHY LIVING, HEALTHY EATING, HEALTHY FAIR!"

THE FAIRHAVEN COMMUNITY SERVICES DEPARTMENT IN COOPERATION WITH THE CITY OF FLINT FIRE DEPARTMENT & G.I.S.D.'s ANNUAL

"HEALTHY LIVING HEALTHY EATING HEALTH FAIR" AND "CHILDREN'S HEALTH EXPO"



Be Healthy! Eat well, Live well.

THURSDAY - JULY 18, 2019

10:00 A.M. - 2:00 P.M.

FAIRHAVEN SDA CHURCH G-1379 LOUIS AVE. FLINT, MICH. 48505

School supplies "Food Give Away" Bounce House, Water slide, Face Painting, "I.D." you Kids" arts & crafts, Immunizations, BMI testing, "Healthy Food Taste testing, "Antique Cars" and much, much more for the family to enjoy

Vendors: Crim Foundation, HAP, The Genesee County Health Dept., Genesee Health Plan, Hurley Medical Center, University of Michigan, Hamilton Clinic, Valley agency on aging American Cancer Society, GCCARD and many more

# 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](mailto:FlintAsburyUMC@gmail.com)  
[CircuitRider@FlintAsbury.org](mailto:CircuitRider@FlintAsbury.org)

NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION  
U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
FLINT, MICHIGAN  
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 [FlintAsbury.org](http://FlintAsbury.org).  
Pastor Tommy