

ASBURY CIRCUIT RIDER

Debt-Free (What we owe the planet)

Some people, organizations, and companies are accumulating a lot more debt as part of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. Trying to keep the doors open, to keep people employed, and to keep on doing things we do, costs money. And most money comes with strings attached, like paying back whatever was borrowed.

The Payroll Protection Program developed by Congress offered loans to smaller businesses to keep employees working while money coming in is scarce. The amounts are actually loans. But the loan is forgiven if the borrower uses the money to keep workers employed. This is an essential program for the businesses fortunate enough to get access.



More so than scripture, people turn on the news for advice on how to respond to things that frighten us. But scripture is not silent on indebtedness. And the bible is definitely not silent on the subject of economics. Money matters to God because it affects our decisions, how we treat each other, and where we put our trust and allegiance.

There is an old saying among pastors that goes something like this. You can

tell what is essential to a person by looking at their calendar and their bank account. What we do with our time and money says a lot about our priorities. Not the whole story, thankfully. But these indicators offer great insight.

There's a story in scripture about a guy that owed a ton of money. Most translations say the guy's banker was a king, but for us, perhaps it's the payday store, a family member, or an actual bank. The point is that this guy owed more money than he could repay.

When the banker called him in to demand repayment, the guy came clean. There was no way he could repay.

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Volume 20 Issue 26

April 26, 2020

Special points of interest:

*** [All meetings have been cancelled until further notice.](#)

*** A note from Connie on page 10 ...

*** Join in on the conversation... page 7

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Togetherness (Whose side are you on?)

There is a lot of togetherness going on as we all try our best to stay home and stay with whoever is under the same roof. Each day we gain a little more experience with the limitations of FaceTime and online meeting technology.

Meanwhile, political posturing and soundbites continue to pollute the air-

waves, but with some new twists.



I feel blessed that the persons living in the same house as me mostly agree. And that we try to respect each other's viewpoint on the issues that could divide us. But each day brings its own challenges, its own rumors, and a lot of the same as yesterday.

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TogetherNESS (Whose side are you on?) ...cont from page 1

Pastor Jeremy of Court Street Church plans to carry on a conversation with his faith community about grace. Not the grace that describes how people move, but the grace that causes us to cut some slack, even for people who don't deserve it. As I read his reflections on this topic, I was amazed by the relevance of the subject matter to our new series. Grace is a condiment that needs to be on every table for every meal. And in every household.

In fact, grace is an essential ingredient for all human endeavors. Grace is particularly crucial when it comes to determining policy that affects a large number of people. We expect leaders to be superheroes, or at least we hope they can be. But this may be more true if the leader is someone we admire. Yet we all should hope that God extends grace to us.

Jesus has His hands full when it comes to teaching followers a new way to see other people. On one occasion, John, one of His first followers, was bragging about shutting down a group that was helping others. The problem, according to John, wasn't the good

they were doing, but the use of Jesus' name as a source of authority. "He's not one of us," John added.

Jesus was silenced by people in power with a vested interest in keeping His story from becoming headlines.

I'm guessing that John anticipated that Jesus would thank him for his outspokenness. But instead, Jesus told John that what he did was wrong. "Don't try to stop him," Jesus responded, "whoever is not against you is for you." An interesting choice of words with several options for interpretation. This is where the subject of grace is helpful.

Grace is not something we earn. It is more like the opposite. We give and receive without merit. Whether the other person clearly deserves the slack, we offer them, or they clearly don't. We extend grace either way. Earning grace is not a part of the conversation. It just comes with the way we respond to the world. And if we aren't sure we want to offer grace, we remember the grace that we receive from God.

We begin our new series this Sunday, *Risen*. And our series is not about grace per se. Our plan is to promote conversations about inequality. Particularly, disparities highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Conversations that can divide us, if grace isn't present at all times. So this Sunday, we begin by talking about grace, and about what it means to work together.

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about forgiving the man's debt and instead prosecuted him to the full extent of the law. And then some. See the twist?

Jesus told this story to His followers after a conversation about forgiving a person that did or said something harmful. He told the story in response to the question, "But Jesus, how many times am I expected to forgive this person?"

This story serves as a reminder that as we talk about the pressing issues of the day, we may need to offer each other plenty of lenience. This sort of grace often seems missing in public discourse. But without it, conversations that bring us together to tackle thorny issues is difficult, and not very enjoyable for those of us who prefer to get along with others.

You should have had mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you.

Matthew 18:33

Debt-Free (What we owe the planet)....cont. from page 1

He owed millions and couldn't pay the debt off if he wanted to. The banker called the authorities to lock him up. But the guy cried out for mercy. "I have a family," he told the banker, "and I'm not dishonest. I'm just not so good with money."

The banker decided to let the guy go debt-free. It sounds like a fairy tale. Let's say it was a good friend. Someone that just might forgive such a huge debt. So the guy leaves the bank — friend's house — completely free. He not only isn't going to jail or getting

roughed up, but he is also debt-free. What a relief.

So the guy went on to found a charity that helped others, who like him, got themselves into trouble. Right? Nope. The opposite. It turned out that the guy loaned money to someone else. Rather than show the same mercy he was offered, he demanded payment or else.

When the banker/friend heard the news of how this guy showed his greed rather than his gratitude, the banker took back his promise. He changed his mind

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In our Prayers

Curtis Young	Austin & Mary Suffle
Rachel Bastine	Miriam Watson
Norma Buzzard	Shirley Craig
Mary Lyons	Christopher Lewis
Barbara McIvor	Sarah Tanner

FRIENDS AND LOVED ONES WHO ARE HOMEBOUND OR IN NURSING CARE

Elaine Lamoreaux Mary Nations

Emergency Outreach in the East Winds District

Asbury UMC in Flint has been designated as part of the critical nonprofit infrastructure in the city and county's emergency operations plan. As a Help Center, Asbury is providing food and water once a week to the community. Porch deliveries are also being made with a partnership with the Genesee County Sheriff's Department. The Asbury CDC Farms team is hard at work to ramp up their local food production in order to provide more access to healthy produce. A new partnership with the South Flint Soup Kitchen will send out fresh salads once a week.



Coming up this week

April 27 Mon
 April 28 Tues 10am-2pm Water / Food Distribution
 April 29 Wed **No Pastor Book Club Until further notice**
 April 30 Thu
 May 1 Fri
 May 2 Sat
 May 3 Sun



JOIN WORSHIP ONLINE

SUNDAY, APRIL 26TH, 10:30 AM

FACEBOOK LIVE (FLINT ASBURY)

OR

WEBINAR



JOIN BY PHONE

+1 929 436 2866

MEETING ID: 324 841 204

JOIN ONLINE

[HTTPS://ZOOM.US/J/324841204](https://zoom.us/j/324841204)

**Asbury Worship Series
Risen (Coming April 19th)**

Easter is over. I can usually tell by the clearance sales on Easter candy the Monday after. Was there Easter candy on the shelves this year? My avoidance of shopping during the pandemic kept me from impulse buying Easter candy. A small blessing in the midst of so much bad news.

Book Club News

We decided to suspend our study of our latest book, *God and the Gay Christian*, by Matthew Vines. This book is too important to exclude members of our group that have been unable to join our online discussion.



Meanwhile, with so much talk going around about the virus as a sign of the end-times, our group chose to study the Book of Revela-



Governor Whitmer announced in an online town hall meeting, the formation of a task force that will guide emergency response and influence future policy. The justifi-

tions. Last week, several of us got online using Zoom to begin our discussions. This coming Wednesday, and until further notice, we will continue our discussions, a few chapters at a time.

While we still won't know whether there is a connection between the COVID-19 pandemic and John's dream revelation, we are certain to be a bit more knowledgeable about what is found in this mysterious, apocalyptic book.

Written somewhere near the end of the first century, the Book of Revelations was written during a time of persecution of Christians. The Roman Empire, led by Domitian, incarcerated, exiled, or executed persons unwilling to declare the Roman ruler as god. Jews and Christians living

within the boundaries of the empire knew better.

One of the many things about Revelations that makes it such a mysterious book is that the language uses symbols and codes, instead of naming people, places, and nations directly. As readers, we are left to marvel at the poetry, speculate on the imagery, and hypothesis on the meaning for the present time.

The headline for an article in the New York Times reads: *As Coronavirus Deepens Inequality, Inequality Worsens Its Spread*¹.

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I encourage you to join us online for our Wednesday gatherings. We chose not to go on Facebook live since this is intended to be an interactive discussion. You can call in by phone, be heard, and hear what others are saying by calling (929) 436-2866, and entering the meeting ID, 482458815#.

We are a diverse group and we are delighted when new persons join us. I hope that you will join in on our discussion. We usually meet each Wednesday at Noon, but during the COVID-19 crisis we are meeting online at 12:30 pm.

You can contact our office with questions, by phone or simply type your question on our website's homepage — FlintAsbury.org.

Pastor Tommy

Leadership in Worship & Service

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

- Kevin Croom Dir. Operations
- Blair Neifert Farm Manager
- Matt Dee Farm Operations
- Israel Unger Function to Funding
- Kim Sims Connections
- Karl Collyer Production-
- Katelin Maylum Production

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 Staff

- Rev. Dr. Tommy McDoniel Pastor
- Connie Portillo Office Secretary
- Sylvia Pittman Empowerment Arts
- Jim Craig Leadership Chair

Risen (Coming April 19th) ...Cont. from page 4

The article argued that the spread of the coronavirus brought to light the connection between severity of impact and economic inequity. And the reality is that those of us nearer the bottom of the economic ladder are more likely to catch the disease, and also likelier to die from it.

And those who manage to remain healthy are likelier to suffer loss of income or healthy care as a result of quarantines and other measures. But the bad news spills over economic boundaries. Past research on influenza found that in an epidemic, poverty and inequality can exacerbate rates of transmission and mortality for everyone.

Our reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic certainly sheds light on the diversity of human nature. Our fall back labels, characterizations, presumptions, and the like, shatter under such stress. Instead, those characteristics which determine heroism and effective leadership become clearer. Rhetoric gets exposed for just what it is—thin layers of misrepresentation of facts.

Cowardliness and incompetence also share the spotlight. Along with years of allowing greed to determine policy. The competition for supplies is exposing systemic inequalities all over the world. Families, cities, states, hospitals, and countries are competing for life saving supplies. Money and influence uses power to competitive advantage. We all lose.

In our next series, *Risen*, we dig deeper into the inequalities that the COVID-19 pandemic is uncovering, and challenge ourselves to be among the ordinary, faithful people that keep the truth alive. How do our beliefs translate into actions? What difference can a few, faithful, but ordinary witnesses make?

It appears that most, if not all, of our time on *Risen* will be online. I pray that you will join us each Sunday morning at 10:30am. We plan to be live via [webinar](#), through [Facebook](#) live, or you can call (929) 436-2866 and enter the meeting number—324 841 204. We go live at 10:30am. You can find these links along with more information about us on our website at FlintAsbury.org.

Pastor Tommy

But there is more to the story when we read it in the context of Jesus' ministry. Indebtedness is as much an economic issue in scripture as it is about forgiveness. Jesus lived among and advocated for the poor and marginalized. The subject of forgiveness can be painful to victims of oppression. I often hear that forgiveness is not the same thing as forgetting. Sometimes the damage doesn't heal. Sometimes there is a scar, a reminder that keeps the past fresh.

With the availability of information from most places in the world, pictures of the cityscapes in large cities, such as Los Angeles and Mumbai, are getting some attention. Why? Because the air looks clean. The images aren't marred by a filter of pollution. It is as though our planet is ready to forgive us for the abuse it has taken from our progress.

I am also pleasantly surprised that Earth Day received coverage. Earth Day activities are frequently enjoyed outside and in the company of large crowds. But not this year. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the first Earth Day.

According to one article, the first Earth Day was born out of a decade of social action. During a time of protests against the lack of civil rights and the war in Vietnam. We appeared to reject many of the life-goals of our parents.

The success of that first Earth Day, according to Sarah Pruitt, helped motivate leaders in Washington to pass environmental legislation. For example, eight months after the first Earth Day, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was created. And, the Clean Air Act passed that same year. These were followed by the Clean Water Act in 1972, and the Endangered Species Act in 1973.

The debate over whether our lifestyles are damaging the atmosphere over. Science won the argument. But this hasn't stopped the current administration from rolling back regulations adopted as a step towards reducing our damage. The raging debate today is whether we are too late. Is

Is the damage we've done forgivable?

One of the fantastic things about the teachings of Jesus is that they endure for all times. But Jesus often reminded listeners that not everyone understands. Insight into scripture is a gift. Fortunately, it is a gift freely given by the One who made sure we had access. This week, while our message considers the subject of forgiveness, our topic focuses on our earth.

In her speech to the leaders of the United Nations, Greta Thunberg, emotionally told the assembly, "how dare you." Greta went on to point out that national leaders are all talk, but little action. Her emotional speech turned heads across the globe. Perhaps the most disturbing words spoken by Greta was, "And if you choose to fail us, I say we will never forgive you."

I won't try to put different words in Greta's mouth. While Jesus insisted that forgiveness is crucial in the Kingdom of God, like Greta, Jesus made speeches to persons in power that aroused both passionate support and violent anger. This is often-times the nature of public discourse. We don't like what we hear, and sometimes it makes us angry. Anger that we hold onto long after the speech is over.

So what does it look like for the planet to forgive us? Fortunately, the same Creator God made the earth we depend on. And God is merciful and forgiving. But forgiveness begins with confession and continues with action. Perhaps the earth cannot forget all the damage done. But it isn't too late to seek her forgiveness. Its not too late.

We are indebted to the earth that sustains us. We borrow her resources while we are alive. We breathe her air, drink her water, and eat her harvest. We dig up her minerals to build things that make our lives easier. We owe a debt We are indebted to the earth that sustains us. We borrow her resources while we are alive. We breathe her air, drink her water, and eat her harvest. We dig up her minerals to build things that make our lives easier. We owe a debt harvest. We dig up her minerals to build things that make our lives easier. We owe

a debt that we cannot repay. But we can show mercy. We can take steps individually and collectively to show our gratitude for a second chance.

My hope is that each week we can hear from individuals who took the time to research topics that matter to them. Perhaps policy influencers and people personally affected by inequity. I'm looking for you all to do the recommending and inviting.

We are all in this together, even when we aren't actually together — physically or ideologically. But we can work together, making our community and our world a better place. Don't let political posturing keep you from offering and receiving the grace that God offers every one of us. And if the news is causing you heartburn, turn it off for a while.

I invited several persons to respond to a survey on potential topics. A few responded already. If you didn't get your invite please go to [RisenSurvey](#) now and take our survey. This will really help us figure out which topics are important to our participants and who is willing to do and share their research.

For more information this series, *Risen*, see the article, [Coming up in worship](#).

I invite you to join us this Sunday. We plan to be live via [webinar](#), through [Facebook](#) live, or you can call (929) 436-2866 and enter the meeting number — 324 841 204. We go live at 10:30 am. You can find these links along with more information about us on our website at [FlintAsbury.org](#).

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Join in on the conversation

Indebtedness is as much an economic issue in scripture as it is about forgiveness. Jesus lived among and advocated for the poor and marginalized. In this series, we explore current examples of indebtedness, and our role as followers of Jesus' teachings. What issues matter most to you.

For example, one member of our community noted that a person with a gender identity that differs from their biological identity are often marginalized. And it is not enough to avoid persons unwilling to consider that God created them with their identity. Some have been denied essential services during the Covid pandemic.

The pandemic is also shining a bright light on systemic racism. African Americans are disproportionately affected, exposing systemic racism. We serve a diverse community and a God that delights in diversity. What experiences or insights do you have that the rest of us need to hear about?

The people in jobs that help keep the rest of us safe are among the lowest paid. The pandemic is also shining a light on the inequalities of our economic and political systems. The economic separation between the small number of people with most of the wealth and those keeping us safe is large in the U.S. than it is in the rest of the world.

The pandemic is exposing the inadequacies in our healthcare system. Often touted as "world class" healthcare access and quality in the United States is based on economics. Yet fighting a pandemic effectively requires access to healthcare for everyone. Is this an issue that stirs your passion?

Minimum wage and compensation equity	Human dignity
Climate change	Voting
Incarceration	Clean and healthy water
Access to healthcare	LGBTQ
Quality and access to education	Other

Be sure to take a couple minutes to complete our [survey](#). You can find a link on our website's [home page](#). The first question asked which topics are of interest that you are willing to research. This is the list of potential topics:

Several have already responded. If you haven't completed our survey go to [RisenSurvey](#) now and take our survey. This will really help us figure out which topics are important to our participants and who is willing to do and share their research.

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Life Group Questions & Notes

Because the Kingdom of heaven is like this...the servant did not have enough to pay his debt...The servant fell on his knees before the king...The king forgave him the debt and let him go...You should have had mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you.

Matthew 18:23-33 (GNT)

NOTES FROM WORSHIP

QUESTIONS FOR LIFE GROUPS

1. Read Matthew 18:23-33. What do you take away from this story? Can you see examples in your own life where this story applies? How hard or easy is it for you to forgive someone's debt to you?
2. Read the article in this week's Circuit Rider, *Debt free*. Perhaps you can relate? In what ways? Did you remember Earth Day this year? Why or why not? What does Earth Day mean to you? Do you owe any debt to the earth?
3. How can the members of your group help you this week and on-going to help you to be more receptive to hearing and understanding the Word of God? Pray for each other to have the Holy Spirit bless you with more courage.

I have my own political views that come out of my sculpting and experiences. And my sculpting influences how I see the world. The same is true for each of you. Some say that politics shouldn't come into the church. I see their point. But I also realize that politics goes wherever people go. So if I want you all to get involved in church, I can't ask you to leave your politics at the door. Particularly during a time when you aren't coming through a door. A couple of clicks, or dial a number, and you're in church.

And I presume that we are all clinging to whatever helpful news we can find that may help us get through this crisis. And the news about inequities based on race and economics is heart-breaking. On the other hand, the polluted air that usually hangs over Los Angeles is dispersed. A reminder of what is possible for our planet. If we can work together.

Politics go wherever people go...

My hope is that each week we can hear from individuals who took the time to research topics that matter to them. Perhaps policy influencers and people personally affected by inequity. I'm looking for you all to do the recommending and inviting.

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Pastor Tommy

Welcome to the Asbury Community

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Flint, MI 48506



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CircuitRider@FlintAsbury.org

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.

A note from Connie ...

I Hope everyone is staying safe and only going out when absolutely have to. I will be stopping in the office here and there during the week to check messages and emails, but will be in on Fridays, should you need to call me for anything.

We are going into the 4 1/2 weeks of our stay at home quarantine, and it looks like our Governor has extended it till May 15th. Please keep wearing your masks/gloves when around the public, and when coming into the building/church office. We all have to keep each other safe.

If anyone has any questions, please send us an email at FlintAsburyUMC@gmail.com or call the church office 235-0016, and I will follow up with your concerns when in the office.

STAY AT HOME!! and EVERYONE BE SAFE!!