

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 3

May 3, 2020

Special points of interest:

*** All meetings have been cancelled until further notice.

*** A prayer of cooperation on page 3 ...

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

*** Thank you to the City of Flint Police Department on page 10 ...

Jubilee (Rejected and exalted)

The news articles are sprinkled here and there, amid all the other news about the pandemic. Just below the coverage that counts the number of new cases, the number of deaths, and job losses. Stories about the more vulnerable among us.



A writer takes notice of how a virus that doesn't check the background of a host before taking up residence is disproportionately attacking persons of color. Another writer covers persons without a home to provide them shelter-in-place, and persons closer to the bottom of the economic scale. And caught up in the middle of systemic inequities, we find the lesser covered stories. The messy stories.

There's a story in scripture about a time when Jesus returned to his hometown. The scene is the church in Nazareth, where Jesus grew up. Nazareth was one of those small, rural towns, located in the hills. It was like one of us who grew up in the northern peninsula of Michigan, returning home after spending years traveling through the cities of the lower peninsula. Everyone knew everyone.

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Jubilee (Rejected and Exalted) ...cont from page 1

Jesus grew up in Nazareth as the son of Joseph, the carpenter. While Mary was His biological mother, Joseph adopted Jesus after Mary got pregnant and gave birth while the couple was engaged. Likely a not-so-well-kept secret among the hometown folks.

Jesus had the honor of reading from scripture during the church service. All eyes were on Him as the townsfolk listened to find out if this homeboy's reading ability matched the rumors about His popularity as a healer and teacher. The crowd was impressed. His diction and pronunciation of the ancient text was flawless. "I heard he graduated from some Ivy-league school," one lady whispered to her husband.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed. Luke 4:18-19

Things couldn't be going better for the local hero until it didn't. The text that Jesus read was from a book of ancient prophecy that we now call Isaiah, after the name of the main characters. The

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

prophet Isaiah was famous among the ancestors of Jesus. It is said that God spoke directly through Isaiah to all people.

Part of the text that Jesus read said something about a time when prisoners are set free, the blind gain sight, and debts are forgiven. This prophecy connects to ancient laws dating back to a time when the ancestors fled from slavery in Egypt. The name we give this particular set of laws is *Jubilee*.

Pastor Jeremy of Court Street Church, says this about this idea of *Jubilee*:

Every fiftieth year, God said, you shall blow a ram's horn and announce the beginning of a year of Jubilee. In that year you shall rest. Don't plant your fields. Don't even plow. Don't buy and sell stocks. If your neighbor went into foreclosure and you bought his house, give him his house back. If you loaned somebody money and they've never managed to pay it back, cancel the debt. If somebody has fallen so low, they had to sell themselves into slavery, set them free. Release prisoners from prison.

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

Spend the year with your family. Forgive and show kindness and rest. This was God's commandment: every fifty years, push a giant reset button and let everybody start over. It's hard to imagine what that would look like. It was even hard for the Israelites.

The rabbis tell us that this commandment was so difficult that it was probably never obeyed. The teachers of the law talked about this as an aspirational commandment, not one that God actually intended for people to carry out.

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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?

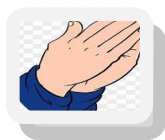
Jesus told this story to His followers after a conversation about forgiving a person that did or said something harmful. He told the story in response to the question, "But Jesus, how many times am I expected to forgive this person?"

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

Matthew 18:33

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.

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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



A prayer for cooperation

Free us, Lord, from our obsession with ourselves long enough to care for others; to be so concerned about the well-being of the human community that we don't have to worry about our place, our church, our class, our values, our vested interests. Help us to know the joy and freedom of putting all our trust in you. Amen. ¹

¹ Walter Brueggemann. Five Talents' Response to the Coronavirus. © March 26, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://fivetalents.org/blog/2020/3/26/five-talents-response-to-the-coronavirus>

Coming up this week

May 4	Mon	
May 5	Tues	10am-2pm Water / Food Distribution
May 6	Wed	No Pastor Book Club Until further notice
May 7	Thu	
May 8	Fri	
May 9	Sat	
May 10	Sun	



JOIN WORSHIP ONLINE

SUNDAY, MAY 3RD, 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

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 Revelations. Last week, several of us got online using Zoom to begin our discussions. This coming Wednesday, and until further notice, we will



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-

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.

cation for this focus is the recognition that, while COVID-19 does not check credentials before taking residence in a new host, systematic injustice means that some are more at risk than others. The reality is that racial disparities in health care exists in our state and nation.

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

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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.

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 Staff

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

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.

Risen ...*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

Debt-Free (What we owe the planet) ...cont. from page 2

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.

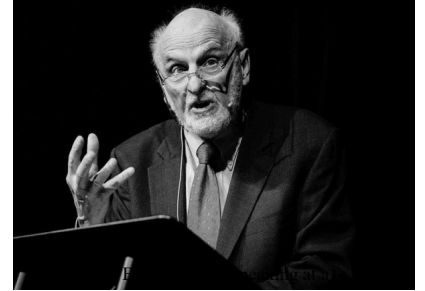
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Humans perfected the art of war until it became possible to annihilate staggering numbers of enemies. And now we spend energy and resources trying to keep these destructive tools out of the hands of people who might be willing to use them indiscriminately. These weapons are designed to destroy and capable of destroying all of humankind.

Warfare divides people into warring factions driven by fear, fueling hatred. We look for the differences that divide us and use them to further fuel our anxiety and disdain. I suspect that without either hate or fear, it may be impossible to take another person's life. But the human brains are amazingly creative at justifying our self-serving interests.



Dr. Walter Brueggemann speaking at a conference

But there is another threat that doesn't differentiate between national borders or ancestral background. Over the past several months, one strand of this common enemy, COVID-19, has killed more people than major wars. And the largest toll within the nation with the most powerful military of all. Our missiles are ineffective, along with most weapons utilized to wage war on other humans.

So what is our best offense against this invisible enemy that defies all the rules of traditional warfare? Cooperation. Our health experts are at their best when they cooperate with health experts from around the world. Unfortunately, our political leaders were elected because they claim to be tougher on human enemies. And their credentials offer evidence that they win fights against other humans. But virus-slaying is not listed on the resumes of our leaders. And they are just as vulnerable as the rest of us if the virus finds a home within them.

One of my favorite writers, particularly when it comes to the topics of warfare, the domination of enemies, and other subjects that touch on the machinery of war, is Walter Brueggemann. In a recent appeal from a nonprofit, Brueggemann shared these thoughts about cooperation:

The usual way of being in the world is anxiety, of being pressed and harried and worried, and that in turn leads to a stance of defensiveness and fear and a determination to keep what we have. Anxiety that believes that we best get what we can and keep what we got. Characteristically, Jesus asks a question which does not require an answer because it's so obvious: which of you, by being anxious, has ever added an inch to your lives? (Matthew 6:33).¹

I suspect that it may be anxiety, and a few other pressures, that motivated a group of people carrying weapons to enter our State Capital building. Their supposed reason was a show of disagreement with policies put in place to save lives. I also support the right for each of us to have a voice, and for us to collectively express our views when we feel that policies are harmful. But the irony can't be ignored.

I discovered more insights from this man who dedicated his life to faithfully interpreting what scripture has to say to help us the rest of us be faithful. In this transcript, we read about prophets who imagined a new economy, "organized around a love of neighbor and that is committed to the viability of widows, orphans, and immigrants. Widows, orphans, and immigrants are people who in the ancient world did not have advocates who were empowered by the totalize in a patriarchal society. So it becomes a test case for the economy."²

Brueggemann calls on the faithful to understand and teach that the church was never intended to be in the charity business. Instead, the church is in the justice business.

In the meanwhile, we realize that there are a lot of people in need. Our inability to cooperate against this invisible enemy is creating demand beyond our ability to respond in the short term. So, as the church, we answer the best we can. But we also look for opportunities to advocate for justice.

If you haven't completed our survey go to [Risen Survey](#) 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](#).

Pastor Tommy

Life Group Questions & Notes

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed and announce that the time has come when the Lord will save his people... This passage of scripture has come true today, as you heard it being read.

Luke 4:16-21 (GNT)

NOTES FROM WORSHIP

QUESTIONS FOR LIFE GROUPS

1. Read Luke 4:16-21. What do you take away from this story? If you can, read this text in more than one translation. Any differences that strike your curiosity? In what ways was this prophecy from Isaiah fulfilled by Jesus? What about today?
2. Read the article in this week's Circuit Rider, *Jubilee*. Do the ideas presented in this article change how you read the scripture for this week? How might we celebrate Jubilee today? What gets in the way? Why do you think that God gave us this idea of Jubilee?
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.

How would it even work? They said. It's just too much to figure out. For thousands of years, it remained an aspiration. For thousands of years, nobody actually had the audacity to declare a year of Jubilee.¹

But, Jesus said that Jubilee is right here, right now, as sure as He is standing there. And, *Jubilee* is key to understanding the identity of Jesus, who embodied *Jubilee*. But how can this be possible? After all, *Jubilee* never really happened. It was a great idea that God gave to His ancestors. But not one of the ideas that was ever really followed. *Jubilee* was more of a concept. More like an idea that isn't really possible. So how can Jesus and *Jubilee* be one and the same?

The passage of scripture has come true today, as you heard it being read.

Luke 4:21

Perhaps they didn't reject Jesus. After all, wasn't He the adopted son of the carpenter Joseph? Wasn't Mary His mother? Wasn't He the kid that got all A's and went on to college and then seminary? Jesus may think that *Jubilee* is long overdue, but He will soon learn that it's not practical. They didn't reject Jesus, just this idea that just because He arrived, so did *Jubilee*. But they still wanted to throw Jesus off a cliff.

Besides, who hasn't suffered from rejection at one time or another? The sting of rejection can leave a venom within us that may fester for years. But when we are

rejected by the people who should know us best, the poison of rejection is particularly devastating. After all, they know us best, don't they?

And for those who may be a bit more different, rejection can become routine. Which is bad enough, but what happens during a time when we need each other? What if Jesus went into the office of one of the persons making up the angry mob that day to get help? Would they reject Him again?

What if a person who rejects the idea that a person's gender is not the same as their physical body suggests is faced with a living example of the concept they rejected? And what if this person holds onto deeply-seated beliefs that the world created by God simply can't work this way? Will they reject the person in front of them, possibly denying to help at all? Even if their job is to offer their help?

Or does a crisis bring us closer together? Can the COVID-19 pandemic be a time when we can put our own biases and insecurities aside and focus on how to best get through this challenging time together?

One idea behind *Jubilee* is to recognize that the world gets messy. Things go haywire. People find themselves in difficult, if not impossible, circumstances. And what they need least of all is rejection. What they need, most of all is to be free from whatever created their conditions. And to be loved because they are who they are. A child of God.

I invited several persons to respond to a survey on potential topics. A few met 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. This week, Katelyn and I plan to share what we learned about an easily forgotten group of people amid this pandemic. LGBTQ youth.

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Pastor Tommy

¹ The Reverend Jeremy Peters, Sr. Pastor, Court Street United Methodist Church. © 2020.

Welcome to the Asbury Community

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Flint, MI 48506



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CircuitRider@FlintAsbury.org

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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.

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 5 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. **Lets see what happens after the 15th...**

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.

EVERYONE STAY SAFE!!



A BIG thank you to Sgt. Mike Holland with the City of Flint Police for delivering masks and gloves to Kevin Croom. Much needed and much appreciated!

THANK YOU CITY OF FLINT POLICE!