

ASBURY CIRCUIT RIDER

Favorites (What was God thinking?¹)

Volume 2 Issue 12

September 12, 2021



Afghan soldiers walk through a destroyed building reportedly linked to Osama bin Laden, then the leader of al-Qaeda, in 2002 on the outskirts of Kandahar, Afghanistan. (Apichart We-

world is news that travels fast. Yet, the loss of life and ongoing suffering of first-responders and grieving families continues.

Another 20-year milestone was the ending of the War in Afghanistan. A war that began as retaliation and escalated as a preventive measure. U.S. involvement in Afghanistan political affairs began after airstrikes against a group known as Al-Qaeda and the Taliban, which offered safe-sanctuary for Osama bin Laden's band of extremists.

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Please continue to wear your masks when in the building. If you don't have one, let us know we will provide one for you.



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This week we remember the events of September 11 that took place 20 years ago. Now known simply as 9/11, it was one of those

days where most of us knew where we were and what we were doing when we heard the news. Planes flying into the tallest building in the

Thirsty¹ (Confusing wells with water)



South Vietnamese civilians try to scale the 14-foot wall of the US Embassy in Saigon, hoping to reach evacuation helicopters as the last Americans departed from Vietnam on April 29, 1975 -- AP

Despite the resurgence of infections of COVID, the pandemic is not the lead news story on most days. So in some ways, the pandemic is a fill-in for a slow news

day, which comes a lot less than I prefer.

The chaotic departure of over 100 Thousand people as the last U.S. soldiers

departed Afghanistan dominated the headlines for most of the last week of August. That is until Hurricane Ida hit the southern coast. Followed by flooding in the subways and streets of New York City.

In his closing comments Thursday night, David Muir noted that the Labor Day weekend would be void of the usual backyard barbecue for thousands of people displaced from their homes. The suffering of others is difficult to set aside, even during times of celebration.

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Thirsty¹ (Confusing wells with water) ..cont from page 1

In all of these cases, recovery takes decades, and the impact lasts for generations. And most of us observe, empathize, and pray from a safe distance. So for most of us, this Labor Day weekend is not that different from other Monday Holidays. If we're fortunate enough to have the day off, we may work on home projects, attend a parade, and a lot of us will light a barbecue.

As we begin episode one of our new series, *Holy envy*, it is essential to point out how current events connect with our subject matter and scripture. First, a little background on how Labor Day became a holiday unique to the United States.

As the name implies, Labor Day celebrates work. More specifically, this holiday focuses on the often uncelebrated, sometimes back-breaking work of those who build and keep our economy going. Historically, labor and immigration go hand-in-hand when finding workers willing and able to do jobs that require long hours and low wages. Whatever the reasons that bring strangers to this country, survival usually involves working, whether on or off the grid.

In a *New York Times* article, Karen Zraick reminds us that by the latter part of the 19th century, many laborers commonly worked 12-hour days with no Sabbath Day off. In addition, work conditions were often harsh, with little concern for the safety of workers. And child labor was common.²

Bringing workers together to stand up against oppressive work practices took courage, and success required capturing public sentiment. The first Labor Day parade took place in 1882 when approximately 10,000 workers marched from New York's City Hall to an uptown park where they held a picnic. Seen more as a "strike" than a celebration by employers, the workers took a significant risk that they might lose their job. Particularly since many of the participants carried signs demanding changes that included 8-hour workdays and higher wages.



Labor Day parade on Main Street in Buffalo in 1900...Library of Congress

President Grover Cleveland officially named the first Monday in September as an official U.S. Holiday in 1894. Since the new law was signed during a period of work disruption initiated by employees of Pullman Corporation in Chicago, this was seen as a political maneuver to appease the public. Nevertheless, the September date was

chosen over May 1st, commonly called International Workers Day, when other countries celebrate working and workers.

Work in the United States is often the great equalizer in bringing diverse groups of people together to get something done. And the history of religious diversity in our country is a part of the history of work.

In her book, *Holy Envy*, Barbara Brown Taylor writes that the first Muslim to come to the new land was Estevancio of Azamor. A guide initially from Morocco, he landed in Florida with an expedition from Spain in 1528. Thousands more soon followed. By some estimates, one-third of Africans brought to this country as slaves were Muslim. They were later joined by Muslims from Europe, the Middle East, and India.

According to Wikipedia, the first mosque appeared in Michigan in 1926 in Highland Park, Michigan. The Dearborn Mosque, which appeared in 1937, claims to be the 2nd mosque built in the United States. However, according to the Harvard University Pluralism Project, Muslims started to build mosques in Maine, North Dakota, Michigan, and Indiana as early as 1915. Before building Mosques, prayer took place in private homes or rented public spaces, which eventually grew into Islamic associations.

In Our Prayers

Kevin Croom
 Sylvia Pittman
 Shirley Craig
 Richard Oram



FRIENDS AND LOVED ONES WHO ARE HOMEBOUND OR IN NURSING CARE

Nancy Elston Elaine Lamoreaux
 Norma Buzzard Mary Nations

Coming up this week

PASTOR BOOK CLUB NEWS:

Pastor Book Club is still meeting via Zoom. Please call the Church Office for more info 810-235-0016 as it changes.

Meanwhile, as a lot of you are already aware, sharp increases in new infections of COVID are pushing us back into isolation. While our regular attendees are vaccinated, we realize that a large number of persons are not vaccinated.

Therefore, we reinstated our policy to require masks in our building for all persons when not eating or drinking. If you don't have a mask, we can provide one for you, just ask the office.

Thank you and everyone stay safe!

Meet Up & Eat Up

Serving Breakfast from
 8:30am-9:30am

AND

Serving Lunch from
 12Noon-1pm

Monday through Friday

STOP BY—BRING YOUR FAMILIES!!!!
 (Asbury UMC 1653 Davison Rd)

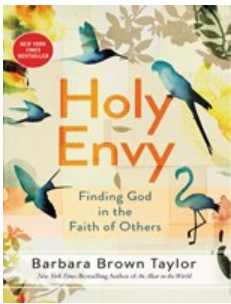
- | | | | |
|---------|------|-----------------|--|
| Sept 13 | Mon | 6:00pm | Worship Team Meeting |
| Sept 14 | Tues | 10:00am-12:30pm | Food/Water Distribution |
| Sept 15 | Wed | 12Noon | Pastor Book Club |
| Sept 16 | Thu | | |
| Sept 17 | Fri | | |
| Sept 18 | Sat | 12Noon | Food Not Bombs |
| Sept 19 | Sun | 10:30am | New Beginnings
Contemporary Worship |

(We are live on [Facebook](#) and our newly launched [YouTube channel](#). You can find these links along with more information about us on our website at [FlintAsbury.org](#).)

Asbury Worship Series Holy Envy



Book Club News



We finished reading and discussing Barbara Brown Taylor's book, *Learning to walk in the dark*, and we're ready to jump into Barbara's recent book. Barbara shares that she wrote *Holy Envy* for a host of reasons.

In an article found in Publishers Weekly, she said that "What I have noticed is how quickly I use traditions to affirm my choices and my way of life." How true her insight maybe for the rest of us!

The way we view the world is a hand-me-down. And like a pair of pants our older brother outgrew, we wear our religious beliefs proudly without noticing that the inseams are a little short.

There are factions of my worldview, Christianity, that still argue that biological

Leadership in Worship & Service

Tony, Mirium	Welcome Team
Anthony, Jim	Ushers
Jonathon, Terrance	Production Team
Miriam	Children
Cyndi	Worship Leader
Christine & Norma	Cafe

Asbury Staff

Rev. Dr. Tommy McDaniel	Pastor & Exec Dir
Connie Portillo	Office Manager
Sylvia Pittman	Empowerment Arts
Jim Craig	Board & Leadership Chair
Kevin Croom	Exec Chef & Dir Opers

September is the traditional month for back-to-school. The school supplies and clothes sales began a couple of months ago in anticipation of a rush to dress and equip children for the occasion. So it's an excellent time to stock up on office supplies even if school never ended while the days were longer and hotter.

I remember an often used ice-breaker from the decades when I attended school was to answer the question, "What I did during my summer vacation?" Of course, I'm sure our an-

evolution is not real. The myth that this view accepts as the basis for their assertions is based on a theory of creation handed down through generations when a lot less was known about the natural world.

Differing worldviews should present us with exciting learning opportunities and often do. However, the historical aggression of at least two of the more pervasive religions causes us to view our differences with suspicion. Killing innocent people because of a religious belief is an act of cowardice and misinformed aggression.

At least, this is how I interpret what my own worldview tells me about relating to persons who view the world differently than I do. Yet, Christianity is one of the religions that are most guilty of acts of aggression and violence. During the January 6 terrorist attack on our nation's capital, Christian symbols stood out clearly, along with red caps and the name of their chosen demigod. Terrorism is incompatible with loving others.

Barbara Brown Taylor left parish ministry to teach others about some of the different ways that our neighbors experience God. And in her book, she shares some of her most agonizing and sometimes embarrassing moments.

Racism, climate change, and attacks on our democracy from within demand our attention as we craft a new normal together. Making sure that we vote in every election is

Matt DePalma	Farms Manager
Chris Freeman	South Campus Bldg Mgr
Israel Unger	Finance Director
Kim Sims	Connections Suprv
Terrance Williams	Arts Center Mgr
Katelin Maylum	Sr Mgr Local Food

swer varies greatly depending on the community where you live and the socioeconomics of your family. Nevertheless, reflection is a skill that children deserve to learn.

So it seems appropriate for me to ask a similar question to anyone who chooses to tune in to our September series at Asbury. My version goes like this — "Where have your beliefs taken you during your time away?" Admittedly, this question is

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more critical than ever. So is diligent oversight of proposed legislation that may impact our ability to vote and changes in voting districts.

Meanwhile, sharp increases in new infections of COVID are pushing us back into isolation. While our regular attenders are vaccinated, we realize that a large number of persons are not vaccinated. Therefore, we reinstated our policy to require masks in our building for all persons when not eating or drinking.

We strongly urge all persons to get vaccinated as soon as practical unless advised by your doctor. Avoid news sources that promote baseless claims and pay closer attention to the experts we depend on to keep us safe.

We each make our own arrangements for lunch at this point. However, we look forward to returning to pot-luck lunches when infection rates fall. We anticipate this happening as the number of vaccinations reaches herd immunity levels, and the CDC relaxes precautionary measures.

If you prefer to avoid groups or live too far away I encourage you to [join us online](#) for our Wednesday gatherings. Alternatively, you can call in by phone, be heard, and hear what others say by calling (929) 436-2866 -- enter the meeting ID, 282 039 5568#.

We are a diverse group, and we are delighted when new persons join us. I hope that you will join in on our discussion.

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

¹ [Barbara Brown Taylor](#), *Holy Envy: Finding God in the Faith of Others*. Harper One, 2019.



Holy Envy ... *Asbury Worship Series*

loaded with ambiguity and begs for more clarity. Nevertheless, this is what makes holy envy an excellent topic for a series.

I borrowed our series title from author, teacher, preacher, and spokesperson for the religiously curious, Barbara Brown Taylor. Her book, *Holy Envy*, provides the background for much of our content. Barbara writes from her personal struggles with answering our essay question.

Barbara credits the phrase “holy envy” to a former Dean of Harvard Divinity School named Krister Stendahl. In writing about the topics of other religions, Dr. Stendahl suggests that we need to allow room for holy envy when we try to understand other religions. Another way to think about holy envy is to consider how our own beliefs might be richly informed by the beliefs and practices of others.

Holy envy may seem more like an affront than a practice to admire when we are heavily invested in a particular set of beliefs. Worse, if someone else points it out to us, we worry that our friend may be tempted to turn away from shared beliefs searching for greener pastures. Never mind that Christianity is rare in our insistence that everyone should believe what we believe.

The greater temptation is participating in a favorite pastime that I call “creating God in our own image.” In this exercise, we gravitate towards beliefs and rituals that reinforce and agree with our lifestyle. Christians pick and choose particular translations and specific verses to support our choices and condemn the choices of others.

We punctuate our argument with a claim of biblical inerrancy. Our claims quickly become more than a claim that our holy scriptures are God’s Word and thus universally true. In reality, we claim that the translation from the original manuscript (which we no longer have access to) accurately reflects the mind of God. Moreover, we argue that our interpretation of what God means by the text is the correct one.

How arrogant!

Furthermore, we often pick and choose specific laws listed from scripture that we lifted from the beliefs that Christianity grew out of that fit our attitudes and opinions. All the while ignoring other laws so we can order bacon or ham with our eggs. And we charge interest on loans to our friends and justify laws that allow for excessive interest rates on loans to persons who need them the worse. We call this smart business. There are too many examples to list them all.

It is no wonder that younger generations equate Christianity with hypocrisy. The same charge that Jesus levied against the religious experts of His generation for similar reasons.

In *Holy Envy*, we take a look at just a few of the beliefs and practices of other worldviews that may be worthy of envy. But, more importantly, we start with the strong likelihood that we don’t have all the answers. Then we hope to open space to view others with a bit more admiration and a lot less fear and worry.

Our Book Club plans to follow along in Barbara’s book during our series if you want deeper discussions on our weekly themes. We have a few books available, or you can check with the library or order your own copy from several sources.

The latest variants of COVID are more contagious. As a result, there is a resurgence of new infections among the unvaccinated. It’s time to come out of whatever fears or biases keep you from being a part of the solution. Get vaccinated!

I pray that you will join us each Sunday morning at 10:30 am. We share our weekly explores live on our [YouTube channel](#). We go live at 10:30 am. You can find these links along with more information about us, or join our live broadcast on our [website](#) at FlintAsbury.org.

Pastor Tommy

¹ Barbara Brown Taylor. *Holy Envy: Finding God in the Faith of Others*. Harper One, 2019.

Favorites (What was God thinking?¹) ... *cont. from pg 1*

It's safe to say that most Muslims are disgusted by the use of violence against innocent civilians in the name of their religion. Of course, this, by itself, does not guarantee our safety. But Claire Parker, writing in the *Washington Post*, reports that "Experts largely agree that both al-Qaeda and the Islamic State lack the strength to pose a serious threat to the U.S. homeland."

Frankly, the more significant threat to our security for the past few years has been domestic terrorism. The presence of religious symbols during the attack on our nations' capital should be a wake-up call. Extremism blamed on God is a threat, no matter which religious group claims exclusive access to divine insight.

The only persistent favoritism shown by God in the scriptures that we Christians count on is towards the poor and marginalized. But no one is left out of the breadth of God's love and grace. Nevertheless, violence towards others indeed violates any and all understandings of divine will. This is true for any exclusive claims to God's favor.

Prophets are often in the unenviable position of pointing these truths out. And Jesus wasn't exempt from the angry responses from people claiming divine favoritism when they are called out for making such claims.

It's a familiar story. A celebrity comes home to visit, and the townspeople look forward to a front-row seat at their performance. Expectations rise with a familiar chorus and demand on the homeboy to "Sing that song that made you famous."

The reputation of Jesus spanned the gap between the Synagog and

the streets. He was declared a prophet by a growing fan base due to both His words and His actions. When Jesus speaks, so the story goes, wisdom gushes out in powerful illustrations. His fame spread throughout the land. And now He was at His home church in front of the people who knew Him as a child.



There was undoubtedly a hush through the crowd as Jesus was handed a scroll. His presence would be honored by reading to the group. This skill by itself was rare among His people. But Jesus was always unique, smart enough to go away to school. And now He is a Rabbi growing in fame. What an honor it was for His parents, Mary and Joseph.

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me," He begins. Reading the words of one of Israel's most revered prophets, Isaiah, is an appropriate choice. And indeed, not that long ago, the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus as He emerged from the baptismal waters of the Jordan River. This same Spirit protected and strengthened Him over the next forty days and nights while Jesus wandered through the wilderness.

Jesus continues, "God has chosen me to bring good news to the poor." Of course, this makes perfect sense. Throughout history, God has set aside men and women to challenge oppressive systems on behalf of the poor.

"God has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed," He continues. This all makes sense. The reputation of Jesus as a prophet and teacher is well deserved.

Jesus finishes reading with the announcement made by Isaiah centuries before. "The time has come when the Lord will save his people." Other translations may end with a phrase like "the year of the Lord's favor," but the idea is similar. God is about to do something huge.

Luke's version of this story takes some liberties with the actual text from Isaiah. We don't know if Jesus recited the text as He wanted it heard or if Luke made his own edits. Still, the story differs somewhat from the version of Isaiah that you and I might read. Nevertheless, there is at least a metaphorical connection with the divine instructions for a jubilee.

Jubilee is a concept of communal grace that mirrors divine grace. It recognizes that bad things happen, we make questionable decisions, and our circumstances deteriorate. So jubilee offers safe-guards to make sure that our downfall isn't permanent. It includes debt-forgiveness and financial restoration, somewhat like an ancient form of unemployment assistance boosted by the CARES act or a reentry program after incarceration.

We don't know the minds of those in attendance other than the brief observation offered by the storyteller. Luke writes that "They were all impressed with Him and marveled at the eloquent words that he spoke."

Six Hindu men from India marched in the annual July 4th parade in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1851. They were employees of the East India Marine Society. The first Hindu Temple appeared in San Francisco in 1906 by the Vedanta Society. Based on a particular Hindu philosophy, this group was first organized in the United States by Swami Vivekananda, who spent two years speaking at numerous events around the country. His 1893 address at the first World Parliament of Religions in Chicago was so popular that he became a favorite guest speaker. This kept him in this country for a couple of years beyond his original plans.

It's believed that Buddhists began showing up during the mid-1800s working in various capacities as miners, loggers, fishermen, farmers, and construction workers. By 1860, ten percent of Californians were of Chinese descent. Montana experienced similar growth. Some of the earliest Buddhist temples appeared in the late 19th century.

The first Jewish Synagogue in the United States was constructed in New York during the 17th century, a decade after 23 Sephardic Jews arrived in New Amsterdam from Brazil in 1654. By 1820, the largest Jewish community in the United States was found in South Carolina, likely due to a 1790 law that gave Jewish men the right to vote and hold office.

Not all immigrants were welcomed with open arms. For example, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1862 stopped most immigration from China. The Immigration Act of 1917 added exclusions for persons from India, the Middle East, and other Asian countries. A national-origins quota was made into law by the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924, which reduced the number of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe to "preserve the ideal of American homogeneity." Some of the laws were repealed in 1943 and 1952, with more extensive revisions adopted with the Immigration Act of 1965.

A professor of world religions, Barbara Brown Taylor, recalled a comment from one student who said, "If you really are a Christian, then you are going to help us see what is wrong with these other religions?" If this wasn't her aim, the young man planned to drop her class. In the mind of this student, being Christian required absolute loyalty to the truths he believed and defending them against any and all rivals. So he dropped her class after the first session.

I'm wondering if her student plans to celebrate Labor Day this year? If so, will his celebration be limited to workers who attend his church?

This brings me back to the end of the 20-year war in Afghanistan. Sadly, If I were writing this article during my senior year of college, my illustration might be the ending of the Vietnam War. The pictures of thousands of people trying to hitch a ride to the United States before the last U.S. Soldier left look familiar.

The Honorable Phan Quan Tue writing last month in the *Washington Post*, shares his painful memories of desperation as he recalled his family of four, including his pregnant wife and two small children sitting on the floor of a C-130. The former Immigration Judge described the scene as "A moment of collective humiliation, to have to leave one's country under these circumstances. The irony was that we knew we were being saved by the very same foreign government that did not stand behind its commitment to its allies in South Vietnam."³

After twenty-one years, the presence of U.S. Troops in Vietnam was finally coming to an end. I remember it well because military withdrawal began a couple years earlier and kept me from being drafted and potentially serving in Vietnam as my brother did a few years before. It was a war that the U.S. couldn't win. Despite the overwhelming differences in the size and might of the two enemies, the North Vietnamese were well supported by our larger enemies. This is one of many striking similarities to the circumstances surrounding our 20-year involvement in Afghanistan.

Life groups questions & notes:

There were many widows in Israel during the time of Elijah, when there was no rain for three and a half years and a severe famine spread throughout the whole land. Yet Elijah was not sent to anyone in Israel, but only to a widow living in Zarephath in the territory of Sidon.

Luke 4:25-26 (GNT)

NOTES FROM WORSHIP

QUESTIONS FOR LIFE GROUPS

1. Read Luke 4:14-30. As this story begins knowledge of Jesus is spreading. Place yourself in the Nazareth Synagogue. How might the people in His hometown see and hear Jesus differently than people who as a teacher? What impressed the crowds? At what point did the crowd's attitude change towards Jesus? Why?
2. Read the article in this week's Circuit Rider, *Favorites*. Do you believe that God has favorites? Who are they? Why do you believe that God favors them? Where do you place yourself in this picture? Who are God's favorites today? How does God's bias toward particular people play out in the world outside the United States? Does God favor our nation over others? Why or why not?
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.

“Feed Flint”



“Feed Flint”



A meal goes a long way for a senior living alone, a family struggling to make ends meet, or a child fearful of empty shelves at home. But for the residents of Flint who carry the effects of lead-tainted water, nutrition is critical. Feed Flint provides locally grown, chemical-free, fresh produce to residents living in and around Flint. And we're hoping that you can help us provide 10,000 meals this summer.

Feed Flint includes takeout meals, produce boxes with recipes, and home deliveries as part of our work to guide and support families in moving to sustainable abundance. The reality is that Michigan's food insecurity levels got worse during the COVID-19 pandemic, and this summer's recovery is leaving behind those at the most risk of having to miss meals.

Flint families continue to struggle with the ongoing effects of the water crisis.

We're bringing together the resources of the Asbury Community Development Corporation. This includes Asbury Farms, the South Flint Soup Kitchen, the Asbury Community Help Center, multiple food pantries, and our Sizzling Culture Mobile Food Trailer. Our plan is to care for our neighbors when they need it most. We accept all people as they are, and our doors are always open to anyone.

Asbury Farms provides locally grown produce used to create fabulous and nutritious meals. Our seed-to-table approach is community-based. This not only helps families make it through emergencies and crises. We help move families towards sustainable abundance.

Our Sizzling Culture program provides jobs and new skills to our city's youth. This includes year-round employment. Our staff and most of our volunteers come from the neighborhoods we support. We call this sustainable abundance because families move from need-based on scarcity to enough based on community-generated abundance.

Our work is also about food and justice. Our vision is a revitalized community where every resident can use their talents and passions for the common good, where children grow into active citizens. And all residents can enjoy safety, good health, and a culture that fosters life-long learning and satisfying lives. This summer, help us address food insecurity and strengthen Flint's budding local food system by supporting the Feed Flint campaign. Thank you for taking the time to see what we're doing and considering how you can help.

**Donate to our Feed Flint Campaign by visiting:
flintasbury.org/feed-flint-donate**



LET'S HELP THOSE IN NEED!

September South Flint Soup Kitchen Food Giveaways

**SEPTEMBER 8TH & 29TH
11AM-NOON BOTH DAYS**

**South Flint Soup Kitchen
3410 Fenton Road (Located three blocks north of
Atherton Road) Flint, MI 48507**

Questions??? Call 810-239-3427

No appointment necessary!



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- TRY OUR WEEKLY VEGGIE BOX FOR \$10.00 -

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Select what goes in your box from each week's harvest. Get \$5 off your next order when you fill your box with \$15 of produce.

WANT US TO DECIDE FOR YOU?

Choose Veggie Box Subscription and we will fill your order with a variety of each week's harvest. Pay when you pick up your box. **A \$15 VALUE FOR \$10.**

*** CONVENIENT PICKUP AT ASBURY OR AT THE SOUTH FLINT SOUP KITCHEN ***

Presumably, the honor of reading from the holy scrolls comes with the privilege of adding commentary. Not unlike a guest preacher who both reads from his bible and shares stories, embellishes, and connects the Word of God with everyday living.

Every preacher eventually experiences a sermon that goes downhill after a promising start. A message that isn't well-received by the crowd. This happens a lot to preachers who dare to talk about issues of justice or politics.

Churches tend to be gatherings of like-minded people. While they may not all vote for the same candidate, they find enough common ground to spend an hour each week together. And they expect the preacher to cater to their expectations of God while challenging them to be more like the people they think God wants them to be.

The commonality centers on a particular view of the world. And this worldview is handed down from prior generations. While worldviews are refined by each generation, much of the built-in bias remains.

In the case of these hometown parishioners listening to Jesus two thousand years ago, they undoubtedly knew that they were descendants of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and so on. People who were set apart by the God of creation and called the people of God. This made them a bit more unique in their eyes than the church down the street. And significantly more special than the church thousands of miles away who speak a different language and obviously worship another God.

Perhaps, in their mind, they never considered their view as presumptuous of divine favoritism. Instead, the hometown folks simply expected that God surely appreciates their efforts to carry out divine will. After all, didn't they speak out in protest against laws that they believed were contrary to scripture?

And then the wheels start to wobble as Jesus takes them back to two familiar stories. One story involved assistance to a widow offered by God through the Prophet Elijah. The rub is that the widow in this story was a foreigner. She wasn't one of them. They never considered this particular detail.

When the people in the synagogue heard this, they were filled with anger. Luke 4:28

But Jesus used this story to illustrate that God didn't send Elijah, one of Israel's most famous prophets, to one of his own. Instead, God was intentional in sending Elijah outside the neighborhood and to another country.

The wheel-wobble intensifies with Jesus' 2nd story about Naaman, an enemy military leader. This general owned a slave woman captured in one of his army's attacks against the ancestors of the crowds holding on to every word. Naaman had a terrible skin disease. He followed the advice of his Israelite slave and was healed by Elisha — another prophet familiar to the folks in the pews.

Jesus turned the focus of these well-known stories away from God's favor towards the hometown crowd. Instead, God frequently chooses to show favoritism to persons living outside the circle we draw around us. Often to people that disagree with us.

And with this emphasis, the wheels come completely off.

And with this emphasis, the wheels come completely off.

The story ends with the people turning on Jesus. Their attitude quickly turned from admiration to contempt. Never mind that Jesus did not directly criticize them nor defend God's decision to show divine favoritism to people with entirely different views.

But it was clear that Jesus wasn't there to perform for or even impress the hometown crowd. Instead, his divine mission was spelled out in the text He shared. Good news for the poor, freedom from bondage and oppression, and the recovery of sight.

The list of strategic initiatives that Jesus listed did not include condemnation of persons who disagreed with Him or His role in salvation. Nor did Jesus list a particular community or nation as chosen over the rest. Instead, he simply spelled out that God so loved the world that God chose to live among people.

God did this to save the world and not condemn it.

When Mary was pregnant with Jesus, she sang a familiar song handed down from ancient times. The lyrics speak to God's track record of scattering the proud with all their plans, bringing down the powerful, lifting up the lowly, filling the hungry, and sending the rich away empty. Perhaps this song continued on repeat somewhere in the depths of Jesus' head.

If God shows favoritism, it has little to do with our confidence that we know the mind of God. More likely, God looks for us to listen intently to each other's hopes, dreams, and beliefs. Listen not to correct and certainly not to condemn. Instead, listen to understand as much as speaking to be understood.

May it be so. May you and I recognize that God favors the weaker, the less able, and the underdog over the certain, the confident, and the privileged. And may we accept God's will in the same way that a child hears his mother's lullaby.

Our series this month is called **Holy Envy** and this is episode two. Join us each Sunday as we navigate life's challenges using the Word of God as our guidepost. And recognizing that none of us have a monopoly on knowing the mind of God. So we're better when we work together.

This month we look for God in the faith of others. In doing so, we expect to experience holy envy from time to time. We anticipate once in a while wondering whether the water might be a bit sweeter coming out of our neighbor's well. Plan to join us.

We have a new button on the homepage of our **website** - **Click here to watch**. This button takes you to a viewer to allow you to join live or watch later in the week. We're also live on our newly launched **YouTube channel**. You can find these links along with more information about us on our website at **FlintAsbury.org**.

A reminder that we publish this newsletter that we call the *Circuit Rider* each week. You can request this publication by email. Send a request to **connect@FlintAsbury.org** or let us know when you send a message through our **website**. We post an archive of past editions on our website under the tab, Connect - choose **Newsletters**.

That same year, the judge and his young family would find a mixed bag of hospitality and hostility towards their presence. Phan Quan Tue initially worked in numerous low-paying jobs. But he eventually attended law school, served as an immigration attorney, and failed in his bid for election to the U.S. House of Representatives as a Republican candidate in 2014. The sources I found on Phan Quan Tue only stated that he "moved" to the United States without mentioning the circumstances of his family's mode of transportation and status as refugees.

Barbara Brown Taylor offers this warning to her students of Religion 101 that is just as important to you and me. She writes that "Religious illiteracy is a luxury they can no longer afford."

As a student of the historical Jesus of Nazareth, the parallels between 1st Century Palestine and the present never ceases to amaze me. And as a Christian who believes that Jesus is also God living among people, His teachings mean much more to me than the wisdom that I find in thousands of other sources.

Nevertheless, I appreciate Barbara's distinction between the metaphors of living water and the well. I know and appreciate the nuances of the well I depend on, and I've come to rely on drawing enough nourishment with each pump of the handle.

But I've also learned the importance of respecting that more people know a different well as their source of living water than

know the well I count on. So navigating between my calling to share my own experiences with Jesus and God's insistent that I treat each person I meet as crucial to God is challenging at times.

One of my favorite stories about Jesus occurred when He was traveling among foreigners. Stopping at a village well in Samaria, a woman comes to the well to draw water. The woman is puzzled when Jesus asks her to share her water. People from the place where Jesus came from didn't spend time with Samaritans. Moreover, a Jewish man would never speak to a strange woman.

Those who drink this water
will get thirsty again, but
those who drink the water
that I will give them will never
be thirsty again.

John 4:13-14

Jesus tells the woman about water that gives life to the thirsty. "Give me some," the woman responds, perhaps with a bit of attitude and disbelief.

Most of us Christians interpret this story as an example of effective evangelism. We emphasize that the only well where this living water can be found is the well we know. But Jesus was in Samaria and assured the woman that living water can be found wherever we happen to be at the time.

Perhaps we sometimes confuse the water with the well.

In this month's series, *Holy Envy*, we look for God in the faith of others. In doing so, we expect to experience holy envy from time to time. That is, we anticipate once in a while wondering whether the water might be a bit sweeter coming out of our neighbor's well. I anticipate that the outcome will be a greater understanding and knowledge of our own well. Plan to join us.

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Pastor Tommy

¹ Much of the content of this series is based on Barbara Brown Taylor's book: Barbara Brown Taylor. *Holy Envy: Finding God in the Faith of Others*. Harper One, 2019.

² Karen Zraick. "What Is Labor Day? A History of the Workers' Holiday," © *New York Times*, Sept. 3, 2021.

³ Phan Quang Tue. "I came to the U.S. from Saigon in 1975. Here's what Afghan refugees can learn from my family's experiences," © *Washington Post*, August 24, 2021.