

ASBURY CIRCUIT RIDER

Favorites (What was God thinking?¹)

Volume 2 Issue 19

September 19, 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. Page 6



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.



Inside this issue:

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

the sadness hasn't gone away. And I'm not as sure about the unyielding anger he predicted. It's hard to stay angry at the intangible.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks begins his book, *Not in God's Name*, with the declaration that "When religion turns men into murderers, God weeps." The Rabbi comes to this conclusion from reading the book of Genesis. After making humankind in God's own image, the first humans disobeyed God's first instructions, and the

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Re-born (How can we be born again?¹)



Courtesy of Faithworks.life blog

I don't know about you, but the images of planes flying into buildings are on repeat in my head this week. Perhaps the prediction made by George W.

Bush that these images will remain in our heads forever came true for me. But, for me, disbelief was replaced by a recognition that religion is dangerous, except

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Re-born (How can we be born again?¹) ..cont from page 1

first murder took place soon after. It wasn't long before God's new world was filled with violence, and "God regretted" what had become of humankind (Genesis 6:6).²

The history of religion is filled with violence. And much of the violence is done in the name of God. Rabbi Sacks argues that religion began as polytheism, the belief in multiple gods, as the "vindication of power," and religion was used as justification for power structures. This allowed the few to rule over the many by leveraging deeply held convictions to safeguard against uprisings in response to oppressive demands.

Monotheism, the belief in one God, became a "sustained protest" in opposition to hierarchies justified by claims of divine ordering. The idea of one God made a provocative claim that all humans are created in God's image. And, this claim was valid regardless of heritage, culture, birth parents, or any other human-made ordering. Moreover, the account of Abraham's covenant with God was based on concepts that included the sacredness of life, righteousness, justice, mercy, and compassion.

Abraham's covenant emerged as the origin of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. And remarkably, the original ideals captured in our collective holy scriptures are consistent with other religions that claim different origins and sources of enlightenment.

Yet, violence continues to be perpetrated by individuals and groups towards others, citing God as the divine arbitrator. That is, God inspired the very acts that God declared as evil. Could it be that we just simply don't understand?

We find the story of Nicodemus in the Gospel of John. Poor Nicodemus — the blind guide — the Pharisee who simply didn't get it. Is the point that we don't want to be like Nicodemus or that we're all a bit like him? Let's compare.

It's after dark when Nicodemus makes his way to where Jesus is staying. The consensus for the late hour is that Nicodemus has a reputation to protect and doesn't want anyone to see him. This is all speculation since the writer doesn't reveal his motivations.

What we do know is their conversation begins with flattery. I'm guessing it was blatant superficial flattery when Nicodemus says, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher sent by God. No one could perform the miracles you are doing unless God were with him" (John 3:2).

Now we know this to be true, but Pharisees sat on the other side of the aisle on most issues when it came to the reputation of Jesus. If Nicodemus really believed what he was saying to Jesus, why wouldn't he show up earlier in the day? Remember that almost everything found in John's gospel is symbolic, and things said and done in the dark are suspicious unless they come from Jesus.

Jesus doesn't bite on the flattery. Instead, He ceases a teaching moment and reminds Nicodemus that he can't know whether what he says is true or not. Unless Nicodemus is first born again.

Re-birth is taken for granted by most of the Christians I meet. It's often a status that comes along with a willingness to join a church. Sometimes re-birth is associated with baptism or some form of a catechism. Others apply a qualification of the obvious presence of the Holy Spirit with varying ideas about how to test their assessment.

Nicodemus is more honest. He asks the question that we don't ask but hope to listen in on the answer. "How can a grown person be born again when it's impossible to reenter their mother's womb?"

So Nicodemus asks an obvious question — he is the Pharisee version of Peter. The Peter who asked questions the rest of us wonder about but don't ask.

But the answer is confusing — or at least nebulous. So first, Jesus explains how a person is re-born of spirit, which doesn't help much. And then Jesus reminds us that God's Spirit is like the wind. We don't know where it comes from or when or in which direction it may blow.

I don't mean that the weather forecast that predicts winds out of the South at 20 miles-per-hour isn't a good indication of whether you burn leaves. Instead, at any given moment, we don't know if a puff of wind may blow our leaf pile. Similarly, we don't decide the if and when of God's Spirit.

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!



For those of you that might not know this, Mary Nations (a long time member of Asbury, who is in a nursing home) lost her daughter-in-law Sandy to Covid a few weeks ago and now her son Tim Reip is in the hospital with Covid, (They were also members of Asbury at one point). Please keep Mary and the Reip family in your prayers.

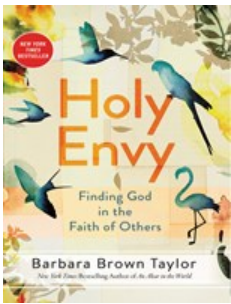
Sept 20	Mon	6:00pm	Leadership Team Meeting
Sept 21	Tues	10:00am-12:30pm	Food/Water Distribution
Sept 22	Wed	12Noon	Pastor Book Club
Sept 23	Thu		
Sept 24	Fri		
Sept 25	Sat	12Noon	Food Not Bombs
Sept 26	Sun	10:30am	New Beginnings Contemporary Worship

(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."

But the empty flattery offered by Nicodemus suggests that he thinks he knows that Jesus was sent by God when he doesn't. No one does unless they are re-born of the Holy Spirit. Which none of us have power over.

"How can this be?" asks Nicodemus. This is a great question and likely an honest one coming from a person the community sees as an expert on matters of God. This is perhaps why Jesus asks Nicodemus, "How could you not know?"

After Jesus asks how he could be an expert in religious knowledge and still not understand, Nicodemus stops talking.

One of my Dad's favorite sayings for me was the importance of keeping my mouth shut. "Better to let others think You're a fool than to verify it by saying something foolish." Perhaps this story is about Jesus telling Nicodemus the advice my Dad gave me.

No one can see the Kingdom of God without being born again.

John 4:3

Sometimes it's better to sit quietly and listen to God. Nicodemus thinks he knows the mind of God when he doesn't. The truth is that no one does. Barbara Brown Taylor reminds us that this is what it means to be human.

This brings us to making sense of the rest of this story. After Nicodemus quits asking questions, Jesus expands on His lesson, explaining the essence of what continues as controversy today. But, first, Jesus tells Nicodemus that God wants to save, rather than condemn, the world. And this decision comes out of God's love for the world.

Jesus explains an even more challenging to understand reality when He describes the means of salvation. First, God loves the world so much that the Son of God will save us. And salvation begins with the belief that this promise is true with the hope of re-birth.

Out of this story and others, Christians come to the conclusion that salvation comes through this process. But, while we're willing to accept that Jesus alone is the mediator of our salvation, we seem hesitant to entirely give up our desire to be a co-mediator. We want some say in which way the winds blow and who gets re-born.

The human Jesus was born into a Jewish family and raised in Jewish tradition and beliefs. We read that He adhered to the rituals and traditions that He learned since childhood. This is not to say that Jesus adapted to and adopted every nuance. He argued with teachers and made controversial statements and claims.

And Nicodemus heard first hand the most controversial of all the claims made by Jesus. And Nicodemus was understandably confused and then silent for the rest of the story.

We don't know if Nicodemus was ever re-born, even after spending time with the world's greatest evangelist. Jesus didn't ask Nicodemus to pray the "sinners prayer" or join His church. He didn't offer to baptize Nicodemus or suggest he go to the Jordan River and find John the Baptist, who baptized Jesus.

Instead, Jesus shared what He knew to be true about God. And it appears that Nicodemus sat and quietly listened.

I get the feeling that there is room for Nicodemus in the Kingdom of God that Jesus described that day. I think there is room in the heaven that I believe Jesus oversees. And if I'm right about this, perhaps I'll get to meet

Nicodemus someday. I've got questions of my own.

Do you believe that Jesus is the way, the truth, and arbitrator of eternal life? Then, may we all learn to let Jesus do what God has done since the beginning and will do long after our bodies return to the dust we came from — even without our advice and counsel. Let's leave the decision of who receives salvation to the One we believe owns it.

Our series this month is called *Holy Envy* and this is episode three. 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](#).

Pastor Tommy

Life groups questions & notes:

No one can see the Kingdom of God without being born again.” 4 “How can a grown man be born again?

John 3:1-21 (GNT)

NOTES FROM WORSHIP

QUESTIONS FOR LIFE GROUPS

1. Read John 3:1-21. Try to recap the story of Nicodemus in your own words. What did you learn about Nicodemus? What did you learn about Jesus? Did you learn anything about yourself?
2. Read the article in this week’s Circuit Rider, *Re-born*. What does it mean to you to be born again? How does re-birth affect how you treat others? How might re-birth affect how you speak to persons who have different beliefs than you? Is there room in the heaven you believe in for them? Why or why not? Are you willing to let Jesus decide on the salvation of others?
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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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**.