

# ASBURY CIRCUIT RIDER

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## No Bull (Speaking truth to bull artists)



We've all been there. A time when someone is speaking about a topic they clearly know nothing about. Truth and lies flow out with equal measure and emphasis. Even if we like the person our minds wander to more productive scenery, wondering when the speaker will finally grow tired of hearing the sound of their own voice.

This scenario, according to Princeton Professor Harry Frankfurt, is an illustration of bull (2nd word intentionally omitted).<sup>2</sup>

"[Bull] is a greater enemy of truth than lies are," concludes Professor Frankfurt. The bull artist is so dangerous because he or she makes no distinction between truth and lies. Fact or fiction doesn't matter to the speaker. A liar at least cares about the truth. The bull artist writes

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.

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## Inside this issue:

No Bull	1
Collective Effervescence	1
In Our Prayers/Coming up this Week	3
Asbury Worship Series	4
Pastor's Book Club	4
Leadership in Worship & Service	4
Asbury Worship Series	5
No Bull	6
Collective Effervescence	7
Small Group Questions & Notes	8
Feed Flint	9
Feed Flint	10
SFSK January Dates	11
Asbury Veggie Boxes	12
Coming up in Worship (The Way)	13

## Collective Effervescence (Welcome to Worship)



A year ago, in a Forbes Magazine article, Tracy Brower wrote that "The pandemic has played havoc with our mental health." Top among reasons that so much isolation is bad for mental health is that "We

are hardwired for connection." And the key to feeling connected is "all about our need for belonging."<sup>1</sup>

"But belonging is more than just being part of a group, writes Brower. Be-

longing is also critically tied to social identity—a set of shared beliefs or ideals. "But Brené Brown warns us that "Common enemy intimacy is counterfeit connection and the opposite of true belonging." So what is "common enemy intimacy," and how do we recognize and avoid falling into a trap baited by it?<sup>2</sup>

Let's acknowledge that it's not easy to avoid the lure of believing that we

Page 2



## Collective Effervescence (Welcome to Worship) ....cont from page 1

belong to a particular group because we dislike or even hate the same ideals or people. There is a lot of emotion involved from our need for connection to our fear that the ideals or people targeted by our disdain represent our worst nightmare.

Mid-term elections come up this fall. This means that every member of the House of Representatives and one-third of our Senators are elected or re-elected. Unfortunately, this means you and I are in for months of political rallies and speeches, along with a daily barrage of unwanted emails and ads.

The elections are months away — it's only January. Still, based on past elections, Democrats are predicted to lose their razor-thin margins in the House and Senate. Particularly since 19 states passed new laws making voting more difficult. And this trend is expected to continue in response to the "big lie."

The "big lie" is, in actuality, a label for a national marketing campaign to raise money and rally support to slow down our nation's shift towards more progressive policies. However, since public opinion has moved decisively towards more progressive policies, higher voter turnout favors the more progressive candidate.

Reducing the influence of the majority of citizens is challenging. However, majorities have been convinced to go against their self-interest for centuries. And often by a relatively small number who benefit the most from their agenda. Their secret is to promote hate and fear of a common enemy. And the less specific the definition of the enemy, the easier it is to fabricate believable lies.

In last week's episode, we noted how standing up to an onslaught of bull with the truth takes courage. But this is part of finding true belonging. This is how we claim the identity that God gives us and live as the person God intended. The bigger lie is that belonging comes from hating the same ideals and people.

What if we stop looking for belonging by joining groups supporting candidates who oppose the same people and ideas that we don't like or frighten us? What if, instead, we focus our energies and expectations toward our love and concern for each other?

In his book, *The Happiness Hypothesis*, Jonathan Haidt calls this "vital engagement." Brené Brown offered a phrase from research known as a collective assembly. You and I might call it getting together with a bunch of other people.<sup>3</sup>

Whatever we choose to call such a gathering, it's much different than a political rally organized around common enemies. And the most effective group events include music that moves us by sharing artistic expressions of how life brings us closer together.

Worship is likely the most effective vital engagement that offers a starting point for belonging. However, remember that worship is ambiguous and sometimes just as misleading as belonging. So just to be clear, by worship. I'm presuming that we begin with the notion that the focus of our worship represents the center of our belonging.

Émile Durkheim, a sociologist, focused on studying the role of religion in society, coined the term "collective effervescence." He used this term to describe the sacred connectedness we experience when we realize that we are a part of something much bigger than ourselves. During these times of collective effervescence, our focus shifts from ourselves to the group.<sup>4</sup>

Searching for the word "worship" in the Bible yielded a wide range of hits depending on the translation. For example, the NASB translation produced 180 verses while the Contemporary English Version used worship 1,016 times. The Good News Translation, which is found in our worship center, uses worship in 762 verses. What gives?

According to the GNT, worship first appears in Genesis 4:26. Here worship is described as the people acknowledging or "calling upon" the name of the Lord in worship. The CEV uses the phrase "worshipping in the name of God." But the NASB, which is known for staying closer to the original Hebrew, states simply that "people began to call upon the name of the Lord."

Several complicating factors are involved in translation, not the least of which is interpretation disguised as translation. The GNT and CEV are interpretations that choose worship as an act of calling on the name of the Lord. I lean towards this editorial freedom, in this case, because I'm inclined to agree with a more general application of worship.



## Asbury Worship Series Wilderness Experience



Cyndi and I enjoy watching reality shows that feature individuals living in the Alaskan wilderness. Neither of us have a desire to live alone in the woods. Rather, we're fascinated by the creativity and grit that these rugged individuals discover within themselves to survive. And even more so by the few that seem

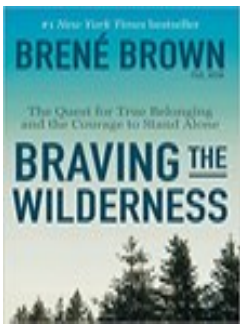
to thrive in the midst of so many obstacles.

A common theme heard among the Alaskan pioneers is a sense of belonging to the vast untamed and unforgiving wilderness. They share common bonds with the other creatures living

Page 5

## Book Club News

Our theme for December was *Going home*. This theme led us into weekly conversations about home as we wrestled with what home means for each of us. In addition, we celebrated the Season of Advent by studying the ancient prophecies that promised the coming of the Messiah.



We kick off the New Year with a topic most associate with home. In our next series, *Wilderness experience*, our theme is belonging.

Our book for this series is *Braving the Wilderness*. In her best-selling book, Dr. Brené Brown offers the metaphor of wilderness as a paradox. In scripture, the wilderness is thought of as a place of solitude and

dangerous temptation. But the untamed wilderness is where we travel to find true belonging according to our author.

The write-up found on Amazon has this to say about our next book:

Social scientist Brené Brown, Ph.D., MSW, has sparked a global conversation about the experiences that bring meaning to our lives—experiences of courage, vulnerability, love, belonging, shame, and empathy. In *Braving the Wilderness*, Brown redefines what it means to truly belong in an age of increased polarization. With her trademark mix of research, storytelling, and honesty, Brown will again change the cultural conversation while mapping a clear path to true belonging.

In her book, Brené Brown describes a spiritual crisis of disconnection that she believes is pervasive in society. And she offers recommendations for how to experience true belonging that challenges what we think about ourselves and each other. She encourages us to venture out of our ideological bunkers and show up as our true selves. Dr. Brown challenges us to brave the wilderness of uncertainty and criticism.

Increases in new infections and yet another variety of COVID pushed us back

into isolation. While the latest surge is described as a pandemic of the unvaccinated, breakthrough infections are rising, putting us all at risk.

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 and rumors 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](http://FlintAsbury.org).

## 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 McDoniel	Pastor & Exec Dir
Connie Portillo	Office Manager
Sylvia Pittman	Empowerment Arts
Jim Craig	Board & Leadership Chair
Kevin Croom	Exec Chef & Dir Opers

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



*Wilderness Experience... Asbury Worship Series*

around them, even those they hunt for food. All belong to a natural order that is much larger and beyond their grasp.

There are unseen dangers and yet to be discovered delights in the wilderness waiting for the brave ones willing to take the risk to venture into its uncertainty.

Our new series, *Wilderness experience*, explores the risks and rewards of braving the uncertain. And in exploring the uncertain we tackle the thorny question of “Do I belong?”

Brené Brown asserts that “belonging is the innate human desire to be part of something larger than us.” Based on her research into one of life’s most intimate questions Braving the Wilderness calls each of us to reclaim who we are by letting go of who we are not. <sup>1</sup>

But discovering who we are is only the beginning. Being who God created us to be is easily confused with fitting into a particular expectation. If we confuse fitting in with belonging we’re disappointed and lacking. It’s exhausting to be whatever persona others choose for us.

I wonder if choosing to be alone in the wilderness of Alaska takes less effort than fitting into a community as an imposter. On the other hand, in being who God created us to be may mean taking a stand where no one else is visible. We may find ourselves standing alone.

But what if this is true belonging?

Our series consists of five episodes that roughly maps to Dr. Brown’s book. There are extra copies of her book in the Arts Center. Alternatively, her book can be found at libraries, bookstores or purchased online.

I pray that you will join us each Sunday morning at 10:30 am. We share our weekly episodes 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

<sup>1</sup> Brené Brown. *Braving the Wilderness — The Quest for True Belonging and the Quest to Stand Alone*. New York: Random House, 2019.



## No Bull (Speaking truth to bull artists) .... *cont. from pg 1*

Frankfurt "does not care whether the things he says describe reality correctly. He just picks them out, or makes them up, to suit his purpose."

If this sounds familiar, you may be listening to politicians and journalists who are particularly adept at spewing bull. Besides its blatant disregard for the truth, the danger of bull is that culturally we are likely to give the bull artist a pass when it comes to the validity of their statements. While at the same time, we hold someone who tells a lie accountable, even if unintended or misinformed, if not said within the context of bull.

Bull is often used as a substitute for knowledge about a particular subject. We expect candidates for political office, to weigh in on a wide range of topics. Most of which they and we know very little about. The result is bull as a substitute for actual facts.

In a democracy, a decision to implement a policy, write and enforce a law, and oversee the nation's vast resources requires voting. A decision comes from choosing sides of any and all arguments when the time comes to vote. And in the U.S., most of us choose to support one of two political parties even though other parties exist and some candidates self-identify as independents.

This leads to one of the primary dividers that sort us into one of two ideological camps. Even though the vast majority of us likely fit in more than one camp based on our core beliefs.

Dr. Brené Brown writes that "one of the biggest drivers of the sorting that's happening today is the proliferation of the belief that you're either with us or you're against us." Philosophers note that this argument is a false dichotomy since there are almost always other choices. Nevertheless, some politicians regularly spew bull to force us to take sides.<sup>2</sup>

But what if we refuse to accept the terms of the argument and challenge the framing of the debate? This is a hard choice because doing so is a lonely place to go. Insisting that a better decision comes from debate rather than division sends us out into the wilderness.

Dr. Brown notes that standing up to bull and refusing to take sides is challenging. Refusing to take sides is difficult "Because the argument is set up to silence dissent and draw lines in the sand that squelch debate, discussion, and questions." It doesn't matter that debate, discussion, and questions lead to practical problem-solving.

I sometimes wonder if Jesus adds fuel to the bull fire when He challenges us to take a stand with Him? After all, we are asked to choose. We're asked to make a solemn declaration regarding our loyalty to Jesus. There are only two choices according to the gospel accounts.

As the ministry of Jesus reached larger numbers of people, His popularity was on the rise. He was healing, teaching, and challenging the political, religious, and economic systems privileging a few while oppressing the most vulnerable. And the more His popularity rose, the more aggressive those who had the most to lose looked for ways to silence Him.

His attackers started showing up and heckling Jesus in front of crowds making accusations that while Jesus was doing some miraculous things, He was breaking the law. So Jesus takes a stand with the challenge, "Anyone who is not for me is really against me; anyone who does not help me gather is really scattering" (Matthew 12:30).

Pay particular attention to the distinction that Jesus makes about gathering rather than scattering. The challenge made by Jesus is not about dividing as much as it is about unifying. Don't get me wrong. We're being asked to make a decision.

We either believe that Jesus is really who He claims to be or a liar. While historically, bull artists are given a pass, it was clear that Jesus was focused on the truth and exposing lies. So if His opponents could catch Jesus in a lie, they could send out their spokespersons on a media circuit to smear His reputation. This would be much harder to do if Jesus was a bull artist.

Their challenge was that if Jesus was telling the truth, which He was, they ran the risk of their negative campaign backfiring when their lies were exposed. The proven solution that is quite popular today is to send in the bull artists.

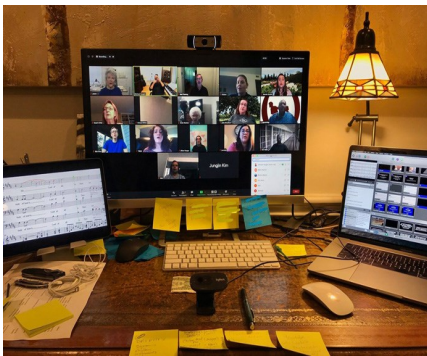
Truth isn't of concern to the bull artisan. They easily blend truth and lies together as they weave a narrative to accomplish their intended goal. Even if there are dire consequences, they are given a pass because it's understood that bull doesn't need to be truthful.

It was then that people began using the Lord's holy name in worship.

Genesis 4:26

For me, worship acknowledges a higher power by showing reverence and ascribing a degree of separation from the fray of everyday living. Whether we choose to call it karma, the force, God, or the Holy Spirit, this higher power is the glue that holds us together collectively and individually.

For Christians, this higher power is manifested in Jesus Christ, whom we believe was God living among humanity. Our belief in incarnation is not held by the other two-thirds of the world. So when I worship, I call on the name of the Lord, whom I call Jesus Christ, in the belief that God's power is greater than whatever I fear the most.



A worship leader planning online worship

Rather than worship focused on asking God to deal with our problems, I believe that worship should focus on gratitude for all that God is already doing. If I expect God to focus on my agenda, I'm discounting the importance of other agendas that conflict with mine. And frankly, I may be

showing a bit less reverence to the only power that I believe can sort this all out if I try to dictate God's priority list.

This doesn't mean that worship shouldn't include prayers of intercession and an expression of our felt needs. On the contrary, Jesus teaches us that we ought to ask and expect that God hears and acts on our behalf. However, we should keep in mind that Jesus was focused on the common good, which requires that we all sacrifice a degree of autonomy and self-indulgence.

Worship also includes our request for mercy and forgiveness. The Bible tells the story of Cain taking the life of his brother Abel sometime after their parents were expelled from Eden. A murder motivated by Cain's jealousy after he learned that God preferred Abel's display of reverence.

The first record of one human taking the life of another human came after an argument over the best ways to show reverence to God. And the debates continue.

Welcome to the Wilderness experience. I'm glad you're going with us. Belonging begins in the wilderness, where we discover the person God created us to be. And sometimes, we may stand alone. But wherever we stand, we'll know that we belong.

I invite you to worship with us on any given Sunday. We gather in the Asbury Arts Center in person and online on either YouTube or Facebook. Video replays are available to watch later.

You can join us each Sunday online by going to the button on the homepage of our [website](#) - [Click here to watch](#). This button takes you to our [YouTube channel](#). You can find 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](mailto: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

<sup>1</sup> Tracy Brower. "Missing Your People: Why Belonging Is So Important And How To Create It." © Forbes Magazine, January 21, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Brené Brown. *Braving the Wilderness — The Quest for True Belonging and the Quest to Stand Alone*. New York: Random House, 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Haidt. *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom*. NY: Basic Books, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Émile Durkheim. *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. Mark S. Cladis (Editor), Carol Cosman (Translator). New York: Oxford University Press, Revised Edition 2008.

### Life groups questions & notes:

*It was then that people began using the Lord's holy name in worship.*

Genesis 4:26 (GNT)

### NOTES FROM WORSHIP

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### QUESTIONS FOR LIFE GROUPS

1. Read Genesis chapter 4. Verse 26 is our theme verse this week because it is the first place that we find the word "worship" in certain translations of the Bible. However, the story of Cain and Abel includes a holy sacrifice that can also be considered worship. What is worship for you? What makes worship special for you? Which rituals help you to feel a sense of belonging?
2. Read the article in this week's Circuit Rider, *Collective effervescence*. Where do you feel as though you belong? In what ways does worship bring out feelings of belonging for you? Do you ever attend or watch news coverage of political rallies? How often is the focus on what the candidate is against? How often is the focus on the candidate's promise to provide safety from a threat? How much of the speech is focused on the candidate?
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”

Page 10



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](https://flintasbury.org/feed-flint-donate)



# South Flint Soup Kitchen January Giveaways

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

May this year bring new happiness...

Angel Closet Dates (Appointment only):

January 19th & 26th

11am-noon

**MASK REQUIRED REGARDLESS OF VACCINATION STATUS.**

If you  
don't have one, one will be provided for you.

Food Giveaways (NO APPOINTMENT NEEDED):

January 5th & 12th

11am-noon

Call 810-239-3427 to make an Angel Closet appointment or for  
questions!

South Flint Soup Kitchen

3410 Fenton Road

Flint, MI 48507



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**AND**

Receive a \$15 credit on your account for your first purchase

**CREATE YOUR OWN VEGGIE BOX**

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 \***





The American Revolution, as taught in history classes across the U.S., was a necessary and heroic struggle for freedom. It was necessitated by unfair taxation without representation in government.

Pastors offered moral justification for war from pulpits across the colonies, turning war into a righteous cause. This included the proposition that our experiment in democracy could possibly be a shining example of the rule of Christ on earth.

This fueled, in part, a rising sentiment that the U.S. is a Christian nation, governed and occupied by followers of Jesus Christ. Perhaps it is this very sentiment that prompted the adoption of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution that begins with "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion." After all, the clergy ordained by the Church of England was bound by oath to support the king.

This same individual, Paul, wrote in a letter to other followers living in Corinth that we're all equally important in the eyes of God. (1 Corinthians 12:12-13). Yet, even as war was waged against the British another war was brewing steeped in Christian belief and ethics. Persons stolen from their homes in Africa and inhumanly transported to the emerging country in America to provide free labor, were also subject of Christ's Kingdom.

The war for civil rights was nothing like the wars fought with canons and bombs. Instead, civil rights was a movement based on non-violence. It was a movement tailored in large part on The Way. That is, the teachings of Jesus rather than the articles of wars and treaties.

According to the writer of Acts, followers of The Way were first called "Christian" by the Greeks living in Antioch (Acts 11:26). When Paul appeared before Marcus Antonius Felix, Governor of the Judea Province, he admitted to being part of a group of misfits referred to as "The Way."

As Paul's trial began, the High Priest Ananias, with the help of a prosecuting attorney named Tertullus, spelled out their charges against Paul. "We found this man to be a dangerous nuisance," testified Ananias, "and is a leader of the party of the Nazarenes" (Acts 24:11-23).

The Way referred to faithful followers of a man executed by Roman authorities known by His first name and hometown, Jesus of Nazareth. The Way, however, came out of the group's countercultural approach to living the way that Jesus taught His followers. Rather than allegiance to Rome and its leadership, the followers of The Way were loyal to Jesus, who they believed was the only true Son of God.

Jesus was arrested, found guilty of crimes against Rome, and executed. But not because Jesus led a violent revolution against those in power. He didn't hire a lawyer to represent Him in court. Instead, Jesus represented Himself but offered no defense other than His Kingdom was not of this world.

Our series for February will focus on how The Way was so radically different. Each week's episode will tackle questions from the teachings of Jesus as found in the four gospels. Including: What does Jesus say about enemies and violence? What does Jesus say about money? What does Jesus say about foreigners and immigrants? What does Jesus say about sinners?

Along with other sources of commentary and interpretation, Brian Zahnd's Postcards from Babylon provides our narration for traveling on this potentially treacherous road known as The Way.

I pray that you will join us each Sunday morning at 10:30 am. We share our weekly episodes 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](http://FlintAsbury.org).

Pastor Tommy

<sup>1</sup> "Religion and the Founding of the American Republic: Religion and the American Revolution." Library of Congress. Retrieved from: [Link to Article](#).

<sup>2</sup> Brian Zahnd. *Postcards from Babylon: The Church In American Exile*. Spello Press, 2019.



For example, fact-checkers at the Washington Post counted over thirty thousand false or misleading statements from our former president. Yet he is given a pass by millions of Christians. This is because he is skilled in the art of bull.<sup>3</sup>

A Fortune Magazine article noted that our former president told six times more lies in his first ten months in office than Obama said in eight years. Defenders attempted to refocus the public's attention on the "quality of lie" told by the two. But this really wasn't necessary since bull artisans constantly get a pass on lying regardless of the quantity.<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, I'm betting that we are all guilty of bull artistry from time to time. This partly happens because of the pressure to weigh in on unfamiliar topics and our dependence on bull artists for information. In addition, most journalists are beholden to sponsors and ratings, and apparently, bull artistry gets high ratings. Perhaps this is one reason we give bull artists a pass on lying.

So what does scripture say about our cultural focus on rewarding bull over truth? The answer is quite a lot. Jesus, in particular, spoke truth to bull artistry. Spoiler alert. The bull artists didn't handle the loving correction of Jesus very well.

Jesus quoted the Prophet Isaiah in one story where He responded to criticism that He and His followers were not following the rules. Of course, Jesus wasn't against following rules, but he insisted that intention is critical. In other words, Jesus did not share our appreciation for bull artistry.

Jesus accused the leaders of turning away from God while claiming otherwise. "You are defined by the words that come out of your mouth," argues Jesus, "for from your heart comes evil thoughts" (Matthew 15:18).

Isaiah was one of the numerous famous prophets who lived centuries before Jesus was born. Unlike journalists, we count on prophets to share God's mind with us. No bull — just the facts.

Leaders in every generation, including religious leaders, struggle to keep their priorities in line with what's important to God. And prophets were responsible for holding the leaders accountable when the gap widened enough to ignore the suffering of vulnerable and powerless citizens.

Scripture testifies that God uses prophets to warn leaders and those who support them when divine priorities are pushed aside. If God's warnings are ignored, divine intervention, justice, and correction follow. While the stories in scripture happened thousands of years ago, these stories are divinely constructed as insight into what is true and false.

The history of God's chosen people (substitute you and me) is a history of separation from God followed by divine intervention, transformative justice, and long periods of peaceful abundance. During one of the times of separation, God warned the people through Isaiah that the leaders "carry out their schemes in secret and think no one will see them or know what they are doing. They turn everything upside down" (Isaiah 29:15-16).

**You are defiled by the words that come out of your mouth...**

**Matthew 15:18**

"Upside down" is explained by illustrating God's plan for transformative justice. "It will be the end of those who oppress others and show contempt for God." Contempt for God is shown when "people claim to worship God, but their words are meaningless, and their hearts are somewhere else." And when "their religion is nothing but human rules and traditions" (Isaiah 29:13).

In another story found elsewhere, Jesus walks in on His team, arguing over which one of them is greater than the others. Rather than correct them directly, Jesus illustrates the importance of humility

and focusing on what's important. A child became a metaphor for anyone without power (Luke 9:48).

The powerless, excluded from privilege and placement, is God's first priority. And those who choose similar preferences demonstrate faithfulness to Jesus Christ and thus honor God. Instead, bull artists focus on their own agenda, which centers around their own self-interest. Truth doesn't enter into their consciousness.

There is clearly one time that the statement "you're either with us, or you're against us" rings true. Jesus made this case with leaders whose claims aren't connected to truth. In His words, Jesus reminds us that we either spread divisiveness or we call for unity in following the truth (Matthew 15:30).

Welcome to the Wilderness experience. I'm glad you're going with us. Belonging begins in the wilderness, where we discover the person God created us to be. And sometimes, we may stand alone. But wherever we stand, we'll know that we belong.

You can join us each Sunday online by going to the button on the homepage of our [website](#) - [Click here to watch](#). This button takes you to our [YouTube channel](#). You can find 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](mailto: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

<sup>1</sup> Brené Brown. *Braving the Wilderness — The Quest for True Belonging and the Quest to Stand Alone*. New York: Random House, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Harry G. Frankfurt. *On Bullshit*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Glenn Kessler, Salvador Rizzo and Meg Kelly. "Trump's false or misleading claims total 30,573 over 4 years." © *Washington Post*, January 24, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Kirsten Korosec. "How the Quantity of Trump's Lies Compares to Obama's." © *Fortune Magazine*, December 14, 2017.