ASBURY CIRCUIT RIDER

Volume 6 Issue 18

JANUARY 18, 2026

Limits (Epiphany)

This week, a young mother was killed in Minneapolis. A life was taken. A family was shattered. A community was wounded. I want to say plainly what many of us are feeling: I am angry. I am heartbroken. And I am struggling to find words that neither numb the truth nor inflame it beyond recognition.

Silence feels dishonest. But rage, left unchecked, can also betray the very values it claims to defend. What happened in Minnesota is yet another example of how unbridled cruelty is destroying our moral compass.

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Truth (Epiphany)

This past week has been devastating. The news has been relentless about federal immigration enforcement expanding into cities and neighborhoods. Meanwhile, the family of a mother killed during an ICE operation in Minnesota is grieving. Her community is grieving.

Immediately after she was gunned down after dropping off her child at school, competing stories began circulating. Stories that included carefully worded statements, partial explanations, official justifications, and conflicting official accounts about what happened and why. Afterwards, there were resignations from within government agencies; protests, lawsuits, and grief that has nowhere easy to land.

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JANUARY 19, 2026

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Limits (Epiphany) cont. from pg 1

We are living in a moment when power is being exercised loudly, quickly, and without restraint. News headlines remind us—daily—that decisions made far from us can ripple outward with enormous human cost. And while the details may be complex and contested, one truth is not: how power is used matters.

When the only limit on power is personal morality, the absence of moral restraint becomes a national crisis. This is because power that answers only to itself has already abandoned accountability. Power without limits forgets its soul. On the other hand, restraint is not retreat.

As people who confess allegiance to a crucified Messiah, we cannot pretend that any action taken in the name of security, order, or national interest is therefore justified. The phrase "one nation under God" is not a claim of divine endorsement. It is a confession of accountability. It means that even national power is subject to moral limits.

And we need to be honest about what this moment does to us emotionally.

It is right to feel outraged by the deliberate harm caused to individuals and families through the distribution of drugs for profit. There is something deeply evil about using creativity, intelligence, and influence to enrich oneself by poisoning communities and destroying lives. We do not need to soften that judgment, nor do we need to apologize for wanting such harm to end.

It is human—deeply human—to look at that kind of cruelty and feel that only force can answer it. Anger rises quickly when suffering feels intentional. The desire to end it decisively, even violently, is not a sign of moral failure; it is a sign that we are not indifferent to evil.

But here is where limits matter.

Because I am not only outraged by those who profit from destruction abroad, I am equally outraged when our own nation uses its immense, divinely entrusted resources—its power, its wealth, its influence—not primarily to protect the vulnerable, but to pressure other countries in ways that enrich us while destabilizing them. When power serves itself, even under the banner of justice, something sacred has already been lost. Power without limits forgets its soul.

The church does not exist to manage empires or to baptize force. But it does exist to say—clearly and without apology—that violence, coercion, and domination are not neutral tools. Even when injustice is real. Even when wrongdoing is undeniable. Even when our anger feels justified. Jesus never suggests that righteousness gives us permission to abandon restraint.

This is not about denying evil or excusing harm. It is about refusing the lie that we can oppose injustice by becoming unjust ourselves. History teaches us—again and again—that when nations convince themselves that their cause exempts them from moral limits, the damage does not stay contained. Chaos multiplies. Humanity erodes. And the very values we claim to defend are the first casualties. Power without limits forgets its soul.

So we name this concern plainly: policies that rely on intimidation, coercion, or violence—regardless of intention—stand in tension with the way of Jesus. Not because Jesus is naïve about evil, but because He is abundantly clear about who we are called to be. Power that forgets its limits forgets its soul.

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IN OUR PRAYERS

Virginia Bigger
Sylvia Pittman
Mirium Watson
Richard Oram
Jonathon Misner

FRIENDS AND LOVED ONES WHO ARE HOMEBOUND OR IN NURSING CARE

Dean Lamoreaux
Norma Buzzard
Nancy Elston

COMING UP THIS WEEK: JANUARY 19 - 25

Jan 19	Mon		**Martin Luther King Jr. Day**
		6:00pm	Leadership Team
Jan 20	Tue	9:00am-until gone	Produce will be available each week, along with canned goods, until further notice
		12Noon—6pm	Taco Tuesday (see flyer on pg. 23)
Jan 21	Wed	11am-1pm	Angel Closet at SFSK (see flyer on pg. 22)
Jan 22	Thu		
Jan 23	Fri		
Jan 24	Sat		
Jan 25	Sun	10:30am	New Beginnings Contemporary Worship

FLINT MISSION ZONE MEETING: Asbury UMC will be hosting this Zone meeting on Tuesday, February 17, 2026 at 1pm in the Asbury Library. Please mark your calendars. Any questions, feel free to call Michele Weston 810-624-1184.

*** PLEASE WORK ON THE 2025 LOCAL END OF THE YEAR CHURCH REPORTS AND **GET THEM IN TO ME BY JANUARY 26TH.** CONNIE

(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*.)

Upcoming Worship Series "Epiphany"

As we begin a new year, we live in a world marked by rapid change, deep division, and widespread exhaustion. Many of us sense that something essential is being revealed—but we are not always sure what to do with what we see. This *Epiphany* series asks a simple but demanding question: What do we need to see more clearly now?

Take a close look at the image above. What do you see? Why was this image chosen for a series on epiphanies?

A figure stands alone in ruins—crumbling walls, peeling paint, debris scattered across the floor. The space feels abandoned, forgotten, and left to chaos and decay. But look closer. The figure isn't looking at the destruction around them. They're looking through it, toward an archway that frames brilliant light streaming in from beyond.

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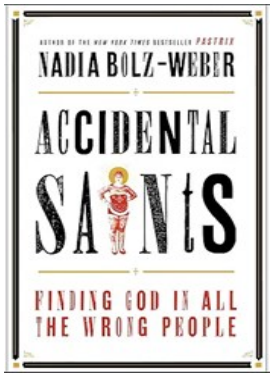
Book Club News



For our Epiphany series, we'll be reading Nadia Bolz-Weber's *Accidental Saints: Finding God in All the Wrong People* as our companion book. But here's the twist: we're not reading it cover to cover. We're reading it thematically—jumping around to match each week's sermon focus.

Before you panic, hear us out.

If you haven't met Nadia Bolz-Weber yet, prepare yourself. She's a heavily tattooed, foul-mouthed Lutheran pastor who founded House for All Sinners and Saints in Denver—a church for people who don't fit anywhere else. She's exactly the kind of person religious folks might dismiss, which is precisely why her voice matters.

Accidental Saints tells 19 stories of how Bolz-Weber discovered that the people who drove her crazy, the ones she wanted nothing to do with, kept turning out to be her teachers. God, it seems, has a sense of humor about who gets to deliver divine truth.

The book is funny, honest, and deeply faithful. Bolz-Weber writes about depression, addiction, difficult people, and the messy reality of trying to follow Jesus without any of the usual religious polish. She refuses to sanitize her stories or offer easy answers. Instead, she tells the truth about what it actually looks like when broken people encounter a God who loves them anyway.

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Asbury Staff

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Upcoming Worship Series — "Epiphany"

This is a threshold moment. Not the comfortable kind where you stand safely on one side deciding whether to cross. This is the kind where you've already stepped through—where the doorway behind you has closed, and the only way forward is toward that light ahead, even if you can't yet see exactly where it leads.

That's where we find ourselves as we begin 2026.

Over seven weeks, we will explore epiphanies that matter for this moment—epiphanies about limits, truth, neighbors, suffering, and responsibility. These are not abstract ideas. They are ways of seeing that shape how we live together, how we love, and how we act with integrity in the world God so loves.

In our tradition, the season of Epiphany begins with the Magi—outsiders to Israel's faith, culture, and story. They were immigrants. Strangers who traveled far to encounter Jesus. While there, a dream warned them about King Herod's true intentions, and they had to find another way home. They couldn't return the way they came.

Having seen what they'd seen, the old road was closed. They'd crossed a threshold. There was no going back.

Epiphany reminds us that God's self-disclosure is rarely confined to familiar places or familiar people. And while thresholds are intended as two-way, for entering and exiting, the reality is that once we cross, we don't return the same.

That's the invitation of this series: to name what we've seen, to stand honestly in the ruins of what's broken, and to keep our eyes fixed on the light ahead rather than exhausting ourselves trying to force our way back through doors that have closed behind us.

Epiphany is not about having all the answers. It is about learning to see—and then deciding how we will live in response.

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Upcoming Worship Series — "Epiphany"

Here is the outline of our series:

Episode	Sundays	Title	Scripture
One	Jan 4	Strangers	Matthew 2:1–12
Two	Jan 11	Limits	Mark 6:30-32
Three	Jan 18	Truth	John 8:31-32
Four	Jan 25	Neighbors	Luke 10:25-37
Five	Feb 1	Suffering	Matthew 2:16-18
Six	Feb 8	Responsibility	James 2:14-17;
Seven	Feb 15	Transformation	Matthew 2:12

Each week we'll explore these epiphanies alongside Nadia Bolz-Weber's book *Accidental Saints* (see our Book Club article for details). Her raw, honest stories about encountering God in unexpected places will deepen our journey through this season.

Look again at that figure in the ruins, standing at the threshold, facing the light. That's us. That's where this series begins.

Join us starting January 4 as we ask together: What do we need to see more clearly now? And having seen it, how will we live?

We can't go back to 2025. And who would want to given the chaos that unfolded across our nation. Likewise, we can't unsee what we've already witnessed. The only question is: will we keep moving toward the light, or exhaust ourselves trying to force our way back through a door that's already closed? This Epiphany, we choose the light. We choose to see clearly. And we choose to let that clarity change how we live.

The threshold is behind us. The journey begins January 4.

Please join us each Sunday at 10:30 a.m. We share our weekly episodes on ***Facebook*** and our ***YouTube channel***, and go live at 10:30 a.m. You can find these links and more information about us, or join our live broadcast on our ***website, FlintAsburyChurch.org***.

Pastor Tommy

Nadia Bolz-Weber. *Accidental Saints: Finding God in All the Wrong People*. NY: Convergent Books, 2015. (ISBN 978-1-60142-755-7).


GROW
ENGAGE
Feed Flint
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"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

LIFE GROUP QUESTIONS & MORE:

If you obey my teaching, you are really my disciples. You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

John 8:31-32

NOTES FROM WORSHIP

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QUESTIONS FOR LIFE GROUPS:

1. Read John 8:31-32 and the article in this week's Circuit Rider titled Truth. This week, practice truth-telling by paying attention to the stories you repeat by asking whether they clarify reality or conceal it.

2. Second, practice listening to voices shaped by grief, fear, or marginalization.

3. Third, practice courage. Truth requires refusal to laugh at cruelty, to spread distortion, to look away from harm.

4. And finally, practice hope. Not the kind of hope that denies reality, but the kind that trusts God to be at work within it. The kind of hope that believes truth, once chosen, can still open a way forward.

5. How can your group members help you be more receptive to hearing and understanding the Word of God this week? Pray for one another to be blessed by the Holy Spirit with greater courage.

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Why Read Thematically?

Each Sunday, we'll explore a different epiphany—limits, truth, neighbors, suffering, responsibility. We want the book to deepen what you're hearing in worship, not just run parallel to it. So we're assigning chapters that connect directly with each week's theme.

For example, when we talk about truth-telling on MLK weekend (Week 3), you'll have just read Bolz-Weber's raw account of preaching at a Sandy Hook funeral and her critique of mission-trip savior complexes. When we talk about embodied action (Week 6), you'll have just read her foot-washing stories. The connection matters.

At about 200 pages total with 19 chapters, we're planning to read 2-3 chapters per week (roughly 25-30 pages). Bolz-Weber's writing is conversational and moves quickly—you won't need a theology degree or three hours of uninterrupted time.

Here's a taste of what you're in for. Bolz-Weber writes: "God's grace is not defined as God being forgiving to us even though we sin. Grace is when God is a source of wholeness, which makes up for my failings. My failings hurt me and others and even the planet, and God's grace to me is that my brokenness is not the final word."

If you're tired of pretending everything is fine, if you're weary of religious performance, if you've ever wondered whether God shows up in the mess—this book is for you.

Let's read together and see what God wants to show us.

If you choose to follow along, here is our plan:

Sunday's	Chapters	Themes
Jan 4	Intro, Chs 1-2	Seeing what's missing
Jan 11	Chs 3, 4, & 9	We're not so good
Jan 18	Chs 5, 8, & 11	The truth sets us free
Jan 25	Chs 6, 10, & 12	Loving real people
Feb 1	Chs 7, 14, & 17	Sitting in pain
Feb 8	Chs 13, 15, & 16	Faith in action
Feb 15	Chs 18, 19 & Concl	Home by another road

Yes, we're skipping around. Yes, you'll get all 19 chapters by the end. No, the world won't end if you read them out of order.

But What If I'm a Sequential Reader?

Look, we get it. Some of you break out in hives, figuratively, at the thought of reading Chapter 9 before Chapter 5. Your inner librarian is screaming. You color-code your calendar and alphabetize your spices.

So, here's your permission slip: Read the book however you want.

If reading straight through from page 1 brings you joy and keeps you engaged, do that. You'll still benefit from the series, and honestly, the chapters work both ways—they tell a coherent story sequentially, AND they stand alone thematically. Bolz-Weber structures each chapter around a different saint or liturgical moment, so jumping around doesn't break anything essential.

But if you're willing to try something different, give the thematic approach a shot. You might discover that reading Chapter 8 (Sandy Hook) right before hearing a sermon about truth-telling on MLK weekend creates connections you wouldn't have noticed reading it in order. Sometimes disruption leads to epiphany. Which is, after all, what this whole series is about.

We'll have a few new books available for purchase at $7 each. Additional copies of the paperback edition are available through Amazon for under $11, and used copies in good condition are even less. This book may also be available at the local library.

Our Book Club does not meet as a group. However, our weekly messages reference that week's chapters. You can anticipate spoiler alerts unless you keep up with the pace. You can purchase your own copy or visit your local library.

You can contact our office with questions by phone or simply type your question or enter a prayer request on our website's homepage — FlintAsburyChurch.org.

Pastor Tommy

Nadia Bolz-Weber. *Accidental Saints: Finding God in All the Wrong People*. NY: Convergent Books, 2015. (ISBN 978-1-60142-755-7).

Cash or checks can be sent to/dropped off at South Flint Soup Kitchen, 3410 Fenton Road, Flint, MI 48507. Please make checks out to South Flint Soup Kitchen!

Online at www.mightycause.com/feedflint

Donations can be dropped off Monday-Friday 11am-12Noon. Calling ahead is not necessary, but our needs change frequently, so calling ahead of time is a good idea!

Give time! We need volunteers!!! Volunteers arrive at 9:30am and are done by 12:30pm. Tasks include handing out lunches, assisting in the Angel Closet, light cleaning, putting together items to pass out to clients, and more.

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Questions??? Call 810-239-3427

or email southflintsoupkitchen@gmail.com

This is where our faith speaks—not with strategies or slogans, but with moral clarity. The world does not need the church to shout louder. It needs the church to remember who it is.

Scripture does not avoid the reality of human rage. In fact, it preserves it—sometimes in ways that unsettle us. Psalm 137 is one of those texts. It begins with grief: "By the rivers of Babylon—there we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion."

This Psalm was written by and for people who have been conquered, displaced, and humiliated. People who, understandably, refuse to sing songs of joy on demand. Their sorrow is deep. Their anger was justified. And then the psalm ends with words so violent we wish they were not there at all: "Happy are those who pay you back for what you have done to us—who take your babies and smash them against a rock!"

Shocked? I feel this way every time I read this Psalm. Both, because it feels so raw and violent. And because it reminds me that I've said some pretty mean things about people who I believe need to be punished.

Psalm 137 does not tell us what to do. It tells us the truth about what we feel when evil has stripped us of dignity, safety, and hope.

It gives voice to rage that rises when suffering feels intentional—when cruelty profits, when injustice persists, when power seems immune to accountability. And Scripture does not censor that rage. It records it. Not because it is holy, but because it is honest.

But the Bible does not leave us with rage as the final word.

Mark's Gospel gives us another image—this time not poetry, but flesh and blood. Jesus encounters a man living among the tombs, isolated from the community, consumed by forces he cannot control. He is described as violent, self-destructive, and terrifying to others. Chains cannot hold him. He is dangerous, not because he is evil, but because something destructive has taken hold of him.

This is what Psalm 137 looks like when it has a body.

What is striking is not the man's condition, but Jesus' response. Jesus does not meet violence with violence. He does not overpower or destroy the man. Jesus begins with a question: "What is your name?" It is an act of restraint. An act of refusal.

Jesus refuses to reduce the man to his behavior. He insists on naming what has occupied him, because what is unnamed cannot be healed—and what is met only with force will return again in another form. Restraint is not retreat.

The forces leave. The man is restored. And when the community sees him clothed and in his right mind, they are afraid. Not of what he was—but of the disruption of a system that had learned to live with his suffering at a distance.

This matters for us. Psalm 137 tells the truth about rage. The demoniac shows us what happens when rage is allowed to take up residence. And Jesus shows us a third way—not denial, not indulgence, but naming in the presence of God. Anger is not the enemy. But unexamined anger becomes one.

And that brings us to Jesus' surprising response to his own followers—right at the height of their activity, urgency, and success: "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while."

Mark tells us that the apostles return to Jesus and report "all they had done and taught." It sounds tidy. Efficient. Almost triumphant. But if we slow down, there is no reason to believe this return was emotionally simple. When the disciples come back, they are not simply reporting success. They are carrying everything they have seen and done.

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Jenna Russell, writing for the New York Times, noted that Facebook comments were mixed, with several thanking the church for "speaking truth to power." While another person posted that "the devil has infiltrated the church." Elizabeth Doris-Gustin, 67, a longtime neighbor of the parish, said this: "You might not agree with everything, but it makes you think. I wish a few more churches would be this bold."

Nativity scenes appeared across the country this year without the Holy Family. They still have a stable. There are animals. The structure looks familiar. But Mary and Joseph—and sometimes the child—are missing. Often, no explanation is offered. The scene is simply incomplete.

That image lingers, because it feels familiar.

There is a growing sense that something essential has been removed—not destroyed, just displaced and not argued away, just quietly set aside. Over the past year in particular, many have felt it: a loss of hope we once assumed would always be there.

Many of us hope that our country will mirror our values, shaped by the teachings of Christ. This is different than making Christianity a national religion, since our hopes mirror those of most of the world's religions. It is the hope that strangers can be welcomed without fear, that truth can matter more than power, that the vulnerable are worth protecting, and that the future can be more just than the present.

Instead, something has shifted: fear has been normalized, suspicion has been rewarded, cruelty has been excused as realism, and outsiders have become convenient symbols for everything we're anxious about. What's been lost is not confidence or comfort—it's moral imagination. The ability to believe that we can be better than our worst instincts.

This is the hope many feel has slipped through our fingers—not because it was weak, but because it was treated as expendable.

Matthew begins his telling of the Christmas story with people who don't belong. And that tension feels uncomfortably familiar. They're not neighbors. Not insiders. Not people who already belong. Nor are they shepherds from nearby fields. Neither are they neighbors from Bethlehem. And they're certainly not faithful insiders who know the songs and the scriptures by heart. No, they're just strangers from somewhere else.

At least three individuals, "Matthew tells us—scholars from the East, likely Persian—make their way across borders and through uncertainty, guided by a sign they cannot fully explain. They arrive in Jerusalem with a question that unsettles everyone who hears it: Where is the child who has been born King?

They came from different customs, different food, and likely had different assumptions about how the world works and how God speaks. They dressed differently. They likely spoke an ancient Persian dialect (Iran) and also Aramaic, the language of the Holy Family. Nevertheless, they somehow show up in Matthew's gospel as the ones paying attention.

Their journey is long, uncertain, and risky. They cross borders. They travel through unfamiliar territory. They rely on hospitality that they cannot guarantee. And when they finally arrive in Jerusalem—the religious and political center—they don't find welcome.

They are not looking for something new. They are looking for something true. They're looking for hope.

So they do what makes sense. They go to the palace, where they find Herod. Herod listens, but not with curiosity. He asks questions, but not because he wants to learn. He smiles, but it doesn't reach his eyes.

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So what is the truth? Some of us watched the footage. Some of us read the reports. All of us felt the same sinking recognition: that the truth is being managed.

At the same time, we live in a country where reality itself feels unstable. A country where the violence of January 6 is still minimized or denied. A nation where a free and fair election is called fraudulent without evidence, despite courts and officials saying otherwise. And an administration lying about affordability that does not match the lived experience of most families.

These lies are not harmless distortions. These are not abstract debates. Neither are they simply differences of opinion. These lies shape policy. They shape enforcement. They shape whose lives are protected—and whose are treated as expendable. And for many of us, the weight of it is not just political. It is emotional. It is spiritual. It is exhausting.

People are afraid—afraid to speak, afraid to protest, afraid to be noticed. Communities are told they are threats. Dissent is reframed as disloyalty. Questioning is labeled as extremism, and the term "domestic terrorists" is applied to anyone daring to disagree and readily used as justification for cruelty.

Because when truth is unclear, or selectively told, or wrapped in half-statements and slogans, the cost is never evenly distributed. When power insists on its own version of events—when truth is filtered, delayed, or denied—the consequences do not fall on those who craft the narrative. They do not fall on the powerful first. They fall on the vulnerable. They fall on the unseen. They fall on the innocent. The consequences fall on communities. On families. On people who did not choose the spotlight but find themselves caught in the consequences.

So let's name this plainly, without commentary or defense: Lies exploit the innocent. This has proven true this week. It has been true in our history. And it is not new.

What makes this moment especially difficult is that lies often feel safer than the truth. They are simpler. More satisfying. Less demanding. Lies allow us to tidy up reality just enough to avoid discovery—just enough to avoid responsibility. What makes lies so dangerous is not just that they deceive—it's that they reassure. They offer a version of the world where no one has to change, no one has to repent, and no one has to tell the whole story.

Truth, on the other hand, asks us to see what is actually happening. To sit with grief we didn't cause but now must acknowledge. To recognize harm even when it's justified with official language. Truth is harder. Truth disrupts. Truth demands that we see what is actually happening, not just what we wish were happening.

This struggle between truth and power, between public claims and private cruelty, did not begin in our lifetime. Truth is often resisted—by individuals and by empires alike.

And many of us sense—whether we can articulate it or not—that we are being asked, again, to choose what kind of people we will be in a moment like this. Perhaps not yet settled on what we believe. But whether we are willing to see the truth.

That tension between what is said and what is real, between official claims and lived consequences, is not unique to our time. It sits at the very center of the Christmas story we often prefer to skip past.

Matthew tells us that when visitors from the East arrive in Jerusalem, asking about a newborn king, King Herod is terrified. Not curious. Not cautious. Herod is terrified.

So he lies.

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They have been welcomed—and rejected. They have encountered suffering they could not undo. They have tasted authority and power. They have seen lives changed—and others untouched.

Jesus sent them out into real villages, among real people, with real suffering. They would have encountered bodies that did not heal, homes that did not welcome them, authorities that resisted them, and pain they could not undo. Some would have listened. Some would not. Some would have been grateful. Others are angry or afraid.

They would have seen what we still see today: suffering that feels unnecessary; injustice that feels entrenched; lives altered in ways they could not fix.

> *The apostles returned and told Jesus all they had done and taught. Jesus said to them, "Let us go off my ourselves to someplace where we will be alone, and you can rest awhile."*
>
> Mark 6:30-32

And alongside that, they would have tasted power—the strange, unsettling experience of being agents of healing and authority themselves. That combination alone is dangerous. Power mixed with pain rarely leaves us unchanged.

It is not hard to imagine what they carried back with them. They return to Jesus fully human—and emotionally loaded. And Jesus sees it.

Some may have been exhilarated—"Look what happened when we spoke in your name." A few felt overwhelmed—"There was so much need, and we barely touched it." But some may have been angry—at resistance, at cruelty, at systems that protected themselves. And others may have been quietly disturbed by how much they enjoyed being listened to.

In other words, they came back human. And Jesus sees it. Before they can organize, before they can strategize, before they can decide what comes next, Jesus does something that feels almost irresponsible in a world full of need: "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while."

Mark even adds the detail: "For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat." The urgency was real. The crowds were real. The suffering was real.

And still—Jesus interrupts. Why?

Because Jesus understands something we resist: unprocessed experience distorts judgment. Pain that is not named becomes rage. Power that is not examined becomes entitlement. Urgency that is not interrupted becomes justification. Restraint is not retreat.

Because Jesus understands something we resist: unprocessed experience distorts judgment. Pain that is not named becomes rage. Power that is not examined becomes entitlement. Urgency that is not interrupted becomes justification. Restraint is not retreat.

Jesus does not restrain the disciples by lecturing them about violence. He restrains them by insisting they stop and rest. This is not just physical recovery. It is emotional processing. It is spiritual recalibration. It is space to ask: What did this do to me? What am I carrying that I don't yet understand? What am I tempted to do next—and why?

This is how Jesus teaches restraint—not by denying the world's pain, but by refusing to let pain set the agenda.

If we are honest, we know this emotional landscape well.

Jesus still sends us out—into workplaces, families, communities, systems, and conflicts where harm is real, and stakes are high. We encounter suffering that outrages us. We encounter injustice that tempts us to believe force is the only language left. We encounter our own capacity for anger—and sometimes our enjoyment of power.

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And then we come back carrying all of it.

What Jesus offers is not escape from responsibility, but protection from becoming unrecognizable to ourselves. "Come away." Pause before your anger hardens. Rest before your certainty becomes cruelty. Withdraw long enough to remember that you are not the savior. Restraint is not retreat.

This is especially critical in moments like ours—when national power is exercised without restraint, when fear justifies excess, when urgency crowds out reflection. Jesus' command becomes more, not less, necessary.

Because the chaos of the world does not give us permission to abandon the way of Jesus.

Restraint begins not with policy, but with people who are willing to stop long enough to notice what the world is doing to their hearts. And that is why Jesus leads them away—not to disengage from the world, but so they can return without losing their souls.

Jesus understands what we resist: experiences that are not processed will begin to govern us. Pain that is not named becomes rage. Power that is not examined becomes entitlement. Urgency that is not interrupted becomes justification.

Jesus teaches restraint not by suppressing emotion, but by creating space for reflection. Rest becomes a moral discipline. A way of refusing to let anger, fear, or power make decisions for us. In our companion book reading, Pastor Nadia comes to recognize anger as her own "demon"—not something imaginary or exaggerated, but a force that, left unnamed, begins to shape her reactions, her judgments, and her sense of righteousness. Her anger is understandable. It is rooted in real harm. But it is also dangerous.

Once named, it loses its power to rule her. That is what Jesus is doing with his disciples. That is what he still does with us. He does not shame our anger. He does not deny the reality of evil. He refuses to let our most intense emotions set the terms of our faithfulness.

Especially in moments like ours—when injustice is real, when violence feels tempting, when national power is exercised without restraint—Jesus' invitation becomes urgent: Stop. Step away. Reflect. Remember who you are—and who you are not.

Many of us saw this on display in the days following the killing of a young mother by and ICE agent in Minnesota. While the administration rushed to judgment not supported by evidence, the governor spoke not with threats or defiance, but with restraint—calling for calm, accountability, and space for truth to emerge.

In a moment primed for escalation, restraint became an act of leadership.

Remember, restraint is not withdrawal from responsibility. It is protection from becoming what we oppose. This is where our faith meets our moment. We are not the saviors of the world. We are witnesses to a different way of being in it. And restraint is not retreat.
Limits are not weaknesses. Restraint is not retreat. Limits are how love survives.

To follow Jesus in this moment is not to disengage from the world's pain, nor to baptize our instincts for domination. It is to refuse the lie that urgency absolves us of restraint. It is to insist that even our resistance must reflect the God we claim to serve.

Jesus calls his disciples away not because the work is finished, but because how they return matters. And the same is true for us.

Here are suggestions for practicing restraint. First, let's practice truthful prayer. Not polished prayers, but honest ones. Prayers that name anger, grief, and fear without turning them into justification for harm. Prayer that slows us down enough to remember who we are.

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Because Herod is not seeking truth—he is seeking control. And when the visitors do not return, when the truth escapes him, Herod reveals the lie, when he orders the slaughter of the children of Bethlehem.

This is not a metaphor. This is not symbolic violence. This is state-sanctioned cruelty justified by fear and preserved by deception.
And here's the part we often want to skip past: Herod does not invent a new strategy. He simply lets the lie finish its work. The lie says: I must protect my power. The lie says that violence is necessary. The lie says that some lives are expendable for the sake of order.

And the innocent pay the price.

Nadia Bolz-Weber, in her book, *Accidental Saints*, reminds us that this brutality is not an accidental footnote to the Christmas story. It is part of the story. God does not enter a sanitized world. God enters a world where rulers lie, where power is fragile, and where children die because adults are afraid of losing control.

Jesus is born into a reality shaped by deceit and enforced by violence. Which means that the world we are living in—a world marked by contested truth, institutional cruelty, and managed narratives—is not foreign to God. It is precisely the world into which Christ comes.

And that is why Jesus reminds us, not as a slogan, not as a platitude, but as a warning and an invitation: Truth is not neutral. Truth is not safe. Truth is a choice. And—Truth frees those who choose it.

Our companion book, *Accidental Saints*, invites us away from the idea that truth is something we wield—an argument to win, a position to defend, or a weapon to expose others. Instead, Pastor Nadia frames truth as something that first reveals the truth about us.

Her stories circle around moments when people stop managing their image—when the masks crack, and the curated versions of faith fall apart. Truth shows up not as moral clarity from a distance, but as confession up close: addiction named out loud, resentment acknowledged, doubt admitted, harm remembered rather than erased. In these moments, truth is not clean or comfortable—but it is real.

What becomes clear is that, in Christian communities, truth is not primarily about being right. It's about being known. Grace struggles to find us when we insist on being impressive, and forgiveness struggles to find us if we refuse to be honest. The church, at its best, is not a gathering of people who have figured things out, but a place where people risk telling the truth about their lives—and discover that God is already there.

This king of truth feels costly because it dismantles self-deception. It strips away the false stories we tell about ourselves and others. But it is also freeing. Truth, in these stories, does not lead to shame; it leads to connection. It becomes the doorway through which healing, reconciliation, and actual transformation can begin.

Truth is not an abstract doctrine. It is embodied, spoken, confessed, and received in community. And that, ultimately, is where it aligns so closely with the gospel: the truth that sets us free is not the truth we use to judge others, but the truth we dare to tell in the presence of mercy.

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. understood something essential about truth that our moment is relearning the hard way: lies do not merely deceive—they organize cruelty. Like now, King lived in a world where official statements contradicted lived reality. Where authorities spoke of "law and order" while children were beaten. Where violence was justified as necessary, and dissent was labeled dangerous. He knew that lies don't just confuse people—they make injustice sustainable.

That's why King insisted that truth must be spoken aloud, even when it is inconvenient, even when it disrupts public comfort.

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In his Letter from Birmingham Jail, King names one of the most dangerous lies of all: the lie of timing. The lie that says, "Now is not the right moment." The lie that asks the suffering to wait until those in power decide it is time for change.

King rejected that lie outright because he saw what waiting does to the vulnerable. Delay preserves injustice. Silence protects cruelty. And moderation, when it refuses truth, becomes a collaborator. King also understood something Herod understood—but used for opposite ends: that truth threatens power. Herod responded to that threat with violence. King responded with courage. And he paid for it.

Like the prophets before him, and like Jesus Himself, King tells us—by word and by witness—that truth is never neutral. It either confronts injustice or it serves it. There is no safe middle ground.

This is why King's work still unsettles us. Because he does not allow truth to remain theoretical. He insists that truth has consequences. That truth demands a response. That truth costs something. And yet King never believed truth existed for destruction alone. He believed truth was redemptive. That it could bend the arc of history—not magically, not quickly, but faithfully.

If you obey my teachings, you are really my disciples; you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

John 8:31-32

Which brings us back to the choice before us. Lies exploit the innocent. Truth frees those who choose it. King chose truth, knowing it would cost him comfort, safety, and eventually his life. Not because truth guaranteed victory—but because truth was the only path that honored human dignity. And that same choice faces us now.

So where does this leave us? Not with easy answers, not with certainty, and not with the comfort of believing that truth belongs only to one side or one moment in history. It leaves us with a choice.

Jesus does not say that truth will make everything simple. He does not say it will make us popular. He does not even say it will make us safe. He says that truth will make us free. And freedom, in Scripture, is never passive. Freedom is something we step into. Something we practice. Something we choose—again and again.

Lies exploit the innocent. Truth frees those who choose it. Choosing truth does not mean we must have perfect clarity. It means we refuse to participate in denial. It means we resist stories that erase suffering or justify cruelty. It means we tell the truth about what we see, what we feel, and what we fear—even when that truth unsettles us.

But it also means we tell the truth about ourselves. Nadia Bolz-Weber reminds us that grace can only reach what we are willing to name. Confession is not about shame—it's about honesty. And honesty is where transformation begins.

Martin Luther King Jr. understood this too: that truth spoken in love is not an act of aggression, but an act of faith. That refusing silence is sometimes the most faithful thing we can do.

So here are a few simple, faithful next steps—not as a checklist, but as practices: First, practice truth-telling. Pay attention to the stories you repeat—about the world, about others, about yourself. Ask whether they clarify reality or conceal it. Choose honesty over convenience or political affiliation.

Second, practice listening. Especially to voices shaped by grief, fear, or marginalization. Truth often arrives through people whose experiences make us uncomfortable. Stay present long enough to hear them.

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Second, let's resist dehumanization wherever it appears. In our words, and in our online lives. In how quickly we assign blame or dismiss suffering. Let's refuse the easy narratives that make some lives expendable.

Third, we can take actions within our real sphere of influence. For example, we can speak to our representatives. We can support organizations that protect life and dignity. We can show up locally, relationally, tangibly—without pretending we control outcomes we do not.

Finally, remember that God does not ask us to save the world. God asks us to be faithful within it. To rest when rest is needed. To speak when silence would betray love. And to trust that restraint, practiced in hope, is not retreat—but witness.

Hope does not rush past its limits. It waits, breathes, and returns faithful, knowing that restraint is not retreat.

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Pastor Tommy

Nadia Bolz-Weber. *Accidental Saints: Finding God in All the Wrong People*. NY: Convergent Books, 2015.
(ISBN 978-1-60142-755-7).

Third, practice courage. Truth does not always require confrontation, but it does require refusal—refusal to laugh at cruelty, to spread distortion, to look away from harm.

And finally, practice hope. Not the kind of hope that denies reality, but the kind that trusts God to be at work within it. The kind of hope that believes truth, once chosen, can still open a way forward.

Because the world Jesus enters—then and now—is a world where lies do real damage. And yet, it is still the world God loves. Christ does not arrive after the truth is sorted out. He arrives while it is still contested.

Still painful. Still unfolding, Jesus leaves us with this freedom: to choose truth, to walk in it together, and to trust that God will meet us there.

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