ASBURY CIRCUIT RIDER

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JANUARY 25, 2026

Neighbors (Epiphany)

A concept known as "emotional intelligence" gets top billing in the psychological and organizational literature of our day. Emotional intelligence is defined as the ability to understand, regulate, and responsibly express emotion, as a core foundation for healthy relationships, wise decision-making, and effective leadership. Like cognitive intelligence, we all possess varying degrees of these capacities, but we're all crippled to some degree by life experiences, poor role models, DNA, and our environment. *Page 2*

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. *Page 16*

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Neighbors (Epiphany)

cont. from pg 1

Emotional development is a lifelong process that begins in our earliest relationships, but continues into adulthood. Secure attachments in childhood, supportive learning environments, and models of self-reflection and empathy help develop the emotional skills that enable adults to regulate impulses, understand others' distress, and respond with sensitivity rather than defensiveness. Conversely, deficits in emotional formation—whether from trauma, neglect, or patterns of avoidance—can make it harder for well-meaning adults to engage with others in ways that are healthy and life-giving.

Experts describe emotional intelligence not merely as feeling what we feel, but as the capacity to recognize our emotions, to reflect on how they shape our choices, and to integrate that awareness into how we get along with others. Those of us who develop these competencies tend to be better at empathy, conflict resolution, and navigating complexity with compassion rather than with impulse or reactivity.

Importantly, emotional maturity is not simply a matter of age or experience. It isn't guaranteed by the passing of years alone. Instead, it involves conscious growth: learning to accept one's emotions without being ruled by them, developing empathy for others that is distinct from self-interest, and choosing responses that reflect wisdom rather than instinct. This capacity to pause, reflect, and act with integrity shapes not only personal well-being but also the quality of our civic and communal life.

In recent years, psychologists and behavioral scholars have offered candid conversations about the emotional lives and public conduct of leaders in high office. Some have described certain leadership patterns in terms of malignant narcissism—a blend of grandiosity, hypersensitivity to criticism, and intolerance of vulnerability that reshapes how individuals perceive threats and respond to others.

Others note that when leaders exhibit high levels of traits such as entitlement, low empathy, a need for constant affirmation, and a readiness to manipulate information for their own advantage—traits associated in research with the so-called "Dark Triad"—the result is not merely individual insecurity but a relational style that dehumanizes and degrades others.

In professional ethical discussions, clinicians remind us that diagnosis is not appropriate without direct clinical evaluation. But many also acknowledge a duty to warn when patterns of emotional instability and reactive behavior among public figures have clear consequences for others' well-being and for institutions tasked with protecting human dignity.

It would be easy to hear these descriptions and imagine that they apply only to someone else—to leaders, to public figures, to people whose brokenness is amplified by power. But that would miss a harder and more hopeful truth: the traits being described are not foreign to us. They are common human strategies for coping with fear, shame, and vulnerability.
A common reaction is to blame the victim when confronted with tragedy.

Our own emotional formation—how we learned to cope with shame, fear, and vulnerability—matters deeply here. Each of us carries scars that sometimes urge us to avoid discomfort. What makes a person a good neighbor, however, is not lack of fear but the courage to love despite it. Fear blames, but love heals.

Most of us know what it is like to defend ourselves by diminishing others. Most of us know the temptation to avoid situations that might demand empathy we feel unequipped to offer. Most of us, at one time or another, have protected ourselves by insisting we do not need anyone.

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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 26—FEBRUARY 1

Jan 26	Mon		
Jan 27	Tue	9:00am-until gone	Produce will be available each week, along with canned goods, until further notice
		3:00pm	CDC Board Meeting
		12Noon—6pm	Taco Tuesday (see flyer on pg. 23)
Jan 28	Wed		
Jan 29	Thu		
Jan 30	Fri		
Jan 31	Sat		
Feb 1	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 TURN YOUR 2025 LOCAL CHURCH REPORTS IN AS SOON AS POSSIBLE ... 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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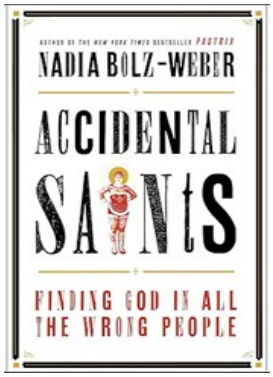
Book Club News



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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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
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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:

Which one of these three acted like a neighbor toward the man? The one who was kind to him. Go, then, and do the same.

Luke 10:25-37

NOTES FROM WORSHIP

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QUESTIONS FOR LIFE GROUPS:

1. Read Luke 10:25-37 and the article in this week's Circuit Rider titled Neighbors.

2. This week, pause and reflect when fear feels justified, and blame comes easily. It may mean resisting the urge to explain someone's suffering instead of acknowledging it. It may mean allowing ourselves to need others rather than insisting on self-sufficiency. Love rarely begins with certainty. It begins with attention.

3. 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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or email southflintsoupkitchen@gmail.com

These are not signs of moral failure so much as unhealed emotional formation. They are the scars left by lives lived under pressure—by wounds we did not choose, fears we did not invent, and lessons we absorbed long before we knew we were learning them. Crossing to the other side of the road, away from victims, is often the body's way of saying, this feels like too much.

This is why none of us is meant to function alone.

Healthy emotional life—whether in families, churches, or nations—depends on interdependence. We need others to name what we cannot see in ourselves, to slow us down when fear accelerates us, to remind us of our shared humanity when our instincts push us toward isolation or domination. The problem is not that we have these traits; the problem is when they go unchecked, unchallenged, and unhealed—especially when combined with authority.

Fortunately, the gospel speaks a clear word of hope. Scripture assumes our brokenness long before we confess it. God does not wait for us to be emotionally whole before offering grace. Instead, God meets us precisely in our fear, our defensiveness, and our avoidance—offering not condemnation, but formation.

Grace is not permission to remain as we are. Grace is the power that makes growth possible. To remember that fear blames, but love heals.

God works through relationships—through community, accountability, and love—to strengthen our capacity for empathy, restraint, and compassion. God does not remove our scars overnight, but God gives us something stronger than fear: an inner freedom that allows us to move toward others even when every instinct tells us to cross the road.

This is why Jesus never asks whether we are wounded. He knows we are. The question He presses is whether our wounds will be allowed to rule us—or whether grace will teach us a different way.

Most of us are blessed to live in circumstances where our emotional shortcomings cause limited harm. We stumble, we fail, we repair, we grow. But the stakes change when emotional brokenness is paired with unchecked power. That is why formation matters—not only for our private lives, but for our shared life as neighbors.

Jesus's story of the Good Samaritan is well known even outside its place in Luke's Gospel. But it is important to pause and consider one of the deeper dynamics at work in that parable: the development of emotional maturity over the course of a life. Luke shares both the parable and the backstory in his gospel.

A group of legal experts confronted Jesus, looking for a way to trip Him while blowing their own horns. One of them asks Jesus what one needs to do to please God and thus receive eternal life. Jesus, in His usual manner of responding in such situations, asks a question. "How do you interpret what scripture tells you?"

The way Jesus reacts doesn't appear to assume anything about the questioner's intentions or preexisting bias. And his answer seems consistent with how Jesus would answer the question. "Love God and your neighbor," he replies.

But after Jesus acknowledged that He agreed with his answer, the expert pressed further. Luke says that he was trying to justify himself, which makes me wonder about the man's emotional intelligence. Nevertheless, his question is a good one. "Who is my neighbor?"

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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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After all, if we're to love our neighbor, isn't it important to establish boundaries? There are a lot of people in this world, and most of us will only meet a tiny percentage of them. Who counts and doesn't count in this critical question of who we're expected to show love towards.

Jesus responds with a story to illustrate rather than offering specific boundaries. In His story, a man is in need of assistance. Two people see his desperation as he lies helpless, but cross to the side of the road to avoid stopping. A third man stops and goes to great lengths to offer help.

Who pass by are a priest and a Levite. These are prominent, powerful people with access to power and resources. But instead of stopping, they both move quickly past the wounded man. Jesus doesn't say that they chose not to help out of malice. But why did they not offer assistance?

Let's speculate by putting ourselves in their sandals. What if both walked by without helping because of their own emotional framework? What if their emotional maturity was shaped by fear, rule-keeping, or avoidance, leaving them unable to see or to stay with suffering?

The priest and the Levite cross to the other side, perhaps telling themselves there must be a reason this man ended up here. When fear takes hold, it's easier to explain suffering away, assign fault, and protect ourselves by distancing ourselves from the wounded. Fear blames the victim.

The one who stopped to give aid, on the other hand, was a Samaritan. This information would not go unnoticed by those listening. They would have bristled at the idea of a person from Samaria playing the role of hero in the story. In today's context, this might be an undocumented immigrant that we've been led to believe is dangerous.

Which one of these three acted like a neighbor toward the man? The one who was kind to him. Go, then, and do the same.

Luke 10:25-37

The Samaritan demonstrates a different emotional posture. He notices the wounded stranger, and his heart is moved. To see another person fully—to refuse to reduce them to failure or fault—is an act of love. Healing begins not when wounds disappear, but when someone stays.

He interrupts his journey to engage in the work of mercy. The Samaritan stops, draws near, and tends what is broken. Fear blames. Love heals.

"Who was a neighbor to the person in need?" Jesus asked as He finished telling His story. "The one who gave assistance," the expert responded. Jesus concludes His response to the man's original question with, "Go and do likewise."

The story Jesus told does not ask whether we have scars. Jesus knows we do. The question before us is this: whether our own formation teaches us show love to others in crisis, or to put a safe distance between us and those who suffer?

Luke's story insists that maturity is not the absence of fear, but the courage to love anyway. Fear blames. Love heals.

This week's chapters from our companion book remind us that emotional formation—the willingness to know ourselves, to accept ourselves honestly, and to share who we are with others—is not merely a private endeavor. It is the soil in which neighborly love grows.

As we prepare to respond to Jesus's challenge about who our neighbor is, we can begin by admitting where our own emotional development has helped us show compassion—and where it has hindered us from entering into the suffering, confusion, and need of others.

In our reading this week, Nadia reminds us that our spiritual lives are shaped not only by what we believe but by what we learned early on about survival, power, and self-protection.

In Chapter 6, she invites us to revisit Jesus' unsettling image of the thief in the night—not as someone who steals what matters most, but as Christ who quietly takes away what we never truly needed in the first place: our illusions of control, our defenses, our carefully constructed identities.

Jesus does not steal our life; He steals the false selves we cling to because they make us feel safe. That kind of theft is terrifying to anyone whose emotional life has been formed around vigilance and fear. Trauma does not make someone cruel, but it does train the body and mind to avoid danger at all costs. When the nervous system is shaped by threat, the instinct is not to move toward pain, but away from it—to bypass, to numb, to survive.

Read through that lens, the priest and the Levite are not monsters. They may simply be people whose emotional formation has taught them that stopping is unsafe, closeness is costly, and vulnerability is dangerous. Crossing to the other side can feel like wisdom when fear is in charge.

Nadia confesses her own deeply ingrained belief that she does not need others. Independence, she realizes, had become not a strength but a shield. To need no one is to remain unexposed, unaccountable, and unentangled. But it is also to remain isolated. This is another way emotional brokenness shows itself—not as panic, but as self-sufficiency hardened into pride. When we believe we do not need others, relationships become optional, and neighbors become expendable.

In Chapter 12, we learn from Bobbie and Amy what it means to see one another. They recognize one another's humanity, not despite their brokenness, but within it. They are not winners in the conventional sense. They have not mastered life. But they have learned something essential: to see another person fully—to refuse to reduce them to a problem, a burden, or a loser—is already an act of love. And that kind of seeing requires emotional maturity and courage.

Taken together, these stories help us name a difficult truth: the inability to love and accept others is rarely a sign of strength. More often, it is a symptom of fear, emotional injury, or unresolved need. Crossing to the other side—whether from a wounded man, a struggling neighbor, or a suffering people—is not neutrality. It is a learned response to a perceived threat.

And here is where this becomes uncomfortably personal. All of us carry emotional scars. All of us have moments when something inside us whispers, keep moving… don't get involved… protect yourself. The gospel does not deny this reality. Instead, it asks whether we will allow those instincts to have the final word. Most of us, by grace and practice, find the inner strength to move toward others anyway. And when we fail, the harm we cause is usually limited.

But not everyone holds power in the same way. When emotional brokenness goes unexamined in positions of great authority, its consequences multiply. The refusal to see others as neighbors becomes policy. The inability to need others becomes isolation. Fear, unchecked, becomes cruelty.

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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What is salient for us isn't clinical labels—but the observable patterns we all see when emotional immaturity is coupled with power: a low capacity for empathy, a quickness to dehumanize, and an instinct to defend oneself by objectifying others. These are the same dynamics that incline hearts to cross to the other side of the road rather than stop, stay, and care for the wounded.

By the end of Jesus' story, the question has shifted. It is no longer, Who is my neighbor? The question is, will I cross to the other side of the road?

The road itself is unavoidable. We all encounter suffering, disruption, and need. We all feel the pull of fear—the instinct to explain pain away, to protect ourselves, to blame the wounded so we don't have to stop. Scripture does not deny that fear. It names it honestly.

But Jesus tells this story to show us that fear does not have to decide the direction of our lives.

The Samaritan is not fearless. He is formed. He allows compassion to interrupt him. He sees the wounded man not as a problem to solve or a failure to explain, but as a human being to be loved. He crosses the road toward him—and healing begins there. Healing begins when we stop pretending we don't need one another, when we allow ourselves to be seen and to see, when we refuse to reduce others to their wounds or our fears.

Jesus tells us this truth through stories, instruction, and action: Fear blames. Love heals. And every day—quietly, deliberately—we choose which one will guide our steps.

That same choice confronts us again and again. Sometimes it appears in public debates or national crises. More often, it shows up quietly—in conversations we avoid, judgments we make too quickly, neighbors we pass without really seeing. Each time fear urges us to blame or dismiss, we are given another opportunity to ask a better question: What would it look like to move toward healing?

This week, that may mean pausing when fear feels justified, and blame comes easily. It may mean resisting the urge to explain someone's suffering instead of acknowledging it. It may mean allowing ourselves to need others rather than insisting on self-sufficiency. Love rarely begins with certainty. It begins with attention.

We are not meant to practice this alone. Emotional and spiritual maturity grow in community—through relationships that slow us down, challenge us, and remind us of who we are when fear narrows our vision. God works through one another to form us into people who can stay present, cross toward suffering, and choose compassion even when it costs us something.

We live in a world where blame is easy and rewarded, where fear is amplified and normalized, where turning away is often mistaken for wisdom or strength. But the gospel tells a different story—and offers a different way: Fear blames. Love heals.

The road will be there again tomorrow. By grace, may we notice it—and may God give us the courage to cross it toward love. You can join us each Sunday in person or online by clicking the button on our ***website's*** homepage. ***Click here to watch***. This button takes you to our ***YouTube channel***. You can find more information about us on our website at ***FlintAsburyChurch.org***.

This is a reminder that we publish a weekly newsletter called the Circuit Rider. You can request this publication by email by sending a request to ***FlintAsburyUMC@gmail.com***, or let us know when you send a message through our ***website***. We post an archive of past editions on our website under Connect - choose ***Newsletters***.

Pastor Tommy

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

Richard Wood. *"Does Malignant Narcissism Fit Trump?"* © Clio's Psyche, Volume 31 - Number 1, Fall 2024. Retrieved from: ***link***

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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