

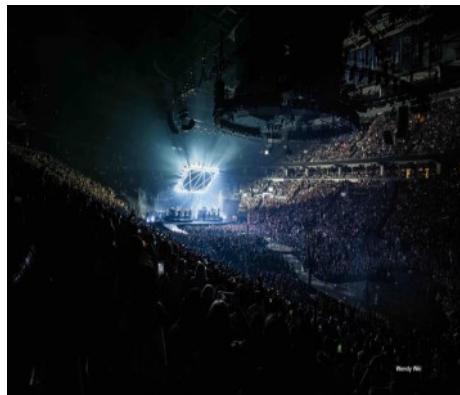


ASBURY CIRCUIT RIDER

Volume 6 Issue 8

FEBRUARY 8, 2026

Responsibility (Epiphany)



One of the defining struggles of our time is the widening gap between those with wealth and power and the vast majority who live without either. These inequities reach far beyond access to comfort or convenience. They shape whose voices are heard, whose bodies are protected, whose stories are believed, and whose suffering is ignored. When power concentrates in the hands of a few, the many are not simply inconvenienced—they are rendered invisible.

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Suffering (Epiphany)



Who are the peacemakers in times of haunting wars?" Olena Tovianska asks from Irpin, Ukraine. She does not ask as a distant observer or a detached theologian, but as someone living inside the question. War is not an abstract concept where she lives; it constructs daily reality. Olena is a translator by profession, but her ministry reaches deeper—she

explores how the performing arts can help traumatized communities begin to heal.

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41 more days for
Spring!! ...



DONATE

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We've seen this tension surface publicly through figures like Bobby Pulido and Bad Bunny. While both are successful, wealthy, and influential, and appeal to millions, they both discovered that popularity is celebrated only as long as it remains harmless to those in power.

Once they chose to use their platforms to speak on behalf of the marginalized—particularly people of color and immigrant communities who have been profiled, detained, and separated from their families—their voices suddenly became 'problematic.' What offends is not their fame, but their solidarity with people the administration has tried to convince us are the enemy.

This matters because the cost of these inequities is not theoretical. It is paid in fear, displacement, detention, and the daily erosion of dignity. Language and skin tone become grounds for suspicion. Entire communities learn that safety is conditional. When this happens, the issue is no longer politics—it is the value we place on human life.

And this is where faith can no longer remain neutral. If we truly believe that every person is loved by God, then equality is not an abstract idea—it is a responsibility. A responsibility that asks us to notice who is being silenced, to question who benefits from that silence, and to decide where we will stand when

power and compassion are no longer aligned.

From God's perspective, we are not ranked by wealth, influence, citizenship, language, gender, or skin tone. We are loved. And because we are loved, we are equal. That conviction is not sentimental—it is disruptive. Any system—political, economic, or cultural—that treats some lives as expendable directly contradicts that truth. And God's love for all persons challenges every system that depends on hierarchy and every instinct we have to sort people by value.

It also raises a hard question: if this is who we are in God's eyes, what responsibility does faith place on how we treat one another? That is the question the letter of James refuses to let go unanswered.

The letter of James was written to a community under pressure—socially, economically, and spiritually. These were early Christians trying to live out their faith in a world shaped by scarcity, hierarchy, and favoritism. Wealth meant protection. Poverty meant vulnerability. And even within the church, the surrounding culture's values had begun to seep in.

James writes not as a detached theologian, but as a follower of Jesus who is deeply concerned that faith is being hollowed out from the inside.

His letter is practical, urgent, and at times uncomfortable because he believes something vital is at stake. For James, belief in Jesus is not merely a matter of personal conviction—it is a way of life that must take visible shape in community.

Throughout his letter, James returns again and again to a single concern: faith that remains private, polite, or abstract is not yet alive. He sees a community tempted to confess the right things while quietly adopting the world's assumptions about power, status, and worth. And James will not allow them—or us—to claim devotion to God while participating in systems that devalue those God loves.

What good is it for one of you to say that you have faith if your actions do not prove it?

James 2:14-17

Nowhere is this clearer than in James's challenge to favoritism. He understands that partiality is not just a social failure—it is a theological one. To treat some people as more deserving of dignity than others is to forget who we are before God. James presses this point because he knows how easily communities of faith can mirror the inequalities around them while convincing themselves they are being faithful.

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IN OUR PRAYERS

Virginia Bigger
Sylvia Pittman
Mirium Watson

Paula Gamble
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: FEBRUARY 9—15

Feb 9 Mon

Feb 10 Tue 9:00am—until gone Produce will be available each week, along with canned goods, until further notice
12Noon-6pm Taco Tuesday in Fellowship Hall

Feb 11 Wed Please RSVP for Spaghetti Luncheon by today (see flyer)

Feb 12 Thu

Feb 13 Fri

Feb 14 Sat **HAPPY VALENTINE'S DAY!**

Feb 15 Sun 10:30am New Beginnings
Contemporary Worship
12Noon-2pm United Women in Faith
Spaghetti Luncheon—Fellowship Hall

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.

**** Sending Prayers for our Asbury member Paula Gamble, as you goes through heart surgery this week at Henry Ford Hospital.**

(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 [\(FlintAsbury.org\)](#).)

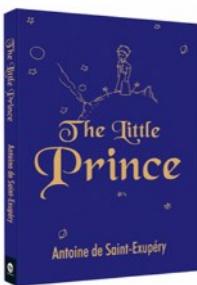


Upcoming Worship Series

"All y' all"



Book Club News



During the season of Lent, our worship series, *All Y'all*, invites us to hear the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the

Mount the way his first followers heard them: not as a list of impossible individual expectations, but as a shared way of life meant to shape a

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Over the past year, most of us have felt unmoored. Truth feels fragile. Anger feels constant. Power feels reckless. And too often, fear has been rewarded while compassion is dismissed as weakness. In moments like these, it's tempting to retreat, to disengage, to harden, or to surrender our moral imagination to the loudest voices in the room.

During the season of Lent, Asbury will join other congregations in a shared worship series entitled *All y' all*, rooted in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. In this sermon, Jesus sets before his followers a vision of life that is both breathtaking and unsettling. Again and again, he takes familiar commandments and intensifies them:

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community that can heal the world.

To accompany this season, our suggested companion book will be *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry.

At first glance, *The Little Prince* appears to be a children's book. Its language is simple. Its illustrations are playful. But readers quickly discover that it asks profoundly adult questions.

Leadership in Worship & Service

Tony & Mirium	Welcome Team
Cyndi	Worship Leader
Anthony & Jim	Ushers
Jonathon & Terrance	Production Team
Yasheah & Mirium	Nursery
Christine	Cafe

Through a series of brief encounters, the story explores how grown-ups come to value the wrong things, how power and possession distort relationships, and how love always carries responsibility and risk.

In this way, *The Little Prince* pairs surprisingly well with the Sermon on the Mount.

The Little Prince is a deceptively simple story that asks adult questions about power, truth, love, and responsibility. During Lent, we'll read it slowly, alongside Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount, letting the story help us notice what we might otherwise miss.

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Upcoming Worship Series — “All y’ all”

You have heard that it was said... but I say to you..."

In All Y’ all, Jesus speaks to a people living amid instability, division, and the abuse of power—and calls them to become a community shaped by truth, restraint, courage, and love. These teachings are not abstract ideals. They are practical guidance for communities learning how to live faithfully when the world feels like it’s coming apart.

This series matters because the way we respond to anger, desire, truth, retaliation, and love will determine what kind of people we become—and what kind of future we help make possible. Each week builds on the last. Each teaching presses deeper. And together, they form a vision of shared life that can resist chaos without becoming chaotic itself.

This Lent, we will not look away. We will listen closely. Because how we live together now matters more than ever.

Jesus’ teachings on anger, desire, divorce, truthfulness, retaliation, and love have often been treated as impossibly high moral ideals. As a result, Christians have found ways to sidestep them, explain them away, or reduce them to private spiritual aspirations rather than lived practices.

This Lent, *All y’ all* invites us to ask a different question. What if Jesus was not giving instructions for individual moral perfection, but describing the kind of community that could heal the world?

The Gospel of Matthew was written for a Jewish Christian community living through upheaval. The Temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed. Jewish followers of Jesus were being expelled from synagogues. Long-standing religious and social structures were unraveling.

In response, Matthew presents Jesus as a figure deeply rooted in Israel’ s story. For Matthew, Jesus is a teacher like Moses, calling God’ s people into a renewed way of life. Just as Moses went up the mountain to receive a law meant to shape a people, Jesus goes up a mountain and teaches a way of life meant to form a community.

When Jesus speaks in the Sermon on the Mount, he is not addressing isolated individuals. He is speaking to a gathered people. They are a diverse crowd of the poor, the overlooked, the wounded, and the hopeful. And Jesus calls them salt of the earth, light of the world, and a city set on a hill.

This communal context matters.

Do not presume that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill.

Matthew 5:17

In English, we lose an important distinction that exists in the biblical languages. When Jesus says, “But I say to you...,” the “you” is plural. Jesus is speaking to all of them together. A Community. If we were to translate Jesus’ words into a Southern vernacular, we might hear him say, “All y’ all have heard it said... but I say to all y’ all...”

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Upcoming Worship Series — “All y’ all”

The title of this series comes from this anomaly.

The “higher righteousness” Jesus describes is not about spiritual heroics or moral scorekeeping. It is about how a community treats its members, especially the vulnerable. And how that community bears witness to God’s reign in the world.

For example, anger is not just a private feeling because anger corrodes relationships. Lust is not just a thought because lust objectifies and dehumanizes. Divorce laws are not abstract; they shape lives and power dynamics. Oaths and promises are not rhetorical flourishes. They reveal whether a community can be trusted. Retaliation is not inevitable because cycles of violence can be broken. And love extends beyond friends and allies to enemies.

Taken together, these teachings describe a people learning how to do right by one another and by God. Most of us read the Sermon on the Mount as a set of impossible standards meant to drive us toward guilt or despair. But the early church heard these teachings differently. For them, the Sermon on the Mount functioned as a rule of life. It served as a practical guide for shaping communities marked by reconciliation, honesty, accountability, and love.

In other words, rather than asking, “Can I live up to this?” the better question may be, “What would it look like for us to practice this together?” This shift from individual achievement to communal formation stands at the heart of *All y’ all*.

While guest preachers and pastors will bring their own voices and contexts to these texts, the shared question remains the same. What kind of people are we becoming when we take Jesus seriously and take each other seriously in the process?

This Lent, we will allow Jesus to challenge our assumptions, stretch our imaginations, and invite us into a deeper way of living together. Not perfectly. Not individually. But faithfully—all y’ all, together.

Throughout Lent, we will explore six teachings from Matthew, chapter 5:

Episode	Sundays	Title	Scripture
One	Feb 22	Anger	Matthew 5:21–26
Two	Mar 1	Adultery	Matthew 5:27–30
Three	Mar 8	Retaliation	Matthew 5:38–42
Four	Mar 15	Divorce	Matthew 5:31–32
Five	Mar 22	Swearing	Matthew 5:33–37
Six	Mar 29	Love	Matthew 5:43–48

Our journey begins on February 22, the first Sunday after Ash Wednesday.

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

Series concept and substantial content created and shared by © The Rev. Jeremy Peters, Court Street United Methodist Church, 2026.

Used with permission. Additional content from: Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. *The Little Prince*. Translated by Richard Howard. NY: Harper Collins, 2000.



“Feed Flint”

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“Feed Flint”

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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:

What good is it for one of you to say that you have faith if your actions do not prove it?

James 2:14-17

NOTES FROM WORSHIP

QUESTIONS FOR LIFE GROUPS:

1. Read James 2:14-17 and the article in this week's Circuit Rider titled *Responsibility*.
2. This week, let's pay attention to who is being dismissed, ignored, or spoken about rather than listened to—at work, online, or in our community. And ask ourselves where comfort, familiarity, or fear might be shaping our responses to others more than love.
3. Then look for one way to move closer to the needs of others—through presence, advocacy, generosity, or listening. Let's pray with honesty, not only for those who suffer, but for the courage to take responsibility where faith calls us to act.
4. 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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 funding@flintasbury.org

Like Jesus' teaching, this story does not argue its case. It tells the truth sideways. It invites reflection rather than compliance. And it reminds us that what matters most is often invisible to those who are certain they already understand the world.

Rather than offering a strict reading schedule, we invite you to read this book slowly and lightly during Lent. Some may read it all in a sitting. Others may return to a few chapters again and again. Either approach is faithful. The goal is not completion, but attention.

Throughout the series, themes from the book—seeing clearly, resisting domination, loving without possession, and accepting responsibility for one another—will echo the questions raised in worship. You do not need to read the book to participate fully, but for those who choose to do so, it may offer another way of listening for what Jesus is saying to all y'all together.

This Lent, we invite you to read a story, listen deeply, and practice seeing with the heart. Here are our planned themes for this series:

<u>Sunday's</u>	<u>Themes</u>
Feb 22	Misunderstanding and frustration
Mar 1	Possession versus love
Mar 8	Responsibility and consequence
Mar 15	Words, meaning, and trust
Mar 22	Power and resistance
Mar 29	The cost of love

We'll have a few books available for purchase at \$6 each. Additional copies of the paperback edition are available through Amazon for \$6. 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 or themes. 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



** WAYS TO GIVE TO SOUTH FLINT SOUP KITCHEN ** Page 12

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.

Refer people!!

Questions??? Call 810-239-3427

or email southflintsoupkitchen@gmail.com



In this week's scripture lesson, James begins by naming what often goes unspoken: favoritism is not a minor social flaw; it is a theological failure. When we sort people by appearance, wealth, or usefulness, James says we have made distinctions among ourselves and placed ourselves in the role of judge. In other words, partiality is not neutral—it is an act of authority we were never meant to claim.

In our companion book chapters for this week, Nadia Bolz-Weber pushes back hard against the idea that Christian responsibility is about moral superiority, correct opinions, or personal purity. Instead, she keeps returning to the stubborn, grace-soaked truth that belonging to Christ binds us to one another—especially to people we would rather keep at arm's length. Responsibility, in this telling, is not first about doing better but about staying present.

In her stories, we see responsibility emerge in the form of showing up honestly, as she names how tempting it is to curate a spiritual life that keeps our mess hidden and our reputations intact. But grace disrupts that impulse. When we tell the truth about who we are—our addictions, our failures, our fears—we take responsibility not only for ourselves but for the

community we inhabit. Honest confession becomes a gift to others, making room for shared humanity rather than silent judgment.

As she continues, she deepens this by confronting the myth of self-sufficiency. Here, responsibility is mutual. We are not just responsible for ourselves; we are responsible to one another. The church is not a gathering of the spiritually independent but a body where weakness, need, and dependence are unavoidable. Grace does not erase accountability—it redefines it. We are accountable for how our lives affect others, whether we intend that impact or not.

During this week's final chapter, responsibility takes on its most concrete and uncomfortable form: love that costs something. We're encouraged to refuse a version of faith that remains abstract, polite, or safely theoretical. If grace is real, it will shape how we treat bodies, stories, and lives in front of us. Responsibility shows up not in lofty beliefs but in ordinary acts of care, restraint, and solidarity—especially when doing so complicates our lives or challenges our assumptions.

Christian responsibility is less about being "right" and more about being bound. Bound to truth. Bound to one another. Bound to a grace that refuses to stay private or theoretical.

Responsibility is what happens when grace moves from something we admire into something we practice.

Our letter from James names a hard truth: when we show partiality—when we decide who belongs, who matters, and who deserves our attention—we place ourselves in the role of judge. This isn't just bad manners or poor hospitality; it's a failure of responsibility. Grace binds us to real people, and James exposes favoritism as a refusal to live into that binding. To sort people by status, wealth, or usefulness is to deny the shared ground we stand on before God.

James does not leave us with a slogan or a theory. He leaves us with a mirror. If all are loved by God, then all are equal—and faith that truly believes this cannot remain passive in the face of inequality. Responsibility, as James understands it, is not about fixing everything or saving everyone. It is about refusing to participate in systems and habits that deny the dignity of those God loves.

The examples we see around us—public figures willing to risk popularity to speak on behalf of marginalized communities—remind us that responsibility always involves choice.

Her words do not deny the ugliness of war. They refuse to look away from wounds and tragedies. Instead, she asks whether there are people courageous enough to stand with victims and confront aggressors. Implicit in her question is a harder one: what happens to human beings when power is exercised without accountability, restraint, or compassion?

The suffering Olena describes is not unique to Ukraine, even if the bombs and ruins are more visible there. Around the world—and closer to home—suffering often begins with a failure of leadership to live as God intends we live together and to protect rather than exploit the vulnerable. It's happening to immigrants living in Minneapolis who came to this country with great anticipation

Research consistently shows that people do not leave their homelands casually. Studies of immigration to the United States reveal that while economic opportunity matters, a significant number of immigrants cite violence, insecurity, and the collapse of basic freedoms as central reasons for leaving. Immigration, for many, is not ambition—it is escape. It is an act of survival in response to cruelty, corruption, or fear that has become unbearable.

That story continues once people arrive here. Journalists

have documented families who fled violence, bled violence, followed every instruction given by the U.S. government, attended hearings, checked in regularly, and tried to build quiet, faithful lives—only to find themselves suddenly detained, separated, or living under constant threat.

Moreover, the suffering caused by aggressive immigration enforcement is not limited to those who lack authorization. In practice, it falls most heavily on people of color from countries viewed as disposable or suspect by those in power. The result is a form of suffering that experts describe as chronic and corrosive: parents afraid to drive, children anxious about school, entire communities learning to remain invisible. Like war, it is suffering shaped by decisions made far away, by leaders who will never meet the people who bear the cost.

Human beings respond to this kind of suffering in predictable ways. Trauma specialists tell us that prolonged fear and uncertainty rewire the nervous system; people live in a constant state of alert, unable to rest. Sociologists note that when suffering is paired with powerlessness, it erodes dignity and hope.

Those watching from the outside often respond differently. Some turn away, overwhelmed by the scale of pain.

Others explain it away, insisting it is necessary, deserved, or

inevitable. Still others grow numb, scrolling past one more story of loss because paying attention feels too heavy. Yet voices like Olena's refuse that numbing. They insist that suffering is not a statistic or a political inconvenience—it is a moral summons.

Across war zones and immigration courts alike, the pattern is clear. When leaders cling to power through fear, ordinary people suffer. And when suffering is ignored, justified, or hidden, it multiplies. The question Olena asks from Ukraine echoes here as well: Where are the peacemakers? Who is willing to face the ugliness without looking away, to plant seeds of courage, to stand with the wounded and name the truth about what is being done to them?

At the same time, we need to be honest about something else. For many of our neighbors here in Flint, especially those who rely on shelters and warming centers, like the one run by Catholic Charities, suffering is not something they read about in the news. It is something they wake up with in their bodies. Chronic illness, untreated pain, exhaustion, anxiety, and the daily stress of not knowing where they will sleep or how they will be cared for weigh heavily on them.

Influence can be used to protect comfort, or it can be used to widen the circle of care. James invites us to make the same choice, whatever our level of power or privilege may be. For the church, this means asking hard but necessary questions. Who feels safe here? Whose voices are missing? Where have we offered words instead of action, prayers instead of presence? These questions are not meant to shame us, but to wake us up to the life faith is meant to live.

Our text from James closes the distance between belief and action because he believes grace is alive. And living things move. They reach outward. They take responsibility for the world they inhabit. When faith is alive, love does not remain an idea—it becomes a practice."

This week, let's pay attention to who is being dismissed, ignored, or spoken about rather than listened to—at work, online, or in our community. And ask ourselves where comfort, familiarity, or fear might be shaping our responses to others more than love.

Then look for one way to move closer to the needs of others—through presence, advocacy, generosity, or listening. Let's pray with honesty, not only for those who suffer, but for the courage to take responsibility where faith calls us to act.

Faith doesn't come alive when we believe more—it comes alive when love takes responsibility to choose according to our beliefs. 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).

For someone already overwhelmed by their own survival, stories of war in Ukraine or immigrant families facing deportation can feel distant, even unbearable. It is not indifference; it is depletion. Compassion is hard to extend when every ounce of energy is already spent just getting through the day.

The same is true for many who will hear or read these words. Much suffering is hidden. Some are grieving losses no one else sees. Others are carrying medical diagnoses, financial strain, fractured relationships, or deep loneliness in silence. For them, global suffering does not always put their pain “in perspective.” More often, it adds to the weight.

Scripture never asks suffering people to minimize their own pain in order to care about others. Instead, it recognizes that suffering has many faces—and that God’s concern is wide enough to hold them all at once.

Matthew begins his gospel with a story that feels just close enough to the cruelty we’re witnessing today to feel like a foreshadowing of things to come. Matthew tells us that when visitors from the East arrive in Jerusalem, asking about a newborn king, King Herod is not curious, but terrified. After Jesus was born, the king feared his power might be challenged, so he ordered the slaughter of the chil-

Matthew includes a haunting reference to an older Scripture—words about Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted. Matthew is not quoting poetry at random. He is reaching back into Israel’s memory of trauma, exile, and loss, reminding his readers that the suffering surrounding Jesus is not new, and it is not ignored by God. To understand what Matthew is doing, we need to listen carefully to that earlier story—and to why tears, not triumph, are the first sounds that surround the birth of the Savior.

When Matthew quotes, “A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children,” he is reaching back to the prophet Jeremiah. Rachel, one of Israel’s matriarchs, had long been remembered as the symbolic mother of the nation. In Jeremiah’s time, her “weeping” names one of Israel’s deepest collective traumas: the Babylonian exile.

Ramah was a place where captives were gathered before being marched away from their homes, their land, and their future. Parents watched children disappear. Families were torn apart. The loss was so profound that Jeremiah describes Rachel refusing comfort—not because comfort is cruel, but because grief that deep cannot be rushed.

Scripture does not ask us to pretend this grief isn’t real. In fact, it gives us language when our own words fail. Psalm 13 cries out, “How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?” This is not a loss of faith, but it is faith refusing to lie. Like Rachel’s tears, this lament is allowed to stand. God does not interrupt it with explanations. God receives it.

In Jeremiah, Rachel’s tears are not the end of the story. God speaks words of promise: “Keep your voice from weeping... There is hope for your future.” Importantly, the hope does not erase the grief. God does not scold Rachel for her tears or tell her to move on. The promise comes after the lament, not instead of it. In Israel’s faith, grief is not a failure of belief—it is part of faithful remembering. God allows the tears to stand.

*A sound is heard in Ramah,
the sound of bitter weeping,
Rachel is crying for her
children, she refuses to be
comforted, for they are dead.*

Matthew 2:16-18

This matters for anyone who is suffering now. Jeremiah does not ask wounded people to pretend the exile wasn’t devastating. He gives them language for their pain and assures them that God hears it.



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We need to know how much Spaghetti to cook, etc... so please let us know how many of you will be joining us by telling or calling Michele Weston at 810-624-1184, by Wednesday, February 11, 2026!



MANY THANKS!!

Sure, we would like to earn a little money, but we are more excited to see some of our other church friends and Asbury CDC Board Members too!!



A **\$LOVE OFFERING\$** will be taken to help us rebuild our **MISSION FUNDS.**

When Matthew brings Rachel's weeping into his Gospel, he does something striking. He places Jesus' story squarely inside a history of unresolved grief. Herod orders the killing of children not because they are dangerous, but because he is afraid. Like tyrants before him, he confuses vulnerability with threat and responds with violence. Mothers weep. Families mourn. Innocent lives are lost. And Matthew does not soften the horror.

Just as important is what Matthew does not say. He does not explain why God "allowed" this to happen. He does not suggest the suffering was necessary or redemptive in the moment. He does not rush us toward resurrection language or silver linings. Instead, he insists that the birth of Jesus occurs in a world where abusive power causes suffering, and leaders still sacrifice the vulnerable to preserve themselves, and where grief is real and justified.

For people suffering today—whether from war, displacement, poverty, illness, or quiet despair—this honesty matters. Matthew refuses to turn suffering into a theological puzzle to be solved. He tells the truth: the coming of Christ does not immediately end tyranny or prevent tragedy. What it does is place God inside the story of suffering, not above it or outside it.

It can be tempting, in the face of suffering that seems overwhelming, to reach for familiar spiritual phrases — "God has a plan," or "It will all work out for good." But too often these words end up minimizing pain, as if suffering must be explained rather than felt.

would be remiss if I didn't lift up the story of five-year-old Liam Conejo Ramos and his father, Adrian Conejo Arias. The two were taken into custody recently in Minnesota by federal immigration agents. They were not arrested for violence or for wrongdoing of any kind. In fact, they were in the midst of an active asylum case that they had pursued legally and patiently.

Images of Liam, wearing a blue bunny hat and a Spider-Man backpack as he was led away by agents, quickly became a symbol of how vulnerable lives are affected by enforcement practices enacted by the current administration. Community members and school officials reported that the boy had just come home from preschool when the agents approached, and observers raised serious questions about the way the operation was conducted.

The outcry that followed was neither quiet nor abstract. People — from teachers to lawmakers to advocates — spoke up. Protests formed outside the detention facility in Texas where they were held, with demonstrators insisting that children are not criminals and

calling for humane treatment. State and national leaders pressed for accountability and urged respect for the family's right to due process. A federal judge ruled that neither Liam nor his father could be deported or transferred while their case proceeds in court, affirming the basic legal principle that no one can be removed from the country without due process of law.

These responses matter for our vision of what faithful presence looks like. Courageous witness is not found in denial of suffering, nor in shrugging helplessly at cruelty, but in speaking truth — even when it is uncomfortable or costly. People came forward despite their fear, despite knowing that raising their voices might invite backlash. Their actions reflect what our companion book describes as hope that engages reality rather than escaping it — the kind of hope that stands with suffering people instead of patting them from afar with clichés.

And this is precisely the kind of vision God casts for us: a vision in which suffering is acknowledged fully, where power is held accountable, and where the community of faith refuses to let injustice go unnoticed. To stand against suffering is not the same as believing suffering is

absent. It is saying — with our actions, our voices, and our compassion — that cruelty does not have the last word and that God's presence is with the wounded.

Nadia Bolz-Weber, in this week's chapters from our companion book, reminds us that God does not hide uncomfortable truths behind platitudes. God stands in the midst of suffering, with those who mourn and with those whose lives have been caught up in cruelty and fear, and calls us to stand with them, too.

God is with those who suffer in Ukraine, with families seeking refuge, and with every neighbor whose pain is unseen or unheard. God calls us not to minimize their experiences but to walk alongside them — advocating, witnessing, and giving voice to their dignity. This is what it means to see suffering the way God sees it: not as a test to be explained, but as a reality to be met with courage, compassion, and justice.

For those at the warming center in Flint, for those navigating chronic illness, for those carrying grief or fear they rarely name out loud, this story does not demand more than they can give. It does not ask them to fix the world or feel compassion they do not have the energy to feel. It simply says this: God sees suffering clearly, names it honestly, and refuses to look away. Rachel's tears matter. Ukrainian tears matter. Immigrant tears matter. Your tears matter.

Matthew's Gospel begins not with triumph, but with mourning—because God is not afraid of grief. And because salvation does not begin by denying how broken the world is, but by entering it fully.

From the beginning of Jesus' story, Matthew tells us that God chooses to enter a world shaped by tyrants rather than wait for a safer one. Rachel's tears are not dismissed. Families fleeing violence are not invisible. Those who suffer in body, spirit, or circumstance are not asked to justify their pain or find meaning in it too quickly. God stands with those who suffer—and stands against the forces that cause suffering. That is not sentiment. That is the moral arc of the gospel.

So what does faith look like in a world like this? It does not require us to carry suffering we do not have the capacity to carry. It does not demand perfect words or heroic action from everyone. What it does call for is honesty, presence, and courage—expressed differently depending on who we are and where we stand.

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

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AFRICAN DRUM AND DANCE PARENT ASSOCIATION



PRESENTS:

TACO TUESDAY IN FEBRUARY!!

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African Drum and Dance Parent Association Presents

TACO TUESDAY

**Every Tuesday in February
February 3, 10, 17, & 24, 2026
12:00 PM to 6:00 PM**

**Asbury United Methodist Church
1653 Davison Road, Flint, MI 48506**



**Call Baba Collins at 810-394-3880
or Mama Mel at 810-394-6521**