

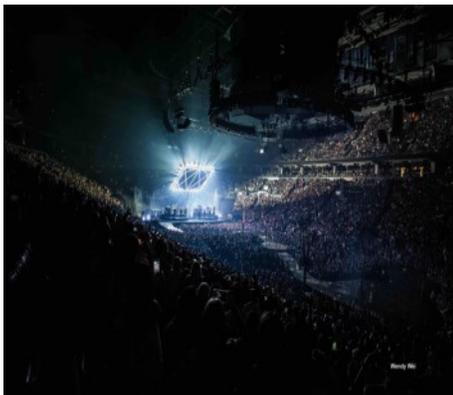
ASBURY CIRCUIT RIDER

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Issue 15

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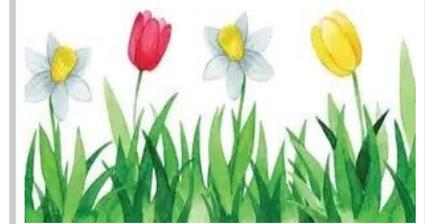
Responsibility (Epiphany)



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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34 more days for
Spring!! ...

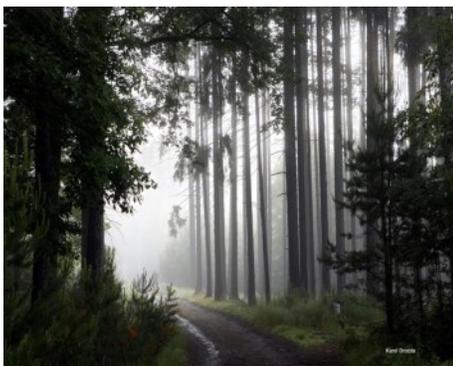


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Transformation (Epiphany)



When we travel today, we rarely choose roads the old-fashioned way. Most of us enter a destination and are offered a route shaped by preferences we don't even remember setting. Preferences like "fastest route" or "avoid tolls." We tap "Go" and trust the voice guiding us forward. Only occasionally do we override the map and choose a different way.

How many roads in life do we travel that way? Roads suggested, shaped, selected for us long before we stop to ask where they lead — long before we even notice we're on them.

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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.

IN OUR PRAYERS

Virginia Bigger Paula Gamble
 Sylvia Pittman Richard Oram
 Mirium Watson Jonathon Misner



FRIENDS AND LOVED ONES WHO ARE HOMEBOUND OR IN NURSING CARE

Dean Lamoreaux Norma Buzzard
 Nancy Elston

COMING UP THIS WEEK: FEBRUARY 16—22

Feb 16	Mon	PRESIDENT'S DAY	
		6:00pm	Leadership Team Meeting
Feb 17	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
		1:00pm	Flint Mission Zone Meeting—Asbury Library
Feb 18	Wed	11am-1pm	Angel Closet open at SFSK (see flyer)
		6:00pm	ASH WEDNESDAY SERVICE AT BURTON CHRIST UMC (4428 Columbine Ave, Burton)
Feb 19	Thu		
Feb 20	Fri		
Feb 21	Sat		
Feb 22	Sun	10:30am	New Beginnings Contemporary Worship

(We are live on [Facebook](#) and our newly launched [YouTube channel](#). You can find these links along with more information about us on our website at ([FlintAsbury.org](#).)

Upcoming Worship Series "All y' all"

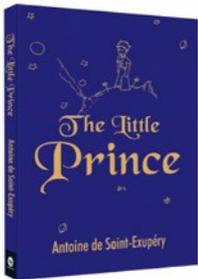


Over the past year, most of us have felt unmoored. Truth feels fragile. Anger feels constant. Power feels reckless. And too often, fear has been rewarded while compassion is dismissed as weakness. In moments like these, it's tempting to retreat, to disengage, to harden, or to surrender our moral imagination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

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.

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

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.

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

This communal context matters.

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:

<u>Episode</u>	<u>Sundays</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Scripture</u>
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”



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:

They returned to their country by another road, since God had warned them in a dream not to go back to Herod.

Matthew 2:12

NOTES FROM WORSHIP

Four horizontal lines for taking notes.

QUESTIONS FOR LIFE GROUPS:

- 1. Read Matthew 2:12, 17:1-13, and this week's Circuit Rider article titled Transformation.
2. This week, let's sit with the light of Epiphany and the command of the mountain: "Listen to him." Notice who Jesus protects, who He challenges, and who He welcomes.
3. Third, honestly examine where control, resentment, or cynicism may be steering your direction, and allow grace to dismantle the narratives that make you feel secure.
4. Fourth, choosing another road is not theoretical. It shows up in conversations, in advocacy, in hospitality, in the refusal to dehumanize. It may not fix the system. It may not produce quick results. But it is faithful.
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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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

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.

We are living in a moment when the roads available to us are being shaped not just by laws and policies, but by rhetoric, fear, and narratives that demand a response.

Across the country, immigration enforcement has intensified. Federal agents have been deployed into cities in search of immigrant families, including those with legal status or pending asylum claims. And people of color, or those who speak with a foreign accent, are living with renewed uncertainty. Ordinary acts, like attending a required check-in appointment, have resulted in detention.

Just days ago, a Colombian family seeking asylum — here legally while their case was being processed — was deported after the father was detained during what had been a routine immigration check-in.

The family attended Newtonville United Methodist Church, located in the hamlet of Newtonville in the Town of Colonie, NY. The church is a historic, active faith community that has been serving the area since 1799. This small church surrounded the family with love and support, including housing, advocacy, and friendship. So, for the people of this congregation, the debate about law and mercy was no longer theoretical. It had names. It left empty seats.

At the same time that we are already reeling from the daily news of immigration crackdowns gone awry, long-standing environmental protections have been dismantled. Once again, accompanied by the repeated claim that climate change is a hoax. It's likely people welcomed that decision. Most of us are alarmed. Once again, the road seems to split.

Rhetoric is offered as explanations. We are told enforcement is about removing "bad people." We are told deregulation is about freedom. Depending on which road we are already traveling, we either exhale or brace ourselves. These are not abstract policy debates. They shape how we think about mercy, responsibility, belonging, and truth itself.

This past week, I sat in a room with other pastors discussing a case study about how a congregation responded to an immigrant family attending their church. The study presented a scenario that recurs in most congregations. Members did not agree on how and how much to help the family. Tensions rose during a meeting in which a request was made for substantial financial assistance.

Our conversation, which lasted for a couple hours, was thoughtful and sincere. Some raised the question of documentation-whether legal status should shape how we respond.

Others reminded us that Scripture calls us to obey governing authorities. That faithfulness includes honoring the law. On the other hand, I can't imagine asking someone whether they had ever received a speeding ticket, cheated on their taxes, or harbored negative thoughts about people unlike them before deciding whether to help them. How is immigration status any different?

What struck me later wasn't that we disagreed. It was how certain each of us felt that our road was the faithful one. No one in that room was trying to be unfaithful. We were all trying to discern what obedience looks like.

And yet we found ourselves standing on different roads. One road emphasizes order. One road emphasizes mercy. One road leans toward caution. Another welcome. We discovered how easily we gravitate toward the road that feels most responsible to us.

And each road can quote Scripture. That's the part we don't like to admit because that realization is unsettling. It's true that the apostle Paul urges believers in his letter to the Church in Rome to be subject to governing authorities. Yet the Bible also

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).

tells us that the apostles declare in Acts of the Apostles 5, "We must obey God rather than men." Moreover, Jesus knowingly broke the law when He healed on the Sabbath and overturned tables in the temple.

Scripture does not flatten the tension between law and justice. It holds it. And so must we. These are not abstract debate points. These are families. These are communities. These are future generations. And the roads being laid out shape how we think about mercy, responsibility, law, and power.

We're all facing a time of discernment. When leaders amplify rhetoric that echoes white nationalist themes...When demographic changes are framed as threats rather than gifts...When legal arguments press toward racial profiling. As Christians, we're called to pay attention.

When scientific consensus is dismissed because it interferes with political goals...When institutions meant to safeguard public health are weakened...When truth itself becomes negotiable depending on who is speaking...as Christians, we're called to pay attention.

Not because we are partisan, but because we are disciples. The question is not simply what policies we support. The question is what shaping us.

What kind of people are we becoming as we walk these roads?

Scripture does not flatten the tension between law and justice. It holds it. Which means the question is not simply, "What does the law say?" The deeper question is: What kind of people are we becoming as we follow these roads?

Matthew tells us that strangers came "from the East" in search of a newborn King. They were foreigners. Astrologers. They were people who dressed differently, spoke with unfamiliar accents, and read the sky instead of the Torah. However learned they were in their own land, here they were travelers—dependent on hospitality, vulnerable to the integrity of the ruler whose territory they entered.

Ideally, they would have been welcomed with warmth. Instead, they were manipulated.

They arrived in Jerusalem asking a simple question: "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews?" They expected competence. They encountered insecurity. They expected joy. They found fear. Herod received them not as guests but as instruments. His was the road of control—power maintained by threat, information gathered for harm, religion consulted for advantage.

But the story does not end in the palace.

The foreigners continue on. They kneel before a child. They offer gifts without leverage. They listen — not to the anxious ruler but to a dream. After encountering the Christ child, the visitors from the East are warned in a dream not to return to Herod. And so, as Matthew tells it, "they went back to their own country by another road." No confrontation with Herod. No public statement. No political victory. Just a different road.

Revelation often leads to reorientation.

They returned to their country by another road, since God had warned them in a dream not to go back to Herod.

Matthew 2:12

Their status as outsiders matters. Matthew could have written a story in which the priests or the scribes recognized the Messiah first. Instead, he tells of foreigners who see what insiders miss. Grace crosses borders before borders are defended. The first to worship Christ in Matthew's Gospel are not guardians of purity, but seekers from afar.



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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
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12:00 PM to 6:00 PM**

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Epiphany always unsettles our assumptions about who is inside and who is outside.

The lectionary this week offers another epiphany story. In the 17th chapter of Matthew, Jesus takes Peter, James, and John with Him up a mountain. There, Jesus is transfigured before them. His face shines like the sun. His clothes become dazzling white. And standing with him are Moses and Elijah — the Law and the Prophets — not abolished, but fulfilled and gathered up in him. Understandably, the disciples are overwhelmed, afraid, and disoriented. When a voice from the cloud declares, “This is my Son, the Beloved... listen to him.” Notice the pattern.

On the road to Bethlehem: light appears. Outsiders kneel. A warning comes. They change direction. On the mountain, a light blazes, disciples fall to the ground, and a voice speaks. They are told to listen — but then they must descend the mountain and return to the work below.

In both stories, glory is not given for spectacle. It is given for guidance.

It is not incidental that the three disciples on the mountain were also outsiders. Fishermen from Galilee. Men without status in Jerusalem’s religious hierarchy. They had walked with Jesus,

yes. They had heard his teaching. But on that mountain, they experienced Jesus anew — not merely as Rabbi, but as the radiant convergence of Law and Prophets, promise and fulfillment. Epiphany does not simply inform. It transforms.

Perhaps the Magi’s transformation was nothing more than geographic. They went home another way, but we’re not told the rest of the story. But the disciples’ transformation was vocational. They would listen to Him — even when Jesus spoke of suffering, even when He challenged inherited assumptions about power and greatness.

In both stories, revelation interrupts the road we thought we were on. And in both stories, the choice that follows is quiet but decisive.

Herod remains on his road — anxious, threatened, violent. The Magi step onto another. The disciples could have clung to the mountaintop, building shelters to preserve the moment. Instead, they descend, carrying with them a deeper understanding of who Jesus is.

Light is given not to dazzle us, but to direct us.

Epiphany invites us to ask: When we encounter Christ—in scripture, in a stranger, in truth that unsettles us—do we double down on the road of control?

Or do we listen and allow our direction to change?

Grace comes first. Listening follows. Then comes the long obedience of another road.

In the final chapters of our companion book, we return to where we began: grace. Not as sentiment, and not as reward, but as the persistent presence of God that refuses to be exhausted by human failure. After walking through identity, truth, suffering, neighbors, and responsibility, the book does not end with solutions or strategies. It ends by reminding us that transformation is not self-manufactured. It is received—often slowly, often unevenly—through grace that keeps meeting us where we are.

These chapters press an uncomfortable truth: grace does not remove us from the world’s brokenness; it changes how we remain within it. We are not transformed *out of* conflict, injustice, or complicity, but transformed *within* them—learning to live differently even when outcomes are uncertain, and power feels lopsided.

The closing sections resist the temptation to declare victory. Instead, they emphasize faithfulness over effectiveness, presence over purity, and endurance over resolution. Transformation,

the book suggests, is less about becoming someone else and more about becoming more fully who we were created to be—people shaped by grace rather than fear.

That arc mirrors the stories we have been tracing.

The visitors from the East are not changed not by confrontation, but by encounter. They do not overthrow Herod. They do not fix the system. They simply cannot return the same way they came. And this is the kind of transformation described in the stories of the accidental saints Nadia Bolz-Weber encountered. Not dramatic reversals, but reoriented lives. Not moral superiority, but deepened clarity. And not escape from responsibility, but new ways of carrying it.

Grace, then, is not the excuse to “let it go.” Grace is what makes it possible to keep going without becoming hardened, cynical, or cruel. It is what allows us to choose a different road—even when the world we leave behind remains unchanged.

Our author sums up grace this way:

There’s this power of God in the universe that is restorative and redemptive, and no one is worthy of it, but everyone gets to receive it. It’s powerful, but it’s offensive at

the same time, because it’s not fair, and it doesn’t work into our notions of justice. It changes us, and it’s what we need, but it doesn’t mean it feels good. If it’s real grace, it’s never going to feel good.

That is not cheap comfort. It is disruptive mercy. Grace unsettles the powerful and humbles the certain. It exposes fear masquerading as strength. It refuses to let us baptize our preferred road simply because it is familiar. And it calls us—again and again—to listen to the Beloved Son and walk accordingly.

If Epiphany reveals light, and Transfiguration intensifies it, grace is what enables us to walk in it. If transformation is directional, then the question before us is not abstract: What road are we on?

Discernment is not about achieving perfect clarity. It is about cultivating the capacity to listen. Listen to Scripture, to the Spirit, to the cries of our neighbors, and even to the discomfort that exposes our own complicity. It is about noticing when rhetoric echoes fear more than faith. It is about asking whether our posture toward strangers reflects Herod’s anxiety or Christ’s welcome.

We will not all map the terrain in identical ways. The clergy conversation reminded us of that. Faithful people can stand at the

same crossroads and describe the landscape differently. But the measure of our road is not partisan alignment or personal preference. The measure is whether we are being shaped by grace rather than fear.

This is the final episode of our *Epiphany Series*. Next week, we begin the Season of Lent, where we’ll stay with Matthew until Easter, looking closely at a part of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. As we travel together over the coming weeks, I invite you into three practices:

The first is attentive listening. Return often to the Gospel stories. Sit with the light of Epiphany and the command of the mountain: “Listen to him.” Notice where Jesus consistently stands—who He protects, who He challenges, who He welcomes.

The second is honest examination. Ask where control, resentment, or cynicism may be steering your direction. Grace is offensive precisely because it dismantles the narratives that make us feel secure.

And third, pray for an embodied response. Choosing another road is not theoretical. It shows up in conversations, in advocacy, in hospitality, in the refusal to dehumanize. It may not fix the system. It may not produce quick results. But it is faithful.

We are not called to be spectacular. We are called to be responsive.

The strangers from the East returned home by another road. The disciples descended the mountain and followed. We, too, are invited—not to escape this moment, but to remain within it differently.

Light has been given. Grace is present. The road before us is not predetermined. The question is whether we will listen—and whether we will walk accordingly.

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).

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