

The Mission Central Meyer Minute

“The God I Know Is Not a Culture Warrior.” Of all places, that title was in yesterday’s New York Times, a paper that doesn’t line up with traditional Christian beliefs. It was written by Tish Harrison Warren, a priest in the conservative Anglican Church in North America.

“In the news and on social media, God usually shows up when we are fighting about something. The subject of faith seems most often discussed in conversations about voting patterns and campaigning. God appears in our public discourse when Representative Marjorie Taylor Green, a Georgia Republican, calls for Christian nationalism. Or in Twitter debates about whether a coach should publicly pray on the 50-yard line. Or when the former Georgia gubernatorial candidate Kandiss Taylor painted ‘Jesus, guns, babies’ on the side of her campaign bus” (A19).

Pastor Kyle Wright and I are team-teaching a Sunday morning Bible class. We’re calling the class “You’re Peculiar,” from the old King James translation of 1 Peter 2:9, “you are...a peculiar people.” In modern versions, “a people for (God’s) own possession” (ESV). We’ve asked the class, “What would you like to study?” and they’ve responded with many topics. Ms. Warren: “Churches and other religious groups must continually highlight how our traditions address pressing issues that will never trend on Twitter or dominate political debates: problems like loneliness, despair, conflict in families, disappointment, grief, longing, loss and those all-too-human anxieties and insecurities that keep us up at night.”

“Peculiar” is a gentle word for how many in today’s media and intelligentsia judge biblical Christianity. “Religion Dispatches” lambasted the Times for running Ms. Warren’s writing, “out of touch,” “bigoted social politics,” “misogynistic,” “homophobic,” etc. (September 8, 2021). We’re increasingly branded “peculiar,” usually worse, more and more like the Christians to whom Peter wrote, believers slandered, side-lined, and sometimes hauled into court for beliefs the majority thinks are un-American. It’s a one-sided view of the First Amendment, but the place where we respond should be less in front of our digital affinity groups, less in front of cameras, and more in quiet learning and discussion of Christian Scripture. Ms. Warren: “Faith touches all areas of life, and issues such as abortion, religious liberty and the relationship between church and state are important. But when we primarily talk about God in the context of political or ideological debate, believers’ actual experience of God, worship and faith – not to mention spiritual virtues like humility, gratitude and kindness – often get lost.” God’s people in Christ are indeed peculiar.