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RLN exists to explore issues at the intersections of faith and life. In doing so we solicit and publish a range of opinions, not all of which reflect the official positions of the Diocese.

We acknowledge that we meet and work in Treaty 1 Land, the traditional land of the Anishinaabe, Cree, and Dakota people and the homeland of the Metis Nation. We are grateful for their stewardship of this land and their hospitality which allows us to live, work, and serve God the Creator here.

RLN welcomes story ideas, news items, and other input. If you want to be involved in this media ministry, please email the editor at:  
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My daughter is 15 months old. As I'm sure most new parents can attest, the first year of parenthood is both mentally and physically exhausting. For me, the first three months were the toughest, what with the interrupted sleep, constant crying and spit up, and naps too short to offer any respite. It was hard for me to see, in those first few months of caring for a newborn, that it would get better one day.

I didn't have many opportunities to go out much, either, and I often felt isolated; the only other person I saw on a regular basis was my husband. But, when my daughter was 4 weeks old, rehearsals for my choir started up again and I went to that first practice with her strapped to my chest.

I'm not a particularly gifted musician or the strongest singer, but I've been involved in music, in one form or another, for most of my life. I sang in choir and played flute all the way throughout middle and high school. I took piano lessons when I was 5 and it is probably my biggest regret that I didn't continue. Right around the

time I was finishing up university, I was part of a small community choir called Sonolux, where I discovered that I can hit the really low notes as an alto. And, now I sing second alto in an a cappella group called Incantatem.

I credit Incantatem with getting me through the first year of motherhood in pretty decent mental shape. Being able to get out of the house


Church: John K. Samson and Cate Friesen interviewed by Janet Ross and Mike Koop interviewed by myself. As well, Denise Fortier, who chooses the music for each Sunday service at St. Chad's, explains the importance of music to the liturgy and worship. And, in via media, Lissa Wray Beal offers new insights on Jeremiah's lamentations.



Photo: [Valentino Funghi](#)

once a week without the baby, getting together with friends, and doing something that I loved – making music – was a balm for my soul and the best form of self-care I could have come up with.

This issue of *Rupert's Land News* is all about the importance of music. We'll hear from three musicians on music, spirituality, and the

Whether we can make music ourselves or have to content ourselves to simply listening to it, music can make such an impact on our lives. I think the Church is stronger when we bring it into our sacred spaces. 

# THE POWER OF MUSIC

*Donald Phillips*

It is appropriate to define music as a “language” of sorts, but it is so much more. Ordinary language stimulates the cognitive centres of our brains, but only if we allow it to. Though verbal or written language impacts us when our brains analyze and process the meaning it’s conveying through auditory or visual cues, we can decide to simply ignore those messages, especially if we desire to shut out the source.

*Music provides a channel through which we can receive transformative revelations from God that transcend the limits of our thoughts or our feelings on their own.*

But music is different. We have no effective “shield” against the messages of music. Think of the indispensable role that music plays in the portrayal of visual media such as films. When we are watching *Indiana Jones*, we know that Harrison Ford is about to appear and do something heroic when his musical theme comes on, even if our eyes are not on the television screen. Or, when we are watching a suspense or horror movie, it is difficult to resist feeling a heightened sense of fear and anxiety from the sinister-sounding

music.

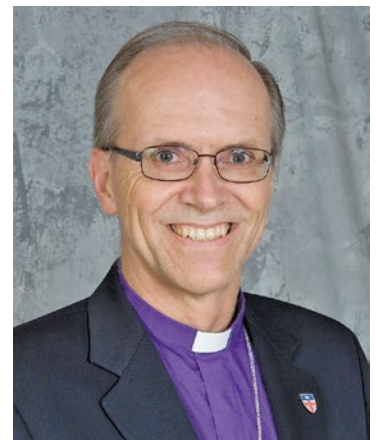
Scripture attests to the power of music, even to the point of its power over the influence of evil spirits. In 1 Samuel 16, when the spirit of the Lord departed from Saul and he was being tormented by an evil spirit, his servants summoned the young shepherd boy, David, to come and play the lyre for Saul. “And whenever the evil spirit ... came upon Saul, David took out his lyre and

played it with his hand, and Saul would be relieved and feel better, and the evil spirit would depart from him.” Likewise, the Scriptures are full of references to both the command and the impact of praising God, particularly in song.

Why does music have power? Neurological science tells us that music engages both hemispheres of the brain by stimulating the left (linear/cognitive) as well as the right (holistic/imaginative). And perhaps even more important, because of this dual involvement, it actually helps to build and

strengthen “bridges” between the two sides of the brain. Beethoven once said that, “Music is the mediator between the spiritual and the sensual life.” While he wasn’t referencing brain hemispheres, the choice of the word *mediator* between two essences is significant. A mediator brings understanding and connection between two different parts, resulting in their integration and ability to synthesize something new.

Think about this potential in our spiritual lives. Music provides a channel through which we can receive transformative revelations from God that transcend the limits of our thoughts or our feelings on their own. It can open us to new perceptions of truth and beauty in our world and ourselves. [rin](#)



△ **Donald Phillips,**  
**Bishop of Rupert's**  
**Land**

# MUSIC AND SPIRITUALITY

*Janet Ross*

Music has had a significant place in my life and in some ways has been a “character” or perhaps more accurately a kind of dialogue partner in my life story. Music has invited me into new spaces of existence and existentiality, has confronted me, and has comforted me.

When approached with the topic for this month’s edition of RLN, I asked if I might include a bit about music and scripture, and then interview two Winnipeg musicians on their understanding of music and spirituality. Thus, the format for this article includes first some roles of music in scripture and, next, comments on experiences of music and spirituality from two Winnipeg musicians, [Cate Friesen](#) and [John K. Samson](#).

## MUSIC IN BIBLICAL TEXTS

Music arrives on the scene very early in the biblical canon. Genesis 4:20-22 relates a brief account of the “origin of skills,” naming three categories of job skills ostensibly considered most necessary by the biblical authors: the ancestor of metalsmithing (Tubal-cain), the ancestor of livestock farming (Jabal), and the ancestor of musicians (Jubal). I have always appreciated this text



Photo: [Leif Norman](#)

△ *John K. Samson*

that ascribes to music the same value as the practical skills of life. What can be discerned from this? How might music be as necessary to life as farming and food? What nutrition/nurturance does the creation of, performance of, and hearing of music offer?

We discover in biblical texts that music accompanies us on all journeys in life – from birth to death, harvests, weddings, joys and celebrations, sorrows and grief. From the coronation of kings to sacred ceremonies, music

rang through the streets of Jerusalem in processions and through individual, social, political, economic, and religious worlds. Music was powerful enough to win wars (Gideon’s trumpets and rams’ horns at Jericho), heal illness, and challenge oppression. Music is said to aid prophets in attaining their messages (2 Kings 3:15). Perhaps the culmination in the biblical text is that only the call and invitation of music affords the Divine Presence to inhabit the temple ascribed to Solomon in Jerusalem.

Music, therefore, unites the worlds of human and divine (2 Chronicles 5:13). In a utopic description, the text relays that it is only when the musicians and singers are as *one*, in complete harmony, that divine glory descends to live among the people. As human and divine co-exist, and as humanity is united in harmony, creator and creation are brought together. Is this in part how we enter into being co-creators in the process of composing and singing/performing music?

## MUSIC AND SPIRITUALITY

Music and spirituality have long been intimate companions. Some say music was earliest humanity's first language. As a Quaker who participates in the contemplative practices of silence and spirituality, I spoke with two Quaker musicians, John K. Samson and Cate Friesen, about their understanding and experience of

music and spirituality.

**JR: Do you consider music and spirituality to be related?**

**JKS:** I do think they are related, but I'm also wary of the connection. I grew up singing in religious contexts and found that music was often used as a form of indoctrination and control. This was difficult for me, so as I was beginning my musical career this is always something I was very wary of – that kind of reactionary element of music.

When I landed with the Quakers many years later, one of the things that appealed to me was the relative lack of music in their gatherings of Meeting for Worship. As I did some research, I was intrigued by this idea that early Quakers (1600s England) were very suspicious of music. I actually really like that about Quakerism. I appreciate this and I think there is something "programmed" about music. There is something that can be enforced.

For me, the lack of music in my religious life is gratifying, because the absence of it provides a shape of it. It allows me to appreciate it in new ways. I find that I use it more sparingly than I used to as a spiritual instrument. And this makes it more powerful than it was before.

I do find that one of things I've been interested in

lately is [shape-note singing](#). I'm so gratified by this experience. One of the things so profound about it is there is nothing "performative" in it. (There is a joke that people would travel days and days to participate in shape-note singing, but wouldn't cross the street to hear it.) There is something pure about it, something truly experiential. There is a power to that. When I go to Christian worship services in mainstream services, I'm often struck by how music is used in a way to amplify feeling. I'm also struck by how much "praise" music there is and how little "fear and trembling" there is in music. In some ways, it is so uplifting that it doesn't lift me anywhere.

Music is a huge part of my life – it's one of the best things in my life and performing for other people is a real joy and privilege that I sort of can't get enough of. I grew up in a liturgical Lutheran community and church. Most of the music I make can be traced back to the sung liturgy of the Lutheran church I grew up in. I still find something powerful in that. I'm fascinated by the music of language itself and how profound it can be. Basically I "talk-sing" and that is an intersection I'm interested in – when speech becomes song and recognizing that the line between the two is malleable. Defining what music is for me is also a kind of puzzle I'm interested in



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teasing out and Quakerism provokes interesting arguments in that regard.



△ Cate Friesen's album, "Wayward"

**CF:** With both music and spirituality is a sense of mystery. There is something intangible and incredibly powerful about music and about spirituality. This is a significant link for me. In my childhood, they were completely intertwined. I grew up Mennonite, singing in harmony and the music was very much around spiritual themes. Even when this diversified for me, it remained incredibly powerful, and is something that is beyond words. There is a quality to both spirituality and music that cannot be described in words and that can move the heart.

I know some find this in art, and I find it in music.

For such a long time, music was the major way

I expressed many things: the wonder I had about the world, the hard stuff and the beautiful stuff. I would celebrate all this through making and writing music. Music is never "background" for me. As I've grown older, I choose to listen less, because I need more silence. I find I can't listen to music and work; I have to focus on one thing as I hear music as *music*. I'm pretty selective about what I listen to, but it

still tends to open my heart often in ways I wasn't aware I needed to be opened up. This is that powerful, unnamable Mystery.

**JR: What would you like people to know about music and spirituality?**

**CF:** Music does not always need to be spiritual music. We don't all find the mystery in the same thing. Also, it never needs to be just church music to find the spirituality in it. There is amazing church music that I love, and my heart is moved even if the lyrics/theology aren't my own. There is a way for music to be spiritual that is not connected with religious music.

Another key thing is

that I've had very specific spiritual experiences when I sing with others. There is something about collectively singing with a group of people that is moving, and is very much like the difference between collective worship and individual worship. This makes me still love hymn singing, or shape-note singing. I can be sitting with a group of people from many difference spiritual backgrounds, but when singing together there is something amazing that is happening among us. It is an incredibly strong experience.

**JKS:** Music is democratic and available to everyone. The culture's obsession with auteurism and originality is in opposition to the spiritual value of music. It should be available to all. [rlin](#)



△ Janet Ross teaches at the Centre for Christian Studies. She is a member of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) and enjoys hiking with her spouse.

# WHY DO WE SING WHAT WE SING IN CHURCH?

*Denise Fortier*

I love music. I particularly love hymns – at least most hymns. Ancient office hymns and gospel hymns each have their niche. I love what we call “praise music” as well. I like to think that each person who sits in the choir or in a pew is open to receiving the message in the music. As Christians we rejoice in music that brings glory, praise, thanksgiving, and prayer to God. We take solace in songs that tend to the injured soul and respond to themes that give hope and call us to action and justice.

So, why do we sing what we do during Sunday service?

It has a lot to do with who we are as a Christian community, as well as where we are in the liturgical calendar. The preparation of the music for a particular service starts with the readings assigned to that day in the Christian year. We are led through the seasons of Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, and Ordinary Time in a journey laid out in the Common Lectionary. The music is chosen primarily to support and reflect on the texts for the day. As we are part of both a Christian and a secular community, we also attempt, through our music choices,

to respond to issues and concerns in our church, country, and the larger world. Justice and peace are major themes which echo throughout the year.

At St. Chad's, I am the person who selects the music for our services. I first sit down with the scriptures and read. I contemplate. I take notes. I read again. Then I

pray. I find this dedicated time with God a cherished part of my devotional life. I simply take time to dwell in God's presence and still the thoughts of the day so that I can hear the music that is hidden in the silence. It is the most important part of the process.

Then I get to work. I consult McCausland's Order of



Photo: [David Beale](#)



Divine Service, which is the “master guide” to all things in the liturgical calendar for the Anglican Church in Canada. McCausland gives suggestions for suitable hymns taken from the Common Praise hymnals.

I also often take to the web, visiting some of the dozens of websites I have bookmarked where I can find inspiration. Two of my favourites are [Gordon Johnston](#), Organist and Choirmaster at the Church of St. John the Evangelist in Ottawa and Director of Music in the Anglican Studies Program at Saint Paul University, and [Natalie Simms](#), an Australian church music leader who has an amazing amount to offer each week in terms of music insight and breadth of

resources.

I find it exciting to think that I am part of a huge global community of Christians who are searching, at that very moment, for ways to bring the message of the scriptures that week alive for their congregants. It humbles me, while at the same time giving me great joy in a sense of shared purpose in bringing glory to God through sound and voice.

Sunday service in the Anglican Church is all about the liturgy: the order of service, words of praise and love, the prayers, the petitions, the Eucharist. Things that are written, in black and white, for every occasion. We are a people who follow a form of corporate worship that has been written

for the ages and will speak to ages to come. We can modernize the liturgy, but we choose not to change the essence of what we do when we meet as a congregation before God.

A former priest of mine was once confronted by a parishioner who wanted to know why people smiled and let their children run ahead when they came forward to receive the Eucharist. He replied, “Because it is a family meal.” They complained that there was not enough time set aside for much silent prayer and quiet contemplation. He answered, “This is the family gathering to give praise to God and to learn about Christ’s teachings. Silent prayer is something between you and the Creator. It is private, and is most properly accomplished during your daily time alone with God.” Liturgy is akin to the rules for the preparation of a meal: Who does what, and when. It prevents us from getting distracted by the table decorations and keeps us focused on the substance of the nourishment set before us.

When I select music, I plan for flow and continuity in the service. At St. Chad’s we start the service with a Prelude, followed by a time of silence during which the body and mind prepare for the journey ahead. The Processional music should be a welcome, setting the mood

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for the day while lifting voices in praise, and reminding us why we are there. We choose to sing "Glory to God" each appropriate week of the year. On weeks when we observe Morning Prayer, we sing the canticles and rest in the knowledge that the words and the tunes are ancient and connect us to the past where beauty is also present.


The Gradual hymn calls us to listen attentively to the Word. We have a tradition

If there is a time to make an offering to the Lord this is it.

There is much beautiful Eucharistic music, but we often choose to sit and listen to an instrumental. The music which accompanies the Holy Eucharist is often contemplative and full of awe. It needs to reflect the most sacred meaning of the occasion as we are led through the liturgy but should not ever be so bold as to draw the focus from the celebration taking place at the table.

on track, just like a daily planner for study or work. The liturgy is a useful tool to assure that the jobs all get done, and we keep our eye on the target. It allows us to forget all the busy-ness of putting together new words which will communicate the essence of the corporate worship service, and especially the magnificence of the Eucharist. We rest in the beauty and the sure truth of the past, while connecting it to our modern needs and issues.

Music is the companion which elevates our worship beyond mere words. It is a most precious and powerful gift and gives life and light to both praise and prayers.

I say: Rejoice, give thanks, and sing! 

*The liturgy is a useful tool to ensure that the jobs all get done, and we keep our eye on the target.*

of using a hymn that reminds us of the importance of the words of the Gospel. We usually divide it, singing one or two verses before the Gospel reading and another one or two after. We will stay with the same hymn for a season at a time so that the words sink in, week by week bracketing and uplifting the importance of the Gospel spoken.

The Offertory hymn fits with the readings and, well, offering. This is the opportunity to let the congregation lift their voices together and it must be a hymn which is familiar and full of meaning.

The Recessional hymn is often referred to in other churches as the "Sending Hymn" and should inspire the people to go out into the world with purpose. "Go into the world to love and serve the Lord." Following the Recessional is a carefully chosen instrumental postlude, which provides a few moments at the end of the service to allow one to absorb fully the blessing of the time spent together in the presence of God.

As Anglicans we choose to be led through the days, and through the years, using a template which keeps us



△ *Denise Fortier has enjoyed a lifelong love affair with music, word, and art. She and her daughter are active members of St. Chad's Anglican Church in Winnipeg.*

# THE SAME OLD THING: AN INTERVIEW WITH MIKE KOOP

*Kyla Neufeld*

*Mike Koop is a musician who regularly leads worship at saint benedict's table, where most of what we sing is original music written by members of the community. I asked him a few questions about how he approaches writing music for Sunday worship and how he views his role as a musician in the Church.*

**KN:** Can you tell me a bit about your musical career and influences?

**MK:** I have been making music since 1987-88 or so, though I would say the music I've been making could start being vaguely classified as "good" somewhere around 1992-93. This is, obviously, open to debate.

I've released around nine or 10 albums both solo and with various groups, such as The Bonaduces, Buick Six, The Kicker, and The Waterworks. Most of my stuff is available on [YouTube](#) and [The Bonaduces releases are on Bandcamp](#). I am ferociously inept at self promotion and completely stupid about music as a business. My newest group [The Leftists](#) (oh, how I love that name!) does have a Facebook page, which I have no control of. There's some pretty sweet videos there though! And, if people wanna talk they can message me on Instagram – my handle is [@imintocds](#).



Photo: Mike Koop

My influences include The Who, Neil Young, The Velvet Underground, Teenage Fanclub, Big Star, The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, Larry Norman, Husker Du, The Replacements, Superchunk, Sebadoh, Jawbreaker, Nikki Sudden, Epic Soundtracks (the artist, not the record label), The Cure, power pop, old blues, and country music. Other influences I'm less willing to reveal include musical theatre, hair metal, and the

once-inescapable invisible hand of Cancon.

**KN:** What do you think is the role of church musicians besides providing music for worship?

**MK:** To make the very best music you can make. Your art should be a reflection of God's glory so you should really give your all to create and preform to the very best of your abilities. To be as inviting and open as





△ Mike leads worship at saint benedict's table.

you can be (not all personalities work this way, I know, but still).

Musicians and leaders have to remember it's not about them so they need to be open to criticism especially when it comes from a place of, "is the music promoting faith, hope, and love? Providing a space for worship and contemplation? And, as is sometimes required, is it pushing people into less comfortable places where the unenjoyable and/or downright ugly truths of the world around them are laid bare?"

**KN: You often write music based on verses in the Bible to fit a particular Sunday and you have a distinct style. How do you approach writing music for these verses? How do you decide on tempo, range, rhythm, etc.?**

**MK:** More or less, I ask (or am informed) about what

the particular scripture is for a given Sunday. I look it over, pick up my guitar start playing. As I play I start singing. If what I'm playing and singing "works," I keep singing and playing it over and over until I feel it's taken shape. At that point I make a quick demo recording so I don't forget what I've done.


With music for saint ben's, I often try to keep the [Taizé music tradition](#) in mind: "short songs repeated again and again (to) give it a meditative character." As well, I prefer trying to emulate, or at least show the influence of, early 20th century blues, country, and gospel in my saint ben's material. I am completely incapable of copying any particular style properly – it always ends up sounding, for better or worse, like me.

**KN: Do you think musicians have a place in forming the theology of a**

**church?**

**MK:** If they are gifted to do so, then yes. It must be the community, not just the leadership – including the music leaders – that ultimately forms the theology through reading, discussing, debating, prayer and contemplation.

**KN: While you mostly write music for Bible verses, we have sung a few of your settings of traditional liturgical texts, like "[Agnus Dei](#)," "[Kyrie Eleison](#)" and "[Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord](#)." And, at saint ben's, we have begun contemporizing the language of some hymns. Is there an onus on musicians to update or renew words and passages that have been around for hundreds of years?**

**MK:** In music, the "new thing" may not always be the best thing for a given situation. However, there is always room for new art and new music. New music or art may open willing eyes and ears that have been closed to "the same old thing." Sometimes, these newly opened eyes and ears may eventually come to respect and desire what they once dismissed. But, the new thing always, always, always becomes "the same old thing" eventually. 

# PARISH NEWS **ROUND UP**

## ▷ Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council



### Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council

is seeking volunteers to help with newly arrived Yazidi refugee families by providing friendship and social support. This is a special opportunity for parishioners of the Diocese to help refugee newcomers and make connections with people you might otherwise not meet.

Criminal Record Checks and Child Abuse Registry Checks will be required, but Manitoba Interfaith will cover the cost of these and help with the applications.

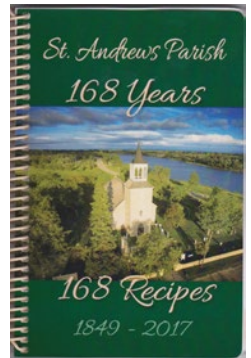
A group of four volunteers is ideal and parishes are encouraged to organize themselves into a 'team' to undertake this. However, if there are individuals who volunteer on their own, Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council staff will make up teams. There will be an orientation for volunteers and staff will make the initial connection and be available for ongoing questions.

If you have questions or are interested, contact the Diocesan Refugee Coordinator, [Gail Schnabl](#) or [Maysoun Darweesh](#) at Manitoba Interfaith.

## ▷ St. Andrew's on the Red

Old St. Andrew's (3 St. Andrews Road in St. Andrews) has published a recipe book with recipes provided by parishioners to mark their 168 anniversary. The book costs \$12.

You can purchase your copy by contacting [bbg@mymts.net](mailto:bbg@mymts.net) or [fjborn@hotmail.com](mailto:fjborn@hotmail.com).



## ▷ St. Saviour's Anglican

St. Saviour's (690 Munroe Avenue) has introduced a new series of Contemporary Evening Eucharist Worship Services, Sunday evenings from 7:00-7:45 p.m. All are welcome to attend. For more information, visit [St. Saviour's website](#) or call 204-667-0336.

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## ▷ Companion Diocese Orphans Program

The [Companion Diocese Team](#) is low on funds for its [Orphans Fund Program](#) and is calling on Rupert's Land parishioners to help support this program.

The following is an abridged version of an [article from RLN's website](#).

The Companion Diocese partnership between Rupert's Land and Central Buganda Diocese in southern Uganda is entering its third decade of shared ministry.

The Companion Diocese Committee,

which facilitates the Parish Links Program and the Orphan's Fund Program alongside the Diocese of Central Buganda, would very much like to see the Orphan's Fund Program continue. The needs are many and local resources scarce as very few aid organizations operate in the region.

It is our hope that this treasured program will continue to contribute to the lives of children through our shared partnership with our Ugandan friends in our sister diocese of Central Buganda.

– *Companion Diocese Committee*

## UPCOMING ISSUES

▷ **December** is a time for **Feasts**; we'll look at the history behind feast days, feasting on a low income, and food sustainability.

▷ In **January**, we'll contemplate the mystery of Christ's incarnation in our issue on **Epiphany**.

*Rupert's Land News* is always looking for writers and artists! If you'd like to write for RLN or submit some artwork, [please send me an email](#) with your name and the topics on which you'd like to write, or samples of your artwork. In particular, I am looking for people who might be interested in writing reviews of books, movies, or CDs. You can also send me an email if there are any themes or topics you'd like to see in future issues of RLN.

– *Kyla Neufeld, Editor*

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# SHARED PAIN: THE POWER OF JEREMIAH'S LAMENTS

*Lissa Wray Beal*

*"You deceived me, LORD, and I was deceived; you overpowered me and prevailed. I am ridiculed all day long; everyone mocks me. Whenever I speak, I cry out proclaiming violence and destruction. So the word of the LORD has brought me insult and reproach all day long." – Jeremiah 20:7-8*

Jeremiah is known as the "Weeping Prophet." These words are part of a [series of laments](#) in which Jeremiah pours out his anger, anguish, loneliness, sense of betrayal, and despair in a form similar to the laments found in the Psalter.

Jeremiah ministered in Israel's final years, through the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, and the peoples' exile into Babylon. He called God's people to repent and return to the goodness of covenant life (Jeremiah 1:4-19). Despite God's assurance that he would be with Jeremiah and strengthen him, ministry was incredibly difficult, lonely, and costly – and ultimately did not prevent exile. No wonder Jeremiah wept.

For a century, scholars have generally considered Jeremiah's laments as personal expressions of his inner struggles, often confidently

linking them to imagined scenarios or one of the biographical accounts in the book of Jeremiah. But, more recently, scholars have felt less confident in asserting such historical contexts, and have moved to other, less historicist approaches. Two such perspectives are explored here, each arising from the prophet's role as a mediator who represents both the people and God. Each provides helpful ways to engage Jeremiah's ancient laments.

One role of a prophet is to stand as a representative of the people. In light of this representational perspective, Jeremiah's laments can be considered as giving voice to the Israelites in exile who are attempting to make sense of their shattered lives. Traumatized by the unparalleled national and personal loss occasioned by the exile, their experience of siege and famine, brutal warfare, social collapse, loss of national identity and land, and suffering and deportation, may have left them numb, shocked, hopeless, and even unable to articulate the experience.

Recent application of disaster and trauma studies to the book of Jeremiah, like Kathleen M. O'Connor's



△ *"Jeremiah Lamenting the Destruction of Jerusalem" by Rembrandt, 1630. Public Domain.*

*Jeremiah: Pain and Promise*, acknowledges these devastating effects of exile. As well, such studies show that public lament names the trauma and thus gives voice to what feels unspeakable and reaches toward restoration and hope. As the book of Jeremiah took form in the exilic period, the prophet's laments and their emotions of pain, bewilderment, and loss voice a whole community's lament. Far beyond merely recounting the prophet's personal experience, the words provide a public lament by which God's people can negotiate disaster, acknowledge its devastating pain, and reach again towards God.

A second perspective likewise moves Jeremiah's laments beyond the personal. As a prophet, Jeremiah speaks God's words to the people. At times, the voice of the prophet and God blend seamlessly, switching speakers and [blurring the lines between them](#). Jeremiah's prophetic words truly mirror God's word to the people.

Similarly, Jeremiah's life experience communicates God's message through [enacted parables](#). Alongside these parabolic communications, Jeremiah's experience of suffering provides an embodied word to God's people. Jeremiah consistently [laments opposition](#), and there were many attempts to silence him through [arrest, trial, and imprisonment](#).

When Jeremiah issues his first lament, he says:


"I had been like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter; I did not realize that they had plotted against me, saying, 'let us destroy the tree and its fruit; let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name be remembered no more'" (Jeremiah 11:18-19).

Jeremiah's sadness and rejection in these words is palpable, but they also prophetically speak of God's own experience of rejection. "God's experience becomes Jeremiah's experience. As

God was rejected by the people, so also the prophet who spoke and embodied God's word was resisted and renounced by them. Jeremiah's laments, whatever their roots in his personal life, thereby have become a proclamation of the word of God to the audience for whom these chapters were written," says Terence E. Fretheim in his 2002 book, *Jeremiah*. For those in exile processing the pain and anguish of loss, this identification of God's own pain would communicate that God laments over God's beloved people, despite the fact they rejected their covenant God. This would provide a powerful invitation to hope and renewal of covenant life.

In this second perspective, Jeremiah's laments embody God's experience of rejection, and his pain as a rejected covenant partner. In this, Jeremiah, like the Suffering Servant in Isaiah, stands as a typological anticipation of the God who comes in human flesh to suffer rejection, pain, and even death for God's purposes. The great church commentator, Jerome, reflecting on Jeremiah 11:18-19 in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Jeremiah, Lamentations*, recognized the Christ presented in the persona of

Jeremiah. Much more than the personal laments of an ancient prophet in a specific historical context, Jeremiah's laments prefigure the suffering Christ – the one who suffers rejection and pain to win back recalcitrant humanity.

The two perspectives explored here consider Jeremiah's laments as more than personal expressions. As powerful corporate reflections on loss, rejection, and pain, the laments provide pastoral windows into our contemporary contexts. In Jeremiah, God joins our suffering, providing words and The Word, which meet us there. 



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