rin rupert'slandnews









7 "How Long O Lord?"

CONNECTING CHURCH & COMMUNITY

CONNECTING CHURCH & COMMUNITY



Publisher | Bishop Geoffrey Woodcroft Editor | Sara Krahn Accounting | Joy Valencerina Advertising | Angela Rush Layout & design | <u>cityfolkcreative.ca</u>

Rupert's Land News is published 10 times per year (September - June) by the Diocese of Rupert's Land, in the Anglican Church in Canada. It connects churches and communities from Portage la Prairie, MB, to Atikokan, ON, by offering news, events, opinions, and ideas to 4,000 readers per month. RLN is available in a variety of formats: <u>Website</u> • <u>Facebook</u> • <u>Twitter</u>

We also deliver timely news and information via a weekly email. <u>Sign up here</u>.

Advertising - RLN accepts advertising in our monthly magazine and our weekly email. <u>View</u> <u>our rate sheet</u>. To discuss advertising call (905) 630-0390 or <u>email us</u>. Editorial offices: Anglican Lutheran Centre 935 Nesbitt Bay Winnipeg Manitoba, R3T 1W6 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, 2, and 3 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 <u>email the editor</u>.

Contents copyright 2021 by *Rupert's Land News*. All rights reserved.

Cover: Charles





What do prison writers have to teach us about the intimate love of God? Maybe, everything. Some of the most profound spiritual writings in history come to us from individuals who've found themselves in captivity. "God is nearer to us than our own soul," writes the 14th century anchoress Julian of Norwich from her isolated cell, in the wake of the Black Death. In more recent history, I read a letter published in The New Yorker from a Christopher Fausto Cabrera, writing from the Minnesota Correctional Facility in Rush City to his pen-pal, the renowned photographer Alec Soth. Cabrera writes, "I can't even imagine who I'd be without my ability to see in my dark—all the beauty I've discovered!" Convicted at the age of 22 for killing a man in a drive-by shooting, Cabrera has spent 17 years incarcerated, writing prose and reading the likes of Marilynne Robinson, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Ralph Waldo Emerson. In the midst of the past year's upheavals (and with nothing to lose), he wrote a letter to Soth, a famous photographer of alienation and sadness in America. Soth wrote back and thus began a tender friendship between inmate and photographer. Their friendship is compiled in *The Parameters of Our* <u>Cage</u>, and is a testament to the hope that can emerge from darkness and alienation.

Imprisoned voices from various vantage points in history succeed, time and again, in transcending the four walls that enclose(d) them. We continue to hear messages of hope from the Tullianum dungeon and Flossenbürg prison, from the Birmingham city jail and, now, from the Minnesota Correctional Facility. The following issue compiles theological musings on a few notable individuals whose experiences in prison have profoundly shaped their understanding of Christian faith. In his opening meditation on the *Significance of Saint Francis for Prison Ministry*, chaplain Donald Stoesz (himself a kind of prison writer) reflects on his work with inmates, whose lives scrape the bottom of societal existence and yet reveal the rich spirituality that manifests in the wake of radical suffering. Stoesz writes, "It is only as we give up human intimacy that divine intimacy is possible." One of the best examples from the 20th century of this kind of surrender of human intimacy is the life of German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer—the subject of our second feature by J. Ryan Smith. Smith reflects on the divine intimacy Bonhoeffer experienced in the days leading up to his execution, as he writes what will later become the *Letters and Papers from Prison*.

Immediately following Smith's piece is a striking photograph by R. Susan Smandych, capturing the violent realities of those imprisoned in and around Jerusalem. Then, and in keeping with artistic representations of imprisonment, Cree composer Andrew Balfour gives voice to his latest compositional project, Captive (pg. 10). Finally, in via media, New Testament scholar Gord Zerbe writes about the resiliency and hope that stemmed from Paul's experience imprisoned in Ephesus.

These experiences of imprisonment pose stark and painful realities. As Cabrera writes after 17 years of incarceration: "[I] have had to fight to define redemption for myself. I know that none of this is justice. This system creates more

solves problems and nothing." And yet, in confronting the parameters of his cage, Cabrera finds himself in a tender friendship; and the honest, vulnerable voice of his letters is a testament to the profound intimacy that can find us anywhere, no matter how isolated and lonely our situation may be.



Sara Krahn is the editor of Rupert's Land News.

Balancing Act

GEOFFREY WOODCROFT

My life has changed radically in the past year, but not because of COVID-19.

At various points throughout my life, someone close to me has announced that they have seen real, positive change in me, of which I am often unaware. This last year, however, has seen a slowing of time that has allowed me to witness some of these changes in myself. In this last year, a year of messy awakenings, I have discovered the part of me that requires constant discipline, life-long learning, and regular correction. Remembering the words of Micah 6, "to love kindness, do justice, and walk humbly with God," I consider my daily balancing act to be a child of God, and to be your fellow member in the Body of Christ..

My balancing act is tiresome because I continually default to my normal, my easy, my known life and lifestyle. My battle becomes more intense as I read, meditate, and reflect upon the Word of God as it is read, spoken, exemplified and felt, as it smacks against my fears and insecurities. As God's call intensifies in my heart and mind so also does my selfawareness increase to a point of feeling pressure to choose between hiding from God, or becoming incrementally more congruent with God's purposes. I reflect upon this not to be liberated from my old self, but to be free from poor choices that have kept me from maturing as God's child. That which I now reflect upon has always happened in my life; but with the past year's various restrictions, impositions, and changed schedules, my seemingly stable routines and practices have shifted to a separate, more immediate reality, one by which

I more quickly see things from different perspectives.

Paul, while in prison, probably in Ephesus, wrote to his fellow Christian Philemon, requesting him to receive back his slave, Onesimus, whom Paul taught *The Way* as a fellow prisoner. Let us consider the work Paul accomplished in jail: in the midst of oppression and isolation, Paul perfectly taught Onesimus the very things that landed Paul in prison in the first place. Further, the letter written to Philemon would have been seen as a threat to the culture of slavery and perhaps idol worship. Paul excelled in his separated reality.

This past year I have heard from you, my fellow members of Christ, some of the best preaching I have ever heard, and stories of selfless love and action from the Church in the world; I have observed an adaptability and resilience that truly shows God in our midst. Generosity and hospitality have been a cause for rejoicing, especially with new found modes of communication. This year has exposed how our fears, fissures, and insecurities need not lead the Church to the decline and absence of

creativity and imagination, but rather to be a catalyst for building the Church for the age that has arrived.

May God bless us with great strength, courage, and wisdom to meet each new day and every new relationship in joy.



Geoffrey Woodcroft, Bishop of Rupert's Land



This article represents an edited version of old church. He regarded communion as a key chapter four in Donald Stoesz', Magic of Fiction Illuminating Transformation (Victoria: in Friesen's Press, 2019), pp. 63-77.

Saint Francis' life, imprisonment, conversion, and discipleship have something to teach us about ministry. After becoming a knight in battle, Francis ended up in prison, came down with a life-threatening fever, and returned home with his wild streak intact (Michelle Soavi, Saint Francis). He visited his father's workers and ministered to the lepers in the woods.

These events brought about a crisis of faith. Jesus told the rich young ruler in Matthew 19:10 that he had to sell his possessions if he wanted to enter the kingdom of God. Francis took Jesus' instructions literally and became a beggar.

A second crisis of faith had to do with remaining celibate. The Catholic tradition was firm about celibacy in regard to priests and nuns. The records are not precise about what this entailed for Francis. We do know that he had a dear friend, Clara, who joined him in his vow of poverty and became a religious sister.

A third crisis of faith had to do with obedience. Francis was perceived as an idiot, madman, fanatic, and fool (Julien Green, God's Fool: The Life and Times of Francis of Assisi. Peter Heinegg). translated by People concluded that his actions were the result of his fever, his fervour, his tumultuous relationship with his father, his time spent in prison, his misadventures in chivalry, his madness, and/or his radical sense of spirituality.

Francis was able to demonstrate his orthodoxy. He devoted himself to renovating an part of worship. He devoted his preaching to repeating the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. He received permission from the Pope to form a band of followers.

Impetus for change is real when a person is convicted and sentenced to incarceration. Shame and guilt are powerful factors that motivate a prisoner to take a serious look at their past life. Loss of freedom, loss of reputation, loss of relationships, and loss of livelihood occur as a result of imprisonment.

Saint Francis is helpful in this regard. He willingly gave up money, marriage, and independence. Francis showed his father that there was something more valuable than money. He demonstrated to Clara that the intimacy of spiritual love surpassed earthly love that bound one person to another. And he proved to the pope that his spirituality was reflective of the church's celebration of the body of Christ in word, deed, Eucharist, fellowship, and communion.

The men that I worked with were willing to steal and sell drugs and commit fraud in order to become rich. Their need for excess and greed landed them in a situation where they had nothing to show for their efforts. They ended at the opposite end of the spectrum of wealth and success they were hoping for.

A similar need for discipline was evident in the men who came to prison for sexual crimes. Their preoccupation with sex ended them up in a situation of enforced abstinence. The safeguarding of sexuality within broad emotional, spiritual, and social frameworks allows us to be sexually active in a way that is not possible for those men who have few boundaries. Their need to abandon taboos ended up in a prescribed state of abstinence.

The same result occurred for those men unable to obey the law. Their antiauthoritarianism was so severe that they were now under the thumb of taskmasters who told them when they could get up, when they were supposed to work, and when they were supposed to go to sleep.

We live within the bounds of authority, sexuality, and salaries because we consider these aspects of our lives to be part of what it means to be fully human. We conform to the demands of our bosses because we want a pay check at the end of two weeks. We are sexually faithful because we want to keep our relationship commitments intact. We live on a reasonable amount of money because we know that riskier adventures in the stock market or frequent changes in jobs can result in a worse financial situation than before.

This mediocre lifestyle results in a mediocre spirituality. The underlying meaning of money, sexuality, and obedience is not directly evident because we have accepted the general norms of living within our financial means, enjoying sex within the bounds of faithfulness, and being obedient in our work and social situations. Our spirituality has not been severely tested



Donald Stoesz is an ordained minister with Mennonite Church Alberta. He worked as a prison chaplain for thirty years with Correctional Service Canada under a contract system before retiring in 2020. He is currently working part-time as a pastor with the Lutheran Church (ELCIC). He is married to Naomi Brubacher and they have four children.

because none of these three disciplines has become a problem.

The matter is quite different for the men with whom I worked. Their obsession with sex, their insatiable need for money, and their inability to listen to anyone but themselves brought them face to face with the law. External bounds were necessary because no internal ones were adequate to rein them in.

The willingness of Saint Francis to be "abnormal" comes into view. It is hard for us to watch Francis disassemble himself from normality because it makes us question the normality under which we are living. How can any one be called to such charisms of poverty, chastity, and obedience when less extremism will do?

Chaplains journey along this road of privation because this is the only path available for inmates in order for spirituality to shine on the other side of pain and suffering. We enter into the lives of these men as they face the facts that they have been richer, more promiscuous, and more disobedient than we have been in our staid, middle-class existence. These prisoners face the fact that they are now poorer, more celibate, and more obedient than we need to be.

Francis forced me along with the men I worked with to face the starkness of the spiritual life. It is only as we give up human intimacy that divine intimacy is possible. It is only as we surrender ourselves to human authority that we understand what acquiescence to God really means. And it is only as we give up control of money that the satisfaction of heavenly desires is possible.

Prayer of Saint Francis

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love, Where there is injury, pardon, Where there is doubt, faith, Where there is despair, hope, Where there is darkness, light, Where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master,

Grant that I may not so much seek To be consoled, as to console, To be understood, as to understand, To be loved, as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive, It is in pardoning that we are pardoned, It is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

"How Long O Lord?": Prison Writing and the Pandemic

J. RYAN SMITH

Sometimes the world changes and we are caught right in the middle of it. A year ago, was the beginning of that moment for us, and every day since is lived in light of a new world, with new habits, fears and hopes. In some ways it is easy to say what has changed. We live in a world of the virus, we are often alone, and we have learned all sorts of scientific language for which previously we had little use. Yet in other ways it is a struggle to say what has changed. There are so many unique stories of loss and grief, like the loss of an elderly friend or relative, or stories of courage like those of nurses and doctors risking their lives to treat the sick. These stories are part of this new world as well. But I have found, and perhaps you have too, that there are many stories of small grief, and daily hopes which have also changed. It is difficult to speak or make sense of all these stories. Yet at times, attending carefully to one story can shed light on our own, and offer new light which unveils God's presence even in the midst of our struggle to have faith, and find hope and experience Christ's love.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Letters and Papers from Prison is one of the most unlikely and heartrending classics of the twentieth century. It is unlikely because of its genre, a collection of Bonhoeffer's letters written from his various prison cells and interspersed with poetry and sermons written for special occasions. It was also written just before the early and sudden death of its author. Indeed, Letters and Papers from Prison is no thoughtful work of literature, but the thoughts and hopes of a man who longed to be free of his small prison cell and watched, instead, as his world of non-Nazi Germans cascaded towards destruction without him. Bonhoeffer's Letters is heartrending because it sketches out the daily thoughts and concerns of a man who believed he would be free almost until the end, only to be executed at Flossenbürg concentration camp in 1945. Bonhoeffer led one of the most interesting lives of the twentieth century. He was a theologian and pastor, a seminary director and a double-agent who plotted against Hitler in a circle of anti-Nazi Germans. In spite of this remarkable life, Bonhoeffer's writing reflects the suffering of an ordinary person in an extraordinary situation.He requests particular books or special foods, he receives very rare visits from friends and family, and he plans a wedding with his fiancée. This combination is what makes Bonhoeffer's writing about Christ remarkable; it is a chronicle of a struggle to follow Christ in the midst of absolute uncertainty.



Courtyard where the execution of prisoners at a camp near Flossenburg took place.

In this collection, Bonhoeffer points us to Christ within his small prison cell, or at least gives us breadcrumbs to follow the presence of the one who often remains hidden from us. Bonhoeffer does not provide a cheap parlour trick, where Christ suddenly appears and suffering and pain is revealed to be a bad dream. He is no escapist. For many of us, myself included, it is a struggle to see how Christ is present here, in this loneliness, grief and even death, and we long for a great rescue.

Bonhoeffer points us away from escape to endurance when he writes

One of my predecessors here has scribbled over the cell door, 'In 100 years it will all be over.' That was his way of trying to counter the feeling that life spent here is a blank; but there is a great deal that might be said about that, and I should like to talk it over with father. 'My time is in your hands' (Pg. 31) is the Bible's answer. But in the Bible, there is also the question that threatens to dominate everything here: 'How long, O Lord?'" (Pg. 13).

We feel here the answer to the Jewish question of agony, "How long, O Lord?," which captures the struggle to make sense of how our time is in God's hands. Bonhoeffer reminds us that we are not the first to engage in this struggle. We are given permission, in the midst of days, weeks and months of the new reality we live in, to both trust God and ask "How long, O Lord?"

This question is no "wish fulfillment" for Bonhoeffer. As he reflected on the place of God in his own suffering he began to reflect on the meaning of God in his own life. In one letter he writes, "God is no stop-gap; he must be recognized as the centre of life, not when we are at the end of our resources; it is his will to be recognized in life, and not only when death comes; in health and vigour, and not only in suffering; in our activities, and not only in sin." He points to a critical paradox in our life with Christ. Bonhoeffer's life in the cell awakens him to the fundamental ways God had been a stopgap, a crutch to lean on in times of trouble, but now he struggles to see Christ as a very effective "crutch." He goes on to write, "[Christ] is the centre of life, and certainly didn't 'come'

to answer our unsolved problems. From the centre of life certain questions, and their answers, are seen to be wholly irrelevant."

In prison, where Bonhoeffer sits and writes with diminishing hope in freedom, he grasps that the "stop-gap Christ" is not sufficient to the pain and grief of his life, but what is needed is the Christ who comes to restore all things in the fullness of time.

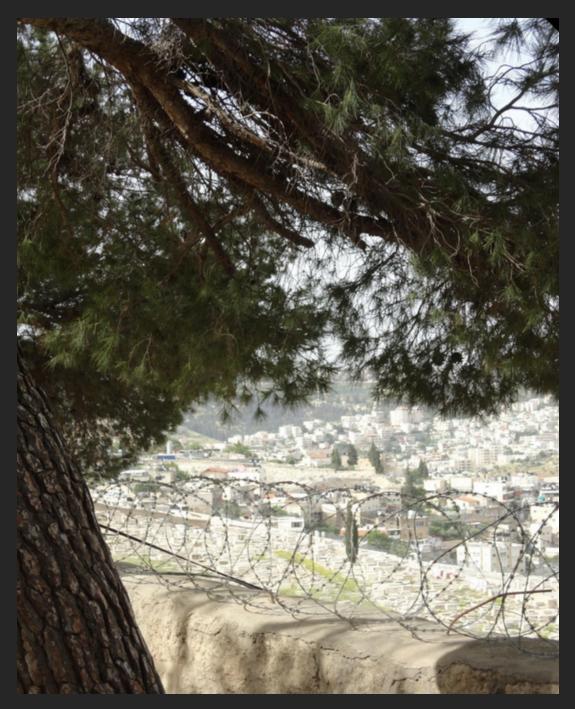
The Christ spoken of in the fullness of the Prophets, the Apostles, and the Prayer Book is no addendum to our lives, but is the centre of them. This is the Christ to whom we pray and to whom we have hope. Bonhoeffer asks "Who is Christ for us in this time? Is He a stop-gap only? Or is the Christ given to us in Word and Sacrament something much greater?

Bonhoeffer was no stranger to solitude; he considered it a significant and critical spiritual practice. Yet in prison he found solace in writing to those he loved, and we find that Bonhoeffer's struggle is not suffered entirely alone, but is marked with letters to his friends, family and fiancée. The result is a chronicle of small sufferings and joys lived in a world of suffering, grief and death, which causes readers to slow down and see God in these small and often fleeting moments. For Bonhoeffer, the solitude

of imprisonment reveals that "Christ is our hope" and this is the "strength of our lives." In the solitude of a small cell in Tegel Prison, Bonhoeffer finds Christ not in the wishes of escape, but in the steady presence at the centre of all aspects of His life. This is true even as he cries out in the midst of his small prison cell, like so many of us in a time of pandemic, "How long O Lord?"



J. Ryan Smith is a former youth worker who loves exploring the hard questions about God and faith at Wycliffe College. In his spare time, he loves to read old books and play board games with his family.



Photographer's Statement:

This photo was taken in May 2011 on the Mount of Olives, near Dominus Flevit Chapel. Note the barbed wire, a reminder of violence within and around Jerusalem, and of people imprisoned for their religious beliefs. This is where Jesus wept over the fate of Jerusalem. Although Jerusalem means "abode of peace" it is still vulnerable to violence and unrest. The city has been destroyed and rebuilt over 17 times. During my visit to the Mount of Olives with members of my parish in the U.K., we prayed the Psalm 122 (a song of ascent), and prayed for the peace of Jerusalem, and freedom for all parishioners.

> R. Susan Smandych is completing a Master of Divinity at Trinity College. She is currently an Intern at St. Paul's Fort Garry Anglican Church.

Andrew Balfour's groundbreaking *Captive* is the story audiences need to hear

Andrew Balfour was a 'Sixties Scoop' child, taken from his Cree mother when he was an infant in 1967, then adopted when he was six months old and raised in Winnipeg. He considers himself very fortunate that his adoptive parents were a loving and supportive couple, who shared their love of music with him. At an early age, he sang in the men's and boys' choir at All Saints' Anglican Church in Winnipeg, where his father was a priest. He claims that it was there, in the All Saints' boy choir, that he learned to love early music. Andrew is now a celebrated composer of new music, and the Artistic Director of the Winnipeg choral collective Camerata Nova. I put this article together after having a conversation with Andrew about his up-and-coming project, Captive.

- Sara Krahn

Camerata Nova is scheduled to release a recording and video performance for *Captive*, the third project in their Reconciliation Series. The series is spearheaded by composer and

Camerata Nova Artistic Director, Andrew Balfour, who curates each concert around a theme that resonates with the Canadian Indigenous experience. So far, the series has featured collaborations with an impressive range of Indigenous artists, including Cree hip hop artist Lindsay Knight and Polaris winner Jeremy Dutcher (*Taken*, 2017), and traditional Ojibway drummer-singer Cory Campbell and cellist Cris Derksen (Fallen, 2018). *Captive* will feature compositions by Andrew Balfour and the Juno Award-nominated, two spirit cellist Cris Derksen.

Photo: Camerata Nova

Originally slated for May 2020, the *Captive* concert was granted an additional year to percolate (in the midst of the pandemic), and Balfour has been unexpectedly grateful for the extra time.

One of the added challenges of *Captive*, prior to May 2020, had to do with the lack of familiarity between the collaborators, in addition to their being scattered across the country as active performing artists. In order to create a truly exciting collaboration, one that is cohesive and forward-thinking, Camerata Nova decided to organize a composer gathering for all of the creatives involved in the project. The gathering took place over four days in the Manitoba prairies (in the middle of winter!) and proved a valuable bonding experience for all involved. For Balfour, it was an essential event in his creative development of the concert.

"I think that *Captive* will be profound in part because it's changed so much. To have an extra year to sit with the project has been very eyeopening into what we want its statement to be."

"Our platform is, of course, choral music, which can be an incredibly powerful medium.

With this project, we've been able to collaborate with Indigenous artists at a high level, and bring their vision to fruition through the artistry of conductor Mel Braun, head of the vocal program at the Marcel A. Desautels Faculty of Music, and the singers of Camerata Nova, alongside the safe space we're able to offer these artists."

Ultimately, the pandemic has given Balfour the time to go deeper into the story he wants to tell, and figure out the best methods to provide the context of this story to his audiences.

"The motivation at the heart of the *Captive* project (and the entire Reconciliation project) is to provide a platform for the voices of Indigenous artists. Though we may delve into some pretty heavy subjects, it's so important that we provide our audience with the right context. This is vital. It's one thing to be an artist or creator or composer and have something to say about murdered or missing Indigenous women, or Residential Schools or addictions; but you have to give performers and audiences context. Otherwise the message will be lost. The country in general needs context."

Balfour's own 25-minute piece, 'Captive,' has evolved over the course of the last year. Initially intended to tell the story of Chief Poundmaker, the historically renowned chief of the Poundmaker Cree Nation, the narrative has instead morphed into a larger story of Indigenous incarceration, to be presented in five abstract scenes.

"There's a legacy in our country of imprisonment of Indigenous people, and it's a very tragic part of our colonial history here; indeed, most of our prisons are still filled with

Indigenous people. One of the key things these Truth & Reconciliation Concerts do is allow myself and other composers to reset and rethink how we want to tell a story. Like 'Notinikew' (from the *Fallen* 2018 concert), it is not my intention to end 'Captive' with a positive note. Although I am myself a positive person, this is a subject that doesn't have an optimal conclusion.

"Alongside that thought, it's also important for me to highlight that I don't speak for all Indigenous people. I can only speak from my perspective. Indeed, I've had a little experience within the justice system, and have seen the powerful tragedy and racial injustice from the But of course, this injustice inside. is everywhere; it's in the medical system, it's in the social system, it's in our religious institutions, it's everywhere. And the people who work in these systems, they are our intended audience. Ultimately, these Reconciliation stories are meant to be seen by those who are non-Indigenous."

"I can't explain emotionally what the listener will get from my piece. I do feature the choir in a way that's both subtle and important; they're the bystanders and witness to what is happening. I was originally going to use performance art again, but I've decided instead to do something that better features the choir and the powerful vocal forces that we have in our midst, to create the tension, suspension, and final declension of the narrative."

In another perspective, Balfour's 'Captive' can be understood as a statement of being held captive by the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I would say it's a soundscape of mourning, solitude, and captivity; these emotions have cycled through many of us through this time of lockdown, where we've been separated from our loved ones, and, unfortunately for some of us, experienced the passing of those close to us without being able to be with family or friends."

"Most importantly, however, 'Captive' addresses my own perspective on Indigenous incarceration. When we are finally able to come out with this performance, I think that our audiences will be quite moved by the poignant and multi-layered statement of this concert."

Parish News Roundup

Supporting our reflexivity and openness

My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me.

– John 10:27

I have always loved this verse from the Gospel of John for it contains what at first glance seems a simple, forthright approach to being a disciple of Jesus. We hear the Shepherd's voice, we are known by the Shepherd, and consequently we have the good sense to follow. While all this seems straightforward enough it can, from time to time, also be somewhat more complicated. Some months ago, when actively engaged in my studies, I was introduced to the term reflexivity. When being reflexive we are being asked to examine our feelings, our reactions, our perspectives and our motives as these all have influence on what we are doing or in what we are thinking about a certain situation. As humans we are all complicated and carry that complexity around with us in all that we do, think and speak. Who we are is in a very real way the result of all the experiences we have had in our lives. These experiences have formed and shaped us. While exactly how all these experiences then interact with the "voice of the shepherd" referenced in John above, is as varied as we are, and yet the fact that they do influence us is undeniable. At some level we all know this, but there are moments we forget this. How then, as those wishing to follow the shepherd, do we acknowledge those things in our lives that predispose us in one direction or another and that ultimately may hinder our hearing that voice of the Shepherd? Of course, awareness of these influences is usually the best place to begin, but beyond that lies the place, or perhaps better, the path of vulnerability, that way where we dare openness to God's Spirit. Being vulnerable takes courage, and trust, in both the voice of the Shepherd and in those with whom we journey. Within the Education for Ministry gatherings, the aim is always to create a safe space for regular theological reflection that can play a role in supporting reflexivity and openness. As we continue in the days of COVID, sorting out as we go what it is to be church in these days, and what it is to be a follower of Jesus in an ever-changing landscape, now more than ever we strain to hear the Shepherd's voice. Through all of this, we find both our comfort in being fully known by that same Shepherd and the grace to be open to all that is next.

If you are interested in learning more about the art of theological reflection as presented within Education for Ministry, or to explore the role it plays in our ongoing growth and development, please contact Susan Roe-Finlay sroefin@gmail.com or phone 204-783-3357.

- Rev. Canon Val Kenyon (originally published in the Huron Church News, February 2021 edition)

Rev. Dr. Canon Val Kenyon is EFM Animator in Huron. Education for Ministry is spiritual, theological, liturgical, and practical formation for laypeople. EFM is about integrating faith and life, and communicating our faith to others.



Changing and Adapting to Pandemic Realities: Lutheran pastors producing podcasts that delve into church issues



Rev. Erik Parker and his wife, Rev. Courtenay Reedman Parker, have been producing podcasts on the theme of adaptation and change.

When it comes to adapting to the current pandemic situation, a pair of Lutheran pastors find at least part of their playbook is five centuries old.

"It's baked into our DNA that we're willing to adapt to the current context and technologies," explains Rev. Erik Parker, referring to how 16thcentury reformer Martin Luther used the printing press to distribute his German Bible translation and theological treatises.

Since September, Parker and his wife, Rev. Courtenay Reedman Parker, both 38, have been producing podcasts on the theme of adaptation and change, fuelled jointly by a \$4,800 mission grant from their denomination and a passion for nudging, even hurrying the Christian church into the 21st century.

They've been blogging at <u>millennialpastor.ca</u> for several years, under the tagline "iPhone pastors for a typewriter church."

"Sometimes we are slow to change and for both of us it can be frustrating because the church is limiting itself because the church isn't using the tools available to us and the world," explains Reedman Parker, minister at Messiah Lutheran in Westwood.

The couple used the grant from the Manitoba/Northwestern Ontario Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada to buy recording equipment, intending to produce 24 episodes of their Millennial Pastor podcast in a year.

"So far, it's just been the two of us, but our plan is to include guests on the show and include some other voices," says Reedman Parker of their podcasts, downloaded more than1,300 times.

Over the past five months, they've tackled issues around the pandemic, discussing ministry challenges, managing congregational life, deconstructing and reconstructing church, and posing their ideas on what post-pandemic life may look like for their own congregations and the larger church.

Religious institutions had no choice in moving online during the COVID-19 pandemic, since measures to contain the coronavirus meant limiting gathering size or closing down in person worship. But they do have a choice in how they proceed online from here, says Reedman Parker.

"It's recognizing we are changing and we are being changed. That's hard to do and it's messy." she says.

Embracing that messiness — or at least the differences — has been Rev. Tyler Gingrich's focus over the past 11 months. Moving back into pastoral ministry in December 2019 after years of denominational administration, he found himself in a congregation with no online presence other than a private Facebook group. He set up his camera to capture video during Sunday morning worship, and then four months into his new job found himself scrambling to develop a website, social media accounts and virtual worship when the pandemic hit.

"The pandemic thing blindsided us in a big way," explains Gingrich, pastor of Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in Charleswood.

"We can't meet in person and we've never done it any other way."

Now he employs Zoom to deliver and moderate 30 minutes of teaching on Sunday mornings, opens up the microphones for 15 minutes of prayer time, and then encourages people to tune in to a short recorded service.

"This is not an in-person service so we're going to use the medium differently," he says of

presenting sermons using a variety of visual techniques, including Lego animation by his daughter.

Gingrich's congregation received a mission grant from the synod as well, and used the money to purchase video equipment, intending to build capacity for video production within the congregation and with young filmmakers in the neighbourhood. Restrictions around the pandemic have stalled that part of the project.

He also collaborated in an ecumenical project with Rev. Gwen McAllister of St. Matthew's Anglican Church and Rev. Tim Crouch of Young United Church to produce an upcoming six-episode podcast titled Not in Stone.

Intended for the members of their three congregations, the episodes provide a way to connect people during this time apart, says Crouch, who formatted his own sermons into podcasts early on in the pandemic.

The church may have a long history of slow adaptation to change, admits Crouch, but a conversational medium like podcasting allows for ideas to emerge and grow, one headset at a time.

"We've never going to be at the front of the line," he says.

"But we can try not to be at the back of the line in terms of communication."

That middle-of-the-road approach sits well with Parker, who describes himself as a high church Lutheran, liturgy geek, gamer, musician and amateur techie. online and at home and live more fully into that reality when we move between the in person and online."

- Brenda Suderman, Faith Reporter

Break Every Yoke: Motion 46, the Church and the Question of Income for All

On March 24 at 7 p.m. (CST) David Driedger (First Mennonite Church of Winnipeg) will moderate a panel with Winnipeg Centre MP Leah Gazan presenting Motion 46 which aims to ensure a livable income for all Canadians. In addition, author and organizer John Clarke will address the need to keep public supports and opportunities at the forefront of working towards a just and dignified society. These important contributions will be used to discuss how the church can respond to Isaiah's prophetic call to *break every yoke* that causes unnecessary suffering.

Presented by the Missions and Service Committee of First Mennonite Church of Winnipeg

Sponsored by: Mennonite Church Manitoba Mennonite Central Committee Manitoba Treaty One Christians for Socialism Anglican Diocese of Rupert's Land Prairie to Pine Regional Council – The United Church of Canada

"We have to recognize we can do things





Of the one hundred or so references to prisons, imprisonment, or prisoners in the New Testament, nowhere is the prisoner denigrated and the imprisonment or the prison system positively affirmed. This is astonishing and already tells us very much: the New Testament comes from the underside of structures of power and control. Indeed, in repeated instances, the reader is advised to take special concern for the plight of prisoners or captives (Matthew 25:36-44; Luke 4:18; Colossians 4:18; Hebrews 11:36).

Paul the political prisoner for Christ

Perhaps the most well-known prisoner within the Jesus movement, after Jesus himself, was the bi-cultural Saul-Paul. He claimed that his "chains" were "in Messiah," which means both "for his cause" and "in his pathway" (Philippians 1:13; Philemon 1:1). While some of his fellow claimed Christ-followers that Paul's raised doubts about his imprisonment legitimacy (Philippians 1:15-18), he himself asserted that his multiple imprisonments were among the credentials of "weakness" that demonstrated his legitimacy as an envoy ("apostle") of the Messiah (2 Corinthians 6:5; 11:23), and he wore his torture marks as a badge of honour (Galatians 5:17). It appears that his rivals who sought to gain through his imprisonment preached a kind of upwardly mobile wealth and health gospel, and were not

inclined to think of Christ's way of suffering love for others—all the way to imprisonment and martyrdom—as a model to follow in their own lives.

Paul is best understood as a "political prisoner," and his letters are best contemplated alongside the letters from prison by the many dissenting figures of recent history, such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King Jr., and Nelson Mandela. Just as these others, Paul was imprisoned and accused of crimes-whether treason, sacrilege, unlawful assembly, or illegal propagation of non-Roman values—because he was regarded as a threat to those in positions of power and control. His preaching was considered to go counter to the established social and religious norms of Roman society. The ancient world did not separate "religion" and "politics" in the way we do in Western democracies, and Paul cannot be understood simply as someone undergoing "religious persecution."

The Roman imperial security system

To fully understand Paul's imprisonment, one needs to know something about the security system of the Roman imperial world. Prisons were not major institutional complexes as we know them today, but simply secure places where captives or undesirables were detained as they awaited either trial or their punishment after trial. Imprisonment itself was not considered a form of punishment, nor a means of correction and rehabilitation. Actual punishments included death (by various methods), exile, hard labour (in chain gangs in mines or quarries), corporal punishment (flogging), fines, confiscation of property, public humiliation, and/or enslavement. In general, one's social position (citizenship, wealth-status, class-rank, etc.) was crucial for determining the mode of confinement and interrogation, and eventually guilt and punishment. Torture was a common method of interrogation, especially for those at the lower ranks: slaves, foreign migrants, or conquered populations. Outside of Italy in the "provinces" (regions under a military "charge," under imperial occupation), the security and law-and-order systems could look quite varied, depending on whether the area was formally a Roman "colony" (like Philippi or Corinth), had been "pacified" over a period of time (like Ephesus or Antioch), or was more troublesome, with persistent unrest among conquered peoples (such as Judea or greater Syria).

Prisoners were referred to by various metaphorical terms, such as those who were "fettered/chained," "captive/captured," or "under watch/guarding." Of the many types of prisoners, the following broad categories can be distinguished in the Roman world: (1) local petty lawbreakers; (2) economic detainees, those subjected to debt-bondage (e.g., Matthew 5:25=Luke 12:58-59; Matthew 18:23-34); (3) war captives and foreigners on their way to slave markets; and (4) political prisoners. (5) In addition, some of those we would today regard as suffering from mental illness were also secured "by chains" (Mark 5:3-4); even today a large segment of the prison population in Canada consists of those with mental illnesses.

Paul's experience of prison

Five of the thirteen letters attributed to Paul in the New Testament are written from the context of detention by Roman imperial authorities. In these letters he is awaiting trial on capital charges. While imprisoned in Ephesus in the summer of the year 55, Paul writes three extant

letters (Philippians, Philemon, Colossians). His ordeal was so traumatic that he admits a few months after his release that he was "utterly, unbearably crushed" such that he "despaired even of life" (2 Corinthians 1:8-11). But as he writes his letters while "in chains" he shows a resiliency and hope, even if completely uncertain about the outcome as he looks at death squarely in the face, and he comforts others while he himself is the one needing consolation (Philippians). During this time, he was detained along with some co-workers (Colossians 4:10; Philemon 1:23; Romans 16: 7). And assisting him throughout from the outside was his reliable colleague Timothy (Philemon 1:1; Philippians 2:19-24), along with others who were sent by committed "partners" to support him (Onesimus by Philemon; Epaphroditus by the congregation in Philippi, 2:25-30). Some of these assisting from the outside risked their own lives, he says, and so should be given special recognition (Epaphroditus, Philemon 2:25-30; 4:10-20; Prisca and Aquila, Romans 16:3-4).

Only a few months after his release, Paul reflects retrospectively on his imprisonment and trial when he writes 2 Corinthians and Romans. While still in trouble as he writes 2 Corinthians ("tension on the outside, and fears within," 7:5) and then convalescing as he writes Romans, awaiting the re-opening of the ports for travel by sea, he pens some of his most profound and poignant comments on the meaning of suffering on behalf of Christ and his mission,

indeed on the meaning of the suffering experienced by the whole world as it longs for healing and renewal (2 Corinthians 1:8-11; 2:14-17; 4:7-12; 6:4-10; 11:1-12:10; Romans 5:1-5; 8:17-39). Paul is thoroughly convinced that God's justice will one day prevail.



Gordon Zerbe is a New Testament scholar at Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg. Zerbe is the author of Philippians (2016) and Citizenship: Paul on Peace and Politics (2012).