

HOSPITALITY

Open Door: A Prophetic Discipleship Community Honoring The Black Jesus, Dorothy Day and Martin Luther King Jr.

Vol. 42, No. 6

PO Box 10980 Baltimore, Maryland 21234 404.290.2047 www.facebook.com/ODCBalt/

November/December 2023

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"Poverty is the loss of liberty," Matthew Desmond tells us in his new and indispensable book, *America, by Poverty*. "Today, scores languish in jail, not because they've been convicted of a crime, but because they ... can't make bail."

We who courtwatch in Athens, Georgia are everyday witnesses to how our criminal legal system can work to crush people — especially the poor and marginalized — in our community. And we are particularly made aware of how the sinister cash bail system essentially denies poor persons their fundamental right to the presumption of innocence by denying them their pretrial liberty.

Cash bail is cruel, though not unusual.

Over the past four years, volunteers with the Athens Area Courtwatch Project have observed hundreds of first-appearance bond hearings in Athens-Clarke County's Magistrate Court. The vast majority of prisoners — and I do mean *vast majority* — who appear at their bond hearings are



Rodney Grainger

was barred from the Welcome Center for two years.

Six days later and still in jail, Cleveland Thomas appeared handcuffed and shackled in our State Court. His public defender was seeking a bond reduction, arguing that her client should not have been charged with public indecency in the first place. She asked that Mr. Thomas' bond be reduced from \$1,000 to \$100 so the Oconee Street UMC Community Bail Initiative could assist and gain her client's release from captivity. (Two years ago, my church, Oconee Street United Methodist, established a small bail fund to enable courtwatchers to post small cash bonds for individuals unable to buy their release from pretrial captivity.)

This judge, realizing the ridiculousness of keeping Mr. Thomas behind bars another day longer, set bond at \$20. That same afternoon, one of our courtwatch-

ers drove out to the Clarke County jail and handed a deputy sheriff \$46 (\$20 bond, \$6 court costs, \$20 sheriff's fee). Cleveland Thomas left the jailhouse after spending nearly one week behind bars.

We who courtwatch in Athens, Georgia are everyday witnesses to how our criminal legal system can work to crush people — especially the poor and marginalized — in our community.

Black or brown, un- or under-employed, suffer from a physical or mental disability, are precariously housed if not homeless, haven't completed high school and have little to no visible family support. And nearly all of these women and men appear at their bond hearings lawyer-less, unable to afford an attorney to assist them during this first and crucial phase of their criminal case. Legal help will come later, almost always in the form of a public defender.

When a magistrate judge decides that these defendants must pay money to gain their pretrial release from captivity — even those charged with misdemeanor offenses, and even those assessed with bonds as low as \$10 or \$20 — they languish in jail, unable to buy their way out. Here are recent examples of how poverty meant the loss of liberty to three indigent defendants in Athens-Clarke County, Georgia:

One Monday morning, I sat in Magistrate Court to observe a first appearance bond hearing for Cleveland Thomas. The 44-year-old Mr. Thomas had been arrested and jailed 24 hours earlier, on Sunday morning, just as church services were underway throughout Athens. Mr. Thomas was allegedly naked from the waist down, and according to the police report, "defecating into a black plastic bag in the breezeway of the Athens Welcome Center's secondary building." Also, according to the officer's narrative, "A trail of unknown liquid could be seen coming from where the male was standing." And again, from the officer's written report: "Cleveland advised me that he had to use the restroom but the doors were locked."

Cleveland Thomas "was placed in double-locked handcuffs" and charged with misdemeanor public indecency and hauled off to jail.

At his Monday morning bond hearing, it was clear to me that Mr. Thomas had mental health issues. He also was homeless, sometimes staying at the Salvation Army. Nonetheless, the magistrate judge set bond at an astounding \$1,000. Additionally, Mr. Thomas

Shelly Fife was arrested this past spring and charged with simple battery and cruelty to children. Two months earlier during a mental health crisis, Ms. Fife allegedly pushed her brother Jamie and pulled her 12-year-old daughter Abigail's hair in an attempt to seize the family dog. The hair-pulling allegation was deemed a felony.

The day after her arrest, Ms. Fife appeared before an Athens magistrate judge who denied the 49-year-old woman bond. Ten days later though, a superior court judge decided that bond was appropriate, and set Shelly Fife's bond at \$3,000. No matter. There was no way Ms. Fife could make this bond amount.

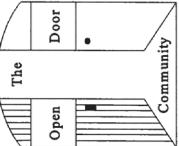
So Shelly Fife sat in jail for a total of 110 days until late June, when her public defender persuaded a state court judge to reduce the bond to \$20. Ms. Fife's brother Jamie, the battery victim, was at the hearing to support his sister's release from jail. (Ms. Fife's daughter Abigail waited just outside the courtroom with one of her uncle's co-workers. Ms. Fife was at that point not allowed contact with her.)

After the judge reduced Ms. Fife's bond, I spoke to Jamie Fife outside the courtroom. Jamie was unsure whether he'd be able to rustle up the \$46 (\$20 plus fees and surcharges) to post Shelly's bond. I was able to provide him with the money, thanks again to the Oconee Street UMC bail fund. Later that afternoon, Jamie Fife posted his sister's bond and, after three-plus months in the jailhouse, Shelly Fife finally went home.

In early summer, I received a text message from the chief assistant public defender here in Athens. She informed me that she'd successfully convinced a state court judge to reduce Darrell Meadows' \$5,000 bond to \$10. This, after Mr. Meadows had spent 34 days in our jail, unable to post the \$5,000 bond set by a

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FREE

Cruel, But Not Unusual continued on page 7

Yes, Mama!

By Catherine Meeks

I watched her, week after week, sitting at the kitchen table meticulously doing schoolwork that was to be sent to Philander Smith College in Little Rock, Arkansas, where she was a student working on her degree in education. This was before computers and distance learning. She was doing college level work through what was called a correspondence program.

Later, the college offered classes in a nearby town, about twenty-five miles from our home. Mama went to those classes as well. She would work in my father's sharecropping field for a part of the day before getting herself, my siblings and me ready and in the car to attend her evening class. As the eldest child, it was my lot to be the responsible one to attend to my brother and sister while she was in class. We behaved ourselves because Mama was doing something very important. She was getting an education. We weren't exactly sure what that meant, but we knew that we were an important part of it.

Mama was already teaching school without her degree because it was allowed in that era, in the early 1950s. Of course, not having the degree meant that she did not get a very good salary. All of the teachers received small salaries, but those without degrees got less. Yet, teaching was better than being a maid or having no job at all.

But my tears are also laced with rage and momentary outrage toward Ron DeSantis and the book banning energy that he is helping to spread around the land.

Thus, for the next handful of years, I watched my mother continue the pattern described above. She did not talk much about the value of education, but she did not need to do so. I paid attention. I knew that getting through school had something to do with being a freer person, and I knew that I wanted to be free just like Mama wanted to be.

In May 1964, I graduated from high school, and in August 1964, my Mama graduated from college. She had gone to college through those correspondence courses, extension programs and



Episcopal News Service

an occasional summer session for the major portion of my life. It had taken her close to eighteen years to earn her bachelor's degree. She went to the campus of Philander Smith College in the summer of 1964 to fulfill some type of residency requirement and to take her final courses. She was finally going to be a college graduate.

Our aunt and uncle took us to the campus for her graduation, which was an amazing event for us. We were so proud of her that day with her black robe and cap! We knew that all of us had won something, though we were not quite sure what it was. I continued to be convinced that it had to do with my freedom. Mama seemed freer on the way back home from Little Rock.

Now, as I sit here writing this reflection about the lessons that I

learned from my mother and her quest for education's freedom, I am preparing to travel to Virginia Theological Seminary to receive an Honorary Doctorate. It will be the first of three that I am to get this year. In two weeks, it will be the Seminary of the Southwest and in the fall from the Berkeley Divinity School at Yale University.

I am in tears.

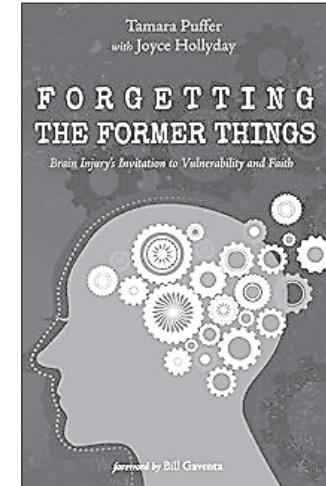
The tears are a combination of gratitude for my mother's courage and the lessons that she taught me about education, vigilance and freedom, and gratitude for being given the grace-filled honor to do the work that has led to these degrees being conferred upon me. Along with this is the deep gratitude for the opportunity to

The Absalom Jones Episcopal Center for Racial Healing is joining in the resistance against this idiotic energy by purchasing as many banned books as we can afford and starting a library of banned books. These are books like *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by my sister Arkansan Maya Angelou and other classics by some of the best minds this country has ever seen, as demonstrated by Toni Morrison, Zora Neale Hurston and many others. We will not stand for this foolishness, and we will not be quiet about it.

Will you join us by doing the same thing in your part of the country? I am standing with my Mama by continuing to say "Yes" to freedom through education, and I hope that you will as well. ♦

*Catherine Meeks is the Founding Executive Director of the Absalom Jones Episcopal Center for Racial Healing, and the retired Clara Carter Acree Distinguished Professor of Socio-cultural Studies and Sociology from Wesleyan College. She has published seven books and is editor of *Living Into God's Dream: Dismantling Racism in America* (2016), which focuses on racial healing and reconciliation. She and Nibs Stroupe are authors of *Passionate for Justice* (2019), a book about the life and witness of Ida B. Wells for our time. Her latest book is *The Night Is Long, But Light Comes in the Morning: Meditations for Racial Healing* (2022). She writes for the Huffington Post and is a regular contributor to Hospitality. She is involved with prison work, visits on death row and works for the abolition of the death penalty. (kayma46@gmail.com)*

Recommended Reading



Forgetting the Former Things

by Tamara Puffer with Joyce Hollyday

Tamara Puffer is a Presbyterian pastor. She lives in Asheville, North Carolina, with her husband, Michael Galovic. Tamara and Michael are co-founders of the Brainstormers Collective, a support and advocacy group for survivors of traumatic brain injury.

HOSPITALITY

Hospitality is published by the Open Door Community, Inc., Baltimore, Maryland. The Open Door is a Prophetic Discipleship Community honoring the Black Jesus, Dorothy Day and Martin Luther King Jr. Subscriptions are free. A newspaper request form is included in each issue. Manuscripts and letters are welcomed. Inclusive language editing is standard.

A \$10 donation to the Open Door Community helps to cover the costs of printing and mailing *Hospitality* for one year. A \$40 donation covers overseas delivery for one year.

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Ed Loring
Joe Dan and Jennifer Lee Walker joined David Payne in Baltimore for a planting in honor of Murphy Davis.

Newspaper

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Photography and Layout Editor Calvin Kimbrough

Poetry Corner Editor Ed Loring

Associate Editors Peter Gathje, Catherine Meeks and John Cole Vodicka

Copy Editor Julie Martin

Proofreaders Nelia Kimbrough and Julie Martin

Circulation A multitude of earthly hosts

Subscriptions or change of address David Payne
(davidpayne@opendoorcommunity.org)

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Eduard Loring Activist/Advocate/Ally

He/Him/His

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Please join us on Facebook for the continuing journey of the Open Door Community in Baltimore.



Murphy Davis ¡Presente!



Never Giving Up on Working for Justice

By Ed Loring

After I was fired at Columbia Seminary, only a half pound of calendar pages were turned before I was back teaching short-term courses or co-teaching with seminary colleagues. The Georgia heat was oppressive but fossil-fuel-gobbling AC made the southern summer bearable. There I stood in a classroom, telling my truth with the emphases of African American preachers about Dorothy Day, founder of the Catholic Worker and Clarence Jordan, founder of Koinonia Farm.

In the next classroom, a sober and frozen presentation of another truth was being offered. When the class took a pee-break at the end of an hour, sweet Jennifer Lee came to my classroom. She wanted to know who that was yelling in class. She and I have been good friends ever since. Jennifer became a Resident Volunteer at the ODC. We lived together for almost two years.

Today, Jennifer Lee helps people facing death, helps them die. She is a Hospice Chaplain in Atlanta and she serves Beersheba, a small Presbyterian church in Summerville, Georgia.

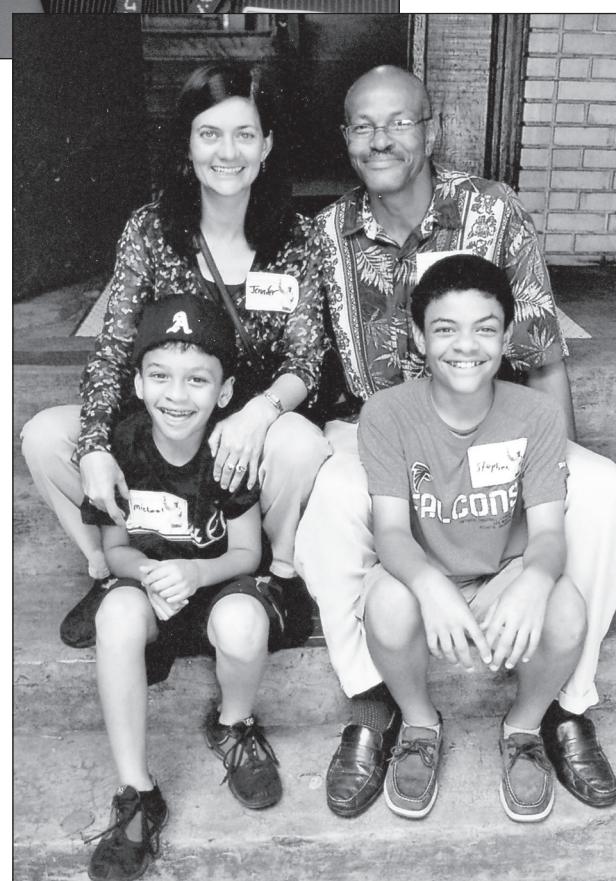
While at the ODC, Jennifer met Joe Dan Walker. They fell in love, married and have two sons. Stephen is 24, he is assistant

director of elections in Polk County, Georgia. Michael, 20, is a student at Kennesaw State University, discovering his path and vocation.

Joe Dan Walker is an “overcomer.” He is a representative “Human One” from the prisons and streets, addiction and distortion. He moved into the ODC three times. Twice, with the monkey still



ODC | Baltimore



Photographs by Calvin Kimbrough

above: Ed Loring, Joe Dan and Jennifer Lee Walker, Hannah and Michaela Murphy Buc and Jason Buc, and David Payne enjoy a meal together in Baltimore.

top right: Jennifer Lee, Ed Loring and Joe Dan Walker after Butler Street Breakfast, April, 1998.

right: Michael, Jennifer Lee, Joe Dan and Stephen Walker in front of 910 Ponce de Leon, May, 2011.

far right: Joe Dan Walker with his new smile!

Dear Ed,

I am so thankful that Joe Dan and I obtained a copy of Murphy's book *Surely Goodness and Mercy* from you during our visit this past April. I regret that I have just been able to sit down and read it this past week and that only Covid gave me the opportunity to do so (since I was not allowed to do anything else). I do now wish I had read it sooner.

Reading the book has been a reminder to me of how privileged I am to have known both you and Murphy and to have been a part (though perhaps too briefly) of the Open Door Community of Atlanta. I have come to realize how unaware I was of Murphy's struggles and pure determination in fighting her illness. The way God's providence was so eloquently woven in the midst of her journey and your journey is truly amazing. I am struck by knowing that the work that you all continued in the midst of her illness journey touched and changed the lives of so many, surely thousands that are unknown to you. I am thinking particularly of the Grady Coalition. I now wonder if all your fighting for justice on behalf of those that Grady serves did not have a direct effect on my brother's treatment when he was life-flighted to the Grady Trauma center in

June of 2004. There he received intensive and compassionate care without the question of his lack of insurance and lack of income.

I remember you once saying to me, back in 1996, that you always want to be remembered as one who never gave up working for justice. I believe I can say with confidence that you and Murphy have not let anything get in your way of working for justice, whether in prisons, on Death Row, on the streets, in the halls of government or at Grady. Twenty-five years of a journey with life threatening illnesses would not stop Murphy. The fact that she could see God's grace in the midst of it all is a lesson for me. Not to mention that she saw her illness as a gift of solidarity with people in poverty and on death row. I hope I can take her lessons to heart. I truly miss her.

Ed, Joe Dan and I are honored to call you friend. Thank you for your determination to continue fighting for justice. Thank you to you and Murphy for teaching us about the Beloved (not perfect) Community and what it means to represent the Crucified One.

Love,

Jennifer Lee

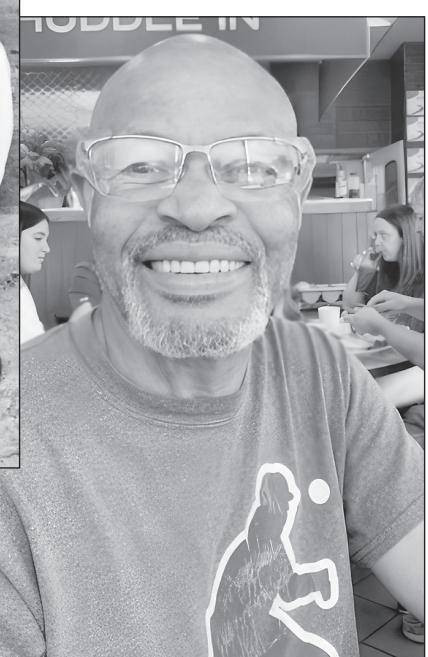
riding on his strong Black back. The third time, he met Jennifer, fell in love, later married. But he had not reached the top of the rough side of the mountain. Takes time. Takes love. Takes support. Takes will. Takes COURAGE.

Mumble, fumble, stumble Joe Dan Walker for many a day lives Jesus' promised “Liberty to Captives.” A beautiful, mature man is he. The Lee-Walker family with loving sons are light to the nations of life lived in solidarity with the oppressed and the power of passionate love and undying loyalty. Thank you, Jesus, who came to set us free by Grace and hard, difficult inward and outward work.

So, it was on Thursday, April 27, 2023, Joe Dan and Jennifer came to visit the ODC. What a loving and empowering reunion we had. Talking into the night and on Friday we had a “street day” in the pouring rain. Friday night we met the MUBU's for a special meal. Saturday morning, these beautiful friends departed.

I am unable to express my gratitude for the visit. Since Murphy's death, these visits make me feel loved like I'm a little boy. Thank you, Joe Dan and Jennifer.

Oh my, I forgot 2 other thankysous. First, Joe Dan. Joe Dan saved my life, or at least my body, one morning at the Butler Street Breakfast. A man in a furious rage came after me with fierce fists already swinging. Joe Dan jumped between us, held the brother tightly, and got him out the door. Thank you, Joe Dan. And while Dick Rustay lay dying, Jennifer, often with Joe Dan, would visit Dick. As time was draining from Dick's clock, Jennifer would dial his phone and we were able to talk 'til he could talk no more. Thank you, Jennifer Lee. ♦



Jennifer Lee Walker

Dear Friends of the Open Door Community

Since 1989, you have been there for me several times in my life. Through many struggles and celebrations, I have known that I could always call you family. This time in my life is no exception.

After visiting with Ed and David this past April, they observed that my teeth needed some attention. While I was slowly working on a solution, removing a tooth at a time, my wife and I had worried how we could afford the biggest expense of final extractions and dental work. Particularly, we had no idea how we were going to pay for dentures. You have come through again for me and I am grateful. Thank you so much for helping me gain my new smile!

Lovingly,

Joe Dan Walker

Enacting What We Believe

The Roles of Theater in the Work of Justice

By Susan Stroupe

On the first day of my theater history classes every semester, the first question I ask the students to consider is: What is the purpose of theater? The answers are always a mixture of purposes, but in my classes of largely 19- to 21-year-old students, the majority of answers often lean toward “entertainment,” “to escape everyday life,” “to be transported away from life’s troubles,” or some variation of what we might call “escapism.”

Yes, the purpose of American theater — a direct descendant of theater of the ancient Roman Empire that stripped public funding from theater and made it compete for audiences against gladiator fights and prisoner execution-by-lions — is often thought of as merely a vacuous, insular form of escapism for the rich and cultural elites, concerned more with selling tickets than confronting systems of oppression.

That's not an unfair judgment of American theater, nor is it unique in the world; in fact, whenever we study a new topic in theater history, we always ask: Is this kind of theater affirming or challenging the status quo of the culture it's in? The documentation of theater we have from millennia of history is often the theater funded by the empire to perpetuate its beliefs and subsume or erase the cultures of those being conquered. On the flip side, throughout history we see many types of theater used to question, subvert or outright challenge oppressive authorities and systems in the name of justice. Theater is an art form, and like all art forms, it can be used to advance the causes of justice or the causes of oppression.

But what do I even mean when I use the word *theater*? Many philosophers and theater practitioners like Judith Butler and Richard Schechner have theorized about the “performativity” of many

While theater cannot meet immediate physical or political needs, it can offer the opposite in a radical way: space and time, separated out from the rest of life, to wrestle with complex conflicts, complex questions and complex humans.

types of events and of everyday life, so what can we even define as theater? Sierra Leonean theater scholar John Conteh-Morgan lays out some good boundaries that I use in my classes: In short, theater is set apart from the regular “social script” of life by space and time. A consecrated spot, with a beginning and ending. In the era of film we also like to note that there must be an audience and performers going through the narrative journey together. And, as Dr. Conteh-Morgan lays out, there is no singular goal that must be reached other than completing the performance itself.

So, how can theater, a performative story deliberately separated out from the rest of life by space and time, not working toward a singular goal other than its own completion, best serve the work of justice? In the U.S., the answer is complicated. We don't have much public funding for the arts in this country, and the process of making theater often feels counter to the urgent work of justice — theater work is slow, deeply collaborative and takes many resources to create an ephemeral performance. Many theater artists often question why we do what we do when there is so much “practical” need in

our country; as director Melissa Hillman wrote in a particularly bleak moment in our national landscape in 2018, “What good is art when 40% of the nation supports open hatred, open ignorance, open rejection of . . . basic fact? Why are we fiddling while Rome burns? How can it ever be enough?”

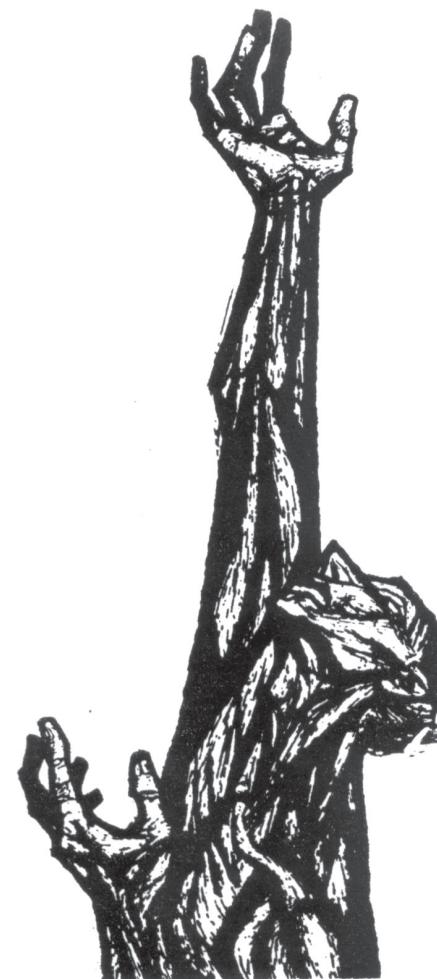
If seeing a play does not offer immediate food for the hungry, imminent release for the prisoner, immediate assistance to the poor, not even immediate goals for political action, what can it offer to the work of social justice? In the 2020 societal reckoning (which very much included theater workers), playwright Michael R. Jackson offered a beautiful answer: “Theater can't *do* social justice well, but theater is good at telling stories.”

Telling stories: the primary tool through which humans relate to each other and the world. While theater cannot meet immediate physical or political needs, it can offer the opposite in a radical way: space and time, separated out from the rest of life, to wrestle with complex conflicts, complex questions and complex humans.

Unlike reading an article or watching a film, theater requires everyone to be in the same place at the same time — audience, performers and crew — to go on the narrative journey together. In theater, you meet characters whose stories, acted out in front of you by a live human being, may challenge

your life experience or speak a truth about yourself that you hadn't been able to articulate. In theater, in order to truly participate in what director Cristal Channelle Truscott calls the “call-and-response” between audience and performers, everyone has to let go of some control, and everyone has to be open to the offering of strangers.

Finally, and this is where the work of justice is hardest in theater, a play is not an advertisement. Watching a play is one of the few places left in our country where you are not being sold a product, nor are you the product being sold. The singular goal of performing a play is to perform it — to journey through the story together and hope that nothing catastrophic causes the stage manager to yell “HOLD” and stop the performance. Why that makes the work of justice difficult is that, like not having a clear product to point to as a way to solve all your problems, we theater makers also can't control what the audience does with the story we offer them. Plays — the best plays, actually — do not offer answers, but ask difficult questions, and then just leave the audience to grapple with how to answer them in the world. Even the most overtly radical



Robert Hodgell

political theater companies like Bread and Puppet in Vermont and the San Francisco Mime Troupe must relinquish control of what happens to the blunt, clear political messaging they offer to their audiences, once those audiences leave the performance space.

Space and time. Real, live human connection. Questions but not answers. Enacted through stories, the stories of what we believe to be true. It's that bit about how narrative connects to truth — to what we believe — where theater can have its most radical connection to the work of justice. As several writers and thinkers have noted in recent years, the social changes required for lasting justice are rarely precipitated because of hearing facts or reading numbers. The changes needed for justice are seeded through stories. The relationships built through them. The time and space taken to experience

them. The letting go of transactional goals in favor of uncontrolled outcomes. We theater makers have a literal platform to offer a live audience the truth of what we believe, which can be an opportunity for all of us in the theater to re-investigate the past, to reckon with the present and to viscerally and visually imagine a more just future.

So, what can you do to be a part of justice-oriented theater? While it's great to talk about it (and I can do that all day), the best way to engage in the work of justice through theater is to go see it! Go see live theater in your city and community. Being an audience member is participating! Search the internet for theaters in your area and look for the ones that are non-profit and have a mission of social-justice-oriented theater. And being an audience member may not be your only opportunity to participate. Many theaters need volunteers in many capacities. Just ask! Even if you don't have theater experience, you have something to offer that a theater needs.

If you are able to purchase tickets or volunteer time in exchange for tickets at your local theaters, one of the most important things to remember is that you likely will not “like” all the shows at any given theater, *but keep showing up*. In order for theaters to be able to take risks on shows about the work of justice, audience members must be willing to take risks on showing up to bear witness to performances that may not be their cup of tea, may make them uncomfortable or may be more about grappling with issues than escaping from them. The greatest thing you can do for the work of justice in theater is to show up, to make space and time. ♦

Susan Stroupe is a generative theater maker who has worked as a director, performer and collaborator all over the country, now based in Baltimore, Maryland. She is a founding member of Submersive Productions, Baltimore's immersive theater collective, a long-time teaching artist for Baltimore Centerstage and UMBC and a freelance director for many companies in Baltimore.

(susan.stroupe@gmail.com)



Welcome Pantry Needs:

- Small OJ Bottles, Shelf Stable Milk
- Pop Tarts
- Single Serve Oatmeal Packets
- Assorted Small Cereal Boxes
- Pretzels
- Crackers
- Granola Bars
- Baby Wipes
- Travel Tissue Packs and Toothpaste
- 2 in 1 travel shampoo - 1oz. size
- small hand sanitizer containers

We have an Amazon Wish List: <https://tinyurl.com/yfjcr3bm>



Rini Templeton

Christopher Nolan's "Oppenheimer"

A review by Wes Howard-Brook

When we deny the EVIL within ourselves, we dehumanize ourselves, and we deprive ourselves not only of our own destiny but of any possibility of dealing with the EVIL of others.

— J. Robert Oppenheimer.

Where to start to review a three-hour film about a famous physicist? One could explore where "Oppenheimer" fits (or not) within the Christopher Nolan canon of films. One could explore the curious overlap of actors, such as Cillian Murphy playing J. Robert Oppenheimer after being a bad guy in the Nolan-made "Batman" films. One could note the many criticisms of what the film doesn't address, such as the Japanese experience or that of the Congolese workers who mined the uranium.

But for *Hospitality*, it seems to me that the central question is what does "Oppenheimer" tell us about how to be faithful to the Black Christ amid the threat of nuclear annihilation?

For younger folks, the "Cold War" and "the arms race" likely reek of "once upon a time" historical events. With climate change upon us with a vengeance, and the ongoing issues of poverty, housing, immigration and racism — along with just plain capitalism — it is easy to imagine that "nukes" were a problem for the Boomer generation, but not now. For me, though, the film shows us that in fact, nukes have never been more of a danger to the world than they are today. The war in Ukraine has made that crystal clear, along with the ongoing growth of right-wing governments and military coups around the planet. We might not like to think about them, but they are there. Both Russia and the U.S. currently have over *five thousand nuclear bombs each*; the other seven nuclear powers combined have roughly two thousand.¹

"Oppenheimer" is not a film about the arms race, nor about World War II, nor about the development of the atomic bomb. Rather, it is plainly a biopic, adapted from the mammoth and monumental Oppenheimer biography, *American Prometheus*, by Martin Sherman and Kai Bird. The authors have noted that it took twenty-

Both Russia and the U.S. currently have over *five thousand nuclear bombs each*; the other seven nuclear powers combined have roughly two thousand.

five years of research and interviews to produce the 721-page volume. Even a 180-minute film can only touch on small bits of such a saga. I'd like to fill in some of the aspects of Oppenheimer's life omitted from Nolan's film.

My first impression of the young Oppenheimer, a working physicist in his 20s in the 1930s, was that he was a spectacularly brilliant man. Born in 1904, he had inherited the breakthrough work of the previous generation such as Einstein, Schrödinger, Bohr and Born. But in his generation there were many others of great achievement, such as Enrico Fermi (b. 1901), Leo Szilard (b. 1898), Werner Heisenberg (b. 1901) and Paul Dirac (b. 1902). Oppenheimer saw himself as part of a wider movement of young, creative men (and I do mean "men") who were changing the world, such as Picasso, T.S. Eliot and Stravinsky. Other physicists questioned him about being "distracted" by art, music and poetry. But he never saw it that way; each was a vehicle for expanding human knowledge of the world.

The movie touches on a related aspect that is covered in more detail in the book: Oppenheimer's unbelievable ability to absorb languages like a sponge. To read the Upanishads, he learned Hindu in *four weeks*. Similarly with Italian to read Dante. His compelling drive was to comprehend how the universe worked by whatever means.

By all accounts, he was a mesmerizing speaker, even if folks often had no idea what he was talking about. As a teacher at UC Berkeley in the 30s, he would cover the blackboard with equations while lecturing steadily on the latest, cutting-edge developments in quantum mechanics. He also gave many public talks that people found spellbinding. He quickly became a recognized figure in his porkpie hat and ever-present pipe.

During that period, physics had been an international affair, with scientists sharing their latest work with each other. But then there was Hitler and the war. Suddenly, Oppenheimer's friends and colleagues were working for the enemy. He, more than perhaps anyone else, knew how smart they were. When Leo Szilard showed



in 1933 that a uranium chain reaction was possible, and German physicists produced one in 1938, Oppenheimer immediately understood the implications: it could make a bomb. He had no idea what such a bomb would look like or how powerful it would be. But he

knew at once that his former colleagues would go right to work on the project. What would *you* do if you were in his shoes in the late 30s?

Neither the book nor the film portray Oppenheimer as a hero. Much of the second half of the film focuses on Leo Strauss' campaign to discredit Oppenheimer as disloyal to the United States. Strauss comes out as a "bad guy," but that doesn't make Oppenheimer the "good guy." Yes, he was a victim of serious official injustice, lies and conspiracy. Yes, he was in trouble because he opposed Edward Teller's enthusiastic promotion of the hydrogen bomb along with the wider emerging nuclear arms race with the Soviet Union. But the fact remains that it was the combination of his brilliance and charisma that made the Manhattan Project a success. Famously, after the Trinity Test at his beloved Los Alamos, he quoted the *Bhagavad Gita*: "I am become Death, Destroyer of Worlds." Indeed he had, but so have all of us. As the film's director, Christopher Nolan, has said regularly in interviews, we all live in Oppenheimer's world now.

The book and film cover other aspects of his life, such as his marriage and affair. In that regard, he was nothing remarkable nor anything heroic. There are few figures whose private life seems to bear so little relationship to their public life. He was a post-war icon who symbolized different things to different people. The media loved the power of his image: he was on the cover of *Time* magazine in November 1948. He became the face of the atomic bomb project, even though he would have been the first to point out the tremendous collaboration involved among many scientists and other workers under General Groves' stern command. In the end, he was killed by a series of small explosions: cancer from the endless cigarettes and pipe smoke he inhaled constantly for decades.

Folks have had fun with "Barbenheimer," that is, the releasing of a serious, philosophical film on the same day as a pretty-in-pink feminist parody of a children's toy. But the connection is more real than the playful hype. The postwar world that Oppenheimer inhabited produced the first Barbie doll in 1959. The kids that grew

up in the shadow of Oppenheimer's bomb played with Mattel's Barbie and Ken. Together, it seems to me, that generation inherited the cold war paradigm: unfettered, patriarchal capitalism defended by the threat of global annihilation.

There is no longer a "Cold War." Yet numerous Catholic Workers and friends have continued stubbornly and faithfully to remind us of the ongoing stockpile of weapons and the threat they represent. *These* are the heroes: the people who risk their reputations, their freedom and their very lives to stand up for the Peace of Christ, day in and day out, year after year. I thank God for all these people, seeking to heal the harm done by J. Robert Oppenheimer and his colleagues. ♣

¹<https://ourworldindata.org/nuclear-weapons>.

Wes Howard-Brook shares with his wife, Sue Ferguson Johnson, the ministry "Abide in Me." (abideinme.net) His current project is Radical Bible. (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCIEJwHfiN-7OIG4Hko9s3Jg>) His books include Unveiling Empire: Reading Revelation Then and Now (with Anthony Gwyther), Becoming Children of God: John's Gospel and Radical Discipleship, and 'Come Out My People': God's Call Out of Empire From the Beginning to the End.

The Box

Compiled by Ed Loring

Obscene Wealth

In a new report, the world's 500 richest people added \$852 billion to their wealth in the first half of 2023.

According to a Bloomberg analysis of its Billionaires Index, the world's richest people added an average of \$14 million per day to their wealth over the past six months. Elon Musk saw the largest net worth boost of any global billionaire, adding nearly \$97 billion in the first half of the year. Mark Zuckerberg saw his wealth grow by close to \$59 billion, the second-largest gain of any billionaire.

— www.commondreams.org/ from the Catholic Agitator, August 2023

Democracy cannot thrive where power remains unchecked and justice is reserved for the select few. Ignoring these cries and failing to respond to movement is simply not an option — for *peace cannot exist where justice is not served*.

— John Lewis / from Weldon Nisly. Bold type is Weldon's.

Woke means awakened to the needs of others. To be well-informed, thoughtful, compassionate, humble and kind. Eager to make the world a better place for all people. Be Woke!

— Catherine Meeks

Benediction for the Elderly

May your weary souls find nourishment.

May your aching bones find relief.

May you find Thanksgiving as you live your life with grief.

— Ed Loring, August 2023

TIME IS

Too Slow for those who Wait,
Too Swift for those who Fear,
Too Long for those who Grieve,
Too Short for those who Rejoice,
But for those who Love,
Time is not.

— Henry van Dyke, 1852-1933 / from Ed Crouch, Seattle, Washington

Why do people live in large luxury houses?

Have luxury vacation houses?

Don't they know?

Have they not heard?

Do they give a damn?

Signs of the Times: Part Two

By Alan Jenkins

A Modern-Day Noah's Ark

In this apocalyptic time of rising sea levels and rising heat strokes, imagine a sanctuary full of nature's wonders. Envision something like a modern-day Noah's ark, full of biological diversity, including humans, all together on a journey to ride out the climate crisis. In the heat of the summer, rest your tail under the standing ones, the towering sycamore and oak trees. Dip your feet in the cool creek, teeming with the colorful finned ones. Then, listen to the curious calls of feathered ones, a hundred species or more, going about their day. Consider the pileated woodpecker, (Matthew 6:26) feasting on rising insect populations and vociferously proclaiming its stately presence for all to hear.

Apart from such utopia, we are understandably 'afraid, very afraid,' to use the prophetic words of Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg. And yet, such a verdant, thriving place exists. Enter stage left: Shoal Creek Sanctuary, nestled in the Piedmont region of North America (*Turtle Island*, in First Nations' terminology), just downstream of the southern Appalachian Mountains near the Oconee River. For thousands of years, the Creek Nation people inhabited these creeks prior to broken treaties by an occupying experiment called The United States of America.

The land is permanently protected, and just as important, chemicals are strictly forbidden (unlike in U.S. national forests and church lawns). The founders, biologists Stella Guerrero and her partner, John Pickering (retired entomologist from the University of Georgia's Odum School of Ecology) are uncovering a different narrative amidst otherwise frightening climate news. At the Sanctuary, UGA graduate students tabulate increasing numbers of the 130 different bird species each year. Dr. Pickering, over the course of the last decade, has also identified an astounding 1,460 different kinds of moths! In the face of a frightening world-wide decline of insects, the data shows an increase in their population, too. The birds sing with ever more delight, seemingly oblivious to the melting of the Greenland icesheet. This is in direct contrast to bird populations across the U.S., which have dropped by nearly three billion in the last several decades. (Learn more about Shoal Creek Sanctuary at DiscoverLife.org/sanctuary).

Solving the Climate Crisis or Embracing the Beloved Earth Community

I was tasked in this two-part essay to address directly what actions we can take to address the climate crisis, i.e., to survive. Instead, I have attempted to reframe the issue theologically (as an apocalypse) in light of two tough truths: first, we humans will not be able to reverse the continued warming of the planet; and second,

We need a revolution in our relationship with Earth.

Such a revolution is apocalyptic. Certainly, Earth and her Creator beckon us to see the world anew, adopting a new worldview and practice.

the climate crisis is but "a symptom of a far deeper malady within the[North] American spirit," (to adopt MLK Jr.'s language).

Reducing greenhouse gas emissions remains key, along with other needs including ending war, stopping the overthrow of democratic governments and cleaning the air of particulate matter from fossil fuel emissions that kills an estimated eight million people per year, globally. However, that list is only one part of our adoption into The Beloved Earth Community. To use a phrase from King's 1967 Beyond Vietnam speech, we need "a radical revolution of values." We need a revolution in our relationship with Earth. Such a revolution is apocalyptic. Certainly, Earth and her Creator beckon us to see the world anew, adopting a new worldview and practice. Paul, likely responding to the Roman Empire's deforestation of Jerusalem and felling cedar trees of Lebanon to build warships: "The whole creation waits breathless with anticipation for the revelation of God's sons and daughters." (Romans 8:35, CEB) What kinds of sons and daughters (and non-binary siblings) does Creation have in mind here? And might Jesus' beatitude apply, as well? "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." (Matthew 5:5, NRSV. See also Psalm 37:11)



Turtle Island | Brian Kavanagh

Answers lie not in a fear-driven flight from Earth amidst an otherwise horrifying apocalypse. Instead, one answer is to be found in a sustained, peaceful-yet-fierce loving embrace of Earth — an embracing of the Beloved Earth Community, from the least of these among us, to all species around us. And the Creation waits ... breathless.

Practices of the Beloved Earth Community

Here, I propose three practices of embracing the Beloved Earth Community. These will not solve the climate crisis, but perhaps will lead us to deeper solidarity and resilience with all life. It's important that I acknowledge my White, male background, and I recognize that indigenous peoples, such as Dr. Robin Wall Kimmerer, are more appropriate guides in this apocalyptic transformation. (See her book, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 2013, Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions.)

a deluge of flooding that August. That month, a pastor whom I met in Guatemala City welcomed 16 of his parishioners to stay in his humble 800 square foot home. The more fragile homes of these parishioners had all washed down a ravine. We may not live next to ravines, but we are called to practice such hospitality — if not from heavy rains, then heavy heat, rising sea levels or regions experiencing mega droughts. Perhaps we should look for direction from the Cuban government, planning already to move homes and towns farther inland to be less vulnerable to flooding and hurricanes.

A third practice actually serves as a larger theological construct to root ourselves where we are — Watershed Discipleship. Its author, Ched Myers, teaches in a book by the same title: we live in a watershed (or apocalyptic) moment in human history; We are called to practice discipleship (faith) within our own watersheds; and we are called to see the watershed as rabbi or teacher. Ched draws us toward an embrace of the biological zone where we find ourselves. And just as a watershed encompasses all surface area that collects water for a given river basin, so too does Ched encourage us to engage with issues within the watershed, both non-human and human. This could include the history of colonization and other justice-related issues. It could include cultivating food within it or creating relationships with its farmers.

Oakhurst Presbyterian Church in Decatur, Georgia, for example, established a relationship with representatives of the Southeast Muskogee Nation (other descendants spell it Muskogee), who formerly inhabited the land where the congregation now gathers. We meet annually, seeking relationships of reciprocity according to our gifts and abilities.

Shoal Creek Sanctuary (SCS) serves as one stellar example. In the urban context, the West Atlanta Watershed Alliance serves as another, protecting green space with youth leadership and advocating for the prevention of floods created by, for example, the impermeable golden calf of Atlanta known as the Mercedes-Benz Stadium.

SCS also learns something from their teacher, the watershed, that is both disturbing and hopeful. The conservation of land and the commitment to be chemical free allows biological diversity to flourish. Dr. Pickering is not as concerned about climate chaos as he is chemical catastrophe. The Air Force Reserve Command, for example, uses C-130 airplanes to spray insecticides. In southern Louisiana alone, according to their website, they sprayed a half million acres in the wake of hurricanes in 2020, all in order to control mosquitos. Herbicides are used almost without exception on public lands, forests and national parks. It's in our water. It's in our food. That over 600,000 people die in the U.S. every year from cancer certainly beckons us to become more aware of what's going on in our watersheds, to say nothing of the disappearance of birds.

But What If?!

But what if? ... What if sea level rise accelerates? It will. ... What if the Amazon goes up in flames? It might. ... What if arctic tundra melts and releases loads of methane? It already is. ... And still we will embrace the Creator's Earth, we'll build more soil, plant more trees, welcome the stranger and bring Wall Street to its knees, if sea level rise doesn't beat us. In the words of Guatemalan poet Julia Esquivel, we will be threatened with resurrection. We will be apocalyptically transformed with and within our own watersheds. It won't be easy. Thy Beloved Earth Community come. Thy will be done. ♣

Rev. Alan Jenkins, ODC Resident Volunteer (2001-'02), was ordained to a ministry of environmental stewardship in 2007 (Presbytery of Greater Atlanta), later served as a hospice chaplain and continues as a parish associate at Oakhurst Presbyterian Church, Decatur, Georgia. He resides in Rutledge, Georgia, as a new, regenerative farmer: (jenkins.alan73@gmail.com)



Rita Corbin

Ancestral Songlines

Bearing the Weight of Traumatized Bloodlines and Contested Landlines

By Elaine Enns and Ched Myers*

On July 19th this year, under a jigsaw of mid-day clouds and sun, we stood in silence with some two hundred Mennonite settlers at the old train station in the rural town of Rosthern, Saskatchewan. We were commemorating the arrival, one hundred years earlier, of a train carrying over 600 impoverished Mennonite refugees from eastern Ukraine who had fled a pogrom of dispossession and terror in the wake of the Russian Revolution. Their prosperous German-speaking "Commonwealth" along the Dnieper River had been shattered by violent insurrection, counter-revolution and banditry that wreaked havoc on their farms and families, traumatizing a generation — as another brutal war in Ukraine is again doing in our time.

Many gathered were descendants, with stories similar to mine. My grandfather Heinrich Toews was on that train, the first of many that brought over 20,000 "Russländer" Mennonites to the Canadian prairies between 1923-27. This mass migration had profound impact on our communal bloodlines *and* the landlines of Treaty 6 territory.

We were there to remember a sacred moment in that story. On July 21, 1923, a crowd of *Kanadier* — Mennonites who had emigrated earlier from Russia and settled on the prairies — gathered at the Rosthern station to meet their worn-out coreligionists. The latter had survived a long, perilous journey, beginning at Lichtenau, Ukraine, where they were crammed into boxcars with whatever they could carry, bidding tearful farewells to family, many of whom they would never see again. They had prayed intensely until they passed through the Red Gate between Russia and Latvia, then endured countless subsequent inspections, a voyage to North America and more train rides across Canada. Now they could finally exhale.

A Saskatoon *Star Phoenix* reporter described how, as the train slowly pulled into Rosthern, "a great hush fell upon the assembled thousands, and to [our] ears ... came a soft, slow chant ... a musical expression of the great tragedy and heartbreak." The *Russländer* were singing *Nun Danket Alle Gott* ("Now Thank We All Our God"). Then those on the platform "took up the song and the tone increased in volume, growing deeper and fuller, until the melody was pouring forth."

What that reporter did *not* know was that those two kindred communities had for two generations been alienated from each other by religious and class differences (some of which *still* linger). Yet in that call-and-response moment, their mutual suspicion dissolved into a shared hymn that bore the weight of both suffering and resilience. And every *Russländer* family was welcomed into a Mennonite settler home, and helped to begin rebuilding their lives.

Thirteen years earlier I and my oldest sister, during a roots-pilgrimage to Ukraine, stood on that Lichtenau platform and sang *Nun Danket* to remember that journey, followed by a moment of silence for the 80,000 Mennonites who never made it out of the Soviet Union, many disappearing or perishing in gulags, including our own ancestors. That song and story, lodged so deep in our bones, was now echoing again (in gorgeous four part harmony) in Rosthern among emotional descendants of survivors.

This is the poignancy and power of "Songlines," which we defined in *Healing Haunted Histories: A Settler Discipleship of Decolonization* as traditions of faith and conscience that sustain, inspire and animate each generation to live into justice and healing.

There was another holy voice at the centenary commemoration — one *not* present at Rosthern Station in 1923. Cree elder Harry Lafond from nearby Muskeg Lake First Nation was invited to open the proceedings by welcoming the group to Indigenous territory. Harry is a deeply respected chief and tradition-keeper, local bridge-builder, and a dear mentor with whom we'd shared a pipe in ceremony two days earlier. As we've experienced so many times, this Catholic deacon again offered to a settler group just the right words of compassion, invitation and challenge.

After greeting us in Cree, Harry noted that his grandfather and other elders were keenly "aware of your ancestors' arrival" — but the reverse was not the case. He reminded us how the Canadian government had taken land set aside for Cree bands in Treaty and without consultation or compensation re-granted it to European immigrant settlers, thus facilitating the "domestication" of the prairies in the late 19th century. And how the 1920s Mennonite influx

we were commemorating further dispossessed and marginalized First Nations peoples in their own homeland.

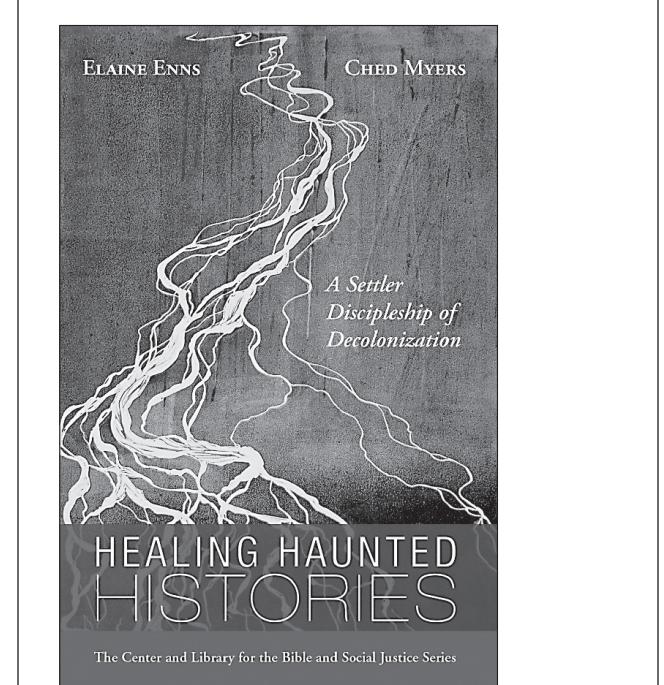
Harry then gently but firmly refocused the moment, eclipsing the reverent nostalgia with a vision of repair. "We have an opportunity in this generation to transform the version of Canadian history that has de-formed us all, through dishonest narratives that the land to which settlers came was empty of culture, economy, politics and spirituality." He exhorted us to return to the Treaty 6 covenant signed in 1876, and its "recipe for how we could and should be in relationship," neighbors with open hearts sharing different expressions of connection to the land. "Do not forget the stories of your ancestors" he warned, and indeed a week earlier at Muskeg Lake Treaty Day we'd watched him tutor his band members in their genealogies and traditions. "Only by understanding ourselves," Harry concluded, "will we understand each other."

The day of commemoration appropriately concluded with a short drive west to Opwashemoe Chakatinaw. This sacred hill lies at the heart of Reserve #107 — the land granted to Chief Chippewyan's people at Treaty 6, but transferred in 1897 to Mennonite and Lutheran settlers. The Young Chippewyan band has been landless and federally unrecognized since, while white farmers have prospered on fertile soil. We gathered in a circle to hear Indigenous leader Gary Laplante relate how fifty years ago a protest by band members had awakened some settlers to learn about and begin to address this historic injustice (learn about this compelling story at www.reserve107thefilm.com).

Since then, trust-building circles between Young Chippewyans, local white landowners and justice advocates have taken place at Opwashemoe Chakatinaw, several of which we've had the opportunity to join. Educational and cultural events have begun to turn the tide, such as the Spruce River Folk Fest at a nearby Mennonite farm, which raises money for land claim efforts. Our commemoration group walked a recently completed storyboard path on the hill that narrates the conflict, but also recent experiments in restorative solidarity, which have finally led the Canadian government to adjudicate Young Chippewyan claims.

As we listened to LaPlante, we thought of the powerful drumming and chanting we'd experienced the previous week at the Muskeg Lake Pow Wow. Harry and Gary's musical tradition, so radically different from my Mennonite hymns, has also borne the weight of suffering and resilience through centuries of oppression. These Indigenous "songscapes" also call us to decolonization.

Both Mennonite and Cree Songlines anticipate the transfiguration of ancestral trauma and contested lands. In the visionary



Healing Haunted Histories

A Settler Discipleship of Decolonization

By Elaine Enns and Ched Myers

In their latest book Enns and Myers take on the "ghosts" of settler colonialism, Indigenous displacement, and white supremacy that can be found in many of our family histories — if only we have the courage to face them.

journey that closes our Biblical canon, John the Revelator portrayed ancient elders "singing a new song" about how Creator and Christ liberate people "from every language, people and nation." (Rev 5:9) May we join our voices to such songs from every tongue and tribe in our work to heal our haunted histories. ♦

Elaine's voice is in the first person, as it is in her and Ched's most recent co-authored book, Healing Haunted Histories (Cascade, 2021) (<https://healinghauntedhistories.org/>). They live in Chumash territory and work with Bartimaeus Cooperative Ministries (www.bcmc-net.org). This article is reprinted from the July, 2023 issue of Geez Magazine.

Cruel, But Not Unusual *continued from page 1*

magistrate judge at his first-appearance hearing. That judge somehow determined that the 55-year-old homeless African American's misdemeanor offense of violating a family violence order was serious enough to impose what for the indigent Mr. Meadows was an insurmountable good security bond.

"Darrell can't possibly post bond, even at ten dollars," the public defender said. "Can your bail fund possibly assist?"

"Of course!"

That evening I drove out to the jail and, after almost two hours, was finally able to sign paperwork and give a deputy sheriff the sum total of \$33 (\$10 bond, \$3 court surcharge, \$20 sheriff's fee) on behalf of Darrell Meadows. He was released the next morning to a local mental health agency.

Each year there are thousands and thousands of people in my community of Athens, Georgia, who are arrested and accused of things like loitering, prowling, public urination, obstruction, public drunkenness, pedestrian in roadway, shoplifting, driving while unlicensed, simple battery, giving false information, trespassing and other low-level, petty crimes. The vast majority of these individuals are persons of color and nearly all of them are poor. And because they are poor people, many remain in our jail — *pretrial* — unable to post even the smallest of cash bonds, for days, weeks, even months.

At this writing, thanks to the small community bail fund and our courtwatch project, my church has gotten 58 women and men out of our local jail over the last two years. Prior to their arrests, many of these 58 were essentially living hand-to-mouth, some with mental health diagnoses, others hounded by chemical dependency. Most had been locked up after allegedly committing misdemeanor offenses. None would have gained their release from jail had it not been for our community bail initiative. These 58 people spent a combined 1,869 days in jail before their cash bonds were posted.

Pretrial liberty should not be a question of money. Yet, as Georgetown University law professor Peter Edelman writes in his book *Not a Crime to Be Poor*, "...regardless of actual guilt or innocence, poor people are criminalized for their inability to buy their way out of jail."

In other words, money bail puts a price tag on one's freedom. The rich get bail; the poor stay in jail.

John and Dee Cole Vodicka and sons were Resident Volunteers at the Open Door Community in 1985-86 and 1992-93. John founded and, for 15 years, directed the Prison & Jail Project in Americus, Georgia. Today he is an activist, writer and community organizer who lives in Athens, Georgia. For information about the Bail Initiative in Athens, contact John Cole Vodicka. (johnvodicka@comcast.net)

Grace and Peaces of Mail

Dear Ed,

I wanted to write to tell you how much I was enlightened by the article Elizabeth Dede wrote titled "Jesus and John Wayne." [Hospitality, July/August 2023] I have shared it with many of my progressive friends around here in Greenville. The article was so insightful into why evangelicals as well as so many other people would be supporting people like Donald Trump and other right-wing politicians whose actions are so contra to the life and teachings of Jesus. I had the good fortune of meeting Elizabeth at the Open Door in Atlanta back in the 1980s and was so impressed with her desire and actions toward helping the less fortunate in this world. I am so glad to hear that she is still carrying on her efforts as well as enlightening us with her article.

Bill Neely
Greenville, South Carolina

Bill and his beloved Bonnie are among the greatest friends of the ODC. Bill and Eduard were classmates at Presbyterian College. In 1987 our college mentor, Allen King, brought us back together. This rebirth of friendship led to, among other gifts, the ODC's retreat, Dayspring Farm. Thank you, Bill and Bonnie Neely. To read the story of Bill's radical transformation see Ed Loring's The Cry of the Poor, pp. 16-17. Bill Neely's name is not in the text. He is the white wealthy businessman in the story. Bill is completing an 8-volume memoir and Bonnie recently published Real Ventures: Did We Really Do That?

Dear David:

Greetings and blessings. This is Bro. Anthony Zuba, OFM Cap., one of your *Hospitality* subscribers. I am moving permanently from Montebello Road in Jamaica Plain, Mass., to New York State. Please update my subscription information and please send *Hospitality* from now on to my new address. Thank you for the grace and peace you bring with every edition of *Hospitality*.

Sincerely,

Bro. Anthony Zuba, OFM Cap.
Capuchin Franciscans
Capuchin Mobile Ministries
www.capuchin.org/mobile-ministries/



Rita Corbin

HOSPITALITY Prays

Prayer is the heart of a genuine Christian radicalism.
— Ron Ferguson

A Prayer for Truth-Telling

O faithful God, at some point, we apparently decided that it is OK to stray from truth-telling, to use self-serving falsehoods to get whatever we want, to ignore Your call for integrity.

And so we continue to lie, perhaps more now than ever before, creating a toxic society that cares less and less about the common good.

Our political leaders lie...

- when they distort what is just and equitable;
- when they manipulate truths to gain power and votes;
- when they create "alternative truths" to sell their views.

Our economic leaders lie...

- when they offer fake remedies for human woes.
- when they encourage us to worship the "almighty dollar" rather than You.
- when they argue that there is never enough "stuff" to make us happy, that greed brings more happiness than generosity.

Our governmental leaders lie...

- when they suggest that violence is the way to win peace, ignoring the role of justice;
- when they contend that only incarcerations and executions can reduce crime, and that rehabilitation has no place in our justice system;
- when they demean their opponents while developing public policies.

Even some of our churches and their ministers lie...

- when they water down Your Gospel and preach race-based nationalism;
- when they turn congregations into exclusive clubs only for "our people;"
- when they ignore the poor, the sick, the stranger.

Forgive us, O God, when we lie for comfort and enjoyment.

Empower us, O God, to be Your truth-tellers,

to be followers of the One who is "the way, the truth, and the life."

Guide us, O God, to being Your "beloved community,"

a people who cherish Your truth;

a people who delight in welcoming and serving all people,

a people who "walk humbly" with You, day by day. AMEN

—Lee Carroll

Lee Carroll is an ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and Associate Professor Emeritus of Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, Georgia. He is the current chair of the Board of Directors of the Open Door Community. (lcarroll@ix.netcom.com)

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Open Door Community
PO Box 10980
Baltimore, MD 21234

poetry corner



Julie Lonneman

Whereas

On Saturday, December 19, 2009, U.S. President Barack Obama signed the Congressional Resolution of Apology to Native Americans. No tribal leaders or official representatives were invited to witness and receive the Apology on behalf of tribal nations. President Obama never read the Apology aloud publicly — although, for the record, Senator Sam Brownback five months later read the Apology to a gathering of five tribal leaders, though there are more than 560 federally recognized tribes in the U.S. The Apology was then folded into a larger, unrelated piece of legislation called the 2010 Defense Appropriations Act.

My response is directed to the Apology's delivery, as well as the language, crafting, and arrangement of the written document. I am a citizen of the United States and an enrolled member of Oglala Sioux Tribe, meaning I am a citizen of the Oglala Lakota Nation — and in this dual citizenship, I must work, I must eat, I must art, I must mother, I must friend, I must listen, I must observe, constantly I must live.

Whereas at four years old I read the first chapter of the Bible aloud I was not Christian

Whereas my hair unbraided ran the length of my spine

I sometimes sat on it

Whereas at the table my legs dangled

I could not balance peas on my fork

Whereas I used my fingers carefully

I pushed the bright green onto silver tines

Whereas you eat like a pig the lady said

setting my plate on the floor

Whereas she instructed me to finish on my hands and knees she took another bite

Whereas I watched folds of pale curtains inhale

and exhale a summer dance

Whereas in the breath of the afternoon room

each tick of the clock

Whereas I rose and placed my eyes and tongue on a shelf above the table first

Whereas I kneeled to my plate

I kneeled to the greatest questions

Whereas that moment I knew who I was

whereas the moment before I swallowed....

— Layli Long Soldier

*These are short excerpts from a much longer work of poetry and prose by Layli Long Soldier from her book *Whereas*, drawing on the official U.S. government language of the Resolution and Apology. She is a recipient of a Lannan Literary Fellowship, a Native Arts and Cultures Foundation Native Artist Fellowship, and a Whiting Award. She lives in Santa Fe.*