

freedom  
from  
prisons



COMMUNITY READINGS *et*  
MEDITATIONS FOR LENT



## Lent Booklet 2018

FREEDOM FROM PRISONS

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## Editor's Note & Introduction

This Lent Booklet was produced by Grandview Calvary Baptist Church and was printed, bound, and distributed on unceded Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh territories. As we continue to untangle our complicity in historic injustice and the systemic oppression of Indigenous people, we work towards—and yearn for—a world where all things are reconciled.

As part of our church community's commitment to developing better relationship with our Indigenous neighbours, we have undergone a process of discernment in tandem with Healing at the Wounding Place to hone our attention. One focus that arose from working group discussions was the disproportionate incarceration of Indigenous women, and the ways that this compounds colonial violence, disintegrates familial bonds, and maintains deeply-rooted injustices for Indigenous people. What also arose was a collective and heartfelt desire to further investigate this issue, energized by our understanding of God as liberatory, a Creator who seeks the unshackling and flourishing of all.

This booklet is in part themed to expand consciousness around this topic, especially in grounding our understanding of violent incarceration in the words of Christ, proclaiming “I have come to set the captives free.” In this Lenten season, we are acutely aware of all the ways we hold—and are being held—captive. We lament the structures (physical, economic, ideological) of incarceration that contain not the most dangerous, but the most vulnerable. We mourn the places and people held in the death of bondage, desperate for resurrection and renewal. We yearn for the *not yet* to be *now*.

We have organized the reflections by week, with five daily readings per week. Collected writings represent a cross-section of those who are part of the GCBC community, and as such, the pieces included within do not represent all perspectives. What they do hold in common is a posture of vulnerability, grief, and grappling with the weight of all that is not right: all of creation that groans for restoration. We encourage you to keep this shared posture in mind when sitting with pieces that make you uncomfortable.

Please note that some pieces contain strong language and/or difficult content, so we encourage discretion when sharing with younger readers.

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## Daily Litany

Each day of Lent, you are invited to respond to the daily reflection by praying through the following litany:

**Where have I encountered Christ today?**

(silence)

**How have others encountered Christ through me?**

(light candle)

**Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.**

**We are forgiven and held in the endless mercy of Christ.**

(extinguish candle)

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Artist unknown

WEEK I, DAY I

## Prisons of Our Own Making: Fear in the Age of the Refugee

by Trudy Taylor Smith

*We*  
imprisoned by narratives of fear  
and scarcity  
label the other as  
*Terrorist;*  
*Illegal:*  
taker of lives,  
taker of jobs,  
taking away our homogeneity  
and sense of security.

We call our prison a fortress,  
believing it is we  
who have prevailed over  
the chaos outside,  
and not our own fear  
that has won by  
relegating our existence  
to captivity and isolation.

And *they*—  
those from whom  
we have separated from ourselves  
by language  
by place of origin  
by passport stamp—  
or lack thereof—  
*they*  
are imprisoned, too.

But their cells are not  
the walls of their own imagining.  
They are the real cement and iron  
of immigration detention centres  
turning profit  
by the bed  
by the day,  
punishing the audacity  
of those who have the nerve to  
cross politically imagined lines in the sand  
and seek opportunity  
seek safety  
seek survival.

What would it be  
if we could look *them* in the eye  
and see  
not outsider  
or villain  
or poster child  
or political symbol  
or threat to our way of life,  
but a reflection  
of ourselves?  
A spark of the Divine;  
a life that's on the line.  
A human being  
who belongs,  
and who longs  
to be free?

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WEEK I, DAY 2

## Lamentation & Confession

by Scott Neufeld

As of August 2017, approximately 5% of the women in Canada are Indigenous. In a just world, where racialized categories don't determine people's chances in life, we would expect 5% of the female prison population to be Indigenous women. But we do not live in such a world. Instead, 39% of the women in prison, in Canada, are Indigenous.

**Just Creator, I lament my ignorance.**

**Just Creator, I confess my inability to see, or to comprehend injustice.**

The United Nations considers the use of solitary confinement (administrative segregation) in prisons to be a form of torture. To be totally cut off, from human contact, human touch, human community. To be confined to a tiny, windowless space, 23 hours a day.

In federal prisons in Canada, 50% of female prisoners in solitary confinement are Indigenous women.

**Tortured Christ, I lament my ignorance.**

**Tortured Christ, I confess my privilege, my disconnection from those who are marginalized by our systems, to not have known this.**

In 2008, the Government of Canada effectively terminated the Mother-Child program in federal prisons by making women who had been convicted of a wider range of serious crimes ineligible for the program, and mandating that family services automatically follow any woman who applied for the program. By March 2011, only one woman was participating in the program across all Canadian prisons.

Indigenous women were disproportionately excluded from the program by the

new policies.

**Mother God, I lament the ways the prison system replicates the residential school system, fostering ongoing cultural genocide by splintering families, removing mothers from children, removing children from their cultures.**

**Mother God, I confess my complicity, confess the way every settler benefits from the endless removals of Indigenous bodies from ancestral lands, from endless separating of Indigenous children from Indigenous mothers.**

It is too easy to imagine that the over-incarceration of Indigenous women is “not a sociological issue, but an issue of crime.” It is too easy to imagine that criminals, who commit crimes, deserve what they get. As if settlers have anything to say about deserving what we get.

A 1990 Justice Inquiry, written by two previously incarcerated Indigenous women stated, “There is no accidental relationship between our convictions for violent offences, and our histories as victims...For us, violence begets violence: our contained hatred and rage concentrated in an explosion that has left us with yet more memories to scar and mark us.”

Colonial violence and intergenerational trauma intersect with patriarchal power and intersect again with racist paradigms to produce the over-incarceration of Indigenous women.

**Spirit of peace, I lament the cycles of violence that ever deepen the violence of our systems, of our state, of our society.**

**Jesus of non-violence, I confess that I cannot comprehend why those who take up the sword should perish by it, when the sword was forced into their hands.**



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WEEK I, DAY 3

## Seeing Beyond the Crack

by Christina Chiu

“When there is a crack in my mirror, I cannot see myself as I am—all I see is the crack. The crack tells me that something is wrong with me, that I’m not enough and that this is how others see me too. It’s not a question of finding a better mirror. It’s about seeing beyond the crack...” –Richard Wagamese

Do we realize how we imprison people by responding to others by only seeing the cracks? Out of our fears? Self-protections? Or critical judgments? Or our hidden prejudices?

Recently, someone with mental illness came to the same event as me. I felt nervous when this person approached, then self-protective, and I didn’t want people to identify me in the same category as this person, so I pulled away physically and emotionally. Only after did I realize that I was doing the same thing that others have done with me. I have been hurt by being labelled inaccurately and having people treat me with fear and self-protection and false assumptions without giving me any room for things to be different than an incident in the past. Am I not trusting in the healing and transforming work of God? Have I also been guilty of this sin against others?

Why are people on the margins? Because people have excluded them from participation and pushed them there. Because of the criteria we force on people, and if people do not measure up to our standards then they are excluded. We do this every time we emphasize difference, rather than common humanity. We do this every time we distance our heart from someone else’s.

I once attended a talk by John Dawson on the sin of unrighteous judgment. He explained how we see someone and judge them and yet we do not measure rightly because only God knows how this person has responded with what they have been given—both in terms of power, position and privilege and also conversely in terms of suffering, injustice and brokenness. We do not know their story. He went on to explain that to those to whom much more is given, much more is required.

I also remember a concept another Pastor explained called “still framing”—when we have an image of someone and then never allow this image to change. This fixed judgment is usually negatively framed: the one who holds this negative view never gives the other person a chance nor lets this person have room to change. Like a photo taken at a certain fixed period of time in a person’s life, the view never changes, and we are skewed by our framing of them. This tendency is usually due to past hurts that we are unwilling to forgive or judgments we have made. We must realize that the world is not divided between good and evil people: the dividing line between good and evil is in each of our hearts.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn writes: “And it was only when I lay there rooting on prison straw that I sensed within myself the first stirrings of good. Gradually it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either—but right through every human heart—and through all human hearts. This line shifts. Inside us, it oscillates with the years. And even within hearts overwhelmed by evil, one small bridgehead of good is retained. And even in the best of all hearts, there remains... an unuprooted small corner of evil.

If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?” (from *The Gulag Archipelago*)

Have you ever seen Rembrandt’s painting of the return of the prodigal son? One of the figures looking on this homecoming unhappily is the elder brother. Henri Nouwen has a whole book reflecting upon this painting’s portrayal of this biblical story.

Nouwen describes how the older brother who has been “dutiful and righteous” is, in fact, walking in darkness because of the state of his heart. Maybe the older brother’s self-righteous judgments of his younger brother hinder the younger son from coming home. “When the Father’s House is filled with the Father’s Love; then the Prodigals will come home” (Paul Cain). We are invited to open our hearts to respond to others more as the Father does. The Father seeks to transform us and soften our hearts—both for our own heart and for the hearts of others. Through the parable, Jesus shows us both weakness and hope: how we contain elements of the younger son and also the older.

Richard Wagamese continues: “I am not, nor ever will be, perfect. But I don’t need

to live for approval. I need to live for acceptance and joy in the unique, worthy, loveable, beautiful sacred being that I am and to celebrate the same thing in others. That's seeing beyond the crack. I am learning to love my imperfections; in the end, they make me who I am, in all my flawed glory." (from *Embers: One Ojibway's Meditations*. Hannah Klassen passed this quote on to me.)

Can we hear God's invitation based on what Jesus has purchased on the cross? How can we bring more freedom? How can we invite more of the new creation and transformation of Jesus into our relationships with people? This Lent, would you ask Jesus: "what step can I take in this direction?"

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WEEK I, DAY 4

## Being Church in These Dividing Times

by The Rev. Dr. Kelly Brown Douglas

*This talk is excerpted from Kelly Brown Douglas, "More Than Skin Deep: The Violence of Anti-Blackness" in Vincent W. Lloyd and Andrew Prevot, editors, Anti-Blackness and Christian Ethics. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2017). The transcribed talk can be found in full at <https://goo.gl/dfuh7X>.*

The narrative of anti-blackness is [inherently] violent as [its] sole purpose is the denigration and dehumanization of black people, and those who are regarded as black by a narrative of white supremacy. And so, what are we as people of God, as church, to do about it? This brings us to the cross.

The cross represents power that denigrates human bodies, destroys life, and preys on the most vulnerable in society. As the cross is defeated, so too is that power. In God's resurrection of Jesus, God defeated the cross through non-violent, life-affirming force. It cannot be stressed enough that God's resurrecting power is one that by definition respects the sacred integrity of all human bodies and the sanctity of all life. This is significant in two ways as we reflect upon the violence that violates black lives.

Black feminist literary artist and social critic Audre Lorde once said, "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us to temporarily

beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change.” What the crucifixion–resurrection event reveals is that God does not use the master’s tools. God does not utilize the violence exhibited in the cross to defeat deadly violence itself. As Lorde suggests, using “the master’s tools” may bring a temporary solution, but it does not bring an end to the culture of deadly violence itself. This implies, therefore, that the only way to defeat violent power is with non-violent means.

There is no doubt that the cross reflects the depth and scope of human violence. The cross, in this respect, represents the consuming violence of the world. It points to a world that is saturated with violence. This violence includes not simply the physical brutality meant to harm bodies, but also the systems, structures, narratives, and constructs that do harm, including the narrative of anti-blackness and the systems and structures it fosters in conjunction with the narrative of white supremacy. To reiterate, anything that would devalue the life of another is violent. Through Jesus, God enters into this world of violence, yet does not take violence into God’s very self. Thus, God responds to the violence of the world not in an eye-for-an-eye manner. Instead, God responds in a way that negates and denounces the violence that perverts and demeans the integrity of human lives. God accomplishes this by affirming life, as seen in the very resurrection of Jesus. Essentially, God responds to the violence of the cross—the violence of the world—in a nonviolent yet forceful manner that is life-affirming.

Put simply, the protest of Jesus was one that affirmed through word and ministry the life of those that the violent systems and structures of his day disavowed. In this regard, God’s non-violence is not passive. Rather, it is a forceful response that protects the integrity of one’s sacred humanity and thus life. Again, this is clear as one recognizes that Jesus was crucified because of his active resistance to the violent political and religious powers and structures of his time that trapped certain people in violent, hence crucifying, realities of living.

Essentially, while violence, like narratives of anti-blackness and white supremacy seek to denigrate and do harm to the bodies of people, nonviolence seeks to free bodies from denigrating and deadly violence. Not resorting to violence breaks the very cycle of violence itself. It is in this way that the crucifixion-resurrection event reflects nothing less than a counter-narrative to the crucifying narrative of violence.

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WEEK 2, DAY 1

## A Reflection for Lent

by Carly Lecuyer

*Colossians 2:6-15*

the days, slowly but surely lengthening,  
pushing back the dark  
the sunlight filtered through new growth and evergreen  
the wind whispers possibility, hope of spring, the world made new

and yet

the darkness lingers at the edges of consciousness  
shades of purple, colour of pain, hue of suffering  
oftentimes unsure of how to stand  
in the seemingly ever widening gap  
aware of suffering both silent and shouted, personal and global

sometimes it feels easier to make a life small  
close eyes to the headlines,  
close ears to the cries for help,  
close hearts to the stories,  
but then realize there is no longer Christ  
in that small dark room

and so, a prayer, a plea,  
echoing letters penned by Paul:

may all of life be Christ  
spilling over with gratitude  
being pulled into the orbit of a universe created  
sustained by the substance of Christ

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WEEK 2, DAY 2

## Welcome the Spirit; Hear Her Cries

by Chung Hyun-Kyung

*Chung Hyun-Kyung gave the following address (excerpted here) at the World Council of Churches gathering in Canberra, Australia, in 1991.*

My heart is overwhelmed with sadness due to ongoing war. The cries of mothers, wives, and sisters who lost their beloved in the war break our heart. "...The whole creation has been groaning in travail" (Rom. 8:22). In the midst of this senseless destruction of life we call upon the Spirit who "intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words" (Rom. 8:26). We pray to the Spirit asking her desperately, "Come Holy Spirit. Renew our whole creation."

The spirit of this compassionate God has been with us from the time of creation. God gave birth to us and the whole universe with God's life-giving breath (*Ruach*). This wind of life, this life-giving power of God is the spirit which enabled people to come out of Egypt, resurrected Christ from death, and started the church as a liberative community. We also experience the life-giving Spirit of God in our people's struggle for liberation, their cry for life, and the beauty and gift of nature. The Spirit of God has been teaching us through the survival wisdom of the poor, the blessings and curses of nature. Only when we can hear this cry for life and can see the signs of liberation are we, able to recognize the Holy Spirit's activity in the midst of suffering creation.

When God's spirit was upon the people on the day of Pentecost, God confronted their broken hearts and called them into discipleship. The rush of wild wind and fire for life from God called them out from the culture of silence, violence, and death and called them into speech, the language of their own. They no longer needed to communicate with the language of their colonizers, rulers, and imperialists. They could hear the good news in their own native languages. Now they could hear each other and understand one another, not with the monolanguage of the Roman Empire, but with the diversities of languages of their own. It was a language of liberation, connection, and unification from below. The wild wind of God breaks down all divisions among us and around us. This wild wind of life calls us to be passionate lovers and workers for a new creation.

With humble heart and body, let us listen to the cries of creation and the cries of the Spirit within it:

Come: the spirit of Hagar, Egyptian, black slave woman exploited and abandoned by Abraham and Sarah, the ancestors of our faith.

Come: the spirit of Jephthah's daughter, the victim of her father's faith, burnt to death for her father's promise to God if he were to win the war.

Come: the spirit of Indigenous people of the earth, victims of genocide.

Come: the spirit of Martin Luther King Jr, Oscar Romero, and many unnamed women freedom fighters who died in the struggle for liberation of their people.

Come: the spirit of Earth, Air, and Water, tortured and exploited by human greed for money.

Come: the spirit of the Liberator, our brother Jesus, tortured and killed on the cross.



*Holy Trinity* by Julie Lonneman

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WEEK 2, DAY 3

## Set the Captives Free

by Erin Peters

The cell is cold, dank—  
dampness permeates your pores  
the smell of urine  
invades your nostrils  
and you choke  
the rage wells up inside you—  
you silently scream until  
it becomes audible  
then uncontrollable and then—  
you are thrown into darkness  
where time doesn't exist  
and you begin to wonder:  
*am I still even human?*

Shut up  
shut in  
and shut down—  
the cycle of oppression silences  
contains the troubled in isolation—  
separating us and them,  
haves and have-nots  
white and brown—  
and this country claims  
it no longer engages in acts of torture?  
I'll call 'bullshit' on that—  
let's hear the facts:  
58% of women behind bars are Indigenous  
86% have histories of abuse  
so then, critical  
to our understanding:  
we're locking up victims, not  
criminals.



The real perps:  
corrupt RCMP  
compassionless judges  
white men in seats of power—  
colonizers (our ancestors, and us  
passively participating) come to  
divide and conquer  
rape and plunder  
blame the victims and  
shut them up  
shut them in  
shut them down  
for attempting to  
survive.

When will we see  
justice done  
when will we begin  
to do the work He did:  
breaking open gates  
loosing chains—  
we hold a responsibility:

Rise up  
and let justice roll  
down like waters, righteousness  
like a  
    never  
        ending  
            stream.

It's on us—  
Christ, have mercy.

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WEEK 2, DAY 4

## A Prayer for the Incarcerated

by Kenji Kirumitsu

*This prayer is from A Booklet of Uncommon Prayer by Kenji Kirumitsu, published in 2017 by Evangelicals for Social Action.*

O Christ Jesus,  
bless all those who are imprisoned,  
whose bodies are bound behind wire and metal  
and held in cages meant for chattel.

Grant us the decarceration you have promised:  
that the prisoners would be set free,  
that more sustainable and rehabilitative justice  
might be birthed here,  
and that wise and brave lawmakers, agitators, and leaders  
would help us in this task  
so that human hope may be restored.

In the Name of Jesus,  
who confronted his imprisoners without hatred or bitterness  
and who, even while enduring the death penalty,  
extended hope and forgiveness to a fellow prisoner.

Amen.

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WEEK 2, DAY 5

# Moth

by BamBam Sam

*Editor's note: BamBam Sam was part of an inner-city creative writing group that I [Céline] ran in Calgary. He also went by 'Lithium Kid.' He stopped taking his medications because they made him feel groggy and unhuman, and the last we heard of him was that he had been sent back to jail, separated from his young daughter.*

Maybe my mind is not as free as I feel  
For so long it has been sealed  
I now feel like I'm in a field with no  
indication of which way I want to go.  
Sporadically I run this way and that  
Kind of like a hyper cat in a garden full of moths  
For so long, I've been the moth  
stuck between two palms  
flickering around through the cracks  
I can see the world but hopelessly I was contained  
Yes that's it, two hands wrapped around my brain  
For so long they have been closed around me  
I've been flickering around sporadically  
And now they open just a crack  
Just enough to fly away  
But now I'm sacked, for so long  
I've been trying to fly  
But now I just walk around,  
examining that which once contained me,  
forgetting that it was my enemy,  
forgetting what is right in front of me.

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WEEK 3, DAY I

# Jesus, Lazarus, and the Christian Community

by Daniel Aguilar

*This is excerpted from a larger post entitled “Towards a Black-Womanist Theology of Mass Incarceration” from [thetatteredrose.wordpress.com](http://thetatteredrose.wordpress.com).*

My experience as a formerly incarcerated convicted drug felon from a low-income brown family has led me to ask the question, *what does God mean for those under the oppression of mass incarceration?* To speak of mass incarceration is to speak of a system of racial oppression. It is also to speak of the failure of that system to rehabilitate persons, and the victims this failure creates. I argue that God is involved in the dismantling of mass incarceration and in ensuring the survival and quality of life of those who have to endure it.

After receiving the news about Lazarus' illness, Jesus told his disciples that he would go to him in Judea. The disciples, deeply concerned, questioned the efficacy of going into dangerous territory to help Lazarus, but Jesus was not deterred. When Jesus came to Lazarus' sister, Mary, she was deeply worried that it was too late to save her loved one because “he had already been in the tomb for four days,” but Jesus comforted her by reminding her that he *is* the resurrection. Even though Jesus knew that he would raise Lazarus from the dead, upon witnessing the pain of Mary and the community of those who loved Lazarus, “Jesus wept.” Finally, Jesus told members of the community to remove the tombstone. Then, he called out to Lazarus, and Lazarus responded by coming out of the tomb. Finally, Jesus called on the community once again to unbind Lazarus and to let him go!

In this story, Lazarus is the prisoner. As a former drug addict and inmate, I can attest that being in this bondage can feel like one is spiritually dead. Like Lazarus' loved ones, even the loved ones of inmates can sometimes lose hope that the inmate can overcome being “dead.” But like Jesus, the Christian community is called to be compassionate and to empathize with the pain of others—indeed, even weeping alongside those whose pain would otherwise not directly affect one's self. Jesus did not raise Lazarus from the dead alone; members of the community were involved in removing the stone. As such, the Christian community must be involved in removing the structural barriers that keep inmates ‘dead’ and going in

and out of prison (i.e. advocating for macro social prison reform). Like Lazarus, inmates must respond to Jesus' call by taking the human initiative to walk out of the tomb. Finally, Jesus calls on the Christian community to help Lazarus and the inmate re-enter into society by "unbinding" Lazarus and helping him to remove the vestiges of his former state of being.

In this story, we can see that God's involvement in mass incarceration involves structural changes, human initiative, and a Jesus who is the resurrection and raises the dead (i.e. rehabilitates individuals) even before and after the event on the cross.



*Mary, Comforter of the Afflicted* by Kehinde Wiley

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WEEK 3, DAY 2

# Lament for the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women

by Teresa Diewert & Céline Chuang

*This reading is excerpted from a longer service, Evening of Lament for the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, hosted by Streams of Justice on February 5, 2018.*

READER 2: Ecclesiastes 4:1 “Again I looked and saw all the oppression that was taking place under the sun: I saw the tears of the oppressed – and they have no comforter; power was on the side of the oppressors – and they have no comforter.”

FACILITATOR: We name now the powers and principalities at work, not only responsible for the murder and abduction of our Indigenous sisters, but for the patterns of brokenness that pervade our society, city, and world. Colonialism, racism, patriarchy, empire: these systems continue to destroy life. With deep grief and repentance we name our own place in the pain of Indigenous people.

FACILITATOR: For our participation in structural oppression, as people of faith and settlers on Turtle Island:

ALL: **Creator of all, forgive us.**

FACILITATOR: For our ignorance and denial of histories and theologies that injure rather than heal:

ALL: **Creator of all, forgive us.**

FACILITATOR: For our complicity in violence against Indigenous communities and cultural genocide:

ALL: **Creator of all, forgive us.**

FACILITATOR: For our worship of a white Saviour:

ALL: **Creator of all, forgive us.**

(The following portion of the lament is revised from Walter Brueggemann's  
"Awed to Heaven, Rooted in Earth")

FACILITATOR: Some say our society is going to hell,  
and the hell holes are often easy to spot-  
holes of indifference and distraction  
where there is only death  
And we, even in our privilege, know various signs  
and degrees of hell.

ALL: **We hold in our hearts deep awareness of all the  
places where your light  
is not visible and has not yet come;**

FACILITATOR: Our hearts link to many places of wretchedness  
short of your light:  
we know up close the deep wretchedness  
of poverty, of homelessness, of racism  
and no light yet.  
And we wait—

ALL: **We wait for you to ache and hurt and care  
over us and with us, and beyond us.  
Cry with us the brutality  
grieve with us the misery  
tremble with us the poverty and hurt.**

You are invited to name your sorrow, rage, and lament aloud, and after each person,  
we will respond together:

ALL: **O Creator, we cry out.**

Time of Sharing

Time of Silence

READER 3: Matthew 5:3-4, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for  
theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those  
who mourn, for they will be comforted."

FACILITATOR: We wait,  
not clear about our waiting.  
But filled with a restlessness,  
daring to imagine  
that you are not finished yet–

ALL: **So we wait, in fierce sorrow and fierce hope.**

FACILITATOR: And yet, Your Spirit still breathes us  
from dust into flesh,  
from stillness into motion.  
And yet, Your tears baptize us into  
renewed justice-seeking  
as sorrow binds us to those in struggle.  
And yet, Your wild garden of kinship grows.

ALL: **So we work towards a world made new.**



*Portrait of a Residential School Girl*  
by Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun



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WEEK 3, DAY 3

## Hirundo Rustica

by Adam Roper

i.

My dad left one year in a snowy winter  
when I was still a tiny swallow,  
flying North for work and finally resettling,

Some birds will always travel on the wing,  
Some will settle where their wings are broken  
As for me, I'll learn to tailor wings of my own

to save myself being left unfinished,  
from the fear wondering when I'll be  
seeing him again,

I promised mom I'll  
never be a singing bird in the cage  
crying "Lord, I must be freed."

ii.

The problem with Icarus was not only that he  
flew too close to the sun,  
it was that his dad used wax for his wings  
instead of thread.

As a child I sold the wings my father made  
to pay for my way to the ferries  
To study fashion in the city,

my work  
commissioned for down fineries,  
bright rainbow plumage and chignon pins worn by the  
Duchess of Cambridge,

flying so close to the sun  
I forgot the fear of wonder for a moment,  
the fear  
of being a disappointment,

I showed him the tattoos on my hands,  
the same as his,  
I said I missed him on the phone.

iii.

Each season I pack my sadness in suitcases  
made of soil  
to regrow into poems  
when I've grown a little more.

My sorrow sorts itself out in  
stinging nettle, ferns and vanilla leaf,  
as if to say all the mistakes I've made

will be redeemed on the forest floor,  
recycled and renewed as  
words I could have said.

iv.

Last summer I sewed my feathers to a poem  
that said I shall not  
dwell in blame,  
in depression or resentment

A poem that will not be a crying bird in a cage  
that sings instead my Lord,  
I am not my pain,  
I am not my broken wings,  
I am not my father leaving,  
I am not displacement,

I am only the songs I write for mercy,  
"My Lord, I must be freed."

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WEEK 3, DAY 4

## Remember

by Mady Sieben

And then one day,  
Suddenly  
And yet  
    Lethargically,  
I stumbled toward freedom.  
I remember the day.  
I remember the way the sun came.

Before this day,  
I had entered my prison encapsulated by all the scars on my skin—  
named by the pain and the pain's origin.  
So when I left,  
I didn't know where to begin—  
I didn't know how to tell the brand new open space around me that its me.  
I wanted to tell the sun that I was back: I'm the same, but also, no.  
    I'm not.

The chains of my mistakes wrote names on my face but now I'm a clean slate.  
I love this.  
But also,  
I need to say: *I love you*, to my chains:  
For teaching me so many things.  
*I love you,*  
*but I cannot stay. I have to go and find a new name.*  
And then the night ended and the day came.

The words felt like rain  
but then the clouds cleared, and,  
The air is light around my face as it erases all the letters and all the marks  
from the days behind bars.

Now,  
I look in the mirror and they are still there— yet, this time only as memories.  
And then every so often, like snow reflecting the sun; they glitter and gleam.  
I look in the mirror and I see.  
I see the ways my scars stay to remind me; they whisper:  
‘Do you remember? Remember that you’re free?  
Do you remember that you’re free from me?’

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WEEK 3, DAY 5

## A Lent Reflection

by Mari Grundling



DANHENSON1 VIA GETTY IMAGES

In 2012, I had the opportunity to do a clinical placement at a forensic psychiatric hospital in Windhoek, Namibia. One of my roles was to create a rehabilitation program for the inmates to help them eventually reintegrate into society. Some individuals had been there for more than 20 years, which meant they had never even lived in an apartheid-free Namibia. They were the ones that society was purposely trying to forget. Most, if not all of them, are still there, still forgotten.

I discovered and witnessed many injustices during this time that left me feeling frustrated, hopeless and angry. I might even have gotten in a fight with one of the guards at one time...

Yet surprisingly to me, what I witnessed in some of my clients was not bitterness or hostility or hopelessness, but a jubilant and infectious Joy. A Joy so profound that it brought them freedom despite their hopeless circumstances.  
A Joy that I'm always still searching for.  
A Joy that I hope you find also.

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WEEK 4, DAY 1

## Blessed are the Persecuted

by Benjamin Hertwig

*This piece is reprinted with permission of Geez Magazine (the Prison Issue, Issue 44, Summer 2016). A note that it contains strong language. Since it has five parts, we have split it into five days.*

### I.

**As of March 2015, Aboriginal inmates represented 24.4% of the total federal custody population while comprising just 4.3% of the Canadian population.**

The new Remand Centre is outside of town, close to the military base. You need a car to get there. From downtown it would take you days to walk, and this distance may very well be intentional. When I was a courier downtown, I'd bike past the old, imposing, concrete Remand bunker in the early mornings. Wet footprints in the snow, the slender lines of bike tires. In the fall messages spray-painted onto the bike path—hieroglyphs of love and memory, apologies, admonitions. Sometimes people standing on the path and shouting up at the embrasure-like window slits. Sometimes lights were on—florescent, artificial against the glowing dawn or the grey morning. I'm not sure if anyone heard the shouting. The building is now empty.

A friend called me from the new Remand and asked me to put some money on his card, for cigarettes. Years earlier we'd drive to work together and pull bleary-eyed morning shifts. We became friends. That was before he started drinking again, lost his home and ended up on the streets. The timeline of our friendship is fuzzy. It seemed to collapse into trauma—my own, his. One morning he called me and

asked for a place to stay. He'd been up north, taking heavy-duty mechanic training when police officers approached him outside the convenience store and ran his name. He had warrants. Drinking in public. Trespassing. He ended up in jail and was kicked out of the program. After the police let him out he wandered the quiet highway and ended at my apartment where he fried bannock and moose meat, opening spring windows, smiling and rubbing his face. He stayed three days and the smell of bannock stayed long after he left.

I walk in to the Remand centre and both the guards are white—they don't smile when I walk up. "What do you want?" one of them says. I'm taken aback. I've dealt with police before, but this is different. The guards make me feel like I've done something wrong. Like the land we're on is their land. I can acknowledge treaty six as much as I want, I can speak the words, but words are one thing and guards with guns behind desks are another. I thought I might be able to see my friend. I'm naive and I'm white. I put the money on his card and leave quickly.

---

WEEK 4, DAY 2

## II.

**In the ten year period between March 2005 and March 2015, the Aboriginal inmate population increased by more than 50% compared to a 10% overall population growth during the same period. As a group, Aboriginal people accounted for half of the total growth in the federal inmate population over this time period. The situation is even more distressing for federally sentenced Aboriginal women. Over the last ten years, the number of Aboriginal women inmates doubled. At the end of the reporting period, 35.5% of incarcerated women were of Aboriginal ancestry.**

Lance and I met at an inmate reintegration program. Turns out I had his name wrong for over a year and he never corrected me. He was quiet—one of the few Indigenous people in the program. When I got to know him, his time was almost up. He was preparing to move into a half-way house. He was looking for work. I gave him my phone number and he called me a few times. He got a job with an organization I knew, and we drifted out of contact. I didn't see him for months—until I drove past the river valley and he was sitting under an awning, trying to stay out of the rain. I asked if he had somewhere to sleep. I could tell he was embarrassed. He changed the subject. We drove to the program together, and the meal was already underway when we arrived. I had to leave early. Months later I started picking up

shifts in the drop-in again. I saw him from time to time. He talked about trying to go home. A few weeks later, he arrived in the morning and had cuts on his face. He told me he needed to get out of the city.

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WEEK 4, DAY 3

### III.

**The intergenerational effects of Aboriginal social histories (i.e. residential schools experience; involvement in the child welfare, adoption and protection systems; dislocation and dispossession of Aboriginal people; poverty and poor living conditions on many reserves; family or community history of suicide, substance abuse and/or victimization) continue to drive the disproportionate number of Aboriginal peoples caught up in Canada's criminal justice system.**

Before he died, Dave showed me his list of convictions. "It'll take you a while to read," he laughed. He'd spent much of his life in jail, much of it on the street. Three months later I sat next to him in a hotel room as the representative of the government of Canada offered him an official apology for the abuse he'd been subjected to in the residential school system. He talked quietly about who he became once he left school, how the abuse made him angry at the world, how he couldn't hold a job, how he felt guilt for things that had been done to him by white people who professed to care for him and love God. I'd never heard him talk this way before. He'd often come into the drop-in and play tens, a card game popular in Edmonton jails. Years on the street ground his body down. He was slender. He walked slowly. When he finally got sick, his immune system couldn't fight the infection. I visited him in the hospital where he was hooked up to an IV, his face covered with a mask. He spoke slowly. The nurse told me how he had been flirting with her ever since he arrived. "Come visit me again," he said. I couldn't see his lips moving because of the mask. His voice seemed to float in the air, disembodied, joining the slanting light from the window. The following day I left on a vacation, and he died before I returned. His funeral was outside of town on his home reservation. The coffin was open, his hair braided. Tattooed hands folded over his chest. Someone had put a joint in the coffin with him. I don't think it's a stretch to say that residential school killed him. That the prison apparatus killed. That white settler colonialism killed him. That in ways I don't like to acknowledge or think about, I killed him.

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WEEK 4, DAY 4

## IV.

**“Vulnerable people often end up in jail for something as small as not paying for transit or similar fines. Landing in jail further perpetuates a cycle of incarceration and poverty, which certainly does not create safer communities.”**  
–Alberta Minister of Justice, Kathleen Ganley

Laurie and Keith have known me for a few years now. They are both currently homeless. At fifteen Laurie spent six months in the Edmonton Youth Offender’s Centre. “I spent my eighteenth birthday incarcerated,” he says. As an Indigenous man living on the streets, he explains, the police view him as a threat: “Rookie cops are headstrong. They want to prove themselves. Sometimes they give me tickets for drinking in public.” Keith has spent years in prison. “Don’t have the exact number,” he says when I ask how many. He spent some of his childhood in the shadow of the Charles Camsell Hospital, a boarded-up hospital formerly used as a sanitarium for “Indians with tuberculosis.” He talks about the Windigo spirit of the place, about rumours of mass Indigenous graves. His mom was a residential school survivor, but she didn’t talk about it, Keith says. “She took it out on us.” At twelve years old he recalls cops beating him, handcuffing him to the floor, telling him “you’re lucky we didn’t hurt you.” Keith has experienced a lot, but his vision goes beyond personal well-being. “It’s not about me, it’s about our people,” Keith says. “Trauma plays in your head and it brings you down. It fucking hurts. I didn’t want to speak the truth because I was hurt myself. I took the tough-guy jail attitude outside.” He wants people to know the truth. “It’s about connection to the Creator,” he says. “People living together.”

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WEEK 4, DAY 5

## V.

**Aboriginal inmates account for 47.21% of all inmates in the Prairie Region. The Prairies region has led population growth and is now the largest region,**



**both in geography and population. Several institutions in the Prairie Region have Aboriginal inmate populations exceeding 50% of their total population.**

When I first started working in the inner city, Karen Bruno showed me some of the ways my people have hurt and continue to hurt her people. She invited me to listen and be an ally. “We’re not really working on the generational issues,” she says, “even after the TRC.” As a follower of Jesus, I’m aware that the church has blood on its hands. Real blood, not metaphorical. And yet I am invited to listen and participate in change. In his book *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, Michel Foucault contrasts the historical soul of Christian theology with the “colonized” soul formed from “punishment, supervision, and constraint.” Indigenous people still live under the shadow of these power structures, even though some of the structures have been named for what they are: forms of cultural and physical genocide. As churches how do we continue to colonize? As individuals how do we continue to punish and constrain? I often think of the people I’ve met and the time we’ve spent together. And I don’t have any advice to offer to the Indigenous men and women who’ve let me into their lives. But I believe this to be true: there will be no justice without justice for Indigenous people, for Colton Boushie and Tina Fontaine.

Justice Sinclair’s recommendations are a good place to start. Europeans have a history of nailing theses to churches—Luther nailed 95 of them. Justice Sinclair has made 94 recommendations. Those recommendations should be nailed to every place of worship, every agency, every public office. Each settler should print off a copy and read it to their children. “But reading is not enough,” Karen Bruno adds. “What does relationship building look like? What do triggers and trauma look like? How is your agency going to adapt its policies and procedures?” What do the TRC recommendations look like in practise? The courts and churches and agencies and individuals can speak about justice and reconciliation—I can speak about justice and reconciliation—but if we continue to ignore the people we’ve wronged, the land we’ve wronged, those who our systems have shuffled from reservation to residential school to prison to the street we will never know peace. And in the end, it’s not about the kind of peace that alleviates settler guilt anyway. In Keith’s words, “It’s about connection to the Creator. People living together.”

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WEEK 5, DAY 1

## Jesus Prays in the Garden of Gethsemane: Station of the Cross #1

by Christina Chiu

*Mark 14: 33-36*

Jesus said, “My soul is sorrowful to the point of death” (Matthew 26:38). His agony was so intense that “his sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood” (Luke 22:44). In His immense loneliness, he fell on his face and cried out, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass me by.” Jesus couldn’t face it. Too much pain to hold, too much suffering to embrace, too much agony to live through. He didn’t feel he could drink that cup filled to the brim with sorrows.

Why then could he still say yes? I can’t fully answer that question, except to say that beyond all the abandonment experienced in body and mind, Jesus still had a spiritual bond with the one he called Abba. He possessed a trust beyond betrayal, a surrender beyond despair, a love beyond all fears. This intimacy beyond all human intimacies made it possible for Jesus to allow the request to let the cup pass him by become a prayer directed to the one who had called him “My Beloved.” It was that spiritual sinew, that intimate communion with his Father, that made him hold on to the cup and pray: “My Father, let it be as you, not I, would have it” (Matthew 26:39).

In Henri Nouwen’s words, “Jesus didn’t throw the cup away in despair. No, he kept it in his hands, willing to drink it to the dregs. This is not a show of willpower, staunch determination, or great heroism. This was a deep spiritual yes to Abba, the lover of his wounded heart.”

Or as John V. Taylor said, “Love is the anticipation of justice before its realization. Love can and does flower in the dark before the dawn. That is its pain and its glory. Love comes to its triumph while it is still on the cross [and before the cross, in the Garden of Gethsemane].”



Sketch by Christina Chiu

Jesus' love for His Father and for us triumphs in the garden. He looks to His Father and He looks to the light: the dawning of a new day. "Abba, My Father," he cried, "everything is possible for you. Please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine."

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WEEK 5, DAY 2

## A Poem for my Nephew, Doug

by Kathy Parsons

*Time and chance happened.*

*Caught. Trapped. Taken.*

*You, who were not usually swift or strong,  
did you know you were offering your sacrifice?*

My sister's son, Doug, was stabbed on a warm July evening last summer and died soon after.

As we understand it, he did not know the man and woman who are accused of murdering him.

As we understand it, he was stepping in to help a woman being attacked and the attackers turned on him.

As we understand it – we can't understand it.

I think about the different prisons that now hold us.

Prisons:

For the loved ones and friends.

For the accused and their families.

For the witnesses.

All caught in sadness or anger or fear or darkness.

And I think about freedom.

I don't even know what freedom I'm hoping for.

Is Doug experiencing freedom?

Will freedom come?

How can freedom possibly come? Even to these?

But still I cry: "Oh, set the captives free. Set all the captives free."

And wait.

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WEEK 5, DAY 3

## Longing to be Free/d

By Jeanette Moss

I am the pacing warden  
Imprisoned

I serve and protect myself from  
Fear  
Failure  
Feeling unworthy of freedom

Facing a lifetime sentence, attempting to control the uncontrollable

Confined to being right, relevant, liked  
Driven to keep rooms tidy and first impressions shiny  
Chained to screens where I compare and despair  
Stuck on sucking in, tucking in my tummy  
Compelled to smooth wrinkled wobbly bits

Locked up in self-importance  
Bound to self-preservation

Estranged from  
those I do not know  
those I refuse to see  
those incarcerated in factories, farms, food lineups, street corners

Jesus came to set the prisoners free  
Did he come for the warden?  
Did he come for me?

---

WEEK 5, DAY 4

## The Apartheid Wall

By Sam Ponting

*“And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken, and immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone’s bonds were unfastened.”—Acts 16:26*

The concrete wall is 8 meters tall.

Twice the height of Berlin’s infamous dividing line.

800 kilometres from North to South along the West Bank, and growing still.

Separating farmers from crops.

Vendors from markets.

Children from schools.

The sick from hospitals.

Lovers from lovers.

In Israel-Palestine, one racial group dominates another. Laws uphold this domination. And the wall becomes an instrument for economic segregation. The urban hubs know this well. Nablus, Jenin, Ramallah, Hebron, Jericho, and East Jerusalem. And the struggle continues...

*The International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid. Open for signature November 30, 1973 by the UN General Assembly.*

Those who have read it call the occupation of Gaza and the West Bank “Apartheid.” Those who have lived under South Africa’s Apartheid regime see Palestine as too familiar a place.

Just ask Desmond Tutu, the first black archbishop of Cape Town.

“I have witnessed the systemic humiliation of Palestinian men, women and children by members of the Israeli security forces,” he said. “Their humiliation is familiar to all black South Africans who were corralled and harassed and insulted and assaulted by the security forces of the apartheid government.”

If we are not careful, we let history repeat itself.

Desmond Tutu also said, “Those who turn a blind eye to injustice actually perpetuate injustice. If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor.”

He speaks of the world's wounds.

But I ask you, what keeps you from liberation? Some people walk around freely but feel bound to brokenness. Hurt. Grief. Pain. Others' spirits are bold and bright, while their bodies are surrounded by razor wire. Electric fencing. Surveillance cameras. Watch towers. Trenches. Sensors. Ditches. Patrol roads. Checkpoints.

Our hearts become heavy for different reasons. And we seek solace in each other's arms. In the Creator. Her love is captivating. Her smile is electric. I saw it once very clearly in the Yukon, when the Northern lights danced sweetly liberated across the sky. The darkness was Her ballroom.

Between July 8 and August 27, Israeli airstrikes killed at least 2,104 human beings in Gaza. At least 495 were children. The fences kept Palestinians from retreating. There was nowhere to run to. Shots fired, no warning.

It was 2014. Now Operation Protective Edge is over. Today, civilians are thrown into jail for throwing rocks. Months without a trial. Unequal laws, unequal punishment.

Their tactics are many. Sometimes, when Palestinians protest, the IDF brings out a skunk tank. It is a machine that sprays demonstrators with a foul-smelling liquid. It seeks to humiliate.

I have a friend named Rana who once climbed onto the top of a tank. She raised her fist and held up the Palestinian flag. She was tackled to the ground by soldiers, but she was not imprisoned. The Brazilian cartoonist, Carlos Latuff, saw a video of her. He drew a cartoon of the event.

Her courage inspired many. Courage brings us together.  
Now, the concrete is a canvass for those that seek to inspire.

The graffiti reads:

“To exist is to resist.”

“No to the Ghetto.”

“Free Palestine.”



<http://www.creativeresistance.org/to-exist-is-to-resist-empire/>

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WEEK 5, DAY 5

## Conversations with John

by John Baird

*The following is excerpted from a longer conversation with John Baird.*

I got put in Kent, awhile back. This place was quite the eye-opener. I've been in prison half my life and this place really scared me. I'm tough as nails and I was scared. All these guys doing multiple life bets. I shouldn't have been there at all. It was a maximum penitentiary—where you went if you were trouble. They shipped me there right from the streets because I was a hardcore biker. They gave me five years for beating up a guy who beat up a girl and robbed her.



Things were bad back then. I used to drink a lot. I don't drink no more but I used to, and my head wasn't in the right place.

Most people at church don't know I was in prison. I was there for a lot of reasons, but I realized later on that a big part of it was the way I was raised. I didn't get the love I needed. I was in group homes and my dad drank a lot. The first time I went to prison was for stealing food to eat. A lot of people in prison weren't raised right. No love.

People don't talk about Kent, but it's one of the worst places in Canada. It was crazy in there: kill or be killed. Everyone was just trying to survive.

I used to be called Johnny Rotton in those days. But now I'm called new names... like Johnny Be Good or even Father Johnny!

The good Lord has really done a lot for me.

I got out. They put me in and I got out. It's a miracle. I didn't tell anyone I prayed in there because it was a sign of weakness. But I did every day. I'm still thankful to the Lord.



John Baird (left) back in Johnny Rotton days

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WEEK 6, DAY I

# Hope

by Mo Korchinski

*This poem comes from Arresting Hope: Women Taking Action in Prison Health Inside Out, edited by Ruth Elwood Martin, Mo Korchinski, Lynn Fels, and Carl Leggo. Mo Korchinski is co-author and a former ACCW (Alouette Correctional Centre for Women in Maple Ridge, BC) inmate.*

**hopeless**  
my life  
**hope**  
to die  
**hopeless**  
getting busted  
**hope**  
charges will be dropped  
**hopeless**  
going to court  
**hope**  
for short sentence  
**hopeless**  
off to jail  
**hope**  
for ACCW  
**hopeless**  
turns to hope  
**hope**  
turns to healing

---

WEEK 6, DAY 2

## Can I Imagine?

by Teresa Diewert

*“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound...” Isaiah 61:1*

Can I imagine a world  
where prison doors are opened  
where those shackled  
by oppressive, unjust, inhumane  
practices are set free;  
are not incarcerated  
are not behind bars?

Can I open my mind  
to imagine a new world?  
A world where the prophets  
imaginings  
can be realized.  
Where an alternative reality,  
– the one that Jesus imagined –  
can be realized.

Can my heart  
gather the fragments of  
traces of truth  
that reveal  
a reality that recognizes  
– as he did –  
the systems that bear down  
on  
those who have  
borne the brunt  
of colonial practices  
of white supremacy.

Can I wrap my head around  
the reality  
of  
the deep trauma and sorrow  
that has been the reality  
of the life of the poor  
the captive  
the incarcerated?

Not really...

It is not my reality...

Thank God,  
He has come  
to proclaim  
release of the captive,  
freedom for the oppressed.

Can I hear His call  
to join Him in our tangled chaos  
to build a new reality?

---

WEEK 6, DAY 3

## Caged Bird

by Maya Angelou

A free bird leaps  
on the back of the wind  
and floats downstream  
till the current ends  
and dips his wing  
in the orange sun rays  
and dares to claim the sky.

But a bird that stalks  
down his narrow cage  
can seldom see through  
his bars of rage  
his wings are clipped and  
his feet are tied  
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings  
with a fearful trill  
of things unknown  
but longed for still  
and his tune is heard  
on the distant hill  
for the caged bird  
sings of freedom.

The free bird thinks of another breeze  
and the trade winds soft through the sighing trees  
and the fat worms waiting on a dawn bright lawn  
and he names the sky his own

But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams  
his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream  
his wings are clipped and his feet are tied  
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings  
with a fearful trill  
of things unknown  
but longed for still  
and his tune is heard  
on the distant hill  
for the caged bird  
sings of freedom.

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WEEK 6, DAY 4

# The Door is Open

by Aida Sanjush

*Aida is part of the Kinbrace community. Below is an explanation of her painting.*



This cage portrays the ethics of some humans who think they have liberating lives. So much so that they underestimate others, and feel superior to others who aren't the same as them. I chose the cage to be brown as it symbolizes the rusty iron, very hard and old- a cage that has trapped the minds of people for very long. The gold

colour represents the materialistic world where people think that life's all about the money and extravagances which is not true. I chose the cage to be brown because the humans that I mentioned above think that they can imprison those whom that they think are in a lower class. However, In fact, they are themselves in the prison but never realize it.

The question marks symbolize the humans who think are very knowledgeable but actually they are not. The birds are the free humans who are being underestimated but they are happier than those who feel superior. Even though the door of the cage is open, people can get out of the cage, the key is hung on the door as well but the people do not want to come out as they have so much arrogance within them. The reason why I made this piece is to express my feelings about pride and how it does not look good for a human to have pride especially about things that are so trivial like money. Pride only looks good on God as he is the most High, the most Powerful and has every reason to be proud. As a Muslim, I believe that God does not like people who are arrogant, we all are the same and should want the best for others as we do for ourselves.

After all, how can we really feel proud of ourselves when most of our fellow humans around the world are hungry and sick?

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WEEK 6, DAY 5

## Jesus is Condemned to Death by the Council: Station of the Cross #3

by Christina Chiu

*Mark 14:55-56, 60-65*

Recently, I attended Healing at the Wounding Place's event concerning Indigenous women and overrepresentation within the prison system. I learned that many of these women in prison are single mothers who stole for subsistence: food, basics for their children or items they could easily sell. These women are then sentenced and put in prison for years at a time, but many end up having to stay even longer because of violence and racism. THIS SHOULD NOT BE!

In “Les Miserables”, Jean Valjean was put into prison for stealing a loaf of bread to feed his sister’s son. What was his crime? Having been born poor, he and his family can’t be blamed for stealing a loaf of bread because this action was forced upon them by an unjust society. Due to the inhumane conditions in prison, Valjean’s sentence got extended several times due to “violence” from fighting to survive and from trying to escape the horror of prison. The prisoners were not treated with dignity as human beings, and the prison guards abused their power. Javier who could never allow Jean Valjean to ever make a new life for himself—even after having been an excellent Mayor for years.

Valjean was also treated horribly when he got out of prison. He simply wanted to find some decent work so that he could have food and a place to sleep, but instead people treated him with suspicion. After he was labelled, people mistreated him, not giving him work, not letting him stay or literally kicking him out, throwing rocks at him and forcing him to move on. We all say we want to rehabilitate criminals but we also often say (or support policies that say) “Not In My Backyard” (NIMBY or Nimbyism). We can judge without it costing us anything personally.

Once you are in the system it is extremely difficult to free yourself from the stigma of having a record—even if all you did was shoplift once. Police also tend to racially profile individuals and this profiling exacerbates the stigma. Our human brain goes into survival mode when we are afraid or feel threatened. Our brain stem takes over to ready our body to “fight or take flight” which means redirecting blood and energy from the parts of our brains used for deeper reflective thought or compassion or creativity. The individual gets into “non-relational” mode. Being treated with suspicion begets more feelings of threat and more behaviours that breed suspicion, so the vicious cycle spirals onwards.

The good news is that instead of distancing himself from us, we have a Saviour who was willing to so identify himself with us. He identified so closely with us that he became incarcerated, pronounced guilty of crimes he did not commit. He was paraded through the streets and hung on a cross, displayed before the public as a criminal, a man worthy of being sentenced to death and labelled as crazy and blasphemous. Jesus was treated unjustly, labelled a criminal, and suffered great physical pain. This is true solidarity. It cost Him everything. Have you ever been judged or misunderstood or had wrong assumptions made about you? Have you ever been wrongly labelled? Ever had “your friends despise and forsake you”? Ever had people accuse and slander you? Ever faced the condemnation of people looking down at you? Distancing from you? Ever been so raw with pain that you could cry out, “Why God? Why God have you abandoned and forsaken me?”

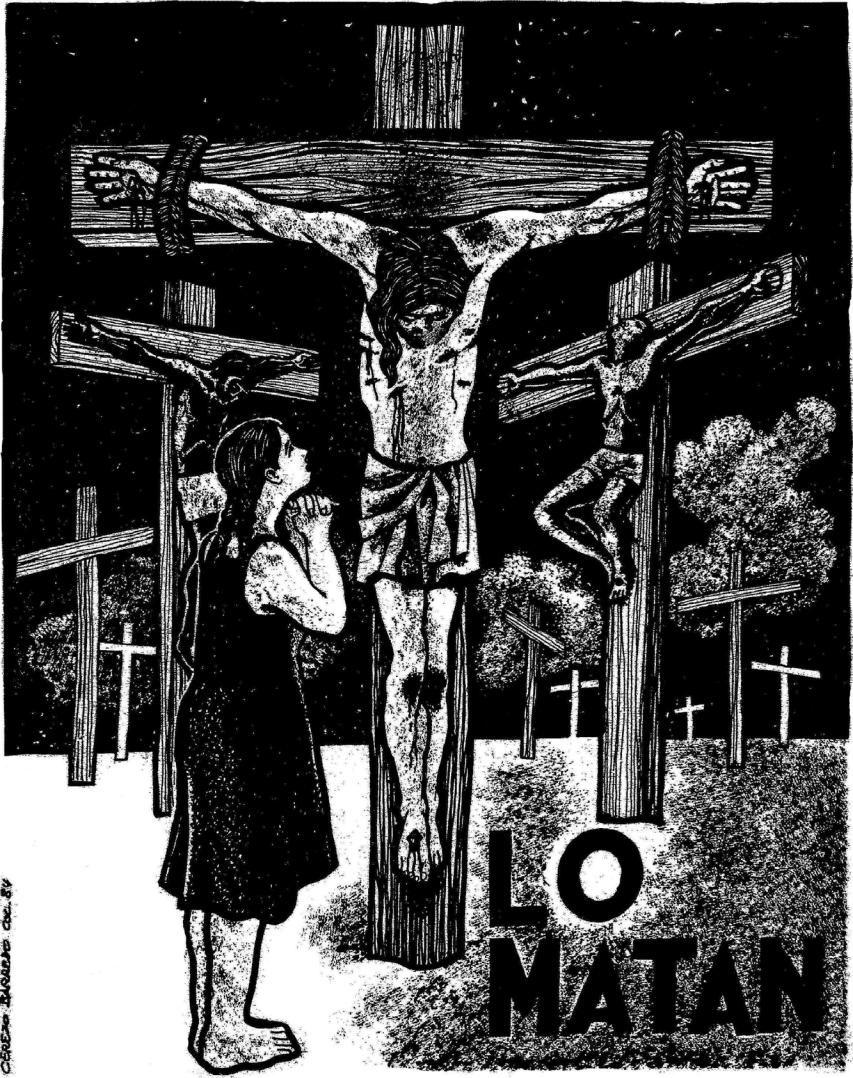


Then, dear brothers and sisters, know that Jesus can empathize with us because he has walked with us. Jesus took on all our suffering and pain and demonstrated that He is not distant from us. Oh no! True solidarity costs dearly, and he offered himself for us. Take this to heart: he truly loves us.

### **Prayer**

Jesus, you who were imprisoned unjustly because you spoke truth and challenged the unmerciful ways of those in power, thank you for loving us so much! Thank you for being one with us. Look upon us in your mercy and forgive us the disproportionate incarceration of Indigenous people in the Canadian prison system. Let your kingdom of Hope, Freedom and Light come to this domain of injustice, oppression and darkness. Jesus, the Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon you to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, to proclaim the Jubilee and show us how we as your people can participate with You. Please let us be one with you and with our brothers and sisters who are precious to you. Hear our cry for the healing of wounds in this land.

So let this be, Amen.



From *Stations of the Cross* by Maximino Cerezo Barredo



*“He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the  
captives, and release to the prisoners.”*

Isaiah 61:1, Luke 4:18