

Where We Stand

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Artwork by Bizzy Feekes-Hulsether

Poetry by Mae Stier

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An Invitation to Lamentful Truth-Telling

Without a doubt, 2020 has been rough. This year has been marked by loss, heartache, and hardship for many people, including me. 2020 has been one of the hardest years I've ever experienced. With the beginning of a global pandemic, normalcy became a stranger. I lost both my aunt and grandmother within two months of each other. I was the first member of my immediate family to earn a bachelor's degree, but I was unable to commemorate like I had been dreaming for years. My husband lost his job, then later health insurance, which left us in a place of financial insecurity and with an uncertainty of how we might make it through the year. In the midst of these experiences, I joined in with many others to grieve the issues of racism and inequality that were brought to the forefront of our conversations.

All of these unique experiences brought me to the question: "How long, Lord?" This question has run through my mind many times this year. I became even more familiar with the emotions of anger, frustration, hopelessness, and sadness. I found myself in a place of lament.

With the help of my church, City Chapel in Grand Rapids, Michigan, I began to learn more about lament and deepened my understanding of what it really looks like. The general understanding of lament is that it is simply mourning and sadness. While this—naming our sadness—is a vital piece of lament, I've learned to draw more deeply from it. Mark Charles, a pastor and theologian, has defined lament as "a truth telling before God." This definition invites us to think about why we are sad and mourning.

We don't lament just to be sad, but instead to help us understand that things are not the way they should be by uncovering truths about life as we know it. Even further, it draws us to believe that things don't have to be this way, and that we can work toward a future that is not marked by the hurt and loss we've experienced.

I've been awakened to the idea that lament is an ongoing work and spiritual practice of uncovering truths and looking toward Christ for sustaining strength, endurance, and hope. I am still practicing truth-telling before God and learning to live in the tension of lament and hope.

Lament in 2020, by Bizzy Feekes-Hulsether (RCA Today)

Land Acknowledgment

As we enter into this space of lament, allowing for the following words and images to guide us, we first want to acknowledge the land upon which this work was created.

We collectively acknowledge that the State of Michigan occupies the ancestral, traditional, and contemporary Lands of the Anishinaabek–Three Fires Confederacy of Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi peoples. We recognize Michigan’s twelve federally recognized Native Nations, historic Indigenous communities in Michigan, Indigenous individuals and communities who live here now, and those who were forcibly removed from their homelands. In offering this land acknowledgment, we affirm Indigenous sovereignty, history, and experiences.

What Are Land Acknowledgements?

A Land Acknowledgement or Land Recognition is a formal statement, often given orally at the beginning of organized events, celebrations, or activities. It recognizes, respects, and affirms that there is an irreducible and ongoing relationship between Indigenous people and the Land. Land Acknowledgements are especially important in contemporary nation-states, like the US and Canada, in which the political structures are based on settler-colonialism and the expropriation of Lands from Indigenous peoples. Land Acknowledgements or Land Recognitions serve to illuminate ongoing Indigenous presence, as well as recognize and counter settler-colonial legacies of violence and Land expropriation.

This Land Acknowledgment and explanation are directly adapted from the Michigan State University American Indian and Indigenous Studies webpage. For more information on Land Acknowledgements, visit www.aisp.msu.edu/about/land

A Dinnertime Lament

We were taught
to keep politics and religion
away from the dinner table,
lest the evidence of our greed
ruin our appetites.

Civility more important
than the ability to lament
the genocide committed
for centuries (and even now)
in the name of our God.

We bow our heads
to bless these spoils, and pray
for the enemies we have made
and tortured, that their souls
may be saved.

That their souls
may be saved.

What have we lost
in our pursuit of more,
what of our humanity
have we traded
for the delusion of wealth?

What pain have we caused
and buried,
lying to ourselves
to keep our meals
palatable,

“pass the stuffing and potatoes,
let us give thanks
for this great country
and freedom,
amen.”



Thy Kingdom Come

To live has meant to conquer
for so long, holy wars waged
to claim ownership over land
we stole, bodies we buried in the name
of imaginary justice.

What kind of God creates all this variety
only to sanction our attempts at sameness?

What kind of God creates a wild world
to be tamed for our consumption?

What lies have we swallowed
for the promise of prosperity?
Who is this false god we created
to condone our destructive self-interests?
Do they help us sleep at night?

What if we imagined that when God created
everything and declared it "good," he meant it:
without our intervention, without our evangelism,
without our self-imposed whiteness masquerading
as righteousness.

What if we sought the kingdom God created,
instead of the one we have made?

Force

My Grandpa used to say
there's a lot of force behind water,
and I think of that now
as we try to force, contain,

bottle, and profit from our waters,
calling our consumption conservation,
changing the shoreline
with last-minute efforts
to save our investments,
all while believing we have control.

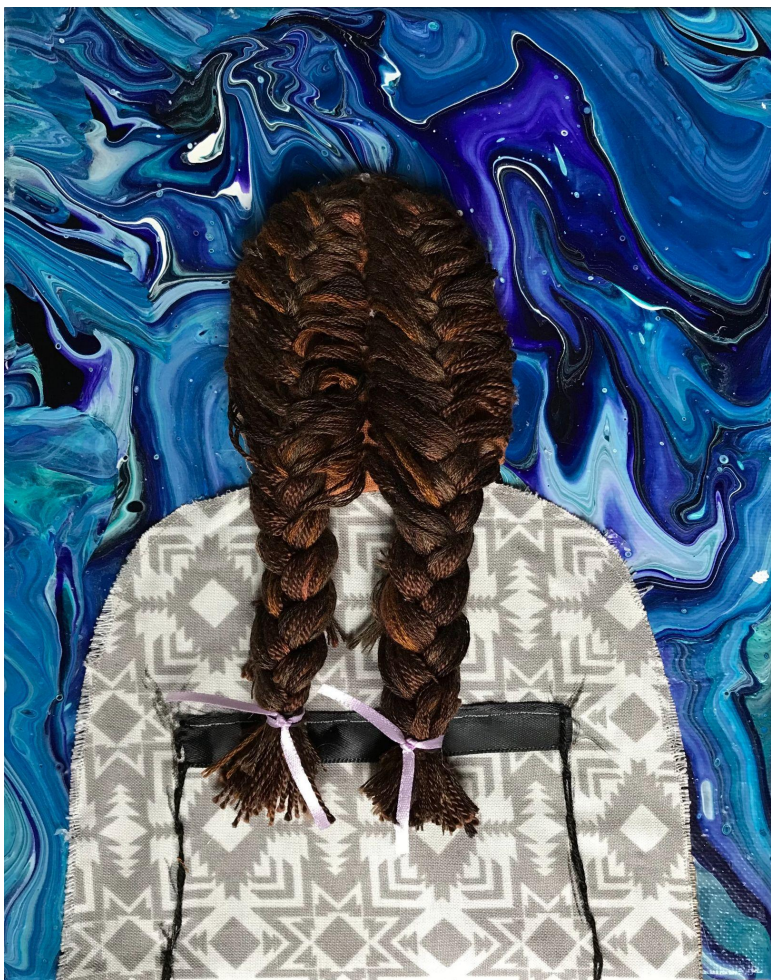
As if the Lake
won't just swallow our attempts.

There's a lot of force behind water.

At some point, it was decided
the shoreline is public
only to the high-water mark,
so the Lake went and drew a new line,

a reminder that money does not
have the final say. Sure it talks,
pushes its weight around,
but listen—the Lake drowns out the noise,
waves eroding sand, moving rocks
and trees and, if we listen, our belief
that everything can be bought.

There's a lot of force behind water,
and history buried in the depths.
Our existence is carried in the current
of rivers that reach across the land.
Our bodies ruled by, desperate for,
built of: water.
Not the other way around.



Where We Stand

I kneel with my hands in the dirt,
holding decomposed earth,
life from what has been.

And I pray: tell me the stories
of this place where I stand,
this well-loved land
and
abused, misused,
stolen land.

A history that cannot be changed
but must be reckoned with,
the same.

May we acknowledge the stories
of this place where we stand,
this ancestral Anishinaabek land
and
still, Ojibwe, Odawa,
and Potawatomi land.

May we practice the names
as they roll off our tongues
of the nations who preceded this one.

Look to the earth,
the dirt where you stand,
here in Michigan on Anishinaabek land,
since time immemorable
and still, Ojibwe, Odawa,
and Potawatomi land.

Thank You to Mark Charles

We would like to extend a word of gratitude to Mark Charles. His book *“Unsettling Truths: The Ongoing, Dehumanizing Legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery”*, co-written with Soong-Chan Rah, was a cornerstone in the development of this booklet and included artwork. Mr. Charles has given us the words necessary to begin to understand our own need for lament and the roles that we can play in lamenting land conquest.

Resources For Further Engagement

As we continue forward into our understanding of lament, we acknowledge that listening is an important early step. Below, we have gathered a few resources that might be helpful for you as you consider beginning the work of lament.

“Unsettling Truths:

The Ongoing, Dehumanizing Legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery”

by Mark Charles & Soong-Chan Rah

“Prophetic Lament:

A Call for Justice in Troubled Times”

by Soong-Chan Rah

Where do you stand?

To gain more awareness of the land you live on and to learn more about the Indigenous nation in your area, check out the interactive map @ www.native-land.ca

About the Artists

Bizzy Feekes-Hulsether is a Winnebago Hočąk artist living on land of the people of the Three Fires, the Ottawa (Odawa), Chippewa (Ojibwa) and Potawatomi, now known as Grand Rapids, Michigan. She completed her undergraduate studies in Intercultural Studies as well as Bible and Theology at Kuyper College. She has participated in a variety of projects with both City Chapel of Grand Rapids and the Reformed Church of America related to art, anti-racism, and lament. Bizzy is currently pursuing her Masters of Theology with a concentration in Reconciliation and Intercultural Studies through Seattle Pacific Seminary.

Mae Stier is a writer and photographer living on the ancestral, traditional, and contemporary land of the Anishinaabek–Three Fires Confederacy of Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi People—in what is now known as northern Michigan. Her writing is deeply inspired by and connected to the region that has become her home, and she is always working to be a better caretaker of the land and water around her. Her self-published collection of poetry and essays, “Lake Letters”, is available on her website letterstolakemichigan.com. You can learn more about her photo and writing work at maestier.com, or follow along on Instagram at [@maestier](https://www.instagram.com/maestier). She lives with her fiancé, their toddler son, and their dog near Interlochen.

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