



Poems from a Prison Church

by

J.S. Russell

Cover Art by Scott Onofio

*Lettering by Austin "Pep O'Deen" Brown
of Moh Fiya Ent.*

Dedicated to:

The brothers seeking the kingdom and freedom.

In loving memory to Mrs. Renee, Grandma Hawkins, Dr. Adair, Bro. Anderson, Sis. Carter and the others who I've shared memories with at my former church homes; whose names I can't recall to memory, but images stay with me.

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

I'll start off by stating that my views in regards to my faith and religion are unorthodox. These poems give glimpses into my thoughts or reactions to various occurrences surrounding Sunday services. This collection is just a part of my "Writing Freedom from Within the Pen", series. If you appreciate any of this be on the lookout for future projects. I'm unapologetic for my views though it is not my aim to offend anyone. Brace yourself. I hope you enjoy.

J.S. Russell

Table of Contents

- i Dedication*
- ii Acknowledgements*
- iii Introduction*
- 1 Palm Sunday*
- 2 According to the Preacher*
- 3 Boo Hoo*
- 4 Consider Your Audience*
- 5 Missing the Mark*
- 6 In the way of the Spirit*
- 7 Rapture*
- 8 The recipe*
- 9 Blessings*
- 10 Listen*
- 11 Fifi-Buster*
- 12 Affirmation of Faith*
- 13 Blue and Gray*
- 14 Suit*
- 15 Good Mourning*
- 16 Salvation*
- 17 The prison Church*
- 18 Circumcision*
- 19 Rough Mourning*
- 20 The Blood*
- 21 Prophecy*
- 22 Truth*
- 23 Don't Remind Me*
- 24 Saving*
- 25 Church Woman*
- 26 Palm Sunday 2*

March 20, 2016

Palm Sunday

*Drunk some coffee this morning
because breakfast comes at 4 and I've been up since then
drunk some coffee this morning
because I knew I had church service and would attend
It's a little tough to stay up this morning
because it's Palm Sunday and they've allowed the service to extend
Yet there's some good preaching this morning
I'm so thankful that these ladies have been allowed to come in,
Man, it's good to see beautiful Black women this morning
to that I simply say Amen
I have to say this has been a good morning
I have recorded with my pen*

J.S. Russell

March 27, 2016

According to the Preacher

*According to the preacher, I'm not saved
because I don't believe in the resurrection as he or they do
according to the preacher, I'm going to hell
because I don't read, believe, and agree as they do*

*According to the preacher, I wouldn't be here if Jesus hadn't
died for my sins*

*Well, when I did believe in this zombie magician act I was still
sinning and experienced a hell far greater to anything since I
gained understanding*

and I didn't feel like I was saved from anything then

Now, I'm a better Christian

J.S. Russell

May 1, 2016

Boo Hoo

Where are we...? No
Where are you going with this?
You say it doesn't make sense
the happenings and occurrences in your life
you
the preacher
are you telling me what God's done ain't right?
or are you saying you don't understand?
I'm a little confused because I'm missing the message
I'm in prison as your audience, help me out in this lesson
We've lost and been through at least as much as you
I hope you tie this up and get to the point before you're through
I can relate, is basically all I'm trying to say
Did you think this sermon out before you decided on it today?
You want something, huh?
Oh, you think God should be rewarding you?
So what you're suffering some troubles in life, boo hoo
this is what it is
and you telling me as a preacher, you don't understand
That's a damn shame
I'm going to need you to do a little more living, a little more
learning, and a lot better my man

J.S. Russell

May 22, 2016

Consider Your Audience

*I'm not comfortable
uncomfortable
with white men preaching about "us" being slaves and bondservants
I don't like this choice of sermon
I don't feel that I'm a believer
when I'm listening to a white man saying a deacon is like an overseer
Man, this is hitting me the wrong way
Damn, I can't believe this is what he wanted to say
And he is supposed to be preaching about joy
Boy, oh boy
this is not what I'm experiencing
I think this white man is feeling joy reminiscing
This is awkward
it's making me sick
where's the doctor?
He lost me
I need a map
I'm not feeling joy
I'm exhausted
I need a nap*

J.S. Russell

June 5, 2016

Missed the Mark

*Critical
not just for the sake of
I come to service for motivation, to wake up
inspiration
a good work
the gospel, the good news
so I'm expecting the word to be brought in such a way that I leave
in a good mood
the message
the delivery
I'm looking for something uplifting
spiritually
I need something to carry me on
since I can't currently go home
so I critique
what went wrong when the man speaks?
why didn't I get what I seek?
I got up early to fill this seat
when I could have just stayed asleep*

J.S. Russell

July 3, 2016

In the way of the Spirit

*Sucka security saying such things to subject my Sunday mourning
to sinful thoughts
sitting there stating the obvious, but not bringing the proper
action forth
Fat, sad, and young nonchalant shooting energy at me that I'm not
ready for
upsetting me with an issue that's so miniscule that I didn't
realize it was a topic of discourse
I'm not even fully awoke, just because you having a nasty mournin
backward as crackers, you kill yourself
I'll have my joy*

J.S. Russell

September 11, 2016

Rapture

Rapture

I prefer Anita Baker's

on a day that terror quaked us

I rather not think the world's getting or going to get worse

*I rather not look towards Armageddon and torture bought on four
horses*

You will not scare me into compliance

You will not shake me from thinking the highest

Highest good of man and what will and can be done

I will not give power to this horrible end

because I know I have the power to create what is to become

J.S. Russell

September 18, 2016

The Recipe

enthusiasm

charisma

makes all the difference to an audience

spirit

energy

does so much for giving a message

feeling

confidence

gets my attention so I listen

J.S. Russell

September 25, 2016

Blessings

*Blessings, blessings
ignore the stressing
open eyes to the skies
and realize
what's present
all things provided
all things decided
all things invited
to receive
just believe
just breathe*

J.S. Russell

October 8, 2016

Listen

Listen

I'm hurting right now and frustrated

I need you to listen

things are going in a way that I don't like and I have no control

please listen

I need an open ear, no judgment, criticism, or answers

I just need you to listen.

My burden is heavy and it's suffocating me, I need to unload

listen

I can't figure out, understand, or see how to fix it

will you listen?

I'm sad, overcome with despair, I don't know how to handle it

won't you please listen

Here is my heart, heavy with my love, my cares, my world that I

have to share and strip my soul bare

listen

It's such a relief, I feel unburdened now, and light

I feel free

Thank you, I'm so grateful that you listened

J.S. Russell

October 2, 2016

Fili-Buster

*You fili-Buster!
thanks for wasting my time
saying nothing, all because you can
I got up this mourning to hear a word
a good word
to help me where I am
but you're not doing time
so you don't take account of mine
because you don't understand
You fili-Buster!
you have a platform
help a nigga out
give me uplifting
with the words out of your mouth
don't just say anything
for the sake of saying
what he say?
nothing
In the time I need encouragement and praying
You fili-Buster?
Man , it's a shame
I don't think you realize the difference you could make
if you just took consideration and planning
fili-Buster
I guess you feel you're doing the damn thing
and if it's worked for you so far
who am I to complain?
obviously, I don't like my time being filled with empty words
it does nothing for my progression
I wonder what it does for yours
maybe it doesn't take much in your soul saving campaign*

J.S. Russell

December 11, 2016

Affirmation of Faith

*Affirmations
I affirm
the affirmative
confirm
the germ of thought
to give
what I believe
I shall receive
knowing
growing
in more detail
the picture
a clear image
from imagination
to location
it's amazing
thinking
breathing
speaking
believing
and receiving
through affirmation*

J.S. Russell

January 15, 2017

Blue and Gray

*Confined
constricted, restricted
to only wearing blues and grays
fighting the conditions of only feeling blue and gray
chain linked fence all around me
but not for my protection
chained minds surround me
it's so infectious
man of color barred from wearing colors
it's deeper than prohibiting gang colors
the psychology preventing a man from experiencing a range of
color
difficult to feel joy, love, happiness, serenity, compassion, and
content
though not impossible
you need something higher to keep you from feeling forgotten and
irrelevant
it's a major obstacle
I trust in where my blessings comes
where the messages comes
where the gift, relief, reward, and correction comes
delivering me from this correctional facility
delivering me to where my correction has presented me
blues and grays
the blues giving me grays
sorrow bringing wisdom
to cling to hope and faith*

J.S. Russell

February 12, 2017

Suit

*I'm looking forward to the suit
wearing the suit
being in suit
of what's suitable
I'm in pursuit
of having suits tailored
a life that suits
a successful man
a powerful man
a giving man
that looks the part
sharp
In his business suit
two piece suit
three piece suits
double breasted
for a man well invested
in honorable pursuits
I play my suit
making hearts trump
love
compassion
imagine
drunk with passion
the improvement
through influence
a movement
full of suits
men and women
designer stitching
a proper life
the return for investing
in that which suits
the good
suitable to the favorable
remove the hood
to what's flavorful
taste
contoured to shoulders and wrist
truth
look at my face
then admire my suit*

J.S. Russell

May 14, 2017

Good Mourning

*A beautiful mourning
a mourning of beauty
thankful to see it
a chance to see it all truly
clouds of fluffy white cotton balls
stretched in various forms
floating across the blue sky
the sun shining
and I feel the conflict of having shades cover my eyes
crisp Sunday mourning
and I take a stroll
a good mourning
to hear a good word
to comfort my soul*

J.S. Russell

August 13, 2017

Salvation

*This salvation
often is made to seem so easy
this salvation
is made to be as simple as accepting and believing
this salvation
is sold off so cheap
but I know this salvation
is not for the weak
I put in time, work and that doesn't stop
I have to walk continuously being mindful or constantly correcting
my step
It's not just a quick hop
this is a life that I can lose if I'm not right
My salvation
has been much more than words to recite*

J.S. Russell

September 3, 2017

The Prison Church

*I see a sea of Black faces
men in service with hope of salvation
men in blue, white, or gray shirts
because that's all that is allowed in such places
men stripped of much, but hope for amazing graces
men tied up in a system tightly bound like laces
just a sprinkle of the majority amongst this larger number of
minorities
together to rejoice and sing
but so separate where justice and freedom ring
all of these various shades of Black men that I'm seeing
Come to hear a word to help them carry on being
I'm looking at the prison church scene*

J.S. Russell

September 24, 2017

Circumcision

Circumcision
an emphasis on the conditions of dicks
attention to the appearance of dicks
this
is what is preached about and how trivial is this
no one sees
unless it's shown
there's still this division
of what's not known
not until exposed
not until revealed
if one chose
this stuff matters I suppose
not to me
a distraction really
perverted by today's standard
Who's willing to inspect little boy's pampers?
they haven't developed their soul yet
better not have extra skin on their pole
yet I thought there was an entirely different goal
flesh being something to get over
have control over
not to cause a split
it's hard enough not to focus on the split
dick has never been the solution before
and because of this
because of what history teaches
I will not concern myself with it

J.S. Russell

October 22, 2017

Rough Mourning

*The complexity of this body we're given
a mixture of fluids composed with bones for this function of
living
I have sweat coming from my head
snot coming from my nose
all reactions to the air of the environment to which I'm exposed
I walked to church this mourning
took a little stroll
and my allergies
have me ready to go*

J.S. Russell

November 19, 2017

The Blood

*Blood spills
staining the asphalt
my fault
blood hot
provoked past point
of return
conviction burns
like a flame
shame
because of the brother I slain
the blood cries out
the grieving mother shouts
and I'm broken
the ground soaken
the blood has spoken
of the act
I can't take back
I didn't stick around to look at
the blood
as it spilt in the street
it speaks
and gives me no peace
but there's another blood
that's been sacrificed for me
it humbles me
with mercy*

J.S. Russell

November 26, 2017

Prophecy

*It seems like they got it wrong
maybe they put too much into it
I think they hoped it would be so
but it doesn't seem so
I think they got it wrong
maybe something got lost in translation
maybe lost in travel
I know something's not right in this interpretation
because it sounds like they got it wrong
did prophets always get it right?
nawh
Could God let them see his sight?
I don't know
but the stuff that they said was to happen
isn't what history shows
So did they really know?
Is that really what they were told?
maybe, how would I know?
They might have just needed to believe something*

J.S. Russell

January 25, 2018

Truth

*A different mind for things
a different way of seeing
through hearing I make the distinction
but there's no need to mention
no need
it's not necessary to point out the discrepancies some believe
without research
some research just to support their views
not for truth
it's not the truth
I want the truth
too long have I been lied to
others with an agenda will hide you
they'll even despise you
People are comfortable accepting this because it's the way of the
majority
I'm different
I don't mind be a minority
I don't mind having the truth supporting me
It's something to stand on
I'll stand strong
even if I'm on my own
the truth needs no support
I'll stand alone
different
seeing the shortcomings and failures
I can trust in what truth shows
I see where truth goes*

J.S. Russell

February 4, 2018

Don't Remind Me

*I don't need a reminder about what I've done
I've spent years, consisting of days,
days consisting of hours
hours consisting of seconds
thinking about it
in my time doing time I've reflected on how it came to this
opportunities I miss
things I didn't know
and how I can fix it
There's no need to remind me about what I've done
because what I've done is correct where I come from
I've taken advantage of the time that I was given
time I was sentenced
to correct my vision
and create a vision
one very different from where I began
one that consist of living
nothing can make me forget about this
work I've put in
the hardships I've experienced
and the struggle I've had to endure in correcting my living
nothing can make me forget the pain
all that I had to sacrifice and let go for gain
all that I went through with Elaine
all that I put her through
That's one thing that you don't have to do
I had to live it
give it
Dig it back up time and again
think if I could do it all over
but I couldn't
so I have to keep moving
and with my movement it seems I was going nowhere
I remember who was and wasn't there
did and didn't care
So there's no need to resentence me
remind me
of what I was guilty
don't continue to punish me
because I've already done and won't forget the years*

J.S. Russell

February 25, 2018

Saving

*What is this saving?
saving from what?
Who?
Hell?
the devil?
what does this saving do?
get me to heaven?
get me to God?
When?
Where?
I've been there
been with them
and I find that there really isn't any saving me if I can't get
right within
there's no confession, creed, affirmation, or reading of writing
that can save my life when
the work isn't being done
I heard the man say who can't save and who can
right then I saw the ignorance in him
I saw the narrow mind,
the prejudice
truth and grace has no room for this
truth will shine the light
and grace may give it time
but heaven, hell, God, or the devil
can only be gotten to by the mind*

J.S. Russell

February 25, 2018

Church Woman

*I said when I get home I'm going to go to church to find a
woman
I figure she'd be on the right path and if she doesn't have a man
she'll appreciate the character and qualities that I have
I know when I go home I can find a woman in church
a fine sister dressed to work
work the room
work the crowd
work my nerves
have me feeling convicted by thoughts I have in church
Yea, I know I can find me a good woman sitting in a pew
someone understanding of my life and what I've been through
I'll sho' nuf make one of these church going women happy
because of all these years in the joint
I sure would appreciate any woman that'll be sweet and appreciate
me*

J.S. Russell

February 20, 2016

Palm Sunday 2

*On this day I would fold palm leaves into crosses for the
congregation, mostly the children
On this day I would most likely hear about people shouting
Hosanna to the man riding the donkey or colt as it was written
On this day I would be sitting next to my family in a church pew
Instead I'm listening to a confusing sermon by Bro. Buck
surrounded by men in D.O.C./DPSCS blues*

J.S. Russell

About the Author



J.S. Russell is a poet and author of a couple of children's books that he wrote for his daughter. Mr. Russell is incarcerated in the Maryland State System where he is working hard to better himself, and mentoring others to do the same. To contact the author write:

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Other books by

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Malia's Daddy and the Magical Mash Potatoes

&

Writing Freedom from Within the Pen