

YALE INSTITUTE OF SACRED MUSIC PRESENTS

Parting the Waters Beneath the Cross

An evening of sacred music honoring the effectual work of
Black women preachers in literature, music, and theology

DR. MELANIE R. HILL

moderator and violin

HONOREES

Ruby Sales

Bishop Dr. Barbara M. Amos

The Reverend Dr. Sharon S. Riley

The Reverend Dr. Cecelia Williams Bryant

The Reverend Dr. Renita J. Weems

MUSICIANS

Chaz Lamar Shepherd, organ/piano

Calvin Sellers, bass

Marcus Johnson, drums

FRIDAY, APRIL 8, 2022

7:00 PM

MARQUAND CHAPEL

Parting the Waters Beneath the Cross

Abiding under a womanist lens, *Parting the Waters Beneath the Cross: An Evening of Sacred Music Honoring Black Women Preachers* offers a deep reflection on the sacred, sermonic work of Black preaching women in literature, music, and theology. By democratizing Black women preachers and theologians, we witness how their social justice work liberates, redeems, and transforms, in transcendent ways, the art of the sermon in literature and music. The ingenuity and impact of Black women's preaching work is marked through the artful eye of the Black sacred tradition in sermon and song.

Parting the Waters Beneath the Cross illustrates a transdisciplinary framework through which we recognize and honor Black women preachers. This evening will encompass music and conversation highlighting the social justice work of our honorees – Ruby Sales, Bishop Dr. Barbara M. Amos, The Rev. Dr. Sharon S. Riley, The Rev. Dr. Cecelia Williams Bryant, and The Rev. Dr. Renita J. Weems – dynamic Black women preachers and theologians known throughout the world. This concert is a manifestation of Dr. Melanie R. Hill's forthcoming manuscript, *Colored Women Sittin' on High: A Phenomenology of Womanist Sermonic Practice in Literature and Music*.

Program

WELCOME

The Reverend Joanne Jennings
Director, Black Church Studies

INVOCATION

McCair Tulloch
Master of Sacred Theology '22

SCRIPTURE

The Reverend Joanne Jennings

OPENING SELECTION

Yale Black Seminarians' Gospel Choir

LITERATURE READING

Twenty-First Century Black Warrior Wimmins Chant by Hattie Gossett

VIDEO MONTAGE

INSTRUMENTAL SOLO

Dr. Melanie R. Hill, violin



PARTING THE WATERS BENEATH THE CROSS WELCOME

CONVERSATION I

Ruby Sales

SOLO

Chaz Lamar Shepherd

CONVERSATION II

Bishop Dr. Barbara M. Amos

SOLO

Chaz Lamar Shepherd



CONVERSATION III

The Rev. Dr. Sharon S. Riley

INSTRUMENTAL SOLO

Dr. Nathaniel Gumbs, organ



CONVERSATION IV

Rev. Dr. Cecelia Williams Bryant

DANCE MINISTRY

Dr. Kathleen S. Turner

Mr. Curtis Turner



CONVERSATION V

The Rev. Dr. Renita J. Weems

PRESENTATION

FINALE

“I Hear the Music in the Air”

The Rev. Dr. Sharon S. Riley

ABOUT THE HONOREES

Dr. Barbara M. Amos is a messenger of the Gospel and its practical application in moving individuals, families, and communities to total wellness. Because of her tenacity and anointing, lives have been transformed through submission to the God of unconditional love and justice. She is thoroughly committed to sharing the good news of the Gospel in “word and deed.” Amos is the founder of several ministries and initiatives; these include Faith Deliverance Center in Norfolk, Virginia – an inner-city ministry that meets the holistic needs of its community through diversified outreach – Kinston Christian Center, the Faith Deliverance Christian Fellowship, and Faith Academy School of Excellence – a Christian school offering curricula concentrated in mathematics, science, technology, and spiritual and cultural awareness from preschool to eighth grade. Amos likewise works with Dorcas, a non-profit promoting spiritual, educational, and economic wellness in disadvantaged communities. Amos holds a B.S. degree in criminal justice from Hampton University, and has completed graduate studies in social work at Norfolk State University. She is a graduate of the Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology at Virginia Union University, whence she graduated magna cum laude with a master’s degree in divinity. She went on to earn her Doctor of Ministry from Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Reverend Dr. Cecelia Williams Bryant is a graduate of Boston University with a B.A. in International Relations and an M.A. in Political Theory. Bryant has done doctoral studies in the political science department at Howard University and is a graduate of Howard Divinity School with a Master of Arts in Religion. She has been awarded honorary doctorates in the humanities from The University of Liberia and Paul Quinn College in Dallas, Texas. Bryant’s primary life work has been as a spiritual director, missionary and women’s empowerment leader with a global vision. Her extraordinary leadership has heightened the awareness and response of the African and diasporic churches to causes that focus on health, ecological justice, human development, cultural affirmation, reconciliation, and peace. She is founder of the A.M.E. Church in the Ivory Coast produc-

ing more than forty congregations, and co-founder (with her husband, Bishop John R. Bryant), of the A.M.E. Church in India, where there are now more than 200 congregations. She has been an advocate and teacher of prevailing prayer throughout her life. Bryant served as dean of Empowerment Temple A.M.E. Church International College of Intercession for two years. She has published several books on the spiritual disciplines including, *Kiamsha, I Dance with God*, *Letters of Light for First Ladies*, and *Kujua*. As the gifted visionary and director of spiritual life and enrichment for global prayer convocations, Bryant works to restore intercession to the life and ministry of the Christian church, worldwide. She has launched prayer initiatives in Israel, the Bahamas, Barbados, Liberia, The Ivory Coast, Hyderabad, India, Canada, Dallas, Texas, Sierra Leone, Lesotho, Zambia, Los Angeles, Chicago, and most recently in Baltimore. Among her numerous awards, she most cherishes her Volunteer Service Award, presented by President Barack Obama's Council on Service and Civic Participation. Her recent publication, after fifty-one years of marriage, *A Biblical Meditation on Covenant Marriage* is available on Amazon and Kindle. Bryant's most recent prayer initiative is an app entitled, "Come to Me: Global Intercessions." Currently, she is an adjunct professor at New York Theological Seminary.

Dr. Sharon S. Riley is an innovative and anointed preacher, worship leader, musician, teacher, and administrator. Since 1999, she has served as pastor, praise and worship leader, and administrator of Faith Deliverance Christian Center (FDCC), a multi-faceted inner-city ministry in Norfolk, Virginia. Riley has been known to imbue her work with the fine arts, including modern dance, step routines, spoken word performances, acting, and mime. With Riley's leadership, FDCC engages in community-focused work and activism such as voter registration, food and clothing pantries, and political and social justice informational initiatives. She has served on several commissions and boards including Mayor Paul Fraim's "Poverty Commission" (2014-2015), Norfolk Virginia's "Pastors' Roundtable", and the "BankOn" advisory board, ensuring that everyone has access to safe and affordable banking. Currently, Riley serves in a leadership capacity with Hands United Building Bridges (HUBB) and the Coalition Against Poverty in Suffolk (CAPS). Dr. Riley holds a B.S. in mathematics from the Uni-

versity of South Carolina, a Master of Science in Urban Education from Norfolk State University in Norfolk, Virginia, and a Master of Divinity from Virginia Union University in Richmond, Virginia, whence she graduated summa cum laude. She earned her doctorate in ministry from Palmer Theological. She is the mother of one daughter, and grandmother of two granddaughters.

Dr. Ruby Nell Sales is a long-distance runner for justice. She answered her call to social justice at Tuskegee University as a teenager. She views her extensive civil rights, social justice, gender, and intergenerational work as a calling rather than a career. Sales received her B.A. from Manhattanville College and attended Princeton University for graduate studies in history. She received her Master of Divinity degree from the Episcopal Divinity School where she was an Absalom Jones Scholar. Sales felt compelled to make a difference locally, nationally, and globally. Through her hard work and dedication, she has been recognized with numerous awards. As a social justice activist, Sales' work is cited in several books, journal articles, and films, such as Taylor Branch's *At Canaan's Edge: America in the King Years 1965-68*; *Broken Ground: A Film on Race Relations in the South*; Dan Rather's *American Dream*; and *Blood Brother: Jonathan Daniels and His Sacrifice for Civil Rights* by Rich and Sandra Neil Wallace. Several of her more recent and notable mentions are her inclusion in the Smithsonian Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C., and in the Equal Justice Initiative's new Legacy Museum. After divinity school, Sales founded and continues to direct a national nonprofit organization called the Spirit House Project. In her role as director, she steers the organizational work in the areas of race, class, gender, and sexuality within a social landscape of a 21st century, post-industrial America where very few lives matter, and Black lives matter least of all. Sales' dedication, intelligence, networking, and hard work established her as a renowned and respected public theologian, writer, and social critic. Her interview with Krista Tippett, "Where Does It Hurt?" draws on Black folk theology to set forth a radical language and paradigm that makes spirituality the heartbeat of social justice. Sales continues to teach, preach and speak at colleges, universities, churches, cathedrals and organizations around the United States.

In addition to being a former professor at Vanderbilt Divinity School (1987-2004), **Dr. Renita J. Weems** has taught at Spelman College, Howard University Divinity School, and Memphis Theological Seminary. She grew up in Atlanta, GA, where she attended Atlanta public schools. Dr. Renita Weems earned a Ph.D. degree at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1989, making her the first African-American woman to earn a doctorate in Old Testament Studies. Her dissertation was a trailblazing effort. Writing in an era when women doctoral students hesitated to take on “women’s issue” topics, and when most male faculty still felt uncertain, if not uncomfortable, advising such topics, Dr. Weems chose to study marriage imagery in the Hebrew prophets. Her work offered careful, challenging, and often painful insights into use of this metaphor; moving beyond traditional scholarship, which had all too easily looked only at the “love” side of the marriage metaphor. Weems was among the first to point to the violence associated with this biblical imagery, violence acceptable within the prophets’ cultural assumptions about marriage and all too often considered acceptable even in twentieth-century America. Dr. Weems’ 1995 volume *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets* brought this important work to a wide audience, with powerful hermeneutical reflection on implications for contemporary understandings of God and of marriage. *Just A Sister Away: A Womanist Vision of Women’s Relationships in the Bible*, published in 1989 along with a host of other articles and books highlighting the questions and experiences that Black women bring when reading the Bible has sealed her legacy as a trailblazer in the field of womanist biblical scholarship. Her seminal essay “Reading Her Way: African American Women and the Bible” appeared in the landmark book *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation* (1991). Her commentary on the book of “Song of Songs” in the New Interpreter’s Bible (1997) remains an important resource for understanding biblical notions of love, sex and human sexuality. Finally, Dr. Renita J. Weems is a biblical scholar, a minister, and an author whose scholarly insights into modern faith, biblical texts, and the role of spirituality in everyday lives has made her a highly sought-after writer and speaker for more than four decades. She has numerous books, commentaries and articles on the Bible and prophetic religion to her credit. She has written multiple articles and essays for academics, preachers

and lay audiences on topics of faith, prophetic religion, Christian ethics, biblical notions of justice, women's spirituality, and the Bible and human sexuality. Dr. Weems is featured in "*Black Stars: African American Religious Leaders*" (2008), a collection of biographies of some of the most important Black Religious Leaders over the last 200 hundred years, including such impressive figures as Adam Clayton Powell, Elijah Muhammad, Sojourner Truth, Howard Thurman, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Lecture (2008). She is the first Black woman to deliver the Yale University Lyman Beecher Lecture (2008). Dr. Renita J. Weems lives in Nashville with her family.

Bios provided by presenters, with thanks to Melanie R. Hill.

ABOUT THE MUSICIANS

Marcus Allen Johnson is a native of New Haven County, Connecticut. His exceptional skills as a drummer are nationally recognized. Marcus discovered his love for music at an early age, with his first professional gig at the age of seven. Since then, Marcus has played and continues to play in a plethora of bands, churches and community organizations worldwide. Marcus believes that he is never too talented to practice and spends numerous hours practicing and perfecting his craft. Marcus' passion, for music, dedication, and creativity characterizes him as one of the best, well-rounded, professional musicians.


Calvin Sellers is a renowned bassist who serves God faithfully in his music ministry.

Born in Philadelphia to Cheryl and Ronald Shepherd, the actor, writer, producer, singer, songwriter and host **Chaz Lamar Shepherd** started performing and training in his mother's highly respected Lessons in Dance Studio at five years old, and later, at the top of his mother's bedroom stairs as an early teenager. As water-to-seed, the additional support and musical training at

the Evelyn Graves Christian Academy was instrumental in Chaz's career as he played Steve Harvey's son on *Me and The Boys*, Stevie (aka Jada's brother) in the classic movie *Set It Off*, Al Bryant in *The Temptations* miniseries on NBC, John Hamilton on *7th Heaven*, Trey Wiggs in *The Game* on the CW and BET, and Piranha Jones in Marvel's *Luke Cage* among others. Chaz has starred and co-starred on Broadway in *Chicago*, *The Color Purple*, and the national tour of *Dreamgirls*. Other than hosting the Apollo Theater's classic amateur night, Ashford and Simpsons legendary Sugar Bar, leading thousands in praise on Sundays, and being featured at Carnegie Hall, Chaz is the classic *Star Search* champion of 1993, and has a 2010 album titled "Love & Truth." His latest film, *Kirk Franklin's A Gospel Christmas*, was a hit for the Lifetime Network. Chaz is currently filming his next movie and recording his next album.

Bios provided by musicians, with thanks to Melanie R. Hill.

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