

Lincoln, Luther, and the prophet Jeremiah lament our pathos-filled world

Who I'd invite to my writers' dinner party

by [Walter Brueggemann](#) in the [May 10, 2017](#) issue

Jeremiah of Anathoth is the most compelling and most contemporary character in the Bible. His capacity as a writer includes his readiness to disclose his double life: on the one hand a bold, confident truth teller, and on the other hand a tortured person who tormented God even as God tormented him. Martin Luther was a prolific writer who penned a torrent of material all the way from formal theological argument to unbuttoned commentary on his troubled internal world and his vexed external world, all of which he knew to be in the presence of God. Abraham Lincoln was a gifted writer who crafted his words with immense care, claiming authority and capacity to generate a new world of honest generous humaneness.

I anticipate that this conversation with Jeremiah, Luther, and Lincoln would concern our pathos-filled world. Jeremiah's lamentations attest the anguish of life in such a broken world, broken now as then. Pathos led Luther to a "theology of the cross" that contradicted every uncritical "theology of glory." Lincoln knew so much grief with a nation that refused its future. Such pathos as our conversation would probe pertains now in a society numbed by uncritical certitude and so absent honesty, discernment, or attentiveness.