

Sermon / Kauwhau given at Service of Worship on Sunday 6 July 2025, led by Graham Redding, at Knox Church Ōtepoti Dunedin New Zealand

Readings: Colossians 1:15-28, Luke 10:38-42

"Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold."

So wrote the Irish poet W.B. Yeats just over a century ago, but his words could just as easily have been written today.

Look around: the climate is in crisis. The oceans rise while trust in our institutions sinks. Wars rage, democracies tremble, economies wobble. The news cycles spin so fast, we forget what yesterday's disaster was about. We live in a time when it truly feels as if the centre no longer holds.

And that global unease mirrors our personal lives too. So many of us feel scattered, anxious, distracted — pulled in a thousand directions. We long for stability, for clarity, for a centre that can hold us together when everything else is shaking.

Which is why these two passages — one from a letter written in a prison cell, the other from a quiet moment in a village home — speak so urgently into our time. They offer us something we desperately need: a centre that *does* hold. A presence we can return to. A mystery we can live into.

Let's begin in a small village called Bethany, where two sisters welcome Jesus into their home. One is bustling — the other is still. One is busy preparing — the other is listening. Martha is stressed, burdened, distracted. Mary is at peace, centred, present.

Let's be clear: Martha is doing a good and honourable thing. Hospitality is holy. But she is so caught up in serving Jesus that she's not able to receive Jesus. She's anxious, worried, pulled apart by many things.

Jesus, with no scolding but a deep tenderness, says, "Martha, Martha... you are worried and distracted by many things; but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen the better part, and it will not be taken from her."

This is not a story about personality types. It is a story about presence. About attending. About what holds the centre of your life. Mary has centred herself in Christ's presence. She has made space for mystery.

Now let's jump from Bethany to a Roman prison cell, where Paul is writing to a small, fragile church in Colossae — people trying to keep the faith in a tumultuous, divided world not unlike our own.

And what does he give them? He doesn't start with advice or a litany of woes. He starts with an expression of awe: "Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation... in him all things hold together."

Christ is the still point in a turning world. The centre that not only holds but holds us. Paul doesn't offer his readers a neat solution. He offers them a mystery: "The mystery that has been hidden for ages and generations but is now revealed... which is *Christ in you*, the hope of glory."

Think about that. Christ is not simply over us, or before us, or above us — but *in* us. The mystery is not far off. It is here. It is now. In the chaos of the world, there is a hidden centre. And that centre is Christ.

Paul says his whole ministry is about helping people grow into maturity in Christ — not just *for* Christ, but *in* Christ. That's what Mary was doing at Jesus' feet. She wasn't being passive. She was being profoundly attentive.

In this age of digital distraction and fractured attention and global chaos, attending to Christ — being present to the mystery — is counter-intuitive, but life-giving.

It's not always dramatic. Sometimes it looks like sitting in silence. Or reading Scripture slowly. Or walking through a forest and listening. Or holding someone's hand in hospital. Or being truly present in worship.

It's about *noticing* the holy, not rushing past it.

So let me ask: what dominates the centre of your life right now? Is it anxiety? Busyness? Achievement? Regret? Or is it Christ?

If we are not centred in Christ, there is a danger that we will be scattered by everything else. But if Christ is our centre — if we attend to his presence and make space for the mystery of "Christ in you" — then even when things fall apart, we will not.

The world is shaking. Martha is worried. The Colossians are under pressure.

And yet, the centre holds. Because the centre is not an idea, or a plan, or a project. The centre is a Person. And in him, all things hold together.

What might this mean in the context of global upheaval and Knox Church's membership of the Community of the Cross of Nails?

As we know, the Community of the Cross of Nails has a threefold purpose: Healing the wounds of history, learning to live with difference and celebrating diversity, and building a culture of justice and peace.

1. Healing the Wounds of History

When we centre ourselves in Christ — who is the image of the invisible God, and through whom all things are reconciled (Col. 1:15–20) — we are drawn into God's work of reconciliation.

Christ at the centre reminds us that no wound is too deep for grace, and no history is beyond redemption. Rather than being trapped in cycles of blame or denial, we can face painful histories truthfully but not destructively — because in Christ, crucifixion leads to resurrection.

Like Mary at Jesus' feet, we are called to a posture of *listening* — not only to God, but also to those whose stories have been silenced or distorted by history. To be centred in Christ is to let the cross — not national pride, grievance, or despair — be the lens through which we engage the past.

2. Learning to Live with Difference and Celebrate Diversity

When Christ is our centre, we are freed from the need to defend our own ego, tribe, or worldview. Paul writes that *in Christ, all things hold together* — and that includes the rich diversity of the human family. Christ is not a tribal Messiah but the one in whom Jew and

Gentile, slave and free, male and female, are made one. Centred in Christ, we do not need to erase differences or flatten uniqueness. We learn to celebrate diversity as a gift, not regard it as a threat.

Mary's stillness is a metaphor for receptivity. When we are rooted in Christ, we can sit long enough with others — especially those different from us — to listen, learn, and love. We no longer measure others by likeness to ourselves, but by their reflection of the One who made them.

3. Building a Culture of Justice and Peace

Centred in Christ, our activism becomes more than reaction — it becomes participation in God's reconciling mission. Paul's ministry was to proclaim Christ, *"warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ."* Maturity in Christ is not piety in isolation — it is lived out in communities of justice, mercy, and peace.

The peace of Christ is not passive; it is *shalom* — the flourishing of all. Centring ourselves in Christ empowers us to resist the violence of indifference, the injustice of exclusion, and the shallow peacekeeping of conflict avoidance.

Without Christ at the centre, even good causes can become ego-driven or tribal. But when rooted in Christ, our pursuit of justice is shaped by humility, mercy, and courage. A culture of peace begins in hearts that are stilled by love, not stirred by vengeance.

What does this look like in practice? Some of you will be familiar with the story of Corrymeela in Northern Ireland.

Like the Community of the Cross of Nails, Corrymeela is deeply rooted in the costly work of reconciliation, healing, and peace-building — and it offers a wonderful example of what happens when people in the midst of conflict, sectarian division, and violence centre themselves in Christ .

Corrymeela began in the aftermath of trauma — not only the trauma of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, but also the deeper wounds of colonisation, sectarianism, and centuries of enmity between communities. Ray Davey, Corrymeela's founder and a former chaplain and WWII prisoner of war, witnessed the horrors of Dresden and came home with a conviction that faith must be lived at the fault lines of history. Corrymeela offered a safe space for Catholics and Protestants to come together, sit together, eat together, speak their stories, and be heard.

To be centred in Christ in this context meant choosing presence over power, confession over silence, and truth over sectarian loyalties. It meant believing that the cross has something to say not only about personal salvation, but about collective healing.

Corrymeela's ethos was never about erasing difference but learning to live with it redemptively. In a world where difference often leads to suspicion, centring in Christ allows us to approach others not as enemies and persons of suspicion but as fellow image-bearers. Ray Davey once said that reconciliation begins when we stop defining people by what group they belong to and start seeing the person in front of us.

In Colossians 1, Paul says that in Christ "all things hold together." Corrymeela lives this truth by helping people hold together across seemingly irreconcilable lines: Catholic and Protestant, Loyalist and Republican, victim and perpetrator.

And like Mary at Jesus' feet, Corrymeela invites people to listen deeply — to each other, and to the Christ who speaks in every human encounter.

Peace at Corrymeela isn't passive — it's prophetic. It's peace that names injustice, peace that creates alternatives, peace that is practiced in shared meals, difficult conversations, community living.

In his younger days in Scotland, at the height of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, Peter Matheson was an active supporter of Corrymeela, travelling often to Belfast to share in the community's work of reconciliation. One enduring memory, he said, was attending a kitchen Mass in Andersonstown as British helicopters circled overhead.

Centring in Christ does not mean withdrawing from the world but engaging more deeply in it. It means justice is not an optional add-on to faith, but its very fruit. In Christ, we are not just saved *from* something — we are saved *for* something: the work of reconciliation.

Like Paul, Corrymeela "labours and struggles" with all its energy to present a vision of maturity in Christ — where people and communities flourish, not just coexist.

Both the Community of the Cross of Nails and Corrymeela were born in the ruins — literal and figurative — of human conflict. Both embody a cruciform faith: a faith that goes to the broken places and stays there in love.

To centre ourselves in Christ — is to reject despair when history seems too painful to face, to welcome the other not in spite of difference, but because Christ is in them, and to work for peace not just in theory, but through the hard daily practices of patience, listening, and justice.

In a world where the centre often does not hold, communities like Corrymeela and the Cross of Nails remind us that Christ is the centre who does. And from that centre, the work of reconciliation anchors us in a deeper truth, a wider compassion, and a more enduring hope.

And from that centre, the Church — like the Community of the Cross of Nails — can bear witness to healing, diversity, and peace not as slogans, but as signs of the Kingdom breaking in.

Knox Presbyterian Church, Ōtepoti Dunedin

Our vision is to see the reign of God, made known in Jesus, have a transformative effect on people's lives and on the world in which we live.



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