

¹⁵He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶For by^[a] him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.¹⁸And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ¹⁹For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven,

Back, almost 100 years ago (1919), and in the midst of the Irish Revolution, that would result in freedom from England, and then in the ensuing Irish Civil War, in which the Irish Soldier Leader who signed the Independence Resolution with England (Michael Collins) was killed by his own people because they weren't satisfied with all the terms of the Independence ... in the midst of this, the Irish poet William Butler Yeats penned these words ... words that people once again, in today's topsy-turvy circumstances, are quoting:

**Things fall apart, the center cannot hold ...
The best lack all conviction,
While the worst are full of passionate intensity.**

So – in view of Yeats being quoted again today, I ask the question with the sermon title: **CAN THE CENTER HOLD?**

A few years back I read the 2010 book by Ross Douthat: “Bad Religion: How We Became a Nation of Heretics.” Douthat claims that we have always had people called heretics – people alleged to have strayed from our core belief. And he provides voluminous examples.

Douthat was not advocating a return to the modern version of a SPANISH INQUISITION. Indeed, he said, **“An orthodoxy that doesn't**

leave any room for heresy is dangerous and destructive [However,] a world that is all heresy and leaves no room for orthodoxy is dangerous, as well.”

His basic complaint is the absence of any substantially held orthodox belief; the absence of any largely held center, *against which* all ideas can be claimed to be heretical. He says that in today’s world “anything goes.” There is no standard against which ideas are measured.

What IS the CENTER?

Things fall apart, the center cannot hold ...
The best lack all conviction,
While the worst are full of passionate intensity.

OK, I need to be clear about two things, at this point:

(1)QUESTION: What is the context to which this sermon is being preached? ANSWER: our current social-political situation AND the current discussion in the United Methodist Church about whether or not we should split, as a denomination.

(2)QUESTION: What is the answer to the sermon title question: Can the Center Hold? ANSWER: Absolutely!!

What **IS** the CENTER? Our scripture today – for Christ the King Sunday – tells us that **JESUS CHRIST is the center.**

- **Jesus is the VISIBLE IMAGE of the INVISIBLE GOD.** See Jesus ... and you see God.
- **Everything was created through Him.** (Or, as the Franciscans say: CREATION really is the FIRST TESTAMENT of GOD’S REVELATION.)

- **In Jesus ... Get this! ... ALL THINGS HOLD TOGETHER!**
- Jesus conquers death – first, as the pioneer of our faith. He conquers death, so we are the victors over death as well

And

- **HIS PURPOSE** – this IS the Center – is to **RECONCILE ALL THINGS!**

Can the Center hold? You betcha! And **it's not up to us to make it hold. It IS up to us, to accept the truth of it.**

Can you quit worrying? Can you accept the fact that Jesus is THE CENTER and He has it covered?

Live into that faith statement

Act like you believe it ... until you DO believe it.

The founder of our denomination, John Wesley, said that **“right opinions is at best, but a very slender part of religion.”** (“Plain Account of the People Called Methodist” (1748) The important part of faith ... the important part of orthodoxy ... (says Wesley) **is having a living, vital relationship with God, whom orthodoxy [attempts to] describe.”**

Act like you believe it ... until you DO it.

Oh, preacher, but I'm worried about ... the economy ... the government ... people not believing the right things ... the future of the United Methodist Church.

Hold on ... hold on ... hold on...

Before you go off on all those OTHER PROBLEMS – Get YOUR OWN PERSONAL HOUSE IN ORDER.

Make sure that Christ is the Center of your life, first.

Remember what our scripture tells us: Christ in the Center of everything:

- **Jesus is the VISIBLE IMAGE of the INVISIBLE GOD.** See Jesus and you see God.
- **In Jesus ... ALL THINGS HOLD TOGETHER!**
- **HIS PURPOSE** – this IS the Center – is to **RECONCILE ALL THINGS!**

And

- **Everything was created through Him.** (Or, as the Franciscans say: CREATION really is the FIRST TESTAMENT of GOD'S REVELATION.)

The Franciscans say that, because Paul said it in **Romans 1:20:**

For God's invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. [So nobody has an excuse for not knowing.]

If you're having a hard time accepting this for your own self, let me give you some **real practical advice:**

Look to where you can find the center.

The whole thing began by a river in a garden (they called it Eden.) The very first Psalm is about finding it by a river (Ps. 1:3). Jesus goes to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane. (Matthew 26:36-46) Jesus is buried in a garden and is raised from the dead in that garden. (John 19:41). The end of the whole story is by a river in a garden (Revelation 22)

Get thee out of your house or office and go outside to a garden; go down by a river; go where **God's invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the**

creation of the world, in the things that have been made and FIND YOUR CENTER.

And, if you can't get out of the house – then take each thing that you eat, or prepare to eat ... each piece of clothing that you put on ... STOP and consider where it came from ... and who made it ... and where did they get the ingredients ... and run it back ... it ALWAYS comes back to Jesus. Jesus is the source of all that is.

When you take the time to actually do this, you gain a deeper awareness of WHAT REALLY IS THE CENTER THAT HOLDS IT ALL TOGETHER.

Don't just "think about" such a practice; don't just "ponder" the notion. Actually DO IT! Day after day until THE CENTER holds in YOUR life.

Can the Center hold? You betcha! **But, it's not up to us to make it hold. It IS up to us, to accept the truth of it.**

There is serious discussion over whether the United Methodist Church should split. The one thing at the center of the discussion is the issue of homosexuality. At the 2016 General Conference the Council of Bishops were directed to find "a way forward" that will keep us from splitting apart as a denomination. Our own Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball was appointed as one of the three facilitators in charge of that "way forward." A Special General Conference will gather in 2019 to make a decision on that issue.

Well, if it does split:

(a) it makes me very sad, and

(b) if it splits then it probably *needs to split* because it has lost its center.

No longer is Christ the King when the controversy over "positions" is more important than Christ's message of reconciliation of ALL THINGS. If the Church has lost that, then that is a church that has lost its way.

It's not the first time. Shucks, the whole east/west split was over whether the "Spirit emanates from the Father and the Son" or "the Spirit emanates from the Father." Really?! That's an issue over which people are really concerned today!

I pray for those in positions of leadership. (Bishop [Sandra Steiner Ball](#), particularly.) But I am not in a position to do anything else. So I certainly am NOT GOING TO WORRY ABOUT IT!

IWII (It Is What It Is) And if we split, we surely have lost our way, and lost our center. Too bad, too. We had a good thing going.

But YOU and I my sisters and brothers ... THERE IS SOMETHING we can do. WE CAN QUIT WORRYING and start CENTERING. That's where Christ the King is. And that is where the victory is.

- In Jesus ... **ALL THINGS HOLD TOGETHER!**
- **HIS PURPOSE** – this IS the Center – is to **RECONCILE ALL THINGS!**

In this I am content to rest. Will you join me?

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.