

FINDING A CENTRE

July 21, 2019

Pentecost 6

[Luke 10:38-42](#)

[Colossians 1:15-28](#)

(prayer)

This December, I plan to go see [Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker](#) (aka Episode Nine).

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I was a young teenager when the first [Star Wars](#) movie came out in 1977. Now-a-days you have to call it "Episode 4: A New Hope", but (at the time) we had no idea that it would be the first of many movies telling a wide ranging story; we just called it "Star Wars".

George Lucas labeled it episode four, not because he envisioned a movie series, but, as a literary device, to indicate that viewers were stepping into an on-going narrative.

But, with two more films over the next six years, the era of the modern blockbuster movie sequel series took shape. When [Return of the Jedi](#) came out, to my peers and me (and the whole world), the Star Wars series was complete.

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Obviously, there was an appetite for more.

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In the late 90s (when a prequel trilogy was announced) movie goers were invited to expand their Star Wars universe. I gleefully jumped back into the Skywalker story. And I accepted the confusing reality that the fourth movie would be episode one... henceforth, four would be one and one would be four.

And then, less than five years ago, we started a new trilogy, set 30 years after the original movies. This new set of three will be completed this coming winter. And, we are told that this ninth film will conclude the so-called Skywalker Saga.

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I know that some people have many criticisms of some of the movies (certain characters, some bad acting, an over-reliance on computer animation), but I love them all! Messa don't even mind JarJar Binks.

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Now, there is more to official [star wars canon](#) than the nine, episodic, Star Wars films; there are also the *Rogue One* and (Han) *Solo* movies and several novels, comics, TV series and video games; and it will continue to expand. But...

as I said, what began (with the original Star Wars in 1977) will end this December. Regardless of what order they were released in theatres, episodes one to nine create a single story arc (aka *The Skywalker Saga*).

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The original movie introduced us to *The Force* (an energy field created by all living beings that binds the universe together) and how some people are gifted enough to be able to learn to use this force as a source of power.

That first movie introduced us to the concept of a dualistic use of the force: a light side and a dark side -- it provided the good versus evil plot points that made for interesting story telling in the original trilogy. By the end of the third movie, good triumphs over evil (at both a galactic and individual level).

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In the second trilogy (which, remember, occurs before the original movies), Episode One (the fourth movie) introduced us to the prophecy of "The Chosen One" (one who would bring balance to The Force). In these prequel movies, the light and dark sides of the force were personified as the Jedi and the Sith: contrasting ideologies of how to use the force. The Jedi assumed that "balance" meant the defeat of the Sith.

By the end of the third episode, the Sith were not (in fact) defeated; the presumed *chosen one* actually ended up (all but) eliminating the Jedi and solidifying the Sith's hold on power.

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The prequel timeline moves us into the original trilogy story, where a new Jedi emerged and the Sith are finally defeated.

Did that bring balance to the force?

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As we moved into the final trilogy, we learn that, although good may have won the *battle* over evil in Return of the Jedi, evil re-grouped and emerged in a new form... and the dark side of the force remained strong. Eight movies into the series and, clearly, there is not yet *balance* to the force, as Episode One had hoped.

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The (image on the screen in church) is Rey (the central character of the final trilogy) sitting by a mosaic of (perhaps depicting the first ever Jedi). The mosaic is made up of both light and dark stones in an yin-yang type image.



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When Star Wars was just three movies, it was a story arc about Luke Skywalker... good versus evil.

When Star Wars was six movies, it was a story arc about Anakin Skywalker... rise, fall, and redemption.

Now that it is to be nine movies, it appears to me that it is a story arc about a desire for balance.

I have no inside knowledge about this. I don't frequent the chat rooms and spoiler sites. It is my own little observation.

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It is my hope that Episode Nine will find a way to conclude this whole *seeking balance in the force* storyline.

And I hope that it is not about unity as a result of one side defeating another but through a coming together of inescapable complex realities.

But I may not get my wish... dualistic thinking (this or that, with us or against us) is hard to get beyond.

We'll see on December 20th.

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You may know that the various "books" of the New Testament were originally written in the language of Greek.

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Although the Roman Empire dominated the first-century Mediterranean world: politically, economically and militarily... philosophically and culturally, greek thinking still dominated -- a holdover from the time of Alexander the Great (300 years earlier).

This included a [mind-body dualistic](#) approach to life -- a philosophy that holds that aspects of our existence can be categorized on one side or the other. We see this philosophy throughout the New Testament... particularly in the writings of the apostle Paul and those who followed in his footsteps.

The *Paul school of thought* often contrasted the mind and the body, spirit and flesh, thought and action, faith and works, etc. The reading from Colossians is an example of this.

The flesh dies, it suffers, but in the reconciling mystery of Christ, there is hope beyond the body.

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Luke's version of Jesus' encounter with the sisters Mary and Martha personifies this dualistic thinking. Martha is concerned about physical things; Mary focuses on mindful things.

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Dualist thinking strongly encourages us to go one way or the other. Jesus appears to make it clear... between Mary and Martha, he picked Mary.

Martha, you are distracted by many things; there is only one thing - and Mary has chosen it.

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More than one sermon has been preached on the question: are you a Martha or a Mary? Are you a doer or a ponderer? A server or an annointer?

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If we are forced to choose one or the other attitude (as dualist thinking implies), the mind, spirit, and faith will always win out over the body, flesh, and works.

This leads inevitably to doctrines based on guilt for not measuring up, because we are (for better or worse) physical beings in a physical world.

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But... does the church really want to purge itself of everything *Martha*? Is it always the lesser choice?

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Dualism is certainly a central, contextual understanding *behind* the Colossians letter, but, as we examine the details in the text, there is less condemnation of the realities of the world.

The dualism comes through in the assurance that the limitations of our physical existence will not hold us back from experiencing the presence of God -- which is the high hope.

While not abandoning centuries of dualist thinking, the Colossians letter does profess that Jesus is a bridge (of sorts) between the extremes.

Our passage today started off with the statement that *Christ is image of the invisible God ... In him, the fullness of God was pleased to dwell*. In other words, in the physical, earthly life Jesus, we are getting as close to viewing God as is possible in this life. The gospel of John begins with a similar proclamation *The Word began flesh and dwelled among us*.

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John and Colossians express (what is called) a high christology... the christ exists (and has existed) for all time and simply became part of our physical world for a while: *In Christ, all things were created. All things have been created through him. He is before all things, and - in him - all things hold together.*

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Jesus is part of everything in creation ??

Jesus holds us together ??

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JESUS IS THE FORCE!!

Mmmm, the force Jesus is.

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In Christ, we can experience balance in a dualistic worldview. We do not have to accept *all or nothing* dualism as our only approach to life and faith. Afterall, dualism is *only a philosophy* that can highlight the extremes. There is value as well between the edges.

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Even Mary and Martha didn't exist only on those edges. John's account has both Martha and Mary say that they believed that Jesus could have kept their brother alive, but it is Martha who expresses belief that Lazarus will know resurrection. In John, Martha is the one who seeks out Jesus, Mary has to be located and told to go to Jesus.

At the dinner, the text does say that Martha served and Mary sat at Jesus's feet, but Martha was not criticized for her service. When Mary's attention to Jesus was questioned, she **was** defended, but the criticism was not in relation to her work ethic compared to her sister.

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A lesson we can glean from today's readings is that Jesus made the divine visible within our physical existence. Jesus brought a new experience of God into the lives of his disciples.

For them, this brought a new sense of balance between faith and action.

Jesus was both a teacher and a doer.

Jesus found people who were on the edges of life and society (outcasts, the sick, the troubled, women, children, foreigners, those labeled *sinners*) and he healed and welcomed and honoured and restored.

Jesus entered unbalanced lives and re-centred them.

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Everyone knows what it feels like to be out of balance... physically. We have all had our dizzy moments. Whether it is an issue with our inner ear, or we have just gotten off an amusement park ride, or we have done it to our selves just for fun, by spinning around and stopping suddenly.

At best, a lack of balance is unsettling.

At worse, a lack of balance is stressful, even dangerous. An elderly relative of mine lost her balance getting out of bed a couple of weeks ago and fell, fracturing her hip.

When unbalanced, we need to regain our footing before any more serious damage is done.

The remedy for a loss of physical balance is to pause, focus our eyes on something stable, maybe put our hands on a wall or widen our stance until we find our centre.

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"Balance" is a good metaphor for us in church. Because we can be off-centre mentally, emotionally, and spiritually as well.

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These types of unbalance can also be stressful and even dangerous, if left to knock us over.

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What we long for is the calm that comes with being back to a quiet centre.

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Just like being physically unbalanced, a lack of centre within our hearts, minds and souls can take some work to move away from the edge.

To regain physical balance, I mentioned a three step response: *pause, focus, and reach out.*

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Finding greater balance in our spirit can benefit from a similar response.

PAUSE and acknowledge that we are not where we long to be (need to be). Slow down the spinning long enough to realize that we are spinning and that it is not fun anymore.

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A path to balance then invites us to FOCUS on something beyond ourselves that is stable. For a spiritual person, this could be found in the words of scripture or the stories of faith, where God has been the rock, the sure foundation in times of upheaval and concern. The Apostle Paul was arrested and imprisoned for the work he was doing. And yet, as we heard in Colossians today, although he suffered, he remained focused on the good news of God's compassion and the hope and promise for full and complete reconciliation with the one created heaven and earth. Paul focused on the bigger picture and it allowed him to balance his suffering with joy.

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In the same vein, in our times of unbalance, let us pause into ourselves and focus on our God who is steadfast and stabilizing.

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Finally, let us REACH OUT.

When we are dizzy, we extend our arms, like a wire walker. It broadens our stance, distributes our weight to create a firmer connection to the pull of terra firma.

Even though one's spirit well-being is personal and internal, it is important to also remember that we are not alone; we are part of something greater than ourselves; we are part of the wider body of Christ.

A valuable part of rebalancing our spirits is to allow ourselves to know the supportive embrace of the community of faith.

It is one of the things we seek to do with (and for) each other when we gather together for regular worship, for community fellowship, for study and just to be *church*.

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The gathered community of the church (whether a fuller coming together (like on Sunday mornings) or those times when two or three come together) [the community of the church] is a manifestation of the companionship of Jesus.

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For the Christian, Jesus Christ is our centre.

Jesus is our image of the invisible God.

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Christ is the one who helps re-focus us in our distractions and calls us to rediscover the centre of our existence --- that we are good creations of a loving God who is before all things and holds everything together.

We are not alone!

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Balance is not a running away from our worries and stresses, but complimenting them with wonder and hope that draws us back to our centre.

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In Christ, we can find our centre -- collectively and individually.

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Our centre will include the best of both our Mary and Martha natures. It will balance our thoughts and actions.

We are the hands and feet of Christ in the world today. Christ is the image of God.

Like Martha, we are hosts of Jesus in the world, even as we continue (like Mary) to be learners and ponders of Jesus's way.

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We come to find the quiet centre as it is the place where we are rejuvenated and inspired and *from where* we venture out to guide others in from the edges of our circle.

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In both Hebrew and Greek, the word for spirit is also used for breath.

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A balanced faith is like a series of breaths -- in and out; from the edges into the centre and back out again.

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Let God's spirit give us life.

In this, we can find balance.

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Let us pray:

God of all wisdom, as we follow Jesus' way, we seek courage and clarity enough to know that we are never alone and that (in you) we have all we need to face the opportunities this life affords. Amen.

#374VU "Come and Find the Quiet Center"