



Shared Centre

2020

Preface – Placing Jesus at the Centre

With Jesus as our centre, we desire for Jesus Collective to be a centred-set community. This means that while we take our shared theological core seriously, our goal is to go beyond simply 'believing the right things'. We are a relational network seeking to live, share, and call others to the Jesus Way, remembering that Jesus identified those who love him as those who obey his teachings. The orientation of our hearts – and our ongoing movement – towards the person of Jesus as the central focal point of our faith and life is what defines and unites us as a network.

Our desire is to be clear about the Jesus-centred faith expressions at the core of Jesus Collective, while inviting conversations about these beliefs and practices with prospective Partners in the context of relationship, understanding that the process of shaping our faith and ministry is often long and incremental for a given church or leader.

Following Jesus' own unique way of responding to the polarizing cultural controversies of his day, the early Anabaptists pursued a "third way" that was rooted in the person of Jesus in the midst of the heated controversies between Catholics and Protestants. We believe this Jesus-centred "third way" provides a helpful aspirational model for us to demonstrate self-sacrificial, agape-love toward sisters and brothers on all sides of a particular issue. We choose to listen to and respect each other, even when others' interpretation of scripture disagrees with our own. We seek to understand and honor another person's inner conscience, even when our own conscience directs us otherwise. We promote honest, challenging conversations and disagreements, while remaining united as sisters and brothers in Christ, and walking together towards Jesus as the centre of our faith. Because this third way orientation is a disposition rather than a particular belief set, it need not compromise or dilute our core faith expressions as a network.

Our Core Faith Expressions

These expressions of faith shape the Jesus-centred theology and practices at the heart of Jesus Collective:

1. **JESUS IS LORD.** Everything about us starts and ends with Jesus, the Alpha and Omega, the author and finisher of our faith, and the King of our Kingdom. Jesus is God in the flesh, the union of God and humankind, our doorway to knowing, understanding, and experiencing God and our true humanity, and the model and means for our reunion with God. Jesus is the authoritative living Word of God to us, and we submit to him as his lifelong apprentices, Kingdom citizens, commissioned ambassadors, and beloved friends. Through Jesus, we get to know the Father and experience the Spirit.
2. **GOD IS LOVE.** The essence of the Source and Sustainer of the universe is love. Love is relational energy, within and between persons. God is, by definition, always relating within Godself. God is triune, three-in-one, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Everything God does is an expression of who God is, which is eternal, infinite love.
3. **THE HOLY SPIRIT EMPOWERS.** The Spirit, the breath of God, blows us toward Jesus, grows the fruit of love in our hearts, empowers us for ministry, and distributes gifts among the Church to help build up the Body of Christ. Through the Spirit, we have the mind of Christ, and continue to experience the presence of God at all times for conviction, confirmation, and comfort.

4. **WE ARE VALUABLE.** Humans are made in God's image and likeness, made by Relationship for relationship, by Love for love. As the parables of the lost coin, lost sheep, and lost son affirm, we have lost our way through our own sin and are unable to save ourselves. But Jesus shows us a God who values us enough to pursue us, restore us to who we were made to be, and celebrate with us whenever we come home.
5. **SOMETHING IS WRONG.** The Bible teaches, history demonstrates, and experience affirms that something is wrong with everything. This world is filled with both beauty and horror, and humans amplify experiences of both. The Bible calls the corrosive force that separates us from God, from each other, and from our better selves, "sin". Jesus came to heal our hearts, save us from sin, and show us a better way.
6. **SAVED BY GRACE.** Through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, God brought an end to his own religion (the Old Covenant), inaugurated the New Covenant (a new way of being in relationship with God and one another), and offers us eternal and abundant life now, all as a gift. In this New Covenant, God gives all believers a new heart, a new spirit, and God's own Spirit to change us from the inside out. This is pure grace, which we receive by simple faith, expressed in following Jesus.
7. **FAITH IS FOLLOWING.** To *believe in* Jesus is to *trust* Jesus, which is to *follow* Jesus. Biblical "faith" includes "faithfulness". Jesus calls us to follow him, through death, to life. Christians pledge their allegiance to King Jesus as Lord, Leader, Messiah, and Master. We are not just *believers*, but *disciples, apprentices* of Jesus, learning together how to obey everything he commands. Baptism is not only about our death to and cleansing from sin, but also about us rising again into a new life of faithfulness to and intimacy with Christ.
8. **SCRIPTURE IS INSPIRED.** Like John the Baptist and the star of Bethlehem, the Bible points people to Jesus. The Bible, Old and New Testaments, is our God-given window to see Jesus most clearly, and is useful to equip us for living as his disciples. We believe in the divine inspiration and delegated authority of all Scripture and we read and interpret the Bible together, with Jesus at the centre. Most importantly, the Bible helps us know Jesus, and Jesus helps us interpret, understand, and apply the Bible. (Note: In practice, while many Christians speak of the "inerrancy" and "authority" of the Bible as the "Word of God", we tend to reserve this language for speaking of Jesus.)
9. **PEACE IS THE WAY.** Because we see Jesus' life and teaching as God's authoritative Word to us, we take his teachings about all things – including non-violent enemy-love, active peacemaking, relational reconciliation, and the priority of receiving and offering forgiveness – very seriously. We seek to live peaceful, reconciled lives, to encourage other believers to do the same, and to actively extend the peace of Jesus to the world. We especially desire to be peacemakers within the fractured body of Christ as we make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.
10. **CITIZENS AND AMBASSADORS.** Jesus came to establish his Kingdom and he invites us to live in it now. This isn't a Kingdom of land and laws, but one of our hearts and relationships. This Kingdom defines for us a new culture and identity that stand in sweeping contrast to the kingdoms of this world. Christ-followers are ambassadors on behalf of the Jesus Nation to the people of all nations, with church communities functioning as embassies to experience a taste of the Christ Country. Our purpose every day is to experience, express, and extend the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth.

Lived Implications

These theological and ethical implications extend naturally from our core faith expressions. We invite conversations about these ideas as part of building a relationship with prospective Jesus Collective Partners, vs. wielding them legalistically to draw a hard, dividing line.

1. **FREE WILL.** Human will is freed by God to trust him or to reject him. God wants all people to trust him, but does not force his will upon his own image bearers. In light of our free will, we believe that Christians are not saved because of our family of origin or religious heritage, but because of God's gift of salvation which we freely accept. Hence, baptism is the Jesus-given symbol of our freely chosen faith in Christ's death, burial, and resurrection on our behalf and our commitment to his lordship.
2. **NEW COVENANT ATONEMENT.** The incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ is the centre of human and cosmic history. The cross is the source of our healing, our redemption, victory over the kingdom of darkness, the coronation of our King, the inauguration of God's kingdom on earth, and the sealing of the New Covenant, which offers forgiveness and cleansing to everyone. This New Covenant opens the way for the Holy Spirit to be offered to all. The Holy Spirit changes our hearts and offers us not only justification (imputed righteousness) but rebirth and renewal (imparted righteousness).
3. **EVANGELISM & ETERNITY.** It is our privilege and passion to prioritize learning, living, and giving the good news of Jesus to anyone with ears to hear. In matters of salvation, God is the final judge and we are not. The emphasis of New Testament gospel preaching is not the threat of hell as much as the promise of life with God. It is not the Church's job to guarantee hell to non-believers, but based on the good news of Jesus, we can and do announce the guarantee of heaven to those who do believe and are in a genuine relationship with Jesus as Lord of their life.
4. **EQUALITY IN MINISTRY.** God has made all people in his image and likeness and grants us all gifts, including leadership gifts, as the Holy Spirit decides. Therefore, all mature and gifted believers should be considered for all expressions of leadership in the Church, regardless of gender, race, or socioeconomic status.
5. **THIRD WAY.** Jesus Collective brings an understanding of God's intended design for human sexuality and marriage that aligns with the historic Church and Anabaptist movement. At the same time, we believe that faithful Christians who are aligned with Jesus Collective's vision and Jesus-centred paradigm can arrive at a different biblical interpretation of this issue, including a different understanding of and/or posture toward same sex / LGBTQ+ marriage, and different ways of welcoming and engaging with the LGBTQ+ community. We want to welcome and learn from those leaders and churches within our network. Our 'disposition' and attitude towards others both inside and outside the network is more important than the theological 'positions' we carry on this or other non-core topics. Jesus Collective calls churches and leaders within the network, regardless of where we each land theologically, to be clear about our convictions on this and other issues, *and* committed to seeking unity and peace with others in our network, and with all Christians, including those with whom we disagree.