

the corrymeela[✠] community

Address at the annual Corrymeela Sunday service
at Coventry Cathedral, March 22, 2015.

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Below is the text of the sermon preached by Pádraig Ó Tuama at the annual Corrymeela service in Coventry Cathedral on March 22, 2015.

- ❖ *The intercessions, collect and prayer for courage can be found on pages 9-11*
- ❖ *The 50th anniversary events are listed from page 12 onwards.*
- ❖ *Information about the **Corrymeela Connections Weekend** (formerly known as the Corrymeela Friends weekend) is on page 13.*

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*A Dhia, ár gceol beo thú. Déan buíochas ar ár mhisneach, ár gcroí is ár ngrá.*  
God, you are our living music. Bless our courage, our hearts and our love.  
Amen.

*Cairde mo chroí, friends of my heart, it is an honour to be here at the place of such faith and witness to peace. We at Corrymeela are honoured by our long friendship with the witness of your Cathedral here in Coventry. I bring with me the prayers, love, friendship and solidarity of all at Corrymeela.*

A number of years ago I had a dream. In the dream I had been condemned to death. I was walking on a hillside, petrified, shocked and overwhelmed. I bumped into a friend on the hillside and told him that I'd been condemned to death and he said to me "Oh yeah, I heard about that. don't worry. It happened to me before too, You go into a cave. There's a chasm in the cave that has fire in it. you sit in the cave and the fire in the chasm rises and it'll overwhelm you and you'll die."

In the dream I walked to the cave and at the door I looked around. A friend of mine was nearby but he couldn't help.

I turned around. The doorway to the cave was pure darkness.

I walked in to the cave.

I woke up.

Joseph Campbell is a scholar of story, mythology and anthropology. He wrote “Where you stumble, there lies your treasure. The very cave you are afraid to enter turns out to be the source of what you are looking for. The damned thing in the cave, that was so dreaded, has become the centre.”<sup>1</sup>

It is a theme of all faiths and narratives - that there is something to be found beyond the most dreaded thing.

Today’s gospel reading (John 12:20-33) is not a comforting read. Jesus’ soul is troubled and he is wondering about how he can live his life in the context of what will bring glory to God.

There is talk about grains of wheat dying, and talk that the only way that a grain of wheat can bear fruit is through death.

And there is talk about loving something more than life, of believing in something so big that it lives beyond your own life.

And this, it seems, is what the writer of the gospel of John is talking about when he talks about Jesus being lifted up as a sign. It is a symbol that the truth that each one of us, individually and in our corporate lives, will face limitation, rot and death but that if we can live in such a way that what is living will continue to live then we may move into the fruit of love.

Those who work for peace know that these endeavours of peace are not always done because you can actually see a strategic plan for how things can improve. Sure, we hope they will. But we bear witness, first, to love in the midst of the violence that upends us and betrays us. Our witness to peace is not only because we are strategic, but because we believe in a love that is bigger than death, so that death itself is not the end, because love is bigger than that.

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in *Reflections on the Art of Living, A Joseph Campbell Companion*. Diane K. Osborne (New York: HarperCollins, 1991)

In the midst of the intensity of the weeks leading up to the torture and murder of Jesus of Nazareth, it was his own prayer that brought him to reflect - from time to time with palpable desperation - on the love that was bigger than deathly circumstances, whatever those circumstances would be.

And this is the witness to the resurrection that we hold onto, even in Lenten darkness - that love is always stronger than death, that death is not the final word even when it is looming. This isn't some vague baseless optimism, it is a belief that all things are held together by that which is always bigger than the final word - the first word, the first word of welcome, of love, of life, of justice, the first word of belonging, the first breath.

Each of us - in our own lives and our corporate lives - will come face to face with the threat of death - large and little deaths. In the dream that I had, I was burdened by what would happen to me if I walked into the cave. I was fortunate to have a good spiritual director. He said to me "Walk into the cave. It is clearly calling you. Look around, you might learn something."

People in Northern Ireland have faced into the abyss of something for a long time. We're glad that we are making our way - year by year - towards better ways of living well together. Those of us in Corrymeela are honoured by the support we have received, and also by the way in which our vision for something has been nurtured by friends here in Coventry.

We are not the only people to go through this. We know that.

In the text from Jeremiah, we hear that Jeremiah has God say that there will be a covenant of the heart. The word for heart in Hebrew is *leb* - the inner person, the self, the seat of thought and emotion together. It is the place of courage, it is the place of understanding.

The word courage is linked to the Latin word for heart: *cor*. This tells us something - that to act with courage today means that we have a deep link with the place of

the heart - and it is here where the belief in a love that is bigger than death, any death, is nurtured.

Last year we had the honour of hosting a man from Pakistan who wished to come to Corrymeela to learn about our understandings and interventions in sectarianism so that he, in his practice at a school campus in Pakistan, could adapt what we had learnt.

We have spent fifty years learning what it means to bear witness to life when we know that death is around us, and that we, too, are part of the problem of death. we do not have a solution, but we have six faces of our work and practice.

- We begin with the most important word - welcome.
- We then share stories together. This, if you have the right kind of mix of people in the room, is both exhilarating and exhausting.
- We also then seek to learn about power together - learn about the dynamics of power and privilege, the dynamic of victimhood, scapegoating and the addiction to systems of threat and violence that we all participate in.
- We confess together that we are part of the problems that undo us.
- And then we risk together in order to
- Live well together into a future that is made by making courageous steps today.

These are not fancy processes that are easily commodified.

These are the things of survival for communities who, like the characters in the gospel text, are facing the fracture of their own way of being. We know that sometimes the fearful thing is "out there" and other times it is our own addiction to our failures that means we fear the life that calls us.

Patrick Kavanagh in his poem 'Snail' said "I know the shadow-ways / of self" and Mary Oliver, comforting a distressed dog called Benjamin rubs his shoulders and kisses his feet, fondles his long hound ears and says "Don't worry. I also know the way / the old life haunts the new."

We read in our gospel reading today about Jesus of Nazareth who is in a time of need. In his time of need he looked toward that which he knew was bigger than any looming death that beckoned him. It occurs to me that if you were to speculate about what it is that brought Jesus' respect to the fore it was when he encountered somebody who knew what they needed. Somebody who was close to their desire, who knew that they were in want. We all go through that. Societies like the north of Ireland knew their want and great goodness - witnesses like Corrymeela and many other initiatives of good will and courage - came about.

Each society has this. And it takes courage to come to terms with your needs.

In Marilynne Robinson's book *Home* the main character, Glory, is reflecting on prayer. Her father had told her to pray for patience, but deep in her is a desperate truth and desperate desire that is longing to be given the air to breathe and the dignity of voice:

*So she prayed, Lord, give me patience. She knew that was not an honest prayer, and she did not linger over it. The right prayer would have been, Lord, my brother treats me like a hostile stranger, my father seems to have put me aside, I feel I have no place here in what I thought would be my refuge, I am miserable and bitter at heart, and old fears are rising up in me so that everything I do makes everything worse. But it cost her tears to think her situation might actually be that desolate, so she prayed again for patience, for tact, for understanding—for every virtue that might keep her safe from conflicts that would be sure to leave her wounded, every virtue that might at least help her preserve an appearance of dignity, for heaven's sake.<sup>2</sup>*

At many times of our lives we will come into contact with our needs. It is a terrible thing to tell the truth. Sometimes telling the truth is more frightening than living in denial. We know this in our private lives, our public lives, or organisational, faith and group lives. We know that we are capable of participating in privileged living that marginalises and oppresses others. We are people in need of telling these truths.

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<sup>2</sup> Marilynne Robinson, *Home*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008.

Places of reconciliation exist in order to help us tell the truth.

May we have the places to tell them and the safety to tell them and the risk and the courage to tell them. May we know that our desire for the greater good is part of what makes us in the image of God. May we trust that what is deepest in humanity is not our abysmal failures but our capacity, even in our frailty, to hold onto love even when it is dark and fearful.

At Corrymeela we have these six faces on our work, six sacred words:

- Welcome
- Story
- Power
- Confessing
- Risking
- Together.

These are the things that we hold onto - the things that we know are bigger than any deaths that face us.

We are on this journey because we have friends who have been together with us - together in prayer, together in support, together in risk, in learning, in courage and in love.

And this annual pilgrimage of witness to you at this Cathedral is part of our loving commitment back to you.

We are, thank God, in a situation where in our part of the world, things have been getting better.

They six faces of our work remain sacred for us because we know that our human societies and organisations and denominations and gatherings worship small gods of rivalry, and in the deaths that these small gods require, we are always in need of a larger vision of love.

As we end, let us end with a prayer for ourselves and our world:

Friends, may we enter the caves of death that frighten us, knowing that there is a love greater than any death.

Friends, may we welcome each other together on this journey of humanity.

Friends may we listen to each other's stories.

Friends may we have the courage to speak to power  
and the courage to confess our own complicity in the systems that undo us.

Friends may we risk together.

Friends, may we live well together.

We ask this, together, in the presence of God who is always bigger than death.

Amen.

## Intercessions:

We give thanks for the Corrymeela Community's 50 years of witnessing to faith and peace. We pray for the women and men who has passed through the doors, and pray for their families, their work, their circumstances and lives. May they all be nurtured in peace and supported by courage. Lord Hear us.

We reflect on our readings today and remember those Greeks who asked questions. May we see the bonds of friendship, curiosity and humanity that bind us all to us all. May we find the courage to live well together in a world that thrives on fractures, divisions and power-games. May we be drawn to each other with love and truth. Lord Hear Us

We give thanks for the witness of Andrew and Philip in the reading. They supported each other in their questions. We honour and thank and bless those people who have been companions with us on our way. May we all know the blessing of a companion when we are burdened. May we reach out. May we reach in. Lord Hear us.

We give thanks for the witness of the Coventry Cathedral to a world that continues to fracture. May the work in and from this place continue to flourish. We pray for the workers, the participants, the funders and the beneficiaries of this great endeavour. In all of this, may we be drawn deeply into the beloved community. Lord hear us.

At Corrymeela we take a moment of silence in each meal to give thanks for the food in our own way. Now here, in this service, we take a moment of silence. We think of those who are bereaved. We think of those who are far from their truest selves. We pray for them, and we pray for us all. Lord hear us.

We live lives of rhythm. We get up, we work, or meet people, go about the routines of our day. We listen to the news, we talk, we are silent, we are stressed, we relax, we sleep. Help us be present to our world, God. Help us see the dignity in the small events. Help us see incarnation in every moment. Lord hear us.

## Collect:

God of Covenant

Who turns towards us in word and sacrament

Who turns towards us in incarnation

Who turns towards us in our ordinary days.

We turn to you in our texts, in our liturgy in our worship.

May we also turn toward you in our public lives, our political lives, our lives of argument, fracture and division.

Because you are the one who holds all together.

In this turning we will find each other, and find our truest selves.

In this turning we will find our vocation.

In this turning we will turn from death to life.

Amen.

# The Corrymeela Prayer for Courage:

Courage comes from the heart  
and we are always welcomed by God  
the Croí of all being.

We bear witness to our faith  
knowing that we are called  
to live lives of courage, love and reconciliation  
in the ordinary and extraordinary moments  
of each day.

We bear witness, too, to our failures  
and our complicity in the fractures of our world.

May we be courageous today.  
May we learn today.  
May we love today.  
Amen.

# Corrymeela events marking our 50th year.

All events will be on [corrymeela.org/events](http://corrymeela.org/events)

Corrymeela's 50th celebrations in Dublin Friday 8th-Sunday 10th May



Corrymeela is Northern Ireland's oldest peace and reconciliation organization  
[www.corrymeela.org](http://www.corrymeela.org)

## “Living Together Well in a Culturally Diverse Society”

A Corrymeela 50th Anniversary  
Dublin Event  
*Friday 8th - Sunday 10th May*

All Hallows College - Glencree Centre for Peace & Reconciliation - St. Patrick's Cathedral

*A weekend of encounter and engagement with the realities  
of diversity, prejudice, upstanding and community,  
across the island of Ireland and beyond.*

Be a part of the conversation with:

|                                                                  |                                                                                                |                                                                                         |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Pádraig Ó Tuama</b><br><i>Corrymeela Community Leader</i>     | <b>Joan Burton TD</b><br><i>Tánaiste of Ireland</i>                                            | <b>Tiffany Allen</b><br><i>City of Sanctuary UK</i>                                     |
| <b>Katherine Dowds</b><br><i>Dublin's interfaith community</i>   | <b>Sergiu Pruteanu &amp;<br/>Nadette Foley</b><br><i>Musicantia</i>                            | <b>Sean Petris</b><br><i>Corrymeela</i>                                                 |
| <b>Rev. Dr. Sahr Yambasu</b><br><i>City of Sanctuary Ireland</i> | <b>Philip McKinley &amp;<br/>Uche Gabriel Akujobi</b><br><i>Discovery Gospel Choir</i>         | <b>Vivian Ni Chuilv</b><br><i>Dublin Historian</i>                                      |
| <b>Discovery<br/>Gospel<br/>Choir</b>                            | <b>Dr. Jasbir Singh Puri</b><br><i>Sikh Representative on Dublin<br/>City Interfaith Forum</i> | <b>Rosaleen McDonagh</b><br><i>Leading feminist within<br/>the Travelling Community</i> |

**Everyone is welcome to take part in the event.**  
There is no fixed charge; however, for those who can afford it  
a suggested donation of €20 would be appreciated.

**Space is limited, registration is essential.**

Please register at <https://corrymeela-dublin-event.eventbrite.ie>  
For more info: E: [dublin@corrymeela.org](mailto:dublin@corrymeela.org) Ph: +353 (0) 86 683 6494 (Pádraig)



## **Corrymeela Connections weekend (formerly known as the Friends weekend) 29th - 31st May, 2015, Corrymeela Ballycastle**

The theme is **“Faith and Tension: dialogue in a time of deep difference”**.

We will collate a team of experienced thinkers and practitioners with theological and political expertise to help Corrymeela friends, associates and new friends consider questions about faith and political tensions in the post-election days of May 2015.

£105 single accommodation.

£90 shared room.

£45 non residential

Booking form available [here](#):

<http://corrymeela.org/site/assets/files/1204/bformccweekend.doc>

Full programme available [here](#):

<http://corrymeela.org/site/assets/files/1204/ccweekendprogramme.pdf>

## **Aperture Festival: July 31-Aug 2nd. Corrymeela Centre, Ballycastle.**

Aperture is a festival celebrating 50 years of Corrymeela's witness to the world - poets, artists, theologians, politicians, food, circus performers, writers, people, friends, new friends, tensions, debate, dancing and reconciliation. Come and part a part of this unique festival.

*Our Anniversary weekend will run from Fri 30th Oct - Sun 2nd Nov.*

### **Fri 30th Oct, Belfast City Hall, 7.30pm. The Poet, The Peacemaker and the President.**

This event will be a wonderful occasion for members, staff, volunteers and friends of Corrymeela. We will hear reflections from Ireland's greatest living poet Michael Longley, Kathleen Kuehnast from the US Institute for Peace and former Irish President and UN Human Rights Commissioner Mary Robinson. There will also be live music and plenty of conversation.

### **Sat 31st October, Ballycastle, 1-6pm. Fifty Years, Fifty Stories.**

We will transform the Ballycastle centre into a living museum featuring fifty stories from the past fifty years. Some will be written, some audio, some video and even some living stories where you can sit and have a cup of tea with some of our longest serving members.

### **Sun 1st Nov, St. Anne's Cathedral Belfast, Celebration Service.**

The fiftieth anniversary celebration service. John Bell from the Iona Community has written music and liturgy for our event. Pádraig Ó Tuama will lead the service and there will be contributions from Corrymeela Community members and the Catholic Primate of All Ireland. The sermon will be delivered by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

**A reminder: you can find information about all of these events on [www.corrymeela.org/events](http://www.corrymeela.org/events)**