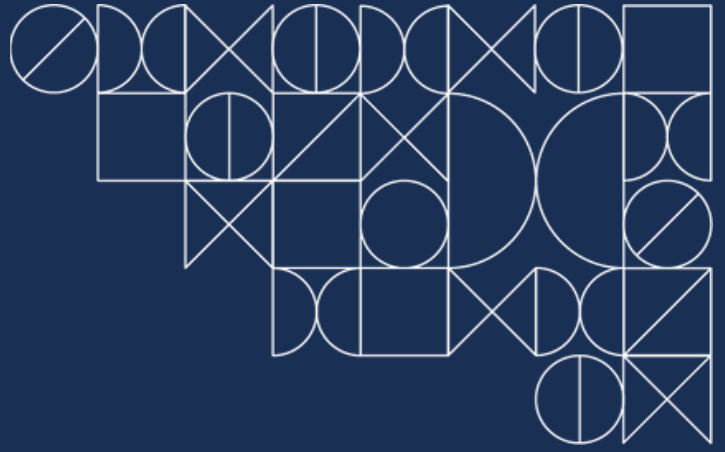


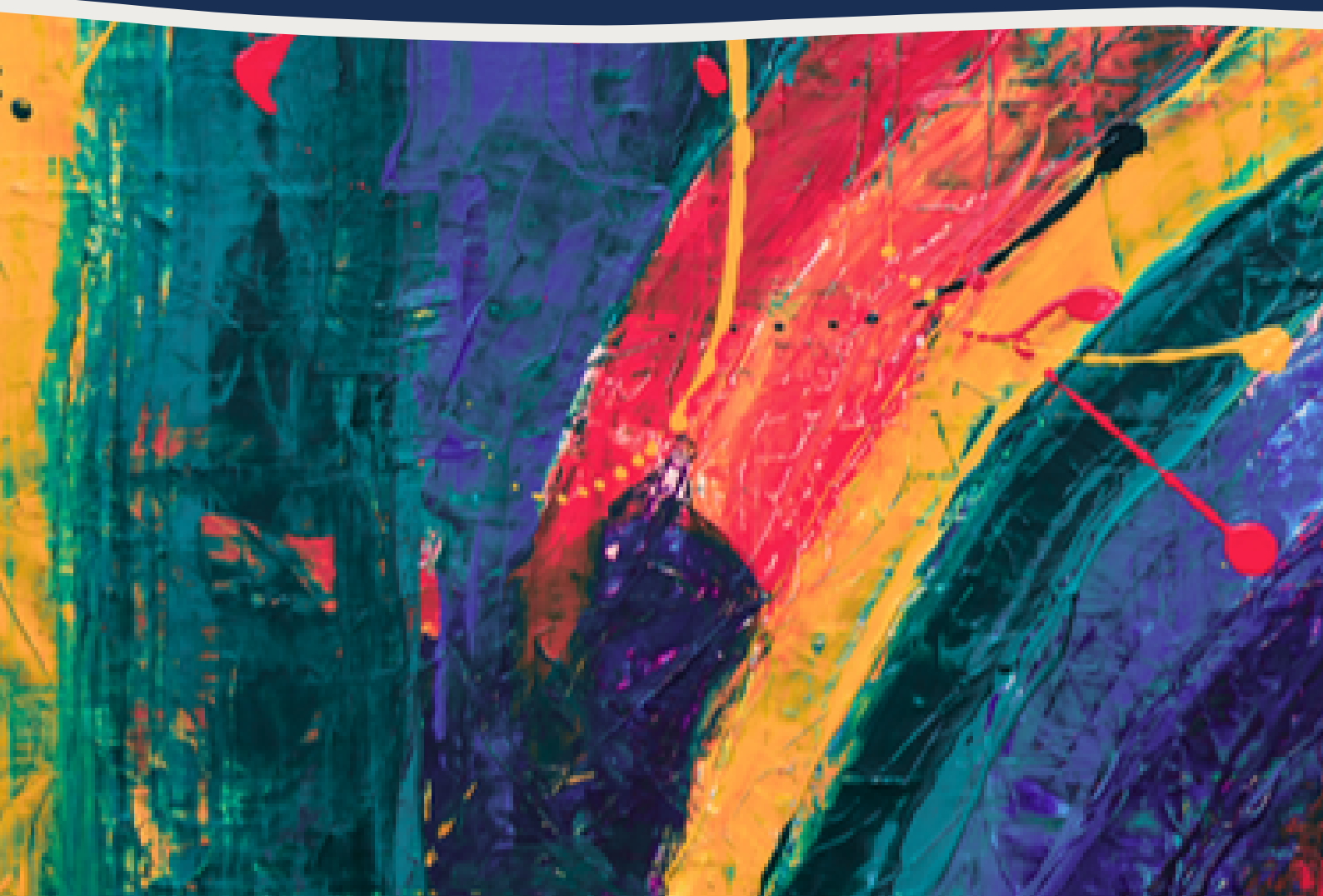


ROSE CASTLE
FOUNDATION



A Christian wisdom of reconciliation.

By Professor David Ford and Canon Sarah Snyder



This is a summary document.
For more information, visit our website:
www.rosecastlefoundation.org



Seek peace and pursue it
Psalm 34:14



1

Reconciliation is from God

We live in a world in desperate need of reconciliation, but also one in which God is at work to bring reconciliation.

2

Identity and Belonging

Reconciliation involves receiving and committing to a new identity, with all the sacrifice and uncertainty which that entails.

3

Re-membering the Past

Addressing the past does not imply that it can be fully 'made sense of' or that we can, or should, accept as good our past actions or those of others.

4

Breaking Boundaries

The work of reconciliation not only calls us to tread the painfully familiar territory of the past but also to venture into places which are entirely unfamiliar.

5

Trust and Risk-taking

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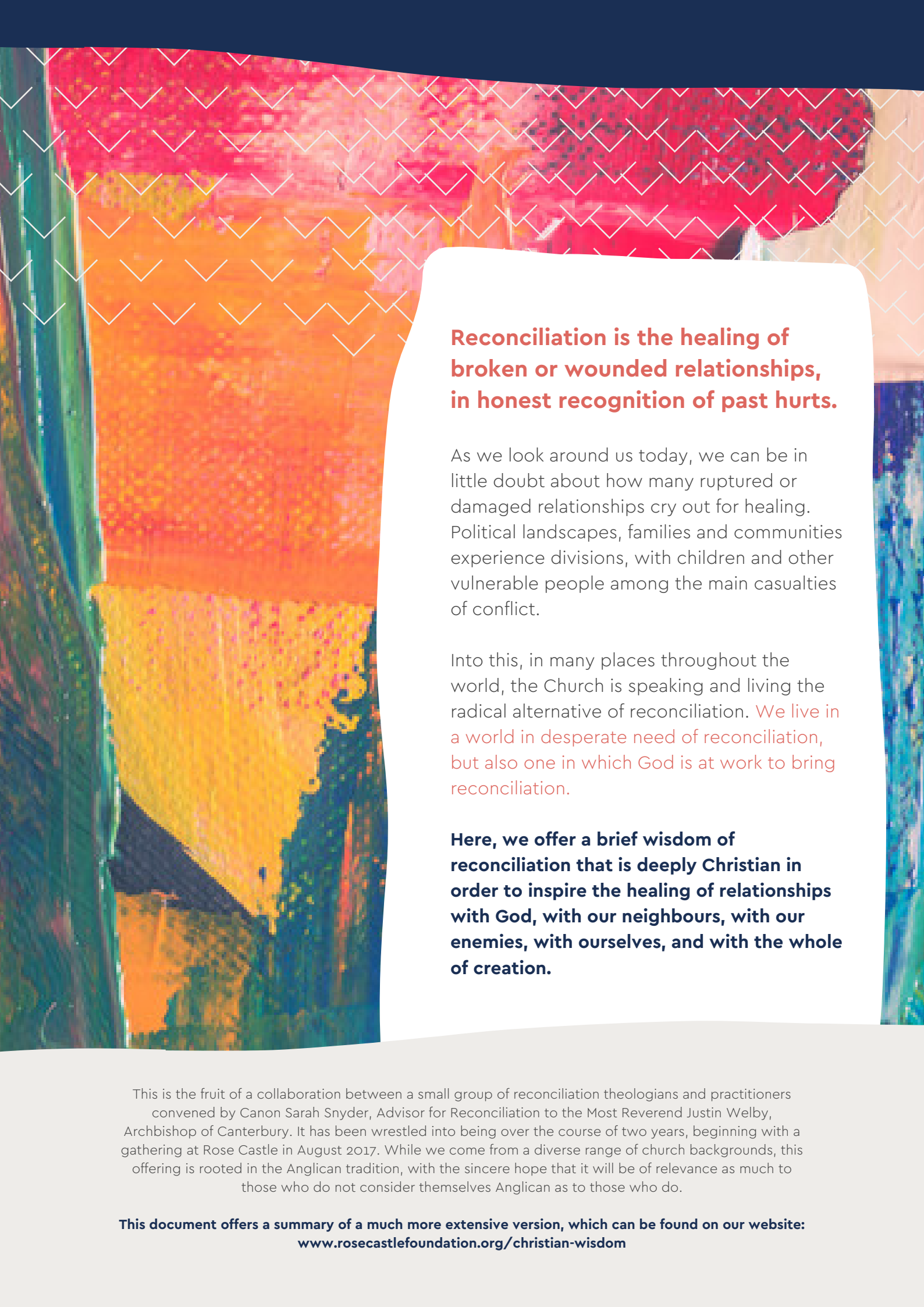
Messiness and Surprises

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7

Lament and Hope

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Reconciliation is the healing of broken or wounded relationships, in honest recognition of past hurts.

As we look around us today, we can be in little doubt about how many ruptured or damaged relationships cry out for healing. Political landscapes, families and communities experience divisions, with children and other vulnerable people among the main casualties of conflict.

Into this, in many places throughout the world, the Church is speaking and living the radical alternative of reconciliation. *We live in a world in desperate need of reconciliation, but also one in which God is at work to bring reconciliation.*

Here, we offer a brief wisdom of reconciliation that is deeply Christian in order to inspire the healing of relationships with God, with our neighbours, with our enemies, with ourselves, and with the whole of creation.

This is the fruit of a collaboration between a small group of reconciliation theologians and practitioners convened by Canon Sarah Snyder, Advisor for Reconciliation to the Most Reverend Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury. It has been wrestled into being over the course of two years, beginning with a gathering at Rose Castle in August 2017. While we come from a diverse range of church backgrounds, this offering is rooted in the Anglican tradition, with the sincere hope that it will be of relevance as much to those who do not consider themselves Anglican as to those who do.

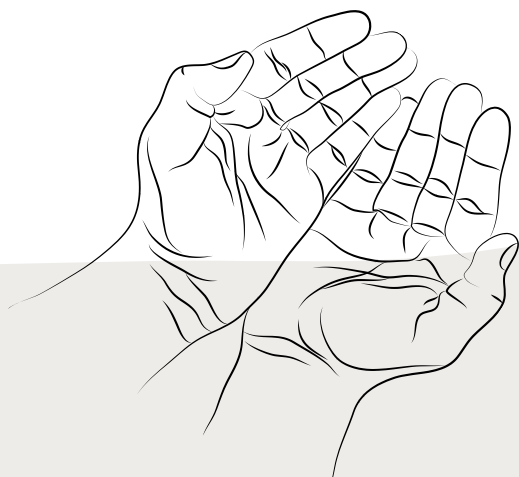
This document offers a summary of a much more extensive version, which can be found on our website: www.rosecastlefoundation.org/christian-wisdom

Reconciliation is from God

In 2 Corinthians 5:18 Paul tells us that 'All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation'.

Reconciliation is an energy of love – given freely and abundantly – at the heart of the one God, the complete relationship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit which we are invited to allow to take hold of us.

Remarkably, God not only authors this reconciliation but embodies it utterly, and enacts it. The person of Jesus Christ is both our model, who calls us into reconciliation, and also the unique, once-and-for-all Reconciler who is 'our peace' (Ephesians 2:14).

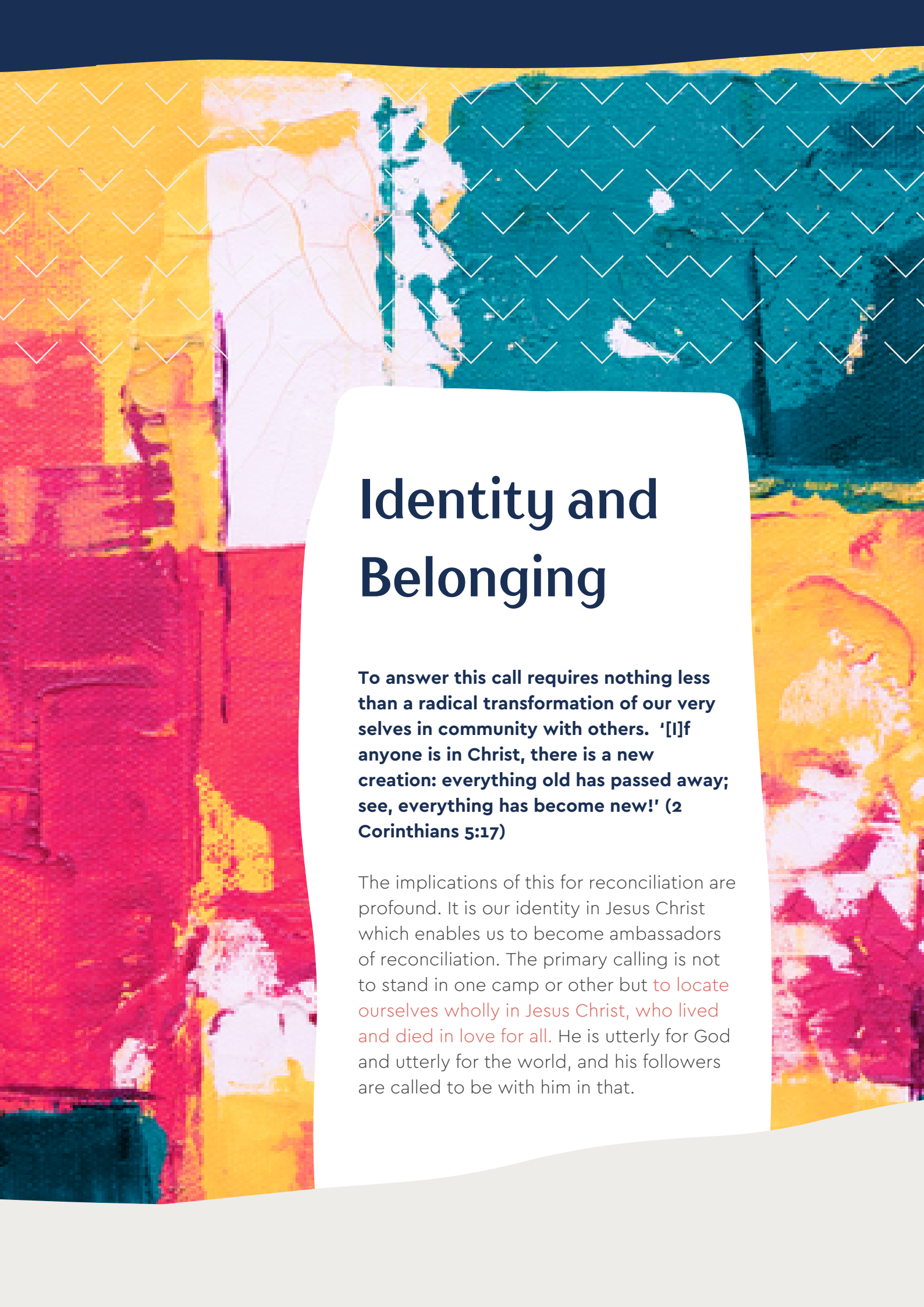




It is from the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus that our reconciliation flows. He was sent, as we are, to create signs of abundant life – giving good news, teaching, forgiving, healing, feeding, welcoming, challenging, forming a community of love. And this involved being sent, as we are, into darkness – into situations of sin, suffering, evil and death.

It is God's deep longing for unity and love, its peace overflowing towards the whole world, that draws Jesus to his death. And when, having suffered betrayal, flogging, humiliation, and crucifixion, he appears to his disciples alive, with pierced hands and side, his repeated words are: 'Peace be with you' (John 20:19, 21).

They are called to be a community of peace, forgiveness, and love, willing to suffer and die for love.



Identity and Belonging

To answer this call requires nothing less than a radical transformation of our very selves in community with others. '[I]f anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!' (2 Corinthians 5:17)

The implications of this for reconciliation are profound. It is our identity in Jesus Christ which enables us to become ambassadors of reconciliation. The primary calling is not to stand in one camp or other but **to locate ourselves wholly in Jesus Christ, who lived and died in love for all**. He is utterly for God and utterly for the world, and his followers are called to be with him in that.



The most important distinction within this new creation is not between a new 'us' and 'them', but between a formerly divided humanity and a newly restored one.

Paul invokes the image of Christ breaking 'down the dividing wall', creating one humanity which shares one space, without hostility and division, incorporated into one body, related to one God, united to God and to each other by the love of Jesus Christ in dying for all, and by his resurrected presence in the Spirit (Ephesians 2:14-16).

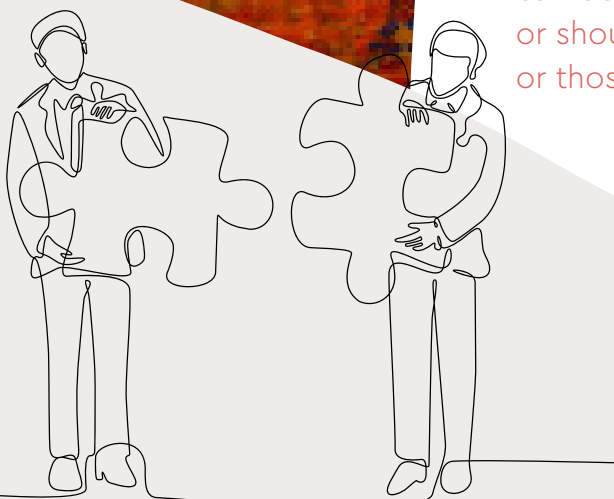
Reconciliation involves receiving and committing to a new identity, with all the sacrifice and uncertainty which that entails, and this will invariably involve refiguring our history and that of our relationships. A crucial element of reconciliation is learning to inhabit our past in ways that open up the possibility of an alternative future.

Re-membering the past

The wisdom of Scripture is that forgiveness and the healing of the past are long and uncomfortable paths. The same wound may be revisited often.

We are to forgive 'not seven times but... seventy-seven times,' Jesus teaches (Matthew 18:22). This may be seventy-seven different injuries, or the same one which aches seventy-seven times, demanding to be addressed anew.

Addressing the past does not imply that it can be fully 'made sense of' or that we can, or should, accept as good our past actions or those of others.

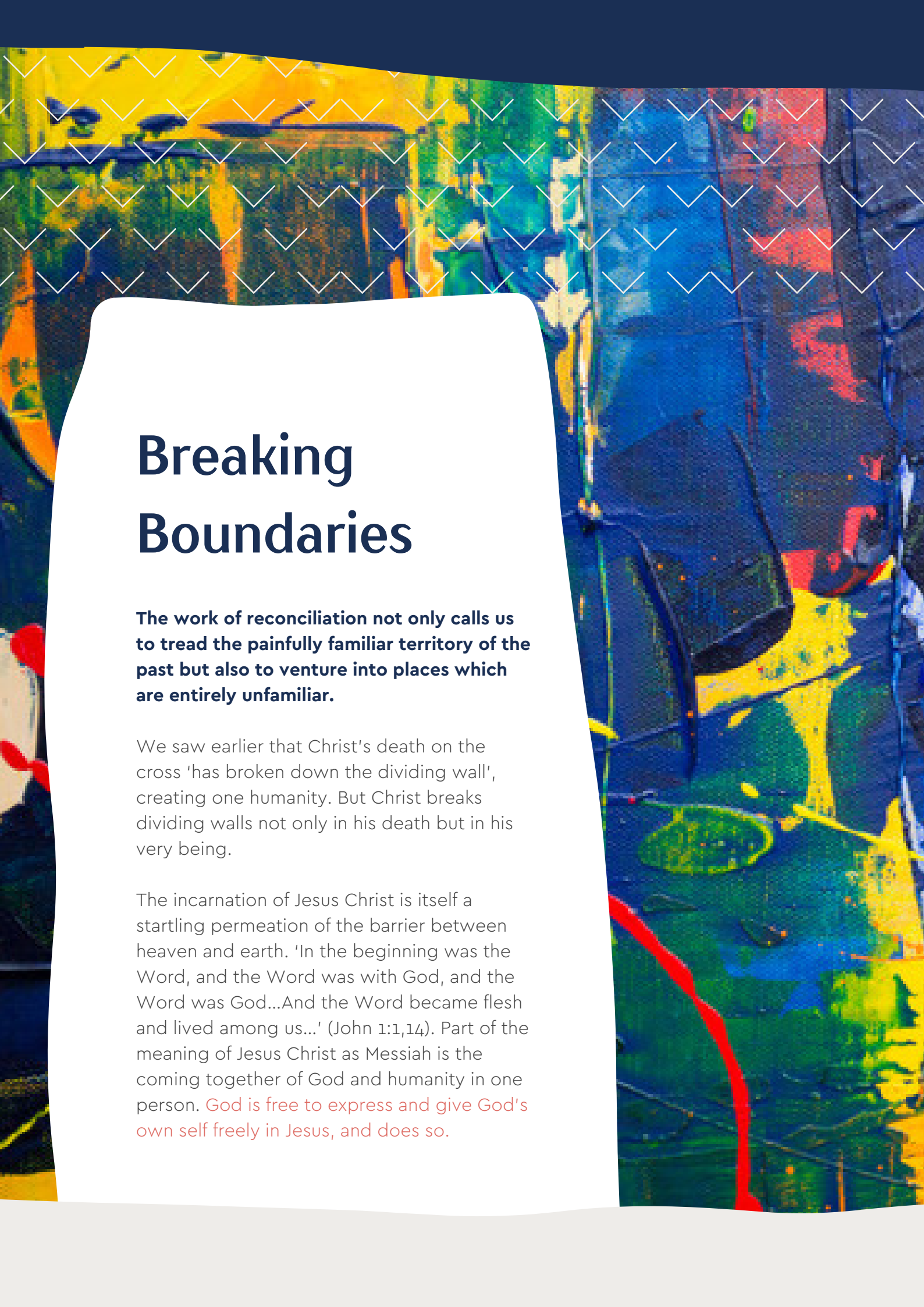




When Peter betrays Jesus by denying him three times, he went out and 'wept bitterly' (Luke 22:62). There is no hint that he could ever reconcile himself to those events. But he, and his relationship with Jesus, are not forever defined by that night by the fire in the courtyard.

God is for Peter, as he is for each one of us. And he invites him (no compulsion here, as there never can be with reconciliation) to a ministry which will demand everything of him (including his life), but one in full, restored relationship with Jesus Christ Himself (John 21:15-19).

Even after very bad history there is the possibility a better future.



Breaking Boundaries

The work of reconciliation not only calls us to tread the painfully familiar territory of the past but also to venture into places which are entirely unfamiliar.

We saw earlier that Christ's death on the cross 'has broken down the dividing wall', creating one humanity. But Christ breaks dividing walls not only in his death but in his very being.

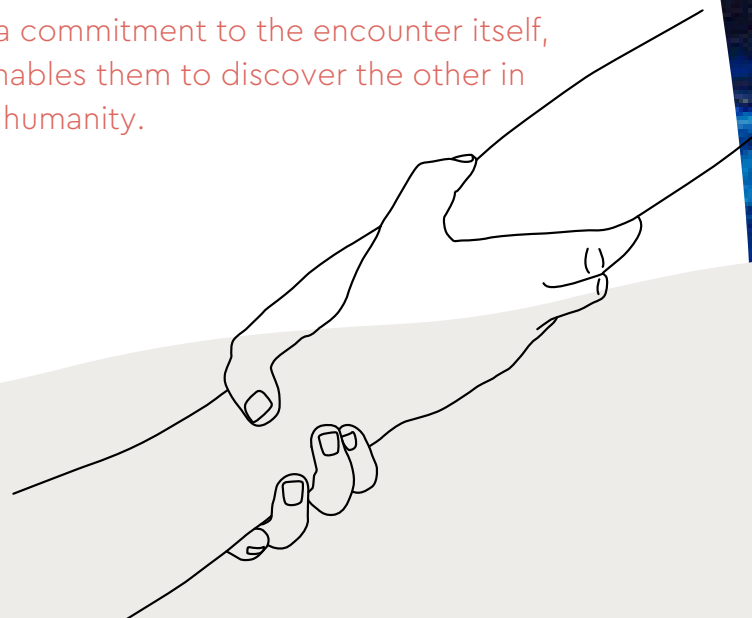
The incarnation of Jesus Christ is itself a startling permeation of the barrier between heaven and earth. 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...And the Word became flesh and lived among us...' (John 1:1,14). Part of the meaning of Jesus Christ as Messiah is the coming together of God and humanity in one person. **God is free to express and give God's own self freely in Jesus, and does so.**

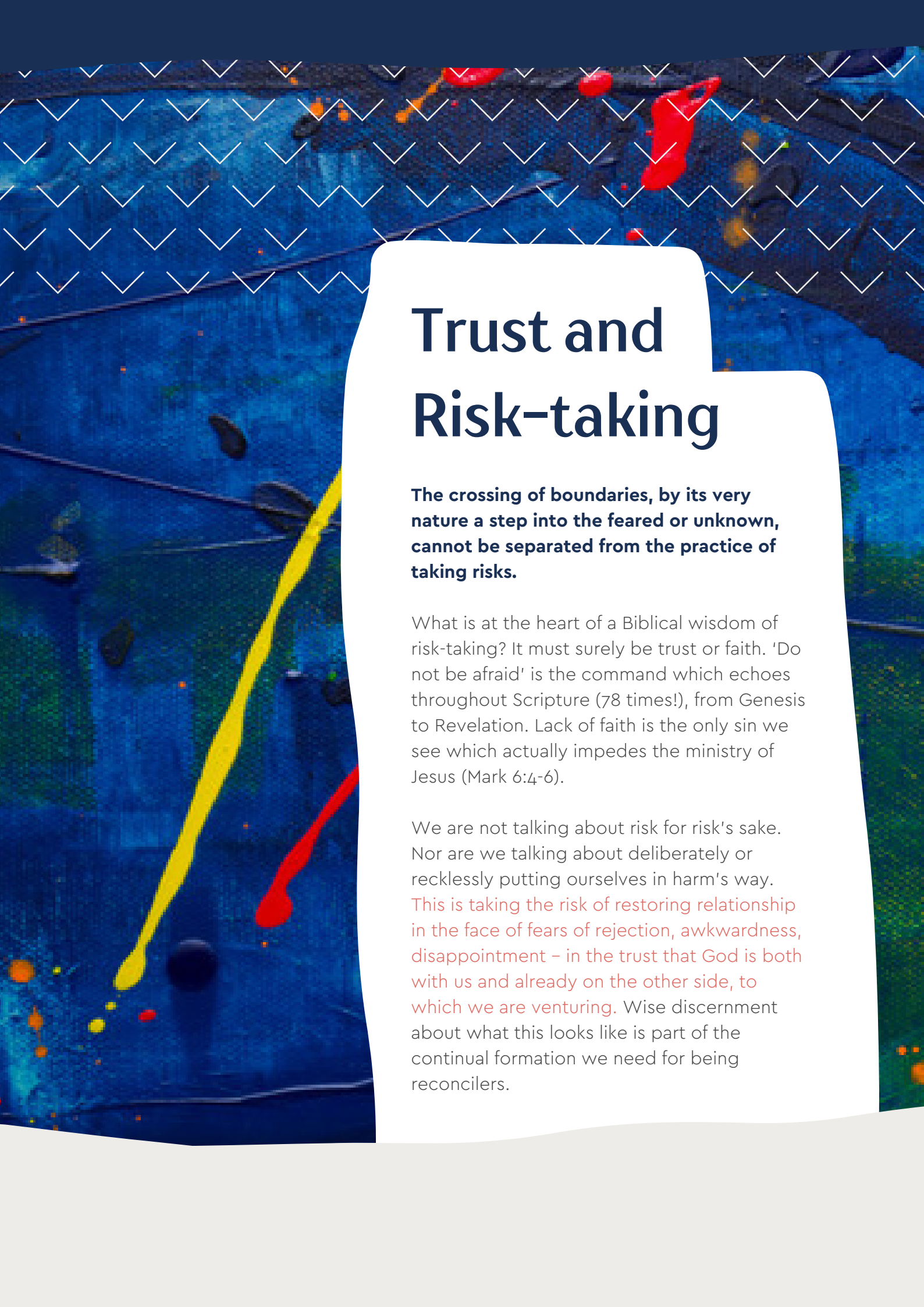


It is this unfathomable reality which enables (and compels) us to see in the face of each person, and above all in the face of the marginalised, the humiliated and the suffering, the face of Jesus Christ himself.

'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me,' Jesus says to those who have fed the hungry and visited the prisoner in his picture of final judgement (Matthew 25:40). We see in this echoes of the encounter of Abraham and Sarah who, by showing hospitality to strangers, end up being guests of God himself (Genesis 18:1-15). Love of God and love of neighbour cannot be separated from one another (Matthew 22:40).

This breaking of boundaries goes hand-in-hand with radical openness to the other. The story of the ministry of Jesus is one of continually disrupting physical, mental and social boundaries which inhibit that openness. For example, the radical openness to the other which Jesus demonstrates in his encounter with the Samaritan woman in John 4 was not one which swept difference under the carpet or disguised it politely. The conversation is robust and sparky, grappling with their social and cultural division. But there is a commitment to the encounter itself, which enables them to discover the other in their full humanity.





Trust and Risk-taking

The crossing of boundaries, by its very nature a step into the feared or unknown, cannot be separated from the practice of taking risks.

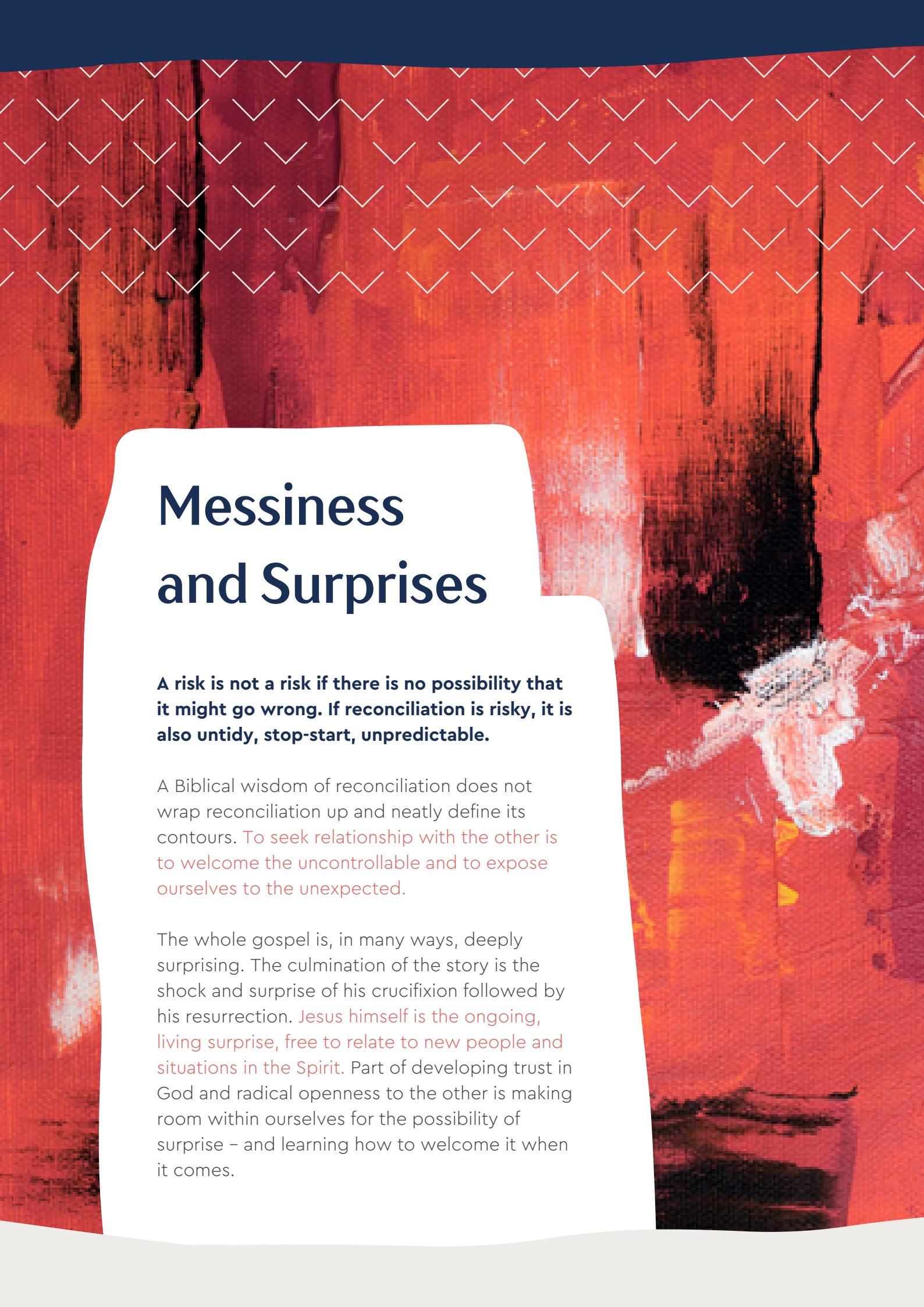
What is at the heart of a Biblical wisdom of risk-taking? It must surely be trust or faith. 'Do not be afraid' is the command which echoes throughout Scripture (78 times!), from Genesis to Revelation. Lack of faith is the only sin we see which actually impedes the ministry of Jesus (Mark 6:4-6).

We are not talking about risk for risk's sake. Nor are we talking about deliberately or recklessly putting ourselves in harm's way. **This is taking the risk of restoring relationship in the face of fears of rejection, awkwardness, disappointment – in the trust that God is both with us and already on the other side, to which we are venturing.** Wise discernment about what this looks like is part of the continual formation we need for being reconcilers.

The biggest risk of all is perhaps that of putting trust in the other. That is one of the things that is so remarkable about that moving scene between Jesus and Peter on the beach. Jesus knows that Peter has abandoned him in his hour of greatest need and has denied having anything to do with him (despite all of Peter's protestations that he would be faithful). He even knew Peter would do it before it happened.

Here – with profound grace and gentleness – Jesus addresses Peter's three denials by asking three times 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' But, more than that, he entrusts Peter with responsibility: 'Feed my lambs'; 'Tend my sheep'; 'Feed my sheep' (John 21:15-19). To take the initiative to put our trust in others often requires many preparatory relationship-building moves – in this story, Jesus has led up to the conversation by hosting a meal: 'Come and have breakfast' (John 21:12).





Messiness and Surprises

A risk is not a risk if there is no possibility that it might go wrong. If reconciliation is risky, it is also untidy, stop-start, unpredictable.

A Biblical wisdom of reconciliation does not wrap reconciliation up and neatly define its contours. To seek relationship with the other is to welcome the uncontrollable and to expose ourselves to the unexpected.

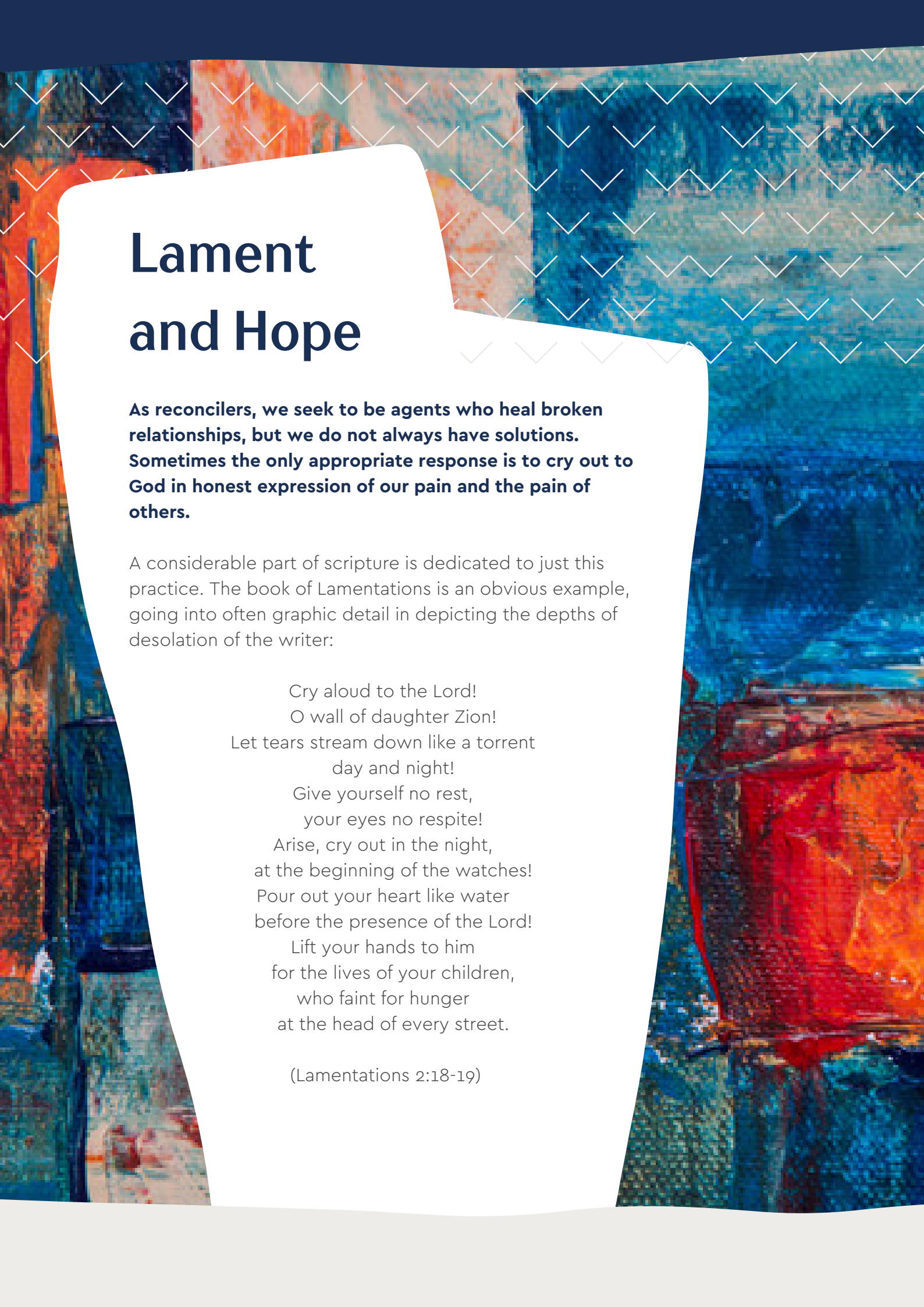
The whole gospel is, in many ways, deeply surprising. The culmination of the story is the shock and surprise of his crucifixion followed by his resurrection. Jesus himself is the ongoing, living surprise, free to relate to new people and situations in the Spirit. Part of developing trust in God and radical openness to the other is making room within ourselves for the possibility of surprise – and learning how to welcome it when it comes.

This can be profoundly challenging and uncomfortable because it involves letting go of narratives about the other which are often deeply entrenched.

We can get so used to our divisions, oppositions, enmities and even oppressions that they become part of our identity, and ending them feels like a threat to who we are. We can easily fall into a mentality of scarcity in which we feel that the inclusion of others equates to our own exclusion. This dynamic was at work in much of the resistance to Jesus' engagement with 'tax collectors and sinners'. Sometimes we may be surprised by the emotions of envy or fear stirred within us, even when we believed ourselves to be wholly committed to reconciliation.

There will also be many times when the healing we seek to experience or bring about does not happen. Some with long experience as peacemakers estimate that they fail in over 90% of cases. Relationships remain broken, or they deteriorate. The attempt to have honest conversations produces deeper hurt, rather than deeper understanding. Our relationship with our own selves remains dysfunctional or damaging despite seeking help – where we can only turn to God and seek His mercy. How do we respond to repeated disappointment and even trauma?





Lament and Hope

As reconcilers, we seek to be agents who heal broken relationships, but we do not always have solutions. Sometimes the only appropriate response is to cry out to God in honest expression of our pain and the pain of others.

A considerable part of scripture is dedicated to just this practice. The book of Lamentations is an obvious example, going into often graphic detail in depicting the depths of desolation of the writer:

Cry aloud to the Lord!
O wall of daughter Zion!
Let tears stream down like a torrent
day and night!
Give yourself no rest,
your eyes no respite!
Arise, cry out in the night,
at the beginning of the watches!
Pour out your heart like water
before the presence of the Lord!
Lift your hands to him
for the lives of your children,
who faint for hunger
at the head of every street.

(Lamentations 2:18-19)

The many passages of the Old Testament that model lament set an example of honesty with God, and ourselves, which is essential for those immersed in contexts of brokenness and suffering. Lamentations also appeals to a community to 'cry aloud' together. Being part of a community that can lament, as well as praise, is a meaningful, powerful response to conflict, terror, and deep disappointment.

Perhaps counterintuitively, **lament and questioning – an engagement with the complex, painful reality around us – are also the vital foundations for hope.** This hope is not optimism that all will soon turn out well, but faith and trust in the One whose reconciliation work we are caught up in. It is a love of the people and the world in these 'in-between' times, in assurance of a full restoration that is promised. It is an echo of God's 'yes' to human life and relationships.

Of particular importance for work for peace and reconciliation is the presence of God with those who suffer: 'The Lord is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit' (Psalm 34:18). **Lamenting with one in pain is more meaningful than any quick fix in expressing the deepest consolation of all (the one God offers us): 'I am with you'.**

And so we end our theology of reconciliation where we began, recognising that the territory of reconciliation is holy ground. God was here before us, is here with us, and is our future. It is a journey into the inexplicable and the painful. It is also (sometimes simultaneously) a calling which leads us to joy. Joy signals the fullness of life and peace, and is a mark of forgiveness, freedom, faith, love, hope, and celebration. This joy and peace do not rule out suffering, lament, and even death, and do not depend on the absence of conflict or on everything going well. **It is joy in the Lord who 'is our peace', in who Jesus is, in one who went through conflict, suffering and death, and sends his followers as he was sent.**





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