

ST AIDAN'S UNITING CHURCH

SUNDAY 24 JANUARY 2010

Rev. Vladimir Korotkov

Luke 4: 14-21

"Graceful Interdependence: Living Life and Mending Our Divided World!"

1. Audacious living in graceful interdependence!

Audacious living in graceful interdependence! This is Luke's overarching theme in his Gospel. This theme was imaged in my witness on the fourth Sunday in Advent when I spoke about generativity leading to joy and generosity. Mary and Elizabeth illustrated the emergence of this audacity. They were both pregnant with new identity and possibility, which shaped their joy, and released in Mary a melody of thanks for God's concern for anonymous, ordinary and poor humanity like herself.

Generativity! Psychoanalyst Erik Erikson described this to mean: "a concern not just for myself or my family, but for others, the world." It is about creativity between the generations. Humanity struggles with such openness and connectivity, as we will see in next week's reading!

In Jesus' baptism, graceful interdependence emerges in God's connecting, naming and affirming of Jesus and humanity, and emerges with the Spirit's empowerment. This event creates a surprising new identity for Jesus and constructs a fluid and non-defensive self, one free of rigid brand-loyalties. Such a process always disturbs already constructed identities by parents, societies and governments!

2. Graceful interdependence lives out its life in mending our divided world!

For Luke the Spirit of God is centred in the affirming, naming, empowering and mission activity of Jesus, the early church and thus in human and planetary life.

In our reading today, Jesus uses texts from Isaiah to describe the heart of the Christian message: God's Spirit inspires Jesus to bring good news to the poor, set free the captives, heal the sick, liberate the oppressed, and proclaim God's Jubilee year of Shalom, the letting go of all debts and loans. As Brian Stoffregen notes, with these words Jesus emphasises that being Spirit-centred "does not mean escaping the world, but a radical engagement with the poor and oppressed of the world." (<http://www.crossmarks.com/brian/luke4x14.htm>)

As Bruce Epperly notes profoundly:

Jesus' invocation of Isaiah describes the values necessary for healthy and dynamic human communities, which foster creativity, self-actualization, and mutual affirmation.
(<http://www.processandfaith.org/lectionary/YearC/2009-2010/2010-01-24.shtml>)

He notes that underlying these words is the affirmation of the humblest as well as most powerful members of a community. These words actually set the world into relationship with each other.

This first sermon of Jesus in Luke actually generates a new social identity and relationship to humanity.

As Epperly writes, in Jesus' words we see that we are:

part of larger circles of graceful interdependence. We are not alone; God's call and response lures us toward healthy personal and communal lives. We belong to a larger universe, in which our lives are part of a larger story (the "universe story") and a "holy adventure" of call and response, and order and novelty. In this holy adventure, we can do our part in mending the world and healing this good earth. (*Ibid*)

3. Bodacious living is a journey towards an undivided life

Yet, as we will see in next week's reading when Jesus' message is totally rejected in his hometown and they try and destroy him, bodacious living (unconstrained by conventions or exclusivity) is a **journey** from within a divided life and a world antithetical to connectedness and audacity.

Generativity, the "concern not just for myself or my family, but for others, the world", follows when we set out to live life bodaciously, audaciously.

And that life is a dynamic process of learning to be an adventurer is what struck me in the movie, *UP*, which I saw this week.

In the amazing, animated adventure, *UP*, from the Pixar company, producers of *Toy Story*, *Finding Nemo* and *Monsters Inc*, and more recently *Wall-E*, two totally different and unlikely pair of unadventurous characters meet and are catapulted into what turns out to be an audacious adventure.

Carl Fredricksen is a gruff 78 yr-old widower retired balloon salesperson. His accidental companion is eight-year-old Russell, a plump, lonely pretend-Wilderness Explorer, a sort of Boy Scout whom no one notices.

We first meet Carl as a shy, introverted young schoolboy who dreams of audacious adventures like his hero, Charles F Muntz (Christopher Plummer), whom he sees in a black-and-white newsreel in the 1930s. Muntz travels the world in his airship, "The Spirit of Adventure", visiting exotic places and collecting strange animals, and disappears in search of the legendary Paradise Falls in South America. Carl meets his spirited childhood sweetheart, Ellie, who has the same fantasy.

Carl and Ellie marry, daydream, gaze at the clouds, suffer a terrible grief, and grow into contented old age together. Their life is recounted in a beautiful miniature of compression ... and it ends with Carl as widower, stranded in ... loneliness. [Now a grouchy 78 yr-old], Carl finds his house dwarfed by a soulless high-rise development and about to be repossessed; he himself will soon be carted off to a retirement home. (Anthony Quinn, *The Independent*, 9 October 2009)

Bodaciously, Carl refuses institutional containment! From here on, the movie "slips into Wizard of OZ mode" (Philip French, *The Observer*, Sunday 11 October 2009). The nurses from the retirement home arrive only to watch his house lift off from the ground courtesy of a multicoloured bouquet of hundreds of helium balloons. Yet, as the house heads off into the clouds on its way to discover Paradise Falls in South America, Carl is overwhelmed with one unanticipated challenge after another. All of them transform his life.

The first surprise for this gruff, impatient and reclusive intrepid traveller is the irritating 8 yr-old

stowaway Russell, wanting to collect an “Assisting the Elderly” badge.

Eventually, they land in South America and have to drag their house across it in search of the Falls. They meet and befriend a giant multi-coloured bird of paradise, a female called Kevin. Carl finally connects with his childhood hero Muntz, only to find him to be obsessed with capturing the exotic bird. Muntz is an obsessed adventurer who is only concerned for his own passions. He lives alone on his airship with hundreds of guard dogs that he's taught to speak and to kill and thinks only of restoring his early fame.

Eventually, Carl and Russell bond on their way to Paradise Falls, and the irascible Carl discovers both the son he never had and his own youthful self by fulfilling the adventure he and Ellie didn't manage. (French, *Op Cit*)

4. Conclusion

This film illustrates what life teaches us, that generativity evolves as we step out into life with audacity and lift off from the constraints of our constricted lives. Theologically stated, it means allowing ourselves to be driven by the Spirit, or as Luke suggests, to be centred by the Spirit, as Jesus is described in this and next Sunday's readings. The Spirit who lures us to live out graceful interdependence so as to work to mend our divided world!

This requires wisdom on the way, and wisdom to reflect on what happens when we live adventurous lives as suggested by Parker J Palmer in his book, *A hidden Wholeness, The journey toward an undivided life*. Parker Palmer, a Quaker, believes that we need to learn to welcome our soul and weave community in a wounded world. Or said in another way, “it's about living in Non-violent Covenant, distributive justice-compassion, and peace. In other words, it's about repenting from violent consumption and embracing sustainable life.” (See Raven, <http://www.gaiarising.org/2010/01/voice-in-wilderness.html>)