

ST AIDAN'S UNITING CHURCH

SUNDAY 2 MAY 2010

Rev. Vladimir Korotkov

John 13: 31-35

“Releasing the Power of Love”

In our reading from John 13: 31-35, Jesus gives his followers a new commandment, love one another! This scene is overshadowed by the previous verse, John 13: 30! “It was the night”, and Judas, darkened by his own devious desires, goes out to betray love for the other, Jesus. Is this why Jesus seeks to inspire the care and concern of his disciples?

Care should be taken not to divide Judas’s darkened being and behaviour from the rest of us. In Acts 11: 1-18, one of the readings set for this Sunday, Peter returns from sharing a meal with the Roman Gentile Cornelius. His cross-cultural and interfaith act faces the censure and strong criticism from the leaders of the Jewish Christian congregation in Jerusalem. This is the church which has just experienced new resurrection life!

Bruce Epperly’s comment about the early church is our challenge today:

Acts 11 presents a key moment in the life of the church. Will it turn inward and remain a Jewish sect or move outward to become a world faith? The other apostles had good reason to be concerned: they knew deep down that welcoming the Gentiles as equals would change their theology, ritual, and emerging ecclesiology.[\[1\]](#)

Jonathan Swift’s (1667-1745) editorial cartoon about the religious fighting in India, writes the Lutheran Brian Stoffregen, is pertinent to the conflicts between denominations or within and between congregations.

We have just enough religion to make us hate, but not enough to make us love one another. (from Thoughts on Various Subjects; from *Miscellanies* -- 1711)[\[2\]](#)

And that is what happens when religion remains a fixed tradition closed off to changes and love.

The 1971 film, *Fiddler on the Roof*, which I tearfully watched again these last two weeks, symbolises the titanic struggle between tradition and the changing nature of life and society, and the power of love.

Ukrainian milkman Tevye is a Jewish peasant in pre-Communist Russia. He has many challenges. His three daughters, whom he wishes to marry through a traditional match-maker, and the ruling Russian government's anti-Semitism which threatens to drive him from his home. How does he survive? Let’s listen to the opening words.

A fiddler on the roof. Sounds crazy, no? But in our little village of Anatevka, every one of us is a fiddler on the roof trying to scratch out a pleasant, simple tune without breaking his neck. It isn't easy. You may ask, why do we stay here if it's so dangerous? We stay because Anatevka is our home. And how do we keep our balance? That I can tell you in one word: Tradition!

Because of our traditions, we have kept our balance for many, many years. Here in Anatevka, we have traditions for everything: how to eat, how to sleep, how to wear clothes. For instance, we always keep our heads covered, and always wear a little prayer-shawl. This shows our constant devotion to God. You may ask, how did this tradition start? I'll tell you. I don't know. But it's a tradition. And because of our traditions, every one of us knows who he is, and what God expects him to do.

Now, of course, tradition seldom totally directs passions! Love, passion and time override every fixed tradition and the three daughters make their own choices: the first marries a poor tailor, the second marries a Marxist and the third marries a non-Jew.[\[3\]](#)

The reality is, we all occupy traditions, secular and religious, that direct our lives. We all occupy and express plural identities, what the Nobel laureate Amartya Sen has called "diverse diversities."[\[4\]](#)

Yet, we are called to infect them with love which makes our traditions and cultures pliable. This means ongoing dynamic reflection on life within our self, family and community.

Again, our Ukrainian milkman and Jewish peasant Tevye, symbolises the internal dialogues that produce transformation. When his eldest daughter Tsaytl approaches her father with Motel, a simple young tailor she has loved for many years, to ask if they can be married, Tevye is deeply traumatised. He has just betrothed her to an older man! In song he reveals the internal conflict that rages between his mind and heart.

They gave each other a pledge, unheard of, unheard of, absurd. They gave each other a pledge, unthinkable! But look at my daughter's face! She loves him, she wants him! And look at my daughter's eyes, so hopeful!

Then he roars, Tradition!

And finally, Well children, when shall we make the wedding?

Then social and family pressure returns! Golda, what shall I tell Golda?

Love involves more than feeling! It calls us to embrace the world in all its larger complexity! And as Dan Clendenin writes, love is public and embraces understanding and appreciation of diversity.

To understand someone, we must consider factors of civilization, religion, nationality, class, community, culture, gender, profession, language, politics, morals, family of origin, skin color, and a multitude of other influences.[\[5\]](#)

In John 13: 34, Jesus teaches, Just as I loved you, you also should love one another. Gail O'Day offers a powerful interpretation of this text:

To interpret Jesus' death as the ultimate act of love enables the believers to see that the love to which Jesus summons the community is not the giving up of one's life, but the giving away of one's life. ... the love that Jesus embodies is grace, not sacrifice. Jesus gave his life to his disciples as an expression of the fullness of his relationship with God and of God's love for the world. Jesus' death in love, therefore, was not an act of self-denial, but an act of fullness, of living out his life and identity fully, even when that living would ultimately lead to death ...

Jesus did not deny himself; he lived his identity and vocation fully. Rather, to love one another as Jesus loves us is to live a life thoroughly shaped by a love that knows no limits, by a love whose expression brings the believer closer into relationship with God, with Jesus, and with one another. It is to live a love that carries with it a whole new concept of the possibilities of community. [6]

In conclusion, to love others we need to undergo a journey of transformation. Part of this is to reflect on and give away aspects of our self and our own attachments to elements of our tradition.

In her new book, *Deep Coaching: Using the Enneagram for profound change*, Roxanne Howe-Murphy informs us that

The personality is ... an energetic system, that like any system, if closed or uninterrupted, continues to build on itself. When uninterrupted, the system allows in only selective information that reinforces its existing patterns.

... each of us has a specific core belief. This core belief is like a central operating principle that unconsciously shapes the developing personality.

The core belief actively filters and selects data that reinforces itself from the vast field of information that bombards us continually.

Data which does not fit into our core belief patterns are unconsciously dismissed.

Therefore, data which could provide another perspective are ignored. Looking over one's recurring experiences over time, the individual is convinced that their experience is the truth.[7]

Love interrupted Tevye's fixed version of how other's should live and find love. Letting go of tradition leads to a fuller life for self and others.

[1] Bruce G.Epperly, <http://www.processandfaith.org/lectionary/YearC/2009-2010/2010-05-02.shtml>

[2] Brian Stoffregen, *The Commandment to Love* (vv. 34-35), <http://www.crossmarks.com/brian/john13x31.htm>

[3] Roger Ebert, *Fiddler on the Roof*, January 1, 1971 <http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/19710101/REVIEWS/101010308/1023>

[4] Dan Clendenin, <http://www.journeywithjesus.net/Essays/20070430JJ.shtml>

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] Gail O'Day, *John*, Interpreter's Bible, 734.

[7] Roxanne Howe-Murphy, *Deep Coaching: Using the Enneagram for profound change*, 9f.