

ST AIDAN'S UNITING CHURCH

SUNDAY 1 AUGUST 2010

Rev. Vladimir Korotkov

Luke 12: 13-21

“The Courage to Change”

1. Luke has created this story today for his own first century congregations. It reflects possible historical situations in Jesus life: brothers competing over their parent's inheritance, and a time when Jesus shared this parable about the mismanagement of resources.

Yet when brought together, this story creates challenges to Luke's readers: how do we live together and deal with our differences, and how do we share the abundance which we have inherited from God and Jesus? And these stories are challenges to Christians: how do we create congregations that are rich toward God and share common life among difference cultures, Jewish and Gentile! And this would have meant, as we know from our study of the early church, how do we give up our traditions, how do we feed the poor from our abundance.

2. Rona Forsyth and Robert Sanderson have introduced us to the Synod resolutions, four priority areas, which are to shape our congregational life and to guide our future directions. At the heart of this encouragement from the Synod to us as the Uniting Church is the challenge which our text brings to us. We are congregations with dwindling numbers, resources and inhabit buildings and have maintained past cultures which are perceived as irrelevant to our society.

How does our text address the challenge the Synod has left us?

3. In reading our text, our parable particularly, I want to suggest a way of reading that relates to our own challenges of formulating solutions to the abundance which we have as a church.

We have a person with land, with enormous productive potential. He is not an evil man. Like any business person today, he reflects and considers what he should do with the land and its abundance. He would have a family, personal and business gifts, obviously, and drive and vision and values.

But as he considers his abundant produce, he remains **anxious** about it, about losing it. He does not consult with anyone. He is caught in within his mind and his internal, isolated emotional ecology, so he goes into a building expansion programme so he can store his abundance.

And then he does a review of his productivity and congratulates himself on his great profits.

4. Let's review this reconstruction I have placed on this story.

We have a good man, with aspirations, ability, and good values. Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey in their book *Immunity to Change* would call this **column one**:

visible commitments, aspirations.

But then we have behaviour which contradict this identity of this caring, capable business man. This would be **column two**: He hordes his abundance in a building programme. Behaviours that contradict his values and care.

Now Kegan and Lahey stress that behind these behaviours, invisible to this man, are hidden, competing commitments. This could be, "I want to be viewed as a successful, powerful man." These make up a **third column**, hidden competing commitments. And then, behind this, also very invisible, is a **fourth column**: Big assumptions that unconsciously drive his behaviour, for example, I assume that if I am not a success as a profitable farmer I will be failure.

Now if this business-man was deeply sincere about wanted to change, would it ,be just a simple, conscious, mental matter of changing his behaviour? Just changing column two with his column one values of care and business capacities?

As Kegan and Lahey write:

Change does not fail to occur because of insincerity. The heart patient is not insincere about his wish to keep living, even as he reaches for another cigarette. Change fails to occur because we mean both things. It fails to occur because we are a living contradiction. ... with one foot on the [accelerator] and one foot on the brake".

You see, as Kegan and Lahey have discovered in their work on human development and organisations over the last twenty years, we are all as individuals, families and organisations (such as the church, schools and in businesses) made up of the four columns. We are a mental, emotional and physical ecology, a complex, intricate survival system, that functions as an immune system to make us who we are, to protect us and to control anxiety and fear.

Conclusion

Since we don't have time today, let me summarise my point and continue with the crucial subject of immunity to change over the last weeks I have with you.

To change we need to be understand, see and accept who we really are, both our beautiful immune, survival system and our immunity to change, which works systematically against every goal we may set for change: That is: 1. our visible commitments, 2. our obstructive behaviours that work against our values and goals, 3. our hidden competing commitments, and 4. our hidden basic assumptions. We can only do this in community and with skilled leadership guiding us. / We can change, no matter what age we are, neuro science has given evidence of the plasticity of the brain and the ability to learn to be different But it requires "developing a whole new appreciation of human courage.

Courage involves the ability to take action and carry on even when we are afraid." (Kegan & Lahey, 47) "It is action in the face of fear that demonstrates courage".

It is not change that causes anxiety; it is the feeling that we are without defences in the presences of what we see as danger that causes anxiety...

We build an immune system to save our lives.

However...

Our immune system can be overcome. Too constricting an anxiety-management system can be replaced with a more expansive one... (Kegan & Lahey, 49f)

... we run these systems at a cost... they create blind spots, prevent new learning, and constantly constrain action in some aspects of our living.

In most Christian denominations, anxiety about change has constrained action.

Our parable actually addresses our deepest anxiety, and reminds us we are truly rich with God's great gifts and possibilities to be the best and most creative managers of what we have into new possibilities.