

ST AIDAN'S UNITING CHURCH

SUNDAY 15 AUGUST 2010

Rev. Vladimir Korotkov

Luke 12: 49-56

“Refined by Learning to Live with Complexity”

1. What is deeply disturbing about our text today, when Jesus said that he has come to bring fire to earth, that he has brought division rather than peace, and this in families, what is deeply disturbing is how the church throughout history has abused these sayings to further its own agenda. To convert its opponents with the sword, heretics burned by fire or drowned!

What is deeply disturbing is how certain religious groups have taken family members away, on the basis of their superior belief. Much closer to aspects of the intent of Jesus is the social justice sector of the church that emphasises this text is about Jesus challenging the violence of injustice.

As Rick Marshall writes:

that the gospel should be a hammer on a society that uses coercive power and policies of death to defend its wealth against the poor.

<http://www.processandfaith.org/lectionary/YearC/2009-2010/2010-08-15.shtml>

William Loader adds dimensions to this intent:

It was not that Jesus sought to subvert families as such. It was rather that he espoused a vision of God and God's agenda for change which often stood in direct conflict with other absolute claims, like wealth, possessions, land, culture, religion and family.

<http://www.staff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/LkPentecost12.htm>

2. What disturbs me though, even with this language, is that it leads to language like Brian Stoffregen the Lutheran theologian uses in his comment on this text: “Perhaps what divides the families is not Jesus himself, but his demand for total allegiance to his cause.” He asks, what comes first, the family or the church? I ask, why make such a naive distinction? If you state the issue this way, already you have an implicit conclusion set in the premise! Only one can emerge as primary! This is not what Jesus meant!

Now I agree with the notion of allegiance to Jesus' cause *if* it is to make human life more human, and that God, who is pleased with us (last week's text), who is the re-creating compassionate power who works with us in this, as we work to overcome differences and learn to live with the complexity this entails. This means dealing creatively with anxiety and relaxing and trusting that we are working towards acceptance of difference, even as we are different. Does our difference define us or our humanity? Expressed another way, does our anxiety divide us or does it produce an “Oh Boy”, let's work together to address our fear and anxieties.

What divided the church and families in Luke's and Paul's time is that people associated God's cause with their own particular exclusive religious expression, and that became more important than cooperating with God's Spirit to make human life more human in its chaotic splendour!

Bringing fire to earth and facing divisions in families, organizations and societies, is about acknowledging our avoidances of our human and planetary challenges, it's about truly and bravely

facing them. As the American country singer Garth Brooks imaged it in his song, *Standing outside the fire*:

Standing outside the fire
Standing outside the fire
Life is not tried it is merely survived
If you're standing outside the fire.

3. To illustrate what it means to stand in the fire, Brooks created a video clip in 1993 for the "Standing outside the fire" song.

In the video clip a young man with Down syndrome decides to attempt his high school's regular sports event rather than the school's events for mentally challenged students. His mother supports him. This creates strong divisions in the household. The father is strongly opposed to this, claiming he will only embarrass himself. The mother fiercely names the unseen big assumption, which unconsciously drives the father's anxiety: he disapproves because he will be embarrassed if his son fails! He is still unconsciously carrying the shame, a shame which relates to human anxiety about imperfection and failure!

I want to spend the rest of this witness to continue to share material from Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey's book, *Immunity to Change* which I began referring to a few weeks ago which addresses our immunity to change.

Our immune system [created by us for survival and keeps us from being open to the complexity of the world] 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.

Complexity is really about the relationship between the complex demands and arrangements of the world and our own complexity of mind (that includes both our thinking and feeling). (Kegan & Lahey, 30)... a gap exists here: our own mental complexity lags behind the complexity of the world's demands.

The challenge is how to develop a complexity of mind in the face of the complexity of the world! This is called an adaptive solution! This requires a new means of perceiving. The challenge is: how to make changes - in yourself and your organisation - enabled by developing greater mental complexity. (32)

We can achieve this by developing a visible mental map revealing invisible dynamics: helps us see, 1. How things are at the moment, 2. Why they are this way, and 3. What will actually need to change.

4. Let me share a case study from Kegan and Lahey's book.

The study shares Peter's immunity map. (32ff) Peter is a co-founding CEO of a financial services company in USA. He is a stimulating, energetic, humorous person. Gifted and like all of us, he had his limitations. These limitations grew more noticeable as the company increased in size by buying other companies. The merger meant having to deal with melding different corporate cultures, needing across-the-board redefinitions.

Peter's leadership had to change, and so he brought in Kegan & Lahey as consultants to assist in this

process. The whole executive committee of around 18 people were included and they also created their own immunity to change maps, filling out all four columns with input from each other (see below). 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.

PETER'S IMMUNITY TO CHANGE MAP How he is preventing the very changes he really desires to make (Kegan & Lahey, <i>Immunity to Change</i> , 2009)			
1. Visible Commitments (Behavior goals)	2. Doing / not doing instead (Behaviour that work against goals)	3. Hidden competing commitments (What captivates and competes with stated goals)	4. Big assumptions (The "one-big-thing")
Be more receptive to new ideas. Be more flexible to roles and responsibilities. Be more open to delegating, supporting new lines of authority.	Was unreceptive to new ideas. Did not ask open-ended questions or seek the opinion of others often enough. Expected others to depend on him. Too quick to offer his opinions when others were not asking for it!	To have things done <i>my way</i> . To experience myself as having a direct impact. To feel the pride of ownership (of how we do things); i.e. "see my stamp". To preserve <i>my sense of myself</i> as the super problem solver, the one who knows best, the one who is in control.	Intense need to control. View of himself as the one who knows best. Assuming that I will not be deeply satisfied unless I am the super solver.

Peter drew on his self-awareness, and wanted 360-degree feedback from those around him: which meant inputs from all the people he related to in the organisation.

In column 1. visible commitments, he identified the following personal change goals. He wanted to:

- Be more receptive to new ideas.
- Be more flexible: new roles, responsibilities for this new organisation.
- Be more open to delegating, allow new lines of authority.

He then learnt that **column 2. existing in his life: Doing/not doing instead (Behaviour that work against the goals)**.

- Was unreceptive to new ideas.
- Did not ask open-ended questions or seek the opinions of others often enough.
- Expected others to depend on him.
- Too quick to offer his opinion when others were not asking for it!

His colleagues over weeks of workshoping fed back to him, with a degree of anxiety: **Column 3. Hidden competing commitments** (What captivates and competes with stated goals)

- To have things done my way.
- To experience myself as having a direct impact.

- To feel the pride of ownership (of how we do things); that is, "see my stamp".
- To preserve my sense of myself as the super problem solver, the one who knows best, the one who is in control.

Then, **the fourth column** was the toughest. This took weeks of self-observation and brave conversations, asking the question, What's the single thing you think is most important for me to get better at? Peter bravely suggested they include a 720-degree feedback: including key people in private life as well as public life, including what he called the "spousal test".

Column 4. Identifying each person's one-big-assumption.

- Intense need to control.
- View of himself as the one who knows best.
- Assuming that I will not be deeply satisfied unless I am the hero and super solver.

When all the executives had developed maps of their immune systems, they recognised how their own immunity was protecting them from some form of dread or anxiety. (65) The members of the executive had known each other for years, but through this brave process they were coming to know each other in a new way. It made them all feel very vulnerable to engage in this self-assessment process.

Peter's and his COO (Chief Operating Officer), Ron, had worked together for 15 years. Ron's one big assumption was "the need to please". When they all shared their maps with each other, Peter on hearing Ron's immunity map said to him: "I'm an abuser and you like it!" ... They laughed, but then Peter responded:

This is very counterproductive. We really do need to change this behaviour... We kind of knew this, deep down inside, that this kind of dance was going on, but we never had the language for it. We probably never had the courage to really sit down and face it directly, and the "one-big-thing" approach ... gave us a structure and the language, the ability to address this in a way that was seen as positive and not simply a personal attack. (69)

The work that we did really provided a common language for us all to talk about the challenges of personal development.

... to be able to talk about the issues that were important to us ... to talk about how we'd try and change behaviour individually and collectively, and why.

Conclusion

Robert Kegan and Usa Laskow Lahey in their book, *Immunity to Change*, would say that the quality of mental complexity strongly influences whether we could address our anxiety enough to stand in the fire of life, or whether it keeps us standing outside the fire, like the father in the film clip. Learning about our immunity map allows us to brave the fire that Jesus seeks to release in life, for true, courageous, hopeful living with anxiety and difference.

The mother's courage to overcome her anxiety about family division and name her partner's one big assumption, of being ashamed of his son which is a shame about himself, produces a larger view of life for him. In the video clip, when his son is racing and falls over, he tells the coach to not go out and rescue him; but he encourages the son to pick himself up and do the best he can. The clip ends with both parents embracing their son.

There's this love that is burning
Deep in my soul
Constantly yearning to get out of control
Wanting to fly higher and higher
I can't abide standing outside the fire.