

## **ST AIDAN'S UNITING CHURCH**

**SUNDAY 29 AUGUST 2010**

**Rev. Vladimir Korotkov**

**Luke 14: 1, 7-14**

### **“The Joy of Living that comes from a Self-transforming Mind”**

#### **Winter Warmth Humour**

Two men dressed in pilots' uniforms walk up the aisle of the plane. Both are wearing dark glasses, one is using a guide dog and the other is tapping his way along the aisle with a white cane.

Nervous laughter spreads through the cabin, but the men enter the cockpit, the door closes, and the engines start up. The passengers begin glancing nervously around, searching for some sign that this is just a little practical joke. None is forthcoming.

The plane moves faster and faster down the runway, and the people sitting in the window seats realize they're headed straight for the water at the edge of the airport. As it begins to look as though the plane will plough into the water, panicked screams fill the cabin.

At that moment, the plane lifts smoothly into the air. The passengers relax and laugh a little sheepishly, and soon all retreat into their magazines, secure in the knowledge that the plane is in good hands.

In the cockpit, one of the blind pilots turns to the other and says,

“You know, Dennis, one of these days, they're gonna scream too late and we're all gonna die.”

#### **1. The unwelcome in the welcome**

Welcome, was the word on the mat outside his apartment, in a multi-storied apartment block.

Welcoming in its intention, the word on the mat greeted all who walked to the door or along the corridor. Welcome! A clear sign of this tenants desire to offer hospitality. A visible commitment!

This tenant goes outside one evening to walk his dog and he sees his neighbour, Simon, with a young stranger, wearing foreign clothes. He becomes hyper-vigilant! “Who's that?” he aggressively questions.

It isn't long before his neighbour, Simon, has the police visit his apartment, and he is forced to report daily to the police for his association with the stranger.

What we notice about this tenant with the welcome-mat, is behaviour that contradicts his intended commitment, his behavioural goal.

This tenant's contradictory behaviour is driven by his hidden competing commitments and his big assumptions. Like the other people in the Channel port of Calais in France, he harbours hidden competing commitments (to being welcoming) to ensure his way of life and wellbeing are not disturbed or taken advantage of by asylum seekers, whom he prefers to label as illegal immigrants.

And, probably, deep below this, is the unconscious, intense need to be in control, and to maintain a culture that has shaped his identity and satisfaction up to this point. Underlying all this is fear and anxiety, within him and collectively, in his community.

This story emerges in the film, *Welcome*. As David Stratton writes:

THE subject of Philippe Lioret's *Welcome* is nothing if not topical.

The setting is the Channel port of Calais. These days Calais is notorious for its treatment of asylum-seekers who have travelled from Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, and found themselves stuck in a mainly hostile environment.

...

Ships and containers are minutely searched and -- in what seems to the outside observer a very strange and heartless policy -- refugees unable to find transport to Britain are reluctantly allowed to sleep rough on the streets of Calais.

(David Stratton, *When asylum-seekers become stranded*, The Australian, April 03, 2010)

Simon, the neighbour of the man in his apartment block who has the welcome-mat, is a citizen of Calais, a swimming instructor. He meets a young, Bilal, an Iraqi Kurd at his swimming pool, who is wants to learn how to swim so he can cross the Channel to London. Bilal does not have the required papers and so he is constantly interned and persecuted by immigration police. Any national providing such people any support is open to five years imprisonment, which is part of President Sarkozy's policies.

Frederic and Mary Brussat describe the underlying issues in this way:

The rise in nonwhite immigration particularly from the Muslim world has empowered far right parties across Europe that feed on racial hatred. They want to "close the doors" to stem the tide of poor people who they think will put too much pressure on schools, hospitals, and public housing.

(Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat;

<http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/films/films.php?id=19861>)

## **2. Jesus welcomes the unwelcome**

In our scripture reading, Jesus presents a contradictory view. He challenges the closing of doors on the tide of the poor. In fact, he suggests that this Pharisee in whose house he was banqueting, seriously consider changing his welcome or hospitality policy.

Part of this is to be humble, and not place yourself above others. *Being above others*, in the Greek, implies one is trying to be like God. Being humble, again in the Greek, suggests "coming back to our human reality" (Brian Stoffregen, <http://www.crossmarks.com/brian/luke14x1.htm>).

Coming back to human reality is about changing the structure of value and importance of people. Jesus teaches them that the well-off host should invite people who are poor, lame, crippled and blind. This is a radical inclusive way of sharing our meals. This is a reversal of fixed personal and social behaviour.

In this way, Jesus names the elephant in the room. Jesus was not seeking to ridicule his host, but to empower this host to embrace a more brave, compassionate life.

Such new ways of restructuring life require dealing with change, and the resistance, anxieties and fears that arise when individuals and communities are faced with change.

## **3. Unearthing core contradictions and constraining mindsets**

Now, it is natural for individuals and communities to feel overwhelmed and anxious when their life and culture is experiencing change and the influx of strangers who will rely on limited resources.

Yet is it really acceptable to demonise the immigrants and refugees, and the people and groups who seek to deal compassionately with such challenges?

Once a society gives power to such hostility and fear, a society such as the one in Calais is in danger of revitalising the era of the Vichy France and the ghettoising of the Jews (which one character in the film alludes to).

Rather than being reactive, we can become proactive by seeking to unearth the core contradictions and the constraining mindsets, as Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey suggest in their book, *Immunity to Change*. I share another brief case study from Kegan and Lahey, this time a situation where a collectivity address how they resist change and are overwhelmed by anxiety.

The senior faculty of a major research department of a US university decided to examine why they had not promoted a person from their junior ranks in eleven years. At a conscious level, they were convinced that their **collective commitment (improvement) goal** was to promote junior lecturers. Kegan and Lahey asked them if they would be brave enough to consider the idea: “we might have something to do with it!” (Kegan & Lahey, 89)

Kegan and Lahey then asked them to collectively construct a “fearless organisational inventory” of **obstructive behaviours**: “What are the things you collectively do ... or fail to do that work against your improvement goal?” (89)

The senior faculty realised that they overloaded their junior lecturers with too much work: assignments, teaching hours, publishing.

Now for those of you who have been here over the last three weeks, this group of people were creating the first two columns of their behaviour: 1. Collective commitment goals, 2. Collective behaviours of doing and not doing, behaviour that works against the goals. To see what is stopping change, it is important to uncover this contradiction.

The most revealing column is the third column: the hidden competing commitments that compete with the stated goals. Remember, Peter the CEO discovered he was unconsciously committed to control; Ron his COO did everything to ensure people (his boss mostly) liked him. This allows us to see the whole forest and not be lost in the trees.

How do Kegan and Lahey enable people to uncover their **third column** commitments?

“We begin by surfacing the biggest fears that arise from doing the opposite of any or all of the second-behaviours. ... for the senior faculty [this meant]... “What would we collectively be most concerned about or worried about if we were to try and do the opposite?” (91)

The responses they came up with really disturbed them: If the juniors taught less, then they would have to teach more; if juniors took less assignments they would have to pick them up, and so on. And then, from an even deeper place came the realisation of ego concerns: “No one looked out for us when we were junior faculty - we got tenured... Why can't they?!”

I shared this case study and others to empower us for our own individual and collective journey of change. That faculty were curious, courageous and willing enough to be learners, who were motivated enough to uncover and save themselves from the grip of competing commitments and constraining big assumptions. They made the shift out of the socialising mind, past the self-actualising mind, and into living from a self-authoring mind.

#### 4. Conclusion

Luke shares these sayings of Jesus, within the context of a respected leader's home and his style of hospitality, to enable the church of his time to reflect on their own individual and collective welcoming and hospitality behaviour. And this to uncover the unseen, unconscious dynamics, the various columns that exist in all our communities, some of which contradict our values and faith.

In the film *Welcome*, Simon is a terribly flawed and anxious person. Anger issues have ended his marriage with Marion. Before Simon met 17-year-old Bilal, the Iraqi refugee, she was unhappy with his lack of interest in her protest against injustice, when undocumented immigrants are thrown out of a supermarket.

Through the film, however, Simon observes, relates to, and begins to gain a deeper understanding of the injustice that the undocumented refugees are experiencing. He builds a relationship with Bilal and his community, and grows in courage and generosity. Through this process he learns to welcome in a way he never understood before. His became an Oh Boy anxiety. As David Stratton concluded, "*Welcome* is a timely reminder that one should love one's neighbour, even if one's neighbour has a foreign accent and a different culture."

For such love to grow, we must experience the kinds of awareness and conversion experiences that deepen one's four-column understanding of ourselves and others, that grows beyond a socialised mind, through a self-actualised mind, and enter the joy of complexity with its attended anxiety, living out of a self-transforming mind.