

Awake to the crisp dawn's rising in your life

Pitt Street Uniting Church, Sunday 27 May 2025

A Reflection by Rev Vladimir Korotkov

Easter 3C

John 21:1-19

This worship service can be viewed on You Tube at <https://pittstreetuniting.org.au/spirit/reflections/>

1. A story of unresolved shame and failure

Debie Thomas, a former writer for the *Journey with Jesus* blog, shares a common and moving story about how some families deal with failure and shame. It is certainly one with which I can identify.

Debie shares that whenever she engaged in various forms of wrongdoing as a child and a teenager - ruined a new dress, stayed out too late, misbehaved in church, ignored chores, failed in some way, trivial or terrible – the most painful and darkest aspects of her wrongdoing were shame, abandonment in wrongdoing, the withdrawal of affection and authentic, restorative conversation. Debie writes that the result was that

“life returned to a bruised normal. But a wound still festered below the surface. A thick, hot shame that filled my body and assured me that I was unfixable, unlovable, and wrong.”ⁱ

2. Peter remains asleep to his shame and failures and losses his identity

The Gospel of John seeks to reveal who Jesus is for the world and to invite the reader to enter a life-long faith and self-discovery journey, a journey which will have many revelatory movements from darkness into light. And as we witness in the symbolic story of Peter, John' Jesus seeks to address the issues of shame and failure, and the loss of identity.

As this crisp new day dawned in John 21, a week since the second appearance of the Risen Christ, Peter and his six friends “return”, regress, to their former life in the fishing profession. Out with the fishing licence, tools of trade, boat, and nets. And to whom belongs the lake and fish on Lake Tiberius? The colonial power, Rome. Are they abandoning the community of Jesus and reverting to normalcy? Peter's influential leadership qualities emerge; his six friends eagerly join him.

What is happening here? On the surface of things, we have no indication as to why Peter has done this, or how he feels about recent events: of denial, betrayal, fear of arrest, his reactions to the crucifixion. It seems he has lost his way.

Most New Testament scholars suggest that John 21 has been a later edition, and that it is about recalibrating the followers of Jesus, to get them to reengage in mission.

I disagree that mission is the primary intention.

3. John seeks to reveal who Jesus is for the world

In John's Gospel, the intimacy that Jesus of Nazareth experiences with the Divine Source of life is revealed and gifted to all humanity. What this means for us is expressed by Richard Rohr, "[E]xperiencing radical grace is like living in another world.... It's a way of living in the Presence, living in awareness of the Presence."ⁱⁱ It is a holistic movement from the darkness of the unknown into the light of new life.

And for John, this means, as Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza's writes,

"fullness of life which the revealer gives and promises throughout the Gospel. Wine, water, bread, light, truth, way, vine, door, word, are essential to human life because without them people perish. These images not only designate Jesus himself, but his gifts for life, the living and life-giving divine powers that lead to eternal life as well".ⁱⁱⁱ

Eternal life means abundant life.

And so awakening, resurrecting Peter to fullness of life is the primary intent of our story, to accompany him from his darkness, his repression and denial, shame and failure, to light and fullness of life. And about our awakening resurrecting!

Richard Rohr reminds us that *"All spiritual disciplines have one purpose: to get rid of illusions so we can be present. These disciplines exist so that we can see what is, see who we are, and see what is happening."*^{iv}

Which means that revelation is a dialectical movement of discerning Present Divine life and uncovering and transforming our illusions and deathliness in all its forms.

4. Jesus seeks to awaken Peter to fullness of life

So, let's return to our Peter story.

The Risen Jesus appears to be a stranger, unrecognised. Yet, he greets them as friends and advises them how to catch fish.

Then, as a crisp new day breaks, Jesus confronts Peter with a charcoal fire, a material symbol, like the fire over which Peter huddled when he denied Jesus three times. This was a strategy to enable Peter to regain access to what he denied and repressed deep into his memory, his inner unconscious life. He is now lured back to what is: back to memory through his senses - visually seeing the fire, its smoke filling his nostrils, hearing its crackle and spit - mentally recalling its similarity to that other shame-enflamed fire, exposing feelings of guilt and failure. Always a discomforting experience, which is why they are avoided, why we do not want to see who we really are.

Finally, we have that memorable scene, after breakfast, in which Jesus indirectly, yet intentionally, leads Peter back into his three-times denial of Jesus, by probingly asking him three times whether he loves Jesus. John informs us that Peter's third response was cathartic, boiling over with embarrassment and strong emotion.

Three times Peter has not loved Jesus, and resurrection grace three-times confronts yet empowers Peter, through love, to face, process and overcome failure, shame, and embarrassment. Resurrection grace and love always seeks to engage and process the unconscious - yet "*hidden in plain sight*" - aspects of life where denials, shame, failure and guilt may fester in the inner life, in the anxious self, and in the interpersonal, familial, communal, social, political, and national realities of our everyday existence.

Conclusion

A final comment. The author of our story has not written a romantic ending about Peter and his traumatic experiences. This was only one episode in a life journey of many transformations.

Our lives will have many resurrection transformations that raise us from our many tombs to return to life, to engage life and seek out ongoing resurrections for self and others.

Our Gospel story becomes an invitation to shape our journey with courage and compassion, with ourselves and with others.

ⁱ <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/essays/2191-you-know-everything>

ⁱⁱ Richard Rohr, *Everything Belongs*, p30ff

ⁱⁱⁱ Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, p328

^{iv} Op Cit, Rohr, p31