

The passion of Jesus transforms communities

Pitt Street Uniting Church, Sunday 18 May 2025

A Reflection by Rev Vladimir Korotkov

Easter 5C

Acts: 10:13-16a, 34; 11:1-9, 17-18; Luke 3:2b; John 13:31-35

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

Leibesh: *Is there a proper blessing for the Tzar?*

Rabbi: *A blessing for the Tzar? Of course.
May God bless and keep the Tzar - far away from us!*

Introduction

How did the two communities, of Anatevka and the church in Acts 10/11, inhibit love and inclusivity?

How did transformation occur?

1. Fiddler on the Roof

In the film *Fiddler on the Roof*, Ukrainian milkman Tevye is a Jewish peasant in pre-Communist Russia living in the town of Anatevka. The film begins as he informs us that:

"everyone 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? And how do we keep our balance? That I can tell you in one word: Tradition!"

Yet the power of tradition for this community had fixed how love and marriage were negotiated: and fixed tradition can limit and contain the expression of love with freedom.

Their tradition had set ways of marriage, through a matchmaker.

But when Tevye's eldest daughter Tsaytl approaches her father with Motel the young tailor to ask if they can be married, Tevye is deeply traumatised.

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!

How did transformation occur?

At first it appears transgressive.

But the power and passion of love contests contained society. Of the young couple, and the opening of the heart.

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!**

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## **2. Acts 10 & 11**

In our reading from Acts we find the Christian community in Jerusalem still held an exclusive view of love, even after Easter.

The words of Jesus in John was to “*love one another as I have loved you*”, which meant loving as Jesus loved people.

And how did Jesus love people? Suzanne Guthrie writes:

*By befriending and eating with outcasts and sinners, collaborators and prostitutes, the unclean, the impure, the unloved. By stretching the boundaries of his own love. By self-sacrificial life and death. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have this kind of love for one another.*

Yet, the church in Jerusalem still divided the world into the clean and unclean, into the included and the excluded, in contradiction to the practice of the historical Jesus.

### **How did transformation occur?**

In our story in Acts 10, 11, Peter responded to a vision he received which challenged his Jewish cultural and religious ideology, which divided his world up into the clean and the polluted. Even as a Jewish person, he visited the home of the Roman Gentile Cornelius, ate with them and at their request shared the story of Jesus.

And then on his return to his Jewish Christian congregation in Jerusalem, he faced the censure and strong criticism from the leaders for his cross-cultural and interfaith act.

## **3. Peter transformed: a new passion, eros**

In our Acts story we meet a transformed Peter. What has happened given the past?

When Jesus was on trial and then executed, Peter strongly denied his association with Jesus. Three times denying. He betrayed him. Peter disappeared for a while.

And then in John 21, after Jesus has been crucified, after a week or so, Peter reconnected with some of the followers of Jesus who were fishers, and boldly suggested they return to their trade. Acting as though nothing happened, and life was back to normal. His psychological state of denial was palpable.

What was happening here at a psychoanalytical level?

I will start with an interpretation using the Enneagram. The Enneagram suggests that there are nine basic personality structures which each of us inhabit uniquely: nine points of view, values systems, nine ways of being in the world, each with defences, motivations and habits. (Hudson and Riso, Understanding the Enneagram, 4).

My interpretation, different to Richard Rohr who sees Peter as a “six”, is that Peter expressed an “eight” personality style. A style of being the leader. His defence mechanism was denial. A defence mechanism is a way we unconsciously negate and repress whatever makes us feel anxious, vulnerable, sad or where we have failed.

So, again, in John 21, Peter had an experience with the Risen Christ. In this spiritual encounter the Risen Christ accompanies Peter through a process of raising to consciousness the dead, the buried, the repressed, and denied experiences. This to raise and uncover guilt so it can be seen and Peter can forgive himself. Three times he asks Peter, do you love me. And on the third time Peter is upset, and he gets it, he has entered his unconscious, his denials.

The Risen Christ provides the support of a loving other, willing and able to facilitate Peter’s unconscious yearning for self-discovery, for rehabilitation, and transformation. And in trust, the Risen Christ assigns Peter to love and care for his followers, to love the world, to lead his community into the transformation, beyond exclusivism. To change meaning systems and structures so as to embrace the world and welcome those who are different as equals.

And so, as Divine Life delighted in Jesus at his baptism, the Risen Christ affirms and delights in Peter, in his metaphoric dying and rising in his baptism of fire, even with his contradictions. And so too Divine Life affirms all of us here today, and delights in us. We are valued and loved as equals.

And Peter? He was now fired with a new passion, an eros. For me the term love is less powerful than the notion of eros.

## **Conclusion**

Peter would not be transformed, would not be fired by passion, unless he was accompanied into his inner life, his unconscious. Peter would not have had space in his imagination to receive dreams and visions about inclusivity. Or to have a passion for just community unless he was released from his burdened, repressed feelings, powerful failures hidden away in his unconscious.

As Mari Ruti writes, transformation means mediating between our conscious and unconscious processes of making sense of the world and our contradictions ... that is, *“that one of the aims of psychoanalysis is to enable us to develop an actively interpretative relationship to our unconscious motivations,”* to uncover and work through what sabotages our lives and relationships. (Ruti, *Fragile*, 8)

Finally, a word on Eros, which I suggest is a more powerful notion than the overused term, love.

Mari Ruti notes that Audre Lorde *“conceptualises eros as a source of energy that permeates our whole existence. Eros is that power that intensifies all our experiences.”* (Ruti, *Reinventing the soul*, 101) It connects us with others: *“of sharing physical, emotional or intellectual connections with loved ones”*. (101) And eros is a source of energy *“as a dynamic and responsive manner of interacting with the world in general.”* (101) *“Every level upon which we sense and experience the world potentially is open to eros as satisfying experience of our capacity for joy”*.

The power of eros, for Lorde, is such that we are *“less willing to accept states of despair, resignation, and powerlessness, and begin to take responsibility for ourselves and our actions in the world. This is because eros allows us to live from within ourselves rather than by external directives that guide us into normative psychic and social arrangements”* (Lorde, 58).” (Ruti, 102)