



# One Page Sermon

## By Pastor Robb McCoy

### August 6, 2023

## The mournful cry and joyful shout

Sermon Recap from 8/6/2023

Scripture: Ezra 3:10-13

Solomon's Temple was destroyed by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BCE. About 50 years later Persian King Cyrus declared that the Jews could return from exile. The Book of Ezra details the attempts to rebuild the Temple. The foundations were laid some 50-70 years after the original Temple was destroyed. Rebuilding the Temple was a long and sordid process that faced much opposition, but Ezra 3 reveals the first bittersweet days of the project, when the sounds of mournful cries and shouts of joy were mixed so that one could not tell the difference.

Some who remembered the old Temple cried while those celebrating what was to come celebrated. Some were devastated by the nostalgia of memory. Some celebrated the chance to build something new while holding onto the ancient promises of God. The tension between progress and tradition was pronounced as the people sat on the precipice of a new chapter of their history.

Society was shifting and no one knew exactly what the next step would be. Ezra's answers were found in rebuilding the Temple and keeping the people pure by avoiding mixed marriages and shunning the help of neighbors and foreigners. It was a complicated time, complicated by clashing culture, clashing understanding of Torah, and clashing ideas of how the people should move forward. This tension lies at the heart of *Fiddler on the Roof*.

During the opening monologue, Tevye asks rhetorically, "How do we keep our balance?" And the answer comes back with a resounding, "Tradition! And because of our traditions," Tevye adds, "Everyone knows who he is and what God expects him to do."

There is safety in tradition. There is comfort in knowing who you are and what God expects you to do. Problems arise however, when the circumstances of life change and the expectations of God may shift. God's expectations are always to love one another, but when society shifts, what love looks like may also shift. In *Fiddler*, this is most apparent with their wedding practices. Arranged marriage suited Tevye and Golda just fine. The Matchmaker system worked... until it didn't.

Tevye's daughters want to bypass the tradition. They want a blessing, not permission. They want to choose based on love, not to keep the complicated inner-workings of village life flowing comfortably. The story of shifting cultural expectations of marriage feels as timely now as it did in Czarist Ukraine. Some call fights over same-sex marriage a clash between tradition and progress. Love, however,

has always shaped how traditions of marriage are understood. Love is the tradition, and love, mutuality, and respect is at the heart of traditional marriage. Why should gender effect this?

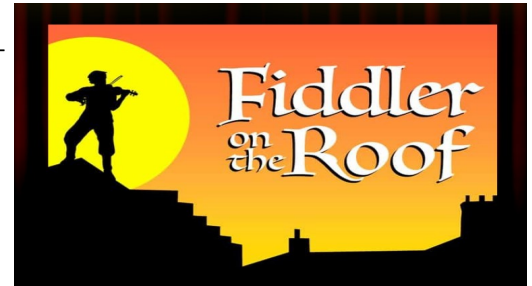
The struggle between tradition and progress goes beyond the institution of marriage. It is shown in the turmoil in fictional Anatevka. To remain faithful to God in the midst of Christian persecution, the people of Anatevka must

hold onto some traditions. They refuse to convert and assimilate to get by. Their courage and faithfulness is heroic in the face of oppression. Some of their traditions are too important to compromise.

When Tevye's daughter wants to marry a Christian, this feels too far. There is no "other hand." However Chava's actions at the end—to be allies to the Jews and resist the persecution in their own way, reveals that there is something deeper than Ezra's tradition. When I watch the final scene and see Tevye say simply, "God be with you," to Chava and her husband. Love breaks through. I'm not sure if my tears are of a mournful cry or the product of a joyful shout.

The tears and joy are mixed as the tension between progress and tradition are transcended by the one value that surely stands the test of all time: Love.

This is the guiding principal of Ezra, *Fiddler*, and Christ. What that love looks like given the cultural and social context might look different. The tradition that keeps us all knowing who we are and what God expects us to do is simple: love one another. Through the happiness and tears, from sunrise to sunset. Like a fiddler on the roof, we're all just trying to scratch out a happy tune, and love of God and love of each other is the tradition that helps us keep our balance.



**The underlying tension within *Fiddler on the Roof* is antisemitism. Christians have long been at the forefront of anti-Jewish violence and persecution. Christians should be at the forefront of countering this evil. Violence against Jewish people is not a Christian value. The recent rise of Christian Nationalism, with its chants of "The Jews will not replace us!" is a plague on our society and a direct violation of the Good News of Jesus Christ.**

**Next Week: The Gospel According to Broadway:  
*Godspell*; James 1:15-18**