

3 Easter, Year B, April 19, 2015; St. Leonard's, Red Deer  
St. Paul's Hillstown  
Acts 3:12-19; Psalm 4; 1 John 3:1-7; Luke 24:36b - 48;

Periodically PWRDF reminds us how it began. It started with the offering of relief for the families of miners who died in the Springhill mine in Nova Scotia in 1958. There was a sharp underground 'bump' or seismic jolt in the coalfield that could be felt and heard miles away. It caused the collapse of supporting walls and trapped many miners underground and they died there. This past week there were a lot of programs on TV and radio concerning Auschwitz and other concentration camps, and also it was the first anniversary of the murder of five U of C students at an end of year class party. These are the kinds of bumps, seismic jolts or shocks that we sustain on a regular basis through the daily news. In this season of Easter we are invited to deal with resurrection shock as well.

Resurrection shock may not strike us very hard because we are so familiar with the story, but the original disciples and followers of Jesus were dumb-struck because, in their grief over his death, they simply did not remember that Jesus said he would rise from death. But in all the shocks, including resurrection shock, that we receive there are questions about the source of our security, there are questions about the source of our identity, and there are questions regarding the purpose of our life.

Our Biblical readings tell us that the directions the answers to these questions take us will be different depending on how the resurrection of Jesus from the dead has impacted our life. The death and resurrection of Jesus is what makes Christian faith different from, and subversive within, the culture in which we live.

The culture we live in gives us the message that our ultimate security is to be found in a whirl of busyness, in the accumulation of possessions, in the size of our bank account or RRSP's, in the strength of our locks and deadbolts.

The Psalm reading is clear that in the midst of upheaval and disturbance in life the ultimate source of our security is God. This is

so because God hears when we cry out in distress and uncertainty; because God has set apart the faithful for God's self; because it is only God who can keep us in safety. This does not mean that we might not be beaten or robbed or killed; it does not mean that we will not suffer heartache at the premature or sudden death of loved ones due to accident or disease; nor does it mean that we might not be the ones who succumb to accident or disease. Our security in God is for the long term and should not be viewed from a short-term perspective. We have God's assurance that God in Christ is with us regardless of the circumstance of life.

We all face times in our life when shocks, bumps, or other upheavals occur and we have to make some large adjustments in our lives. The effect of the resurrection on those first disciples was just as sudden and life changing. There was the denial and the disbelief and then the acceptance and their lives were never the same again. They changed from being frightened, uncertain people into people who spoke with confidence about God's work in the world, who carried on Christ's ministry of teaching and healing in the world.

The reading from Acts gives us Peter's speech to the people at the Temple who were dumbfounded because a man was healed of his lameness by the power of Jesus' name. He reminds them that they refused Jesus. You killed the Author of Life, he says, recognizing that they did it out of ignorance. So there is both the time and the possibility for repentance and for turning toward God for forgiveness. This where real security lies.

We also kill the Author of life and ask for a murderer. We do it every time we choose less than what God intends for us; every time we place our spirituality on the margin of our lives; every time we refuse to forgive; every time we choose hate and alienation over affection and community. (O'Driscoll, Child of Peace, Lord of Life, Yr. B, p. 39) In doing such things we announce to the world that our ultimate security is based somewhere other than in God, somewhere other than in the Author of Life.

The first letter of John encourages us to consider our identity. See what love the Father has given us that we should be called the children

of God and that is what we are. I find that some adults don't like to think of themselves as the children of God, because they think of children as small and immature. But children grow and the truth is we remain our parents' children all of our lives, even when we are old ourselves and our parents are long dead. As children of God we start out in immaturity. As we respond more and more to God's love we grow in maturity, but we still remain God's children. The writer of the letter says we don't stay the same. We are God's children because of God's love and are in the process of becoming Christ-like.

Our culture says our identity comes from our performance in the workplace or in school, from our productivity in society, from the merit that others assign to us, to our work and our person. Because this way of looking at identity is so pervasive it is difficult for us to hold on to our knowledge of ourselves as children of God, for our identity as children of God is not rooted in our character, nature or achievements. It is rooted in God's character, in God's nature, in God's love for us. We cannot earn God's love and we cannot make God give up loving us. We can and do turn our backs on God's love; we can and do get sucked into our culture's view of ourselves and others; but we cannot prevent God's love for all creation, or from declaring us to be God's children. For us the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the foundation of our identity as God's children who are in the process of becoming like Jesus Christ.

Both the readings from Acts and from the Gospel describe Jesus' followers, his disciples, his Church, as witnesses. A witness is someone who has seen or knows something and is competent to give evidence concerning it. In the reading from Acts Peter says the disciples are witnesses that Jesus, who was killed, has been raised from the dead. In the Gospel reading the risen Jesus tells his disciples 'you are witnesses that the Messiah suffered and rose from the dead;' and that repentance and forgiveness of sin are to be proclaimed in his name to all the nations.

This is another aspect of our identity and, like the first aspect, it is also linked to purpose. We are children of God for the purpose of becoming Christ-like; we are witnesses of God's power in our lives and the life of the Church through the risen Jesus, for the purpose of

telling everyone, all the nations, the whole world, that repentance and forgiveness of sin come through the power of Jesus' name.

Our culture has become a culture of consumption which says that our purpose in life is to consume more and more, to gather more possessions, to obtain more and better of what we already have.

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead indicates that our purpose is to give evidence of the power of God at work in our lives. This is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead and that empowers us to speak what we know, to be witnesses. And that same power enables the forgiveness of sin, that is, the forgiveness of all that distorts relationships between people and people, and between people and God.

Because our culture gives us such a strong message about the source of our security, our identity and our purpose in life, and such a different message than we receive from our faith, it is necessary for us to strengthen our faith and the message we receive from it concerning the source of our security, our identity and our purpose in life. We do that by gathering together in worship, by incorporating times of prayer and study and of deep and profound fellowship with others into our lives. Otherwise we can be overwhelmed by our culture and transformed by it, rather than having our sense of God as the source of our security, our identity and our purpose in life transform our view of the culture in which we live.

In the New Testament writing the 'world' always refers to those who are opposed to God. We are called to be in the world but not of it. We are to be witnesses because we are God's children whose ultimate trust is in God, and we are to witness to God's powerful love and forgiveness to all those who are opposed to and estranged from God. We do this through Jesus Christ who was raised from the dead into new life so that we also might die to all that separates us from God and receive abundant new life from the Author of Life, through all the bumps and shocks that we face in this present life.

In the name of the risen Lord. Alleluia