

*Unshakable...*  
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That which cannot be shaken.

I have this air conditioner. It's just about time to put it in my bedroom window for the summer. While I prefer to have open windows over the a/c, sometimes it is just too hot, too uncomfortable, to do otherwise...except turn it on.

The only problem is...it shakes.

Somehow, no matter what I do, it shakes: the window, the frame, the screen or the building in such a way – that it keeps me awake; until I finally can be kept awake no longer, and I fall asleep.

I anticipate the shaking, even now, wondering if by some magical cure, that *this* year – it will be different. It will go into the window and *presto!* hum with not a rattle to be heard!

Now and then, the edges of my mind rattle like the a/c in the window.

Some event or situation occurs, some thought about something, and try as I might, I just can't let it go – until it seems to have subsided enough, or I have become weary enough of it – that it no longer keeps me awake. I fall asleep, move it to the “back burner,” and hope it (like the a/c rattle) is gone in the morning.

And, often it is...until it or something new appears to start it all over again. Generally, I am pretty good at keeping things in the now, staying away from too much projection and the like...but sometimes there are just things that “shake” me.

Usually, self-centered as I can be, they start with me and situations close to me. There's plenty of those:

- For example: what will it be like in the next few months to say good-bye to this congregation; or,
- what will this General Assembly produce in terms of justice for marginalized groups, such as LGBT;

- what role am I supposed to play in continuing to encourage this church to change;
- which one of the phone calls I receive will be announcing that a loved one has completed this journey;
- when will my own journey end –
- and how do we create ways to talk about dying,
- what's next or not;

...we all have our list of “shakable things.”

Probably, like me – yours may begin with situations in close proximity to family, loved ones, friends, students, colleagues...

From there, the “fires of shake” are fanned the further “out” we go:

- who is the right choice for my vote in the upcoming elections;
- how will this war in Iraq/Afghanistan/Other places come to an end;
- will terrorism be always with us and where will it next strike;
- will the current financial crisis send us barreling into another recession, depression, stagflation spiral;
- the list goes on.

The direction of my comments is not to directly address all these today, it would be impossible to do so. Even though I would like to talk about them all, especially about the beginnings and ends on this plane of the lives we have been given to live. No morbidity here, just the fascination with something so close to us that mostly gets spoken of when shaken, usually in hushes – even then, and then given “rest,” until the next or imminent loss is with us.

I would like to do have those conversations, and if anyone else is interested, please let me know. We can put something together.

Another “shaker” that is upon us and that we continue to address, hopefully loudly, clearly, transparently – is the transition in our congregation. The PNC is working hard to see that the right new pastor will soon be chosen. Questions abound with this change! And continue speaking about this we will; and, if you need more, just say so!

But this morning, specifically – in a general sort of way - what I want to speak about what is the “unshakable” in our lives.

What is **there**, when everything else is shaken lose, literally or in a figurative way?

- I have come to know all of you over the last nearly three years. As I write these words, Gail comes to mind and her story of survival during World War II and the time of the occupation.

- In private conversations, you have shared with me times in your own lives, many of you, when events had become so burdensome, so overwhelming – that you thought you might never emerge from the rubble, and yet you have.
- And, three years is far from long enough to know the much more that is unspoken yet, between us. And still, we are here. There is something *unshakable* in our lives that – even when forgotten for a moment, or perhaps a long time – something that reappears when needed: sometimes in a flash like lightning, sometimes over years – but reappears nonetheless to help us carry through, to move on, to live another day.

<sup>18</sup>**You have not come to something that can be touched, a blazing fire, and darkness, and gloom, and a tempest,** <sup>19</sup>and the sound of a trumpet, and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that not another word be spoken to them. <sup>20</sup>(For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even an animal touches the mountain, it shall be stoned to death." <sup>21</sup>Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear.") <sup>22</sup>**But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering,** <sup>23</sup>and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, <sup>24</sup>and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. Hebrews...

We transcend...from the touch of the finger and the thoughts of the mind to a place or presence of God, however it is we do so.

And, when we do, in some small and yet radical way, we discover what is unshakable in our lives. We meet it somehow, know it, and enter into it.

It can take a while and a lot, sometimes, to get there. I can not tell you what it is, for we all know it in personal and intimate ways; but it is *unshakable*, if sometimes distant;

...and even when it is nothing more than a sweet, indiscernible fragrance in the air – it is enough, for it is the presence of God.

The words of the poet who wrote Hebrews described it as best as he or she could. Described it in the language of fire and tempest; earthquake-ridden landscapes and volcanically active mountains. God was the force that changed the terrains of the universe -- by force and then freed it in the new forms that followed.

Every one of us knows that upheaval and subsequent balance in our own lives, and, so, not surprising for the scribe to transfer such personal experiences to a geologically active planet in human terms describing God. And, in reality, if

somewhat wrong in interpretation, certainly true in context. Some might say... And some might say, even more...perhaps these were days when God played with the mountains like clay and a kiln...

More so, geology was not the only thing active in this near ancient world. Luke, following the Matthean gospel with some leanings towards Q, and some influence from later translations -- brings to life the exuberance of the early followers of Jesus, who went out in his name to preach and to heal sickness, exorcize demons, and spread the Good News. This author, also author of the Acts of the Apostles, has most likely comprised this reading from a variety of sayings and recollections.

Again, it is important to remember that these writings were not written for historical purposes, but to reflect the times and teachings of Jesus in ways that demonstrated his power and the changes attributed to him.

Certainly, it was a time for these early followers when they were unshakable in their belief in this man, Jesus, ecstatic in their preaching, and totally charismatic in their dealings with others. These were believers on fire and there is no doubt that then, as now, healing and great wonders occurred in the name of Jesus. Must have been quite a time!

Viewed in light of the first reading, these disciples had found something unshakable, if inconsistent, that they must have totally embraced. Yes, these would be many of the same people who would disappear as Jesus was executed, but for this moment and in this time, the Spirit to which Luke so often incorporates and refers to had taken precedence over everything else...and would again, even after there mistakes.

They **were** on fire. They were talking, healing, casting out of devils, and they must have been contagious and powerful and awesome to encounter. Whatever was going on with them affected others around them and they not only brought the Spirit of God and the Teachings of Jesus with them – but they brought it out in others, as well.

The disconnect, sometimes for us, is that we rely on these passages with an eye toward the past and no relevance to the present. OK, who's casting out demons now? Where did all this charisma go?

What happens for some of us is that the absence of the same conditions described cause us to question if they ever occurred, especially when we take on the text and historical criticism of the Bible.

Well, these wonders do exist. We are touched all the time by the faith of others, and in those moments when we have all our defenses unpacked and are left with only ourselves and God – alone or with each other, even if in argument with God,

we often find that unshakable, charismatic presence of God's power that makes it possible for us to leap into a place of faith, acceptance, and peace.

Now these are all relative, and if Luke were to write about the spiritual experiences of our own lives – yours and mine, no doubt they would appear more visibly profound than they may sound to us at the moment. However, there is in each of us the same disciple-like exuberance that helps us sometimes in just being able to put one foot in front of the other (that is perhaps the most disciple-like action of all) and at other times rises with us to the heavens, as the music in this sanctuary so does, carrying us elsewhere.

Ultimately, the deep-abiding relationship with God, however that may come to pass and be known, is what gives hue and depth and sound and light to the canvass of our lives. Sometimes certain parts get painted before others, but sooner or later for the very most if not all of us – the final touches will be that unshakable experience of God, the healing presence of God, and the wonder we share with one another in the name of Jesus – a name that points us always in the right direction.

The healing that is most needed, for me – maybe for you, always seems to be in this spiritual, inwardly transcendent realm. So, let me say that if there is something blocking access to that place, disturbing it, or otherwise making it less available to you or loved ones, let's invite one another into prayer and conversation about what is going on. Let us always be sensitive to the needs of others and to ourselves. Sometimes that means asking another if they need some help or to talk, and it sometimes means asking for the help ourselves, not always an easy thing to do.

For as Hebrews suggests, the God in each of us can help one another shake loose what needs to be shaken loose, so that the Spirit and us can be full and free in the joy of God's presence, no matter the world around us. Then we, too, like those disciples of the seventy will be alive in ways well beyond our imagination and dreams.

Amen.